

# VISUABLES

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## **B.U.S.Y.**

By John S. McCranie IV January 11, 2015

I don't know who penned the fable below but with my schedule lately I feel convicted by its message. I need time away to realign my soul. Time for family and quietness. Time for solitude with my Savior, time for prayer and meditation. Here's how the story goes. . .

Satan called a worldwide convention of demons. In his opening address he said, "We can't keep Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from forming an intimate relationship with their Savior. Once they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken."

*"So let them go to their churches; let them praise their God, but steal their time, so they don't have time to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do..." said the devil. "Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital Holy Spirit connection throughout their day!" "How do we do this?" his demons shouted.*

*"Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow. Persuade the wives to go to work for long hours and the husbands to work 6-7 days each week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their empty lifestyles. Be sure to keep them from spending time with their children, though. As their families fragment, soon, their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work!"*

*"Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear the still, small voice of the Enemy. Entice them to play the radio whenever they drive or chat incessantly on their cell phones and see to it that they stay connected to our internet. It is proving a most powerful weapon to weaken the faithful. Be sure that they play non-Christian music on their devices. This will jam their minds and break that union with The Enemy. Fill the coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, mail order catalogs, sweepstakes, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services and false hopes."*

*"Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. . . have them return from their trips and vacations exhausted. Keep them too busy to go out in nature and reflect on God's creation. If they insist on going to the woods make sure they are busy hunting or fishing and be sure to always have plenty of alcohol. That Keep them busy, busy, busy! They'll have no energy for prayer, their greatest weapon!"*

*"It will work! It will work!" chanted the demon horde. It was quite a plan! The demons went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get more busy and more rushed, going here and there--having little time for their God or their families. Having no time to tell others about the power of Jesus to change lives.*

Let me leave you with a question: Has the devil been successful at his scheme? Answer honestly! Perhaps "busy" means: B eing U nder S atan's Y oke

Blessings,  
John

# A Praying Church

by John McCranie January 25, 2015

I've been thinking lately that P - R - A - Y can stand for P-ersonally R-evealing A-ffections for Y-ahweh. Because it seems that my personal prayer life is spending more and more time expressing to God how very much in love with Him I am. My prayers used to focus mostly on the "I need You to..." and "they need You to..." Now, they begin and end with how I adore the One who adores me most. This practice has led to a novel discovery.

Want to know what I hear is often missing from prayers I hear? Before I reveal what it is, I would like to share that if someone had proposed this essential element in prayer years ago I don't think I would have noticed. I would have allowed it to ricochet off my mind or taken it for granted. I am confessing that I did not realize how essential this was in my prayer life.

It is love. What makes for a great prayer life is a great love for the God to whom we are praying. Yes, loving other people causes us to pray to God on their behalf. And, the benefits to the one prayed for is obvious as well as the stress it reduces from our own concerned souls. But, when you close your eyes and tell your heavenly Father how deeply you love Him and how much He means to you, that, in my estimation, is when prayer ultimately engages. What I am referring to is when we go beyond the mentality that we are approaching the most powerful person in the universe to ask Him some favors. This is more than medical prayers, more than "I'm sorry" prayers. Those certainly have their place but the Lord's heart is moved when one of His children first lets Him know He is loved. Don't you prefer that someone tell you they love you more than seek you out for what you can do for them? Which brings to mind church prayers.

In my recollection, most of the public prayers I have heard in worship settings are an expression of gratitude for what the Lord has done on our behalf and an intercession on the behalf of others. It is scriptural and correct for us to do so. But rarely will I hear a brother open his heart and then open his mouth and simply declare how dear the Lord is to us. Churches that offer these kinds of prayers see things happen – big things . . . church-changing things . . . people-changing things. These congregations learn the difference between a church that prays and a church devoted to prayer. The following is from a church's web page I stumbled upon.

"A church that prays fits prayer in whereas a church that is devoted to prayer gives prayer a priority. A church that prays does so when there are problems; a church that is devoted to prayer prays when there are opportunities. A church that prays announces a special time of prayer and a few in the church show up but in a church devoted to prayer sees the entire body show up when a special time for praying is scheduled. A church that prays asks God to bless what it is doing whereas a church devoted to prayer asks God to enable it to do what God has already blessed it with. A church that prays is frustrated by financial shortfalls and then backs down from projects; a church that is devoted to prayer answers its financial challenges with fasting and faith. A church that prays grows tired, weary and stressed out but a church devoted to prayer mounts up on wings like eagles, runs and grows not weary, walks and grows not faint. A church that prays sees its members as its parish whereas a church that is devoted to prayer sees the world as perishing."

Father in heaven, what makes a church great? It's not big budgets and big facilities but large hearts in love with You. It's not about soft seats and beautiful decor, but about courageous, visionary members grasping the magnificence of Christ. It's not about programs, personalities or plaudits – it's about prayer. It's about having enough faith to acknowledge You alone are able to build Your church and change people's disposition. It's about You, Father, and how intensely we as your children love You. In Christ. Amen.

Blessings,  
John

## Grace in the Face of Rejection

by John McCranie February 3, 2015

How is it that our children show such powerful grace in the face of rejection? With Christ living out His life through theirs, that's how. From whom have they learned that? I would say most learned it from their Christian mothers. Our precious sons and daughters shine as little lights in the dark halls of their schools. They are made fun of and taunted. Schoolmates from secular homes tease them and point out how different they are. Nonetheless they walk as Christ walked in a world that rejects godliness. Dale Galloway tells a story in "Dream a New Dream" that beautifully illustrates this point.

Little Chad was a shy, quiet young fella. One day he came home and told his mother, he'd like to make a valentine for everyone in his class. Her heart sank. She thought, "I wish he wouldn't do that!" because she had watched the children when they walked home from school. Her Chad was always behind them. They laughed and hung onto each other and talked to each other. But Chad was never included. Nevertheless, she decided she would go along with her son. So she purchased the paper and glue and crayons. For three whole weeks, night after night, Chad painstakingly made thirty-five valentines.

Valentine's Day dawned, and Chad was beside himself with excitement! He carefully stacked them up, put them in a bag, and bolted out the door. His mom decided to bake him his favorite cookies and serve them up warm and nice with a glass of milk when he came home from school. She just knew he would be disappointed -- maybe that would ease the pain a little. It hurt her to think that he wouldn't get many valentines -- maybe none at all.

That afternoon she had the cooling cookies and cold milk on the table. When she heard the children outside, she looked out the window. Sure enough here they came, laughing and having the best time. And, as always, there was Chad following behind, alone. But he was walking a little faster than usual. She fully expected him to burst into tears as soon as he got inside. His arms were empty of valentines, she noticed, and when the door opened she choked back the tears.

"Mommy has some warm cookies and milk for you."

But he hardly heard her words. He just marched right on by, his face aglow, and all he could say was: "Not a one -- not a one." Her heart sank. And then he added, "Mom, I didn't forget a one, not a single one!"

*Father God, what beautiful things happen when You control a servant's mind. You remind us that life's greatest joy is to bring You honor by giving Your love away. Although our kids are ostracized, they don't have to feel abandoned. Thank You Lord for using mothers to fill up the emptiness the world scoops out of our children's hearts. Continue to bless our moms as they empower our kids to have grace in the face of rejection. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.*

Blessings,  
John

# Dire Straits' Song

by John S. McCranie IV February 23, 2015

According to a Greek legend, two famous captains sailed their ships safely past the island where the Sirens sang. The Sirens sat on the rocky shore and sang with such sweetness that they lured mariners, irresistibly, to their doom. Odysseus sailed past the rocks and survived by stopping up his sailor's ears with wax so they would not be able to hear the alluring songs of the tempters. Because Odysseus wanted to hear the songs himself, he had his men tie him to the mast of the ship with instructions not to release him regardless of his screams until they passed the dangerous stretch of water.

The other captain was Jason. He and his Argonauts had been warned that in order to pass through these dire straits they would require the sweetest musician of that time, Orpheus. As Jason's ship passed the Island of the Sirens, he noticed his sailors making efforts to steer the ship toward the taunting, deadly singers on the shore. Yet, the Argo was saved. How? Orpheus stood on the upper deck, picked up his lyre and played more beautifully than that of the Sirens, thus drowning out their alluring but deadly song. One man taunting temptation at the risk of his crew. Another overcoming temptation by listening to that which saves. Stories in which temptation failed.

Isn't it remarkable how rarely we read of someone who has defied enticement? When was the last time you saw a character in a movie overcome temptation? Saying, "no" seems to be a no-no in Hollywood. For the narcissistic, the impulse justifies the consequence. To the hedonist, rationalization excuses every action. Even as their lives cycle into ruin they cry out that no one has the right to restrict them. They resent being reminded that not every thing that feels good is actually good.

Now let's move our attention to the Kingdom of Christ. Statistics show that more churchgoers are succumbing to temptation and fewer see a need to repent. Perhaps you ask, "How is that possible?" The answers would take longer than this article can cover so I'll share, in my view, the top two reasons. One is the "I'm only human" scenario. This is where Holy Spirit conviction is capitulated by pop culture "I can't really be blamed for what I did since I'm not perfect like Jesus Christ." script. In this philosophy, freewill and personal accountability are swept under the rug by the mind set that one cannot be condemned for giving into sin. God takes issue with this "only human" slogan because it's absolutely untrue. In addition to being human we are also made in God's image and partake in His divine nature. Besides, if this philosophy is true then why did Jesus sacrifice himself on the cross? If we can't really be held responsible for giving into sin, then why did Jesus go through the terrible episode of being crucified in the first place? Jesus died to save sinners who admit it not excuse it.

Speaking of excuses, the second major reason Christians sin so much today is grace. Yes, I actually meant that. Let me explain. For decades, pulpits have trumpeted the wonderful attributes of God's grace and have trumped God's call for repentance. The result is a false security. The error goes like this, "Since God loves me so much that Jesus died for my sins and since I have His grace in my life then if I decide to sin, God will automatically forgive it." Or worse yet there is a church mentality where the weak member gives in to temptation banking that grace will cover it later when confessed. One gets to have their carnal pleasure and keep in God's favor with the added bonus feature of heaven one day! Wow, it can't get better than that, right? There is a theological term for this, "antinomianism." The antinomian supposes that, due to grace, one is released from obligation to keep God's commandments. Apostle Paul clearly refutes this in Romans 6:1-2, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

Today's sirens call out to Christian fellowships beckoning them to crash on the rocks of easy believism and cheap grace. All the while their pulpits deny the danger of spiritual dire straits and pump up their passengers with rhetoric of how God loves them just as they are and cares little if they are obedient or not. Where's the motive to be righteous? Ironically it is understanding the true price of grace. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" 1 Peter 2:24.

*Lord God, please drown out the siren call from our culture tempting us to not worry about sin because we are imperfect humans and can't be faulted for moral lapses. Drown out the feel good messages from preachers telling us that its okay if we have sinned since we are saved no matter what. Lean our ears to hear Jesus' song to deny self and be like him in every way. We need your help to die to sin, Father. We need your Spirit to live righteously. Steer us through our dire straits. In Jesus' blessed name. Amen.*

Blessings,  
John

# Aroma

by John S. McCranie IV August 31, 2015

It was the day after. Simon was tired. He didn't get much sleep the night before. He had tossed and turned and couldn't get those words out of his head. Besides, the house still reeked of that woman's perfume. The pungent odor of alabaster invaded his nostrils the same way the Teacher's words invaded his thinking.

It was all so embarrassing. This rabbi from Galilee accepted his invitation to dinner, which somewhat surprised Simon because he had heard that the Galilean had made disparaging remarks about Pharisees. All the same, He couldn't be accused of spurning them socially. The meal was going nicely when that woman took advantage of the custom of allowing a needy person to have some leftovers. Simon knew this woman and was well aware of her sinful reputation and felt offended that she had even entered his house. Watching her weep uncontrollably when she stood behind the reclining rabbi didn't soften this heart. She certainly had plenty of reasons to cry.

Why was this woman attracted to the Nazarene? What motivated her to come? What was it about Him that made sinners feel so drawn to him? Simon didn't feel comfortable around sinners. He reasoned that, since the Rabbi was such a holy man that sinners would have felt uncomfortable in His presence, like dirt on white linen. How was it that this Jesus makes sinners feel so comfortable?

What surprised Simon was how after getting the Teacher's feet wet with her falling tears, she actually knelt down and wiped His feet with her hair. What audacity! She even kissed His feet! Simon thought to himself that under no circumstances would he ever have allowed this impropriety. How could He allow such unchaste affection? He was beginning to have some serious doubts about this wonder worker's holiness.

But it was the parable of the moneylender that truly disturbed Simon. He felt exposed by its admonition. His ecclesiastical garb was stripped away by the Galilean's statement, "*Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.*" Simon, a Pharisee, a reader of Scripture, a faithful attender of worship services has been told he has a stony heart. The Rabbi had confronted Simon's lack of forgiveness. To top it all He said these things in front of his guests at his own banquet.

Although the temperature outside was low, Simon has all his doors and windows open. He wants the smell gone. He wants the aroma of remembrance to dissipate. Ironically as he shivers from the cold, his heart grows even colder than it was before his encounter with the Son of Man.

(To read the background of this week's Visuable read Luke 7:36-50.)

Blessings,  
John

# Cleanup

by John S. McCranie IV

Why do so many churches place an importance on doing service projects? In today's culture there is something truly effective in getting members to do something for others out of Christian charity. The early church built a reputation as being selfless and generous. It was the reverse of the "What's in it for me?" mentality. Our projects demonstrate we are interested in helping people. It proves we aren't narcissists. It opens opportunities to explain why we are being helpful. Namely, because Jesus has helped us so much!

This brings to mind that years ago my family directed a youth ministry in an "Adopt a Beach" service project in Ventura. Our group scoured the beach between Seaward Ave. and Marina Park for litter. Armed with buckets, bags and trash pickers we removed anything that wasn't natural to the environment. Most of what we picked up was just trash but some of the things we picked up were offensive and others were too gross to mention. All I can say is a lot more goes on at the beach than building sand castles!

When we arrived at Marina Park, the Park Patrol Ranger was very impressed with the amount that we gathered. All of us felt really good afterwards. There is such fulfillment in doing a big project that benefits others. Jesus was right on the mark when he said, "It is better to give than receive" (Acts 20:35).

The beaches of our souls need cleaning on a regular basis also, so that our litter doesn't build up and our divine beauty isn't spoiled. 1 John 1:7-9 states "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." When we don't confess our sins in prayer, the shoreline of our soul becomes cluttered with ugly and grotesque litter. When we repentantly ask God to forgive our violations, it is Jesus Himself who picks up our trash. He and the Spirit become our "soul patrol."

When we worked the beach that day, there were some who followed the group from behind and were able to pick up the things that the others had missed. I'm sure the main bunch thought they had gotten everything but the others in the back made the cleanup more thorough. James 5:16 tells us "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." His instruction is clear - - by confessing to others they pick up on things we might have missed if we just confessed privately. When you tell a person, who can hold a confidence, the shortcomings and mistakes you have made they can help you see the things you couldn't on your own.

*God, thank you for adopting us! It's hard to express how grateful we are for You using faithful brothers and sisters to make our souls cleaner. We love walking on the beach, in the light! Keep us spotless in Christ. In His name. Amen.*

Blessings,  
John

# Diamond Heroes

by John S. McCranie IV

In the sixth inning of the 2008 Conference Softball Championship game between Western Oregon University and Central Washington University, Sarah Jakalski, a senior at Western Oregon, hit a home run with runners on first and second base and two outs. Sarah had never hit a home run in her life - not in junior high, senior high, or in her college career.

In her excitement, when she rounded first base, she failed to touch the bag. As she headed toward second base, her first base coach yelled for her to come back. When she immediately pivoted to go back, her cleats caught in the dirt and she fell to the ground in excruciating pain with a completely torn ACL. She literally crawled on her hands and knees back to first. Her coach asked the umpire what would happen if she substituted a runner for Sarah and was told that her home run would be recorded as a two run single and the runners would have to go back to second and third base. Her teammates asked if they could carry her and they were told that if any of them touched her it would be an out and the inning would be over.

Mallory Holtman, a girl from the opposing Central Washington team, who had hit more home runs than anyone in conference history, went to the umpire and asked if there was anything in the rules that would prevent players from the opposing team carrying Sarah. He said no. Three girls from the Central Washington team picked up Sarah Jakalski and carried her around the bases, lowering her uninjured foot to touch each base. Central Washington lost the championship by a score of 4-2. Fewer than a hundred people watched that game, but it was recorded in the annals of great moments in sports history.

So my question is, "Who was the hero?" To whom did the victory go? It was a victory for nobility of character. Despite all the claims of the humanists the most impressive things we humans do are implanted in each of us, by our heavenly Father. We are indeed created in the image of God. The diamond heroes mentioned above demonstrated a selflessness witnessed all too seldom. Self-interest controls almost all our actions. We constantly succumb to our driving appetite for praise and respect. That's why when those softball players lifted up their opponent it lifted the hearts of those in the stands that day.

Creationists assert correctly that the greatest and highest qualities people possess spring forth from God's attributes. Romans 1:16 states, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made..." When others see Christians acting selflessly and nobly they reflect their Father. The God, "In whom we move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Lord, help Your children suppress the passion and appetites of their selfish nature and fully demonstrate Your divine nature within them. May others take note and be drawn to You through their actions and reactions. Help us lift up the wounded so that they may victory in Jesus. In His name. Amen

Blessings,  
John

# Firestorm

by John S. McCranie IV

In the Fall of 2003 my son, John who was sixteen at the time, and I walked along County Line Beach at sunset. County Line is right on the border of L.A and Ventura Counties. The wildfires in the surrounding mountains created a huge black ominous cloud that spread over the coastline. The sun was deep red and orange light danced across the crest of the waves. John asked me a solemn question at that hour and we had a sober conversation as we strolled barefoot along the water's edge. I later asked him to compose a couple paragraphs and any Visuable from that moment that came to his mind. Here are his thoughts.

“Pop, do you think that dark cloud is what the sky will look like during the Apocalypse?” That was the question my father heard from me. This question surprised my dad for a second or two. He immediately showed me the verse in 2 Peter 3:10 as we walked down the beach (I'm going to make you look it up!). It was a befitting verse for this conversation. The sun was red outside and the dirty haze covered the valley.

Is your life like a valley covered in haze? If so, think of God as a refreshing wind that is ready to clear the 'sinning smoke' from your life. The fire of Satan's lounge may burn through life's thicket, but the wind will bring rain if you let down your barrier. The end is inevitable, but for an unpolluted Christian so is heaven.”

My son's Visuable still haunts my mind. Sin is indeed a fire that is never satisfied. Fire never says, “Enough!” so declares Agur in **Proverbs 30:16**. A big fire goes where it wants and consumes all in its path. When it's hot, dry and windy no one tells a fire “Go out!” So is it in the spiritual landscape of our culture – dry, hot and windy. America no longer seeks holy water and well springs from God's Word. We have turned up the heat on sexuality and carnality. The columnists and commentators broadcast hot blasts that titillate their listeners but weaken our moral framework. Satan is the ultimate arsonist and he stands ready with matches in hand.

During all the wildfires it becomes obvious that as advanced as mankind is in craft and chemical he cannot put these fires out. Raging nature is but annoyed by firefighting and emergency crews. They can deftly deter a threatening edge of a fire but are impotent at putting the whole thing out. Only two things cause a firestorm to die: lack of fuel and rain. As my son poetically said, fire from Satan's lounge will burn through life's thicket and only rain from heaven can put that fire out.

Many people disregard the Lord when things are going as they want them to but their rugged individualism pales in the face of disaster. Perhaps these wildfires will penetrate the tough veneer of folk's hearts. Sadly, once the rains come and rebuilding takes place they often end up dismissing Heaven as before. But occasionally after a calamity, a family's independence is replaced by humility and they search out Christ in faith and dedicate themselves to pleasing Him by doing things His way. Then not only is their land replenished but their soul is restored.

Father, there are houses gone and lives lost. Comfort the distressed and grieving. Protect those who are in harm's way battling the menacing edges of these devastating fires. In the spirit realm, Lord, there are homes destroyed and souls lost. Many have flirted with Satan's fire and have reaped sin's firestorm. Send us rain to douse this destroyer. Bring to those with contrite hearts invisible rain to cool the burning and wash away their wounds. The Apocalypse draws nearer, even so Lord, come! Amen.

Blessings,  
John

# Ice Cream Grace

by John S. McCranie IV

I really enjoy ice cream. In fact, I find it sad to head to bed if I haven't had a couple scoops sometime after dinner. I can't recall ever turning down an invite to an ice cream social. One of my new favorite flavors is a homemade recipe that Brother Andy makes at the Dearborn Church made from Red Hots. It's a wonderful thing! It's also a beautiful thing to see young and old alike working over a dish of the stuff when gathered on a hot summer day. Speaking of young and old and this dairy delight check out this mother's story. . .

"Last week I took my children to a restaurant. My six-year-old son had asked if he could say the prayer. As we bowed our heads he said, 'God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank You more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all, amen.'

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, 'That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice-cream . . . Why, I never.'

Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, 'Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?' As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table. He winked at my son and said, 'I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer.' 'Really?' my son asked. 'Cross my heart.' Then in a theatrical whisper he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), 'Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.'

Naturally, I bought my kids ice cream at the end of the meal. My son stared at his ice cream for a moment and then did something I will remember the rest of my life. He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman. With a big smile he told her, 'Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes, and my soul is good already.'"

Let me ask you, did that little boy's ice cream melt that woman's stone-cold heart? Who knows? With the ever increasing hardness of people's hearts these days there is no guarantee that they will open up in response to our love. Most people today have not even opened their hearts to the Savior who died for them. But, I will guarantee that we will never melt any one's heart unless we possess that self-sacrificing kind of spirit that Jesus so wonderfully demonstrated.

Ministers love word studies because we know how important Bible terms are. We are blessed when we dig down into the unique definitions of certain words and phrases. The New Testament Greek word "charis" (pronounced "khar'-ece") translated "grace" is one such word. "Charis" means the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life. To give something to someone undeserving. "Charis" trumps judgmentalism. Negative opinionism alienates and drains, grace draws people closer and empowers. This may be behind the verse in Romans 12:3 "*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment...*" Grace helps us get over ourselves and the harsh things others say about us. Grace teaches us to filter our own words for other's benefit (Col. 4:6).

I have to agree with the older gentleman in the story, ice cream is good for the soul. Why? Because, just like grace, it cools things down and brings about joy. What about you? Do you need a little scoop? Next time you pray before a meal why not ask your Father for a big helping of grace. I'm sure He will be happy to oblige.

Blessings,  
John

# The Outsider

by John S. McCranie IV

He was a loner in the eyes of some. Unfamiliar and unpredictable. He was different. Spoke of strange things. Weird things. Things that no one had heard before. His mom had a bad reputation with some. He tried to talk about his relationship with his father. Few of the teachers listened or seem to care. He belonged to a gang that was considered dangerous that roamed the towns, causing local authorities trouble. He was homeless. He confronted people and called them out when they didn't admit they were wrong. He hung out with losers. Rich kids hated him. Some said Satan was in him. He called the teachers names to their faces. He got violent occasionally. He was expelled from worship a couple times. He talked about his own death calmly. He promised to come back from the dead. One of his own gang got him arrested. He defended himself in court. He lost. The state executed him. It was a horrible death. On the third day, he kept his promise.

A youth worker named Dave Tippet wrote the above edited prose. This haunting yet insightful poem reinforces the truth that in His day Christ was very much an outsider. 700 years before the Word became human, a prophet wrote another amazing poem, *"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53:2-6). Even Father God made Jesus an outsider.

I used to scrutinize and screen people I didn't recognize when they came into the assemblies I had attended. I would size them up to see if they were a threat. I'd watch them very carefully to see if they were wolves in sheep's clothing. Why? Because they were outsiders and I was a Pharisee. That was in a church where doctrinal and moral perfection would harden members' hearts and where imperfection was shunned . . . even in sincere followers of Christ who made mistakes and regretted it.

That was before the grace of God flushed that spiritual toxicity from my soul. That was before it dawned on me that Jesus and Paul were persecuted by hardliners thumping their Bibles. That was before being lovingly confronted by godly and mature members that I had become a doctrinal and moral watchdog. That was before I was reminded that when I first attended a church I was an outsider.

Now I understand Titus 3:3-7. Now when I see someone I don't know I see an opportunity. I see a chance to assist someone in their quest for salvation and belonging. My mission now is to be all things to all people that I might save some. Now I want to love people into the kingdom and help them belong.

Blessings,  
John

# Sleeper

by John S. McCranie IV

Years ago a farmer owned land along the eastern seaboard. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the coast. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops. As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals.

Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. "Are you a good farmhand?" the farmer asked him. "Well, I can sleep when the wind blows," answered the little man. Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him. The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work.

Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!" The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows."

Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down. Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew.

*"And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, 'Save us, Lord; we are perishing.' And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?' Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?'"* (Matthew 8:23-27). Christ was a storm sleeper. He was secure and had nothing to fear. He knew His time had not yet come. But, His disciples didn't know that and their faith was being whittled away by wind and waves. Not all their faith was gone. It was He they called to and it was they who believed He could do something about their dire circumstance.

Jesus answered their cry – He saved them. He saved them from drowning. He saved them from having "little faith." He saved them from living lives precariously teetering on the surface and showed them the blessing of going deeper in their trust of God. In the boat, on that day, the followers' fear was juxtaposed with Christ's contentment.

Tonight, I will be bringing a message called "Contentment in an Irritating World." I have found one of the toughest things in my faith walk is to actually feel as though things are good. . . no matter the circumstance. Our culture thrives on being discontent. Jesus slept when the wind swept. We have proof in the Word of God that we can rest assured that Jesus stills the storms or can still us and let the storm rage.

Blessings,

# Inventory

by John S. McCranie IV

As each year comes to a close, I feel prompted to take inventory of the past twelve months. This inventory reveals that in 2016 there are things many things for which to thank the Father. I am thankful He blessed me with such an amazing wife. Becca is truly the most beautiful Christian woman I have ever known. I'm thankful for our two sons that love God. I'm grateful to work with a congregation of such wonderful people that are in love with Jesus and care for one another. I especially appreciate our leadership team and staff. This has become such a rewarding ministry!

Inventories also uncover shortcomings painful to admit. Past experience proves that failure to address these deficiencies results in restricting God's blessings in my life. I am paying the consequences of being physically inactive. I used to walk in the mornings and take hikes in the hills but this year I have become sedentary. Now, I have sleep apnea and am constantly fatigued, fight hypertension and headaches and having difficulty with concentration, memory and other symptoms.

But the thing I am most convicted by in my review is my lack of time alone with God in prayer. I pray with others and pray for meals but find it a challenge to enter my "prayer closet" and open my soul to the Lord. I feel the conduit between me and the Holy Spirit is constricted reducing what He wants to do in my life. Do you know what I mean? Do you also struggle to get on your knees?

It's at this time I look for inspiration. One such source is John Baillie's A Diary of Private Prayer a thirty-day journal of morning and evening prayers. Below is an especially relevant entry on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> day.

*"Holy God, to whose service we long ago dedicated our souls and lives, we grieve and lament before You that we are still so prone to sin and so little inclined to obedience:*

*So much attached to the pleasures of sense, so negligent of things spiritual:*

*So prompt to gratify my body, so slow to nourish my soul:*

*So greedy for present delight, so indifferent to lasting blessedness:*

*So fond of idleness, so indisposed for labour:*

*So soon at play, so late at prayer:*

*So brisk in the service of self, so slack in the service of others:*

*So eager to get, so reluctant to give:*

*So lofty in my profession, so low in my practice:*

*So full of good intentions, so backward to fulfil them:*

*So severe with my neighbours, so indulgent with myself:*

*So eager to find fault, so resentful at being found fault with:*

*So little able for great tasks, so discontented with small ones;*

*So weak in adversity, so swollen and self-satisfied in prosperity:*

*So helpless apart from Thee, and yet so little willing to be bound to Thee.*

*O merciful heart of God, grant me yet again Thy forgiveness. Hear my sorrowful tale and in Thy great mercy blot it out from the book of Thy remembrance. Give me faith so to lay hold of Thine own holiness and so to rejoice in the righteousness of Christ my Saviour that, resting on His merits rather than on my own, I may more and more become conformed to His likeness, my will becoming one with His in obedience to Thine. All this I ask for His holy name's sake. Amen."*

You are invited to worship at the Dearborn Church of Christ that meets at the Missouri River Christian Camp at 91 Big Pine Lane, Dearborn. A meal is provided following the service.

Blessings,  
John

# Christmas is About Family

by John S. McCranie IV

Have you ever watched the movie How the Grinch Stole Christmas? I like best the classic cartoon from 1966. It brilliantly portrays the lead character who was stunned to discover that although he burgled all things Christmas the people of Whoville still sing at its arrival. It dawns on the Grinch that Christmas can't be stolen. Why? It's not about presents and decorations.

Christmas is about family. Look at the great distances we travel to be with family on Christmas Day. Those serving our country overseas are making arrangements for transport back home for the holiday. Those serving God in foreign missions are readying to get to airports and airplanes in order to come home. Watch for SUVs crammed with food and gifts as they jam down the freeway to mom and dad's place. Think about the great dinners that families will enjoy wearing their new outfits received that morning. Pictures and videos shared that day place family members center stage.

Christmas is about spiritual family also. This season is an especially beautiful time for fellowship. I openly admit I would rather be with my family in Christ than the biological side of my family during the holidays. Christmas . . . is a time of love, generosity and charity. It's a time to cease our crazy schedules, silencing the noise of our culture. It's a time to listen. Listen to each other and ask God to listen to us as we pray for one another.

But mostly the idea of Christmas is about one family. Our heavenly Father sent His only Son away from the splendor of heaven to enter this dark world as one of us. We don't know what it was like the day He left glory and became flesh. Did He spend time alone with the Father and Holy Spirit before leaving? Did the adoring and worshiping angels weep as He withdrew? Did He tremble as He departed the shining brilliance of heaven for the darkness of Mary's womb?

Why did the Savior come to earth? It's about love. Loving us in spite of our behavior. Redeeming us when we love Him enough to surrender ourselves to Him. He disrobed the attributes of deity to put on humanity. He was stripped of His clothes and nailed to a cross. Why? Because that's what you do for family.

Father, thank You for Christ and His amazing incarnation. We see beyond the materialism and the selfishness. We pause all things and ponder at Jesus' selflessness. Thank You for the joy you brought to the world. Lord, make our hearts grow three times bigger as we invite others to attend next Sunday morning and celebrate that we are Your family! In the name of Your Son. Amen.

Please join the Dearborn Church of Christ this Sunday morning at 11:00. It's located at 91 Big Pine Lane, Dearborn. A potluck lunch will be provided.

Blessings,  
John