issue ninety-seven

THE REACH OF GRACE

LEE STROBEL

MARK MAXWELL

ANSWERING TO A HIGHER COURT

ALUMNI IN ACTION

PEACE IN A WAR ZONE
A higher court

Societies crumble from within. History has shown that great cultures launch from the cornerstones of strong principles and great ethics that are grounded in respect... both for the divine and for community.

Over time, ruling classes become entitled, principles are abandoned and convictions are compromised. The current trend in the west is to believe that acceptance is the best way to show love. However, true love finds that precarious balance of acceptance of the person while showing them the way to truth.

Jesus identified the great principles that lead to healthy, vibrant cultures when, with the genius of simplicity, he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39).”

In the Sermon on the Mount he explained that moral ethics trump the letter of the law. This is as true of the laws of our country as it was of the Mosaic laws at the time of Jesus.

There have been times in history when culture and society have been wrong. There have been times in history when even the high court of the land has been wrong. So, while the Supreme Court of the United States has declared same-sex marriage legal in every state in the US, there is a higher court to which we answer... and to which the Supreme Court will eventually answer.

Christians are a peculiar bunch. We choose to follow a man we believe is also God, the Almighty Creator of the universe. We choose to live by the standards laid out in ancient manuscripts called “the Holy Scriptures” and we believe those Scriptures are inspired by God. Not many would see our position as particularly enlightened or current. But we believe it is not only the truth, but the way that leads to life—abundant life. And we believe that we do not have to agree with someone’s lifestyle to truly love and care for them.

We cannot expect others who do not accept the authority of the Bible to follow its principles. That doesn’t change the truths we believe are imbedded in its pages.

Among those are guidelines in the book of Leviticus like: don’t sacrifice your babies to the gods and don’t have sex with animals (18:21-23). Our culture today would continue to see those practices as inappropriate. Sandwiched in between those two principles for healthy community, however, is a directive for a healthy family: “Men should not lie with men as they do with women; it is an abomination to the Lord.”

We are told in the Scriptures that these codes of conduct will give us life, protect us and help us to live well together. Whether or not a person accepts the Bible as truth doesn’t change the fact that these principles help build healthy homes, societies and enduring cultures.

At Prairie, we continue to hold the Holy Scriptures, in their entirety, in the highest regard. We embrace a Community Covenant that brings the great principles of God’s Word into the context of our local community, including the definition of marriage as one man and one woman, faithful to each other. We thank God the Creator that we live in a country where we are free to worship him and live in a way that we feel is honoring to him.

In keeping with the teachings of Scripture, we believe that Jesus, the Son of the living God, lived a sinless life, died on a cross to take our place, rose again from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in the throne room of the universe. So let’s be peculiar if that means standing for a better way to live. Let’s hope that we can help keep our culture from inventing its own demise.

Mark Maxwell is president of Prairie. He welcomes your comments. Send them to mark.maxwell@prairie.edu
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PUBLISHER PRAIRIE BIBLE INSTITUTE
PRESIDENT MARK MAXWELL
EDITOR PAT MASSEY
DESIGN TWO 01 STUDIO

LETTERS

Your offer several years back of the book “Christians, Muslims and Jesus” by Carl Medearis has significantly impacted me personally. Since reading it I have become actively involved in serving our city’s Muslim community. As a result a number of Muslim individuals have become personal friends and acquaintances with significant opportunities to share about Jesus Christ through these relationships. Keep up the good work!

Name withheld

I can’t wait for the next issue of Servant magazine. I love the life experiences of God’s children and we are blessed if we learn from others and their walk with the Lord.

Noreen Hamm, Sunridge, ON

Thank you for Servant magazine. I especially enjoyed the article “What a Mom Makes” by Phil Callaway. I’m keeping it to send to another stay-at-home mom. After my career it was quite a come-down to be “just a housewife.” My husband thought I needed a status symbol so he made a huge sign that said “Mary Hansen—household engineer.” I still have it in my kitchen.

Mary Hansen, Edmonton, AB

Thank you for the “Glorious Ruin” article. This week our family found out that our brother’s cancer is taking over and he is now hospitalized. Earlier in the week his brave wife shared a song also called “Glorious Ruin,” so it was extra-special to see this article and read its insightful words—a gift from God in our great time of need. Thank you for producing an encouraging and thought-provoking magazine.

Name withheld

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Lee and his wife Leslie. “God’s grace in her started my journey to faith.”

SERVANT: WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD?
Lee: Its ability to transform lives. Living an immoral and self-centered life as an atheist and having God open my eyes and turn my life upside down has made me a fanatic about collecting stories of how God revolutionizes lives because they’re so encouraging to me. My wife Leslie had no hope that I would ever bend the knee to Jesus when someone shared with her Ezek. 36:26 where God promises to replace a heart of stone with a new heart. So she prayed for me for two years and ultimately I came to faith.

WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT FORTY-THREE YEARS TOGETHER, DOES THE GRACE OF GOD COME TO MIND?
Oh my, yes. I’ve seen God’s grace in Leslie so often, especially when I was still an atheist after she had become a Christian. I’d go out and get drunk. I had a huge anger problem. But because God had poured his grace into her, she let that overflow in the way she treated me with so much patience and kindness. As the character of God became more and more evident in her life, it was changing our marriage in a positive way.

WHEN LESLIE MET CHRIST, WHAT DID YOU THINK WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO HER?
Everything bad. I thought she’d turn into a prude, some Holy Roller who would preach on street corners. I thought she was going to get sucked into the vortex of this evangelical sub-culture where she would start admire people who believed in Jesus and where would that leave me? I didn’t see any good coming out of it.

AND WAS SHE ANY OF THOSE THINGS?
No! She made some mistakes like putting Christian books on the coffee table with things underlined—that didn’t help. But the positive changes, the love she showed me despite my obnoxiousness, the way she loved the children—it was winsome and attractive. I was sleeping off a hangover one Sunday morning when she asked me to go to church with her. What I had seen in her was making me more receptive, so I went. Bill Hybels gave the gospel and I understood it for the first time in my life. I didn’t believe it, but that’s what started my two-year journey to investigate whether or not it was true.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR READERS WHOSE SPOUSE DOESN’T SHARE THEIR FAITH?
If you’re a Christian and your spouse is not, I recommend building into three relationships. The first is your relationship with God. Your spouse isn’t going to encourage that so you’ll have to do it on your own. That means studying the Bible, reading good books, praying and practicing spiritual disciplines that will help you grow in your faith. Then build a relationship with a mentor of the same gender. Leslie had a friend who led her to the Lord and would study the Bible with her, answer her questions and give her suggestions on how to keep our marriage intact. That was really important. The third thing is to strengthen the relationship with your spouse. You married that person for
a reason. Remind yourself what you loved about them, common activities that you loved doing together. There are forces in a spiritually mismatched marriage that are trying to tear you apart so it’s important to strengthen those bonds.

YOUR BOOKS HAVE GENERALLY RESPONDED TO OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIANITY. WHY A BOOK ON GRACE? The older I get, the more I’m in awe of God’s grace. Not only did he change my life, but so many others around me and it seems like a time in the world when people are searching for the truth and for hope and for God. The one thing that is unique about Christianity is grace. Every other world religion is based on doing something to earn your way to God. About four years ago my wife found me unconscious and I woke up in the emergency room where the doctor told me I was steps away from dying. My illness created a lot of mental side effects and hallucinations and I became convinced that God had rejected me, that there was no hope, and I imagined being cast into outer darkness forever. It was my son who helped me to reconnect with God in a very profound way. But having felt the horror of what it’s like to be separated from God caused me to redouble my efforts to rescue people from that predicament, to tell them that there is hope and grace in Jesus. I think that’s a lot of the drive behind this book.

DO YOU FIND IT IRONIC THAT ALTHOUGH THE CONCEPT OF GRACE SETS CHRISTIANITY APART, WE HAVE TO BE HONEST AND ASK HOW MANY UNBELIEVERS WOULD EQUATE GRACE WITH CHRISTIANS? Sadly, that’s true. It’s been said that the best argument for Christianity is Christians— their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians, when they’re joyless, self-righteous and narrow. I wonder if it’s because so many who have come to Jesus all of a sudden feel they have to prove to God that he was right to give them grace; that they’re going to be great Christians and they become judgmental toward others who aren’t as serious and committed as they are. It becomes a rules-keeping game, us versus them, the good guys against the rest of the world. When people see Christians, what they ought to see is sinners saved by grace who are full of joy and forgiveness and love.

YOU MENTION IN THE BOOK THAT YOU NEVER EXPERIENCED A GRACE-BASED RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER. I found out when my mother was dying that to my father, I was an unwanted pregnancy. They had three children and were ready to move on with their lives when my mom got pregnant. My father was a good man but we never connected emotionally and things got so bad between us that during an argument on the eve of my high school graduation he told me, “I don’t have enough love for you to fill my little finger.” This kind of coldness and distance often leads people toward atheism because if their earthly father was disappointed in them, they sure don’t want a heavenly father. That was exactly the case with many famous atheists in history. A recent study from the University of California found that a father may be a pillar of the church but if he doesn’t provide warmth and affirmation to his kids, they will likely not follow him into the faith.

I BECAME CONVINCED THAT GOD HAD REJECTED ME AND THAT THERE WAS NO HOPE. “How can we withhold forgiveness from him after God has forgiven us so much?” He was ultimately set free and he’s now an elder in his church and a man of prayer, reaching out to young people in public housing projects. When God changed his life, he learned to forgive those who had hurt him, but he himself was also a beneficiary of people who had offered grace to him.

DID YOU EVER RECONCILE WITH YOUR DAD? No, I didn’t. My father died of a heart attack at age 64 and we never fully reconciled. At his wake I stood in front of his casket and said I was sorry. I needed to own a lot of the pain in our relationship because I was a rebellious and difficult child in many ways. I had never even thanked him for paying my college tuition despite the rift between us. And then I told him that I forgave him. I wish we’d had that conversation when he was alive. It was a reminder to me that if we have a broken relationship, we need to put everything else aside and go deal with it. You can’t own the whole situation and you can’t control the way people react, but you can offer forgiveness, not because they deserve it but because God forgave you.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED? I hope someone will look at my life and say: There was a guy who cared enough about people to tell them that they could have hope and forgiveness and eternal life. He just couldn’t keep it to himself.
FROM THE INSIDE

TURKEY
A CTEN worker reported from a ministry trip to Turkey: “While I was in Turkey, Kurdish refugees were coming to faith in Christ like ripe apples falling from a tree, despite miserable conditions and the constant threat of danger from many sides.”

UKRAINE
Prairie alumnus Bill Kapitaniuk recently visited Ukraine. “I was impressed,” he says “by what the Lord is doing through his servants. In spite of the war in the East, the hundreds of thousands of refugees and the thousands of young men who have died defending their nation, the people have not lost hope but continue to pray night and day. Pastors are encouraging the people to call upon the Lord because only God could deliver them.”

LAOS
Alex Smith of OMF shared a recent report: In 2002 when the government attempted to close all churches and imprisoned Christian families, the result was the rapid expansion of Christianity. When believers were scattered across other provinces the church grew from a dozen families to 3000 in one year. Leaders have been strengthened through persecution and Christians are now found in every province and among almost all the tribes.

GERMANY
Christian communities in Germany are seeing hundreds of Iranian and Afghan refugees converting to Christianity. While most insist that true belief prompted their decision, there is little doubt that it may also be seen as boosting their chances of winning asylum. Pastor Gottfried Martens of Trinity Church in Berlin agrees, but for him, motivation is unimportant. “I am inviting them to join us,” he says, “because I know that whoever comes here will not be left unchanged.”

NEPAL
Massive earthquakes struck Nepal in April, killing thousands and displacing millions. Hundreds of believers died when church buildings collapsed around them but the church continues to respond as the Nepalese people transition to long-term recovery. “They have been a true witness of God’s love,” reports B.P. Kahnal, a local missionary, “and helped the affected ones regardless of their religion. Also the worldwide Christian community has been real friends of those in desperate need. Despite much opposition, people are flooding to the churches and trusting in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.”

IRAN
According to Elim Ministries, Iran, despite fierce persecution, has one of the fastest growing churches in the world. Disillusionment with the Islamic regime, widespread distribution of the Scriptures in modern Persian, Christian satellite TV, the work of the Holy Spirit through dreams and miracles, strong leadership training and worldwide prayer for the Iranian church are among the reasons for this growth. In early 2015, more than two hundreds Iranians and Afghans were baptized. Many isolated believers had never seen so many Christians gathered in one place.

SEE WHAT GOD CAN DO IN ONE YEAR

Explore
One-year Certificate in Outdoor Leadership
Have you ever wanted an outdoor classroom? Prairie’s wilderness-based Explore program fosters community as we blend biblical studies, discipleship training, strong academics, and leadership development.

Encounter
One-year Certificate in Bible
Come to a better understanding of your faith and the biblical truth on which it is built.

Discover
One-year Certificate in Intercultural Studies
The program provides a year of life-changing education that includes Bible, community development, intercultural awareness and insight into global justice. This program contains six weeks of study abroad.

IN ALL THINGS, GOD WORKS…
ROMANS 8:38 (NIV)

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“God honors simple things. He honors the man, the woman, who does what needs to be done, regardless of what it costs. He honors the person who, putting his hand to the plow, does not turn back. He honors the person who does today what his hand finds to do, and does it with all diligence. The person constantly wishing for a better station in life seldom achieves. Somehow his big dream of the future often blocks a man from accomplishing the little things demanded by the present. But God never skips steps. He does not hopscotch through life, jumping over squares to miss the rock. He hits every step and brings us up through the ranks one grade at a time until we are ready to assume the task for which He has been preparing us all along.”
The slave, my brother

For many of us, the word “slave” relates to cotton plantations and names like Wilberforce and Lincoln.

But Kevin Bales shocks us with this statement: “There has never been a single day in our America, from its discovery and birth right up to the moment you are reading this sentence, without slavery.”

It is estimated that there are between 21 and 36 million slaves today and that they are found in every nation of the world. According to UNICEF “a child is trafficked every 30 seconds.” Women, children and men forced into the sex industry account for about 22% of those held captive, but the majority are in different forms of labour slavery.

Most of us have never met a slave and yet every one of us is affected by their pain, through the food we buy, the clothes we wear, and the electronics we use. Coltan, the metallic ore used to store electricity in our electronic devices, is likely mined by children in the Congo. The cotton in our T-shirts may be harvested by slaves in Uzbekistan. What can we do about it?

We can ask questions about what we buy and hope this will cause shop owners to put pressure on their producers. We can discover the supply chain all the way from the Burmese man forced to work on a fishing boat outside Malaysia to the fish we buy in the supermarket. We CAN make a difference. There are already a number of companies who guarantee that their products are not made by forced labour.

The Bible commands us to care for the poor and to have compassion on those in captivity even if we do not know them personally. “Whose children are they who stitch footballs, yet have never played with one?” asks Kailash Satyarthi, 2014 Nobel Peace Prize winner. “They are our children. Whose children are they who harvest cocoa, yet do not know the taste of chocolate? They are all our children.”

Students at Prairie are made aware of global needs at weekly chapels and in their classes. One is currently gaining experience at a ministry in Thailand that cares for children at risk of being sold and each year the GlobeTREK team is exposed to agencies who work toward social justice. These issues are a cruel reality in our world today and Prairie students are paying attention.

Professor Emma Karin Emgård is the coordinator of Prairie’s Intercultural Studies program. Her interests include missions, world cultures and religions and social justice issues.

PRAIRIE PROPOSES GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE DEGREE

July 7 was a historic day for Prairie College as representatives from nine international organizations gathered on campus for a consultation on global issues.

They included Compassion Canada, Dalit Freedom Network Canada, Food for the Hungry, Hagar USA, International Justice Mission Canada, Crossroads Christian Communications, Medical Ministry Intl Canada, Samaritan’s Purse Canada and World Vision Canada.

The purpose of the gathering, according to Prairie’s president Mark Maxwell, was to learn from leaders in the field who are providing a Christian response to issues such as poverty, human trafficking, food and water shortages, empowering of women and other world-wide needs. Their input will be crucial as Prairie develops a program of studies in global social justice with a solid biblical foundation, equipping students to provide practical and spiritual hope in Jesus’ name. The college is looking at a possible start date of September 2016.

For more information, contact Kevin Peters at kevin.peters@prairie.edu
STUDENT PROFILE  DIANNE METUQ

From brokenness to beauty

It is April, 2015, and Prairie’s annual mission conference is underway, its focus: “Canada: A Broken and Beautiful Mosaic.”

The auditorium is silent as the haunting tones of an Inuit lullaby fill the air. A tiny woman sings with eyes closed, the familiar words transporting her back to her homeland in Canada’s far north. Born and raised on the rugged shores of Baffin Island, Dianne Metuq has known a life of struggle and ultimately of healing. “Broken and beautiful” is an apt description of her journey.

As a young girl in the tiny Hamlet of Pangnirtung, not far from the Arctic Circle, Dianne flourished in a loving and godly environment. The area, known as “the Switzerland of the Arctic,” thrived on tourism and its reputation for beautiful artwork, music and traditional knowledge. From her grandparents she learned stories of camping and hunting, whaling ships, and the coming of the gospel to the Inuit people. Her parents taught her the value of prayer and the Word of God and how to be strong in the Lord.

“Our family was always busy,” she remembers, “in the community, in education, the arts, politics, ministry and music, travel. My parents, siblings and extended family shaped my life in an amazing and beautiful way and God has used them to teach me, love me, cheer me on and see the good in all of the different seasons of life.”

Things were not perfect, however. Early on it became clear that little Dianne would face life-long challenges from cerebral palsy. The family surrounded her with acceptance and encouragement and told her repeatedly how dearly she was loved. But when it came time to go to school and step outside of that protecting shelter, the girl experienced her first taste of rejection.

Cruel taunts taught her that she was different and led her to compare herself to other peers who were physically healthy. This led to episodes of depression that left her feeling inferior and empty. Not yet serious about her faith, Dianne blamed God for making her that way and began a search for fulfillment and ways to fit in.

“When I tried to serve both the world and Christ,” she recalls, “I ended up in difficult situations and wrong relationships. But God always intervened and I learned that he never gives up on me. That made me want to know him more and I rededicated my life to Christ. When a dear friend told me about Prairie, I wasn’t interested at first. But God made it clear that he had an assignment for me there and would help me to finish well even though there would be many challenges. I have always wanted to help people and learn about their cultures, so I entered the Intercultural Studies program. It was both heart-wrenching and amazing to hear the stories of famous missionaries and to recall those who had nourished my own people with the gospel.”

College wasn’t easy for an older student from a different culture whose first language was not English. At times Dianne wanted to give up but God challenged her to stay, that he had a purpose for her life.

“My time at Prairie was a season of walking by faith and I sometimes felt like I was in the wilderness,” she admits, “but I needed to be whole before I could help others. Acceptance was a first step as I asked God to heal my soul from the wounds of my condition. It took time and many journeys, including counselling and a class called Freedom Session, but since then my life has not been the same. I still have symptoms, but I no longer feel sorry for myself. Instead I can say that God is making me beautiful and usable in his kingdom in spite of my weakness. He calls and uses whom he chooses and I am privileged to be his child. After experiencing forgiveness and reconciliation with Christ, I have found that there is healing and restoration when we trust God with all that he has given us.”

As a child Dianne never expected to go anywhere or achieve anything. But God had other plans. She has finished high school, graduated from college and travelled throughout Canada and is waiting to see what adventure God has for her next. Her passion is evident: “I give him all the glory because he has healed my soul and redeemed me through Christ. He finished it all at the cross so I can be set free to live an abundant and authentic life and to see the world with new perspective. Truly I am rich in my life in Christ and I would not trade it for anything.”

Dianne Metuq graduated from Prairie College in 2015 with a BA in Intercultural Studies.
Surely there must be limits—monsters whose ghastly transgressions extend far beyond the redemptive shadow of the cross. If there were ever a case, I knew it would be found in the story told by Christopher LaPel. I met the diminutive, black-haired pastor in his Los Angeles office where he calmly told me a tale of sadism and survival.

“I grew up in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where my father was a high priest and spiritual advisor to Prince Norodom Sihanouk,” he said. “Sometimes he would take me to the palace where I would play with the prince’s children. One day I saw a craftsman and asked if he would make me a cross out of ivory. I’d seen one on a Catholic church and to me, it represented power and purity. I put it on a gold chain and nobody could see it—until one day I reached for something and the cross fell out of my shirt. My dad was angry. ‘You shouldn’t wear that,’ he said. ‘We are a Buddhist family.’ He offered to make me any idol I wanted. But I didn’t want anything else.”

LaPel was wearing the cross on April 17, 1975, when the Khmer Rouge came and forcibly emptied Cambodia’s towns and cities. The terrified nineteen-year-old and his family joined a flood of residents who clogged the narrow roads. There was mass confusion and panic and they soon realized they would never return home. The Killing Fields lay ahead.

Over the next 1,364 days, Pol Pot’s Communist regime, seeking to obliterate the social classes and create a society of peasants, killed, starved, or worked to death about two million Cambodians. Teachers, government workers, journalists, anyone who was educated—all died. Out of 11,000 university students, only 450 survived. Just five percent of secondary students lived through the genocide. Nine out of ten physicians perished. Money was abolished, property confiscated, schools and courts closed and religion suppressed as masses of people were driven into the rice paddies to be used as slave labor.

Separated from his family, LaPel was put to work in the fields to grow rice and build canals as part of a grand strategy to construct a massive irrigation system. He worked twelve to fourteen hours a day with no food but a watery soup. His weight dropped to ninety pounds. At night, the Khmer Rouge would call out names and people would disappear, never to be seen again.

“In late 1977, I got very sick with a high fever,” he told me, “and missed three days of work. One night the Khmer Rouge dragged me from my hut and asked why I hadn’t been working. I told them I was sick but had no food or medicine. They began checking me and one opened my shirt, exposing the cross. There was silence. Then somebody said, ‘This guy is really sick. We’ll let him go.’ The next day they gave me medicine and rice soup and treated me very well and I got better. I believe that cross saved my life.”

Still, the struggle to stay alive became increasingly difficult. The brutality was relentless and the workload increased as the food supply diminished. LaPel escaped to a refugee camp in Thailand where he heard how Jesus Christ had died on the cross so that he could be saved from his sins. Remembering how he had been spared because of the ivory cross, he committed his life to serving God.
and became a pastor, but his family was not as fortunate. His father and mother were worked to death and his sister and brother were killed. “Then there was my cousin…” he said. “She was a scientist who taught school. She was arrested and taken to S-21.”

The notorious S-21 was a former high school outside of Phnom Penh that the Khmer Rouge converted into an interrogation, torture, and execution center. Kaing Guek Eav, known as Comrade Duch (pronounced Doik), a former mathematics teacher, presided over the institution with brutal efficiency, documenting every torture session, forced confession and murder. Torturers would compel confessions with electric shocks, suffocation with a plastic bag, or beatings with electric cords. To save on bullets, throats were slit, heads were bashed with a shovel, or necks were broken with a hoe. Babies were dropped from balconies or smashed against trees. When the Khmer Rouge was overthrown in 1979, Duch disappeared.

More than 14,000 prisoners entered S-21. Only seven survived. LaPel’s cousin was among those buried in shallow graves nearby. “I weep when I think of what happened to her,” said the pastor. “S-21 is now a genocide museum. Her brother took me there in 1993. There are hundreds of mug shots of prisoners on the walls.”

He blinked away tears. “We found the picture of my cousin.”

Fifteen years after the demise of the regime, LaPel and a team from his congregation built a church in northwestern Cambodia. The following year, he returned to conduct leadership training for local Christians. One of his leaders invited a friend who was a teacher in a village nearby. He was in his mid-fifties and scrawny, with ears that stuck out. Though not a Christian, Hang Pin had come because he was suffering from deep depression. Invaders had broken into his house, stabbed him in the back and bayoneted his wife to death. He sat at the back, withdrawn and discouraged. The sessions ended with an altar call for those who wanted to receive the forgiveness of Christ and one day Hang joined several others.

“He said he had done a lot of bad things in his life,” LaPel told me, “and didn’t know if his brothers and sisters could forgive the sins he had committed.”

“Did you ask for any details?”

“No, I was more concerned whether he was repentant and if he understood that forgiveness is a gift of God’s grace. He did. I prayed with him and the next day I baptized him. Rarely have I seen such an immediate transformation. He sat in the front row, excited, asking questions, taking notes and reading the Bible eagerly.” Hang returned to his village and led his children to Christ; then he planted a house church and came back for more training. Military violence sent him to a refugee camp in Thailand where he trained health workers and saved countless lives by helping stem a typhoid outbreak. Later, he returned and worked with World Vision to provide healthcare to women and children.
until a phone call woke LaPel in his Los Angeles home in April 1999. It was a reporter for the Associated Press. “Could you help us identify one of your disciples?” he asked. “He’s not very tall, his ears stick out.”

“He’s one of our lay pastors,” said LaPel.

“He’s hardline Khmer Rouge,” said the reporter.

LaPel’s mouth dropped open.

“What do you mean?”

“He was in charge of S-21. Hang Pin is comrade Duch!”

LaPel’s mind raced from his murdered cousin to baptizing Hang Pin. How could this be?

Slowly, the story emerged. When the journalist tracked down Duch in his village and confronted him about his identity, he responded, “It is God’s will you are here. I have done very bad things. It is time to bear the consequences of my actions. I am so sorry. The people who died were good people.” Anticipating his arrest and imprisonment, he said, “It is okay. They have my body. Jesus has my soul.”

Put on trial before a United Nations-backed tribunal for crimes against humanity, Duch didn’t hide from his past. His testimony made headlines around the world because of his clear-cut confession. “I am responsible for the crimes committed at S-21,” he told the judges. Taken in handcuffs back to face his accusers, he collapsed in tears, saying, “I know that you cannot forgive me, but I ask you to leave me the hope that you might.” Duch is now in prison for the rest of his life.

Christopher LaPel finally met the lay pastor he knew as Hang Pin in 2008. “I love you as my brother in Christ,” he told him. “I forgive you for what you’ve done to my family.”

“It was as easy as that?” I asked.

He shook his head. “No, not easy—necessary. How could I receive forgiveness from Christ for my sins but at the same time refuse to forgive someone for their sins?”

“How did he respond?”

“With tears. As for me, I felt at peace. We prayed together and then I served him Communion and read from the Twenty-Third Psalm. ‘The Holy Spirit has convicted my heart,’ he told me. ‘I will tell the truth, and the truth will set me free.’”

Whenever LaPel travels to Cambodia, he goes to the prison to meet with Duch.

“Since his sentence to life in prison, what is his demeanor?” I asked.

“He is joyful and peaceful and so thankful for God’s grace. He is sharing Jesus with the guards and the other prisoners who are former Khmer Rouge. He tells them there’s forgiveness available for them as well. ‘I’m not a prisoner,’ he says. ‘I’m a free man. I deserve death. But I have Jesus, and so I have love. If I had Jesus before, I never would have done what I did.’”

At the trial, LaPel described how Duch had admitted he was a sinner and received Christ as Savior. At one point, a judge leaned forward and asked: “Was this a true conversion?”

LaPel had sworn on the Bible to tell the truth. He replied simply: “Yes.”

Under Buddhist theology Duch’s grievous sins would follow him as bad karma which he would have to work off over many successive lifetimes. That seemed like a better picture of justice to me.

“Justice, maybe,” replied LaPel. “But grace is not fair. We should be grateful for that. If God were to deny Duch grace by drawing a line and saying, ‘No more,’ then who’s to say where the line might be drawn next time? Jesus’ death was enough to cover all the sins of the world. If we say some sin is too terrible, then we’re saying Jesus fell short of his mission. Grace is only grace if it’s available to all. Perhaps we don’t think we need it as much as Duch does, but none of us deserve grace. For each of us, it is a gift. The Bible assures us that ultimately God will do what is right and I have the utmost confidence in that.”

What do Cambodians think?

“Many are surprised he would admit his guilt and humbly ask forgiveness,” said LaPel. “God is opening up hearts to see that Jesus is love and can bring healing and hope. Grace is unknown in Buddhism. The hatred and anger in many Cambodians could erupt in another era of violence. Maybe if they learn about forgiveness through the story of Duch, it can break the cycle.

“Wouldn’t it be just like God,” he said, “to turn the Killing Fields into the Harvest Fields?”
Growing up on a quiet dairy farm in Ontario, Canada, Katie Prenger went along with her family’s Christian lifestyle until, at the age of fourteen, she met God for herself on a youth ministry trip. Back home, however, she found herself riding a spiritual roller-coaster and knew she needed a more positive environment. A family vacation to the Canadian Rockies began a love affair with the wide open prairies and Katie enrolled at Prairie College in the wheat lands of Alberta.

When professors challenged her to dig into scripture for herself and search out the “why” behind things she had always assumed to be true, it was a stretching experience for a girl who was not a fan of change. After graduation she returned to Alberta and built a comfortable life for herself working with disabled adults. But wider worlds were waiting.

On the other side of the globe, a young man was cutting his teeth on one foreign culture after another. Adopted by missionary parents, Darryl Elliott spent his boyhood in war-torn Liberia and then moved from England to Canada to Brazil to the Philippines. Those adventures gave him the desire to be a missionary teacher, so after college Darryl taught school in Taiwan for four years. His memories of children in crisis made him want to show them that something better was possible and when an opportunity came to teach at the International School in Kabul, Afghanistan, he applied immediately. It would be an unforgettable experience, one where danger, fear and sadness shared equal billing with excitement and amazement.

By that time Katie and Darryl had met and a serious relationship was underway. When they became engaged, she went to visit and soon realized that she was about to step many miles outside of her comfort zone. Married in 2009, the couple returned to Afghanistan the next year and Darryl resumed teaching while Katie worked as an administrative assistant at the school. Their students ranged from the extremely wealthy to the very poor and both boys and girls were welcomed.

It was an adjustment, but the Elliotts saw an opportunity to impact the next generation and to help these isolated young people understand that they were more than what they had been taught. Just because someone had different beliefs didn’t mean they deserved to be killed. Discussing the Christian faith was forbidden, but godly attitudes and actions had a strong influence on the children. In years to come, perhaps those who reached high positions in their country would recall the grace-filled example of their teachers.

Katie’s daily interaction was with the national staff. “Some were working to give their children a better life,” she recalls. “For others it was just survival and that was heartbreaking. We knew that some of the women went through horrible things at home and had nowhere to go, no hope of change because women were so unimportant in their culture. That was extremely difficult for me. We longed to help but couldn’t.”

While it was the most stable part of the country, Kabul was still an extremely volatile environment. Although the Taliban no longer controlled the city, they remained active, along with other groups who resented western influence. Foreigners, anyone with a more liberal lifestyle, women who were involved in politics or public life—all were at risk. Being co-ed, the International School was also a target. Strict checkpoints around the city made it difficult for bombs to get in, but it still happened—every day.

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the street. Risk was determined by what was going on in the city and it meant we could or couldn’t do certain things, from a tiny bit of freedom to total lockdown.”

At the end of their first year, the couple travelled to Canada for the birth of their son Camden. They returned to Afghanistan soon afterward but their tiny boy, who had arrived a month early, had difficulty eating. His weight began dropping and he was often extremely fussy. Even an excellent doctor could do little without resources and just finding the right medicine was an enormous challenge. Bomb blasts and gunfire were a daily occurrence, something the locals took for granted. But to a new mother struggling with a fragile infant, post-partum depression, cultural restrictions and constant danger, it all became too much.

“What made it so difficult,” says Katie, “was that my friends had new babies and they managed just fine. People told me I would too, but it wasn’t happening and I felt so guilty. In a place like that, you’re expected to have a certain level of strength but sometimes the stresses just pile layer upon layer and you can’t get out from under it. I was ashamed that I wasn’t ‘tough’ enough and that just made me feel worse.”

Fear pushed Katie to cover herself as much as possible whenever she went out so no-one could identify her as a foreigner. She was terrified that every motorcycle might carry a suicide bomber and had begun going to extremes to avoid anything that might be a target.

Darryl struggled as he saw what his wife and son were going through. “What have I done?” he thought. “We believed the Lord had asked us to serve the people of Afghanistan but at the same time it was becoming harder and harder to go on. Your whole being is put into daily living there because you’re in survival mode. And you become so deeply involved with your students that it’s incredibly heart-breaking to leave. We felt like we were failing, not just in our work and ministry, but failing God.”

While military struggles plagued the country, the Elliotts were facing battles of their own where surrender went against the grain. Even though their son had ongoing medical issues and Katie was suffering severely, they felt bound by their commitments and the certainty that God had led them there. They decided on a trip to Thailand where the peaceful surroundings allowed them to step back and look at things more objectively. After wrestling for days over how to survive the rest of their contract, Katie and Darryl realized that it made no sense to stay another year in Kabul when those who knew them best advised against it.

We felt like we were failing, not just in our work and ministry, but failing God.

They realized it was time to stop fighting the obvious, even if it meant leaving the students they had come to love.

“We needed to do this for our family,” says Darryl. “The decision was hard, but at the same time it made total sense and I believe God blesses when we care for those he has given us.”

“I clung to Jeremiah 29:11,” remembers Katie, “that God had plans for our future that included giving us hope—the thing I needed most of all.”

Once they surrendered, the peace came. Everything miraculously fell into place and in 2012 the Elliotts returned to Canada. Getting help for Camden was a first priority and then it was Katie’s turn. She was taken aback to learn that, along with postpartum depression, she was suffering from PTSD. “When the doctor told me,” she recalls, “I didn’t believe him because I wasn’t a combat soldier. But anyone can suffer from PTSD when traumatic experiences cause so much stress that you simply can’t function. I had no idea how deep it was. Sometimes you don’t see it until you’re drowning. Once I got help, my anxiety levels began to lower considerably.”

Today Darryl oversees the care of Prairie’s campus in Three Hills and Katie is again enjoying her work with disabled adults. They have gained a deep compassion for others in similar situations and learned the importance of holding things loosely and letting God lead. “I believe he called us to Afghanistan for a purpose,” says Darryl. “There are things I might have done differently, but I wouldn’t change the experience because it molded us into who we are today.”

Katie agrees: “We’re not heroic. We’re real people and very real and difficult things happen. It was the hardest two years of my life, but along with the personal struggles, there was great reward in impacting the lives of Afghan students. It showed us what God can do with a willing heart.”

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Two phone calls came on Saturday. The first was from my son Steve who said, “Dad, my water heater broke. It’s leaking all over the place; what do I do?” I have no idea why he would call a guy like me. I have less mechanical ability than hair.

Though remotely aware of the fact that hot showers contain hot water, I have no idea where hot water comes from. The basement, I think. “Shut off the taps,” I advised. “Mop up the water and call your Uncle Bill. He’s a plumber.”

The second call came from my daughter Rachael who said, “Daddy, my water broke.” Each April 1st she calls with some jarring statement. “I’m dating.” “I’m engaged.” “I’m expecting.” But this was May: This was no joke. “Mom,” I yelled. “Help! She says the contractions are fifteen minutes apart! Is that urgent?”

My father was a few thousand miles away in Miami, Florida, on business when I was born. That’s how it was back then. Dads were not allowed in the same zip code as their wives during childbirth. The exact reason for this is not known, but most believe it’s because guys kept fainting in the delivery room. “Bob, look, there’s the placenta.” Wham. Then everybody had to keep stepping over Bob. So most dads were called away on business during childbirth. If the hospital staff was particularly accommodating, fathers who remained behind were granted permission to sit in the waiting room provided they kept quiet and did not faint. Preferably, expectant dads were to stand outside the building much like smokers do now. If they needed to smoke, they came back inside the hospital where there were smoking rooms. In fact, the surgeon general was probably in there smoking. He might even be in the delivery room.

Times change. Months before my daughter’s water broke, she sent out formal requests inviting to the delivery room her husband, her mother, her best friend, and her doula. A doula is someone who has had at least twelve children herself without anesthesia, is qualified to offer emotional support and say things like, “You’re doing fine. Did I ever tell you that I had little Friedrich during a coffee break?” My wife paced around in tight circles, worrying, saying, “It’ll be okay,” mostly to herself. I stayed home watching baseball. The phone rang. “We need you,” said my wife. “We’re out of food. Bring more snacks, mostly fruit. And smelling salts.”

So I did. And suddenly I was standing in my own daughter’s delivery room. Dad would have been shocked and impressed. Worship music played. The doula took pictures. I offered words of comfort. “Rachael, don’t panic,” I said in a panicky voice. “Here’s what helped me— Then my mind went blank. Rachael consoled me. “I know. You’ve told me before. Keep telling yourself that most people throughout history have been born this way.”

That’s right,” I managed. Then I hugged her and almost fainted. Back home Steve called to say he was looking at a new water heater. “You put these in wrong and they can blow up,” he said. “As high as 1,000 feet.”

“Great. Is your bed above the water heater?” I asked. “Move it.”

“Why pray when you can worry, Dad?” he laughed.

There’s much to pray about at this stage of life. Eleven months ago Rachael called from Germany. “Daddy,” she said, “we lost the baby.” And so we prayed. And God heard our prayers for peace and comfort and another child, another little miracle. I flipped off the game and noticed my wife’s Bible was open to Psalm 78. Words were underlined: “We will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the LORD…his power and his mighty wonders…He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them… and they in turn will teach their own children. So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.”

Early Sunday morning we greeted our second cute-beyond-words grandbaby. I was love-struck. Despite my suggestion that they name her Phyllis in my honor, she is named after a character from Lord of the Rings, the courageous Eowyn. I held her tight and whispered, “Welcome to our world, Eowyn. Jesus is here. And you’re gonna like your granddaddy. I’m gonna feed you ice cream before your parents want me to. Then we’ll all go over to your uncle’s place where you can have a hot bath. He’s got a new water heater, you know.”

Phil Callaway now has a third grandchild on the way. Visit laughagain.org for info on his books, speaking, and daily radio program.

I don’t care if he was your favorite dog.
We are not naming our baby ‘Old Red’!
Last year, nearly a quarter of our students took part in international practicum placements. Equipped with a biblical foundation and practical skills, students saw God at work in over fifteen countries around the world. Our programs include:

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