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Urban juggle

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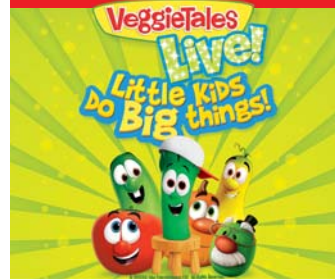
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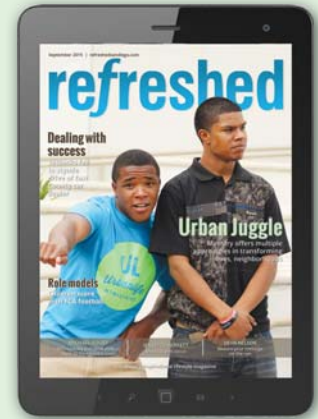
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VOLUME 2 | NUMBER 9

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Refreshed is an independent, faith-based magazine published monthly by Selah Media Group. It is distributed in bulk, free of charge, to hundreds of locations throughout San Diego County.

For a 1-year mail subscription, send \$24.95 to the address below or visit refreshedmag.com.

Refreshed welcomes story ideas. All unsolicited material is subject to approval of the publishers and is not returned.

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Beware your message on the run

Coming back from a run one morning this summer, I did what I usually do, and walked the last couple of blocks in order to cool down. It was a little warmer than usual that day, which meant I was sweating more than usual, and when I sweat a lot from exertion, my face turns bright red. (My basketball buddies say it's more of a purple.)

When I got within a block of my house I passed my neighbor, who is usually working in her garden when I walk by. Typically we just wave and share a meaningless greeting. But this day, she caught me off guard.

"You don't make running look very attractive," she said, peering over her glasses, giving me a pained look.

It made me laugh at first.

"Really? You don't look at me and say, 'Wow, I can't wait to look hot and exhausted like that guy?'" I asked.

"You look miserable," she said.

When I got home and cooled off, I got to thinking about what she said.

The Sunday School class I teach at my church has been going through Philip Yancey's most recent book "Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News?" He wrote it out of a concern about how we represent our faith to others.

"We are called to proclaim good news of forgiveness and hope, yet I keep coming across evidence that many people do not hear our message as good news," he writes.

Of course, when I am running, or cooling down from a run, I am not trying to get others interested in running. I do it for myself. I am not trying to send a message of anything, except for the occasional "Get out of my way!"

But as a Christian, I AM sending a message all the time, whether I want to be or not, and whether I am aware of it or not.

Is it a message of mercy, forgiveness, healing, compassion, humility, gratitude and love?

Is it a message of judgment, condemnation, superiority, condescension and arrogance?

Both messages are often done in the name of the gospel. Which one is good news?

Yancey tells of a friend who was on the staff of a large metropolitan church, who took a side job as a barista at Starbucks. When the conversation with one of his customers turned to religion, the customer said, "When Christians talk to you, they act as if you are a robot. They have an agenda to promote, and if you don't agree with them, they're done with you."

Who were the people attracted to Jesus? People with secrets, like the woman at the well. People who were hungry and thirsty. Sinners. People who knew there must be more to their lives than just getting through each day. Rich people who wondered, "Is this all there is?" People who had exhausted all of their resources and were being ground down by their world. People who were afraid.

Who were the people not attracted to Jesus? Religious leaders. Smug people who manipulated and took advantage of others. Demons.

When I first became a Christian at age 16, it was not because I lost a theological debate, or was told I was going to hell, or was sorry for my sins. I became a Christian because I saw people who were living at a level that I found desirable. I wanted to live in the love they were living in. I wanted the freedom they had. I wanted the joy.

Because of their lives, they made Christian faith look attractive.

I understand why people don't want to follow Jesus, because what they've seen of Christians is all bad news. But



think of what a little salt and a little light could do to change a person's perspective.

Through our lives, people might be able to hear the words, "Follow me" and know that it's good news.



Dean Nelson directs the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. His book about seeing God in everyday life is "God Hides in Plain Sight: How to See the Sacred in a Chaotic World."



Urban Juggle

Ministry offers multiple approaches
in transforming lives, neighborhoods



story by LORI ARNOLD
photos by ROMIN IRANI

Cindy Soria may have lived in a big house with her family, but like many teens living through the Great Recession, security was often fleeting.

“The rent was going up every month,” she said. “We barely had food to eat. I remember eating just beans and tortillas for a while. I missed eating meat and snacks like chips and cookies.”

Instead of dwelling on what she didn't have Soria decided to stay busy with school and volunteering so she “wouldn't feel bad about myself not do-

ing anything.

“But even when I volunteered and took advantage of opportunities at school, I wasn't fulfilled,” she said.

That changed during her senior year at Mar Vista High School when Soria accepted an invitation by her Aunt Arlyne to attend a program offered by UrbanLife, an inner city ministry dedicated to transforming people who can then transform their neighborhoods in City Heights and Southeastern San Diego. Arlyne, just a year older than her niece, was

a volunteer with UrbanLife's high school program.

“I went to the high school night program expecting the worst, and I actually felt welcomed and curious about God,” Soria, now 23, said. “We had leadership classes after church every other Sunday. Through church, meetings and Bible studies I became more aware of what becoming a Christian looked like.”

And she liked what she saw.

At UrbanLife she discovered a team of young adults committed to youth development through a variety of programs that included spiritual mentoring, relationship building and practical outreaches such as a running club, urban gardening, tutoring, service projects and the UrbanLife College Achievement Network, known as UCAN.

“There are so many different elements when you're trying to tackle neighborhoods affected by poverty and injustice, that it can quickly become overwhelming,” said Sarah Carter, executive director of UrbanLife.

Carter, who holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in business administration, joined UrbanLife after spending a decade in ministry with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Her time with InterVarsity, she said, fueled her passion for ministry.

“It was through God's pursuit of me, and being surrounded by other young people who wanted to follow Jesus, that helped me decide to not hold anything back from God,” she said. “From that point, it has been an amazing journey to center my life around being radically disciplined by Jesus.”

Carter arrived at UrbanLife with her husband, B.J., who directs the ministry's farm program.

“We were in a small group with some of the UrbanLife staff, particularly the founder Jake Medcalf,” she

Cindy Soria, center, celebrates graduation with students involved with UrbanLife. Soria, who joined UrbanLife as a senior in high school, now serves as director of the middle school program.

said. “Jake began to talk about what the opportunities were at UrbanLife. I began to pray about joining UrbanLife, and it seemed like God had already lined up many things, including living in the neighborhood that I would be serving, and utilizing my skills and experience in Christian community development and church planting. I had no idea what I was getting into, but it has been an amazing journey that I am privileged to be a part of.”

Dual approach

The ministry emphasis is two-pronged, focusing on church plants that they call missional communities, along with community development initiatives. In essence, the team spiritually feeds youth and young adults and then trains them to pass it on. UrbanLife reaches as many as 300 youth and children annually with a corps of 75 volunteers who donate more than 5,000 hours annually. They



have seven paid staff members and expect to expand that number to 10 by the end of the year.

“God has continued to show me His preferential care and concern about those on the margins, and challenged me to believe bigger, have more faith, in what He can and will do as we work with Him and through Him,” she said.

Carter said she marvels at how God is shaping her while shaping the ministry.

“I think I have learned my tendency to trust in my own plans or strength, and how limiting, and truly how sinful that is,” she said. “All good works and effort come from the work of the Holy Spirit through God’s people. I am still on a constant learning curve to seek the Lord and His plan for UrbanLife, to rely on His dreams and plans, and operate out of God’s power to get it done.”

In addition to the internal work of

Neighborhood nitty-gritty

UrbanLife grew out of a youth ministry at La Jolla Presbyterian Church. Under the direction of founder Jake Medcalf, the community began to pray and reach out to Mission Bay High School. In the process, they encountered a community of students that were bused in from City Heights.

Sarah Carter, the executive director of UrbanLife, said those early students from City Heights “were natural leaders, excited to learn about Christ, and determined to make an impact in their neighborhood.

“From this community of young people, UrbanLife was formed, and it became its own 501(c)3 non-profit, focusing on and

operating out of the neighborhoods of City Heights and Southeastern San Diego.”

The ministry primarily operates on two paths: its Missional Communities and Community Development Initiatives.

Missional Communities

These are small worshipping communities that meet together on Sundays for church. UrbanLife operates two distinct communities, one in City Heights and one in Southeast San Diego. They are open to anyone interested in learning about Jesus and committing to the growth and flourishing of the neighborhoods. They meet at Sunday mornings in

each neighborhood, and then come together for one corporate worship service monthly.

“They are really an expression of the work that is going on in our communities throughout the week ... discipling young people, running our community development initiatives, loving and serving our neighbors and neighborhoods and praying for God’s Kingdom to come more fully all around us,” Carter said.

Community Development Initiatives

UrbanLife operates four distinct programs aimed at growing people and, ultimately, their neighborhoods. In the coming months, the ministry will launch

Right, neighborhood children collaborate on a clean-up project in their neighborhood through UrbanLife, which seeks to transform young people who will then transform their own communities.

Below, a teen is baptized through the UrbanLife ministry. UrbanLife holds quarterly baptism services for students who decide to follow Jesus as a result of their ministry.



UrbanLife, the ministry also collaborates with other inner city ministries such as Urban Young Life, Urban Youth Collaborative, numerous churches and various secular organizations including Second Chance, plus local school administrators.

Although the initial focus of UrbanLife is centered on changing the hearts of young people one at a time, its goal is to multiply that outreach by resourcing young people so they can “pay it forward.”

“When I came to Urbanlife I went on a trip called mission week,” Soria said. “I gave up my week of spring break to help others. I volunteered at a homeless shelter and had to reorganize some thrift shops. That’s when I realized that God exists. He showed me what it was like to have nothing and what it is to have everything. And how easily it can be taken away. I learned that I should get to know others before judging them. I wanted to be better. I wanted to know what life with



its fifth initiative, a culinary program that will provide skills and training opportunities for students.

• **Neighborhood Youth Development:** This is a collection of programs that function like youth groups for the different schools in ministry neighborhoods. They serve Crawford and Hoover Highs and Horace Mann Middle in City Heights, and Lincoln and Gompers High Schools in Southeast San Diego. They meet on different days and times, but the general purpose is to create a safe environment for youth to hear the gospel and interact with adult mentors who will love and disciple them.

City Height Runners: This is a running club for middle and high school students in City Heights. It offers after school and Saturday practices for students at Wilson Middle School, and also

serves the Hoover High School cross country and track and field programs by providing off-season training and racing opportunities. The running club offers a proven means of developing resiliency factors in student-athletes, which is necessary for their overall well-being and healthy development as they move through high school and on to their college and/or career years.

UrbanLife Farms: Through two urban farm sites, the ministry employs high school students, giving them first-time job experience and training while helping to beautify neighborhoods and provide access to fresh, organic produce. The farm program will work in concert with the soon-to-be launched culinary program.

UrbanLife College Achievement Network: Known as UCAN, this program

has developed college-prep after-school tutoring/mentoring services to encourage City Heights and Southeast San Diego youth to strive for academic excellence. UCAN is focused on identifying and reversing students negative intrinsic associations with higher education. The program is focused on reinforcing and strengthening college-prep support networks within each student’s circle of influence, while providing after-school tutoring and college admissions guidance.

San Diego Refugee Tutoring: The vision of SDRT is to achieve social justice through educational access. San Diego Refugee Tutoring provides one-on-one tutoring and holistic academic support to refugees at Ibarra Elementary School in eastern City Heights.

Learn more at www.urbantilifesd.org.



Students involved with UrbanLife remove landscaping debris during a missions project sponsored by the ministry.

God was like.”

That journey with God triggered immense changes in Soria as she began her life as an adult.

“My relationship with God has grown over the years, being challenged to learn more and read more,” she said. “My relationship with my family and issues I’ve had, UrbanLife has been there to listen and pray with me. UrbanLife has made me the leader I am today. It has been a way of life, helping one another and our community.”

Soria has honed those skills serving adolescents through the ministry’s middle school program.

“I fell in love with the kids and how I could relate to them and share stories,” she said. “It was the perfect fit. I was a committed volunteer leader for four and a half years.”

Digging in

That journey was not without its ebbs and flows. Two years ago, while balancing her job at Sea World with ministry commitments for UrbanLife, Soria floundered.

“I felt I was giving my all and not receiving anything back, God wasn’t listening to my prayers. I was being appreciated at work, (but) I felt replaceable at UrbanLife,” she said. “I had distanced myself from God and UrbanLife that summer. In September I realized that I needed God in my life and I couldn’t do it alone. I needed my UrbanLife family.”

She reached out to one of the ministry leaders, who helped her re-prioritize her life.

“I told him how I felt and that I just wanted to be involved again and do what I loved most, hanging out with middle school kids,” Soria said. “I have learned that your faith doesn’t stop growing, whether you know more or less of God or the Bible. My faith has been growing through my own experiences with God and seeing other miracles happen with students and friends.”

That experience only further solidified her commitment to help other young people cultivate the organic nature of their own faith.

“Even though it might feel like certain situations and experiences are only happening to you, you are not alone,” she likes to tell people. “God might take a while to show up, but he never fails. God loves you and he puts people in your path to share your story. So don’t be afraid to share and let others in.”

Recognizing her clear call to youth, UrbanLife brought Soria on staff last year where she serves as director of the middle school program.

“My favorite part of urban ministry is seeing all the good a kid can offer, but they haven’t noticed it yet,” she said. “Seeing them grow, not just as they get older or move on to the next grade, but their spiritual growth with God. They don’t just accept God, but ask questions and are curious about him.”

Daily aha’s

As chief orchestrator for UrbanLife, Carter said Soria’s success is one of many constant reminders of why she remains committed to the ministry. She lauded her young middle school leader who recently escorted 30 students to a transformational camp at Forest Home.

“Cindy had to deal with upset parents and rowdy middle school boys, while still focusing on discipling her cabin of girls,” she said. “She grew so much in her leadership, and is an amazing example of someone who was transformed and is now transforming her neighborhood through leading our middle school program.”

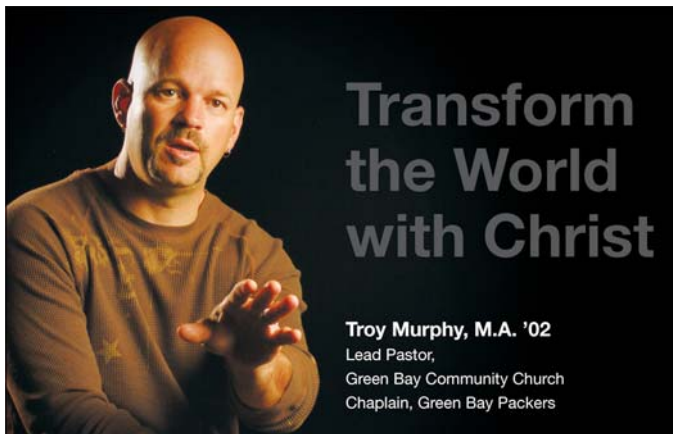
Another UrbanLife leader guided six high-schoolers in a meeting with San Diego Councilwoman Myrtle Cole, where they pitched the need for more recreational space in their neighborhoods.

“(They were) telling her how God showed them that they can make a positive impact in their neighborhood through our summer internship,” Carter said.

Soria credits the skills she learned through the ministry with helping her to pursue something greater than a fast food job and single parenthood.

“If I hadn’t been involved with UrbanLife I would probably be living in Imperial Beach never knowing about God or experiencing God’s presence,” she said, adding that her leaders also gave practical, biblical advice on purity and holiness. I would probably not know how to respect myself and (would have) become a single mom. I would have let someone take advantage of me if I didn’t have a conversation with my leader about self-respect and waiting till marriage.

“God is big and powerful, but he wants to be our friend, our father and our teacher. And that God loves us for who we are.” ■



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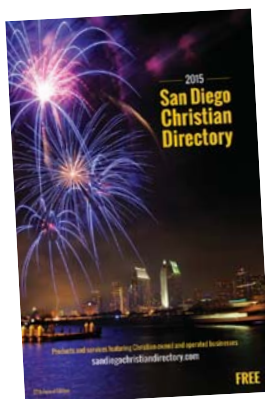
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DEALING WITH SUCCESS

Setbacks fail to stymie drive of East County car dealer

by LORI ARNOLD

Chris and Debbie George were listening intently to the guest preacher at their new church in Eugene, Oregon, where they had just moved with their three boys. They relocated to the Pacific Northwest from their native San Diego County so that their sons would enjoy the benefits of being raised in a small town. It was a risky move—literally—because although they had saved money to relocate, Chris George still did not have a job.

While uncertain about his work future, the couple remained steadfast in their faith and had already found a church home. It was there that a traveling preacher delivered a sermon on first fruits, of giving the best we have to offer.

“God spoke to Debbie and myself that we needed to give out of our need and give we did,” he said.

Even with no job prospects, the couple gave one third of their seed money for the move.

“A week later I got the best job I ever had in the auto business,” he said.

In 2007, more than a decade after arriving in Oregon, George sold his business and brought the family back to El Cajon, where they longed to reconnect with family and friends.

“I knew we were dying a slow spiritual death,” he said.

Just like when he left, George was returning without a job.

This time he opened his own dealership, Jack Murphy Auto Group.

“(It was) in the middle of a recession and under-capitalized,” he said. “I say in my carnal mind we committed financial suicide. Twelve months later, 20 years of savings gone, and about \$70,000 in debt, we closed the doors. Debbie and I were sitting in our garage selling off all our toys, office supplies and anything that didn’t eat.”

George took a sales job with BMW of El Cajon and worked his way into management with its parent company, Sunroad Automotive Group.

“God trimmed, pruned, and cut back my desires, plans and goals,” he said.

“What we did have was incredible growth in every area money couldn’t buy. Personally, with my children and my marriage, we were all growing. Financially I lost everything we had and was in debt. A failure! Knowing God had a plan didn’t make it any easier, but kept me going. In every box He was faithful.”

Two years later, when the pruning ended, there was new fruit.

“I was heading home and came around the bend at Highway 8 and Johnson Avenue,” he said. “I was looking at a dying Kia store. And I knew it was for sale.”

The dealership, George said, was selling just 10 to 15 cars a month.

He reached out to John Kiefer, an out-of-town business associate.

“John, I think there may be an opportunity to acquire a Kia dealership in San Diego. Would you be interested?” George asked.

“If I was, would you run it for me?” Kiefer responded. Team Kia was born in 2009 and now sells 350-plus cars a

As general manager of Team Kia of El Cajon, Chris George stresses adding value, a motto that he also applies in his personal life. In addition to his duties at the dealership, George is involved in the community and at his church.

PHOTO BY SARAH TOLSON PHOTOGRAPHY



“...our God is an unshakable God that knows our future and our past, that directs our steps...”

- Chris George



Chris George dances with his wife Debbie at a celebration for her birthday.

month.

As the new general manager, George began the process of resurrecting the dealership by putting his personal motto of adding value into action.

“How else can we change the world

unless we add something?” George, 51, asked.

“Plus, minus, or neutral. In life, I hate the second two more than I’m passionate about the first one.”

Greater goals

Nearly simultaneously, George also set his sights beyond the boundaries of the car lot, reaching into the community and developing relationships with other business, church and city leaders.

“God put that in me,” George said of community building. “Somewhere I realized I knew I wanted to make things better. First it was my bicycle, next it was my car I had to fix up because it wouldn’t run. Next it was our home, and then our community.”

He now serves as president of the Valley of Cars Dealers Association and was recently a guest speaker at the East County Mayor’s Luncheon. He also makes a monthly radio appearance on the David Spoon Experience show on KPRZ 1210 AM.

“I love people working together to improve a situation, to make a difference, to support a cause, to clean up a town, to help another person because they think they are stuck and you know you see potential in them, you see what God sees in them, what they can be, not the lie of what they are,” he said.

In George’s case, that improvement mostly came by way of life experience and not through formal training. Although he attended Grossmont College for two years, he describes himself as being “allergic to school.” Yet, he lists three of his main hobbies as growth, reading and learning.

He also loves baseball, which as a child he hoped to play professionally. It’s not surprising, then, that analogies from the diamond and from other sports often end up in his conversations.

“I love the movie or story that has the coach that demonstrates tough love, accepts but doesn’t tolerate,” he said. “There is greatness to be discovered by



Chris George took an ailing Kia dealership in El Cajon and rebuilt it into a thriving business.

PHOTO BY SARAH TOLSON PHOTOGRAPHY



Chris George and his wife Debbie enjoy an outing with their sons and their dates.

those who believe in us. I want to be that guy to my boys, to the employees, to our friends.”

Facing fear

George is quick to remind people that networking should not necessarily be confined to the work environment, but that network contacts should be people with shared values.

“One piece that sticks would be to find someone ahead of you in life and plug into them. Ideally it would be our parents, but if not, find someone you respect, and submit. Everyone in life needs to be accountable. It’s simple—but not easy.”

George admits that he still wrestles with a fear of succeeding.

“I’m not sure I have overcome it,” he offered. “I am determined to walk in my God-given destiny, regardless of my fears.”

One of the ways he accomplishes that is by pedaling downhill.

“That keeps you working when things are going well, which keeps you humble,” George said. “It also prepares you for the season when we must plant, water, and tend.”

“There are only two motivators in life: Fear of loss, and hope for gain. In my lifetime I want to see Christians walk in the second motivator. The first one is created by the enemy, to kill, steal, and destroy.

“If we as Christians operated from hope, we would vote, we would contribute, our kids would be the ones all the businesses wanted to hire because they had such good work ethic. We would add value, not move, not run, not quit, but press through with the hope and knowledge that our God is an unshakable God that knows our future and our past, but directs our steps and wants to bless His kids; that we as Christians would walk as King’s Kids; that our descendants would know their inheritance because of our willingness to pedal downhill.” ■

CHRIS GEORGE AT A GLANCE

Age: 51

Years married: 26

Children: 3 sons, ages 17, 21 and 24

Occupation: General Manager, Team Kia of El Cajon

Hobbies: Growth, reading, learning, riding street bikes.

Community Connections:

- Member of the San Diego East County Chamber of Commerce, where he sits on the Business Development Council. He was a First Friday Breakfast speaker earlier this year and is sponsoring this December’s breakfast.
- Participates in the Ethics in Business program for local high school students
- Involved in ministry opportunities at Foothills Church and High School
- Through Team Kia, George has raised more than \$14,000 for Youth Venture teen centers and \$7,000-plus for Life of Valor, a men’s ministry.
- Mentors young men

ROLE MODELS

Children score with FCA football camp

story by LORI ARNOLD

photos by CYNTHIA SINCLAIR

The 8-year-old boy, fresh off a day-long football camp featuring several Chargers players, scampered into his mother's car for the ride home. The first thing he grabbed after sitting down was not the pigskin, but a Bible.

"This shows the power of influence," said Colin Sinclair, San Diego County area director for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which sponsored the summer football camp that featured Chargers players Darrell Stuckey, Jimmy Wilson and Nick Novak, plus Vincent Brown of the Indianapolis Colts. All of the pro athletes donated their time and several helped to underwrite the cost of the camp, Sinclair said.

The annual free camp drew 200 children who participated in skill drills with the players and listened intently as the professional athletes shared how their belief in Jesus molded their actions on and off the field. During the event they were also treated to lunch by Chick-fil-A. At the conclusion of the program, the athletes stayed to take photographs and sign autographs for students.

"Watching the kids smile from ear to ear as they get a photo and an autograph, and knowing that the campers will remember that these players play for God are wonderful takeaways," Sinclair said. "I love hearing stories like the one about the 8-year-old kid reading his Bible because his sports heroes told him how important that is."

The area director said the football camp, one of numerous activities sponsored annually by FCA, is considered a vital ministry opportunity because it offers children a glimpse into the lifestyle of players who are not making headlines for bad behavior.

"The world is starving for positive role models," said Sinclair, a dad with two young children. "We are being fed lies about how to be 'happy' and 'cool.'"

We are also fed that Christianity is ancient history and not true."

He further noted that many children are starving for solid male role models because they have only limited or no contact with their fathers.

"The athletes who served at our camp gave kids a positive role model to follow," he said. "They showed the campers that being 'cool' and 'happy' is following God's plan for their lives and not man's. They talked about the importance of integrity, teamwork, servanthood and excellence. They shared their favorite Bible verses and how the Bible is their playbook for life. They tell the campers that the habits of reading the Bible, praying and going to church help them be better men, husbands, fathers and teammates."

In an interview with Pro Players Insider, defensive back Jimmy Wilson said he enjoyed hearing children say that they believed in Jesus.

"I am glad they see that reflecting off of me," he said. "I want them all to keep doing good and keep obeying Jesus."

Les Steckel, president and CEO of FCA, said developing faith and increasing commitment is at the heart of all FCA programs.

"Oftentimes, these kids participate in an FCA camp hoping to improve their game or meet their sports heroes, but we hope they leave with a newfound fervor for learning more about Jesus and knowing that when they follow Him, they will always be 'Undefeated,'" the national director said.

In addition to the local camp, FCA sponsors the FCA Total Athlete Camp, which was held at UCLA and drew 715 kids from Southern California, including 200-plus from San Diego.

In San Diego County, the FCA programs reach 6,000 junior high, high school and college students each week through Bible studies (called huddles)



Following instruction by their NFL role models, several boys practice their tackle routines.



Former Chargers player Vincent Brown, now with the Indianapolis Colts, runs drills with kids.

A refreshing event for women

RANCHO SAN DIEGO — Skyline Church is sponsoring the “Nourishing the Total Woman” event on Sept. 25 at 6:30 p.m.

Breakout sessions will cover such topics as prayer, Pilates, menopause, weight loss, and diet. Ladies can also learn more about Jamberry, Essential Oils and Zumba.

Skyline Church is located at Hwy 94 and Jamacha Blvd.

Registration is \$15 and may be completed online at www.skylinechurch.org/nttw.

For more information, call (619) 660-5000 or visit www.skylinechurch.org.

30 schools beautified

SAN DIEGO — Urban Youth Collaborative, in affiliation with churches around

the county, held its sixth annual school beautification project on Aug. 22.

Through the effort, church and community leaders teamed up with school administrators and more than 1,250 faith-based volunteers to beautify 30 campuses in San Ysidro, City Heights, Downtown, Santee, Escondido, Fallbrook, San Marcos and Vista.

Urban Youth Collaborative is a countywide ministry that links public middle and high schools with area churches to host faith-based campus clubs. Its goal is to have all 280 middle and high schools linked with a church by 2020.

Learn more at www.uyc.org.



Young volunteers show off their work gloves during a break from their chores at Cherokee Point Elementary School. The kids were part of a countywide school beautification project that resulted in upgrades at 30 campuses.

Financial strategies for women

SAN DIEGO — Thrivent Financial is sponsoring a financial workshop and luncheon geared specifically for women, “Smart Women, Smart Choices.”

The event will be held Oct. 9, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the San Diego Central Library in the Shiley Special Events Suite.

Melanie Meyer will speak on “Savvy Social Security,” and Stephanie Shields will speak on “Retirement and Estate Strategies.” Both women are certified financial experts with Thrivent Financial.

Although the event is free, reservations are requested. RSVP by Oct. 5 to Monique Gallery at (619) 226-9458 or monique.gallery@thrivent.com.

Book series for girls debuts

ENCINITAS — “Bible Belles,” a new book series for girls that is designed to model the feminine traits of five “superhero” women from Scriptures, has released its first installment. “Hannah: The Belle of Prayer” shares the story of the biblical Hannah through the eyes of Rooney Cruz, a 9-year-old girl.

The series was created by Encinitas resident Erin Weidemann, who named her young character after her toddler daughter.

“These five women represent a journey that today’s modern girl can take to become someone whose beauty radiates from within, a journey to be heard,” Weidemann said.

The author will be signing copies of her book from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sept. 13 at the RockPile Bookstore at Rock Church.



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These services held at: 3219 Clairemont Mesa Blvd. (In Clairemont)
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Liberty Bible College & Seminary

Weidemann was motivated to change the lives of young girls after coming to the Christian faith during own journey with cancer which began at age 26.

Learn more at www.biblebelles.com.

Creation museum to host annual festival

SANTEE — The Creation & Earth History Museum will hold its 10th annual Museum Day Family Festival from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sept. 26. The free event will showcase the grand opening of the turtle and tortoise enclosures.

Other featured activities include guest presentations by NASA Astronaut Col. Jeffrey Williams and other science experts, as well as a Kids Zone, a movie screening, and food and vendor concessions.

Williams, a creationist, spent six months aboard the International Space Station in 2006, orbiting the earth more than 2,800 times. He is said to have taken more photographs of the earth than any astronaut in history and is grateful to have had the rare privilege of studying earth from heaven's perspective.

Other speakers include museum owner Tom Cantor, the CEO and president of Scantibodies Laboratory, Inc., one of the largest privately held biotech companies in the world; Dr. Jobe Martin, a former Darwinian evolutionist who now produces the Creation Proclaims DVD series that highlights animals that cannot be explained by traditional evolution; Buddy Davis, a speaker and singer/songwriter for Answers in Genesis who leads the AiG's popular "Creation Adventure" children's workshop; Brian Thomas, a science writer and editor at the Institute for Creation Research and author of



Astronaut Col. Jeffrey Williams will speak at Museum Day.

Men's dinner and message

SAN DIEGO — Mission Valley Christian Fellowship will host its Men's Fill Up at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 11. Doors open at 6 p.m.

"Dinosaurs and the Bible"; Eric Hovin, president and founder of the Pensacola-based organization Creation Today; and Dr. Andy McIntosh, a visiting research professor in Thermodynamics and Combustion Theory who authored the book "Genesis for Today."

The Kids Zone will include rides, bounce houses, games, a petting zoo, science experiments, animal balloon making, face-painting, and live music.

Guests will also be able to view trailers from the Genesis 3D Movie and browse new titles at the onsite bookstore, which will offer sale items and raffle prizes.

Tours of the museum and its many exhibits will be provided, including

Dinosaurs and the Bible; The Tabernacle Theatre, Age of the Earth Mineral Cave; Human Anatomy; Fall of Man; Mount St. Helen's; Days of Creation 1-3: Heavens and Earth; Days of Creation 4: Astronomy, Light, Sun, Moon and Stars; Days of Creation 5-7: Living Creatures and Garden Genesis; Dinosaurs Gardens, Hall of Scholars: Creation and Evolution Debate Since Darwin; Ice Age, Ancient Civilizations Room, Noah's Ark World-Wide Flood; Grand Canyon Wall and Fossils: Evidence for a Flood; Tabernacle and Age of the Earth.

The museum is located at 10946 Woodside Ave. N.

Learn more at www.creationsd.org.

The event includes a pasta dinner, dessert, sharing of personal stories, message and a time of worship.

The evening theme is based on Psalm 48:14: "That this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever."

Tickets are \$7.

Learn more www.mvfc.com or call (619) 683-7729

Community children's choir forming

LAKESIDE — Lakeside Presbyterian Church is forming a community children's choir for children ages 6 to 12. Teenagers are also being sought to help teach the children music and dance moves.

The church, which has a pipe organ and hosts regular concerts, plans to expand the new choir beyond vocals by exposing the children to drama, dance and American sign language. Through the choir, church leaders hope to help the children build friendships and install life principles.

Learn more at www.lakesidepc.org or call (619) 443-1021.

FALL CONCERT CALENDAR

- Sep. 12** The Craguns, Grace Community Church, Ramona
- Sep. 13** The Craguns, Seven Church, Lakeside
- Sep. 13** Crystal Lewis, House of Blues
- Sep. 16** All Sons & Daughters, Robbie Seay at Horizon Christian Fellowship
- Sep. 19** MercyMe, Rock Church
- Oct. 4** The Gaither Homecoming Tour, Skyline Church
- Oct. 24** VeggieTales Live!, Balboa Theatre
- Oct. 25** The Hoppers, El Cajon Wesleyan Church
- Oct. 26** Matt Redman, Rock Church
- Oct. 29** Michael W. Smith, Skyline Church
- Nov. 22** Liberty Quartet, El Cajon Wesleyan Church

Learn more about all these concerts at www.refreshedmag.com/calendar.

Missions conference highlights Middle East

EL CAJON — Narratives Church and Advancing Native Missions are hosting “Thrive,” a free two-day global empowerment event designed to promote the international ministries of women working in some of the most hostile regions of the world.

The conference will be held Sept. 25 and 26.

Sessions run from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

The event—sponsored by International Women’s Ministries, a division of Advancing Native Missions—will include dessert on Friday night, breakfast snacks and a tostada bar for lunch on Saturday.

This year’s theme is “Streams in the Desert.”

All proceeds will benefit the work of Advancing Native Missions.

Participants are asked to bring school and medical supplies which will be distributed through a clinic in the Philippines.

Although the event is free, registration is requested.

The church is located at 450 Fletcher Parkway, Suite 224.

Visit www.advancingnativemissions.com/thrive for more information or call (619) 379-5674.

Strategies for Social Security

SAN DIEGO — When it comes to navigating the Social Security landscape, the choices can be overwhelming. Thrivent Financial is sponsoring a free workshop to help sort out the options in making the right decision. Certified Financial Planner Christopher Fenimore, with ten years experience in the field, will present the workshop.

The event will be held Oct. 6, from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m., at St. Therese Parish’s Murray Hall, located at 6016 Camino Rico.

For more information, call Sarah Pierce at (858) 455-5324 or email sarah.pierce@thrivent.com.

Messianic High Holy Days

SAN DIEGO — Kehilat Ariel Messianic Synagogue invites everyone to experience the Jewish roots of their faith in Yeshua, the Messiah.

Rosh Hashana (New Year) will be observed on Sept. 13 at 8 p.m. and again on Sept. 14 at 10:30 a.m. Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) will be observed on Sept. 22 at 7:30 p.m. and on Sept. 23 at 10:30 a.m.

Reservations are required for the free services.

Learn more at www.kehilatariel.org or call (858) 490-4355.

EVENTS ONLINE

For more Community News and an online Calendar of Events for San Diego County, please visit www.refreshedsandiego.com.

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'90 Minutes in Heaven' – believable

by MICHAEL FOUST

One year after moviegoers flocked to the big screen and turned "Heaven is for Real" into a major hit, another near-death-experience movie will hit theaters Sept. 11 when "90 Minutes in Heaven"—based on *The New York Times* bestselling book—is released.

Comparisons between the two films are inevitable, although they are very different stories ... and very different movies.

"Heaven is for Real" is based on the testimony of 4-year-old Colton Burpo, who says he visited heaven while undergoing an operation, although he never died. In "90 Minutes in Heaven," pastor Don Piper says he visited the entrance to heaven after he was pronounced dead by paramedics following a horrific car wreck.

The film "Heaven is for Real" focuses on the testimony of Burpo and his parents' struggle in accepting his claims. "90 Minutes in Heaven," though, spends most of the movie spotlighting Piper's gut-wrenching hospital recovery after the wreck. Despite pleas from his wife and friends, Piper *didn't* want to live, simply because of the joy he says he experienced at heaven's gate.

The theological debate about "heaven visits" is a worthy one, with both sides making valid points, but for the moment let's focus only on the latest film's artistic merits.

Is "90 Minutes in Heaven" worth watching?

Well, it's certainly a film that's well done and one that I expect fans of the book will especially enjoy. The same actor (Hayden Christensen) who famously played Anakin Skywalker in the most recent "Star Wars" trilogy plays Piper and, honestly, he is more impressive in this movie than he was in George Lucas' films. His performance depicting Piper's recovery is particularly believable. Kate Bosworth, known for her roles in a host of films including "Superman Returns," also delivers a standout performance as Piper's wife. With Chris-

tensen, Bosworth and even Fred Thompson in the film, acting is definitely a strength.

Singer Michael W. Smith, who does a fine job in a minor role in the movie, told *Refreshed* magazine he is typically skeptical of heaven visitation stories.

"But when I read the book and read the script, I believed him," Smith said of Piper. "And I really believed him when I met him. I think this guy is telling the truth. I think he had a real experience. But (the story is) more

than just about him going to heaven. It's about him overcoming adversity, trials and tribulation. He was in so much pain."

Christianity is front and center in "90 Minutes," but heaven is not referenced as much as it is in "Heaven is for Real." During the wreck we see a glimpse of what Piper says he witnessed, but it lasts mere seconds and it isn't until the final 25-or-so minutes of the movie that Piper even reveals to a friend—and then to his wife—what he says he saw. It is then that we see more of heaven, but even here it's only friends and family members he once knew who have died and who are welcoming him into its gates. (He does not enter it.) In case you're wondering, Piper—unlike Burpo—says he



PHOTO BY QUANTRELL COLBERT

Firefighters rush to extract Don Piper (Hayden Christensen) from his car's mangled wreckage. Piper was pronounced dead at the scene but began to breathe 90 minutes later after a pastor prayed over his lifeless body.

didn't see Jesus.

Often lost in the debate over Piper's book is the inspiring story of the man, Dick Onarecker, who stopped his car and felt led to pray over Piper's lifeless body, despite the fact that Onarecker was told he was dead. The movie depicts that scene wonderfully and makes prayer for Piper's healing a centerpiece of the film. That alone may be worth the price of admission.

"90 Minutes in Heaven" is rated PG-13 for intense accident and injury images. It contains no sexuality or language.

Michael Foust has covered the faith film industry for more than a decade. Learn more at 90minutesinheavenmovie.com.

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Waller title single featured in 'War Room'

John Waller, former frontman for the band According to John, has released his most recent solo project, *Crazy Faith*, with its title track featured in the new movie "War Room."

The video for the title single had already received more than 20,000 views by the time the album—his first in four years—had released.

The movie, created by Alex and Stephen Kendrick, the award-winning creators of *Fireproof*, *Courageous* and *Facing the Giants*, was released on Aug. 28. Waller, a Georgia native, was at the movie's Atlanta premiere and walked the red carpet with the Kendrick brothers.

"I knew when I heard 'Crazy Faith' it would be the perfect song for 'War Room' and would inspire people all over the na-

tion," said Alex Kendrick.

"Crazy Faith" is not the first Kendrick-Waller pairing. The title track of his second solo project "While I'm Waiting" also landed a spot in the Kendrick hit "Fireproof."

New project for Cheri Keaggy

Dove Award-winning singer/songwriter Cheri Keaggy has released her ninth album, *No Longer My Own*.

The songwriter said the project, which she also produced, brought tears to her own father.

"After he had a chance to give it a good listen, he called me," Keaggy said. "He said, 'You wouldn't have been able to write these songs if you hadn't gone through the things you've been through.' He went on to say, 'This is your best one yet.' It touched me that it moved him so deeply."

Keaggy said she believes this project might be her most bold recording to date.

"Brokenness humbles you and makes you more sensitive to the world around you and, perhaps, even more in tune with the Father's heart," she said.

One of the most poignant songs on the album is her newly penned, "Be My Sabbath," which serves as a desperate cry for God's restorative power and refueling. Keaggy wrote the song after experiencing the sheer elation of reaching her goal on the Kickstarter campaign that funded the CD, and the unanticipated physical and spiritual burnout that followed.

"The hectic pace of life, work, and ministry simply caught up with me, and the usual things I did to find renewal wouldn't work," she said. "I was stuck."



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KIMBERLY RUBY

Help! My kid wants to become a vegetarian



The voice on the other end of the phone was desperate.

"I can't believe she wants to do this," the lady shrieked. "My 15-year-old is not being rational."

Was my patient's daughter running away, dropping out of school, getting a body part pierced? No, she just wanted to become a vegetarian. It was my job to set up a meeting and, as a nutritionist, fix her and steer her back to consuming animal flesh. But maybe not so fast.

Whenever a concerned parent calls me and seeks deprogramming for their kid on the meatless train, my first question is, "Has your child viewed the following documentaries recently: 'Meet Your Meat,' 'Forks Over Knives' and 'Food Inc.?' Of course they have; no 15-year-old voluntarily gives up their McNuggets and midnight Papa John's.

I'm not a stranger to the meat-free idea. When I was 14, my parents moved us from the inner city to rural Lakeside hoping for a life that connected us more to nature (OK, livestock) and open space. But when I saw a neighbor's steer standing on all fours in the morning and hanging from a mobile butcher's truck after school I, too, declared I would never eat meat again! That lasted about a week. Then I joined El Capitan's Future Farmers of America and raised a prize-winning champion pig. We all know that after a Junior Fair auction our animals aren't given a retirement pasture in Ramona to live out their days.

I was still courting the idea of becoming a vegetarian and even attended The Natural Gourmet Cookery School in New York City, founded by America's top vegetarian chef, Annemarie Colbin. Her two best-selling books, "The Book of Whole Meals" and "The Natural Gourmet" were ever-present in my kitchen becoming well-stained over the years with red lentils and umeboshi paste.

Unfortunately, my Montana-raised husband was highly skilled on the grill, and veggie kabobs as a main course were not an option.

For many, the reason for pursuing a plant-based diet includes disease prevention, longevity (as proven by the Loma Linda Seventh Day Adventist Study) a healthier weight, and convictions related to religious or philosophical beliefs. It's well documented that a vegetarian diet may offer a reduction in chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, intestinal disorders, colorectal cancer, osteoporosis and metabolic syndrome.

Benjamin Franklin, Leonardo da Vinci, George Bernard Shaw, Tony Campolo, Mike Tyson and even Mister Rogers were/are all vegetarian. For social and economic reasons as well as concerns for sustaining our environment, those eating no meat point out that a bovine requires nine pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat.

Planning a nutritious vegetarian diet

Yes, it is possible and safe to reduce or eliminate your animal protein consumption, but the two areas I discuss with my patients who would like to try a vegetarian diet are complementary vegetable proteins and concerns about possible dietary deficiencies.

I never meet a patient who is protein-deficient but, because nine of the 20 amino acids we require cannot be manufactured in the body, carefully combining plant proteins such as beans with grains or legumes and peas with nuts and seeds, for example, ensures a balanced and complete protein intake.

A greater challenge is for those who eliminate all animal products from their diets. Vitamin D, B-12, riboflavin, calcium, iron and zinc deficiencies can

be problem nutrients for vegans or even vegetarians.

I recommend a few books to my patients, all available on Amazon, if they are serious in seeking vegetarianism. They are: "The New Becoming Vegetarian," "Low-Carb Vegetarian," and "Living Vegetarian for Dummies." I noticed the USDA's old food "Pyramid" from 1992 morphed recently into the newer, more relevant "food plate" example. For the first time the divided sections for fruit, grains and vegetables also included the word "protein" rather than meat.

You can visit www.choosemyplate.gov where you can plan, analyze, and track your food and physical activity on mobile, tablet or desktop.

Check out the great recipes and downloads as well. As for me and my pursuit of eliminating meat from my diet, I came to a compromise: I like to call it being a "step-vegetarian." I only eat animals that are themselves vegetarian. I let them do all the work and I benefit. Seriously, in all things practice wisdom and moderation, realizing we are stewards and caretakers of this beautiful creation around us and are only given one earthly body to care for and cherish.

May you thrive and experience health this month!



Kimberly Ruby, certified nutritionist at University Compounding Pharmacy, has been in the wellness industry for more than 20 years. She has been facilitating one of the

longest running weight management support groups in the nation, meeting weekly in the North County for 10 years. Her health segments have appeared on local news channels.

You tell enough white lies and after a while you start to grow color-blind.

Telling the truth with tact

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” — Ephesians 4:15

Do you recall the television game show called “To Tell The Truth?” Three people on a panel claim to be the same person with some unique experience or skill. Contestants try to guess which person is not an imposter. ABC announced recently that it plans to revive the show again later this year.

Have you ever felt like your relational reality is a bit like that television show? This happens when you know someone who likes to tell “little white lies” on a regular basis.

White lies are those little distortions in the truth that supposedly protect someone from a painful reality. Think, “Does this dress make me look...”

I recently had a couple in my office and the conversation went something like this: The wife said, “I can’t believe you have a secret credit card with a \$5,000 balance on it!” The husband quickly responded with, “If I had told you about that card you would have flipped out—I had to keep it to

myself or you would have been really upset.”

The husband’s excuse for hiding his credit card was allegedly to protect his wife, but in truth there were at least three offenses to his wife in this little exchange.

First, there was the deception of opening a credit card account without his wife’s knowledge and running up a secret balance. Second, hiding this fact to protect her was the white lie. And third, in blaming her for his deception, he avoided taking responsibility for the lie.

People make mistakes in life, but the bigger error comes when we lie to avoid responsibility and, in so doing, place the blame on someone who is innocent.

Think of it like this: Having integrity means being transparent. Lying to protect someone else’s feelings is considered a “white lie.” But when that lie is really about protecting ourselves, then it quickly darkens to other shades of gray or black.

I would argue that there really are no white lies—that all lies are really self-protective in some way. You tell enough white lies and after a while you start to grow color-blind.

Research has shown that by attempting to change someone else’s reality by distorting the truth, you run the risk of actually believing the lie yourself. If you tell enough lies, you lose the ability to distinguish truth from fiction. This is actually the definition of insanity—an inability to distinguish reality from fantasy or fiction. Additionally, these little white lies prevent improvement that can follow

useful feedback. A lie denies access to reality, making it impossible to develop good solutions through accurate information.

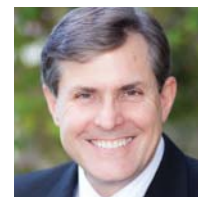
You don’t have to share every negative thought when someone asks for feedback, but sharing the truth in a gentle and loving way, even if it hurts in that moment, is superior to believing something that is false.

Even when it’s painful, reality is our friend because then we can learn, grow and mature. Caring people will confront others in kind ways rather than avoid conflict just to “keep the peace.” Conflict-avoidant individuals often carry wounds from the past that motivate them to change reality. Ironically, they often have to deal with more conflict than they would if they had simply told the truth in the first place.

There’s also a clear connection to emotional intimacy here as well. Risking the truth about one’s feelings and opinions allows others to really know us at deeper levels.

Have you ever known someone who only says what they think you want to hear? After a while you start to take their feedback with a grain of salt. It’s the gentle confrontations in life that mean the most to us, even if they do sting, but also because they point us in the direction of improvement.

To tell the truth is the challenge for anyone who seeks personal integrity, intimacy with others, and Christ-likeness.



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JANICE THOMPSON



Practically speaking... Becoming a wise investor - Part 3

In last month's article, I took you to Investment Street, Anytown USA, and gave you the first five questions to consider before crossing. They were: Where do I want to go? How much time do I have? What risk can I tolerate? Are there other ways of crossing? Have I carefully studied my route?

Now, let's look at the final four questions to ask before you cross this busy street.

6 Systematic Investing. Am I investing in a disciplined manner? Markets go up and markets go down. They can even be flat for extended periods of time. This is normal. Systematically investing at regular intervals regardless of what the markets are doing is called *dollar cost averaging*.

While systematic investing brings no guarantee, it has the potential to reduce some risk and produce better results over the long run. Investors should always consider their ability to continue purchases through periods of low price levels or changing economic conditions because that's what it takes to benefit from this principle.

7 Values. Does this investment decision align with my values? There are clearly investments that violate values you hold dear so as you look for investment opportunities, look for ones that can advance toward your financial goals and at the same time align with your values. In this way, you can actually become part of the solution, participating in causes that are close to your heart.

For example, you might invest in a company with a sustainable model for delivering clean water around the world or one that addresses critical infrastructure needs. There are many reasons to invest in companies, affinity groups or

funds that are profitable and at the same time do a tremendous job of producing value-based results.

8 Motivation. Is this investment decision driven by either greed or fear? These two extremely dangerous twins can derail a sound investment plan very quickly.

Greed quite often trips us up with the allure of a get-rich-quick scheme. I caution you to run from betting on the "big one" or buying just because everyone else is. (Think housing bubble!) Proverbs 28: 20 warns us that "...one eager to get rich will not go unpunished."

Fear is the other extreme and equally dangerous. Fear plays itself out in the following common investor behavior: You want to participate because stocks are steadily going up in value, so you buy "high," but then when there is a market correction or crash, you can't get out fast enough and sell "low." This "buy high/sell low" cycle is completely the opposite of what a wise investor should be doing.

Greed-driven or fear-driven decisions have no basis in a sound investment plan.

9 Counsel. Do I need professional counsel? If this series leaves you scratching your head and wondering just where to go from here, let me suggest the importance of surrounding yourself with people who can speak wisdom and truth into your life. If you are married, wise counsel begins by exploring these concepts first as a couple. Next, consider the importance of professional counsel. As you begin your search, make sure you're consulting with qualified, competent and genuinely wise men and women who share your worldview.

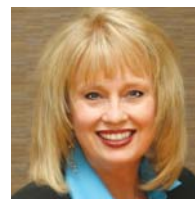
If you are looking for a biblically wise

financial advisor, a great place to begin your search is through a resource like Kingdom Advisors* (www.kingdomadvisors.com). Their mission is to engage, equip and empower Christian financial professionals to communicate biblical wisdom to their clients while applying high professional standards in their practices. Engaging an advisor who meets high professional standards while intentionally integrating God's wisdom with your priorities can make a great deal of difference!

I began this series with this premise: YOU are an investor—we all are. Every day you are trading something of present value for the hope of a future reward. So ask yourself, "What do I have to invest?" and "What am I going to do about it?" If you need help, seek qualified help. If you like to do this yourself, use these principles to evaluate your alignment with prudent investment practices. Above all, commit to taking judicious risks with your time, talent and treasures.

Are you still standing on the curb, ready to take the first step? I encourage you to proceed—not just with caution, but with great anticipation of the possibilities that await you on the other side!

**Janice Thompson serves on the board of Kingdom Advisors.*



Janice Thompson is a certified financial planner and co-founder/CEO of One Degree Advisors, Inc. A frequent speaker on financial topics and mentor for financial

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Will I love my biological child as much as my adopted ones?

The bright computer monitor in the hospital delivery room read 151, then 155, then 153. My wife and I traded smiles. It was my unborn son's heart rate, and the reading was—the nurse said—perfect. The sound, though, was what put a tear in my eye.

Tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump it rapidly went, telling anyone who knew our background: God is amazing ... and He has a sense of humor.

We had decided to call him “Isaac,” simply because we, like Abraham and Sarah and their own son by that name, literally laughed when we learned my wife was pregnant. That’s what you do when you become pregnant in your 40s, seven years after adopting your first child and three years after adopting twins. It’s what you do when you learn you’re pregnant 10 years after visiting a fertility doctor, crying and wondering what the future holds. It’s also what you do when you become pregnant after you give away your baby carrier, your baby toys and all your baby clothes.

It’s not the path I would have chosen but, in hindsight, I would not change a thing.

Many couples struggling with infertility—like we did—look at their options and contemplate a question they’d rather not voice publicly: Can I love an adopted child as much as a biological one?

But before Isaac was born this summer, I confronted a very different question: Can I love a biological child as much as my adopted ones?

Our first child was Graham, now 7, who I held seconds after birth and then cried as I gave him his first bottle. He had big cheeks and brown eyes, and before he could walk he’d give me a toothless grin with an “I-want-to-be-just-



The Foust family: Michael and Julie with Graham (7), twins William and Maggie (3) and newborn Isaac.

like-you-when-I-grow-up” look on his face. I helped teach him to ride bikes, to throw a football, to skip rocks on a stream. When he hugs me nowadays, he tells me in his still-sweet voice, “I could do this forever.”

There’s Maggie, now 3, the daughter I thought I’d never have and the child who melts my heart every time I arrive home from work, skipping toward me with outstretched arms. She loves ponytails, puppy dogs, purple dresses, pink shoes, and, yes, me. When she senses I’m discouraged or sad, she smiles, gives me a gentle kiss and says out of the blue, “I love you so, so, so, so much Daddy.” And she asks when we’re next going on a date.

Then there’s William, her twin brother, the most energetic 3-year-old in America—and also the funniest. He loves watching sports (just like I do), looking at planets (just like I do), planting seeds in the garden (just like I do), and eating Mexican food (just like I do). He also loves to make up silly songs. His greatest hit so far is one called “Me and Daddy are buddies,” which has all of five words and can last upwards of five minutes. But it’s simply awesome.

Those are my kids, and—perhaps we

should get this out of the way—they are “my own.” Sure, they’re adopted, but so is anyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Romans 8:15). We were all formerly children of wrath, but now children of God (Ephesians 1:5), simply because God adopted us. We are “His own.” Just like my first three children received a new last name, God gives His children a new identity.

One hour after Isaac was born, his excited brothers and sister came to the hospital to visit, each carrying an “It’s a Boy!” balloon. They took turns welcoming him into the family and giving him a soft kiss. “Shhh,”

Graham told him, comforting his newest brother as he held him. It was a precious, surreal moment: three children we didn’t conceive, welcoming into the family a baby we *did* conceive.

“What’s his last name going to be, Mom?” our 3-year-old son asked, innocently.

“The same as your last name,” my wife responded.

Love, after all, has nothing to do with family lineage or ancestral history or pointless bloodlines. The *entire Gospel* is about adoption—God adopting us because He loved us.

So what about Isaac? Can I love him as much as my other children? Absolutely—and I already do. I’ve cried tears of joy over the thought of raising him, but I did the same with my other three kids, too.

God planned this, and my new son needs me. And I love him.



Michael Foust is the father of four small children and blogs about parenting at michaelfoust.com.

JEANETTE MOFFETT

Show up and dance

This year, I have really been challenging myself to show up for people. Not just visiting them in the hospital or officiating at their wedding, but also when something great is happening in their lives.

Seems like Jesus did a good job at showing up for people at their dinner tables and parties and even a wedding he didn't officiate.

Now, I'm not "Super Pastor" by any means, but when I hear "the voice" (and I don't mean the TV show), saying "I need you to show up," I try not to argue with Him. So, when my friend Nettie called me and said she was dancing at the Del Mar Fair this summer, I scheduled the date into my calendar. Nettie is a 45-year-old woman with a condition called Williams Syndrome, a genetic condition. It results in several challenges, such as cardiovascular disease, facial abnormalities, developmental delays and learning disabilities.

On the flip side, Williams Syndrome folks are highly social people with great verbal abilities. The best part? They have an overly optimistic outlook on life. You can see why everybody could use a friend like Nettie! As a side note to the optimistic part, one time I took a picture of Nettie, she looked at it and said "Oh wow! I'm so beautiful! Maybe you shouldn't show this to anybody; they might get jealous!"

Don't you wish you had a little of whatever *that* is?

So I decided to surprise Nettie and show up for her big dance debut. When the day arrived, I went to the office to finish some work, stopped by the store to pick up some flowers for the dancing girl, and then home to change and meet up with my husband, daughter and two grandkids. Nettie was going to have quite the fan club. As I walked up to the venue at the fair, I spotted Nettie in the

front row waiting with her friends.

I snuck up behind her and called her name, "Nettie!"

I have never been greeted with that much excitement in my life. She literally squeezed me so hard that it took the breath out of me! Pretty soon, Nettie was up on stage dancing her feet off, and then about halfway through her performance, it happened. She turned to the side, with arm outstretched and a big smile—and curled her index finger at me, motioning me up on stage!

"Please, Lord, NO!" I thought. Then came "the voice." So I looked at my husband, said, "You better record this," and up on the stage I went to dance with Nettie. She exploded with joy and all of a sudden I couldn't have cared less what I looked like as I tried to follow the dance moves.

When it was over, I was relieved there were no church people there watching... WRONG! Several church folks ran up to me, arms wide open and saying "Wow, it's so amazing you made the time for Nettie and how awesome that you got up there and danced! Pastor, you are an

incredible example to all of us!"

NOT!!! If they only knew how hard I fought myself to show up. If they only knew how badly I did not want to get up on that stage!

When Jesus showed up on planet Earth for us, it was purely because He loves us. The reason Jesus was not driven by a calendar or the expectations of the religious leaders or worried about what people would think of Him is because LOVE trumped all of that stuff.

I am a driven person, I don't like failing and I love excellence, but what I have discovered is that many times I need to just show up for people to remind me that love trumps everything.

Who is God talking to you about? Who is your Nettie? Show up. Love people and start dancing again.

"This is my command: love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends."

— John 15: 12-13



Jeanette Moffett, is co-founder and co-lead pastor at The Church at Rancho Bernardo.

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JOANNE BROKAW

Gauging my Internet IQ

It is with some sadness (and a little embarrassment) that I report to you, dear readers, that based on a quiz I recently took on Facebook, I have learned that I am not a genius.

I know what you're thinking. I'm clearly intelligent. And those quizzes are designed to collect information for telemarketers, so obviously they can't be taken seriously. But lately it's been uncanny the way that every Facebook quiz I take seems to reveal some truth about myself. Yes, I am disorganized. I do love dogs! Wow, how did they know I live in New York?

I understand the skepticism so, just as an experiment, I started taking the same quizzes over and over but purposely giving answers that were untrue. My favorite food? Tofu. I'd much rather go skydiving than read a book. I love country music!

And guess what happened? I got the same results, regardless of how I answered the questions. It can only mean one thing. The Internet really does know me. Scary, isn't it?

So when I took the quiz to see if I was Mensa material, I went into it with total focus. I think I'm pretty smart, but I wanted the validation. The quiz was from an article on the *Washington Times* website, so surely it was a legitimate IQ test, versus the quizzes I usually take to see which "Peanuts" character I'm most like. (I'm Sally, spunky and pragmatic. Obviously.)

I got off to a great start with the first question: "Which of the following makes the best comparison? Coffee is to cup as letter is to." My choices were writer, address, stamp or envelope. The answer, of course, was envelope. Look at how smart I am!

Question two: "If six people can read 12 books in six hours, how many books can three of these people read in nine

hours?"

Um, there's math on this test?

OK, this had to be a trick question. Clearly these people are fast readers, which is their first mistake; how can you enjoy a book if you're rushing through it? But if they devour two books an hour, then in nine hours, they'd each read 18 books. So 18 times 3 equals 57. But 57 wasn't one of the answers.

Wait, I forgot to factor in the amount of time spent refilling the snack bowl, divided by the minutes spent trying to read while the cat rolls around on the book, multiplied by the frequency of a dog barking at the mailman for 11 minutes straight. The answer is 27.

Nope. It's nine. Nine? How is nine the right answer?

I spent the next half hour trying to figure out how the answer could possibly be nine and all I got was a pile of scrap paper and a headache. I was about to give up, but I figured that the entire test couldn't be that difficult. I'm smart, right?

Question three: "Joey has a baseball card collection. All but five are signed. All but five are rookie cards. All but five are at least 10 years old. What is the minimum number of cards in Joey's collection?"

You've got to be kidding me. Another math problem? You know what the answer should be? Joey needs to stop worrying about baseball cards and find a job.

By now my head was pounding so I just clicked the first answer I saw— six cards—and guess what? It was the right



answer! I'd clearly found my problem with this quiz: I'd been thinking too much.

For the next series of questions, I just started clicking the first answer I saw, sometimes without even reading the question. And wouldn't you know I got them all right? Every single one.

At that point I was halfway through the quiz, and I realized that I didn't even need to finish. Facebook already told me I was a genius, when I aced the "Can you name these teen idols from the 1970s" quiz.

And just this moment—honest, just as I was writing this—I think I've figured out why the answer to question two is nine books. I might be slow, but I'm not stupid.



Award-winning freelance writer Joanne Brokaw spends her days dreaming of things she'd like to do but probably never will—like swimming with dolphins, cleaning

the attic and someday overcoming the trauma of elementary school picture day. She lives with two dogs, a cat, six chickens and one very patient husband. Learn more at www.joannebrokaw.com.

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