# Theology  

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A bilingual Khmer-English Theological Journal to give biblical knowledge to its readers as a honeycomb gives strength to exhausted travelers.






ชณ్ఞึโิการ Russell H. Bowers, Jr.





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## Honeycomb

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# Glorifying the Creator with our Creativity 

Gioia MICHELOTTI and Noren Vann KIM

In the beginning, the one true God spoke a command that arose from his limitless imagination. Planet Earth was formed to spin gracefully through outer space in the company of myriads of mysterious heavenly bodies. This aerial ballet of stars, suns, planets, and moons has been performing ever since, through eons of time, and in galaxies vast and inaccessible. The most powerful telescopes on Earth or from space have caught only glimpses of their majestic processionals, which continue to proclaim the glory of their Maker.

Also in the beginning, this First Great Artist spoke another command, and a collage of life forms began to multiply upon Planet Earth, populating her fields, skies, and seas. Fantastic creations appeared, each patterned after a unique design-painted with vibrant colors, sculpted with varied textures, choreographed with rhythmic movements, accompanied by musical sounds, imbued with tantalizing aromas and tastes-all works of art without equal.

And God gloried in each of his creations, exclaiming that everything was very good. But his greatest masterpiece was yet to come-the creation of man and woman.

The first man was called Adam, not created by an impersonal command like God's previous creations. Instead, Adam
was intimately and painstakingly formed from the dust of his earthly home. He was, amazingly, designed in the image of God himself. And, finally, Adam was brought to life by the gentle breath of his loving Creator.

The one true God invited Adam to be co-creator with him. Not in the sense of being equal with God in his primary work of creation, but rather by fulfilling God's purposes for man's creation - to be a reflection of God's image and to give glory to God through the secondary channel of human creativity.

At first, Adam was commissioned to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden, mankind's first home, making it a place of beauty. Then Adam was allowed to choose creative names for the special animals and birds created by God. Through all of this, God was causing Adam to realize his need for a companion like himself to help accomplish all this artistic work. And then God created the first woman, Eve, from the body of Adam, marrying them to each other as partners in God's appointed task.

This beautiful story is recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. But in the third chapter, we read about how evil entered the hearts of Adam and Eve. Satan, God's enemy, tempted them to disobey God's one negative command-not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Because of this first sin, God's good creation began to be corrupted. The rest of the Bible describes how sin has continued to influence descendents of Adam and Eve throughout the ages, causing them to worship their artistic creations as idols, or compelling them to use their artistic gifts to glorify themselves or to serve Satan and his evil spirits.

But the One True God did not leave his creation without hope. Right in the middle of the sad story about the beginning of sin, God promised that He would one day send a savior to destroy Satan's corrupting work. ${ }^{1}$ That promised savior is none other than Jesus Christ, God's only son!

Jesus Christ came from heaven to live a perfect life for us, to die on the cross to pay for our sins, and to rise from the dead to
'Gen 3:15.
reign forever at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. All who confess their sins and believe in Jesus, as Savior and Lord will be cleansed of their sin, filled with God's Holy Spirit, and saved from eternal punishment. It is up to us to receive or reject this priceless gift of salvation.

Jesus Christ was with God the Father creating all things in the beginning. ${ }^{2}$ At his own appointed time in history, he came to reclaim for himself all the creation that mankind's sin had corrupted. ${ }^{3}$ And mankind's artistic gifts are among the things that are being cleansed and reclaimed for God through Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer." ${ }^{4}$ People are created by God, along with all of their creative giftshere proclaimed "good" according to God's original design.

So, again, it is really up to us. We may choose to use art for sinful purposes, as the worshipers of the golden calf did. ${ }^{5}$ They blatantly disobeyed God's command against worshipping idols. ${ }^{6}$ Or we may choose to use art to glorify God, as those same people did when they skillfully fashioned the tabernacle in the wilderness, this time carefully following God's instructions. ${ }^{7}$ There is also a third choice. Because of sinful artistic expressions in the world around them, some Christians reject most art forms as unsuitable for use in serving God. But this choice overlooks the many divine affirmations of sanctified art recorded in the Bible. And it also shrinks back from obeying clear scriptural commands, such as "Praise Him with timbrel and dancing." ${ }^{8}$

The Hebrew words māḥôl and $m^{e} h ̣ o ̂ l a ̂ ~ a r e ~ u s e d ~ t o ~ d e s c r i b e ~$ both sinful and sanctified dance. ${ }^{9}$ The scripture writers do not

[^0]assign any inherent morality to the act of dancing itself. Therefore, the purpose for its use and the heart intention of the dancer renders the dancing acceptable or not before God. The same reasoning would apply to every art form.

The Bible is filled with references to art that has been sanctified to bring glory to God. Music, singing, and dancing are often included together. ${ }^{10}$ Visual art is highlighted in descriptions of both the wilderness tabernacle and the temple in Jerusalem. ${ }^{11}$

Drama was often used by Hebrew prophets to convey messages from God. ${ }^{12}$ The entire book of Job seems to be constructed in the form of a play. And much of the Bible is written in poetry, especially the Psalms and the Song of Solomon. The stories of Esther and Ruth are masterpieces of Hebrew literature. And the parables of Jesus illustrate yet another unique literary genre.

So, let us embrace these examples from the Bible. Let us also join with one another as co-creators with the Creator of the universe, bringing beauty and meaning to life on Planet Earth, as we reflect the image of God and glorify the creator through our creativity.

[^1]











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## Writers For Cambodia From Cambodia

## Introduction

"Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Francis Bacon thus lauds exactitude as writing's unique contribution.
He is correct. Writing, re-writing, and re-re-writing, allow an author to hone her words till they say neither more, nor less, than other than what she intends. This is the joy and strength of the pen. A word mouthed extemporaneously may fill a moment's need, but carefully crafted composition-be it aphorism, essay, or tome - can be faceted into a diamond. Many of the world's most memorable spoken words were painfully labored over in the study before being uttered. Lengthy extemporaneous speech often wanders into fuzziness and redundancy. Editing shaves the fuzz and lops the loquacity. Writing, indeed, maketh an exact man. Arthur Hunt has recently highlighted the specificity of written vis-à-vis visual communication, and hence its appropriateness to the Christian faith. ${ }^{\text {. }}$

Writing tends to last longer. A word well spoken may ring in the ear for a month, but a written word can counsel for generations. A book, an article, a letter can be pulled off the shelf and pondered. Wrestled over in detail, the written word can be half-nelsoned into acknowledging its nuances. These can then sink deeply into heart and mind. Writing's witness continues for decades. Abel is not the only one who "still speaks, even though he is dead." So do Paul and Isaiah and John, whose compositions nourish the human soul centuries after the men themselves passed on.

[^3]Writing naturally lends itself to broad distribution. The publication of Luther's tracts rooted his reformation, in contrast with the rapid blossoming and wilting of Hus. Written materials are a low-cost, lowtech, but effective way of conveying thought to the masses.

Unfortunately, Khmer literature and those who produce it suffered between 1975 and 1979. The blows dealt then raised welts that fester today. Cambodians in general (but with happy exceptions) neither write nor read significant literature. That can change. And for the church, it must change if she is to fulfill her mandate of teaching everything the Lord commanded. ${ }^{2}$

To help raise a new crop of Cambodian Christian writers, Training of Timothys recently sponsored two seminars. The first was taught by accomplished Khmer authors Mam Barnabas, Chhon Phan Kong, Uon Seila, and Arun Sok Nhep. Two weeks later, a select group of invitees studied four more days under Mr. Wightman Weese from Tyndale House Publishers. At the conclusion participants were asked to write short parables.

What follows are reflections on the second writers' seminar by Mr. Weese, and then three of the student parables selected for publication in Honeycomb. We hope that others will catch the vision of training a new generation of Cambodian Christian authors to help ground the church with words that are incisive, lasting, and widely read.

-Editor

## Seminar Reflections



Wightman Weese

Four days was not a long time to spend with a group of fifteen men and women-dedicated people who already sense a deep need of developing literature for the church in Cambodia. But those four days, September 1-4, 2003, convinced me that all the desire and commitment needed to make a vital contribution was highly visible in this gathering.

My willingness to come to Cambodia, as a writer and editor, and with some publishing experience both in magazine and book publishing, was based on several assumptions.

First, I assumed that all writing no matter in what language-had structures close enough in form to be workable, and that such structures could be taught through translation and language interpreting. I wasn't really sure it was true, but the week's experience brought some new insights into the nature of the scriptures, its literary forms, and language itself.

Evangelical Christianity is based on the belief that the original biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and koinē Greek were God-ordained. God, who brought about the consequences of the Tower of Babel in the confusion of languages, planned that the Word of God that would come down to all humankind through these
three languages would adequately convey sacred truth. Bible translation efforts since then have called for the best scholarship and linguistic skills to replicate this sacred truth in languages that would be understood by "every tribe and language and people and nation."

Even the most cursory examination of Scripture reveals a number of literary forms - extended narratives, dialogue, and a rich array of figurative language and literary devices. Accurate renditions of these forms have proven that even the colorful nuances of these forms can survive translation efforts.

I came to see in a new way while in Cambodia that these literary structures are manageable in Bible translation. So it seemed safe to assume that some basic literary forms are in fact universal. Writing forms have evolved in other parts of the world to communicate to a fast-moving society with an ever-decreasing attention span. There is no reason not to believe that the same writing forms will be needed as well in what is becoming a fastmoving culture in Cambodia.

Everyone at that gathering would agree with me, I am sure, that it won't be easy to provide the churches and Christian leaders in Cambodia with a wealth of Christian literature-commentaries, inspirational materials, education and evangelism tools to meet the needs of a growing church. As an outsider looking in, as I was during the September Writer's Seminar, I was delighted at what I saw. In spite of certain limitations on the development of writers, editors, and publishers, the vision of those gathered for the seminar, appeared in every way to be an exceptionally good beginning.

So, as an outsider looking in, I will be praying for the Cambodian church and its leaders what I believe to be the most needs are:

1. A church on its knees in prayer for unity and a spirit of Christlike humility to see you through some potential. Scripture challenges us to that kind of a teachable spirit: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." ${ }^{2}$

[^4]2. A commitment of time by the best-educated and spiritually mature people in the Cambodian church to understand the difference between what is "urgent" and what is "essential for the future." A ministry in a church that is already experiencing the blessing and nurturing truths that are coming across the pulpits to the pages of literature that will bless others also, now and in years to come.
3. A concentrated effort to restore classical language--Khmer and others - to the education system of both public and private and Christian schools. The 1611 Authorized Version of the English Bible, clumsy as its language seems to be today, provided for centuries a standard of English usage. The writings of William Shakespeare also contributed to the stability of the language. Khmer needs also some such stabilizing body of literature. Further work in developing Christian literature needs clear language standards in order to stand the test of time.

Many nations around the world are on the brink of imploding, just as Cambodia did several years ago. The example that the Cambodian church can set may provide a valuable model of how a recovering church can aid in the redevelopment of a recovering nation.

Some of us outsiders looking in are hoping, praying, and desiring not to control or manipulate, but to offer constructive help in any way we can. We are aware of the potential dangers pointed out in Uon Seila's insightful and instructive article in the July Issue of Honeycomb. ${ }^{3}$ It would be wrong for anyone on the outside to try to inject alien and divisive cultural or theological ideas into the Cambodian church, especially at this critical time of recovery.

All in all, I was enlightened and encouraged by my short visit. I didn't get to meet many people during my short stay in Phnom Penh, but the fifteen leaders whom I met through the seminar will be very much in my prayers and in my thoughts in coming days as I have opportunities to share what I learned there.

[^5] 2003): 10-15.

## Three Parables

## (1) The Heart of the Father



TRUONG Leapromluc

After eating a meal one rainy Sunday evening last month, I sat down to watch the national and international news on TV. My children also sat around me. The news described some young people who had been arrested for the fearful drug addiction that affects our neighboring country. Suddenly one of my daughters turned to her brother, "Oh Bong Kha, what happened to your friend who was addicted to drugs?"

The brother answered, "You mean Rithy? He is healed." When I heard my children talking this way about his friends I asked my older son, "Kha, who is Rithy? What happened to him?"

My older son told me everything. "Mother, you remember. Rithy studied with me in Baktouk High School, and he used to come to our house. Rithy is the son of Uncle Brak Sambath, who has huge villa in front of Toulkok. His father is very rich; they have several cars. When he completed high school he went to study at the National

Institute of Management near Wat Phnom. Just two years ago he earned his bachelor's degree."
"After finishing college, why did he fall into drug addiction?" my other daughter asked.

My older son continued, "Life is very easy for rich children, unlike the poor who can do nothing. We are too short to reach anything. After earning his degree, Rithy asked his father to give him money to open a tourism business in Siem Reap. Because father favors him and always gives him whatever he asks, he agreed, and gave him a lot of start-up capital.
"Rithy began well às a business owner, but later he became acquainted with friends who enticed him to do many bad things for kicks. Now he was learning bad habits from a neighboring country-going places, drinking, getting girls for his business. Finally he became addicted to drugs. As a result he lost his credit as a moral and knowledgeable young man, and his company closed its doors. He had nothing.
"Later he realized that he had wasted everything that his father had given him. Not only that, he had also become addicted to drugssomething that society hates. After contemplating all this, he decided to come back to Phnom Penh to apologize to his father, even though he was scared that his father would punish him severely.
"When he arrived home he was so afraid he almost could not go inside. But when his father saw how very skinny he was, he felt great pity for him. When Rithy saw his father, he knelt down and begged his father's forgiveness, but his father lifted him up and called all his brothers and sisters to come and welcome him home. Then he found a good doctor to treat him until he got better. This year his father sent him to another school to get his doctor's degree."

At that time my youngest son said, "Rithy's father is very kind; he loves his son so much."

All the words that my son says remind me of the prodigal son in the Bible. Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees to teach them about God's compassion for us. We as his children do many wrong things against him, but our Heavenly Father forgives all our sin when we turn back to him.

This story also reflects to us the problems of present society, and reminds us to carefully teach our young people not to fall into those bad things. Don't conform to this world. Watch out for the influence of the culture of our neighboring country that may lead us to fall into this destruction. We all know that young people are like young bamboo. If they don't value their lives as belonging to God, they may end up practicing the immorality that society hates. Our young people must not become like salt without taste. Therefore they must think carefully about making friends, listening carefully, controlling themselves, not loving money, and living with integrity. As good citizens we must unite together to build up our society to be pure and peaceful.

## (2) Faithful Servant



LONG Sambath

Two Americans, Dale and Rick, went for a stroll in a town in Siem Reap province. While walking Dale touched his pocketand a shock ran through his body when he realized that his passport and the $\$ 1,000$ that had been there were gone. Dale and Rick grew very nervous, and searched everywhere on that day in 1999.

While he was searching, a Japanese man approached him. "What is your name?" he inquired. Because Dale was so worried he snapped back, "What is your name?" Then he continued his search.

After a while the same fellow approached Dale again. "What is your name?" he repeated. "What is your name?" Dale again retorted. Still later the Japanese man came to him one more time with the same question. Dale started to grow curious, and this time answered in a polite manner, "My name is Dale."
"What is your family name?"
"My family name is Jones."
"What are you looking for?" the stranger asked. Then he took out a picture and asked, "Is this yours?"

With surprise he took the picture in his hand. "Yes, this is mine!" he replied.

That Japanese man then returned the more than $\$ 1,000$ and passport that had fallen from Dale's pocket. Dale was very happy ... but at the same time sorry about his bad attitude and behavior toward the Japanese man. He should not have used impolite words with him. Dale apologized and thanked the man for finding and returning what had fallen from his pocket.

This Japanese person was a faithful man. Do we have people like him in the Christian community? How many of our leaders have this kind of commitment to keep themselves pure by fearing God? Jesus said, "If you love me, you have to obey my commandments. You have to carry your cross everyday." God did not create people to act any way they want, but rather to obey and worship Him only. True worship takes place not just inside the church once a week, but should be our activity every minute in praise of His name. If you do not do good to people, how can you say that you are glorifying God?

We must not forget to do good, although we remember that good works do not save us. We received salvation to do good works, and to do them with gladness of heart. This Japanese man did good with gladness. Most people would not be willing to give up something valuable they found and could keep, but this Japanese man wanted to keep purity of heart as the pattern of his life.

People often do not practice good because we have been born into a sinful world. Sin leads us to do bad things. Good works cannot happen unless there is a motivating strength inside, and that strength is love.

The Son of God came to this world not because somebody forced him to come; he came voluntarily out of obedience to his Father and love for humanity. Because of love he sacrificed his life for our sake. To do good honors him and shows that the love we have toward him is not enough. Faithfulness requires total commitment to him.

The Japanese man wanted to return the passport and money even though the owner at first treated him rudely and impolitely.

To fulfill his plan Jesus confronted the Pharisees and the teachers of the law although they mocked and crucified him.

Commitment is the strong foundation for a leader and also is the underlying strategy that leads to success in every endeavor.

Finally, Jesus is giving you time to return to him. Let him give you strength and mold your life so you may become like a diamond that shines brightly to the lost world. Whatever situation you are in, God still needs you. You are an example to other people by your good work and loyalty to what you are doing. One day you will meet Jesus and He will say, "You have been a good, faithful servant; please come and be happy with me" (Matt. 25:21-22).

## (3) My Father and Love



## SAOKHON Sireyvath

Tlalking about Cambodia reminds us of the famous Angkor Temple, which draws many people to visit it at least once in their life time. But we also remember the dark age of the Pol Pot regime when millions of Cambodian lives were lost. There is no exact answer to the questions of what happened to all the people then.

I also am one of those who endured that horrible time. On April 17, 1975 all who lived in the city were forced by black-shirted solders to leave for the various provinces of Cambodia. My family was among them. Along the way were crowds of people. My father and family were unsure of where to go; we just followed the crowds. At that time I was only six years old. My father said, "Come, I'll carry you," and he carried me and later put me on his back. When I was on his back, I felt very happy and warm. Nothing could compare with this peace. While we are walking along the way I frequently asked my father, "Father, father, are you weary?" He answered, "No." I asked him many times about what I.was seeing but didn't understand. Often time we laughed together and were very happy.

This reminds me of the love between a father and his son. God is not different-he loves us as his children, he protects us, he carries us away from the trouble that arises from sin. His love means that he never complains, but continually protects us in all circumstances because he loves us as his children. The Bible says, "... in the wilderness ... you sàw how Yahweh your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place" (Deut 1:31).

- Whenever son face a problem, the father always protects him.
- Protection is love.
- In his love God sacrifices everything to protect and care for us.


## Conclusion

Perhaps the preceding has prompted you to write an article for Honeycomb. If so, we offer, with tongue in cheek, the following advice to our English authors:

## Advice to Our Contributors <br> "How to Write Good"

1. Avoid run on sentences they are hard to read.
2. About sentence fragments.
3. It behooves us to avoid archaisms.
4. Also avoid awkward or affected alliteration.
5. Don't use no double negatives.
6. If I've told you once I've told you a million times: don't exaggerate.
7. Avoid commas, that aren't necessary.
8. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
9. Likewise, pronouns have to agree with its referents.
10. Use of the passive voice should be avoided.
11. Never use a long word when a miniscule one will do.
12. Don't verb nouns.
13. Kill all exclamation marks!!!!!!
14. When dangling, don't use participles.
15. Who needs rhetorical questions?
16. Never, under any circumstances, use repetitive, repetitious redundancies.
17. Proofread carefully to sure you didn't any words out.
18. Eschew obfuscation, and employ the vernacular.
19. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
20. Avoid ampersands \& abbrevs., etc.
21. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
22. Remember to never split an infinitive.
23. Contractions aren't necessary.

26 HONEYCOMB 5/1 (October 2004)
24. Foreign words and phrases are not à propos.
25. One should never generalize.
26. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
27. Be more or less specific.
28. One-word sentences? Eliminate.
29. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
30. Beware of irregular verbs that have crope into our language.
31. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague (they're old hat).

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## Gentle Strength: A Model for Ministry

Russell H. BOWERS, Jr.

What does a Christian minister look like? Is he a strongman with big muscles and a cold stare? Or is she a nurse quietly caring for her timid young patient?


The minister as strongman


The minister as nurse

Actually, neither picture tells the whole story. Each tells something about what a faithful minister looks like, but each picture needs to be balanced by the other. The Christian needs to be both strong and gentle.

To be specific, those who serve in Christ's name must be strong in the Christian faith without being arrogant in the way they present it. They need to act differently toward mistaken ideas and those who believe them. We must hold firmly to our faith while respecting the people who believe another. It is important that we learn humility and the ability to listen even when we are convinced that we know the truth. Christians should interact with non-Christians whenever possible rather than withdrawing in isolation from them.

## The Christian Minister: Strong for the Truth

Christianity is not a weak faith. The Bible calls for Christians to be strong in at least three ways: discernment, decisiveness, and deeds. That is, we are to be strong in mind, strong in will, and strong in action.

## Discernment

The Bible tells us we should not try to blend our Christian faith with anti-Christian beliefs into something new with a little bit of each. Christianity and anti-Christian beliefs are like oil and water-they do not combine. Another thing we should not do is simply choose a faith to follow - either Buddhism or Christianity or Islam or Hinduism or whatever-without first trying to decide which one is really true. Rather, the Christian must be strong in mind to distinguish truth from error. Both trying to blend opposite beliefs together, and simply choosing one (without struggling to find out which one is true) are forms of mental and spiritual laziness. People who are lazy in this way sometimes end up believing almost everything. Instead, we need strong minds that we use to discern truth from error. And we need strong wills to choose to follow the truth, even when family and friends around us want us to do otherwise.

There are many biblical passages that urge us to exercise our minds in this way. Here are a few. 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 gives us the wise response when we encounter new teaching (or "prophecies"). First, do not ignore it (or put out the Spirit's fire by treating it with contempt). But second, do not swallow it without thinking; instead, test what is said. Third, hold onto whatever you find in it to be good, and turn away from whatever in it is wrong (or evil).

One audience that followed this method was the Jews from Berea.' When Paul and Silas introduced to them the news about Jesus, the Bereans did not ignore it. But neither did they blindly accept it without thinking. Rather, they listened to the message with great eagerness and then tested it scripturally. They compared Paul's new message with what the Bible said. As a result, many believed.

[^9]A strong mind is needed not only to help us choose between Christianity and another faith. After we become Christians we will also need to distinguish between true, biblical Christianity on the one hand, and groups that claim to be Christian but misunderstand and misuse the Bible on the other. The apostle John warned his readers not to "believe every spirit, but [to] test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ${ }^{\prime \prime}$ There is a danger that Christians might be "led astray from [their] sincere and pure devotion to Christ" and follow "a Jesus other than the Jesus [the apostles] preached, ${ }^{3}$ or desert "the one who called you by the grace of Christ and [turn] to a different gospel-which is really no gospel at all."4 Christians must stop thinking like children and think like adults. ${ }^{5}$

The ability to see the difference between truth and error-or better and best-is not something that happens to us all of a sudden and once-for-all. Rather, it is a continual and ever more refined exercise throughout our lives as individuals and as churches. That is why Paul prayed that the Philippians' love "abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that [they] may be able to discern what is best...." ${ }^{\circ}$ In this verse discernment means choosing what is best when we have many good things we could do. Sometimes we have many good ways we could go, or good things we could do, but one is better than the rest. In these cases we need to say "no" to the good so we can say "yes" to the best. The point I want to make here is that Christianity calls for many kinds of strength of mind to discern truth and excellence from error and mediocrity. Christianity does not pretend all ways are equal.

## Decisiveness

Once we discover what the truth is, God does not want Christians to be half-hearted for it. The Bible calls on us to make a

[^10]strong, decisive, and clear commitment. Biblical Christianity is not for the faint of heart.

Some verses suggest that God would rather people be strong in their commitment-even if it is a commitment to error-than be indecisive. Joshua wanted Israel to choose their god, even if that meant another than Yahweh. ${ }^{7}$ Elijah urged an indecisive Israel to go ahead and serve Baal if he truly were god, but by all means to stop wavering between two opinions. ${ }^{8}$ Jesus wished the Laodiceans were either hot or cold." If the resurrection is not true we should "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." ${ }^{10}$ If we want to be significant for the kingdom of God we must deny ourselves. "hate" our natural relatives, take up our cross, and follow." Significance does not come to those indecisive souls who put their hand to the plow and then look back. ${ }^{12}$ Being a Christian means being a Christian, not being a Christian and worshiping the spirits or the Buddha at the same time.
${ }^{7}$ Josh 24:14-15.
${ }^{8} 1 \mathrm{Ki} 18: 21$.
${ }^{9}$ Rev 3:15.
${ }^{10} 1$ Cor 15:30.
"Lk 9:23-27; 14:26-27. "Love" and "hate" are sometimes used in the Bible not to describe feelings of "affection" and "revulsion," but the dispassionate notions of "choose" and "reject." Thus in Mal 1:2-5 God "loved" Jacob but "hated" Esau. The issue here seems to be more of choice than of emotion, as Paul's use in Rom 9:10-13 makes clear-"Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls--she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved [i.e., chose], but Esau I hated ${ }^{\text {[ }[\text { i.e., rejected as covenant partner]." Similarly, Jesus did not }}$ urge his disciples to loathe money. Proverbs in particular speaks of its value. Rather, since we cannot serve two masters, we hate [reject service to] the one and love [choose to serve] the other. In Luke, "hate" cannot mean a strong emotional distaste for one's parents, since that would contradict the rest of scripture, especially the command to honor one's parents. Rather the disciple "hates" his parents in the sense of not giving first place to their wishes, but choosing instead to follow Christ.
${ }^{12}$ Lk 9:62.

## Deeds

Having exercised critical strength of mind to discern the truth and decisive strength of will to side with it, the Christian is urged to demonstrate active strength of doing. She is to live for the truth.

This is true, first, for all of life in general. But in particular the Bible requires the Christian community to stand against wrong religious ideas. Being strong for the truth includes being strong against wrong. When some Jews tried to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised and obey the Old Testament Law, Paul and Barnabas entered into "sharp dispute and debate with them." ${ }^{3}$ The false Jewish teaching stirred up in the apostles a sense of urgency to show how wrong it was. This is because false teaching is not an innocent difference of opinion about things that don't really matter. Rather, false teaching can both destroy the faith of individuals and ruin whole households. ${ }^{14}$ Only by watching his doctrine closely can the Lord's servant save both himself and his hearers. ${ }^{15}$ Consequently early church leaders did not smilingly welcome wrong doctrine and practice but vigorously opposed them, even if doing so meant publicly opposing the chief of the apostles. ${ }^{16}$ The glorified Lord commended Ephesus for exposing false apostles. By contrast he rebuked Pergamum for having people who held to the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, and Thyatira for tolerating "that woman Jezebel" who called herself a prophetess." Swerving from true doctrine can lead to loss of reward, and welcoming those who teach it entails sharing in their wicked work. ${ }^{18}$ Early church leaders felt compelled to urge their followers to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." ${ }^{19}$

To summarize: truth and error in religious teachings is an important matter. The biblical Christian needs to be strong in mind to

[^11]discern the truth, strong in will to commit himself exclusively to it, and strong in action to promote the truth and expose error. The strongman does in fact represent one part of Christian leadership and ministry.

## The Christian Minister: Gentle with People

But does the strongman tell the whole story? In particular, how should we display our strength? The Christian minister must be strong as far as the truth is concerned. But what is his behavior like toward people?

## The General Pattern

The general pattern is gentleness. Both in its commands and in its examples, the New Testament urges gentleness as the way to commend truth and expose error. The scriptures do not encourage us to be proud and combative as we proclaim the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:23-26. 2 Timothy is probably Paul's last letter. In it the apostle instructs his student how to carry on the ministry after he himself is gone. The letter introduces the pattern of combining strength for the truth with gentleness toward people.

In this passage, we see the idea of strength for the truth emerges when Paul says that God did not give us a spirit of timidity. Therefore Timothy should not be ashamed to speak about the Lord, but strong enough to join Paul in suffering for the gospel. ${ }^{20}$ He must keep the pattern of sound teaching, and guard the good deposit that was entrusted to him. ${ }^{21}$ Strong in God's grace, Timothy is to pass the content of Christian faith on to others, ${ }^{22}$ taking care to handle it accurately. ${ }^{23}$ Giving his mind in this way to good teaching, he should shun foolish arguments. ${ }^{24}$

But how should Timothy carry out this ministry of strength for the truth?

[^12][T]he Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. ${ }^{25}$

The Greek word translated "quarrel" means first to fight physically, and second to fight with our words: quarrel. wrangle, dispute. It therefore implies a serious conflict, intensive and bitter. The servant of the Lord must not engage in such combativeness. Rather, he or she must be "kind," a word that the Greek New Testament uses to describe the way a mother cares for her little children. ${ }^{26}$ She is not harsh with them, but patient and soothing, even when she needs to be persistent in instruction or correction. Here is where the image of the nurse calming a young patient, rather than the strongman lifting his barbell, is appropriate. Further, the Christian minister must be "not resentful," meaning able to endure difficulties without becoming angry or upset. Rejecting resentment, the strong servant of the scriptures "gently" instructs his opponents. The word behind "gently" means gentleness of attitude and behavior in contrast with harshness in one's dealings with others.

Chapter four repeats this pattern of strong for the truth, gentle with people. In view of the wickedness of the last days and the persecution that awaits the godly, ${ }^{27}$ as well as the tendency of people to prefer smooth talk to sound teaching, ${ }^{28}$ the Christian leader is to preach the word (i.e., be strong for the truth). ${ }^{29}$ He must capitulate neither to evil nor to the spirit of the age. But again we ask, how is he to preach the word? "With great patience and careful instruction." The word translated "patience" means longsuffering, the prolonged restraint of passion, anger, or rage. It is "a state of emotional calm in

[^13]the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaint or irritation. ${ }^{33}$ Timothy and we who follow him must not get quickly angry with those who oppose us, but suffer long under their criticism or ridicule; not to shout, scold, or rely on sarcasm, but to reply with careful instruction. Strong commitment to the truth does not require that we act inappropriately toward opponents. Strong for the truth ... but gentle with people.

1 Peter 3:15-16. Peter says the same thing. Peter opens these verses by saying that his readers should 1) in their hearts set apart Christ as lord, and 2) always be prepared to explain and defend their hope. This is being strong for the truth: strong in mind to be able to give a reason, and strong in will in decisively choosing to make Christ lord of one's life.
"Gentle with people" follows in the apostle's instructions regarding how this strong, reasoned defense of one's faith is to be made: "with gentleness and respect...." For "gentleness" Peter employs the same word that Paul did in 1 Thessalonians 2. ${ }^{31}$ The word translated "respect" is a word that is more often translated "fear." It sometimes meant the panic that prompts a person to flee. It could also be used to describe profound awe for a god. Because of who God is, people treat him with fear and respect. That is the kind of attitude we should have toward other people, even those who question our Christian faith. We should neither be flippant, sarcastic, haughty, nor disinterested. Paul suggests the same when he teaches that we should "show true humility toward all men," ${ }^{32}$ and James when he warns against cursing men. ${ }^{33}$

[^14]
## Reasons to Deal Gently

But why be gentle? Why not be strong in our dealings with people, just as we are strong in our commitment to the truth? The Bible suggests several reasons:

We Also Have Weaknesses. In describing Old Testament worship, Hebrews says that high priest "is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ${ }^{34}$ Recalling our own sinfulness is good medicine to cure us from the sickness of pride. Paul says the same when reminds Titus that "[a]t one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ${ }^{35}$ Both our present weaknesses and past follies should incline us toward humility and the gentle treatment of those who are themselves going astray.

Others May Be Right. Some Christians believe that they have all the truth and only the truth, whereas everything that everyone else believes is wrong. Neither is true.

Abraham is one of the most honored people we read about in the Old Testament. He was the founder of the Jewish nation and is "the father of all who believe." ${ }^{36}$ His faith made him the friend of God. ${ }^{37}$ Yet these things did not make him always right.

On one occasion Abraham moved to Gerar. There he lied about his wife, and Sarah ended up in Abimelech's harem. To fix this problem, God did not speak to Abraham but, of all people, to a Philistine king! ${ }^{38}$ Through his lack of faith and reliance on improper schemes, Abraham had made himself incapable of hearing God's voice on how to resolve the present crisis. God instead warned Abimelech, who immediately restored Sarah, and indirectly rebuked Abraham at the same time. Abraham, the believer, the covenant partner, the friend of

[^15] in Gen 26:1.

God and father of all who believe, only heard God's voice on this occasion through the mouth of a pagan, Philistine king. He had lied because he falsely assumed, as Christians sometimes do today, that there was "no fear of God in this place" ${ }^{39}$-among the non-believers with whom he lived.

This instance is not the only one in the Bible. Josiah was a godly king of Judah, who "did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left." ${ }^{40}$ The Bible says that "[n]either before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to Yahweh as he did-with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses." ${ }^{n 4}$

By contrast, the Pharaohs of Egypt are not generally pictured as being very close to God. Yet when Egypt's Pharaoh Neco marched out to fight Babylon, he warned Josiah not to oppose him: "God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you." Tragically, the Bible says that Josiah "would not listen to what Neco had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo." He was shot by archers and died. ${ }^{42}$ The godly king had refused to listen to God's voice coming from an unexpected source.

Jesus observed that "the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." ${ }^{43}$ Proverbs says we should learn from ants. ${ }^{44}$ Even donkeys and stones may on occasion have things to say. ${ }^{45}$ Only if we have more faith and a closer walk with God than did Abraham, and more zeal for Yahweh than did Josiah, can we afford to ignore those outside our community

[^16]of faith. Though the believing community may be the usual way God speaks to us, it may not be the only way.

Abusive Speech is the Tool of False Teachers. Although some people think that the louder and more forcefully someone speaks, the truer his words must be, there is actually no relationship between loudness and truth. Slander and abusive speech are the tools of false teachers, who use them to cover up the weakness of their arguments and persuade the simple-minded to follow them. It is "godless men" and "dreamers" who "slander [even] celestial beings" and "speak abusively against whatever they do not understand." They stand in sharp contrast with the archangel Michael, who dared not bring a slanderous accusation against even so obvious an enemy as Satan. ${ }^{46}$

Peaceful Words Coupled with Godly Living is the Wise Pattern. On the contrary, the wise teacher controls his tongue, not using it to "curse men, who have been made in God's likeness." He demonstrates his wisdom "by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." Heavenly wisdom is neither envious nor ambitious; but pure, peace-loving, and considerate. ${ }^{47}$

Jesus Dealt Gently. This is the way Jesus ministered. In seeking to paint a picture of Jesus' ministry Matthew quoted Isaiah:

> Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope. ${ }^{48}$

Verse 19 does not mean Jesus said nothing at all, for the previous verse speaks of his proclaiming justice. Rather, the picture is one "of gentleness and humility (11:29), of quiet withdrawal ... and a presentation of his messiahship that is neither arrogant nor brash." ${ }^{49}$ When Peter wants to summarize Jesus' ministry, he talks about "how God anointed Jesus

[^17]of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing...."50 The normal patter Jesus followed was not one of confrontation.

## When to Break the Pattern

There were, however, occasions when Jesus did speak harshly. In Matthew 23 he pronounced seven woes against the teachers of the law and Pharisees, whom he named hypocrites, sons of hell, blind guides and fools, whitewashed tombs, snakes, and a brood of vipers. This is not exactly the softest approach. In addition to Jesus, one can think of Elijah with the prophets of Baal, ${ }^{51}$ Paul with Elymas, ${ }^{52}$ and Isaiah with idol worshippers. ${ }^{53}$ Why on these occasions did God's ministers depart so dramatically from the normal pattern of gentleness?

One key seems to be that people who are scolded harshly are those who should have known better. The lawyers and Pharisees had long studied God's law; their godlessness was the result not of lack of opportunity, but of willful misreading. Elymas was a Jew who also should have had access to the truth, but who instead turned to false prophecy and sorcery. Paul's treatment of him differed greatly from the way he pleaded with the pagans in Acts 14:11-18 without scolding them. The Israelites whom Elijah confronted should have known Yahweh. The idolaters Isaiah ridiculed had failed to do the most basic kind of thinking. ${ }^{54}$ Their guilt thus exposed them to rebuke rather than entreaty.

Second, those who were scolded had not fooled themselves only, but were often leading others astray. The lawyers and Pharisees were not just blind, but blind guides. Elymas was deterring Sergius Paulus from the truth. Paul personally opposed Peter in the presence

[^18]of others (implying a possible loss of face for Peter) because "other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy" and "even Barnabas was led astray."ss He later urged Titus to sharply rebuke legalists "because they are ruining whole households." ${ }^{56}$

We may conclude that the general pattern for ministrycertainly the initial approach-is that of gentleness. This is what the teaching passages say and what many examples and stories illustrate. There are, however, occasions when people so irresponsibly and actively embrace error that they must be opposed as strongly as the doctrines they promote.

## Three Mechanics of Gentleness

## Separate the Person from the Problem.

The preferred procedure, however, and the one that should be followed first, is to distinguish between a false teaching and the person who happens to hold it. The false teaching is the problem; the person is not.

In their book on negotiation, Fisher, Ury, and Patton devote a chapter to separating the person from the problem. ${ }^{57}$ They remind us that negotiators are people first, and that every negotiator has two kinds of interests-those dealing with the substance of the negotiation, and those dealing with relationships among the negotiators. The chapter concludes by asserting, "Separating the people from the problem is not something you can do once and forget about; you have to keep working at it. The basic approach is to deal with the people as human beings and with the problem on its own merits." ${ }^{58}$

[^19]McGrath picks up this attitude toward negotiating business differences and adapts it to Christian apologetics. ${ }^{59} \mathrm{He}$ suggests the following:

Suppose you are talking to a lifelong atheist about his ideas. The superficial agenda may be about whether or not God exists. But beneath the surface, there may be a conflict going on within this person, unnoticed. Thoughts like this might be flashing through his mind: "I've been an atheist for twenty-five years now. That's a long time. And everyone knows that I'm an atheist. If I change my mind now, people will laugh at me. I'll lose face. My personal reputation is tied up with my atheistic views. I'm locked into this situation. Somehow, my atheism and my personal identity have become mixed up with each other. If I change my mind on this one, I'll somehow be condemning my whole past." The apologist can very easily reinforce such prejudices through a tactless and insensitive approach to the matter. ${ }^{60}$

To reduce the likelihood of making the problem worse, McGrath suggests first separating the people from the problem, and then making it easy for the people to change their minds.

Scripture seems to support this approach. Returning to 2 Timothy 2:24-26, we see that Paul urges gentle treatment of the erring person in the hope that he will abandon his wrong ideas. The enemy in this case is the devil who has ensnared those who oppose true doctrine. Gentle instruction and God's intervention may open the eyes of the blind to see and accept the truth. 2 Corinthians $4: 1-6$ says much the same thing. ${ }^{61}$

[^20]Gentleness may seem to be merely an attitude, a behavior that is hard to describe in precise terms. But there are procedures that can be used to assure a gentle approach. Separating the person from the problem is one. Listening before speaking, and using familiar terms are two more. Taken together they promote a sense that the speaker is not so self-satisfied that he says what he wants to say with a careless "Take it or leave it" attitude.

## Listen Before Speaking.

"He who answers before listening-that is his folly and his shame. ${ }^{.}{ }^{62}$ There is wisdom in hearing and understanding another before talking with her, especially if the speaker wishes to discuss worldview or religion. Failure to do so may lead to needless misunderstanding or offense.

Paul practiced this approach by not just looking, but looking carefully at the Athenians' shrines before addressing the Areopagus. ${ }^{63}$ This occasion reflected his overall strategy of becoming all things to all people in order to win as many as possible. His goal was not to dump a pile of words on an audience without caring whether they understood or not, but to win as many converts as possible. ${ }^{64}$

There are what may be called "[s]tandard techniques of good listening." These are

> to pay close attention to what is said, to ask the other party to spell out carefully and clearly exactly what they mean, and to request that ideas be repeated if there is any ambiguity or uncertainty. Make it your task while listening not to phrase a response, but to understand them as they see themselves. Take in their perceptions, their needs, and their constraints. ${ }^{65}$

Such active, detailed listening does not necessarily mean that we agree with what is being said.

[^21]Understanding is not agreeing. One can at the same time understand perfectly and disagree completely with what the other side is saying. But unless you can convince them that you do grasp how they see it, you may be unable to explain your viewpoint to them. Once you have made their case for them, then come back with the problems you find in their proposal. ${ }^{66}$

We may, in fact, disagree strongly with another, and yet do well to listen and understand.

The reason [entering into another's worldview] is important is that we want to get at the facts. What Hitler thought and felt and did were facts. The inner facts about Hitler help to explain a lot of the outer ones, and we need to know the inner Hitler as well as we can, if we wish to understand the terrible history of those times. Likewise if we wish to explore the nature of Buddhism we need to get at the meanings which are held by the Buddhist texts and Buddhist people. Our views are not facts about them, but facts about us. Later, when we have found what Buddhist Buddhism is we can shape our own. ${ }^{67}$

## Present Christ in Familiar Terms.

Those who place high value on their content but little on their audience often speak their message in forms familiar to themselves, whether or not they communicate. Who cares if I have made what I have to say attractive, understandable, or relevant to my listeners? I have made my grand speech. What I said was clear enough to me. If they want to understand it, they will simply have to work harder to be able to do so.

Perhaps this overstates the case. But the effective communicator-the gentle communicator-will learn as much as possible about her audience as well as her subject. She will then tailor the latter to fit the former. Gentleness with people includes understanding them and making their work of listening easier.

Recently I attended a meeting for rural Asian pastors, many illiterate, some from restrictive political contexts. These were people

[^22]hungry for encouragement, worship, and basic instruction. The seminar had been organized by a wealthy, well-known Western evangelistic organization, and met in our capital city. No doubt the organization's intentions were noble. But when the opening speaker talked about their live satellite simulcasts to a long list of nations, he left his audience confused and hungry still. By contrast, he was followed by another who talked for three or four minutes: "Brothers, some of us know how to use the toilets, and others do not. Those who do must not laugh at those of us who do not, but rather help them learn. And here in the city, it is impolite to spit on the walls or floor of the hotel. I know some of you do that in your villages, but here is not a good testimony to do so. If you have to spit, use your bathroom or go outside, but do not spit on the walls or floor of the hotel." The second speaker knew his audience. His words, though lacking the great learning and flowery speech of the first, accomplished much more.

God has worked not only to communicate with humanity, but to make his communication plain. This is a major purpose of the incarnation, when Jesus came to earth in the flesh. No one has ever "seen" God in his essence and glory-with either the physical eye or the eye of the mind. The best we can hope for is that he put us in a cleft in the rock and cover us with his hand until he has passed by. Then he can remove his hand so we can "see" his back, but never his face. ${ }^{68}$ Because God in his nature and character is so much greater than we are-living "in unapproachable light"-no one has seen or can see him. ${ }^{69}$ The incarnation was God's method of communicating himself in a form you and I could grasp. "God, the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." ${ }^{70}$
${ }^{68} \mathrm{Jn} 1: 18 ;$ Ex 33:22-23.
${ }^{69} 1$ Tim 6:16.
${ }^{70}$ Jn $1: 18$. The word behind "has made known" means explain fully, give a detailed report. It stands behind the English exegete and exegesis. The job of the biblical exegete is to "lead out" the meaning of a text-neither to add to nor subtract from nor alter it-but to explain the text and its implications fully. So Christ has come to "exegete" the Father, who otherwise would have remained much more largely unknown.

Jesus spoke in familiar terms-talking about wells and water with the woman of Sychar; seeds, weeds, and crops with his agricultural audiences. Paul dressed his identical message in different clothing when speaking to Jews and Greeks, making it easy for each group to hear. ${ }^{71}$ Gentleness with people entails fitting our message to our hearers.

## Dealing With Opponents

Ministering in such a way that we are strong for the truth but gentle with its adversaries is likely to raise opposition. Non-Christians will most likely object to our being strong for the truth; whereas fellow Christians may suspect that a gentle approach means that we are compromising somehow. How should we handle these objections'?

## Non-Christian Opponents.

Most religions believe that they alone are right. Even those like Baha'i that say that all religions are valuable reject the exclusive claims of any particular one, insisting that their all-embracive approach alone is valid. The exclusive claims of Christ will inevitably clash with those who believe other faiths.

When this happens we may recall that it is not necessary to be combative when opposing error, even though we don't believe it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained respectful even when they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. They simply stated their commitment to Yahweh and refusal to bow to any other god. Three chapters later, in Daniel 6. Darius outlawed prayer except to himself. Daniel made no public scene in response, but simply continued his own faithful practice. When Festus raised his voice and accused Paul of insanity, the apostle did not reply in the same way. He merely answered that what he was saying was "true and reasonable," properly addressing him as "most excellent Festus.""2 More strikingly,

[^23]when the cured Namaan apologized in advance for bowing down (in body, not in heart) with the king in the temple of Rimmon, Elisha (who was no compromiser) told him, "Go in peace." ${ }^{73}$ All of these disagreed without being disagreeable.

## Christian Opponents.

By contrast, Christians are more likely to object to a gentleness that seems to get evangelists too close to their unbelieving audiences, because they suspect that getting close in this way involves compromise. Jesus' foes repeatedly accused him of befriending tax collectors and sinners, forgetting that it is the sick who need a physician, ${ }^{74}$ and failing to grasp how deep God's love is for the lost, and how far he goes to win them back. ${ }^{75}$ Jewish Christians criticized Peter for eating with the uncircumcised. The apostle had to explain in detail to them the certainty of God's call to visit Cornelius, and Cornelius' conversion that followed. ${ }^{76}$ Therefore it is not surprising that some Christians today criticize others for getting too close to outsiders they are trying to reach.

When this happens, each side should assume the best of the other side, recalling that in this disputable matter as in others, Christians may in good faith adopt different positions. Unless compromise or sin are clearly and biblically at stake, Christians should not despise or condemn others whose practice is different. Each will one day give an account of himself, not of others. ${ }^{77}$

[^24]
## Conclusion

Gentleness without strength robs us of a sure message. Strength without gentleness builds walls rather than doorways into the hearts of our hearers. The effective, biblical minister will use both-the strength of discernment, decisiveness. and deeds when the issue is truth; the gentleness of separating, listening, and adapting when the issue is presenting that truth to people.



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## Abigail, the Peacemaker

Linda VEJLUPKOVÁ

TThe Bible is an all-embracing tapestry, weaving together the nature and purposes of God, its strands relating how he creates, saves, and blesses. It is brim-filled with great names; lives glorious or tragic; exciting plots and impressive outcomes. Yet, as ordinary individuals, we should not be overwhelmed by the immensity of the biblical stories revealing how God works in our world. The scriptures do not demand us to live out a doctrinal system, a moral or religious code as depicted by its contents. Rather, they invite us to understand what it looks like to be human and what is needed for us to enter and mature as human beings in our stories where God is the pivotal theme. In studying biblical stories and characters, we can indeed glimpse how we should or should not live our lives. But, even more, we see how in fact we do live, how our everyday experiences are the very building blocks that Goduses to work out his purposes of salvation in us and in the world.

The story of Abigail dramatically compares the character and temperament of a gracious, discerning woman with that of her surly, bigoted husband Nabal. Abigail deflected the blame for a tense state of conflict between Nabal and David, away from her husband to herself,
and, in so doing, brought calm to a situation that had had the potential of becoming a massacre of innocent people. Further, her actions not only appeased David's anger, but stopped him from taking revenge with his own hands.

## Setting the Scene

## Historical background

God had personally governed his people Israel for centuries. Throughout this theocratic rule, God used his anointed leaders to govern his people, the last leaders being called judges. Samuel was the last of the judges, and he also functioned as a prophet. The people had a leader they could trust, a leader of integrity, one on whom they could rely. However, despite Samuel's leading the people closer to God and the nation's growing in its trust of his leadership, Israel longed for a king like the nations around her. Samuel was disappointed with their request, so he brought it before the Lord. After reassuring Samuel that Israel's call for a king represented a crisis of confidence in God himself rather than their lack of trust and confidence in Samuel, God allowed the people to have their way. Through Samuel, God decided that Saul would fulfill the role, and so Saul was acclaimed by the people as their first earthly king.

In 1050 B.C., Saul began his reign as king with national trust at its highest level, the result of Samuel's faithful work rather than the effect of Saul being the new king. Samuel's decision to merge a ceremony of covenant renewal with the formal installation of Saul as king established the king as an instrument of God's covenantal rule of Israel; the king did not govern in his own right, but under the authority of God. The king only exercised authority legitimately while he remained obedient to God. However, Saul showed his true colors and made three major mistakes in which he refused to obey Samuel, subsequently leading to God's rejection of him as king. God was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel and, again through Samuel, chose the young David to succeed him.

After being rejected by God, Saul became increasingly subject to periods of depression that sometimes verged on madness. Ironically,

David the musician was appointed to provide comfort for Saul's melancholy, and so their lives became intertwined. After David became a national hero by killing the Philistine Goliath, Saul became jealous of him and tried to kill him. David had no choice but to become an outlaw, supported by a band of fugitives who lived on the margins of Israelite society. So David knew that Saul was an irrational ruler whose days were numbered. He knew that he himself was to become king. As the story of Abigail unfolds, David had been living as an outlaw in the desert, surrounded by his six hundred fugitive men whom he had turned into a fighting force, constantly pursued by Saul's men for the last eleven or twelve years. Despite Saul's murderous attempts on his life, David had proved himself loyal and faithful to his king, refusing to retaliate.

## Social and economic background

David and his men acted as a type of vigilante force, protecting the flocks of wealthy livestock owners from raiders and wild animals. The custom was that when the sheep were sheared, these "security guards" would be paid a gratuity, a thank-you for their protection. Sheep, and the more common goats, were a major feature of ancient Israel's rural economy, being used for food, fabric, within the sacrificial system, as a method of payment and as a measure of wealth. Tents were made with fabric spun from goat hair, as were the curtains of the tabernacle. Sheep were used in striking bargains and were also a measure of God's blessing on the owner. Annually, in springtime, the sheep would be sheared, cutting off the whole woolen coat of the animal. The lanolin contained in the fleece would be removed as a sweet-smelling, softening, thick oil used in cleansing and beauty treatments. The fleece would then be spun to make woolen clothes.

## Time and location

1 Samuel 25 opens with the statement that Samuel died and all Israel assembled and mourned for him, burying him at his home in Ramah, some five or six kilometers northeast of Jerusalem. David
then moved into the desert of Maon, ${ }^{\text {' }}$ about forty kilometers south of Jerusalem and just south of Carmel.

## The characters

We have already noted the character of Israel's king-elect, David. He was in a very difficult position, being hounded by Saul who had already made many attempts on his life, banished to living in the wilderness with his band of renegades, yet knowing from Samuel that he was chosen by God to become heir to the throne. When an amazing opportunity presented itself, he had shown great restraint and understanding of God's law when he had not taken revenge on Saul. ${ }^{2}$

Nabal-the very name meant "Fool," and folly went with this man. ${ }^{3}$ Folly is a lack of wisdom or contempt for wisdom, which shows itself in a lack of understanding and obedience. Scripture contrasts human foolishness with divine wisdom. Human folly is seen in rebellion against God, ignoring his way and will, a failure to understand him, encompassing moral and/or spiritual irresponsibility. Nabal was "surly and mean in his dealings." ${ }^{4}$ His servant described him as "such a wicked man that no one can talk to him," a man who hurled insults at David's messengers as they offered him their master's greetings. ${ }^{5}$ He was disrespectful, stingy and miserly, belligerent, obstinate, arrogant, ill-mannered, and rude. His reluctance to part with his money or possessions was foolishness indeed and, like all miserliness, led to misery.

He "was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep." Ungodly people often make the possession of wealth a priority. They do not understand the true nature of wealth, and they do not realize that they will have to face God in judgment. The ungodly grow rich, often obtaining their riches unjustly, accumulating, hoarding, and trusting in their riches. However, the ungodly, like all people, must

[^37]leave their riches to others. Lastly, Nabal was a drunk and a glutton.? His excessive eating and drinking represented greed, the unrestrained self-indulgence that often leads to a deeper iniquity, and represents a rejection of godly moderation.

Abigail was the antithesis of her husband. She was beautiful both physically and spiritually, bringing pleasure to those who beheld her. She was intelligent, ${ }^{8}$ using her human cleverness to the full in God's service and to dedicating her gifts and abilities to him. She was wise and prudent, sensitive and sensible, generous and hospitable.

Outward appearance, that which is visible externally, may reveal the true person, but often it misleads instead. Here, both Nabal and Abigail had outward appearances that reflected their real characters.

David, Nabal, and Abigail

During the winter months, in the desert of Maon, David and his men had been safeguarding the flocks of Nabal. It was now springtime. On hearing that Nabal was shearing sheep in Carmel, David sent ten of his young men to greet Nabal and ask for the gratuity payment due to them in respect of their protection of his animals and shepherds. They were to suggest to Nabal that he could check with his own servants as to their worth in doing this work and, since sheepshearing was a festive time, to ask him to give them and their master David whatever he could find for them.

David's men showed grace in their manner of approach to Nabal, and naturally expected grace in return - grace expressed as generosity and kindness. They waited. Instead they were met with insults, prejudice, contempt, and indifference. Nabal answered, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where? ${ }^{\prime \prime}$ In biblical times, meat was a luxury, eaten at special times such as this festival of sheep-shearing.

[^38]Likewise, this was desert country, so water was also very precious. Nabal was certainly not going to share any hospitality with these rogues!

The ten young men turned round and went back to report every word to their master. David was furious. He commanded four hundred of his men to put on their swords, armed himself likewise, and, leaving two hundred men to stay with their supplies, set out.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's shepherds told Abigail, Nabal's wife, what had happened. He related how David had sent his messengers to salute Nabal, but that the wealthy owner had responded by tearing into them with insults. The shepherd confirmed that David's men had protected them very well during the previous months, but, unless his mistress could do something quickly, disaster would befall them since nobody could reason with her impossible husband.

Using her intelligence and great discernment, Abigail had to think of a way to bring calm to this tense situation, a way that would appease David whilst protecting Nabal. Acknowledging David as God's anointed, she knew that his anger should be defused and he should be discouraged from carrying out revenge with his own hands. Further, she appreciated that she had to leave room for God to move in his time and in his way in her husband's life. However, Abigail recognized that her conduct must ultimately honor the Lord. She flew into action. She had a feast of bread, wine, mutton (sheep meat), roasted grain, raisin cakes, and fig cakes loaded on to some donkeys, asked her servants to go on ahead of her, and followed on her donkey. She said nothing to Nabal.

As Abigail followed the feast fit for a king, her donkey descending into a ravine, David and his men were descending into the same ravine from the opposite direction. David had just been talking with his men, bemoaning the fact that all his efforts to protect Nabal's property in the desert had been useless, had been rewarded with nothing but insults, his good being repaid with evil. He vowed to destroy every male in Nabal's household by the morning. He was out for revenge. Likè Nabal, he was demonstrating folly by ignoring God's command, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but
love your neighbor as yourself." ${ }^{10}$ He was stooping to the depths of a Pharaoh of a previous era. ${ }^{11}$

Abigail and David met there on the road. Abigail quickly dismounted and fell on her knees at his feet, her face to the ground in homage, a gesture of reverence, honor, and submission before a future king appointed by God. "My lord, let me take the blame!" 12 What a gentle and sensitive spirit! Of course her husband deserved everything that was coming to him, but Abigail was prepared to shoulder the responsibility for the grave situation. She was not concerned about her own safety and reputation, but was willing to sacrifice herself to protect her husband and the innocent family members whose lives were in such danger. She was also thinking about David's future.
"Please let me speak to you. Listen to what your servant has to say. Don't dwell on what that brute Nabal did. He acts out his name: Nabal, fool-and foolishness oozes from him. I wasn't there when the young men my master sent arrived. I didn't see them. And now, my master, as God lives and as you live, God has kept you from this avenging murder-and may your enemies, all who seek my master's harm, end up like Nabal! Now take this gift that I your servant girl, have brought to my master, and give it to the young men who follow in the steps of my master.
"Forgive my presumption! But God is at work in my master, developing a rule solid and dependable. My master fights God's battles! As long as you live no evil will stick to you.

If anyone stands in your way,
if anyone tries to get you out of the way,
Know this: Your God-honored life is tightly bound in the bundle of God-protected life;
But the lives of your enemies will be hurled aside as a stone is thrown from a sling.
"When God completes all the goodness he has promised my master and sets you up as prince over Israel, my master will not have

[^39]this dead weight in his heart, the guilt of an avenging murder. And when God has worked things for good for my master, remember me. ${ }^{1 / 3}$

Abigail was seeking David's forgiveness for her audacity in approaching him and speaking to him in this way. She was admitting negligence for not being around, for not offering hospitality when David's messengers had arrived. Likewise, she was apologizing for her husband's appalling behavior. Far more imperative, however, was her recognition of David as God's appointed servant and future leader of Israel, a man who fought God's battles. She was declaring the urgency of averting his desire for revenge, the potential guilt of which would have been "on his conscience" as a "staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself." ${ }^{14}$ With careful discernment, avoiding rash behavior or speech, and showing tact and wisdom in her relationship with David, Abigail's prudence had averted disaster. A lowly "servant," she had counseled a future king!

David responded by praising God for having sent Abigail to intervene. He asked the Lord to bless her for her good judgment and for keeping him from becoming guilty of bloodshed or of avenging himself, rather than leaving revenge to the Lord. He then accepted the gifts she had brought on the donkeys, telling her to return home in peace. He had acknowledged her words and promised to grant her request.

When Abigail reached home, Nabal was holding his own "king's banquet" and was very drunk. She deferred telling him what she had done until he had sobered up in the morning. On hearing the whole story, he had a heart attack and fell into a coma. Some ten days later, he died. David, learning of Nabal's demise, again praised the Lord, this time for upholding his cause against Nabal, for keeping him from an evil act, and for bringing Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head. He then sent his servants to Abigail in Carmel, telling her that David had sent them to take her to become his wife. Still true to character, Abigail bowed down to them, with her face to the ground, saying she was ready to serve them and wash their feet-expressing,

[^40]once more, hospitality and servanthood. She quickly mounted a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with the messengers and became David's wife.

## Reflections

This short, concise saga of human behavior in the face of crisis offers us profound models of godly and ungodly characteristics. We should not, however, attempt to mold ourselves to fit the godly virtues, to "think like this in order to live well." Rather we must read in it the very humanness of the characters, their strengths and weaknesses, their relationships to each other and, ultimately, their relationship with God. And then we can begin to perceive ourselves, our own humanity. Human life, other than mere biology, must deal with God. We need to constantly and prayerfully ask ourselves, "Where does God fit into this? Is he central, or have I placed him on the periphery, or have I omitted him altogether?"

Undoubtedly, Abigail was a noble and virtuous woman, comparable to the later "wife of noble character." ${ }^{1 s}$ She had God at the center of her life: He was her Lord, her King, and her Master. Her thinking and her actions revolved around God. She was sensitive, having deep feelings for others and sympathy for their needs, leading to appropriate action on their behalf.

David also was sensitive, though here he was oversensitive to Nabal's rejection, and this led to his hasty reaction of seeking revenge. It is interesting to consider why David should react in this way in this story, when he had previously chosen not to take revenge against Saul, ${ }^{16}$ and would again spare Saul's life in a subsequent encounter. ${ }^{17}$ Why was God a central consideration when David was dealing with Saul, but was somehow missing from the equation when it came to Nabal? Could it have been because of the difference in status of the two men? In the situation with Nabal, in his haste did he forget God's commandment?

[^41]It is mine to avenge; I will repay.
In due time their foot will slip:
their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them. ${ }^{18}$

Whatever the reason, David's reaction to Nabal's insults was to take revenge - to kill him and all the male members of his household before the next dawn. How often do we do that, flare up in anger, seeking retaliation against someone for some offense, getting the situation out of all proportion? Yet, if God is truly at the center of our lives, he will answer our prayer: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. ${ }^{\prime \prime}$ He will use other people, events, or situations to stop us sinning. He used Abigail to stop David.

As we study the characters in this and other Bible stories, may we prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to work in us a desire for such godly characteristics as displayed by Abigail: generosity, hospitality, prudence, virtue, patience, wisdom, sensitivity, discernment, and peacemaking. May we ask for these in the words of James: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt. ${ }^{20}$


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Russell H. BOWERS, Jr.

Irecently read the best-selling novel The Poisonwood Bible. It imagines the story of an American missionary family in the Congo during its 1960 struggle for independence.

Endorsed as it is by Oprah's Book Club, The Poisonwood Bible predictably paints a pessimistic picture. The missionary husband and father, Nathan Price, is ignorant, bigoted, chauvinistic, proud, harsh, self-centered, insensitive, and irrelevant. The family isolates itself from the villagers, who in turn ignore the father's skewed and jingoistic "gospel." Price's wife and four daughters at first fear and then loathe the man.

Although critics wax rhapsodic about the beauty and incisiveness of the story, it is actually a threadbare litany of popular stereotypical misconceptions of what believing Christian people are like. Nothing novel in this novel. And not only is it not new, it is arguably not true. Barbara Kingsolver in her Author's Note thanks her parents "for being different in every way from the parents I created for the narrators of this tale." She is right-she created them. They are also "different in every way" from the flesh-and-blood missionary people I know.

An example? Not long ago I crossed the Mekong River with Jeff and Heather Williams and my wife Glenna to a poor village opposite Kompong Cham. We went to conduct tuberculosis screening among the children. The other three were doing the work; I just watched. Jeff and Heather had become alarmed over the extent of TB infection there, and were pushing to enroll its children in a government-sponsored treatment program. To qualify they first needed to have a health professional perform screening injections, so Glenna had come to help with that.

In the weeks preceding our visit, Heather had painstakingly surveyed the village's households, enrolling each child by name and age. Now we walked the winding ways from house to house. Jeff and two Cambodian associates kept records, Glenna injected serum, and Heather explained the process to skeptical children and then comforted them after their shots.

I cannot imagine a contrast greater than that between the fictional Price and the living Williams families. Jeff and Heather chatted with villagers about everyday concerns as they strolled from house to house. Heather modeled love and patience as she cradled each child, explained the test, and calmed their fears (well, the fears of mosttwo or three out of the one hundred twenty-seven we tested that afternoon remained terrified.). As I watched her talking heart-to-heart with naked boys and cuddling scabies-infested girls, I pictured the busy and important Jesus taking children into his arms and blessing them.

Sure, Jeff and Heather would like to introduce these people to Jesus. But last Sunday afternoon I don't remember hearing his name mentioned. Last Sunday was instead devoted to loving these people and providing essential health care for them that they could not get for themselves. No one forced the Williams to do that; they took it on themselves out of the kind of genuine concern that prompts practical deeds.

No one will write a New York Times bestseller and Oprah Book Club selection about Jeff and Heather Williams on a sunny Sunday afternoon near Kompong Cham. Too many readers prefer ill-informed and indignant poisonwood fiction.

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Heather Williams comforts a Cham girl
who has just received an injection





































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## Meet Molly Yos

Brian MAHER


Molly YOS

Molly Yos was born in Prey Veng province in 1960. She was the ninth of twelve children, only two of whom were boys. Her father, an official in the Ministry of Agriculture, supervised three provinces.

The family relocated to Phnom Penh in 1967 upon his promotion to Supervisor of Provincial Agriculture in Cambodia. Molly enrolled in Phnom Penh schools where she made friends with a girl named Young Setha-whom they called "Eang"-from Arey Ksach, the village directly across the river from the Royal Palace. Eang and Molly, both young teenagers in 1973, heard about a free English class. Phnom Penh during the sixties and early seventies was the hub of Southeast Asia and in touch with the pulse of both the region and the world. Molly and Eang did not want to be Cambodian teenagers who would
be referred to as "frogs in wells" or boun cheroong (square), so they were very interested in studying English. The classes were offered at the OMF Youth Center near Olympic Stadium. Molly and Eang found the place and enrolled to study English in their spare time. From the posted schedule they could choose their study topic from teachers Don Cormack, Alice Compain, Ruth Patterson, Rose Ellen Chancey, Andrew Way and Andrew Butler. Mr. Triev Sary was the Cambodian in charge. Both Eang and Molly first studied English from the gospels with Ruth Patterson. Then, when Rose Ellen Chancey came later, they studied English from the book of Genesis. They both bought English and Khmer Bibles to ensure they understood clearly.

Meanwhile, while Molly was studying her English, Molly's older brother Antipo had come to faith in Christ--the only Christian in the family. Molly was not much interested at the time, but sure took notice when her uncle beat him up after he preached the gospel to the family. As Molly was learning English from the Bible, Antipo was leading the youth group in the Bethany church.

Molly found the book of Genesis interesting and relevant because it answered many life questions about which she had wondered since childhood. The Buddhist religion posits neither a creation epic nor a creator God. Molly found the concept of a God who created her and knew her before she was born very comforting. As Molly studied Genesis, she gradually began to believe in this creator God and his son Jesus, and sometime in early 1974 gave her life to Christ. She began to attend Bethany church, led by Chhirc Taing (an officer in the army of Lon Nol's Republic and the older brother of Rev. Taing Vek Houng of Campus Crusade) and Mien Tien Voan (at that time Country Director of World Vision). Both Chhirc and his cousin Voan were later most likely martyred.'

Molly continued her study of English and the Khmer Bible at the Youth Center with Triev Sary on weekdays, and faithfully attended Bethany church on Sundays. During 1974, Molly began to help out at

[^46]the Youth Center, organizing the place and learning how to be a Bible study cell group leader. On Sundays after church, Molly, Rose Ellen Chancey, and her friends from church went out to share the gospel and hand out gospel tracts in the Tumnop Tek area of Phnom Penh, on the southeast rim of the city. Molly remembers selling tracts and Christian literature at the Olympic stadium when Dr. Stan Mooneyham preached in a large crusade.

Molly brought her younger sisters Sokun and Sotheavy to church with her, but it wasn't so easy convincing her parents to let them tag along. The fact that Sokun and Sotheary had become sponsor children of World Vision helped ease the concerns of her Buddhist parents who knew World Vision was a Christian organization. Through Molly's bringing them to church, both Sokun and Sotheavy became Christians and learned to work with the children in the church. Their parents even began to transport them back and forth from church activities. Molly's younger sister Sokun grew up to become a schoolteacher in the eighties, and worked for FEBC radio in the nineties. She currently works for World Vision Cambodia as a community development worker and has a great Christian witness.

In late 1974, Antipo's sharing his faith with Molly's two older sisters, Yos Im Sithan and Yos Sangkany, began to show some fruit. As Khmer Rouge artillery began to pound the city, these two older sisters gave their lives to Christ.

Treiv Sary, the director and manager of the Youth Center, realized that though he had evangelized and discipled these young people, other churches were using their gifts but not appreciating what he had done for them. In addition, churches like Bethany and Bethlehem were already overcrowded as more and more refugees daily arrived in Phnom Penh. So he decided to organize church services at the Youth Center on Sundays. Molly and Antipo stayed at Bethany and helped with smaller churches like Noah's Ark Church, an abandoned house boat stuck on the western bank of the Mekong. Noah's Ark was owned by a new believer from Bethlehem church, and Takmau Bible College students preached and ran the services there.

The Khmer Rouge were getting close, and there was fighting on the outskirts of the city. Eang, whose village was directly affected
by the fighting between Lon Nol's troops ${ }^{2}$ and the Khmer Rouge, fled to the city and her family bought a house near the Olympic Market. Eang and Molly did everything together after that. Antipo, Sithan and Sangkany sold vegetables at Dam Tkeov market near the Tumnup Tek area. Sometime during 1974, Molly joined in a large baptism hosted by the Takmau Bible College. Şhe remembers being encouraged to pray for the salvation of her parents by her youth pastor, Mr. Ngeth Samawn (Setha).

When Christmas rolled around, they celebrated the holiday with Rose Ellen and Alice at their home, together with other churches around Phnom Penh. All the expatriate missionaries in House \#72 were packing their bags to leave, since it appeared to be only a matter of time before the Khmer Rouge would overrun the city. Molly's missionary friends warned her to not allow the Khmer Rouge to catch her with English books or a Khmer Bible.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. They immediately began to execute Lon Nol's soldiers and others who had been a part of his government. Many soldiers buried their uniforms and joined the enforced mass exodus of the citizenry. Phnom Penh residents who were evacuated to the provinces came to be known as "new people." Many of these former city dwellers were to be systematically starved or worked to death. Others were simply taken away, never to be seen again.

In this mass exodus of over two million people, Molly and her family headed toward their home village in Prey Veng. They crossed the Mekong at Neak Loung, and made it to the town of Kompong Trabaek. Further into the countryside, they built a little house of bamboo and palm fronds. After arriving in Prey Veng province, most of the family contracted malaria. During this time of sickness, Molly's parents asked her to lead them to Christ. Molly and her mother were the sickest members of the family, and were taken to a rudimentary Khmer Rouge health clinic. The clinic had no medicine, and some patients were taken away to be killed.

[^47]After a few months Molly recovered, but her mother deteriorated. Those running the clinic were about to send Molly's mother home to die when she slipped into a three-day coma. In her coma she saw hairy demons chasing her, and soon became exhausted trying to flee from them. Two women came alongside her, each grabbing an arm, lifting it up, and supporting her. They encouraged her to keep going. In the distance loomed a white church. The two women took her past the white church and told her that it was a religious temple. She saw another church, this one was blood red and situated on the far side of a big ocean. The demons continued to chase her. They swam, but she was able to walk across on the water. As she arrived on the shore and set her foot on the steps leading into the church, the demons caught up to her. At that point, she yelled out, "Jesus, help me!" She saw Jesus coming out of the church saying; "I am Jesus Christ and this is Judgment Day." Upon hearing this, the demons fled. Molly's mother-in the real world-began moving her toe-a sign that she was still alive.

Soon after she returned from the clinic in good health. The family began to secretly read the Bible, but soon the situation became more repressive and they buried the Bible for fear of death from the Khmer Rouge. Even so, Molly's mother's faith began to blossom. But tests also came: Sotheary, the youngest in the family, suffered without medical care from dengue fever for seven days, and then died.

Molly was forced to plant rice and build paddy dikes in return for one bowl of watery gruel with a few rice kernels in the bottom. Seeing a dog run by made her mouth water as she thought about roasted dog meat. Because of lack of food and intense labor, Molly became ill. She had constant diarrhea, and quickly became dehydrated and malnourished. The authorities sent her to rest at another rudimentary clinic.

The Khmer Rouge were getting ready to conduct a mass marriage in Molly's village. Her mother insisted that Molly return from clinic and take part in this ceremony, thinking that if Molly married a villager, she might end up living close by. Molly was not thrilled with this idea at first, but eventually went along with her mother's wishes
and married Pot Sopharong in a group marriage ceremony in 1978. Her sister Yos Im Sithan was married in the same ceremony.

Ten days later, the Khmer Rouge forced the married couples to relocate to Pursat province in northwest Cambodia. Her mother, father, and sister decided to go too, and walked west all the way to Neak Luong. From there they were shipped north by truck to Phnom Penh, which was devoid of people. From Phnom Penh they took the train north to Pursat. During those difficult times under the Khmer Rouge, Molly's husband shared what food he had with her, and he carried her things when they were forced to move. She had a bad infection in her arm, and she is convinced that because of his help she remained alive and was able to survive the arduous journey

Antipo had been missing since they left Phnom Penh, as he was visiting his girlfriend when the Khmer Rouge entered the city. He had been relocated to Battambang, Cambodia's second largest urban center in the northwest, close to the border of Thailand. Molly remembers him recounting that three times the Khmer Rouge rounded him up for execution, but all three times the trucks were so filled that not even one more emaciated person could fit on the truck. After his third reprieve, Antipo fled to Thailand and joined the former Prime Minister of the sixties, Son Sanne, and the KPNLF (Free Khmer) to fight against the Khmer Rouge. He was the accountant for the KPNLF, until accused of pilfering funds and sent to the front where he was badly shot. He went to a Thai hospital to recover, then lived with a Thai family until he recuperated.

1978 was an extremely difficult year for Cambodians in terms of food security, as the Khmer Rouge exported a large percentage of rice to China and stored the rest in their mountain hideouts. Devastating floods also hit Cambodia's rice bowl that year, wiping out any rice that poor starving Cambodians might depend on.

On Christmas Day, 1978, Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge relentlessly attacked and massacred Vietnamese citizens living inside the Cambodian-Vietnamese border, especially in the Kampuchea Krom and Mekong Delta area. On January 7, 1979, Vietnamese troops victoriously entered Phnom Penh. From there they pushed the Khmer Rouge leadership into the
mountainous northwest along the Thai border, where they were safe in their Thai-protected border enclaves.

Vietnamese troops allowed Molly and her family to leave Pursat, but did not permit them to return to Phnom Penh. Instead they went to Prey Veng. They fortunately were able to go back to the family plot in their home village of the sixties, rather than the village where they lived during the Pol Pot regime. It was rice harvest time, but the fleeing, wounded, black-clad Khmer Rouge had torched the rice fields, poisoned wells, and destroyed roads and houses. Molly's family had little food, so were forced to beg from their neighbors. They worked out an arrangement under which Molly and her family worked long hours plowing and planting in the neighbor's rice fields, exchanging labor for rice to eat. For that whole year, they had little means for procuring food of any type. Six hundred thousand people died of starvation during the first year of the Vietnamese occupation. Under the Vietnamese K-5 program, any Cambodians suspected of not supporting the regime were sent to clear jungle and fortify areas against the $\mathrm{DK}^{3}$ in mountainous regions of Battambang.

The new government - the Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea, led by Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, and Hun.Sen (all having ties with the Vietnamese) -recalled Molly's father to his government agricultural position and to further studies. At the end of one year on the Prey Veng homestead they moved back to Phnom Penh, and Molly went to work for the Ministry of Agriculture. Her husband also went to work there, and made a lot of new friends who had a bad influence on him. He was soon squandering what little salary he earned on drinking and gambling. When their first child was born in 1981, he no longer took much interest in Molly or helping her raise the family. Molly tried her best to get him to change his ways but she could not, and resigned herself to care for her child without his help, depending on her mother and sisters for food and money to help pay the bills.

Sometime in the very early eighties Molly met up again with Eang. Eang was secretly worshipping at the underground Takmau church and invited Molly to join them, but Molly's father said "No"

[^48]because it was too dangerous. Molly had enjoyed little conscious spiritual activity since 1975. But in 1988 her father began to succumb to the effects of high blood pressure, so Molly went to find Eang. Eang brought Molly to her pastor, Seing Ang, who prayed over Molly's father and anointed him with oil. He died months after that and went to be with the Lord.

Since the whole family wanted to bury their father according to Christian tradition rather than cremating him as in the Buddhist tradition, they called Pastor Seing Ang back to lead the funeral. That was in July of 1988. They didn't even bother to get permission from the government but went ahead with the funeral. There was a huge turnout. All the government friends of her father came, as well as friends of Molly, Sithan, and the other children. The underground church came out at this funeral for the first time. They all sang and worshipped God. Many pre-1975 Christians, many of whom came to Christ at the Stan Mooneyham Crusades, came out for the funeral. Attending were Pastor Im Chhorn, Pastor Muth Bunthy, Miss Yorng Setha, Mrs. Ngeth Sambo, Miss Srey Heim, and Heim's mother, as well as Molly and her family. Molly remembers the funeral procession being miles long.

An unexpected problem arose: "Where do we bury him?" A Vietnamese-Cambodian Christian, Paul Ba, helped contact the Catholic church, which allowed Molly's father to be buried in a Catholic Vietnamese cemetery in Kean Svay District, just over the river toward the southeast, off of Route One.

Through the funeral, Molly became aware of other believers who were meeting in secret locations around town. In 1989 it was estimated that there were no more than two hundred Christians in Phnom Penh.

Molly recounts, "One day not too long after the first public baptism in the Kantoeut River, west of PhnomPenh (done surreptitiously with about fifty believers), I saw my șister Sithan hold a paper in her hand. She was asking other key Christians to sign it. She had about ten signatures on what apparently was a petition of some sort. My sister was working at that time in the Ministry of Education, and was respected by her colleagues. She submitted that petition to an important man in the government who sent it through the system; it eventually
arrived on the desk of the Minister of Cults and Religion." Fortunately, Sithan had a longtime friend who turned out to be the wife of this minister and was able to arrange an audience with him. Molly and her sister met with the man and implored him: "Under this regime we have no right to worship in the tradition of our faith, no place to bury our dead according to our tradition, no rights at all. This isn't right. What can you do for us?"

The three Yos sisters, Molly, Sithan, and Sokun, bicycled to the minister's house every afternoon for more than three months. He wanted to learn more about Christianity in order to make an informed presentation of their case to the government. Each afternoon they sang hymns, worshipped, taught from the Bible, and listened to worship songs on cassette. The minister even borrowed cassettes to listen in his car going back and forth from work. He asked many questions, which they answered.

During this time, Molly had dreamed that she and her family were running around the nearby Olympic Stadium, shouting joyfully to everyone in hearing distance: "Bravo Jesus, Bravo!" She felt God was telling her that they would be given a decisive victory that would break Satan's strong grip over her beloved land.

Meanwhile, Molly's father's funeral had spurred local Christian leaders to form a provisional church committee comprised of ten members (four of them women), and headed by Pastor Siang. ${ }^{4}$ Molly's sister Yos Im Sithan was on that council. It was June of 1989, and Christians were hoping for changes in the new state constitution showing more tolerance toward Christanity. That June, the Council of Ministers permitted Christians to express their faith in worship, but did not permit evangelism.

While Yos Sithan, Molly, Sokun, and others continued to meet with the minister, the Cambodian church was invited to attend the Lausanne II World Conference in the Philippines. They could not attend, but did send a report about their situation. This mobilized those

[^49]attending to pray fervently for official freedom of religion for the church in Cambodia.

On the last day the sisters met with the minister, he asked them if Christians got involved in politics. Molly explained from Romans 13 that God ordains leaders of a country and Christians are encouraged to submit to and pray for their leaders. She reassured him that Christians in Cambodia only wanted freedom to worship, not stir up unrest in an already unstable country. The next day he called them back, quite shaken up about something one of his superiors might have said. He asked them again to explain to him very clearly about the political part. Molly explained once again that Christianity would not intentionally cause problems for the government; they only wanted freedom to follow their religious tradition legally. The minister went back to make his second appeal to the government. The very next Sunday, April 7, 1990, ten months after Lausanne, during a worship service in Molly's house, the Cambodian Government formally announced its recognition of the Christian Church. The next week, in the presence of government representatives, 1,500 Christians-Catholic and Protestant, Cambodian and Vietnamese-celebrated their new freedom together in Phnom Penh's largest auditorium.

The government remained wary of Christians; Molly and Sithan were among those followed by spies. Since Sithan was the primary mover and shaker in obtaining freedom for Christianity, the government wanted her to keep a tight lid on things to ensure that the church did not abuse its newfound freedom. Tight restraint was impossible after Christianity began to grow rapidly and missionaries and denominations arrived from all over the world. It was a Texas-based evangelist Mike Evans who almost lost freedom for Christianity in November 1994 in his ill-conceived Olympic Stadium crusade. Many missionaries in Cambodia had advised him against coming, but he came anyway because he thought God told him to. The crusade was a disaster. The advertising promised that everyone who attended would be healed, and that did not happen. The church experienced blatant persecution for the first time since it had gained freedom.

Yos Molly, Yos Im Sithan, Yos Sokun, Young Setha (Eang) and Pastor Seang Ang played critical roles in obtaining freedom for

Christianity under Hun Sen's Cambodia. That freedom has been enjoyed by the church, Christian organizations, Christian NGOs, missionaries, and the Cambodian people to this day.

In October 1991, as Molly was applying to World Vision Cambodia, her husband continued to gamble. Molly's application was accepted, so she bore the burden of her husband's gambling and supported her three children with her own salary. On occasion, her husband would attempt to change, but such changes were short lived. He sometimes didn't come home at night, and even gambled away a motorbike or two that Molly had bought with her earnings. At World Vision she began as a receptionist and inventory clerk, but was soon promoted to assist in the Operations Support Unit, then Staff Development and Spiritual Nurture, two different entities under Human Resources. Under the Spiritual Nurture Department she helped create the World Vision Cambodia Holistic Witness Policy Paper, organized pastor fellowships, translated World Vision's core values into Khmer, led staff Bible studies, coordinated Friday chapel and Tuesday Bible forum, arranged retreats, and was responsible for the orientation of new staff. In February 1998 she was transferred to the Kompong Thom Operation. Kompong Thom is a three-hour drive north of Phnom Penh. In Kompong Thom, Molly led the Spiritual Nurture and Leadership and Staff Development programs, really two full-time jobs. One year later Molly was promoted to Operations Manager. In February 2002, for the sake of her family, she has returned to Phnom Penh to take a less demanding position as an Area Development Program capacity builder. Molly's husband did recently leave her, and she now continues to look after three children, a boy and two girls.


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[^0]:    ${ }^{2}$ Jn 1.
    ${ }^{3} \mathrm{Col} 1$.
    ${ }^{4} 1$ Tim 4:4-5NASB.
    ${ }^{5}$ Ex 32.
    ${ }^{6}$ Ex 20.
    ${ }^{7}$ Ex 25-31.
    ${ }^{8}$ Ps 150:4NaSB.
    ${ }^{9}$ See Ex 32:19 for the former; Ex 15:20; Ps 149; 150 for the latter.

[^1]:    ${ }^{10}$ Ex 15; 2 Sam 6; Ps 149; 150.
    ${ }^{11}$ Ex 25-31 for the tabernacle; $1 \mathrm{Ki} 6-7$ for the temple.
    ${ }^{12}$ E.g., Ezek 4-5.

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[^3]:    ${ }^{1}$ Arthur W. Hunt III, The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World, Focal Point series, gen. ed. Gene Edward Veith, Jr. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003).

[^4]:    ${ }^{1}$ Rev 5:9.
    ${ }^{2}$ Phil 2:3-4.

[^5]:    ${ }^{2}$ Phil 2:3-4.
    ${ }^{3}$ Uon Seila, "Cockfight in a Common Nest," Honeycomb 4/2 (July

[^6]:    ${ }^{9}$ Arthur W. Hunt III, The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World, Focal Point series, gen. ed. Gene Edward Veith, Jr. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003).

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[^9]:    ${ }^{1}$ Acts 17:10-15.

[^10]:    ${ }^{2} 1$ John 4:1.
    3 2 Cor 11:3-4.
    ${ }^{4}$ Gal 1:6-7.
    ${ }^{5} 1$ Cor 14:20.
    ${ }^{6}$ Phil 1:9.

[^11]:    ${ }^{13}$ Acts 15:2.
    ${ }^{14} 2$ Tim 2:18; Tit 1:11.
    ${ }^{15} 1$ Tim4:16.
    ${ }^{16}$ Gal 2:11-21.
    ${ }^{17} \operatorname{Rev} 2: 2,20$.
    ${ }^{18} 2$ John 7-11.
    ${ }^{19}$ Jude 3.

[^12]:    ${ }^{20} 2$ Tim 1:7-8.
    ${ }^{2} 2 \operatorname{Tim} 1: 13-14$.
    ${ }^{2} 2 \operatorname{Tim} 2: 1-2,14 a$.
    ${ }^{23} 2 \operatorname{Tim} 2: 15$.
    ${ }^{24} 2 \operatorname{Tim} 2: 14 b, 16,23$.

[^13]:    ${ }^{25} 2$ Tim 2:24-26.
    ${ }^{26} 1$ Thess 2:7.
    ${ }^{27} 2 \mathrm{Tim} 3$.
    ${ }^{28} 2$ Tim 4:3-4.
    ${ }^{29} 2$ Tim 4:2.

[^14]:    ${ }^{30}$ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains in Bible Windows 6.0 (Cedar Hill, Texas: Silver Mountain Software, 2001), s.v. $\mu \propto \kappa \rho \circ \theta v \mu i \alpha, \alpha \varsigma f$ patience 25.167.
    ${ }^{31}$ The word is used eleven times in the NT: 1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor $10: 1 ; \mathrm{Gal}$ 5:23; 6:1;Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:25; Tit 3:2; Jas 1:21; 3:13; 1 Pet 3:16. See also related words in Matt 5:5; 11:29; 21:5; and in 1 Tim 6:11.
    ${ }^{32}$ Tit 3:2
    ${ }^{33}$ Jas 3:9-12.

[^15]:    ${ }^{3+} \mathrm{Heb}$ 5:2.
    ${ }^{35}$ Tit 3:3.
    ${ }^{36}$ Rom 4: 11-12, 16-17.
    ${ }^{37}$ Jas 2:23.
    ${ }^{38} \mathrm{Gen} 20: 1 ; 21: 22,34$. Cp. Isaac's experience with another Abimelech

[^16]:    ${ }^{39} \mathrm{Gen} 20: 11$.
    ${ }^{40} 2$ Chron 34:1.
    ${ }^{41} 2 \mathrm{Ki} 23: 25$
    ${ }^{42} 2$ Chron 35:20-24.
    ${ }^{43} \mathrm{Lk}$ 16:8. The word translated "shrewd" implies showing practical wisdom.
    ${ }^{4}$ Prov 6:6-11.
    ${ }^{45}$ Num 22:28-31; Lk 19:40.

[^17]:    ${ }^{46}$ Jude 8-10. Cp. nearly identical words in 2 Pet 2:10-12.
    ${ }^{47}$ Jas 3:9-18.
    ${ }^{48}$ Matt 12:18-21. Cp. Isa 42:1-4.
    ${ }^{49}$ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary,

[^18]:    gen. ed. Frank E. Gæbelein, CD ROM ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), on Matt 12:15-21.
    ${ }^{50}$ Acts 10:38.
    ${ }^{51} 1 \mathrm{Ki} 18: 27$.
    ${ }^{52}$ Acts 13:9-11.
    ${ }^{53}$ Isa 44:9-20.
    ${ }^{54}$ See esp. Isa 44:19-20.

[^19]:    ${ }^{55} \mathrm{Gal} 2: 11-13$. This text does not include the kind of stinging words of rebuke in the previous examples, but does suggest a rather sharp and immediate confrontation with the putative chief of the apostles.
    ${ }^{56}$ Tit 1:10-13.
    ${ }^{57}$ Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, $2^{\text {nd }}$ ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991). Chapter two, "Separate the People from the Problem," occupies pages 17-39, and is the leading chapter in Part II, "The Method."
    ${ }^{58}$ Ibid., 39.

[^20]:    ${ }^{59}$ Alister E. McGrath, Intellectuals Don't Need God \& Other Modern Myths: Building Bridges to Faith through Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 88-92.
    ${ }^{60}$ Tbid., 88.
    ${ }^{61}$ In 2 Cor 4 Paul talks about how the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers. He is therefore the problem, as well as the doctrine he teaches. The proper response is to set forth the truth plainly and commend oneself to every man's conscience, preaching Jesus as Lord and themselves as servants. Both the above phrases fit the pattern of being strong for the truth yet gentle on people.

[^21]:    ${ }^{62}$ Prov 18:13.
    ${ }^{63}$ Acts 17:23.
    ${ }^{64} 1$ Cor 9:19-22.
    ${ }^{65}$ Fisher, Ury, and Patton, Getting to Yes, 34.

[^22]:    ${ }^{66}$ Ibid., 35.
    ${ }^{67}$ Ninian Smart, Religion and the Western Mind (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 4.

[^23]:    ${ }^{71}$ Compare Acts 13:14-43 with Acts 17:16-34.
    ${ }^{72}$ Acts 26:25. In New Testament times, "most excellent" was an honorary form of address to high officials. By application, Christians today should use such honorific titles, where appropriate, in addressing their nonChristian objectors.

[^24]:    ${ }^{73} 2 \mathrm{Ki} 5: 15-19$.
    ${ }^{74}$ See, e.g., Matt 9:10-13.
    ${ }^{75} \mathrm{Lk} 15: 1-2$ and the three stories that follow.
    ${ }^{76}$ Acts 11:1-18. The story is told twice, because it was hard for early first-century Jewish Christians to believe that God truly loved and accepted the Gentiles as Gentiles.
    ${ }^{77}$ Rom 14:1-15:4.

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[^32]:    ${ }^{6 d}$ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, gen. ed. Frank E. Gæbelein, CD ROM ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), on Matt 12:1521.

[^33]:    
    

[^34]:    ${ }^{* \pi}$ Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, $2^{\text {nd }}$ ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991). Chapter two, "Separate the People from the Problem," occupies pages 17-39, and is the leading chapter in Part II, "The Method."
    
    \& ${ }^{6}$ Alister E. McGrath, Intellectuals Don't Need God \& Other Modern Myths: Building Bridges to Faith through Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 88-92.

[^35]:    ${ }^{\text {bd }}$ Fisher, Ury, and Patton, Getting to Yes, 34.
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[^36]:    ${ }^{6 \pi}$ Ninian Smart, Religion and the Western Mind (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 4.

[^37]:    ${ }^{1} 1$ Sam 25:1.
    ${ }^{2} 1$ Sam 24.
    ${ }^{3} 1$ Sam 25:25.
    ${ }^{4} 1$ Sam 25:3.
    ${ }^{5} 1$ Sam 25:15, 17.
    ${ }^{6} 1$ Sam 25:2.

[^38]:    ${ }^{7} 1$ Sam 25:36.
    ${ }^{8} 1$ Sam 25:3.
    ${ }^{9} 1$ Sam 25:10-11.

[^39]:    ${ }^{10}$ Lev 19:18.
    "Ex 7-11.
    ${ }^{\prime 2} 1$ Sam 25:24a.

[^40]:    ${ }^{13} 1$ Sam 25:24b-31 from The Message, by E. H. Peterson
    ${ }^{14} 1$ Sam 25:31.

[^41]:    ${ }^{15}$ Prov 31:10-31.
    ${ }^{16} 1$ Sam 24.
    ${ }^{17} 1$ Sam 26.

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[^46]:    'Helen Penfold mentions in Remember Cambodia that witnesses saw them clubbed to death by men clad.in black shortly after the Khmer Rouge invaded in the city of Neak Loung.

[^47]:    ${ }^{2}$ FANK—Forces Army National Kampuchea, the troops of Lon Nol's Republic.

[^48]:    ${ }^{3}$ DK: Democratic Kampuchea, Khmer Krahom, or Khmer Rouge.

[^49]:    ${ }^{4}$ Don Cormack, Killing Fields Living Fields: An Unfinished Portrait of the Cambodian Church-the Church that Would Not Die (Crowborough, East Sussex: OMF, 1997), 391.

[^50]:    

[^51]:    ${ }^{6}$ Don Cormack, Killing Fields Living Fields: An Unfinished Portrait of the Cambodian Church-the Church that Would Not Die (Crowborough, East Sussex: OMF, 1997), 391.

