



REGGIE: You Can't Change Your Past, but You Can Change Your Future

By Reggie Dabbs

Toward the end of my presentations, I always ask for the hands of all the English teachers in the room. Considering the usual spectacle I have just made with the other teachers and administrators, it is a wonder that they dare to raise their hands at all. Fret not, though, because you can always count on students to throw their teachers under the proverbial bus and brazenly point them out like a Las Vegas neon arrow on the Strip.

Why choose English teachers specifically? ...

I am the product of a \$20 sex agreement. Bluntly stated, my mother sold her body to a sexual predator because it was all she knew to do. But don't feel sorry for me because I promise you that I am worth more than \$20!

Some time passed in our home after my foster mom enlightened me about my biological mother's history. After a few years I became curious and inquisitive about what my biological mother looked like. Momma pulled me onto the couch and took out an old, school yearbook. Turning to a page with a bent corner — a telltale sign that she had been

there many times before — she showed me an old classroom picture. The students in the picture were second-graders, little kids all lined up in rows.

Standing beside them was a beautiful woman. "Who's that lady, Reggie?" my mother inquired in the sweet voice that was hers alone.

"That's you, Momma!" I replied. "You're so pretty."

"Thank you, baby, and that's right. That's me as a second-grade teacher." Then she pointed out a little girl in the second row and told me to remember her face. Reaching for another, bigger yearbook, she again turned instantly past pages that had felt her fingers many times over. She stopped on another classroom photograph, 10th-graders this time. A slightly older yet still equally beautiful lady was standing beside the class.

"Momma, that's you again!"
"That's right, baby."

Are you starting to put it all together?

Momma then moved her finger to one of the girls in the class. "And that is your mother. She was one of my students in second

grade, the one I showed you in the other picture. Then she was my student again in my 10th-grade English class. I was your mother's English teacher."

Momma went on to tell me the story. When the little girl was in second grade, my mom told all of her students that if they ever needed anything at all, they should call her. Imagine the young lady's surprise when she walked into her first day of 10th grade and reencountered her beloved childhood elementary teacher. By this time Vera already had her first child, Keith. She and Momma reconnected. And as she had done in second grade, my mom again offered to help Vera with anything she needed.

What that gracious English teacher could not know were the mistakes and abandonment that Vera would face soon after their fateful reconnection: a second pregnancy and her parents splitting town, leaving her with nothing; a deserted high school dropout, she tries to raise three babies in a halfway house; a tragic move to survive leads them to living in a chicken coop; and a \$20 proposal results in another pregnancy.



The pressure was just too much to bear, and Vera simply had nowhere else to turn. One night the phone rang at Mrs. Dabbs' home, and on the other end was a desperate young woman, her former student. My mom and dad came to her rescue.

They moved Vera and her children into their home and took care of the little family for the duration of Vera's pregnancy, literally saving their lives.

When the time came for the little bundle of joy to be born, Vera knew she could not handle another child in her already complicated life. So right there at the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville, she unexpectedly turned to the only person in all her life who had ever cared about her or had ever attempted to show her real love, and she made the greatest request that could ever be made of anyone on the planet. She asked my mom to raise me as her own child. My mom said yes.

When it was all said and done, by the age of 18, Vera would have four children in three years. When I was born, she gave me

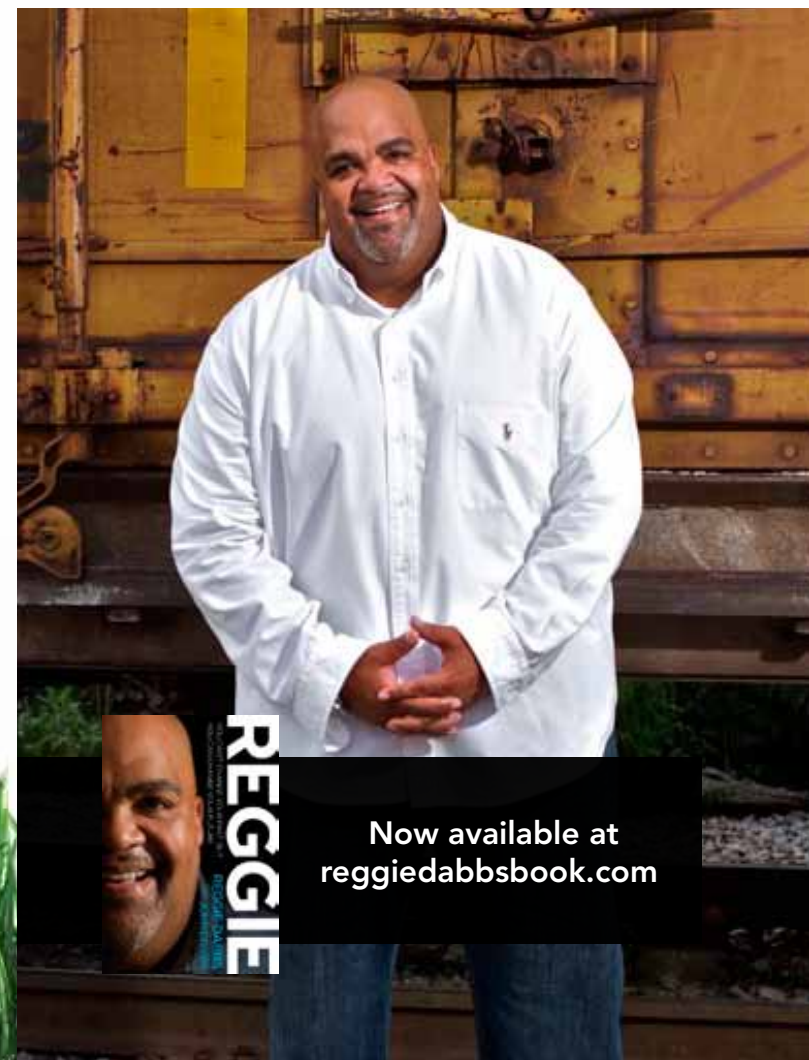
up. I temporarily became a ward of the state — my birth certificate actually says "Property of the State of Tennessee." Mr. and Mrs. Dabbs immediately took the necessary steps to become my foster parents and, eventually, my adoptive parents. In fact, they were the ones who brought me home from the hospital. They became my family.

So that is why I have a soft spot for English teachers. Trust me; it is not because of my grammar! **e**

From REGGIE: You Can't Change Your Past, but You Can Change Your Future by Reggie Dabbs (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2011). Excerpted with permission.

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CONGRATULATIONS

to Reggie Dabbs, member of the North Central University Alumni Class of 1987, on the release of your new book:

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Put God in the Driver's Seat

By George O. Wood

During my first six months at Newport-Mesa, the church emptied out. You could have fired a shotgun in the sanctuary on Sunday morning and not hit anybody. Even the church finances began drying up. I had been faithful to build on the strengths God had given me, but I was a total failure.

That's when I came face to face with this principle of godly leadership. It's not enough to build on your own strengths, because they're not enough to build God's kingdom.

God-powered finances

By mid-summer we were getting disconnect notices from the utility company. I had to take a check in person to the utilities office one day to keep the church's electricity from being cut off. We were that tight. I hadn't said a word to the congregation about our financial straits. For one thing, I didn't want to admit I was already a failure as a pastor. And I was trying to tough it out as if my last name were Mueller — except I didn't have George Mueller's faith.

As a pastor, I've always found it difficult to talk about money, but I decided to bring the problem to the board. I asked the seven deacons to begin meeting me every Saturday at 6 a.m. for breakfast at a restaurant where we could have a private table. We would do three

things: eat breakfast, pray, and decide what bills to pay during the upcoming week.

For 17 years, our board met on Saturday morning, and even though we eventually moved the start time to 7 a.m., we were always done by 9 o'clock. I thought that was great. If you have evening board meetings, husbands and wives — we had men and women on the board — begin to resent their spouses being absent. Second, people who have worked all day can be a bit tired and crabby at night. On Saturday morning, though, their kids and spouse are still sleeping, they get out of the house, and they're home a little after 9. Everybody's happy, and you get good service out of your team.

By the third Saturday in August 1971, we were in really bad shape, and deciding which bills to pay was especially difficult. While we were discussing the bills, though, one of the deacons pointed out, "You know, Pastor, since you've been here, we have not met a single missions commitment." He was right. I'd been pastor of the church for eight months. Our missionary commitments were \$257 per month, but we had not met a single monthly commitment.

We can't pay our bills; how can we pay the missionaries? I thought. *We're supporting no one with more than \$10 per month, and*

some of them with just \$5. They're not going to miss it anyway.

The deacon persisted. "I think we ought to take whatever comes in tomorrow's offering and pay at least two months' missionary commitments before we pay any bills."

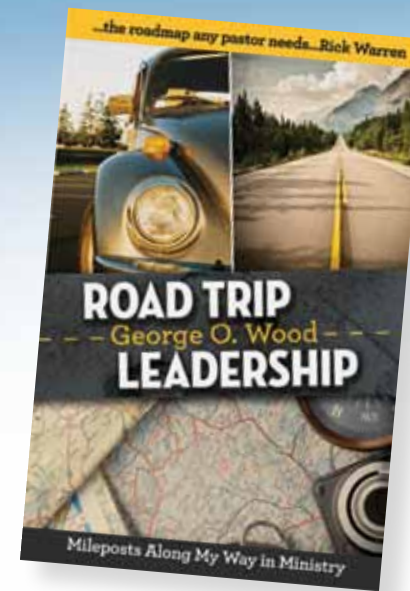
That's \$514! I thought to myself. *We never see an offering like that.* But they all, being deacons (whom I discovered many times had more faith than I), thought it was a great idea. So they agreed, and we prayed.

When we finished praying, the deacon who'd made the motion looked at me and said, "Now, Pastor, you understand the bills we won't pay also include your salary."

That was when Jewel and I were selling stuff out of the house just to make ends meet. But I said to them that, while I had not realized the motion also included not paying me, it was OK. If that's what they felt we should do, I would go along.

So Sunday morning arrived, and we had our usual handful of people. I said nothing to the congregation about what the board had decided. I didn't make a special appeal, didn't talk about the prayer we'd prayed, or mention anything about money. The ushers took the morning offering and then another on Sunday night.

I've never allowed money to be



counted while the service is going on because I've found that those who miss the service to count money grow spiritually dry over time. It's important that they be in the service and be nourished by the worship and proclamation of God's Word. So we didn't count the money until after the Sunday night service. (As our church grew, we took this practice a step further and kept the offering in a safe and counted it on Monday morning.)

The two deacons who counted the money that night came to me, looking very happy. "Pastor," they said, "guess what the offering was today."

I had no idea. I don't remember the exact amount now, but more than \$1,350 had been given. I was astounded. Not only was our overall giving trending downward, the third Sunday in August is supposed to be one of the lowest Sundays in the year for most churches. It certainly had been for our church — I went back and looked at the records, just to be sure! People are on vacation — and they take their tithes with them. But here we were with a record-breaking offering.

The next morning, as usual, I was in my office, but my thoughts

weren't "usual." I said to the Lord, "Whatever the lesson is, help me to learn it from this offering."

Another impression hit. I felt the Lord say quietly, to my heart, *George, I'm not interested in building this church on your personality; I'm interested in building it on Mine. Put Me and My cause, My kingdom, front and center, and I'll take care of you.*

The first part — "I'm not interested in building this church on your personality" — was a direct rebuke. I had been 29 when I became pastor of that church and felt I had a great pedigree for ministry. I was a missionary kid, an evangelist's kid, a pastor's kid. I had "seen it all" while growing up in church. I had a bachelor's degree, a master of divinity degree, even a doctorate in pastoral theology. I was as well trained and prepared as you could get, and I thought I was just the answer to that church's problems. I was super confident that I would come in and turn things around overnight. Instead, they went south.

What the Lord allowed me to understand in that desert time was that I wouldn't be the one to turn it around. While it may be true that a leader should build on his or her own strengths, personal strengths are not enough. Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain. **e**

From Road Trip Leadership by George O. Wood (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 2011). Excerpted with permission.

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Pastor Challenges Christians to *Act Normal*



An Assemblies of God pastor in Texas recently challenged his congregation to revolutionize their lives by making one change: acting normal.

There's a catch, explains Scott Wilson, senior pastor of The Oaks Fellowship in Red Oak, Texas. Normal behavior for Christians, as described in Scripture, is supposed to be noticeably different from the rest of the world.

"Our expectation is skewed of what normal Christianity should look like," Wilson says. "The Bible says the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in us. If that's true, what is normal?"

Wilson says the answer is found in John 14:12: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (NIV).

"Jesus said our lives should look like His," Wilson says. "That means compassion is normal. Sharing our faith is normal. Hearing from God on a daily basis is normal. Praying for miracles

is normal. And going through struggles is normal as well."

That was the inspiration behind Wilson's recently published book, *Act Normal: Moving Compassion From Niche to Norm* (Springfield, Mo.: Influence Resources, 2010), a study of the Book of Acts designed for use by individuals, congregations and small groups.

"As you read through the Book of Acts, it shows you what normal is supposed to look like for the people of God," Wilson says. "It helps Christians assess their lives in comparison to how Jesus and the apostles lived."

Wilson is guiding his own congregation through the study and challenging them to make the principles of compassion, giving and servanthood a normal part of their lives. He says the response is beginning to impact the Dallas-area community.

In the first few weeks of the challenge, congregants organized a mentoring program, a blood drive and an outreach for victims of human trafficking. Others signed on as volunteers of existing community programs, such as Meals on Wheels.

The *Act Normal* study includes a 50/50 challenge that encourages participants to volunteer 50 hours or spend \$50 to bless someone each year. One member of Wilson's congregation delivered \$50 in candy and gifts to Denny and Debby Seler, AG missionaries to Jamaica.

"Little did we ever realize that God had this little Seler family in mind when the pastor introduced the challenge," Debby Seler says. "In the realm of life, such a little thing, but monumental for us at this time."

Wilson says he started rethinking his idea of normal after reading about Jesus washing His disciples' feet, a job normally reserved for servants in Bible times. Wilson says Christ redefined normal when He performed this lowly task and commanded His followers to do the same for one another.

"People in our culture have been taught that life is all about getting ahead and getting things for themselves," Wilson says. "But that's not biblical truth."

Wilson says he has heard from numerous pastors who are inter-



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ested in challenging their congregations to act normal.

"Dedication to a life of compassion for others should be the norm for Christians," says Lee McFarland, senior pastor of Radiant Church, an Assemblies of God congregation in Surprise, Ariz. "In *Act Normal*, Scott Wilson teaches us how to help make that a reality."

George O. Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, says he is eager to see this challenge spread across the nation.

"*Act Normal* is a campaign designed for churches to motivate those merely involved to move to God's standard of normal, Spirit-led, compassionate and generous lives modeled in the Book of Acts," Wood says. **e**

CHRISTINA QUICK is a freelance writer and former *Pentecostal Evangel* staff writer. She attends Central Assembly of God in Springfield, Mo.

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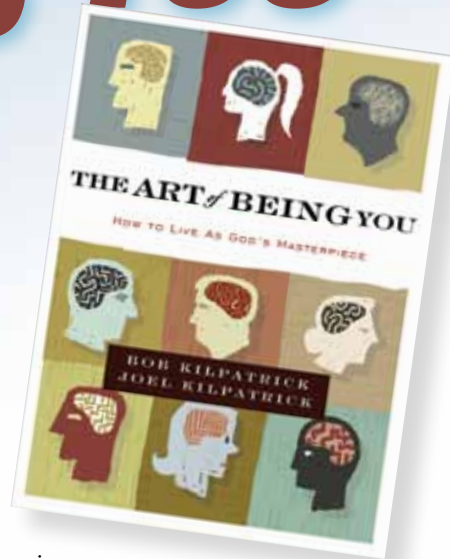
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The Art of Being You

By Bob Kilpatrick and Joel Kilpatrick



God is more than a mathematician or mechanic.

God is an artist. He is preparing the greatest art show ever staged, and we are the materials of His art, the grandest expression of His creativity. The art show He is preparing transcends canvas, clay, chords or cinema. He has expressed His creativity in you and me and is making a living display out of the whole human race.

This precious truth, like the pearl of great price, can change our lives forever. Yet in the course of many conversations, it became clear that this way of understanding God goes against what many Christians think. I heard a well-known Christian musician say in a concert that God is in the business of fixing broken people. I went home and thought about that for a while, and I came to a different conclusion. I can't find anything in the Bible that says God wants to fix broken people. I don't think God wants to be known as the Great Mechanic who replaces faulty parts on otherwise good engines. He's out not to rebuild us but to remake us. God wants us to die and to be resurrected. He desires to lead us into new life, to make us new creations.

God looks at us as an artist does his favorite work of art. ...

You might think, *But I like math. I like to solve problems.* So do I. But this book isn't about our personalities or abilities. I'm not asking how *you* see you; I'm asking how you think *God* sees you.

Do you think He sees you as His problem, or His canvas?

Is He your Solver, or your Savior?

Is He trying to fix you up, or make you new? ...

God wants to tell a story in you — the *Story of You* — that is unlike any story ever before or to come. Ephesians 2:10 reads, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (NKJV). The word *workmanship* in this verse used to put me in the mind of the Erector set I had as a boy, as though God were screwing us together like I used to do with my little Erector beams and bolts. But the Greek word used here is much more evocative than that. It is *poiema*, from which we get our word *poem*.

Our physical bodies may be God's Erector set, but our hearts and souls, dreams and passions — these are His poetry.

When John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), he reveals an expressive God, One who wants to stand on the stage of eternity and shout a poem to the

universe — and that poem is you.

None of us is a paint-by-numbers kit. You are not a machine to be fixed or a problem to be solved and shelved. You are God's performance art. There is coming a day when He will gather all His art together, the curtains will open, the lights will come bursting on in all their brilliance — and the art show will begin. Here, in His earthly workshop, right now, He is preparing you for it. **e**

From *The Art of Being You* by Bob Kilpatrick and Joel Kilpatrick (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010). Excerpted with permission.

BOB KILPATRICK is a professional musician and AG minister. JOEL KILPATRICK has authored and co-authored many books.

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The Art of Being You Describes God's Masterpiece

By Ken Horn

I confess. I began this book intent on my usual procedure — a quick scan to catch the highlights and fulfill my editorial responsibility. (We receive hundreds of books every year in our offices.)

But I was unable to stick to it. As I scanned, I found fascinating passages that required a detailed read. I also found myself backtracking so I didn't miss anything. Finally, I just read the whole book.

The Art of Being You by Bob Kilpatrick and Joel Kilpatrick (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010) turned out to be not only high in valuable content, but downright interesting. It sucks you right in and whispers, *Don't put me down.*

Some of the points made by the book I had heard before; some I hadn't. All of it was written *artfully*. And it was exceedingly enjoyable to read, filled with personal experiences and appropriate anecdotes adeptly directing you, the reader, toward the goal of being yourself through your relationship with God

“as Artistic Master rather than Master Mechanic.”

I confess, as enjoyable as this book was to read, it also made me uncomfortable. I share some significant aspects of the “math Christians” the book hopes to see reworked.

Instead of tools to be used, the authors say, we are God's great

art project being shaped, formed and put on display.

You may not agree with everything in the book, but everything in the book will make you think. And you should enjoy it, too. **e**

KEN HORN is editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*.

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ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

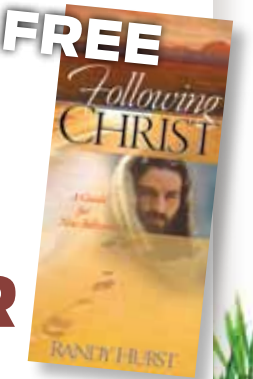
“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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Summer Reads

Soulprint

By Mark Batterson

Exactly what, you may be wondering, is a soulprint? Think of it this way: Your fingerprint uniquely identifies you and differentiates you from everyone else who has ever lived, but your fingerprint is only skin deep. You possess a uniqueness that is soul deep. I call it your soulprint. ...

The best example of how God uses defining moments to reveal a person's destiny is found in the life of David. He wrote: "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:16, NIV).

As with the psalmist, all of your days are ordained by God. And it's your holy responsibility to discover that God-ordained destiny, just like David did. His epitaph speaks for itself: "When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep" (Acts 13:36).

Despite humble beginnings and huge mistakes, David fulfilled his destiny. And that's why David's life is the backdrop for this book. He is the soulprint prototype. The defining moments or scenes in his life double as destiny clues that will help you serve God's unique purpose in your generation. In

this book, we dissect David's life in a way that will help you discover your own destiny.

On the most memorable day of his life, David bent down by a brook that didn't just bisect a battlefield. It bisected his life. His life would never be the same after that day, and he knew it. His life was about to end or about to begin.

Giant footsteps got louder as Goliath drew nearer, but it didn't disrupt David's laserlike focus. Like a child trying to find a flat stone for skipping, David was searching for smooth stones from the riverbed. He knew that the shape of the stone would determine the trajectory of the throw. Then David had a moment, a defining moment. As he bent down by the brook, he saw a reflection of himself in the water, and it was like he was seeing himself for the first time. Everybody who had ever known David, including his own father, saw David as nothing more than a shepherd boy. But as David stared at his reflection in the water, his true identity was revealed. David saw the person God had destined him to become: a giant killer. That was his true identity. That was his true destiny.

Like the ripple effect created by



David as he reached down into the river, there are defining moments that reverberate down the years of our lives. **e**

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MARK BATTERSON is lead pastor of National Community Church (AG) in Washington, D.C.

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Compel Them to Come In Issues Ministry Call

By Darrin Rodgers



Fifty-eight million Americans live with some form of disability. Yet many churches have seemingly ignored this large and diverse population.

A new book, *Compel Them to Come In: Reaching People With Disabilities Through the Local Church*, compiled and edited by Tom Leach (Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2010) provides a guide to ministry to people with physical and mental disabilities. This book — an anthology of essays by Assemblies of God leaders in disability ministries — is the first of its kind to be written by Pentecostals.

With a solid, ministry-tested approach, *Compel Them to Come In* seeks to introduce pastors and people in the pew to some of the issues and strategies regarding ministry to people with physical and mental disabilities.

The book's title was inspired by Jesus' parable in Luke 14 of the master who ordered his servant to "Go out ... and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame ... and compel them to come in, so that my house may be full" (vv. 21,23, NASB).

The book offers practical suggestions regarding the adaptation of specific ministries (e.g., outreaches, the worship service) to the needs of the disabled as well as how to minister to people with specific disabilities (e.g., mild intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities). The volume also discusses the importance of provid-

ing encouragement to caregivers, pointing out that people with disabilities have a valuable role in ministry to the body.

The authors write from experience. Tom Leach, the editor, was born with mild cerebral palsy. His mother, instead of aborting Tom, gave birth and placed him for adoption.

At age 25 while a student at Trinity Bible College (Ellendale, N.D.), he survived a car wreck that left him paralyzed from the chest down as a C6-7 quadriplegic. He is now an Assemblies of God evangelist serving with Special Touch Ministry, a parachurch organization that serves the needs of people with disabilities and helped develop this book.

Additional contributors include: Charlie Chivers, a nationally appointed Assemblies of God missionary to people with disabilities and founder of Special Touch Ministry; Larry Campbell, also a nationally appointed Assemblies of God missionary to people with disabilities; Paul Weingartner, the executive director of the Assemblies of God Center for the Blind; and Sarah Sykes, who works with the Assemblies of God Center for the Blind.

I had the privilege of meeting Tom Leach last summer. Within the course of an hour, he changed my views about people with disabilities. He shared his testimony and showed me *Compel Them to Come In* and another book he had authored.

I still cannot grasp how Tom was able to produce two books — even with a computer adapted to his needs and with the assistance of his wife, Gayle, and a handful of ministry colleagues.

Tom completed this book after having spent 26 years as a quadriplegic and 18 years in ministry to people with disabilities. He has wrestled with the problems of suffering, human weakness, and feeling unlovely and unwanted.

He writes: "People with disabilities live in a raw, harsh reality. They are painfully aware that their conditions and circumstances are often ugly and distasteful to others, and that their lifestyle and behaviors are sometimes interpreted as being weird, abnormal, and bizarre." Tom then reminds readers that Jesus embraced "the ugly, dirt-encrusted feet of His disciples in His holy hands and washed them" (p. xvii).

The message in *Compel Them to Come In*, and in Scripture, is unmistakable: Christ gave a mandate to the church to minister to those with disabilities. This is a message that Pentecostals — and the broader church — need to hear. **e**

DARRIN RODGERS is director of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center in Springfield, Mo.

Email your comments to pe@ag.org.



Genuine Love

By Kerry Clarensau

What does genuine love look like? For a moment, let's put aside everything we've ever learned about love from past experiences, movies, novels and music. Now let's imagine the Bible's description of what genuine love looks like:

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16-18, NIV).

Genuine love is more than a strong emotion — those who have genuine love actively give themselves for others. First Corinthians 13 gives us a wonderful description of this self-sacrificing love in action:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

How does genuine love play out in our marriage? Whether we intend to or not, we may respond

conditionally to our husband: "You are supposed to love me, and I will love you according to how much I feel you love me." But, remember that genuine love offers no conditions — it simply loves. It is conveyed in every word we speak, every expression on our face, and even in the tone of our voice.

How can we grow in our ability to show genuine love? We may be tempted to think, *When my husband starts showing genuine love, then I will too.* But this thought actually reveals that we are showing superficial love. The truth is, the choice to love is not based on the goodness of the recipient, but on the character of the giver. We can be women of incredible character!

Growing in genuine love is a lifelong journey. Here are five steps that I continually need to take in order to express Christlike love to my husband:

Step 1. Realize that my relationship with God is a journey of becoming more like Him.

We must understand that being selfish is a natural human tendency, but it is also the opposite of genuine love. We can ask God to show us when we are being self-focused and to help us be more like Him.

Step 2. Understand and accept God's amazing love.

When God's unfailing love floods our hearts, He heals our hurts and drives away our fears. Then His unconditional love can flow through our lives to our husbands (see John 15:9-12).

Step 3. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and fill my life.

Genuine love isn't something we can generate on our own. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to empower us to love unconditionally (see Galatians 5:22).

Step 4. Make a daily choice to love sacrificially.

We can wake up every morning and choose to focus on our husband and look for ways to show him love. Remember that genuine love costs us something — the apostle Paul even compared it to a debt (see Romans 13:8). When we choose to do what's right, we can be sure that God will give us the strength to show love even in difficult situations.

Step 5. Become aware of what I am communicating to my husband.

The words we speak are only a part of our communication. Our facial expression, tone of voice and body language can speak louder than words. **e**

From Secrets: Transforming Your Life and Marriage by Kerry Clarensau (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 2009). Excerpted with permission.

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The Judgment

By Beverly Lewis

Tomorrow holds nary a promise, my dear Mamm often says. But thankfully some things are quite certain — we plow, we plant and harvest. We attend canning bees and quilting frolics. Our wedding season always begins on the first Tuesday in November. And this year there are many couples marrying and looking ahead to starting their own families.

My own first cousin Esther Kauffman will wed John Glick, her longtime beau, tomorrow morning. My pretty plum-colored dress and full white apron, which match Esther's own, are hemmed and pressed, ready to slip on right after breakfast.

I should be smiling-happy since I'm one of Esther's wedding attendants. But I must confess to getting a bit tetchy with Esther last evening when she dropped by. She

reminded me that her older brother Melvin and I are expected to spend most of the day together, since he's the fellow opposite me in the wedding party. This includes sitting with him at the *Eck*, the corner of the feast table reserved for the bride and groom and the four attendants. So, even though I'll be within flirting distance of Silas Good, I won't get to enjoy the daylong celebration with my betrothed, including the evening meal.

My first thoughts each day are of Silas. His sensible ways and his family's standing amongst the People make me feel so fortunate. Oh, that wonderful-gut smile when he looks my way! But no matter how happy I am to be engaged to the most eligible young man in Lancaster County, I must admit there are times when I still think of my friend Nick Franco, the bishop's former foster son. Gone more than a month now.

I must've known a real different Nick than anyone else did. Almost everyone assumes he's a bad seed — most even believe he caused the death of the bishop's only son. But when Nick and I were together, I saw his softer side. That's the part that gnaws at me in the most curious way these days.

Truth is, I ponder where Nick might've run off to ... and I wonder if he ever misses Amish life. Or me, his best friend.

After all these weeks since his disappearance, I haven't told a soul this — not even my older

sister, Hannah, known by most as Hen. But the unusual bond Nick and I shared as youngsters somehow managed to get far deeper into my heart than I realized. I continue to beseech the Lord for poor Nick, praying that God might see fit to forgive him for his years of rebellion.

I pray for my only sister, too. Sadly, Hen's coffee meetings with her estranged worldly husband have turned out to be all but fruitless. And when she's not working at the Amish fabric store, or here at home cooking and whatnot, she has a faraway look in her light hazel eyes, as if caught betwixt and between. I daresay she misses her husband more as the days pass. Misses him ... even though there are many things that keep them apart.

I am hard-pressed to imagine a solution to their dilemma. So I pray for wisdom from above, knowing I can trust God's timing and way — and His will to be done for them. **e**

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