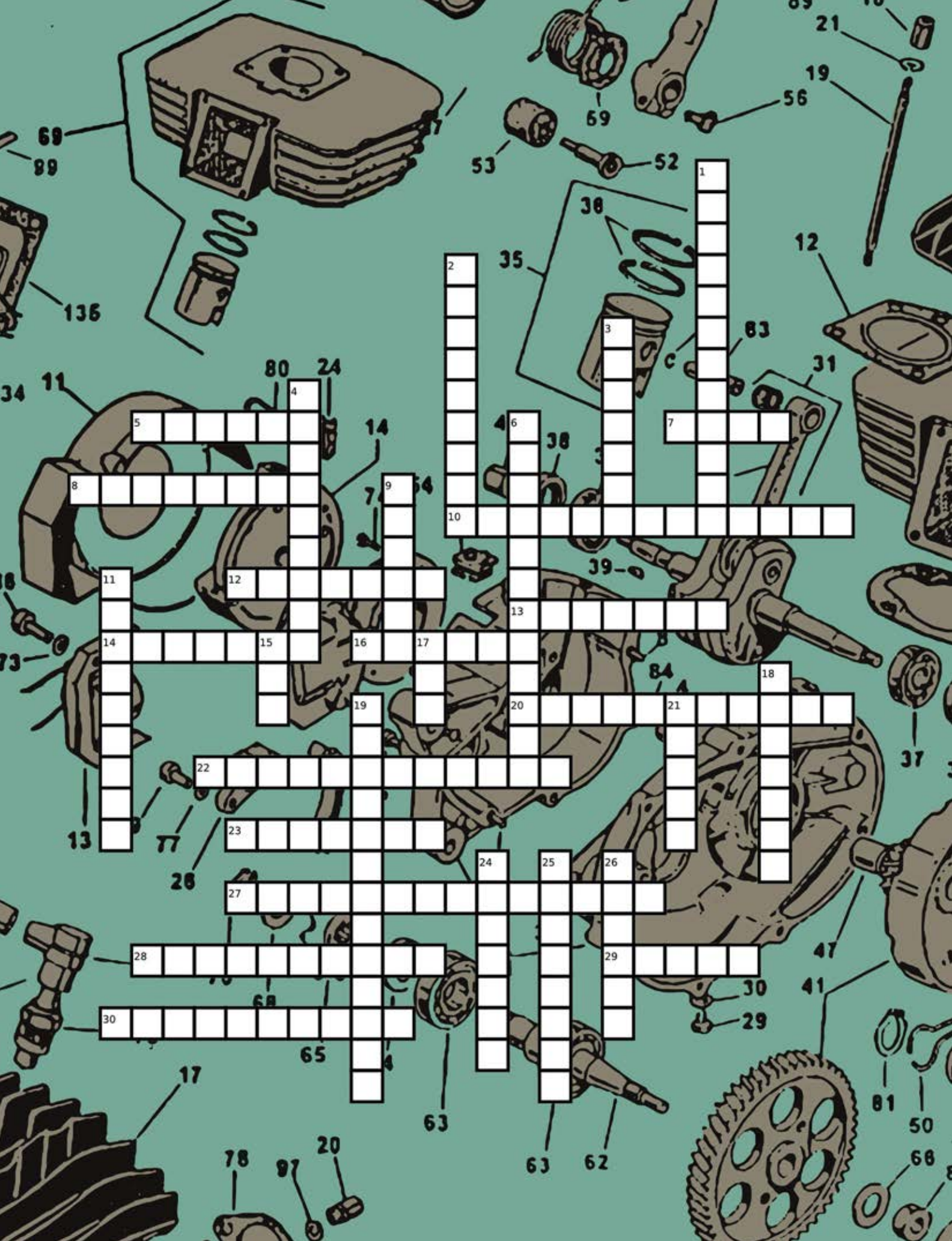


AND SONS

IMITATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL

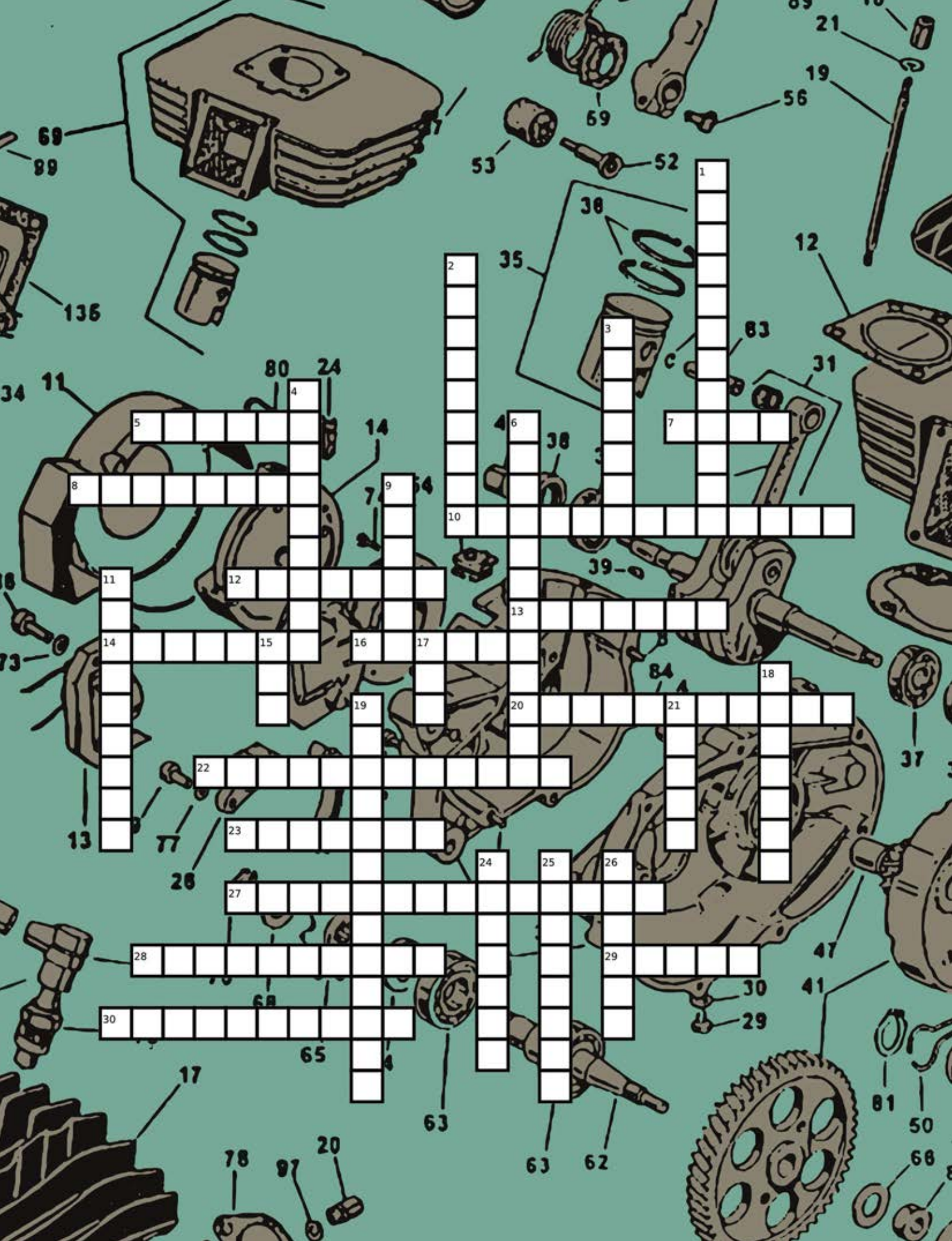


VOL. 5



A crossword puzzle grid is overlaid on the technical drawing. The grid consists of white squares for letters and black squares for empty space. The starting positions for the words are indicated by numbers:

- 1: Down, 10 squares
- 2: Down, 10 squares
- 3: Down, 10 squares
- 4: Down, 10 squares
- 5: Across, 10 squares
- 6: Down, 10 squares
- 7: Across, 10 squares
- 8: Across, 10 squares
- 9: Down, 10 squares
- 10: Across, 10 squares
- 11: Down, 10 squares
- 12: Across, 10 squares
- 13: Across, 10 squares
- 14: Across, 10 squares
- 15: Down, 10 squares
- 16: Across, 10 squares
- 17: Down, 10 squares
- 18: Down, 10 squares
- 19: Down, 10 squares
- 20: Across, 10 squares
- 21: Across, 10 squares
- 22: Across, 10 squares
- 23: Across, 10 squares
- 24: Down, 10 squares
- 25: Down, 10 squares
- 26: Down, 10 squares
- 27: Across, 10 squares
- 28: Across, 10 squares
- 29: Across, 10 squares
- 30: Across, 10 squares



AND SONS

IMITATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL

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VOL. 5

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CONTAINS MATURE CONTENT
(But only the stuff that will feed a young man's soul)

ANDSONSMAGAZINE.COM

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Front cover by Mike Marshall. This page by Sam Eldredge.

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Longtime pilot David Buckles and his helo, looking like Airwolf and flying to save lives.

FOREWORD

In a single week, as this issue came together, three young men one or two degrees removed from me died unexpectedly. Tragic accidents in the wilderness and on the road. While I know, in my mind, that this world is not our end, my heart can't help but feel the fragility of it all.

Lately, I've been picturing myself on a sailboat in the clear blue waters of the Caribbean. A friend of mine has been daydreaming constantly of a beach bungalow, no cell service, and nothing to do but ride waves. Another keeps telling me what he'd do if he had a billion dollars and 24 hours to spend it. I think our fantasies reveal a doorway into our pain.

To say that it's been a tough year would be an understatement. It's an easy bet for me to make, but I'm guessing you're no stranger to trauma, stress, and fantasizing about relief.

Welcome back, comrades.

What follows is a volume that was built in garages and in hospital rooms. It was planned and executed in a fragmented time, yet with the hope and the vision that on the other side may be something beautiful. In those still moments where we dreamed of getting away to the mountains, or of being celebrated, or of seeing change come to ourselves and to our community, we consented to wrestling with the pain—not fleeing from it—while simultaneously pursuing kindness and Jesus and restoration.

I'll warn you here: This is a heartfelt volume. As more of the world and more of ourselves get stripped away, I've found it's impossible to not get to the core of something quickly. It's what we're after, but having my core so easily accessible has come with its portion of vulnerability that I'm not always comfortable with.

It's also a beautifully hopeful volume. And playful, too. Because we need that, and we were made for it. I hope you enjoy what follows, but more than that I hope it resonates with you because this is your story, too.

– Sam Eldredge

READER MAIL

I've been reading your family's writing since I was 16; that's over 16 years. Recently I bought all the back issues of the magazine, and got Morgan Snyder's new book. I've never felt as tangibly as I do now the voice of my heavenly father speaking to me like he has through your writing.



God has used this crazy pandemic time to really stir up my wife's and my heart toward new dreams, centered around a life of adventure, excavation, and initiation of our souls. I'm so grateful for the circumstances that God placed in my own life that created a crash and burn, a rebirth, and a new purpose and mission. This has been a process nearly 3 years in the making, but as Morgan quotes in *Becoming a King*, "When the pupil is ready, the master appears."

– Sam P.

I can't remember the exact day Volume 4 arrived—the quarantine days all blended together by that time. What I do remember is how timely so many of the articles were. Whether that's by the focus of *And Sons* to address perennial issues of the young man's soul that aren't confined to a particular time of year or some Truman Show-level surveillance, either way it was seriously useful. The piece on returning to art inspired my own personal renaissance into my preferred art of woodburning, which helped to fill that empty time with something meaningful and beautiful, and *Face To Face With a Dying God* spurred a level of reflection on what I have called "god-killing questions" (emphasis on the small g). Lots more can be said about so many of the other pieces, but those two stuck out to me the most in this past issue and I look forward to checking out what comes next both in print and through the podcast!

– Noah D.

The magazine and podcast are constant sources of strength, encouragement, and conviction for me. Volume 4 was incredible and several articles brought tears, challenged me, or made me feel less alone. Specifically, "The Longing" by Ben Richardson did all three. I have said, either to myself or out loud, "I wish I could just move into a cabin in the middle of the woods" more times than I should probably admit over the last year. A beautiful but grueling hiking trip on the A.T. last spring and a lifelong dream trip to Maine in the fall partially satiated the longing, and partially made the hunger for it increase.

I am so comforted that not only am I not alone in feeling this way, but that God really does find inventive ways to feed this part of our souls if we allow Him to and are open to looking for them. He's fathering me through letting Him provide mini adventures or mini respites, while also encouraging my heart that the ultimate longing I'm feeling is for the new heaven and new earth—the promise of eternal adventure with no pain or sorrow attached. If we'll let it, the longing can adjust our perspective each day by clearly pointing us home. I'm exceedingly thankful for you all and am covering you in prayer daily.

– Brandon P.

And Sons is on the bedside and inside the go-bag. I'm a married 46-year-old father of 5. We just managed to somehow find a camping spot this weekend in spite of weird CV19 barriers. I'm sitting by the lake and just read "The Longing." The powerful juxtaposition of the pictures combined with Ben's words were an amazing direct hit. I felt like one of the students at the beginning of "Dead Poets Society" as I looked at the pictures. Like God was Robin Williams behind me whispering, "Don't miss this." It was perfect timing on God's part to let this article land while we are on this mini weekend adventure.

– Greg S.

Just wanted to send a message and say how much I love you guys and your authenticity. I am a 46-year-old mom of two boys, 25 and 20, and I enjoy your podcasts. Of course I love your dad and his book "Waking the Dead" changed my life! My older son told me about your podcast a few years ago, and I'm telling you it has also brought so much perspective into the point of view of young men. But also I always feel more intellectual after Blaine's point of view and his vocabulary! Keep up the awesome Kingdom work you are doing because you bless both men and women of all ages!

– Katy D.

Here's a picture I snapped at my in-laws' property. They live on 72 acres about 8 minutes from our little suburbia, and most afternoons we take [our son] Hunter over there to see Papa's tractor, play in the creek, and get to be a boy in a beautiful place. I'm so thankful he will get to grow up with that environment. We usually go check the mailbox for Nana at the bottom of her driveway every day, and this afternoon there was a copy of the latest *And Sons* in the mailbox.



Hunter decided to plop down right on the driveway and check it out. It brought me so much joy to know that one day he will actually open his own copy and hopefully be as strengthened by what you guys offer as I am.

This picture felt like a moment I wanted to capture and just hold on to, to remember that so much good is coming. Even in the moments when I feel like I want life to “get back to normal.” I would probably never have had this moment with him otherwise.

Thank you for continuing to offer so beautifully and courageously. Strength to you and the whole team!

– Andrew F.

I'm an associate pastor at a growing church in suburban St. Louis. I love the area, the people, and what God is doing in our church. I was taken completely off guard when, during a time of prayer and fasting over my wife's employment situation, God told us it is time to leave our home and church to find our next chapter somewhere else. We have no idea where he wants us to go or where we're going to land, but we're looking and praying! Excited for the adventure, but also sad at the prospect of what we're leaving behind.

It has been over a month since then, and I'm feeling pretty exposed. We've told the rest of our church staff and closest family and friends what God told us, but now we're waiting for the next step. (In the meantime, we're doing everything we can to prepare.) We still don't know where we're going, and honestly feeling a little silly for it. Yesterday I confided to a close friend how I was feeling and wondering all the things one would expect: What is God waiting for? ... Did I hear wrong? After all, why would someone want to leave where God is moving?

This morning I read your article, “Winter Ascents.” One line in particular caught my attention: “On the eve of nearly every new adventure, the familiar begins to feel tempting and the battle with that ‘resistance’ has higher stakes than we might realize in the moment.” That little reminder was a refreshing balm in the battle to stand in what God has called us to do. Thank you!

– Tim H.

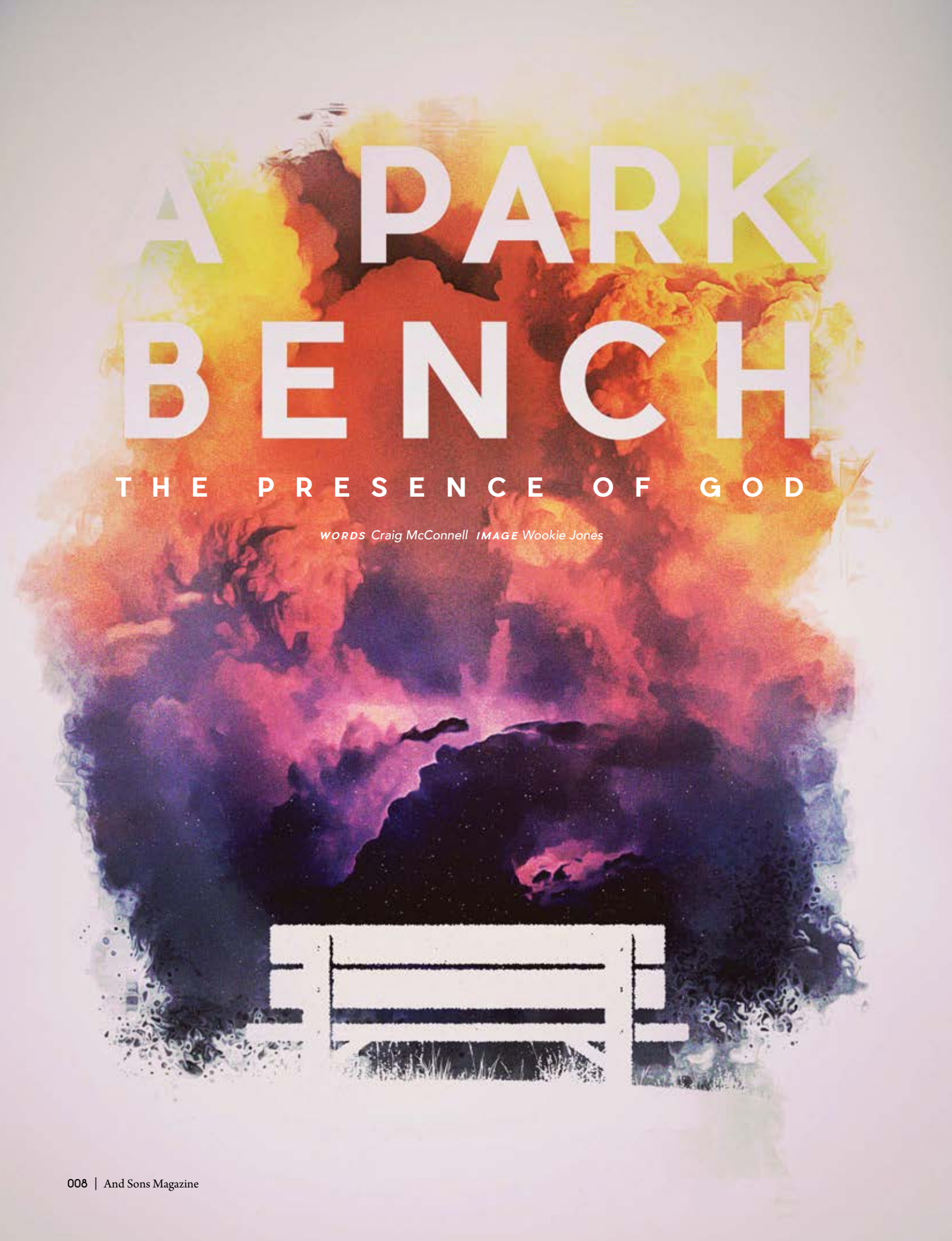
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(Letters may be edited for length and clarity.)



A PARK BENCH

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

WORDS Craig McConnell IMAGE Wookie Jones

I'm dissociating in front of my computer under the weight of a deadline and a life failed (or so it seems). Feeling 14 and wholly overwhelmed by expectations, bills, this thing called "cancer," kids I don't get time with, and the regular maintenance a 40-year marriage requires, I yearn for clarity and presence, courage and strength, and a Father's validation.

And then, outta nowhere, I have an unsolicited and seemingly random vision or picture from God. Here it is...

I'm on a park bench, stretched out like a warped board, slouched with my legs extended in front of me and my head resting on the back railing. It's a beautiful park with large, grassy areas separated by a walkway slaloming between huge, mature shade trees. I'm checked out, not really present, staring over the horizon at nothing. Though I'm cognizant of my surroundings, there is no conscious thought. I am in that state in which you neither blink nor swallow; there's no measurable brain activity and barely a pulse. Alive but not present. That's me! I am certifiably detached from life.

It's midday and there's a warm breeze blowing, just enough to rustle the leaves of an old cottonwood that's shading me. The scene cries "summer" with the air full of pollen, gnat tornadoes, and the musty scent of fresh cut grass. In the background is the sound of sprinklers machine-gunning water over a flowerbed...chit-chit-chit-chitachitachitachit. Straight ahead, a little to the left, is an old park table with four young women enjoying their lattes and the reunion they're having. To the right, a bunch of pigeons are trying to enforce a clear pecking order while scrambling to eat a handful of feed someone threw out for them.

I'm taking this all in but am unmoved by any of it. It's clinical; I'm an observer of life but not a participant in it. As my vision pans right, back from the birds to resume my vigilant dazed and confused gape, I notice or sense something peripherally...right next to me. It's a person.

I can't hide my being startled by this out-of-nowhere stranger who's suddenly sitting eight inches from me on our shared little bench.

It's a man, an older man with weathered but not leathered skin. Actually, it's God. I don't know how I know, but I know. My new bench friend, The One True and Eternal, Just and Holy, Powerful and All-Knowing Creator God is right next to me. I'm a little rattled that He's unanimated, silently slouched on a park bench, apparently killing time. He hasn't yet said a word or even made eye contact, but I do notice a tear forming and then falling from the corner of His eye.

Outwardly, I'm unfazed! I don't sit up straight on the bench or fall on my face; my demeanor and countenance remain the same. If you were to have walked by and seen us, you may have muttered under your breath, "Get a life!"

There we are, the two of us sharing a bench for what feels like hours with nothing said, no eye contact...just sitting and staring into nowhere. That He is silent says so much. He is just there, next to me...with me... and I am in His presence and...He's crying; His tears say everything. From His tears, I know that He knows all that I'm facing: the losses and pain, the struggles and terrors, my failures and ache to live and love well. I can tell He knows, and knowing everything about me, my life and this season moves Him. He's crying with me, for me, over me. The tear is everything!

He doesn't offer affirmation with deeply validating words. ("Craig, you have lived so well in this difficult season. Well done, my son. You're so on the right track. I love you! Keep it up.") That he doesn't offer that seems to say I don't need it. Wow!

He doesn't call me out, either. There is no exposing of another deeply rooted, profoundly governing, historic, and systemic sin that explains my struggle to live and love well from a heart of true adoration and worship of God. That He doesn't go there seems to say so much. So, so very much. Apparently there is something more important than going over all of that.

I think it is about just being together.

I could have sat on that timeworn bench forever.

It's been so deeply encouraging to have a visual, a mental picture of a park bench with God sitting there—available, present, waiting and wanting my presence and time to chat or just be. Throughout the week, I'll hear a simple invitation along the lines of, "Meet Me at the Bench," and I know it's time to pull away and be with God.

It is good to have a mental picture, a place, a song, park, trail, His Word, or a piece of art where you and God can enjoy one another. In His presence you do not see life the same; a Larger Story captures you, and the overblown small story of worry, fear, hatred, weakness, and pain cannot be preeminent. You see yourself as you truly are and will more fully be. Everything I need to live and love in a world that is so violent, parched, deceptive, and unforgiving is found in the presence of God. I have often sought God's words, voice, counsel, understanding, guidance, and validation. Each of those is a valid and necessary pursuit to go to God with. What's new for me, in this season, is to simply pursue Him to be with Him. To simply be with Him.

I can't tell you where I spend most of my time, but it isn't in the presence of God. I can tell you that one moment on a park bench with Him is better than a thousand elsewhere. Oh God, extend the times we're together. ■



S I N G L E



LIFE BEGINS NOW

WORDS Josh Skaggs

This goes out to all the single dudes. The unmarrieds. The heartbreakers and the heartbroken. The garter catchers checking out the bouquet catchers. The celibate for the hell of it. Chilling at coffee shops. Camping with friends. Downloading dating apps. Deleting dating apps. Still listing your dad as your emergency contact. Still cooking meals for one. Still single.

Still. As if singleness were a phase that should already have ended. It feels transitory, seasonal, preparatory. We are tempted to behave as if our real lives begin later—after we get married, after we buy a house, after we have kids. Everything up til now has been preseason, but we know that one day we'll get to play for keeps. For now we are in a "season of maturing," which sometimes feels like waiting around, as we use phrases like "where God has me" to allay the baffling fact of our still single lives.

Lest you feel depressed, I'll come right out and say it: This view of singleness falls far short of what Jesus offers us as single men. Single man, you are already a force for the kingdom. You have already been called by name and given resources to steward. You are not a half-formed creature, awaiting the metamorphosis of marriage. To state the obvious—your life has already begun.

So why doesn't it feel that way?

The world has diminished and distorted what it means to be a single man. While married men buy a home and "settle down"—words we use for rowdy toddlers—single men can still buy cool toys and goof off with friends. There is a childishness in the unmarried man that we expect marriage to cure. ("Are you ready to become a man?" I overheard someone ask my brother before his wedding.) America's most famous bachelors are roguish playboys, lounging in hot tubs, presiding over a harem of women who pine after their long-stemmed roses.

The idea of bachelors as infantilized premen is an obvious sham, but we may fall prey to its more spiritual forms. American Christian culture tends to treat singleness as a prelude to marriage and to view singles as second-class members of the church community. This is harmful for several reasons.

First, it glosses over some of the Bible's key statements about singleness, neglecting to acknowledge celibate Christians as essential and celebrated members of the Kingdom of God. In some churches, single adult men are even kept from key leadership positions, in favor of men who can write "Husband" and "Father" on their resume. These are hurtful practices, especially when we consider our LGBT brothers and sisters who are searching for a viable, lifelong home in the Church. (Not to mention the growing percentage of men who may find themselves single or divorced later in life.)

Second, church culture often makes marriage into an idol. In place of Jesus as reward, young men in the Church may feel entitled to a good spouse in exchange for their holy life or sexual purity. In place of Jesus as savior, single men may look to marriage to save them from their selfishness or even addictions. This idolatry is subtly reinforced by married believers who are keen to point out how selfish they were before they got married, even going so far as to insist that they didn't know real love until they had a spouse.

Jesus invites us to join him in forging a family, a diverse people that will one day dwell with God. In this family, we all find a home.

As single men, we must be quick to forgive friends and leaders who have partnered with a toxic culture of idolatry. We must also learn to recognize where we have submitted to those distortions in our own lives. We need to recover a right view of singleness.

A paradox might help. In Genesis, God says a defining word about men: It is not good for man to be alone. Yet in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that it is better to remain single. These two passages seem contradictory, but we may find a path forward when we integrate the two. The Gospel offers a single life that is not, ultimately, alone.

As usual, the Gospel forces us to jettison some fleshly tendencies (band name!). The world builds communities based on personality and common interests, turning us into consumers who swipe through a selection of friends and dates. Even at church, we often self-segregate into small groups based primarily on our preferences and tastes. There is something to be said for finding friends who are in season with you, but the bedrock of Christ's kingdom is not founded on affiliations like these.

The way of Christ is the spirit of adoption, a chosen family that supersedes blood, a man on a cross who has the right to say, "Behold your mother, behold your son." Jesus invites us to join him in forging a family, a diverse people that will one day dwell with God. In this family, we all find a home.

I don't mean to sound idealistic. Somehow—it seems almost a miracle—I've seen a humble picture of this in my own life. I find myself deeply embedded in a family of families, a community in which I belong.

I am frequently in the living rooms of married friends, helping them with the dishes, chilling in their backyards. I live in an apartment next to other single people who cook for each other and bear witness to each other's lives. I admit, there were lonely years before this, years when I searched without success for people with whom I could belong.

To find my family, I made many intentional choices; I also received many unmerited gifts. It wasn't a straight line. I can, however, offer one choice to orient your quest: Be a leader. Be brave enough to take the first step toward people, to invest in others before they invest in you. Ask Jesus who he is inviting you to bring near, in response to the way he chose you.

Learn to lay down your life—before a wife or child demands it of you. If your life is constructed upon selfishness and worldly narratives of singleness, what makes you think you'll change when (if) you put a ring on it? If you indulge in self-pity while you're eating dinner alone or hearing about your friends' sex lives, chances are you'll indulge in self-pity when (if) you're changing diapers and missing out on a night with the guys.

Single life begins now. Every choice you make is shaping you into the man you are becoming. Be gracious, and engage the joys and pains of your singleness with a generous spirit. Turn your bachelorhood into kingship, stewarding your resources for a higher calling. You're still single, so make the most of your singular life. ■



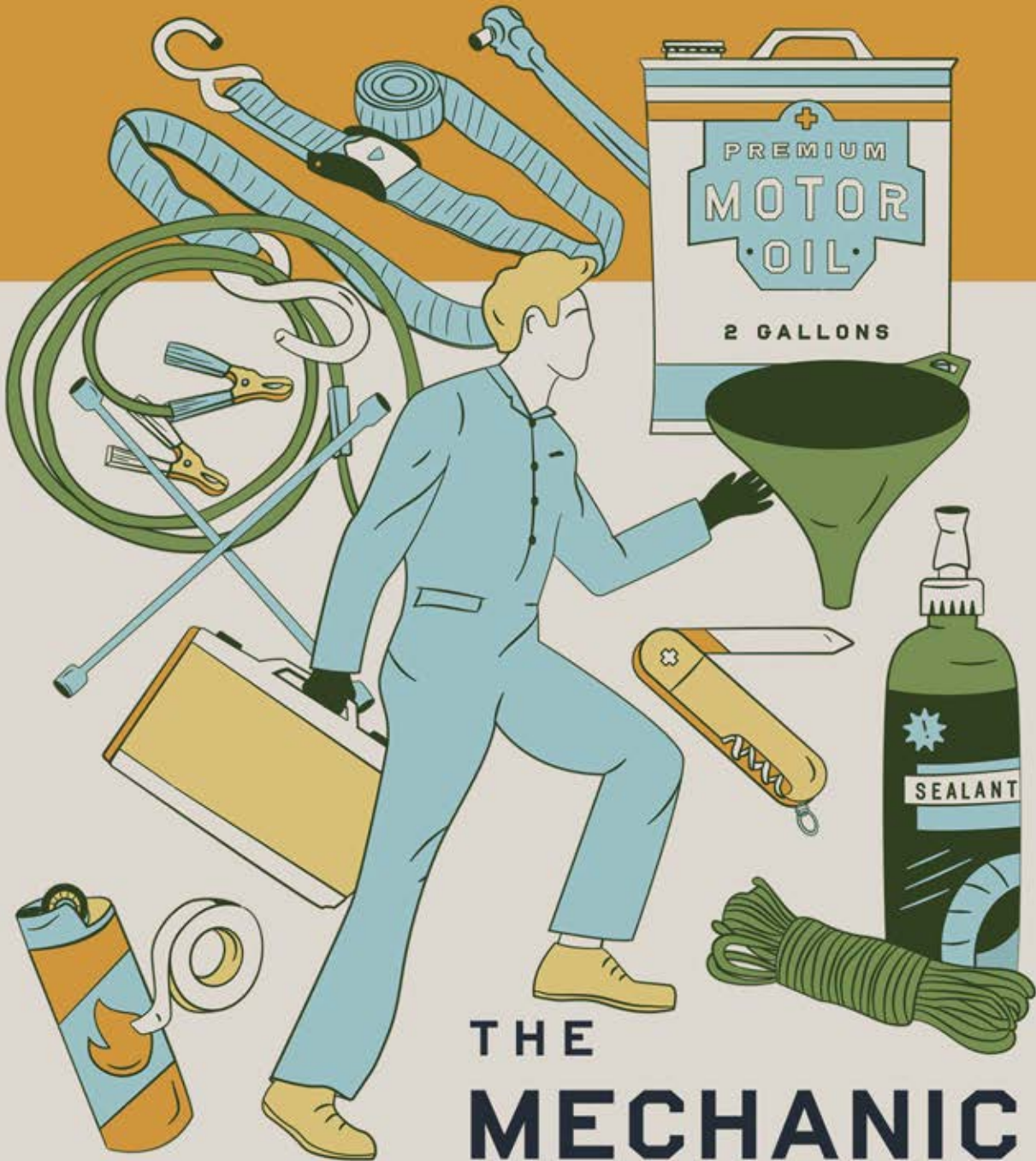
PSST! A SECRET MESSAGE FOR MARRIED READERS...

Hey there. Sorry to interrupt your sexy times, but I'd like to pass along a note. We see you. We see the many ways you're striving to be a good husband, father, and friend. And we're grateful. We encourage you to keep going. Keep following Jesus into a love that expands beyond the confines of your household. Keep letting single guys linger on your couch, since we are likely returning to an empty home tonight. Keep including us in family rhythms, since this dinner might be our best chance to practice brotherhood and fatherhood today. Keep showing us that we belong because even though we sometimes loiter like the boldest squatters, we're secretly afraid of imposing. In exchange, single people have a lot to offer. We would love to help you with an overdue house project, to fight for your marriage, to give your kids some undivided attention, and to invoke your destiny with the bright-eyed energy of someone who hasn't seen you on the toilet. We're God's family, and we need each other.

TRUNK ID

HOW TO DETERMINE WHAT A GUY
DOES FROM THE STUFF IN HIS CAR.

IMAGES Becca Kaiser

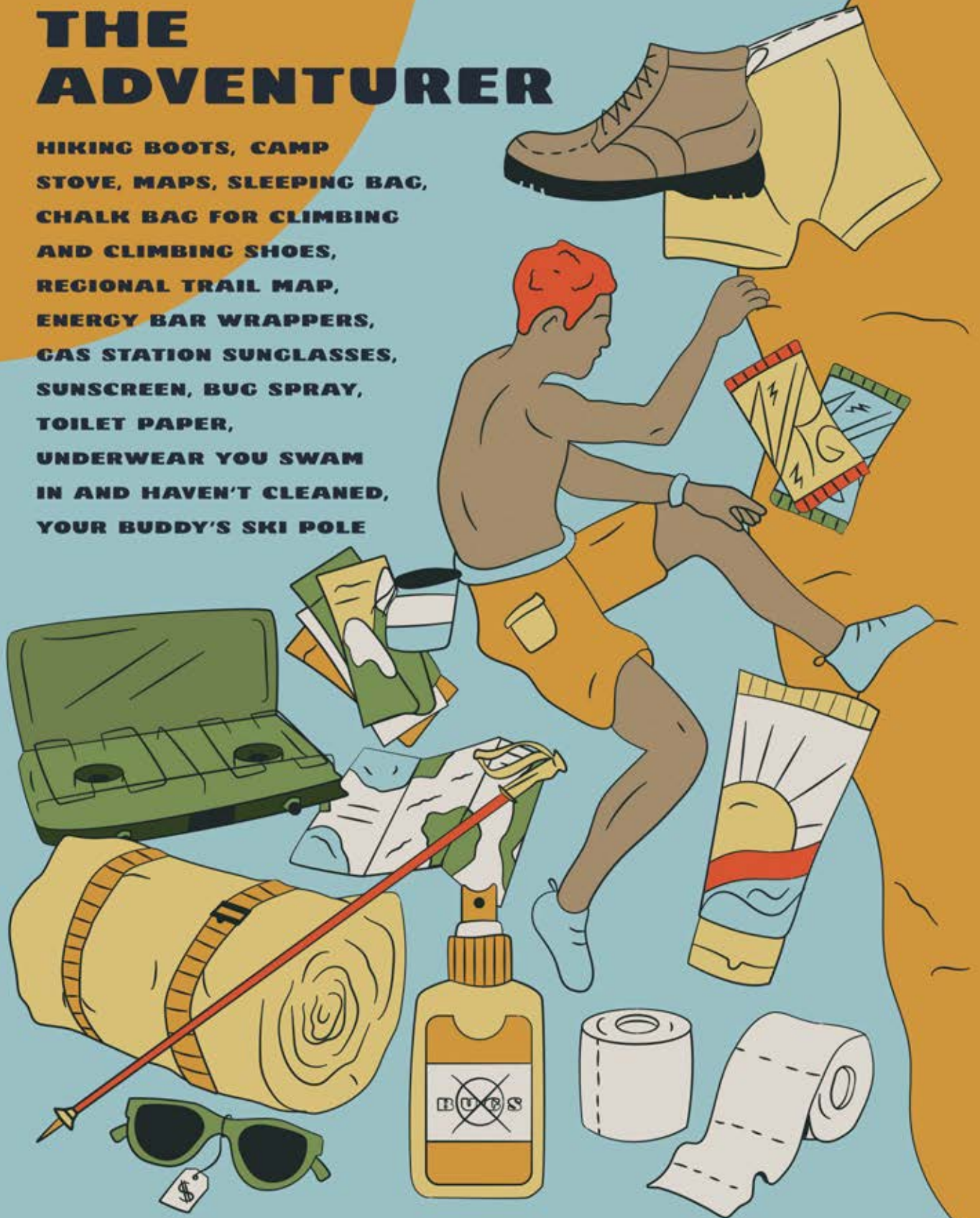


THE MECHANIC

MULTI-TOOL, JUMPER CABLES, SOCKET SET, TIRE IRON, TIRE SEALANT, OIL,
WASHER FLUID, 550 CHORD, TIE-DOWNS, TAPE, FUNNELS, AND A LIGHTER

THE ADVENTURER

HIKING BOOTS, CAMP STOVE, MAPS, SLEEPING BAG, CHALK BAG FOR CLIMBING AND CLIMBING SHOES, REGIONAL TRAIL MAP, ENERGY BAR WRAPPERS, GAS STATION SUNGLASSES, SUNSCREEN, BUG SPRAY, TOILET PAPER, UNDERWEAR YOU SWAM IN AND HAVEN'T CLEANED, YOUR BUDDY'S SKI POLE

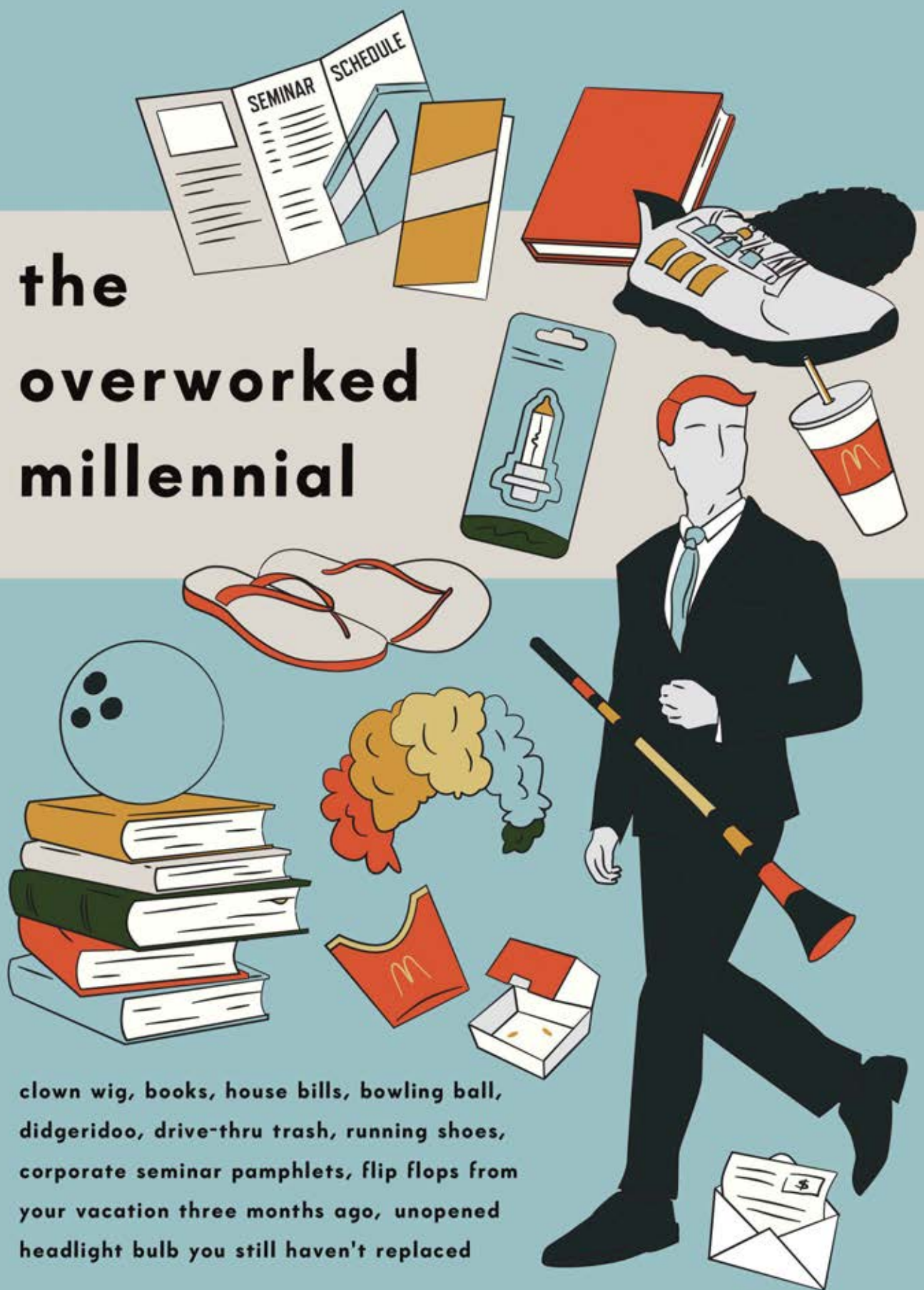


THE GYM RAT



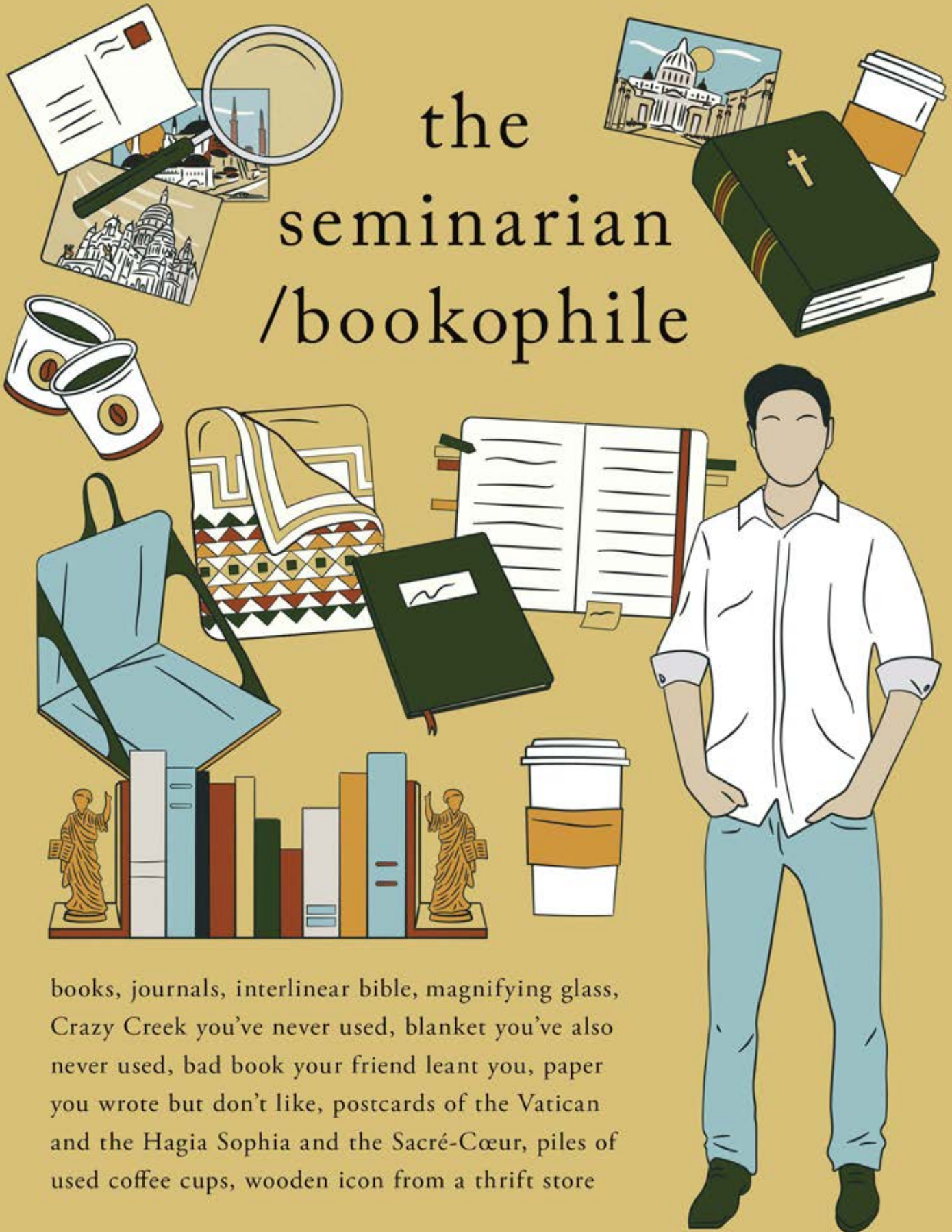
water bottles, Chamois Butt'r, 2/3 empty bag of electrolyte powder, dirty socks, helmet, pump, backup pump, old wheel you got a good deal on, fragments of shifter cable, half eaten sandwich, rotten bananas, 1 glove, 1 winter legging, 2 paper cappuccino cups

the overworked millennial



clown wig, books, house bills, bowling ball,
didgeridoo, drive-thru trash, running shoes,
corporate seminar pamphlets, flip flops from
your vacation three months ago, unopened
headlight bulb you still haven't replaced

the seminarian /bookophile



books, journals, interlinear bible, magnifying glass, Crazy Creek you've never used, blanket you've also never used, bad book your friend leant you, paper you wrote but don't like, postcards of the Vatican and the Hagia Sophia and the Sacré-Cœur, piles of used coffee cups, wooden icon from a thrift store

**diapers, trash, used
pouches, broken toys,
overdue kids books,
1 sock, broken sunglasses,
towel, gardening supplies,
crackers you forgot
you bought**



the parent





LIFE THROUGH A LENS

WORDS & IMAGES Ian Helmcke

As a photographer, the most important factor to capturing beauty in an image is the subject and search for beauty itself. In the movie “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” Sean Penn’s character states, “Beautiful things don’t ask for attention,” meaning beautiful things are not flaunted, pushed in your face, or shown off. Beauty as the essence of things must be pursued. This is something I did not learn in a university but during a time of physical injury and healing. The art of searching for beauty through a lens allowed for my damaged brain to discover color, joy, and life again.

In my 23 years, I have suffered 19 concussions. Some came from running into signs, stunts gone wrong, or once trying to impress a girl I admired, which backfired in a humiliating way. I suffered most of my head trauma during my junior year of high school when I had four severe consecutive concussions in nine months that resulted in harmful TBIs (traumatic brain injury). I spent most of the year stuck in a dark room with extraordinarily little social contact, and simple tasks like reading or walking became incredibly exhausting. My balance suffered and I recall having to depend on a cane at some points for help. My broken brain was trying to function normally when it felt like only 25 percent of it was actually working. Any energy I had at the beginning of the day would vanish in a snap and I could feel my brain crash. My physical health was bad, but my mental health suffered the most.









SAFETY - FIRST
DURING LOADING AND UNLOADING
EQUAL LOAD PATTERNS MUST BE
MAINTAINED ON EACH SIDE OF CAR

SAFETY - FIRST
DURING LOADING AND UNLOADING
EQUAL LOAD PATTERNS MUST BE
MAINTAINED ON BOTH SIDES OF CAR

SAFETY - FIRST
WHEN CAR IS EMPTY
ALL END OF THE COWHITCH
MUST BE WITHIN THE CATCHER WING

The change came when one of my therapists recommended a radical idea. He said I should grab any type of camera and try to take a single picture on a daily basis.



With head trauma, it is easy to forget about the mental health of a person, and during this time my depression, despair, and anxiety skyrocketed. I observed the world with no beauty and no color. Imagine looking at a glorious sunset and not being able to register the warmth of the sun's rays on your skin or connect the smell of fresh rain with peace and tranquility. My brain could not perceive or register the beautiful things of life. When I would see a red flower, I could process that it was red, but I could not comprehend its essence. Its beauty was blocked from impacting my life. I was so frustrated because I felt my own head was robbing my heart. This was a very helpless place because my brain, the thing I depended on for thought, reasoning, and rationality, was failing me and it was becoming my worst enemy. Many sleepless nights left me feeling lost and quite hopeless.

But this story does not conclude with hopelessness. In fact, it is quite the opposite for as I write this, I look back and see how hopeful this story can be. I went through medical therapy (both mental and physical) for my brain trauma and saw some small and minor improvements. The change came when one of my therapists recommended a radical idea. He said I should grab any type of camera and try to take a single picture on a daily basis. This would challenge me to search for beauty and color when all I could see was mundane hopelessness.

This was hard because my despair saw no point in renewing my mind. I did not expect to see beauty; I did not expect to be able to hike or climb or adventure in the same way ever again.

I reluctantly grabbed my dad's point-and-shoot camera and began to delicately look for beauty through a camera lens. It took time, a lot of time, but I found healing from a damaged brain through the pursuit of beauty in God's creation and the world around it. The day came when I registered color, warmth, and smell again. It was wonderful! I bought my own DSLR camera and started to document this amazing discovery on a more professional level. What amazed me was the fact that I was not only capturing beauty through a lens, but I was also able to observe its nurturing tendencies in my own life. When I could not form a full thought, beauty caused my mind to begin to build itself back up and awakened my heart again.

Beauty has a way of healing a broken man in a way no technological tool or advancement can. God has designed beauty in such a way that when all seems lost or hopeless, one can observe a shooting star or a warm sunset and subconsciously begin to let it nurture brokenness. Beauty does not flaunt itself. During my concussions, I had to seek it. I have now had the opportunity to travel to many places around the world for photography. I have had the blessing to experience the impact of designed beauty upon a broken soul.

I still suffer from some minor post symptoms of concussions like memory loss and dyslexia. But through the art of photography, I am reminded of why I love making pictures: There is beauty in this world, and it's worth fighting for. ■

Seasonal Boundaries

WORDS Josh Skaggs IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

I used to love a particular shortcut, a back way through the woods near my house. Now it's closed, and I feel as if I've lost a part of my freedom. This was my trail!

It takes some serious self-control not to jump the (new) fence. It wouldn't be a big deal if these "Area Closed" signs only popped up on my hikes. But lately God's been setting them up along all kinds of familiar and favorite paths. He's redrawing the lines of my life and, yep, I want to jump those fences, too.

Unlike some of God's more obvious commands (don't murder anyone, don't lust after someone's wife), seasonal boundaries have a subtler logic. Which makes them easier to excuse ourselves for breaking.

An example: maybe you need to delete your Netflix account. It's not a sin to watch Netflix. All your friends watch Netflix. In the past, you've enjoyed winding down from a long day with a few shows. But you have a nagging sense that God is asking you to put that away for a time.

Or maybe it's more complicated: maybe you need to re-evaluate one of your friendships. This friendship used to bring a lot of joy, but lately you feel weird (and, weirdly, bad) every time you hang out. When you tune in to the Holy Spirit, He seems to be counseling you to back off for a bit.

Let's admit that sucks. When a familiar path is closed, it feels inconvenient. Painful. Unfair.

But remember the trail sign? Paths are closed "for revegetation." These seasonal boundaries have a purpose, and it usually has to do with healing—either ours or someone else's. We start to realize that this territory has been misused, or used beyond its capacity, and now it needs to be restored.

Some of the more archaic trail signs use the phrase "closed for reclamation." The path is being reclaimed. Similarly, seasonal boundaries reclaim us for God. They remind us that we are not our own. Our time is His. Our money and our energy are His. All our friends belong to Him. This is a good thing.

Our souls cannot be well apart from God. When we relax and stop resisting Him, we are able to say with David, "*The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance*" (Psalm 16:6). ■

**CLOSED FOR
REVEGETATION**

**STAY ON
DESIGNATED
TRAILS**



**UNLAWFUL TO ENTER ANY
PARK AREA WHICH IS POSTED
AS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC
CITY ORD. 8-97 & 01-42**



WORDS Blaine Eldredge *IMAGES* Wookie Jones

Let me tell you a story. There was a king in Mesopotamia. He inherited a raggedy empire, and though he had endured a long time in obscurity, he re-saddled the horse and armored the chariot and conquered a large part of the world. His name was Nabu-kudurri-usur. Rendered in English, that's Nebuchadnezzar, second of Chaldean kings and greatest among Babylonians. The name is not a human title. It's an appeal to the country's slaughtering god, and in the way of kings at the time, he took many captives home. The young, the learned, the promising. They were tutored in politics and economics and astrology, and also sorcery, and divination, and enchantment. There were a good many magicians in his court, and many strange things came of it.

Among those born to Babylon were three young men from near the Mediterranean Sea: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. "God is good," "Who is like God?" and "God saves," in their own language. But they've lost their history so completely they're known today by their slave names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. "Servant of the moon god Aku," "None is like Aku," and "Slave of Nergal." It's hard to imagine a more direct assault on their identity, but it happened, and they became Babylonian officials.

At this point Sunday-schooled Christians see the story coming, but stand by.

Nebuchadnezzar made a statue. He summoned the rulers of his kingdom, down to the minor ranks. It must have been a sight: satraps, magistrates, governors, treasurers, judges and prefects on camels, palanquins, and chariots. With the groan of slaves and the clatter of armor and the chants of magical sects, it must have been like Burning Man or some other festival on the desert plain. Overhead, eagles and ravens thought it was battle. Commands were given though no one could hear them. No matter—the rules were laid out in the summons.

"When you hear the music, worship the statue." The pipes sang out, and like blown grass the crowd went down.

Only, not the three above.

It was conspicuous and Nebuchadnezzar heard about it. He was, the story says, furious with rage—the same phrase used to describe the Pharisees when Jesus healed on the Sabbath—and he called for the men.

So. Here we are in the present tense. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are taken to the king.

In other circumstances, it would have been a splendid scene. The sandstone walls engraved with Babylonian legends. The palace steps. The gold, the cloth, the cropped trapezoidal goatee of the king, and back of the throne, the sibilant murmur of sorcerers. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah approach the dais. Up on his throne: Nebuchadnezzar, leering and biting his thumb.

Now, he knows these guys. Their buddy Daniel helped him out with a dream of his a year ago. He asks, in effect, "What the hell is going on?"

The men answer together: "We can't do it."

Nebuchadnezzar snorts and takes a breath. Then he tries another tone. "This can all go away," he says. He looks at the watching officials; his reputation's on the line. These guys better cave. Nebuchadnezzar lowers his voice to hiss, "Just say you're willing to worship the statue, and you can go."

The men are resistant, not rebellious. They look him in the eye but they don't bother answering.

"Oh." Nebuchadnezzar's eyebrows go up. "Perhaps you think your god will save you?" Down he comes from his throne. His platform sandals clap on the tile. He leans over them. There's a jangling of gold and a rush of harsh perfume. His voice is an ominous hush. "No god can save you from me."

Except, that's not how it goes. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are thrown into the city's sacrificial oven, into fire so hot it kills their executioners, and their God does not quench the flames. Instead, he appears inside, burning hotter than the fire. This is the Jesus we're talking about, the most astonishing figure who ever changed the course of history. He is the answer to the human heart. Knowing him, and loving him, is the meaning of life.

We're living in a stressful time. The people and systems we trusted to save us are being shaken and many of us are wondering what, exactly, we're supposed to do. How do you fix humanity? How do you change the human heart? How do you change the world? The answer may surprise you. At least, it's surprised saints throughout the ages. Love Jesus. Fall in love with him again. Let him seed a change in your heart that will indeed transform the world.

But of course you can't love someone you can't see, and you can't love a stranger you can. I had to shake hands and chill with my neighbor before I could learn who he was. I had to meet and date my wife before I could see who she was and fall in love with her.

So what about Jesus? There's an ancient solution. It's that peculiar, tissue paper-paged book, the Bible, which exists for a number of reasons, the most important of which is to help you see Jesus, long before he comes in the flesh.

Say what? Before he comes?

Indeed: by the time you get to the stories of Jesus, you've been told a lot about him. Most of it's not facts, most of it's stories, and most of those—stay with me here—are about other people. Taken together, they unveil the character of Jesus. Meaning: Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, David, Elijah, etc., all show you one part of Jesus, like tiles in a mosaic, so that when he finally comes, you know what he's like. They show Jesus in their own actions. And they show Jesus in the way Jesus—being God—responds to them.

Some things you have to see to understand. So off we go: to the deaths of three men with whom Jesus closely identifies. Let's start with Deuteronomy (chapter 34), and the finale of the Exodus story.

Moses is old though you wouldn't know it. The narrator makes it clear: "his eye was undimmed, his vigor unabated" (*Deut 34:7*). He's like a tough old sailor in an Irish bar, with fading tattoos and a grip like a crab trap. He's led Israel for more than 40 years, and now, at last, they're on the border of the Promised Land.

Only, Moses isn't going in. He's known that for some time. Back in the desert, he lost his temper—again—and more or less called himself God. That's a

dangerous inclination for the leader of an idolatrous people, and God made it clear: when you get to Canaan, someone else is leading Israel in. Which is about to happen when you get to this scene.

It's evening in the desert, and lovely in the way of dry places. There's a breath-soft breeze, and a gauzy band of deep red where the sun went down, and Moses strolls out of camp to climb a low hill. It's called Pisgah, "The Cleft," which must be an inside joke, because that's where Moses was when he saw the Glory of God (cough Jesus) walk by all those years ago. The LORD is with him. They walk up Mount Nebo, then down an alpine saddle, and over to Pisgah. There's a solemn air between them, as of a wedding, or a funeral, or a coronation. When at last they stand on the hilltop together, they turn a slow circle. God is showing him everything: Gilead and Naphtali, Ephraim and Manasseh, and Judah all the way to the sea.

In fact, God shows him more than you can see from dinky Pisgah, which is a mystery in itself, but still, there you are: Moses sees the Promised Land. It's hard to imagine what that was like. Israel had been away 400 years, and even before that, they hadn't really lived there. Not even Moses saw Canaan when he fled Egypt in his youth.

He went South, to Saudi Arabia, because Canaan was too dangerous. And yet Moses knows this place from his dreams and from the ancient scrolls and from campfire stories the elders pass down. Yonder green band must be the palm trees of Jericho. That dusky valley there must be the Jordan. I guess that's Galilee, all the way up there. God nods to him and (paraphrasing here) softly says, "Here it is. Everything I promised to give you. I wanted to make sure you saw it."

But of course he did—Moses worked for this his whole life. He worked for this when he strode up to Pharaoh and made his demand. He worked for this when he saw a river turn to blood. He worked for this when he went up a mountain in the desert, into the very presence of God, and came down so full of the power of God his face shone like the temple itself. He grips hard on his staff and nods and chokes down a sob. It's his dream, but he's seeing more than that.

**Some things you have
to see to understand.
So off we go: to the deaths
of three men with whom
Jesus closely identifies.**

Moses



David



He's seeing the goodness of God, and the way God keeps promises, and picks up dying dreams to shelter them until they heal and come true.

And after that, Moses dies. It's not totally clear who buries him, but it's probably God (the alternative is that Moses buries himself, which is, at the very least, improbable), reserving for Himself the honor of raising a cairn over his friend. After all, that's what Moses was. The scribe makes it clear: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel, like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face."

Notice that significant detail: it's not so much that Moses knew God. It's that God knew him. It's a wonderful reversal of the story people tell themselves because God is the actor. Moses did not search for God. God searched for Moses (*Ex 3:4*). In fact, this pattern goes all the way back to the beginning. It's God who seeks out Adam (*Gen 3:9*). And Abraham (*Gen 12:1*). And Hagar (*Gen 16:8*). And Gideon (*Judges 6:12*). And Elijah (*1 Kings 19:9*). And everyone else, over and over again. I mean my goodness, after the resurrection, Jesus spends a good deal of time tracking down his disciples (*John 20:19*).

Humanity is not the principal actor in the dance with God. God seeks out humanity in an effort that persists to this day. To put it in simple terms, Jesus is searching for you right now.

And then, these two things from the story of Moses: First, Moses indeed enters Canaan. When Jesus transfigures, and Moses shows up to chat, they're standing in the Promised Land. Second, Moses is there because the prophet everyone wanted has come. A man the LORD knows face to face. After all, "This is my son" (*Matt 3:17*). He's the leader, the priest, the one who can carry the very presence of God to the people because that's who he is.

Or here's another one.

The old king David is dying—he can't get up from his bed (*1 Kings 1-2*). Forget supple Moses. At night, David shivers so hard his blankets fall off. And the kingdom is not well. Though the crown is going to his youngest son, named Solomon, his oldest living heir's the cock of the walk. Adonijah—he has servants and chariots and royal apartments. He has command of the army, and the loyalty of David's fey general Joab.

That's background, though. In the foreground is a familiar scene: it's dark. And late at night, David calls for Solomon, who rushes through a palace empty and

austere as any hospital to see his dying dad. The room is black, though there's a candle by the bed, and Solomon sits down. David looks over and smiles. But he doesn't say anything, and he looks at the ceiling again. Solomon waits, and notices again how thin his dad has become, and wonders at the many thoughts in his face.

In fact, there's too much in David's face for David to say. You have to think of Marcus Aurelius, or Alexandre Dumas's Abbé Faria: a feather-bearded sage on the border of eternity, cooking up his last words.

Finally, he locks eyes with Solomon. "I go the way of all flesh," he says. He shuts his mouth to see what Solomon will say. And though the room is dark, there's a visible spark in his eyes because David sees the truth, though few men worked harder for a routed dream and no one knew death better. Really: his best friend Jonathan was slain in the wars when Philistines routed the army and Jonathan was trapped on a hill and not one of his company survived. His oldest son was murdered by a brother. His next died in the first years of his life—at least, no record of his life remains. In fact, David lost two sons that way. The next rebelled and was killed. It broke David's heart because he tried to save that son even while he slandered David's name.

And here's the truth: David gained his kingdom by the sword. He fought for it all his life. And now, as he dies, his work is in shambles. No peace has come, no war is ended, no dwelling place of God with man exists. Not one thing he did changed the human heart, and it doesn't matter because David sees the God who is saving the world. Do you see? David leans over and holds Solomon's thin wrist. "Be strengthened," he says. "Become a man." And then he lowers his voice still more and urges, "Give your allegiance to the LORD. Walk the path he puts in front of you. See him. Love him. Because if you do, we will not lack a king in Israel."

And David's right, in the end. Though Solomon fails, and the kingdom splinters after him, there is indeed a king in David's line because centuries later Jesus comes to the world. That's the truth David sees: Even when the world we know is passing away and all our work is in shambles, God will find us in our darkness and turn a dead fire into the beacon that will save the world.

After that, the room goes dark. The candle wanes, and early in the morning David lets go of Solomon's hand. He's smiling, though: when there's enough gray light to see David's face, there's a clear dimple in either cheek. And of course he is. He's finally gotten what he wanted, which was to see God face to face.

Are you seeing him yet?

The loving king who blesses an unexpected heir and imparts to him all the treasures in heaven? The man who walks straight toward his enemy, completely confident in God's power to save? The king who mixes justice with mercy and loves even those sons who are scorning his name? The one whose bright eye holds the love to heal all things? That is the Jesus we're talking about.

There's plenty already. But let's end where we started, in Babylon (*Daniel 9-12*). The man is Daniel, who is—did I mention?—a descendant of King David.

He couldn't yet grow a beard when Jerusalem fell and Nebuchadnezzar took him away, but he knew the LORD, and he did the dream interpretation thing, and he had a knack for politics. In time he became a ranking official. In fact, when Nebuchadnezzar disappeared (a story for another time), and his son, Belshazzar, took over as regent, Belshazzar offered Daniel the third highest job in the land. Daniel refused. Then—funny how these things go—Daniel got the job anyway. Ten years later, Babylon fell to Cyrus, king of Persia, and all the friends that Daniel made were swept away. Then Cyrus's son, Darius, made Daniel third in command. It was a sensible choice—Daniel was an old man then, nearing 80. He wasn't Babylonian, and he knew the region well.

Now, somehow, Daniel had the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah. It was probably contraband and most everything in Jerusalem had been burned, but still, there you are. Perhaps he sent away for it or brought an unknown scribe to dictate his own copy. That's possible; after all, he was an influential man.

But anyway. In Jeremiah, it says that Israel would stay in captivity some 70 years. Daniel thinks his time is almost up. He can practically see the palms again, and all the old haunts near Jerusalem. There's no telling if any of his childhood friends are still alive. But they may be. They may be. So he prays and asks God if he's going home soon. Then, unfortunately, Gabriel comes and says no, it's not almost over, your people are not ready, there are 400 years to go.

After that, Daniel fasts and mourns all the time. He never was a party guy (he's not in the room during

Belshazzar's famous feast, and he's conspicuously absent during Nebuchadnezzar's statue festival), but now, his lifetime hope is gone. Three years go by. There's a lot of work to do, and it's safe to assume Daniel is busy. There are too-bold Egyptians. There are rowdy Babylonians who can't take a point. There's a war with the Greeks in the north. In fact, there are rumors a battle's coming at a place called Thermopylae, but who knows. The Greeks are always threatening to occupy the ocean there.

Then, one night, Daniel has a vision. He's down by the Tigris—as he so often is—when a heavenly being appears. This guy's much stranger and brighter than the angels mentioned before. It's like a person (ish), only radiant and terrifying and hard to describe. Daniel can't move, so the creature comes over and says,

“Be strengthened.” He puts a hand on Daniel's arm, and Daniel gets up.

When Daniel gets his breath again, he asks, “What's up?”

“This story will end,” the creature says. Daniel cocks his head and the creature nods to confirm its meaning.

This. Story. The fall of man, the separation from God, the spiritual war, God's pursuit of humanity. Daniel's eyes go wide. “But,” the creature adds, “it gets worse before it gets better.”

Now remember—Daniel has already seen two violent wars, and two established nations fall. He's probably seen the death of his three best friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. At least, there's no record of them surviving the Persian invasion. “Worse?” he asks.

The creature nods. “People exalt themselves,” it says, and Daniel agrees. “They'll do anything for power and anything with it.” Daniel nods again. He knows that well enough.

But then the creature blows his mind. “At the end,” it says, “those that sleep in the dust will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame. And those who are wise will shine like gods forever.”

Daniel gapes—this is new. Resurrection and everlasting life? That's something to know about.

And then Daniel tilts his head. The creature can tell what he's going to ask, but Daniel asks anyway: “What will the outcome be?”

The creature hesitates.

**Daniel gapes
—this is new.
Resurrection and
everlasting life?
That's something
to know about.**

Daniel



Jesus



Because of course Daniel wants to go home. He wants to see Jerusalem again. He wants to see the fields where he grew up, if he can find them. To dip his feet in the Jordan while the frogs come out and watch doleful tortoises come down to drink. He wants to hear Hebrew spoken again, and to hear his old name called, just once, “Daniel!”

But he doesn’t get to. The last words of the book go like this: The creature replied, “As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest in the earth. At the end of the days, you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”

Daniel doesn’t get to go home. No, what Daniel gets is better. He doesn’t get Hebrew, he doesn’t get ruined Jerusalem; he gets the restoration of all things. He gets to see all his vanished friends again. He gets the Jerusalem of his youth, with water in the fountains and laughter ringing on the ancient stones.

And there’s so much more to say about Daniel. He endures a little Gethsemane. He’s a prophet who doesn’t want his role, but accepts it anyway, and suffers faithfully for his resurrection into glory. He loves and serves and then dies among his enemies. He’s a prophet who has, as Belshazzar’s wife puts it, the spirit of God in him. And he’s a man who carries the longing for redemption in the center of his chest. Jesus, too, weeps for Jerusalem. Jesus can’t wait to see the world restored. As Daniel goes to Babylon, so Jesus enters the world.

Except. Jesus ratchets all this up a notch. He is the future. He is the restoration of all things coming back in power to bring judgment on every terrible empire. He is the firstborn from among the dead, so that while Daniel is promised life in the world to come, Jesus rises in this one to make good on that claim.

This is the man we are talking about, visible in a thousand ways.

In the synoptic gospels, Satan takes Jesus to a high place. It’s the end of Deuteronomy, only with the roles reversed, and Satan shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world and says, “You can have all this if you’ll honor me.” Jesus responds with all the fire of scrappy Moses, only more so: “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.” It means Jesus is faithful, yes, and it also works another way, as in, Jesus says: “I am the LORD. Stop testing me.”

Or look at John 6. Jesus has done some impressive stuff and, as with Daniel, folks want to give him all the power they can (6:15). Jesus refuses and slips away. And then, in what is literally the next scene, Jesus walks on water, which is both, A, hard to walk on, and, B, the mythical chaos element in the Bible. In other words, Jesus refuses power and then shows that he holds all of it anyway.

Or look at Jesus before the high priest of the Sanhedrin, right before his execution. They’ve got him on trial and nonetheless Jesus stands tall with the shocking resolve of David in his eye and the stature of the king. His bearing is so clear they can’t help but ask him, “Are you the anointed one?”

Jesus responds, “That’s what you call me—king in Israel. But you’re about to see me take the throne above all things.” And they do see him do it. They see him reign in power by dying for his enemies, descend into hell to personally confront the captain of demonic evil, and rise again to impart life and power to the world.

Jesus is the one who is seeking you even now. He’s swiftly at work in the world, at his original business: the overthrow of evil, the healing of the heart, and the restoration of all things. And you are the center of this action. I mean it. The God who entered the fire, who rubbed shoulders with Moses, who kept his promise to David, who is coming soon, again, has done all this for you, for the restoration of your heart, and so that you could see him again. Nothing remains for you but to see him, and love him, and give him your wholehearted allegiance.

And what about the world? Its redemption is well underway, and when you make loving Jesus your principle project, you can hear his voice, and contend with evil, and ask for the transformation of your heart until real restoration overflows it like water from a well-fed pool. You will find your place in the line. After all, Abraham, Moses, and Rahab, Ruth, David, and Peter, Joan of Arc, Athanasius and Teresa de Avila, George MacDonald, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Dallas Willard, and the unknown heroes in your hometown are already ahead of you. With Jesus, you will find your place among them. ■

**Jesus is the one who is
seeking you even now.
He’s swiftly at work
in the world, at his
original business.**





THE COPPER TRIANGLE

WORDS & IMAGES Sam Eldredge

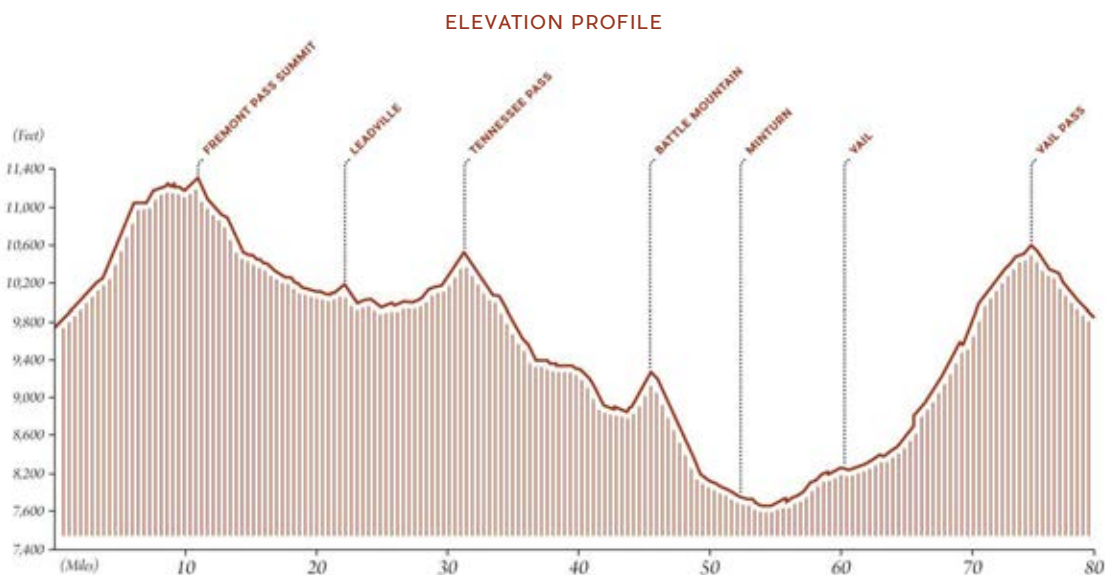
“I live in the flat, and wait for the downhills.” That’s what Luke admitted to me nine miles in and 1,800 feet up toward Fremont Pass. I almost had to pull my bike over in the tidal wave of shame that I felt in relating. It didn’t help that we weren’t yet to the top of just one of our three passes for the day, and that we had another 71 miles and 4,242 feet of climbing to ride.

The Copper Triangle is a route that weaves and climbs its way through the Colorado Rockies, from the Copper ski resort up and over Fremont Pass to Leadville, then over Tennessee Pass and Battle Mountain to Minturn, and finally skirting Vail and the 18-wheelers blasting along I-70 to the top of Vail Pass, ultimately, like any good triangular shape, back to the dirt parking lots of Copper. It’s beautiful, sometimes terrifying, certainly punishing on the underprepared, and our chosen way to spend the day.

In a “normal” year there would be a bike race on this course with thousands of cyclists climbing through the mountains. There would have been an entry fee, but with that would have come aid stations for the unavoidable fatigue and flat tires. Today, we had the course to ourselves, except for the pair of old-timers who cooked past us on the way up Tennessee, but we’d prefer to not dwell on that.

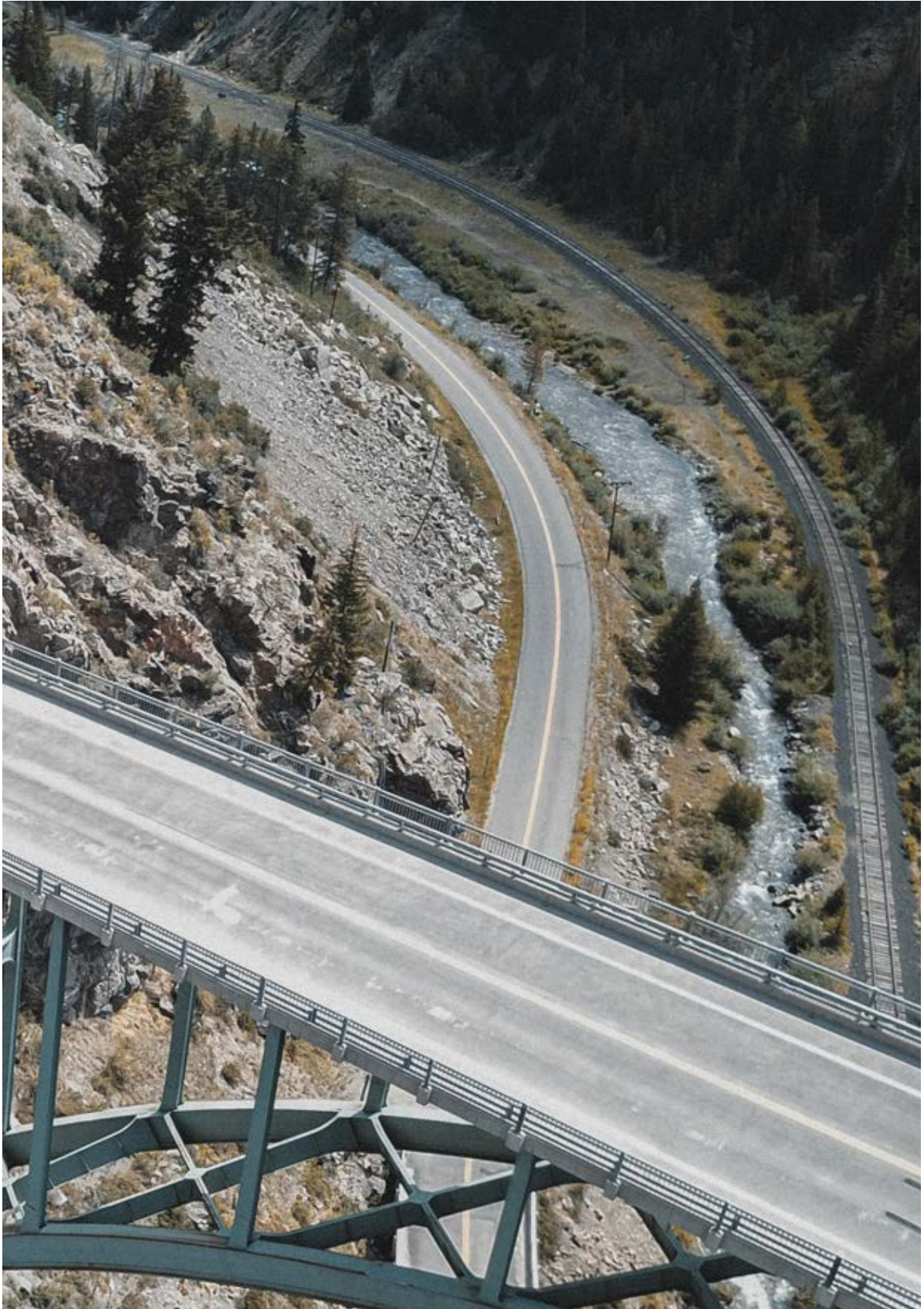
Luke had reached out to me only the week before, asking what mountain passes were good for cycling up, you know, to have something to work toward over the summer. Only I’d been cooped up and needing to get out of my home office, and if I’m really honest I wasn’t in the mindset to work toward anything right then. So I suggested the following Tuesday. And there we were, not two hours in, dreaming of downhill.

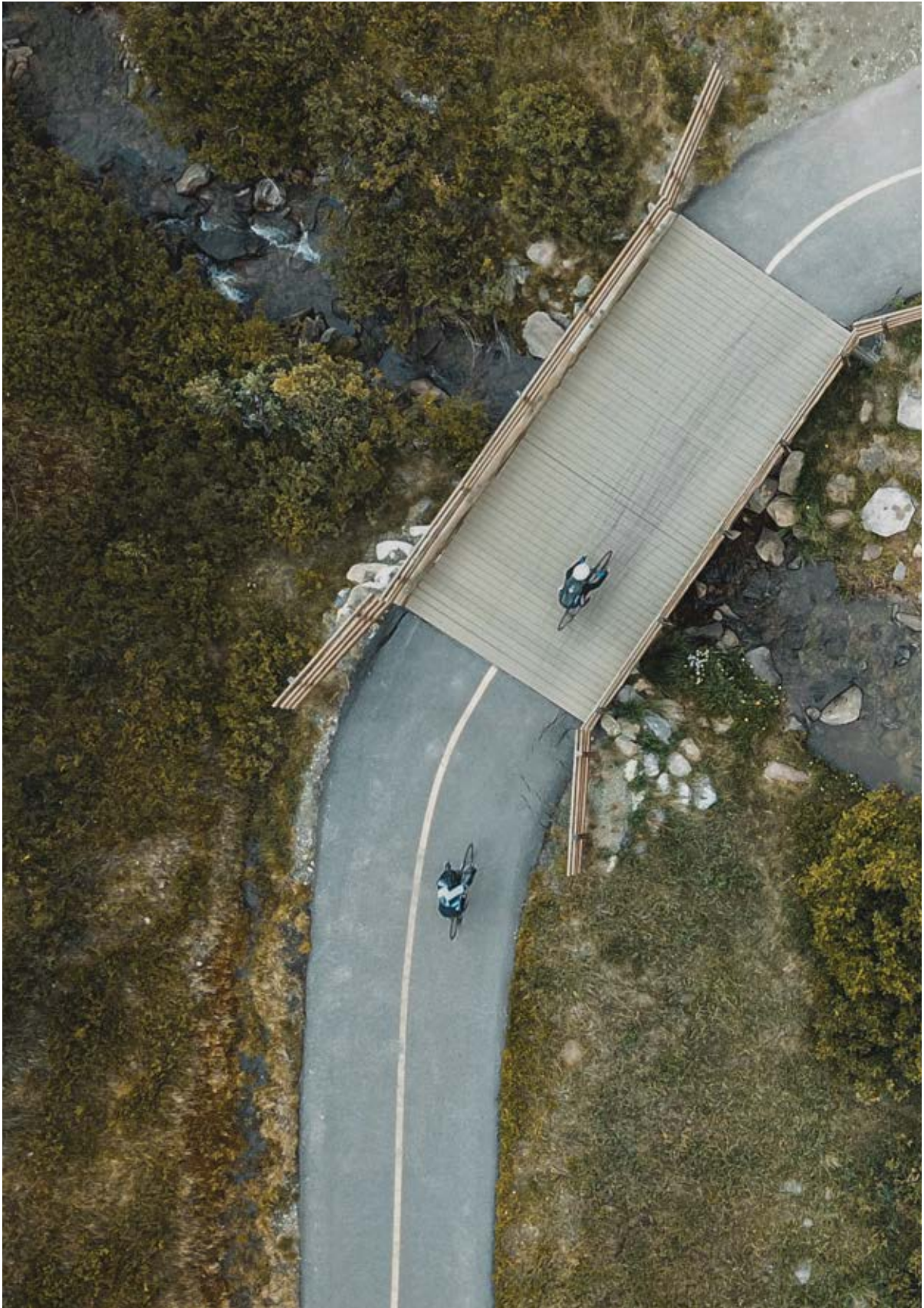
By the end of the ride, my knee would be killing me, bringing with it bad memories of tendonitis that took me out of the ride we did for the filming of *Killing Lions*. I haven’t had pain this bad in that knee since then, something I’ve accomplished through gradually increasing my activity. It turns out my newfound baseline of fitness isn’t a replacement for consistency. I had to ask the guys to pull over just about every mile of the Vail Pass climb, and even that was pushing it.













**How often do I avoid what's difficult?
How much do I bail at the first sign that the adversity
I am facing won't be ending soon?**

So, why did I want to pull over right at the beginning of the ride? Luke's comment rang so true that it felt like a punch to the gut, that tidal wave of shame that came on all too quickly and all too familiarly. "I live in the flat, and wait for the downhills."

How often do I avoid what's difficult? How much do I bail at the first sign that the adversity I am facing won't be ending soon? Am I living with my eyes focused on some point in the distance where things get easier and the downhill starts?

The actual count doesn't matter because the answer that comes is: "too often."

Which turned out to be one of the reasons we went on this ride. Not everything needs to fall into some oversimplified category like running away from difficulty or running toward ease or just coasting along, but Luke's comment made me painfully aware of how often I shy away from discomfort of any scale. So, surrounded by beauty, with the excuse of needing to get out of the house for one day please dear sweet lord, I chose something difficult in the hopes that when the stakes are higher I will have practiced the art of perseverance in a hundred small ways. ■







WHAT I WOULD SAY TO

AT
40

MY 20-YEAR-OLD SELF

WORDS Sara Hagerty IMAGE Wookie Jones



My diploma was still in an unopened Manila envelope on my apartment desk when I stood in front of a crowd of 300 sets of smiling eyes to tell them about what I'd committed to doing for the rest of my life. Though I didn't say it in so many words, at 22, I knew I wanted to change the world for God.

The night of our ministry fundraising banquet, I was in high heels and a new pencil skirt—dressed like I felt. Pulled together, tight, and ready to inspire.

I arrived at the hotel in a flurry just before the banquet started. I brushed past moms of teenagers and grandmothers on the committee of this organization and businessmen and women who had careers about which I knew nothing. Tonight we'd converged around the significant. I didn't think much about what they'd left behind at home to be there. We had vision to impart.

At 20, I was a sprinter. Forty felt old and 30 not yet worth considering. I'd known God for a few years now. Time was already lost—there was so much to do for Him. I was full of vision, never mind an entry-level position when there was a front of the pack.

I wanted my life to show up on the map. My name, written across lives and stories and kingdom-impact. (My laundry could wait.)

And this was all before social media.

I could blink, and I would be right back there, except now what I remember about that night is the graying 50-year-old who grabbed my hand after the

evening was over and told me she'd been praying for me in the dark of the morning. The worn creases along the corners of her eyes looked like pencil markings, years of experience shadowing the fire behind them. I remember the mother of four who had a dignified weight to her countenance but yet spent her days carpooling teenagers and unpacking backpacks and warming the sidelines of soccer games. I remember the 60-year-old businessman of very few words—must be boring to be him, I thought back then—who, many years later, taught my husband how to pray through his dark night.

I'm days away from 40 and scanning that crowd all over again, except this time I'm not behind a podium, wanting that each person in that room would give their lives to something significant. I'm standing in the back, valuing all that isn't seen but which holds great value.

At 20, I couldn't yet see that things like having a name, being a point on the map for someone's life or their day, wouldn't sustain me.

At 20, I didn't know that 300 sets of hands applauding would never come close to how I would feel when I got a private whisper from God, a look my way from the One who made me.



All these things that felt like roadblocks at 20 ended up being the very circumstances that made me find Him.

I hadn't considered, at 20, that being snubbed by a friend or overlooked by a leader wasn't the end of me, but the beginning of a conversation with Him that would alter my insides. I didn't realize that God could turn hasty judgment by man into an opportunity for His validation.

All these things that felt like roadblocks at 20 ended up being the very circumstances that made me find Him. In the tireless paper chase for adoption that didn't include ultrasound pictures—about which few friends could under-

stand—I found His eyes on me. When the big church with the beautifully profound vision we helped start folded, I saw Him... seeing me. While I was turning out the lights in a mostly-empty home with mostly empty bedrooms at night, He was most near me. God gives a gift in being hidden. Himself.

I didn't expect that I could find Him, just as much, in sweatpants scrubbing the grout along the corners of my bathroom tub on a Saturday as when I was hearing scores of teenagers tell me that I'd changed their lives.

(I didn't know that His sending place, for those who actually do change the world, often is in the rooms without doors or windows, with just Him.)

The "likes," the applause, the fanfare, and recognition—we crave it because we were made for it. We scan our social media feed, subtly wondering how we might posture ourselves to be seen. Yet (let's admit it) we are so often ignorant that only one set of eyes can validate the parts of us that He uniquely made.



We resent being overlooked. Yet, could it be that God hides us just so that we might find that single set of eyes? Masked, by Him and for Him.

At 40, I'm finding the craving for that set of eyes on me is the only deep-unto-deep passion that can keep me up at night and make me reach toward changing the world, but perhaps in a way that can mostly—only—be validated by Him.

At 40, I'm becoming a distance runner.

When I was 22, I ran a marathon. The hardest part of the 26.2 miles was when the spectators thinned, and fatigue set in. I'd been pounding the pavement for hours, and now no one but the other racers—fatigued, themselves—could see or cheer or celebrate.

Though I mentally prepared for that stretch, I can still feel the tiredness in my bones when I think of running it, unseen.

After I finished the race, I likened the last stretch before the finish line, where there were wall-to-wall fans (including a dozen who came just for me) to my wedding day.

It had been one of my top five best moments of life. The unhinged cheers of fans whose brothers and girlfriends and children had trained for months for this—sometimes even

two times a day, running and forcing their untrained bodies into a submission of the road ahead of them—were knowing.

They celebrated from a place of understanding. And I loved that celebration. I was received into the finish chute by volunteers trained to care for ones like me who had given months of their life to this. That last stretch was powerful.

At 40, though, I look back on that race with different eyes. It's mile 21 that I revere.

Months of work, both mental and physical, planning, and prayer, and only One saw the point I wanted to quit.

Only One could know how Saturday long runs at 6 a.m. in the dark danced in my mind as I considered forfeiting it all, at mile 21.

At mile 21, I met with God—in a way I didn't when the crowds swelled with applause.

In that unseen, hidden stretch, I moved from being a runner to a marathoner.

Now here I am, near 40, and being unseen is no longer drudgery. I can't wait to find His eyes on me there.

We are made in secret. (*Psalms 139:15*) ■



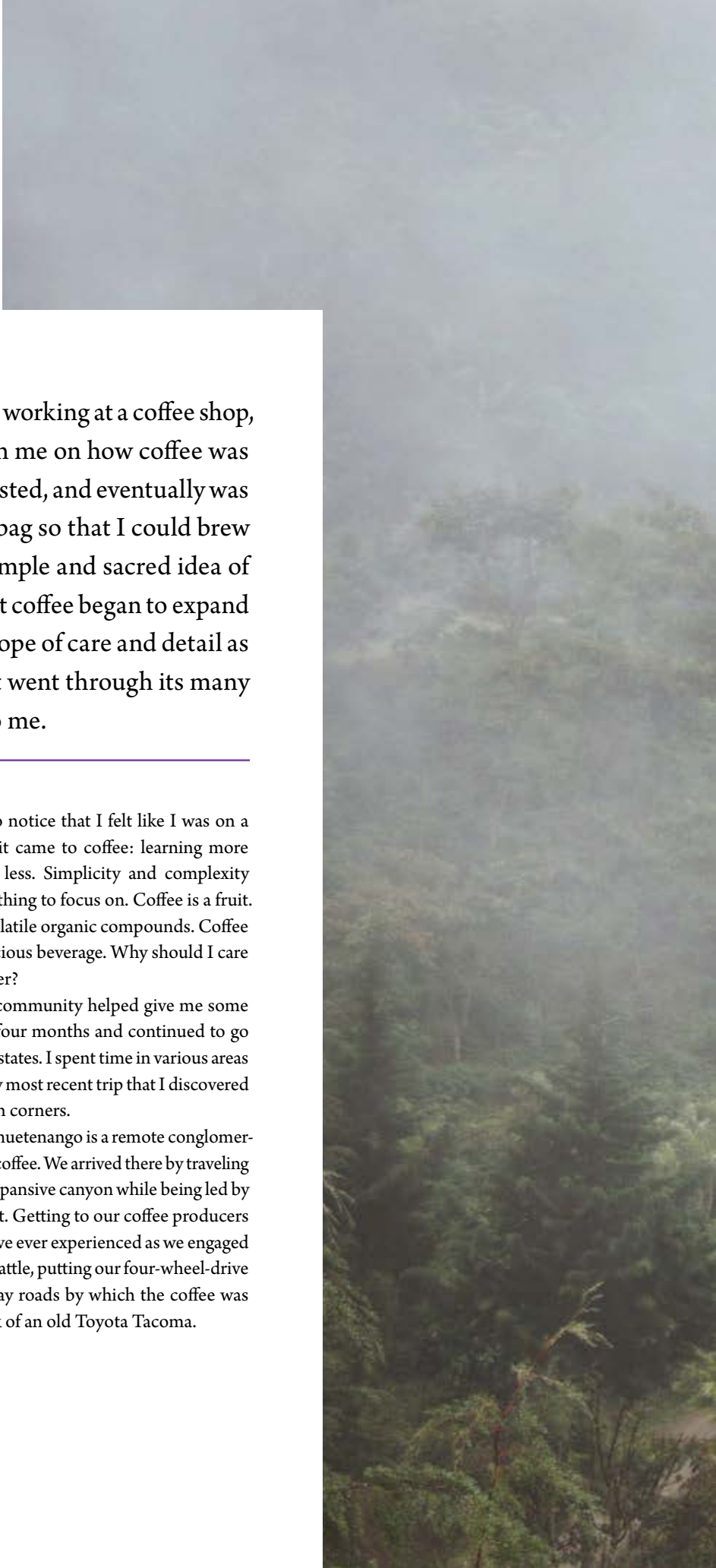


THE BEST PART OF WAKING UP

FALLING IN LOVE WITH COFFEE

WORDS & IMAGES

Josh Neibert

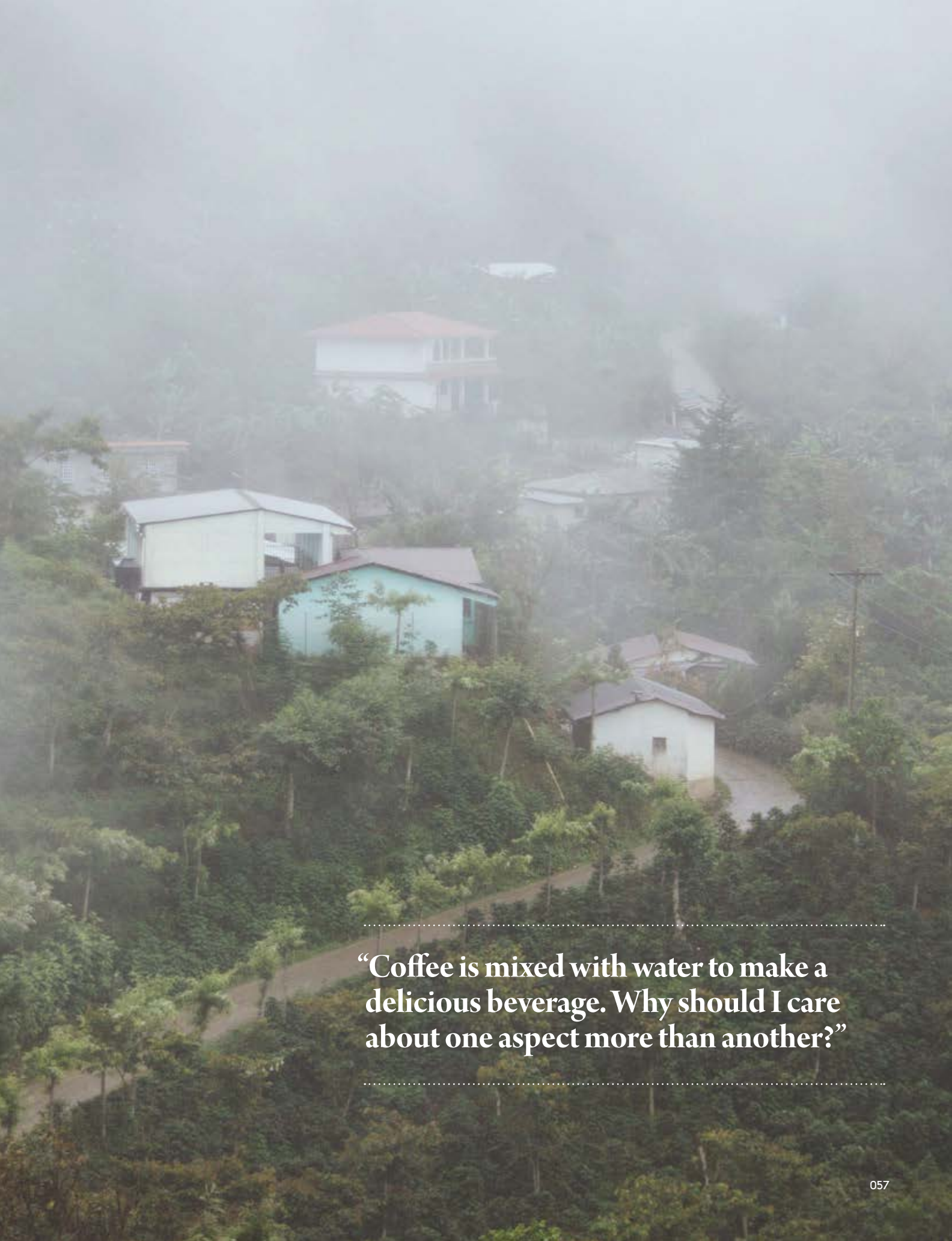


In high school, I had a job working at a coffee shop, which began to enlighten me on how coffee was harvested, processed, roasted, and eventually was brought to me in a little bag so that I could brew it for our patrons. The simple and sacred idea of that first sip of a cup of hot coffee began to expand into a complex kaleidoscope of care and detail as this agricultural product went through its many phases before arriving to me.

Journeying deeper, I began to notice that I felt like I was on a seesaw of knowledge when it came to coffee: learning more and yet feeling like I knew less. Simplicity and complexity both presenting themselves as the thing to focus on. Coffee is a fruit. Coffee has many components of volatile organic compounds. Coffee is mixed with water to make a delicious beverage. Why should I care about one aspect more than another?

Living in a coffee-producing community helped give me some clarity. I moved to Guatemala for four months and continued to go there even after moving back to the states. I spent time in various areas of the country, but it wasn't until my most recent trip that I discovered one of my favorite and most hidden corners.

The Agua Dulce region of Huehuetenango is a remote conglomerate of communities that all produce coffee. We arrived there by traveling up a 10,000-foot pass through an expansive canyon while being led by the curves of the river that carved it. Getting to our coffee producers meant navigating the worst roads I've ever experienced as we engaged in a muddy and quite literal uphill battle, putting our four-wheel-drive to the test. These were the everyday roads by which the coffee was transported—normally in the back of an old Toyota Tacoma.



“Coffee is mixed with water to make a delicious beverage. Why should I care about one aspect more than another?”





I am fluent in Spanish but for the most part, we were outside the realm of my utility as most of the communities spoke only Mam—a Mayan language of the region. We were there to observe labor practices, learn about wages, and perhaps understand what the coffee picker life was like while building relationships with our producers. One afternoon was spent visiting a mill and then going to the site where coffee cherries were being harvested. Standing there watching the work was beyond fascinating. I began to experience so many emotions concerning my immediate surroundings. Honor, respect, and such gratitude for the ability to be amongst an ancient people group that were putting in the hard work to achieve a quality product and, more so, a provision for their families' needs.

There it is.

That's when I begin to get some clarity on the question of why I would care about volatile organic compounds within coffee. I realize that however pompous the barista (and I don't believe they should be), their work is directly involved with many ancient and well established groups of people around the world whose directive has never changed. They are in the business of livelihoods. The ability to buy a cup of coffee that came to you by the work of an indigenous community that has existed for centuries deserves some attention.

The work of the owner of the farm is neither singular nor primitive. It takes a lot of care and intelligence to structure a thriving plantation. Whether it is the placement of new lots of coffee trees that must be carefully cultivated in a nursery, or the redistribution of the cherry pulps that aid in fertilization, it requires exhaustive attention to detail.

This brings me back to some of the first lessons I learned while working in coffee. I want to engage with the complexities of coffee because it means making the legacy of a coffee-producing family the best it can be. It means taking part in a relationship between their strivings and my own. I also want to understand the simple truths about coffee and that it is a way for many people to provide for their families. The former engagement is by no means an excuse to act pretentiously or to take responsibility for a coffee being good or not, but merely a chance to pay my respects to the people who came before me both in life and in the process. My responsibility as a coffee worker is to carry out the relationship that I'm involved in by providing education, service, and a true representation of the work that coffee producers put forth. It's the community that culminates in the directive that we all share. The provision for family and the value we show to each other through the work that we do. ■



KINGDOM



THE ART

WORDS Luke Eldredge
IMAGE Olga Tereshenko

Locking the coffee shop door for the last time, I expected trumpets and a feeling of ecstasy. What I got were fragments of conversations wafting from the nearby brewery and crushing isolation.

I mopped the floors for the last time, closed the till for the last time, cleaned the espresso machine and countless other pieces of essential equipment familiar in any third-wave coffee shop for the last time. I had been working in coffee to help pay the bills while studying in grad school.

As anyone who works in the service industry can tell you, it's hard work—spending the day on your feet, navigating the stress of rushes and the frustration customers take out on you. But I had finally mopped my last floor. I was done with the feeling that my college degree meant nothing. I was done with the service industry. But as I locked the door and walked away from my last closing shift and a story three years in the making, one year at this specific job, I felt no gratification, only loss.

Olivia was immediately aware of my despondency. Opening the door to our apartment, she met me with an enthusiasm that I couldn't match. Being asked what is wrong, I told her I wanted a celebration feast. Having walked across the parking lot after leaving my last day of work, I realized that this was an end to a story, but only for me. The coffee shop would go on as if I had never been there, and most of the co-workers I had forged a bond with had already moved on to other opportunities. I wanted the end of this story to be celebrated and honored.

I wanted to gather around the table with the men and women I had lived through this season of my life with, to eat together, to share stories, to celebrate, to raise a glass, to mark the end of a season.

I love Arthurian legends. One of my favorite parts of every tale of a knight-errant is when he returns home to King Arthur's court and all his stories are told. Everyone who journeyed with and fought alongside the knight receives their chance to raise a glass and tell their part of the story. But sadness descended, as I knew this part of my story would end and be instantly forgotten. No stories would be told. No glass raised. My heart was not made for such a shallow ending, or such a shallow way to live a life. My heart was made for the Kingdom of God.

I love those stories of knights returning to Camelot after an adventure to be met with a feast and celebration because it is an image of the wedding feast after Christ's return, when all our stories get told, all the unknown acts of bravery and sacrifice are shared, and all the hidden sufferings honored. The heart within me longs for the Kingdom it was created for, and its longings are not met in the shallow "now and not yet" of this world. Olivia and I were recently at a wedding where we didn't know anyone, not a single soul, save the bride and groom. We had traveled a few states over, and because of that distance none of our other friends could make it. The social anxiety of walking into a room full of people I don't know is petrifying. But we instantly made a connection.

Olivia and I began a conversation with college friends of the bride that lasted the whole evening, transferred to a bar after the rehearsal dinner, and was picked back up at the reception the next day. The ease of the conversation and the instant intimacy felt like stepping into a favorite pair of dancing shoes I forgot that I owned. Our hearts let out a contented sigh. But as we left the wedding, we were drowned in a feeling of loss.

The new friends we had made live across the country, and seeing them again feels so unlikely. Why aren't all of our relationships like this? After drinking in the pleasure of genuine and deep connection, we can't help but feel like we are skimming the surface of friendship. And even those shallow levels feel so hard fought for and hard-won. Our hearts are made for more, when the veils between us are removed, and we can truly see one another.

There is something about the epic and mythic nature of that story that reminds us of the epic and mythic story of God.

Every Christmas season, Olivia and I watch the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Last year we dove into the extended editions. Despite the joy that the movies bring, we are always left despondent when they end. And yet every year we return and enter into the cycle of joy and inexplicable loss. There is something about the epic and mythic nature of that story that reminds us of the epic and mythic story of God—filled with danger, beauty, sacrifice, and ultimate redemption. As we leave that vivid world, our own lives seem so dull in color. Our hearts were made to live in such a story, do live in such a story, but the world we live in does everything it can to tell us that we do not. Our hearts carry the longing for a world that has not yet fully arrived. It is nostalgia for a place we have never been, nostalgia for the Eden some part of our eternal soul remembers.

At the etymological level of its Greek roots, nostalgia means “pain,” and “return home.” Other translations have it as the “wound of home” that we carry with us. This wound is piqued in moments of longing, where some experience seems to jog a forgotten memory of desire. And it is painful because it is a reminder of a desire that cannot be met in this life. But knowing that my heart was made for an eternal kingdom is such a better explanation than simple ennui or selfish disappointment, and it leads me to chase as much of the Kingdom as I can, here and now.

Though I did not get the Arthurian celebration feast that my heart desired, my Kingdom heart did tell me to pay attention to the moment, reminded me that it was significant, that it mattered, and that it needed to be celebrated, even in the simple way of toasting a glass with Olivia in our small apartment. ■



Race, Righteousness, & the Gospel

AN INTERVIEW WITH REVEREND JT THOMAS



Jonathan Tremaine Thomas is an actor, activist, pastor, producer, social entrepreneur, fifth generation “preacher’s kid,” and the grand-nephew of the legendary civil rights artist Dr. Nina Simone. He’s also the founder of Civil Righteousness, an organization committed to racial justice and reconciliation through Jesus. In this conversation, we sat down to talk about Jesus’s unique justice agenda, and the way we play our part. – Ed.

And Sons: *We’re going to jump into the deep end of the pool. What is the opportunity for the Kingdom of God and how exactly do you see the church participating?*

Jonathan Thomas: The opportunity is for us to mature, and to actually take on a greater measure of the love of God and the character of Christ than we perhaps have ever known in church history.

I know that sounds like a really big statement, but I say that because the Bible informs us that Christ is going to return for a mature church. And that means that we’re going to come into a greater oneness, not only with Christ, but with each other. According to the book of Ephesians, we’re actually going to believe the same things about Jesus. That’s profound when you look at how much division exists in the church and between denominations. That’s the opportunity: To allow God to deal with us and to transform us.

AS: *In the background, there’s a massive movement underway, calling for racial justice in the United States. Something we think is very unique about your organization is, simply, the name: Civil Righteousness. You guys say that civil inequality requires a civil rights movement, but that civil iniquity needs a civil righteousness movement. Would you unpack what you mean by iniquity and righteousness and how they’re related?*

JT: When we think of inequality or injustice, we could use a biblical term, transgressions, or even trespasses. We say it in the Lord’s prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.”

That’s really, “Forgive us the injustices that we’ve committed against one another as we forgive those who have committed injustices against us.” Injustice, or, the external violation of a person, requires a righting of that injustice. That’s an external, justice-centered movement.

But Jesus’s justice agenda is different. One of the reasons why he was so hated on Earth is because he stood before the Pharisees and the religious leaders of his day and he said, “You know what? You’re pointing your finger at me for hanging out with a prostitute, when in your heart, you’re imagining yourself with her. You’re really jealous that I’m hanging with her because you’re lusting after her.” And he goes, “As you think in your heart, so you’re doing.” You’ve already committed adultery at the heart level. The iniquity is your thoughts. It’s the inward life, the intentions, and the motives of your heart. And Jesus is saying, in effect, before you point the finger at me, before you point the finger at them, or at that group of people or that political party and say, “They need to change,” you need to change.

Jesus’s justice agenda begins with justice on our inside, within us. It’s internal transformation that leads to the reform of everything externally, where we live, and how we live with people.

AS: *Woah. It’s so helpful. And it sounds more challenging. One of the problems right now is that it feels like the blinders are always on. It’s just the year 2020. It’s just the latest act of violence of the latest racially-biased event. What you’re bringing to the table is that as Christians, we’re uniquely situated to say, “Okay, not only is it larger as in the entire history of the United States, it’s larger as in human nature across time. Human beings fundamentally need Jesus.”*

JT: Yeah. When we’ve looked at racism, we’ve looked at injustice as a purely political issue, and we’ve pursued political solutions. We’ve had so many movements, whether around race or gender or sexual orientation, but at a fundamental level, God is like, “How can you love God who you cannot see if you don’t love your brother who you can see?” (1 John 4:20).

And it's like, wait a second: From heaven's perspective, you don't even love Jesus if you cannot genuinely love your neighbor.

AS: *That really ups the stakes. We've noticed that there's an interesting polarity that emerges inside the church whenever a new movement begins to garner momentum in response to the question, "Should the church participate?" We think part of the problem is that we don't understand how the transformation of the heart by Jesus affects social and political structures. When we realize that it's true that we don't love God if we don't love our neighbor, what are some of the first steps to engaging that problem in our own hearts?*

JT: Oh, that's a great question. I think the first one is tears, and I call it the gift of tears. If you look at the prophets of old—Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, Isaiah, who had tears, Ezekiel, who had tears—you have to wonder about the power of mourning. What's the power of being able to feel and empathize? Because that's the starting place. It's mourning and saying, "God, you know what? I'm confused. I see all these riots, I hear all these debates. I don't even know where to start. But God, break my heart. Help me to feel what you feel."

When you get tears, it's a sign of hard-heartedness breaking off. And from that place, you can move into saying, "Okay, I'm broken now. Lord, what do you want me to do? How can I enter into the gap with you?" Because that's what Jesus did. He bridged the gap between what was right and what was wrong, what was broken, the healing that was brought on the cross.

We say, "I'm going to enter into this with you, God." That starts with getting uncomfortable, with being willing to step out and go and serve the person that you're most upset with. That's where blessing your enemies comes in, which is a hard thing to do.

Who do you think is your enemy? Go serve them. Go find a way for them to be blessed, even in the uncomfortable realities

of what you feel, and you might see a miracle take place. You might actually begin to see them beyond offense and beyond pain and beyond your fear, and then you can begin the work of reconciliation.

AS: *That's a challenging recommendation, made more difficult, we think, by the difficulty of knowing who your enemies are, and what service in love looks like. What handrails would you give someone to think about that?*

JT: The first thing is that the Bible says that our real war is not against flesh and blood. So no matter who you think your enemy is, whatever human you can pinpoint, you have to understand that it is not them. It's actually the enemy of the ages. It is Satan himself who gets in the mouths and in

Who do you think is your enemy? Go serve them.

the minds and in the emotions of other humans. And so, no matter what battle you think you're facing, the real enemy behind the enemy is the enemy of our souls.

Secondly, no matter who Satan is using as your enemy physically, one of the things that we can do when we're speaking the truth in love is to separate facts from truth. Because you can wield facts all day, but if you're filled with anger and accusation, you can operate in the spirit of slander versus the spirit of love.

You can be angry for a moment, but there's righteous anger and unrighteous anger. Unrighteous anger will ultimately cause that person—and even you—to be more depressed, more angry, and more divided than you were before the confrontation. Righteous anger bears

the fruit of righteousness. And the fruit of righteousness is love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, patience, self-control, long suffering, and forbearance.

If you are angry in righteousness, you can speak the truth to a person. If you're broken-hearted for the person who offended you, you can get to the place where you actually feel God's compassion for them, even though you feel violated. And if you can get to that place and then confront them in truth, the fruits of righteousness are going to follow whatever you say to them. They're going to experience healing, they're going to experience peace, they're going to experience transformation.

AS: *Wow. So, simple question. When a guy begins to catch this vision, what's he to do next?*

JT: Well, there are four steps that we've developed to help frame the national conversation. The first thing is, learn. Because we're such a progress-centered nation and the news cycles are so fast, we don't even remember what happened two weeks ago, much less 200 years ago. And so when we think of slavery, when we think of even the civil rights movement, we think of something far back in history, not understanding that there are people alive today whose parents and grandparents were slaves. I'm a young man—I'm still in my 30s—and my great-grandmother was born on a slave plantation.

When we realize how close history is, we see that you can't undo what took 400 years to build in a few decades. We're dealing with history today. I think it's important for all of us not to jump into denial and say there is no systemic racism.

And it's also important for those who have been awakened to the realities of the systems we've inherited not to weaponize that knowledge. I've seen folks get "woke" from the white community, and they're like, "It's my mission. I'm going to tell every white person, 'You are terrible!' If you don't use



your voice, silence is violence!” I appreciate the passion, but that can cause even more division and more hardheartedness and more closed ears and closed eyes.

So what do we do? We enter into a corporate learning. All of us. This is not just black history; this is not white colonial history. This is American colonial history, and we’ve all inherited it. We’ve inherited the wounding from it and we’re in it together. And we all have to enter into a fresh pursuit of truth.

So become a student. Study history.

Second, listen.

Listen to the experiences of others, black and white, Asian and Hispanic. Let’s come to the table. Posture yourself as a listener—listening not with the intent of trying to disprove, but coming with honest questions and being willing to be taught.

Learn, listen, and then lament.

That goes back to the tears. Enter into the lament. You can grieve on behalf of your ancestors, even if your family didn’t own slaves. Some people say, “Well, my family was poor Irish folks. We didn’t own slaves,” but the bottom line is Jesus. Jesus was sinless and yet he said, “Crucify me.” If we’re going to be like Jesus, your lament is going to help bring healing to somebody else.

And then we move from learning, listening, lamenting to innovation and implementing.

Civil rights has always pursued innovation and implementation first. “We have to change this law, we have to create this scholarship fund, and this investment fund.” And we need to do those things. But that’s not where we start because when you do that, you never deal with the psychological, emotional, and spiritual wounds. What we want to do is deal with the psychological, emotional, and spiritual wounds first through learning, listening, lamenting, then we move into innovation and implementation.

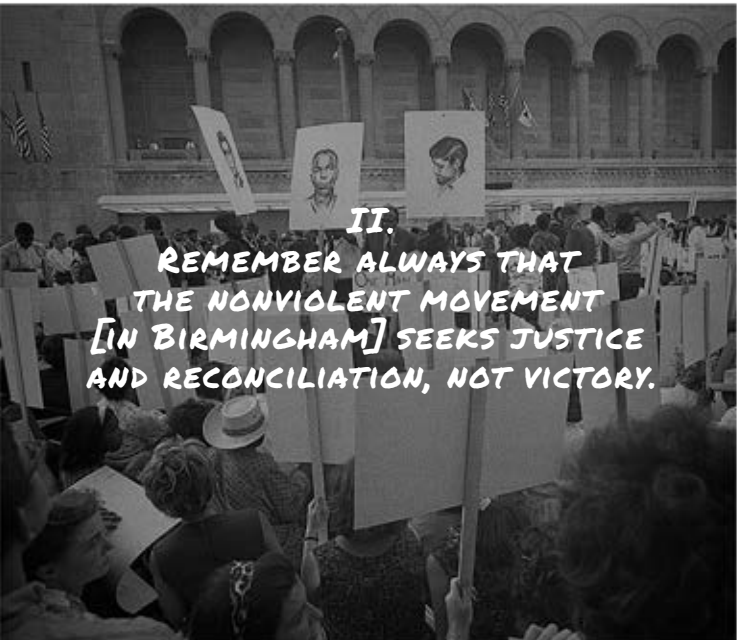
So how do we innovate? What can you do in your coffee shop, for example, right now, to provide more equitable employment opportunities for former convicted felons? How can you do justice in your sphere of influence? How can you implement changes in your corporations, in your classrooms? Wherever it is that you have influence, we have to do Micah 6:8: “Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” Extend a second chance, be merciful to people, be gracious with them, and let’s walk the Jesus walk. ■

Learn more about Reverend JT Thomas’ organization Civil Righteousness at:
CIVILRIGHTEOUSNESS.ORG

M.L.K.'s 10 Commandments for Nonviolence




I.
MEDITATE DAILY ON THE
TEACHINGS AND LIFE OF JESUS.



II.
REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT
THE NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT
[IN BIRMINGHAM] SEEKS JUSTICE
AND RECONCILIATION, NOT VICTORY.



III.
WALK AND TALK IN THE MANNER
OF LOVE, FOR GOD IS LOVE.



IV.
PRAY DAILY TO BE USED BY
GOD IN ORDER THAT ALL MEN
MIGHT BE FREE.



V.
SACRIFICE PERSONAL
WISHES IN ORDER THAT ALL
MEN MIGHT BE FREE.



VI.
OBSERVE WITH BOTH FRIEND
AND FOE THE ORDINARY
RULES OF COURTESY.



VII.
SEEK TO PERFORM REGULAR
SERVICE FOR OTHERS AND FOR
THE WORLD.



VIII.
REFRAIN FROM VIOLENCE OF
FISTS, TONGUE, OR HEART.



IX.
STRIVE TO BE IN GOOD
SPIRITUAL AND BODILY HEALTH.



X.
FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS OF THE
MOVEMENT AND OF THE CAPTAIN
ON A DEMONSTRATION.



A BEAUTY THAT HURTS

WORDS Ben Richardson IMAGES Evie Shaffer

Have you ever witnessed something so profoundly beautiful that it actually wounds you? A holy moment so breathtaking that you want to simultaneously pause it forever, as well as fast forward through it because it's just simply too much to take in? These are the times where the boundary between Heaven and Earth seems to momentarily shatter, overwhelming our broken souls with the glory of God.

I first experienced this shortly after we had moved to Colorado. Often I would scramble along the hidden trails of Cheyenne Canyon past the hordes of people, into the untamed corners of the Pike National Forest. One fall afternoon, I found myself alone and miles from anywhere. The dimensions of reality seemed to shift, and the Golden Hour sun brought the landscape into sharp luminosity. The peaks, creeks, and pinyons seemed to emit their own radiance, as if Aslan just sang them into being on Narnia's First Day. All I could do in that moment was to fall to my knees and scream.

I remember sitting with a sage seeking wisdom on the episode; the intensity of it all. He referenced a brilliant sermon from C.S. Lewis, entitled "The Weight of Glory." I recommend folks read the entire essay, but this segment was especially poignant:

"In one way, of course, God has given us the Morning Star already: you can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it."

On that autumn Colorado day, I wanted to tear my heart open and somehow swallow the landscape, become a part of the peaks and gravel slides, and breathe in the wilderness. All of this occurred in a matter of seconds. So all I could do was scream in pain and worship.

Nearly 10 years later, I experienced another occasion of aching beauty. My wife and I are the proud parents of three adventurous, rambunctious, challenging boys. Our days are complete with padawan battles, war scenes, and pirate attacks. For years our home has been filled with the sights, sounds, and smells (so many smells) of little boys. And it has been a joy. With raising boys, I am in my element. I can build the LEGOs. I can lightsaber fight with the best of the Jedi. You want weird noises? I've got you covered. And then, in August of 2019, everything changed.

“You’re having a girl!”, said the ultrasound technician.

“Are you sure?” I asked. What about farts, wrestling, and cowboy shootouts? A girl? And on January 2, 2020, we had our baby girl, Maggie Grace. How precious she was in our eyes. Perfectly made, a full head of hair, such a beautiful face. Ruffly onesies, frills, and princess pink and purple showered our home. We finally had our girl, and we loved it.

Then, in March, something changed. “She’s not smiling as much anymore,” my wife would say. I would blow it off, saying she’s just gassy or it’s the change in her formula. Baby stuff—nothing to worry about, you know? But one morning at 5 a.m. my wife just knew, as only mothers can know. “I’m taking her to the Urgent Care.”

By 9 a.m., the Urgent Care said something did not look right, and they were ordering an ambulance to transfer Maggie two hours away to Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston. At noon, Maggie and her mom raced to a team of doctors and nurses, as Maggie slipped into unconsciousness. Maggie had to be resuscitated, but she miraculously pulled through and was moved into the Pediatric ICU. And then I got the call.

Four doctors, a nurse, and my wife were on the line. Speaking in that steady, calculated voice they’ve practiced to try and keep families calm, the doctors said, “Maggie is very, very sick. She has leukemia, and we think you need to come down here as soon as possible. We’re not sure she’ll make it through the night.” My knees buckled; I nearly threw up. Tears came, and my heart rate doubled. How could this be? Only yesterday we were all sitting on the back patio, holding Maggie, laughing and dreaming as a family.

I sped to Houston and met my wife in the ICU. Maggie, my beautifully-made 3-month-old baby, was now unconscious and hooked to ventilators, medicine drips, and monitors. The sound of beeps and whirs filled the room along with the clamor of concerned nurses.

The doctors came to talk. But honestly, I only remember a few words. Diagnosis. Leukemia. Long road. Two years of treatment, we hope. Choose only one caregiver. You see, to further complicate the situation, COVID-19 restrictions allowed for only one designated caregiver to be with Maggie, with no interchanging. We decided my wife would be best suited so I could try and continue working and keep our insurance. I wouldn’t be allowed to see Maggie again for six weeks.

The sound of beeps and whirs filled the room along with the clamor of concerned nurses. The doctors came to talk. But honestly, I only remember a few words.

In that time, we prayed like Elijah on the mountain. Our community stormed the heavens with vigils and fasting, agonizing with us in our Gethsemane. And Maggie started to get better. The prayers seemed to be working. Her cancer cells reduced. Maggie was taken off the ventilator, and brought out of her coma. She started physical therapy. She even smiled and giggled.

Then something happened. “She’s developed an infection”, they said. She had contracted rhinovirus, the common cold. Slowly Maggie started to drift away from us again. Back on the ventilator. No more physical therapy, smiles or giggles. Her life was supported once again entirely by the machines of intensive care.

“You’ve always wanted us to be honest with you, and tell you when we don’t think there’s anything else we can do,” the medical team shared with us one horrible day. “We think we’re there, and we are so sorry.” The room spun and I started to sob uncontrollably. Complications from the common cold. Are you f---ing kidding me? How could this be? She was doing so well...

For 42 days, Maggie Grace fought for her life until she died in her mother’s arms, the very same arms that welcomed her into this world just four months earlier. While Maggie was slowly slipping away, we wept and prayed and sang. We sang worship and we sang Yellow Submarine, the song her brothers used to sing to her. As the room became still and the machines were finally silenced, I could once again sense the veil between worlds tearing. We passed Maggie off to Jesus, and I could feel Him weeping alongside us. I was comforted knowing Maggie was fully restored in the Kingdom of God, finally relieved of leukemia, swelling, and death. But I was crushed at the loss of our daughter in the here and now. It was the holiest, most horrific moment of my life. I wanted it to last forever, and I couldn’t wait for it to be over.

Alongside a nurse, my wife and I prepared Maggie’s now empty body for burial. In one final act of mercy, we changed her, washed her, and lathered her in her favorite lavender lotion. We said our goodbyes, and walked out of the room to a gathering of medical workers. Doctors and nurses were standing at the door, sullen faces reflecting a universal belief: A baby should never have to die. “I’m so sorry” is all they could muster, and is really all that could be said.

Maggie’s life was far too short, but it was intensely meaningful. For weeks after Maggie died, we received messages from the doctors and nurses that had walked with us through the Dark Valley, trying to express just exactly what Maggie’s battle had meant to them. They called her Maggie the Warrior, for she had fought so valiantly. And Maggie the Graceful, as she handled such immense discomfort so sweetly.

For me, I'm left with someone else's words to summarize what Maggie's life, fight, and her memory means. It comes from Tolkein's "The Return of the King:"

"And all the host laughed and wept, and in the midst of their merriment and tears the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold, and all men were hushed. And he sang to them, now in the Elven-tongue, now in the speech of the West, until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness."

Maggie's memory remains a joy like swords. Searing pain and delight come at her thought, along with the blessed tears of a wounded heart. I'll never know what it feels like to hold Maggie again in this world. I won't know what it will be like to see her spin and twirl her dress, hoping to catch my eye with her beauty. I won't be able to take her on lunch dates, or be a guest at her tea table. I won't walk her down the aisle, or hold her first baby remembering what it was like to hold Maggie as an infant. Not on this side of Eden. And yet I remain grateful. Because amidst all our boys, monster trucks, and wrestling matches, we finally had our girl, and it was beautiful.

A beauty that hurts. ■



It's in the Story

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Wookie Jones

I met a real asshole, and I don't tend to use that particular moniker. I don't mind when people cut me off—maybe they have to poop real bad—and I don't get ruffled by my neighbor moving my trash cans every week so he can park his truck behind my house. I can let it go. But this time it is just true. Emotionally distant doesn't quite say it; rough around the edges has too much midwestern euphemism. The guy is just an asshole.

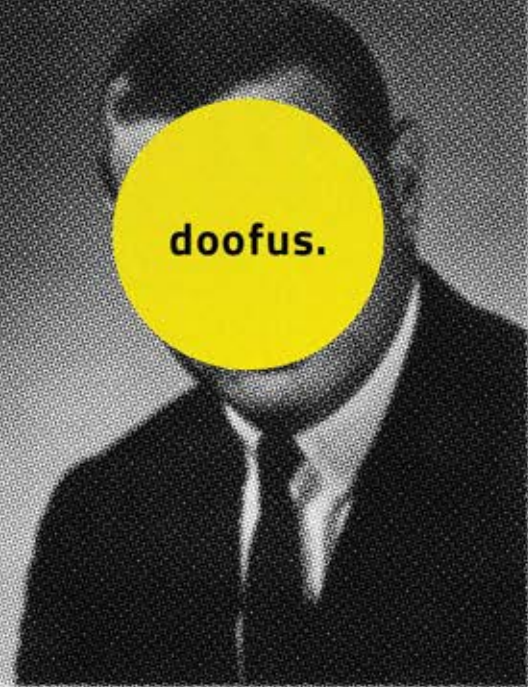
But maybe he is simply rubbing me the wrong way: Every question is met with a cold and gruff reply; every comment is seeped in a deep cynicism about the world, even his body language is both aggressive and defensive simultaneously. When talking with him, he interjects at inappropriate times and too loudly with the unkind sharpness I'm just not here for.

But then I hear his story.

I don't know why he shared it, but in a transitional moment when it was just him and me, he told me a little bit about what his life has been like: "Parents divorced when I was a kid, then I was in an abusive situation until I could move out of the house. Because of that I work as a court liaison working with attorneys in cases of child abuse. I've seen some fucked up shit. I know that can make me hard to be around."

It became really difficult to write him off as an asshole after hearing just a snapshot of his story. I can't imagine what kind of tenderness and grace would have entered in if we'd had an hour and not 15 random minutes. Our brokenness and pain does not justify our sin or poor behavior, but on the receiving end, it does allow for love and understanding to enter the story.

I don't know if you've ever had this experience, but I bet you have. The "Of course" moment. After hearing your story...of course you are the way you are and you struggle with the things you do. (And I hope even more that you have had a moment of "Of course" for yourself.) To understand people, to love people well, you need to know their story. Why you meet the person you meet, why you experience them the way you do, is in their story.



doofus.



nitwit.



oaf.



worthless.



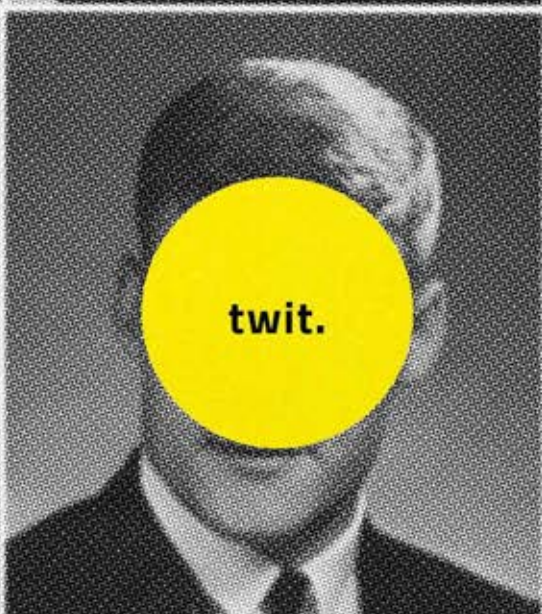
asshole.



nimrod.



dolt.



twit.



coward.

Why people are the way they are is found in their story.

Now, I'm not a determinist. I don't believe that all events and actions are determined by causes external to human agency. I believe in free will and that people are responsible for their own actions.

But the basis of all good relationships—friendship, a band of brothers or sisters, and certainly marriage—is knowing one another's story. Yet, why do we know so few of the stories of those closest to us? Quite simply, we never ask.

An essential key to wholehearted relationship is easily missed. Part of it is the knowledge and understanding of our own story (which is a lifelong journey that I don't have room to get into here), and part of it is knowing how to listen to other people's stories well.

Why people are the way they are is found in their story. Why people struggle with their particular addictions, how people respond to what life throws at them, what people deeply believe about God, and how you experience them as people all find cause in their story.

To love and live life with someone well requires you to know their story. To do so without knowing their story is almost impossible. Words that are meant to offer comfort might be playing right into the messages of harm a person has received over the course of their life, solidifying that message. Despite all good intentions, you might not even realize the damage being done. A friend's unpredictable anger or another's refusal to accept the promotion she is so qualified for will be perplexing to you until you understand their story.

Everyone has a story. Everyone has heartbreak; everyone has deep desires that have shaped them into the man or woman that you meet today. To love someone well and to partner with God in their restoration and with God's vision for their life requires you to understand that story. Without knowing someone's story, interacting with them is to meet the sum of a life incomprehensible, to navigate without sextant or map.

And yet the kind of mutual understanding and intimacy achieved by those who know each other's stories is rare. To share your story is a deeply vulnerable task that requires safety and trust. And handling someone's heart in the vulnerability of his or her story is too easy to mishandle. It is painfully easy to partner with the assignments against people's lives and add to the damage.

Listening to someone's story is such a rare gift in this world. It sounds almost too simple, but knowing the stories of those you walk through life with is key to loving them well. ■

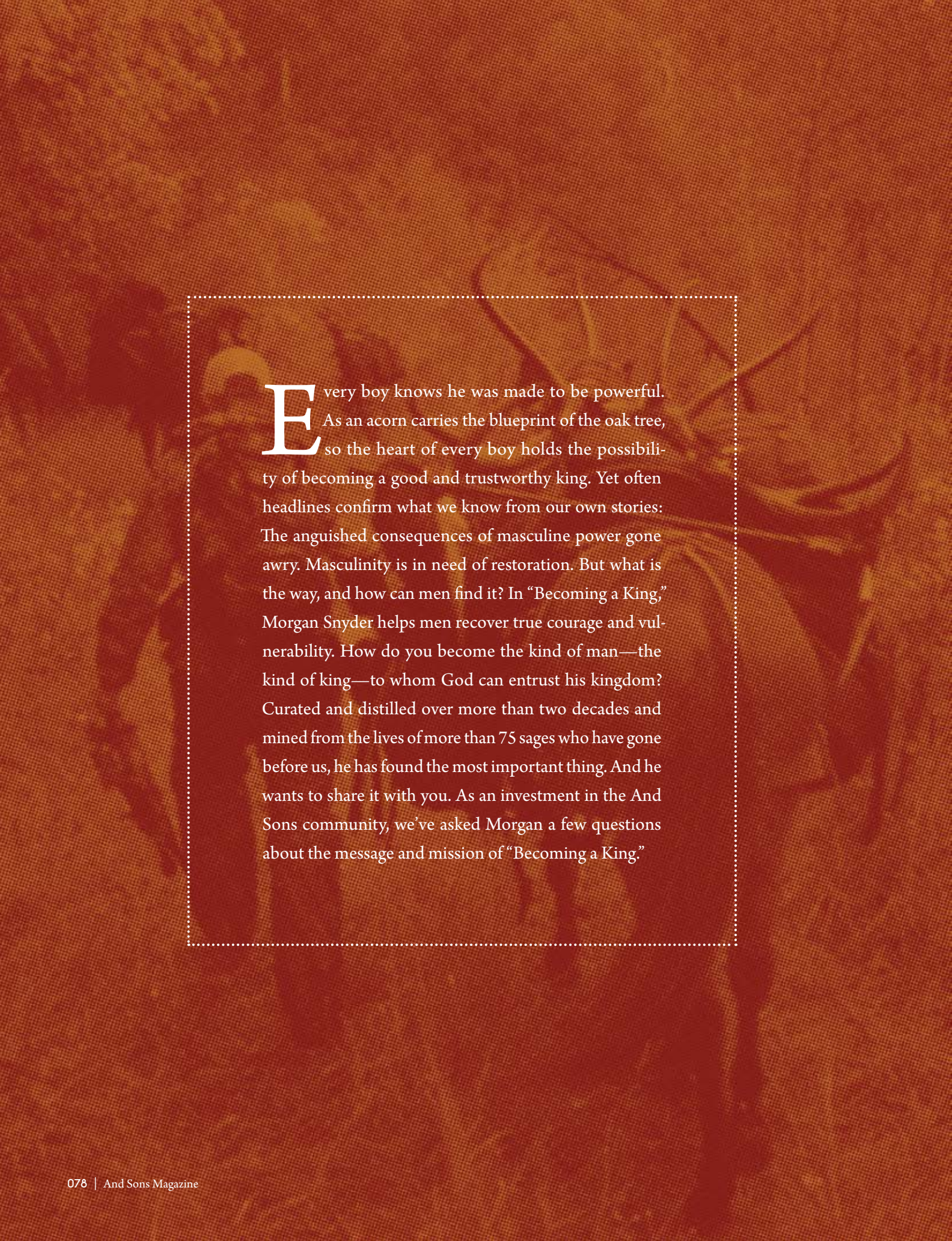


valuable.

INTERVIEW

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

MORGAN SNYDER ON HIS BOOK "BECOMING A KING"



Every boy knows he was made to be powerful. As an acorn carries the blueprint of the oak tree, so the heart of every boy holds the possibility of becoming a good and trustworthy king. Yet often headlines confirm what we know from our own stories: The anguished consequences of masculine power gone awry. Masculinity is in need of restoration. But what is the way, and how can men find it? In “Becoming a King,” Morgan Snyder helps men recover true courage and vulnerability. How do you become the kind of man—the kind of king—to whom God can entrust his kingdom? Curated and distilled over more than two decades and mined from the lives of more than 75 sages who have gone before us, he has found the most important thing. And he wants to share it with you. As an investment in the And Sons community, we’ve asked Morgan a few questions about the message and mission of “Becoming a King.”

And Sons: *How is the desire to be powerful central to a man's soul?*

Morgan Snyder: In Genesis, God lets us in on his most audacious plan. After his wildly creative work is established, all of earth is handed to Adam and Eve. "Let us make men and women in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth" (*Gen. 1:26*).

John Eldredge explains in "Waking the Dead" that we are meant to exercise fierce mastery over our domain. "Like a foreman runs a ranch or like a skipper runs his ship. Better still, like a king rules a kingdom, God appoints us as the governors of his domain. We were created to be the kings and queens of the earth."

To be made in the image of God is to have a seed planted deep within us. Desire reveals design. And design reveals destiny. We are marked for a destiny to become the kind of man who can be entrusted with this most central and sacred of tasks.

AS: *What do you mean by "An Ancient Path of Becoming"?*

MS: Our culture promises quick, cheap, and easy roads that lead to life. Yet Jesus shoots it straight with these words: "Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention" (*Matt. 6:13-14 MSG*). For 20 years, I've brought the question, "What's the most important thing?" to more than 75 sages, and their answers helped recover a path to becoming the kind of person to whom God can entrust the care of his kingdom. In this upside-down kingdom, shortcuts are unwelcome. We excavate before we build; we choose the lowest seat at the table.

It's a path filled with adventure and risk, joy and possibility, and though few choose to take it, the invitation is available to all. The best things in life take time. The rewards are worth the work. And the traveling companions you'll find along the tried and true road will prove the reward will always exceed the cost.

AS: *What are the implications of a man considering himself to be a son to God the Father?*

MS: Whatever else we encounter when we engage the life of Jesus, we encounter a person living fully as a son. Sonship is the epicenter of Jesus' life, and it's the epicenter of ours (*Rom. 8:15*).



**As we grow in our
understanding of this
identity, we are able to
bring our strength—
rather than our need for
validation—to the world.**



George MacDonald said, "Since we are the sons of God, we must become the sons of God." As we grow in our understanding of this identity, we are able to bring our strength—rather than our need for validation—to the world. Look at the lives of most men and what we find is a story rooted in self-sufficiency. It's tempting to be sure but over time the fruit so often is some combination of feeling behind and having a deep sense that "life is up to me." What if there was another way of believing that over time transformed our interpretation of all things? What if abundance replaced scarcity, courage replaced fear and "life is up to me" was replaced with some deep confidence that we were being led by love

and being beckoned to respond to a quest tailor-made for the particular purpose for which we were born? It is through the narrow gate of becoming a son we must pass if we are ever to become the kind of person who can prevail in any circumstance, and recover deep and lasting joy.

AS: *What do you mean when you write, "Mostly what you meet when you meet a man is his false self"?*

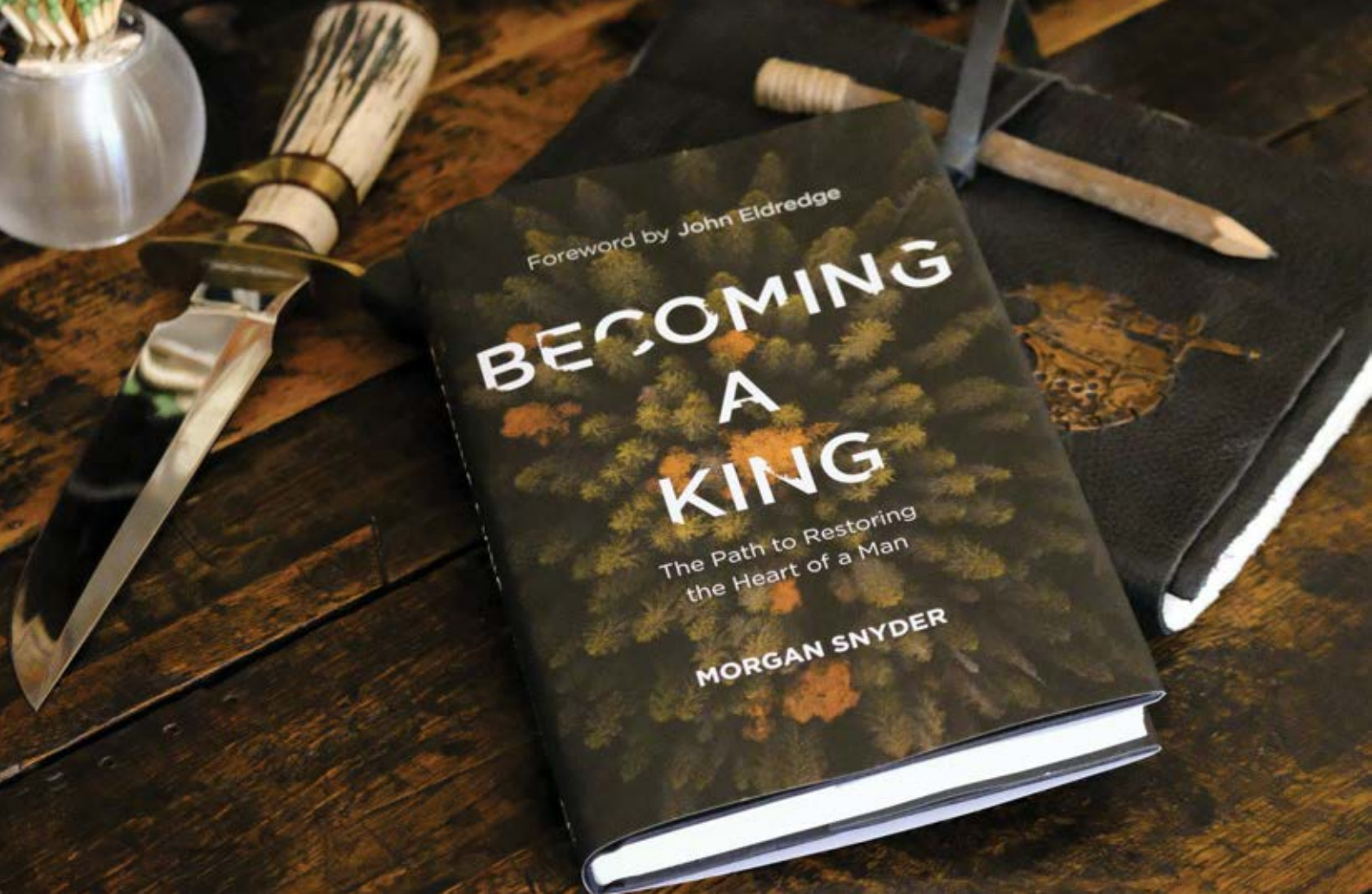
MS: After the fall of man, Adam confessed, "I was afraid, because I was naked; so I hid" (*Gen. 3:10*). Adam's story is every man's story. We have become who we are not. Haunted by fear of failure and taunted by what we lack, we form caricatures to deny our vulnerability and survive independently. Yet the self-protective man is not the truest us. The truest reality of the masculine soul is that we are inheritors of original goodness, magnificently crafted in the image of God. As Jesus promised, putting to death the false self allows a greater life to emerge (*Matt. 16:25*). God is inviting us to risk engaging in the process of recovering a life of ever-deepening union with Him—a life worth living.

AS: Explain the statement, "We cannot live beyond the identity we have embraced."

MS: Mostly what you meet when you meet a man is an elaborate fig leaf, borrowed from Adam but crafted over decades to make life work apart from God (*Gen. 3:10*).

We have an inherent need for identity (Who am I really?) and validation (Do I have what it takes?). If we have not found the answers in God, we will bring our souls' deepest questions, rather than our strength, to our worlds.

The ancient path invites us to become increasingly aware of the self-protective man so that what is false in us can be put to death and we can pass into greater life.



AS: Briefly summarize the main points in your chapter “Becoming a Generalist.”

MS: It’s been said sometimes the best thing for the inside of a man is the outside of a horse. To become a generalist is to restore the capacity to do real things and handle real things, to become the kind of man who can handle himself in any situation—whether fixing a broken toilet or helping mend a broken heart.

The generalist brings skill and harnessed strength to meet the world’s needs. Instead of corrupted power or learned helplessness, he brings humility and confident skill. In all things, through cultivating an experiential knowing of a little bit about a lot of things, the restored generalist brings life and not harm. He steps into—rather than around—his places of fear and inadequacy.

He cultivates a certainty about himself and his God that he carries into every circumstance he might encounter.

We cannot recover specifically who we are uniquely meant to be until we first recover what we are meant to be, fundamentally, as wholehearted men and women.

AS: Why did you select “Becoming a King” as the title of your book and the ultimate metaphorical goal for a man?

MS: Each of us has a kingdom, a domain where we have a say, where what we want done is done. This is true for every human being, starting with choices like what to eat for breakfast. Our kingdom begins with our own soul and extends to our body, our mind, our choices. As our borders expand, they include people, responsibilities, and parts of creation over which we’re given jurisdiction.

We were intended to become kings and queens (small *k* and small *q*) to whom God can gladly entrust the care of his kingdom. Most of us have too much kingdom and not enough wholeheartedness or character to care for it well, but imagine a world where the news predominantly featured stories of men and women handling power in love and service to others, on behalf of the greater good!

From our homes to our communities, churches, businesses, and governments, I believe that through consenting to a path and process, we can become men and women who play a central role in bringing the kingdom to earth as it is in heaven.

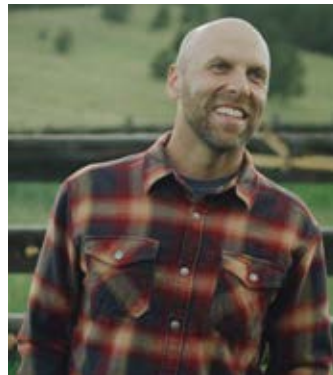
We cannot recover specifically who we are uniquely meant to be until we first recover what we are meant to be, fundamentally, as wholehearted men and women.

AS: *If you could leave us with one idea, what would it be?*

MS: The greatest revolution in history began through 12 men saying yes to a personal invitation from the King of kings. “Becoming a King” is, above all, an invitation into a process of becoming the kind of person to whom God can entrust his kingdom. It’s not easy, cheap, or quick.

Though the path is made available to all, few choose it. Yet those happy few who say yes will recover a life that is truly life, for themselves and those under their care. And the world will find itself in good hands as students become sons, sons become warriors, and warriors become good-hearted kings. So much of the pain we see in the world can be traced to the mishandling of power, particularly by men. What if—steadily, over time—our lives could embody a central part of God’s solution to healing a deeply broken and divided world? ■


Find a fellowship of the like-hearted, and much more, at
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MORGAN SNYDER

Morgan is a grateful husband of more than 20 years and a proud father of a wildly creative and witty daughter and a joyful and passionate son.

Morgan serves on the executive leadership team at Wild at Heart and has contended for the wholeheartedness of men and women alongside John and Stasi Eldredge for more than two decades.



THE LAST SURF

WORDS Tanner Kalina

IMAGES Sam Hall





We all build altars. We all seek out those places where we encounter His Presence. I'm not just talking about the stone table at the center of a church. A friend can become an altar if they draw our minds and hearts up to God. A song can serve as an altar. A particular meal can take us to Him.

The ocean has been one of my altars... that place where I meet Him. And catching waves has been my act of bowing down before Him and bursting into praise. It's where I sit in awe and wonder at His power and mercy. It's how I fill myself with gratitude for His ruthless pursuit of me. Each wave is a thousand miles in the making for only a momentary dance. What better way to understand the lengths to which He will go for my heart.

I've traveled up and down the Pacific coast to explore different waves, to learn different dances with my Savior. "Cowell's" in Santa Cruz has a slow, spilling righty tucked into a stadium of rocky cliffs, a righteous rumba that can carry you forever.

"Tarantula's" in Jalama has neatly folding triangular waves, a transcendental tango that flows left and right. "C Street" in Ventura has about as lengthy a stretch of waves as you can find, a consecrated Cotton-Eyed Joe with a spread of surfers gliding together.

"Trestles" in San Onofre has the perfect wave. You just can't find better. Because of that, it draws the best surfers. You have to choose your waves carefully or run the risk of getting run out of the water.

Amidst the chaos, however, there's joy. There's peace. There's God, selecting His moment to pick you up and sway with you. A shaka thrown your way from a local as you paddle back out is a whisper from God, saying "I got you."

"Cerritos" in the Baja has a...well, a Don Julio-filled haze in my memory. I caught that wave before I really fell in love with Jesus, so I can't speak into its majesty, unfortunately.

The ocean has been my older brother, a fellow creation from the Creator. He's helped calm me down during distress. He's given me advice during rocky moments in relationships.

He's beaten me up when I've gotten too cocky and tried to show off. He's taught me a lot.

But now I'm in Colorado. The Lord has invited me into campus ministry, to be an older brother to college students finding their way.







Bowling For Soup has a lyric that my angsty younger self would quote: “There’s no surfin’ Colorado...” It’s true. And terrifying. And sad. As I embark on this new adventure, I can’t help but mourn my departure from my divine sibling. That sounds dramatic—I’m a \$250 roundtrip flight from being right back there—but it won’t be the same. I can’t just walk down the street and see the sun set over the Santa Monica Mountains. I can’t pound my morning coffee, grab my board, and then trot right out to my spot at Breakwater. I won’t have daily access to the altar where I talk with and listen to God.

But I am gaining the mountains. The organization I’m now a part of, FOCUS, placed me at CU- Boulder. I’m right at the base of the Flatirons. A 20-minute walk from my front door will have me “sending it” right up those bad boys.

I can’t help but reflect on Scripture and notice that Jesus constantly went away to pray privately. And where did He go? The mountains. (*Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12, John 6:15*)

The mountains were a safe place for Him. They were an altar where He would meet His Father and commune with Him, a divine triune dance upon the summit. This makes me happy. This gets me stoked. As Christians, we are called to be imitators of Christ. What better way to imitate Him than by praying as He did—away on a mountain?

There’s a reason the ocean is one of the most oft-used metaphors for serenity. It’s calming, relaxing, all the things I’ve already mentioned. It’s obvious. And yet it’s never completely still. It’s never actually silent. It’s in and out, up and down, crashing and washing. It’s never still.

Mountains, however, are pillars of silence. They’re unmoving. If there’s a geologist somewhere reading this, yes, mountains grow 0.4 inches annually. They still move. Just not as much.

Right now, I feel God calling me into a season of silence. A season to root myself firmly in Him and fortify the strength of my faith.

I’m convinced that it’s only through silence that we come to actually know the Person of God, to actually encounter Him. It’s antithetical to the way our society operates, but it’s the prescription for how our soul was designed.

Before I left for Colorado and this silence, I went out for one last surf. I dreaded that surf. I’m not good at goodbyes, and I was putting this one off for last. My goodbye to my Brother Ocean.

It was a super small day, a bummer my last day would be spent catching ankle biters. I paddled out sans wetsuit because I wanted the water to soak into me. To stain my skin. To become a part of me. The problem with rocking only board shorts (besides skin cancer) is that the Pacific is cold. Even at its warmest, the water carries a frigid sting. I muscled through the pain for as long as I could because I didn’t want to leave the water. I couldn’t leave the water. However, my body could only shake for so long.



Under the click clack of my teeth, I prayed, “Just one more wave, God. One more.”

My teeth chattered so intensely that I couldn't see straight. Under the click clack of my teeth, I prayed, “Just one more wave, God. One more.”

Immediately, my vibrating jaw softened. My vision focused. A sense of stillness and warmth poured over me. I stopped shaking, and my eyes locked onto a beautiful set crawling in from the horizon. I heard God whisper, “Go.” So I went.

And it was the wave of the day. A beautiful leftie that I rode all the way to shore. The two surfers in the water with me flashed some shakas as I cruised past. When I hopped off my board, I took off my leash and pounded my chest. “I got you.”

I'm excited to build new altars. Maybe I'll build one on the Flatiron in my backyard. Maybe I'll build one on a 14er a couple hours away. Maybe I'll build one at the burrito spot down the street. I'm excited to transition from being a man of the sea to being a man of the mountains. I'm excited to learn new lessons from these mountainous mentors just as I did the ocean. I'm excited to find God in the total, un-moving silence. I'm excited. As Pope John Paul II said, “In this oasis of quiet, before the wonderful spectacle of nature, one easily experiences how profitable silence is, a good that today is ever more rare...In reality, only in silence does man succeed in hearing in the depth of his conscience the voice of God, which really makes him free.” ■

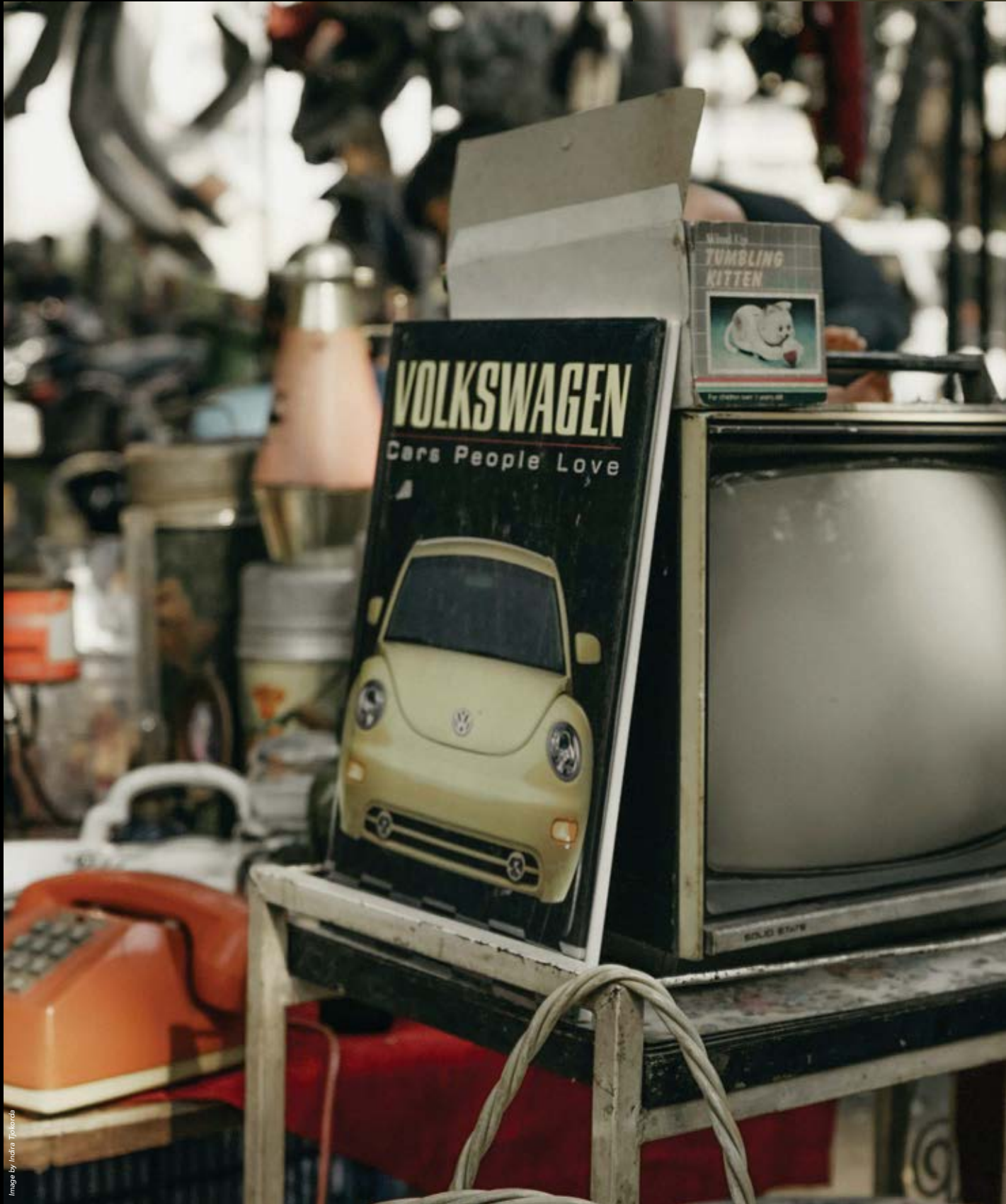


Image by Indira Tikoroch

GEAR GUIDE

THRIFT STORE SCORES

IMAGES Luke Eldredge & Jonathan Royal

We love new things as much as the next guy: Trendy outdoor T shirts and stylish coats and modern fabrics. But the thing is, when you feature a gear guide, sometimes you're just giving a guy something to buy. To counter that trend, here are some fresh recommends from the thrift store nearby, where everything costs one cent less than the next dollar up. You don't need substantive apparel to look great. You need to be a substantive guy to make apparel look great.



EMBROIDERED WHITE SHIRT (\$4.99)

What's with the de-embellishing of clothes? Plain white pocket Ts. Pants with no pockets. Single-color dress shirts. Not this guy: This thing's one part matador, one part island getaway, and 100% viable. Pair with an alligator skin jacket to rule the Christmas party.



RAIN JACKET/RAIN PANTS COMBO (\$8.99)

Filming a hip hop music video? Waiting for a bus in the rain? Suit up! Fact is, all rain gear makes you hot. The only difference is that this rain gear costs 1% of "real" rain jackets.





SIZE M SHORT SLEEVE BUTTON-UP
(\$4.99)

This is barely, barely different from what you get at prAna or REI or some such. It's not the pattern; it's the person. Good for the crag, the office, or the fifth date. You know. Once she's interested and you're not going to scare her away.



OLD EXPRESS 5/8 LENGTH PANTS
(\$9.99)

We couldn't understand why these pants ended where they did. But get this—a friend of ours buys pants at the thrift store, then has them tailored for \$20. Perfect fit, every time.







BIB PANTS (\$8.99)

“What would I use those for?” Fair question: store a pair in your garage and you’ll see. Vapor-blasting carburetors, crabbing, processing roadkill deer, these pants do it all.



GEOMETRIC SHADES (\$1.00)

Cheap sunglasses dilate your pupils without filtering harmful rays. So you shouldn’t wear them...during the day! Don these at night for some extra 80s cool. Just don’t don and drive.



RANDOM SPORTS JERSEY (\$3.99)

Incredible how many old jerseys you can find. Good for running, good for lifting, good for summer barbecues.



CARGO SHIRT
(\$5.99)

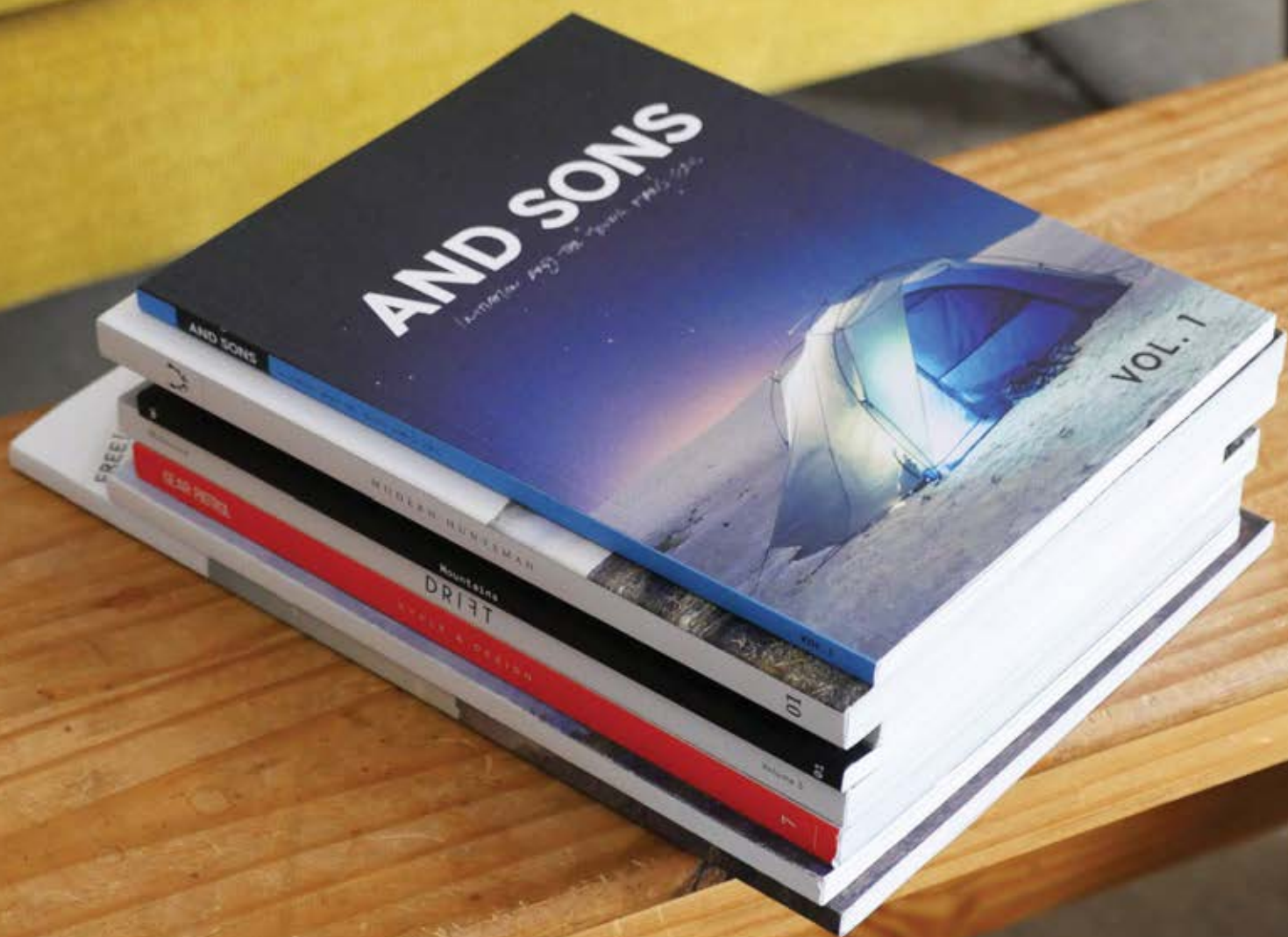
We can't promise you that you'll find an original Gung Ho cargo shirt, but if you want to go on safari, or carry all your wrenches, or look like an old-school journalist, this is the garment for you.



SENSIBLE CARGO SHORTS
(\$6.99)

It took civilization 1,400 years to come up with pockets. Since then, we've been removing them for no good reason. Pockets are useful. You can store tools, phones, and neat rocks. Pocket it up, my friends.

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LIFE WITH GOD IS



E P I C

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILD AT HEART VP
BRAD BECK

Images courtesy of the Beck Archives



BRAD BECK IS A GENEROUS, MAZDA MIATA-DRIVING M.D. WHO KNOWS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE IN ZERO GRAVITY. IN SHORT, HE'S WALKED WITH GOD, AND HIS STORY IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE FACT THAT YOU DON'T NEED A MASTER PLAN TO HAVE AN EPIC LIFE. YOU JUST NEED TO WALK WITH GOD.





And Sons: *We've wanted to do this interview for a long time because of the variety of stories, experiences, and roles you've had in your life. Surgeon. NASA. Football coach. VP. Any one of them would feel like an end unto itself, but I actually want to start in the middle. Take us into the cockpit.*

Brad Beck: Alright—I was flying a T-38 with NASA. I had an instructor pilot in the front seat—it's called familiarization flight. They give you the stick, and you get to push it through afterburner and go up beyond Mach 1. I was flying about 1.2, 1.3, over the Gulf of Mexico, in a very safe airspace, thankfully, so I wasn't running into airliners or anything else. And I wasn't sonic booming over a residential area.

AS: *That's thoughtful.*

BB: You know, when you fly, you don't hear the sonic boom. It's behind you, when you fly through Mach 1.

AS: ... Right. Wouldn't you fly with pilots when they'd test different flight patterns?

BB: A launch profile, yes. A couple of days before a flight, the astronauts had the opportunity to fly their T-38s. And most astronauts didn't like to do that for some reason, but an astronaut named Ken loved to fly. I noticed he was on the schedule and that no one was flying with him. And I said, "Ken, can I fly with you?" And he said, "Oh, this'll be great. Sure—I want to do shuttle launch profiles." And I said, "Uhhhh okay..." And he asked, "You know what I'm talking about?" I said, "I have no idea." So he said, "Alright. I'll show you one, and then you'll do one."

We were in Kennedy Space Center Airspace and we had a military area next to it, and he said, “Okay, here’s what we do. We fly along the ground as low as we can go”—which was 500 feet—“and then we’ll kick into afterburner and when we pull up next to the launch pad, where the actual shuttle is sitting, we’ll pull the stick back, go vertical, and go as high as we can, following the path into space that the shuttle will take with a T-38.” You don’t have much thrust in a T-38, so you’re going to stop at about 30,000 feet. So we did that. We were at 500 knots, 500 feet off the ground, and things were going so fast, I couldn’t see where we were, because 500 miles an hour 500 feet off the ground is really, really, really fast.

He pulled the stick back, and we went vertical. I grayed out. We were pulling six Gs.

AS: *It sounds fast.*

BB: It is. And it’s low. I couldn’t make things out, but we got to the launch pad, and suddenly I could see the shuttle on my left. He pulled the stick back, and we went vertical. I grayed out. We were pulling six Gs. My vision went down to like zero. But I could see the instrument panel and see that we were vertical. Then we bled off air speed, and when we got up to about 30,000 feet we were going about 100 knots. And then we just sort of fell over, back toward Earth. And he let me do one.

We lined up, went vertical, and went through the roll program, where you turn 90 degrees. And then at 100 knots, we just kind of fell over and did the whole thing again.

AS: *Okay, okay, okay. So the question is, what was your role, exactly, that you could walk up to an astronaut, and say, “Hey, I noticed you don’t have anyone sitting behind you on this test flight,” and he would say, “Oh, sure you can come” in this fighter jet thing?*

BB: Well, a T-38 is a supersonic trainer aircraft—that’s the T, after 38. How I got to fly in backseats was I was a flight surgeon for NASA. So when I was assigned to a crew for a particular space shuttle mission, I would get to fly with them. I would fly with them to the Cape and then, sometimes, on other training runs. That was one of the reasons I went to work for NASA; I knew I could fly jets.

AS: *What was another highlight at NASA?*

BB: Oh, there was a mission where a satellite was launched off of a booster and a rocket. And the booster rocket malfunctioned, and it didn’t shoot the satellite into geosynchronous orbit. NASA offered to go up and pull the booster off and put a new one on and use the space shuttle to do it. The crew trained to be able to do that, and the shuttle launched with five crew and three EVA astronauts. Space walks, in other words—Extra Vehicular Activity. They were supposed to go out and capture the satellite with a device that would lock onto the bottom ring. The thing is, it didn’t work.

So they came up with plan B overnight, and they decided to put three astronauts outside, in a triangle, and then fly the space shuttle up to satellite and have all three guys grab it.

AS: *This is a room of very intelligent people trying to catch a very expensive piece of equipment, and somebody in the room had to be the one to say, “Why don’t we just grab it?”*

BB: Right. Actually, the crew and the ground were both working on it. It wasn’t exactly Apollo 13. But it was an era of “Let’s figure out how to do this.” And then, while they were coming up with the plan, they took a day off. They actually went into the water tank—which is where they train for space walks—to see if they could even get three astronauts into position to grab it.

Now, the satellite was actually spinning slowly, so it stabilized some. Things that spin are more stable in weightlessness. They all agreed that it was pretty low risk, they thought.

So finally, the commander flew the shuttle, with the payload bay first, to the satellite. I was in mission control when it was happening. One of the astronauts counted to three. One, two—the satellite was moving around their fingers—three. And they all just grabbed it at once, and it stopped. Then they were able to put on a device and bring it into the bay. The mission ended up being a success.

AS: *Wow. So, if your life were a film, we’d want to cut from the satellite capture to payroll, or a board meeting. How does anything feel epic after flying T-38s?*

BB: Well, it’s epic in a different way. When you get to pray for a guy after a wound session at a Wild at Heart conference, and you find out what he’s dealing with, and you get a vision of a para-rescuer jumping into the water, and you realize it’s Jesus, pulling the guy out, that’s epic. It may not be 500 knots or pulling 6 Gs, but it’s epic, even though my job is administrative.



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AS: *Wow. We'd love to connect a few dots here. We know you coached football, we know you were a doctor, but how exactly did you get there? And how did you hold on to the epic through all that?*

BB: It was very much one step at a time. I became a Christian in college. I was in pre-med. All I knew was that I felt like God was calling me into medicine.

So there was an easy fleece: Can I get into medical school? I didn't know any doctors, other than my family doctor. But I asked God, "Am I supposed to go into medicine?" I felt like Jesus said yes. And I got into every medical school I applied to.

I was called to one, in particular. I didn't know anybody at that school, the University of Kentucky, but I felt like there was some spiritual reason to be there. I ended up having an incredible fellowship of like-minded Christian men and women in my class. It was a fellowship that completely enabled me to live through medical school. And then, when it came to picking residencies, desire led the way.

I was good during my surgery rotation, and I decided to go into general surgery in Cincinnati. But one of the reasons I wanted to go was that I knew of a church that was very life-giving and mission-oriented. I actually felt like I was picking the church and the city, more than my surgery profession, at that time.

AS: *Wow.*

BB: Right. So, I went into surgery. And that was a tough thing. It didn't go well. I was very beat up emotionally through the training program, which was common then, and probably still is common. I ended up leaving the surgery residency, but I had been living as a member of an extended family with a pastor and his family of five kids. And God was in that experience and in the spiritual training for me, even more so than the medical training.

I went into emergency medicine instead, practiced that for a while, and went through a lot of spiritual growth at the church—counseling, inner healing, spiritual and prayer healing—that helped form me in my single life.

AS: *We're hooked. What happened next?*

BB: Then I met Lisa and married her. She had spent time with YWAM (Youth With A Mission) and felt like we were going to be called back into some sort of Christian ministry, even though I was working as a doctor in emergency medicine. After we got married, we had the opportunity to go with YWAM for a year, in our second year of marriage.

That was so foundational. I mean, great teaching, great experiences—you're on the edge, always walking with God and very dependent on him. We were in the Philippines. Just crazy, crazy, stories, watching God move through people groups and through your team. Lisa and I headed up a team, even though we weren't on staff. It was a medical base, and so we went and did simple medical things.

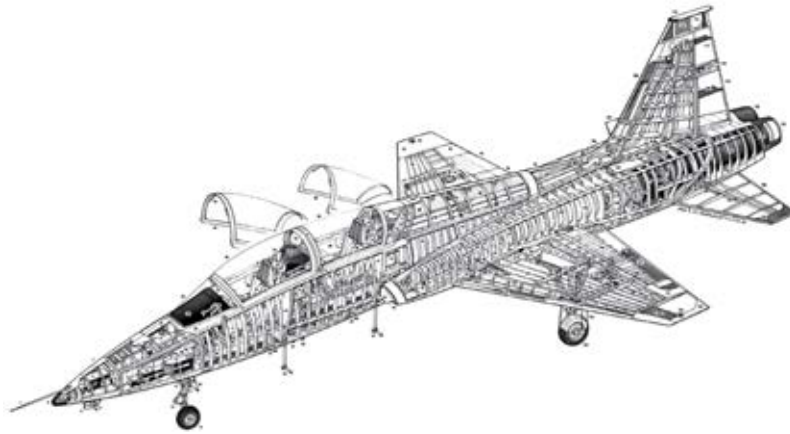
And so from there: aerospace medicine. I love the space program, and I felt like God was honoring a desire in me. I found out about a training program up at Wright State and I applied to it and was accepted. Our third year of marriage, we are back in Dayton, Ohio, and I was going through another residency program. And I had favor. I did well, and got to go to NASA, where I got to experience those flying stories, and satellite capture stories, and began to have kids down in Houston. Aerospace medicine—it's medicine. It's not really a mission field. It's not particularly a faith journey, though we had great fellowship there. God was so awesome to provide Christian friends throughout NASA.

At that point I realized that a lot of my skills were not so much medicine but in organization and project administration. I ended up working for an airline after NASA, and then working for a university. And then we had the opportunity to go to a physicians conference up at Colorado Springs at Focus on the Family. So when I did that, they were looking for a physician to come on staff. Lisa and I talked about it and prayed about it. I applied, and about nine months later we moved to Colorado Springs, in September of 1996. We were in a ministry area for medical professionals, mainly administrative, but outreach to doctors and their families. It was going super super well, until it wasn't going super well.

AS: *That sounds like it may be an understatement.*

BB: They got rid of the magazine and downsized my department and Jesus said, "Well, it's time to go." I was really sad about that, but I felt like Jesus was in it, and so I left and went into full-time practice. That didn't go well. And then I was, oh gosh—I was a camp doctor for a lot of the early Wild at Heart Boot Camps in the early 2000s. So I was around Wild at Heart, and I contacted somebody here and said, "Hey, I'm looking for work. If you guys hear of anything that you think I'd be eligible for, let me know."

Somebody contacted me and said there was project work here—help with benefits, help with the medical plan, help with payroll, a bunch of projects for the building. And so I came on and worked six months. I got that finished. Then they asked me to do a few more projects. And then they kept giving me more stuff to do until they just said, "Oh, just, just stay."



AS: *“So I’ll just stay and be the Vice President.”*

BB: That was 14 years ago. I was kind of COO, and then ended up getting more stuff to do and working administratively and getting more and more handed to me throughout the years.

AS: *We’re struck by the fact that there’s no wasted time. While you’re gaining one skill, medicine, you’re also gaining all these administrative skills. And we actually find it refreshing to hear you name some of those seasons as difficult: “I tried this residency, it didn’t go well,” sounds clear, in hindsight. We’re curious if it felt clear in the moment, as you were moving from one thing to the next.*

BB: Oh, not at all. It felt organic. I knew what the next step was, but there were huge unknowns. I heard God pretty clearly, but there wasn’t like an obvious opportunity. At one time, I actually talked this doctor into taking me on as his partner. He had a Christian practice, but he wasn’t looking to have anyone come alongside him. But I kind of presented a way I could, and it just didn’t go well. I wasn’t very good at it, to be honest.

I remember sending that email to five or six close friends, saying I had no idea what was next. But then the opportunity to work at Wild at Heart came up. We had a daughter who had a lot of medical challenges right after she was born, and then all the way through her life. I got really good at handling medical insurance, from a consumer point of view.

And then, when I was at Focus, the benefit department asked me a bunch of questions about what they should and shouldn’t cover. I would get drawn into administrative, medical things, not realizing that literally one year later, I was going to be doing that for Wild at Heart. But the skills I had picked up having an ill daughter ended up helping Wild at Heart come up with a better medical plan.

AS: *If you could go back to Brad at 24 and be able to just offer him a thought, a piece of advice, what would you say?*

BB: I think I’d say, “Worry less, trust God more, don’t try to plan too far ahead.” Actually, I never thought much more than five years ahead. It felt like I knew enough at that point. I didn’t have an ultimate job that I wanted to sit in for 30 to 35 years. Even though NASA was a desire and very interesting for me, I didn’t see myself parking there.

I had experienced enough of the spiritual journey to know that my career journey and my family journey were not going to be linear. They were going to be organic. They were going to be full of surprises. It’s the adventure that God called me to. And I trusted him enough, even in my 20s, to know that it might not look the way I thought.

So my advice to my 20-year-old self would be, “Simmer down, don’t sweat the details, and walk with God. See where he takes you the next day, the next week, the next month, and don’t plan a whole lot longer than that,” to be real honest. ■

Want more? Listen to the full interview at
ANDSONSMAGAZINE.COM/PODCAST

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don’t try to plan too far ahead.”**



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P A U S E
B R E A T H E
C E N T E R

WORDS John Eldredge *IMAGE* Meritt Thomas

I feel like a wildfire spotter perched in a lookout high in the wilderness.

clearly see smoke in the distance, billowing like a thunderhead, dark and ominous. But my radio is broken, and it's going to take weeks before I can get word to anyone in the outside world. It's an awful feeling.

Seventeen years ago the SARS-CoV-1 virus (step cousin to SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19) hit Hong Kong. In three short months it blew up, swept the city, killed hundreds, and subsided. Brutal, but much better than the pandemic we are living through. And yet, the citizens suffered collateral damage. As Jacob Stern reported in *The Atlantic* this summer:

“Over the next four years, scientists at the Chinese University of Hong Kong discovered something worrisome. More than 40 percent of SARS survivors had an active psychiatric illness, most commonly PTSD or depression. Some felt frequent psychosomatic pain. Others were obsessive-compulsive. The findings, the researchers said, were ‘alarming.’”

Every natural disaster carries a psychological wallop (epidemics are generally categorized as natural disasters). What Hong Kong went through in 2003 was a short-lived storm within a small region. Think of what nearly a year has done to us living through the global march of SARS-CoV-2, and all the accompanying fallout. This year has been brutal on all of us, and we're not out of the woods yet. Which brings me back to the smoke on the horizon...

By the time this issue reaches your door, months will have passed since we wrote these articles. The pandemic was resurging, bringing with it a new round of restrictions, anger, economic uncertainty, and social tensions. Add to this the volatile U.S. presidential election, and it's probably safe to say things are a little rough right now.

Surely you've noticed the mental and physical fatigue, low reserves, diminished productivity, mental fragmentation? Also there's the irritability, short fuse, the wince when more bad news comes your way, the desire to just go somewhere for six months and leave the world behind? Wish we could; it's probably not available.

With that in mind, I'd like to offer some counsel for your well-being, the strength of your soul.

What we have to do is take our soul care very, very seriously right now, right here in the midst of the chaos. I was struck by this afresh when recently reading the story of Paul's disaster at sea. He'd taken passage onboard something like the Titanic; they were pummeled for weeks by a hurricane, and were about to run aground and break the ship apart.

What are the things that typically center you in Jesus? Is it worship? Scripture? Nature? Do it every day with the intention of restoring your union with God.

At this point Paul—rather level-headed for someone in a shipwreck—offered some sound counsel and words of comfort:

“Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. ‘For the last fourteen days,’ he said, ‘you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.’ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.” (Acts 27:33-36)

The traumatized crew had been battered by “constant suspense” for weeks (sound familiar?). Paul urged them to pause, eat, and be refreshed before the next blow (which would be throwing themselves in the sea and swimming for shore).

Hoping we are not totally shipwrecked, but very aware of what months of constant suspense (not to mention the spiritual warfare raging around us have cost us), allow me a Pauline moment of some very practical counsel:

- Keep your news intake to five or ten minutes a day. Get the basics and get out. Anything more is harming.
- Get outside every day. Even if it’s just on your porch or balcony, on the roof of your building. Outside heals; nature is a balm to the weary soul.
- Add to that a daily walk, run, ride, or swim. Your body is storing up all the stress; you’ve got to get out and shed it.
- Listen to beautiful music.
- Eat healthy; don’t use sugar, caffeine and nicotine to get through your day. You’re burning your fragile body out.
- Most of all, above all, center yourself in Christ. He is our only hope. We just don’t have the reserves to make it on our own.

We need the power of Christ in us every day. It would take another 30 pages to outline how and why various spiritual practices center us in Christ, but we haven’t the time. Let me cut to the chase.

What are the things that typically center you in Jesus? Is it worship? Scripture? Nature? Do it every day with the intention of restoring your union with God.

Being a “good guy,” trying to “live well” in this hour just isn’t going to cut it. We need the supernatural resources of Jesus Christ living inside of us. Tapping into him should be your number one priority right now. As Paul knew, *“I can do all things [only] through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13). ■

We’ve got a couple of resources that may help a lot. Pray what we call “The Daily Prayer.” It’s a rescue, a lifeline. You can find it on the Wild at Heart app and website. Download the One-Minute Pause app; let it guide you back to centeredness in Christ each day.

WILDATHEART.ORG



The Close Reader's Crossword

All answers sans 5 are from the volume in your hands. The outstanding 5 are from the And Sons Hall of Fame. Classic podcast quotes. Best-of articles. Points will be added for ingenuity in case of vague prompts.

DOWN

1. Sorry, this trail is closed.
2. Better is one moment there than a thousand elsewhere.
3. Where you succeed in hearing the voice of God. Sometimes.
4. What I'd say to 24-year-old Brad.
6. The kind of resource we need to live right now.
9. If you're surfing in Tarantula's, you're in _____.
11. The wound you carry from your home.
15. Man's longing for infinity.
17. A Mayan language.
18. Wild at Heart slang for an unexpected gift, good news, or sudden act of love.
19. Something to get comfortable with.
21. Why people are the way they are.
24. The T, after 38.
25. The kind of transformation that starts Jesus's justice agenda.
26. Can heal like nothing else.

ACROSS

5. Think, the Mona Lisa of safari shirts.
7. Pandemic survivors sometimes show symptoms of _____.
8. Stop tinkering and observe a threshold.
10. A remote conglomerate of communities.
12. Where a roadie lives.
13. Luke's new best friend is an _____.
14. The bitch goddess of William James.
16. Listen then learn then _____.
20. America's most famous bachelors.
22. Mostly what you meet when you meet a man.
23. God's gift to us when we're hidden.
27. The mindset of the change-maker at 40.
28. A man's gradual becoming.
29. The thing you need with God but forget to maintain.
30. What "you spend your life working for your retirement" really is.

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