

Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

October/November, 2009

The Creative Mind

It was in the fall one evening some time ago that Donna and I joined a group after church enjoying a pot luck dinner on the patio of a friend's home. The surroundings were near perfect, ideal weather, good friends and thought provoking conversation. It was made especially good by the ability of those gathered to use one idea as a catalyst for another. The fascinating thing is that these thoughts would probably not have arisen from the mind of one person. It was the interaction, the "iron sharpening iron" that was the seed for new fruit.

Watching the group interact I marveled at the power of creative thinking. It is one of the greatest gifts God has given human beings. And one of the most neglected. Did you know there are businesses that specialize in ideas? One company, IDEO lists some of the largest industries in the world as clients. What they do for their customers is "think." Seems odd that a major corporation would employ a company to think for them or to develop new products or find ways to improve old ones. But IDEO doesn't think for the company. They have made creative thinking an art form. And there is much we can learn from them.

Some of the things you use every day were developed by IDEO. Remember when the caps on toothpaste became

so gunked up with paste that you couldn't screw the cap back on? IDEO changed that by creating snap on caps.

Why do companies need to hire IDEO to improve their products? Why did Proctor and Gamble need help to think of a better idea for a toothpaste cap? The answer is simple. IDEO found a way to unlock the creative potential within average people. They did the same thing we were doing after church. They arranged opportunities for people to talk and let "iron sharpen iron."

Sound too simple? Listen. Humans are good at quenching the spirit that God placed in man. For example, an office manager wants to increase employee productivity so he cracks the whip on private conversations. He sends a memo to his staff telling them to stop gathering around the water fountain talking with co-workers. Or a company designs its new office with narrow hallways to discourage people from stopping to talk. IDEO does just the opposite. They encourage communication among all levels of employees because they've learned this opens the creative spirit. These conversations are the iron sharpening process that results in better products.



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This is a Christian principle that works in the office but even better at church. The Prophet Malachi wrote of a time when godly people were discouraged because of trials. They muttered and complained because their enemies were successful and they were overcome with problems. What was the solution? “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.” (Mal. 3:16) Just the fact that brothers and sisters were communicating with each other opened a spiritual door. Evil communication corrupts the spirit but good communication sharpens us as a sharpening stone does a blade.

When Christians “speak often one to another” spiritual energy is generated like sparks from flint striking steel. Your ideas create spiritual energy in your brother that is reflected throughout the congregation.

It seems to be a law that works in every area of life.

Early in the 19th Century a Frenchman by the name of Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States to see what made this country great. The trip was prompted by his search for democracy. France was moving that direction and Tocqueville was a visionary. He realized that a representative democracy was the future. Nations that adopted it would become greater and he wanted to learn first hand from the nation setting the pace so he could take ideas back to France.

One of the things that impressed Tocqueville most was the opportunity Americans have to congregate into groups and talk. He witnessed meetings of citizens with every conceivable

interest. Some groups met for political causes. Others were purely civic. Tocqueville lists all sorts of civil organizations such as organizing festivals, founding seminaries and churches, building inns, establishing schools and creating prisons, distributing books and sending out missionaries.

Tocqueville said that civil organizations like this are the best defense against a tyranny of the majority. In other words, when people congregate to discuss a need or a solution to a problem, they possess a power that overcomes oppression by tyrants. For example, he witnessed a group of 100,000 men pledge themselves to abstain from alcohol because of the efforts of a temperance group.

At first Tocqueville was amused by this. “Why didn’t these men just stay home and drink water?”

In France these men would have petitioned the government to regulate the taverns. But Tocqueville came to understand that it was people, not government that brought this problem under control in America. The consequence of this is enormous. The willingness of people to talk to one another and join efforts by forming small groups stopped the centralization of power and thus the loss of freedom.

There is a reason that God wanted Israel to have a system of judges rather than a King. That sort of centralization of power kills the Spirit. In the free exercise of ideas among men and women who possess the creative spirit given by God there is both power and opportunity.

Want to start a creative firestorm? Talk with your brother. Even Tocqueville recognized that such meetings are the core of a community. [FN](#)

Faith Networks is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Networks by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.

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To request Faith Networks, call 513-755-0040 or send your name and address to jimobri@gmail.com. Faith Networks may also be downloaded at www.youall.com/faithnetworks.

Chocolate Coated Gospel

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Does anyone have to be convinced to eat chocolate? If you've ever been there when a child takes their first bite of the heavenly treat, you probably witnessed an eyes-wide-open-ear-to-ear-grin expression that appeared as soon as the chocolate touched their taste buds. When something tastes that good, you know people will "come and get it."


What has happened in our churches that it has made people sour to religion? Why are they so negative towards it?

Some will say, well the Word of God is a two-edged sword—it's not supposed to be sweet like chocolate. Oh, but the Word of God is sweet like honey (Psalm 119:103).

Some will say, but we're supposed to be like Isaiah and "cry aloud and spare not." And I would kindly remind them that Isaiah also said that we should comfort people and speak tenderly (Isaiah 40:1-2).

As the old saying goes, you catch more flies with honey than vinegar. I wonder if churches showed a little more of Jesus' compassion—if the church experience was a little "sweeter"—would people run **toward** the church instead of **away** from it?

When Hosea says that God's people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge, what knowledge is he talking about? Could it be: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

Now, that is something sweet to savor! 



2 Peter Series - Part 4 of 7: Run With Perseverance

God has a “race marked out for us” (Heb 12:1). Whenever an athlete enters a race, she knows the distance she has to run and has trained for speed and endurance accordingly. But the race a Christian begins after receiving the Holy Spirit is different. We don’t know the distance (our life span) or the degree of difficulty of the course for us personally. When we accept this challenge, we also accept the responsibility for finishing it. If we want the “blue ribbon” or “the gold medal” at the finish line, we must not quit (Heb 10:35-39; 2 Cor 9:24-27).

“Follow me,” Jesus said. When people made excuses why they couldn’t, he said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luk 9:57-62).

Later on, after giving a summary of world conditions between his first and second coming, Jesus said, “By standing firm (or enduring or persevering), you will gain life” (Luk 21:19). Life with God is our prize for finishing our Christian race. We also enjoy life with God now as we run that race (Joh 14:16-18).

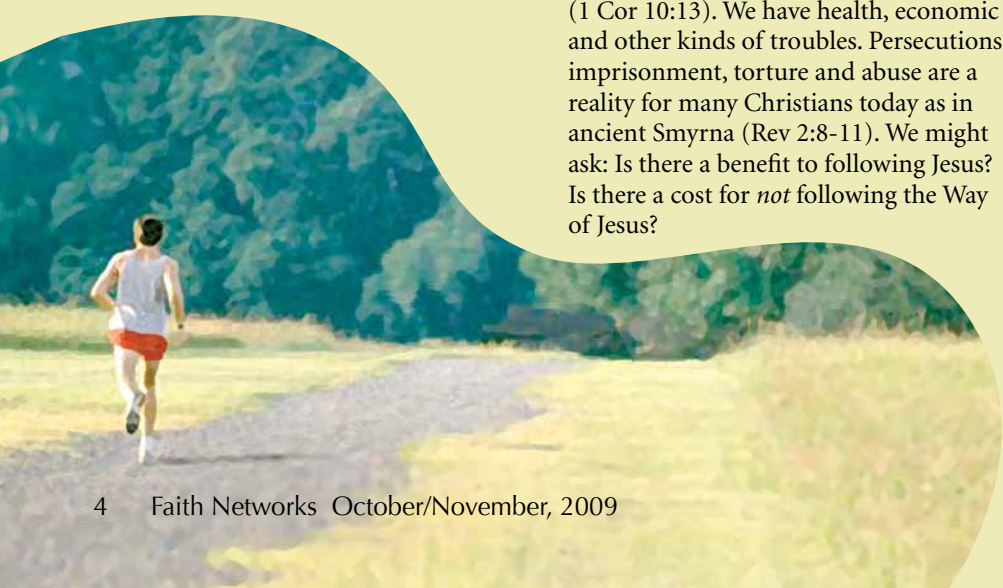


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What are we to persevere in doing?

- Persistence in doing good (Rom 2:6-7).
- By persevering produce a crop (Luk 8:15).
- Patience in the face of suffering (Jam 5:7-11; 2 Cor 1:6).
- Perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring (Jam 1:12; 2 Thes 1:4).
- Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete (Jam 1:2-4).
- Patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Rev 14:12-13).
- Hold on to what you have until I [Jesus] come (Rev 2:25).

Jesus did not promise the easy life to his followers (John 16:33). We have the same temptations everyone else does (1 Cor 10:13). We have health, economic and other kinds of troubles. Persecutions, imprisonment, torture and abuse are a reality for many Christians today as in ancient Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11). We might ask: Is there a benefit to following Jesus? Is there a cost for *not* following the Way of Jesus?



Let's look at the cost of *not* being a follower of Jesus:

- Without God, mankind is deserving of death and is descending into ever increasing evil (Rom 1:18-32).
- Sin deceives, and through the commandment put me [and you] to death (Rom 7:11; 6:23).
- You were dead in your transgressions and sins (Eph 2:1).
- We were by nature objects of wrath (Eph 2:3).

- A fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Heb 10:27).
- If any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).
- No entry into the Holy City (Rev 21:27; 22:15).
- Right now, in this life, receiving the consequences for breaking God's law such as making enemies of people you have hurt or wronged in some way (Jam 4:1-3).

Let's look at some of the *benefits* of persevering in the Way of Jesus: (Ephesians 1:3-14)

- Every spiritual blessing in Christ.
- Holy and blameless in his [God's] sight.
- Predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.
- Redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- Marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

(Romans 8)

- No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- The righteous requirements of the law met in us.

- The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.
- He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.
- Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
- We are children—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.
- The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.
- We look forward to eternity with God in which there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:3-4).
- Those who follow Jesus will be rewarded in this life and in the age to come with eternal life (Mk 10:28-30).

Those who add perseverance to their faith (2 Pet 1:5-7) have a sure promise:

God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life (Rom 2:6-7).

Keep on running. Everyone who finishes God's race can expect a reward far beyond gold medals. FN

Don't Miss the Winter Family We

Seminars • Team Sports • Kid's Games • G

Wednesday, December 23rd through Sunday, December 27th. Sponsor

Activities begin on Wednesday evening December 23rd with warm fellowship and music.



Two full days of activities are planned off site, then back to the Marriott for seminars on Friday evening and Sabbath morning.

Location

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The host hotel is the fabulous Griffin Gate Marriott Resort. This outstanding resort carries a Mobil four-star rating and normally charges over \$175 per night for these rooms. But it's only \$53 at the Winter Family Tournament beginning December 23rd if you mention the Church of God. To reserve your room call the Marriott at 800-391-6690. Free shuttle service is available from the Lexington airport.

Activity Entry Fees

Entry fees for sports and other activities are \$10.00 per person or a maximum of \$40.00 per family. Registration forms are available at: www.cogcincinnati.org.

Volunteers?

If you would like to assist in activities, planning, or sponsoring, please contact Jim O'Brien at jimobri@gmail.com or (513) 755-0040.



Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky!

Gymnastics • Skating • Bible Studies • Music

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Youth Sabbath classes, teen seminar, and church services on Saturday December 26th.

Go to www.cogcincinnati.org for full schedule of events.

The Gift of Life

There was a time when you and I did not exist. Then suddenly we were! We have no personal memory of what it was like years before we were born, for we were not. Then suddenly, with no planning of our own, we were given life.

A child in a good home has a deep love of life. He enjoys playing, skipping, running, and many more things. I can vividly remember getting up in the morning when I was a child and how much I enjoyed eating, and I still do. I would go out and run up and down Solari Hill in San Francisco. My neighborhood friend (Roy) and I would build forts out of bushes. We would dig holes and hide in them. Why we liked all that is hard to explain other than it is a love of life.

As we got a little older, Roy and I developed a desire to climb every fence in the neighborhood. If it was a difficult

job, then we worked on techniques until we could do it. There was something inherent in us that

made us want to be able to do what seemed hard to do. We found great joy in conquering what we set our minds to do. The neighbors probably didn't like us climbing their fences, but they usually let it go without complaining. Roy and I wanted to explore everything. We played hide-and-seek with kids in the neighborhood. We liked jumping off of wood piles and anything else we could find. My boyhood friend Roy, with whom I maintain contact, remembers all the things we used to do and marvels at how much we were into life. And all these things are merely types of what is planned for us by God. Life is worth so very much. It is our greatest gift.



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Why are we the way we are? We were made to want to learn, to experience life, and to do new things even if they are difficult. God put that in us. I could see that there was some kind of drive in me that wanted to overcome obstacles. That too is something God has put in people. God put it in us because he is that way too. We are, after all, his children, and children are very much like their parents in some ways, even from birth.

Roy and I used to dream about what it would be like to explore the universe, and we'd talk about it. Before we were even yet teenagers, we'd imagine what an incredible thing it would be to stand on the moon. We'd walk around in spacesuits, examine features, and look at the Moon Mountains. And what was Mars like? Nobody had seen a clear picture of Mars at that time. We wished we could go there and find out. This was how we talked in the early 1950's, long before space flight. There was something in us that seemed to know no bounds.

Our minds were not tied up in knots. We had been given minds that were creative and that could think in vast ways. That, too, tells us something about God and the kind of mind he has, for all we have comes from him.

I see the love of life in my grandchildren. They become excited and enthusiastic about so many things. Sophia and Ethan love running through puddles barefooted. Do you remember how much fun it was to go running around barefooted? All this would not be possible if we hadn't been given life and the innate love of life that is just somehow inside us.

What are we to learn from this?

This life and our desires to fully experience the good things of life is merely a shadow—a prototype—of what God intends to give us. It also tells us something about him.

God has given us a desire to live forever. We are driven to love life forever. But the love of life that we have now is

only a foretaste of what kind of a life is ahead for us as spirit beings (1Cor 2:9-10). And just as a child who is born didn't give himself that life, neither can we give ourselves life. But it is something Jesus and the Father want to give us, and they can.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. . . . My sheep listen to my voice: I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (John 10: 10, 28).

Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him (John 17:1-2).

There is a time period in this human life when many, if not most, people want to have children. In effect, they want to give life. And when they do, the child is precious to them. They will guard and look out for their child and seek to see that he has a full, abundant life. All of this tells us something about God, for we are given our human desires by God. And this life is nothing compared to the type of life that lies ahead. So many of the desires we find in ourselves were put there by God and tell us something about what he is like.

I described how Roy and I had some innate craving to overcome obstacles, to accomplish, to create. We also wanted to build things. (Roy, incidentally, became a building contractor.) It may seem trite at times to say "God is Creator." But it is a profound truth, and it is not just what he has done in the past, for he continues to create. After all, that is his nature. We like to build, do things, and accomplish things. That tells us something about what God is like. He does things. He doesn't sit on a park bench waiting for things to happen. The Father loves life, and he has put those inclinations right in us.

We must not become discouraged by trials, for a kind of life is ahead that will dwarf the one we know now. And our Father will get us there, for he is not put off by our difficulties. He doesn't quit, any more than Roy and I would give up when we set our minds to do something. The gift of eternal life lies ahead, so we should not grow weary in well doing.

Think about what God is like in the ordinary things of daily life. Remember God when you see children playing in puddles. Love life now, but know that an even more dramatic, exciting, and fulfilling life lies ahead. [FN](#)

We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it.

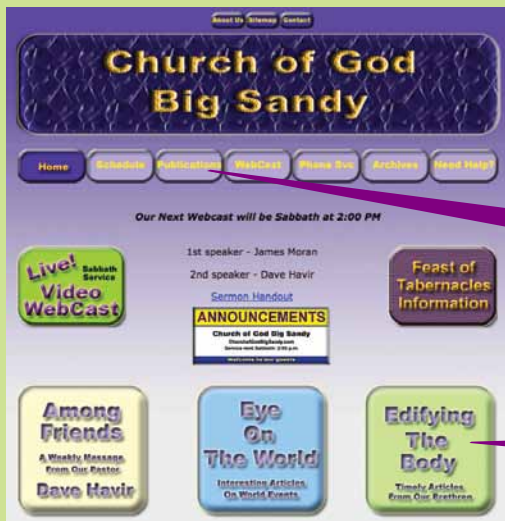
~George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, 1860

Church Website Offers Weekly Articles

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The Church of God Big Sandy invites brethren around the world to visit the church website: www.ChurchofGodBigSandy.com and read a weekly article written by various members of the congregation.

The articles are posted for each weekend and can be found in the section of the site called *Edifying the Body*.



No internet access? Please contact us at (903) 636-4600 and we will be happy to send you a printed copy.

If you want to view previous articles, go to the **Publication** section of the site and click the prominent *Edifying the Body* icon on that page.

If you want to view the current article, go to the home page of the website and click the prominent *Edifying the Body* icon.

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Build houses, start families, create businesses. You are going to be in a strange land for a long time. Most of all, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.” (Jer 29:7 NASB)


If in fact we are pilgrims and sojourners on the earth, exiles in the American Babylon, Jeremiah’s message to his exiled people is a good message for us as well. The city’s prosperity is our prosperity. The city’s peace is our peace. Its welfare is our welfare. As citizens of both the higher kingdom and the earthly one we must do whatever we can to make this Babylon a better place for all who inhabit it so that it can be a better place for us too.

This comports well with the New Testament admonition to be salt and light to the world. It also brings into a clearer picture Jesus’ statement that we should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. We might argue about what is Caesar’s and what is God’s—that at the core defines much of the political

discourse in the American Babylon today—but it does give us the freedom, indeed, the obligation to participate in the life of the city, provided we remember that our true citizenship is in the New Jerusalem and that we conduct ourselves accordingly.

That’s why becoming involved in town hall events to strive for the welfare of the city is lawful, assuming we conduct ourselves lawfully. It’s why standing for the values of Jerusalem and working for the welfare of the city is consistent with who we should be. It means easing the path for others, being generous to a fault, ministering to the needy, and conducting ourselves with a kindness and openness that will reflect the life of Christ.

It means standing for justice for the weak and helpless even when the political winds blow otherwise and doing what we must to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity by not selling our inheritance for the short term economic gain for a few.

In short it’s completely acceptable for people of faith to have our voices heard on the public square to defend our values in this American Babylon, for exiles are to work for the welfare of the city. 

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Jerusalem and Babylon

America is a strange mix of Jerusalem and Babylon. So states the late Richard John Neuhaus in his book *American Babylon: Notes for a Christian Exile*. While acknowledging the religiously aware nature of the nation's founding and of its citizens, he reminds us that



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America is Babylon not by comparison with other societies but by comparison with the radically new order sought by all who know love's grief in refusing to settle for a community of less than truth and justice compromised.

This, our union, is less perfect than the more perfect one the Constitution envisions, and hence the people of God are in reality in a foreign land. But if exiles we are, then what is our role as the people of God in a foreign land?

In about 600 BC Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, removed the people of God from their own land and transported them to a literal land of exile. The prophet Jeremiah, still in Jerusalem, gave a bit of advice in the form of a "thus saith the Lord":