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09.11.21 VOLUME 36 NUMBER 17

WORLD

"I JUST REMEMBER THE ABSOLUTE FEAR AND TERROR OF THAT DAY, FEELING LIKE LIFE WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME." —A GENERATION GRAPPLES WITH 9/11, P. 46

SQUANDERING AMERICAN SACRIFICE

9/11 and the fall of Afghanistan
p. 40





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WHAT MAKES REPORTING ON AFGHANS SO HARD?

"The 9/11 reporting for me began before the Taliban took Kabul, and I had interviews with Afghans I suddenly couldn't use. Overnight they were in mortal danger, or their families were. There had to be lots of cross-checking, some tears, and little sleep for awhile."

—Senior editor Mindy Belz, whose story appears on p. 40

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PROFILES IN POVERTY-FIGHTING

CHARLENE RANDALL/MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

I loved Sophia Lee's organizational choices for WORLD's effective compassion coverage: categorization, discernment, and perseverance. All deserve in-depth study, yet you still proclaimed the gospel front and center, the core value driving all charity.

A DECADE OF DESTRUCTION

JULY 31, P. 38—BRAD O'BRIEN/SCHERTZ, TEXAS

The Syrians sadly are not an OPEC petroleum-soaked nation. Were that the case, the rest of the world might care.

AN ANNUAL ASSESSMENT

JULY 31, P. 30—JACK W. WESTALL JR./ASHEVILLE, N.C.

While George Friedman has significant credentials, and I have none, I question his belief that President Joe Biden would take significant action if China invaded Taiwan. I fear that Chinese President Xi Jinping knows Biden might make a speech or two but do nothing to interfere.

A HOSPITAL VISIT

JULY 31, P. 8—KENDRA SANDFORD/DUBLIN, N.H.

I am surprised that Joel Belz's Muslim nurse "made a point of holding us as Christians at a short distance," because the hundreds of Muslims I have known would be more likely to discuss faith and pray with me—or allow me to pray for them—than the average New Englander.

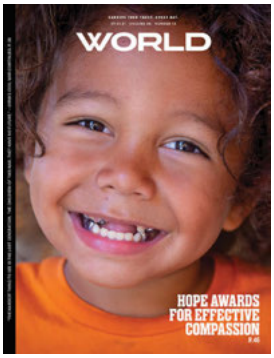
J. KELLY SMITH/HAMILTON, GA.

Joel Belz's thoughts and questions were spot-on. His comments on the "nonsectarian secularism" in the United States were particularly pertinent and show that at its core, we have a vast spiritual problem.

PAINFUL SELVES

JULY 31, P. 18—CHERYL GALANTI/WARRINGTON, PA.

In praise of Janie B. Cheaney's column: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. The Spirit witnesses to the presence of Christ in our lives. If He shows up enough for us to be insulted for our Christlikeness, the pain is the blessing.



PROFILES IN POVERTY-FIGHTING

What an adorable, charming, heartwarming photo on the cover of your Hope Awards for Effective Compassion issue!

JULY 31, P. 46—ALLEN A. WIANT/WESTERVILLE, OHIO

AM I GAGGED OR NOT?

JULY 31, P. 76—CAROLE HUTCHINGS/RATHDRUM, IDAHO

Marvin Olasky's last line prompts me to recommend the book my small group is studying: *We Will Not Be Silenced* by Erwin Lutzer. Each chapter ends with a prayer and suggestions for how we can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

GENEVIEVE NUNN/MADERA, CALIF.

Olasky's column brought Romans 3:18 to mind: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Many Americans think they know better than the Creator when it comes to our littlest ones, marriage, and family. I wonder if all we're dealing with has something to do with God's chastening. He is amazingly patient and long-suffering, but there is a limit.

A ROLLER COASTER LIFE

JULY 31, P. 71—KEVIN LANTAFF/COMMERCE CITY, COLO.

The contrast between the issue's last two Notebook articles was not lost on me. The story about Holocaust survivor David Wisnia was one of courage, perseverance, and gratitude, while the photo of Gwen Berry dishonoring our flag and country accompanying the article that followed ("Stars and swipes," p. 72) was of selfishness, pride, and naiveté.

CORRECTION

Upcycling company ReGrained is based in Berkeley, Calif. ("Snack from a brew," Aug. 28, p. 72).

READ MORE LETTERS AT WNG.ORG/MAILBAG

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Notes from the CEO KEVIN MARTIN



Our newest podcast

Lawless features long-form journalism in the true-crime genre

I LIKE USING THIS SPACE to tout new projects we're working on at WORLD. It makes sense to do that here, right up front, given our mission of Biblically objective journalism, our goal of making that journalism increasingly helpful to you, and your central role in empowering all of that.

So here's the latest: a new podcast series called *Lawless*, launching in a few months, hosted by WORLD senior writer Lynn Vincent. *Lawless* is WORLD's entry into the "true crime" podcast genre.

Of course, you can expect WORLD to bring its own flavor to the format. That certainly will be true of Season 1, during which we will tell the true story of Terri Schiavo.

Schiavo, you may remember, died in 2005 after the court-ordered removal of her feeding tube. WORLD reported on her case extensively back then, and we'll draw on a lot of that reporting. We'll add fresh interviews and research to help paint a personal picture of Terri, help us understand the people around her who were making decisions about her treatment, recount the legal and moral battle to save her life (but that ended in her tragic death), and describe the energy her story provided to the pro-life movement.

Lawless is the latest podcast we've been working on, but don't forget about the other good work we're doing in our WORLD Radio division. We're right in the middle of Season 2 of *Legal Docket*, our excellent and entertaining analysis of important Supreme Court cases from the court's current session. And if you're not already a regular listener to *The Olasky Interview*, *Effective Compassion*, or *Listening In*, you'll find updated episodes for each of those podcasts.

YOU CAN EXPECT WORLD TO BRING ITS OWN FLAVOR TO THE FORMAT. THAT CERTAINLY WILL BE TRUE OF SEASON 1.

If you've never heard one of our podcasts, you're missing out on a major outlet for WORLD's Biblically objective journalism. The newest podcast, *Lawless*, is a great reason to start listening now, but each is worth your consideration. All of WORLD's podcasts are on all the major podcast platforms. You can find them on our website (wng.org) as well. ■



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What if current missions strategy is actually limiting the global spread of the gospel?



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Finding the right man

A search for an editor in 1981 had long-term implications

TIME WAS RUNNING OUT. For a whole year, we'd been planning for the launch of *It's God's World*, a weekly paper to help children in the middle grades think about news and current events from a Biblical perspective.

Now it was early April of 1981. Many details had fallen into place for a late August inaugural issue. But I hadn't found an editor—someone who could manage the content of this important venture.

It hadn't been for lack of trying. Word about this project had spread around the country, in both educational and journalistic circles. I had reviewed 45 applications and resumés—including some that were pretty impressive. But each one of those 45 stumbled at one or two key points.

Along the way, the process had helped me develop a true-to-life job description. The person I was looking for had to have (1) a proven ability to write for children; (2) teaching experience in a Christian school; (3) a mature Biblical perspective on life; (4) a sensitivity to the multifaceted theological-socio-political orientation of the Christian school movement; (5) resourcefulness and an ability to pioneer; and (6) a willingness and ability to move to Asheville, N.C., no later than July 1.

Needless to say, that last point was a biggie.

A scattering of other historical notes is also in order. All this was before the robust explosion of the homeschool movement. The reference to "pioneering" is a reminder that we had no mega-investor committed to the commercial success of the venture. And the need to relocate to Asheville helps us recall that distance-learning and distance-managing were largely undeveloped arts in 1981.

I DON'T REMEMBER NORM OR HIS TEAM EVER BEING CHARGED WITH A SIGNIFICANT FACTUAL ERROR.

But yes, ignoring or soft-pedaling any one of the six issues could easily deep-six the whole project. Better to delay the effort for a year.

We delayed—but in God's providence, it didn't need to be a year.

There was, you see, this fellow out on the plains of central Kansas. His name was Norm Bomer, and his resumé was one of the 45 I had already processed. But in his resumé he had selflessly explained how a year earlier he had been sidelined from a teaching career because of medical issues. Indeed, even now he was recovering from treatment at the famous Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. I remember thinking: I've got enough hoops to jump through. I don't need to take on someone's medical challenges along with everything else.

But now, as I said, time was running out. This Bomer fellow came closer than anyone else on my list of 45 to filling all six of my "requirements." "Could you get on a plane," I asked, "and come here to Asheville for a few days so we can get to know each other?"

All that was just 40 years ago. Only four months later, Norm had moved his family to Asheville. He had created the first ever issue of *It's God's World* and established a topical weekly outline for the rest of that 1981-82 school year. He had begun to assemble a staff. I don't remember, in the midst of all that, that he had a single minute to visit a doctor.

Under Norm Bomer's editorial leadership, the God's World series of magazines for children came to include graded editions for kindergartners all the way to high schoolers. Although the subscriber list through the years included thousands of Christian schools and, later on, hundreds of thousands of homeschooling families, I don't remember Norm or his team ever being charged with a significant factual error. Only in 2011, with three decades of this grueling pace under his belt, did Norm Bomer step aside as the senior editor for God's World News.

But by then, he'd helped to set a grand stage for our future. Our offerings for students have now grown to include *WORLD Watch*, a daily 10-minute video newscast aimed at high schoolers and launched just last year.

And I think you'll find that *WORLD Watch* rivals the original establishment of the God's World papers for children as a significant journalistic venture. ■

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DR. YENY AGILA DE PINOS
QUININDÉ, ECUADOR

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A departure disaster

A momentous withdrawal from Afghanistan went awry for the Biden administration, and politicians aren't the only ones suffering for it

by Jamie Dean

JUST FIVE WEEKS BEFORE THE FALL OF AFGHANISTAN to Taliban militants, U.S. President Joe Biden told reporters in the East Room of the White House, "The likelihood there's going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and running the whole country is highly unlikely."

Biden insisted there were "zero" parallels between the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the nation's sudden departure from Vietnam in 1975: "There's going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States in Afghanistan." →

A U.S. Chinook helicopter flies over the U.S. Embassy in Kabul on Aug. 15.

RAHMAT GUL/AP

A month later, the U.S. military dispatched helicopters to airlift workers from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. By nightfall on Aug. 15, American C-17 transport planes evacuated hundreds of Americans out of the country as the Taliban took control of the capital city and reclaimed a nation it lost nearly 20 years ago.

U.S. officials acknowledged they were surprised by the Taliban's speed in advancing on the capital, but it didn't come without warning: At least 23 American staffers from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul reportedly sent a confidential cable to the U.S. State Department in July, warning that the Taliban was making rapid territorial advances in the country and committing atrocities along the way.

During the same month, the U.S. military vacated the Bagram Airfield it had occupied for nearly 20 years. The airfield included a prison that held some 5,000 prisoners, including many alleged Taliban fighters. It also included two giant runways—a resource that could have proved invaluable in August during frantic evacuations from the single runway at Kabul's commercial airport.

Taliban fighters often beat back Afghans trying to reach the airport—including many who assisted the United States during its tenure in Afghanistan and who held paperwork that should have allowed their departure from the country. As the exit window narrowed, U.S. military servicemen and veterans decried the likely abandonment of many Afghans who risked their lives to help the United States.

U.S. Air Force veteran Sam Lerman told the Associated Press, "This is murder by incompetence."

Still, Biden defended the withdrawal, noting former President Donald Trump had started the process. Biden asked how many more generations of Americans should be sent to fight in Afghanistan after 20 years of war.

But Rory Stewart, a British expert on Afghanistan, noted that the United States has maintained a considerable level of security in Afghanistan with only 2,500 American troops and had suffered no American combat fatalities in 18 months. The number of American troops based in South Korea nearly 70 years after the Korean War: more than 28,000.

Other critics focused less on the plan to withdraw and more on *how* the United States executed it. Though Americans were managing to leave at a much faster pace than Afghans, the United States was still scrambling to evacuate thousands of U.S. citizens ahead of a self-imposed Aug. 31 deadline.

> **THIS IS MURDER BY INCOMPETENCE.**

On Aug. 18, the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan issued a security alert to Americans, saying the U.S. government "cannot guarantee safe passage" to the airport. Two days later, Biden said "we have no indication" Americans hadn't been able to get through to the airport.

LEFT: U.S. troops guide evacuees aboard a C-17 at Kabul's international airport. RIGHT: Taliban fighters patrol a Kabul neighborhood.





PLANE: SENIOR AIRMAN BRENNEN LEGE/U.S. AIR FORCE VIA AP; TALIBAN: RAHMAT GUL/AP

The next day, the embassy issued another alert to Americans, urging them not to try to come to the airport because of security threats. ABC News correspondent Ian Pannell reported from Kabul: "It just seems the reality and the rhetoric are miles apart."

But that was true beyond the chaotic evacuations. Biden also noted the United States went to Afghanistan to get rid of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda there: "And we did."

The United States did get rid of Osama bin Laden, but even *The New York Times* reported that while al-Qaeda's presence was decreased in Afghanistan, "Mr. Biden is wrong to say that the terrorist group is no longer in the country."

Indeed, three days before Biden's remarks, the U.S. Defense Department released a report saying "the Taliban continued to maintain its relationship with al-Qaeda, providing safe haven for the terrorist group in Afghanistan."

In the United States, some wondered whether the crisis would affect next year's midterm elections or the presidential elections in 2024. But a much more urgent concern confronted the millions of Afghans suddenly living under Taliban rule after 20 years—and for any Americans remaining in the country: What will life be like for those left behind? ■





2021 Hope Awards winner

SAFE HARBOR FREE CLINIC in Stanwood, Wash., won WORLD's 2021 Hope Awards for Effective Compassion contest and will receive $10,000. Our other finalists—Christian Encounter in Grass Valley, Calif.; Westside Ministries in Turlock, Calif.; and East County Transitional Living Center in El Cajon, Calif.—will each receive $2,000.

In many ways, Safe Harbor resembles other free medical clinics around the United States. But when WORLD Magazine senior reporter Sophia Lee visited Safe Harbor earlier this year, she found the ministry is anything but a typical medical clinic.

Safe Harbor began in 2009 when family practice physicians James Grierson and Keith Erickson in Stanwood—about 35 miles north of Seattle—saw medical needs there and decided to act. They gathered other physicians and Christians and opened Safe Harbor using another clinic's space. On its first night, patients lined up out the door and appointments stretched into the early morning hours.

Physicians volunteered one Friday night per month to man the clinic and treated ailments typical of most walk-in clinics. But opening so soon after the Great Recession, they began seeing chronic illnesses—such as diabetes and hypertension—from patients who no longer had insurance or who couldn't pay medical bills. Some couldn't navigate complicated websites and paperwork. Some didn't know how to contest providers overcharging them.

So, Safe Harbor also provided personnel to help patients wade through the medical morass: filling out paperwork and making calls to resolve billing questions, among other tasks.

In 2014, donors and grants provided enough for the clinic to rent its own building. It transitioned to appointment-only instead of walk-in.

But the gospel undergirds the clinical work at Safe Harbor as well as the love volunteers and staff show patients. Lay counselors check in with patients and pray for them. Volunteers have a chance to build one-on-one relationships with patients and share their Christian faith.

"Whatever God's vision is, that's what we want," executive director Sandy Solis told Lee. "It becomes all Him ... you have that opportunity to pray for your patients and see what God's going to do in their lives." *—Michael Reneau*

SAFE HARBOR: PHOTO BY RON WURZER/GENESIS

A CALAMITOUS END

2,442

The number of U.S. military fatalities suffered in the two decades of fighting in Afghanistan, according to a Brown University report.

$2.26T

The total cost of the war effort in Afghanistan for the United States.

2,500

The number of active duty military personnel serving in Afghanistan in January before President Biden announced his withdrawal plans.

20,000

The number of Afghans still in the Special Immigrant Visa application process.



38 THE NUMBER OF DAYS between President Joe Biden's July 8 statement announcing an Aug. 31 deadline for the full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban's retaking of the capital, Kabul, on Aug. 15. With thousands of Afghan interpreters searching for a way out, the U.S. State Department's email server for Special Immigrant Visa applications crashed after Afghans flooded the inbox with applications, according to former *Washington Post* intelligence and defense correspondent Jeff Stein.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE


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PUMMELED

Double disasters strike Haiti

An earthquake–tropical depression combo hits the Caribbean nation within days

A 7.2 MAGNITUDE QUAKE demolished towns in southwestern Haiti on Aug. 14. Ten days later, the official death toll climbed just past 2,200, though it was likely to continue rising since 344 people were still missing. The injured flooded into hospitals in and around the city of Les Cayes as the fragile Haitian government rushed to assess the damage and send aid. People in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, about 125 miles east, felt the shaking and rushed outside in fear, but the city did not appear to sustain significant damage. Days later, a tropical depression swept through, complicating relief efforts further. "Unfortunately, when disasters stack on top of each other, it slows the delivery of relief supplies," said Ryan Grabill of U.S.-based Convoy of Hope. "There are few countries in the world that an earthquake happening would be worse than Haiti."

FLOODED

At least 22 people died after record rainfall brought down cell phone towers and took out roads in rural areas an hour west of Nashville on Aug. 21. Humphreys County received more than 17 inches of rain in less than 24 hours, topping Tennessee's one-day record by more than 3 inches. Victims included 7-month-old twins swept from their father's arms. People who live in Waverly, Tenn., described a wall of water rushing into their town from higher ground. GoFundMe pages asked for help for funeral expenses for the dead. The water left a landscape of collapsed houses, tangled debris, and flipped vehicles strewn about town.

UNPICKED

A little over a week after landing the job as host of *Jeopardy!*, Mike Richards resigned on Aug. 20 as Alex Trebek's replacement on the popular game show. *The Ringer* published offensive comments Richards made while hosting a podcast from 2013 to 2014, including calling his female co-host a derogatory term, saying that women in one-piece swimsuits looked "really frumpy and overweight," and referencing stereotypes about Jews. Richards said he didn't want his comments to distract *Jeopardy!* fans from the show. After Trebek died in November, the show auditioned potential replacements. Richards will remain in his role as executive producer, and the show will feature another round of guest hosts.

SAVED

An Oklahoma woman worked a personal connection with a diplomat in Qatar to evacuate 10 Afghan schoolgirls as the Taliban took control of the country. Allyson Reneau met the girls at a robotics and engineering event in Washington, D.C., in 2019. As the Taliban swept across Afghanistan, Reneau contacted her friend in Qatar, who worked all night to process paperwork. Officials got 10 girls, ages 16 to 18, on a plane. Reneau, a Harvard graduate with a degree in international relations, flew to Qatar to bring the girls to the United States where they will study. "It was a very narrow window of opportunity," Reneau told NBC News.

JONATHAN ALPEYRIE/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

"Why did my friend get blown up? For what?"

Former U.S. Army Ranger TOM AMENTA, who served in Afghanistan in 2002 and whose friend, Army Ranger Jay A. Blessing, was killed there by an improvised explosive in 2003. Amenta told *The Washington Post* the U.S. withdrawal "makes me angry, really angry."

"All of my thoughts and behavior should not be determined by the so-called red lines under the national security law. I should be led by the teachings in the Bible."

KIWI CHOW, a Hong Kong filmmaker who secretly shot a documentary on the city's 2019 pro-democracy protests, telling Hong Kong Free Press why he planned to remain in Hong Kong despite potential prosecution for his film. *Revolution of Our Times* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival this summer.

"We came about a foot from drowning. I thought we were gone."

Middle Tennessee resident RICKEY LARKIN, who told a *New York Times* reporter he was trapped by rising water in his home with his wife and cat as flash flooding hit communities in rural Humphreys County. Rescuers eventually reached Larkin and his wife, but 22 others died in the floods.

"As you can imagine, our staff are gutted and appalled by this."

VINNY GREEN, chief operating officer of Snopes, on news that the fact-checking website's co-founder David Mikkelson had plagiarized dozens of stories he'd written for the site from 2015 to 2019, according to *The New York Times*.

"It is as if we are cursed."

The Rev. LUCSON SIMEON, a minister in Haiti, on the string of disasters the country has faced in recent years, culminating in a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in mid-August that killed more than 2,200 people and left thousands homeless. The earthquake was followed two days later by a major storm. Simeon told a *Washington Post* reporter, "We just keep getting beaten down. I ask myself, how can this be?"



1

SOFT-SERVE LANDING

POLICE IN TISDALE, SASKATCHEWAN, placed a 34-year-old man under arrest after he landed his helicopter at a Dairy Queen on July 31. Royal Canadian Mounted Police say the unnamed pilot from the nearby town of Leroy touched down in a busy parking lot near the fast-food establishment, where he dropped off a helicopter passenger who walked inside to pick up an ice cream cake. "When it landed, the helicopter blew up dust and debris through the area, which includes schools, an aquatic center and more," a Mountie spokesman said. Because police determined the cake-pickup landing didn't qualify as an emergency, on Sept. 7 the pilot is due in court to face charges for dangerous operation of an aircraft.

2 **CAT TO THE RESCUE** An elderly British woman has her pet cat to thank for her rescue after a bad fall on Aug. 14. Police in Cornwall reported that loud and persistent meowing from a cat named Piran helped lead rescue workers to the location of an 83-year-old woman who had tumbled down a ravine. Neighbors had phoned police after the unnamed woman went missing for more than an hour. That's when Piran, the woman's cat, perched atop the creek bank and began loudly calling out. After locating the cat, emergency workers clambered down the 70-foot bank into the creek to render aid. Authorities said the woman survived the fall and was in stable condition days after the accident.

3 **UNCLEAR THREATS** A 67-year-old bank robber in the United Kingdom received a four-year jail sentence in July despite botching his first attempted heist through bad handwriting. In a Sussex courthouse, Alan Slattery pleaded guilty to trying to rob three banks earlier this year. During his first attempt, Slattery's poor penmanship on a threatening note handed to the bank clerk resulted in confusion. After the teller couldn't read his handwriting, Slattery fled the scene. Later, Slattery successfully made off with about $3,300 in currency in a second holdup after writing a neater note. Slattery left a third bank robbery attempt empty-handed after a cashier challenged him.

4 **TEEN VS. LAKE TAHOE** In August, 14-year-old James Savage became the youngest person ever to swim the length of Lake Tahoe, completing a distance swimming challenge known as the Lake Tahoe Triple Crown. Swimming alone for 12 hours, Savage covered 21.3 miles of open water to complete the challenge. "I had no doubts whatsoever," James' mother Jillian Savage told the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*. "He's been swimming almost every day, six, seven days a week since he was 8. With open water, it's just what he does. But mentally, even though it takes a whole bunch of us to make the swim possible, he's really out there by himself." The Los Banos, Calif., teen swam the width of the lake that straddles the border of Nevada and California last year.

ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL BEATTY

5 **KARAOKE WITH COMRADES** Beginning Oct. 1, karaoke playlists in China will presumably grow shorter. The nation's Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced it would introduce a list of songs banned from appearing on karaoke playlists. Ministry officials said karaoke singing should be restricted to songs that promote healthy lifestyles and generate love of country, as defined by the Chinese Communist Party. Violent and sexually explicit songs will be prohibited, as will music that "endangers national unity" or "violates China's religious policies."

6 **'TIS THE SEASON** Officials at Nissin Foods believe they know what customers will want this fall. The maker of Cup Noodles announced it would introduce a pumpkin spice flavor to its noodle offerings beginning Oct. 1. "After 50 years of noodle innovation, what better time to release our most unexpected flavor to date with pumpkin spice, and trust me it really is that good," Nissin Foods vice president for marketing Jaclyn Park said. The company cited its own marketing research for the decision, highlighting data that showed more than half of Generation Z consumers are "obsessed" with pumpkin spice flavoring. The research found weaker support among older consumers. The food-maker suggests consumers top their cups of pumpkin spice noodles with whipped cream.

7 **PORKY PANIC AT SEA** When it comes to its buffet service, Carnival Cruise Line is hoisting the white flag. A company official announced in August the cruise line's Lido Buffet would limit the quantity of bacon served on every ship beginning Aug. 16. Brand ambassador John Heald explained in a Facebook Live video that the cruise line had run into difficulties with its suppliers of bacon and would therefore only serve bacon every other day. "We purchase thousands of pieces of bacon every week, and the people that supply us and the cruise industry are having some challenges sourcing bacon for our ships at the moment," Heald said. The ambassador reminded Carnival's patrons that breakfast ham and sausage would still be available every breakfast.

> **AFTER 50 YEARS OF NOODLE INNOVATION, WHAT BETTER TIME TO RELEASE OUR MOST UNEXPECTED FLAVOR TO DATE WITH PUMPKIN SPICE.**

8 **HIGHWAY RODEO** Traffic along Interstate 15 in San Bernardino County, Calif., ground to a halt Aug. 11 when a large bull wandered onto the highway. After grazing along the shoulder, the bull stepped onto the northbound side of the freeway in Rancho Cucamonga, causing motorists to slam on their brakes. Officers with the California Highway Patrol found the bull lazily meandering around the expressway. Eventually officers corralled the bull, led it off the interstate, and fed the animal.

9 **TAKING LIBERTIES** The mayor of Nagoya, Japan, apologized to a Japanese Olympic softball player on Aug. 12 after he decided to bite her gold medal. Pitcher Miu Goto had won her medal at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo after Japan's softball team beat the USA in the final. During Goto's courtesy visit to Mayor Takashi Kawamura on Aug. 4, the mayor asked if he could wear her medal—then bit into it. While athletes often bite their medals while posing for photos, they don't generally bite others' medals. "I'm really sorry that I hurt the treasure of the gold medalist," Kawamura said after receiving criticism for the stunt. The International Olympic Committee agreed to give Goto a replacement medal.





Educating from the top

Strings attached to funding can tie educators' hands

BACK WHEN I AUTHORED children's books, I got to hang out with public school teachers. This was both fun and edifying, since, while homeschooling my own kids from grades one to 12, my main exposure to public school came from John Taylor Gatto. Gatto, a veteran teacher and author of *Dumbing Us Down* and *Weapons of Mass Instruction*, was very sour on the school system.

But the system isn't necessarily the teachers, many of whom do the best they can with dwindling resources and constant "improvements" in education policy. During my school-visit years, the latest improvement was No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal mandate that left almost every teacher behind. NCLB demanded accountability, and the only way to get it was by standardized testing. Test prep and practice consumed so much classroom time, especially during spring semester, that there was little left for fun stuff like author visits.

I was sympathetic, and yet ... wasn't it all about the money? Both teachers and administrators complained about underfunding, but if the feds were handing out money, might they want some accountability? Besides, the U.S. Department of Education supplied only 8 percent to 10 percent of a state's education budget. Couldn't local districts find a way to ditch the tests and forgo the dollars?

I never asked.

Teachers still complain, with some justification, about teaching to the test. That may be why so many of them supported Oregon Senate Bill 744. The bill passed both Oregon houses in June and was signed by Gov. Kate Brown on July 14, in a process reported as "unusually quiet." No wonder, because when the news broke, it broke hard: "Oregon governor signs bill suspending math, reading proficiency requirements for HS graduates." Across the podcast world it stirred about five minutes of outrage: "more dumbing down education," "public school failure," "Is this how we compete?"

PUBLIC FUNDING MAKES PUBLIC DEMANDS, AND MASS SCHOOLING MEANS MASS MANAGEMENT.

There's more to the story. The focus of SB 744 is not erasing standards (or not directly), but reconsidering graduation requirements after the devastation wrought by a year of online school. "Demonstrating proficiency" in math and reading means passing Oregon's four Essential Skills tests, a bridge too far for the many underprivileged students who fell through the cracks. While a task force evaluates Oregon's graduation requirements and makes recommendations, the state will waive said requirements. In the meantime, high-school students must "successfully complete the credit requirements" in order to graduate—that is, show up for class and turn in homework.

Teachers who supported the bill in public testimony consistently pointed to the tyranny of testing: "being reduced to a single number on a single day"; "devastating for students, teachers, and principals." "I was not teaching how to write [or] communicate ... I was test-prepping them—again." Isn't there a better way to educate kids of diverse backgrounds and incomes?

Not in the overbuilt, top-heavy structure we have now. Public funding makes public demands, and mass schooling means mass management. Classroom teaching has never been the best model, but back in the day of mostly local control, it was much more responsive.

Sen. Ben Sasse, in his book *The Vanishing American Adult*, makes the point that schooling is not education. Schooling is limited to four walls; education happens everywhere. "Public education" is becoming an oxymoron—a point lost on the Biden administration, now pushing for free preschool and free community college. They assume more schooling equals more learning and therefore more opportunity. The equation isn't that simple.

It's not that kids can't succeed in school, or that nothing good can come out of a classroom. Most of us can recall at least one inspiring teacher who made a lifelong impact on our developing minds. It's just that the further education policy gets from the individual child, the less effective it will be. Oregon may be making a good-faith attempt to meet the needs of at-risk students by reevaluating their standards. But starting at the top almost guarantees lowering—even eliminating—standards at the bottom. ■

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IRON sharpens IRON Radio

With CHRIS ARNZEN





While broad evangelicalism sleepwalks to Babylon, smugly embracing the culture that intends its demise, Chris Arnzen on IRON SHARPENS IRON exposes idols and exalts the word of God. -Dr. Rosaria Butterfield



Chris Arnzen represents a vital voice today. We are in a time that is growing ever darker. Many Christian voices are capitulatirg to the culture on critically important issues. Chris and ISI Radio are where the light of the Gospel and the sufficiency of Scripture remain key. -Virgil Walker



What I appreciate most about Chris Arnzen is that he keeps the main thing the main thing. Chris's unwavering focus on the sufficiency of Scripture to address social, cultural, and political issues facing the evangelical Church is refreshing. -Darrell Bernard Harrison



Chris Arnzen is an exceptional interviewer with one primary objective–to know and make known the life, doctrine and ministry of the one being interviewed. He has a commanding personality, and his questions were courteous, relevant and revealing. -Paul Washer

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GAMER'S DELIGHT

Free Guy makes blockbuster cinema out of video game culture, with room for a theological parallel

by Collin Garbarino

HALFWAY THROUGH THE NEW FILM *Free Guy* someone explains that people don't want anything original, they just want more sequels and reboots. The joke of course is that *Free Guy* is one of the few summer blockbusters not based on some preexisting franchise. But the joke goes deeper—*Free Guy* might not be a sequel or reboot, but every scene contains bits stolen from familiar movies. I had my doubts about this remix approach to storytelling, but director Shawn Levy has created a surprisingly rewarding summer hit.

Ryan Reynolds plays Guy—his full name is "Blue Shirt Guy"—a non-player →

character (NPC in gamer speak) who lives inside a video game called *Free City*. Guy isn't real: He's an algorithm whose only purpose is to let the game's players mistreat him. *Free City* is a massively multiplayer online game (more gamer speak) in which players level up (gain powers and abilities) by performing missions. The game is violent—a cross between *Fortnite* and *Grand Theft Auto*—and one of its missions is "Bank Heist." Poor Guy is the bank teller whom the players rob and abuse multiple times a day.

Guy doesn't mind. He's just an algorithm after all, and he was programmed to enjoy his terrible existence. But he becomes dissatisfied when he meets a player named Molotov Girl (an endearing performance by Jodie Comer). Molotov Girl tells him his world is just a game and warns him that the game's owner (an over-the-top Taika Waititi) is about to pull the plug on *Free City*. Guy decides if he's going to save his world he'll need to level up, but he's going to do it by being a good guy rather than by hurting people.

Free Guy should feel too derivative. Reynolds' performance, though entirely likable, comes across like an impersonation of Will Ferrell's Buddy the Elf. Moreover, Guy never deviates from his daily routine while humming a catchy pop tune, reminding us of *The Lego Movie*. We can't help but compare what we're seeing to *Ready Player One* and *The Matrix*, movies exploring the connection between the real and the virtual. There's a little bit of *The Truman Show* thrown in when Guy starts to live his own life but realizes he can't escape the city. We hear echoes of *Groundhog Day* and *Edge of Tomorrow* as Guy levels up by working through the same scenarios until he's perfected them. And since Disney now owns 20th Century Studios, producers take the opportunity to highlight other major franchises in the Disneyverse.

But in a movie about an NPC that comes to life, all these allusions somehow feel appropriate. Video gamers and connoisseurs of nerd culture like nothing better than hunting games or films for "Easter eggs," or surprise references to other media properties. The movie also includes cameos of superstar gamers (Ninja, Pokimane) whom the casual moviegoer won't recognize, but many teens and 20-somethings will. The movie successfully captures the vibe of the gaming culture, but that culture can be a little crass, which earns *Free Guy* its PG-13 rating for foul language and crude references.

The film draws freely on what's come before, but I was surprised by the new direction it takes those concepts. While watching, I found myself asking, "Will they be able to bring this scenario to a satisfying conclusion?" The answer is yes: The filmmakers manage an ending that feels fresh and natural.



> THE MOVIE PROMISES THAT LOVE AND KINDNESS AND SACRIFICE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

Most surprisingly, the narrative opens itself to a theological reading. Without spoiling anything: Guy lives in a world that's fallen—it wasn't supposed to be so violent. He was programmed with a longing in his heart that he doesn't understand, a longing that he eventually realizes can only be satisfied by his creator. The movie promises that love and kindness and sacrifice can change the world. I don't know whether the Christian parallels were intentional, but finding these unexpected Easter eggs made *Free Guy* worth the watch. ■

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION



A marshal and his mastiff

by Collin Garbarino

The new *Turner & Hooch*, streaming on Disney+, continues the 1989 film starring Tom Hanks. Hanks played Scott Turner, a small-town policeman who teams up with a slobbery French mastiff. In the new series, Josh Peck plays Scott's son (also named Scott), who is a U.S. marshal based in San Francisco.

Like his dad, Scott wants everything neat and tidy, but also like his dad, his life is thrown into chaos when he adopts an unruly dog named Hooch. The elder Turner died right before the show's first episode, and he left his latest French mastiff to his son.

Each episode features a bad guy of the week—Scott chases bank robbers, kidnappers, and jewel thieves. Hooch keeps tripping him up, sometimes literally. A mystery also lurks in the background. Maybe Scott's father was working on a secret investigation when he died.

Does this series live up to the 1989 movie? Josh Peck is no Tom Hanks, but the new *Turner & Hooch* is more family friendly. There's gunfire, but despite the whizzing bullets, no one dies in the first four episodes. And unlike the original movie, the love story has remained chaste so far.

But the show gets a slow start as early episodes spend too much time recreating parallels with the movie. Even if this series develops some original storylines, I'm not sure it will be able to run with the big dogs.

ANIMALS ON SET *Turner & Hooch* filmmakers smeared chicken-flavored baby food on actor Josh Peck's face to entice the dog to lick it.



PUPS TO THE RESCUE

Dogs save the day in *PAW Patrol: The Movie*

by Marty VanDriel

ARE YOU A CAT PERSON or canine lover? In *PAW Patrol: The Movie*, Mayor Humdinger loves felines and despises dogs, so you can be pretty sure he is the villain of this children's tale, based on a popular TV series beloved by youngsters under the age of 10.

The movie, in theaters and streaming on Paramount+, follows the same formula as the TV show. The bad guys are clearly identified (though not particularly scary or menacing). The members of the PAW Patrol are lovable and brave. They resolve crises quickly, with lots of cool, loud vehicles and tools to get the work done.

Sometimes, writers and producers take the opportunity of a larger stage to preach new messages to their audience—perhaps with a new LGBT character or a jarring environmental subplot. PAW Patrol didn't take such liberties, not even with Rocky the recycling pup or new team member Liberty, whose biggest dream is to be as brave and adventurous as the rest of the gang.

Parents of adopted children should be aware the movie revisits scenes of one dog's abandonment in the big city. Chase, a German shepherd puppy, was rescued by Ryder, the human boy in charge of the Patrol. A crisis looms when Chase loses his courage, disturbed by memories of being all alone in a strange and scary environment. Parents may wish to talk about that plot point with their children, reminding them we all were rescued from despair by a loving Father.



FIVE KID-FRIENDLY DOG MOVIES

1. Lady and the Tramp (1955)
2. Homeward Bound (1993)
3. Lassie Come Home (1943)
4. Clifford's Really Big Movie (2004)
5. One Hundred and One Dalmatians (1961)

COMPLICATED QUEEN

Jennifer Hudson's *Respect* brings gospel singer Aretha Franklin to life yet leaves some questions unanswered

by Sarah Schweinsberg



THE OPENING SCENE OF *Respect*, a new film depicting the life of Aretha Franklin, shows the gospel singer impressing people at an early age. In the Franklin family's Detroit home, young Aretha is seen surrounded by musical talent—Ella Fitzgerald, Sam Cooke, Dinah Washington, and pianist Art Tatum. Someone quips that at age 10, Aretha's voice is going on 30.

Respect, featuring singer Jennifer Hudson in the role of adult Aretha, brings to life the Queen of Soul. While the film shows the obstacles she overcame to achieve her dreams, it falls short in portraying her personal motivations.

The film reveals Aretha's difficult childhood. Her mother, who was separated from her father, died of a heart attack when Aretha was 10. The film alludes to how Aretha was raped by an older boy—an incident not depicted onscreen, although *Respect* is rated PG-13 for language and sexuality. She gave birth to her first son when she was just 12 years old, and her second son at age 15.

Music, gospel in particular, is Aretha's way of coping. At 16, she travels the country with her father, preacher C.L. Franklin (Forest Whitaker), who is musically and politically well connected. She performs gospel music at church services promoting civil rights, and Martin Luther King Jr. becomes a family friend.

What Aretha really wants is her own singing career outside of the church. But her father controls her talent, insisting he approve her record labels, her songs, and the clothes she wears. To break from him, Aretha leaves with her boyfriend, Ted White (Marlon Wayans), who becomes her manager and her first husband. Seven years later, her marriage to White dissolves amid reports of domestic abuse.

Even as Aretha's hits roll in, her happiness is short-lived. She turns to alcohol, stricken by grief over her traumatic past and buckling under pressure to produce more hits. The film culminates in her return to her musical roots: gospel.

The lengthy movie—145 minutes—is carried by Jennifer Hudson's brilliant portrayal of Aretha, including her musical performances of Aretha's top hits and hymns like "Amazing Grace." Director Liesel Tommy wisely allows Hudson to sing Aretha's songs at full length.

Aretha, who died in 2018, had pursued a biopic about her life since 2012. But the *Detroit Free Press* reported that film producers believed creating a successful film about Aretha would only be possible after her death. They thought the deeply private singer, who was sensitive about how her family might be portrayed, would have resisted elements in the script needed to tell her story effectively.

That's why it's interesting the film didn't get more personal. Throughout, we never really get a glimpse inside Aretha's mind. We don't hear what she might have thought about having a child at age 12 or how her mother's death affected her. Nor do we hear why her goal was fame when so many singers she grew up with, including her own mother, were content with their voices remaining within church walls.

Still, *Respect* is a moving tribute to the Queen of Soul and the mark she made on American music. ■

HANDPICKED PERSONATION Before her death in 2018, Aretha Franklin chose Jennifer Hudson to portray her in her future biopic.

QUANTRELL D. COLBERT/MGM PICTURES

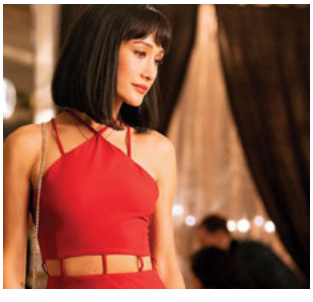
BOX OFFICE BUST *Reminiscence* had a $68 million budget but earned only $2 million on opening weekend in the U.S.

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

WEEKEND OF AUG. 20-22, ACCORDING TO BOX OFFICE MOJO. QUANTITY OF SEXUAL (S), VIOLENT (V), AND FOUL-LANGUAGE (L) CONTENT ON A 0-10 SCALE, WITH 10 HIGH, FROM KIDS-IN-MIND.COM

		S	V	L
1	**Free Guy*** PG-13	....	not rated	
2	**PAW Patrol: The Movie*** G	.....	not rated	
3	**Jungle Cruise*** PG-13	..	1	6 1
4	**Don't Breathe 2** R	...	not rated	
5	**Respect*** PG-13	.....	not rated	
6	**The Suicide Squad*** R	5	9	10
7	**The Protégé*** R	.....	not rated	
8	**The Night House** R	..	not rated	
9	**Reminiscence*** PG-13	..	6	5 5
10	**Old*** PG-13	.....	5	6 5

*REVIEWED BY WORLD



TOP 10 FOCUS

The Protégé has the bang and the flash, but in the end, it's just firing blanks. The narrative about skilled assassin Anna pursuing revenge for her mentor's death takes too long to let the audience understand what's going on and why. By the time we learn why Moody was killed, we've stopped caring. —from WORLD's full review at wng.org



FILM NOIR TO FORGET ABOUT

Reminiscence delivers neither a good story nor a much-needed message for our time

by Jim Hill

REMINISCENCE MAY BE about the power of memories, but this is one movie that is regrettably forgettable.

The new film from Warner Bros. packs plenty of star power as actors Hugh Jackman and Rebecca Ferguson, who worked together in *The Greatest Showman*, rejoin forces. But big stars and solid performances aren't enough to carry a script that can't decide what it wants to be.

The story takes place in Miami in the dystopian future, where a war and global warming have caused the oceans to rise and mankind to become nocturnal because of the daytime's increased heat. Audiences meet Nick Bannister (Jackman), a war survivor possessing a particular talent that allows him, with the aid of a futuristic machine, to cause people vividly to relive their own memories. Besides helping people escape the dreariness of their lives, Nick's ability enables him to aid citizens and local law enforcement in unraveling mysteries.

This plot initially works as viewers seem to embark on an exhilarating sci-fi ride similar to *Minority Report*. But then the film turns in a darker direction, morphing into a futuristic but lesser version of the Jack Nicholson film noir *Chinatown*. In the end, a muddled plot and a weak payoff leave audiences feeling they were entertained but not satisfied. With violence, foul language, and sexual situations, *Reminiscence* easily earns its PG-13 rating.

What's most disappointing is not so much what this film is, but what it could have been. At one point near the end of the story, the film has a chance to redeem itself by taking a stance on whether having the ability to relive the past is a good thing or not. It's an opportunity to remind audiences to live in the present, not wallow in nostalgia. As C.S. Lewis put it, "The Present is the point at which time touches eternity" and therefore is where we should aspire to spend most of our thought lives (*The Screwtape Letters*).

Such a message could have encouraged Christian and non-Christian viewers alike to break from patterns of reminiscing and regret and flourish in the "holy present." Instead, as Nick decides whether to continue living in the present or the past, *Reminiscence* provides a contemporary answer, suggesting the reasonable solution is whatever makes us happy. Such an idea fits all too neatly into postmodern thinking.

Taking this easy way out is exactly why *Reminiscence* will require the likes of Nick and his machine for anyone to remember it.

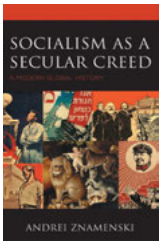
THE PROTÉGÉ: SIMON VARSANO; REMINISCENCE: BEN ROTHSTEIN/WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC.

Socialist and anti-racist religion

Analyzing Marxist myths and racial divisions

by Marvin Olasky

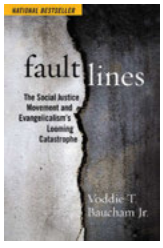
KARL MARX'S PREDECESSOR, Auguste Comte, made up "the Religion of Humanity," within which humanity would worship itself. In ***Socialism as a Secular Creed*** (Lexington Books, 2021), Andrei Znamenski explains what atheists deny: the religious nature of Marxist hopes past and present.



Znamenski shows how radicals often pose as liberty-lovers until they gain power. That follows the game plan of early socialist Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin: "We demand at this moment freedom of religions so that one single religion may more easily be built on all these ruins of humanity's religious past. … We lay claim to freedom of education so that our doctrine may be propagated more easily, with no obstructions, and be one day the sole affection, followed and practiced by all."

Znamenski tells the saga well. The hierarchs of Marxist religion have to decide how to treat resisters. Some leaders resist the pressure to murder opponents, but the ruthless see those reluctant to kill as "soft" and eventually push them out or kill them. Revolutions bring the worst to the top: "Democratic socialism" is a myth.

If you've read Kendi-kindled books on racial issues promoted since the George Floyd tragedy, it's worth reading the other side: ***Fault Lines*** (Salem, 2021) is a response by African American pastor Voddie Baucham Jr. Baucham opposes racism and describes the current "anti-racist movement" as a religion with its own cosmology, canon, theology ("ethnic gnosticism"), sins ("whitesplaining"), and creation myth: "On the sixth day, white people created white fragility."



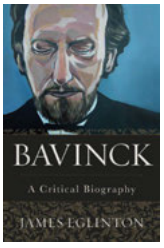
Baucham also analyzes police shootings of both blacks and whites, alongside cases of police being shot. He examines the epidemic of abortion in black America and wonders why that goes largely unpublicized. Baucham lists some of the people who have lost jobs or gained scorn merely for criticizing critical race theory absolutes.

What's not helpful is Baucham's dismissal of theologically sound Christians, including individuals and groups like Tim Keller, the Gospel Coalition, and Mark Dever/9Marks. We can make more honey if we go beyond buzzwords. Let's sting the latter-day followers of Marx, Darwin, and the Black Panthers. Let's ally with those who also emphasize the Bible rather than racial division. Let's agree that black lives matter but oppose the BLM industrial complex.

And a reminder: As Christians face race-first attacks, more still unites us than separates us when we stand on the Bible. William Edgar's ***7 Big Questions Your Life Depends On*** (Crown & Covenant, 2020) includes looks at "Did God Really Say?" (frequently asked now) and "Do You Want To Be Healed?" (not asked often enough).

I also recommend Kenneth Samples' ***Christianity Cross-Examined*** (RTB Press, 2021) and Christopher White's ***God & Man and Monkey at Yale*** (Lowe, 2021), a critique of Darwinism. Faith in evolution rather than creation is racism's best friend, God's most potent ideological enemy, and abortion's ally: Babies seen as products of chance seem readily replaceable.

Bookmarks



Five favorite biographies:

Bavinck by James Eglinton: Bavinck, a Dutch theologian, is overshadowed by the more famous Abraham Kuyper. Eglinton shows how Bavinck (1854-1921) was a vital Kuyper ally.

Calvin by Bruce Gordon: Gordon sets the European context. Calvin fled persecution in France, then transformed his native land and Europe by sending trained missionary-pastors back home.

Daws by Betty Lee Skinner: Dawson Trotman, who made spiritual disciplines practical through the Navigators ministry, challenged Billy Graham and others to take a very disciplined approach to growth in Christ.

Jonathan Edwards by George Marsden: Marsden, a history pro, shows Edwards as a pastor, theologian, philosopher, missionary, and family head.

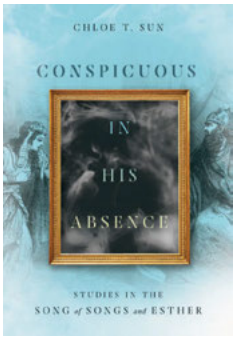
The Life of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 1899-1981 by Iain Murray: Lloyd-Jones is famous for his commentaries. Murray condensed two earlier volumes and updated this preacher's story in this excellent version.

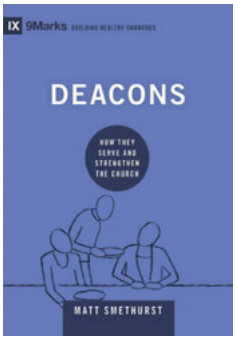
I also recommend four other biographers: J.C. Ryle, John Pollock, Peter Masters, and Marcus Loane. *—Russ Pulliam*

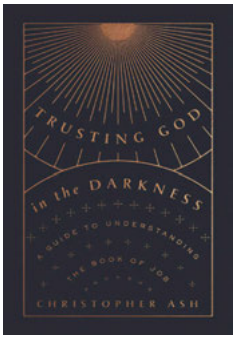
Scriptural exegesis

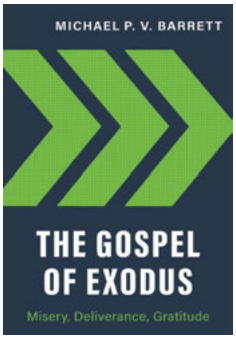
Four accessible theology reviews

by Caleb Nelson









Conspicuous in His Absence: Studies in the Song of Songs and Esther **by Chloe T. Sun:** Sun noticed many similarities between the book of Esther and the Song of Songs, so she wrote a marvelous book highlighting the parallels between the two. One example: Israel flows "with milk and honey," just like the Song of Songs' bride has "honey and milk" under her tongue. Neither book mentions the name of God or quotes His speech. Across four themes—time, temple, feast, and absence—Sun compares their testimony to the Pentateuch and Prophets, where God speaks all the time and His name appears in almost every verse. She is gifted at questioning the text and patiently digging out its rich testimony to the God who saved silently in the days of Esther.

Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church **by Matt Smethurst:** Historically, the role of deacon is the most confusing and underutilized office in many churches. Smethurst writes here an exceptionally clear treatment of the Biblical material, showing that deacons are in the body to meet physical needs. They do mercy ministry, helping the poor, sick, widowed, disabled, and other needy people in the church (and outside it, if possible). And, as the origin of deacons in Acts 6 shows, deacons are "shock absorbers." "So often a deacon's job is to diminish conflict in the church," he writes. When practical needs such as parking, building cleaning and maintenance, and hospitality are taken care of, Christ is glorified. Drawing on Luke 22:27, Smethurst calls Him "Kings of kings, Deacon of deacons." How glorious!

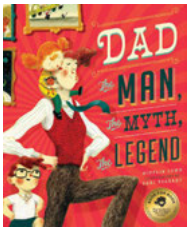
Trusting God in the Darkness: A Guide To Understanding the Book of Job **by Christopher Ash:** This book argues that Job is not about why humans suffer, but about God: His character, His worship, and how the temporary suffering of His servants will give way to their final vindication. Ash also treats with great sensitivity and insight the search for cosmic Wisdom (Job 28), the need for justification before God (Job 29-31), and the long chapters of misery between Job's descent into agony and resurrection into life. "The book of Job ought to shape our expectation of the normal Christian life. Plan on being treated like God treated His blameless servant," writes Ash. After all, this is what happened to Jesus, "and because Job is about Jesus, it is also, derivatively, about every man and woman in Christ."

The Gospel of Exodus: Misery, Deliverance, Gratitude **by Michael P.V. Barrett:** Like the Heidelberg Catechism, the book of Exodus is structured around three themes: misery, deliverance, and gratitude. Barrett guides readers through these movements and their intersection with the book's major topics: deliverance, sacrifice, faith, the Ten Commandments, and the Tabernacle. He concludes that the corporate deliverance that brought Israel from slavery to worship means "there is every warrant for referring to the book as the Gospel of Exodus." The very narrative shape of the book highlights its gospel dimension: "That God gave the law at Sinai rather than at the burning bush speaks volumes. … Had Moses taken the tablets into Egypt as the requisites for deliverance, the exodus would never have happened." Barrett offers accessible, Biblically faithful insight into the good news of Exodus.

Connection points

Four picture books about relationships

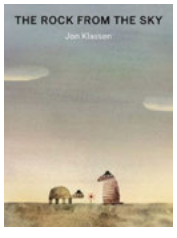
by Mary Jackson



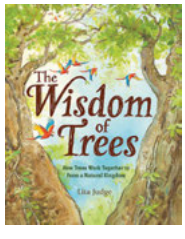
Dad: The Man, the Myth, the Legend **by Mifflin Lowe:** In the eyes and imagination of a 10-year-old son, Dad is capable of anything, from fighting pythons to blasting into space. In each escapade, a level-headed Mom humorously brings father, son, and readers back to reality. The son grimaces at his parents embracing but relishes snuggling into their bed at night. He loves hearing his Dad say, "You can do anything," but what he really wants is to be like him. Dani Torrent's lively illustrations and Lowe's positive depiction of family life and fatherhood make for a worthwhile read. *(Ages 4-8)*



Fern and Otto **by Stephanie Graegin:** Fern the bear and Otto the cat share a cozy treehouse and a beloved friendship. Fern begins writing a story about their friendship, but Otto says it lacks excitement and suggests they venture into the forest for better material. The pair set out, encountering familiar characters and fairy tales in progress, including "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Three Bears," and most scary, the giant witch from "Hansel and Gretel." Fern and Otto gain new appreciation for their home and uneventful rhythms. Soft illustrations will leave young children lingering with much to see. *(Ages 3-7)*

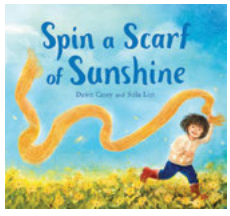


The Rock From the Sky **by Jon Klassen:** Humorous interactions reveal personality differences between a stubborn turtle and an inviting armadillo—each sporting bowler caps—and a silent snake companion in a beret. In 96 pages and five short sections, the turtle and the armadillo debate naps, sunsets, the future, and whose spot is better, all while encountering weird events such as a rock falling from the sky and a futuristic extraterrestrial. Klassen's story about the workings of friendship amid odd, unforeseeable circumstances includes his signature minimalistic illustrations, witty dialogue, and telling eye movements. *(Ages 5-8)*



The Wisdom of Trees **by Lita Judge:** Judge combines fascinating detail and poetry with watercolor spreads, giving readers new insight into tree ecosystems. Trees send messages to each other through root fungi—the "Wood Wide Web"—and have the ability to share food, help each other ward off diseases and insect attacks, and build support systems stretching miles. Judge covers topics such as photosynthesis, winter dormancy, tree rings, and the need for reforestation, expanding with further explanation in the appendix. Despite a strong environmentalist bias, this book showcases the wonder of God's design. *(Ages 6-10)*

Afterword



In ***Spin a Scarf of Sunshine*** by Dawn Casey (Floris Books, 2020), a young girl nurtures a lamb, then shears, spins, and dyes its wool for a winter scarf. With similar themes as Harriet Ziefert's *A New Coat for Anna* (Knopf, 1986), the book shows children the cycle of making clothing using wool.

In Richard Ho's ***The Lost Package*** (Roaring Book Press, 2021), a child's carefully prepared package eventually finds its way to its intended recipient but not without mishap and unexpected connections. In the endnotes, Ho plugs the beleaguered U.S. Postal Service, where his father worked for three decades.

Parents should know Newbery-winning author Matt de la Peña's latest picture book, ***Milo Imagines the World*** (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2021), features a same-sex wedding. The story portrays a boy observing and sketching people around him on a subway, speculating about their comings and goings, then realizing they are probably different than he imagined. —*M.J.*

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— **RICK PERRY**
FORMER SECRETARY OF THE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
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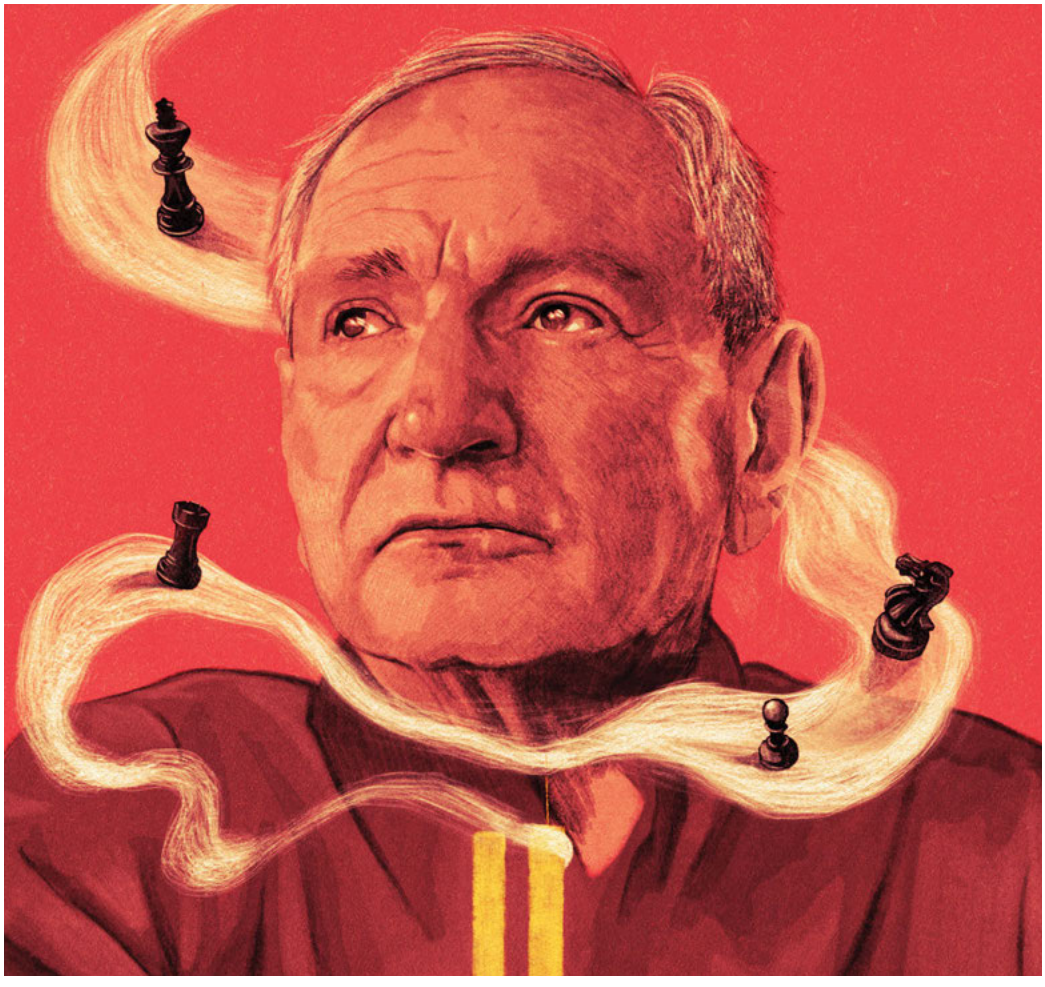
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A POST-9/11 WORLD AT 20

More forecasting of tensions with Afghanistan, Israel, Iran, Korea, and beyond



MARVIN OLASKY INTERVIEWS GEORGE FRIEDMAN

HERE'S PART TWO of the June 21 interview with Geopolitical Futures chairman George Friedman. Part one, concerning China and Russia, ran in our July 31 issue. We talked about Israel, Iran, Korea, and other parts of a perilous world, but since the Sept. 11, 2001, attack led to the war now concluding tragically in Afghanistan, this edited and tightened Q&A starts there. I don't agree with American abandonment of Afghans.

Long ago you said the whole idea of establishing democracy in Afghanistan was "demented" and impossible. You said the Taliban will rule it again. Will that happen when U.S. troops pull out? It's already happened and will continue. Afghanistan is an ancient civilization. It has different values, not even Islamic ones. Afghans, believing the basic unit is the family, created structures like the *jirga*, in which the heads of the families and clans meet to make decisions. They don't want to be like us. They don't respect us. They don't think we properly accept the authority of the elders. They regard the youth culture as blasphemy.

Our "nation building" hasn't worked? Americans have a habit of hanging onto

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER STRAIN

the battlefield far beyond any rational possibility of achieving anything. Defeating the Taliban and creating a democratic Afghanistan was never going to happen. We invented in Vietnam the idea that we would create a democratic Vietnam, and we had the same fantasy in Afghanistan. We couldn't withdraw having made that pledge until we succeeded, but there was no way we were going to succeed.

What happens to the Afghans who have been either brave or foolish enough to side with us? These people stand a very poor chance of doing well. If the U.S. was occupied by a foreign power, it would be unpleasant for those who collaborated with that foreign power. That's what's going to happen in Afghanistan because we're not prepared to admit them here and they don't necessarily want to come here.

If they want to come here, because the alternative is death, how many are we talking about? With the army they have, it's something around 150,000-200,000 families. They were in the Afghan army, which is regarded as treasonous. They were in the Afghan government, which is now regarded as treasonous. This is the tragedy of nation-building. We went in with a perfectly reasonable goal: destroy al-Qaeda. We managed to disrupt it. Then, instead of, "Mission accomplished. Time to go home," we invented a new mission.

We took in lots of Vietnamese refugees, probably not as many as died in the attempt to get here, so why don't we take in lots of Afghans? There is no sea they can easily reach. Moreover, the Vietnamese were happy to have some people leave, and private families would pay ransoms for them. Afghan families in the United States are few, and not nearly wealthy enough to pay hostage fees.

Thinking of our own self-interest: What's the likelihood of Afghanistan becoming once again a haven for terrorists? Afghanistan knows the price of messing with the United States. Afghans will not want to have another Islamic terrorist group home there. But that doesn't really matter. There are a lot of places terrorists can be.



AFGHANS WILL NOT WANT TO HAVE ANOTHER ISLAMIC TERRORIST GROUP HOME THERE.



On to Israel. Last time I covered an election there was 2006. What's changed in 15 years? We have a new Middle East. The United States is no longer needed to be the housekeeper, the great power. That's Israel, which is now in a position of near-hegemony.

Does it make any difference that Netanyahu no longer runs the show? You've got a circus running the show now. Every other party in Israel, including the Arab parties, is in this government. The only thing in common is they're really sick of Netanyahu, which is understandable. But it's not a government. It can't govern. One party wants to withdraw from the West Bank. Another party wants to take all the land. This proves that Israel's completely secure, because otherwise they wouldn't put this gang in power with this combination. The prime minister has only three votes in parliament. He's from the weakest party. So they must feel pretty good about themselves.

What about the nuclear sword hanging over their heads? The Israelis are prepared to carpet-bomb Iran with nuclear weapons if the Iranians are closing in on their own nuclear weapons. Iran knows how far it can go, and being on that path is worthwhile, because then you can extract concessions. Iran's rhetoric is about Israel. Its concern is about the Arab world, in particular Iraq.

What's the basic fault line in the region? Persia and Babylon, Iranians versus Arabs. Iran and Iraq fought a terrible war in the 1980s. A million people died on each side. Iran's real interest is not Israel. It says it is because that gets a lot of applause among Arabs. Iran's leaders fear a united Arab nation. They want nuclear weapons to deter an attack on them. This is really about the relationship between two factions of the Islamic world.

Does it matter that Iran now has "hardliner Raisi" as president? The press says he's a hard-liner, but Ayatollah Khamenei is in charge. He can be as hard-line as you want on foreign policy, but if he steps out of line he'll get slapped around. The West now has another fear, Raisi—so Iran can say, "we can't give you this, we've got a hard-liner now." This is good bargaining.

Does it make any difference whether we have a nuclear deal or not? The Iranians use their nuclear program as a bargaining chip, but not to get an effective nuclear program, because Israel will react to that. Same strategy North Korea uses. It's a good bargaining chip, but you lose it when you really scare your enemy, and he has nuclear weapons. You lose a lot more.

Let's turn briefly to North Korea. It's a little country that has nuclear weapons and can be annihilated with three →

decent-sized hydrogen bombs. They know it. So they always threaten to do things they can't do. They're highly vulnerable.

What could they do? They could open fire on Seoul, an enormous city right on the border. They have artillery massively concentrated near the border. That's their nuclear weapon. North Korea says to South Korea, "We will annihilate your city." South Korea says to Americans, "We don't want our city to be annihilated. Don't do an airstrike." That's the game.

George, you're optimistic about forces balancing out each other, but don't individuals often miscalculate? That's always possible, but we are here in this republic at this moment freely speaking to each other. Our enemies have suffered greatly at our hands. The United States has 330 million people who are resilient but also operatic. You will hear the operatic songs of hysteria from both sides. At every stage we've had dissent and hatred. We are not a pleasant people, but we get things done.

At WORLD we say the sky is not falling because God holds up the sky. But in the absence of that faith, what would you say to people in Paris early in 1940? Wouldn't they say, "Look at our army. Look at our fortresses." And yet, the government was incompetent. It was also incompetent in the First World War, which it won because the United States intervened. France has a long history of incompetence. It is a country that knows how to surrender and survive. The United States is not simply luckier. We have a vast economy, an enormous military establishment, and an incredible industrial plant. Russia tried to beat us and collapsed. Sometimes honesty means realizing you're much better than you want to think. I was born in Hungary. I've been back there many times. I know what a small miserable country looks like. This isn't it. I like it here.

Here's what you were saying in 2010: Brazil and Argentina—counterweights to each other. China and Japan—ditto.

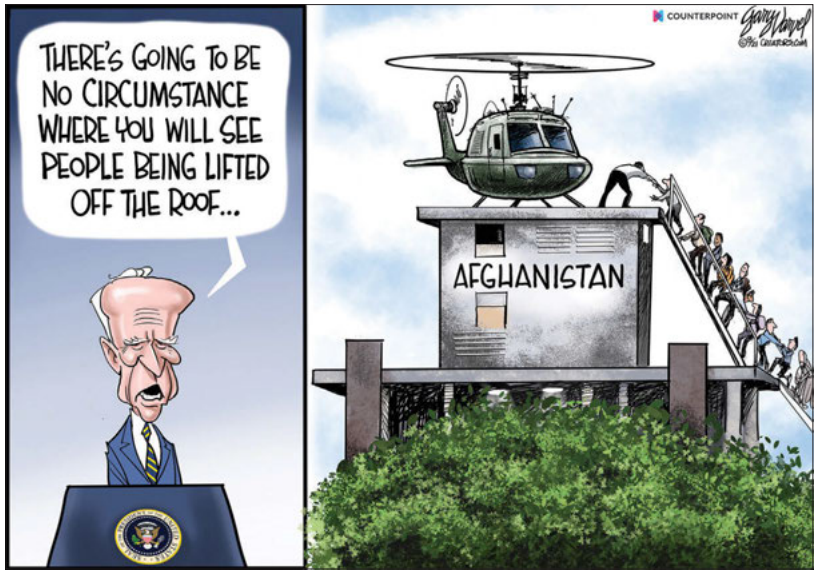
GERMANS CAN'T DECIDE WHETHER THEY'RE THE ENEMY OF RUSSIA, THE FRIEND OF RUSSIA, OR JUST A QUICK DATE.

Germany and Russia—ditto. India and Pakistan—ditto. Africa and Latin America—ignore. Use Baltic countries as bargaining chips. I doubt if you were broken up about Hong Kong. Isn't this all cold-blooded? Where's the heart? The heart comes in when you see your children and grandchildren safe. For the rest of the world, you have to discipline your heart not to feel. If you think about foreign policy as war, you learn to harden your heart.

You've said Germany worries you. Germans can't decide whether they're the enemy of Russia, the friend of Russia, or just a quick date. Of all the balances we've seen, the only one I'm concerned about but not yet certain of is Germany and Russia.

A decade ago, when I asked about the Russian threat to Gruzia—the little country in the Caucasus we call Georgia—you said to throw it under the train. Let me ask about the Uyghurs in China. Do we care, should we care? Care all you want. Do I want to go to war in Xinjiang province? No. Should I care? Of course I care. Would I pay the price needed? I don't even know what that price is. So we have to be cold and ruthless. Otherwise you wind up sending a lot of people to bad places.

Talking about cold and ruthless, any last thoughts on Putin and Russia? Russia is a Third World power in the sense that it still has not created a modern industrial economy. It lives by exporting oil at prices it can't set. In the long run, the collapse of the Soviet Union was not the end of anything but the first phase of the next drama. This regime can't survive either. ■



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Living up to legacies

On releases from Lynyrd Skynyrd and a family of Dylans

by Arsenio Orteza



IN ROCK 'N' ROLL, the only thing harder than creating a legacy is perpetuating one.

Consider Lynyrd Skynyrd, whose recent box ***Nothing Comes Easy: 1991-2012*** (Cherry Red) gathers the 4½ albums that the band's Mach 2 incarnation recorded for Atlantic and Roadrunner.

As fronted from 1973 to 1977 by Ronnie Van Zant, Skynyrd combined hard rock, Southern boogie, and gimlet-eyed observations bordering on the philosophical into a potent brew.

As fronted from 1987 to the present by Ronnie's younger brother Johnny, who helped resurrect the band after a 1977 plane crash killed Ronnie, guitarist Steve Gaines, and Gaines' background-singing sister Cassie, Skynyrd has become a curious case of old wineskins and new wine.

Initially, the presence of Mach 1's Gary Rossington, Ed King, Leon Wilkeson, and Billy Powell guaranteed continuity. Then all but Rossington began dying, and attenuation began setting in—especially in politics.

PANDEMIC PAUSE Lynyrd Skynyrd began a farewell tour in 2018 that had to pause for the coronavirus before resuming with a new name this summer.

Skynyrd under Ronnie was hard to peg: Conservatives and liberals claim "Sweet Home Alabama" for their own. Under Johnny, the band has become a Deplorable's dream, cranking out sizzling anthems to freedom, faith, and family.

Nothing Comes Easy includes *1991*, *The Last Rebel*, *God & Guns*, the *God & Guns* bonus EP, and *Last of a Dyin' Breed*, which includes the literal altar call "Start Livin' Life Again." Would that the box had focused on such highlights and collated them into a single-disc, or maybe a double-disc, best-of.

Even Skynyrd, after all, seems to know that its latter-day oeuvre could stand some pruning. The only Mach 2 song in the group's current live set? "Skynyrd Nation."

An even weightier legacy than Skynyrd's is Bob Dylan's. To be fair, both Dylan's 51-year-old son Jakob and Dylan's 25-year-old grandson Pablo insist they're not paying it any mind. Only Jakob can make that denial with a straight face.

Exit Wounds (New West), the latest album by Jakob's band-in-name-only the Wallflowers, contains nothing Dylanesque unless a vague resemblance to Dire Straits and Tom Petty counts. From its medium tempos and nondescript hooks to lyrics that could be randomly shuffled from one song to another with little loss of "meaning," it's dull.

There's nothing dull about Pablo's first two 2021 EPs, ***Solitude*** and ***Fortitude*** (Columbia) (there's a third on the way), mainly because they take homage-paying to an almost comic extreme.

Following in his grandfather's melody-appropriating ways, the former teenage hip-hopper rewrites "The Times They Are A-Changin'" as "Behold 'Tis Autumn," "I Want You" as "I Descend My Westward Course," "When You Gonna Wake Up" as "Shadow of the Guard," and "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" as "The Massacre at Fort Pillow," cramming each with more socio-historically cross-referencing syllables than anyone but an ex-rapper with the subterranean homesick blues could spit out.

Even the dense, wild-mercury sound rings a bell. ■

STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Crossing genres

Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

***Crowlink* by Shirley Collins:** Consider this five-song, 15-minute digital download a bonus disc to Collins' 2020 comeback-continuing *Heart's Ease*. Not only does it pick up with the nature recordings with which that album left off, but it also revisits two of its songs—the hymn "Wondrous Love," retitled "Through All Eternity," in an eerie synthesizer-only mix, and "Barbara Allen," retitled "The Rose and the Briar," using one of that ballad's many alternate texts. Collins also revisits her 1971 album *No Roses*, reciting a verse from "Just As the Tide Was a 'Flowing" to the sounds of chirping birds and calling it "Across the Field." She doesn't sing at all on the synthesizer-and-birds "At Break of Day." "My Sailor Boy" shows why she's the grande dame of folk.



***Sob Rock* by John Mayer:** From its pastel tints and Mayer's 1980s hair to the fonts and the "Nice Price" sticker that Columbia used to affix to its budget-line reissues, the cover could actually have people expecting previously unreleased Mayer tracks from the early '80s. Mayer, however, was only a child at the time. So he wouldn't have been capable of crafting and performing these pleasant soft-pop anachronisms at any level, let alone the high level that he crafts and performs them here. Anyway, if this album really had come out 40 years ago, Columbia would've told Mayer to delete the F-bomb in "Shouldn't Matter but It Does." And, come 1989, people would've accused Bob Dylan of rewriting "I Guess I Just Feel Like" as "Most of the Time."



***Into the Mystery* by NEEDTOBREATHE:** For a guy who, in terms of emotion, swings for the fence as often as he does, Bear Rinehart has an insane on-base percentage. Not only does he never strike out, but he almost always makes contact. "I found a fortress where I could surrender, / where my shame didn't hide what I lacked"—not bad for a church-reared, South Carolina rock 'n' roller. And, when the lyrics totter due to one too many inexact rhymes or on-the-nose clichés, the melodies, the production, or the playing of his fellow band members picks up the slack. Most impressive for a slugger, he's not averse to small ball or to "sacrificing" some spotlight to Switchfoot's Jon Foreman if it results in the truly hit-worthy "Carry Me."



***A Touch of Jazz* by Frankie Valli:** Frankie Valli marks the 59th anniversary of his first Top 40 hit by applying his voice, which is still disarming in its borderline effeminacy, to a collection of Great American Songbook standards ("How High the Moon," "Jeepers Creepers," "I'll Remember April") that would've been considered his parents' music when "Sherry" and "Big Girls Don't Cry" were making teen hearts throb. Could he have achieved a sensitivity and an intimacy unlike anything else in his career without the help of the organist, saxophonist, trumpeter (in that order) Joey DeFrancesco, who also produced and arranged? Does it matter? "Beautiful!" exclaims someone at the end of "We'll Be Together Again." And he's right.



Encore



"If you think we're rusty tonight," shouts Bear Rinehart during the second number of NEEDTOBREATHE's recently released ***Live From the Woods, Vol. 2***, "you are sadly mistaken! You hear me?" The roar of the crowd, a sound that not that long ago seemed doomed to extinction and whose days may yet prove to be numbered, confirms that, yes, the audience does hear. Just as they did on the band's *Live From the Woods at Fontanel* (from which this 15-track album repeats only four songs, three as parts of medleys), such responses help raise the temperature to a fever pitch.

Almost all of last year's *Out of Body* gets reprised, but at no point does redundancy kick in, so transformed are these songs by the fan-interactive energy off which the band feeds. The sole track from 2016's *Hard Love* benefits most of all. It may, indeed, have been a great night when the group put the finishing touches on "Great Night" in the studio, but hearing it explode to life onstage makes its title seem like an understatement. —*A.O.*



Soft bigotry in hard places

In Afghanistan, change was everywhere if you had eyes to see

ON MY SECOND REPORTING TRIP to Afghanistan, I found my way to a corner shop in Kabul where I was told I could buy a SIM card. Then I waited at the corner for a young man whom a mutual American friend introduced to me over email chats. Amin, we will call him, was a university student working for a local nonprofit, and together we went to lunch at his office.

The meal was spread over a large table and we sat, me and the men. In Afghanistan lunch is typically served on the floor, men in one room and women in another. More out of the ordinary, one of the older men bowed his head to pray. These were Christians, the older man (old in Afghanistan is 45) a leader in one of the church networks then multiplying underground throughout the country.

I can't describe the privilege of that meeting for me, or the warmth of it in a country so full of unrest and distrust. A woman (even veiled) taken into a congregation of men, a journalist trusted inside a group that even then was hunted and despised.

To think about Afghanistan, you must unwind Western assumptions and look at what its people have lived. Afghanistan is a landlocked country overrun by invaders. Most adults there have lived only in war: 35 years of a Cold War–driven Russian invasion and occupation, followed by civil war, Taliban rule ending in 9/11, and a U.S.-led war ending now in a Taliban takeover. Distrust is the water they drink. "The war has taken away trust even among Afghans," the older Christian told me.

IT'S A STATIST BELIEF THAT PEOPLE ARE ONLY AS GOOD AS POWERFUL GOVERNMENTS MAKE THEM.

"Another believer would not easily come and introduce himself to me."

I had stepped across a canyon-like divide, later taking cabs to meet a driver to go to an office to meet another driver to go to a safe house, and in this way learning about their underground church and the small group of Westerners who sometimes lent support. Far from the headlines and the televised summits, these were the ways relationships formed in Afghanistan. It's why you see the outpouring of help and grief from U.S. veterans and others now.

When a Christian amputee turned up in jail, we learned fellow inmates beat and raped him because two Westerners running a school were brave enough to visit the prison. They got in to see Musa and offered to do his laundry as a way to make regular calls. Musa hid notes in his dirty clothes detailing horrible conditions, notes they passed to Western diplomats, eventually building pressure for top U.S. officials to demand his release. He fled for Rome and lives in Europe to this day.

Crossing the divides is a tall order for Afghan Christians, too. Many are converts from rigid Islamic families. Some are former mujahedeen. Many, even as the Taliban were on a clear march to destroy the work of 20 years, decided to change their national identity cards to indicate they are no longer Muslims but Christians.

That decision made it easy for the Taliban to track them down. Hundreds escaped by land, but at the Kabul airport many more could not get through. They had documents and their names appeared on State Department manifests, but when they showed up at proper gates, they were denied entrance.

If hardened Islamists can become softened Christians, willing to risk their lives and future on a gospel they treasure, why can't nations change, too? Why invest at all or ever, unless such change is possible?

When President Joe Biden blames Afghans for what's happened in their country, behind it lurks what President George W. Bush famously called "the soft bigotry of low expectations." It's a statist belief, rife among foreign-policy realists, that people are only as good as powerful governments make them.

We Christians buy this at our own peril, and the peril of Afghan believers and others. To deny Afghans the right to change when dramatic examples of change abound (see Afghan women in universities, infant mortality rates, literacy growth, private-run media, etc.) is not only something cruel, but self-defeating. ■

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SOMBER REMEMBRANCE

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan clouds Afghans' future and upends military and civilian achievements 20 years since 9/11

BY MINDY BELZ





Hoping to escape Taliban rule, Afghan people climb atop a plane as they wait at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan.

WAKIL KOHSAR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

In 2001 Ariane Hiriart and her husband Jacques took the last UN flight out of Kabul. Following the 9/11 attacks, Westerners evacuated as a precaution, fearing U.S. bombardments or reprisals from the Taliban.



It was an orderly departure, unlike the one she found herself trying to oversee from her home in France as the 20th anniversary of the attacks neared.

"So far we have 172 files with names and passport information of Afghans who must leave the country," she told me by phone. "It's been nearly a week, day and night, because these people are going to die if they don't get out of the country."

Besides the tens of thousands of Afghans who swarmed the Kabul airport following the Taliban's Aug. 15 capture of the city, thousands more hold papers issued by the United States or its NATO allies granting them departures—but no orderly way to exit.

For Westerners like Hiriart, who worked in the country long enough to live with Taliban rule, war, and now Taliban control again, the many lives of Afghans who have become like family are at stake. Later she will reckon with the security vacuum created by the final exit of U.S. forces, and the heartache.

The anniversary of 9/11 has become a somber remembrance for lives lost in the air and on the ground in the United States. But when President Joe Biden announced this spring he would withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, he tied the day to the American mission there. By underestimating the crack speed of the Taliban's offensive to retake the country, the Biden administration found itself racing for the exit doors, with Americans confronting a profound defeat in a war launched just a month after 9/11.

The losses already are reverberating through the 800,000 U.S. military personnel who served in the Afghan War. But they are equally profound for thousands of aid workers and missionaries who've helped Afghans rebuild society during two decades of relative freedom.

HIRIART AND HER HUSBAND made their life in missions overseas after losing their 10-year-old son to leukemia in France. They arrived in Afghanistan in February 2000, starting a school for the deaf in Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood. Their organization, Le Pelican, later opened a French-style café on a main road, employing Afghans and some deaf students while serving an international clientele. The café had to close in 2010 due to threats from the Taliban.

The school has grown to four Pelican schools with more than 400 students and 54 staff members and faculty, all serving the Hazara ethnic minority that live in the neighborhood. It's her employees and their families who need to get out of the country. Hazaras, who are Shiite Muslims, are persistently targeted by the Taliban and other Sunni jihadist groups. A triple bombing at a girls school in Dasht-e-Barchi in May left 100 people, mostly students, dead.

Despite the dangerous climate, the 74-year-old Hiriart, whose husband died in 2013, has lived most of the last two decades in a small apartment attached to the first school. When the Taliban entered Kabul, all the Pelican schools closed, and most of their families went into hiding.

"It's a terrible chaotic time, and very scary," she said by phone, and through tears. "The Taliban are in Dasht-e-Barchi, they are killing people and taking people from homes. My people are very, very afraid, and I am trying to help them out of this hell."

Every day, she said, she has to stare down all over again her disbelief in what's happened. "Twenty years ago we returned to Kabul after the U.S. invasion. The Taliban were gone. Children were crazy with joy, out in the streets with their families. Music came back. Women put away their burqas and wore veils instead. We were seeing their faces for the first time. It was also a chaotic time, but it was chaotic with joy."





Taliban fighters (left) patrol the streets of Kabul. An Afghan family flees to the Kabul airport.

WHEN THE FOUR PLANES hijacked by al-Qaeda delivered the most deadly strike in history on the U.S. homeland, Americans watching the news struggled to comprehend how the world could so suddenly change, how the attacks could happen, what they would mean.

But those more familiar with the ground out of which al-Qaeda grew knew the confrontation had been years in the making. They understood then it would not end soon or bloodlessly. Still, most everyone alive then remembers where they were and how that Tuesday morning in 2001 changed their lives.

Paul D. Miller was in a training session at Ft. Huachuca in Arizona and joined others in the barracks in time to watch on television as the second tower of the World Trade Center fell. "It was one of the defining moments of my life," he said.

He could not know then how his career would be shaped around confronting the al-Qaeda threat. He also didn't know that on that day his future wife was working inside the U.S. Capitol: "I owe it to the passengers on Flight 93 for saving her life."

Miller served with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan in 2002. After his active duty tour, he joined the National Security Council and was director for Afghanistan under Presidents Bush and Obama. Today he's still in the U.S. Army Reserves and teaches international relations at Georgetown University.

"The war in Afghanistan has had the air of persistent failure for a long time," despite the gains in Afghanistan, the weakening of al-Qaeda, and the fact that "we've not had another 9/11 type attack," Miller said.

Miller would have argued against the Trump administration's decision to negotiate withdrawal with the Taliban and President Biden's decision to go along with the 2020 agreement. "You cannot argue that what we had in Afghanistan before is worse than what we are seeing now."

Like others, Miller believes the biggest winner in the U.S. withdrawal will be China, which already is making overtures to the Taliban and has its eye on Afghanistan's mineral wealth.

"It's not the final most important event of the 21st century," he said, "but it is one more stop on the road of the disintegration of the liberal order, the erosion of the free world, and the rise of authoritarianism with its unbridled and often zero-sum contest for power. That contest has no winners, and it leaves the world more violent and poor."

DAVID GARRISON HAD JUST RETURNED to Thailand from travels to Bangladesh and India on 9/11. The regional director for the International Mission Board, the mission arm of Southern Baptists, was ironing his shirts at home in Chiang Mai when he saw news of the





Afghans desperately try to enter the Kabul airport (left). A woman who lost her husband a week earlier to the Taliban shares a tent with her children at a makeshift camp for displaced persons in Kabul.

planes crashing. He too understood right away it was a terror attack on the United States, and one likely to change his part of the world.

Two days before, Garrison had begun evacuating workers from Pakistan and Afghanistan following the daylight assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud. As head of the Northern Alliance and leader of the anti-Taliban resistance in Afghanistan, Massoud was at the time the closest Afghan ally of the United States. After his death, his fighters would be the first to join U.S. forces to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda. (Under Massoud's son, the Northern Alliance in late August was still fighting the Taliban in the Panjshir Valley, one of few regions still outside Taliban control.)

By Sept. 11, Garrison needed an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the workers needing to be evacuated. With threats against non-Muslims mounting, he had to protect their identities, and many to this day are not publicly identified as ever working in the region or serving with Christian missionary groups.

Over the next days, while rescue workers at Ground Zero in New York dug through rubble looking for clues and bodies, Garrison stationed himself at the airport in Chiang Mai, checking off names as they arrived.

"It was very challenging," Garrison recalls. "Air travel everywhere was shut down, yet we managed to get them out. Some got off the plane wearing Punjabi suits or long beards. They had been living among people who had become their friends, and now it was unclear what to think, what the future held."

By that time al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden had claimed credit for the attacks on Arabic television. President George W. Bush had issued his own ultimatum to the Taliban: Hand over al-Qaeda militants and bin Laden "or share their fate."

What Bush and many others failed to understand at the time were the extraordinary ties the Taliban and al-Qaeda had already forged.

By 1998 bin Laden had married his oldest daughter to Mullah Muhammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban. The al-Qaeda leader, a Saudi, became fully absorbed into the Pashtunwali—the "code of life" of the Pashtuns who dominate Afghanistan and the Taliban. A Pashtun bride from the Taliban elite became bin Laden's fourth wife.

The Pashtuns "will now defend him and fight for him," wrote Yossef Bodansky in his seminal 1999 biography, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*. "The lure of international recognition or American foreign aid is irrelevant in the Pashtunwali framework."

Yet even as bin Laden drew militants from around the world to fight his war on America, another movement was underway too. For

LEFT: HAROON SABAWOON/ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES



many Muslims, 9/11 "shattered the delusion" many had about themselves and about Islam, said Garrison. "They were content to see Islam as the answer for the world, and after 9/11 they no longer could believe that."

Americans saw news clips of Muslims cheering the attacks in Tehran and Gaza, but Garrison and other Christians who had spent years working among Muslims saw something else. For Muslims who had tolerated the extremist ideology flowing from the Sunni madrassas of Pakistan or the Shiite councils in Iran, after 9/11 they could no longer deny its deadly intent.

"We did not see this at first, how it jolted Muslims. Looking back now, we see how it was a wake-up call for many to reconsider their faith," said Garrison.

Already at the turn of the century, Garrison and others were seeing new numbers of Muslims coming to Christian faith. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and Quranic scholars had approved translations of the Quran into languages other than Arabic so that it could be understood in places far from Mecca and Medina.

"They thought it would spur deeper interest in Islam, but it did the opposite, it backfired. People who could read the Quran in their own language were finding that their religion was bankrupt," said Garrison. "I was hearing Muslims say, 'After reading the Quran, I realized I was lost.' It was like a medieval Christian suddenly able to read the Bible in his own language after hearing it recited only in Latin."

While Americans focused on the challenges of the U.S.-led fight against terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Muslim world couldn't look away from jihadist groups' unparalleled violence. Where authoritarian regimes once controlled access to information, Muslims even in remote Afghan villages have internet and Facebook accounts, exposing them to Western freedoms and to alternatives to Islam.

In 2010 a colleague encouraged Garrison to study Muslim movements to Christ, defined as at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptisms among Muslims over a 10- to 20-year period. Garrison could count 25 such movements in the beginning, but by the time his study finished four years later, it had identified 82 movements spread through all parts of the Muslim world. Of those, 69 had begun after 9/11—with an estimated 2 million to 7 million converts in the past 20 years. Many are in areas most hostile to religions other than Islam, including Afghanistan.

Garrison believes the chaotic withdrawal and defeat of the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan will "pour fuel" on Islamic aspirations. "I think it will inspire a lot of groups that otherwise are marginalized: al-Shabab in Somalia, al-Nusra in Syria, al-Qaeda in West Africa."

But his findings also remind him that other trends may be at work, too.

CHRISTY WILSON IS CONSIDERED the father of modern Christian missions to Afghanistan, a closed country when he received permission to work there, arriving in 1951. With missionaries prohibited, he leveraged his profession, working as a teacher in a country that was then 97 percent illiterate.

Wilson served there 22 years, becoming principal of a government high school, starting with his wife a school for the blind, and teaching English to top officials. Dangers were perennial, as they are today, but the gospel he carried proved contagious for many Afghans, and he would build a church in Kabul (now destroyed) and pastor an international congregation.

With the launch of the Afghan War, Western Christians like the Hiriarts seized a similar opportunity to leverage their professions following the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban. They reopened hospitals and started schools, launched medical clinics and rural services, and fostered business and leadership training programs at universities.

One of the most dramatic ways theirs and others' work contributes to improving the lives of Afghans is the country's infant mortality rate. From 2009 to 2019 infant deaths per 1,000 live births dropped from 66.5 to 46.5. They also helped to foster a revival of Muslim converts to Christ in Afghanistan. The Afghan-only church—which meets in clusters of house fellowships—is ranked among the fastest growing in the world.

The 9/11 anniversary finds many Afghan Christians hoping to join Westerners who've already made it out of the country. About 200 Christians fled by land to Pakistan and Iran three days after the government's collapse, but the fate of an estimated 10,000-12,000 others will be in jeopardy. One Afghan pastor said, "Our people are going through fire."

Their departures underscore how the 9/11 anniversary may mark the end of something Americans want to put behind them, but for others the beginning of a new ordeal. ■

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GENERATION

THE SEPT. 11 TERROR ATTACKS 20 YEARS AGO CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUNG AMERICANS' LIVES AND GAVE MANY A CYNICAL OUTLOOK ON THE WORLD. BUT SOME HAVE FOUND REDEEMING OUTCOMES IN THE AFTERMATH OF TERRORISM, WAR, AND DISCOURAGEMENT **BY EMILY BELZ**



A man watches smoke rise from the site of the World Trade Center after the Sept. 11 attacks.

CHRIS HONDROS/GETTY IMAGES

9/11



MATTHEW STRONG WAS 21 YEARS OLD ON SEPT. 11, 2001, when 19 al-Qaeda terrorists launched a coordinated attack on the United States from within its borders. After hijacking four jetliners, the terrorists flew two into the World Trade Center in New York City, one into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and one—failing to reach its destination—into a field near Shanksville, Pa. ¶ Nearly 3,000 people died in the terror attack—the deadliest ever on U.S. soil. ¶ Not far from Shanksville, Strong, a recent college graduate, was working an internship at an insurance company in Pittsburgh at the time, hoping to become a financial adviser. But after the attacks, the stock market dove and financial companies froze hiring. Strong never attained his career in finance. ¶ Besides his career trajectory, the 9/11 attacks and resulting War on Terror ultimately changed the city Strong planned to live in and reshaped his political views. They would also affect his family and his personal outlook in ways he couldn't imagine. ¶ The 9/11 attacks, launching two decades of war on the backs of a volunteer military force, influenced a generation of young Americans, shifting not only careers but attitudes about the world. After feeling a burst of patriotism immediately after 9/11, millennials became less hopeful about the future than their parents. They have less trust in institutions, including government, media, and the church.

PHOTO BY PAUL ROGERS/GENESIS



Matthew Strong and his parents, Vicki and Nate, stand next to a memorial at their home dedicated to Matthew's brother Jesse, who was killed in action in 2005.

"9/11 changed the world, but it changed the world more for millennials," millennial pollster John Della Volpe told the *Hartford Courant* in 2009.

But some of those emerging adults, including Strong, also found ways to redeem the aftermath of terror attacks, war, and discouragement about the future. Here are a few of their stories.

THE STRONG FAMILY—the Rev. Nate Strong, Vicki Strong, and their three children—have deep family roots in Albany, Vt., a small town near the Canadian border. Nate and Vicki homeschooled Matthew, Jesse, and their daughter Heather, and the kids grew up close-knit: When they went separate ways to college, Matthew and his younger brother Jesse would say "I love you" to each other at the end of every phone call.

Two weeks before 9/11, Jesse had graduated from Marine Corps boot camp. Vicki says she hadn't thought about the implications of her son being in the military until 9/11 happened. He had joined in peacetime, and to her it seemed like her son had gone to camp. After the attacks, she called him to see how he was feeling, and he assured her he wasn't afraid.

Jesse had finished a college degree at Liberty University and started on a seminary degree when he was deployed to Iraq in 2004. He served in Anbar province, which included cities like Fallujah, where fighting was especially fierce. In November 2004, he wrote a letter to fifth graders at a Catholic school near his hometown in Vermont.

"It is pretty dangerous where I am, but the Lord always watches out for me," he wrote. Then he reminded the fifth graders it was important for them to know God. "No matter what happens, God always has your best interests in mind. That means that God *always* does what is best for you—even when it seems hard. He loves each one of you very much."

Two months later, insurgents killed Jesse Strong and three other Marines in an ambush attack.

The Strong family went into shock. Jesse's parents joined a support group of Gold Star parents who had also lost children, but Vicki worried her children had fewer coping tools.

Matthew had a good friend who surprised him by traveling up to Vermont for the two weeks surrounding Jesse's funeral. But he otherwise struggled to know how to grieve. He recalls the feeling of wondering, "Did my body forget how to breathe?"

He coped by managing the mountain of mail the family received every day. He watched his sister struggle at college, where young friends didn't know how to comfort her and professors chastised her for missing classes.

There was also a generational divide in the family's grief: Vicki drew hope from the patriotic, unified national response after 9/11, and her son's sacrifice helped inspire her to run successfully for office as a state representative. Jesse fought for freedom in Iraq, and she would do the same at home. She recalls the family's hometown newspaper running a front-page photo of an Iraqi woman voting—Iraq's first free elections in a half century—above the story about Jesse's death.

"Jesse was defending the polls for their first election. … Women voted while our son's body was being shipped home to us," she says, tearing up. "And that to me said, Jesse's life and death weren't in vain."

Vicki's recollections of the aftermath are mostly hope-filled. She says family members came to faith in Christ after Jesse's funeral, and she describes a supernatural lack of bitterness against those who killed her son.

But Matthew says he had "a lot of anger." He remembers being specifically upset about soldiers like his brother not having properly armored vehicles, a problem that U.S. troops had confronted Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld about at the time. Matthew became a libertarian, and he began to distrust official statements coming from Washington.

"I became more cynical about government and media and the world at large," he says.

SOCIOLOGISTS ACKNOWLEDGE that millennials tend to be more cynical than older generations. Millennials feel an outrage about bad things in the world, but also feel powerless to fix them. And while trust in social institutions has declined for decades across demographics, the 2001 terror attacks and aftermath may have accelerated that distrust of institutions for millennials.

"Boomers have much more of a sense of confidence, security, changing the world, even after the late '60s when things were really dark," said Christian Smith, a sociologist at the University of Notre Dame who has studied millennials. "In terms of ontological security, the world feels at a basic level to millennials

"9/11 MADE ME FEEL FEAR IN ALMOST EVERY AREA WHERE I DIDN'T FEEL IT BEFORE. WHO KNOWS IF THAT'S A PRODUCT OF 9/11 OR A PRODUCT OF GROWING UP."

that it's not necessarily the case that things are going to be OK. And 9/11 had to have had something to do with that."

Smith himself remembers hearing on the radio the daily death counts from the Vietnam War, but he says Americans at that time still felt more in control of their destiny and purpose than younger Americans do now. He sees a streak of nihilism among millennials—"Not total despair, but just lowered expectations."

Conspiracy theories have blossomed as young people have less and less trust in scientists, journalists, and others in positions of authority—compounded by U.S. government scandals over intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and spying programs on American citizens.

"It accelerated things that were already in the works. It's not like everything was *x* until 2001, and then it turned into *z*," said Smith.

Demographers Neil Howe and William Strauss, who coined the term "millennial," have said that older millennials who clearly remember 9/11 and the beginning of the War on Terror are risk-averse and closer to their parents than previous generations.

That's especially true for certain millennials who experienced the attacks in their backyard.

Dana Sutherland, 40, a public-school administrator in the South Bronx, grew up on Long Island. She was in a staff meeting last year when staffers got into a debate about whether the COVID-19 pandemic is a bigger deal than the 9/11 terror attacks. New York transplants and younger people thought the pandemic was more significant.

Sutherland and the other New Yorkers disagreed: September 11 was still the worst day of their lives, when everything changed and nothing felt safe anymore.

When the attacks happened, Sutherland was studying abroad in Italy, and she remembers the panic of being unable to get in touch with anyone back home. "I felt like I was jerked into another world that I didn't expect. I just remember the absolute fear and terror of that day, feeling like life would never be the same," she says. Only a day or two later did she learn her close friend's brother had died, along with several dozen people from her Long Island town, including neighbors she'd grown up with.

A British student in her study program told her after the attacks, "It's about time something happened to you," meaning America. A Jewish friend of Sutherland's had phone calls from her mom telling her not to wear anything that would mark her as Jewish.

Sutherland experiences a lot of anxiety now, which she doesn't think she was prone to. "Is that genetics? Maybe," she says. "But 9/11 made me feel fear in almost every area where I didn't feel it before. Who knows if that's a product of 9/11 or a product of growing up."

For years in New York she remembers looking around on the train for anything suspicious, like someone with a big bag. If she spotted something, she got off the train regardless of the stop. She never has visited the 9/11 Memorial Museum and doesn't think she could bear it. She can't watch a movie where the attacks are part of the plot or read books about it.

She completed her master's degree in London, and while other friends got jobs there, she went back to Long Island. "I would never leave my family," she says. "It changed my outlook."

She now works with children in the South Bronx who have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, and she feels in some way Sept. 11 gave her a window into that experience.

JEREMIAH SWANSON, now 37, joined the U.S. Army in 2006, feeling a sense of patriotic duty and hoping to learn Arabic. He became an Arabic linguist and worked in intelligence, deploying to Afghanistan, where U.S. and Afghan forces battled Taliban militants amid a surge in suicide bombings and growing anti-American sentiment there.

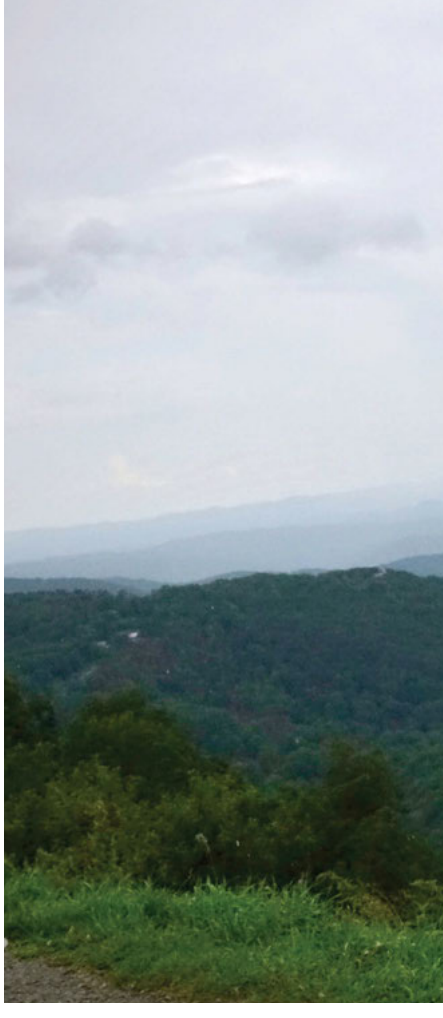


PHOTO BY MARC J. KAWANISHI/GENESIS

Swanson would eventually come to view the U.S. wars in the Middle East as "destabilizing," wars that "disproportionately harmed local Christian communities throughout the region." He thinks individual Americans joined out of an "act of virtue … separate from whether the war was justified or not."

When he left active duty in 2011, the natural move as an Arabic linguist would have been to work in government intelligence. But he was interested in theology and the classics and wanted to work in a field more aligned with his "deeper values."

As he began a series of postgraduate degrees related to the classics, however, Arabic kept appearing everywhere. He studied the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides and found his writings in Judeo-Arabic. He found Greek philosophers who wrote in Arabic, and then he learned some Syriac, an ancient language in Middle Eastern Christian communities.

"What Arabic did for me was to unlock Middle Eastern Christianity," he said.

Studying Arabic and ancient history also helped him better understand Islam, which he views as valuable for Christians who want to be bridge builders and peacemakers. It also helps him better understand the cultural context for his current job as an analyst for international security operations at Samaritan's Purse. He researches and writes up reports on risks for various regions and responds to security emergencies for Samaritan personnel.

He joined Samaritan's Purse since, after leaving the military, he felt some moral responsibility to return to the Middle East and help rebuild those communities. He thinks highly of Samaritan's relief and development work among Yazidis and others in northern Iraq.

Jeremiah Swanson felt some moral responsibility to return to the Middle East and help rebuild those communities.



NOTHING IS BEAUTIFUL and true," says the 9-year-old main character in Jonathan Safran Foer's best-selling 2005 novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, which tells a story of a boy whose dad dies in the World Trade Center on 9/11.

Like the fictional boy, many real-life millennials who were children or teens when the Twin Towers collapsed have struggled against cynicism over the years. Still, some have learned to look beyond it.

For a decade, Matthew Strong wore his brother's dog tags every day. Even today, Jesse's death hasn't stopped affecting him emotionally.

He cried on the phone remembering the beauty of his brother's life. He thinks his brother's death helped him understand Jesus' suffering better, and why God allows bad things to happen.

Jesse was extremely friendly to anyone regardless of who they were, Matthew said. That's why his funeral was packed and why the Strongs' mailbox overflowed after his death. Matthew didn't have that extreme friendliness: He said he can quickly perceive people's personalities and avoids them if they don't pass muster. But after Jesse died, Matthew reassessed how he approached other people.

"It made me have a real change of heart for people who need friends," he said. "I have this ability to empathize with people and encourage them, so let's not be so picky and choosy." He thought about some of Jesse's friends in the Marines who have struggled with the aftermath of the long wars and losses in the Middle East. He knew he could encourage them.

Ultimately, despite the pain they'll always share, Matthew thinks his family appreciates one another more than ever.

"Every time I talk to my parents or sister, it's more meaningful now," he said. "You don't know when a last conversation would be." ■

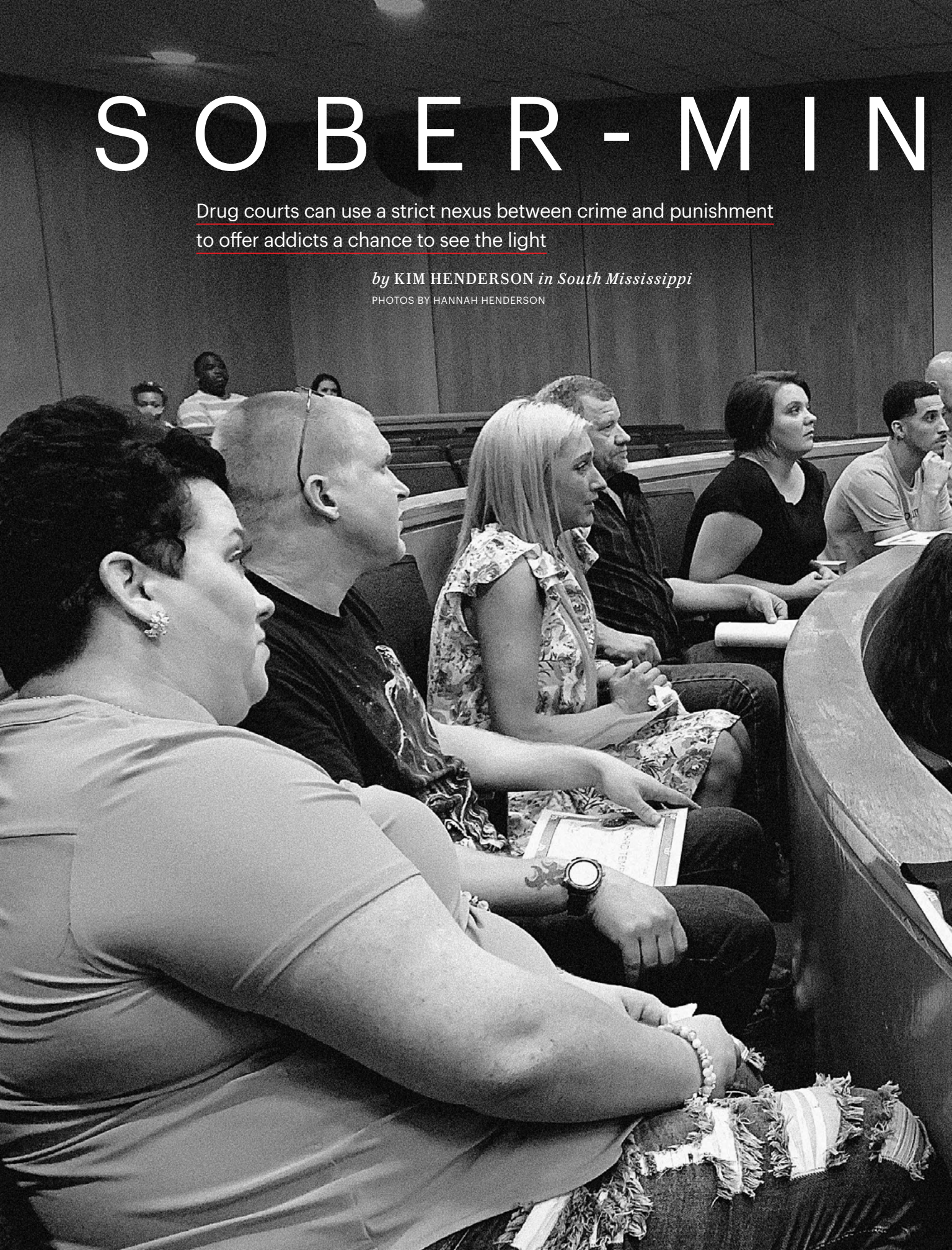
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SOBER-MIN

Drug courts can use a strict nexus between crime and punishment to offer addicts a chance to see the light

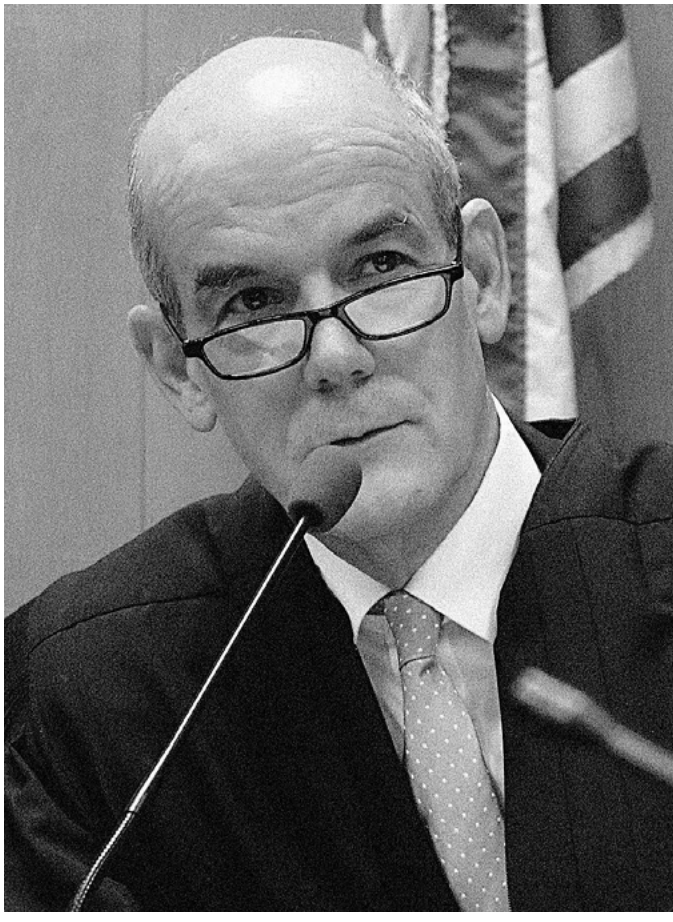
by KIM HENDERSON *in South Mississippi*

PHOTOS BY HANNAH HENDERSON



D E D





MONDAY MORNING COMES LIKE A PROMISE TO OLE BROOK, A NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE CRAPE MYRTLE PETALS COLOR SIDEWALKS AND AMERICAN FLAGS HANG FROM PEDIGREED HOMES.

At precisely 7:30 Judge Michael Taylor exits one of its Greek Revival standouts. He skirts past temporary supports on the porch—his current restoration project on a house that requires many—and heads to a portico where a pickup truck with government tags waits, idling. Sliding across the seat, the judge reaches for the radio knob. Better to make use of the miles talking shop with his driver, John Douglas, than listen to music.

At first glance, a productive Taylor-Douglas alliance looks unlikely. Douglas, 47, wears Ropers, a goatee, and a sunburn picked up during a saltwater fishing trip. The judge is a grandfather who shared law school professors with John Grisham. But they bring their blend of legal knowledge and street smarts to their work. One wields a gavel, the other grace, the kind that comes with conditions and a stack of notarized papers. Together they oversee Taylor's biggest restoration project, the Mississippi 14th Circuit's drug court, and today, like most Mondays, the pair will "ride the circuit," visiting three courthouses in three counties.

But this is no ordinary Monday. Thirty-seven participants have met the drug court's requirements and are set to walk in annual graduation ceremonies—and hopeful long-term sobriety.

The nation's first drug court convened in Miami-Dade County, Fla., in 1989, and by the turn of the century, similar startups across the country were collectively graduating 17,000 participants a year. Today drug courts have a foothold in every state. Most are give-and-take propositions offering nonviolent felony offenders a choice between jail sentences and long-term drug treatment.

With a national completion rate of 59 percent, drug courts more than triple those achieved by some private treatment facilities. What makes the difference? Proponents say it's the combination of supervision, screening, and work requirements that drug courts are uniquely positioned to offer. Taylor and Douglas don't disagree, but they think the biggest factor may be another key they hold. To the jail.

"There needs to be a therapeutic element. There needs to be a restorative element. But no private treatment works as well as drug court because no private treatment has a jail," contends Taylor, who at 57 has been on a bench since Bill Clinton was president. "They should be used carefully and sparingly, but jails work to change human behavior."

Heather Rice-Minus, a senior vice president at Prison Fellowship, agrees: "Drug courts have not only the carrot, but the stick. Psychologywise, both of those things play a role in motivating people."

AMERICA RECORDED ITS HIGHEST NUMBER of overdose deaths in a single year in 2020: more than 93,000. Pandemic isolation likely played a part and underscored what drug courts have been demonstrating for 30 years—it takes a village to recover an addict. In Mississippi's 14th Circuit, drug court employs five full-time workers, from parole officers to a counselor who helps participants find and keep jobs. A contracted psychologist determines if offenders have program potential. Sheriffs, court reporters, and even Taylor, whose main role is circuit court judge, perform drug court responsibilities as unpaid add-ons.

Taylor's district is "almost the size of Rhode Island, but there's no Starbucks," he laughs. Yes, 50 miles stretch between the county seat and a signature caramel macchiato, but Big City's fentanyl found its way to these rural parts. Heroin hitched in too.

For 10 years John Douglas had a front-row view of that



Judge Michael Taylor presides over a drug court graduation ceremony.

infiltration as he sat in unmarked cars, surveilling drug deals. He believed God called him to his work as a narcotics agent, and when in 2011 the judge suggested Douglas become his drug court coordinator, he told him as much. Taylor, an every-Sunday sort of Presbyterian, didn't balk. "I said, 'By all means, do what God called you to do. But if you ever get tired of laying on the ground getting bitten by fire ants while you watch a crack house, come see me.'" Two days later, Douglas contacted Taylor. He'd had a fire ant experience they now refer to as an Old Testament–like confirmation.

The law officer is quick to correct the notion he changed sides: "Narcotics agents want to help people as much as drug court staff do. We need both."

As they drive toward a waiting courtroom, Douglas reminds the judge one of the graduates wants some mic time during the ceremony. After eight years in a program that averages four, Rachel Williams has something to say.

IF SUBSTANCE ABUSE RECOVERY had a poster child, Williams would be in the running. She's the product of parents who had a thing for PCP and a school crowd that smoked pot during lunch. By 10th grade, she dropped out. By age 22 she had a thousands-of-dollars-a-month cocaine habit. Along the way, Williams gave birth to three children, none of whom authorities allowed her to raise. When she landed a forgery charge, arresting officers recognized Williams from previous encounters. They also recognized her underlying problem.

For a while, Williams was a model drug court participant. She passed drug tests, changed her environment, attended required group therapy sessions, showed up for her shifts at Sonic. But a 2017 fall into credit card fraud left her supervisors with a tough decision: Drop her or give her a second chance? They added three more years to her treatment time. Williams stayed the course and became an eight-year drug court anomaly.

Taylor believes immediate, sure sanctions like that are critical: "Treatment courts are sometimes accused of being hug-a-thug programs, but we have objective criteria. If you fail a drug test, you get three weekends in jail. If three weekends didn't work, you get five. If you're late to court or don't bring your meeting sheet, you get community service."

He applies punishment almost mechanically, and that's the first thing participants notice: "We do sanctions in open court, and they realize it's a fair deal. And then if somebody does something that gets them finally kicked out of drug court and sent to prison, they're all sitting there watching that, too."



Rachel Williams hugs John Douglas at the graduation ceremony.

Graduations are the high-water mark of that intentional practice. Standing before her peers, Williams praises drug court for doing what nothing else could do for her—help her stay sober. Now she's married, works as a traveling caregiver, and enjoys mended relationships with a sister she stole from and a daughter she gave up.

"It's been eight years, five months, and a day since I've done any drugs," she says, flashing a wide grin at rookie participants and fellow graduates alike. She's sporting a new hair color along with fake nails and false eyelashes, but for this room of recovering addicts, she's as real as it gets. Maybe they can do this thing after all.

Williams and everyone else in attendance know the stakes are high. Weeks earlier a drug court candidate was going through the hoops, preparing for admittance, when Taylor warned him not to use that night. The judge knew from his record he was a heroin addict.

The next day, the young man missed his first mandatory screening. He had died from an overdose that morning. "We have to remind attorneys and ourselves how time sensitive this is and how important it is to not have the usual bureaucratic delays," Taylor said.

TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE JUDGE'S FED-UP (Fostering an End to Drug Use Problems) drug court program, offenders must obtain his recommendation, as well as one from both the district attorney's office and the arresting law enforcement agency. They undergo an evaluation to verify addiction, then plead guilty to their crime, although adjudication is put on ice. Finally, they agree to follow 23 rules, such as paying fines and permitting searches of their homes and vehicles.

Taylor's drug court takes four phases, each granting increased autonomy as participants learn to manage their recovery. Taylor faces budgetary pressures to run a shorter program like some other states, but studies show graduates of a three-year drug court stand a much better chance of lifelong recovery. "An 18-month program looks great on paper and works—for 18 months. People we really care about keeping sober, like physicians, judges, and nurses, have five-year programs."

Donavan Koehler, 22, understands that, but three years in, he's wondering when he can get on with his life. Or rather, get it started.

Waiting outside the Pike County Courthouse in Magnolia, Miss., Koehler describes a high-school hallucinogen addiction

bad enough to have him digging in cow pastures for psilocybin mushrooms. It later led to his arrest in the first psychedelic drug bust the county had seen in decades—a notoriety that shames him still today—and Koehler remembers he couldn't get out of jail and into drug court fast enough. "It was terrible. Jail is nothing like the TikTok videos going around," he says.

The threat of going back to a cell helped Koehler clear his mind and stay on the drug court straight and narrow. Now he says he's ready to move on: "I've passed my screenings and paid nearly $10,000 in fines and fees, but I can't pursue a real career until I get my record cleared."

Like all participants, Koehler pays monthly fees to be enrolled in drug court. The state funds 75 percent of the cost to administer Taylor's program to 200 people. With 240 currently on their rolls, though, keeping it funded is a stretch.

But statistics indicate spending more on abuse prevention could save money down the road. In the United States, substance abuse comes with an annual $600 billion price tag. Treating an addiction for a year costs a fifth of an equal amount of prison time. A Department of Justice study found that 72 percent of drug court graduates have no arrests at the two-year mark.

But funding may not be drug courts' biggest challenge. Some say addiction is a public health problem, not a criminal justice problem. A 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs recognized addiction as a "complex, multifactorial health disorder characterized by a chronic and relapsing nature" rather than behavior to be addressed punitively. The World Psychiatric Association hailed that change from a criminal justice mentality to a public health approach.

Taylor admits he leans libertarian on some issues, but not this one: "Not everyone works in Silicon Valley and likes to use a little cocaine now and then. There are people whose lives are devastated by this, whose childhoods were devastated by this."

The Biden-Harris administration drug policy priorities also reflect new views. In August, the Office of National Drug Control Policy announced $2.5 million to support the establishment of state-level model legislation to expand access to harm reduction services such as syringe service programs. This comes after the COVID-19 stimulus package's $30 million toward the same effort. Another of their top concerns? Stigma reduction for substance use disorder.

Using the word *disorder* rather than *abuse* is evidence of changing perceptions, and even the drug court camp isn't immune. The homepage of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals reflects the same terminology.

Taylor and Douglas, however, possess a different vocabulary. Words like *sin. Depravity. Repentance. Restitution.* When they can, they grasp opportunities to share the gospel with drug court participants. But that can get complicated: "We have to be careful to not use the office wrongly," Taylor said. "But we also have the responsibility to give them the right answer. There is a huge danger of creating the impression that sobriety and salvation are the same. We emphasize that drug court is temporary, but other things last."

In December, Taylor sends a personal Christmas letter to each participant, backed up by a courtroom talk. Last year's version referred to Christ's birthplace: "God knew we couldn't clean up or get our act together. The stable says the opposite. It says, 'I will come into your mess to get you out of it.'"

David Ludington, CEO of Christian Rehab Network, has spent 42 years working with substance abusers. He has a firm belief about recovery: "A personal relationship with God—that's the only thing that's going to solve somebody's addiction. Period."

Drug courts throughout the country offer Christian treatment facilities as an option for treatment, but state and federal laws limit what they can do. "They don't want to see Christianity in treatment," Ludington said. "They don't mind seeing 'faith-based' or the look-alike, but not straight-out Christian."

Another problem with Christian treatment is paying for it. Securing medical staff and screening equipment is expensive business, and Ludington is frank: "People need an insurance policy that covers treatment. Otherwise, it's too costly—$35,000 for a 90-day stay—and we just don't have enough funding from churches to help."

"The most offensive thing about addiction is seeing people lose their dignity. Addicts are image bearers. The Christian response should be to restore that dignity."

BACK AT THE CEREMONY, the crowd applauds politely as Douglas awards diplomas. But things get emotional when they hear an announcement about signed expungement orders. Graduates weep, cheer, slap backs, and wipe trails of mascara running down their faces. The guilty pleas that got them there are gone, as well as any possible incarceration because of them.

Watching the scene over his reading glasses, Taylor remembers that the guy on the front row used to live in a dog kennel. The one in the back is a prominent business owner's kid. The lady over there is a nurse.

"The most offensive thing about addiction is seeing people lose their dignity. Addicts are image bearers. The Christian response should be to restore that dignity," he says. "We know where grace comes from, and it's not a drug court program, but the first thing is getting a person sober. Then they can hear, they can see, they can respond." ■

LABORS OF LOVE

What do people in rural Northwest Iowa do all day?

BY WORLD JOURNALISM INSTITUTE STUDENTS

Labor Day, 2021: Emerging from the pandemic, Americans continue to debate both immigration and the question of whether welfare should have a work requirement. Meanwhile, Northwest Iowa continues to benefit from the work ethic that immigrants, mainly from the Netherlands, brought with them in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They built farms and businesses and created a close-knit culture that continues to value work. World Journalism Institute students, meeting at Dordt University in Sioux Center, interviewed Iowans about what they do all day.

ORANGE CITY, IOWA, population 7,000, lies about 10 miles southeast of Sioux Center. Its volunteer fire department has responded to 21 calls over the first five months of 2021. So what do firefighters do when they're not fighting fires?

Dan Roghair is assistant chief of the city's volunteer fire department. His father worked for the department, and Roghair's two sons, Andrew and Lee, are also firefighters. Since the department typically has only one call per week, Roghair works mainly as a buyer for a local paint company, but he's passionate about the fire department he has served for almost 31 years.

He explains that firefighting takes preparation. Little things make all the difference. He keeps his pager on his left hip during the day. At night, it stays on his nightstand: "Next to my dresser, I have a hook on my wall where I have my clothes and stuff laid out ... gotta be prepared ... gotta take care of yourself before you take care of other people." He lives a block away from the station and backs into his parking space on Sundays to cut down his response time.

Roghair even stays clean-shaven to ensure his gas mask properly seals to keep out fumes. He takes pride in the station and keeps a chore chart of maintenance tasks the volunteers perform, such as laundering coats, sweeping under all six engines, and testing the backup generator weekly: "Keeping the building clean is just showing respect for the community. They gifted it to us, and I want it to last as long as possible."

Rural firefighters deal with unusual issues such as grain entrapment rescues. Hot and humid summers cause a crust to form on exposed grain, forcing farmers to open their silos and manually break up the top layer. Sometimes farmers fall into the silo and sink, since their body density is greater than the grain's. Iowa also has many agricultural runoff ponds and creeks, so some towns form scuba teams—and Roghair, a certified scuba diver, volunteers on Orange City's. *—Christina Grube and Katherine Futch*

PHOTO BY JESSE BROTHERS, ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL BEATTY



Dan Roghair



Elderberry bushes







Verlyn Sneller

THREE MILES AWAY from the fire station, Verlyn Sneller, 75, stands between rows of knee-high elderberry bushes. He's co-owner of West Branch Elderberries, which operates out of a large industrial steel building that sits on 16 acres surrounded by corn and soybean fields. He retired from his job as a livestock nutritionist but still starts work before sunrise: "I'm not the kind of person who likes to sit around and wait to die."

Sneller says few U.S. farmers are crazy enough to make a business out of elderberry, whose trendy antioxidant is marketed for its potential antiviral properties. That's because it is a tricky crop to grow and harvest—but it can be lucrative for those willing to improvise. Sneller has had to adapt machines used to harvest grapes and blueberries, since no one makes dedicated ones for elderberries.

West Branch Elderberries gathered its first crop in 2016. It relied on church groups and members of the community to help gather the tiny dark round berries. They left with purple-stained fingers. This year Sneller will use his adapted machinery to pick the berries. Behind his desk hangs a framed slogan: "Growth is impossible without change."

For Sneller, change means developing organic and sustainable farming methods. He's experimenting with a biological soil supplement processed with molasses, which he stores in 250-gallon drums in a trailer kept at a steady 90 degrees Fahrenheit. He sprays the heavy, sweet-smelling mixture on his elderberries—and gives it to his neighbors for use on their crops. They are monitoring yields, and if it works he plans to market the mixture. It will help the community be better "stewards of the soil." *—Grace Kenyon and Anna Timmons*

THE FLORAL MARKET lies less than half a mile from the Orange City Fire Station. Owner Erica De Jong, 40, hums along to music from a local Christian radio station as she places newly planted succulents in the front window. She has lived in Orange City all her life and married her husband when she was 19 years old in Calvary Christian Reformed Church, three minutes away. De Jong and her family live in the house her husband grew up in, on a farm that has been in her

ELDERBERRY FIELD: ANNA TIMMONS; TREES: GRACE KENYON; SNELLER: FACEBOOK



husband's family for four generations: "We're rooted."

For the past year and a half she has owned the local florist shop. The previous owner focused on flower arrangements, but De Jong and her husband have added greeting cards, décor, custom balloons, and pottery. The shop is closed on Sunday, but De Jong gives employees Saturday off, too, so they can spend time with family. She credits her mother and grandmother for teaching her the joy that flowers and gifts bring people.

Because De Jong grew up in Orange City, she knows most of the people who come into her store. She greets them by name and treats them like family: "Family is a hug when you need it. We do hug our customers when they need it. We do stop and pray with them when they need it." *—Mikaela Wegner and Mikayla Kuckel*

JAN ZANDSTRA and her husband Bart started the Zandstra Family Greenhouse 17 years ago. It's a family business located next to their house in Hull, Iowa, about 10 miles northeast of Sioux Center. They have two greenhouses and sell annual plants such as petunias, geraniums, alyssum, and coleus during the busy season, mid-April through June.

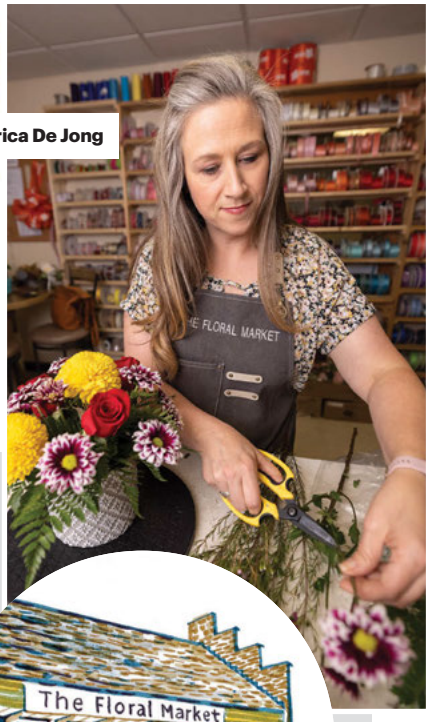
Deciding what plants to buy is a yearlong process. Jan Zandstra analyzes what customers like and what they pass over. She orders tiny root systems called plugs from suppliers, 200 plugs to a tray, and plants them in January. Snow may cover the ground outside, but inside feels like "little Jamaica." Heated by two diesel furnaces, the greenhouse stays warm. Evaporating water that cannot escape creates a tropical effect.





Zandstra finds winter relaxing. Starting in April, though, Zandstra works 12-13 hours a day, serving the steady flow of customers. She wakes up at 6:30 a.m. to water the plants. That's also a good time for Bible reading, because if she doesn't take time then, she won't have time in the rush. She and her husband often eat fast food during the busy season, but on a slow day they have time to grill bratwursts.

Inside the greenhouse, plants cover the tables. Petunias dangle over the sides of baskets hanging from the rafters. Red geraniums are the most popular plant: Zandstra orders 4,000 each year and says it is mostly a convention of Dutch culture among the older generation. She says trimming dead and overcrowding leaves, watering the plants, and digging dirt is better than any therapist, and cheaper, too. *—Hannah Urban and Jonathan Harbour*

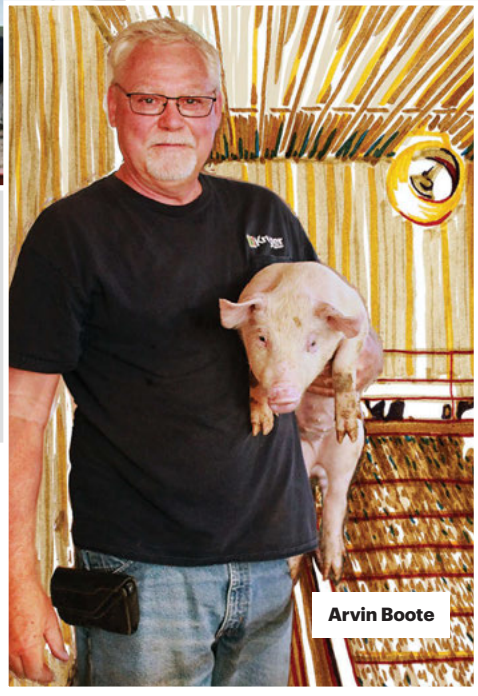












Arvin Boote



Nathan and Kirbee Nycamp



ARVIN BOOTE, 64, pulls a lever on an ice-cream-cone-shaped metal bin supported by four red poles. In less than two seconds, corn-based cow feed fills a 5-gallon bucket to the top. Boote (pronounced "Boat") has nine steers in the cattle pen: He isn't looking to go big, because the nine head will provide plenty of meat for his family and several friends for a year: "God provides me a good living. ... He takes care of whatever I need, and I don't have all of the headaches that some of these large, large guys have, either."

Boote's grandfather came to the United States from the Netherlands in the early 1900s and started a family tradition of farming in the Midwest. But farming has changed even since Boote's father built grain bins on the land that Boote still farms. His father's grain bins hold 5,000 bushels of corn. Modern bins often hold 15,000-30,000 bushels. When his father farmed, corn harvest usually generated 100 bushels an acre. Now farmers can expect 225-250 bushels per acre, and farms of 300-500 acres face competition from 1,000-3,000-acre mega-farms.

Boote says he likes "being a jack of many trades." He works with cows, grows corn, raises piglets, repairs old, broken-down machinery—and serves others.

Almost 15 years ago, he considered becoming a pastor. He decided to stick with farming after taking one seminary class and auditing several others, but he's found that ministry does not require a degree. When his seasonal work schedule allows, Boote travels to help others. He has assisted with disaster recovery in the United States and taken three mission trips to Mexico and nine to Haiti.



Boote stays on the farm not because he has to, but because he likes it. He enjoys driving his equipment, forgoing the automatic steering and GPS that many farm vehicles have now. "A lot of times I'll turn the radio off and just listen to God. He tells me more things when I'm sitting in a tractor, doing nothing."

—Lauren Dunn and Chloe Baker

AT BROTHERS BICYCLE in downtown Sioux Center, Nathan Nycamp customizes bikes for those with special needs. He once crafted an adult tricycle for a client suffering from balance issues. One organization asked Nycamp for a bike to accommodate a disabled person and a caretaker. He designed a side-by-side bicycle with independent pedaling and one set of primary steering duties.

His shop is a safe and fun place for the Nycamps' 4-year-old to play, and she's even beginning to learn to help out with the bike repair work her father does there.

Nycamp's wife Kirbee has her own business, the Violin House, which she runs from home: She rents refurbished violins, teaches, and—like her husband—builds relationships in Sioux Center.

BOOTE, COWS: CHLOE BAKER; NYCAMP: FACEBOOK; BICYCLE: HANDOUT; ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL BEATTY; UTTHACHOO, FOOD: JESSE BROTHERS





Pete Utthachoo



"With a small community, a good name is everything," Nathan said.

The Nycamps didn't plan on business careers and didn't take business courses in college, but they realized that small business ownership would allow them to spend more time with their three young children. Both had parents who could stay at home or work from home, and they didn't want to be a both-parents-working-full-time household, Kirbee said: "We liked getting to be more in charge of spending time with our family and with our kids." *—Lauren Vanden Bosch and Caleb Bailey*

NEW IMMIGRANTS are now adding their talents to the Northwest Iowa mix. Pete Utthachoo and his family serve authentic Thai food to downtown Sioux City at Pete's Thai on 5th, about 45 miles south of Sioux Center. A native of the central rice-growing plains of Thailand, Utthachoo started cooking in his family kitchen at 5 years old: "We learn from generation to generation. You watch the parents cook and they tell the story."

When Utthachoo, the youngest of three boys, was 18, he lost his middle brother to tumors and his father to a heart attack. He worked hard, became banquet chef at the Regent Hotel in Thailand, and then emigrated to San Francisco and opened his first restaurant, Pete and Mom Thai Press Restaurant. But Utthachoo struggled to handle labor costs and closed it after two years.

Utthachoo says, "I never give up," so he opened a Thai restaurant in Sioux City in 2006, calling it Diamond Thai as an engagement present to his now-wife, Chay Vanh. In 2017, he sold the restaurant to take care of his mother, started two eateries in other cities, and in late 2020 returned to Sioux City with Pete's Thai on 5th.



His wife, sister-in-law, and stepson work with him.

Utthachoo, now 53, has calloused fingers and salt-and-pepper hair. He doesn't use recipes, and instead prepares his dishes by taste. I watched him prepare chicken pad thai: He added sugar to sweeten the dish and tamarind sauce for a sour touch. The ingredients—rice noodles, egg, chicken, red and green onion, sweet radish, bean sprouts, and peanuts—sizzled in the wok. "Ta-da!" he said, taking the wok from the stove and portioning the pad thai onto a serving tray.

Thai culture is "still on my heart," Utthachoo said, but he calls Sioux City home: "The place where you live, where you are happy, is what you call home." *—Sam Landstra* ■

Christina Grube, Katherine Futch, Grace Kenyon, Anna Timmons, Mikaela Wegner, Mikayla Kuckel, Hannah Urban, Jonathan Harbour, Lauren Dunn, Chloe Baker, Lauren Vanden Bosch, Caleb Bailey, and Sam Landstra graduated from the World Journalism Institute

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Adam Bleakney competes in the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

PARALYMPIC POWER

Since 1960, the Paralympic Games have given athletes with disabilities an opportunity to showcase their strengths

by Jenny Rough

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD Adam Bleakney had just finished his freshman year of college when he was mountain biking and crashed into a tree in Breckinridge, Colo. He only remembers snippets of what happened next: He couldn't get up. A rescue crew cut down trees so a helicopter could airlift him to a nearby hospital.

The accident in 1995 left Bleakney with a spinal cord injury. He spent two months in recovery and was paralyzed from the waist down. →

SCOTT HEAVEY/GETTY IMAGES

Yet his disability didn't deter him from his love of sports. When he learned the University of Illinois had a comprehensive athletic program dedicated to students with disabilities, he transferred to compete in wheelchair racing. Bleakney later went on to compete in the Paralympics—winning a silver medal in Athens in 2004—and now works at the university as its wheelchair track coach.

The Paralympic Games, with roots stretching back to 1948, have helped many people find a sense of power despite disabilities. This summer's Paralympics are in Tokyo, running from Aug. 24 to Sept. 5, with about 4,400 athletes competing. Twenty-one are current and former University of Illinois students—15 of whom were coached by Bleakney, including Tatyana McFadden, born with spina bifida, and Brian Siemann, paralyzed after complications at birth.

Illinois was the first university with a rehabilitation education program of its kind. Established in 1948 by Tim Nugent, an advocate for people with disabilities, it initially sought to serve World War II combat vets, although non-vets also attended. Before the advent of penicillin, people with spinal cord injuries had a short lifespan. One reason was incontinence, Bleakney explains: A catheter works but often causes kidney infections. With antibiotics, lifespans increased significantly. Nugent helped the vets develop necessary skills to be productive members of society.

> SPORT ACTS AS A COMMON POINT OF UNDERSTANDING.

The same year the University of Illinois started its program, Sir Ludwig Guttmann, a doctor working with spinal patients at the Stokes Mandeville Hospital in England, organized an archery competition to coincide with the opening day of the London Olympics. Sixteen paralyzed men and women competed. The event led to the inaugural Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960. Sweden held the first Winter Paralympic Games in 1976.

Both Nugent and Guttmann recognized the value of sports for spinal patients. Building strength helped with daily living activities, such as transferring in and out of chairs or a car. And engaging in sports provided a sense of competency and power.

Bleakney recalls that desire. Right away, he taught himself to use a racing wheelchair. A year after his accident, the Paralympic Games came to Atlanta. "That was the first time the Paralympics had been held on U.S. soil," he says. The buzz and excitement drew him in. He watched the Games that summer, and four years later, in Sydney, he participated for the first time. Today, he's a four-time Paralympian. In Athens, he won silver in his disability class in the 800-meter race.

Because of the variety of disabilities represented, the Paralympic Games are organized into 10 impairment categories: visual impairment, intellectual impairment, and eight physical impairments—including amputee, impaired muscle power, and short stature.

Paralympic alpine skier T.C. Carter was born without a fibula in his right leg and underwent an amputation as a toddler. He has used a prosthetic ever since. He competes against other amputees, not vision-impaired or seated skiers.

Even within the same category, disabilities can vary widely. For instance, some athletes are on one leg and one ski with two outriggers (poles with skis attached to their bases). Some, like Carter, ski on two legs, but one leg is a prosthetic. Others have impairment in both legs and ski with a tether between the two skis.

Time adjustments and further classifications help level the playing field. "It's not a perfect system," Carter said, "but they've put a lot of thought into it and really try to make sure that everyone is being equally represented." Carter is aiming to compete in the giant slalom (skiing downhill while curving around gates) and super-G (a similar event at higher speeds) at the March 2022 Paralympics in Beijing.

Bleakney says the Paralympics are important, and not just to the disabled community: "I find that sport acts as a common point of understanding, allowing all of us to better connect and understand our fellow human beings." ■



T.C. Carter competes in the 2018 PyeongChang Paralympic Games in South Korea.

LINTAO ZHANG/GETTY IMAGES



GOOD NEWS HIKING

Once a month Nate Oinonen takes a group of strangers out on a nature trail and shares the gospel

by Grace Snell and Carolina Lumetta in Austin, Texas

ON A 95-DEGREE Sunday afternoon in Austin, eight hikers made their way to the green wooden picnic table marking the head of the Barton Creek Greenbelt Trail. They gathered around Nate Oinonen, a 42-year-old deacon of Grace and Peace Church (PCA). He welcomed returning and new hikers who found his invitation via the online service Meetup.

Oinonen read Psalm 56—"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you"—from his Bible app, asked if everyone had water, and explained that they would hike the first portion in silence to reflect on the passage. Then, he led the way into the woods.

The hikers marched along the rocky trail in a single, silent row. Other visitors passed by coming from swimming holes and juggling beach towels, toys, coolers, and devices blasting music. As the hikers continued down the path, the whirring of cicadas replaced the noise of music and conversation.

The hike was part of Worship in the Woods, a ministry Oinonen started in 2019 while pondering his New Year's goals. Oinonen has been self-employed the past 10 years running a DJ company and frequently comes up with ideas for new ministries. Two years ago, he challenged himself to put one of his ideas into action.

He decided to combine his love of hiking with his love of telling others about Jesus. He jotted down some ideas, and Worship in the Woods was born.

Nate Oinonen (right) with hikers

Since then—with the exception of a seven-month pause due to the pandemic—Oinonen has led groups of strangers about once a month on hikes. On this Sunday, after 20 minutes the seven hikers followed Oinonen into a small, tree-shaded clearing. The hikers formed a circle and sat cross-legged on the dusty ground. They listened as Oinonen spoke about assurance of salvation. He used simple words and personal stories to illustrate his points. As he spoke, he drew lines in the dirt and glanced up at his audience from time to time.

Oinonen never knows how many people will show up. Sometimes groups are as large as 25 or as small as three. His primary goal for Worship in the →

HANDOUT

Woods is to create a nonthreatening environment for people to hear about who Jesus is and what He has done.

Oinonen says the mechanics of the ministry are easy. He uses Meetup to publicize hikes. He reads Bible passages from his personal study to the group. He finds it a discipline to stay focused instead of moving on to his next big idea. Staying in the right mindset takes work: He has to keep wanting to connect with strangers and keep showing up.

Sometimes people on the hike tell him how much his Bible reading or message spoke to them. Other times, they don't. Many people attend once and Oinonen never sees them again.

After one Worship in the Woods meeting, Oinonen's father told him over the phone: "If one person is led to Christ—well then, it's a triumph." Oinonen said even if his work never leads anyone to Christ, the attempt glorifies God.

Last fall, a new hiker joined. During introductions, he told the group he was from India but had moved to the United States. He was exploring Christianity and had started attending a local church and Bible study. In his message that day, Oinonen described sin as the dirty, smelly rags we wear until Jesus gives us the clean coat of His righteousness. The man became a regular on Worship in the Woods hikes over the next six months.

Back in the clearing, Oinonen concluded his lesson after a few minutes and invited others to share. With a shy smile, the man from India spoke up: "I got baptized."

For Oinonen, moments like this are a rare glimpse of how God uses his ministry. Most people come and go without him really getting to know them. He guesses most people signing up for a worship hike are probably Christians, but he keeps talking about the gospel anyway. For him, it is "the reminder that Jesus loves us," and there's no such thing as hearing that too many times.

At the trailhead after the hike, Oinonen asked if anyone wanted to close in prayer. A new group member volunteered. The hikers bowed their heads as she thanked God for His assurance. ■

—Grace Snell and Carolina Lumetta are World Journalism Institute graduates

AN ALL-STAR'S HARD LIFE

Pitcher J.R. Richard was a baseball star before falling to illness and homelessness. As he recovered, he ministered to others struggling like him

by Susan Olasky



SEPT. 5 IS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of one of the most auspicious pitching debuts in Major League Baseball history. It's also one month after the death at age 72 of Houston Astros pitcher J.R. Richard, who reached the heights of All-Star success, descended to the depths of all-homeless poverty, and had a comeback in homeless ministry and preaching.

Richard on Sept. 5, 1971, struck out 15 San Francisco Giants, tying the record for the most strikeouts by a pitcher

RICH PILLING/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

in his first major league game. Willie Mays struck out three times and said after the game, "Who was that? He nearly scared me half to death!" That's because Richard was 6 feet, 8 inches tall, threw a 103 mph fastball, and was often wild.

That James Rodney Richard would reach baseball superstardom wouldn't have surprised his Lincoln High School teammates in Ruston, La. He didn't give up an earned run his entire senior season. The Astros drafted him second in the 1969 amateur draft and were eventually rewarded when Richard twice topped the National League in strikeouts: 303 in 1978 and 313 in 1979.

At the end of 1979, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, four Dodger regulars sat out their last game against Richard. Houston teammate Enos Cabell said, "Nobody wanted to face him. Guys on the other team would say that they were sick to avoid facing him."

Richard was in his prime in 1980. He signed a contract that paid him $850,000 a year. By the All-Star Game—he started and pitched two scoreless innings—he had a 10-4 record with an earned run average of 1.91. Then everything changed.

Richard had been complaining of nonspecific physical ailments, including arm deadness and fatigue. Some fans and teammates accused him of faking it. They whispered about cocaine use. (Richard later admitted to occasional drug use but denied being a heavy user.) Local reporters mocked his complaints: One columnist said they could be grist for a soap opera, *As the Stomach Turns*. But on July 30, 1980, during a light workout, Richard "became real nauseated, and I lay down on the Astrodome floor. And the next thing I remember I was waking up in the hospital."

Richard had suffered a major stroke caused by a mostly blocked carotid artery. Emergency surgery saved his life. Two weeks later he had more complicated surgery to fix a vascular problem in his pitching arm. Astro employee Ed Wade visited Richard in the hospital and found him "struggling to speak." The hand that was so large it could hold eight baseballs was "cold to the touch."

Richard never regained his hand-eye coordination or power. Hidden damage reduced his ability to focus and make decisions. The Astros released him in 1984. His wife divorced him. By 1987—just seven years after his All-Star triumph—a *Los Angeles Times* reporter found Richard overweight and depressed, lacking motivation and failing to keep jobs or commitments. He was living with his girlfriend and their young child.



BASEBALL IS SIMPLE, IT'S LIFE THAT CAN BE VERY HARD.



He told the reporter he was living on interest from his savings and had few friends: "Jesus is my closest friend. … The Bible said … man *will* let you down every time he says he won't." Richard ignored that knowledge and invested a million-dollar settlement from the Astros in scam artists: $300,000 for nonexistent oil wells; $150,000 for movie production; $125,000 for Arizona real estate; $25,000 in a spa, all disappeared.

By the early 1990s Richard was bankrupt. He lost his car and his house. He sometimes slept under a highway overpass where a *Houston Post* reporter discovered him. When former teammates read what had happened to him, they got him help with the Baseball Assistance Team, which agreed to pay his rent for six months.

A pastor invited Richard to his church and got him involved in homeless ministry and lay preaching. He gave occasional motivational talks to the homeless and offered private pitching lessons to promising young athletes. "I try to teach them about life," Richard told the *Toronto Star*. "I don't try to teach them about just baseball. Baseball is simple, it's life that can be very hard."

Life continued to be hard for Richard, but after two divorces he married in 2010 a woman he met at church. She helped him bring order to his life, maintaining his schedule and taking his calls. He told the *Houston Chronicle* that she helped with stability: "Trust was a big deal for me because I had been hurt a whole bunch of times."

Over the past decade Richard received increasing recognition for his achievements: In 2012 the Astros inducted him into the team's Walk of Fame—though they failed to retire his No. 50, an honor he dearly wanted. In 2018 the Negro League Baseball Museum inducted him into its Hall of Game, an honor that made him "peacock proud and honeymoon happy."

After his death on Aug. 4, obituaries focused on what J.R. Richard lost. Sometimes he did the same thing. In 1999 he mused to *The Sporting News*, "Who knows how much better I would have gotten or what kind of records I would have put up?" Yet in that same story he also said it "doesn't do any good to sit here and dwell on what could have been. … Life is good, God is good to me." ■



Do not be surprised

Scripture tells us trouble will come for the Christian

THIS WAS NOT LIKE THE TIME my husband surprised me on my birthday with a new microwave oven, and when we opened the manufacturer's sealed box we found inside a used, disgusting, food-encrusted appliance that some miscreant had returned to the store.

That was a gut punch too, but it was random and anonymous. No, what happened on July 4 was not that. What happened on July 4 was targeted and personal—although, let me not get ahead of myself, or beg the question. Here are the details and you decide:

Arriving back home about 6 p.m. from a parade, we noticed something odd about the two cars parked in front of our house—the red Mustang of the woman staying with us, and the SUV of our guest. Both were smeared, as by strong and methodical fists, with long thick streaks of brown mud, on all four sides of the cars as well as windows and windshield.

In the first few seconds it doesn't sink in. I saw a movie once (*Winning*) where the Paul Newman character comes home unexpectedly from a trip, opens the door, and finds his wife, the Joanne Woodward character, in bed with his best friend, played by Robert Wagner. There's a long pause in the film at this point, because Newman's brain is going crazy trying to process the scene. It takes a while for everything you thought you knew in life to be unlearned.

In fact, it didn't bother me as much on first sight as it would in later hours when I retired for the night and did more thinking. In the beginning I was happy enough to buy my father's theory that a couple of neighborhood rowdies were having holiday fun. Even so, it was odd that no other vehicles on the street were touched.

It also strained credulity that anyone—funster or not—would create such a thorough art tableau when he had every reason to suppose, by the fact of the parked cars themselves, that the residents were at home. Would you take the chance?

The logic doesn't add up even two months later: If I really wanted to inflict pain on someone I would "key" the car rather than administer a mud facial pack, wouldn't you? Faster, more efficient, more damage, less work, less chance of being caught hauling a mud bucket to the site.

Anyway, my neighbor across the street has a camera mounted on his house and trained on the portion of road we share. So I texted him and asked if by chance his all-seeing eye had picked up anything suspicious from 4 to 6 p.m. The normally verbose neighbor made a one-word reply: "No."

By sheer coincidence, our pastor's sermon on the morning of the 4th was on 1 Peter 4:12: "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." He very honestly confessed from the pulpit to being personally surprised at how surprised he is when people dislike him for the sake of Christ.

There is no evidence at all that the car thing had anything to do with me being a Christian. I say this to my shame, perhaps. We're told that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). If you're not being persecuted, are you just lucky, or are you not living godly enough? After being beaten for their public faith in Christ, Peter and other Apostles rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41).

Red Mustang jealousy is as plausible a guess as any, I suppose. Still, it's best to be ready for trouble, since our own Lord predicted that "because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

Ask the brethren of Afghanistan. ■

WE'RE TOLD THAT "ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS WILL BE PERSECUTED."

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GOD'S WORLD NEWS



History's gospel

What we learn from studying the past

TWENTY YEARS AGO, immediately after Sept. 11, how many people thought that two decades would go by without another major attack? Yes, we've had the Great Recession and COVID-19, and all of us should join the lament of those who have lost friends and family members—but pundits were predicting far worse for the nation as a whole.

Remember Christ's story of poor Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in hell? At the end of Chapter 16 of Luke's Gospel, the rich man wants his five living brothers to hear from Lazarus via a special Zoom call. Abraham responds that "Moses and the Prophets" have already given them all the information they need. The same is true today.

Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell once said that if he died and met God, he would accuse God of providing insufficient evidence of His existence. Russell wanted God to provide a special message outside the Bible—but a study of history shows that God has already done that.

Study the Thirty Years War, fought in the name of Christ from 1618 to 1648. You'll see why those who praise His name should be at peace with each other, loving neighbors more than ourselves, instead of using Christian claims to pursue our own murderous tendencies.

Study the 18th-century Enlightenment and its culmination in the French Revolution. You'll see what happens when we elevate man's thinking above God's. Robespierre's religion of Reason concluded with a reasonable invention that saved bullets: the guillotine.

Study 19th-century American racism and the millions of brutalized slave lives, the 600,000 Civil War soldier deaths, and the new oppression that began when Northerners, many also racist, abandoned the ex-slaves in 1877. You'll see why it's deadly to treat some humans as *not* made in God's image—and why even in 2021 we are still paying for the sins of America's patriarchs.

GOD ESTABLISHES BIBLICAL OBJECTIVITY WHILE RESPECTING MAN'S SUBJECTIVE LIBERTY.

Study the first half of the 20th century and see what happened when Germans, Russians, and others followed the teachings of Darwin and Marx: Adolf Hitler's Holocaust and Josef Stalin's mass murders all followed the decision to treat some human beings as merely products of material forces. Germany, Europe's most academically advanced country, proved that knowledge without wisdom leaves the know-it-alls on an inch-wide ledge.

Study the 76 years since atomic bombs vaporized tens of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to see God's mercy in protecting hundreds of millions more. Never before in recorded human history has a potent new weapon not been used again for such a long time. (You'll also be driven to prayer that Iran, North Korea, or others don't break that record.)

If those five studies aren't enough to convince you, look at Jewish history. What are the odds that in one minor chieftain 4,000 years ago, Abraham, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed"? That this statement came true 2,000 years later? That 2,000 more years later a God-hating regime murdered 6 million of Abraham's descendants, but some survivors started a new nation where Abraham had lived? That the new nation overcame 50-1 odds to survive?

(An interesting sidelight: The small Jewish slice of the world's population has had far more Nobel Prize winners, chess champions, and other leading intellectuals than any other similar population—and even more comedians. Natural? Coincidental? I don't think so.)

Blaise Pascal was wiser than Bertrand Russell. Pascal understood that God establishes Biblical objectivity while respecting man's subjective liberty: God is "willing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart. God so regulates the knowledge of himself that he has given indications of himself which are visible to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him. There is enough light for those to see who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition."

Praise God who overcomes fear and will one day wipe away every tear. ■

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