

# Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

May-June, 2008

## Getting God Out Of Our Box

### Part 2

The ballroom was filled with teens and young adults for the Youth Rally in December at the Annual Winter Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky. George Constantine was giving an inspiring message and was about to demonstrate a physical absurdity.

He pulled out a small jewelry box and opened it, and asked a young teen if she could fit inside that tiny box. Of course she shook her head “no,” thinking it some kind of practical joke. He asked me, and it was clear that I surely couldn’t fit my body in it either. The illustration served to make a point: that despite the unfathomable Greatness of God, we can create little boxes into which we think we can fit God and how He operates.

I call it the God-In-The-Box Syndrome.

In last month’s issue, I talked about how people have a proclivity towards shoving God into little boxes of doctrine we devise for Him. Even biblical laws such as circumcision can be perverted by men to limit with whom and how God operates.

Circumcision is just one example of how a biblical requirement became a box that people tried to cram God into. Far more numerous are traditions that become the box churches try to fit God into. There are many, many non-biblical or extra-biblical traditions

that people make into doctrines.

Traditions can be nothing more than personal tastes: the lighting of candles at sundown; television or no television on the Sabbath; not cooking or going out to restaurants, to name a few. Now there’s nothing wrong with those traditions, or traditions in general; but, they become a problem when we make them doctrinal. Oftentimes, people play “Bible Bingo” with their own personal tastes and preferences to create a “scriptural” doctrine all must obey.

Music is one such subject that often finds itself under the auspices of “doctrine.” A battleground of argument for many congregations, some groups make the choice and style of music a doctrinal box. This has, unfortunately, excluded or alienated a large number of youth from involvement in church life. Taste in music is subjective, and I bristle when I hear ministers and church leaders tossing scriptures around to denounce a style of music they do not like.

Now I personally do not care at all for the “rap” style of music—so much of it that exists is plain foul and raunchy. I prefer not to play such rap music at our CEM dances, but



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the popularity of the music style is a mainstay among the youth today. Never did I think such “trash” music could have any redeeming qualities. I was to learn an interesting lesson about another thing I had in my little box, when my personal preference suddenly conflicted with my service in playing music for dance events. At the Winter Weekend Dance, I was given a CD and asked to play a song on track three. When I inquired what kind of song it was, I was told “Jesus Rap!”

“Jesus Rap?” I replied incredulously. The young lady assured me the words were biblical and pleaded with my reluctance to play hard rap music at a church dance. But play it I did, trusting this young lady, and to my utter astonishment, I suddenly had an entire dance floor filled with teens and young adults jumping, clapping, and “rapping” the Psalms!

I’m still no fan of rap music. Personally it’s more noise to me than music. But to see an entire dance floor with the youth jumping and shouting in joy the Psalms to a rap beat—I have to admit that I cannot recall any 80’s disco or Prince tunes that I like inspiring me to sing the Psalms.

Who are we to judge what God finds acceptable? God looks on the heart. Mark 12:41 is the story of the poor widow who gave less than a penny, all she had to God. And Jesus said she gave more than the wealthy with all their thousands did. Is God going to show favoritism to the group dryly singing only simple melodic songs written in the 1800’s versus a crowd of youths dancing and chanting with tears and outstretched arms the Psalms in a “Jesus Rap” song? It’s a sad thing that we mere men decide that God is pleased only by what we put in our box in terms of music He finds acceptable for worship.

We limit God by having an attitude that “God exists only in this particular box.” Music, the protocols of services, what day we start counting for Pentecost, and even the particulars of Sabbaths and Holy Days of God—are not what God is measuring our stature by. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments,” and when we do, we are blessed for doing so.

We understand that and do them, and are blessed. But those keepings are in and of themselves not the full measure of what a Christian is.

James 1:27 tells us that:

“Pure religion in the sight of God our Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

Tie this into the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says:

“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25: 37-42)

I can admit I was wrong because I did not employ that pure aspect of religion outside of the box of the church organization of which I was a member at one time. Pure religion before God is serving others, and unfortunately my former group was of the opinion that such pure religion was only for serving members within the congregation. How wrong we were, and I wonder how much good was left undone for our unwillingness to see and act outside our own box?

*Faith Networks is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Networks by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.*

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God is not limited to our little boxes. I have met people who have been blessed with the Spirit of God, and with understanding, that have never had a connection or history with anyone from a Sabbatarian Church of God background. There are people on fire for the work of God, as much of it as they understand. I marvel at such people, and am disappointed in myself for lacking such fire. I imagine what kind of Christians those people will be when they understand what I do doctrinally, combined with what they are already doing in service for God by serving others. We are no better than someone who might worship on a different day when we do not come in the name of Jesus to comfort the widows, feed the hungry, reach out to soothe the anguished and the imprisoned. All the traditions that we think endear us to God, without reaching out and serving those in need as Jesus instructed, do not fulfill the obligation that is expected of us.

Traditions are good when we use them with a proper focus. We just need to be mindful that God is not limited to what we have stuffed into our little boxes of understanding about Him. We are blessed by doing what we know to do, and we should never hinder or allow those boxes to become stumbling blocks or jail cells for those who are at a different level of understanding or background than we are.

We need to remind ourselves to get God out of our little boxes, and instead get into God's infinitely gigantic box.

Given our understanding of God's Plan of Salvation, we should all be aware that His box is so much greater and larger than we think ourselves. We should not attempt to limit God, trying to keep Him inside our own.

Think outside your box and into God's. 

## Book Review: ***Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*** By Jerry Bridges



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In the Preface to *Respectable Sins*, Jerry Bridges states that the targets of this book are “the subtle sins” of Christian believers. He was motivated by, “a growing conviction [that some] have become so preoccupied with some of the major sins of society around us that we have lost sight of the need to deal with our own more ‘refined’ or subtle sins.”

He begins by reminding the reader that we are accepted by God by his grace, that in Christ all of our sins have been forgiven. We do, however, have a responsibility:

*“There is a fundamental principle of the Christian life that I call the principle of dependent responsibility; that is, we are responsible before God to obey his word, to put to death the sins in our lives, both the so-called acceptable sins and the obviously not acceptable ones. At the same time, we do not have the ability within ourselves to carry out this responsibility. We are in fact totally dependent upon the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, we are both responsible and dependent.”*

I have found myself at various times in my life swinging between complacent drifting through my days, or wallowing in shame and guilt when forced to come face to face with my own wrongdoing. Neither is a healthy place to be spiritually.

*Respectable Sins* is a book that confronts us with the sins we don’t think of as sins, sins that are more obvious to others than to ourselves. These sins can be so entwined in our thinking and habits

that seeing them for the ugly stains they are can feel totally overwhelming. Jerry Bridges manages to present the hope of the gospel, while he gently rebukes us over our ignored sins. He does give an overall strategy for dealing with them in seven points within Chapter Six, “Directions for Dealing with Sins.” The following is an abbreviated version:

1. *Apply the gospel: God has forgiven all my sins and cancelled all my debts and credited to me the perfect righteousness of Christ.*
2. *Depend on the Holy Spirit: Cultivate an attitude of continual dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we put to death our sins.*
3. *Recognize my responsibility: Diligently pursue all practical steps for dealing with sins. Keep both dependence on the Holy Spirit and my responsibility to resist sin in mind.*
4. *Identify specific respectable sins: Ask for help/conviction. Identify triggers.*
5. *Memorize and apply appropriate scriptures: such as, Psalm 119:11 “store up” “lay aside for future use.”*
6. *Cultivate the practice of prayer.*
7. *Involve one or a few other believers with you.*

Some of the sins the author covers in the book are: ungodliness, anxiety,

ingratitude, and pride (which he breaks down into four categories: pride of moral self-righteousness, of correct doctrine, of achievement, and an independent spirit).

Many of us can identify with the pride of correct doctrine. He defines it as “a pride in our particular belief system, whatever that may be, and an attitude that in our beliefs we are spiritually superior to those who hold other beliefs.” This type of pride often goes unrecognized by those of us who commit it. He goes on to qualify by saying,

*“I’m not suggesting that we should not seek to know the truths of Scripture and develop doctrinal convictions about what the Scriptures teach; I am saying that we should hold our convictions in humility, realizing that many godly and*

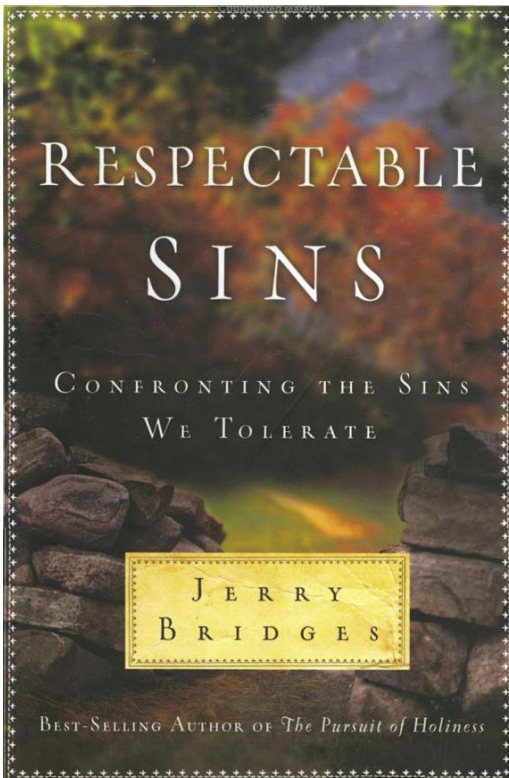
*theologically capable people hold other convictions.”*

As observant as Jerry Bridges is about our “subtle” sins, as he calls them, I didn’t agree with all of his suggestions. For instance, he suggests, “If we want to avoid the subtle sin of pride in the achievements of our children, we might say something like this: “Our son John graduated magna cum laude... We deeply acknowledge that John’s intellectual abilities come from God, and we are profoundly grateful to Him....” He goes on for several sentences in this vein. In my opinion, this generates a different kind of pride which the listener might find amusing rather than humble. But, overall, Jerry Bridges’ treatment of this topic is sound-minded and biblical.

He concludes the book,

*“We have looked in detail at many of the subtle sins we tolerate in our lives. At times, this may have been painful. I hope it has, because that means you have been honest enough and humble enough to admit the presence of some of these sins in your own life.”*

He also reminds the reader that, “if you are united to Christ, God sees you clothed in His perfect righteousness.” [FN](#)



***Respectable Sins:  
Confronting the Sins We Tolerate***

By Jerry Bridges

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## Essentials for Congregational Health - Part 3: Loving Relationships

How close are we to the people in our fellowship? Do we do social things with them? Do we pray for them? Do we pray with them? Do we know what is going on in their lives? Do we know their children and interact with them? Are we like a close and loving extended family?

There are many obstacles to closeness in our society and in our church. We are all busy. We are often scattered. Because of spiritual immaturity it's hard to tolerate differences in others. Sometimes we put less important things (like doctrinal differences, or status) ahead of our relationships.

In addition, science is showing us that all our emphasis on technology and media is gradually reducing our ability to relate to others. For example, the more we stare at a screen the less likely we are to pick up cues from human faces. As a society we are losing the ability to relate, understand, care about, and care for each other.

In their worldwide survey of Christian groups, the Natural Church Development (NCD) people re-confirmed that loving relationships within the congregation promote spiritual health. And that health draws people to the church.

I say "re-confirmed" because that is precisely what Jesus told us: if people see that Christians love each other they will know that they see the love of God in action, and be drawn to it (John 13:35).

That means that the tasks of enlarging the church and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ are the same! If we focus on treating others within our own fellowship as would Jesus Christ, we are also participating in the evangelism efforts of our fellowship.

We could look at the societal trend as gloomy; but, it is also true that as society becomes less loving, Christians who love each other will stand out all the more as lights in the world.

The challenge for us, then, is to maintain or develop genuine loving relationships in our fellowships.

Did you know that more sermons are given about love, than any other topic? It's true. And yet, when analyzed, most of them are filled with generalization and platitudes—exhortation to love, but lacking instruction about how to accomplish the love of God in our lives.

Ministers give us what we want. We don't like to hear that rare sermon showing us *how to love* because, when we come face-to-face with the specifics, it's uncomfortable to realize we are not good at godly love.

A mother came to my counseling practice and told me she loved her son. Yet, her controlling ways were turning him off. When I showed her what she needed to do to communicate love to her son more effectively (i.e., back off and let him make some of his own choices) she became defensive and found reason to drop the therapy.

Another example of the human resistance to change comes out of NCD. A significant number of people have criticized the very specific NCD approach to godly love. They say that love can't be broken down into behaviors. To them the NCD approach seems too mechanical, too structured. Never mind that the behaviors NCD enumerates



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come right out of the writings of Paul. Most of us know them by heart. Paul lists most of them in I Corinthians 13.

People are uncomfortable with specifics because it leaves us no excuses. It is much easier to say that we love someone than it is to be patient with them, allow them to believe differently from us, refrain from gossiping about them, forgive

them, or go to them gently when we have a difference with them.

And yet, there is incredible benefit to anyone who can summon the courage to practice the specifics of love defined in the New Testament. They are a lamp for our feet and a guide for our life—the road to enriching relationships and church growth all in the same bundle. **FN**



## Learn the Eight Qualities of Congregational Health

*G*od is a relational being. He wants a family. That's why he has created us as relational beings — so we will desire to be a part of his family. God has even given us a physical group of people with whom we can share our spirituality — the congregation.

We are told in scripture that the Church is our spiritual mother. All of us, children, teens, and adults, need a healthy congregation to nurture our spiritual growth. Since each congregation is made up of individuals, we can help each other when we know how and endeavor to function together in a spiritually healthy way.

Life Resource Ministries offers an in-depth series of presentations on the **Eight Qualities of Congregational Health**. Each of the eight qualities is covered in four or five 40 minute presentations.

Follow this series through all eight topics and you will learn a lot about what a spiritually healthy congregation looks like and how to contribute to your congregation in a spiritually healthy way.

To order your first presentation go to our website at [www.liferesource.org](http://www.liferesource.org) and order or download the first in the series titled **God's Kind of Love**. We have it available in audio on CD and downloadable mp3, DVD for congregational viewing, and in transcript form for those who prefer to read.



[www.liferesource.org](http://www.liferesource.org)

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# This Storm

3-23-08

Randi Shanta is a teenager recently diagnosed with Crohn's disease, a serious, chronic inflammatory condition of the digestive system. A frequent symptom is intense abdominal pains that can last for hours or days. There is no known drug or surgery cure for Crohn's, only methods of attempting to avoid triggering factors, and lessening the symptoms.

*I stand longing for Your answer,  
In this storm I wait,  
The thunder and the lightning are  
crashing down,*

*Softly You whisper, "Stay."*

*Lord I will,  
In Your grace every day,  
But where do I go from here,  
Where is Your way?*

*My way is right,  
My way is strong,  
My way is here,  
I am never wrong.*

*Father I know,  
You have told me before,  
But what direction do I turn,  
My heart aches as I fall to the floor!*

*Stay child, Stay,  
I will see you through,  
My hand is here,  
Listen and do.*

*Lord I'm listening,  
Where should I go?  
The storm is raging,  
Your direction I don't know.*

*Child did you not hear?  
My way is so clear.  
I said to stay,  
And not to fear!*

*But Father I'm afraid,  
The clouds cover me,  
My heart is weary,  
There's no light I can see.*

*My light is in you,  
Do not fear!  
With Me there is always hope,  
Listen and you will always hear!*

*My way is clear,  
My path is strait,  
Just open your heart,  
And be willing to wait!*

## Author's Statement

I am only 18, and I have a wonderfully blessed life. I have amazing friends and family that bless my life every day. I try and do what is right in the sight of God, and am just a happy teenage girl.

I was working and saving for a college that I've been accepted to, when my days seemed to become too long to bear. I just didn't feel like I could make it through another day of work, and I didn't know why. I was taken to the emergency room where I found no answers and little comfort.

After many, many doctor appointments and awful tests (and it still isn't over) I find myself facing surgery and a disease that I will probably have for life. As most every other person in my position would do, I spent many days asking "Why?" – "Why me, why now, why all the pain?"

Well, as I sat in my room alone one day I cried out to God for an answer. I was demanding an explanation, followed by a plan to my recovery. I felt like I could not take any more if I couldn't see His way out. I cried till there were no more tears, and I prayed through every one of those tears. After I sat quietly for just a little while, I realized what my Father was trying to get me to hear. He was trying to show me that I don't need to know the plan, I just need to trust: "to listen and hear."

I still don't know why all this is happening to me, but I know He has a plan and that He is ALWAYS RIGHT!!

That day after I cried I wrote this poem. God has put a peace in my heart! [FN](#)



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# Solomon's Spiritual Collapse



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King Solomon is known for being the wisest man who ever lived. Yet Solomon, who started well, ended up a disaster in spite of his wisdom. His example can parallel a Christian's life and is a warning to us all. What went wrong?

In 1 Kings 3 we see a very humble and needy Solomon, who has just been made king of Israel. God appears to him, and Solomon asks for wisdom. Note his attitude in verse 7-9:

*"Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"*

God is deeply moved by a humble heart, and he gave Solomon wisdom. Note also that Solomon did not want that wisdom for himself but to help others. We see a different Solomon in his later life.

God is concerned about our latter end. There are habits we need and practices we must follow. What good is it if we are a big wheel now but lose our salvation? The Apostle Paul said it was possible for even him to become a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27). But to help Paul from becoming conceited, God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to trouble him. He may give us one too if we need it. Above all things, God wants us to maintain a humble attitude and rely on him for help.

The king of Israel was not to "acquire great numbers of horses for himself."

He was not to "take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate a large amount of silver and gold." The king was also to write a copy of the law and read it all the days of his life. He was not to consider himself better than his brothers (Deut. 17:14-20). Solomon broke all these rules.

When I was new to Christianity, I learned I should read the Bible every day. The Bible creates a great contrast to other voices coming in from the world around us. If we drift, the Bible corrects us and has a cleansing effect. Jesus said, "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you." (John 15: 3) When we read the Bible directly—not just literature from a church—we are hearing God's voice directly. It's different from any other book. We can ask God to speak to us when we study. It's amazing what can get through to us then! Had Solomon copied and read from God's law every day, he could have been convicted of the ways he was drifting. Do we still read the Bible daily for personal learning and correction? Habits in our Christian life have profound effects on whether we turn astray and fall. We can drift and not know it. Have our motives reverted back to what they were before God entered our lives?

When I was a teenager growing up in the city of San Francisco, I was obsessed with becoming a great one in the field of science. But when God called me, I saw that the desire to be great and applauded by people was really a sick desire. My heart was changed. But it's possible to drift back into the old desires in new

areas and lose humility. This can also happen within a church community. Haven't we seen people striving for office and recognition in their church? To others it may seem obvious and even disgusting. But do they see it? Probably not. Clearly, spiritual drifting has been going on. But is that any different from someone wanting to rise to the top at work, or like my example of once wanting to be recognized as a great scientist?

Solomon continued on for many years with no apparent ill results. He built God's temple in Jerusalem, and God put his presence there. We read of his exploits and wisdom as his life story continues in 1 Kings: 3-10. But something unseen was happening to Solomon.

When we come to 1 Kings 11, we see an older Solomon who turns away from God.

*"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. ... On a hill east of Jerusalem Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods." (verses 4-8)*

Solomon had good worldly reasons for doing what he did. Undoubtedly this idol temple construction must have pleased his wives. It probably also went over well with the nations bordering Israel with whom Solomon wanted to keep peace. Solomon may have resisted this spiritual drift for a long time, but eventually he gave in and filled Jerusalem with pagan

temples. We see a Solomon very different from the early humble person who asked God for wisdom to help the people of Israel. Solomon is a real warning to all of us. Others may see our drift and even bring it to our attention. We can then either deny it, or get the point and correct it.

Do we find ourselves making compromises to avoid trouble rather than standing up for what is right—even if it causes us trouble? An example is telling lies on the phone because your boss tells you to. There may have been a time when we would never have done such a thing, but things are less complicated if we go along with the boss. Just fill in the blanks for what fits your area of drift. After a

while it no longer seems so bad, but

it is the road to spiritual disaster. I wonder if

Solomon knew

he had changed


so much from the

sincere, humble, whole-

hearted servant of God that he

started out as? Have we changed too?

God wants us to have a humble, child-like attitude all our lives. It's not possible to become a self-sufficient Christian. A self-sufficient person is arrogant! We need God desperately and always will. And there is a time to stand up and fight and resist evil regardless of what it does to us. Solomon did not do this. He drifted, compromised, and lost his original humility. In doing so he forsook God who should always be first in our lives.

It's possible for a Christian to lose the ballgame in the ninth inning. Solomon's story is there to warn us. Changes and compromises can slowly affect us. To be truly wise we ought to ask God to show us our personal compromises with sin and the ways in which we are following other gods. 

**Have our motives  
reverted back to what  
they were before God  
entered our lives?**

JOIN CEM FOR THE 2008

# Feast of Tabernacles

Panama City Beach, Florida

## *A Feast for the People, by the People, and Inspired by God*

The popular CEM Feast site will be located on a beautiful white sandy beach where most everyone can stay in the same accommodations. It's conducive to visiting over a cup of coffee at one of many available places, and jam-packed with spiritual and physical food, activities for all ages, and many opportunities to easily make new friends and bond with familiar ones for young and mature alike. The following are just some of the joys you'll experience during the eight-day festival:



Inspirational, uplifting sermons from some of the best speakers anywhere.



Outstanding music to inspire and draw you nearer to your Savior.



Thought-provoking seminars on relevant Christian subjects.



Fun and challenging YEA classes for kids three to 20.



A potpourri of activities: Family Picnic, Pie and Ice Cream Social, dances, beach parties, evening Praise Worship service, Senior's Luncheon, Youth DayWorship service, and a whole lot more.

CEM not only invites you, we want you to come join us. We want to include you and your gifts and talents. Many of our people and most events, including the daily worship service, will be at the Boardwalk.

For reservations and information about the CEM Feast site, go to:  
<http://www.borntowin.net2008tabernacles.aspx?depart=Accommodations>  
or call 1-800-224-4853 and give the CEM group number 3315.

# Feast of Tabernacles, Costa Rica

The Church of God in El Salvador is sponsoring a Feast site on the sea side in beautiful Costa Rica from opening night on October 13 through October 22, 2008. Fellowshiping with new independent church members will make it a very special Feast for everyone. Services will be translated from Spanish to English. We need about 30 people, in addition to our congregation, to achieve the minimum of 100 required for the negotiated price at the resort. We would also deeply appreciate any extra donations possible as a support for our local church in El Salvador. We're looking forward to the opportunity to get to know all of you.

Sincerely,

*Herberth Cisneros & Patty Cisneros*

## The Location

Feast goers will be staying at the all-inclusive, beautiful, Doubletree Hilton Resort. Breathtaking ocean views, located right on the dark volcanic sand beach along Costa Rica's Central Pacific Region, ten miles outside of the port town of Puntarenas.



## Resort Attractions

The resort is convenient to nearby national parks and biological reserves, rainforests, volcanoes and beaches, both populated and hidden away. Enjoy the hotel tennis courts, aerobics/aquaerobics, or exercise room as part of the all-inclusive package. Hotel activities include nightly shows and karaoke nights, as well as a disco, so there is no chance for boredom!

## What's Included

Meeting facility, all meals, drinks, and use of the hotel's non-motorized water gear.

## Costs

- Only \$110 per adult (based on double occupancy)
- Children ages 4-12 only \$45 per night for "all inclusive"
- \$200 non-refundable application fee



## Reservations

You may make your reservations by contacting Herberth Cisneros at [herberth\\_m\\_cisneros@yahoo.es](mailto:herberth_m_cisneros@yahoo.es) or Linda Pratt at [LindaP777@fuse.net](mailto:LindaP777@fuse.net).

**Latest date to make reservations: July 18, 2008.**

## Contacts

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young man: going to college, working part time, teaching tennis to youngsters, assisting with YEA classes at the Feast, helping with the sound and audio at church, and falling in love...with computers! His major was in computer engineering and he delighted in taking apart, building, testing, and programming computers. I never needed to look elsewhere when I ran into trouble...I turned it all over to him. Many others did also. He was constantly working on other's computers by Remote Control, and I marveled at how he was able to manipulate them from right here at home! We had a wonderful relationship in which he managed to maintain his independence and still enjoy the things we did together.

He graduated summa cum laude in May of 2004 and started working with a computer firm that was headed by a man he much admired. In July he decided to give my sister Vicki a birthday present of upgrading the hardware on her computer and installing some new software she wanted. Although we usually went to Nashville together, this was going to

be a quick trip and he went alone. We had spent the previous weekend (the 4<sup>th</sup> of July) with Skip and Dianne Martin in their new home in Jonesboro, AR, and I felt I really needed to be at our home congregation that Sabbath. We talked several times while he was there; he was pleased that everything was going so well and enjoying his visit. On Sunday, the 11<sup>th</sup>, he packed up and headed home. He called and told me he was on the road and looking forward to a steak dinner that night. Later I called to ask him a question and the call went straight to voice mail. Twice more I called with the same results. I KNEW something was wrong. Fifteen minutes later I received a call from a doctor at the Jackson, TN hospital, informing me that Billy had been killed in a head-on collision with an 18-wheeler. My life as I had known it ended with that call.

I will skip over the weeks—no, months—of utter despair I felt. Knowing that I would see him again in God's Kingdom was the only thing that kept me going. I had never known such hurt in my life. I felt that my real reason for living was gone.

Now, as Ron Dart would say, I tell you

all this to bring you to this point: laughter was a large part of what brought me out of that despair. I began to talk to Vicki and others about all the wonderful and funny things that had happened while Billy was alive, stories of his extreme literal-mindedness and his quirkiness (that



he didn't see as quirky at all!). I recalled the trip to Florida when he was much younger and how we had passed a factory when rolling along the highway...it had a sign on the road that said, "Plant Entrance." Almost three minutes passed and he asked, "Mom, why do they need a special entrance for plants?!" I roared. In later years when I told that story, he always said that he couldn't have said anything that dumb...but he did and I've laughed over it so many times.

I told everyone about how we would be in my office at the same time, with our chairs almost back-to-back as we both worked on our computers, and I would suddenly get an Instant Message, asking me what we were having for dinner and when would we eat. He just saw this as 'modern technology' and not at all unusual. Even when he went to bed he had his handheld computer with him and would IM me about some issue or another from his bedroom.


He programmed the ringtones on his cell phone to match the personality of each caller: I was a police siren (!) and

his friend from India was a cow mooing (he jokingly referred to him as cow-boy because of the Hindu belief in the sacredness of cows). Each and every friend and relative had an appropriate ring.



There are so many wonderful and humorous tales about him, ones that cause me to laugh aloud when I think about them. That laughter has helped me push through the pain...not lose it completely, but become able to bear it. It will soon be four years since his death and I still weep over the loss; I miss him terribly. People expect you to get on with your life, to put the past behind you, and maybe that's possible in a small way. But we are not meant to bury our children,

and I honestly don't know if that pain ever really goes away. I try not to make others uncomfortable with my grief, but Vicki is ALWAYS there for me: she listens, she listens, she listens. She is my physical sister, my sister-in-Christ, and my closest friend; I couldn't make it without her. We not only mourn Billy's death together, but we rejoice in his life. We LAUGH about all the memories we have of him. And that laughter was brought me relief...release from the pain.

That's how laughter has helped me. 

## Love, Loss, and Laughter

In 1999 my husband Lloyd died of a massive heart attack, just four months before our son Billy was to graduate from high school. I was 41 and Lloyd was 55 when Billy was born in 1982...the year we learned that Lloyd was forced to take medical retirement from the airlines due to coronary bypass surgery. We lived on our boat for five years and only moved home because it was time for Billy to start school. We had hours to devote to him, unlike the time with the children we had raised in our first marriages, and we traveled extensively and participated in all his extracurricular activities. We rode motorcycles together, swam in



the oceans, baked bread, and joked together all the time. He was the light of our lives! Billy and I were heartbroken over Lloyd's death and my tears flowed as I watched him cross that stage at graduation because Lloyd was not there to see it.

For the next four years I witnessed Billy become a wonderful

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