

# AND SONS

*INITIATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL*

**VOL. 3**



11

mp

p

System 11: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), 3/4 time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by eighth notes. The left hand plays a bass line of half notes with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.

11

*f*

System 11: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps, 3/4 time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line with a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. The left hand plays a bass line of eighth notes with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.

18

System 18: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps, 3/4 time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The left hand plays a bass line of eighth notes with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.

23

*mp*

System 23: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps, 3/4 time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The left hand plays a bass line of eighth notes with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking.

27

System 27: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps, 3/4 time signature. The right hand plays a melodic line with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The left hand plays a bass line of eighth notes with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking.



# AND SONS

*IMITATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL*

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*Photo on this page and front cover by Mark Skovorodko*









Photo by Taylor Boyd

Landon Creelius of Inland Northwest ski forum [backcountryskifriends.com](http://backcountryskifriends.com) earning his turns in Glacier National Park.



# FOREWORD

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I recently read “Papillon,” the true story of a young frenchman, Henri Charrière, who was falsely accused of murder and sent to spend his life in the penal colonies of French Guiana. Rather than accepting his fate, Charrière spent years in escape attempt after escape attempt, eventually succeeding. What struck me most in his story wasn’t his determination or the wild stories of his cavals. Instead, it was his lack of concern for five or 10 years of his life passing without much to show for it.

Our western culture demands results every day, every semester, at the very least every year. We are obsessed with the immediate.

Here at And Sons we are convinced that things worth having take time. Yes, we want to be present to the moment, but we also want to be focused on the long term, and on the men we are becoming. We are learning to see the day through the lens of the decade. Well, most of the time anyway.

That’s what we’re after with Volume 3: To give our attention to the slow development, to see the themes of our season that we might better discover where we are being invited to grow, or adventure, or to know when a transition has arrived. We’d like to be better men 10 years from now.

So welcome back, comrades. Hitting our third release feels a bit like gaining admission to the “trilogy club,” if there is such a thing, and if there’s not, then we’d like to form it.

Right from the start, we like to lead with a welcome to our Jesus-loving, eclectic, soul-level, adventurous, and (we think) beautiful magazine. No hidden surprises, no hidden agendas, just a group of guys who think it’s better to be ourselves than try to pretend to be something else.

We don’t believe Jesus needs to be dressed up or dumbed down. He is perfectly comfortable being himself and meeting us in the places and hobbies and things that we love, while always calling us further up and further into relationship, initiation, and the men we were meant to be.

– Sam Eldredge



# READER MAIL

---

I am a recent college graduate from the University of Montana and currently applying to medical school. I have been subscribed to your magazine for the past year and have been listening to your podcasts since they first came out. I am writing you guys out of gratitude for the work you are doing for the Kingdom. Your words are always inspiring and have helped me along my journey with Christ as I seek his presence and guidance. I am so grateful for a King that has instilled his Spirit to move you and create something that has changed the lives of many, including mine.

Thank you for inviting Dr. Randolph James into the studio last year. There have been countless times this past year applying for medical school that I have felt hopeless or let lies creep in that say this path I have chosen is pointless. Dr. James has helped shift my outlook on medicine and has helped restore the hope I have for medicine in the future. I will carry on this philosophy with my community as a future physician and believe it will change our nation's outlook on healthcare. Through sitting and listening I am feeling led to pursue Rocky Vista College of Osteopathic Medicine. After being in Montana I learned how to rest and realign my masculine soul in the wilderness through fishing and hiking. There is a deep connection between the physical and spiritual as you guys have said before, and Parker seems like an amazing fit for me and my fiancé to continue our walk together with Jesus.

Continue being the living proof of a loving God. I hope I can provide encouragement for your walk as you have for mine.

– *Jacob Hathaway*

I wanted to send this just to let you know how much I appreciate And Sons and Ransomed Heart. My father was killed tragically when I was 17. I quickly lost my way and began to seek validation in all the wrong places. I found Ransomed Heart and then And Sons and I can honestly say that your message has helped me more than anything. It has helped me find my way back to God and shown me how to cultivate and grow my heart. I am 32 now and have a long way to go, but I sure am thankful to have your help.

– *Will Clarke*

I started listening to your podcasts about a year ago and got my subscription to the magazine shortly after. I remember the excitement of searching through the archives, once I found out that RH had a podcast geared towards guys my age as well! Jesus pointed out episode 18, featuring your father - Adversity and Persistence: Padre, Interpretation, and How Do You Tell When God is Calling You. That's where we dove in together and never looked back.

I remember listening with tears in my eyes, as I felt understood and seen, like I had a place at the table in the discussion. It's like God introduced me to a few wholehearted men (a few steps further along on their journey) who are learning to walk intimately with the Father, as they are bringing others along for the ride as well. This conversation on perseverance spoke directly to a 23-year-old heart, yearning for direction, resources for the war and a tribe to fight alongside.

As episode 18 mentioned, Jesus has been slowly teaching me the "growing skill of not losing heart" - how to take L's well, while training my ears to catch the whispers of His intimate voice. This year, I also cultivated a love for writing, story, and discipleship—as well as a rekindled desire for triathlon! (Thanks, guys!) I'm actually training for a half iron man next summer!

Thank you for creating a place for me to accept an invitation for intimacy with God, as I am learning to be an apprentice of the Father's heart, as Jesus is leading the way.

I love the man I am becoming in the process!

– *Daniel Terpin*

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## WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK.

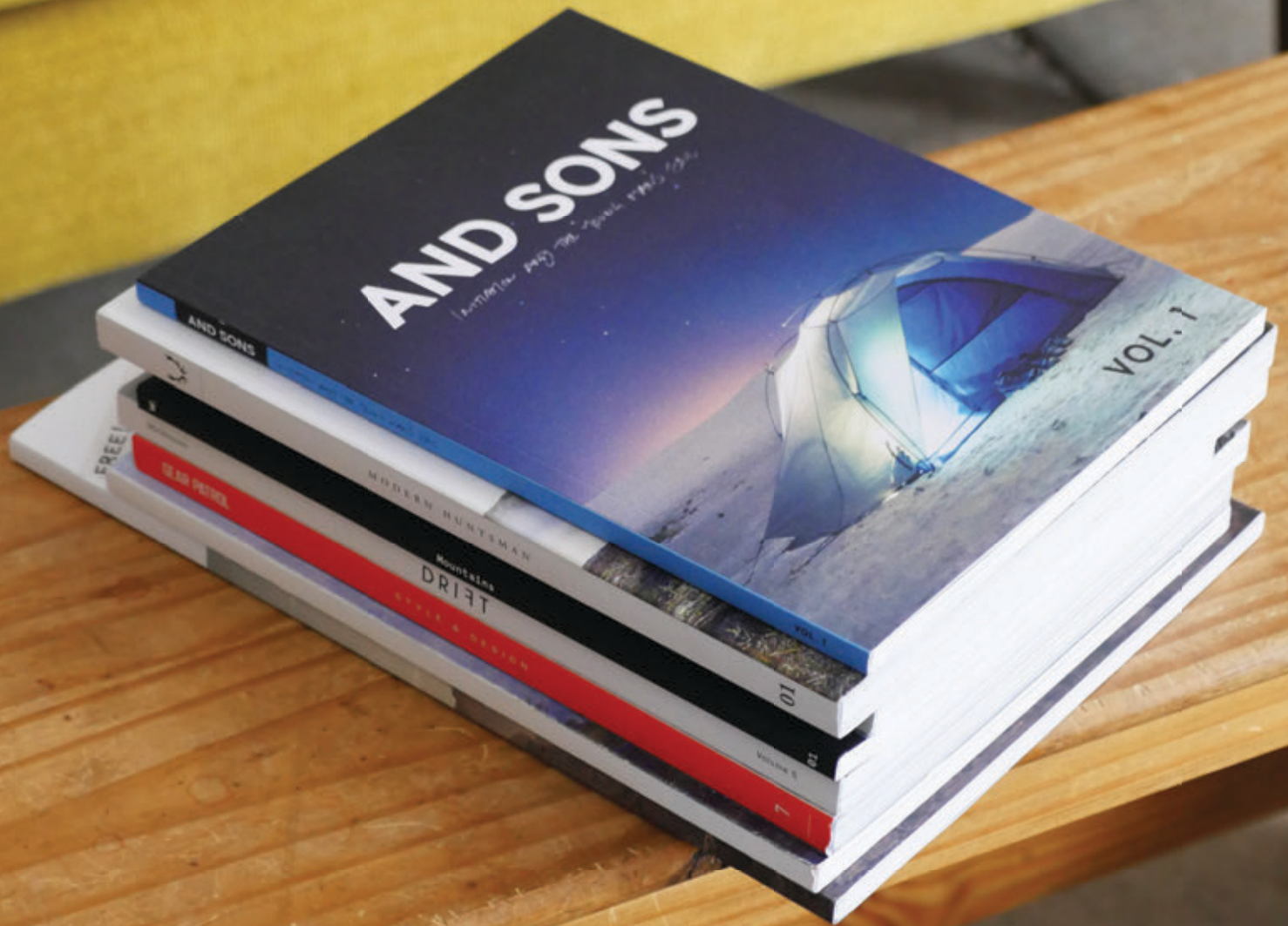
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# COMFORT FOOD

WORDS Josh Skaggs IMAGES Valeriy Kachaev

It's the end of a long day, and you need something. You need junk food. You need to jerk off. You need a joint. You need nachos, Netflix, a bottle of whiskey. You need.

---

You've been good for X days, but today you're about to throw in the towel—again. Maybe it's a sin issue or maybe it's a weird Taco Bell thing that no one knows about. Either way, you know it well: That familiar weakness that keeps getting the better of you. You've been asking God to give you more self-control, to set you free so that you can finally be the perfect man you've envisioned. God doesn't seem interested. You've gotten to the point where this cycle is just a part of your life.

But what if your biggest problem isn't porn or vaping or your (frankly, alarming) queue of K-pop videos? What if your problem is that you're a heretic? Specifically, a Gnostic.

Heretics invented Gnosticism in the second century, and modern heretics like us have perfected it. We perform rituals of abstinence and binging, a dogged attempt to become more "spiritual" by overcoming our bodies. We claim maturity, tamping down any need for comfort in a futile act of self-control—or rather, self-annihilation.

We can recite the Gospel, but we have not reckoned with a God who ate and shat and laughed and cried—a God who was ticklish. We affirm that Jesus was crucified and buried, but we can't wrap our minds around a God who was raised a physical body, a body with skin and scars and an appetite for fish breakfast, a body he still inhabits. This is the body that was broken for us, the body that feeds us.

But lest we get too heady, let's not forget where we started: It's the end of a long day, and you need something.





## *Most of us hate to think about how needy we are, especially our need for comfort.*

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If you're like me, you don't know what you need. Your body is a wise, insensible thing. It knows you're stressed long before your intellect catches on; it intuits your emotions and pain points with startling accuracy. The problem is, it's not good at English. Often the message gets lost in translation. You're anxious, but your body translates this to: "NEED PORN!" You're sad, but somehow the message is: "CHECK INSTAGRAM AGAIN!"

As a recovering Gnostic, you'll be tempted to berate yourself and move on. But your body will only let you disassociate for so long. You know that eventually you're going to have to confront your need. So you receive these feelings as the encrypted messages they are, and you turn to the Father and ask: "What do I need?"

Addressing a father means that you're the kid in this scenario, which is good news. Kids are resistant to Gnosticism. They inhabit a world—i.e. the real world—in which there is very little distinction between physical and spiritual, thinking and feeling. You can see this in the surprising ways they solve problems. They feel sad, so they go outside to play. They didn't sleep well, so they cuddle in their mother's arms.

Good parents are attentive to their kids' needs and help them find rhythms of comfort and relief. Healthy kids can usually learn these rhythms and implement them for themselves. Unfortunately, most of us are not healthy kids. We are more like the kid who downs a two-liter of Dr. Pepper, throws a tantrum and then keeps his parents up all night.

But there's hope for even the worst of us. I used to know a kid who expressed his need by grabbing my face and screaming, "I'LL KILL YOU!" He was a kindergartner with autism who was in the foster care system, and for a year I was his elementary school aid. That year, he taught me to pay attention to my embodied self—by paying attention to his.

Every day, he would scream at me, hang from my neck, ram his skull into my stomach. My co-workers and I called these little outbursts "behaviors." The key to curbing these behaviors wasn't to try to control them, but to make them more and more rare by instilling better rhythms of comfort.

I became sharply attuned to this kid. I could recognize his facial tics and know when he needed a break. For example, if he was edging toward a catastrophe, I might recommend we go wash our hands in the classroom sink. As cool, refreshing water poured over his hands, he would fall into a trance while his breath evened out. Sometimes we'd stay at the sink for several minutes, letting his body reacclimate. Sometimes, if I noticed him starting to go manic, I would press the flats of my hands against his arms and give a comforting squeeze.

It seems small, but comforts like these enabled him to do math problems without blowing snot balls on me. By the end of the year, this boy transformed from a kid who yelled obscenities in my face to a kid who gave me hugs when I dropped him off at the bus.

To be clear, you're the foster kid with autism in this extended metaphor (and I'm, uh... God?). I don't blame you if that feels uncomfortable. Most of us hate to think about how needy we are, especially our need for comfort. But if you're anything like me, your special needs already surface constantly. We all struggle with "behaviors," with outbursts of sin or flesh that make us feel out of control.

So at the end of this long day, tune in. Run a diagnostic. Maybe your body is telling you that you feel sad. Maybe your body is telling you that you haven't been outside in days. Maybe your body is saying "I'LL KILL YOU," but after some prayer you realize what it really means is, "I'm in pain because of that argument this morning."

Good. You're catching on.

Now—what comfort is the Father offering? Try some things out. Go for a hike. Play with your kids. Forgive your boss. Invite a friend over for a home-cooked meal and a good chat. Sing a song of gratefulness. Put yourself in the way of beauty.

It's going to be a process. All of us experience need in a way that is as unique as a limp. The Father is attentive to our special needs, and he is able and willing to guide us into healthy rhythms. I can't tell you what those rhythms will look like—I'm still learning for myself. But I know that however the Father addresses you, He's going to meet your whole self with his whole self. You'll be so relieved. ■









# BACKCOUNTRY SKIING HUT TRIPS

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEX BURTON

*WORDS* Sam Eldredge *IMAGES* Blaine Eldredge

Alex Burton is both friend and coworker and was telling us stories from a backcountry ski trip he took last year through the mountains of Colorado. He was in the midst of prepping for another trip this year when we knew we had to grab him and hear some more about this story. So we've transcribed a conversation we had about skiing, the beauty of the snowy mountains, a torn ACL, and how learning to slow down may be one of the best lessons out there.

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**And Sons:** *Thanks for sitting down with us to talk about not only the basics of backcountry exploration on skis, but also the trip you took last year. To start, though, tell us where backcountry skiing entered your story.*

**Alex Burton:** Last year was actually what I consider the first significant backcountry trip I've done. I've been skiing my whole life, at least it seems like it. I was five when I went skiing for the first time. My dad had been stationed in Germany, and he learned in the Alps and places like Garmisch; he fell in love with skiing, so when they transferred him to Denver, he lived from one great skiing spot to another. When I came along, my dad was taking me up to Vail and putting me on skis.

I don't even remember those days, but that's kind of the beauty of it—I was young enough that I don't remember learning to ski. Skiing was just always something I could do.

**AS:** *That sounds amazing. We would kill for confidence like that in just about anything.*

**AB:** Yeah, it was beautiful. It became this love that I never struggled with in memory. It was like learning to walk. You just know how. So I was really grateful for that, and being part of a family that loved to ski, it kept us together doing something we loved. My mom wasn't a skier, so it was just me, my dad, and my older brother going out early in the morning to the mountains. I remember at six, eight, 10, 12, I never had a problem getting out of bed when we were going skiing. Try to wake me up any other time and it'd be a different story, but for skiing I was always ready to go.

**AS:** *So where did the backcountry stuff start for you?*

**AB:** When I was in my 20s, I went out on a photo shoot with a friend and ended up tearing my ACL. I was married, with our first son on the way, and up to that point I had thought that I might work in skiing as a vocation in some way. What made it worse was that I had a misdiagnosis; my doctors thought it was just a really bad sprain. So I took some time off and then went out again and ended up landing on my bad knee again. I did this three times on what was initially a partial tear before someone diagnosed me correctly.

It actually took two years from the first accident before I got in to a surgeon, and when he came out he said my ligament was so thin it looked like dental floss. If you know anything about knees, [you know] they don't heal quickly. So I took about three years off from the sport I loved. Then we had another kid, and I lost it. We couldn't afford to buy passes, we were in the throes of little kids, and I let skiing go. There was a bit of resignation there, too, if I'm honest.

Interestingly enough, it was my kids who reintroduced skiing to our lives. My eldest was in 5th grade, and some of the resorts in Colorado had this deal where you could take your kid up to three times to each of the different participating resorts. Because of our lifestyle, we couldn't get the kids into skiing any earlier, but I had always wanted to share what I love so much, and so we bought the passes. Which meant I needed to go out and buy a pair of skis.













I had never gotten into backcountry skis before. In the past, I had always been with the folks, hitching rides up the pass and skiing back down without the right equipment, not always knowing what we were doing. I felt very unmentored. But it was a desire, so as I went to get equipment to go with my kids, I figured I'd grab some backcountry equipment. That way, if I had the opportunity, I could seamlessly get into it.

Initially, that gear was just used at resorts, but going with my kids rekindled my love of skiing. What I didn't want to do was go out and try to learn on my own, so I started looking into the sport, and these hut trips caught my eye.

**AS:** *Hut trips?*

**AB:** Yeah, I've always loved backpacking in the winter, since fewer people are out. But I don't really love freezing to death. So there are these huts all across the mountains of Colorado that the 10th Mountain Division helped set up after World War II, and you can plan a trip into the mountains and stay in these huts along the way. You don't have to carry a tent, and you get inside and stay warm at night. It seemed really appealing.

Over the years, I've gotten to know a guy who is into hut trips. He's one of those—what do you call it?—ultra endurance athletes. He runs the Leadville 100—not the bike race, the running race. He's been doing these hut trips, so I asked him if he would take me out some time. He's a good man and someone I really look up to, and he was stoked to take me out.

**AS:** *So he was your foot in the door to that world. It's amazing to get a mentor, let alone one you admire in more ways than one.*

**AB:** Totally. We found a hut called the Polar Star Inn, up on the side of New York Mountain, which is right in the Holy Cross Wilderness.

**AS:** *We take it "Inn" in this case is used rather loosely.*

**AB:** Yeah, probably gives the wrong impression. But if you've slept in the snow and had to make your water by boiling snow in a pan, the Polar Star Inn is pretty swanky. All you need is a sleeping bag, your food, a pillowcase, maybe a bottle of disinfectant, and you're nearly good to go. You're bunking with a bunch of strangers, but it's worth it for a warm night.

When you're planning a trip like this, you need to think about your goal. Some folks want to jump from hut to hut, making their way through the mountains; others are after getting some good skiing in, and picking one hut as a base is a great way to do that. That's what we were after—we wanted to get a full day of skiing in, and so we were doing laps and climbing the mountain to ski. We did two nights at the Polar Star and skied in the middle.











It was about 5.8 miles from the trailhead to the hut and about 2,000 feet of climbing, all on skis. The hut sits at about 11,000 feet, so it took us about four hours skiing in. We stopped on the way to take a break for lunch, but it was pretty enjoyable. When we rolled in to the hut, we were easily the oldest people by a decade or more. I don't consider myself an old dude, but we were the old dudes. There was this moment, though, when everyone was swapping notes on the trek in, when these 20-something guys were talking about how they did the climb up in six hours and another group did it in five and a half... safe to say we blew their perceptions a bit when they heard we did it in four.

**AS:** *I love it! Take that!*

**AB:** Yeah, it was pretty funny. Here's what I will say, though: It's becoming increasingly rare to be in places where there are few people and you are actually in isolated wilderness environments, and it was amazing to be in a space like this. Not the hut itself, but what the opportunity offered. There aren't a lot of people willing to get outside in the middle of winter to brave some of the freezing conditions and the uncertain weather situations, so when you have to skin (yes, skin, a term of art) in for 5.8 miles and 2,000 feet of climbing, there ain't gonna be many people there.

It's a beautiful experience. There's something about snow in trees and on the ground that muffles the sound, and everything's very quiet and still. The animals aren't out. You just hear the crunching of your skins against the ground and your movement through the trees. I love it.

**AS:** *This strikes us as a different goal than typical downhill skiing.*

**AB:** Totally—it slows everything down. You start to realize more and more as you age that there's a benefit to slowing things down, so you begin to notice and see more. What I've found is an increasing desire to slow down my experiences, so I love that aspect of it, particularly the skinning as you climb back up the mountain.

The ski isn't that different from a typical downhill ski. The main difference is you're looking for a lighter and wider ski; you need skis that can handle the powder of the backcountry. The big difference is in the binding. There is Telemark skiing, which allows your heel to be free as you walk and as you descend, and it has its own form of downhill skiing. The other is randonee, which has a binding that frees the heel for climbing and locks it in for downhill to have a more traditional form.

Other than that, the only difference from normal skiing is your skins, which are something you use on the bottom of your skis to keep from sliding back down the hill. These skins usually have synthetic hairs, but sometimes it's actually animal hair on the bottom of the skin, and the hair all runs in one direction. So if you think about it lying down, the hair allows the ski to slide smoothly forward, then catch and push against the snow in the opposite direction and create friction for your ski to climb uphill.

There's the joy of having earned your turns. You didn't jump on a lift and just get there. When things come easy, we take them for granted, right, and it's true in many areas of life, but particularly in skiing. If you take the lift to the top and ski down, you might not be as present to the experience of skiing down the mountain and how cool that is if you had walked it yourself.











It's a wild experience, after all: You're flying down a mountain on frozen water with two boards strapped to your feet.

It's the coolest thing in the world, and when you've skinned for four and a half hours to get there and you've only got 10 minutes down, you're gonna appreciate those minutes a whole lot more. The joy is heightened when you've earned those turns.

**AS:** *You're making us want to go do it right now.*

**AB:** I was very intentional with who I asked to teach me. It ties into my relationship with God because I want to be a student and a son, and in my relationship with God I am constantly looking to see how God is training me as a son and as a student. I think one of the biggest ways God does that is through other people. So being in the woods with Dave was as much about asking him questions about being a father and learning from him as it was about him teaching me about backcountry skiing.

This is probably true for anything I do, whether it's cycling or backcountry skiing, but the biggest motivator for these huts trips is that I wouldn't do it if it were just me. As much as I love doing these turns and being out there in the wilderness, it wouldn't be enjoyable if I were by myself. The biggest factor for me is the relational piece, and, for me, that core desire God's placed in us for relationship and the way we bear his image in that, the way we see the Trinity in relationship, not in isolation—that's what attracts me to adventure. ■

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Enjoy your tea, Bill,  
but don't forget:  
men are arrogant,  
masochistic,  
overbearing and  
generally bad!



YOUR  
BOY  
IS  
OUR  
PROBLEM

BE CONCERNED ABOUT MEN



# DO NOT BE ASHAMED

WORDS Josh Skaggs IMAGE Blaine Eldredge

Last week I was on my couch watching YouTube when the Verdict found me again. The comedian, a young woman, opens her standup routine by saying how terrible it is to be a straight woman in 2019. In her words, to love men is like going to a restaurant that keeps giving you food poisoning. “Turns out, boys, you’re no good. You’re no good.”

---

Cue uproarious laughter. It’s common knowledge that men are terrible. You can read the Verdict in a friend’s Instagram story or hear it from your college professor. You can find it on the news and in your favorite comedy. (If you haven’t noticed the upward trend in vitriol toward men—you lucky guy—watch any SNL episode from the past couple years.)

The Verdict is: It’s time to give up on men. We’ve had our chance at power, and now it’s time for someone else to have a turn. Men are no good.

The past few years have given us little reason to think otherwise. We’re living in the era of Harvey Weinstein and Bill Cosby, of abusive Olympic doctors and deviant Catholic priests. Last year I followed the news about men until I couldn’t anymore. Men have done terrible things. Reading the news, I felt a cry for justice rising up in me, alongside a deep sadness that any court ruling would be too late and insufficient to repair the wrongs that have been done.

As trials are settled and various men are ruled guilty or innocent, I am aware that another important deliberation has left the courtroom. Men—no longer individuals but all of us—are on trial. And things don’t look good.

When is the last time you heard someone affirm men? Not statements about how much money men make or the advantages we have in Hollywood.

When have you heard men affirmed—as a state of being? *Men are good. Men contribute to our society. Men are essential to the future of our nation.*

The growing consensus in our culture is that men are bad. Enough men have been exposed as monsters that we must be wary of all men. If we were to defend ourselves, the Verdict would oppose us: After all the wrong that men have done, do you think you have any right to state your case?

Wendell Berry, my favorite poet, writes about the experience of accusation. He describes a nighttime scene: You are walking peacefully in your backyard, when suddenly a spotlight shines upon you, and your guilt overtakes you.

*Though you have done nothing shameful / they will want you to be ashamed.*

He describes the horror that befalls you if you succumb to this accusation.

*Then such light as you have made*

*In your history will leave you.*

*They will no longer need to pursue you.*

*You will pursue them, begging forgiveness,*

*And they will not forgive you.*

If we submit to the Verdict, we lose our light. Look around and see it happening in real time among your friends and family. Most of us are becoming passive. We avoid risk and back down from conflict.



When their light has picked you out  
And their questions are asked, say to them:  
“I am not ashamed.” A sure horizon  
will come around you. The heron will rise  
in his evening flight from the hilltop.

Wendell Berry

Disempowered in our relationships, we fight virtual battles and take solace in video game wins. Unable to trust the value of our identities and callings, we tally sports stats and follow other men's successes and failures. Like Winston Churchill, we still get pumped up by the man "in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood." But we find ourselves on the wrong side of the equation; we are the critic, "the man who points out how the strong man stumbles."

Meanwhile, frustration simmers just beneath the surface. Seemingly calm men explode in fits of road rage or kitchen screaming matches. Scroll through YouTube comments for 60 seconds (or, if you value your peace of mind, don't) and find men who are making their voices heard in the only way they know how. Scattered across the internet you'll also find INCELs, "involuntary celibates," who respond to perceived rejection with threats of violence and hate speech against women.

As the most extreme example, consider the baffling fact that thousands of men from the western world were recruited by ISIS in the past several years. Recruiters spoke to their identity, wooing them with promises of belonging and a higher calling. They responded in droves.

The Verdict has reached us, and it demands a response. Fight or flight. We either double-down on our power, or we fade into passivity. If we choose the former, we reinforce the Verdict by reacting to it as a threat. We cling to what's ours, downplaying victims' voices and sounding an obnoxious rallying cry for our rights. If we choose the latter, we sink down and float life's lazy river on our backs. Either way, we end up hating ourselves.

Wendell Berry offers another option:

*When their light has picked you out*

*And their questions are asked, say to them:*

*"I am not ashamed." A sure horizon  
will come around you. The heron will rise  
in his evening flight from the hilltop.*

There's a reason so few of us choose this third path. Secretly, most of us fear that the Verdict is true. We aren't good. We have ample reason to be ashamed. Whether in secret or in public, each of us has aligned with evil. Each of us has betrayed our identity and used our power for our own gain. If we say, "I am not ashamed," we say it in a whisper, for fear of being exposed. We cannot make too big a deal of our shamelessness because the devil has dirt on us.

This is when we must align with the Gospel. All of us have fallen short. There is none righteous, not even one. Jesus carries our Verdict into the grave and raises us up with him in new life. It is only when we remember our identity in Christ that we are able to say, "I am not ashamed."

This declaration has vast implications for men and women. To be clear: Women are not our accusers. The devil—literally, "the slanderer"—is. Our enemy will do anything to steal, kill and destroy us. He will even co-opt women to his strategy, exploiting their victimhood to reinforce his narrative.

But we are not unaware of his schemes. We see through the lie that life is a zero-sum game in which men and women contend for a narrow platform. Men don't need to be silenced so that women can have a voice. And women don't need to be suppressed so that men can hold on to power.

The Verdict has hurt men and women alike, and we as men can help repair the damage by standing in the fullness of our identities. Women need men to be strong and alive. The fatherless need a father. The powerless need men who use their power for good.

In Jesus we see the way forward. He understands power dynamics better than we do. When he is accused before Pilate, the man who will decide his fate, Jesus is able to stand without defending himself or kowtowing to lies. He understands reality:

"You would have no authority over me unless it was given to you from above."

Jesus rejects the narrative of accused and accuser. Instead, he lays down his life so that he can take it back up again. He lets go of his reputation so that he can embrace his identity.

When I look at where our culture is heading, I am concerned that men will fall under greater shame and accusation. But that doesn't have to be our story. Jesus was accused, despised and rejected yet he knew his identity and leveraged his power to bring a new kingdom to earth.

In Christ we can do the same. We can be fathers, brothers, husbands, friends. We can bless women to rise. We can advocate for justice. We can be good men. Under accusation, a verdict that says that we have already been ruled guilty, we can stand and say, "I am not ashamed." ■





# NERDY BOARDS

WORDS Blaine Eldredge IMAGES Wookie Jones & Blaine Eldredge

The Jedi paused; behind the door, she thought she heard the click of boots. “What now?” the rebel asked. He was bleeding badly at the hip, his endurance almost spent. The Jedi tensed. There was an ambush waiting, she knew. She checked the hour: no time. Gaarkhan had promised to hold the docking bay gate, but he could not have held it for long. “We get inside,” she said, “we rescue Han and go.” The rebel thumbed the pad beside the door; it shuddered and shook. “When it opens, you run,” he said. He handed her the dice.

Last Christmas, some good friends gave me a blue box with superheroes adorning the front and complicated instructions on the back. A game of some kind. It looked hard, so I did the natural thing and shelved it until a dark winter wore away my reticence. In March, I took it down. DC Comics Deck-Building, it said. For their color and variety, the cards could have been an underwater ecosystem. My wife read the rules. We started a round.

This was no cribbage game. In an instant, it was kicks, punches, and the deadly Suicide Squad. Laser vision, and the King of Atlantis, presided over by the villain Ra's al Ghul. The Green Arrow's bow made the villains come within range. The Lasso of Truth swept their cronies from the lineup. It was beyond nerdy—it was devout. And we were hooked.

When it comes to board games, most people know Bicycle playing cards and Apples to Apples. That's fine, but that's like knowing vanilla and ignoring all other ice cream. The world of (increasingly) geeky board games is wonderful. Here's a primer, in which I evaluate some of my favorites in terms of criteria I value.

But first, a word of advice: Joy is opposed. Board games do not produce joy for every minute put in. All of these games can provide hours of laughter and tribulation, harrowing decisions and triumph. And, as every family navigating a get-together knows, they can fragment just as easily.

Here's what inevitably happens: One person gets six bad rolls in a row. We wince. Another person starts to head downhill after a series of disappointing draws. We tense. Sorry, my friend, but them's the rules. We begin to serve the structure and not the purpose (which is joy). Don't serve the structure.

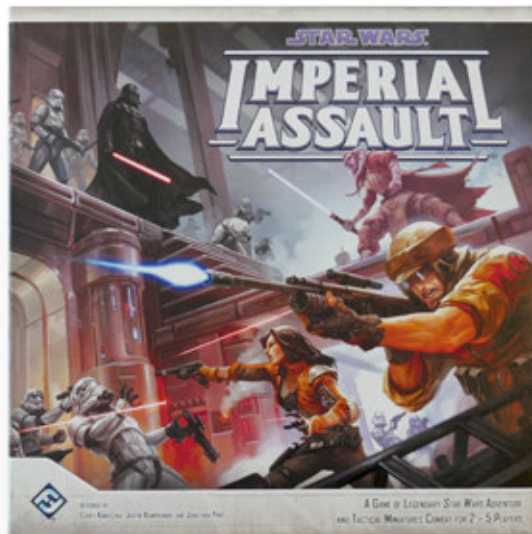
I'm not saying we should sacrifice our every structure to our whims, only that we should remember joy is opposed. Tell your friend to roll again. Throw a useful card to your nephew. Games don't happen in a vacuum. Those dice aren't as random as we'd like them to be, and neither are our emotions, so keep first things first as you take down the Death Star.



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# STAR WARS IMPERIAL ASSAULT

*The Master Chief and Yoda write a choose-your-own-adventure novel.*



## GAMEPLAY

Imperial Assault marks a threshold most players never cross. It's overtly nerdy, for one. It involves multiple missions, for another, and most people aren't used to combining table play with the progression of a video game. That said, if you ever make a foray into the genre, it'll be worth your time. Make it a family Christmas present and break it out December 1st. Each player gets a character, except one, who'll be the Empire/Enemy. That lucky duck plays as a host of stormtroopers, walkers, Star Wars creatures, and Vader himself. That player also has to understand the game pretty well, so good luck reading the manual. It's a combination of strategy and dice, which can be truly annoying. A mission takes about an hour.

## MENTAL STRESS

Remember in the "Star Wars" films the way the Alliance had its base destroyed and only won on slapdash effort?

## COMMUNITY

In every town and college and church, there are a few people who haven't thrown away their Star Wars dreams. Those people are treasures.

## DIFFICULTY

Okay, no joke, this game has a dialect. But you wouldn't spurn Paris just because you don't know much French. I spent my first few rounds contemplating the beauty of the figurines, which softened the edge on the difficult rules.



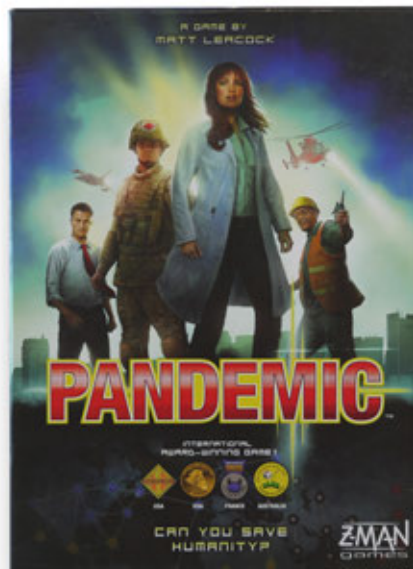




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# PANDEMIC

*This is a game to lose with your friends.*



## GAMEPLAY

Pandemic is played as a team, and not only because misery loves company. The game starts with an infected world and a (not so) highly trained team of specialists developing a containment strategy. If that doesn't sound like fun, think again. That team is racing against three asynchronous clocks: The diseases can exhaust themselves (which makes you lose, oddly enough), they can explode (you lose again), the players can (literally) run out of options. Everybody's on a team, everybody's got an influential ability, and everybody's working together to win a game that's tough to beat. The game evolves between each turn, so there's no waiting around. Everybody needs to carefully revise a common strategy, which crumbles before your eyes. You won't see this much deliberation outside March's NCAA tournament bracket building.

## MENTAL STRESS

Have the Dispatcher fly the Medic to Japan to control the outbreak in Osaka! Oh wait, no! We need the Dispatcher to fly the Researcher to the station in Atlanta to develop a cure! Wait, no, the Containment Specialist is already in Washington! Etc.

## COMMUNITY

You're all on a team! Everyone is needed. This is a game for that difficult aunt who throws her cribbage hands into the fireplace.

## DIFFICULTY

It takes anywhere between one and 10 games to learn which developments matter and which don't. The actual gameplay can be learned in one round.



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# BANG!

*Billy the Kid stumbles into The Departed.*



## GAMEPLAY

Bang! is an Italian game with English subtitles. It's based on the Spaghetti Westerns made in Italy at the height of the genre. Every player gets a role, and every role has a mission. There are Colt 45s, mustangs, and scatter guns. There are alliances and terrible betrayals. It's a game played with a small hand (like Uno or Euchre), and each card signifies a different action. Unlike a deck-building game, you drop your cards in a community pile and rarely hold more than six. While there's not a card to make you use an accent, it's hard to resist.

## MENTAL STRESS

The Outlaws are gunning for the Sheriff. The Sheriff is backed by the Deputies, but also by the nefarious Renegade, who tries to keep the Sheriff alive until the end and then kill the Sheriff himself. Oh, and no one knows who anyone else is, except for the Sheriff, who gets a badge. Try looking in your brother's pleading eyes while he swears he's the Deputy and then draws a gun.

## COMMUNITY

You are enemies and traitors, need I remind you. This is a wonderful game for your imaginative friends but bad for your feuding neighbors.

## DIFFICULTY

The game develops a truly labyrinthian set of permutations. Does a man hiding in a barrel draw for a dodge when he's riding a horse? While the goals are straightforward, some of the scenarios are not (just like a Western!), so it's important to have a sovereign judge, or at least a sovereign principle. We have a tie goes to the runner rule that works pretty well. If a card can be used to a player's advantage in dubious circumstances, we let them do it.







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## DC COMICS DECK-BUILDING

*The Justice League movie plays a game of Solitaire.*



### GAMEPLAY

In a deck-building game, each player accumulates cards over a series of rounds, building on a basic hand. Those cards create complex causal chains that accomplish goals. In the deck-building world, most people have heard of Dominion; it's great, but if you're going to put together attacks and defenses, you might as well do it with Superman. Marvel has a version, too—Marvel Legendary—that's excellent, and a little more complicated. DC COMICS Deck Building's a winner on its play alone. My wife, who has never seen a superhero film, loves the logic of counteracting cards and surprising permutations. BUT. The geek bonus is tremendous. I've seen a lot of superhero movies so I can't help but feel a thrill as Batman faces off against Aquaman faces off against the Suicide Squad...

### MENTAL STRESS

It's not an easy game to lose, except to your teammate. I've played this game on many a relaxing evening and lost no sleep for it.

### COMMUNITY

Superhero lovers unite. Try to land cards that get you other cards, not cards with big effects. Think chains over chain rings, or your teammates' turns will stretch into oblivion.

### DIFFICULTY


It's tough to know why trucks have ABS until you've driven in a winter storm. Some of the cards make no sense until you're entrenched in the game, but the basic actions of buying, attacking, and defending offer an easy on-ramp. ■





# CONFLICT ISN'T FAILURE

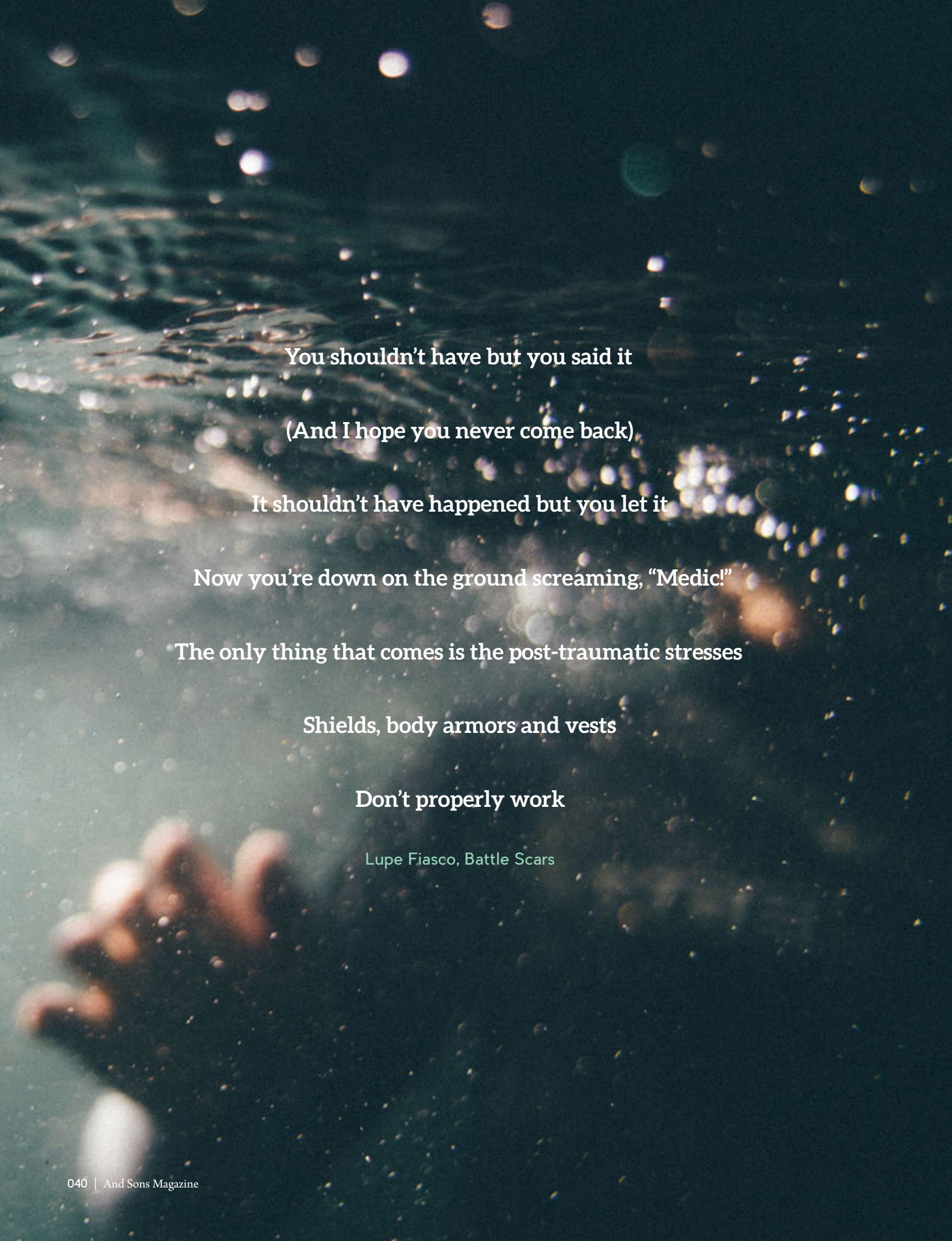
*WORDS* Luke Eldredge



I am drawn to the North Sea. I first met it at 17, on the north coast of Scotland. Something about its wildness, the cold and haunting beauty, captured my imagination. Its waters, dusty blue like deep stone, look north to the pinnacle of the world. I dreamt of returning one day to set out upon its salty skin and engage with the dangerously beautiful. At 22 I fulfilled that dream in a way entirely unexpected: I fell in love with a woman.

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You shouldn't have but you said it  
(And I hope you never come back)  
It shouldn't have happened but you let it  
Now you're down on the ground screaming, "Medic!"  
The only thing that comes is the post-traumatic stresses  
Shields, body armors and vests  
Don't properly work

Lupe Fiasco, Battle Scars

Relationship with a strong, vibrant woman carries with it the wildness and the dangerously beautiful that I saw and longed for in the waters of the North Sea. And it is dangerous for a reason. Just as when two currents converging off a cape create volatile waters, so at the convergence of two hearts, two stories, the waters surge and roil and there is conflict. In most convergences, conflict is inevitable and natural, not a sign that something is wrong—simply proof of the wild powers at play. But if conflict is “natural,” inevitable, why does it always seem to feel like failure?

The war metaphor works because that is what it feels like. There is pain, there is disappointment, and there are feelings of rejection. Like the North Sea, you cannot control conflict. That is one of the reasons why love and the sea (and relationships) are so alluring. But when pain, disappointment, and rejection follow, conflict for me so often feels like failure.

Every time conflict flares up in my relationship, I feel like I’m in Lupe Fiasco’s “Battle Scars”.

Why aren’t I living better? I want to be Jason Bourne or James Bond; I want to have total mastery over my world. Not suffocating dominance, but rather the knowledge that I am completely equipped to handle anything I am confronted with. I want to feel like the sailor who knows the sea.

Conflict flies in the face of this desire. I do not feel mastery when I have hurt someone or have been hurt and I feel anything but equipped. I feel like a five-year-old wearing arm floaties in the middle of a North Sea tempest; the convergence of our mutual longings, our disappointment and pain heave and toss with the momentum of all our past heartache. I feel sucked into the vortex.

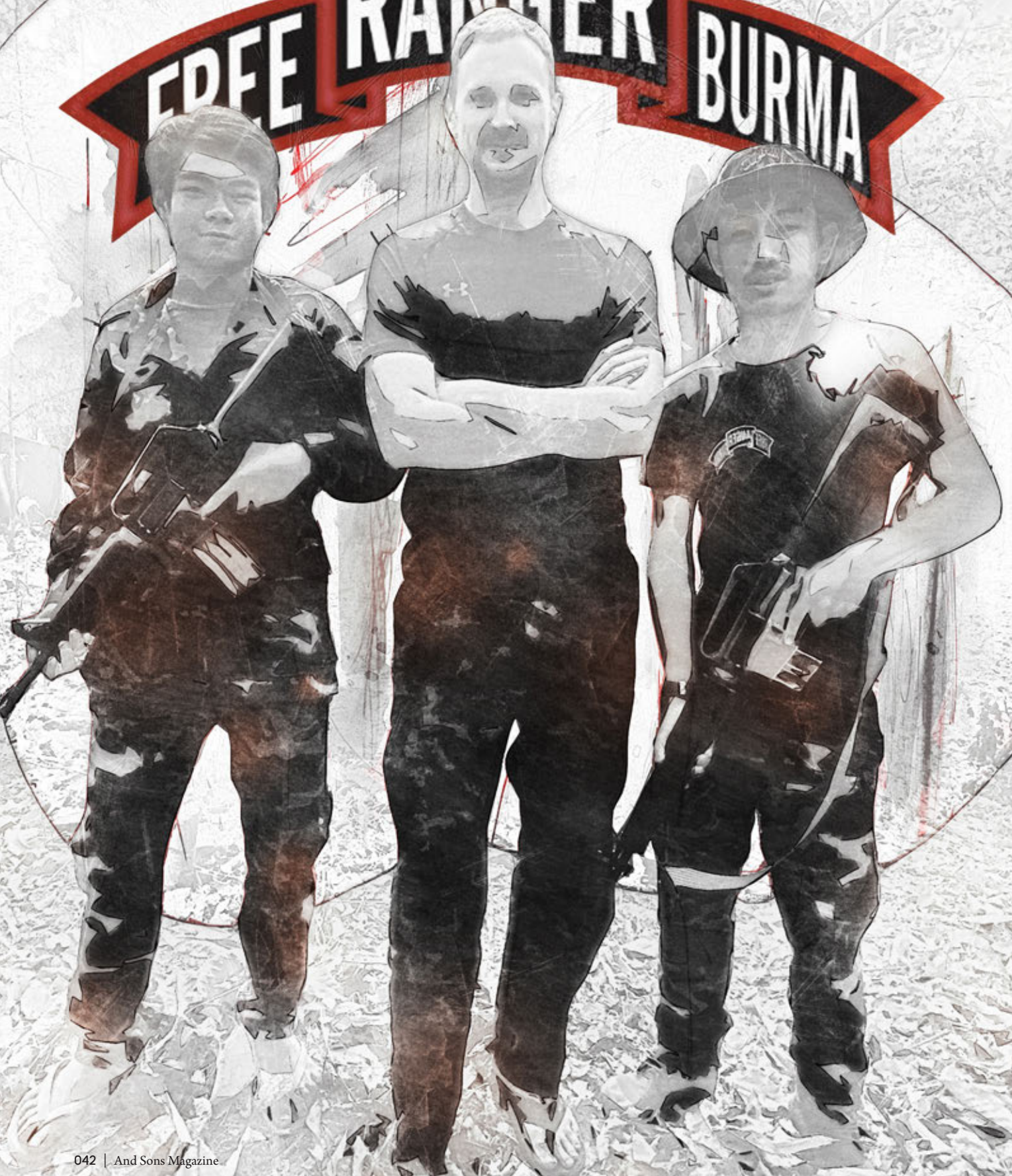
My friends report, “We had a fight.” But I think the problem is betrayed in the language. “Fighting” is inherently separating; it assumes two opponents attempting to subdue the other forcibly, either through pain or strategy. It assumes a winner and a loser. But being in love means being an advocate for the restoration of another person—even in conflict. Especially in conflict. When advocacy and restoration are the context, working through frustration and pain can take place in the safety that I am seeking my beloved’s good, or that she is seeking mine. Yes, there is risk. I find I have to be willing to set sail on the North Sea. As the poet Antonio Machado wrote:

*Mankind owns four things  
that are no good at sea:  
rudder, anchor, oars  
and the fear of going down.*

Conflict is not failure. When I handle conflict poorly, it makes me feel ill-equipped as a man. But in the safety of being an advocate for the other, in our mutual commitment toward restoration, there is safety in naming brokenness. Converging currents are part of the glory of the sea, and of love. But enough maritime metaphors. ■



# FREE RANGER BURMA



I had 20 pounds of uranium in my backpack, it was 90° with 100% humidity, and there were more than a hundred miles of hiking left to get to the border. I was looking up a 3,000-foot jungle climb when I wondered, “What decisions did I make in my life that led me to this moment?”

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Whenever I think about that—whether I’m meeting with a potential terrorist, smuggling a chunk of uranium, sneaking through checkpoints or across international borders in the middle of the night—I can’t help but chuckle to myself because I know the answer. I said “yes” to the Father.

You might be wondering if I am some sort of secret military agent, but I’m just a missionary. An ordinary guy from Canada. About five years ago I thought I would take a couple months off to volunteer with an organization that does war relief work in Southeast Asia. I had just turned 30. I went with the idea that I would spend five or six months volunteering my time, and then come back to comfortable North America and move on with my life. The Father had other plans, though. After six months, I did return, but I returned changed and with a feeling that my regular old life in Canada was done. I had worked as a professional ice hockey coach for a decade (I know, how cliché). I had been immersed in the cutthroat culture of professional sports, and I was slowly starting to climb the ranks. At one point my boss and I had a competition to see who could work the most consecutive days. I did 67 days straight. When I finally took a day off, my boss was angry that I was “unreachable.” The professional sports world is all about who you know and being willing to sacrifice everything for the team. If I wasn’t busy coaching, I was busy networking and promoting myself.

After my six-month stint, I felt the Father was telling me that my career as a pro coach was over, and it was time to follow Him, if I was willing. I spent three months debating, laying fleeces, and making deals with Him. Eventually I realized I was holding onto “control” and that giving up a career I had worked so hard to build, to follow God, was giving up control. It was scarier than anything I’ve ever faced in the jungle. So I returned to Southeast Asia and for the past five years have worked with oppressed people in Burma.











Burma (also known as Myanmar) is home to the longest civil war in the world. The military-led government oppresses its people and commits human rights violations daily. You might have heard about the Burmese army trying to eliminate all Rohingya from Burma. In targeted and precise attacks, they moved into peaceful villages in the middle of the night and opened fire on the bamboo huts where families slept. They locked families in their homes and lit the homes on fire, burning them alive. They targeted women and children, wanting the Rohingya ethnicity to disappear.

This has led to more than 800,000 Rohingya fleeing from Burma into Bangladesh in one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. I was there. But what people may not know is that the Burmese army has been doing things like this against its ethnic minorities for the past 70 years. The Kachin (a predominantly Christian ethnic minority in Northern Burma) faces attacks every week by fighter jets, artillery, and infantry. The Karen (Southeastern Burma) have been getting beat up by the army since the Brits decolonized Burma after World War 2. Burma has more than a million displaced people within its borders, and over a million have left the country and are now in refugee camps outside its borders.



Free Burma Rangers (FBR) was founded by my boss, David Eubank, 22 years ago. We have two missions at FBR: Help the people, and get the news out. If the army comes into a village and starts shooting, we help the residents escape and “clear” the village. Our teams are trained to be the last ones in a village that is under attack. If there is a malaria outbreak, we hike for days or weeks through the jungle to give medicine. However we can help, even if it’s just to share the gospel and pray with someone, to tell them they’re not forgotten, we do it. And we also try to shine a light on what’s happening in Burma. The Burmese army loves to spread “fake news” and lies about what is going on. The United Nations has long been banned from going into Burma, and journalists who report on the truth end up being banned or thrown in jail (or just disappear.) So we gather evidence of ceasefire violations, human rights violations, and the actions of the army. We try to get the news out about what’s happening inside the country.

Sometimes this means finding a “tin mine” that isn’t really a tin mine, but is in fact a uranium mine, sneaking in, stealing some uranium samples, and bringing them back for the UN and journalists to get reports out. (Side note: Uranium is not radioactive unless it’s “enriched,”

and the stuff I was carrying was basically just a big heavy rock. I haven’t gotten any super powers from it yet. I now keep a chunk of it on my desk as a paper weight.)

When I go on a mission in the jungles of Burma, I often send out an email to my “prayer warriors” outlining some specifics they can pray for while I’m out there.

On one of my missions this past year, I was going to be the only foreigner and only English speaker on the team; the rest of the team was of Karenni or Kachin ethnicity. We were going to do a lot of hiking, a lot of sleeping in hammocks in the jungle, and our estimate was that we would be in the jungle for about a month. As I wrote to my prayer warriors, I felt a bit apprehensive about being “alone” for so long. Normally when I go, I have at least two or three other foreigners with me—people who understand my language, culture, and who I bounce ideas off of while out in the field. But this time I was going to be “alone” for at least a month. I wondered how I’d do. One prayer request I always ask of my prayer warriors is “Help me to love the team well,” but this time I wrote “Help me love and be loved by the team.” Be loved by the team? Where did that come from? I had never really thought of receiving love from the ones I’m there to lead and serve. But it just kind of came out. It was the Father’s way of walking with me. It was so gracious.













On the mission we'd spend hours hiking through the jungle, sometimes up to 14 hours a day. At night we'd string up our hammocks between some bamboo trees and make a fire to cook some rice over. We didn't have much to eat other than rice, but the guys were always hunting, always on the lookout for a plant or animal that could be eaten. And they took me into their group in one of the most beautiful ways. Even now, as I reflect on it, the love they showed me, and the love the Father opened me up to receive, was so pure it brings tears to my eyes. Small glances over their shoulder as we hiked up big mountains, making sure I was ok. Hunting squirrel, hawk, and jungle chicken and offering me the best bits (did you know there was a best bit of squirrel?). They would always make sure I had a good place to hang my hammock, and then they would hang theirs close by so I wouldn't feel alone. In the wee hours of the morning when the air was cold and I was tucked into my sleeping bag, they would get up and light a fire near me, or around 4 a.m. I would feel a blanket draped over me and little hands tucking it in. I knew it meant they were giving me their own blanket and that they wouldn't have any. Normally I would vehemently refuse it, but on this mission I decided to receive their love. It was so holy. With each small act of love, I felt this incredible nudge from the Father that the love was His.

In the 1600s when white, English Christians settled America, they formed little colonies. These were safe places away from the indigenous peoples they feared. Yet as Benjamin Franklin noted in 1753, young men would often leave the safety of the colony and move to the tribes. There were many accounts of white young men leaving the safety and security of their settlements to go live among the natives, but there were almost never accounts of natives leaving the tribes to go and live among the whites. Why? I believe it was because of the sense of community in their tribes.

They found a place where, as young men, their strength was needed to survive, and where they were surrounded by a loving, close community.

In our modern society, we live near other people, but we don't live with other people. We live in apartments, apart from other members of our family. We separate our infants from their mothers at such a young age and make them sleep in their own rooms. Most tribal cultures would consider leaving a crying baby alone in a dark room separated from their caregiver a form of child abuse.

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*We're all going to die  
one day. Hopefully not  
today, but one day.  
"Are you afraid of dying?"  
shouldn't be the question.  
No, the question  
should be, "How do  
you choose to live?"*

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Tribal cultures have up to a 90% skin-to-skin contact with infants, and in the "civilized" West it is as low as 16%. We strive for wealth and affluence, and yet the more wealthy we become, the more independent and removed from society we become. It's no wonder that anxiety, depression, and mental health issues run rampant.

Coming back to North America this year was hard. I felt more disconnected to our culture. Even in the safety of the western church I didn't feel the same connection and community that I felt out there in the jungle. I'm an introvert and love my space and quiet time, but once you're

adopted into the tribe you're never alone. In villages deep in the jungle I stand out like a sore thumb. I am a big, tall, clumsy white guy in places that haven't seen foreigners in more than 70 years. I constantly have a crowd around me. When I sleep on the floor of a bamboo hut, I often wake up with three or four of our team members spooning me and snoring away. There are moments it can be too much and I just want my space. But I always miss it. When I get back to my apartment and sleep alone, I miss the warmth of a body next to me. I miss waking up and being loved by someone.

When I work with my Rohingya friends in the refugee camps, they often tell me, "I want to help my people." It's all good and noble and nice, but it often leaves me asking, "Who are my people?" My family? My few? My fellow Canadians? Surely it can't be the hundreds of "friends" and "followers" on social media? Heaven forbid. This year I learned that my "people" are the ones I would feed and fight for. My guys in the jungle who so lovingly adopted me, constantly making sure I was safe and feeding me (even though it was often red ants, snake, or some sort of bug.) They weren't just being polite; they really loved me. And when I am asked by others why I risk my life for these people on the other side of the world, I have to pause and think. A few years ago I would have given you the Sunday School answer: "Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for a friend." Which is true, and I believe it. Another answer I may have given was that I'm not afraid to die. We're all going to die one day. Hopefully not today, but one day. "Are you afraid of dying?" shouldn't be the question. No, the question should be, "How do you choose to live?"

So why do I risk my life for these people on the other side of the world? The answer that comes from a deep place in my heart is that I love them. I really do. They are my brothers, my family, my people, my tribe. I love them, and when you love someone, you show up. ■

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# AN EXPLOSIVE WORD

*WORDS* Scott Morin & Mandy Nelson *IMAGES* Brian Edward Miller





*Jesus is a notorious straight-shooter. It seems, though, that not all the language God employs is so self-evident. By way of example, consider the end of creation, where God looks at what he has done and says, “Good,” like creation was a functioning faucet. Given what’s just happened—light bursting into life, water rushing up through the cracks of the earth—“Good” feels like an understatement. Yet good and goodness permeate the intervention of God into the world from one testament to the other. That being true, we’ve asked a couple friends who know a thing or two about that to fill it in for us, to explain the richness of the language of the speaking God. – Editor*

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**T**ov is an almost ludicrously small but infinitely expansive Hebrew word. Today’s native English speakers may be vaguely familiar with *tov* only because of hearing the Jewish/Yiddish saying “*Mazel Tov*” (“Good Luck” in English), but it’s arguably one of the richest words out there. The explosive power in *tov* can be felt right from the beginning.

*Tov* first arrives on the scene in the creation story—the first story detailed in scripture. It’s the word God uses to describe what God sees after completing various acts of creation. God’s usage of *tov* in Day 3 of creation does a spectacular job of unveiling for us what *tov* is.

*“Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good [tov].”* (Genesis 1:11–12 NRSV)

In these two verses there is a beautiful progression of movement: God calls forth the seeds he has embedded in creation, creation brings forth those seeds with the seeds of future life in them, and God sees the process as *tov*.

Metaphorically speaking, if we are trees and we drop seeds but none of them grow...no *tov*. If we drop seeds and some of them grow and become trees of their own but none of them have seeds of their own...no *tov*. The reason why the plants and trees must have seeds inside of them is so that in due time those plants and trees will drop their seeds into the earth and further the cycle of creating life.

So what would God call good? Anything that produces life and contains the potential for more life within it. Think of a seed becoming an orchard. Or, more practically speaking, think of a conversation or story that stirred you to bring forth life from inside of you and offer it in a way that had the potential to call forth life in another.

Put simply, *tov* occurs when our friend with the ginormous red beard calls out the courage in kids by training them to jib on rails, and those kids then in turn offer encouragement to their peers as they help them perfect their boarding tricks. *Tov* also occurs when that same friend inspires others to praise God as they witness him painting during worship times at fellowship gatherings.

*Tov* occurs yet again when our friend Becky speaks to countless crowds of churchgoers who experience visceral transformation as she teaches on the beauty, wildness, and power of sex when it’s embraced in a mutually honoring way and in the context of a covenant.

The difference between how modern society uses the word *good* and how God uses the word *good* is staggering. In our day and age it's not uncommon to hear *good* being used to describe a new craft beer or an entertaining sitcom or the latest pithy tweet by a celebrity. Scripture, on the other hand, is significantly choosier when it comes to applying the label "good" (*tov*) to something.

Let's explore the story of Solomon receiving the gift of extraordinary wisdom and exercising it with the two-prostitutes-and-the-one-living-baby predicament. This story fleshes out what *tov* in action looks like. In the first part of 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon says to God, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good [*tov*] and evil..."

What frequently gets translated as "an understanding mind" is *עַמְשׁוּת* in Biblical Hebrew (pronounced "lev shomea"), which is "a hearing heart" if translated with simple literalness. The purpose behind God giving Solomon a hearing heart is so Solomon can govern God's people and discern between good (*tov*) and evil.

Shortly after the exchange between God and Solomon, two prostitutes show up on Solomon's doorstep with a baby they both claim to be their own son. Solomon devises a test intended to reveal which woman will choose *tov*. Based on the women's responses in the face of a death threat to the child, Solomon discerns who the true mother is: The woman who cares more about the life of the child than her own desire to rear the child.

Scripture abundantly speaks of *tov*. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph states the following to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good [*tov*] to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." In the first part of Psalm 23:6, David declares to God, "Surely your goodness [*tov*] and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life..."

*Tov* is talked about throughout the Old Testament, and the concept of assessing the fruit one brings forth isn't only addressed there. We know from the New Testament that we are to judge a tree not by its height, the number of leaves it produces, or its visually aesthetic appeal, but by its fruit. (Mt. 7:16; Lk. 6:44)

In Genesis 1 we see that creation is far reaching and encompasses everything from the textured dirt into which we dig our toes to the core fibers of our very beings. God speaks seeds of life into the earth, and in Genesis 2:7 we read about God breathing seeds of life into us as well: "And forming is Yahweh Elohim [the LORD God] the human of soil from the ground, and He is blowing into his nostrils the breath of the living, and becoming is the human a living soul."

Now it's our turn to bring forth the seeds of life within us—seeds of encouraging, teaching, interceding, healing, designing, building, creating, and so on. We've heard it said that people who don't find meaning and fulfillment in their lives aren't bringing forth what God planted inside of them and intended for them to bring forth. We can choose whether to have a hearing heart like Solomon, and we can choose whether to partner with God in bringing forth the seeds of life inside of us.

God's invitation is on the table, so here's wishing you much *tov*. ■

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# HOLY SMOKES

*WORDS* Sam Eldredge *IMAGES* Blaine Eldredge

Ben Franklin is purported to have said, “Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy.” I happen to agree, and would add that most good things are proof of his love for us—be it mangoes, motorcycles, a striking sunset, or cigars. Some of my fondest memories involve a good conversation and a lit cigar. Something about the ritual of snipping or biting the end off and lighting the cigar, the way the smoke smells at that first drag—it connects me to previous times I’ve smoked.

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My Father Garcia y Garcia  
 N. K. Hess, Cedar, Spices,  
 wild floral, creaminess \$30

Alec Bradley Prensado  
 Chocolate, Seasoned leather,  
 Peppery, Spice notes \$10

Armas Fuente  
 Hearing way. Dry  
 wood, toast, small  
 finish \$6



La Aroma de Cuba "Mi Amor"  
 Earth forward, Cacao Nib,  
 Espresso, Semi-Sweet  
 Finish \$8

Rocky Edge  
 Leather, Wood, Oil,  
 Coffee, Long Finish  
 \$8



Like camping trips to the desert, or the afternoon I sold my first car (a VW bug), or the night of my bachelor party where my dad, brothers, and close friends gathered on the beach around an illegal fire and told stories about life and love and what was about to unfold.

The act of cigar smoking is different from its buzz-inducing cousins. A cigar takes time to smoke. It makes you linger in the moment. While a cigarette is a shot of tequila, a cigar is a bottle of wine meant to be shared with friends.

Yes, cigar smoking is often portrayed as an accoutrement to the lifestyle of the gambler, the old time newspaper chief, and the mobster. Something only those with time and an underground crime ring can regularly enjoy. There's some truth to this, actually. A stick worth its weight can land somewhere between 10 and 20 bucks a pop. Down comes a white picket fence, apparently impassable.

It's not.

You can still find a terrific cigar under 10 bucks, and some great smokes under five if you shop around. The palate of an aficionado seems esoteric and needlessly complex to me. You taste leather, chocolate, and the Costa Rican soil? All I taste is leaves stuck in my teeth and the general roughly-sweet flavor of, well, of cigar. But here, at what must be my hundredth cigar, I can now say there are a few things I look for in a "good" cigar.

I like maduros. They hit harder and are more robust than their fair skinned brethren. A solid maduro will be rough on the head with a healthy dose of nicotine that stays just this side of overpowering. It will leave a spicy tingling sensation on the back of the tongue—a region to experience some flavor—that isn't related to the buzz at all; some will be smooth enough to pacify the ex-girlfriend.

Here are a few favorites:

The Rocky Patel "Edge". Big smoke with great flavors for around \$10. Although Patel has some pricey and notable cigars, the Edge offers a great stick for the price.

Stylish dresser Alec Bradley keeps winning awards for his unique cigars. A little more cash but so worth it. The "Prensado" is within reach and a joy to break out for those special moments. Like the end of a big fish day, or a long-expected evening with an old friend.

La Aroma de Cuba "Mi Amore" has been a favorite of ours for years. We love the old "box press" shape, and size fits well into a lunchtime break. Rich medium bodied. Still under \$10.

Everybody knows the Arturo Fuente brand, and as a result they got pretty expensive over the years. But there's a super little smoke called the "Hemingway Short Story" that is affordable and makes for a rich diversion. Perfect for reading an article or two in this magazine.

Want to break the bank? Check out the My Father Garcia y Garcia. We got a deal on a box last winter and have been carefully saving the cigars for special occasions. With an Ecuadorian wrapper and a rich Nicaraguan filler, this smoke's got a red pepper profile, with dark chocolate, earth and natural tobacco filling out the experience.

In closing: First, there are no Biblical prohibitions regarding cigars so please don't write us on that matter. Second, I also am aware that smoking can cause health problems. So does fast food. A car moving at 60 miles an hour is pretty dangerous, too. Smoke responsibly. But more than that... get away from the noise of traffic and the buzz of technology for an hour, sit out back and enjoy the way the sun hits your face. Save yourself from busyness and get some joy back. ■





# THE WORST MOTIVE FOR CHANGE

WORDS Sam Jolman IMAGES Fares Hamouche

I sat with a man last week who is trying to get out of debt. He's got the usual sort of stuff—a bit of credit card debt, school loans, and a new car. It totals around \$80k. That's a lot of money. But he's got his plan. The old Dave Ramsey gazelle-like intensity deal.

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It seems to be working well for him. With budgeting and such, he's able to pay off \$3k a month. I got excited for him when he said this. I even raised my hands in the air to celebrate, thinking he'd join right in. He didn't raise his hands. He didn't even smile. In fact, he furrowed his brow.

Crickets.

I slowly lowered my arms. "So you're not happy about this?"

"No," he said. "I mean, I feel like I need to be doing more. I feel like I should be doing some extra projects at night after the kids go to bed."

Something seemed up with this. It sounds sorta good, maybe noble, certainly gazelle-like. But \$3k didn't even register on his excitement meter.

I said, "I don't get that. You'll have to help me understand what all this pressure is to get it done faster."

He sat back, searching his heart, unsure himself. "Well, I just feel like I made some dumb mistakes."

And the story came spilling out. He bought a car in the middle of a crisis. Actually, he bought two cars because the first one didn't fit their needs after they moved. So they had to turn it in to buy another.

"I just can't get over the fact that a big chunk of that debt was my mistake. I should have kept our original car and saved myself about \$10k in debt."



Did you hear it? His real motive for wanting to pay debt off faster was his anger with himself. A self-imposed punishment. That's what those nights up were about. He was making himself pay for his mistakes.

Let's just call it what it is: Self-hatred. And he was using it as his energy for change.

He is not alone. We all have things like this. The stuff we regret. The mistakes we wince at every time we think of them. The "Why did I do that?" facepalm that fuels our frustration with ourselves. And we think, what could be a better motive for change than hating what we've done? Surely our regret is good for something, we think.

But it just never ever works. Oh, maybe for a little while. But like drinking a Red Bull, the energy falls off pretty quickly.

Self-loathing never produces the kind of change we crave.

I've done workouts at the gym that were so fueled with anger at myself, they could hardly be called exercise. I've injured myself this way. Shin splints from running too long and a pulled back from lifting too much. But who has time to listen to his body when he's trying to work off his mistakes?

I know men who are driven toward success, fueled to never be the failure their fathers said they would be. Trying to prove dear old dad wrong. But who pays in the end? The guy with a great 401(k) and an empty heart, that's who.

People base their entire spiritual lives on this kind of stuff. Being driven by what they think is just "guilt" or "gratitude." And yet the obsession with busy spiritual practice chokes out the desperate need just to sit and enjoy being loved and forgiven by God.

None of this is good. It's never going to get you what you want.

Every January we pass through Resolution season and enter into Blow Your Resolution season. And maybe there's something really good about that. We probably didn't have the right motives anyway. I daresay most of these resolutions lacked the one ingredient we all need to change.

Kindness. Self-compassion. Yep, that's the only way you can change. We all need a baseline level of kindness for ourselves before we change in order to change. Because no one changes in a continuous straight upward path. Change always involves stumbling and failing and just outright blowing it. So change requires immense kindness and grace. If we have no compassion for ourselves, we simply cannot muster the energy needed to get back up and keep going.

You need patience to get out of debt. That's a form of kindness. So is listening to your body while you're working out to get in shape. Diet changes require a thousand good decisions over years to form new habits. Change by brute force is not going to get us there.

Let me say it again: Friends, hatred is never, ever a good motivator. Where you loathe yourself is where you will stay stuck. Hate evil. Don't hate anything God has created. Especially yourself. ■

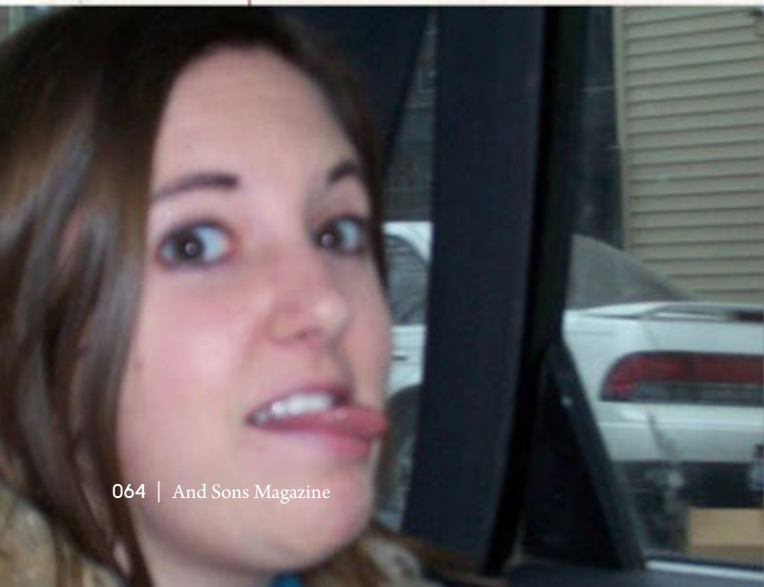






# STAND & DELIVER

WORDS & IMAGES Rachel Douglas Swanson



It isn't a pretty truth, but there it is. It helped that my roommates made sure I wasn't alone on the weekends in case I had panic attacks. And my best friend Karen kept me hydrated on a nearly daily basis with Starbucks hot chocolate.

On weekends before my sister and brother-in-law moved out of the country, I would ride the train to their home an hour west and play with my nephews and cry for hours on my sister's bed. Suffice it to say it was the hardest year of my life.

It wasn't supposed to be hard. I had wanted to be a teacher since I was born. I had done what I was supposed to do: Volunteered at schools, lived in the inner city, read the right books, aced student teaching.

Theory is different than practice.

Early on in my first year of teaching, I got a care package from a dear friend in Minnesota, a teacher himself. When I called to thank him, I asked, "How do you do this? How can you possibly survive being a teacher? I don't think I can make it through the year."

He said, "Yeah, but it's like marriage. You can't let yourself think about divorce. You don't give yourself that option."

There are plenty of really good reasons why people get divorced. But his words have stayed with me because they offered me a different truth. By giving myself the option of leaving, I would be gone long before I walked out of the door.

A few days later while talking (crying) to my dad on the phone, he said the other big truth of that year: "Raye, pretty soon this year will be a distant memory."

I didn't leave. That year was impossibly hard. The kind of hard that plumbs the depths and changes you forever. The kind that leaves you sitting in Lake Michigan a month after the end of the school year, so drunk you can only crawl, screaming at God until there aren't any more tears, there isn't any more voice.

Because it isn't fair that Rashad got kicked out of his house on the coldest weekend of February. It isn't fair that Yari's brother died. Because you can bleed out love for a year, but you can't control the outcomes of the lives you've touched, the lives that have touched you.

I like to imagine that God was sitting next to me in Lake Michigan. That he cried next to me.

I started therapy the following week.

I don't get drunk anymore. I still go to church (almost) every Sunday.

It's been 10 years since that first year of teaching. Now I have come full circle, and I coach new teachers. I help them get through their first year of teaching. I observe in their

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*The first year of anything is hard.  
There's so much that is unknown,  
and it's humbling to have to learn.*

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classrooms once a week and talk with them about their practice. And I remember. I remember a lot. I remember how achingly difficult that year was, the year that indeed is now a distant memory.

But I remember other things, too. Like the way it felt to see Layanna read her first chapter book, carrying it around like a favorite teddy bear, pages worn and cover torn. The excitement she felt when we went to the Borders bookstore only 10 blocks from the school. When she realized she could get there by bus, a bigger world unlocked and opened.

I remember the way Aaron's mother cried at his report card pickup, causing me concern until she said through tears, "You're the first teacher who has believed in my son."

I remember his shy smile as we read picture books and his refusal to be ashamed to read "baby books," determined to read no matter what it took.

Or the time that Diara, who never made my life easy, yelled at some students from another class who made a comment about me. "Don't you dare talk about MY teacher like that!" How she called to see that I was all right when I was out sick for three days, confirming that deep down she really did care.

There were the walks to the Subway around the corner, the Burger King crowns we got on birthdays, my seventh graders not too cool for such simple celebrations. Of course there were the light bulb moments when something suddenly started to make sense. I had most of the light bulb moments during that first year, but I like to believe my students had a few, too.

And there was the commute. Every day I drove down Lake Shore Drive, the road that carves the boundary between Chicago and Lake Michigan. And every day I made a point to look out over the lake to admire the beauty of the sun coming up, its rays kissing the water, showing off its artistic ability. I thought of it as choosing life each day instead of choosing death. Choosing to live that day instead of just surviving. Choosing not to walk out the door. Choosing to remember that the day would not come again.

The first year of anything is hard. There's so much that is unknown, and it's humbling to have to learn.

So we're faced with the choice of doing the hard, right thing, over and over and over.

People like to ask if these sorts of things are worth it. Did the good outweigh the bad? In the end, can I be sure that I did the right thing, that I did all that I could to make sure my students were successful?

I don't know.

But I am so glad I didn't leave. I would have missed so much. ■





19 Stef. della Bella fecit





# LIVING HIGH ON THE HOG

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

*Cum pruid,*



Something I like about wild pigs: The first hogs to run wild in America escaped from Hernando de Soto's expedition, something it's hard to blame them for doing. They flourished in the swamps and—like most animals living in swamps—kept to themselves. Five hundred years went by. Eventually, civilization caught up, and Southern residents caught glimpses of arcane swine vanishing into the slash pine. I say arcane because the European cousins of those pigs had either died out or been bred into oblivion centuries before. In fact the breeds were presumed extinct. Until they appeared again. It's wild stuff, like finding a Dodo in California.

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Then things got really weird. Folks in Texas imported Eurasian wild hogs for hunting purposes. Eurasian wild hogs are like pigs bred with hyenas: Hooves, flat snouts, curly-cue tails, but then stiff black hair, big teeth and spiny mohawks. The hogs escaped. They found and bonked feral pigs living in the South. In so doing they created an American super hog that's canny, resilient, famously destructive, and delicious.

I knew all that but I'd never seen one. Then, in March, we needed meat. Many of my friends avoid meat of uncertain origins, and a few of us only eat animals we've hunted and killed ourselves. There's not much hunting in Colorado in March, so I asked my buddy Zion (his real name) if he knew anyone in Texas who'd like us to come poke a couple hogs.

He said, "Yes, everyone in Texas wants you to kill wild pigs." We roped in Zion's brother, Salem (also his real name), and another guy, Anthony, and went down, through West Texas, to an old military base outside Abilene.

At Zion's direction, we pulled up at a pole building surrounded by mesquite and Zion got out.

"Boys," he said, "I feel alive again." He grinned hugely. Zion and Salem are from Texas. At the border they were overtaken by a kind of jubilant lawlessness. No seatbelts, no agreeing with what anyone said, nothing but huge West Texas smiles.

"It is nice," I agreed, on account it was March, 75 and breezy, the one good month in Texas. The trees were bare but hearty green grass grew everywhere. "Where's Norm?" Norm was—we hoped—the landowner.

Zion gestured at the thickets on either side. "Around," he said. He indicated a steep caliche road ascending a hill nearby. "Anybody wanna run that?"

We said no thanks and wandered past a WWII shooting range heavily overgrown with prickly pear cactus. In fact neither Anthony nor myself was confident Norm existed. Not because Zion spurns the truth, but because not everything he says seems to portray reality in the conventional way. I've got examples but suffice it to say Anthony and I both thought we'd end up sleeping in T shirts on the side of a dirt road.















Then, suddenly and to general relief, Norm pulled up. Red polo shirt, work pants, and immense goodwill. He stepped out of a dusty Isuzu Trooper and asked how everyone was.

“Well,” he said, after introductions, “What’s the goal? You after some time together or meat for the freezer or what?”

“Meat for the freezer,” we answered.

“Alright,” Norm said, “We’ll get serious about it.” He crossed his arms. “I got blinds for everybody on the back of the property. Why don’t you get your guns and we’ll get set up?”

We did. Norm asked us to keep our chambers empty in the truck, and we took off, up white dirt roads to caprock hills where oak and juniper trees grew. Then he delivered us at individual tower blinds. I got out at one defined as “nice,” climbed a steep ladder, and got a look around.

It was indeed very nice. In fact we’d learn everything Norm did was nice, virtuous, and accommodating. Inside were two

office chairs, spent .22 casings, and a can of Sterno I took as a precaution against cold weather. I cracked the windows so I could get a rifle out, made sure I could fire either direction, and waited.

Pig hunting is hunting’s version of war. The animal is invasive. Pigs eat the eggs of endangered turtles, kill whitetail fawns and calves, tear up arable land, sometimes dig deep trenches and destroy \$80,000 irrigation equipment, ruin crops, the list goes on. They’re wily but without the redemptive virtue of the coyote, namely, they’re not pretty. Almost everybody living with hogs hates them; there’s not a lot of rules to hunting them. There are no bag limits, no wanton waste restrictions, no prescribed method of take, you can hunt them or trap them or run them to ground with dogs whenever. If that sounds unfair, remember how resilient the animals are: Pigs are crepuscular but go nocturnal when hunted. They can eat anything. They breed whenever. Generally they resemble humans the way orcs resemble elves.

Of course they have redeeming traits, but there’s something in their pandemic-like spread that’s enough to freak out even ardent animal lovers.

I waited in the tower. The views were nice. To the west, somebody was burning a section of land. To the south, the same green thicket. The sun went down and the sky turned electric orange. Then, in the cobalt evening, somebody fired. A pause. They fired again. My phone buzzed.

“Who is that?” Zion asked. “Anthony?” A pause.

“Not me,” Anthony replied. Two more shots followed. “Salem?” Anthony asked.

“He doesn’t have service,” Zion explained. I got down at dark. The night was warm and quiet with the hoo-whistle of doves. Gray foxes came out to snarf corn at the feeder. Eventually, the Trooper pulled up, and I asked about the gunshots. Zion gave a cryptic smile and tilted his head at the trailer. I poked my head around and saw a good boar in the red brake lights.









“My man!”

Salem looked up from his phone.

“Are you stoked?” I stuck my head in the window.

“Yeah,” he said. He nodded affirmation. Then he tilted his head some as though to ask, “Anything else?”

*No, I thought, You only just accomplished our aim in coming here. No big.* I filed the understatement with the others and got in. Down at the barn, Norm was set up with a couple scimitar-style butcher knives and hog seasoning. “You got a musky old boar!” he said, with real enthusiasm. He grabbed the hog’s teeth. “Look at those!” He looked down. “Ah, shoot,” he said, without alarm. “I said I’d keep my pants clean, but there it goes.”

An aside: Anthony and I were both afraid of brucellosis, something hogs carry. Humans catch it and get flu-like symptoms. We’d seen YouTube videos of game wardens gutting hogs in shoulder-length gloves and rubber coveralls. But here was Norm, who was, we learned, a dentist of some renown, grabbing teeth and getting pig blood on his khakis. We asked if he was nervous about pig diseases.

“Oh, no,” he said, and rattled off a list of regular pests. “Just wash your hands after.” That was enough for us. We de-boned the pig and tossed the offal in the desert, then circled back for pasta around 11:00.

And that was it. No more pigs did we see. Turkeys, deer, squirrels, yes. So many squirrels that, as we drove out for one attempt, Zion looked over from the passenger seat and said, “If those squirrels come back, they’re dead.” He gave one of his family’s signature cryptic smiles.

“I mean—you could shoot the ground next to them, right?” We had a theory about that, an adaptation of a technique called “barking,” and said he should knock himself out, which he did. The squirrel was harvested and tasted great.

Then, on the last night, we pulled up to find Norm at the pole barn. He’d built a fire and was in a hospitable mood. He talked about his life with God, miracles he’d seen, and then, looking at the sky, asked if we wanted to try the thermal.

The thermal was a thermal vision monocular with a range of about a quarter mile. Hold it to your eye, and even the trees stand out in their varying temperatures. We took the Trooper, drove out, and crept on tiptoe to an overlook. Norm had a green Sure-Fire flashlight in one hand and the thermal monocular in the other. “I’ll hand off the thermal, and then I’ll bring the light in. You’ll have a minute to get your scope on them before they run.” The stars were full out, no moon to speak of, a beautiful night. We made the overlook. Norm checked with the monocular. One way, then the other. Then he straightened. He handed me the thermal. “Nothing doing,” he said.

That was true. We searched a mile or so of ground. There was a bird or two, and a coyote ran off. But there were no pigs to be seen.

“I’d love to keep helping you guys,” Norm said, “but I’ve got a surgery to perform at seven o’clock tomorrow.”

That was good with us—it was 11:30, and anyway we had West Texas to cross. ■





# A LETTER FROM MOM

No matter how grown up I felt in every other area of my life, when I went home to my parents' house, I was suddenly 12 years old again. I plopped on the sofa and asked what there was to eat. "What's for dinner? Got any snacks?"

Sense memory, particularly smell, takes us instantly back to the place where the fragrance first made an impact. We go back, and we are a child. A teenager. A person someone should do laundry for.

It works both ways. When my sons come home, it's so easy to see them as children rather than the young men they are. It's tricky, this mothering thing.

And you should know—and now I'm writing for mothers everywhere—it's hard for me to let them go. Let me speak in your mother's voice now: It's hard for me to let you go.

See, I look at you and I see the young man that you are. I do. I really do. I see you but I don't see you. I have to keep reminding myself that you are not 14 years old. Or six or two or 12. I look at you and I can still see you sleeping angelic-like in your crib. Soft cheeks. Soft face. All mine. I want to cradle you. With no effort at all, I can see you running to me with your eight-year-old knobby knee skinned and tears freely streaming down your cheeks, needing mercy. I want to comfort you. I see you at 12, awkward with a mouthful of braces and a heart yet to be broken, full of hope, and I want to shield you. I see your grown man's body and yet I can so easily see you in soccer gear that's too big for you. I feel a surge of pride over you, and when I remember an injury you suffered, the feeling of jealous protection that rises from within me comes out like a mama bear's growl—my reaction as oversized as your shin guards.

I do see you. But equally, I remember you.

I am your mother. I always will be. I love you with a fierce devotion that defies measurement. I honor your choices, your desires, your difficulties, your life. Yet I struggle to reel my responses in.

I'm not supposed to scream with joy when I see you on campus. It's not helpful for you to have me throw things out the window when you are deeply hurt. I can't cradle you or cuddle you. But, oh, sometimes ... sometimes I really want to.

Though you fit perfectly in my full heart, you no longer fit in my lap. Nor my arms. Your soft, puffy hands have become firm, defined, weathered, and strong, and I love them. But sometimes my lap and my arms ache with longing and memory. My body remembers what my soul will never forget.

I know I have to let you go. I have to let you grow. I need to learn who you are now and relearn our relationship. Renegotiate. I need to grow into becoming a strong, encouraging, good mother of an amazing and capable young man, and I don't quite know how to do that. I don't yet know how to be the mother that I want to be—that you need me to be. But because of Love, because of God, I'm confident we will find our way to this new way. And from that spacious, safe place He provides, I want you to know that my well-being is not up to you to provide.

My happiness is not your responsibility.

I love that I am your mother. I LOVE that I am your mother. Though I am yours, I am not you, nor are you me. You are separate from me. You have the right to live your life fully, independently, and wholeheartedly. I admit I don't like the separation, but I respect it. And though I can no longer carry you in my arms as I once did, I will forever carry you in my heart.

It is my honor to do so. It is part of my calling as your mother to do so. And it is part of my calling as your mother to let you go.

So I will let you go as far as you need to, are meant to, and God calls you to. But never so far that you leave my heart. Never that.

Never that.

And now, what would you like to eat? ■







WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge



I heard the crunch of small stones under Olivia's boots behind me as we hiked up a slot canyon. Our backpacking trip had already been thrown for a loop when our intended destination received a freak summer snowstorm. What should have been stunning alpine meadows were fields of snow and ice. For Olivia's first backpacking trip, I wanted to show her the beauty of the Colorado backcountry. But with one night to find Plan B, this was the best I could do.

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The canyon cut into the east side of the Tarryall Mountains and climbs steeply, and seemingly with no end, along a crashing creek and stands of Douglas fir. We had been hiking for several hours and the trail junction that we had been aiming for was still not in sight. Turning to see how Olivia was doing during an especially technical section of trail, the pain on her face reminded me to stop for water and a rest.

"This is hard," Olivia said as we sloughed off our packs, and she was not wrong. I had been into this wilderness before, but never from this trailhead. I thought we should have reached flatter ground an hour ago. Pulling out the map, I tried to get my bearings, and according to my layman's estimations, we had hiked only two miles. Our hearts sank.

Despite an incredible amount of effort ... two miles. For Olivia, it was especially defeating. She had been training for this trip and it felt like not enough. But what was truly difficult was knowing that during my last trip my friends and I hiked 11 miles per day. The futility of our effort was hard to swallow, but feeling so behind what others can do was simply crushing. And I know that feeling all too well.

Olivia wanted to do well on the trip and so she prepared for it by running, lifting weights, and going on training hikes.

Yet when we actually went, she felt like it didn't matter at all because other people could seemingly do a lot more with a lot less effort. Of course, this wasn't actually the case, as what I thought was two miles later turned out to be five, with the bonus of 2,000 feet of elevation gain.

But what my friends and I hiked was a gentle decline (we did not know this at the time). Measuring our success and ourselves by the standard of what other people can do seems to be the cornerstone of my self-perception.

For Olivia it was how far she could hike, and it determined her whole experience. Once we learned how far we actually had gone, and how comparatively difficult the trail was, the trip for her went from a failure to an impressive victory. For me it's just about everything: Career, faith, finances, family, when to be a homeowner, the list goes on. I measure how well I am doing in my life by how I compare to the people around me. The conclusion is that I am behind. Way behind. This has become especially apparent to me in my relationship with my two older brothers. As the youngest sibling and with our natural propensity to compare ourselves to other people, I placed my brothers as my measuring stick for failure and success. If I was doing as well as they were, I was succeeding; if I did any worse than them, I was behind. I had a really difficult time accepting a position as a barista at a coffee shop. It was the right move for me. I needed a flexible work schedule as I entered grad school, and I craved the human interaction that I just didn't get from working on my computer. But it felt like a huge step backwards. Compared to my brothers, who are working on a magazine, a podcast, and what seems like a million other projects, working in a coffee shop did not feel like a success.

I catch myself in comparison all the time. When my friend told me he'd just run five kilometers at a 7:55-mile pace, it made all my running effort seem small and pitiful.

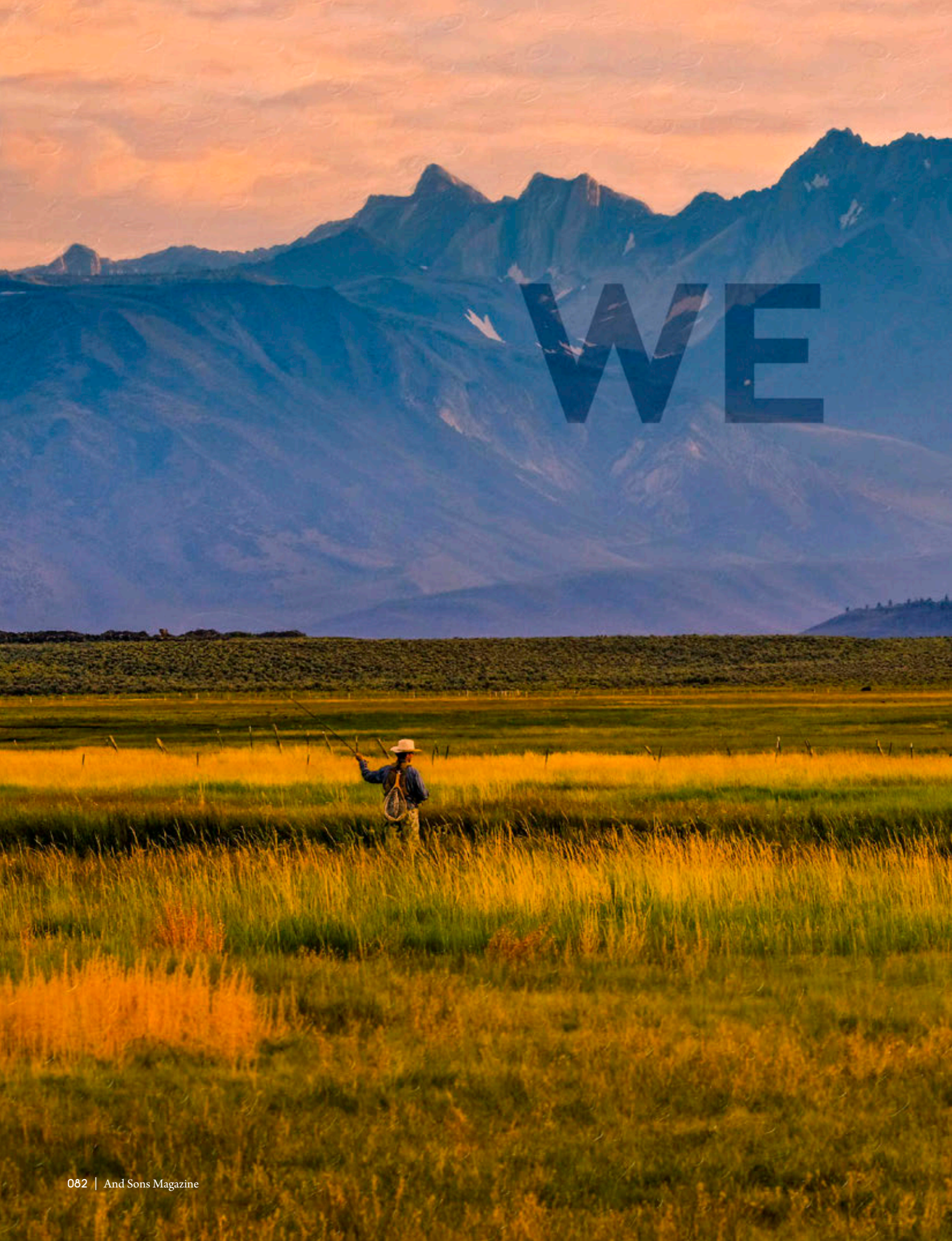
When someone is telling me they read their Bible before work every morning, I think I really need to be reading mine more. But when my growth as a person and how well I am doing is determined by how I compare to other people, I always feel behind.

However, I don't think that I am necessarily behind. A big problem with measuring ourselves against other people is that we can never see the hidden work it took to get to where they are. I believe I am not a fast runner because my friend runs faster than me, but I have not seen all the time, energy, and suffering he has put into being able to run at that pace.

Time, energy, and suffering that I have not put in myself. Another essential flaw in using other people as the measuring stick for myself is that it will always be relative. I may be a slower runner than my friend, but he has never done a triathlon. For Olivia, once the backpacking trip was put into a different context, the experience of the exertion and effort put into it felt completely different.

Comparison is only ever going to make me feel behind in my life because I only compare myself to people who are ahead of me. Rather than measure myself against others, a much more accurate way to know if I am doing well or if I am growing is to compare myself to myself from a year ago. When competing in endurance sports, I am racing myself. I am constantly being passed during a race, yet I am beating my time from last year and that is a victory. Instead of measuring myself against others, I want to learn from those whose performance I admire in order to go through the process they took to get there. ■





WE



A landscape photograph of a mountain range at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The mountains are dark and silhouetted against the sky. In the foreground, there is a field of tall grass, some green and some yellow, with a wooden fence line visible. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# MUST BE

*WORDS* John Eldredge *IMAGES* Eric Figge



Certain stories come into your life, and because of the way they come, or the timing of the moment, or because of what they speak to you when they arrive, they become a part of your soul-library—books that both shape and reflect who you are as a man. One of those stories for me is Norman Maclean’s “A River Runs Through It.”

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In our family,” the tale begins, “there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing.” It is part memoir, part celebration of fly fishing and wild places, part tragedy, set in rough-and-tumble Missoula, Mont., in the 1920s.

Norman and his younger brother Paul have a Huck Finn-like childhood, coming of age at a time when lumberjacks still use two-handed whipsaws and Indians sometimes walk the downtown streets, still made of dirt. The story centers on how Paul’s family tries to come to terms with his unruly life and untimely death as a young man when they find his body dumped in an alley.

Some time later, Norman and his father are talking about Paul. It seems their father is grasping for more to hold onto as he presses Norman for every fragment of information the police provided:

*“I’ve told you all I know. If you push me far enough all I really know is that he was a fine fisherman.”*

*“You know more than that,” my father said. “He was beautiful.”*

*“Yes,” I said, “he was beautiful.”*

It is not an expression often used for men, but it ought to be.

The ancient philosophers and saints evaluated the universe using three categories: The Good, the True, and the Beautiful. To get an idea of what they meant by the last, let me refer to a story from the Gospels.

















*While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant.*

*“Why this waste?” they asked.*

*“This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”*

*Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman?  
She has done a beautiful thing to me.”*

(Matthew 26:6-10)

Jesus describes the act as more than simply good, more than merely truthful. He says it transcended those categories into the beautiful. But though the Master named it as one of the best things ever done to him—thus exalting the beautiful forever—we find that Christians have lost the longing for the quality Christ saw here, the quality Paul’s father and brother saw in him.

As truth all but vanishes from cultural value, some corners fight for what is true; others want to be more relevant and commit themselves to “doing good.” Both are important, but both can fall short of a better way.

Francis Schaeffer—a pastor, missionary, writer, a man many thought to be the greatest “common philosopher” of the 20th century—wept over the bitter taste of many theological debates and church factions turned sour. He saw the devastation done when Christians fight for the truth in an ugly way or cling to a moral good but in a repulsive manner.

It isn’t enough to be right, he felt—there are many who might in fact be in the right, but their lives are so unattractive that they do damage to the very truth they defend. Worse, the manner in which they were right—the pride, the arrogance, the severity, the judgment—made the very morality they fought for repulsive to the watching world.

“We must not only be True,” Schaeffer said. “We must be Beautiful.”

There are simpler ways to catch fish than with a fly rod. A century ago, fishmongers from Denver would dynamite the South Platte and bring home wagonloads of wild trout. But the beauty of a dry fly cast with grace to a rising trout is in a league by itself.

Certainly not as efficient, but if you think efficiency is the point, then you won’t understand this article. In fact, the disciples were upset by the alabaster jar broken for Jesus; they saw a better way to use it for social justice. Jesus said they missed the point entirely and even rebuked them for their righteous indignation.

I know men whose lives are far from perfect. In no way could they be called efficient or “maximizers.” Yet there’s something in the way they love, in what they love. Something in the way they tell a story. Their devotion to an art or a place or a person. The grace they extend to others. The joy they get in a good joke, a dog, a good book, a day on the river. Oh, they love the True, and the Good, but they love the Beautiful even more, and in doing so, their lives have become beautiful. ■









# LIVING WITH OTHER PEOPLE

WORDS Luke Eldredge

One of the greatest mysteries of marriage for me has been doing our laundry. It is less marriage as a covenant and more living with a woman.

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As I sort my dirty laundry to be washed, colors in their pile, whites in theirs, darks in theirs, I am greeted with the familiar aroma of well-worn clothes: A mixture of sweat, dirt, and spilled salsa. Yet when I turn to prepare my wife's laundry, there is no rich tapestry of stench, but rather a gentle bouquet of comforting smells. Her dirty laundry smells better than my laundry even after it is washed. Truly a mystery. Living with a member of the opposite sex has pushed me to grow in many ways, the first being in cleanliness. Living with other people pushes you to live beyond yourself, and this is not just true for "marital bliss," but when living with anyone else.

As I am confronted with the ever mystifying contrast of spousal laundry, the eclectic amalgamation that was living with roommates in college feels much more stark. A typical evening in a house of eight guys consisted of two of my housemates arguing about the ethical implications of racial identity as communal identity within church denominations. Another adding the final touches to his massaman curry, stirring the pot on the stove. A fourth sitting next to me at the kitchen table working on a computer program. The sounds of my roommate practicing the saxophone for a jazz gig wafting through the thin walls.









Unless we choose to be hermits, most of us will eventually have a roommate, a housemate or several, or perhaps a spouse. Over the years before marriage, I lived with many people. Before I moved into a communal house, I guarded my privacy desperately. I had what is called a “move away” personality. In the first house I lived in, I could go days in my basement room with the door closed. The more people I lived with, the more I was faced with the choice to withdraw or engage, to escape other people or, as Dan Allender would say, “mine the riches of people’s idiosyncrasies.”

During my senior year of college, every Saturday morning the men I lived with would gather to make breakfast and share it at one table. Being college guys, our resources were limited, so it was always a cooperative task of combining what we had on hand. One provided pancake mix, another eggs, a third blueberry preserve. In a rather non-miraculous yet still surprising version of fish and loaves, a meal would appear seemingly out of nowhere. In theory it was a fun way to connect, but it would only work if we showed up. Schedules were busy and they were only going to become busier. Everyone couldn’t make it every time, but the steady dedication of a few housemates made it a rich place for community and relationship to grow.

I have found that commitment to engage in the micro-community of sharing a living space makes the community worth having. But living with people means rubbing shoulders, and that rubbing can mean a lot of friction. Living in constant close proximity reveals the beauties of a person as well as their idiosyncrasies, but just as often it reveals a person’s relational failings. (I don’t know how those sailors spend months together in a submarine.) In order to address our shortcomings, toes need to be stepped on. For example, I have a tendency to leave my personal belongings scattered throughout common areas. One of my old housemates never washed his dishes. Ever. Another played his music at new categories of “too loud.” A third relied on inside jokes to connect with his friends but excluded everyone else. Problems like these go unaddressed until someone points them out, and it’s always awkward.

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*...living with people  
means rubbing shoulders,  
and that rubbing can  
mean a lot of friction.*

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Most people don’t like confrontation, least of all me. But addressing problems in the way we live in community allows us to grow and change, and everyone else in the space is happier for it.

Living with other people is a sanctifying process. It requires sacrifice. It requires us to let go of aspects of our lives that feel essential, yet are often damaging. Perhaps 20 hours a day isn’t actually how much sleep is needed. Perhaps binge-watching movies alone all day is not actually restoring. Avoiding confrontation like the plague isn’t actually loving; it’s simply self-protection.

Living with other people has a way of bringing a magnifying glass over our faults. It’s uncomfortable but worth it in the end. I like the way living with other people has shaped my identity. You know how

bouncing your ideas off someone else helps to shape and clarify your thoughts? Well, personality and identity work in a similar way. We notice the ways others react to us and then modify our style of relating in light of what we noticed; and they do the same thing with us. It’s like a dialog of personality—shaping, clarifying. (This is partly why middle school was so awful: We were

trying to define ourselves by others in a continual loop of hormones and uncertainty.) But having people we admire in our lives allows us through the “dialog of personality” to become more like them. Through the daily interaction, our understanding of ourselves can become far more nuanced; we can take what is good in others, and we can begin to let go of what is not so good in ourselves.

As an internal processor, I have always placed a high value on solitude; moments to myself help me to breathe. Living with other people is not conducive to moments of solitude. In years past I too often responded to this by retreating from the relationships around me, at the expense of those relationships. I have learned through living in small communities that the peace and quiet I thought I needed, though of course necessary now and then, is not as restorative as relationship. There’s a lot to overcome when living with other people, but I know that through the crucible I am becoming a better person than I ever would have alone. ■

# GEAR GUIDE

## COMMUTER PACKS

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*IMAGES* Richard Seldomridge

Bike commuting. It's not just for Oxford professors and ear gauge-wearing delinquents anymore. It's for anyone who wants to learn their city, show up in spandex to work, and earn the street cred reserved for those mavericks who walk their bikes through trendy coffeeshops.

We wanted to find the best bike commuter pack, whether you're a minimalist toting a bike tool or a diehard maximalist with a full change of clothes in tow, so we hit the streets for a month. We tried hip packs, heavy backpacks, and interchangeable panniers, in rain, shine, and dust. Then, we narrowed it down to a few favorites. This list is an invitation into an adventurous lifestyle. Get out there. Memorize surface streets and stumble on to shady bike lanes, and bring a good pack along.







CHROME URBAN EX ROLLTOP 18L BIKE PACK (\$120)

Our staff favorite: slender, comfortable and economical, with loops for your lock and a simple sleeve for your phone. This is the smallest pack we tested; it's got room for a laptop and a change of shoes but not a change of clothes. Also, our tester needed a laptop case right away, on account there's no laptop sleeve in the pack.





DAKINE HOT LAPS 5L BIKE WAIST BAG (\$70)

Now, this isn't a commuter pack. But for the hardcore minimalist, fanny packs rock; mountain bikers have latched on to these things and sparked a fanny pack renaissance. This one has good organization, surprising space, and, thanks to the magnet on the hose, extremely accessible water. Leave your computer at work and commute with this bad boy: you can fit flip flops and a spare shirt in the pack pocket.





TTIMBUK2 SPIRE LAPTOP BACKPACK (\$70)

On the surface, this is a very cool bag, with an industrial look and a bottle opener. This pack doesn't seal as well as the others, and the shoulder straps pinched Sam's neck. Pros include lots of organization and a laptop sleeve.





CHROME CITIZEN MESSENGER BAG (\$140)

The godfather of messenger bags: Blaine's used this one for years (note the lint in the Velcro) and it's still kicking. Featuring the world's most comfortable shoulder strap, good pen organization, and a bottomless pit of a main compartment, this is a timeless go-to.







#### CHROME ORLOV 2.0 BACKPACK (\$180)

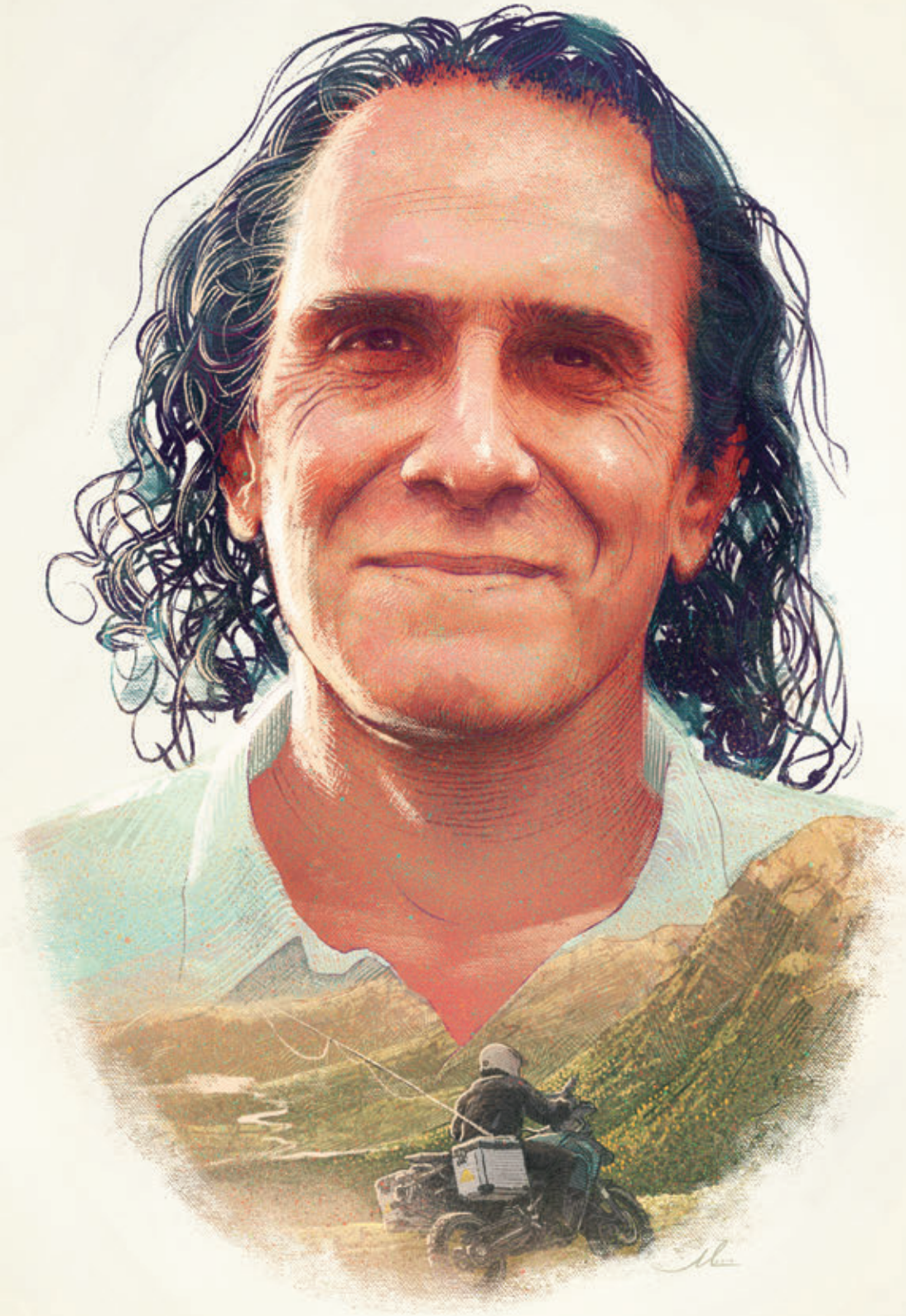
The largest in the lineup. In fact the Orlov proved too large for our liking; it's heavy before you put anything in it, and it's still just a waterproof bag. But it fits a change of clothes and is over-the-top waterproof. We couldn't figure out what to put in the two external pouches, but maybe you could. ■



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# UNDERSTANDING YOUR STORY

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DAN ALLENDER

WORDS John Eldredge IMAGES Mike Marshall

Dan Allender is known to many as an author, psychologist, and founder of The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. We know him as a cigar-loving fly fishing partner and as an early friend of *And Sons*. We don't know a more playful, brilliant or beautifully odd man. An hour-long conversation with him is like talking to G.K. Chesterton or maybe even Jesus.

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**And Sons:** *In your books and teaching, you talk a lot about the importance of story, or “narrative”—what do you mean by that? Why is it so important?*

**Dan Allender:** We were written not only to hear and tell stories, but we are a story. Our lives are composed of millions of stories, but most have been forgotten or simply don't register as important enough to remember. When I say that we are a story, I'm saying that we're more than the sum of our stories. We are, in fact, a unique, once-on-the-earth life that reveals the story of Jesus in a fashion that no one else will ever do in the way we are written to reveal. If we fail to know the themes of our unique story, we are less likely to live that story well or play our role.

**AS:** *Why is it critical for a person to understand his or her own story?*

**DA:** Our story is meant to reveal the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

**AS:** *Ummm... what?*

**DA:** It is our suffering and struggle with sin and injustice that reveals what Jesus endured for our salvation. It is the rescue of God—the surprising, life-giving wonder and awe of his goodness—that proclaims the glory of the resurrection. And it is our use of the gifts that he has given us to reveal his glory that shouts the blessing of his ascension.



If we refuse to suffer—and grieve the depths of our suffering—then we lose power to reveal his death and resurrection. If we don't name and bless the remarkable gifts he has given us, we cannot celebrate the stories he has written in us to reveal his story.

**AS:** *That sounds like something we're going to have to re-read and think about. How does a person begin to get some perspective on their story?*

**DA:** Hang out with people who are confident of the wild goodness of Jesus and who aren't apt to offer quick or silly and superficial solutions to life's struggles. These people are more often than not curious to the bone about the human heart, voracious readers of fiction, lovers of theatre, and absolutely intrigued by the heart of Jesus. If you can find this pearl of a person—a counselor, a sage, or just a compassionate friend—then tell him a single story of some event that deeply shaped who you are. Choose a story that bears heartache in a highly formative period of life. Let your friend listen and feel your story and then let him pursue understanding through conversation. Take it in. Give all the new thoughts to Jesus. Invite him into the heartache with you.

**AS:** *Feels really risky. But okay—as we try to bring clarity to the narrative of our lives, what are the key things we should be looking for?*

**DA:** Linger longer than you'd prefer in those moments where you felt shame. Shame is one of evil's most effective weapons to silence us and shut us down. It is where Satan divides our hearts most effectively from God, others, and even from ourselves. Especially look at your sexual history, even as a younger child, and how the dark prince was thieving, killing, and destroying your integrity and joy as a man or woman. Look as well at what you know in your heart you don't really want to remember. It is often as simple as this: What is easy to dismiss or pass over or rewrite in your story? Take pen and paper or computer and write out the story as if it were fiction. This allows us to see in black and white the reality of our lives that we are apt to skirt over as if the past had no impact.

**AS:** *Whew. Not sure we really want to go there. Can you give us some hope? How can story bring healing to our stories?*

**DA:** Healing comes when I am willing to face the truth—deep and specific truth about myself. It is when my deepest desires are seen in light of what I can't do for myself that I turn, again and again, to the One who loves my ache and knows my sin better than anyone in the universe. Healing comes when our story is raw, bone-deep and full of hunger for what only Jesus can offer.

**AS:** *How do we look for the hand of God in our story?*

**DA:** Okay, be patient with me. I love Jesus. I know he is intimately involved in every freaking moment of my life. But most of the time he appears on stage at the most odd, surprising moments. I sat on the side of a mountain in Colorado with the man your sons call Padre years ago debating whether one could really hear the voice of God. In the middle of the argument, I heard Jesus say: "Ask John to pray for your defiance and cynicism."

Whether it was the voice of Jesus or my own odd head, it felt like being asked to jump to my death. Dying would have felt easier. But I did. We entered some of the stories related to my father's death when I was four. The work Jesus did in that time I hold today as one of the sweetest hours I have known. How do we see the hand of God? Perhaps by being more willing to be far more surprised and freaked out than we often allow ourselves to be.

**AS:** *Surprised and freaked out—we can do that. What do you do in these “Story Workshops” you hold around the country?*

**DA:** We combine teaching on story with small group work with six other participants. We invite each person to tell one “tragedy” story—where there was loss, heartache, and/or shame in their life from the ages of 5-15 and then under the care of a brilliant story listener/guide, we invite the group to explore the story in its implications for the person's past, present, and future. The process invites me to see that I often try to escape my own suffering and equally refuse the kindness of God in the midst of my struggle. It may sound boastful, but the four days feels like a four-month life-changing pilgrimage.

**AS:** *We're guessing that you are still discovering important parts of your own life story. Has anything surprised you in the last few years?*

**DA:** How about the last week? I was fishing in Montana with a dear friend and I fell down a steep incline and punctured my palm on a staub. [AS – *we had to look it up; “staub” means a small protrusion of tree root*]. I patched myself up and then put my rod together. As I began to string up my 6-piece rod, I noticed the top piece had fallen off and apparently floated away. I was enraged—full of contempt and blasphemy against myself. My whole last day on a beautiful river was ruined. I walked back to the car as my friend kept fishing and I heard Jesus say to me: “Ask me to father you.” I am not a man who easily complies with what Jesus asks. It took me a half-mile to finally shout at him: “Fine!” And he did. It brings tears to retell it. He was so kind, direct, and helpful. He settled my heart, turned me from petty rage and reminded me how I could use the hours for good. I guess what is obvious but somehow always new to my heart is how much I need the Father to father me.

**AS:** *Now THAT we really understand. Looking back on your own life as a young man, what do you wish an older man had told you, or taught you?*

**DA:** Okay, more tears. Thanks a lot. I wish my father had been able to not be afraid of me and withdraw into silence and distance. In seminary, a brilliant professor called me into his office after he had sensed (primarily smelled) that I had been drinking heavily the night before. I figured he was going to throw me out of this respectable, dignified seminary. Instead, he wept. I have never in my prior life—including having a gun held to my head—been more soul-terrified. He then told me how gifted I was at reading people and reality and then told me that I was running from delight—his delight and the delight of God. He told me that if I wanted to ruin my glory, God would wait, expose, and constantly invite me back. That's what I needed: An older man who saw me, was not afraid but rather captured by the glory God has written in me, and then was free to call me to whatever my heart most deeply desired—ruin or redemption. I am grateful, even as a slow follower of Jesus, that I chose and was chosen for restoration. ■

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Learn more about Dan Allender's story and ministry at [theallendercenter.org](http://theallendercenter.org).



# GREEK ECONOMICS

WORDS: Blaine Eldredge IMAGES: Nicholas Roberts





On a good day in grad school, I would wind up in an elevator devoid of economists, and after the European Studies and the English and the World Languages students got out on the second, third and seventh floors, respectively, I would be left alone to ride up five more and sneak off.

I was newly married and living in Vancouver. I was an economics student with the tools of rhetoric, but on the elevator between the two departments, my one ambition was to avoid both their questions and the incredulous expressions. The English department was willing enough, excited by the interdisciplinary work and susceptible to the seductive appeal of economic jargon. English students are closet scientists; tell one you're studying agency and isoelasticity and he'll buy you a drink. Economists are not so easily swayed. Most of them believe that English is a hood ornament on the automobile of civilization, and economics is the engine. In fact most social and hard scientists think something like that, and none of them, without a thorough grounding in etymology, was likely to be interested in the two words whose common ancestry grounded my work.

Those words were economics and ecology. *Oiko-nomos* and *Oiko-logos*.

In its basic form, economics is the study of the laws, *nomos*, that govern the household, *oikos*. Ecology is the study of the patterns or knowledges, *logos*, that constitute a household, an *oikos*. Given the explicit similarity between the two concepts, it's silly that economists and ecologists rarely think of themselves in terms of each other. An economy is a system of practices that exists in relationship with—and is in fact submitted to—the patterns of a place.

Hang with me. This is helpful stuff, eventually.

An *oikos* does not mean a household per se. It means the family (as a line of continuous descent), the household (as an extended community of relatives, servants, and friends), and the property (the stuff). Because people have to make rules to get along, every *oikos* had a set of rules (a *nomos*), and, therefore, an economy. But, and here's where things get interesting again, if the family wanted to survive, they had to understand the limits of the place where they lived.

Harvest too early and there'd be no food the next year. Sully the water and there'd be nothing to drink. For that reason, economy and ecology always went together. In fact, for Aristotle, economics was always an ethical endeavor. Ruin your place and you ruin your life.

Why's it matter? Well, because we've got an *oikos* and it needs rules. If it's going to do well, those rules need to line up with the place where we live.

What's your *oikos*? Return with me to the list above. It's your stuff, meaning your bike, cash, clothes, etc., as well as your network of relationships and your immediate family. The rules you make up to regulate your *oikos* is your economy. Fascinating, right? Your economy is not your budget and your bank accounts. Your economy is your rulebook. How many nights a week do you host? How often do you tune your bike or change your oil? Do you do that or does someone else? How often do you buy a new shirt? Do you thrift it or buy online?

Here's the great secret, though: If your economy is going to thrive, it has to match your ecology. A deep knowledge of the patterns of the place where you live.

This applies to every part of your *oikos*. If you live in a dry place, plant drought-resistant grass. If you're made of cells, don't spray weed killers. If you're friends with a bunch of families, learn to love doing chores together because they're not free for other kinds of hangouts. If you live in a hilly place, a lighter bike is better than a faster bike. It's amazing stuff: Wealth is the feeling you get when your economy matches your ecology.

And get this: All this matters beyond our own little *oikos*. It informs the way we think of and engage the capital "C" church. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks economics. He calls himself a preacher of the gospel, an administrator of the household of God. The word administrator is *oikonomoi*. An economist, someone who structures those patterns of the *oikos*, which the Church is. ■





# RETHINKING AMAZING

WORDS John Eldredge

For those of you who missed the whole rediscovery-of-Shackleton craze, let me recount the necessary parts of his story here:

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Ernest was a prominent figure in the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration, as it was called, with various flamboyant characters vying for the coveted prize of first to set foot at the North or South Pole. Ernest was headed South, but Roald Amundsen dashed his hopes when he grabbed that gold ring in 1911. But Ernest—a man aptly named and not easily discouraged—set a new goal of being first to traverse the Antarctic continent. On foot. This was before the age of down and Gore-Tex, mind you. The famous voyage of the *Endurance* came to a crushing end (pardon the pun) when the ship was locked in sea ice and summarily broken to pieces.

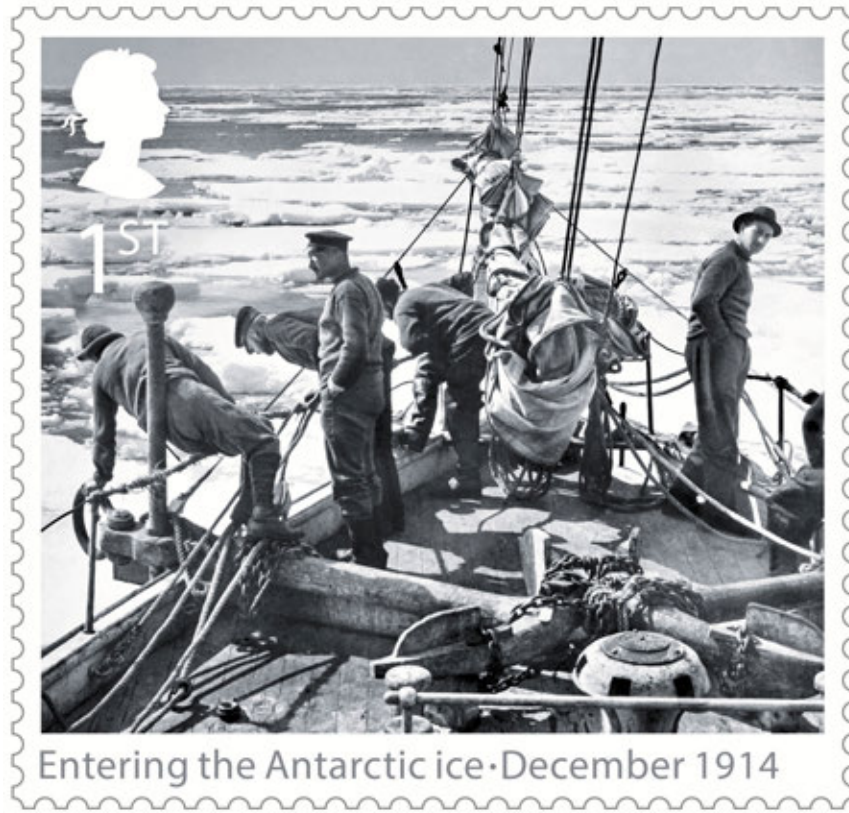
Shackleton and crew escaped to Elephant Island, but that godforsaken place was far from any shipping lane or rescue, so Captain Shackleton and a crew of four set off across 720 nautical miles of open ocean in a dingy, hoping to hit the South Georgia whaling stations—an act rather like hurling yourself off Iguazu Falls in a Dixie cup, hoping to land safely on a ping pong paddle at the bottom.

Meanwhile, the remaining crew stranded on a strip of sand on Elephant Island had to survive on penguins, which were actually much better than our freeze-dried backpacking stuff except for the fact that penguins migrate. Just when the eating got good, the penguins up and left the island, and the boys were then in a terrible strait (these puns just keep coming without intention; my last apology). Desperate and half-starved, the lads had to dig through their garbage dump on the downwind side of the beach to recover rotting penguin offal they had tossed off when the living was still not so bad. One man's garbage suddenly became the same man's feast, or, at least, sustenance.













Now, I'm not saying the cigars we found in the flowerpot were as bad as rotten penguin entrails, but there is a comparison. Stay with me.

We had brought with us a bounty of good smokes back during archery season, and, like the boys on Elephant Island, we made rather generous use of them, tossing aside several completely good sticks that were only half-smoked because the afternoon break was over and we had to get back in the woods for the evening hunt. (Don't write me about good scent control; after thousands of hours in the woods we have become convinced that despite all the newfangled scent products, you will never beat the wind, so just hunt like an Indian and don't fuss over something you can't overcome. To an elk, you will always smell like Burger King.)

As with the penguin guts, those respectable cigar parts sort of "aged" there until weeks later (a life-age of the earth in terms of proper cigar care) when we came back for a few days of rifle season. We returned empty-handed in the Dominican leaf department, and after a few days in the woods it was with no small amount of joy we discovered the buried treasures. Stay with me. This story has a really important lesson.

The rather nasty-looking smokes were, to weary and frustrated hunters, a perfectly wonderful smoke. Truly—they were fabulous. They brought joy.

Which brings me to a precious truth lost to this age: It doesn't always have to be amazing to be wonderful.

My friends, our age is cursed with a strangely backward sort of curse, one you can't see because it looks like a blessing.

We are cursed with The Upgrade of Everything.

Seriously—my old iPhone 5 was amazing. Simply amazing. It took great photos and video; it navigated me through foreign cities; it could translate languages, for heaven's sake. Compared to the mobile phones of 20 years ago, it was from outer space. Had my father owned one, he would have been The Most Interesting Man in the World. But of course Apple knows a good market niche when they see one, so they keep cranking out the next upgrade; I thought my new 6 was pretty dang impressive until I saw the video capacities of the 6S. ("The only thing that's changed is everything.")

Coffee snobs have found themselves swept down the same rabbit hole, moving from the classic Mr. Coffee your mom had, to the classy French press, to various pour-over rigs, to the Chemex, then AeroPress, now Technivorm, and what about where you get your beans from, and who roasted them? Just to remind you, we are talking about a cup of coffee here. The Upgrade of Everything.









This ruthless totalitarian regime now dominates pretty much everything you love. From fly rods to running shoes, beer, skis, climbing gear, road bikes, mountain bikes, chocolate, tennis rackets, headphones, pool cues—the list is endless.

All cursed by The Upgrade of Everything.

It makes you think that some of your really great stuff isn't that great anymore. Or that things have to be amazing to be wonderful.

Thus robbing us of a lot of joy that is right here, already at hand.

Yes, yes—I have cast the new era of fly rods, and they're great. But my 20-year-old five-weight still catches fish and brings me joy. Lots of joy. My old pickup has well over 100,000 miles now, and yes it's looking hammered and I know there are almost a dozen newer models out, but it still drives fine and I like the way it feels familiar, worn in like an old shoe. There are a lot of stories in that truck. I'm told that Voodoo donuts are worth traveling to Portland for, but really...you can't just enjoy that great maple bar you've always loved from down the street?

Joy is not proportionate to the age of your gear. Newer and "latest" do not equal more joy.

I know the fog of this marketing war makes it hard to believe, so let me say it again: Joy has nothing to do with the age or model of your gear.

After two weeks at sea, Ernest and his four mates passed through storms that sank ocean liners in a small dingy caulked with seal blood. They hit the ping pong paddle of South Georgia using nothing but a sextant—an act of seamanship still marveled at in the annals of maritime adventures.

And none of them had an iPhone. ■





31

Musical score for measures 31-34. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a complex melodic line in the treble staff with many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass staff with chords and triplets. Measure numbers 31, 32, 33, and 34 are indicated below the bass staff.

35

Musical score for measures 35-38. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music continues with complex melodic lines and chords. Measure numbers 35, 36, 37, and 38 are indicated below the bass staff.

39

Musical score for measures 39-42. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music continues with complex melodic lines and chords. Measure numbers 39, 40, 41, and 42 are indicated below the bass staff.

43

Musical score for measures 43-46. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music continues with complex melodic lines and chords. Measure numbers 43, 44, 45, and 46 are indicated below the bass staff.

47

Musical score for measures 47-50. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music continues with complex melodic lines and chords. Measure numbers 47, 48, 49, and 50 are indicated below the bass staff.



