

# Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

July, 2007

## Listening to the Holy Spirit

Is there a time that we should step out and move into uncharted areas for us? God's Spirit is always working and convicts us in ways we'd not imagine. Such was the case for Brian and Stephanie Smith of Avon, Indiana.

Brian said he and Stephanie had been feeling discontented about their lives. They felt most of their efforts were going into things that would perish one day. They had been feeling for a while that God might want something more from them. In the fall of 2005 the family was in a car accident on a two lane bridge in Florida. The collision, caused when another driver coming in the opposite direction drifted into their lane, could have been fatal. By God's grace all were fine. They had a renewed gratitude for the life God had given them, and more than ever they wanted to live it for God's glory.

Out of that experience came a much louder voice. God seemed to be telling them to stop and pay attention. He seemed to have something he needed them to hear. The Smiths decided to get quiet and see what God might be trying to tell them. For three months they did only what was necessary, eliminating all other distractions and commitments.

After about 2 months of this they attended the Winter Family Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky. There they heard a seminar by Leon Sexton, who operates Legacy Institute, a Sabbatarian Christian school in Thailand. Brian said, "I felt discontented about what I was doing in life. I was pouring my life into work and a little bit into church. But I wanted to invest in something that has

eternal value. Everything I do at work will one day be burned up. Stephanie and I each wanted to do something that has meaning.

When Leon Sexton came to the Winter Weekend in Lexington in December, 2005, he gave a presentation there. This seemed like just the opportunity that



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I was looking for. We prayed about it, measured it against our family mission statement, life goals, and values. Volunteering in Thailand matched up with what we wanted out of life, so we made the commitment. Then all the doors opened up including funding. We put our house up for sale, and it sold in one day in a time of declining housing value. Everything just clicked.”

Stephanie puts it this way: “We felt the Lord was telling us to go. God opened one door after another and it became plain that it was what we were to do. We felt God urging us to do something different. Leon said they’d be glad to have us as teachers at Legacy. We used some of the money from the sale of our home to change what we do with our lives. The prompting and the opportunity lined up together.”

The local congregation that the Smiths were then attending (COG Cincinnati, whose pastor is Jim O’Brien) also helped cover their expenses. God had not only stirred up the Smiths, but also provided the financing to do the job.

Brian and Stephanie and their two young sons had a life-changing year. They feel they have grown more in that one year than they had in the previous ten.

At Legacy Institute in Thailand Brian taught “Life, Times, and Teachings of Christ,” “Principles of Leadership,” “Computer Applications,” “Choir,” and “Music Theory.” The Bible class Brian taught had only one student officially enrolled, but was of such interest to students that ten others sat in on the class regularly.

Stephanie taught “Health and Hygiene,” “Public Speaking,” and “Community English.” She also home schooled her two sons, Noah (age five) and Isaak (age three).

The Smiths also took a side trip to India where they visited with Sabbatarian minister Michael Hubert and observed his work. Brian holds Michael in high esteem and describes him as a highly-motivated person who wants to save everyone in India. They also visited with the Gampala family who work in a Buddhist culture in India and seek to spread Christianity. The total experience was such an eye-opener to the Smiths that they will never be the same. What if they hadn’t followed the convictions that the Holy Spirit was giving them?

The Smiths experienced strong relationships while in Asia and now see how lacking that is to people in the west. Stephanie especially described the students at Legacy Institute who had become a part of her life, and how she mourns the separation from them. Brian and Stephanie had “withdrawal symptoms” from that meaningful basis of their lives after returning to the States. They see people in the West as being too distracted from relationships and things that are eternal. They sought and received help from a couple who assist missionaries returning from foreign lands to readjust.

God may be stirring you up to step into new areas, away from your comfort zone, as He did the Smiths. If God is convicting you, then listen to him. He not only provides the conviction to act, but the means to carry it out. What is it you feel stirred up to do? Do you feel a desire to impact your community and so let the light of Christ shine through you? Who needs caring? Do you ever get the urge to phone a friend—perhaps someone you haven’t thought of in a long time? It could be he needs that call and the Holy Spirit is “turning you on” to make that call.

If you ask God to let you be more than

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you are now, God will answer that prayer. And when God is behind you he will work in you, and you won't be a failure. Remember that the river Jordan didn't part until the Israelites first set their feet in it. You'll need to take that first step. But not everyone is called to do foreign work. God may be convicting you to volunteer in a soup kitchen in your home town, or counsel people who have been abused. The Holy Spirit seeks to make us active Christians. Don't just quench those convictions.

Prepare to be surprised sometimes by what God leads you to do. We are not all the same, and God knows where we fit even if we don't. God's understanding dwarfs ours.

An extensive article about the Smiths' year in Thailand and India, which includes an interview with them, was published in the May 31, 2007 issue of "The Journal, News of the Churches of God." You can visit the Smiths' website at <http://www.kardias.com>.

*Brian and Stephanie shared stories of their "Asian Adventures" at a Days of Unleavened Bread weekend gathering in Springfield, Missouri, this past April. The photos accompanying this article were taken at that weekend.* 



# The King is Coming!

Americans rejected monarchy in favor of a democratic government centuries ago. They were tired of being taxed with no benefit to them. They were tired of favoritism in court decisions. They wanted freedom to follow their consciences; freedom to work and improve their economic status; freedom to speak their mind; and they wanted a say in how they were governed. They wanted protection from abusive governmental laws and officials. They wanted their government to acknowledge their right to put obedience to God ahead of obedience to human authority. They wanted their government officials to fear the judgment of God, with the belief that even if they were not held accountable in this life, God would hold them accountable on Judgment Day.

To announce to a freedom-loving people that the King is coming does not seem to be good news. Yet to Christians, the cry “The King is coming!” is Good News. They reply, “Even so, Come Lord Jesus.”

Christians love freedom, too. So, why do we want this king to rule over us?

***Our King is humble.*** He is not too proud to labor alongside us. He does not ask anything from us that he is not willing to do himself. He walked among us and took our punishment for our wrongdoing upon himself. (Mat 12:28-30; Php 2:5-11; Isa 53:5-6)

***Our King is just.*** Those who refuse to turn away from a lawless way of life will face judgment. No crime will go unpunished. The punishment will fit the crime. Yet, those who wish to become law-abiding can turn for mercy to the one who paid the penalty in their place.

(Heb 10:26-31; Rev 16:5-7; 20:11-15; Mal 3:5-7)

***Our King extends mercy*** to those who confess their wrongdoing and turn from it. He expects all in his kingdom to extend the same kind of mercy he does. (Mat 5:7; Act 2:38-41; I Joh 1:8-10; Mat 18:21-35)

***Our King is righteous.*** His laws are good for everybody. Only the outlaw need fear them. His laws and instructions teach us to treat one another with respect and generosity. He does not rule harshly or according to his own whim. His discipline is always for our benefit. (Psa 119:137-138; Pro 1:7; Heb 12:5-11)

***Our King is generous.*** He gives us gifts we haven’t earned, and he rewards our productive labor. He provides all of our genuine needs and longings. He owns everything and is not after any wealth we might add to his. (Rom 5:15-17; II Pet 1:3-11; Rev 22:12)

***Our King listens to us.*** He comes to us wanting to talk things over and hear our side of a matter. He is easy to be entreated and eager to please us. He’s not interested in “political correctness” or flattery. He wants our real thoughts and emotions. (Mat 6:5-15; Heb 4:14-16; Rev 3:19-22; Joh 9:31)

***Our King is immortal.*** He won’t ever leave us. Even good human rulers die, and the good they do stops with their deaths. But our Eternal King is establishing a kingdom that will never end. This kingdom will have none of the evils we face in this present world. (Joh 14:18; Heb 13:5-6; Rev 21:1-5; Col 1:12-14)




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**Our King is God.** God has all the best attributes in full with nothing lacking: love, wisdom, power, and all that is good. (I Joh 4:16; Col 1:15-20)

We can rejoice that our King Jesus is returning—this time as Lord of lords and King of kings. We say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev 22:20)

*Lift up your heads, O you gates;  
Be lifted up, you ancient doors,*

*That the King of glory may come in.  
Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,  
The LORD mighty in battle.  
Lift up your heads, O you gates;  
That the King of glory may come in.  
Who is he, this King of glory?  
The LORD Almighty--  
He is the King of glory.  
(Psa 24:7-10) *

## I CEM

*This year I was able to attend CEM's Third Annual Memorial Day Weekend Family Retreat. I was really looking forward to it since I attended the first one in 2005, and it had been a real highlight for me that year. Not being able to go in 2006 (due to family health problems) was a big disappointment, but this year more than made up for it. The whole weekend reinforced why I  CEM.*



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### 1. A friendly welcoming environment:

Though I grew up in the Church of God movement, I have not been as involved in fellowship groups and events in my adult years. My husband is not from a Church of God background. But in 2003 he suggested we go to the Feast of Tabernacles with my parents. So

the Destin, Florida, Feast was my first experience with CEM. I was immediately struck back then with how welcoming and positive the whole eight days was. It meant a lot to me that my husband and children felt comfortable there and had a great time with all of the activities.

CEM does a wonderful job putting a positive face on the Sabbatarian COG movement to the world. And this year at the Memorial Day Weekend was no different. As you can read in the weekend summary article in this issue of *Faith Networks* by my mom, Pam Dewey, Michael Deering brought several members of his Star Wars fan club as guests to the weekend. They not only participated in Michael's Star Wars skit for his seminar, but they also attended the Pentecost service, the barbecue, and the family dance. And they all seemed to have a great time.







## 2. The chance to meet new friends and see old ones:

Back in 2003 at the CEM Feast, I had the chance to see many people that I had not seen in 20 or more years—many my age and my parents' age. This was such a thrill! It was like a happy family reunion. This year at the Memorial Day Weekend, I had the opportunity to see Bronson and Myra James, both of whom I had not seen since I was a teenager in the 1980s. I was good friends back then with their daughter Sharon, so it was great to see them after all this time.

But I also met many new people that I had heard about from my parents or have only emailed and not met face

to face. Again I was struck with how everyone was so friendly and positive, even though we all have our struggles. Many had traveled long distances to be together.

## 3. The chance to participate in exciting/fulfilling ways:

At the Memorial Day Weekend my daughter Katie and I helped out with the Bible Times Bazaar. Seeing an activity like the Bazaar made me very happy for the children who were participating. As a child attending the Worldwide Church of God back in the 1970s, I can only recall one Feast where there were any kind of activities for the children at all. And it consisted of relay races and schoolyard-type games in the auditorium or parking lot. I appreciated it back then, but it had been like an afterthought rather than an integral part of the actual Feast of Tabernacles.

When Mom and I and others planned the Bazaar, we specifically wanted the children to have such a good time that it would help them look forward to God's Holy Days. It was so fantastic to see the



ideas come to life. This was because of all the teamwork involved. Hearing the inspirational background music, seeing all the colorful “booths” and activities set up in the hall, and milling around with the smiling, costumed “characters” made me feel as if I was in a Disney theme park!

My son Jonathan, a big Star Wars fan, was thrilled when he got the unexpected chance to be a last-minute replacement Yoda for Michael Deering’s Star Wars skit. (An added plus for Jonathan was going home the night before with Michael to his home in nearby Paducah, Kentucky, to practice the skit and see Michael’s vast Star Wars memorabilia collection.)

And I had the opportunity to give my first seminar, built on an analogy with the MASH TV show. I talked about how we as believers need to be like “spiritual MASH units” reaching out with the love of Jesus to heal the hurting people in the world. I dressed up

in nurse scrubs and a play stethoscope, and brought a “patient” teddy bear complete with band-aids. I talked about lessons I learned from my all-time favorite show, MASH, and how they can be applied to Christians.

Then I personally handed out rainbow-colored Band-Aids to each member of the audience to remind them to be sure to stay cheerful and find ways to have fun while in the midst of helping hurting people (like the real-life doctor made famous in the Robin Williams movie, *Patch Adams*.)

I had been quite nervous when I



started to talk, but the topic was so dear to me that I really wanted to pour out my heart to the audience. I shared how, even though there have been disappointments and breakups in the Churches of God, I was inspired by the perseverance, faith, and love exemplified by my parents and others for so many years.


I felt such warmth, acceptance, and encouragement coming back

from the audience as they listened and responded to my efforts, it reminded me of the day I was baptized 21 years ago, surrounded by people laying hands on me and praying for me.

To quote Bob Hope, “Thanks for the memories.” Thank you, Ron and Allie Dart,

Larry Watkins, and Skip

Martin for providing a place for all this to happen. Thank you everyone who participated at this CEM event and all the others. You have been a light in the darkness and a lifeline for my parents for many years, and now for me. I am so grateful.

And that is why I ♥ CEM. 



## Locus of Control Part 2:

### The Congregation

Last month I covered the need for the *individual* to have internal controls. But what about a congregation? Where is the control center for a group committed to serving God?

In a letter to the congregation in Ephesus, John quotes Jesus Christ as saying, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: (Rev 2:2) Every church encounters the wolves in sheep’s clothing—people who say they’re Christians but have malicious motives. The church at Ephesus was no exception. The members responded as they should. They stood their ground against them.

But that wasn’t all Jesus had to say: “... and thou hast tried *them* which say *they* are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars...” The text reads in the plural, so there must have been more than one person, and maybe they acted as a group to claim apostolic succession to control the congregation. The members saw them as liars and rejected these presumptuous men. Notice that Jesus supports the right of the congregation to resist these would-be apostles.

This says a lot about how God views a congregation. There was no external political body responsible for the congregation at Ephesus. Nor is there evidence in the New Testament that one should exist. Jesus held the members at Ephesus responsible for themselves. The locus of control, for congregations as well as individuals, was internal.

In fact, each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is judged individually. Fault for their sins is not placed on

someone outside the group. Nor does someone else receive the praise for their character.

Some think that the major job of a Christian is loyalty to a denomination. They teach obedience to a man or a political organization. If something wrong happens, God will judge the leader. But if there was an external political group responsible for the congregation at Ephesus, why did God chastise the group?

Furthermore, each congregation was so different from the others that it is clear no central organization could have had control. God held each group responsible for what happened within the group.

When a person learns to trust the power of the Holy Spirit in his own life, he begins to trust how it works with other people. He stops his attempt to *control* others. He recognizes the authority of the Holy Spirit. Once, when Jesus encountered some chief priests and scribes, those with the most political power, they asked him, “By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?” (Mar 11:28) They trusted the external control of political power.

So Jesus said to them, “I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me.” (Mar 11:29-30) It’s a good question. Did John need permission from the Pharisees to obey God?



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There was a time the Church at Corinth faced a problem with a member involved in a catastrophic sin. It became a problem for the congregation because everybody was aware of what the man was doing. Paul wrote, "...a little leaven leavens the whole lump." (1 Cor 5:6) Righteousness is a pillar of the congregation, and this behavior threatened the foundation.

So he wrote to the congregation demanding that they do something. Notice Paul did not do it for them. He didn't take over. He expected the members to take action. It's wrong to be passive in this type of situation. People of ethics should be aggressive to protect the congregation.

Paul addresses the group as a unique body to discipline itself. "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat." (verses 9-11 NIV)

Members should judge matters within the congregation and, as much as possible, peaceably coexist with people outside the congregation. "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?" (verse 12)

But what process does Paul suggest they use? Does he send someone from Jerusalem to straighten them out? Or did Paul leave his work and fix the problem for them? Not at all. Paul gives instruction that respects the integrity of the congregation and supports the

purpose of life. "Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?" (1 Cor 6:2) Christians should judge congregational matters now so they can judge the world in the future. If someone external to the congregation makes those judgments for them, God's purpose is undermined.

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? (1 Cor 6:3-5 KJV)

*When a person learns to trust the power of the Holy Spirit in his own life, he begins to trust how it works with other people.*

In the opinion of the Apostle Paul it is a shame for the congregation not to make judgments for itself. Paul is not mincing words. If judgments must be made for the congregation, something is wrong with it. And that outside judge may actually be circumventing the purpose of God.

Does this mean the congregation is without structure? That there is no enforceable standard of righteousness? That everyone does what he wants to do? No! It means that the location of judgment is placed where God intended. Jesus instructed Christians to go to a brother and "show him his fault between the two of you." (Mat 18:15 NIV) Keep the disagreement private. If that doesn't work, take someone with you. Broaden

the circle a little. If there is still no resolution, then take it to the “ekklesia,” the congregation. And God enforces the decisions of the group. “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (verse 18)

***A man who desires to exercise dominion over others is fit only to make slaves of them.***

There is absolutely nothing to suggest Jesus was instructing members to seek adjudication outside the congregation.

Is it really that important? Well, let’s look at the founding of America. Of all the acts that led to the Revolutionary War, one stood out as particularly evil. It was the Stamp Act requiring the colonists to pay a tax on every piece of printed paper. One of the most famous phrases of American history was born from this experience: Taxation Without Representation. In a passionate address to the British Parliament William Pitt (the Elder), himself a member of Parliament, spoke in eloquent appeal for Parliament to repeal the tax.


“The kingdom had no right to levy a tax on the colonies. The commons in America represented in their several assemblies have invariably exercised the constitutional right of giving and granting their own money. They would have been *slaves* if they had not. At the same time this kingdom has ever possessed the power of legislative

and commercial control. The colonies acknowledge your authority in all things with the sole exception that *you shall not take their money out of their pockets without their consent*. We are told America is obstinate. America is almost in open rebellion. Sir, I rejoice that America has resisted. **Three millions of people so dead to all the feelings of liberty as voluntarily to submit to be slaves would have been fit instruments to make slaves of all the rest.”**

Those who internalize the righteousness of Jesus Christ will become judges in the Kingdom of God. Can a man who voluntarily submits to the dominion of other men teach others to be free?

There was a time when the disciples argued over which of them would eventually rule over more people. “But Jesus called them unto him, and said, ‘Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:’” (Mat 20:25-27 KJV)

The words of Jesus and Pitt the Elder mesh well. A man who desires to exercise dominion over others is fit only to make slaves of them. The job of the congregation is to set men free. Jesus said, “...a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.” (Joh 8:36 NIV)

Let us teach men how to live forever! 

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**There’s only one corner  
of the universe you can be certain of improving,  
and that’s your own self.**

—Aldous Huxley

## Times of Refreshing: CEM Pentecost Weekend Family Retreat Paris Landing, TN



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Most Church of God groups that sponsor a Feast of Tabernacles site go all out to make sure it is a memorable experience for everyone. There are often classes for children and teens, a fun show, and a wide variety of social and recreational activities for all ages planned. Unfortunately, in most regions of the country, the other Feasts and Holy Days don't get nearly that amount of attention. The sum total of the "celebration" of one of these may consist of one more church service indistinguishable from the 52 weekly Sabbath services during the year—except for an extra piece or two of special music thrown in; and a potluck pretty much like all other potlucks of the year.

Those of us involved in planning and organizing this year's CEM Family Retreat over Pentecost weekend at Paris Landing in Tennessee hoped to pioneer a new paradigm for celebration. We'd like to share the recipe we came up with, in hopes it will encourage others across the country to begin planning to add more life and rejoicing to their own Holy Day and Feast observances! We don't expect

any group to attempt to imitate everything that was done at

Paris Landing, but we hope seeing what we accomplished will spark some ideas for you that will fit the circumstances in your own group. A photo spread in the center of this *Faith Networks* edition shows a number of the items described below. For even more pictures from the whole weekend, visit the photo album on the web at <http://youall.com/cempentpics2007>.

The weekend began with an open house on Friday evening. CEM provided the sub sandwiches and drinks, and young and old alike came to see old friends and make new ones. At 9 AM the next morning, the series of a dozen seminars that would be held over the weekend began. Presenters ranged from young adults to senior citizens, both men and women. The goal was to have seminars that would edify, inspire, and encourage those in the audiences. Many were designed to send listeners home from the weekend eager and equipped to actually make changes in their lives and



become more active in evangelism and/or service to others. There were topics to meet every taste. Michael Deering brought several members of his local Star Wars fan club, who performed in costume for a short skit that punctuated Michael's seminar about using the Star Wars movies as a jumping-off point for discussing biblical principles with young people. Other seminars also used examples from movies, TV, and books to emphasize points, from *Fiddler on the Roof* ("Wouldn't now be a good time for the Messiah to come?") and *M.A.S.H.* ("Spiritual MASH Units"), to *Lord of the Rings* ("Fantasy Literature and the Christian Faith"). Still others covered topics such as Global Evangelism, Christian family development, overcoming bondage to bad habits, Christian activism, the age of the pre-flood Patriarchs, and the challenges facing modern youth.

YEA classes were held on Sabbath and Sunday mornings for youth from 3-19. They featured special full-color CEM YEA Pentecost workbooks that emphasized the significance of this Feast. And age-appropriate learning activities brought to life Christian living principles.

Sabbath services were held in the afternoon, featuring guest speaker

Bronson James, along with lots of congregational singing and special music.



Saturday evening featured the famous CEM Pie and Ice Cream (and this year, Cake) Social. Lisa Laughton from Ohio created a number of items of original artwork for the weekend, and the Social featured one of them: Spread out on several banquet tables were panels to a large mural depicting, in black and white outline, the scene from Acts 2 where the disciples received the Holy Spirit. Crayons were provided on each table, and all were invited to color in the scene. It was amazing to see how popular this activity was for everyone, not just the kids! Grade school children, teenagers, and adults of all ages worked side by





side all evening to make the mural come to life, to get it ready for its big debut the next day at the planned Bible Times Bazaar.

More seminars and YEA classes on Sunday were followed by a Pentecost worship service, which included more singing and special music, and a sermon by Ron Dart. Attendance throughout the weekend was well over 150, with a peak of 200 at the Pentecost service itself.

And then came the Big Event many of the children in attendance had been anticipating, the Bazaar. Over twenty teens, young adults, and adults were on the staff that manned the Bazaar, many of them in Bible Times costumes. Numerous "Booths" (actually tables draped in colorful plastic table cloths) featured activities, crafts, and more. First came the souvenir booth, where kids could decorate their own souvenir visor and goody bag. Then there was Miriam's Tambourine Studio where they could make their own tambourine, and booths where they could create mosaics, a Roman Chariot figurine complete with a pair of horses, sand art, and Noah's Rainbow magnets. There were activities that appealed to adults too. At Martha's Kitchen Show they could watch Martha prepare a delicious middle-eastern hummus recipe, and sample the results

on pita chips. At Baruch the Scribe's computer booth anyone of any age could get their picture on a souvenir edition cover of the fictional *Sinai Shofar News*, with a caption explaining they were an eyewitness to the activities at the foot of Mt. Sinai around Pentecost time about 3450 years ago. Both the hummus and the newspapers were a big hit with all ages! And another popular activity for everyone was stopping by to chat with Omar the Tentmaker, who would share wild stories of finding the Dead Sea Scrolls out in the desert one day, and who would give you one of those very scrolls to keep!

Another booth provided coloring pages designed by Lisa Laughton depicting aspects of Pentecost, along with a variety of Pentecost-themed puzzles and activity pages created by Sharon Richardson (Omar's alter-ego). Visitors could gather the pages, add the pre-made cover, and "bind" it all together with brass brads. This was a very popular activity with adults, many saying they were putting together booklets to take back home to share with grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and other young friends.

Lisa Laughton also created for the Bazaar an impressive Goliath for the Bring Down Goliath activity. Kids





could take a turn at trying to bring the cardboard giant down with five smooth ... rubber balls.

A special Teen Scavenger Hunt held at the same time had teams of teens interviewing the Bible Times Characters to see which ones had Bible clues that they needed to complete their quest, which eventually took them throughout the conference center grounds.

Late in the afternoon there were three “colosseum” events that the twelve-and-under crowd could participate in: A discus throw (paper plates), a javelin throw (rubber swimming pool noodles), and a Roman Horseless Chariot relay race, all announced by our resident Roman Soldier sports broadcaster, Horst “Bubba Maximus” Obermeit. We were very pleased that so many adults, some of them with no children of their own, stayed to watch these events and cheer the contestants along. The kids obviously thrived on all the love and attention that they got from so many adults and teens all afternoon long.

Winding up the afternoon were lessons by Myra James in doing the Israeli folk dance “The Hora” to the familiar tune of Hava Nagila. An enthusiastic dance troupe of all ages tackled this with enthusiasm.



Immediately on the heels of the Bazaar came the barbecue and then an evening Family Dance. The dance got off to a wild start with the whole Star Wars group—Chewbacca, Yoda, The Emperor, Anakin Skywalker, and Obi-wan Kenobi - in costume dancing to “Star Wars Disco”! The best Kodak Moment of the weekend was probably the picture of a fascinated toddler facing down Yoda eye to eye on the dance floor. And the evening truly was a *Family* Dance, with every age group out on the floor most of the time dancing to a wide variety of musical styles.

Monday morning there was one more session of seminars, followed by a stimulating Brainstorming Session led by Jim O’Brien. The questions brainstormed were: “What do we want people to know about us?” and “What are things we can do to support our church and neighborhood community and help them grow?” As ideas were offered, they were listed on sheets of poster paper by Lisa Gregor, and posted on the wall. By the end of the session the wall up front was full of many positive suggestions. You can see a listing of those on the Internet at <http://youall.com/brainstormnotes>.

An inspiring farewell message from Ron Dart ended the weekend. As families got ready to head home, I asked many people of all ages how

their weekend had been. Every one used terms like “fantastic,” “awesome,” and “great” to express their response to the inspirational and fun-filled gathering. **FN**

**You can find complete plans for holding a Bible Times Bazaar at <http://www.youall.com/bazaar> . Included are detailed descriptions of how to run each booth, lists of all the supplies you need, printout pages of posters, signs, coloring pages, stickers, and much more.**

**Many more ideas for enlivening all the Feasts and Holy Days are provided on Pam's Times of Refreshing website at <http://www.youall.com/refresh>.**

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enterprise to write of virtue because men such as David are counted among the virtuous.

God sees not as men see, for God looks on the heart, and I am confident in the case of Schindler and in the case of David, God saw things that you and I would fail to see.

I am struck how the gospels portray Jesus as a man who dined with publicans and sinners. He said, “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” (Luk 5:31) Those who seemed to be religious he chided for the hardness of their hearts, for they bound burdens grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, yet would not move them with one of their fingers. Jesus came to “preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives.” (Luk 4:18) It was in Oskar Schindler's heart to heal the brokenhearted and deliver the captives, and his heart was in the right place.

God does not condone philandering and spendthrift ways, nor does he respect a deceptive heart. But there must be more to it when a man such as David

can be honored in spite of a lifetime of dishonorable acts. “But to this man will I look,” says God, “to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembles at my word.” (Isa 66:2)

These thoughts have occurred to me because our nation is not wholly right with God. None are righteous before his presence. Yet for all our foibles God will look on our collective hearts and will judge us in a way we least expect.

William J. Bennett, editor and compiler of the *Book of Virtues*, has said that the mark of a civilized society is in how it treats its weakest

***The mark of a civilized society is in how it treats its weakest members.***

members. That is a way to measure a people's heart. The Pharisees of old could outwardly look righteous, but within them their hearts were hardened to the plight of the orphan and widow. God will judge us by how we treat the poor and despised, the orphan and the widow, the lost and the lonely. He will judge us by how we execute justice and how we treat one another.

God winked at David's mistakes because his heart was in the right place. We find it right to write of virtue, for we cannot judge as God judges. **FN**

# Writing of Virtue

"It is a risky enterprise to have to write of virtue." Thus writes Thomas Keneally in his book *Schindler's List*, made famous by Steven Spielberg's movie of the same name. "He was Oskar Schindler," says the book's cover. "His name is in the Avenue of the Righteous People in Jerusalem. He ran a concentration camp. ... A German-Catholic industrialist who, through daring, cunning and the use of his own great wealth, single-handedly saved more Jews at greater risk than any other person in World War II."

He was a philanderer, a manipulator, and spendthrift. He depleted several personal fortunes and schmoozed his way up the Nazi hierarchy. Yet hundreds of Jews survived due to his efforts, and he openly wept that he could not save more.

It is truly a risky enterprise to write of virtue.

Scripture tells us that King David was a man after God's own heart. Like Schindler, David was a manipulator and a liar. He was a philanderer and (worse than Schindler) a murderer. God himself called him a bloody man and would not permit him to build the temple. Many have puzzled over how such a one could be hailed as great. And God decreed that among David's descendants would arise the Messiah. It is a risky

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