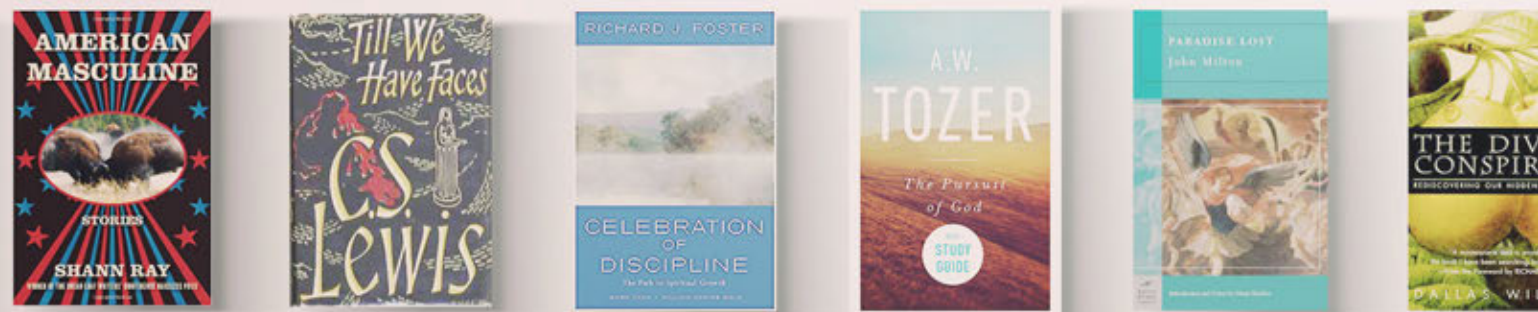
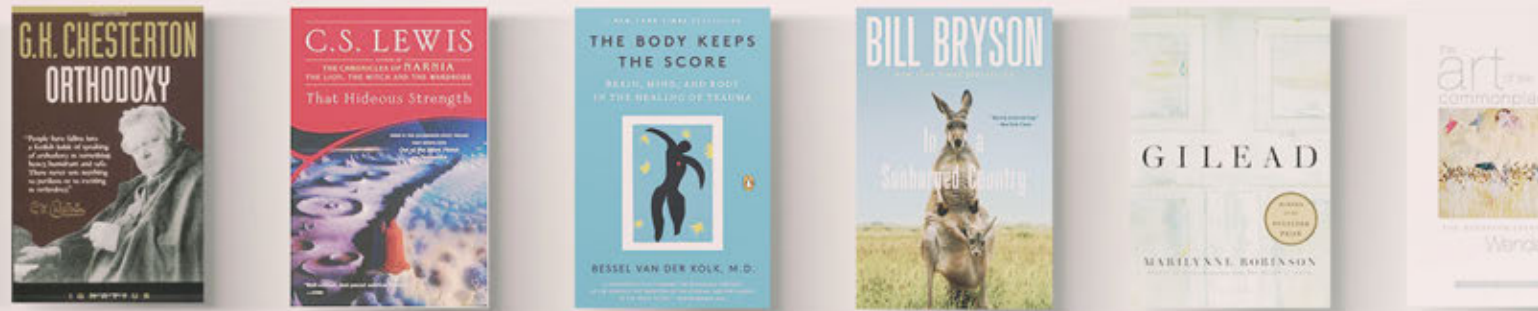


# AND SONS

*INITIATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL*

VOL. 2



# AND SONS

IMITATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL

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*Front cover photo by Blaine Eldredge*

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Photo by Danielle Schmidt

*And Sons contributor Josh Skaggs boarding at the gate in Chad.*

## FOREWORD

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You've picked up a magazine by guys who love Jesus.

We talk about initiation and the young man's soul. There's no better description for what's happening here. An initiation is a beginning. It's the way in to a process that builds maturity.

A funny story about this issue: While building my shed, I routinely conned Sam into manual labor by offering him a ride home then driving to my house instead, where I needed help with some carpentry. This isn't the kind of thing we'd endorse, but it's practical. Anyway, I'd wrung a fair share of labor out of Sam, maybe 10 hours, when he announced he planned to demo and replace his kitchen floor. Of course he meant I'd better help, so I did. We tore out tile, and then a subfloor, and then some very vintage linoleum. And then more linoleum. And then a little more. We found a veritable baklava of kitchen floors.

It's an easy metaphor: however deep you go, there's a layer deeper. Tear up the floor—there's more floor below. That's always true of initiation. An initiation is a beginning. Try making ramen: dissect the bowl, and you get the fillings and the broth. Dissect the broth, and you get kombu, katsuobushi, miso, sake, salt, pork fat, etc. It's not so much you learn to make ramen. You learn how to *learn* how to make ramen. This is the life of the apprentice: making ourselves students, finding the foundations, trying to live it ourselves.

We want to understand the soul—how it grows and functions and thrives. We want to understand how young men become good men. Hopefully, the best men you know. We know the way to do all this is to make ourselves apprentices. Of manual labor. Of travel. Of loving. Of Jesus. Yup, of ramen too.

This issue, the extended *And Sons* team leveled foundations and joined wood, asked mentors how to love the girl, worked towards structured lives, hunted, cooked, traveled, and quit. One guy watched out for snipers in occupied Ukraine. One guy stayed out all night catching tuna. A couple dudes rode the heck out of some mountain bikes. A couple dudes worked toward a monastic life.

Welcome back. This is your tribe. And Sons. An exploration of the young man's life, made by guys living it too.

– Blaine Eldredge

# READER LETTERS

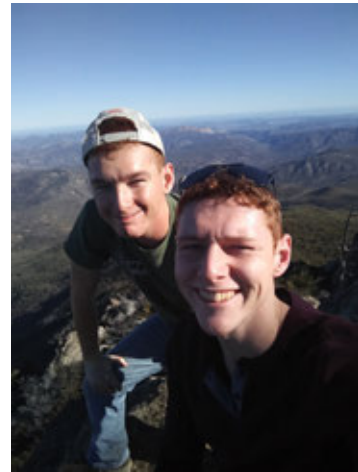
Merry Christmas, And Sons Team!

This letter is from both of us, although I (David) am writing it, because I live in San Diego and my brother, Jonathan, lives in Houston.

For Christmas, I got Jonathan a print subscription to the magazine, which he shared with me when he visited SD earlier this month. His response to all the articles and the whole product was to quote Tolkien: "Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains and hear the pine trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking stick." This captures my reaction, as well.

Thank you for pouring your hearts into the magazine and the podcast. Y'all are champs. Congrats on getting the print roller out! Godspeed.

In Virtue, Masculinity, and Success,  
Jonathan & David Isenhower



*This is me (David, left) and Jonathan (right) after hiking Cuyamaca Peak, during his visit to see me in San Diego.*



The Eldredge Men,

I wanted to write and express my thankfulness for your work. My father gifted me a subscription to the magazine and I have and I have thoroughly enjoyed it all! Some of my favorites being "No Easy Lessons", "A Guide to Marksmanship", "The Prophecy All Around You", and the definition of "Success" in the back.

These all touch me because my father raised me on your books and instilled in me that I do have what it takes. Now, as a professional fly-fishing guide in Alaska, I got here chasing my dreams and with the support of my father and mother, and a good, good Heavenly Father!

You guys also instilled in me a dream to ride from Denver (my home) to Alaska one year. All because of your film, "A Story Worth Living"!

I write to say thank you, deeply! If you're ever up for an epic Alaskan Adventure, let me know!

Grace & Peace,  
Connor Ketchum



and sons magazine podcast  
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# WHAT I KNEW AS A BOY

BY Sam Eldredge

The first thing I can remember is pulling a carrot from the earth. The bright orange, twisting root speckled with the dirt from our little backyard garden felt cool and foreign in my fingers. Our little house was smack in the middle of suburban Colorado Springs, which is a city that spills and rolls over the mountain foothills and out into the plains to the point that it really should be three or four different cities. We lived in the middle, in those houses that stare up at the snow-capped Pikes Peak because they can't afford to live closer to the mountains they so identify with. There, in our little postage stamp of a backyard, right up against the wooden fence, we harvested from our garden the first food I can remember seeing, the first act I can remember doing.

Everything in those early years I took for granted, never questioning that things could have been any other way with our family. Of course Blaine and I shared a room and bunk beds. Every dad must read stories at bedtime with voices for all the different characters, but the best stories were the ones made up about the cowboy brothers who had to keep a watch out for cattle rustlers and find treasure in red-rocked canyons and of course they were us and were real.

Our backyard, our front yard, the banister in the kitchen that we would drape a blanket over and do puppet shows for people sitting in the family room below—everywhere was vast and waiting to be filled with our imagination and adventures. We were Blue Angels on our bikes in the neighborhood. We were Green Berets stalking through the jungle

and crawling over the hill in the yard that was really hardly a mound. There was something wrong with the neighbor who yelled at us for leaving skid marks with our bikes on the sidewalk; that was obviously what bikes and brakes and rear tires were for, just as Mom was for mercy when we slipped and tore up our knees on the asphalt.

The second thing I remember, and remember not in the sense of the photo-montage of people's faces and family practices and the look of places like the poor quality of that knee-tearing asphalt, which was all full of small rocks, or how we were free to roam our street so long as we didn't cross over into a different cul-de-sac and certainly not all the way over to Pemberton, but the second thing I knew, the way I knew that carrot as though it were the finger of God sparking my mind with life, was that I was a cowboy.

And probably so much more than that as well—I knew that I was meant to be the hero of some great story, and growing up in the high desert of central Colorado with the shadow of the mountains to cut our afternoons short, it was only too easy to imagine myself patrolling the wagon trains astride my trusty steed, six-shooter at my hip, duster all crusty from the last rainstorm, revolving carbine snugly in the holster behind my saddle. This was romance, epic, my true identity, and at once frustratingly impossible and eternally worth rehearsing. On days that we grew tired of chasing down outlaws, we invented other roles and other worlds, but each had something of the same longing and role about them.





Of course I was the leader and Blaine was second-in-command, which left our orders to be followed by our brother Luke and Cody our neighbor, who arrived on our doorstep one day like a gift, pulled in a red wagon by his older brother who was scary and strong and huge and all because he was three or four years older than we were, but at least he liked our WWJD bracelets even if he called us the Potty Rangers.

He was wrong, though. We were Jedi, gladiators, cowboys with real hats and boots and fake six-shooters and matching neckerchiefs, and we got to go to the rodeo with our dad in the faded green Wagoneer and watch the other cowboys and wonder when they would recognize just who was sitting in the stands and invite us down to show everyone how it was really done.

We didn't have a television, so far as I knew in those years, and what we did have was our imaginations and a chest with costumes and puppets, and that was all we needed. We would create worlds we knew were real and mattered, and the good guys always beat the bad guys.

I don't remember making decisions then, or being particularly aware of the passing of time or seasons—not that I wasn't—but the days felt so long, and all of a sudden Luke wasn't going to be sleeping in the nursery anymore and the bunk bed had gotten a lot smaller. The mountains were places we went if we wanted to or not, like our trips to visit the grandparents out in California, and I'd be lying if I didn't admit that the pool and the beach and Disneyland were the best part. We'd get muskets from Frontierland and blunderbusses from Critter Country and Dad would have to carry them all wrapped up through the airport so our games back home could be so much better for our new props.

Looking back, it seems like most of our interactions were around play. But then, those were the years before really entering the school system, so our days were long and our world was small, about the size of our house and backyard most days.

And really, play might be the wrong word. That word makes me think of hula hoops and foursquare and pogs; it makes me think of kids rolling around in the dirt laughing in convulsions in a sort of delusional hysteria. We were playing though, while we worked out just who we were and what reality was like. Nothing had been taken for granted about the world outside of our family. The bulls at the rodeo were massive and alien, the ants on the sidewalk were fascinating and precise in their little line, rock formations were surprising and meant to be climbed, the bedtime stories our father read or made up could never be predicted in their twists and turns and complexities.

We were building our world by examining the pillars of the earth which must be somewhere beneath the cracks in the sidewalk, and we were trying to understand our place in the story that was clearly going on, and surely our place in it must be dangerous and capable and probably best fulfilled while wearing a cowboy hat. We knew the world must be a fairy tale with bizarre creatures like giraffes and mule deer, with strange food like bright carrots and Gogurt, and with the pictures of faraway places like Easter Island and the pyramids. All that remained for us was to find our part in it all and to learn if we could handle what would come.

You might dismiss all this as a privileged First World childhood totally detached from reality. But in fact it was about as close to the best preparation any boy can have for reality. Because reality is epic and dangerous, and we need to know we were made for it. ■

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*We would create  
worlds we knew  
were real and  
mattered, and the  
good guys always  
beat the bad guys.*

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# SHED BUILDING

HOW TO BUILD A BACKYARD MINIBARN  
(FOR MORE TIME & MONEY THAN YOU INTENDED)

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

In early January, some friends came over for mezcal and homemade elk sausage. It was a classic midwinter night in Colorado—dry, airish, cold—so we hid inside an 8-by-12 shed/tiny barn in my back yard. The walls are paneled in corral wood, flaking white paint. Several years ago, I knocked those rails from their rotten posts with a four-foot section of railroad tie, held like a battering ram, then went to war removing ancient oxidized nails. In one corner there's a wood stove, overhead there's an impressive whitetail buck skull I found by the Swan River, and a steel roof. There are also windows. Even so, the cigar smoke hung so thick everybody's eyes stung a day or two afterward. I'd been dreaming of that space for well over a year, building for three months.

It went like this: in a startling turn of events, my wife and I bought a little house—one floor, 1.5 bath, corner lot, in every way awesome. It's a lovely, intimate space, which means there's nowhere to separate myself from my lively and precocious and agile daughter. Which is fine. For a long time I'd been thinking of a writer's shed: a small, wooden structure, just the right size to fill with tobacco smoke and masculine conversation. A generative space, I'd do all kinds of writing out there.

Problem was, I lacked the resources to build it. In this case, lacked was a description of priorities—at the time, spare cash went

to home improvements and spare time went to having a family. So I prayed about it for sevenish months and cooked up residual income streams—garage sales, lemonade stands, selling leftover cookies from staff lunches—and then, in month eight(ish), Jesus replied. You have the resources, is what he said. You're just not using them the way I intend. This was surprising but ultimately good news, since my unexceptional but not ultimately meager cash was in fact going all the practical places. I intended to spend an accumulated sum on new windows, which were made (in view of the price) of diamonds. Instead I nixed one or two (or four) and set aside the considerable-by-any-account amount of \$1,500 to build.

A little word on this: in case you didn't know, there's a standing trick to budgeting household and building projects. You build a budget by researching materials and checking comparable undertakings—in this process, the comments section is better than the article. Then you make a timeframe. Then you double both figures. In my case, you triple the timeframe. I am an exceptional underestimator of effort. If you don't set a budget, it defaults to everything you have. Then I started planning.

Convoluting, is all I have to say. Inexperience is not a friendly thing. There are a half-dozen asterisks next to every building recommendation. Example: Wooden skids are a decent foundation \*if the ground is

compact and level \*\*and you put six inches of crushed gravel underneath \*\*\*and moving the shed is something you'd like to do, someday \*\*\*\*and you're that kind of person.

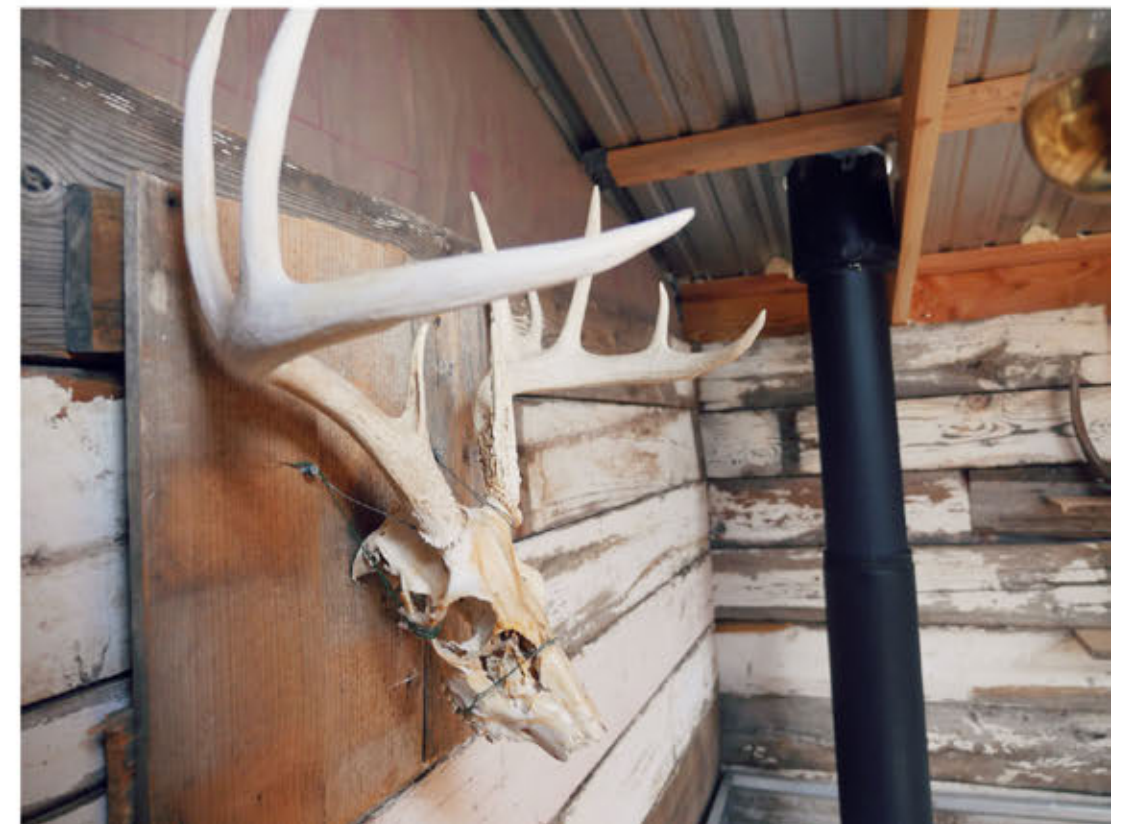
I read online and realized there's only one way forward, which is to find out folks who know building and ask them questions. Padre was a scenic carpenter once, building sets for SoCal universities. I told him my idea and mentioned that the ground outside my house is expansive bentonite clay. It rises and falls like tidewater. Padre suggested I use concrete deck blocks in lieu of conventional piers; if one side of the shed sank, I could lift the corner with a house jack and shim/backfill the shed back to level.

So I bought 10 deck blocks and proceeded to level some road base in a corner of my back yard. It took five hours.

Early on, I asked a friend, a wonderworker of a builder, about his workshop and its siding. It was 6-inch boards on 8-inch boards, an adaptation of board-and-batten siding fit for a dry, sunny climate. He connected me to a lumber mill outside of town. A custom lumber mill is a wonderful place. There's rough-cut wood, huge, curing exotics, and mysterious heavy equipment. I went out there one afternoon and bought 80 ten-foot rough-cut pine boards for \$500 and felt considerably propped up, like I had agglomerated carpentry skills by osmosis. Then I organized a shed raising.









Go back with me. Building, I had two aspirations. One was to wear a tool belt a.k.a. “bags.” Padre had one I could borrow, so that was easily done. The second was an Amish-style barn raising with lots of capable men and hand tools. In my case, the shed raising looked like friends from house church and a rented framing nailer. I carved out a Saturday, folks came over, and we framed a whopping two—two—of the four walls. This is something a carpenter could do while he was literally asleep. Then it got dark and I had to run across town to where I’d left Padre’s truck broken down on a city side street. A story for another time.

So I organized a second shed raising. Fewer men were free, so I cashed in a favor with Sam and finished the framing. The structure stood up. Rafters rose. In a victorious gesture, I slapped a level on one stud. I checked another stud.

Yikes. The shorter side walls were out of plumb. At that point, an experienced builder would have stopped, reversed the process, undone the damage. I went ahead and sheathed the building with OSB plywood, threw up house wrap and then siding. ‘Twasn’t until I started thinking of the finish work inside that I realized what a nightmare those slightly off walls would be. Forever.

I stopped. I despaired. I thought about it one or two nights. Then I texted buddies with building backgrounds and they came over and we spent six hours taking every-

thing apart, restoring the walls to plumb, ensuring everything was square, and tacking it together again.

This is building lesson number one. Build, and you get good at making mistakes. You don’t make so many, sure, but you also get comfortable with frustrating setbacks. I’ve since confirmed this with an accomplished homebuilder. Evidently there are two marks of experienced carpenters. One, they get good at covering up mistakes. Two, they don’t beat themselves up so much when things go wrong, which allows them to work through mistakes without so much lost time. It comes with the territory. Go back. Start again.

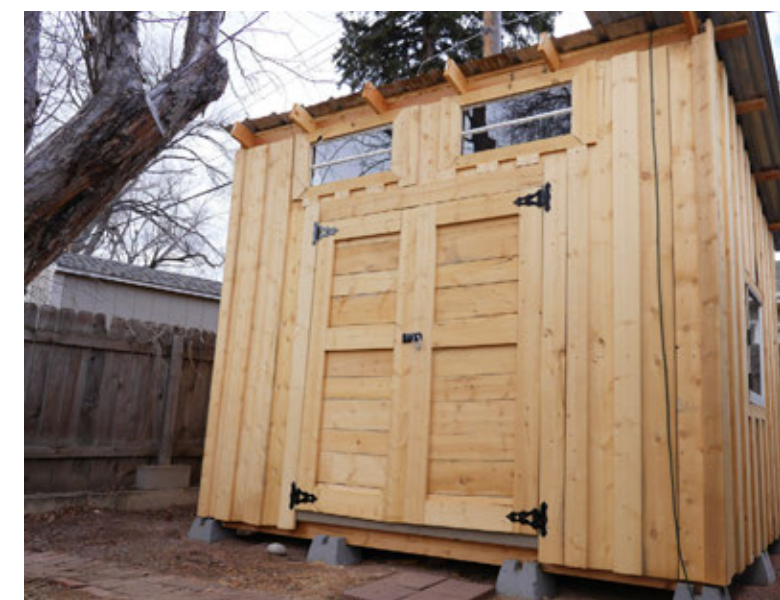
Walls plumb, I restored the sheathing and house wrap and siding to its place. I did most of that alone, in rare hour-increments when I got off work. I learned that carpentry is only monastic and contemplative if you already have a monastic and contemplative personality. I learned that work is hard and it’s meant to grow our ability to reach out for the Father. I am not, turns out, very good at that. I learned what a purlin was and put those up too, then installed the steel roof, then the doors I’d built, then the windows (I bought the windows on Craigslist). I installed concrete backer board on 1-inch spacers, attached sheet metal to the backer board, put in a cinder block pedestal, and installed a wood stove. At that point, the budget was spent. I was reduced to couple

Home Depot gift cards. I used the gift cards to insulate two walls with R-15 fiberglass batts and attach 5-millimeter poly vapor barrier (it’s plastic sheeting in the painting section). Then I put up the fence rails I’d stored on the side of my house eight months.

Then came a thick, soggy snow.

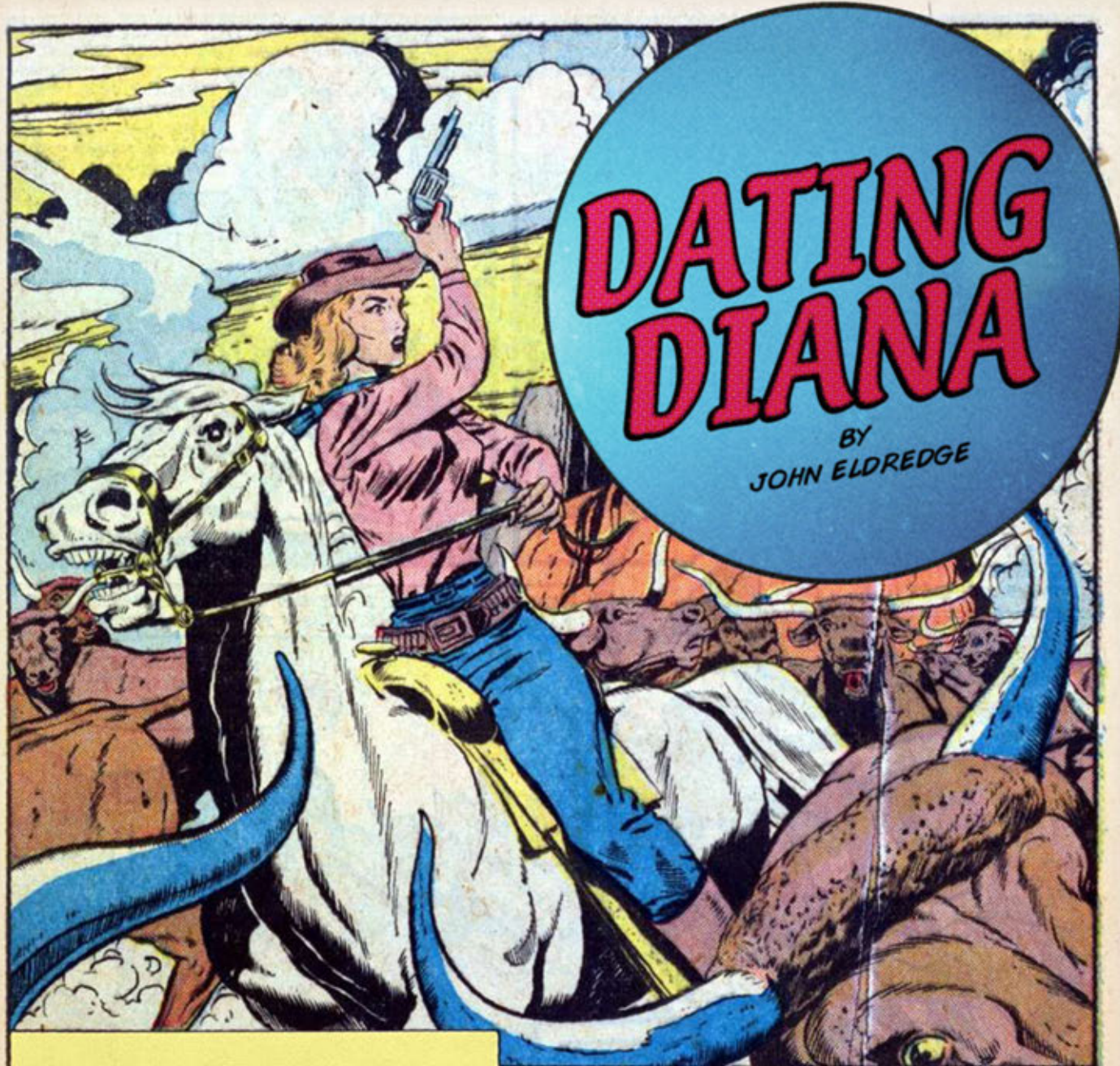
Forgot to mention—when I installed my roof, I was one panel short, which meant 6 inches of the building were exposed to the sky. I covered the gap with tarps but, when the snow came, it troughed the tarps and dumped water right on top of the insulation. Tape aside, the water got in, so I came home to a rivulet running out from behind one wall. Irritating, yes, but, because this was month four, I told Em I needed 90 minutes outside, fixed the tarps, took down the panels, rolled back the vapor barrier, removed the insulation, got a fan going. Later that evening, I put everything back up.

Two of the walls are unfinished. The door jam needs work, as do a hundred other things. But for several weeks, men and women have gathered in the shed. For the fire after dinner. For a morning conversation. For a little solo time when I forgot my keys and locked myself out of the house. It’s very much in process, but even so, the shed represents an ongoing effort to reflect the shape of my life in the shape of my home. Predictably, it takes a lot more time than I guessed. ■



### A few tips:

1. A project, no matter what the scale, will involve an infinite number of trips to Home Depot. Home Depot lets you shop online. Get savvy, and you can add things to your cart as you work, schedule a pickup, and save yourself precious hours.
2. Every search for a shortcut incurs a substantial setback, because reality dislikes shortcuts and cannot be transgressed.
3. If you’re like me and get a kick out of free stuff, you should start looking for a roof right now. Every so often, steel panels or an old shed with a steel roof (which you’ll remove, then burn the shed) shows up on Craigslist. This can be a wonderful way to save a couple hundred bucks.
4. Buy what you need. This is obvious, but if you need 1 5/8-inch fasteners, don’t get 2-inch fasteners. If you need 1 1/2-inch fasteners, don’t get 1 5/8-inch fasteners. Don’t use two-by-six lumber when two-by-fours will do. Overbuilding is cool but expensive; underbuilding is appealing but unwise. In a study on consumer spending, folks noticed that people like to pay more. Take two jackets—all other things being equal, people buy the more expensive one most of the time. We evidently assume the additional cost represents some invisible improvement. It doesn’t. Tyvek is not better than Lowe’s brand house wrap. The minimum viable product is always the best product for the budget.



# DATING DIANA

BY JOHN ELDREDGE

ALL THIS STARTED WHEN A YOUNG MAN DATED A GIRL WHO READ WILD AT HEART - THE FAMOUS BOOK FOR MEN - AND THREW IT ACROSS THE ROOM. "I DON'T NEED SOME MAN TO RESCUE ME," SHE SAID. THAT'S FINE, HE THOUGHT, BUT WHAT ABOUT LOVE AND ITS IMPACT ON HUMAN NATURE...

WHAT DO YA' THINK IT MEANS TO TRULY PURSUE A WOMAN...

YOU MEAN THAT WOMAN WHO NEEDS NOTHING?



This article was instigated by three events that took place within days of each other, and—being prone to some conspiracy tendencies—we thought that was no mere coincidence. You'll see for yourself.

Event Number 1: a conversation with a young man in his 20s (read, bullseye for this magazine), who asks the question, "How do you pursue a woman who doesn't want to be pursued?" Meaning, "She seems so tough and completely uninterested in a relationship." (He's currently in a "friendship" with a young woman who has assumed the "I don't need you" posture so many millennial women have; more on that in a moment.) We felt moved to offer an answer when Event Number 2 rushed in: Another conversation, in which a woman—we are not going so far as to suggest she is the interest of the young man—reports to us that when she read *Wild at Heart*, she threw it across the room. "I don't need some man to rescue me."

Coincidental Event Number 3: Yet another young woman tells us how she "found herself" in the film *Wonder Woman*. The movie has certainly made a splash; current box office sales rank it the fifth most popular superhero movie ever. Guaranteed: it wasn't adolescent boys who put it there. Seems many women are finding themselves in Diana, Princess of Themyscira.

All of which got the fellas in the office talking about how to help our brother in Event Number 1. What does it mean to love and offer and—yes—even pursue a woman who seems to need nothing? Tough girl.

Now, I'm the older contributor to this magazine, and I get to say things only father figures are allowed to say. I'm not millennial and not nearly as encumbered by the need to tiptoe through the minefields of millennial socio-political sensitivities. More to the point, I dated and married a woman who

was—in the '70s, mind you, the height of the feminist movement—the Director of the Women's Center at a very left-wing California state university. So I'll just go ahead and put my cards on the table...

## Are you strong enough to be my man?

—Sheryl Crow

First—human nature is human nature; a woman is always a woman. Either you believe that we bear the image of God, or you do not. If you do, you are faced at some point with the fact that it was "male and female" that God chose to make the human race. Male or Female. Which means that gender is God-given; it is holy, regal. Gender is also at the level of the soul; it is the imago Dei within us. We are, all of us, created male or female.

Which means that strong, independent women are still women.

I know, I know—that is blasphemy in our current milieu. Let me be quick to say that gender expresses itself in many creative ways; I am not about to put everyone into a box.

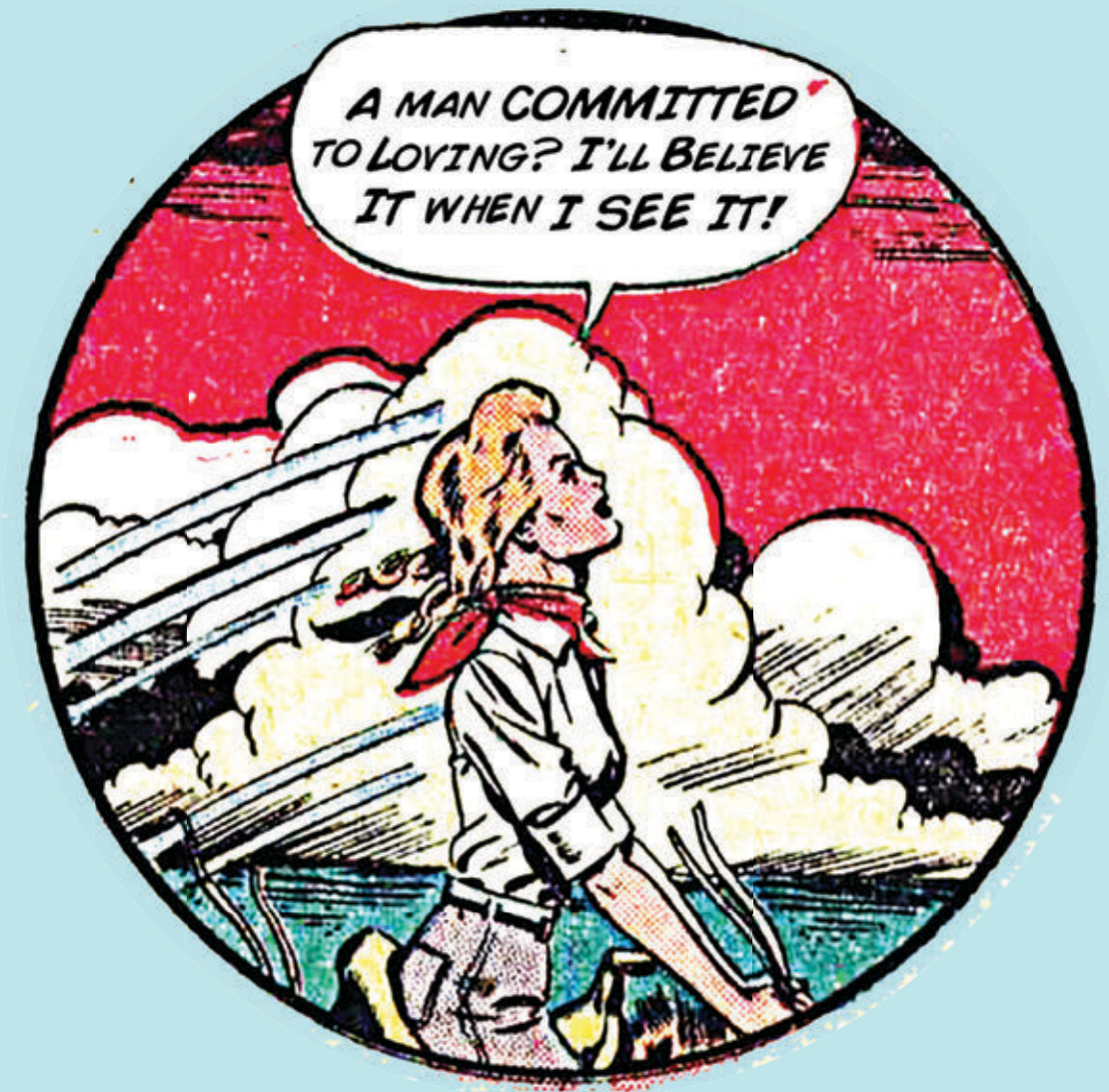
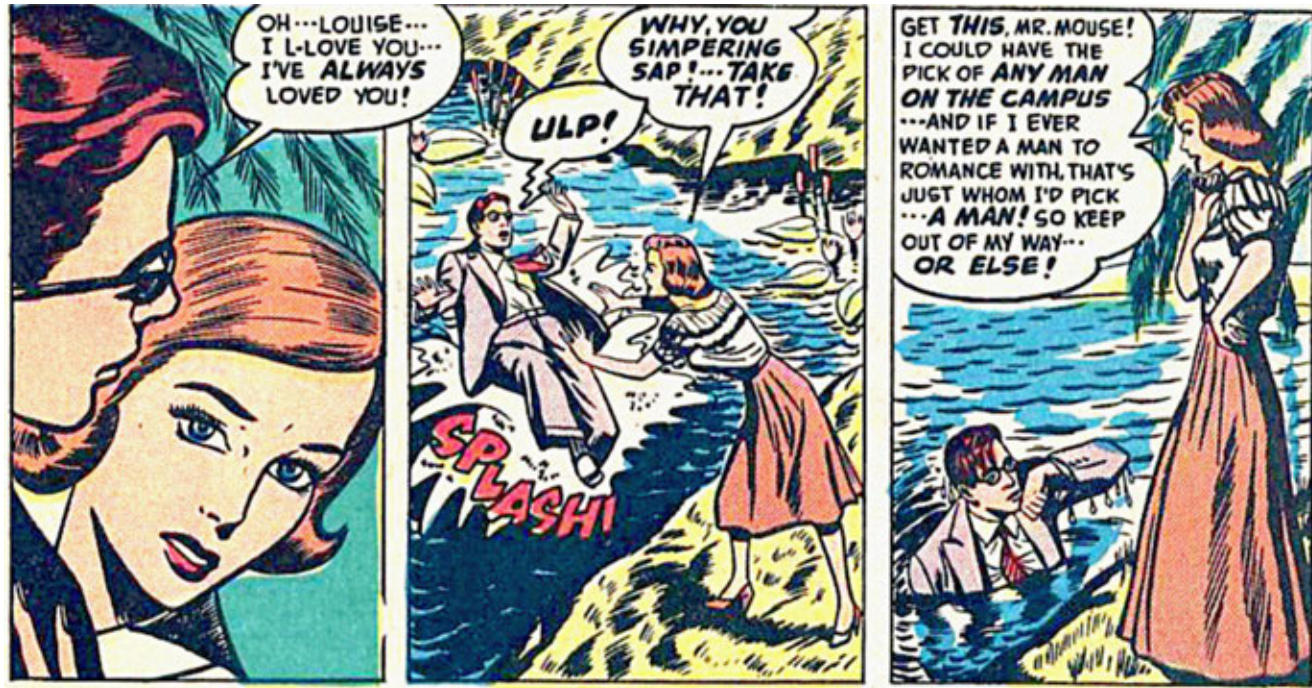
But either you believe human nature has something divine at its core—that we bear the image of God—or you do not. If you do, you then realize that whatever God meant when he created gender is something that transcends time and culture. That there

is something immortal about masculinity and femininity. And I'm not going to try and make that case here; I am hoping to help the young man in Event Number 1 and the young woman who sits across the table from him.

But do let me make one anecdotal observation: the book *Captivating*, which makes a case for the feminine soul, is most popular in women's prisons, of all places, institutions filled with extremely tough girls from many minority groups. Because human nature is human nature. Something every man must keep in mind whenever he is relating to a woman is this: whatever her story, whatever her facade, she is still a woman inside.

Second—to need another human being is not a sign of weakness, but rather, strength. This holds true for men and women. Let me simply point to Gethsemane, where the strongest human soul that ever walked this earth asked his closest friends to stay nearby in his hour of need. Thus Brené Brown has made a killing by stating the radical obvious—that vulnerability is the greatest show of courage in relationship. I am woman, hear me...need.

Third—a woman's desire to be strong and independent can be totally righteous (did you hear that, ladies?). Those of you outside my door can put down the torches and pitchforks. There are fabulously strong and scandalous women honored in Scripture (Deborah, Abigail, Rahab, Mary Magdalene, to name just a few). Lydia was an independent businesswoman (in the first-century Middle East!). Junias was an apostle in the early church(!). God never asked women to be weak; he did ask them to be vulnerable.



But far too often, that “I too can be Wonder Woman” has been shaped not by Christ but by feminist culture, and, truth be told, born of wounding from bad men in her past. Be honest, ladies, “I don’t need you” has had a bit of the middle finger to it. It often feels angry—and hurt. It often is. Every human heart gets wounded in this war, and far too often a woman’s defining wounds come from men. The tough girl is often a self-protection against further harm. Rather than being put off by her self-sufficient persona, you might try having some compassion. Gentleness has won many citadels of the heart.

The simple test of genuine strength is always, Can she be vulnerable too? Where in her life is she allowing for vulnerability—including with men? If the answer is nowhere, then what you have is a self-protective shield going on. But even so...

Fourth—*love never fails* (1 Cor. 13). Every woman wants to be loved. She may hide that, and for some very understandable

reasons. But human nature is human nature, and a woman is always a woman. She wants to be known and understood; she wants to be loved and delighted in; she wants to be someone’s priority. No—she does not want to be treated as helpless or incompetent; she doesn’t want to wait on a man to make her life complete. But she does want to be loved. There is not a human heart that doesn’t.

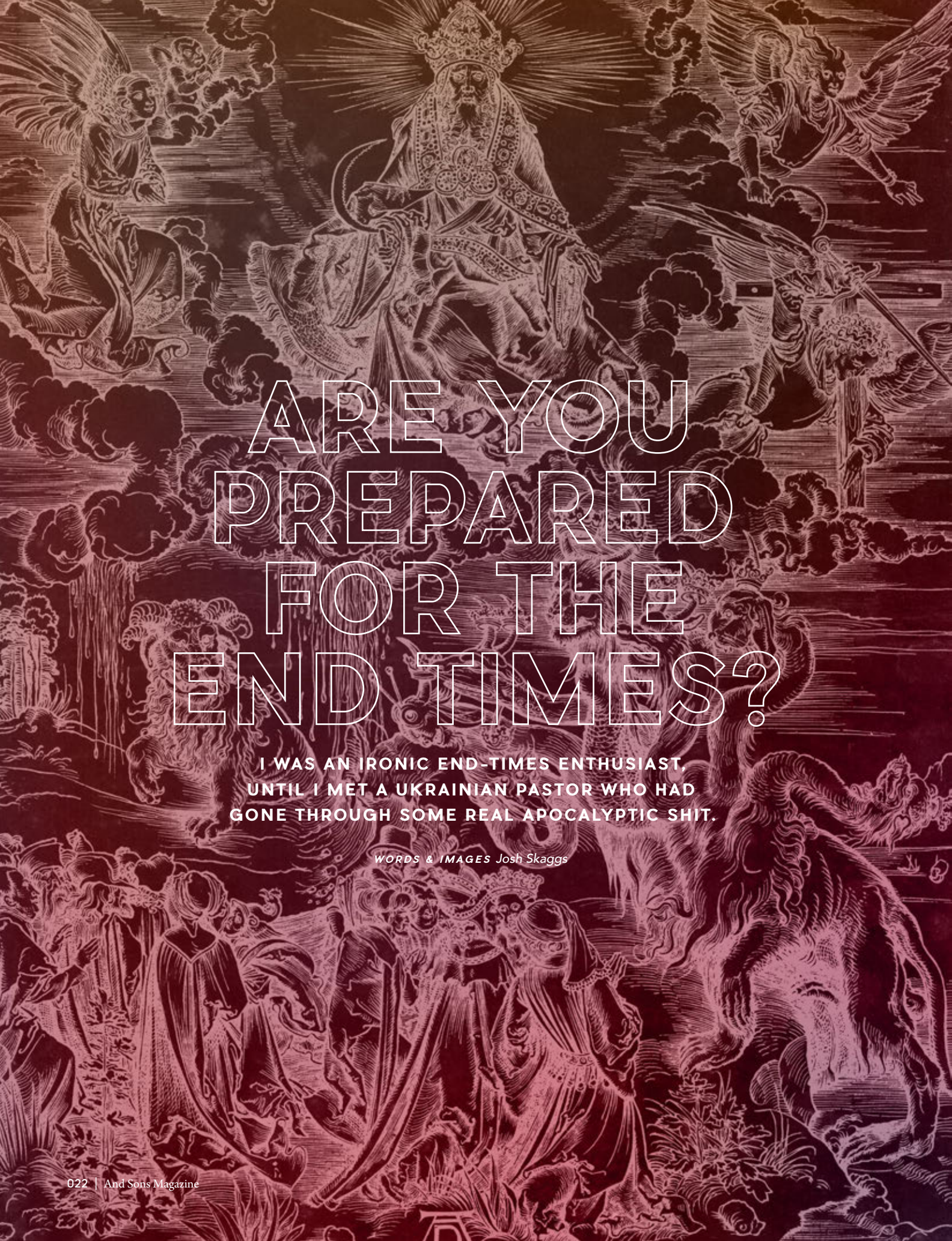
Now we can finally get to the young man and his question. A few pieces of counsel: If you are interested, of course you should pursue her. Don’t wait for her to make it clear. Your lack of pursuit may be sending her signals that you’re not interested (or not brave enough to act), and therefore, she’s going to respond accordingly. Every person pulls away when we feel we are not wanted. What looks “tough” to you may be the result of you not pursuing (ever thought of that?).

Now, I’m not saying charge the ramparts. Do not take on—or criticize or belittle—her independence, for heaven’s sake.

Ask her opinion about things; honor it when it comes. Notice what she is passionate about and talk about those things. Let her take the wheel, row the boat, ascend the climb first. Enjoy her feistiness; delight in it.

As for romance, come in the side door. Just offer thoughtfulness and kindness. And playfulness (I’ve never met a woman who doesn’t like playfulness). Thoughtful cards still work; thoughtful gifts still work. Humor works (but never at her expense). Walks still work (on the beach, in the park, at the zoo, down a country lane—it works). Beauty always works—wilderness, meteor showers, first snowfalls, concerts, flowers (yes, flowers).

In order for romance to flourish, you must live with courage. Men demonstrate courage when they offer their best to a woman before they know how it’s going to go. In dancing, this is called taking the lead; you offer your heart first. It’s going to feel mighty vulnerable, and it should. ■



# ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE END TIMES?

I WAS AN IRONIC END-TIMES ENTHUSIAST, UNTIL I MET A UKRAINIAN PASTOR WHO HAD GONE THROUGH SOME REAL APOCALYPTIC SHIT.

WORDS & IMAGES Josh Skaggs

At a local Perkins during the Obama presidency, my mom accidentally found herself at a women's small group for end-times preparedness. (She'd been invited to check out a women's small group — a description that left out some of the juicier details.)

The women were of various ages and belonged to different churches, but they shared a common fear: President Barack Obama was going to usher in a time of senseless violence and bloodshed that would likely trigger the end times. And they were going to be prepared when that happened.

Over pancakes and eggs Benedict, the women began to take turns responding to a prompt—How are you preparing for the end times? One woman kept a (loaded?) gun on her nightstand and spent her nights rehearsing a tactical maneuver by which she rolled off her bed while aiming her gun at the bedroom door. Another woman had enrolled in a special ops training course in Kansas.

When my mom's turn came to share, she informed the group that she was learning to garden and bake bread—an answer that did little to impress these Rambo-in-training. My mom, it would seem, was not prepared for the end times.

But then, how many of us are?

Having survived Y2K and come of age during the peak of the Left Behind series' popularity, I am familiar with end-times musings. With these fictions and the very real advent of global warming and nuclear proliferation, our generation has never been far from the apocalypse. So yeah, I've thought about the end times. I've let my mind wander through some emergency scenarios, the same way I've pondered how to escape quicksand (lay back and float until you can grab a branch) or kill zombies (headshot, idiots).

I feel a humor reflex in me that safeguards against grappling seriously with the subject. Preppers (and their cousins, the flat earthers) are easy to make light of, with their slowly expiring stashes of Campbell's soup and their hard-edged insistence on cockamamie conspiracies. Any humor writer knows that death is the stuff of good comedy; so, it seems, is the death of the world.

And yet, the Bible is not so glib. Jesus commands his disciples to "be ready" for his return. Peter counsels us to "wait for and hasten the coming of the day of the Lord." Paul warns us that there will be "terrible times in the last days." I could go on.

Although the Bible gives some pretty strong counsel to prepare ourselves for the end times, I've largely neglected these warnings. For a time, I was involved in a prayer community that painstakingly outlined their end-times theology, warning against the great deception coming for those who weren't ready. They urged fasting and prayer as the two primary tools for end-times preparedness.

I appreciated their seriousness, even fasted from time to time. But as I looked around at these pale, scrawny intercessors, I had a hard time imagining them surviving a camping trip, let alone the apocalypse. Was prayer really all that was needed? When we think of the end times, is a person ever really prepared?

These considerations were hypothetical until I visited a place where the apocalypse seems a lot more imminent: eastern Ukraine.

If you're unfamiliar with Ukrainian history, here's a quick crash course: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992, Ukraine has continued to fight for its independence from overt and covert Russian control. After Ukrainians led a successful revolution in 2014 to oust their pro-Russian president from office, Russia retaliated by invading Crimea and much of eastern Ukraine. That territory is still occupied to this day.

So as I drove into eastern Ukraine in a van riddled with bullet holes, rocking back and forth on a bench seat fastened to the floor with a bungee cord, the end times were not far from my mind.

My host was Peter Dudnik, a Ukrainian pastor who made up for his grim demeanor by feeding me one of the best breakfasts of my life. He took me on a tour of Slavyansk, a city of 100,000 that was taken over by militants for several months in 2014. Because Peter's church was positioned at the entrance to the city, the militants claimed it as a strategic base, storing weapons in the basement and posting snipers on the roof.

As Slavyansk shut down under siege, roadblocks were set up and curfew instituted. The Ukrainian government lost access to the city, but as a free agent, Peter was able to fly under the radar. He evacuated his wife and children to a safe location outside the city, then returned and began to help others escape. He established a few meeting places in town, one at the local pool and another in a grocery store parking lot. Every day, he and his team shuttled dozens of people out of town by back roads.

For a time, things got worse. Peter showed me a YouTube video of two tanks shooting heavy artillery from his church lawn. He also took me to the grave of four Christians who had been taken from a church service on the day of Pentecost, interrogated, tortured, and executed. It was a scene straight from the imaginations of Tim LaHaye and Jerry B.



Peter drove me around town and spoke in Ukrainian while a friend translated. “When I drive my car and my tires catch the tank pattern on the pavement, and that noise—all of a sudden I am overcome with memories of evacuating people and going without knowing if we would make it. Sometimes different memories come, and tears start running down my face.”

Peter told me the parable of the 10 virgins from Matthew 25. Ten virgins are waiting for the bridegroom, but when he arrives, only half of them have oil in their lamps. Peter believes that the oil signifies our walks with God.

He says of his church before the siege, “We had already been serving the poor, serving the needy. We had a lot of experience listening to God, hearing his voice, relying on his guidance; so when this happened, we were prepared for this experience.”

He told me that, if his church had not practiced walking with God, they would have responded like everyone else in the city—with fear. Instead, he and his team helped evacuate more than 10,000 people.

“In times of crisis, everything is happening so dynamically, but your spiritual senses are sharpened. In those times, you need guidance from God so that you will find yourself experiencing God telling you what you need to do, and it goes against all logic.

What your eyes will see as objective reality is one thing, but your internal witness will know a different reality. If you learn to hear God’s voice before that, you will trust his voice in times of trouble also.”

He told me stories of miraculous intervention, of God directing him through an intricate series of decisions that ultimately saved lives. He introduced me to a man who had been miraculously let out of jail like Peter in the book of Acts. When we visited his church, he showed me a display of artillery and armor that the militants had left behind. “A museum for tourists,” he said, grinning at me, and I suddenly had a vision of myself from his perspective: a wide-eyed American touring his post-apocalyptic stomping grounds. I felt small.

Compared to Peter, I am small. I’ve never lived in a war zone. No one has ever looked to me for rescue. And while I have no desire to start running drills with a gun on my nightstand, I want to be capable of standing strong when the shit hits the fan. I think of the advice Peter gave me:

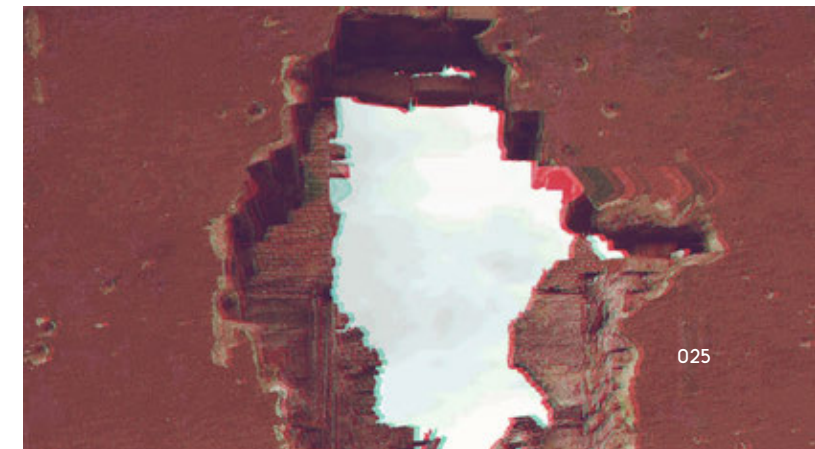
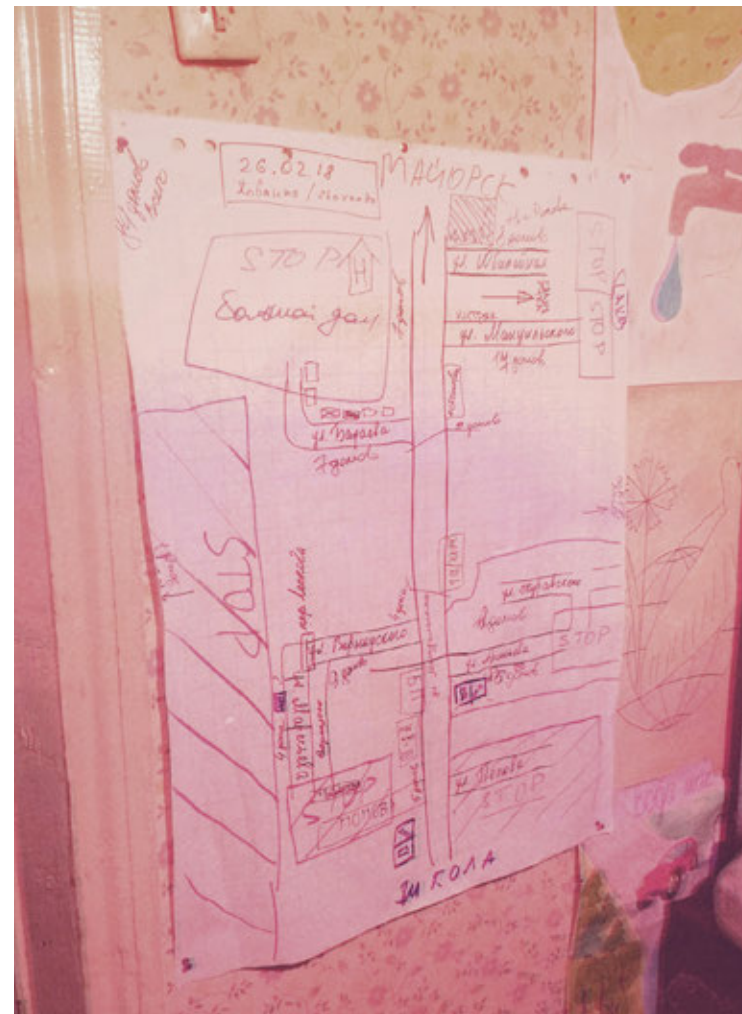
“When times are good, you gain experience in your prayer life, in hearing God’s voice, and reacting to people’s pain. When a time of calamity comes, it is a big test of your faith. If you had the experience of listening to God before calamity came... you will see it as a challenge, that you must act.”

Notice that word, when. Having lived his whole life in a contested region, Peter doesn’t think hypothetically about calamity. In that way, he is similar to many Christians throughout history, especially those in the early Church. Christians in every generation have believed they were living in the last days, and I don’t think they were wrong. Every generation since Christ has experienced war and rumors of war, the “beginnings of birth pains, with more to come.”

To ready ourselves for the end times is not paranoia. Our readiness is a confession of faith in Jesus’ promise that he will return. It is the way we manifest our identity as sojourners and pilgrims in this world, awaiting a Kingdom that will not be shaken.

What stands out to me the most about Peter Dudnik is that his end-times preparedness extended to his entire community. The small group my mom visited and the prayer community I joined both had a limited sphere of what it looked like to survive the end times—one that was primarily defensive and self-focused. Peter looked out for his entire city, and in doing so, he created an opportunity for people to encounter Jesus.

“In a time of calamity,” Peter told me, “the question is not only ‘How do you survive and sustain yourself?’ but ‘How do you exhibit God’s glory?’” ■



# THE BANYA

BY Josh Skaggs

“What pictures flash in your mind when you hear something about the public baths? Probable like most people, not very nice, do not have nothing to do with cleanliness, hygiene and enjoyable pastime. But it’s all superstition, friends. Currently, public baths, for example, up to 20 people, for the comfort of not much different from private ones... We are waiting for you to look in the Russian bath!”  
—From *banya-lefortovo.ru* (translated by Google)

When my roommate John Mark and I started planning our trip to Russia, we knew a visit to the banya would be in order. We had read accounts of the renowned Hermitage Museum and the Mariinsky Ballet, but it seemed to us that nothing would display this country’s soul better than a steamy room full of naked old guys beating themselves with birch branches.

For the uninitiated reader, a banya is similar to a sauna, with wet steam rather than dry heat. For centuries, Russians have visited banyas to wash, recover from illness, and enjoy community. As one Moscow-based banya claims: “In the life of a Russian man, the tradition of the washing bath holds a special place... Banyas in Moscow bring the magical health benefits.”

Choosing the right banya is no easy matter. Like most tourists, John Mark and I were eager to escape other tourists. With this in mind, we bypassed any banya website written in English. Like geniuses, we found Russian websites and relied on Google for a translation.

The first website offered various experiences, including but not limited to the following:

- Russian bath on the 1<sup>ST</sup> person: 600 rubles at 1 o’clock
- Starorussky massage—a broom in the steam room—1 person (brooms not included): 1000 rubles
- Hovering in the steam room of honey—1 person (honey not included): 650 rubles

The banya also offered a service called “massage and the guy.” Massage and the guy was available for “honey massage the belly,” “lymphatic drainage massage,” and “massage cervical zony,” none of which sounded remotely appealing (or possible, considering my lack of a cervical zony). And although hovering in the steam room of honey piqued my interest—I’m only human—I decided to leave that to the OGs.

After scrolling through pages of banya websites, John Mark and I found Coachman’s. According to their website, “the walls of [their] baths remember Lenin, Dostoevsky, and Mussorgsky.” This would seem to go against our aim to avoid tourist traps, but the entry price of 150 rubles (\$2.28 USD) gave us hope that this banya was a local joint.





Perhaps because of our packed itinerary or perhaps because of our deep-seated trepidation, we waited to visit Coachman's until our last day in Russia. Inside the poorly marked building, a woman on the first floor sent us up three flights of stairs to the men's banya. Walking through the door, we expected to find a lobby where we could pay. Instead, we entered directly into a dank locker room filled with wrinkled men in various stages of undress. Inside a booth at one end of the room sat a dour man who would take our money.

When we travel, John Mark and I try to keep a low profile. We talk in low tones and do our best to blend in with the locals. I walked to the booth and blew my cover right away.

"One... um, one banya, please?"

We found a locker for our clothes and walked into an adjoining room to shower. The room was lousy with naked men. I'd visited the Hermitage museum the day before, where I'd beheld the beauty of the human form in myriad paintings and statues. I'd seen men so elegant they resembled women, women so resplendent they looked like angels. Marble collarbones unfurled wings.

The banya welcomed me back to Earth. No painting had depicted such lumps and sags; no marble bellies had grown too large and folded into themselves. These bodies were like poorly peeled potatoes; if forgotten in a cool, dark place, they would soon sprout pale roots. Looking at them and trying not to look at them, I thought, *This is what I will look like in 30 years*. Not that my body is anything sculpture-worthy now. After comparing myself to human perfection in gilded halls, I felt a little relieved to be back among my fellow unshapely men.

I showered and walked to a heavy wooden door in the back. This was it. I pulled open the door. As if I were in a Star Wars film, my entrance was marked by an explosion of steam. Eyes stinging, lungs seizing, I stumbled toward a place in the darkness. Several men shouted crossly at me, and I realized I had left the door open. I trotted to the door and closed it, trying not to laugh hysterically—my reflex response to awkwardness.

I sat. The room resounded with the sound of men beating themselves. I had read about the use of the venik, a bundle of birch branches soaked in water and used to beat oneself. Ostensibly, the practice draws blood to the surface of the skin and opens the pores. I had not imagined the beating to be so loud, so heartily administered, or to release such a pleasant aroma. The men employed the venik with gusto, boisterously whacking their arms, their chests, their thighs. I could feel the spray of their branches on my skin. They grunted and breathed; they loosed throaty yelps like dogs hooked to a sled.

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*As one banya's website describes so poetically, "And what an unforgettable feeling of lightness and purity will give you an effective use of a broom experienced master!"*

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It was hard to imagine women doing the same, only one floor above. For me, there was something inherently masculine in the Russian banya. How many Russian men I had passed on the street, looking formidable and impassive in business clothes. Here I saw these same men with guards dropped. Whatever burdens they carried through life, whatever bulwarks they raised to steel themselves, were here abandoned. Here they were only men. I wondered if they knew I was American.

John Mark sat down beside me, and we sat and sweated in silence. A man behind us lay down full-length across a bench and endured the beating of two friends on his back, buttocks, and legs. He seemed to enjoy it. As one banya's website describes so poetically, "And what an unforgettable feeling of lightness and purity will give you an effective use of a broom experienced master!"

I wondered what a banya would look like in America, but I couldn't imagine it. There is something too self-conscious in the American man, too well-groomed. Glancing discreetly at the other men in the room, at their slack, contented faces, I felt our key difference: none of them were thinking.

The heat hurt. My body temperature climbed until sweat pattered the floorboards between my feet. I finally fled the room and found the cold water tank in the shower room. I am squeamish about cold water, and also about tanks where hundreds of sweaty men have bathed, but none of that mattered as I climbed the ladder and dropped into cool, refreshing water. My muscles chilled. My whole body relaxed.

I was ready for another round.

At the door to the banya, I found a trash can of discarded birch clusters and stared into it enviously. Was I desperate enough to use another man's venik? I grabbed the one on top and examined it, reevaluating my hygienic spectrum. These branches certainly weren't "Used—like new." The leaves were withered and still damp; worse, I had witnessed the most recent departure and could give their former owner a face—along with a belly and jocular buttocks.

I didn't care. I hurried into the banya, climbed a platform where the heat was greatest, and commenced the beating. The leaves stung, and their bite deepened as they took on the room's heat. My skin burned. I couldn't help thinking of an oven and of poultry I'd made edible in temperatures not much higher than this. I breathed deeply. I lowered my head and let my thoughts lift off of me. Bowed and naked, sitting blankly in the primal heat, I was a man.

John Mark came in from a dip in the tank, and he leaned forward so I could hit his back with the branches. I leaned forward while he returned the favor. All around, men were enjoying the "magical health benefits" of the sauna, and I too could feel the magic. ■



# EPIC IN SO MANY WAYS

AS TOLD TO John Eldredge IMAGES Jared Sayers

This interview began with a photo. My pal Craig walked into my office one dreary winter day last January and showed me a picture his son-in-law had texted him. There was a young man standing with what looked like a 20-foot kayak or something. “It’s a paddleboard. These guys are paddling from Catalina to Manhattan Beach.” Having grown up in Southern California, I knew what an insane distance that is, something near 30 miles. Google took me to the website for the Catalina Classic, a 32-mile, open water paddleboard race hailed as “one of the most grueling endurance events in the world.” That’s when I called Jared. I wanted to hear his story.

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**And Sons:** *I want to hear about the race, but I want to hear a bit of your story too. How'd you get into paddling?*

**Jared Sayers:** I've wondered that myself. Growing up in Southern California, it's crowded; there isn't a lot of space. So what we did as a family was go to the beach. My mom had two young, active boys, and so she took us to the beach to sort of run it off. And I don't know—I just naturally gravitated towards the ocean. I think we have video of me standing up on my boogie board at like three years old. Nobody taught me this stuff. My folks are from Oklahoma.

**AS:** *Not a lot of ocean there.*

**JS:** Yeah. So it kind of progressed from loving the ocean as a kid, to owning my own surfboard, to competitive surfing through high school into college. When life had peaks and valleys, I would automatically go back to the ocean. It wasn't so much the surfing, it was being in the ocean. Swimming, diving, body surfing—any excuse I had to get in the ocean, I would.

**AS:** *We love the ocean too. Living in Colorado, it's the one thing we miss from Southern California. But the race—this is a whole different thing.*

**JS:** [Laughs] It is the most unglamorous 32 miles you will ever put yourself through. It pushes you to every limit you knew you had and a bunch you didn't.

I have a friend who works for the fire department, and we were just sitting around, you know, drinking beers, and he tells me he is doing a race in San Francisco, around Alcatraz. I'm thinking, I've surfed, I've dived, I should get into this. But the first time he takes me out on a paddleboard, it's a very humbling experience. It is a torture device; it's very tippy side to side, almost like logrolling. You alternate between paddling on your chest like a surfboard to paddling on your knees, scooping the water with both hands simultaneously. You're not looking around you taking it all in; your head is basically looking towards the front of the board, so all you see is the first five feet of your board, and blue, all around you. For hours. But I had this deep appreciation for the art form and craft of it.

I joined him for the Alcatraz race. It was my first,

roughly 10 to 12 miles. And it was on my 30th birthday. I finished it, and it was one of the greatest feelings I've had in my life. I knew, 'This is going to stick.'

Then some years go by; life began to happen. I couldn't afford a board—they are very expensive—and children started to come along and my career started going. But in 2013, I'm out on the Manhattan Beach pier watching the guys coming in from the Catalina race, watching these guys come out of the nothingness. You look over the ocean and it just goes on forever, and all of a sudden they appear out of the nothingness. The endurance aspect is insane. It looks like they are barely moving. And you can just feel the energy coming off of them at the finish line. After seeing that, I leaned over to Meagan and said, "I'm doing this next year."

**AS:** *We're there. We get it. What kind of training does it take?*

**JS:** It starts around May, three days a week. Two shorter paddles, then one longer paddle on the weekend. The race is in August, so I start four months out. By the time you get to August, your short paddles are six to eight miles and your longer paddles are anywhere from 22 to 25 miles. I average about 12 minutes a mile, but sometimes you just kind of wanna take it easier, not burn out, clear your head.

You're out there for three or four hours.

There's something about this modern day, fast-paced world, with digital exploding and the Internet all around us, bombarded with so much stuff—it becomes downright overwhelming. Paddling is an exceptional place to process a lot of life. I do a lot of paddling early in the morning; I do a lot of paddling by myself. In the training, you are going out anywhere from five to 25 miles of open ocean.

The beauty of paddling is you sort of kill two birds with one stone—you are pushing yourself hard, but you are also processing life, getting answers to things you don't get sitting at a desk. For me, at least, it's a really cool aspect of the whole thing.

**AS:** *Take us into the moment—describe to the rest of us what it's like to be out there in the middle of the race. Describe mile 16.*





**JS:** I'm so glad you asked that. The paddle starts in the dark. You paddle out into the nothingness. The water's rough; adrenaline is going. Then you begin to get into a rhythm. Everybody spreads out. Your escort boat is guiding you, watching out for big shipping tankers. My escort boat gets a warning that there is a small grouping of sharks circling me. There is this moment where I'm 11, 12 miles out into the ocean. The channel is like three to four miles deep. And the sky above. The sun is coming up over the horizon. It is a very humbling, humbling feeling. You think about life, you think about Craig...

*[There is a pause, and some tears. Craig has had a long and brutal fight with cancer.]*

You think about how delicate life can be. How much you love life. It's almost as profound as watching your child be born.

**AS:** *That sounds... incredible.*

**JS:** It really is.

**AS:** *We've heard the crossing isn't the hardest part.*

**JS:** Right. The crossing is 22 miles; then you turn north over your left shoulder and you've got 10 miles to Manhattan Beach. Guys say that's really when the race begins, because your head is like, We did it, we're done. But you have a third of the paddle left to go.

The last two miles is like a bad dream. You see the pier—it's right there—but you are not getting closer. You feel like you are crawling on your hands and knees through the desert. You are physically operating out of sheer will and mental fortitude. You keep looking up, but the pier never ever gets closer. You wonder, Am I fighting a current? It pushes every fiber of who you are to a level you didn't know was there.

Then the last hundred yards—you see the guys who finished before you, you see your family on the pier cheering you on. Your boat driver is almost in tears for you. I had this crusty old boatman, and he was on the verge of breaking down watching me come through the last hundred yards. And you get this... not second wind, more like tenth wind, and you dip into this reservoir you didn't know was in you, and you hammer it through the finish line. It is one of the greatest feelings in the entire world.

I think that's why the people who paddle are so infectious to me. They've had a lot of time alone out on the water, and they've had time to piece together some of the bigger questions. I think that's what attracts me to the sport. You do it to figure out stuff about yourself. And the medium you are doing it in is the definition of high adventure—you see whales, you see sharks, pods of dolphins in the hundreds, you see breaching whales, you see baby whales. You see the sun coming up over the horizon. It makes you ask the bigger questions. And it helps me be more present in the rest of my life. ■



# WHY SEX SCARES ME

WORDS Dan Allender IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

*Editor's note: Our buddy Dan Allender wrote a book on sex with his friend Tremper Longman III called God Loves Sex. We do too, and we love the book. So we asked Dan to write the first "sex" article for And Sons. Better him than us.*

Sex is frightening for men.

Like whistling in the dark when you're terrified or talking too much when you're scared, we hide our discomfort underneath bravado and playful banter.

When we moved to Seattle, we were invited to a neighborhood gathering where I got a lot of curious looks when I was asked, "What do you do?" I told folks that I taught at a seminary.

In Seattle less than 1.5 percent of the population attends any religious service—Buddhist, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, Hindu, or Christian. One dude said: "You teach in a cemetery?" I still don't know if he was joking, but I said: "Yep, it often feels like a cemetery."

After some laughs and beers, a trial attorney started to tell a crassly off-color joke. He was brilliant in his presentation and craft. He held our attention with command. But it was fairly obvious to me that the story was told mostly on my behalf.

Several men sneaked looks to see how the "religious one" was handling the dark and demeaning humor of the story. I was riveted on the storyteller. I indicated to my audience no offense nor approval. Life is often like playing poker.

The story ended and the men guffawed. I knew I had less than a second to respond. If I was silent, I was either a coward or, at core, a religious charlatan. If I showed offense or distaste, I was religious but an idiot. If you live in this world, you must come to love being in a bind.

Before the laughter was lost to the sky, I said to the storyteller, "Do you love sex?"

He looked at me like I had asked him to strip, then stammered, "Ah, well, yeah, of course."

Clearly this man was not used to stammering.

"Me too," I said. "I love sex, but it also scares me to death. My wife is beautiful and desirable, and profoundly sensuous and alive to touch and the goodness of pleasure, and she also wants me to present and attune my desire to hers. She wants me to make love to her in a way that blesses the radical difference between being a man and a woman and to do so by being fully human, holy, honoring, and whole."

"His arms are rods of gold set with topaz. His ~~body~~ is like polished ivory decorated with lapis lazuli."



"Your **navel** is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies."



*For thousands of years, we've obscured the meaning of the text to keep our shame at bay.*

My words were fast, intense, and well-articulated for all to hear. And then I asked, "Is that how you feel about making love to your wife?"

He looked at me, silent. The holy silence of that porch still nearly brings me to tears. I'm highly verbal, and it is usually an error to get in a conceptual bar fight with me. This man was seeing whether he could humiliate the religious boy, and he picked the wrong man to start a fight with. It's not my pugnacious spirit that brings me joy or near tears—it is the silence we all felt for a few seconds.

For a few holy seconds, we all looked at each other and knew that none of us—especially me—is up to the challenge of making love to a woman. There are few moments of this kind of holy awe for most men.

What my wife wants is something that, at my best, I can only dimly approximate. I am terrified to become the man my wife wants for a lover; I am terrified not to be the lover my wife wants from her husband. The only way I can escape the fear is to make love to her and pretend. But she's too wise and sensitive not to know when I'm letting an erection be a stand-in for being a man.

Let me tell you about the book. Not the book we wrote—the real book. The Bible. The Song of Songs. It's not a three-person narrative with a maiden, a shepherd, and Solomon. Nor is it a spiritual ditty that uses sexual imagery to spice up the real message of how God loves his bride. That's in the Bible too, just not this book. This rare and glorious book is an anthology of erotic love poetry that extols the wonders, struggles, and redemption found in sexuality.

Think of it: God loves erotic sexual poetry. A whole book of the Bible is written to tell us that God loves for you to think, write songs, and speak about the glories of sexual play, arousal, and consummation.

Let me give you a glimpse of the heart of God. He inspires a female poet to write this about her man:

*His arms are rods of gold  
Set with topaz.  
His body is like polished ivory  
Decorated with lapis lazuli. (5:14)*

This is not an exaltation of strong biceps and a six-pack stomach. When the poet's image is translated with the English word "body," it is a purposeful obscuring of the real meaning—penis. It is too much for Christian publishing houses to put in the English word that best says what the Bible means.

It happens again when a man is glorying in a woman's body:

*Your navel is a rounded goblet  
That never lacks blended wine.  
Your waist is a mound of wheat  
Encircled by lilies. (7:2)*

The "navel" being referred to is not a belly button that is holding a few drops of sweet tasting wine, it's her vagina. Obviously this is too much for the Christian community to fathom. The word needed to be changed to the nearest indentation in the body that might be able to hold wine.

Insanity. This is heartbreaking insanity. We are so afraid of sex that we have to refer to our sexual organs with names that take away the shame, or at least the adolescent tittering. Why can't we bear that a woman might love to talk about her man's erect penis or a man celebrate the glory of his wife's vagina?

For thousands of years, we've obscured the meaning of the text to keep our shame at bay. Then we call that shame holy and view anyone who talks about sex as a miscreant. We don't know how to talk about sex in a way that is both holy and whole.

So God gives us the Song of Songs—to explore through the poetry of God this fabulously unsettling gift called sex and bow before the glorious body of pleasure God wants us to experience in our holy fear. ■



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WORDS Sam Eldredge

IMAGES Blaine Eldredge, Richard Seldomridge

Let me begin with this: I never imagined I would be writing an article on weightlifting. I'm just not "that guy." Right?

In college I had a friend I'll call ... Chad, because everyone named Chad has done some weightlifting. Chad took me to the campus gym a couple of times, and it lived up to my non-gym-going expectations. He would eat a couple of turkey sandwiches before and after lifting, for that all-important and obvious protein. There were guys in the gym with baggy tank tops doing curls right in front of the mirror. There was obnoxious music blasting. There were a couple of young women on treadmills in yoga pants, and one gal from the softball team doing squats. She looked like she could crush me with her bare hands.

I felt out of place, skinny, weak, and stupid. A few of those things were true. As Chad walked off to go see if his bench numbers had grown from the previous week, I picked up a couple of free weights and tried doing curls until it was time to go. Afterwards, he clapped me on the back and congratulated me on beginning my journey to get "swole." After those first few times, I never went back.

In the decade since then, weights have changed in the public eye thanks to CrossFit. Now I can feel like an idiot and totally weak because I don't know how to do an Olympic powerlift or a clean and jerk or do pullups with chains around my neck. I'd also be lying if I didn't admit a magnetic draw to join one of these gyms and finally have someone teach me how to use all that equipment.

Finances and personal interest led me in a different direction. Over the past few years, I've fallen in love with the sport of triathlon, and because I live in Colorado I don't always get to be active outside, which has caused me to want to use my whole year well, not just the times I get to spend in the sunshine.

Enter weightlifting in the offseason.

Being trapped inside for much of the year has its advantages, one of which is that I've had plenty of time to learn from athletes and coaches much more experienced than I am. So, thankfully, I haven't needed to reinvent the wheel here.

I've come to learn that weights have a variety of purposes, and your goals will define what you do and don't do. This is very obvious to anyone who has lifted before, but was novel to me. I had assumed for the longest time that lifting and weights were all supposed to get you ripped, jacked, and tan, and sort of turn you into Hercules. It turns out that this is a goal, one of many that can be chosen, but not the inevitable result of lifting weights.

Many athletes use weights during the offseason as an injury prevention program for their on-season workouts. Others, including myself now, use specific lifts to target muscle groups that fit the real-world requirements of the sports they do outside the gym. Mind blowing stuff here, I know, but it took doing it wrong for me to learn that without a specific goal in mind, I was just moving weights around without doing myself any real favors. Thanks for nothing, Chad.

Since there are a variety of goals in the gym, and my goal is only partly to look jacked and tan, I'm going to talk specifically about what I do. My goals are part injury prevention, part building strength for the sport of triathlon.

I've taken much of my routine from people who know a lot more than me, like Ryan Flaherty, who is the Senior Performance Director at Nike and who has coached a ridiculous number of successful athletes. We encountered him on a Tim Ferris podcast ("The Savant of Speed," go check it out) and the routine we use is a distillation of his workouts by Triathlon Taren.

At its core, the routine is focused on increasing your power-to-weight ratio. Triathletes aren't looking to become huge, because adding weight, even in the form of muscle, means more for you to carry around on the bike and run.

## THE WORKOUT

### WARM UP

- Walking lunges no weight x20
- Walking lunges with twist no weight x20
- Toe touches x20
- High knees/Butt kicks x20

### GLUTE QUAD ACTIVATION

- Hip bridges 2x8 reps
- No weight step-ups 2x8 reps

### HEX BAR WORKING SET

- 3 sets of 5 reps with 2-3 min rest between sets, (This will taper to 1-2 reps as weight builds)

### SINGLE LEG ISOLATION

- Bulgarian split squat 3x5 reps per leg, one min rest
- Single leg plyometric jump from sitting 3x6 reps

### STABILITY

- Single leg step-downs off side of bench 2x20 reps, alternating leg each set of 10
- Kettlebell swings x75 (broken down into smaller chunks as necessary)
- 7 way hips (you should google/youtube this... it'll make you hurt)

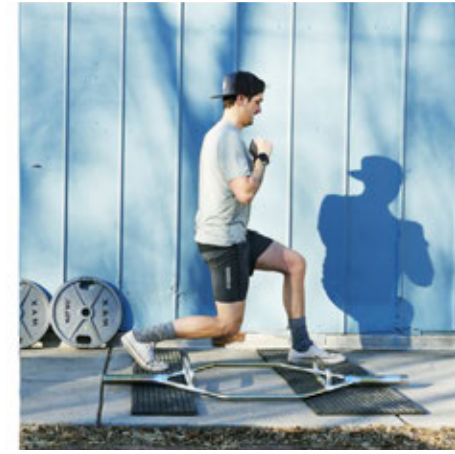
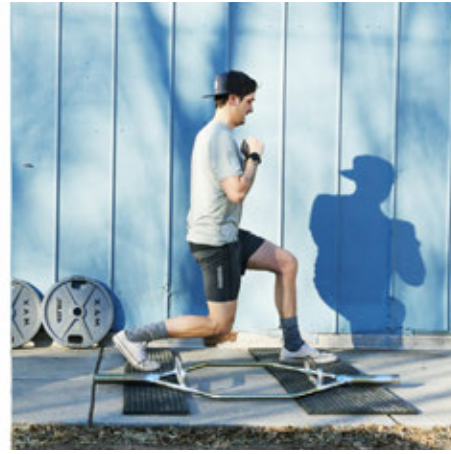
### UPPER BODY

- Overhead press 3x5 reps
- Dumbbell Bench Press 3x5 reps
- "The Tom Hardy" Tapering set (10, 7, 5, 3, 1) of triceps dips, dumbbell shoulder flies, and press-ups (Taken from the routine Tom Hardy used for the film *Warrior*)

## THE EXERCISES

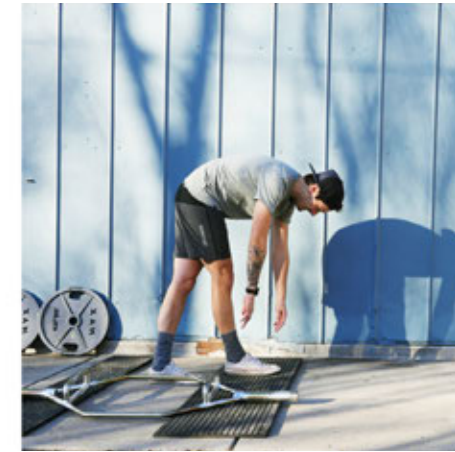
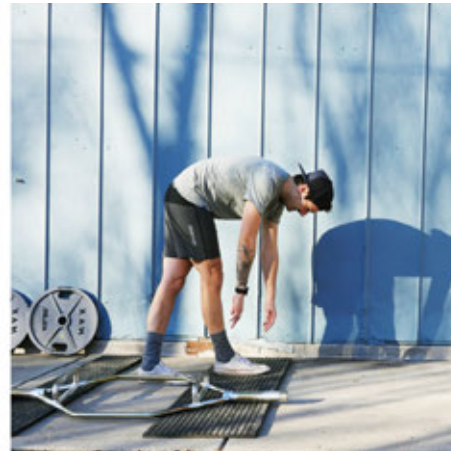
### WALKING LUNGES

Walking lunges are a great way to warm up your legs and glutes. Honestly, I almost always feel the pain on these by around lunge number 15. Remember to keep your knee behind your toe when you drop. It can help to think of dropping your hips and keeping your shoulders back.



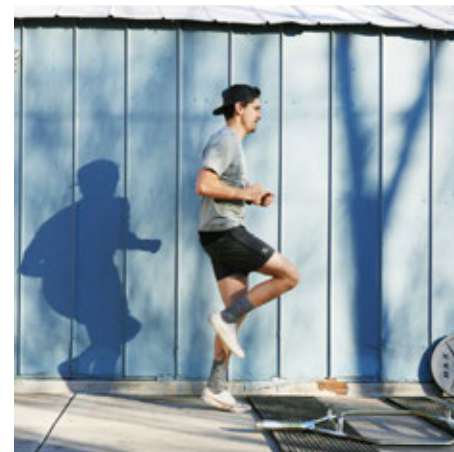
### TOE TOUCHES

Walk slowly, cross your legs, and reach down and touch your toes. You should feel the tension releasing from the back of your legs. Raise your body to a standing position. Step forward and cross with the other leg. Repeat.



### HIGH KNEES

High knees baby! Move fast and get those knees up to a 90-degree angle from your hips.



### HEX BAR LIFT

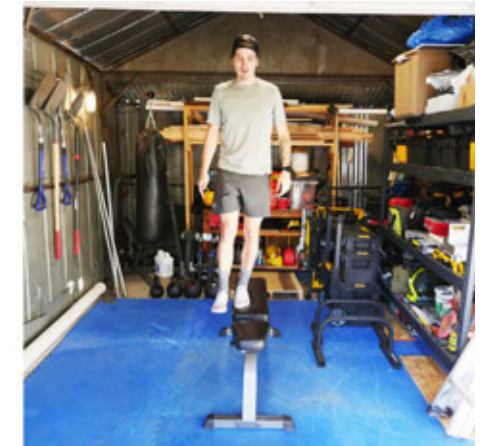
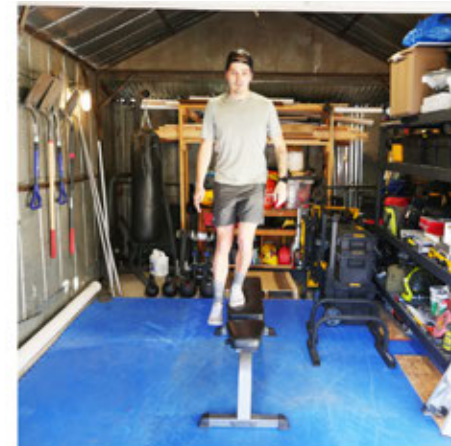
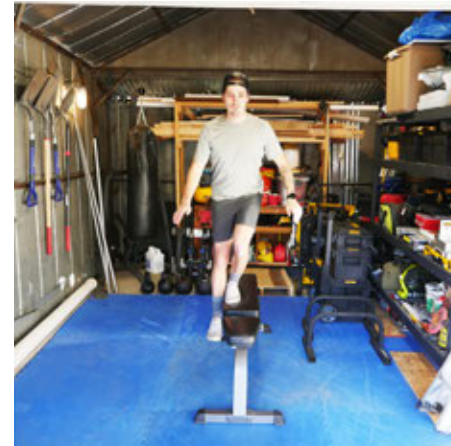
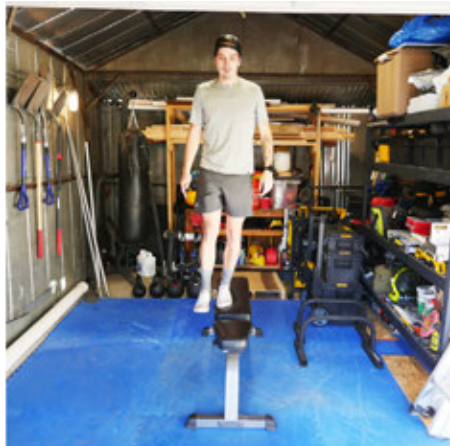
This is the meat of the workout. Ideally, you lift with explosive energy and return the weight to the ground as quickly as possible. If you can drop the weight after you lift instead of lowering it back down, do it. This is where you can build power without adding muscle mass if done correctly. The goal here is to build weight over 12 weeks. Check out Triathlon Taren's weight program, which we've pretty much adapted here.

**WARNING:** Proper form is required to prevent injury, kids!



### SINGLE LEG STEP-DOWNS

Step-downs are a key part of building stability and coordination. Each up and down should take you 3 seconds to complete. Sound too easy? Don't worry, after all the leg work you've been doing, this hurts.



### KETTLEBELL SWINGS

Begin in a shallow squat with both hands on the loop handle. Explode up and forward with your core and glutes while swinging the kettlebell to a 90 degree angle from your shoulders. As the kettlebell falls, sink back into the shallow squat. Rock and repeat. ■





# PRAYER AND THE BODY

WORDS Luke Eldredge

Boredom shifts and nestles into the corners of the airport, accumulating like flies in the summer heat. My eyes glide and wander over the monotone steel blues to kill the time. They stop and catch.

Across the linear terminal in the adjacent gate a practicing Jew faces the wall, rocking back and forth in prayer or Scriptural study, I do not know which. I stop and am struck: first by the spiritual integrity of the man, that he can center himself on God in a physical way while waiting for flight UA1062; and second, by that, his very physicality.

In my younger and more impressionable years, I watched a documentary on the nation state of Israel that focused on the prayer performed at the old Western Wall in Jerusalem. The element of prayer emphasized was the inclusion of the body. Sitting or standing in prayer, these men and women would rock their bodies back and forth in constant movement. The practice is called “Shucklen,” born from a simple and straightforward interpretation of this command: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4-5). In prayer and study, their hearts and souls were turned towards God, and in engaging their bodies, so too their strength, the strength of their bodies.

A time, time, and half a time since Deuteronomy came the carpenter from Nazareth,

who was asked—as all Rabbis were asked—what he considered to be the most important commandment. The Law by that time had been dissected to the utter limits; narrowing everything down to one commandment was the most convenient way to sort out what a specific Rabbi’s views were—a sort of book title to their teaching. The answer this Rabbi gave happened to be the bit about heart, soul, and strength, which makes me feel like it’s kind of important.

Which brings us to the question of how to love God with our strength, with our body.

Those of us raised in a Western intellectual tradition borrow most of our assumptions from Greco-Roman philosophy. When it comes to the body and soul, our heritage is essentially dualism: soul and body are different, so very different they’re basically incompatible; the body is simply a temporary cage for our sojourn, and the sooner we can slough it off, the better. I believe that in all our regimes and 10-step programs to make well the soul, we have taken dualism too far. For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost, and part of what was lost was the divine goodness of our bodies.

*The world has taught us to hate our bodies because they’re never beautiful enough, while the church has taught us to hate our bodies because they’re too damn beautiful and fraught with sin.*

A striking example of loving God with body and soul is the wild and passionate King David, dancing before the Ark of the Covenant. Having brought the Ark back to Israel after its study abroad, David literally danced in front of it. In praising God with song and prayer, David added the movements of the body to the glorification. Now, I’m not saying we should all go out in the streets and dance in our underwear (he was in his underwear), but the man was pretty B.A. and knew a thing or two about walking with God.

The de-sanctification of our bodies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been helped by a new sort of dualism. The world has taught us to hate our bodies because they’re never beautiful enough, while the church has taught us to hate our bodies because they’re too damn beautiful and fraught with sin. Yet the carpenter Rabbi quickly followed his proclamation of the greatest commandment with this: “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” a horrible command, as C.S. Lewis pointed out, if the self is simply to be hated. More importantly, through Christ’s resurrection, our bodies have been reconciled to him just as our hearts and souls have been.

“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Rom. 8:11).

Life, of course, means health, but it also means restoration, and it was kind of the thing the Son of Man was sent to bring: “The thief comes only to steal kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

For me, engaging the body in relationship with God is seeking to fully engage every facet of myself. Sometimes it looks like gently swaying in prayer, my own quiet version of Shucklen, which gives me focus on where my heart is and where I am.

Sometimes it means dancing my heart out at a wedding in celebration of the Kingdom breaking forth in people’s lives. I love the tactile nature of the world, and I will use my senses to engage creation as a way of loving God, or loving God as I engage creation. Certainly the spiritual disciplines are ways in which the church has sought to bring the body into our spiritual life.

As Dallas Willard wrote in his work on the disciplines, “To withhold our bodies from religion is to exclude religion from our lives.”

More and more, I am looking for ways to engage my physical reality in the spiritual reality of loving God. ■





# KOREA X JAPAN

WORDS & IMAGES Sam Eldredge

The narrow street runs uphill before twisting right between tightly packed homes stacked three or four high. A few steps in a straight direction is all it offers before descending in a series of switchbacks down 50 feet to a street below, where it turns left and continues its staggering drunkard pattern. Eventually the homes and apartments become grocery stores and cafés and coffee shops as we leave behind the entwined residential district and find ourselves in the outskirts of the commercial. As we slip into a quiet spot for lunch, I turn to David and say, “Thank you for that.”

Everything is different, unreadable, unknowable. You can never understand the motivation. Yet everything is the same, familiar, like memories from childhood that refuse to come into focus. Steam swirls from vents in the street floor and from vendor carts. A couple dressed in kimonos pass hand in hand, while overhead the electric metro rattles on; tradition mingles with the future, the old with the new, and I know that I am in the Asian East.

It’s no secret that I love this part of the world, so my wife wasn’t surprised when I told her that for our next adventure I wanted to go to South Korea and Japan, specifically to Seoul and Tokyo. With family in Seoul and Tokyo where our plane makes its connections, it seemed very

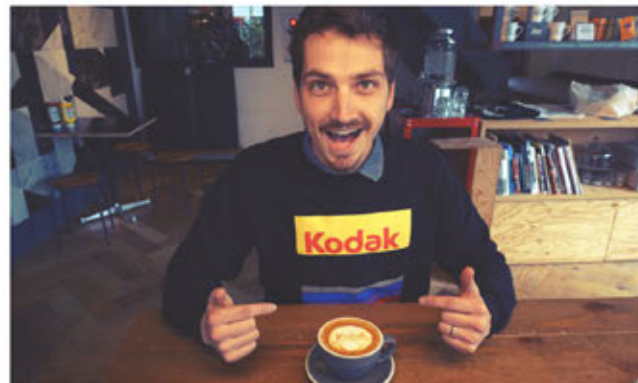
doable. We’ve only just arrived in South Korea, and already Seoul is living up to everything I hoped it would be. Over the next 10 days, words like jimjilbang, ddukbokki, and norebang will feel familiar, though not necessarily normal.

Each year, my wife and I try to plan an adventure that’s all about joy. Much of our year gets swallowed up in the week-to-week living that sort of feels like just trying to keep it all together. I live so much of my “normal” life in the way I take my groceries in from the car: trying to get it all done at once, arms overflowing, just make it to the counter. Except that the counter becomes bed or the weekend or another beer, and those aren’t quite the finish line experience we really need.

We’ve been cultivating a space in our lives where we can recharge. It gives us something to look forward to; it gives us a context to place ourselves in. There is work, and there is rest. There is daily life, and there is mythic. There is the familiar, and there is Seoul and Tokyo.

We begin by staying with family in South Korea, having learned over the years what a difference it makes to explore a new place—especially a new country—with someone who knows it. During the day, we hike into the hills above the city, then wander through the labyrinthine streets and always eat at some hole-in-the-wall place with character.





Globalization has made it easy to find your Frappuccino and Big Mac almost anywhere in the world. Plenty of folks want what feels familiar. I want back-alley grilled fish in a shop filled with locals. I want the wriggling, the fermented, the unusual—or why else come? To be fair, I want that in my hometown to some extent as well...but diving in to what the locals do and eat is exactly what I want to experience.

So we climb the hills and mountains and old walls that protected the Seoul of old, and we go to a bathhouse and my skin gets scrubbed off in sheets, and we sing until...well, until our time runs up. Slow mornings spent with nieces and nephews usher us into new days of exploring. And then, just as we begin to feel comfortable with “hello” and “thank you,” we leave Seoul for Tokyo, and our Etch A Sketch of understanding is all shaken up again. After being with family, it’s both exhilarating and lonely to be on our own. We wander through parks and shopping centers and quiet streets. I’m blown away by the size of it all. Los Angeles is over 500 square miles, with its different valleys and sub-cities

and sprawl, while Tokyo is 850 square miles. Words like “massive” fail to explain it.

On that scale, you could spend a lifetime and not know it all. On that scale, your mind must shrink it all to whichever street you are on, whichever park you are in. For something so large, it invites you inward in countless small ways. Safe to say, I’d love to go back and explore these countries outside their capitals. In fact, I intend to. I read somewhere that to be the kind of person who can be fully present when you travel—someone who enjoys the little details and passing conversations and trying new things—you need to cultivate that posture in your hometown. When I was young, we could hear the coal train passing in the night from miles away. Eventually I stopped hearing it. I’ve lived by the ocean and in the shadow of mountains, and it’s sad how quickly I can forget to look up and take in the view.

Certainly the novelty of a new place can make me pay more attention to details that eventually become mundane, but our lives become mundane only if we let them. ■

# THE BIKES WE RIDE

WORDS Jon Dale IMAGES Blaine Eldredge, Eli Pyke

We'd always wanted to build a mountain bike from the frame up. So when three frames and several boxes of parts started arriving, we couldn't help but get pretty excited.

The problem was where to start. A mountain bike seems like a pretty simple machine: a frame, two wheels, and a few pieces that tie it all together. But the truth is, all three of us were pretty intimidated by the process of taking a stack of brakes, cables, gears, and pedals and somehow building mountain bikes. Thankfully, our friend Devin offered to walk us step by step through the assembly from the frame up. And so, after a few days, lots of double-checking, and a visit to the local bike shop for a specialty tool, we were rolling three shiny new mountain bikes out the door.

There's something unique about riding a bike you've built yourself that's incredibly satisfying. The feeling of knowing how each individual component works and how to adjust it removes the nagging feeling in the back of your mind that when the inevitable happens and something stops working, you're powerless to fix it.

These are not the type of bikes you buy at your local big box store, and a lot has changed since the last time I purchased a new mountain bike many years ago.

One of the biggest changes is that modern mountain bikes have a 1X drivetrain. This means you just have a single ring in the front, and all the shifting is handled by the rear derailleur. This really simplifies both the mechanics of the drivetrain and the user experience. Instead of needing to figure out two shifters while riding, you only have to shift with one hand.

The second big change from earlier mountain bikes is the amount of travel in the suspension. These bikes have upwards of 5 inches of travel, front and rear, which makes a huge difference in the experience of riding on rough terrain. For those of you who don't know what that means, they're so much more forgiving than their predecessors. The third big advancement is the drop seat. If you've ever been riding downhill and felt like the seat was pushing you over the handlebars, you're going to love having a drop seat on your next bike. At the push of a lever on your handlebars, the seat post retracts, moving the seat out of your way for technical descents. We're pretty sure someone with male anatomy invented this particular wonder.

The three bikes we built are each unique. Many of the components we used are identical, but the end result is three very different personalities.





## IBIS HD3

### SPECS TO NOTICE

- RockShox Pike RCT3 160mm Fork
- RockShox Monarch RT3 Rear Shock
- RockShox Reverb Dropper Post

*The Ibis Mojo HD is the lightweight, carbon fiber, long travel bike of the bunch. A true enduro race bike. In enduro, the downhill is timed, the uphill is not. This bike is clearly designed to go fast downhill. The carbon fiber frame makes it incredibly responsive, and it's an absolute blast to ride.*



## DURANGO BLACKJACK

### SPECS TO NOTICE

- SRAM XX1 175mm Crankset
- SRAM X01 11-speed Rear Derailleur
- RockShox Monarch RT Rear Shock

*The Durango Bike Company Blackjack frame was handmade by skilled craftsmen right here in Colorado. It's also super fun to ride, but in a purist, burly kind of way. This thing feels super solid. Where the Ibis feels almost springy, the Durango feels tight. It's a beautiful bike in a handbuilt, I-can-see-the-welds kind of way. This is a bike you end up talking about with any bike person you meet on the trail.*



## TRANSITION SCOUT

### SPECS TO NOTICE

- SRAM 27.5 Rail 40 Wheelset
- Carbon Fiber SRAM Level Ultimate Hydraulic Brakes
- 740mm TRUVATIVE BOOBAR

*The Transition Scout finds itself sitting between the Ibis and the Durango. It's an amazing all-around trail bike. It's confidence-inspiring and sure-footed on any trail.*



*It's really about getting out there, no matter what you ride.  
But if you ever get a chance to build a bike of your own,  
we'd highly recommend it.*

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If you love the downhill and spending as much time with both wheels in the air as on the ground, you'll love the Ibis Mojo. If you want a very capable bike with an amazing story where you can go meet the guy who actually built it and ride your own bike out of the small workshop where it was built, the Durango fits the bill perfectly. If you'd like a great all-around mountain bike from an American company, a bike designed by passionate mountain bikers, you'll be really pleased with the Transition Scout.

As I write this, the days are short and most of the trails are covered with snow, so our rides are limited to quick escapes at lunch during a particularly warm week. We're stoked to get back on the trails again this summer, and as much as we're loving these new bikes, the truth is we spent many years riding junkers before we ever knew what a 1X drivetrain was. It's really about getting out there, no matter what you ride. But if you ever get a chance to build a bike of your own, we'd highly recommend it. With a friend like Devin, of course. ■





Photo by Mark Mitchell

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**HUNTER  
AINSLTER**

AS TOLD TO Blaine Eldredge

**And Sons:** *So, Hunter, how did you come to love the outdoor lifestyle?*

**Hunter Ainslie:** I was born and raised on the Big Island of Hawaii, which is one of the most beautiful places on the entire planet, my bias aside. It has 10 of the 14 climate zones of the world. We have desert, we have lush tropical rainforests, temperate rainforests, high deserts, all of that. At certain times of the year, we even have frozen tundra planes. And the Big Island is significantly larger than the other islands in the chain. The land mass is such that you can fit all of the other islands inside the Big Island. When I went away to college, people were like, “Don’t you get island fever? Don’t you get bored on the island?” And, I was like, “No way. I get bored in the city. I get bored in California. I don’t get bored in Hawaii, because there’s just so much to do here, whether you’re in the mountains or fishing three miles offshore. So being a young boy growing up here—you really can’t ask for anything better. Whenever I was out of class, I was outside.

**AS:** *Where did hunting enter the story?*

**HA:** My story of hunting is a lot different than most people’s. Most people get into hunting because their dad hunts. But my dad never hunted growing up. I couldn’t tell you the day I said, “You know, I want to go hunting.” There’s an instinctual thing when you’re a young boy; you think you’re the best predator out there. If you have a BB gun, you’re just looking at the first bird to walk in front of you; if you’re near an anthill, you’re ready to stick a stick in it. And so I was always kind of like a predator, not in a Oh, I want to go kill everything way, but from an instinctual side of being outside and chasing things. And a lot of the people I grew up with hunted. One day I said, “Hey, Dad, I want to go hunting.” And he was like, “Okay, let’s go.”

So we went. It was just an afternoon out of school—he pulled me out early, and we went up to a place called Parker Ranch.

Without getting into the history of the Hawaiian islands too deeply, Parker Ranch was one of the largest privately owned cow ranches in the United States. It’s massive. They basically controlled most of the island. They’ve since sold off chunks and become smaller, but you could go hunting there.

It was classic—you just drive down the road and hike this hill. Looking down, there’s a bunch of pigs. Pretty easy hunt by most standards. We got out and walked down, peeked over the ridge, and I leveled the .270 and shot my first pig. I was kind of hooked from there. As you know, that happens pretty easily.

**AS:** *Oh yeah, it happens fast. In my mind, the pig makes sense. But I know there are other big game species on the island. What are some of the things people don’t know about hunting on the islands?*

**HA:** The biggest thing is that there are no native large ungulates on the Hawaiian islands. So everything we hunt in the entire Hawaiian islands is introduced. There’s actually a controversial debate that says everything is non-native. That’s kind of a weird statement, because when the native Hawaiians arrived on the islands, they brought pigs with them. So technically, pigs have been here as long as Hawaiians, but one is considered native and one is considered invasive. But in either case, the pigs are everywhere.

Another thing is, there are no natural predators here. There are some wild dog populations, but other than that, there are no coyotes, no mountain lions, no bears, no snakes; there are just no predators. Everything here kind of runs wild. On the Big Island, we have pigs, we have feral sheep, and we have feral goats. But we also have different strains, like Mouflon sheep, which are a really cool, smaller-bodied sheep, and we get a lot of hybrid goats and hybrid sheep. We have the hybrid Mouflon—they’re called Black Hawaiian Sheep. We also have Spanish ibex goats—

**AS:** *Come on.*

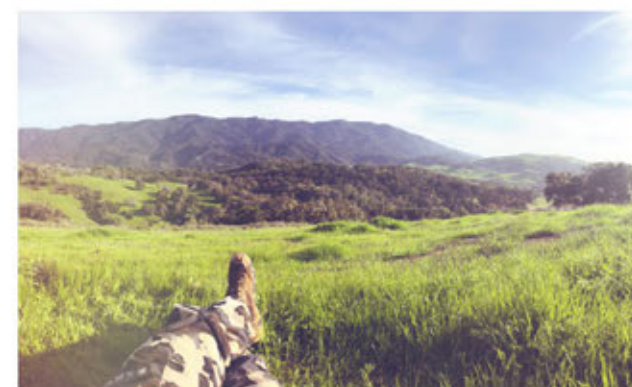
**HA:** Really. A Hawaiian ibex goat is what they’re called. So there’s all kinds of different strains of goats and sheep. You can hunt goats in a lava field at sea level, and then you can go hunt the alpine zone. I was up last weekend at 10,000, 11,000 feet in the alpine zone looking for sheep.

The coolest thing is that you can hunt year round. There’s no bag limits, no tags, no special seasons. Certain areas there are. Everything’s invasive. In the western states, hunting is one of the ways you can manage a wildlife population, on top of natural predators.

The interesting thing about hunting in Hawaii is there’s not a whole lot of public land, which is the total opposite of how it is in the western states. That’s something I really admire about the U.S., how much public land we have. Hawaii is not necessarily like that. There’s state land you can hunt, but the population in those areas is not well-managed, and it’s kind of depleted. The animals are smart, and they realize, Okay—if I just go over here, it’s a private ranch; nobody will hunt me. The best way to get into good hunting here is through private ranches. Or the military base. The base here has a pretty well-managed wildlife resource. If you do hunt on public land here, it’s pretty challenging. But that’s what I like.

**AS:** *When you think of success in hunting, what’s a story you think of? You can define success however you like.*

**HA:** Let’s see—there’s a major military base here, and they have a lot of land, and they open up certain pieces of the land to bow hunting. Archery only. It’s pretty competitive to get a spot. About a month after I moved back to the island, I got a spot. I got in a gate and hiked in about three miles. My plan was, I’m just gonna do what I know how to do: hike to a knob and look through binoculars. And I ended up finding a herd of sheep really fast. There was a pretty small ram in the group that I thought would be a good eating ram.



Top photo by Andy Busch; Bottom three photos by Hunter Ainslie himself.



So I put the stock on them. I had them at 15 yards for 20 minutes, just eating. There were bushes in front of me, so I didn't really have a clear shooting lane. I just sat there for a long time, waiting for them to step out. Perfect wind—I could smell them. I had an arrow nocked, I was ready to go, and then the wind swirled once, and I knew it: they looked up and bolted. I was so discouraged. You know how you get close and you're on a stalk, and you're sitting in the most awkward position, with your legs falling asleep, and you think, Okay, this is gonna happen. This is gonna happen. And then it doesn't. I was so deflated.

I grabbed my stuff and started walking down the road, but then I was like, You know what? I'm gonna see if I can run around and cut off in the direction they were going. I went around and up over this berm, and there was another herd. Right there, on the other side of the berm—30 yards away—I saw this ram with a broken-off horn. All I could see was his left side. Sheep and goats are different from deer and elk in that they don't have antlers, they have horns. So deer and elk lose their antlers every year, but sheep and goats don't—they just continue to grow. So when they break off, they're broken for good. They're called atypicals. For me, it's perfect: you shoot an atypical for population control.

I was stoked. This was a nice-looking old ram. I got within 20 yards, and he was feeding, and there were two ewes right in front of him. They looked up and saw me. I had a staring match with them for, like, 20 minutes, and then they went and fed, and he was just perfect: broadside at 20 yards. I drew my bow.

And my sight was all messed up. My rear peep was just bent all kinds of sideways.

**AS:** *Dude.*

**HA:** Exactly. You go through five minutes where you're like, Okay, I'm so close. I'm 20 yards. I can kind of look down the shaft of my

arrow and put it right ... no. That would be an unethical shot. I ended up letting down. There's no way to do that without making your arrow rattle around like the loudest noise in the world when you're 20 yards from a ram. But I let down and it rattled, and he looked up at me and started moving away. Not sprinting away, but moving away pretty quick. So I fixed the peep, drew back, and he turned towards me. I grunted, and he put his head up, and I stuck him right in the shoulder.

When he turned around and all I could see was his back hip just covered in blood, I was like, His back hip? That's weird. It was really bizarre. I pushed after him, but he ended up expiring 20 yards over the hill. It turned out I had hit him in the shoulder, and it passed through his entire body and came out his back leg.

I hadn't seen his other side, though. It turned out his other side was a nice, beautiful, full-curl horn. He was this really cool old ram. And he tasted great. That was probably the most recent successful one, just because of the whole story: blowing the herd before, then finding another, and then the whole scenario with the peep.

**AS:** *Amazing. Such a cool example of everything coming together: knowledge of the animal, ethics, fair chase, and the cherry on top of harvesting an animal.*

**HA:** Right.

**AS:** *How did you cook him?*

**HA:** My mom loves lamb burgers, and she's always bragging about the lamb burgers she gets from the farmer's market. They're super delicious, so I was like, "Well, let's do a blind taste test. I'll grind up my mutton, and we'll put them next to your lamb, and you tell me which one you like better." So we made burgers out of him, and my mom ended up choosing the one I shot.

**AS:** *Awesome. What about the ocean? Obviously you grew up with it, so you have a certain familiarity. What are you discovering now?*

**HA:** It's similar to the hunting. In high school, me and my best friend, Mark, had a tiny 13-foot Boston Whaler. We put every penny into it and made it this really cool little fishing boat. We used to go and catch Onos (wahoo) on it, and Ahi (yellowfin tuna) and stuff like that. We ended up selling it when we were both in college. He moved back after he graduated. I was in San Diego, and he found this boat on Craigslist nearby. I went and looked at it for him, and I put it on a boat and shipped it to Hawaii. So now we have this really killer 20-foot Boston Whaler fishing boat.

What we've gotten into lately is night fishing. It's funny—you think you know everything there is to know—which is the most ignorant thing to think, but we all think it—when you grow up in the ocean. I'm like, "I know just about all there is to know about what kind of animals live close to the Big Island," and all of that. And then you go at night, and it's a totally different world. You see the fish with the lights on their head, and you see things that are four feet long but an inch thick and look like a sea monster with giant teeth. It's been really cool to see that. You think you're so familiar with a place, and then you see it after the sun goes down, and it's just totally different.

Anyway, in the summers, the water is in the mid-80s, and a lot of the tuna come in really close to shore, so one of the fishing methods we use is called Ika Shibi. You go at night. You have your sea anchor, your parachute, and you hang a big light under your boat. It attracts phytoplankton, and that basically creates a micro-food chain under your boat, and then the squid come in and you catch little squid on squid jigs. Then you put the squid on your big reel and send them down. And then the tuna come along. Hopefully.

OPPOSITE PHOTOS TOP-TO-BOTTOM: Photos by Hunter Ainslie, Hunter Ainslie again, Katie Winkenhower



*Photo by Luke Mitchell*



Above photo by Mark Mitchell. Opposite photo by Kaikea Nakachi.

**AS:** Same question. How do you like to cook your tuna?

**HA:** Oh, all kinds of ways. If we catch a lot of big fish, we'll sell most of them, because anybody can get a commercial fishing license here. But when we catch a few fish here and there, I've been really into using my Traeger and smoking fish. And then, of course, I make poke and sashimi and stuff like that.

**AS:** All right. One more. If you had to choose a few hunting experiences to encapsulate hunting the Big Island, which hunts would you pick?

**HA:** Hmm. Well, one of the really cool things is to get up to high altitude to chase animals. In certain places, there are really incredible populations of Mouflon sheep. Mouflon sheep are small-bodied animals, but they have these massive, swooping horns, and they taste delicious. And they're just really cool to watch, because they're skittish and their hearing is incredible. You have to really be on it to get close. I've yet to really experience a true archery Mouflon hunt, and that's something I want to do.

Second, a lot of the local Hawaiians here hunt pigs with dogs, and it's a totally different way of hunting. But it's fascinating. I've always been intrigued by bird dogs and squirrel dogs—how they find and chase and corner animals. Over here they don't shoot the pig; the guys will actually go in and just knife the pig. It's a really different way of hunting. It's extremely raw. But it's a part of the culture here, and it's how a lot of guys feed their families.

Third. Not on the Big Island, but in Hawaii, we have axis deer. Axis deer are incredible. If you ask most of the big game hunters who've done a fair bit of traveling, they'll say that axis deer is the best tasting game meat, even over elk. And, like animals on the Big Island, they have no natural predators. On Lanai, a few islands over, axis deer outnumber people—I think it's 10 to one. Axis deer came from Asia. Their natural predator is the Bengal tiger, so their fast-twitch reflexes are just incredible. You'll shoot an arrow at them, and as soon as you release the arrow, the deer is 20 yards in the other direction. And you're like, How did I miss by 20 yards? The deer are so quick. It's so fun. That's one of my goals—to get you guys to come out here and plan a hunt like that. ■



# THE GOODNESS OF MARRIAGE

WORDS Blaine Eldredge

Just over Stevens Pass in the North Cascades, my wife and I shoved the nose of our station wagon into a lovely freestone creek. It was not the worst of our setbacks: we'd already slid, sideways, down 15 feet of snowy road and rammed the wheels in muddy dikes.

Cake decorations are not so well established. We knew, though, that a mountain lake lay six miles farther ahead. Years before, she'd seen a twin prop floatplane land on 100 yards of water to rescue a backpacker who'd had a heart attack. Some things you have to see to disbelieve, and I wanted a look.

This happened early in our marriage, on a road trip to an engagement party. A good friend meant to pop the question. He lived several hundred miles away, and Em, knowing the truth, asked, "Do you want to be there?"

I did. So, we packed up and canvassed 16 hours in two days. It didn't need to be so long, but there were stops: a double-track road to a rumored waterfall, lunch on a camp stove, an ongoing quest for the best burrito made on a camp stove.

The mountains, though, were a significant addition. We knew in advance, with all the talk of marriage the days would hold, we'd need to be in a space that reflects the thing marriage is.

I married young and fast, like a snow goose, I was told. Young is perspectival. Younger than Abraham but older than the intended audience of the Song of Solomon. Still, I married, and so encountered, like all people moving towards marriage, a familiar phalanx of admonition: doubt, pain, strong and dire warnings. Marriage is, it seems, like marathons or healthy eating, a kind of purifying sadism. Take the admonition as a whole, and it seems the best you can hope for is to endure, to know God in your suffering, and to be sanctified.

Hearing this, I do wonder why there aren't more married ascetics.

I'm sure most of us have run into this kind of thing. Sure, there's enthusiasm. But there are whole choirs of warning. The trouble is when we overemphasize suffering we curb dreaming. Marriage is a staggering undertaking, yes. And. It is a rich and good thing.

Once, I conspired to spare half a pint of ice cream for another day. It's a standard procedure—I'm a consummate saver. So I hid it. Emilie, clearing the table, asked if I'd put the ice cream away. I attempted a shrug, and she bolted to the kitchen and found it, first try, removable paneling and all. Impressive stuff.

Or, once, she and I drove to the mountains looking for meteors. We lay in sleeping bags on the station wagon roof. Because she'd buried her face in down, it's not surprising she didn't hear the unmistakable bear-like noises in the woods, and so I forgave her laughing at my anti-bear shouts. Still her laughter cleared out every bear, deer, and beetle within a six-mile radius. No question two people versus a bear is greater than one.

And yes. For all the moments of joy, there are hard correlatives. For every evening under starlight, as Eliot calls them, there are harder nights. Spiritual battles. The slow death of my flesh. The loss of dear friends and siblings. There are plenty of moments when we'd believe marriage is finally a marathon. And sure. Okay. It requires strength beyond imagining.

But this, too—the only hope for marriage is that Jesus be himself, because there's a deeper secret going on. Not one of us will make it through on our own. Not one of us can love our spouse as we were designed to do. That, too, is the point. How have we come to believe it would be better to remain as we are? Marriage is miraculous. It dregs up my history. It shines appalling like on my misconceptions, flesh, sin. So many things enjoying sweet and deadly anonymity find themselves exposed.





Here's a personal example. I believe, on a regular basis, that the way to save our life is to save our life. What I mean is this: that the way to be a great man is to come through.

To seek, to strive, to find, and not to yield (Eliot again). Worse, I believe that I can arrange for it all, and I believe that I have to. It's a deep and dangerous belief. And it's wrong. It's connected to a series of common disappointments, downturns where it seems that if we don't come through, there's no strength behind us. I mean Jesus can be trusted with the whole earth, sure, but that's the climax. Here in everyday life it's us against entropy.

It's not true. Marriage is set against that conviction, and my unbelief. Living with another person is often extremely inconvenient. Hard to go on a bike ride when my wife's in tears, hard to believe I'm pretty much an awesome dude when my wife asks for prayer and I feel frustrated about it.

But.

But. That wonderful conjunction God and marriage share. Would you like to know a secret? Here it is: if you cling to your life, you will lose it. If you let your life go, you will save it.

Marriage is about our becoming. Not just becoming sanctified or become long-suffering. Marriage is a place in which we can become more joyful, more compassionate, more tender, stronger. It's the method that so surprises me. In marriage, I get to give my life away. I get to do so without expecting that my wife will ransom her life or mine.

An example: one evening in grad school, I was behind, like I usually was, so we set aside a Saturday so I could work. Oh, the anticipation of some uncontested time. In the morning, I woke up and found already sitting in bed. The tattered edges of a rough night were all around her. It's a sight that sets off an alarm for many husbands. I knew she needed me. My attention. My prayer. My kindness. I knew that if I chose to work instead I was lying. I'd be pretending work was my primary aim. It's not. Loving this woman is. Even so my heart sank. But then, in the nick of time, came the still, small voice. I will save your life, it said. God meant, I will bring you the relief you need. The time you need. The life you need. It was a reminder, from God, of who I am becoming.

Em said, "I had a rough night." I said, "I know." "I'm sorry about your work," she said, when we'd started in to the processing. "It's ok," I got to say.

And mean it. It's a tiny example, a few sacrificed hours. Even so it was hours I could give away without holding the cost against her, expecting her to feel contrite, expecting the world to reward me, etc. In that, I had an opportunity to trust Jesus to be himself: rescuer, resurrector, champion, warrior, redeemer, sacrifice. I could trust him with my life by not protecting it. It's a vital skill. Marriage asks me for everything. How could I give it away if I didn't believe Jesus was trustworthy, and could give it back?

Marriage is a rich and good thing. We play word games falling asleep. We belly laugh over our daughter. We pray, increasingly, together, and we argue over the economic efficiency of cereal grains (cost/meal difference ended up being 16 cents). The life we give away is multiplied.

It's why ascetics do not often get married. They know better than many otherwise insightful people. Marriage is a space of rich joy, of life abundant. ■

## GEAR GUIDE

DRESS TO ~~IMPRESS~~

*Be Slightly More Useful*

First things first: we don't have any connection to these brands, and none of them is paying to be here. Second: it's no secret we think most guys should live slightly\* more physical lives. Chop wood. Change their own brakes. Grapple with the elements. Because that's true, we're often looking to wear stuff that's slightly more durable. See, it's true you can't really beat Carhartt/Dickies/Walls, etc., and that's fine, when you're working—I wore Dickies while building the shed recorded in this issue. But I also write, show up to church, meet guys for coffee or beer, and have a wife who told me Carhartts seldom make her feel romantic. Given that, and my desire to be slightly more prepared to be slightly more useful—without drawing attention to or embarrassing myself, and also looking impressive to my lady—we're always looking for a truly decent shirt, coat, pair of pants.

*\*By "slightly," we mean committedly, increasingly. This means establishing regular rhythms to love the real. Eat your lunch outdoors. Buy some binos and practice watching wildlife. Take more walks. Read a nature book.*





**AMERICAN GIANT AMERICAN PULLOVER HOODIE**

Last year I got curious and started looking for the best hoodie. That's a hefty superlative. Basically, "best" depends on what you want your hoodie for, but there are two acknowledged leaders: the 10-Year Hoodie by Flint and Tinder, and American Giant's Pullover Hoodies. I snagged the American Pullover and it's truly excellent. Heavy and durable, but also—dare I say?—stylish. Notable features include the fact it's not fleece, so the inside doesn't pill. Cozy forever.

**TELLASON STOCK COVERALL JACKET**

Denim is a strange universe. I stumbled on to the company while looking for a do-it-all jacket, and while I don't actually own one, I've held one, and it's tough, thick, and full of unexpected but practical pockets.



**OUTERKNOWN S.E.A. JEANS**

Instant favorite. I like Outerknown a lot, though I don't know how to surf and I don't live near the ocean. Thing is, like Patagonia, Outerknown maintains applause-worthy practices. These jeans are from the leading sustainable denim factory on the planet. Outerknown says these jeans are guaranteed for life: "If they bust or wear out, we'll repair or replace them for free." Hard to know exactly what that means, but it's cool.

**AMERICAN GIANT HIGHWAY SHIRT**

Sturdy, timeless, standout. Important features include the triple-stitched seams and how good it looks. Strong enough to chop wood in (which I did) and comfortable enough to go to work in.





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BLUNDSTONE BOOTS

Big perk: these are “in” right now. It’s like people have forgotten Blundstone boots are just a sturdy Chelsea boot that’s been around forever. I actually own a pair, and they’re tough, comfy, reliable, and (for now) cool.



.....  
PATAGONIA® IRON FORGE HEMP CANVAS CHORE COAT

Patagonia has a whole line of work clothes. And they’re really tough. Like, really. Supposedly, their 12.9-ounce Iron Forge Hemp® canvas is 25% more durable than conventional duck canvas. That’s probably true, but I haven’t used mine for 25% more time than the Carhartt jacket I took from Luke, so I don’t know for sure. A word on this: this jacket is extremely functional. That’s a good thing. It also means that it doesn’t sacrifice functionality to look cool. So the collar looks a little long and the jacket fits loose. Bear that in mind.



.....  
FLINT AND TINDER MILL PANT

For a while my favorite pants were made by Taylor Stitch—the chore pant—but they’ve been discontinued (it seems). Flint and Tinder to the rescue. The Mill Pants really are tough, and, they’re styled so they can slide under the radar at work (in many places).



# THE ONE-MINUTE PAUSE

WORDS John Eldredge IMAGES Richard Seldomridge



I think a lion came through last night. Our horses are really amped up this morning, racing back and forth across their paddock, necks arched, tails high, snorting. Something put them on high alert.

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**M**y wife and I currently have two horses. One is a paint (sometimes called a pinto), a beautiful brown and white spotted horse with white mane and black tail. If you saw the western classic *Silverado*, Kevin Costner rode a paint in that film. The Sioux loved the look of paints so much they would literally “paint” their ordinary horses to look spotted. Our other is a solid brown bay, black mane and tail, with a coat so rich and glossy it looks like a beaver pelt. We used to have eight horses all together, but over time, as our sons moved away, we trimmed our herd down to a more manageable size. Still, sometimes caring for even two feels like more than we’ve got room for.

Horses are powerful, magnificent creatures, but they don’t see themselves that way: in their internal world they feel vulnerable. They are, after all, “prey” animals like elk and deer, who developed their view of the world and survival skills on the great plains of North America and Europe, running from large animals trying to eat them. (In the late Pleistocene, the plains were hunting grounds for huge lions bigger than an African lion, several types of cheetah, terrible giant ground sloths, dire wolves, voracious short-faced bears, and a host of other high-octane predators.) Horses learned their nervous ways in a very rough playground; there’s a whole lot of “flight” in their “fight or flight” response.

In summer, we keep our ponies out at our cabin in the western Colorado sage. There are all sorts of predators out here: packs of coyotes, black bears, bobcats, lynx, and mountain lions. Lots of lions. I had

a horse blow up under me once because he simply smelled lion. There was no lion there, but the males mark their territories with their scent. The horse I was riding got one whiff and exploded, leaving me behind in a pile.

Predators hunt under cover of darkness; from the horse’s point of view, nighttime calls for high vigilance. Come morning, we often need to settle them down before we attempt a ride, so we groom them and do some “ground work.” At some point in their connection with us—once they’re feeling safe and secure—they let out this wonderful sigh. Out of those big nostrils comes a big, deep, long sigh. Their muscles relax; their heads lower. They have switched off hyper-vigilance mode. I love it when they do that; you’re looking for that sigh when you’re working with horses.

We humans do that sigh, too, when we feel settled and in a good place.

I’ll bet you’ve experienced that sigh yourself. You get home from a long day, kick off your shoes, grab something to drink, maybe a bag of chips, collapse into your favorite chair, pull a comfy throw over you. Then comes that wonderful sigh. Sometimes we experience it in moments of beauty—sitting on the beach at sunset or pausing by a lake so still it looks like glass, we are comforted by the beauty, and we sigh. Everything seems right. Sometimes the sigh comes when we recall a deep truth precious to us. We read a verse reminding us how much God loves us, and we lean back and sigh as our soul settles into the comfort of that truth. I did so just this morning.

It’s a good sign, however it comes. It means we are coming down from hyper-vigilance mode ourselves.

## Fight or Flight

For we, too, live in a world that triggers our souls into vigilance far too often. The complexity of modern life is mind boggling—the constantly changing social terrain of what is appropriate, the level of trauma in people’s lives we navigate. The typical sounds of a city trigger adrenaline responses in us, all day long. You are confronted on a daily basis with more information than your grandparents had to deal with in a year (!). And it’s not just information; you are confronted with the suffering of the entire planet, in minute detail, delivered to you on your mobile device daily. Add to this the pace at which most of us are required to live our lives. It all leaves very little room for that sigh and the experiences that bring it.

We live in the emotional equivalent of horses on the great plains during the late Pleistocene.

And I can’t tell whether my soul is more in fight or flight this morning. But I do know this: I don’t like the pace I’m running at. I didn’t sleep well last night (one of the many consequences of living in a hyper-charged world). So when I finally did conk out, I overslept, woke up late, and have felt behind on everything ever since.

I rushed through breakfast, dashed out the door to get to some meetings, and now I’m rattled. I don’t like the feeling, and I don’t like the consequences. When I’m rattled, I’m easily irritated with people. I don’t have the patience to listen to what my wife was trying to say this morning. I find it hard to hear from God, and I don’t like feeling untethered from him.

I notice now in my rattled state that I want to eat something fatty and sugary; I want something that’s going to make me feel better now. When we’re unsettled, unnerved, unhinged, it’s human nature to seek some sense of equilibrium, a sense of stability, and I find myself wondering—how many addictions begin here, with just wanting a little comfort? Get out of the rattled place and soothe ourselves with “a little something”?

We live in a mad world. So much stimulation rushes at us with such unrelenting fury that we are overstimulated most of the time. Things that nourish us—a lingering conversation, a bike ride, time to savor both making and then enjoying dinner—these are being lost at an alarming rate; we simply don’t have room for them. Honestly, I think most people live their daily lives along a spectrum from slightly rattled to completely fried as their normal state of being.

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*“We live in the emotional equivalent of horses on the great plains during the late Pleistocene.”*

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Late morning, I finally do what I should have from the beginning: I pause, get quiet, settle down. I give myself permission, a little breathing room, to come back to myself and to God. My breathing returns to normal (I didn’t even notice I was holding my breath).

A little bit of space begins to clear around me, and in that space I know I can find God. Suddenly, somewhere outside, someone has just fired up a leaf blower—one of the great pariahs of the human race, the Genghis Khan of all domestic tranquility. My body tenses, the stress returns, and because I’m paying attention, I can see for myself how the constant stimulation of our chaotic world causes us to live in a state of hyper-vigilance.

Notice—are your muscles relaxed right now, or tense? Is your breathing deep and relaxed, or short, shallow breaths? Are you able to read this magazine leisurely, or do you feel you need to get through it quickly? Thus we look to all our “comforters” to calm down. But I know my salvation is not in the frappuccino, fudge, beer, chew. So I close the window against the screams of the leaf blower and return to a practice that has become an absolute lifesaver for me:

## The One-Minute Pause

I simply take 60 seconds to be still and let everything go.

As I enter the pause, I begin with release. I let it all go—the meetings, what I know is coming next, the fact I’m totally behind on Christmas shopping, all of it. I simply let it go. I pray, Jesus, I give everyone and everything to you. I keep repeating it until I feel like I am actually releasing and detaching. I give everyone and everything to you, God. All I’m trying to accomplish right now is a little bit of soul-space. I’m not trying to fix anything or figure anything out. I’m not trying to release everything perfectly or permanently. That takes a level of maturity most of us haven’t found. But I can let it go for 60 seconds. (That’s the brilliance of the pause—all we are asking ourselves to do is let go for 60 seconds.) And as I do, even as I say it out loud—I give everyone and everything to you, Jesus—my soul cooperates a good bit. I’m settling down.

I even sigh that good sigh.

Then I ask for more of God: Jesus—I need more of you; fill me with more of you, God. Restore our union; fill me with your life.

You would be surprised what one minute can do for you. Even more so as you get practiced at it. Honestly, you can do this pause nearly anytime, anywhere—in your car, on the train, after you get off your phone. I know it seems small, but we have to start somewhere. This pause is accessible; it’s doable.

As David wrote in the Psalms, “*I have calmed and quieted myself*” (131:2). Or, “*I have cultivated a quiet heart*” (TM). I wonder how many people in your office, your gym, on your daily commute could say they have cultivated a quiet heart? Broad is the path that leads to destruction, and many there are who travel it. What we assume is a normal lifestyle is insanity to the God-given nature of our heart and soul.

The desert fathers were a ragtag group of courageous souls, followers of Jesus who fled the madness of their world to seek a life of beauty and simplicity with God in the silent desert. For they saw the world as “a shipwreck from which every man has to swim for their life.” And think of it: they had no cell phones, no internet, no media per se, not one automobile, Starbucks, or leaf blower. The news that came their way was local; they did not carry the burdens of every community in the world. People lived at the pace of 3 miles per hour (!). They walked everywhere they went. Yet they felt the world sucking the life out of them, and they decided to do something about it. And so we who live in a far more insane hour, we who want to find a better life in God, would want to adopt a few practices that get us out of the madness and into a more settled way of living. Gosh—even living less rattled would be a fabulous beginning.

## Gentle Reminders

We live most of our year in suburbia, in a small valley on the edge of our city. Years before suburban development crept in, a convent was established here by the Sisters of St. Francis. The abbey is a medley of beautiful sandstone buildings scattered through rolling grounds of pine and juniper. The sisters have the most lovely practice of solemnly ringing church bells first thing in the morning at 6 a.m. These aren’t the raucous bells that follow a wedding; these are slow, methodic

rings, a call to prayer. They ring again in the evening, at 6 p.m. I love the sound of old bells; they echo through our little valley like a summons out of the past. A call to prayer, or to silence. I decided to accept the call myself and let them be reminders to me to take the One-Minute Pause.

A few years ago, we took up the practice in our offices. At 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. every day, monastery “bells” ring out as a call to the staff to stop what we are doing, let it all go, and center ourselves in Christ again. I instituted the “corporate” practice because I noticed that during my day, I simply go from one thing to another to another, without pause, morning till night. I finish a phone call, and make another. I complete one email, and plow through a dozen more. Before I can get through my inbox, I go find someone I need a meeting with. There is no pause in my day. No sacred space at all. If God is going to get in, he’s practically got to force his way. And I’ve noticed—God doesn’t like to shout. He doesn’t like to be forced to gymnastics to get our attention, no more than you like having to jump up and down to get your friend or spouse to notice you’re in the room.

So I have seized the One-Minute Pause as my sword against the madness. After I finish a phone call, before I start something else, I simply pause. When I pull into work in the morning and when I pull into my driveway in the evening, I pause. I literally lay my head down on my steering wheel and just pause, for one minute. It sounds rather simple to be a practice that brings me more of God, but it’s very effective. Because what it does is open up soul space, breathing room. And God is right there. Over time, the cumulative effect is even better. It is reshaping the pace of my day. It is training my soul to find God as an experience more common than rare. I feel better. I’m treating people more kindly.

## Giving it a Try

The One-Minute Pause can be used in many ways: for prayer or silence, to find your heart again, to enjoy a moment of beauty. For now, here is a way to start:

Pick one or two moments in your day when you know you are least likely to be interrupted. One of those for me is when I pull into the driveway at the end of the day. I don’t have to leap from the car; I can take a moment. I turn the engine off, sometimes lay my head down on the steering wheel, and just breathe. I try to let go of the day.

It will probably help if you set your phone alarm to remind you. Pick a notification sound that is gracious, not adrenaline producing (“Bell,” or better, “Silk.” Not “Suspense” or “News Flash” for you iPhone users). You are not sounding an alarm; you are inviting your soul to a gracious pause. ■





# HOW TO GET YOUR INNOCENCE BACK

BY Sam Jolman

Trail running has become my guilty pleasure lately. As a dad of two little boys, adventure comes in short bursts. Whatever I can get to the quickest, the better. So throwing on a pair of running shoes and busting out my front door has been my wilderness.

Someone had the brilliant idea of carving out an open space right in the middle of suburbia, right across the street from my neighborhood. It's called Ute Valley Park, and it's actually not a park at all—unless you're mountain biking or running. Think gorgeous, flowing land with ridges and beautiful canyons. This is Colorado, after all.

A couple weeks ago, I extracted myself from our morning routine with the boys and jogged out our front door towards the park. It was an absolutely gorgeous morning. I took the route that had me climb a ridge right in the first mile. Go, lungs, go.

As I made my way along the top, I was stopped by the sudden sound of a couple bucks locking antlers. "Sudden" sounds dramatic, I know—and it was. Somehow in my focus on the trail, I had missed three giant bucks off to my left, now only 20 feet from where I'd stopped.

They could not have cared less that I stood there. These guys are used to suburbanites. They actually find us quite safe compared to the hunter types just a few miles up into the mountains.

I run with my phone in my hand. Yes, it's to track mileage. But honestly, it's more because when I'm running, I'm also beauty hunting (thanks, Morgan, for the idea). If something captures my eye—a bend in the trail, the light on a pine tree, three giant bucks locking antlers—I'm learning to stop and behold the beauty I see. A camera helps train me to do that. It's a means of practicing awe.

So I started taking a little video, then snapped a few photos as these bucks played around.

Right in the middle of the video, I heard something behind me. I turned the camera ever so slowly and caught another buck, their fourth buddy, nibbling dry grass just off the path. That put him about 10 feet from me.

I may as well have been a tree to this guy. He was working his way towards his brothers across the path as calm as could be. It was all amazing. Except another runner up the path decided to crash our party. This guy had his two little dogs out for a stroll on jangling leashes. That proved a little too much for my newfound friends.

The lone buck finished his crossing a little quicker right in front of me. We were now five feet apart. Five feet! I swear to you I could have touched him. And once they were joined up, they bounded off into the rising sun.

After my run, still moved by the experience, I Instagrammed that lone buck and his buddies and posted the photos to Facebook. Come on, you know this was worthy of that. And sure enough, my friends thought it was pretty cool.

In this internet world, that's where this whole thing should end right? I'm supposed to move on and find something else to "like." Yesterday is so last year. But now, even a month later, I still can't get over that experience.

And I'm actually trying not to move on.

Dan Allender has said, "Innocence is the ability to be in awe." And so I've been working on practicing awe as often as I can. Because I really like my innocence, and I want every bit of it back.

*Loss of innocence is really the loss of an open heart. We lose our openness to life, to people, to dreams, to desire.*



## Your Innocence is Lost

We all eventually lose our innocence along the way. In whole or in part, in a moment or the subtle erosion of a lifetime. A thousand windy days bend a tree. It can also be cut down.

So how did you lose your innocence? What are the stories? Some of them you know, I am sure. They are flashing back even now. Some you've forgotten because they seemed so inconsequential.

We don't lose our innocence by what happens to us. Seriously. You can experience or witness a lot of dark and broken things, go through hell itself, and still have an innocent heart. Innocence is not naivety. Loss of innocence is really the loss of an open heart. We lose our openness to life, to people, to dreams, to desire.

Our ability to be in the present and feel what we feel gets compromised. We may still laugh, we may still play, but it's just ... less carefree, less authentic. It takes more energy to get our hearts into life.

Or we become jaded. We laugh a cynical laugh. Nothing shocks us, nothing surprises us. Or so we say. Because we're trying to not be a fool anymore. We lose our innocence when the realm of evil convinces us we were fools for giving the world our open heart in the first place. That if only we weren't so carefree, we could have stopped that betrayal or abuse or ... fill in the blank.

I think most of the time lost innocence looks like boredom. Nothing really moves us anymore.



## How to Get It Back

Which is why Dan's words have been so haunting to me. I want my innocence back. I want my open heart back.

So I'm practicing the presence of those deer. Every so often I get out that video and watch it. Just to enjoy it again. Just to let my heart practice wonder and awe. To let my heart remember its innocence.

Which brings us full circle. What exactly is awe?

A group of California researchers scripted this official definition for you: "Awe is an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that transcend current frames of reference." Say what? Awe is that whole-body experience of being in the presence of something grand, something outside our normal experience, something transcendent. Awe is the experience of wonder. Think mind blown. Basically, any time you verbally or bodily say, "Wow!" (Although you may just be rendered speechless.)

My friend John Blase calls it being "slack-jawed." I like that best.

Seeing U2 live with 50,000 others. Watching a little baby sleep. Sex with your committed lover.

## Drop Your Jaw

These same researchers who defined awe for you above did a little study on awe. They discovered that within a few minutes of sitting in a beautiful grove of trees, people became more generous, more caring and empathic, more connected and aware of the larger world around them to which they belong.

In short, when people experience awe, they love more. Simply put, they become open hearted.

Watching a groom fall apart as his bride walks down the aisle. Hearing a bull elk bugle in the middle of the woods. The sight of a sugar maple aflame in autumn red. A really good steak.

"Awesome" is the word we used to use for these moments. But awesome is a tired word these days, thrown about willy-nilly to describe just about anything we like. At one point it captured only grandeur goodness. That's what we mean here.

You should know you can have awe for terrible things too. Awful means "awe full." Now you see it. A lot of horrific things can take our breath away. The Paris attacks are awful. They left me speechless. I felt deep, cutting awe in seeing the burning homes during the wildfires in our town a few years back. Watching the video of those firefighters who charged back into the towers on 9/11 did the same.

Awe makes your heart alive again. Which is why you can be in awe of the beautiful and the terrible and still remain alive. Let me say it again: innocence is not naivety.

And without exertion. Or, should we say, with the exertion of wonder.

Awe makes us innocent again.

So I invite you to join me in looking for moments to practice being in awe. Put yourself in front of beauty, grandeur, wonderful things. And when confronted with the truly terrible, let it leave you speechless.

Let's get our innocence back, shall we? ■





# JUMPING SHIP

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

I graduated college less than a year ago and quickly learned what a B.A. is worth (not much) and what kind of work is available in a town with a very sluggish economy (even less). As if that weren't enough stress, I also got married, and my wife stepped into a Master's program and job position that require us to live on the university's campus. I was feeling fairly schooled at facing the proverbial fork in the road when a new type of decision-making reared its head:

## When is it time to bail?

I suppose there are spiritual elites so completely in tune with the status of their souls they don't need help knowing when things are headed downhill. That is not me, and I have a feeling it's not most of us, either. I began to see the signs, slowly at first. I noticed I was pursuing counterfeit joy (also known as medicating or anesthetizing). Personally, that means whiskey and television; if I'm drinking a bottle of bourbon and watching 100 episodes a week, I can be pretty sure I'm not doing well.

Whatever "signs" work for you, the point is to know whether or not you are thriving, surviving, or deteriorating. Jesus gave us a pretty handy barometer when he said, "You shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20). If the effect, or fruit, of your work or community, your city or school is the decay of your heart and soul, even your body, a decision is necessary.

I decided to quit the only job I seemed able to get, and my wife decided to leave her Master's program. We didn't make these decisions rashly, in a moment of despair; nor did we make them because brighter, more illustrious opportunities presented themselves.

Quite the contrary. These decisions were made with no known alternative, no safety net. Yet they needed to be made.

My wife's depression resurfaced and was getting worse by the month. I hardly saw her because my work hours were the complete opposite of hers. Here in the first year of our marriage, both of us were in a serious dive, and the relationship itself was paying the price. We had to make a critical decision. Here's what we learned.

**Step One:** Set a deadline. You don't want to force or rush a critical decision and end up making a reactionary one. Nor do you want to let fear keep you from being decisive. The point of a deadline is to figure out if the hardship of a situation is simply a "season" or a reality.

**Step Two:** Assess the nature of the suffering. It might be part of your maturing through adversity. Many of our peers have left a position or a city too early, just because they encountered a little resistance. Life has challenges, and it's important we learn endurance. However, if a "challenge" is costing you your marriage, your relationship with God, that challenge is not doing you good. I felt a lot of guilt when I decided to leave my job. Part of me felt like a quitter who couldn't handle life. However, the severity of the cost of staying was louder than my guilt.

**Step Three:** Get some input. Run the "data" by wise people. Be willing to hear what they have to say, especially if it goes against your "fight or flight" reactions.

Fear can really mess with critical decisions. I did not leave my job for another. By leaving her program, my wife and I will lose our housing situation. We had to trust that Jesus' heart for us is good. Finances, security, community—he knows we need these things.

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matt. 6:31-33).




Seeking first his Kingdom is the point. Deciding to jump ship might be the biggest step of faith you can take; it sure has been for us. To stay in a truly harmful job, program, or city for money or security is to make an idol of those things.

I'll be honest—there's something a little depressing about putting time, energy, and stress into a decision that feels like moving backwards in some ways. But facing and naming why we must leave one situation makes it very clear what to look for in choosing another. Seeking first his Kingdom is the point. Deciding to jump ship might be the biggest step of faith you can take; it sure has been for us. To stay in a truly harmful job, program, or city for money or security is to make an idol of those things.



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**READ FULL CARD**

**1. SET A DEADLINE**

**1. DON'T RUSH**  **TALK**  **SET A DATE** 

**2. ASSESS THE NATURE OF THE SUFFERING**

**DISCOMFORT? \***  **THE HEART/ LIFE WITH GOD! \*** 

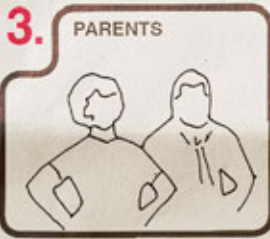
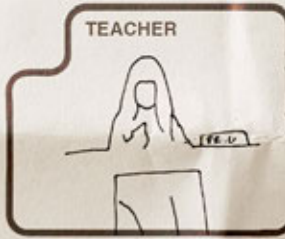

"WE HAVEN'T EATEN OUT IN MONTHS."  
"I JUST DON'T GET ALONG WITH THIS COUPLE IN OUR SMALL GROUP."

"I'VE BEEN AT THIS JOB SIX MONTHS WITH NO PROMOTION."  
"I'M JUST NOT MAKING AN IMPACT."



"I DON'T EVEN WANT THINGS ANYMORE."  
"I CAN'T DO THIS MUCH LONGER."  
"I HAVEN'T SEEN MY WIFE/FRIENDS IN...MONTHS?"

**IMMATURITY? \***

**3. GET INPUT FROM TRUSTED SOURCES. WHO LIVE A LIFE YOU'D LIKE TO LIVE. FRIENDS ARE GOOD BUT INSUFFICIENT. A LIFE WITH GOD IS PARAMOUNT.**

**PARENTS**  **TEACHER**  **MENTOR** 

**4. DECIDE!**

**4a. JUMP!**  **4b. STAY. SET A TIME TO REASSESS.** 

\* ANY ONE OF THESE EXAMPLES CAN DESCRIBE A SITUATION WHERE JUMPING SHIP IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO. SAFETY CARD PRESUPPOSES HEARING GOD.

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# UMAMI

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Elderedge

I know what you're thinking. Well, actually, there are two things you might be thinking. Some of you are grinning to yourselves thinking that we're making some satirical joke about Styrofoam and freeze-dried vegetables. College gourmet. The rest of you are nodding with anticipation, already knowing that we share a passion for a nuanced dish that has been rising in popularity across the country.

To be fair, I've run through the same cycle as everyone else who is just discovering what a bowl of noodles has to offer. When I was younger I loved the prepackaged, flavor-packet-enhanced, sodium-packed, space food that has the same nutritional value as salty cardboard. Warm, slightly meat-flavored, noodly goodness. Okay, so there is some credit to those eye rolls.

That all changed on my first trip to Hawaii when I was 11 years old. A local friend took our family to a spot no tourists were likely to try, an unimpressive building from the outside but packed with fishermen, surfers, families, and all sorts of locals, all patiently waiting for a stool to get at the restaurant's singular dish: saimin, the Hawaiian cousin of ramen.

Fresh noodles, homemade broth, and a slew of unidentifiable but delicious toppings changed my world forever.

It wasn't until years later, while cooped up inside for weeks on end during the Minnesotan winter, that I began to build my own recipe. As a vegetarian, I was hard-pressed to find a spot in town that could serve up something without meat while still retaining flavor (a common problem vegetarians face, as it seems that most omnivorous chefs haven't bothered with creating meat-free food that has flavor and isn't a salad).

While trying to understand why meat-based soups have such an abundance of flavor that the vegetable-based don't, I found my way to umami. For those who don't know, umami is the scientifically acknowledged fifth taste that humans possess.

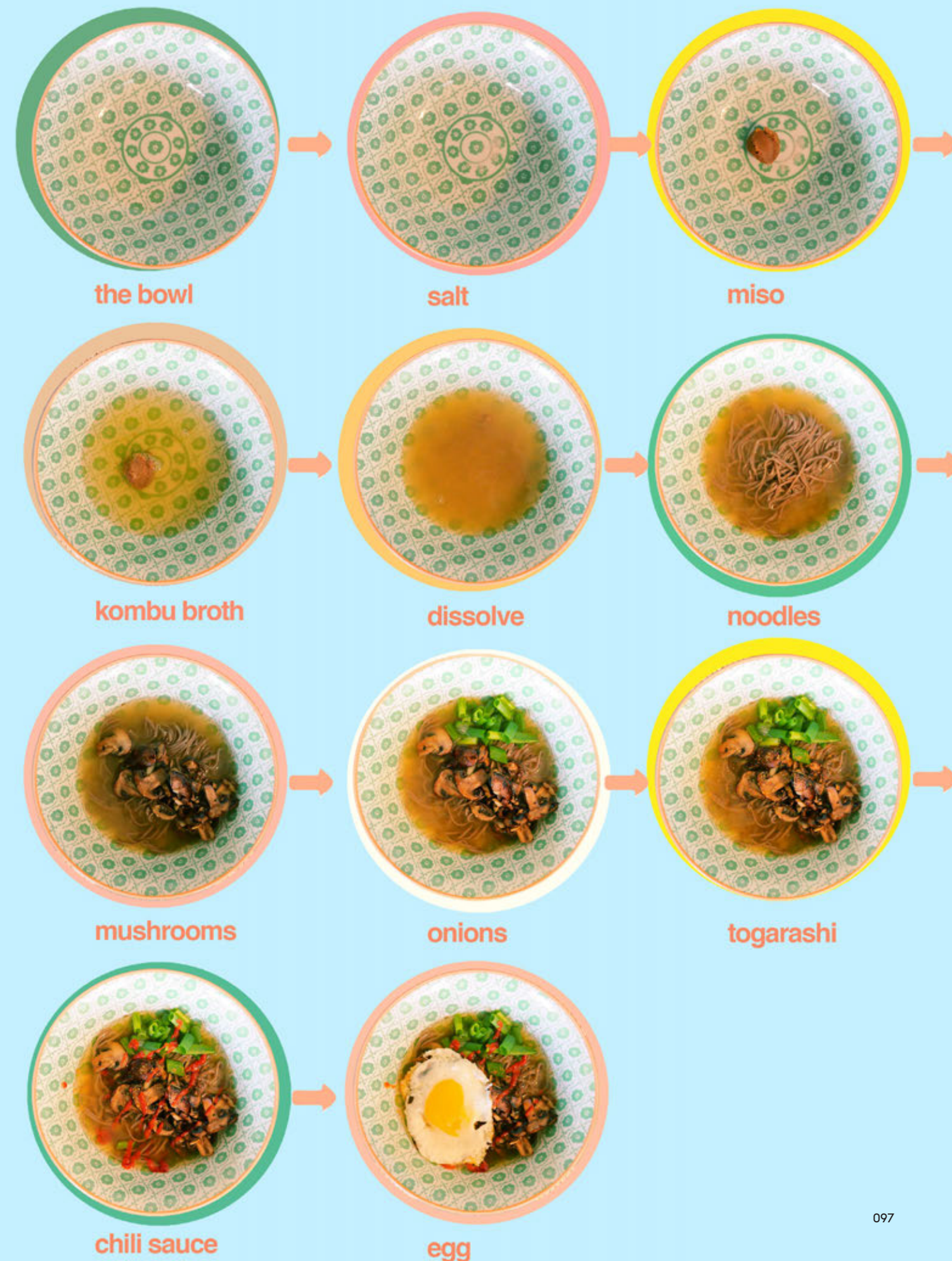
Remember sweet, sour, salty, and bitter? Well, it turns out that we can detect one more, and initially it will sound a little vague. Umami literally translates to "delicious taste" and is better described as the pleasant savory feeling your whole mouth and body get when eating something rich in umami flavor. Deliciousness, some have called it. More than savory, more than salty, it's the rounded sensation on your tongue that has you sucking the roof of your mouth.

This all feels a bit like trying to describe a star you can only see out of the corner of your eye.

In case you're curious, glutamate is the acid responsible for acting as the neurotransmitter that gives this taste such power. This flavor is most prominently found in meat, and the form found in vegetables is easily lost when cooking. This is where all you carnivores who felt that the answer to my question was obvious—and to be clear I do eat meat (mostly game)—but in creating my ramen, I didn't have an abundance of elk bones around to make a tonkatsu.

I'm getting ahead of myself.

There are a few ways of getting at this flavor through vegetables, most notably in a variety of edible seaweed called kombu, which, when combined with dried shiitake mushrooms, amplifies the umami flavor exponentially. Both are added to clean water, which is heated to just before a boil, then lowered to simmer for 10 minutes, then removed from heat for another five, then strained from the now-broth that will be the base of the ramen.





*Have your mind blown as to what ramen is, was, and forever will be.*

Now that I had a good base, I needed to know how to craft a homemade bowl. The rest of my preparation was created through a combination of taking what looked good from online recipes and throwing in my own taste preferences. Perhaps it's best if I walk you through it.

I begin by heating toasted sesame oil. In goes a ton of diced garlic—and I mean a ton, like six to eight good-sized cloves—and some diced ginger, about half as much comparably. Once those have softened up and are near browning, we add the next ingredients. I like some good sautéed mushrooms, so I add about 10 sliced cremini mushrooms and some roughly chopped green onions.

The mushrooms soak up the remaining oil pretty quickly, so after about 30 seconds, add in 2–3 tablespoons of soy sauce, 2 tablespoons Sriracha, and a pinch of togarashi (this is a flavorful blend of spicy peppers, orange peel, and sesame seeds. I could tell you to substitute red pepper flakes, but I'd be lying if I said it would be as good).

I should probably tell you now that this is going to be spicy, so if you want to take it back a notch, skip the Sriracha. Or try it with everything. It won't kill you. (*Disclaimer: if it does, in fact, kill you, I bear no responsibility. How was I supposed to know you were allergic to spicy food?*)

That wonderful soup base I made has been put back on the heat by now, and I'll take a cup out of it to mix in some miso paste. By using 1 ½ tablespoons white miso and 1 ½ tablespoons red miso, I've found the flavor is significantly better, so mix those up in the little bowl until dissolved, then add back into the broth, whisking any bits into oblivion. Crank the heat up on this now. Once it's boiling, in goes one scrambled egg to give additional oomph to the end product.

The mushroom concoction should be well sautéed now, with a decent amount of flavorful sauce in the pan. I'm combining two parts of the traditional ramen bowl by adding all of this into the broth base. For those interested, this would be my version of the tare.

Noodles are another piece of the puzzle that is constantly evolving. Ideally, I'd go 100 percent awesome and make my own from scratch. Eventually. For now, I've found that the local Asian markets typically have some decent fresh noodles in the refrigerated aisles.

Sometimes the good-looking ones have flavor packets with them; toss those bad boys and keep the noodles. Unlike the Italian-American variety, many noodles intended for ramen require as little as 30 seconds in boiling water. Each is different depending on the makeup, so read the package (embarrassing and obvious advice now out of the way...).

Ramen is meant to be plated and eaten immediately, so prepping your toppings is a fun thing to forget and scramble to do while your noodles boil and you combine your sautéed mushrooms, onions, and garlic into the broth with the egg (make sure all the sauce gets in there). I've done the gamut with soft-boiled eggs marinating overnight in brown sugar and soy sauce, but most of the time I use some uncooked green onions, Mung bean sprouts, and a drizzle of togarashi for a simple toppings list.

Noodles go in the bowl first, then the broth, then the toppings. Serve immediately. Have your mind blown as to what ramen is, was, and forever will be. Savor the umami that's rocking your tastebuds and realize with a shock just how flavorful this vegetarian ramen really is.

You're welcome. ■

## Vegetarian Ramen

SERVES 4

For those interested in making this, here is the list of ingredients:

- 9 cups water
- 18 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 16 square inches dried kombu
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 6 cloves diced garlic
- 1 tablespoon diced ginger
- 6 roughly sliced green onions  
(2 for marinating, 4 for fresh toppings)
- 12 sliced cremini mushrooms
- 1 ½ tablespoons white miso paste
- 1 ½ tablespoons red miso paste
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 ½ tablespoons Sriracha
- 2 tablespoons togarashi seasoning  
(1 for marinating, 1 for toppings)
- 1 scrambled egg
- mung sprouts for toppings
- 4 individual packages fresh noodles



# THE POLITICS OF DESPAIR

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

For a long time I assumed my political education began in grade school, when our elementary school made a student government. It was designed to stoke the political imagination of us youths, and it did a good job of introducing the basic concepts of politics, like voting for the handsome people and never realizing your goals, which were, of course, to extend recess indefinitely.

I've since realized that my political training began much earlier, but still, the point remains, by the time I was 10, I understood that life was where people earned virtue, and politics was where they spent it, a little or all at a once, on little changes. By the end of the term, the virtue was gone, but it didn't matter much, because by the time virtue wore out, they had learned to hustle.

The education continued: in high school, all you had to do was dress like the mascot and stand by the cheerleaders during football games. If you could up the ante, more power to you. One particularly memorable time—this was in college—the class president put on a chicken suit and shot through campus on a tandem bicycle to announce the homecoming theme, only to be run down by a band of opportunistic college insurgents. By day, costumed capers; by night, committee meetings of indefinite power, like diurnal Batmen. And the thing I remember most is the vague feeling of distrust I developed when my elected official became more like politicians and less like a human beings.

I was learning, through those fabricated political experiences, that political parties were shifting, opaque, distasteful creatures, and that if I didn't want to be disappointed, I shouldn't put much hope in them. Reasonable conclusions, but, before I realized it, I gave way to something far more damaging than political subtlety—I was allowing politics to shape my assumptions about reality.

Now, this isn't a political magazine. Not because its founders aren't interested in politics, but because we're interested in something deeper—the transformation of the human heart—from which political activity, and all other activity, flows. For those interested in a non-partisan, academic account of shifting political compositions, I recommend social psychologist Jonathan Haidt and his article "How and Why Nationalism Beats Globalism." For those looking for a podcast recommendation clarifying contemporary political processes, DecodeDC. And for those looking for advice: stop reading the news—which makes people make bad decisions—and start reading books, magazines, and academic articles. They contain a particular synthesis of information called knowledge. My thoughts here are about the despair and anger surrounding politics and what to do about them.

Remember 2016? It was a disastrous, turbulent, vindictive time. I hardly need to furnish examples, but here: according to the PEW Research Institute, less than 20 percent of Americans feel they can trust their government. That's the lowest percentage in 50 years, as in, 20 percent less than during the Vietnam War. We tune in to the news, we see the political shabbiness, and we feel—what? Disbelief, disillusionment, frustration, despair. I'm quite sure despair is the worst poison of the political season, and for an important reason. Despair is the chief aim of the kingdom of darkness. When we arrive there, we have lost the secret that sustains hope and come to see the world as the enemy himself sees it.



Despair is a message. It is composed of two parts:

## 1. Size Matters

Large things overwhelm smaller things. The forward momentum of certain devastations is unstoppable. To resist overwhelming corruption of any kind is to deny the visible conclusion of physical laws, i.e. entropy. The rationality of this conviction is difficult to deny, and while very few people accept it entirely, it colors the way most people experience the world, especially the political world. Trouble is, when we are intimidated by scale, we lost one of the great secrets of Christianity: small places overwhelm the larger ones (surely you remember David and Goliath). The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It is like a pearl, a pea-sized stone whose value nonetheless overwhelms the entirety of the marketplace. It is like treasure, like yeast, like a net, like a sprouting seed, but never like a political party, or a great stone rolling downhill, or an occupying force. The logic of the Kingdom, which is more like poetry than logic, is that the trace element of restoration is packed with power to overwhelm the material world.

I think we've all had at least a fleeting experience of this reality. In the checkout line at the store, we suddenly see the clerk, a moment ago a stranger, as family, and his restoration seems like an inescapable certainty. Right in the middle of filing our taxes, we get the startling idea that we should give away more, and all at once it seems absolutely true that we are deeply and mysteriously wealthy. They are small moments when our vision clears, and when it does, all of the intimidations of destruction seem like the villains in a children's story. They're not meaningless, but we'll overcome them.

Despair narrows our vision. Jesus intends for our vision to extend, increasingly, so that, starting from the smallest example of joy, we can see the restoration of all things. Starting from the smallest act of love, we can see the healing of the nations. In that view, we can see the worst political (and geopolitical) degradations and never lose heart.

## 2. Things tend to get worse.

This is more subtle and more dangerous. It is born of the longtime observation that good things seem to end, while bad things do just fine on their own. We see some hopeful political movement peter out. Right alongside our disappointment comes a realist resignation. Isn't that the way things go. We learn that the wildernesses of the world are vanishing, and even though we feel anger, we also feel profound disappointment. The world is vulnerable to ruin. That in itself seems fatal and tragic.

Trouble is, we have learned the wrong lesson. Here's the right one: all good things endure through engagement. They have dependency built in. It is supposed to teach us something about reality: all created things flourish through relationship. But instead, we often feel that good things are doomed because they're good.

Don't all good things end? No. That's like thinking dance is doomed because it requires the coordination of two partners, or thinking music is doomed because it's made of intersecting notes.

Good things require our continual involvement. This is supposed to be wonderful. The Trinity exists relationally. The self-fulfilling prophecy of despair is that if we don't step in, good things do die. But they don't die because goodness is lesser, because all good things come to an end, because chaos is the true nature of the universe and mankind. They die because good things are relational. With this in hand, we don't respond to political ruin by despairing. We respond by stepping in, again and again, to support good things through our relationship. In that we rule a relational world. ■

### ABOUT THE ARTWORK

*Here's one political problem—we engage politics as contest, not as a creative space. I made these posters in 2016 in response to all the shouting: shouting to be heard, shouting to be right, shouting to beat down the opposition. That's a bad way to engage human beings and doesn't change anyone. I'll say it again: you don't change people by shouting at them. You change people by creating. Creativity is always a powerful act. At its best, it is loving, because it is, as a matter of course, for someone else, and it is hospitable, because it welcomes another person into the creator's life. Point is, if we'd like to see more change and less hatred, we might need to change our strategy.*

# THE POWER OF OUR STORY

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

I try to play it as low key as possible, but I am obsessed with Star Wars. If you're familiar with *And Sons*, you'll be familiar with, and hopefully not annoyed by, how often Star Wars pops up. But for me, it runs deeper than the convenient, within reach metaphor. My parents introduced me to the original trilogy as a young boy, and I was immediately hooked. When *The Phantom Menace* premiered, for me at age 6, Star Wars left the living room of a family movie night for the epicenter of my childhood imagination. My brothers and I roamed our neighborhood in karate uniforms with lightsabers as errant Jedi seeking to protect the galaxy from evil.

As I entered high school, I dived head first into the dizzyingly expansive extended universe created by hundreds of books and comics. Wookieepedia, the online encyclopedia of Star Wars lore, became for me a treasure trove of enchanting adventures. Now I enjoy the Star Wars universe through video games, from a base-building strategy game on my phone, to a character-building board game, to a role-playing game on my laptop, to a first-person Star Wars shooter on my parents' Xbox One.

The franchise has been so successful for me because its creative building blocks allow for an endless possibility of imagination. It has the grit of a western, the imagination of science fiction, the drama of a space opera, and the essential elements of myth. But more than anything else, Star Wars and other stories I love offer to me clarity.

Another mythical universe I love is the *Lord of the Rings*. Over a recent break from work, my wife, Olivia, and I watched through the *Hobbit* trilogy and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, all extended editions, of course. Binging the movies was incredibly fun, but Olivia and I were both surprised by the sense of melancholy that set in when we were done. It wasn't boredom because we had to stop watching movies and go grocery shopping; it was a deep sadness that we had to leave the mythological world of Middle-earth. Perhaps it wasn't sadness, but longing. The conflict of the *Lord of the Rings* and the conflict of Star Wars are enviably clear. The villains of the stories are obvious; the characters, though unexpected, know what they have to do to defeat evil; and every action is crucial.



Compared to Isildur taking up his father's sword to defeat the enemy of the free people of Middle-earth, or Jyn Erso stealing the plans to the Death Star, choosing what brand of granola to buy in the cereal aisle feels soul-crushingly meaningless.

I find myself envying the clarity of these stories. I know there is a battle raging between the powers of Good and Evil on this earth; the news is all the proof I need of that. But for me, my role in that battle often looks like praying against a spiritual malaise clouding my thinking or praying against my wife's nightmare or breaking agreements with pressure and performance. I often lose my place in the story God is telling. That is the reason I love these stories, because they remind me again. C. S. Lewis wrote,

*"The value of the myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by 'the veil of familiarity.' ... By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it."*

I have always been drawn to excellent stories, no matter what medium they are told in, because they feel more real than reality. More than just the clarity of the character's purpose, the epic nature of story reorients me to the epic nature of my own story. If you have read any of Padre's writing, you'll be familiar with the idea that we love the stories we do because they reflect back to us the story God is telling, the Larger Story of the fellowship of the Trinity, the battle raging in heaven and in the human heart, the rescue of Jesus, and the future renewal of all things.

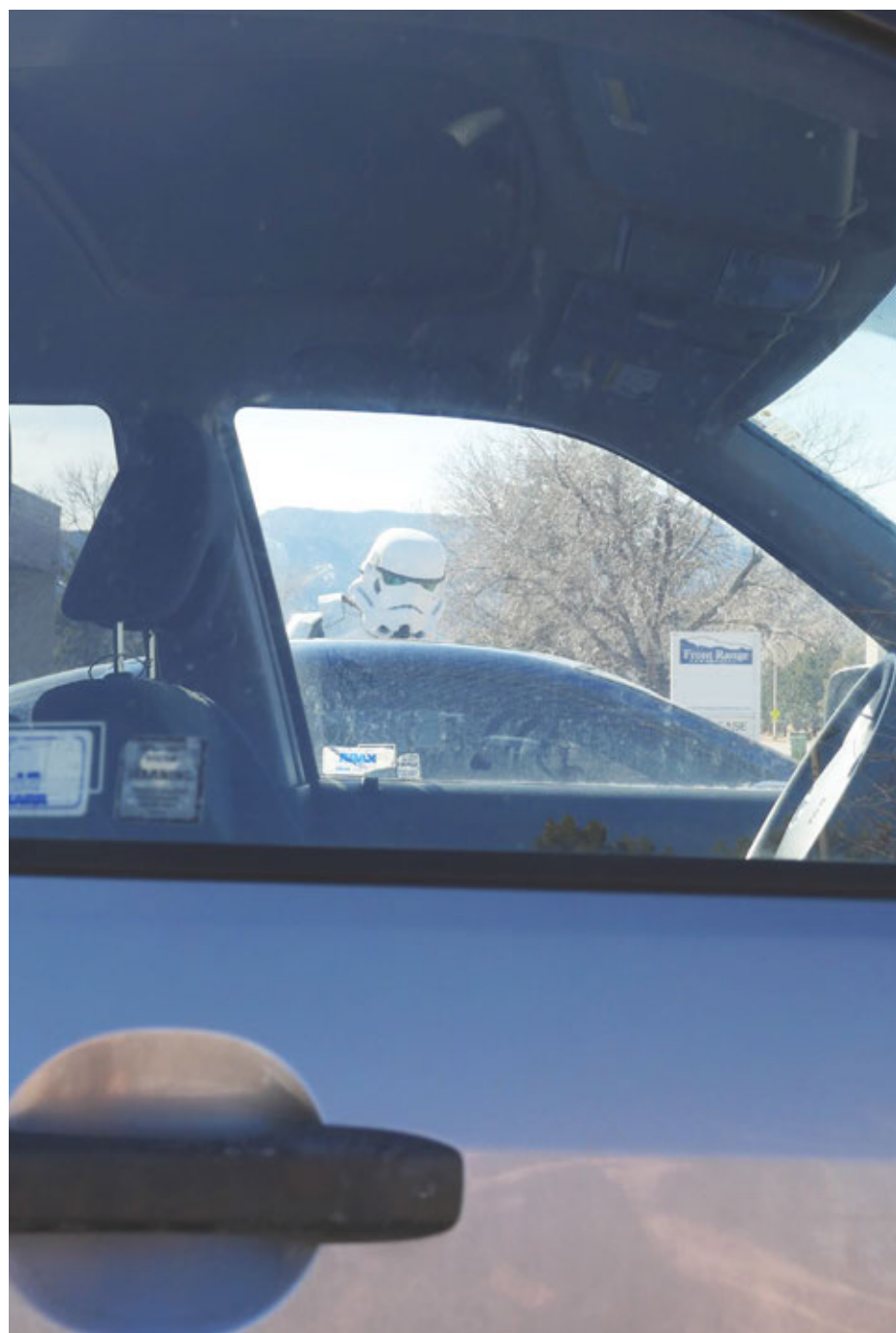
When a good story touches on these elements, it fills my heart with longing. But more than just reflecting back to us the larger story of the Gospel, story itself is the language of the heart. Jesus taught by telling stories. We relate to one another by sharing our stories, large or small. We figure out life and our place in it through story, because our lives are a story.

The stories I love create a rich sense of place and align its characters within a clear context, with a clear goal. Through that clarity, it can bring some clarity to my own story. I am reminded that I have an Enemy. I am reminded that I have a part to play. And I am reminded that despite the meaninglessness of life's minutiae, the story I am living in is imbued with eternal significance.

Because our own lives are a story, they also require what all stories do: witness. As far as reading a book or watching a movie, it might sound like a no-brainer. There has to be someone to read the writing on the page, and there has to be someone in a seat in the theater for story to be known. Almost like Schrödinger's cat, story needs to be observed for it to be real.

In the higher echelons of literary theory, there is a school of thought called Reader Response Theory that says literature does not exist as words on a page, but somewhere between the text itself and the person reading it. For the story of our own lives, the first witness is ourselves.





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*It is near impossible to mourn or rejoice with others if you don't know why they are rejoicing or mourning.*

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Understanding our own story is an excellent place to start, but we need witnesses to our lives. In a section of Paul's letter to the Romans dedicated to instructing on how to live in community, he says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15). A simple yet crucial instruction that requires us to enter into other people's stories. It is near impossible to mourn or rejoice with others if you don't know why they are rejoicing or mourning. I am so aware, too, of how much I need others to enter into my story and rejoice with me, and perhaps even more importantly, mourn with me.

Recently, we lost our family dog, Oban, to cancer. Losing a family pet is always brutal. I remember being in middle school when we lost our first family dog. I found myself so disoriented. Losing a pet is such a personal pain, but I needed that story to be seen. My heart was mishandled by some friends who could not enter into my story, but it was nurtured by others who chose to enter it with me and mourn with me. Losing Oban was a different and more difficult experience, because in many ways he was an unexpected witness to my story. Not that he could enter into my story, but he was there through middle school and high school, seasons where I experienced a lot of loneliness. Oban was a great comfort to me because he provided witness by simply being there, in a time when there weren't many others who could.

We have mentioned in past articles the healing power of telling your story to a counselor or someone trained in facilitating that process. I could not advocate for that more strongly. But seeing other people's stories and having your own life be witnessed is an essential part of living in community, and an essential part of everyday life. Getting together with friends and catching up on what is current feels like a triviality, and spending time talking with a loved one can feel like relational maintenance, but these opportunities to enter into the story of your life with others is what helps us make sense of our lives.

It is what orients us, just as engaging in good story orients us. But not every piece of our story can be witnessed. Not every internal triumph can be seen. Not every painful experience can be mourned with others. But ultimately, Jesus knows all of your stories. He has witnessed, and is witnessing, all of it. ■



# FINDING YOUR MISSION

WORDS John Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

By the time we hit adulthood, we've probably heard a truckload about following our dreams and "finding God's will for our lives." The theme gets rehashed in every graduation speech. It's been a staple of Oprah for years. Even good old Dr. Seuss wrote a book about it called *Oh, the Places You'll Go*:

*You have brains in your head.*

*You have feet in your shoes.*

*You can steer yourself*

*Any direction you choose.*

You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

Heady and exhilarating stuff for a first-grader. But the promise wears pretty thin when we encounter "real life." Paying the bills has a way of throwing cold water on our dreams. Was Buechner right? Is there truly a place for us where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet? Where does a fella begin to find that—or get back on the track of finding it after a few years lost in the woods?

Allow me a story...

By the time I married—at the age of 23—I was chasing my dreams and running a theater company. Sure, it was only community theater, but we loved it. I was living out a passion I'd had since middle school, and back then I would have said it was what

I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It required working two other part-time jobs in order to chase that dream, but I didn't care. It was worth it.

Around the age of 28, I realized my passion for theater was fueled by a deeper desire to have an impact on the world. Bring a message, change the future. I found I was actually more passionate about social reform and justice. So I left the theater and took a job in a social action movement. I gave speeches, wrote op-ed pieces, participated in protests. Those were exciting days—we felt like we would change the world.

Around about 34, I came to the conclusion that if any lasting change was going to take place on this aching planet, it first had to happen in the human heart. I'd long been fascinated by the soul (in order to be an effective actor or director, you have to know the inner life of human beings), and what I really wanted to do was heal people's lives. So I shifted from the macro to the micro. I went back to grad school nights and weekends and got a degree in counseling.

Now, at 54, I am a writer.

My training as a counselor deeply enriches my writing. My background in theater certainly plays into my speaking and writing.

Both fuel my passion for change, helping to bring the Kingdom of God into the kingdoms of this earth, which is the greatest social reform there can be. I couldn't have seen how it might all come together when I was 28 or 34, but now I see—none of those earlier years were wasted. This is such a hopeful thought. Nothing is wasted.

Don't try to figure out what you're supposed to do for the rest of your life. That's paralyzing. You'll find it far more helpful to explore two questions:

What is your "deep gladness," the deep passion of your soul? And what are you supposed to do next in order to move toward it?

Start with the deep gladness piece. Ask yourself, What are my passions? What kind of books do you read? What are your favorite movies? What gets you really angry? Who has your dream job? Look for a theme. Name the "deep hunger" and put it down in words.

And keep in mind, there is the "mythic" and the "specific." You might think your deep hunger is working for a retreat center, when actually your passion is for spiritual growth in people's lives. Working at the center is just the specific application you can see right now.

Or you might name your passion as fighting human trafficking, when in fact that is merely what awakened your passion for human suffering—or even for law.

The reason this is helpful is that the applications might change, and if you think a specific job is your dream, you'll lose heart. The hunger is big. It's mythic. The application is simply the opportunity to live it out at this moment in your life—like my journey from theater to reform to counseling to writing.

Step two gets down to specifics: What am I supposed to do next? "Next" is a whole lot easier to find out than "for the rest of my life." Your dreams will grow and develop over time. More importantly, you will grow and develop over time. So let yourself try things.



*“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”*  
 —Frederick Buechner

You don’t have to nail down the course of your life. You get to do something far more exciting: you get to walk with God. Explore things. Grow as a person.

You’ll also find it helpful to ask yourself, What is in the way of me moving toward my dreams and desires? Is it fear? Finding security in a job you hate? That no doors seem to be opening? Has disappointment gotten in? The subject of chasing dreams has a way of opening up deeper issues in our hearts—issues like doubt or fear or cynicism. That stuff is gold. That’s where you’re losing heart, and therefore it’s where you want to tend to your soul and invite the loving presence of God, for he is far more concerned about the state of your heart than he is about tomorrow’s job search.

Back to “What I am supposed to do next?”

The most important question is, what does your conversation with God sound like when it comes to finding your place in the world?

Are you asking? Listening? Seeking? Or are you just trying to figure it out on your own?

I’m going to let you in on a little secret: God never gives us the Master Plan for our lives. The simple reason is that we’d run with it; we’d take off with the plan in our hands and leave God behind. So he allows for mystery and setback and obstacles so that we will seek him.

He has a place for you. He knows what the next step is towards that place. Give some time to asking him what it is. Not an hour, not a day, but give several weeks or even months to this. Walk with him. The experience alone will be worth the outcome. So often we think it is clarity we need, when in fact our deepest ache is for intimacy with God.

A man needs a mission. That mission may or may not be your job, but if you find your passion, then you don’t really care whether it’s a job or not—you just love being able to chase it.

And “it” is out there, and “it” is in all of us. ■

