

Regent University School of Business

A Magazine for
Christian Leaders
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REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 12

**P.S. The Seventh
Commandment
Applies to the
Workplace, Too**



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Taming the Temptation to Retaliate

Practical Advice for Prioritizing Family Time

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Conquering Lust on the Job

Jeff Wright and Mick Bates

The week's been productive but exhausting. Mark has run nonstop for three days at this conference, meeting both clients and other industry reps. When he took this job, he was looking forward to adding travel to his responsibilities. It seemed important, fun, and even exotic. But life on the road was beginning to take its toll on both his marriage and his relationship with the kids.

Today at lunch he meets Linda, a confident woman who captivates him with her business savvy and quick wit, not to mention her short skirt. For much of the afternoon he keeps playing back their meeting and he can't help but fantasize about spending more time with her. Through sheer will, he breaks the chain of thought and focuses instead on the job at hand...at least until the day's activities end.

Finally, alone in his hotel room for some decompression time, he drops heavily onto the bed and flicks on the television. Mark's assailed from every angle by sexually-charged images, both in commercials and regular programming, broadcast and cable channels. He is captivated by what he sees. Scanning the channels, he's drawn to content that progressively worsens. Memories of his meeting with Linda merge into the images on the screen. He's resisted this for months, but tonight he

gives in and purchases access to adult content to satisfy his growing hunger for more explicit images. Guilt once again washes over him, yet he can't take his eyes off the screen.

Today at lunch he met Linda, a confident woman who captivated him with her business savvy and quick wit...not to mention her short skirt.

"Who am I hurting? No one else is affected," he rationalizes, knowing full well that he's suffering from a debilitating double-mindedness. He's even taught about the problem to his peers in the men's group, but now those mere words are powerless to help him.

Mark is a born again Christian. Mark has a problem. And Mark is not alone.

While running for the office of President of the United States, Jimmy Carter received intense scrutiny for admitting to a reporter: "I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've

committed adultery in my heart many times..."¹ This sincere and frank admission by a public figure was unexpected from a man open about his faith. His confession revealed a truth: Lust is a problem across society as a whole, regardless the depth of a person's faith convictions.

That was almost thirty years ago, but today the challenges we face every day in our jobs are much greater. Workplace attire is more provocative, the environment is more casual, we have the electronic availability of images, and nearly all forms of merchandising and promotion we peruse target our sexuality. All of these fan the flames of lust.

The Physiology of Lust

Although most people in America discount the loosening of sexual standards around us, we cannot help but be affected by them. Moreover, there is not just a cultural but a physiological basis for that problem, one that perniciously encourages participation in behaviors we call lust.

We are a visual society. From old adages like "a picture is worth a thousand words" to our modern obsession to document life graphically

¹ Gelman, D. & Lallande, A. "The Great Playboy Furor," *Newsweek*, (4 October 1976).

(birthday parties, vacations, school plays, etc.), we know that images evoke more than memories. They evoke sensations of the contentment and excitement we experienced that day. How? A solid line of research indicates that the



human body has an internal reward system that creates gratification, but which, in the extreme, can also create addiction. Bodily chemicals encourage us to escalate our experience, whether we're playing video games, eating, gambling, lusting, or taking drugs.

Dopamine is one of these chemicals. Researchers at the University of North Carolina note that this "chemical trigger both precedes and proceeds from the pursuit of gratification";² that is, dopamine is released before we do something potentially gratifying, as well as afterward. This is why our behavior can escalate so readily from observation to lust to affair: Dopamine gives us a

² See Wasowicz, L. "Brain Signal Prompts Addictive Behavior," United Press International. Available at www.medserv.no/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2120

physical "reward" that continually triggers the nefarious behavior.

Our initial attraction – or even the anticipation of attraction – releases a trace amount of dopamine in the body, similar to how adrenaline is released upon stimulation. As we entertain these pleasurable images (live, electronic, in print, or merely in our mind), more dopamine is released into our system, creating a desire for still more intake to get still more pleasure. To make this process even more threatening, research has found that regular introduction of dopamine into the system causes a *desensitizing* of dopamine receptors. In other words, just like heroin, cocaine or nicotine, we require increased levels of dopamine to reach the same level of pleasure as time goes on.³

This could be one of the reasons that lust has become such a problem in our society. It is a spiritual problem for sure, but it is one that has a biological impetus that tends to move in one direction. Moreover, it's hard to turn it off in a society, as one would turn off a faucet, since dopamine responses appear to be passed along genetically. The power of this response varies from person to person, but we're all susceptible, as will be every generation to come.

³ See University of Texas at Austin. *Dopamine: A Sample Neurotransmitter*. Available at www.utexas.edu/research/asrec/dopamine.html

So given this physiology of lust, it's no surprise that Christians, being merely mortal, experience problems in this area too. In a recent online survey of about 13,000 Christians (table below), both men and women responded to the statement, "I look at things I should not look at." The self-reported results are arresting. Fifty-three percent of women and 25% of men reported that they "never" or "rarely" look at things they should not look at. Thirty-eight percent of women and 48% of men said "sometimes." And about one in ten women and one in four men admitted they "often" do this. The research was conducted by a Ph.D., but one does not need a doctorate to know what's going on in these data. By our own admission, we have a problem controlling our eyes, especially us men.



The Theology of Lust

Independent of the physiological reasons, is there any question about God's standard of behavior? God, the

Creator of men, women, and the marriage relationship, is crystal clear regarding the sanctity of human sexuality. Upon creating us, God set the standard of exclusivity, declaring: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Later, when establishing the rules for living through the Ten Commandments, God is unambiguous again: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). The purpose here is to keep the husband-wife relationship pure and families intact.

Understanding our propensity to re-interpret God's law, Jesus eliminated any question about what this meant when he taught: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). The all-too-common practices of subtly scanning co-workers' bodies, lingering on lustful thoughts, and flirting despite our wedding rings elevates our desires above God's will. This is no small matter to Jesus. He punctuates the gravity of sexual sin in the next two verses by telling us to cut off (or out) the offending body part. Do whatever it takes to extinguish the behavior, He directs with customary hyperbole. From God's perspective, the sexual relationship between a husband and wife is a sacred trust, akin to the spiritual relationship between God and man, so do nothing to violate that trust.

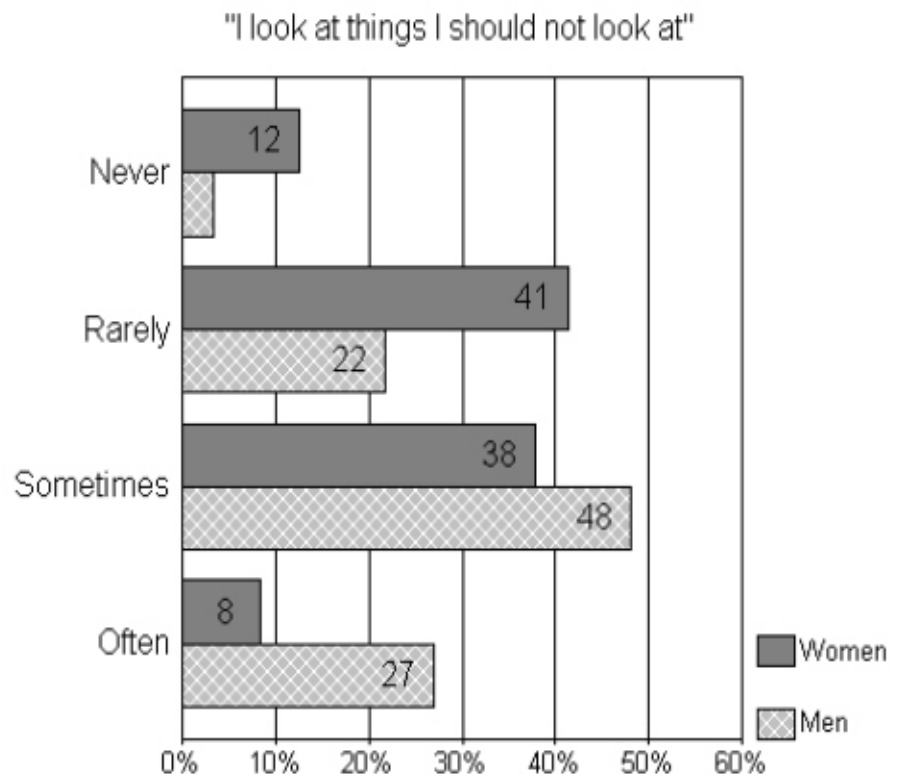
Some Practical Tips to Combat Lust

So what's the answer to lust here? Beyond the "sheer will" approach attempted unsuccessfully by Mark, what practical steps can we take to combat lust at work? Here are several ideas:

Identify the triggers. Learn to recognize those times when your thoughts and imagination wander into dangerous territory. Specifically, determine the triggers that commence the cascade of thoughts. Is a trigger seeing attractive co-workers walk by your cubical? If so, position yourself so that you won't see them. If necessary, eliminate the distraction by rearranging

the office furniture. Create a working environment that remains open, yet changes your view so that you can concentrate on the tasks at hand, not the travels of co-workers. If that's not possible, create an alternative view for yourself by putting a family picture in your line of sight.

Cut off access. Similar to limiting the triggers, minimize your exposure to temptation. If your problem is with porn sites, do not put yourself in a circumstance where you have private Internet access and moreover, install software that makes it impossible to view websites that engender lust. When you're placed in a compromising situation with an attractive co-worker, such



Source: Michael Zigarelli, Regent University, unpublished research based on the Christian Character Index, 2003 (assess-yourself.org). Sample of 12,775 Christians.

as meals alone or traveling to a tradeshow, flee the opportunity by making a stand, or simply making alternative arrangements. When you explain that you are honoring your spouse by not going to lunch unescorted with someone of the opposite sex, many (though not all) co-workers will see that as a sign of strength and honor. Reducing *opportunities* for lust will ultimately reduce lustful behavior.

Plan for the inevitable. The axiom “proper prior planning prevents poor performance” applies here. When going on a business trip, plan ahead regarding how you will combat temptation. How will you deal with the TV? (One businessman we read about actually requests the TV be removed from his hotel room!). How many times will you call your spouse and when will you call? Have you allocated sufficient time for meditating on God’s Word? Where are you meeting customers? Is there a chance you will meet alone with a client of the opposite sex, and do you need to come up with a contingency plan? Setting standards for traveling, meetings, social interactions, and counseling with the opposite sex go far to inhibit temptation. Billy Graham and Zig Ziglar take it as far as never driving a woman to the airport unescorted. It’s remarkable how we can curtail temptation by simply planning to avoid it.

Be accountable. All of the above measures in some way honor God by making no provision for sexual sin. Another time-honored method

– and one that is immensely powerful – is mutual accountability. Plain and simply, having an accountability partner or a group of peers who love you enough to ask the hard questions is invaluable. If you are not in one of these accountability relationships, find one. There are innumerable benefits, not the least of which is greater purity at work.

The Most Powerful Remedy: Divine Detox

Many people find practical tips like those listed above to be quite helpful. The real key to victory, though, is a deep relationship with God.

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37). One of the lessons we can draw from this Great Commandment is that the most effective way to remain pure on the job (or anywhere else) is to ensure your spiritual “reservoir” is constantly full through the pursuit of a love relationship with God. When this reservoir becomes depleted due to lack of attention to the relationship (e.g., lack of prayer, worship, Bible reading, meditation, fasting, confession), opportunity abounds for sin to fill the void, particularly sexual sin. Sampson, David and Solomon are all prime biblical examples of good people who stumbled when out of fellowship with God. Joseph on the other hand provides the essential counter-example because he trusted in God for

something better and demonstrated the potential for a full reservoir to defeat temptation (Genesis 39).

Be honest with yourself. Don’t your greatest challenges with lust on the job correlate with your times of inattention to God? Indeed, there are physiological explanations for what we experience with lust, but at the most basic level, this is a spiritual problem. If you really want to win this war – and that is a critical prerequisite for success – attack it with spiritual weaponry. To conquer lust on the job today, tomorrow, next week and next year, develop a deeper relationship with God. Seek divine detox for your ailment. No laundry list of practical tips will assist you without it.

Jeff Wright is an assistant manager for Arch Wireless who focuses on corporate sales, marketing and management. He can be reached at jeff.wright@arch.com

Mick Bates has served in a variety of sales, marketing, consulting and delivery management positions throughout his 18 years in the contact center technology world. Mick can be reached at mick.bates@adelphia.net

Taming the Temptation to Retaliate

Michael Zigarelli

A friend of mine in the insurance business told me this story about a wacky claim they were handling. An elderly woman in a Cadillac was having trouble finding a parking space at the mall. After circling for about ten minutes, she finally lucked out. A minivan was pulling out near the mall entrance. Her timing was perfect. She put on her blinker and waited for them to leave.

You probably know what's coming. You've seen the scene. As soon as the van vacated, two kids in a sports car raced in, cutting off the woman in the process. The woman rolled down her window, keeping her temper in check, and politely told the boys that she had been waiting for the spot. So the driver said he was sorry and moved his car – yeah, right! Quite the opposite. The driver, freshly graduated from permit to license, offered up his 17-year-old middle digit and said: "In case you forgot, Granny, that's what it's like to be young and fast!"

Having enjoyed a laugh, he and the other choir boy proceeded to the mall entrance. Just as they got to the door, though, they heard a crash. Breaking glass, crunching metal, burning rubber. It sounded ugly. To their horror, they turned and found the front of Granny's car buried deep into their trunk. Then she backed up, put it in drive and gunned it, ramming their car again!

One more for good measure? *Why not?* She thought. After all, the Corvette hadn't fully penetrated the brick wall in front of it. Reverse, drive, gas. It was *The Revenge of the Granny*, Parts 1, 2 and 3.

If you're an "eye for an eye" guy (or gal), consider this powerful formula to help you turn the other cheek

The young, fast teens ran to their car in a panic, unleashing a string of obscenities longer than their pending repair bill. But the woman remained unfazed. She calmly exited her car, approached the boys and handed them a business card.

"Here's the number of my attorney," she said with a smug grin. "That's what it's like to be old and rich!"

Admit it. Deep down, if not further up as well, you're cheering. You can't hide the smile, so don't bother trying. Just let out what you want to say: "Yessssss! Way to kick butt, Granny! You go, girl!"

How can I be so sure that you liked that ending? Because I've been experimenting with this story. Told it to dozens of people. I've gotten more mileage out of this story than Granny did from her '84 Caddie. And almost invariably, the person listening to the story gets a satisfied look on his or her face when they learn how this woman responded. It's a look that says: "Good for her! Give those jerks what they deserve!"

Payback is fun. Settling the score satisfies. Revenge is rewarding. That's evident throughout our culture.

Just look at what we find entertaining, for instance. One of the best parts of a hockey game is a fight. One player instigates, the other drops the gloves. Don't touch that remote. In baseball, the show-stoppers are the bench-clearing brawls that ensue after a batter is hit by a pitch. The World Wrestling Federation, an entertainment company built on payback and pectorals, has become so popular that it's now gone public, offering stock on the NASDAQ. Hulk Hogan and The Rock are household names. Minnesota even went so far as to elect a professional wrestler, Jesse "The Body" Ventura, to its highest office!

And then there's daytime TV. We regularly pause from channel-surfing to watch the shouting match du jour on the Ricki Lake show. If that's not

on, there's always a soap opera – perhaps the epitome of glorified retribution.

It's obvious from the Nielsen ratings that most of us like that sort of thing. We have a penchant for payback. It's in our nature. That's further evidenced by a study conducted by *American Demographics* magazine: 43 percent of respondents to a large survey indicated that if someone hurt a loved one, they would try to hurt them back. Another 41 percent said they weren't sure how they'd react. *That leaves only 16 percent responding that they're confident that they would not retaliate.*⁴

How about you? When the opportunity to retaliate comes your way, do you respond like everyone else? You might not ram any cars, but do you take actions that look just the same to God? Do you repay and eye for an eye, or turn the other cheek?

If you're more of an "eye-for-an-eye" guy (or gal), consider taking a moment to sit on the mountainside. Find a flat surface and get comfortable. Judge Jesus has something to say about Granny's road rage – and our own.

The Sage on Road Rage

Retaliation is part of our fallen condition and it's continually reinforced by our environment. As a result, it's a potent temptation – and the same temptation that many were struggling with in Jesus' day.

⁴ Bernice Kanner, "Turning the other cheek," *American Demographics*, (February 1998) Vol. 20 No. 2., p. 39.

Jesus knew that. He knew what was in their hearts. He knew their trials. He knew their history – a saga of hostile takeovers, cultural desecration and ethnic cleansing. Not all the persecuted wallowed quietly in their despair, though. Many Israelite "zealots" actively sought to avenge the oppression of their people. They waited and they

The seventh Beatitude is an uncomfortable lesson for those of us more gifted in conflict escalation than conflict resolution

planned. And when an opportunity presented itself, they would run their Caddies over as many Roman soldiers as possible.

To hear a zealot tell it, revenge would be bloody and sweet. God would work through the sword to deliver His people as He had in the past. God had done it that way with the Judges. He had done it that way through King Saul and King David. Truly, those with the courage to fight for Israel's freedom would partake in this distinguished tradition, earning the title "sons of God."

And then with one sentence in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turned that thinking on

its head. Out of His mouth did not come "blessed are the sword shakers" or "blessed are the land takers" or "blessed are the car breakers." He taught "blessed are the peacemakers." It is *they* who will be called "sons of God."

Can you hear the collective gasp of the revolutionaries? Barabus probably headed for the parking lot early. He gave Granny a high-five along the way. Back inside the stadium, Jesus was busy elaborating on His principle:

You have heard it said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven..." (Matthew 5:38-39, 44-45).

The seventh Beatitude is a lesson for those who are tempted to avenge an offense – both then and now. Those who are worthy of being called "sons of God" are not those who retaliate, but those who live peaceably with one another. A counterstrike is not God's answer. Love and forgiveness is.

It's an uncomfortable lesson for those of us who are more gifted in conflict escalation than conflict resolution. But regardless, Jesus says put down your sword. Respect God's yield sign. Turn the wheel and go search for another parking spot.

Payback While Earning a Paycheck

And if you think that's a tough lesson to follow at the mall, try it at work. In no place is it easier or more tempting to retaliate. Think about it. If you wanted to get even with somebody at work – and do it covertly – would that be difficult for you? Probably not. It might take a little creativity and some planning, but anybody can pull it off. That's because we work in environments where almost everybody is vulnerable to everybody else. On the job, revenge isn't just sweet, it's *available*.

Consequently, it's widespread. A few years ago, I stumbled across a now-defunct web site that served as a bulletin board for people to regale others with their tales of getting even in the workplace. The public commentary was voluminous. A few of the posted escapades amounted to mere pranks. Most, though, were both costly and a bit depraved. In addition to the time-honored techniques of pulling fire alarms and vandalizing cars, the more imaginative vigilante justice these days includes:

- Waving powerful magnets near computers, thereby erasing all of the memory
- Changing someone's computer screen to black characters and black icons on a black background (how long did it take the victim to diagnose *that* problem?)
- Throwing back miniscule tips at customers as they exited a restaurant

- Dialing a 1-900 number from a co-worker's phone after work hours and then leaving the phone off the hook all night (\$8.95 a minute; must be at least 18 to call)
- Giving sensitive information on pricing to a competitor
- Submitting subscription cards with a co-worker's name and address to hundreds of magazines

Desire times opportunity equals temptation to retaliate

- Sending a package of "returned" lingerie to a male co-worker's house with a good-bye note from a fictional mistress – and sending the package by taxi at a time when only his wife was home to receive it!

There were dozens more on the site, but you get the idea. If you want to get back at somebody on the job, there are countless options at your disposal. Expensive options. Destructive options. Even quick verbal options – something like repaying insult for insult. The only question is whether you'll exercise any of them.

For many of us, it's hard not to. At the emotional moment of decision, we have two powerful forces pushing us toward reprisal. First, there's our *desire* to strike back, courtesy of our sinful nature and our cultural conditioning. Something inside

of us just makes us want to do it. Then, as we've just seen, there's the abundant *opportunity* to strike back, courtesy of our mutual vulnerability in the workplace.

Desire times opportunity. It's a lethal formula whose product is the temptation to retaliate.

Remember, temptation isn't sin. Hebrews 4:15 says that even our sinless Savior experienced temptation: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin." But giving in to that temptation *is* sin. So to avoid acting on our temptation to retaliate, we need to attack temptation on both the desire and the opportunity fronts. Let's examine "opportunity" first, since that's the easier one.

Without opportunity, we cannot act in vengeance. The workplace misdemeanors listed above would not have occurred absent an open door to perform them. A person leaves her cubical unguarded. Exiting customers hang around for a few minutes after leaving 50 cents on the table. Files containing a colleague's work remain in public directories. It's almost too easy.

The solution here is to *run*. At the moment of temptation, run from the situation immediately. The longer you linger as opportunity knocks, the more likely you are to open the door. So run as far and as fast as you can away from that door. The clearest biblical example is a familiar one from its first book.

A young man, sold into slavery by his brothers, was being propositioned by an Egyptian official's wife. The opportunity was practically screaming at him to submit. It was a temptation. But Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife and in doing so, avoided acting on that temptation.

In the same way, when you're presented with the opportunity to get even with a co-worker (or anyone for that matter), *run*. Do whatever it takes. If the opportunity is zero, temptation will be zero (you math jocks can verify that using the formula).

From *desire*, though, we can't run because no matter where we run, there we are! Still desirous. Still craving payback. Still seeking to return and await an opportunity. Running from temptation is an important first step, but it may not be enough since we could end up running right back. Granny could have driven away from her golden opportunity, but after a few simmering laps, she might have returned to squash the Vette anyway.

How do you prevent this? How do you extinguish a flaming desire to get even? What could Granny do while driving those laps?

The same thing that you and I could do after we've initially run from a tempting situation. We can work to forgive the offender. To give up the right to be mad at him. To completely clear his slate. To drop it altogether. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly

Father will also forgive you," Jesus said to the astonished crowd (Matt. 6:14). This is the path to being a "peacemaker" – the path to being a son of God.

And as you probably know, it's also one of the toughest path you'll ever have to walk. Jesus knew that about us too. Maybe that's why He instructed us to "pray for those who persecute you." Have you ever tried that? It's painful at first, but if you can persevere through it, it becomes a surprisingly liberating experience. It drains our desire to strike back since it's virtually impossible to remain mad at someone for whom you are praying. That opens a different door – the door to pardon – and double-locks the door to payback.

Trust me on this one. Try this approach the next time you feel the pull of temptation. I know, you don't even want to think about your persecutor, much less pray for this person, but try it anyway. Just once. The only thing you have to lose is your anger, your hatred, and your desire to get revenge.

We can summarize all of this with another equation, one derived by none other than the Creator of mathematics Himself. Run + pray + work to forgive. It's a powerful formula that will keep both your desire and opportunities under control. And when you've mastered that math problem, you'll find that the sum is zero percent temptation, 100 percent "son of God."

Rewinding *The Revenge of the Granny*

"In case you forgot, Granny, that's what it's like to be young and fast!" Having enjoyed a laugh, he and the other choir boy proceeded to the mall entrance.

Granny wasn't happy about it, that's for sure. Thoughts of turning that Vette into an accordion danced through her head. She had the money to do it with impunity. But then she thought better of it. "Blessed are the peacemakers" she recalled from her Bible study. Blessed are those who can overlook an offense, who can forgive, who can choose the path of reconciliation over retaliation. She continued down the row, silently praying that the boys would come to know Jesus and that their lives would be transformed.

Okay, that ending isn't nearly as exciting, right? No crunching metal? No piercing one-liners? It would never play in Hollywood. It would never air on daytime television. And if I had told the story that way to my friends, I suspect that most of them would have wondered why I was wasting their time. It's a disappointing ending.

...except to God.

Michael Zigarelli is an Associate Professor of Management at the Regent University School of Business and the editor of Regent Business Review. You can reach him at michzig@regent.edu

Practical Advice for Prioritizing Family Time

Pat Gelsinger

Some close friends of our family and members of our church, Lee and Anne Marie, decided they had been led by God to take their family to the mission field. After over a year of preparation they were just about ready to leave in January of '98 and make the long journey to begin their first term. Micah, our youngest, was seven years old at the time they were preparing to depart. He announced to us one day with bold confidence, "When I grow up, I want to be a missionary to Kenya!" Linda and I figured that was like a kid saying, "I want to be a firefighter" and that he'd grow out of it. So, we smiled in affirmation and kept our doubts to ourselves. Recently, however, on my every-seven-years sabbatical from Intel, we made a trip as a family that included three weeks in Kenya. We visited missionary friends working with the Turkana people in the desolate, drought-stricken northern part of the country, just below the Sahara.

At the end of that time, Micah said, "Thanks, Mom and Dad, for bringing us here. I really appreciate it. And I still want to be a missionary to Kenya!" In fact, he's already planning our next family vacation to Kenya and he expects us to make this sojourn every year or two until he's permanently on the mission field.

That experience demonstrates the value of two things: making time to help your children develop a heart for God, and making time for family vacations. As you'll see in this article, I didn't always do a good job with such things.

Here's how Intel's Chief Technology Officer maintains the work-family balance

Breakfast 1-on-1

About thirteen or fourteen years ago, when our daughter Elizabeth was just five years old, I started a practice of taking her out for breakfast each month. As the boys came along, I then had two, then three, and now four kids to take to monthly breakfast. I now have breakfast with one of the kids every week on a rotating basis. It used to be a cheap way to have some special one-on-one time with each of them. We would usually share a breakfast, which they would choose and which made it even more enjoyable. As the kids have gotten older, however, they refuse to share with me anymore. Instead they demand

their own breakfast and part of mine as well.

Over the years, the kids have really grown to look forward to these times. It's our special one-on-one time. When I return home with the designated child of the morning, the siblings will always say, "Where did you go?" and "What did you have?"... "You're lucky it was your turn." Sometimes, I'll drop the child off at school after breakfast on my way to work, which makes it even more special.

Of course, with a busy travel schedule, I don't make breakfasts happen each week. But I have asked my secretary to both schedule and prioritize my breakfast meetings with the kids. Sometimes it takes a bit of juggling, but generally, we get them scheduled in. When I started doing this, I had a simple thought in mind: Maybe if I start young just talking with them, it will be enough of a habit that, when they hit those rough teenage years, we will have at least some venue for continued conversation.

Our breakfast agenda is pretty simple. I only require a formal, written agenda with minutes from our last breakfast, updates on the action items agreed upon at our last meeting, and a new and

proposed specific list of topics for this one.

Just kidding. The real agenda is whatever the kids want to talk about. I will bring a topic that I'll usually (but not always) raise somewhere in the conversation. This might be an issue at home, something that's on my heart about them, a Scripture or a spiritual topic. We'll always discuss how school is going, how they are doing spiritually, and anything troubling them.

As the kids have gotten older, they have started to store up questions or issues that they want to discuss. Sometimes it's stuff related to homework. Other times, they want to discuss items related to their spiritual life. Recently my daughter had three or four Scripture passages she was having trouble understanding. I felt like I was on a Bible Trivia show; they were tough passages. I am so proud to see them looking forward to this time and planning how they can take advantage of it.

In the many years I've been doing this, it is rare that a child doesn't want to take his or her turn. Occasionally, one would give me an "I'm too tired." If so, I would just go to the next kid in the rotation; and with four to choose from, I've only had one instance in twelve years where I couldn't get anyone to do breakfast with good old Dad. Even so, as my kids move into the later teen years – with more activities of their own and their increasing desire to sleep in – I'm tending to hear a few more no-thank-yous.

I also try every weekend to spend time one-on-one with each kid. This could be sitting on my lap reading a book, playing basketball, playing a board game, playing cards, helping with homework, doing some chores together, playing racquetball or tennis, or just

Some weekends I'll be 200 emails behind on Friday night and start Monday 300 emails behind. But that means I've kept my priorities straight.

sitting and talking about school or sports. On Sunday afternoon or evening, before the weekend is over and another frantic week begins, I do a quick mental checklist and ask myself, have I spent time with each of them? Have I had a chance just to connect with all of them individually? If not, I'll quickly try to correct my oversight and ask what they'd like to do.

Some weekends I'll start Friday night 200 emails behind and start Monday morning 300 behind. While I then feel an incredible burden of work and responsibilities on Monday morning, I'm also confident I've kept my priorities in the right places all weekend long.

Family Vacations

As I've already admitted, I tend to work long and hard. It should come as no surprise that in the past I have viewed taking vacations as entirely discretionary. In the first ten years of my career at Intel, I averaged less than one week a year of vacation. Being so busy with school, I almost always found myself with more than I could hope to accomplish at work. Besides, I loved what I was doing at work and school. So why would I stop and go off to do something boring like rest and relax?

Then Linda sat me down and explained that while I may not need those things called vacation times, the family needed me on vacation. It was imperative that we spend that time together and build those memories that we will share for years to come.

Well, she was right. As Linda will resoundingly affirm, it's not often when she's right that I will agree without hesitation, but this was one of those times. Since that talk our family has not missed a single vacation to which I am entitled.

We try to make a big deal out of our vacations. We plan and talk about them considerably as a family. We take big trips and small. In fact, I did a good amount of the editing of this article while taking my third sabbatical from Intel. We traveled through Europe, including London, Paris, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria, then spent three weeks in Kenya.

We had a wonderful time seeing these many countries, cities, and cultures as well as visiting several missionary friends in Kenya and going on several safaris. We followed this with family time at our vacation home, as well as a camping trip. Two years ago we did a trip to Disney World, the Caicos Islands in the Caribbean, and some time at a family reunion on the East Coast. The kids consider this one of our best vacations ever.

Other years we've traveled to national parks or to the East Coast for time with my parents. On other occasions, Linda and I have had romantic trips for just the two of us to Thailand, Australia, and Hawaii.

We've also tried to carve more vacation time out of our normal routine. We will spend a long weekend or school breaks skiing or at the beach. Three years ago, we purchased a vacation home as a place to develop more of those family memories. It gives us even more opportunities to get away as a family or with a few of the kids' friends.

Every spring break we go skiing. As soon as the school calendar comes out, I'll have my secretary start marking these three- and four-day weekends off on my calendar. Sometimes I need to work on those days from our vacation home, but we still get substantially more family time in as a result of just being away.

While family time is always at a premium, with planning you'll be amazed at how much

togetherness you can squeeze in. Add a strong effort to protect those special times and you'll start to build tremendous family memories.

If you haven't yet gotten into the habit of making family vacations a priority, I'd challenge you to begin doing so.

My wife was right. I may not have needed vacations, but my family needed me on vacation

Date Your Spouse

I'm pleasantly surprised when I talk to people who regularly date their spouses. I'm also astonished at the number of people I talk to who can't remember the last time they and their spouses had a date. Too many times, couples have allowed their entire focus to shift to their children. They invest all their finances, all their time, and all their emotional energy in their children. Of course, children need huge quantities of all three. However, we must give our marriages even higher priority than our relationships with our children.

Only from a strong marriage comes a strong family. A strong marriage establishes a foundation for your home, in

which to raise your children. The most recent census data, however, showed a continuing decline in households with both the mother and a father of the children – now less than 25 percent of all homes in the United States. Obviously, far too many people have failed to prioritize the relationship with their spouses.

The marriage bond must be held as our most important human relationship. In Genesis we see this powerful command:

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Gen. 2:24)

I like to choose slightly different words for each of the three commands we see there. They create a nice rhythmic trio that makes the commands more memorable:

1. A man shall leave his father and mother. This is the point in his life when he severs the cords of dependency he has had with his parents.
2. He is to cleave to his wife. He should exchange the dependent relationship with his parents for an interdependent relationship with his wife.
3. Finally, they shall weave their lives together, becoming one flesh. They are to meld their lives into a single entity, intertwining their values, activities and goals.

I suggest you and your spouse consider this model carefully: Leave, Cleave, and Weave. Lacking this focus on the

marriage bond leaves the entire family structure on shifting sand. Soon those children will begin to leave the nest and voila, you will be living with a stranger. You will have lost any semblance of an intimate relationship with this one called your spouse.

At one point, Linda was becoming extremely busy with the children. This wasn't too surprising, with four children and their many needs combined with my hectic travel schedule. In fact, this was almost to be expected. Feeling uneasy, however, about a few instances where it felt as if she had prioritized the kids above everything else, including me, I questioned her one evening: "Linda, am I more important to you than the kids?" It was a difficult but important conversation, as both of us realized that we were letting our precious children squeeze between us.

We decided then and there that we couldn't allow that to occur and began making some priority choices. We made it a point to hug and kiss in front of the kids and not let them come between us when we did. We stopped letting them interrupt our conversations, even though young children always think their wants are earth-shattering crises. We also determined to stop sacrificing our times together with just the two of us.

Linda and I regularly date. While our dates are often ad hoc and spontaneous, we usually have at least one every month. Our goal is to date

twice per month. When the kids were younger, dating required a lot of planning; now that they're older, it's much easier to be spontaneous.

In particular to you men reading this – just do it! Make the plans, hire the sitter, and create a special time for your wife. Of course, wives, you can't overestimate the pleasure your husband receives when you take the initiative to plan a special evening for him, even if he's reluctant to admit it.

Some of our dates are expensive, like dinner in a nice restaurant. But often we just grab a burger and go to a movie. Or we rent a video and pop our own popcorn at home. We may just go to Starbucks to talk for a while. Sometimes it's a walk around the neighborhood to get fresh air and work off the stresses of the day.

Linda and I also spend at least one weekend away each year. We call this our anniversary weekend and go to a beach house or hotel. Something like this can be so valuable for your marriage. Make these times special for you and your spouse, something that you can look forward to for weeks and then recall fondly for years afterward.

For instance, this last year I started building up the excitement weeks in advance. You might have seen those little heart confetti you can buy at some drug stores – they probably cost a whopping \$1.29. Each week for three weeks in advance, I'd hide

those everywhere you could imagine – in her Bible, in her checkbook, in her shoes, in her pockets, in her makeup, in her car, on her pillow, in her jacket and in her clothes drawer. Multiple times a day, she'd find them falling out from all over. She even became tired of picking them up.

For our actual weekend, I planned the location, got her roses the color of our wedding roses, and had a bottle of sparkling cider waiting in the room. I also waxed poetic with one of the love notes we men hate to write. I gave her a new video camera to record more of our family times. I was excited to make this a special weekend and convey how important she is to me.

I'm sure you can be creative and plan special times uniquely suited to your spouse's likes and tastes. You simply can't overestimate the value of these little touches and special times in helping your spouse to feel loved and appreciated.

Pat Gelsinger is a Senior Vice President for Intel Corporation, and its Chief Technology Officer. He is also an elder and Bible study teacher for his church. Pat and his wife Linda live in Beaverton, Oregon and they have four children.

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Coming Home

A Christian CEO Recounts His Spiritual Journey and Helps Us with Our Own

John D. Beckett

At some point in our lives we will ask: How should I relate to God? I believe this is life's greatest question.

Most people have some concept of God. Over the years my opinions have covered the waterfront. I've viewed him as a higher power, a creator, a stern judge to be feared or a friend to be loved. I've been a skeptic, a seeker, a cultural Christian and now...well, I'll save that for later.

My Story in a Nutshell

My desire to know who God is and how to relate to him began early in life. It was a rocky and unrewarding road at first.

I was born in Ohio in 1938. My dad had recently begun his own business, a manufacturing company that made oil burners used in heating homes. The early years were tough. The company was under-financed, and with the onset of World War II, he had to make radical adjustments just to survive.

Even with the enormous demands of the business, my parents were deeply committed to my two younger sisters and me. We attended the Episcopal Church in our small town and made family vacations a priority. We never doubted that we were loved.

I decided to follow my father into engineering and was able to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), the nation's top engineering school. Boston held lots of attractions. Though church didn't top my

I wasn't able to solve my spiritual dilemma the way I normally solved problems. The only way forward required a leap of faith.

list, I regularly packed off to Sunday morning services. Churchgoing filled a niche, but I sensed I was missing something. Many questions went unanswered, especially the most important question: how I should relate to God? Nor did I find answers in calculus classes or at fraternity parties.

Following my first year of college, I met Wendy during a summer vacation in Canada. She and her family were very special – and different! They were warm, engaging people

who enjoyed life *and* spoke easily of a close, personal relationship with God. This stoked my curiosity. But their vibrant faith just didn't square with my rational, logical approach. I kept searching.

After graduation, I began working in the aerospace industry in the town where I'd grown up. Wendy and I were married a year later, and we began a family. A few years after this, my dad asked me to join him in the family business – a small company with twelve employees. It was a big change, but I sensed it was the right thing to do.

A One-Two Punch

We had been working well together for just over a year, Dad the mentor, me the understudy. I was imagining learning from him for at least another decade – that was until I received a call from the police department on a chilly February morning.

Dad, age 67, had been found slumped over the steering wheel of his car, the victim of an apparent heart attack. Characteristic of my hard-working father, he was on his way to work. At age 26 I had been thrust into the daunting task of leading the family business.

Then, only a few months later, a call in the middle of the night

brought the incredible news that our factory was on fire. Only a valiant effort by our local volunteer fire department kept the plant from being totally consumed.

These two events had a huge impact on me. I had always been able to rally my own strength and abilities, but now my confidence was deeply shaken. In spite of the great example set by Wendy and her family, I wasn't sure where to turn. God seemed so far away. Some said getting closer required "a leap of faith," but my mind firmly instructed my feet to not leap anywhere.

What held me back? Was it pride? Was it all the things I knew were wrong in my life? Could I ever be worthy of God?

Months passed without answers. Work challenges continued. I found myself discouraged and confused. But quietly, persistently, I sensed God was drawing me to himself.

Small things happened to encourage me. Someone would give me a helpful book, or I'd hear a speaker who would answer a key question. Was I getting closer to seeing daylight?

The breakthrough came when I finally realized there was but one way forward and that indeed it *did* require a step of faith. I concluded I wasn't going to resolve this dilemma in the way I normally handled problems.

For the first time in my life I let go, yielding to God as fully

as I knew how. I said, in effect, "Lord, I don't believe I need to have everything figured out beforehand. I trust you, and I want to be fully yours. I release myself to your care."

What followed was amazing. I experienced a new kind of peace, certain that God had accepted me just as I was – my intellectual hang-ups, my sense

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of unworthiness and all. I hadn't earned it. I didn't deserve it. But he took my cautious step of faith and, in return, welcomed me with open arms. He was no longer distant. I felt washed, clean – for the first time, rightly related to him. Though there was much I had yet to understand, I was convinced I had finally come home.

As I looked back I could see a clear pattern. God had been at work for as long as I could remember to bring me to himself, guiding choices I made, friendships I developed. His hand had been on me. He never imposed nor compelled but waited patiently for me to see my need and respond.

My world changed. It was soon clear this new relationship would reach beyond my personal and family life into every arena, including my work. To my amazement, I found I could integrate Sundays into Mondays with great benefit to both! That practice, now spanning over 30 years, has reshaped our company's approach to everyday business, from customer relations to our care for people to handling finances to retooling our core values.

Over the years our small business has grown to become the leader in our industry, and we've diversified by developing new companies. We now employ 600 people and generate over \$100 million in sales. Our "experiment" – bringing faith and work together – has enabled us to help other business leaders around the globe who are on a similar journey.

Now here is the key point. Even though I had no idea how my life would be different, that step of faith – when I released myself to God and to his care – was a turning point with immense implications. That's what I want to focus on next in this article. Join me in an examination of this most important of all journeys.

A Business Analogy

I have found an analogy from business helpful when it comes to understanding this idea of a turning point. Suppose our sales people are seeking a new customer. They work hard to build a relationship and create a desire for that customer to do business with us. That process

can take a long time. But nothing is ultimately accomplished until a particular event occurs – we get an order or a contract. That transaction is the turning point. Then, of course, we work closely with the customer to meet his requirements.

Success involves three distinct phases: preparation, the transaction and fulfillment.

I noticed there were similar stages in my spiritual journey. Initially, there was a period of preparation during which God was drawing me to himself. He allowed difficulties. He brought me to the end of my own resources. But he had a goal in mind. It was to “complete a contract.” It was to bring me to a place where I could trust him and release myself to his care.

From that point a new and deeply committed relationship began. I can say he has done everything possible to fulfill the commitment he made to me when I committed to him.

Let me tell you why I’ve written this article: I want to help others come to that turning point. I went for years, searching and struggling. For me, the way home was neither clear nor compelling. I understand others who are confused. For the longest time, I thought it was enough to “be good,” to “do kind deeds,” to “be moral” or to serve others. I now realize these are important, but they are not transformational. They’re not the same as coming home spiritually. That only happens when we enter a personal, life-

changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

At this critical transition in my own life, I understood very little about the profound change that was taking place. Now, through insights gained from the Bible, from sound teaching and the “classroom of life,” I have a much better grasp of how a person enters and walks out that vital

I’ve written this because I want to help others come to that turning point.

relationship. As I explain how one becomes properly related to God, I’m sure I won’t address every question. But I believe I’ve found a reliable roadmap. I know it would have helped me on my journey. I trust it will help you.

In the Beginning...

Every journey has a starting point. Ours begins in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The word Genesis means “beginnings.” There we get a glimpse of what it was like when Adam, the first man, walked closely with God. God deeply loved Adam, and Adam responded warmly to that love. They both took great delight in the openness, trust and companionship they experienced in their relationship with each other.

Work was different from today. It was productive and

satisfying – free from stress, anxiety, corruption or ethical lapses. But, sadly, Paradise was short-lived. What happened then has touched each of our lives.

We learn from the Bible that mankind inherited a fatal defect when Adam gave in to temptation and rebelled against God. At the root was Adam’s choice to walk independently, forsaking the extraordinary bond he had with God at the beginning. From that point, including Adam and Eve’s own children, man’s nature has been ruled by violence, greed, jealousy, hatred and rebellion. The Bible calls this sin. Its result: death.

The Old Testament is an account of man’s struggle against sin and its consequences. God established temporary methods to cover for this now-fallen nature, but these methods did nothing to change that nature. It remained the same. Nor has it been improved by the passage of time or increasing education or scientific discovery or economic prosperity. Man’s basic or “fallen” nature is unaltered from the time of Adam.

Shortly after sin entered the human race through Adam, God foretold the coming of one who would remedy the fatal defect. He then identified a people group, the Hebrews, as the family from whom this person would come. Over hundreds of years, Hebrew prophets gave insight into the one who would restore the fractured relationship.

The Remedy

Our journey now leaps forward in time. We find the account in the New Testament.

A unique prophet named John was born. John the Baptist called on people to repent, or to change the way they were living, and to receive forgiveness for their sins. People responded by the thousands and were baptized as evidence they had turned away from their defiled way of living.

John came to prepare the way for the one who would bring full restoration. He took people as far as he could. But he clearly stated that, at God's initiative, another would follow who would go to the root of the problem, the sin nature itself.

When people repented from their sins in response to John the Baptist, their hearts were prepared to deal with sin, the underlying problem. The true significance of Jesus – God's perfect representative in human form – is that he, and he alone, had the credentials to deal with the root.

Jesus was like Adam in certain ways. Both men were born free from the defect of sin. Both were tempted and capable of sin. But here the two took radically different directions. While Adam succumbed to temptation, Jesus did not. He led a perfect life, serving as an impeccable example of how man should live.

But more than his life, his death and resurrection form the basis for our personal

transformation. Because it is so vital that we understand the uniqueness and scope of what Jesus accomplished, we will now take a fresh look at this watershed moment in history. It is, as one author described it, "The Greatest Story Ever Told!"

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What God Did in Jesus

As we have seen – in the beginning God creates man. Almost immediately man falls through rebellion. Then after thousands of years of preparation, at just the right time, God impregnates a young virgin girl named Mary who was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. A son is born, the Son of God himself.

As a young man, Jesus goes to work in his father's carpentry business. Facing the temptations each of us faces, he grows up without sin. About age 30, Jesus leaves his trade to begin proclaiming the message of his heavenly father's kingdom. Tens of thousands follow him, scores

are healed, even the dead are given back life.

Religious and government leaders see him as a threat. They collaborate and arrange his death on trumped-up charges. Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried, whipped and nailed to a cross. His sentence of death by crucifixion is one allotted to common criminals. He does not fight back but goes voluntarily, though he could have summoned a huge number of angels to rescue him. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, he is led like a lamb to the slaughter. He dies.

On the cross Jesus says, "It is finished." This is the most dramatic point in all history, for Jesus is referring to not only his life, but to the problem of sin. Jesus has become God's remedy. By his obedience, he has satisfied God's requirement as "the perfect sacrifice for sin." This is why Christianity, stripped of the cross, is not Christianity at all!

Jesus is laid into the tomb of an influential Jewish leader. The tomb is sealed. Three days later, to the astonishment of even his closest followers, Jesus is raised from the dead. His disciples find the grave empty and are shaken to the core.

But Jesus appears to them, then to hundreds of others. He comforts and reassures them by affirming these incredible events have been at the very heart of God's purposes.

After 40 days he goes up to heaven where he is reunited with God, his father. The father then bestows on his son

the supreme high honor of headship over everything on earth and in heaven. Jesus is made both Lord and Christ – positions he holds today. “Lord” refers to his rulership. “Christ” refers to his capacity to save. He and he alone becomes the savior of mankind.

From this place of authority, Jesus invites us to become his followers – new creations!

Who can say this is not utterly amazing? I’m not sure the human mind can fully take it in. What kind of love is this – a father sacrificing his only son? Yet this occurred, very literally, for one central, majestic reason – so you and I can reestablish the kind of personal relationship with God that he intended from the beginning. He made it possible to come home.

That process – how we come home spiritually – is what we now want to look at more closely. It is the consummation and purpose of our journey.

Believing

Thus far I have sought to establish two basic ideas. The first is the way in which our lives were corrupted with inherited sin. The second is that Jesus came as the remedy. According to the Bible, these are completely dependable facts.

Now, I want to consider the relationship between these two realities and the possibility that we can build on them to be personally transformed.

The key in appropriating these truths is to *believe* them and

apply them to ourselves. (The word “believe” conveys the same meaning as “have faith in...”) Let’s look more closely at the concept of believing as it is used in the Bible, for in the New Testament we find the word used nearly 250 times!

The Bible emphasizes that personal repentance is vital in the transformation process.

First, what believing is not. Believing is not wishful thinking or unfounded hope. It is not about earning a relationship with God. It is not about doing good deeds or just being a “good person.” We do not become believers simply by affiliation with a religious institution or by following tradition or by being born into a Christian family.

Believing requires an object. It is to place our confidence in someone or something. It is an action word. It involves making a conscious decision. We *choose* to believe – or we choose *not* to believe. Both involve a decision.

In the biblical meaning, believing engages the depths of our hearts, not just our minds. When we believe, we link the realities mentioned earlier with

a commitment to anchor our hope in the person of Jesus.

When we believe, we are responding to God’s love towards us. That love is so profound and so comprehensive it provides the overarching context for all he has done *for* us, and all he expects *of* us. Jesus passionately wants us to be complete in our relationship with him.

The Way Home

Let us look more closely at the key elements by which one becomes reconciled to the Father. Each is vitally important. Any, if absent, could keep our new relationship from being complete.

Our Condition

First, we must understand that we are separated from God. The chasm dividing us is both wide and deep. We inherited a fatal defect at birth. As a result, we have lived our lives independently from him. If we can’t come to grips with the reality that sin separates us from God, we’ll never come home spiritually, for there is no need for a savior. We might say before God, “I realize I am separated from you by a nature flawed by sin. All the human effort in the world won’t change that.”

God’s Remedy

Second, we need to be very clear in understanding who Jesus is and what he has done for us, in order that we might confidently place our faith in

him. He bridged the chasm separating us from God.

Jesus was not just a good man, a great teacher, an inspired prophet. He came to earth as the Son of God. He was born to a virgin. He led a sinless life. He died. He was buried. He rose again on the third day. He ascended into heaven where he became both Lord and Christ.

Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf satisfied God's requirement – complete provision for our sin. This Jesus, and he alone, is qualified to be the remedy for my sin and yours.

Our response: To repent and believe

The Bible emphasizes that personal repentance is vital in the transformation process. Repentance literally means “a change of mind.” We repent when we specifically decide to change the direction of our lives. To repent is to say to the Father, “I want to turn toward you and away from the life I’ve lived independently from you. I am sorry for who I’ve been and what I have done. I am committing my heart and mind toward a permanent change.”

Do you think God hears a prayer like this? He absolutely does, and in his love and mercy towards us he forgives our sins. Many at this point experience a remarkable “washing” from a lifetime’s accumulation of all that has degraded the human soul and spirit. Whether or not we sense that forgiveness, we can be very certain we’re forgiven. Our certainty is based on

God’s promise to us, not how we feel.

Completing the Journey

If we prepare our hearts in this way, the completion of our spiritual transformation is very straightforward. It is *to believe*.

This, to me, is the greatest miracle – truly coming home to our Father in heaven.

Earlier, I described what it means to believe in the biblical sense. *When we believe, we place our faith in what God has done in Jesus. We accept him – not just with our minds, but also with our hearts – as the one who died for our sins, who was buried and was raised from the dead.* Should you desire, you could personalize this statement, making it your own prayer.

Does what I’ve said seem disarmingly simple?

Unfortunately, the concept of coming to Jesus in this way has been so obscured, so wrapped up in extra ideas and extra words that many have been robbed of the wonderful simplicity of its truth. How important it is that we not allow this to happen to us.

The possibility of personal transformation is evident throughout the New Testament. John’s gospel

states: “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Personal transformation results in a completely new nature. It replaces the old, which had been corrupted from the beginning. The Apostle Paul describes it this way: “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

In reality, we have experienced a second birth. The first was a natural birth, which came with a fallen nature. The second is a spiritual birth, free of this basic defect. It is a brand new start. We become a new person!

Jesus says: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” Something of heaven itself – alive, active and imperishable – indwells the new believer.

This, to me, is the greatest miracle we could ever imagine – truly coming home to our Father in heaven – for all this means in this life and in eternity.

Entering a New Orbit

D. Elton Trueblood, author, educator, philosopher and theologian, states succinctly the magnitude of this change: “The new character, being finite, can still make mistakes and actually does so; but that is not the primary fact. The primary fact is that all of the person’s powers are employed in a new way and that his movements are dignified by a new direction. He is a wandering planet which becomes stable in its

movements by entering a new orbit.”

I now realize this is what happened to me, back at the point when I yielded my life to Christ. I had been a wandering planet, but through the generosity, patience and mercy of a loving father, my life was stabilized. I was brought into a new orbit – welcomed into, and made a member of, God’s own family.

A Lifelong Journey

Once a solid spiritual foundation has been set in place, we are able to grow into the new life God has promised us. The Bible calls this “maturing in Christ.” As I can readily attest, it is a lifelong process.

God’s intent is that as new believers, we become different people. We are “under construction.” We’re being transformed from the inside out. The chief architect of these changes is God himself. As a loving father, he comes alongside to personally direct our growth.

From my experience, and in observing others, some dramatic new patterns emerge. Harmful habits change. Attitudes, thinking and language move to a new level. Motives come under scrutiny. We ask, “Why on earth did I do *that!*” God shows us how to behave differently and we move on.

The process continues. Selfishness gives way to service. Relationships with others are restored. Bitterness, envy, jealousy and hatred

diminish as love increases. We experience a new dimension of joy. Not overnight, but steadily, progressively. Profound adjustments are underway. We realize it is true – we really *are* new creations because Christ is living in us!

These inward changes soon become visible. The new believer wants to get together

It’s no accident that you’re reading this article. But the next step is yours. I urge you to rise to the challenge.

with others who also have a faith in Christ. We’re not alone! Fresh bonds of trust, love and mutual respect are forged.

The Bible, God’s own inspired word to us, becomes a newfound friend, now more relevant and understandable. We encounter the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of Jesus himself. We discover he is an incredible guide if we give him access.

But our new relationship brings needed constraints. It is not “anything goes,” for we see that our God is a holy God. He is to be honored, revered and obeyed. As we embrace the high standards he has set for us, we realize even they are for our benefit. In fact, everything

he provides us and does for us is for our good.

Our new life in Christ is not one of unbroken success. There are fresh challenges. Old habits and old associations don’t change easily. Conflicts arise. There are even spiritual forces that oppose us. We doubt. We become discouraged.

Yet it’s different. We’re not on our own. We have entered a new and living bond with Jesus Christ. He leads. We follow. Our faith is set on a new foundation – and that foundation is Christ. How wonderful and reassuring are his words to us: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

In time, the transformed life impacts everything we are and do. Recall the relationship Adam experienced with God before the fall. Would not the Lord want to see that kind of fellowship restored, even in our work? As one business owner commented in a 1999 *Harvard Business Review* article: “I would love to get the workplace as close to the Garden as possible, knowing we can’t. But I shouldn’t stop trying.”

Alan’s Story

When I think about the transformed life, I think of Alan, a colleague in our industry. While he was doing well professionally, he was struggling personally. Setbacks at home and at work had left him discouraged. As with myself years ago, Alan was searching.

One day when Alan was making a business call, a customer told him about the radical change that occurred when he yielded his life to Jesus. Alan listened respectfully, but didn't see how this applied to him.

Then, during a trade show, Alan and I arranged to meet over breakfast. As he poured out his difficulties, I could see that he longed for personal peace. I shared my own story. Then, right at the breakfast table, Alan took that same bold step we've been talking about. He acknowledged his fallen condition, asked forgiveness for his sins and trusted his life to Jesus Christ. He then broke into a broad grin and, with tears streaming down his face, said, "John, I don't think I'll ever be the same after this morning."

Alan and I have stayed in touch, enabling me to see his steady progress. Recently, we

celebrated the third anniversary of his coming to Christ – again over breakfast at our annual industry trade show. I saw in Alan a man whose life is peaceful, rewarding and purposeful. Though he continues to work through challenges, he knows he's a new person, experiencing a joy and freedom he never knew before.

The Next Step is Yours

It is no accident that you are reading this article. Maybe you've been searching for answers for your own life, including the answer to life's greatest question – how should I relate to God? Or maybe you've begun your faith journey but need to solidify basic understandings.

Perhaps you've been a long way from home as I was years ago – uncertain about life's purpose, its end, about

eternity. Wherever you are, once a solid foundation is in place, the adventure of growing and living in Christ never ends.

The next step is yours. I urge you to rise to the challenge. If these thoughts and words are timely, please reflect on them and, with God's help, act on them. With all my heart, I believe they are your reliable roadmap to the way home.

John D. Beckett is the chairman of the Beckett Companies in Elyria, Ohio, and the author of Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business Without Selling Your Soul, published by InterVarsity Press. John invites you to visit www.lovingmonday.com and www.beckettcorp.com, and to send comments to him at johnbeckett@beckettcorp.com

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