A DANGEROUS DISTORTION OF A CONFUSING PASSAGE
P.40

"ON THE LEFT THERE’S A MYOPIC FOCUS ON ACCESS BUT NOT MUCH ABOUT [VOTING] SECURITY, AND ON THE RIGHT YOU’VE GOT THE OPPOSITE." —P. 52
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FINDING HOPE AFTER A FUNERAL

Some parents who have lost kids to the record-breaking drug overdose crisis are finding ways to help their children’s friends, mired in their own addiction

by Emily Belz

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TRANSLATION ABUSE

Some abortion advocates point to a passage in the NIV as Biblical justification for abortion. But the NIV’s speculative translation clouds rather than clarifies

by Leah Hickman

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ELECTION REFORM TUG OF WAR

Republicans and Democrats with tunnel vision are vying to change election laws across the United States

by Harvest Prude

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“ALL WE CAN DO IS FLEE”

Taiwan is a top destination for Hong Kong residents running from the new wave of Chinese authoritarianism

by June Cheng
TODAY BEEKEEPING IS PART OF “THE WHOLE BACKYARD MOVEMENT,” AS FAMILIES USE THEIR BACKYARDS FOR MORE THAN JUST A SWING SET.

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THE IMAGE RESTORED

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UNCIVIL UNREST
FEB. 27, P. 42—CARL PALMBERG/MASSILLON, OHIO
Emily Belz shows how both conservative and liberal movements get sullied by the acts of violent fringe groups. The impact the peaceful “many” last summer and on Jan. 6 had hoped for was destroyed by the violent “few.” May God give our country the character and courage to punish violent offenders and wisdom when addressing the concerns of peaceful protesters.

KATHY CONNORS/MEDINA, WASH.
The media and political elite now want to label conservatives as “domestic terrorists.” I recommend coming out west to see Seattle and Portland. Antifa ransacked these now-decimated cities night after night with no consequences or punishment.

COVER-UP
FEB. 27, P. 8—PRISCILLA BOOT/DORR, MICH.
Thank you for Joel Belz’s observations about mask-wearing. It breaks my heart to see what this response to COVID-19 has done to the most vulnerable, and how it seems to have shifted our priorities from honoring and worshipping God.

DANIEL J. DECOOK/HOLLAND, MICH.
Joel is terribly wrong about the Church “already [taking] an incredible hit in terms of lost opportunity.” No, the crisis is the Church’s opportunity to reach out, to do good in the name of Jesus, to think creatively and energetically about meeting needs in new ways, and to break out of bad habits and slumber.

THE RED COAT
FEB. 27, P. 18—KELLY L. LENTINE/MOUNT PROSPECT, ILL.
I love Janie B. Cheaney’s turn of phrase, “A natural ordinary sign is a kiss from heaven.” During the pandemic, our family has recognized these kisses more and more in the little mundane blessings that are so real and comforting.

BACK OF THE LINE
I appreciate Mindy Belz’s revealing article on the challenges of distributing the COVID-19 vaccine worldwide. Let us hope and pray that production and distribution will greatly increase.

FEB. 27, P. 36—JOHN A. PUMMELL/LAS CRUCES, N.M.

LIFE UNDER BIDEN
FEB. 27, P. 72—ALAN PUE/CASTLE ROCK, COLO.
As Marvin Olasky rightly notes, “Justice without compassion is just ice.” But justice without wisdom and discernment is likely foolish, wasteful, and self-defeating. We need both. How likely is that in a Biden administration?

SANDRA LANGLEY/VIENNA, VA.
Marvin’s assertion that living under President Biden would be tantamount to living under Nebuchadnezzar and Nero was staggeringly off the mark. I do not in any way support abortion, but neither do I endorse the evildoings of ancient murderous god-kings, nor find them equal to our new president.

J. PAUL LANDREY/ELKHORN, NEB.
Marvin has given us an outstanding example of how we should live and how to express why we live this way. Let’s keep encouraging one another to know, trust, and follow King Jesus!

A STORY TO TELL
FEB. 27, P. 28—ROBERT S. WISSOLIK/SEQUIM, WASH.
Susan Olasky’s interview with Jeri Chase Ferris was wonderful because it pointed out that role models for inner-city youth are scarce. But being a victim of government-demanded affirmative action in the 1990s, I cringed at Ferris’ “free pass” for whites comment at the end.

CULTURE CLASH
FEB. 27, P. 50—LONNIE ELLIOTT/RICHMOND, VA.
You neglected to include the authors of the children’s fiction titles recognized as Honorable Mentions for Book of the Year. Margaret Finnegan wrote We Could Be Heroes, but there is also a new science fiction book written for adults with the same title. Please include author names to forestall unhappy parents and children.

LETTERS AND COMMENTS
EMAIL editor@wng.org
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Notes from the CEO  KEVIN MARTIN

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration, we hope to have a “family reunion” of sorts.

A family tree from A to Z

We’re grateful for the hundreds of people who have served at WORLD over the years

‘M SPENDING A GOOD BIT OF TIME these days going through my A-to-Z roster of WORLD employees, both past and present, from Abraham (Priya) to Ziennick (Kyle), and everybody in between.

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration, we hope to have a “family reunion” of sorts. Part of the work of putting that event together falls to Trina Gould, our longtime human resources director, who has been working hard to piece together a listing of everyone we’ve ever employed.

“Can’t you just run some kind of report?” I naïvely asked Trina. “Easy, right?”

Yeah, no, not really.

Until sometime in the early 1990s, we maintained employee records on paper. Believe it or not, we still have many of them, but we’re pretty sure we don’t have them all. Since Trina joined us in 1995, she has kept a file of every employee that includes at least the start and end dates of employment. But that’s a lot of years for which we have neither digital records nor a reliable filing system.

Still, the list she has pieced together—the one I’ve been looking through lately—contains nearly 850 names, and she expects to find a few more. I’ve said in the past that I think of WORLD as a small family business. I’ve been half right: the business is relatively small, but the family is much bigger than I imagined.

Speaking of family, among our staff over the years have been quite a few family members. We have the obvious families (Belz, for example, with 11 family members joining the work at some point) and the less obvious (Scholten, with 6), all of them doing their part to fulfill the mission of WORLD. Among all the employees, we’ve had an unusually high number of spouses, parents and children, and siblings working together in the ministry. Even now, we have multiple Bartletts, Bashams, Belzes, Eichers, and Olaskys.

And none of these numbers reflects our nonemployee co-laborers. At any given time, about half of our editorial staff is made up of “freelancers” whom we consider to be part of the WORLD family. Some of your favorites (Janie Cheaney, Arsenio Orteza, Myrna Brown, and Kim Henderson, to name just a few) fit this category. There are literally hundreds of others.

Put all of these together, and the “staff” part of our family looks pretty big. But these hundreds of staff family members are just a small part of the hundreds of thousands in the overall WORLD family. We may have to wait until heaven for a full family reunion. In the meantime, we love being part of this family.

I

EMAIL  kevin@wng.org
After years of drought and food shortages, in 2020 only 2% of children in Zimbabwe had a diet that met the minimum requirement for growth and development. Mothers cannot produce milk. Children are stunted. Mothers and children are dying.

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We can’t count

A primer on numbers helps with more than just math

O

OT THE LEAST OF THE WEAKNESSES in our national culture, which the COVID-19 pandemic is exposing and highlighting, is this: We don’t know how to count.

Big numbers embarrass us. Just five months ago, we went—largely peacefully—to the polling places and cast something like 150 million votes for president and other offices. Then, and since then, we’ve stumbled all over the place trying to get an accurate handle on how many of those votes properly went to each candidate. And we tied the political process in knots, especially in states like Georgia, trying desperately to make numbers say contradictory things they obviously didn’t mean. Like I said: We’re not very good with numbers.

Within the last month, we were told that 500,000 Americans had died over the last year because of the deadly coronavirus. How many of those, some of us asked, had died explicitly from the virus and how many might have been expected to die, in any case, from other causes? You mean we haven’t mastered the basic art of counting?

It’s in the middle of all this that the Biden administration serves notice that funding for the Social Security system will be running out sometime before 2029—just eight years from now. The numbers are vast, which is probably why no one bothers to take the warnings seriously.

Here’s a disheartening exercise you might try on some of your friends sometime soon. “Take this concept of a ‘trillion,’” you say, “and tell me how many zeros there are in that number.” Chances are good that no one will be ready with the right figure. Did I say we’ve become a nation that doesn’t know how to count?

But it’s not just those great big figures that expose our culture’s numerical illiteracy. A few very elementary figures will illustrate the point—and I fear that might be just as true within Christian circles as outside.

It’s historically the case, for example, that God’s kingdom work has typically been funded by the weekly 10-percent-of-earnings offerings of God’s people. Now, however, that principle largely has been lost to our culture. Most people today are as ignorant of tithing as they are of how many zeros are in a trillion. And the best reporting I’ve seen (among those who call themselves evangelical Christians) suggests that only a relatively few people give regularly, and that what’s given comes in at a level closer to 3 percent than to 10. Did someone utterly fail to teach them how to count?

Or ask yourself what’s gone wrong over the last several generations in evangelicals’ understanding of “1-7.” Give each member of your church’s youth group a blank sheet of paper and this simple instruction: “What’s the first thing that comes to your mind when you see the figures 1 and 7? Write a brief paragraph on the subject.” People throughout Christendom have always had at least a vague sense that the way they behave on a day of rest maybe ought to be different from what they do on the other six. Today’s young evangelicals are largely uninstructed, and therefore illiterate, on the whole subject.

Or shift the focus just a bit and ask those same young people what comes to mind when they see the figures “1-1.” How do you get simpler than that? But watch out! You may be walking on treacherous ground. Not so very long ago, the 1-1 configuration almost always suggested God’s standard for marriage: “One man, one woman.” Today that same little numerical pattern is considered by a growing part of our population to be “hate speech.”

You get the point. I challenge you to compile your own list of numbers that are losing their meaning. Whether they’re meganumbers or minifigures doesn’t matter so much. Just be on guard.
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WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE MIND of 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long on March 16 as he sat in his car for an hour before entering Young’s Asian Massage northwest of Atlanta?

Police say he was depressed about a “sex addiction” and confessed to killing eight people that day, six of them of Asian ancestry. Beyond that we know little, but that didn’t keep both professional journalists and social media users from throwing around accusations.

Six days later, a shooter marched into a Boulder, Colo., supermarket and...
gunned down 10 people. As we write this, less than 48 hours after that rampage, we know little about alleged gunman Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa’s motives—but that lack of information didn’t stop pundits from presenting other easy answers.

Let’s start with the Georgia tragedy and its sad facts, including these: Four dead at Young’s, including two Asian women. Long then drove into Atlanta and allegedly killed three Asian women in Gold Spa before heading across the street and killing one more Asian woman in Aromatherapy Spa.


The first reports from the mainstream press also suggested that the racial and ethnic identity of the perpetrator (white) and most of the victims (Asian) told the whole story. Many journalists seemed to be going with a standard script: America is racist.

Then a second-day story emerged. Police said Long admitted to frequenting Gold and Aromatherapy. They said he denied a racial motivation and was trying to remove sexual temptation. Journalists pivoted to a story of a Southern Baptist church member struggling with pornography and seeking treatment at HopeQuest, a Christian addiction facility. That fit into a second preexisting script about repressed evangelicalism.

Then others trotted out a third preexisting script: This is what men do. The Associated Press quoted Shannon Watts, founder of the gun-control group Moms Demand Action: “Toxic masculinity is truly a problem in this country.”

A fourth preexisting script dominated second-day coverage of the Colorado nightmare. We learned that Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa is a naturalized U.S. citizen, originally from Syria. He was convicted of assault in 2018. His family told reporters he suffered from mental illness and delusions. But the first hot takes on that shooting centered on demands from the left for gun control, and pushback from the right that we need more armed citizens, not fewer.

What are some takeaways for Christians thinking through these tragedies?

First, avoid the hot take. Christians especially should be slow to speak. People are complicated. Explanations that focus only on external factors of race, gender, ethnicity, or legal requirements may miss the motivations that animate individual human beings. The Bible teaches that “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”

Second, engage the heart behind the hot take. Many people saw the Atlanta shootings as a hate crime because some Asian Americans have experienced verbal and physical abuse influenced in part by resentment over COVID-19’s origin in China. Asian Americans also saw the shooting as part of an unjust stereotype, with some white men viewing Asian women as submissive and exotic vessels they can pay to have sex with. The shooter could have targeted other spas: Why did he choose these Asian-run ones?

Third, each of us should assess how we react to news like this. For example, Christians should be willing to reexamine the ways some churches and evangelical groups talk about sex and purity culture. Conservatives should be willing to consider whether tweaking laws without trampling the Second Amendment can prevent some people who shouldn’t have guns from obtaining them. Journalists bear heavy responsibility and need ample curiosity. Those who are sure of the answers before they ask questions are propagandists, not reporters.

Fourth, Paul tells us in Romans 12:15 to “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” If our Asian brothers and sisters are weeping, we should weep with them. Pastor Eugene Cho tweeted after the shootings, “To my fellow Asian community: I am so sorry. It hurts so much. ... We see you, love you, need you.” We should say the same regarding our Colorado brothers and sisters.

Ecclesiastes has it right: This is a time to weep, mourn, and embrace. Other times will come.

—with reporting by Michael Reneau
THE OVERALL COST OF SENDING STIMULUS CHECKS to Americans through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. The $1.9 trillion package contained provisions for American citizens, businesses, and non-profits recovering from the coronavirus pandemic, but it also contained lots of non-COVID-19-related expenditures.
A rampage in Boulder

Investigators try to piece together why a man slaughtered 10 people in a supermarket

Ten people died on March 22 when a gunman opened fire at a King Soopers supermarket in Boulder, Colo. The youngest person to die was 20 years old, and the oldest was 65. Three were employees of the grocery store. The first police officer to arrive on the scene, 51-year-old Eric Talley, died as the police exchanged fire with the shooter, whom they eventually apprehended. “Above all else he loved his family and his Lord Jesus Christ,” Talley’s father said. He had seven children. Family members told investigators that alleged shooter Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, 21, suffered from mental illness and delusions, according to a law enforcement official who spoke to the Associated Press. Alissa, from the Denver suburb of Arvada, required treatment for a gunshot wound to the leg before being booked on murder charges.

Died

Elgin Baylor, 86, died March 22 of natural causes. The Hall of Fame basketball player and 11-time All-Star played his whole career with the Lakers. He changed the game with his ability to jump and change direction in midair. Baylor also had the courage of his convictions. He boycotted one game during his rookie season after a West Virginia hotel refused to house him and two black teammates. The whole team then stayed at a black rooming house. “I’m a human being. … I’m not an animal put in a cage and let out for the show,” he said. In a 2018 interview, Baylor talked about his religious beliefs: “I believed that I served a loving and forgiving God.”

Sanctioned

A 27-nation bloc froze the assets of a Xinjiang bureau it accused of controlling the Chinese province where Uyghur Muslims have faced persecution. Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States joined the European Union in placing sanctions on four senior Xinjiang officials. The officials can no longer legally travel inside the EU, and Europeans can’t support them financially. Beijing retaliated with similar sanctions against four institutions and 10 individuals, including German Adrian Zenz, who has reported on the oppression of minority groups in Tibet and Xinjiang. China initially denied it put Uyghurs in forced labor camps, then rebranded them as reeducation centers.

Detained

Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, released photos of a Border Patrol holding facility where more than 1,000 migrants, many of them unaccompanied minors, are living in overcrowded tents and sleeping under foil blankets on floor mats in small groups separated by plastic sheeting. Biden administration officials were working with officials from Mexico and Guatemala on a plan to manage the growing migration surge. Cuellar said he released the photos because the U.S. government has refused to let reporters examine the migrant holding sites. Some nonprofit lawyers also say the Border Patrol has denied them access to detained migrants.
“I got that done when I was a senator. It passed. We should do it again.”

President JOE BIDEN, describing his role in passing a 1994 crime bill that included a 10-year ban on certain semi-automatic weapons. Republicans pushed back against Democratic calls for gun control legislation following mass shootings in Atlanta and Boulder, Colo., in March. “Every time there’s a shooting, we play this ridiculous theater where this committee gets together and proposes a bunch of laws that would do nothing to stop these murders,” said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

“Reasonable people would not accept such statements as fact.”

ATTORNEYS for Sidney Powell, a former member of President Donald Trump’s legal team, defending her for statements in which she accused Dominion Voting Systems of rigging the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The comments, arguing the public would view her comments only as “claims that await testing by the courts,” came in a March 22 legal filing requesting a court dismiss a $1.3 billion defamation lawsuit Dominion has filed against Powell and her legal fund.

“Disabled people don’t have to die to be dignified.”

Canadian disability rights activist TAYLOR HYATT, commenting on a bill Canada’s House of Commons passed on March 11 that would remove a requirement that a patient’s death be “reasonably foreseeable” to qualify for euthanasia.

“There we were, standing in my apartment, just hugging and hugging and crying and crying, for the first time in a year.”

Bronx, N.Y., resident EVELYN SHAW, whose doctor wrote her a prescription to hug her granddaughter after Shaw received the COVID-19 vaccine. She had been afraid to hug because she was “stuck in COVID-land,” she said.

“Right now the whole world is looking at Evanston, Illinois.”

RON DANIELS, president of the National African American Reparations Commission, commenting to The Washington Post on the Evanston City Council’s March 22 vote to approve the nation’s first taxpayer-funded reparations program for African Americans. The first phase of the program will make available $25,000 home improvement grants for certain black residents.
1 **HONORS BY AGE**

The world’s oldest living human is preparing to carry the Olympic flame ahead of the Summer Olympics in Tokyo this year. Provided she’s in good health and the weather permits, Kane Tanaka, a 118-year-old retiree from Japan, will carry the Olympic torch in May as it makes its way across the country. Although Tanaka will do most of her route from a wheelchair, her family said she’s determined to walk at least a portion. To that end, members of her family gave Tanaka a new pair of sneakers for her birthday in January. Grandson Eiji Tanaka told CNN that when his grandmother is done carrying the torch, she’ll set her eyes on breaking the record for oldest person ever to live, a title held by a French woman who lived to age 122.

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2 **CAT IN THE CABIN** A Sudanese airliner flying out of Khartoum had to turn back after pilots discovered an unlikely cockpit invader. According to a local report in the *Al-Sudani* newspaper, a stowaway cat attacked one of the Tarco Aviation pilots, causing undisclosed injuries about 90 minutes into a flight bound for Doha, Qatar. The pilots were so rattled they turned the plane around and flew back to Sudan’s capital city. Authorities believe the cat may have gotten into the cockpit the night before the flight while crews cleaned the plane.

3 **CAT ON A FAST TRAIN ROOF** Cats may have nine lives, but transit officials in London didn’t want to risk it. Workers at London’s Euston station became aware of a cat sitting atop a high-speed train just minutes before it was scheduled to depart on March 2. Transit workers decided to take the train out of commission rather than take the cat on what would have been a 125 mph ride. With passengers transferred to another train, station workers spent 2½ hours persuading the cat to come down from its perch atop the train near 25,000-volt power lines. “Thankfully curiosity didn’t kill this cat,” station manager Joe Hendry told the *Milton Keynes Citizen*. “We’re glad it avoided using up one of its nine lives thanks to the swift action of the station team and Avanti West Coast staff.”

4 **YARD SALE TREASURE** On March 17, Sotheby’s auctioned off a rare and valuable 15th-century Chinese artifact discovered at a Connecticut yard sale last year. According to Sotheby’s, the unnamed buyer saw the small porcelain bowl up for sale during a yard sale outside of New Haven and paid the $35 asking price. Later the buyer emailed pictures to Sotheby’s, asking if the blue-and-white porcelain was worth anything. In fact, the antique is one of only seven known such bowls that date back to the early Ming Dynasty. The auction house sold the Chinese valuable for a final price of $721,800, including fees.

5 **LIFTED PAVEMENT** Residents of a southern England village awoke March 2 to discover a sidewalk had been stolen. Police in Storrington, U.K., said...
they were poring over CCTV footage to try to identify the villain responsible for taking dozens of stone paving slabs from a sidewalk. The heist flummoxed Storrington residents. One local told the BBC that whoever had stolen the sidewalk had “made a right old mess.”

**6 BRING YOUR OWN BOTTLE** Government officials in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, are cracking down on a local trend of adults drinking coffee and other beverages out of baby bottles. Regulators responsible for overseeing the Dubai economy published a directive banning adult bottle guzzling in cafés, restaurants, and bars. “Such indiscriminate use of baby bottles is not only against local culture and traditions, but the mishandling of the bottle during the filling could also contribute to the spread of COVID-19,” the agency said in a statement. Dubai’s commercial compliance and consumer protection officials say that social media users have promoted the bottle-drinking trend in the Islamic nation.

**7 VOTER ERROR** U.S. House Rep. Lance Gooden, R-Texas, took to Twitter to explain why he seemingly bucked his party in order to vote in favor of a Democrat-sponsored police reform bill on March 3. When the votes were counted, Gooden appeared to be the only Republican voting in favor of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which sought to end racial profiling, bar some no-knock warrants, and institute other reforms. Gooden, who represents a conservative district outside of Dallas, said in a since-deleted tweet that he accidentally pressed the wrong button during the congressional vote. To correct the error, Gooden submitted a handwritten request to change his vote. The bill still passed the House along party lines.

**8 SMOKING FOR SHOTS?** In North Carolina, a pack a day may get you to the head of the COVID-19 vaccine line. State residents who could vouch that they’ve smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetime would become eligible for a coronavirus vaccine beginning March 24. That’s the day when, according to state officials, North Carolina residents with certain high-risk medical conditions become eligible for the shots—including current and former smokers who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes. The announcement prompted some people on Twitter to speculate that North Carolina’s policy will incentivize nonsmokers to burn through five packs simply in order to qualify for the vaccine.

**9 PET REUNIFICATION** A Los Angeles–area animal shelter called a local man in February to tell him good but hard-to-believe news: Someone found his long-lost cat. “I was skeptical. I thought, must be a mistake,” said the man, identified only as Charles. That's because his pet cat Brandy ran away in 2006 when she was just a kitten. “Maybe there’s a 1-in-a-million chance it’s Brandy,” he said. “But after 15 years, it’s highly unlikely.” But the microchip embedded in Brandy wasn’t lying. Neither shelter staff nor Charles can explain how Brandy survived on her own for so long. Charles suspects she had been cared for at some point. But Brandy’s malnourished body and unkempt nails suggested it had been a while since she was in the care of a human. Charles, who already keeps two other cats in his one-bedroom apartment, said he planned on setting up the aging feline with his nearby sister, where he could visit when he pleased.
Dogmatic dangers

Liberal Christians punish harshly what they consider apostasy

My liberal Christian friend is a good person. That’s not a theological statement, since no one is good but God alone. But by normal human standards, she is an ideal mainstream progressive. She firmly stands on the left side of history (to paraphrase her favorite president) in matters of same-sex marriage, reproductive laws, environmental concerns, and educational and poverty issues. She volunteers at local food kitchens and advocates for foster children. She writes reproving letters to her conservative governor and senator. And she registers Democratic voters before every general election.

One more thing: She can talk over disagreements rationally. That’s why we’re still friends.

During one of our back-and-forth email exchanges, she put “religious liberty” in scare quotes. When I called her on it, she saw my point: “Busted!” she wrote. But in spite of the admission, I’m not entirely convinced she believes there is such a thing as religious liberty. To her mind, Christianity has been privileged throughout American history, to the detriment of other faith traditions. Some course correction is in order.

The root of our disagreement is this: She sees the Bible as quite clear on the second greatest commandment but open to interpretation about the first. She is certain about how society should help the poor and relieve the oppressed, but uncertain—even suspicious—of core theology. For her, dogmatic doctrine leads to oppression every time. For me, the Bible brooks no uncertainty about who God is and what He requires. But there’s more than one way to love our neighbor, and some might be better than others.

Progressive certainties are on the rise. “In Biden’s Catholic Faith, an Ascendant Liberal Christianity”—so goes the title of a New York Times opinion column by Elizabeth Dias. She praises Biden for his piety, nods at faith references by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, notes the religious bona fides of Pastor Raphael Warnock (one of Georgia’s new senators) and Rep. Cori Bush. They all lean, at more or less acute angles, toward single solutions to social problems. In his homily at a pre-inaugural Mass for the Biden family, the Rev. Kevin O’Brien listed the priorities of progressive religion: “to help and protect people and to advance justice and reconciliation, especially for those who are too often looked over and left behind. ... This is the divine summons for us all.”

That divine summons points an accusing finger at poverty, climate change, and racial inequality and demands a fix from Joe Biden himself. The imperative is so great that dissent is apostasy. That may be why the administration fired Sharon Gustafson from her post as general counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Though an arm of the executive branch, the EEOC is supposed to be independent. To give an unceremonious boot to a key figure raises questions the administration declined to answer.

Maybe it has something to do with a series of listening sessions through November and December 2020, where Gustafson had given believers of all stripes (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc.) an equal opportunity to state their concerns about workplace discrimination due to faith. The report about intimidation and hostility that she posted online was scrubbed from the EEOC website, along with all references to religious liberty.

In a podcast last year, columnist Ross Douthat speculated on what progressives and conservatives might learn from each other. The former could acknowledge that they had underestimated the importance of stable two-parent families. The latter might admit that they could have been more proactive in constructively helping the poor. This is still true, though the two sides might have drifted too far apart for rapprochement.

For now, liberal Christianity is becoming as dogmatic as any medieval Catholic bishop or New England Puritan. I don’t think we can bridge this gap, or not in public. Privately, or one-on-one, perhaps—not by compromising on God’s commands, but by living them out. “To visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”
The early church worshipped on Saturday. The medieval Catholic Church abandoned salvation by grace. The Reformers removed the Apocrypha from the Bible. While these “urban legends” sometimes arise out of falsehood or fabrication, they are often the product of an exaggerated recounting of actual historical events. With a pastoral tone and helpful explanations, authors John Adair and Michael Svigel tackle legendary misconceptions of church history and reveal the true history behind the myths.

"A church history myth-busting rampage!" —Michael F. Bird

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Resurrection dramatizes the lives of Jesus’ disciples in the days following the Crucifixion

by Bob Brown
HE APOSTLE JOHN reckoned the world itself could not contain all the books needed to recount every detail of Jesus' earthly ministry. A 90-minute movie won’t tell the whole story either, but it can illustrate a particular Biblical truth.

In *Resurrection* (unrated and streaming on Discovery+) from *Son of God* producers Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, the truth in view is the historically pivotal transformations of Jesus’ disciples from cowards to co-workers in God’s kingdom. Splendid sets, sharp costumes, and strong acting support the solid message. A few questionable subplots and some tepid encounters with the risen Savior are minor quibbles. Four violent scenes constitute the only parental cautions.

The film, drawing on archival footage filmed before the pandemic, starts with Jesus’ trial and moves into a graphic crucifixion. The story’s strength comes in conveying the disillusionment the followers of Jesus (played by Juan Pablo Di Pace) feel seeing Roman and Jewish authorities apparently vanquish their Master. For the first time, I heard Jesus’ utterance “It is finished” not as He meant it—a humble declaration of mission accomplished—but as Peter (Adam Levy), John (Babou Ceesay), and the others might have regarded those words that Calvary afternoon: *We are finished. Doomed.* In the film, only Mary (Greta Scacchi), Jesus’ mother, holds out hope.

*Resurrection* also imagines the behind-the-scenes religious and political intrigues. Caiaphas (Richard Coyle) and Joseph of Arimathea (Kevin Doyle) argue whether placing Jesus’ body in the latter’s own tomb has fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that the Suffering Servant would be buried “with a rich man in His death.” Pilate (Vincent Regan) and Caiaphas begrudgingly team up to find “the Nazarene’s corpse” and avert a PR nightmare. (Good luck with that!) The disciples run and hide from Roman squads breaking down doors to find them, and Peter rebuffs a Jewish militant’s repeated offers to join forces.

Amid the fictional dramatics, the film does hit Biblical highlights, including the closed-door reunion eight days after the Resurrection, breakfast on the seashore, and the Ascension. But it also weaves in some ill-fitting threads, such as events in the film’s final 10 minutes surrounding Peter’s healing of the crippled beggar (Acts 3). The wife of Caiaphas tries to bribe the beggar to declare his healing was faked. A public showdown between Peter and Caiaphas ensues. What will the beggar say? The film almost suggests the nascent Christian religion hangs on his testimony.

While *Resurrection* captures the disciples’ fears well, some of the disciples react with surprising composure the first time they see Jesus alive again. For example, at the tomb on Sunday morning, Jesus calls Mary Magdalene (Chipo Chung) by name. She turns and says, “Rabbi!” The film immediately cuts away to another scene. Yet John 20 implies Mary threw herself at Jesus and clung to Him—an embrace every believer is longing for. If ever Christian cinema could indulge a feel-good moment, that would have been it. And when Thomas beholds the scars in Jesus’ hands and side, he exclaims, “My Lord.” That’s it—no “and my God.” Why omit such a theologically weighty confession of Christ’s deity?

Despite a few shortcomings, inevitable when fallen people (reviewers included) speak about a holy God, *Resurrection* tells a story worth sharing.
Pro-life in court
by Leah Hickman

The new documentary Fighting for Life: The Story of NOW v. Scheidler highlights how abortion groups first began using the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) against pro-lifers in the 1980s. The case came before the Supreme Court three times, turning into one of the longest-running federal cases in history. Victory for Scheidler ultimately solidified the right of pro-lifers to protest at abortion clinics.

But the 30-minute film doesn’t do its subject justice. It hits the main points while missing the vivid stories that could have enlivened it; pro-life activist Joseph Scheidler’s stories of days in front of abortion businesses with a megaphone, defense lawyer Thomas Brejcha’s memories of long hours arguing in court.

The documentary also fails to give a full picture of Scheidler and Brejcha’s antagonist, the National Organization for Women. The film shows C-SPAN footage of feminist attorney Fay Clayton but doesn’t address the violence she accused pro-lifers of perpetrating against abortion facility staff and patients. (Evidence later revealed that many of the accusations were false.)

Still, the film has its strengths. It includes interviews with Scheidler, Brejcha, and their wives, Ann and Debbie. The now-aged couples recall the sacrifices made to defend the unborn and pro-life activists. The recorded memories are a valuable heirloom of these longtime pro-lifers—even of Scheidler, who died in January at age 93.

Camp and Dance
Christian-camp musical A Week Away rivals Disney and Nickelodeon hits
by Megan Basham

Cooler-than-thou types may sneer at A Week Away, a jukebox musical about a troubled teenager who finds community and comfort at a Christian summer camp. Clearly, the PG film, debuting on Netflix on March 27, owes something of its existence to the success of Disney’s High School Musical franchise. However, this is one time the faith-based facsimile outdoes the secular original.

Kevin Quinn (Bunk’d) and Bailee Madison (Bridge to Terabithia), playing a guitar-playing delinquent and his good-girl love interest, offer moderately better singing and much better acting than Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens in their Mouse House heyday. Even adults will chuckle at David Koechner (Anchorman, The Office) and Sherri Shepherd (30 Rock) in the roles of camp directors.

In the songs category, it’s hard to argue A Week Away doesn’t rival the Disney and Nickelodeon competition. Hits from Steven Curtis Chapman, For King and Country, Amy Grant, and Michael W. Smith coexist alongside new tunes from Fixer Upper’s favorite house band, Johnnyswim.

This production feels a little too brief, though. Just when we start to get a handle on the central conflict of the story—whether our main character will let the churchgoing teens get to know the real him—the problem is resolved with a kiss and kickin’ talent show performance. With a bit more time and development, the movie could have offered its tween and young-teen audience something deeper.

But light as it may be, A Week Away is still a sweet confection.

Four Child-Friendly Pro-Life Films*

1 Horton Hears a Who: 2008, rated G
2 Storks: 2016, rated PG
3 Meet the Robinsons: 2007, rated G
4 Amazing Grace: (ages 12 & up) 2006, rated PG

*According to Care Net
UNDERREPRESENTED PRINCESS

Raya, the central character in Raya and the Last Dragon, is Disney’s first Southeast Asian heroine.

WORLD 04.10.21

THE LAND OF KUMANDRA—the fictional setting for Disney’s latest big animated movie, Raya and the Last Dragon—represents a paradise lost. Once peaceful and abundant, it’s now a world beset by dissension, where envy drives sociopolitical negotiations and distrust reigns supreme. Every negative event is an opportunity for one faction to impute guilt to another, and no one seems able to come together, even for the purpose of furthering their own self-interests.

If it weren’t for those magical dragons, it would in many ways resemble our own world these days.

Chief Benja (Daniel Dae Kim) believes there is another way to live. He tries to teach his daughter, Princess Raya (Kelly Marie Tran), to pursue common ground. At the outset of the story, he invites the monarchs of the other four lands to a peace summit. “If we don’t stop and learn to trust one another again,” he tells his daughter, “it’s only a matter of time before we tear each other apart.”

But trust is hard-won and easily squandered. When Raya and another princess battle over—and break—the sacred dragon gem believed to grant prosperity, they unleash the Druun, a sort of negative energy born of human discord that turns all life it encounters to ash and stone, including Raya’s father. Flash forward six years and Raya embarks on a quest to reunite the broken pieces of the dragon gem and awaken the last magical dragon, Sisu, to restore Kumandra.

The five lands of Heart, Talon, Fang, Spine, and Tail, named for different parts of the dragon, are gorgeously rendered. Inspired by several Southeast Asian countries, each has a distinct sense of culture and atmosphere. Also refreshing—for once we get a Disney princess who needs to learn more from her parent than the other way around. Raya can’t complete her quest until she learns to believe in herself a little less and others a little more. And while the warrior princess theme has certainly been overdone in recent years, in this case, it doesn’t feel as girl-power-centric as it has in the past.

Less appealing for Christian parents will be depictions of dragon worship. This goes beyond simply faithfully depicting a different culture, as we saw in Mulan. At one point Raya falls to her knees and prays to Sisu. She also performs religious rituals, bowing down to the gem that represents the spirit of the dragons. However, some concern over this is mitigated once we actually meet the dragon Raya is worshipping. As played by actress and rapper Awkwafina, Sisu is a bit silly and underwhelming: There’s not much in this dragon to inspire devotion or laughs.

In the end, while Raya and the Last Dragon may not have the staying power of past Disney princess films, it does offer beautiful scenery and a chance to point out to children the truths of Proverbs: The power of life and death is in the tongue—and as no one, not even dragons, can stand before envy, we should aim not to build societies on it.
Yes Day, now streaming on Netflix, is a family comedy that runs counter to Hollywood’s typical portrayal of the roles of parents and children.

Allison Torres (Jennifer Garner) once lived by “yes,” neither too busy nor too afraid to pass up the adventures life offered daily. She and husband Carlos (Edgar Ramírez) then said yes to one of the greatest adventures of all, children. But with those three children came something Allison hadn’t ever lived by: “NO.”

As many a child’s second if not first learned word, “no” teaches both physical and moral boundaries. But, used too often and without explanation, it can also stifle and frustrate children.

That’s how the Torres children come to feel about their stay-at-home mom. Allison isn’t a helicopter parent. She’s a loving, busy, and tired mom whose daily mission is to make sure her children grow up in a safe, secure, healthy home. Amid the daily parenting grind, she often forgets to enjoy her children’s personalities and imaginations.

Then a school coach suggests a “yes” day: It’s a day when Allison and Carlos will banish “no” and say “yes” to everything their children want to do—with some ground rules. The kids have to earn their day of fun by completing homework and chores, and they can’t plan on illegal or dangerous activities. But that doesn’t preclude wacky activities, like throwing lemonade-filled balloons or driving through a car wash, windows down.

When the “yes” day finally arrives, the Torres family embarks on an adventure of relearning how to enjoy and relate to each other. Some of those adventures in this PG-rated film include mildly inappropriate bathroom humor and language, roughhousing, and some shirtless male models.

But Yes Day holds some valuable lessons for families. It inspires parents raising children in a busy, often scary world to approach their parenting with a lighter touch, to remember to laugh and have fun. Sometimes “no” is simply a way to avoid inconvenience or fear. For parents who just want to be friends with their kids, the film reminds them children crave authority, too.

The too-often sassy and disrespectful Torres children also learn a few lessons. They realize the truth of the Bible’s admonishment to “honor your father and mother ... that it may go well with you.” The world is a not-so-cool place without loving, authoritative, and, yes, sometimes “lame” parents.

If parents choose to watch Yes Day with children, they may want to set some ground rules of their own. My advice: Don’t watch the movie with your kids if you don’t plan on offering them some form of a “yes” day, whether a “yes” hour or a whole day planned together. I don’t have children, but I can only imagine the guilt trips afterward if there’s no application of the “yes” day concept.

And it’s a good idea to remind children that your family “yes” day won’t be—indeed, shouldn’t be—as zany as the Torres family’s. But you can still find ways to say yes to making memories together.
Fatal factions

Actors, assassins, autocracies

by Marvin Olasky

James Shapiro’s *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future* (Penguin Press, 2020) is a brilliant example of how to explore a fascinating microcosm in a way that throws light on the larger patterns of American history. Shapiro shows how John Quincy Adams, in his old age a leading abolitionist, was also a racist who found the black-white romance of *Othello* “disgusting.” Shapiro describes how more than 20 people died during Shakespeare riots in New York City in 1849. He connects the staging of *The Tempest* to immigration restriction in 1924 and links *The Taming of the Shrew* to the beginnings of feminist revolt.

When we come to recent history, Shapiro is pro-LGBT, takes an uncalled-for shot at Clarence Thomas, and reports how the staging of *Julius Caesar* in Central Park became an anti-Trump statement. That’s the latest example of the political use and abuse of Shakespeare: It’s a long tradition, including the tragedy of John Wilkes Booth going from playing Brutus to killing the president he saw as a Caesar. Heading back two millennia to the original act: Peter Stothard’s *The Last Assassin: The Hunt for the Killers of Julius Caesar* (Oxford, 2021) tells how Octavian took revenge, one by one.

As many Democrats seek to assassinate the Electoral College and Republicans assess alternatives, Edward Foley’s *Presidential Elections and Majority Rule* (Oxford, 2020) is instructive: He proposes keeping the Electoral College but tweaking state election laws by adding a two-round system, having instant runoff voting, or creating proportional allocation with conditional winner-take-all results. Foley says one method does not have to fit all states: Variety is a virtue.

Bryn Rosenfeld’s *The Autocratic Middle Class* (Princeton, 2021) features stuffy writing but important substance: While some scholars say the growth of a middle class in poor countries can counter dictatorship, Rosenfeld says it’s crucial to look at who is buttering the bread of that middle class: If government job-holders are the leading segment, state dependency reduces the demand for democracy.

Ecclesiastes 10:8—“He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.” In the 1930s Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin became the two biggest wall-breakers of all time, so it’s satisfying to read about *The Death of Hitler’s War Machine: The Final Destruction of the Wehrmacht* (Regnery History, 2021) by Samuel Mitcham. John Hersey’s 1946 article/short book *Hiroshima*—to my mind the outstanding American journalistic work of the 20th century—had a big effect on Cold War thinking: Lesley Blueme’s *Fallout* (Simon & Schuster, 2020) smoothly tells how the masterpiece came to be.

Recently I’ve caught up to three old, brilliantly written books about the effects of dictatorship. William Shirer’s *Berlin Diary* (1941) is the foreign correspondent’s journal from 1934 to 1941: It’s the oozing horror story of a nation sunk into idolatry. Chaim Potok’s *I Am the Clay* (1992) is a hard-to-put-down novel of three people fleeing during the Korean War, with cold and hunger stalking them. Jan Wong’s *Red China Blues* (1996) evocatively describes her disenchanting time as a young Maoist at Beijing University.

Carlos Eire’s *Waiting for Snow in Havana* (2003) is an eloquent memoir of growing up as Fidel Castro gained power. Tim Wendel’s *Escape From Castro’s Cuba* (University of Nebraska Press, 2021) is an excellent baseball novel with insights into the continuing Cuban tragedy. Another new Nebraska book, Jim Leeke’s *The Best Team Over There*, tells how great pitcher Grover Cleveland Alexander fought in World War I, and later became a sad drunk. —M.O.
Finding identity in Christ
Recent novels from Christian publishers
by Sandy Barwick

All Through the Night by Tara Johnson: At the start of the Civil War, Cadence Piper wants to prove her worth to her father by serving as a nurse. But the head of nursing rejects her because she’s too young and pretty. Instead Cadence brings comfort to the Union soldiers by singing to them. Joshua Ivy, head surgeon at Judiciary Square Hospital, resents the “Songbird of the North,” thinking she’s vain. But as he gets to know her, he recognizes her deep insecurities and encourages her to see herself as God does: a worthy daughter, loved by Christ. Cadence stumbles upon Joshua’s secret anti-slavery activity, and they team up to right the wrongs around them. Several cameos of famous people—Dorothea Dix, Fanny Crosby, John Wilkes Booth, Abraham Lincoln—add authenticity to this historical romance.

Facing the Dawn by Cynthia Ruchti: Mara Jacobs might as well be a single parent. She juggles her delinquent children, a household needing endless repairs, and an unfulfilling job, while trying not to resent her husband who’s away on a three-year assignment building wells in Africa. When tragedy strikes, her spirits sink even lower. She resists help and comfort from others, wanting to be strong on her own. Bits of Mara’s self-deprecating humor relieve the heavy drama. In one scene, as she sits between two good friends, Mara imagines herself looking like “a slice of expired lunch meat between two pieces of fancy herbed bread.” In the end, those good friends teach Mara that accepting help from others is OK and that God’s peace can conquer regrets.

Burden of Proof by Davis Bunn: Ethan Barrett has many regrets in life: selfish decisions, a failed marriage, and his brother’s unsolved murder many years earlier. Diagnosed with terminal cancer, he gets a chance to return to his past to save his brother and right other wrongs. Readers who have difficulty accepting a time travel premise may want to skip this science-fiction-laden novel, but it does contain good qualities: a murder mystery, a courtroom drama, and a bitter-sweet love story. Spiritual substance is lacking. Once, a friend offers Ethan vague advice that “the answer, brother, is to aim for the eternal. Long as you do that, you’re good to go.” But as Ethan faces death, his efforts to affect the eternal by correcting his mistakes through works—not faith—make the story feel hollow.

Roots of Wood and Stone by Amanda Wen: While cleaning out his grandmother’s house with the intention to sell the property, financial planner Garrett Anderson finds an old satchel and donates it to the local historical museum. Inside the satchel, museum curator Sloane Kelley discovers a diary belonging to a woman born in the 1860s. As she researches the woman’s life, Sloane uncovers shocking details about the Kansas farmhouse and its earliest inhabitants. The story alternates between past and present as Wen weaves the two eras together to a surprising and satisfying conclusion. Perfectly paced, the dual storylines are equally compelling and contain reminders of God’s faithfulness: Our plans are not always His plans, but we can trust Him and rest in His perfect peace.
**Paths to endurance**

Middle-grade reads showcase renewal after difficulty

by Katie Gaultney

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**Echo Mountain by Lauren Wolk:** With the onset of the Great Depression, Ellie’s family loses everything and has to start anew in the rugged Maine wilderness. Ellie learns from the land, gathering honey and discovering carved wooden trinkets from a mysterious observer. Then Ellie’s family faces a crisis after an injury leaves her father lying comatose in the cabin they’d built. But Ellie determines to revive her father, and in the process she encounters a hermit woman who teaches her not only how to depend on the land, but also about the fragility and sacredness of family bonds. *(Ages 10-12)*

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**The Science of Breakable Things by Tae Keller:** Natalie Napoli longs for the days when her botanist mother had vibrancy, creativity, and wonder coming from her fingertips. But Natalie’s mother has fallen into depression, rarely leaving her bed. An enthusiastic science teacher urges the seventh grader to enter an egg-drop contest with a $500 cash prize. Natalie hopes to fund a trip that will reawaken her mom’s erstwhile *joie de vivre*. Ultimately, Natalie learns the solution she seeks lies not in unbroken eggs, or even a “magic” blue orchid, but in authenticity and honesty between children and parents. *(Ages 8-12)*

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**Lucky Broken Girl by Ruth Behar:** In 1960s Queens, NY., little Ruthie Mizrahi has a new pair of white go-go boots that lend a hefty dose of style to her hopscotch exploits. But she and her family of recent Cuban Jewish immigrants face challenges. Ruthie’s mother can’t speak English, work stressors shorten her father’s temper, and Ruthie—a bright young girl learning a new language—is in the “dumb” class at school. Then a car accident leaves Ruthie bedridden for a year. Behar delivers an autobiographical tale of endurance, healing, and how brokenness can reveal beauty within. *(Ages 10-12)*

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**Just Under the Clouds by Melissa Sarno:** Cora just wants to belong. Her father died two years ago, and her mother now works long hours to provide for Cora and her younger sister, who has special needs. They move from shelter, to temporary housing, to another shelter, never staying long enough for Cora’s horticulture projects to take root. A burgeoning friendship, a subway pass, and the discovery of a new tree to climb give Cora hope. Ultimately, Cora finds that while the walls around her may change, the love of family—and friends who are like family—create a soft place to land. *(Ages 8-12)*

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**Afterword**

A year of pandemic disruption has led many to a renewed appreciation for nature. *Outside In* (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2020) by Deborah Underwood reminds us that venturing out of doors benefits both body and mind. Illustrator Cindy Derby renders expressive ink-and-watercolor depictions for this ode to the outdoors.

Vanessa Roeder’s *The Box Turtle* (Dial, 2020) affirms individuals’ uniqueness through the story of Terrance, a turtle born without a shell. His parents provide him a cardboard box instead, but teasing from other turtles leads him to look for a replacement. Christian parents can use Terrance’s story to illustrate the truth of Psalm 139:14: We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

For other young book lovers, *If I Never Forever Endeavor* by Holly Meade (Candlewick, 2011) and *Bad Bye, Good Bye* by Deborah Underwood (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2014) offer the perennial lesson that when attempting something new, rewards often lie just beyond fear. —K.G.
Discover . . .
how history’s once most valued brand
came to be used as a swear word;
why everything right
rides on its restoration;
and what your stake and role is
in restoring its valuation.

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– E. J., Michigan

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Embrace these seventeen leadership values and
you will become a better leader and a better
ambassador for Christ.”

JOHN C. MAXWELL,
author of The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership
SEEING THE MIND BEHIND THE UNIVERSE

Scientific discoveries point to a strong evidential basis for theistic belief

Stephen Meyer founded and heads the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute. He has a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in England and is the author of three books that are essential reading in the scientific debate about evolution. The first, *Signature in the Cell*, examines the role of DNA and the cellular-level evidence for intelligent design. The second, *Darwin’s Doubt*, shows how the explosive origin of animal life makes a case for intelligent design that even Charles Darwin would have trouble opposing. *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe*, was due out on March 30.

What is the God hypothesis? It’s the idea that God exists and theism as a worldview explains some of the key evidence concerning biological and cosmological origins. I’m proposing that hypothesis to explain some of the key discoveries of modern science—the origin and fine-tuning of the universe, the origin of life, and new forms of life on this planet.

Why do you use the word return to describe the God hypothesis? It’s a
return because the scientific revolution began roughly in 1300 from a Christian foundation, as more and more scientists thought about nature in Biblical terms. One of the key ideas was that systematic investigation could reveal and help us understand nature. Since we are made in the image of a rational Creator, we could understand the rationality, design, and lawful order God built into nature. Theism provided a framework for doing science, and scientists discovered evidence supporting that framework.

Science moved away from that foundation? During the 19th century that framework dramatically shifted as more and more scientists began to commit themselves to a strictly materialistic approach to science. They became convinced they could explain the origins of the solar system, life, and human beings by reference to purely unguided processes. By the end of the 19th century, the materialistic—or naturalistic—worldview was dominant in Western science. Return of the God Hypothesis is the story of how three great scientific discoveries since the beginning of the 20th century—in physics, biology, and cosmology—have brought back a strong evidential basis for theistic belief.

Let’s start with physics. One of the big discoveries was that the laws of physics, and what are called the “constants” expressed in those fundamental laws, are exquisitely fine-tuned to allow for the possibility of life in the universe. Physicists have discovered matter and energy configured that way from the very beginning of the universe. These parameters could have been very different. They’re not logically necessary. A dozen or more of these fine-tuning parameters have very precise values that allow life to exist. This suggests the need for a fine-tuner.

What’s one example? We need carbon to make the molecules upon which life is based. Fred Hoyle discovered the many fine-tuned parameters necessary to produce it. Hoyle was stunned by the exquisite precision of the fine-tuning. We have this huge abundance of carbon in the universe—much more abundant than we would have expected—and we live in a kind of Goldilocks universe. The laws of physics describe forces that are not too strong, not too weak. The speed of light is not too fast, not too slow. The expansion rate of the universe is not too fast, not too slow. These are astronomically, incredibly improbable.

Let’s move on to biology. There are many layers of evidence of design, but the most foundational evidence is at the molecular level—DNA and RNA molecules, the protein molecules that store information. All living systems require proteins to do lots of important jobs. They build the parts for these exquisite forms of nanotechnologies, little miniature machines that we’re finding in cells: rotary engines, turbines, sliding clamps, all in a miniaturized scale. Those miniature machines are built out of proteins, and the proteins process information. To build the proteins, you need information in the DNA molecule. That information is stored in a digital or alphabetic form.

Francis Crick made an important contribution. In 1957, he put forward the sequence hypothesis: that chemical sub-units along the interior of the DNA molecule are functioning like alphabetic characters in a written language, or like digital characters in a section of software. These discoveries came in a period known as the molecular biological revolution in the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s. They raised a huge question: Where does the information come from? Chemical evolutionary theories of the origin of life have not been able to answer that question satisfactorily.

Now to the third area: cosmology. The cosmological evidence reinforces the evidence from physics. It suggests the need for a transcendent cause. We’ve discovered in modern observational astronomy and theoretical physics—two separate branches of science—powerful indicators that the universe itself had a beginning. This began first in observational astronomy as people realized we live in a great big universe with lots of galaxies moving away from us. As you wind the clock backward in your mind’s eye, the universe comes to a beginning of that expansion. It’s like blowing up a balloon, but then letting the air out of the balloon to go backward in time. You get to a place where all that galactic material would have coalesged and that would mark the beginning of the expansion of the universe, and arguably the beginning of the universe itself.

Does that go along with the idea of the Big Bang, which lots of Christians dismiss? A lot of Christians misunderstand the Big Bang theory. I have a lot of conversations with people at conferences and churches and so forth, and many Christians think that the scientists are saying that the Big Bang caused the origin of the universe, as if the Big Bang was the first cause. They think the scientists are positing the Big Bang as an alternative to God as the Creator. In fact, the Big Bang is the first effect, the first event. The picture that we have of the origin of the universe from theoretical physics is one where either there was a beginning to time, or time and space both. Either way, this is exactly what you’d expect on a theistic understanding of the universe, and indeed, on a Biblical understanding.
The very first words of Genesis are, after all, “In the beginning.”

What did we learn in theoretical physics? Einstein’s great theory of general relativity, his new theory of gravity, and solutions to his field equations implied that the universe had a beginning. There’s been debate about whether or not you can “back extrapolate” all the way to a beginning using Einstein’s theory, but there have been other proofs in theoretical physics of a beginning to the universe.

Critics of intelligent design (ID) have accused the ID movement of secretly pushing creationism. You and your allies have insisted ID is legitimate scientific inquiry that stops short of trying to identify the designer. Now you’re making the case for His identity. Could this book give fuel to your critics? I’m sure it could, but that’s not an evidential objection. That’s an accusation as to motive. It is irrelevant to the merits of the argument itself. The argument we’ve made is that nature points to a designing agent. In biology, we see evidence of design in the digital code that’s present in the DNA molecule. We know from our uniform and repeated experience that information in a digital or alphabetic form—what we call sequence-specific—invariably arises from an intelligent source. If we’re trying to reconstruct what happened in the past, we want to consider what we know about cause-and-effect patterns in the world around us. The same method of reasoning Darwin used has led us to a non-Darwinian conclusion: If there’s a program, then there’s a programmer. Now, I’m looking at a broader range of evidence to answer: “Who is the designer?”

Does this represent a shift for the ID movement, going from defense to offense? The intelligent design movement has been on offense from the beginning. We think we have the best explanation for the origin of information and the irreducible complexity of living systems—a mind of some kind. What I’m doing as a philosopher of science is look-

NO IMMINENT INTELLIGENCE, NO SPACE ALIEN DESIGNER WITHIN THE COSMOS, CAN ACCOUNT FOR THE LAWS OF PHYSICS UPON WHICH ITS VERY LIFE DEPENDS AND WHICH PRECEDED ITS EXISTENCE.

This is something new in your quest. In making the original case for design in biology, I left unspecified whether the designing intelligence was a transcendent designer or an imminent designer, a designer within the cosmos or a designer that transcended matter, space, time, and energy, what we call the universe. In this new book, what I’m doing is simply looking at a broader range of evidence to answer a question that’s been posed to me, which is, “What can we say from science about the identity of the designer? Is it more likely to be an alien or a god, and imminent or transcendent?”

And you’re seeing ... The designer must have preceded the universe, because the fine-tuning was established at the very beginning of the universe. No imminent intelligence, no space alien designer within the cosmos, can account for the laws of physics upon which its very life depends and which preceded its existence. The fine-tuning problems point to a transcendent design that preexists matter, space, time, and energy.

—J.C. Derrick is the former deputy chief content officer of WORLD
The NASB 2020 is an update of the New American Standard Bible 1995 that further improves accuracy where possible, modernizes language, and improves readability. These refinements maintain faithful accuracy to the original texts and provide a clear understanding of God’s Word to those who prefer more modern English standards.

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Twilight rockers
Two legends aren’t letting age stop them
by Arsenio Orteza

AND THE COVER VERSIONS KEEP ON COMING.

On the latest albums by Alice Cooper and the former KISS lead guitarist Ace Frehley, you’ll encounter fresh takes on hits and deep cuts by (in alphabetical order) the Animals, the Beatles, Cream, Deep Purple, Jimi Hendrix, Humble Pie, the Kinks, KISS, Led Zeppelin, MC5, Mountain, Outrageous Cherry, Lou Reed, Paul Revere & the Raiders, and the Rolling Stones—blasts from the past guaranteed to inflict PTSD on listeners conditioned exclusively by 21st-century pop.

Assuming that such listeners ever hear these blasts. At an average age of 71, the rockers doing the detonating aren’t exactly trending on youth-oriented social media.

And why should they be? In 1978—the last year in which Frehley and Cooper both hit the Top 40—the only noteworthy 71-year-old musicians still living were Gene Autry (long retired) and Elva “Mrs.” Miller (who sang so badly that her albums were marketed as comedy). Songs as old as most of the covers on Frehley’s and Cooper’s new albums would’ve dated back to the Roaring Twenties.

In other words, these guys have their work cut out for them.

Not that they sound daunted. Frehley and his fellow musicians on the all-covers Origins Vol. 2 (SPV) approach their task like blacksmiths, boldly hammering songs such as “Manic Depression,” “Space Truckin’,” “Kicks,” and “We Gotta Get Out of This Place” into molten shape and knocking the dust off the originals’ dated production values in the process.

The playing could do with more groove (hard rock doesn’t have to be inflexible) and “Jumping Jack Flash” with less profanity (from guest vocalist Lita Ford). But especially at high volumes, sparks fly, illuminating a slowly dying but once highly influential popular art form as it refuses to go gentle (or quiet) into that good night.

A similar bygone-era vibe characterizes Alice Cooper’s Bob Ezrin–produced Detroit Stories (earMUSIC). Amid raucous accompaniment from MC5’s Wayne Kramer, Grand Funk’s Mark Farner, the Mitch Ryder alumni Steve Hunter and Johnny “Bee” Badanjek, and the surviving members of the original Alice Cooper group, Cooper pays full-throttle tribute to the songs and sounds of his hometown.

Only four of its 15 songs are covers (or in the case of Cooper’s version of Mitch Ryder’s version of Lou Reed’s “Rock & Roll,” a cover of a cover), but they’re the highlights. He tosses millennials a bone by doing Outrageous Cherry’s latter-day sunshine-pop classic “Our Love Will Change the World” irony free.

Praising the Doors’ Morrison Hotel, the late Hunter S. Thompson once wrote: “Crank it all the way up on one of those huge obsolete wire-burning MacIntosh amps and 80 custom-built speakers. Then stand back somewhere on the mainbeams of a big log house and feel the music come up through your femurs ... after that you can always say ... that you once knew what it was like to hear men play rock ‘n’ roll music.”

Old men though they are, Frehley and Cooper obviously still want in on that action.
Listening to the calm

Noteworthy new or recent releases

by Arsenio Orteza

Departures by Jon Foreman: “Departures from what?” you ask. The Switchfoot sound, for one thing. None of these introspective meditations on faith, hope, love, and mortality—not even the chipper ones—rock. And because they’re introspective, they depart from the typical Switchfoot perspective as well. Rather than aiming at the back row of sold-out arenas, Foreman lets his audience overhear one side of intimate conversations between himself and loved ones, himself and God, and himself and himself. “The Valley of the Shadow of Planned Obsolescence” is the wisest song of 2021 so far, even if it does require the melody of “Daydream Believer” to get aloft. And the himself-and-God songs Foreman might as well be singing on his knees.

Catspaw by Matthew Sweet: Don’t believe the “power pop” tag being attached ex post facto to Matthew Sweet by journalists too young (one hopes) to have been sentient when Sweet was toeing the fine line between “alternative” and “mainstream” in the ’90s. There was power, and there was pop, but the guitar sounds that he made, the guitar sounds that he hired, and his overall gestalt were too unkempt to stuff into a box. They’re also slower on the whole—none of these cuts exceed “mid-tempo.” An inevitable result of Sweet’s having hit middle age? Perhaps. Or maybe he simply has enough faith in his latest batch of hooks to let them linger.

Dale Watson Presents the Memphians by Dale Watson: Does the insanity of the 21st century have you down? These 10 original instrumentals totaling 29 minutes and 43 seconds will blast you all the way back to the days when Bill Black’s Combo and other equally cool (or uncool as the case may be) cats were honking and rumbling their way through melodies and rhythms guaranteed to keep the sock hops hopping and the jukeboxes juiking. And, oh, are Watson and his Memphians clever, weaving “Telstar” into “Alone Ranger,” “Heartbreak Hotel” into “Agent Elvis,” and both “Peter Gunn” and “The Trolley Song” into “Deep Eddy” (as in Duane). They do slow songs too, the prettiest of which is called “Serene Lee” because that’s exactly how they play it.

Celebration: The Complete Roulette Recordings 1966-1973 by Tommy James & the Shondells: One doesn’t need all 141 of these songs. The 15 Top 40 hits previously compiled on numerous anthologies will do. But, singles act though they were and James’ precipitous solo decline notwithstanding (see Disc 6), these guys did make one pretty good psychedelic-pop album (Crimson & Clover, Disc 3). Meanwhile, “Crystal Blue Persuasion” and “Sweet Cherry Wine,” inspired (as we now know) by James’ incipient Christian faith, along with his 1971 solo outing Christian of the World (Disc 5), greased the wheels of Jesus rock. Ultimate verdict: more “ authentic,” soulful, and world-historic than the Monkees for sure, and every bit as catchy.

Encore

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the force behind the scenes for the Beats who recently died at the age of 101, was best known as the owner of San Francisco’s City Lights bookstore and the publisher of Allen Ginsberg’s Howl. But it’s in his poetry that his spirit shines through most clearly, and it’s in A Coney Island of the Mind, the spoken-word recording that he made of poems from his 1958 collection of the same name for Rykodisc in 1999, that his poetry most brightly shines.

Atop ambient jazz supplied by Morphine’s Dana Colley, Ferlinghetti takes palpable delight in freeing his free verse from the page. A true son of Whitman, he could be sexually frank, but he was seldom vulgar and, on this recording, never profane, preferring instead to engage the listener (and the world) with whimsy and wit. Begin with the final three tracks (“Dog,” “Christ Climbed Down,” “#11 from ‘Pictures of the Gone World’”) if you think he has nothing to say to you. And be prepared to admit you were wrong. —A.O.
When things are profoundly wrong

Pandemic challenges to lead hurting people from despair to hope

When things are profoundly wrong

Pandemic challenges to lead hurting people from despair to hope

CULTURES OF DESPAIR AREN’T NEW, but the pandemic emphasizes their grip on us. Portugal is one of the latest European countries to try to legislate euthanasia, and also one of the hardest hit with COVID-19 deaths. It’s a strange time for the governing center-left Socialist Party to push physician-assisted, state-sanctioned suicide.

Antonio Pinheiro Torres of the Portuguese Federation for Life put his finger on the despair lurking behind it. “People die badly in Portugal,” Torres told WORLD reporter Leah Hickman, because the country is poor and its national healthcare system isn’t working. “They die in a lot of pain, in a lot of suffering and so on, and so in the minds of people, giving them an injection is a kind of treatment.”

With the pandemic, I’m surprised by the number of Christians I’ve talked to who have succumbed to a parallel despair, thinking COVID-19 deaths are inevitable, yet also minimizing the toll and severity. They see little role to play in their community’s recovery because it wasn’t so bad after all. This robs them of the joy that emerging from the pandemic brings, while along the way denying others their help and nurture. These are opportunities that aren’t always so ripe: tearing down obstacles to the gospel with well-doing.

My overseas travel and daily contacts confirm that people everywhere have experienced loss, separation, and dashed expectations. How can we build on something the world is caught up in together?

The word despair in Latin means to move down from hope. It’s an active process but at its worst feels paralyzing. It’s defined by the American Psychological Association as the feeling “that things are profoundly wrong and will not change for the better” and “one of the most negative and destructive of human affects.”

Despair may take hold of whole cultures, as in Venezuela. A government built on lies wrecks institutions and impoverishes lives, and despair is borne upon months and months of empty grocery shelves.

It can take hold in prosperous cultures like our own. The opioid epidemic is a perfect expression of modern despair, said writer Andrew Sullivan. “Opioids are just one of the ways Americans are trying to cope with an inhuman new world where everything is flat, where communication is virtual, and where those core elements of human happiness—faith, family, community—seem to elude so many.”

For Portugal, as for others, there are concrete answers for despair. It has a significant aging population, yet palliative care—a growing specialty in the United States that minimizes pain and emphasizes comfort for the terminally ill—is lacking. Expanding its use while improving the health system generally would make euthanasia a less attractive option, Torres believes.

But despair at its root lies in the heart. Its “affect” is best uprooted by a bigger affection. The Passion of Christ we observe at Easter has moved Christians—strapping inward conviction over sin and the crucifixion to outward joy that Christ has overcome, well, everything. Jesus took time to ready His disciples leading up to the crucifixion.

Easter calls us to embrace a theology of readiness, answering despair with the grace Christ on the cross has shown us.

That passion through the centuries has propelled Christians to the front lines with help that’s concrete and passion-filled. This month it’s moved medical teams I know, sometimes of two, four, or 10, to war zones providing treatment for COVID-19 and other diseases, plus restoring hope.

Tom Atema leads an organization called Heart for Lebanon that already had its hands full caring for refugees when Beirut’s port exploded last year. Faced with new victims of displacement, his team spread out to deliver meals and rebuild homes for people driven to despair in a country wracked by economic and civil strife.

“It worries us at times when too much focus is spent on the challenges we face,” Atema wrote. “Doing so deters us from seeing the opportunities that lie ahead and the beauty of God’s work in the midst of all the obstacles we face. After all, we say that we are called to help lead people from despair to hope in Christ.”
I’m an Asian American—American by passport, Korean by heritage, a subconscious bearer of multiple intersecting identities, neither fully Korean nor American, a perpetual foreigner wherever I go. I never had to think of myself as an Asian while growing up in Asia, but in my adopted country I’m gradually made aware that my Asian face triggers immediate assumptions about me that I didn’t have to consider before. Yet when I visit South Korea, my own people ask the same question: “Where are you from?” “Oh, your Korean is pretty good!”

I’ve been thinking about what it means to be an Asian American in the wake of the Atlanta shootings, in which a man went on a rampage at three spas, killing eight people, six of them Asian women. I, like many other Asian Americans, was already noting the rise of attacks against Asians in major cities across the country. I had watched one video after another, trying to make sense of what’s happening.

Those videos also made me extremely uncomfortable: What am I supposed to think about many of the attackers being black? Am I supposed to be wary of black strangers now—the very definition of racial discrimination?

I uncomfortably recalled the black-Korean conflict in 1992, in which a Korean store owner shot a 15-year-old black girl in the back of her head over a bottle of orange juice, inciting a major riot that shocked even Koreans in South Korea. I remember, before moving to the United States, people warning me about street violence in America—and they always really meant, “Watch out for black people.” If we talk about these attacks as anti-Asian hate crimes, shouldn’t we also be talking about our own community’s racism and complicity?

With the Atlanta tragedy, we have a white perpetrator. He’s not just white, but a professed Christian who attended a conservative evangelical church. For some, he is the perfect villain: He hits the trifecta of race, sex, and religion. The inside conversations that many Asian Americans had murmured among themselves are now gushing forth in a bitter spurt of sorrow, confusion, and anger.

People debating whether or not alleged killer Robert Aaron Long’s motives were racist are missing the point, though. Whatever his heart’s intent, there’s no escaping the fact that the conversations, the grief, the memories pouring out due to the Atlanta shootings are about race. I’ve spent hours talking with Asian American friends trying to make sense of a senseless crime. Not all of us are beating our chests. Many of us are confused. Some feel baffled or guilty that non-Asians seem more heartbroken than we are. Many have stayed silent, even while watching, reading, and resonating with others who also have been mocked, dismissed, and assaulted because of their race.

Do we have adequate language to understand ourselves? The Asian American community is not a monolithic group with a shared history. Nor do we share the same language and culture. Historically, my people’s oppressors have been the Japanese. Am I supposed to feel solidarity with those who historically brutalized, raped, and colonized my people, simply because we’re all “Asian American”?

Some people want to flush away any talk of race, dismissing it as identity politics. Well, we didn’t get to choose our own identity—our identity was chosen for us by the way people view us, by the way history shaped us, by an infinite number of random actions over which we had no control or knowledge. And now, we want to speak for ourselves, to share who we are as Americans, as Asians, as individuals made in the image of Christ. Are we ready to hear these voices, beyond the loud cries of activists with narrow platforms, or people intent on dismissing the reality of racism?

I don’t delight in talking about race. I can’t speak for others, but I have no interest in painting myself as a victim, allowing activists to weaponize my racial or ethnic identity to promote their cause, or becoming a hashtag. Sharing a viral Instagram post or tweet won’t diminish anti-Asian sentiment. Neither will protesting on the streets.

But looking to Christ will. Christians worship a God who went beyond showing empathy—He became us. He proved His radical love by wearing the skin of human beings and literally putting Himself in our shoes: walking with us, eating with us, and weeping with us.

—An extended version of this column is at wng.org
Some abortion advocates point to a passage in the New International Version as Biblical justification for abortion. But the NIV’s speculative translation clouds rather than clarifies.

by Leah Hickman

illustration by Krieg Barrie
If she has made herself impure and been unfaithful to her husband, this will be the result: When she is made to drink the water that brings a curse and causes bitter suffering, it will enter her, her abdomen will swell and her womb will miscarry, and she will become a curse. (Numbers 5: 27 NIV)
A young man dressed in pink holding a Planned Parenthood sign picked Michele Hendrickson out of the thousands in front of the Supreme Court building during the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. “Are you a Christian?” he asked abruptly.

Hendrickson, then a regional coordinator for Students for Life, responded yes. The man shot back, “Well then, what do you have to say when your God supports abortion?” Then he quoted a psalm and Numbers 5:27. “He had them memorized,” says Hendrickson.

She had heard the Numbers passage before. It describes what a man in ancient Israel should do if he suspects his wife has committed adultery but has no proof: Bring her to the priest, who will mix into water dust from the Tabernacle floor and tell her to drink the concoction. The man should respond to their opponents on campus who sometimes use the verse to challenge a Biblical view of life.

“Miscarry’ may not at all be what’s meant in the Scripture,” Hendrickson told me, explaining her general response to these kinds of questions. “The text is to talk about a situation of adultery. There’s not even confirmation that she’s pregnant.”

Hendrickson knew scholars contested an interpretation that pegs the event as a miscarriage, but the protester presented it as an example of God mandating abortion. Since then, college students have repeated the claim to her. On a recent Zoom meeting with Christian students, one asked her how pro-lifers should respond to their opponents on campus who sometimes use the verse to challenge a Biblical view of life.

The 2011 NIV is one of only two English translations (out of 39 WORLD checked) that describe the event as a miscarriage—and that was a change from the 1984 NIV.
So, why take this interpretation? Can it justify a pro-abortion position?

To get to the root, I talked to four scholars and asked about the Hebrew text, different interpretations, and how one ended up in the NIV. I wanted to know what significance, if any, the passage should have on debates about abortion. I learned that even those who support the NIV's language as legitimate expressed surprise that it was being used to defend abortion.

**BIBLICAL SCHOLAR BRUCE WALTKE**
is a member of the NIV Committee on Bible Translation. He’s been on the committee since the 1970s and helped with the 1984 edition of the NIV. In that version, the Numbers 5 passage sticks to a literal translation of the original Hebrew, which makes no explicit mention of a miscarriage: “If she has defiled herself and been unfaithful to her husband, then when she is made to drink the water that brings a curse, it will go into her and cause bitter suffering; her abdomen will swell and her thigh waste away.” (Footnotes in the 1984 and earlier editions do list “miscarrying womb” as an optional translation.)

Waltke, 90, is now writing a commentary on the Psalms for the Gospel Coalition and works from a home office in his daughter’s house near Seattle.

During our phone conversation, Waltke read word-for-word from the original Hebrew: “‘And her belly will swell up and her thigh will fall.’ … That’s what it says literally.” He opened the old lexicon that he and the NIV translation committee primarily relied on while working on the early editions of the NIV: a lexicon first published in 1906 known as Brown–Driver–Briggs (or BDB). He said it offers little commentary on the Numbers passage.

“Back then, we didn’t have a lot,” said Waltke. “We didn’t have the research that we now have.”

The 1984 NIV hit bookshelves a decade before today’s leading Hebrew lexicon, the *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (*HALOT*), came out in English. *HALOT* translates the event in the passage as a miscarriage, even though the original German version of the lexicon did not. But other studies and commentaries, some dating back to the early 1900s, also provided this interpretation. Some even described the drink as having abortive effects. The NIV translation team adopted the miscarriage language in the 2011 NIV update.

Waltke said he found the 2011 NIV change helpful: “I never really understood the passage until I began to realize it could refer to a miscarriage.” Waltke pointed to a 1975 study that explains the phenomenon as a false, hysterical pregnancy, in which the woman shows all the signs of pregnancy but does not have a baby. Such cases, Waltke explained, are a modern psychological reality and could have happened then too: If the woman is under duress and guilty of adultery, her mind will trouble her and her body will act like it’s pregnant. If she’s innocent, her mind won’t trouble her.

Citing this explanation, Waltke said the miscarriage described in verse 27 is not an actual miscarriage but the end of a false pregnancy. What about using the translation to justify abortion? He replied, “A person [who] wants to believe that is going to believe it. It’s very difficult for me to get that out of this passage. Because obviously she becomes swollen not due to sexuality but due to the drinking of the water.”

Waltke admitted, “Maybe ‘miscarry’ isn’t the best translation. But I think it carries the intention of the passage: there will be no baby.” Because of that, he called the translation “sensible.” I
Either way, “it’s not really parallel to someone using modern abortifacients,” Poythress said. The water’s effect is supernatural, Poythress argues, because it varies depending on whether the woman is guilty or innocent, not on whether she is pregnant. “Another factor is this special role that God has here: that He Himself is doing a supernatural judgment,” Poythress added: “That doesn’t authorize human beings in general to bring a judgment on other people. … What Christians could say is we believe in protecting the life of the unborn child, but God has a right to take life whenever He wants, and of course He does.”

Dr. Wayne Grudem, general editor of the ESV Study Bible and a research professor at Phoenix Seminary, called the NIV’s version of Numbers 5:27 a “doubtful translation” that rules out “other possible understandings of the verse.”

I SPOKE WITH THE EDITOR of the English HALOT, Mervyn E. J. Richardson, a former professor at the University of Manchester in England. He still works as an honorary researcher at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Richardson stood by the introduction of “miscarriage” to the English version of HALOT. In fact, he almost took it a step further. “Perhaps I should have said ‘abortion’ and not ‘miscarriage,’” he said when we spoke via Zoom. The only hesitation? “That raises an ethical issue.”

He admits interpreting the event as a miscarriage or abortion is “speculative” since the language is obscure in the original Hebrew. But he thinks it’s “pretty obvious” and “not taking too much for granted.” Even then, he emphasized he wouldn’t want to use this verse to argue a pro-abortion or pro-life position.

“It’s something I hadn’t thought of until talking with you. I haven’t realized it would be so crucial,” Richardson said. “The focus of the whole thing is punishment much more than producing an abortion or a miscarriage. … Even though I have used ‘miscarriage’—and I’m saying I could have used ‘abortion’ and so on—it’s only one view of this unusual expression.”

He concedes it may have been better to stick with the literal translation that the “thigh will collapse” in the English HALOT entry and simply note that the meaning was uncertain. But at the time, he felt his approach was adequate and didn’t want to expand HALOT’s original German text unnecessarily.

THE 2011 NIV IS AN OUTLIER among translations of the Numbers passage. When we asked for interviews with the NIV translation team through Biblica, the NIV copyright holder, it sent us a statement pointing to examples of God’s judgment affecting children, including the death of David’s child in 2 Samuel 12 and the children of Achan in Joshua 7.

The English Standard Version (ESV) on the other hand, like most other translations and the 1984 NIV, sticks to a more word-for-word translation: “her womb shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away.”

Vern Poythress, chair of the ESV Oversight Committee, explained the reasoning to me in a phone call from his book-filled home office in a Philadelphia suburb, about a half mile from where he normally would be teaching classes at Westminster Theological Seminary. He’s skeptical of the NIV’s miscarriage interpretation.

“It’s not as if the editors of the NIV are trying to be manipulative. They honestly think that this is a euphemism,” he said, referring to the description of a falling thigh in the original Hebrew. But that translation is based purely on postulation, he said: Other Biblical passages that describe a miscarriage use more direct expressions to make the meaning obvious. The particular Hebrew phrase that appears here doesn’t appear anywhere else in the Bible, leaving little guidance for interpretation.

Either way, “it’s not really parallel to someone using modern abortifacients,” Poythress said. The water’s effect is supernatural, Poythress argues. The only hesitation? “That raises an ethical issue.”

Dr. Wayne Grudem, general editor of the ESV Study Bible and a research professor at Phoenix Seminary, called the NIV’s version of Numbers 5:27 a “doubtful translation” that rules out “other possible understandings of the verse.”
Grudem talked to me from the landline of his house in Arizona after consulting resources in his home office. He had not heard of using the verse as justification for abortion until I questioned him.

“The problem is that there are two Hebrew words for miscarriage, and neither of them is used here,” Grudem said. “If it meant miscarriage, why not use the common words for miscarriage?” He said the NIV is continuing a pattern that committee has already set: When a passage has several possible meanings, translators select one they think is the most likely. Although it makes the passage seem clearer, it prevents the reader from recognizing the other possible interpretations of the verses.

“It’s a strange expression. So what ‘falls’? Is it the unborn child?” Grudem said. “Who knows what’s going on. It’s all interpretation, and that’s why most translations have gone with just literally saying ‘her thigh shall fall’ and let the reader decide what it means.”

THOUGH THE NIV COMMITTEE may not have intended to give fuel to pro-abortion arguments in choosing this translation, it’s not just pink-clad protesters flinging the verse at pro-lifers.

In a white-walled room of the South Carolina House of Representatives office building in February, a Democratic opponent of the state’s heartbeat bill quoted the verse during a House Judiciary Committee meeting. Sitting with the other legislators around an oblong, red-brown desk, Rep. Justin T. Bamberg urged others to set aside their personal beliefs when voting on the legislation.

“There are those who say ... abortion shouldn’t happen because the Bible doesn’t allow them,” he said. “Well, it depends on which version of the Bible you read.” He pointed to Numbers 5:27 in the 2011 edition of the NIV and its miscarriage description.

In her own discussion with the pro-abortion protester in front of the Supreme Court, Michele Hendrickson noticed something “reckless” about this application of the verse: “It’s telling people we can pull a verse out of context, without research, without consideration of the Bible as a body of work, and without consideration to God’s character and everything we know is constant and true about Him across Scripture.”

PRO-ABORTION BIBLE VERSES?

Those who profess faith in Christ while supporting abortion have rightly been on the defensive for almost 2,000 years—but as Leah Hickman shows, abortion advocates are weaponizing the New International Version’s translation of one mysterious Old Testament passage.

The 2011 NIV translation breaks with earlier NIVs as well as at least 37 other translations in making three obscure verses—Numbers 5:21, 5:22, and 5:27—suggest that God forces an adulterous woman to “miscarry.” Most of those 37 are like the 2015 New American Standard Bible’s translation: “her abdomen will swell and her thigh will waste away.” Nothing about miscarriage or abortion.

The NIV has a history of fashionable translation. As Daniel Vaca writes in his scholarly Evangelicals Incorporated, in 1997 WORLD exposed “the Stealth Bible,” a previously unpublicized NIV retranslation that bowed to feminist pressure. Under pressure, translators backed off. The NIV’s reputation took a hit and the version lost “market share,” but the NIV is still the best-selling English translation.

The only other translation WORLD found that inserts the word “miscarry” is the relatively little-used Common English Bible, also published in 2011. Four of the five denominations responsible for the CEB—the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the United Methodist Church—were abortion proponents. The fifth, Disciples of Christ, wanted abortion to be legal but rare.

The Bible’s many clear pro-life verses include Luke 1:44 and Psalms 51:5 and 139:13, where David says of God, “You knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” Some abortion proponents have tried to turn this into special cases—yes, God knit David and John the Baptist, but not others. Even if that were not such a stretch, it runs up against passages such as Isaiah 44:2, addressed to everyone in Israel: “Thus says the LORd who made you, who formed you from the womb.” —Marvin Olasky
FINDING HOPE AFTER A FUNERAL
HOPE AFTER A FUNERAL

Some parents who have lost kids to the record-breaking drug overdose crisis are finding ways to help their children’s friends, mired in their own addiction

by EMILY BELZ
Parents also have complicated feelings after their children die from overdoses. LeeAnn Cheeley, while heartbroken, was grateful her son wouldn’t be selling drugs to someone else’s child, who might die. Ken Butler no longer lies awake each night worried he’ll get a call saying his son has overdosed.

Helplessly watching their children become addicted to the point of death is heart-wrenching for parents. But some have also found a sliver of hope. The stories don’t always end happily, but losing a child to drug addiction gives parents unique opportunities to help their kids’ friends struggling with their own addictions.

CHRIS AND LEEANN CHEELEY’S eldest son Zach required the most parenting energy of their seven children. When LeeAnn once told a young Zach not to chop down her tulips, he went and hacked them down. He started fires in the yard. As a teenager he looked for adventures that involved breaking the rules: jumping fences at concerts or taking a jet ski out in the dark. He landed in juvenile detention once and stirred trouble at family gatherings.

“He lived with a world of shame. ... He knew he didn’t fit in with our family,” said LeeAnn. “He was different than everyone else, and God created him that way.” She believes her son had faith in God and treasures his copy of the New Testament, filled with his notes.

After college he taught English in Ukraine for a year, living through a revolution there. When he came back to Idaho, he didn’t feel he fit in and couldn’t hold down a job. He did drugs as a way to calm the “constant angst” he lived with, LeeAnn said.

When his parents asked him to move out, he convinced them to let him live at their lake cabin in Idaho through the winter, without heat or running water. He burned all the furniture for fuel and brought water from the lake to flush the toilet. When his mom saw him around Thanksgiving, he looked “terrible”: He had chapped hands, chapped lips, and

LeeAnn and Chris Cheeley hold a photo of their son Zach.

WHEN DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS began to decline in the United States a few years ago, many hoped the opioid crisis was starting to ebb. But discouraging new data show overdose deaths are at an all-time high: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that for the 12 months ending in July 2020, 83,000 people died of drug overdoses, up from about 47,000 for the same period in 2015. Synthetic opioids drove the spike, according to the report.

Isolation during the coronavirus pandemic is partly to blame, but so is fentanyl, a dangerous opioid that dealers often mix into opioid pills or other drugs for a more potent high.

More than 80 times more powerful than morphine, a few grains of fentanyl can stop someone’s breathing.

When young adults stop breathing, their parents are often left behind. LeeAnn and Chris Cheeley of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, lost their son Zach to an opioid overdose in 2016, right before his 30th birthday. Colin McRae of Las Vegas, Nev., lost his 21-year-old son, Colin Warner McRae, to an overdose in 2015. During the pandemic, Colin’s neighbor and best friend, Matthew Butler, died at age 27 of a fentanyl-laced overdose. Almost all of Colin’s seven or eight closest friends have died of overdoses in recent years, his father said.

Relationships between parents and drug-addicted children often turn rocky. Children sometimes steal from their parents or lie repeatedly to hide a relapse. Sometimes parents have their own addiction, which harms the relationship with their children. And parents without a history of addiction struggle to understand their addicted children.
scabs; hadn’t showered; and wore dirty clothes.

“It’s not like you can stop it,” she said. “You can warn him.”

He checked into a psych ward and seemed to be doing better. Months later during a family dinner, Zach started ranting at his sister. Chris and LeeAnn wondered afterward if they could keep doing family dinners together. But that was the last time they saw him.

Zach had ordered through a Chinese supplier U-47700, an opioid much more powerful than morphine. At the time it was easy to order such drugs from China, but the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) now classifies U-47700 a Schedule 1 substance under tight control. Mexican cartels now flood the U.S. drug market with fentanyl and other opioids, according to a new DEA report.

Zach had tried smoking the drug, but it shut down his lungs and sent him into cardiac arrest. He died later at a hospital. Two people received his donated kidneys.

“He assured me nothing like this would ever happen,” LeeAnn said.

At the funeral, she met Zach’s drug-addicted friends. LeeAnn says her kids would describe her as “straight-laced”—in church since childhood, she never smoked a cigarette or marijuana—but she connected with Zach’s friends.

A little over a year later, one of them wrote LeeAnn from prison: His wife was about to get out of prison herself and needed help. When she was released, LeeAnn was waiting outside in her car. She hadn’t seen or talked to the woman since Zach’s funeral.

LeeAnn rolled down her car window and asked if she needed a ride. The young woman climbed in.

She lived with the Cheeleys for several months. “It was hard having her live with us. She was high-strung like Zach,” said LeeAnn. Struggling with mental health issues and a meth addiction, she required attention that sometimes left LeeAnn’s remaining teenager at home ignored. But LeeAnn and the woman became good friends.

She eventually disappeared after losing legal custody of her child in foster care. For months LeeAnn had a hard time reaching her or her husband because they switched cell phones constantly.
Izzy. “You burn a lot of bridges, stealing money, borrowing money excessively, making yourself a fool in front of family, saying a lot of mean, terrible things. … I felt really shameful in the beginning, and that’s something that only the sober community can understand.”

McRae, who attends Alcoholics Anonymous and will celebrate 25 years sober this year, knew his son was experimenting with drugs in high school. So he brought him to AA meetings. He didn’t know the signs of heroin use, so he thought his son nodding off in meetings was just him being tired. As the years passed, his son’s friends who were using opiates started dying.

McRae wasn’t prepared for those young deaths from overdoses: Alcoholics “didn’t die so quick,” he said. He got sober at 34, and he sees how much harder it is for an 18-year-old dealing with an opioid addiction.

“I saw nobody try harder than those kids in those rooms to do the program,” he said about his son and his friends in the 12-step programs. “By God’s grace some of us guys stayed sober, and some of those kids didn’t.”

Throughout high school and until his death at age 21, Colin was in and out of rehab. McRae knew his own failings with alcohol, so it was “easy to forgive.” Their relationship remained intact even if his son stole from him, or when McRae cut him off from his bank account and kicked him out of the house.

“He knew every night that he was loved, and I hung my hat on that I guess,” said McRae.

The last year of his life, Colin had seven sober months, kept a job, and was helping others in recovery. He befriended another young man, Izzy, at Heroin Anonymous. Each day, Colin took Izzy to 12-step meetings or to have meals with others in recovery. That relationship helped Izzy stick with sobriety.

“A lot of people when you first get sober don’t have family support,” said Izzy. “You burn a lot of bridges, stealing money, borrowing money excessively, making yourself a fool in front of family, saying a lot of mean, terrible things. … I felt really shameful in the beginning, and that’s something that only the sober community can understand.”

Colin’s Across-the-Street neighbor, Matthew Butler, died in late April 2020. Friends since they were toddlers, Matthew and Colin got into drugs and other trouble in high school and alternated periods of sobriety. Matthew’s dad, Ken Butler, is a recovering heroin addict himself. “He spent most of his adult life running from heroin,” he said about his son. “He kept trying to run away from it, and it kept getting him back.”

When Ken had been sober three years, he told Matthew, in his mid-20s, he could live with him, his wife, and their stepson. They could be sober together. Ken didn’t allow drugs in the house, but Matthew would still get high. So his dad would kick him out. The pattern continued. Once after his dad had kicked him out, Matthew overdosed on heroin, fentanyl, and other drugs.

Butler feels “guilty I couldn’t save
him.” But he’ll celebrate four years of sobriety in April, a year after his son’s death. Any chance he gets, he speaks at AA and Heroin Anonymous group meetings. Helping “God’s kids,” as he calls other young people with addiction, is one way he felt he could stay sober.

That’s true for McRae too. McRae will drive Colin’s friends to detox or pick up others from rehab to have a root beer float and celebrate. One of Colin’s friends asked McRae to be his AA sponsor while he was in prison, so McRae called him every week and talked through the steps of AA recovery.

After Colin died, McRae hired Colin’s friend Izzy, recovering from heroin addiction, to work at his event-planning firm. Izzy worked there for two years and said it was his favorite job other than his current one. Izzy is married now, sober, and serving in the Marine Corps.

“He lost his son to the struggle, and I felt—I don’t know how to put it—it helped if I was still sober,” Izzy said of the McRaes. “Without both of them, I don’t want to say it would have been impossible to get sober, but they really helped me out.”

“It’s just a grace, right?” said McRae. “There is hope out there.”

A WAY FOR CHURCHES TO HELP

One Harbor Church in Morehead City, N.C., has several ministries for opiate addicts, but it also has a relationship with local funeral homes. If the family of an overdose victim doesn’t have a church, can’t afford a funeral, or doesn’t have a venue, One Harbor will handle the funeral at no cost.

The church also has a bereavement team for such funerals: Lead Pastor Donnie Griggs said team members usually ask the family’s permission to speak to friends at the funeral struggling with addiction too. He’ll say, “The best way to honor your friend is to go get help, and we know it’s a fight, but we want to help you. We’ll take care of everything right now.” Several people have agreed to start rehab then and there.

Griggs is also a chaplain who responds to overdose calls with local emergency workers: “We had a major uptick,” Griggs said. “Tons of relapses, tons of overdoses. 2020 was brutal.”

When Ken Butler’s son Matthew died of an overdose in late April, he couldn’t find anywhere that would agree to do a funeral during the pandemic. One friend from AA knew of a church that agreed to host the funeral for free. Butler didn’t even attend that church, but he was so grateful he donated to it later. —E.B.
Election reform
Republicans and Democrats with tunnel vision are vying to change election laws across the United States by Harvest Prude
A remarkable tug of war is playing out between Republicans and Democrats in Georgia, a state President Joe Biden narrowly won in the 2020 election. There, since February—when the state’s legislative session began—lawmakers have introduced at least 75 bills aiming to overhaul election laws.

The bills propose an array of provisions, such as requiring photo ID for absentee ballot requests, banning drop boxes, ending no-excuse absentee voting, curtailing weekend voting, and more. One bill would bar voters who have recently moved to Georgia from participating in runoff elections. Another would have banned voting on Sundays, but Republicans dropped the measure after facing criticism that it was racially motivated. (Historically and currently, leaders at black churches have organized “souls to the polls” events where voters cast ballots together after church, in part because they found it safer to vote in groups.)

Some of the other provisions are now under consideration in omnibus form.

“These bills make it more difficult to vote,” said Darrin (DJ) Sims, a local organizer who works on prisoner reentry, anti-recidivism, and voter access issues. Sims warned the bills would restrict voting abilities for “older individuals, college students, young people, and those who lack access to technology or even just awareness about the law.”

On the other side of the debate, Virginia Galloway is aware of these concerns whenever she commutes to the state Capitol in Atlanta for her job working for a political advocacy group. Nearly every day since the start of Georgia’s legislative session, she’s walked past a protest on the election reform bills, she said.
“They’re outside yelling ‘Voter suppression!’ I would really like to stop and say, ‘Have you ever not been able to vote when you wanted to?’ I think we have made it so incredibly easy to vote—but almost so easy we could let fraud in and may have let fraud in.”

The divide between Sims and Galloway matches the divide across the country: Democratic lawmakers are introducing bills to lower barriers to voting they say will encourage higher turnout. Republican lawmakers, citing concerns of fraud and mistrust in the 2020 presidential election, are introducing bills to tighten voting protocols they say will restore trust in the electoral system. Democrats accuse Republicans of engaging in a form of voter suppression by making it harder for minorities to vote. Republicans accuse Democrats of wanting to make it easier for bad actors to exploit vulnerabilities in election systems.

But political analysts and even some lawmakers say reforms can meet both goals: tighten security and make it convenient for people to participate in democracy.

Adam Carrington, an assistant professor of politics at Hillsdale College, says the parties are pulling further apart on what should be a common aim: “Whereas Democrats recognize we are a government by and for the people, Republicans are recognizing we are a government of the rule of law. The rule of law says there are procedures and ways in which people express their views.”

IN THE LAST FEW ELECTIONS. Sims, a seminary student at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, has worked with chaplains and other trusted community leaders to be on-site at polling places. They try to help people, often blue-collar workers and minorities, who run into obstacles at the polls.

In 2018, Sims witnessed widespread confusion from people who discovered on Election Day that officials had purged them from voter rolls: “You can request a provisional ballot ... but [a lot of people] didn’t know that or didn’t know to ask for that.”

Another challenge for some voters in 2020 was polling places changing from past elections. Georgia has decreased the number of polling places steadily for years. Since 2013, the state has cut nearly 10 percent of polling places, an analysis from Georgia Public Broadcasting and ProPublica found. Sims encountered voters who didn’t know their sites had changed.

“These are people who had taken off work or were going to work late. Many of them had taken the bus to the polling site only to find their polling site had been moved to a few miles up the road,” Sims said.

One such voter, a black man in his 70s, got a ride from his sister to a polling place at a library in southwest Atlanta. Sims helped the man, who was blind, get out of the car, unfold his red-tipped cane, and walk up to the polling site.

“As soon as he gets out of the car he immediately starts telling me, ‘I’m here to vote. I’ve been voting for 50 years and voting is what I do,’” Sims said. But when he checked in, an election worker told him he was at the wrong polling site. She offered him a paper ballot (instead of using electronic voting machines).

“I don’t want a paper ballot,” the man said, according to Sims. “I don’t vote on paper. I don’t trust y’all like that.”

Sims and the election worker eventually convinced the man the provisional paper ballot was secure. But Sims says changes that make it harder for voters who already face obstacles will only increase their distrust of election systems.

Galloway, meanwhile, is the regional field director for the Faith and Freedom Coalition, a group that advocates for “people of faith and like-minded individuals” to get involved in politics and policy. Her group has worked with lawmakers on several of the measures.

Galloway and other election reform proponents say changes are necessary to restore trust in the security of elections.

“COVID-19 changed so many things and brought a lot of faults to the surface ... the accusations of impropriety had a lot of people convinced that there was a problem that needed to be fixed,” she said. The aim of such reforms is to help voters “have full confidence that their vote counts and is not shoved aside by an illegal vote or a fraudulent vote.”

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, and the State Election Board have considered and sent dozens of cases of election law violations to state authorities for criminal prosecution in February.

“Fortunately, these individual cases aren’t large enough to change the outcome of a statewide election,” Raffensperger said in a statement. “Their prosecution is an example to
others who may contemplate skirting the rules that protect election integrity in Georgia.

A Heritage Foundation database of election fraud cases shows very few cases from the 2020 election have resulted in criminal conviction so far. There’s no widespread evidence that fraud was enough to change the election’s outcome, but problems that did arise helped spur the election reform bills in Georgia and elsewhere.

Cue the court battles. The U.S. Supreme Court in February rejected a review of Pennsylvania election cases, over the objections of some of the conservative justices. In a dissent, Justice Clarence Thomas said that would leave “election law hidden beneath a shroud of doubt” and “invite further confusion and erosion of public confidence” around elections. In Pennsylvania, a court overrode state law to allow absentee ballots that came in three days after Election Day to count. According to Thomas, the court’s decision “does not appear to have changed the outcome in any federal election. ... But we may not be so lucky next time.”

The high court is also considering whether two Arizona state laws violate Section 2, a provision of the Voting Rights Act that bans racial discrimination in election law. The state is arguing to preserve laws that allow ballots cast in the wrong precinct to be thrown out entirely and that ban third-party ballot collection (also known as ballot harvesting).

When Judge Amy Coney Barrett asked lawyer Michael Carvin, who represented the Arizona Republican Party, why he wanted to keep the laws on the books, he said that any loosening of the laws “puts us at a competitive disadvantage relative to Democrats.” He added: “Politics is a zero-sum game. And every extra vote they get through unlawful interpretations of Section 2 hurts us.”

Yuval Levin, a political and constitutional studies expert at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute, wrote in a National Review op-ed that “most states are in both categories at once, and most of these bills in both categories aren’t going anywhere.” Levin pointed out that some of the bills in the restrictive category would simply roll back voting laws to where they were pre-pandemic.

Levin also pushed back against the idea that higher turnout is bad for Republicans: He noted that thanks to higher turnout, 11 million more Republicans participated in the 2020 election than in 2016, though Democrats got a bigger increase, with more than 14 million additional voters.

“The 2020 election offers strong evidence against the entrenched Republican view that high-turnout elections are only good for Democrats,” Levin wrote. “But the election was close enough that it should suggest to both parties that making it easier for more people to vote and bringing out more people to do so can enable them to win—a thought that would be unfamiliar to too many Republican politicians.”

BUT THE GENERAL ELECTORATE may not be clamoring for all-or-nothing reforms. Kevin Kosar, a political scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, noted that politicians
May be more polarized on the issue of voting than the majority of Americans: “Most Americans want to be able to vote early, they want the option of voting in person if they choose, and most people want the option to vote absentee.”

A 2016 Gallup poll found that 4 in 5 Americans support both early voting and voter ID laws. One state several experts have pointed to as charting a third way is Kentucky: Politicians are working along bipartisan lines both to expand voter access and implement security measures.

Kentucky’s Republican-dominated Legislature approved a measure in March that would both expand voter access and tighten security measures. The bill makes permanent many of the emergency changes made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It allows three days of no-excuse, early in-person voting, including a Saturday. The bill would also allow counties to establish vote centers where voters in the county could vote regardless of their precincts. And the bill creates an online portal for voters to request mail-in ballots, while maintaining restrictions around who can request an absentee ballot.

The bill also bans ballot harvesting, begins a process for replacing electronic-only voting machines for those that create paper trails, and eases the process for removing ineligible voters from voter rolls. Prior to last year, the state did not allow early voting or mail-in voting unless someone met certain age, illness, disability, or geographical requirements.

Meanwhile, Democrats have joined with nearly every Republican in voting for the measure. If it clears a reconciliation process in the Kentucky House of Representatives, Gov. Andy Beshear, a Democrat, will likely sign it into law.

“It’s a really good reflection of the fact that while other states are bickering over voter access and Congress is bickering over security, we’re a national example of reform both enhancing voter access and election security,” Michael Adams, Kentucky’s Republican Secretary of State, told WORLD.

“You don’t have to make it hard for people to vote to make elections safe, and you don’t have to do the opposite,” Adams said. “Unfortunately on the left there’s a myopic focus on access but not much about security, and on the right you’ve got the opposite—concerns about security and a real blindness to access.”
“ALL WE CAN DO IS FLEE”

Taiwan is a top destination for Hong Kong residents running from the new wave of Chinese authoritarianism

BY JUNE CHENG
photos by Kenneth Hu

PASTOR WONG SIU-YUNG, 46, knew he had to leave Hong Kong after seeing himself and his church named in the state-run *Ta Kung Pao* last July. The newspaper claimed he and other initiators of the Hong Kong 2020 Gospel Declaration had violated the territory’s national security law by inciting secession and subversion. Wong, who had been outspoken in supporting Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement, immediately worried what might happen to his family and his church. So Wong made arrangements to leave his homeland. A few days later, he was standing in the Hong Kong International Airport, preparing to board a flight to Taiwan, the self-governing island off China’s southeast coast. He said tearful goodbyes to church members, some of whom he’d watched grow up and start families of their own. That morning he called to say goodbye to his widowed mother—whom he didn’t tell the real reason for his departure—and she too burst into tears.
To reduce suspicion, Wong had purchased a round-trip ticket and packed lightly to blend in with other travelers. His heart beat wildly as he passed through customs, walked down the terminal, and waited at the departure gate. Only when seated on the airplane did he breathe with relief: He was safe.

Wong is one of more than 10,000 Hong Kongers who moved to Taiwan in 2020, a number certain to grow after Beijing overhauled Hong Kong’s election system in March to ensure only “patriots” govern the city. Other Hong Kong emigrants plan to move to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

For Hong Kongers looking to emigrate, Taiwan is a popular option: It’s a short flight away, the culture is similar, living expenses and rent are cheap, and its cities are convenient. Although the spoken language is different—Cantonese in Hong Kong and Mandarin in Taiwan—the written language is the same, and most Hong Kong schools teach Mandarin.

The democratic island of 23 million isn’t a safe haven, though, as the threat of a Chinese invasion looms. There are also barriers to getting into Taiwan: Only students, professionals, and spouses of Taiwan nationals can obtain Taiwanese visas. Previously, protesters entered Taiwan on travel visas the government would extend, but since last year Taiwan has barred most foreign travelers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only allowing asylum-seekers in on a case-by-case basis.

While other countries allow Hong Kongers in as refugees, Taiwan doesn’t have a refugee law, and the United Nations refugee agency can’t operate there. Taiwanese politicians worry passing a refugee law that encompasses Hong Kong, Macao, and mainland Chinese citizens could bring retribution from Beijing.

Still, many migrating Hong Kongers, including Christians and democracy activists, have found a natural refuge in Taiwan. The new wave of Hong Kong diaspora is not only adjusting to a new culture and language but learning how to continue the fight for freedom from abroad. For several Hong Kong exiles I spoke to in Taiwan, that means pastoring a Cantonese-speaking church, educating Hong Kong Christians via the internet, or opening a bookstore.

**HOLDING WHAT ARE NOW CONSIDERED** politically taboo beliefs is a common thread for Hong Kong’s exiles.

The Gospel Declaration that got Wong into trouble was written by the Hong Kong Pastors Network. They modeled it after the Barmen Declaration, which German churches wrote in opposition to Nazi policies. The Hong Kong version listed six spiritual principles, including “Jesus Christ is the one and only Lord of the Church,” to resist Beijing’s tightening grip.

Three thousand Christians signed the declaration. *Ta Kung Pao* took issue with a promotional video accompanying the declaration: The video depicted scenes from Hong Kong’s 2019 pro-democracy protests, prominently featured a now-illegal “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times” flag, and included historic clips from Nazi Germany.

If convicted of the crimes *Ta Kung Pao* accused him and others of committing, Wong could have faced up to 10 years in prison. Several other named pastors have decided to remain in Hong Kong and have not been arrested.

Today, Wong preaches each Sunday at a Cantonese worship service at Chi-nan Presbyterian Church in Taipei—one of the few Cantonese-language services in Taiwan. Wong said the church has grown rapidly as more Hong Kongers move to Taiwan. The Cantonese service, which began in September, has grown from about 30 people last year to 80 today, and Wong
expects attendance to double in the fall as a new school year starts and the potential easing of COVID-19 restrictions brings another wave of immigrants.

Wong sees a great need for establishing more Cantonese churches in Taiwan as well as in Western countries expecting an influx of Hong Kong immigrants. While the United States and Canada already have Cantonese churches, he said most are populated by an older generation of Hong Kongers who left the city long ago and are more pro-establishment. Many of the new immigrants who left Hong Kong over dissatisfaction with the recent Beijing takeover don’t feel comfortable in these churches.

Wong knows of some Hong Kong pastors looking to start churches in the United Kingdom, yet the large size of these countries means it’s difficult to reach everyone. That’s why he joined his friend Douglas Reng Fu Wang, another new arrival to Taiwan, in doing online ministry for Christians who have moved overseas and don’t have access to a church, or who stayed inside Hong Kong and are no longer able to hear politically sensitive topics mentioned from the pulpit.

PICKING TAIWAN AS A DESTINATION WAS EASY for 50-year-old Douglas Wang, who holds a Taiwan passport and had studied and worked on the island before returning to Hong Kong 25 years ago. The former director of China Alliance Press, a Christian publishing company based in Hong Kong, he moved to Taiwan in January after hearing from friends that the Chinese government had taken notice of his involvement in pro-democracy activities. That made him a target for arrest should the government decide to crack down on churches. Ta Kung Pao had also named Wang as the initiator of a statement from Christians against the national security law. The newspaper claimed the statement would “poison young believers.”

In Hong Kong, Wang initially was not very involved in politics until he saw the heavy-handed police response to the 2019 protests—especially the July 21 Yuen Long attack where police conspired with Hong Kong’s mafialike triad groups. He then began to call out governmental injustice.

He put together a statement decrying police attacks, organized an event exploring the Christian ethics of protests, and started a livestream show bringing together pastors, seminary professors, and other Christians to speak on pressing issues of the day. The success of the show revealed Hong Kong Christians’ desire for more education, Wang said, as thousands tuned in to watch despite little advertising or resources.

Wang and other pastors noticed many young believers were leaving the church as pastors kept silent about the societal issues roiling Hong Kong. Meanwhile, some protesters began searching for faith as they saw the futility of political action. Wanting to create a space for these two groups, he started Glorious Worship Ministry in January 2020, originally as an in-person gathering featuring worship music and Bible teaching.

By the second meeting, the COVID-19 pandemic had forced all religious services to move online, where Glorious Worship Ministry has continued until now. He hopes soon to open it again to in-person gatherings for Hong Kongers in Taiwan.

Wang sees his move to Taiwan as part of a generational pattern: His father moved his family from mainland China to Hong Kong when Wang was 3 because of the Cultural Revolution. His grandparents moved to the Philippines for business opportunities. “Political upheavals occur continually in China, and there’s not
As the anti-extradition protests ballooned in size over the next half year—at one point reaching 2 million people—authorities scrapped the extradition law. But later they imposed a much more draconian national security law on Hong Kong.

Although Hong Kong is only an hour away (by air), Taiwan feels like a different world to Lam. He can ride his bike on the streets without fear of being followed. His store’s bookshelves are filled with books on the history and modern-day politics of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China that would be banned back home. Taiwanese police officers drop by his bookstore several times each day not to monitor him but to ensure his security.

Causeway Bay Books has become a gathering spot for Hong Kong immigrants: Some come to talk to Lam about the latest Hong Kong news, while others turn to him for help adjusting to Taiwan. Lam admits it is sometimes difficult following the constant bad news coming out of his homeland because there is so little he can do.

While business at Lam’s bookstore nowadays isn’t good, he has enough donations from supporters to pay rent for his bookshop residence for a year or two. He picks up a book from his shelf about the Jewish diaspora and notes that exiled Hong Kongers can learn from the Jews’ experience: Rather than thinking of Hong Kong as a place on a map, they should think...
of it as a unique people and culture that can thrive wherever they are. “We may live in Taiwan, but our hearts are still in Hong Kong,” Lam says.

LAM RECOGNIZES THE FUTURE OF HIS NEW HOME IS UNCERTAIN. China considers the island part of its territory, and the threat of a Chinese takeover is growing. Chinese President Xi Jinping has made himself emperor of China, Lam said, and hopes to surpass his hero, former Chairman Mao Zedong. Now with Hong Kong firmly in Beijing’s grasp, he can focus on bringing what China considers its “wayward province” back into the fold. This, Lam notes, is something not even Mao achieved.

Pastor Wong sets his hope in knowing that even as Xi proclaims himself president for life, one day he will ultimately face God as judge. Wong believes one day the Chinese Communist Party will collapse, even if he doesn’t live to see it. “It is a purely spiritual hope. In this time, faith is more real because it’s all we have.”

Wong and his wife, who arrived in Taiwan two weeks after him, have now lived on the island for eight months without any expectation of returning home. Although they see no political hope for Hong Kong, Wong says they are not hopeless: “If you trust in man, you are hopeless. But our hope is in the Lamb who was slain.”

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ISLAND GREETINGS

As more Hong Kongers arrive at Taiwan’s shores, groups have popped up to welcome them. One is Hongkongers in Taiwan Fellowship in Taipei, headed by Timothy Lee, who emigrated from Hong Kong six years ago and now works at a seminary. He helps new immigrants with language difficulties, filling out paperwork, finding housing, and other daily complications.

The group also provides spiritual nourishment, with biweekly gatherings for worship, sermons, and small group discussion in Cantonese. Attendees, averaging around 80 people, range from college students to retirees. Lee said the fellowship gives people a safe place to share their thoughts and emotions, which they can no longer do in Hong Kong churches.

Some arrive at the fellowship carrying trauma from their experiences at Hong Kong’s pro-democracy protests. While Lee hopes they can find healing in God, he also encourages them to move forward in their lives as residents of Taiwan, and he refers newcomers to the Cantonese worship service at Chi-nan Presbyterian Church.

He hopes Hong Kongers will be able to bless their new hosts and contribute to Taiwan society rather than confine themselves within their own groups. —J.C.
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SHEPHERD’S GOLD

Beekeeper and Pastor Adam Thomas’ beehives faced a fierce foe during February’s snowstorm

by Julie Spencer
Silence greeted Adam Thomas as he entered the garage office designated as the “bee room.” Uncovering his indoor beehive, he saw a group of still, black bodies blocking the opening to the hive’s feeder. All dead. He grabbed a magnifying glass and puzzled over the heap of bees. Naturally tidy creatures, bees carry their dead out of the hive, and it appeared a mass funeral exodus had clogged access to the feeder. Once a certain number of bees die, the entire hive is lost.

Thomas hurried out of the garage to tell his wife, Kristel. She and their four children were building an igloo in the front yard—an unexpected sight in southern Arkansas. The cold snap that hit the Deep South in mid-February blanketed the Thomas family’s yard in 10 inches of snow. Crunching through the still-falling snow toward his family, Thomas called out, “I think my hive’s done.”

Thomas is one of about 120,000 Americans who keep beehives, a hobby that’s growing in popularity, according to Matt Ross of the Illinois-based Dadant & Sons. Ross, the seventh generation to run the beekeeping supply company, said today beekeeping is part of “the whole backyard movement,” as families use their backyards for more than just a swing set. Behind the Thomases’ house, a hen coop and raised vegetable garden stand within sight of the outdoor hives, as the clucking of hens mingles with the hum of the bees.

Thomas’ own beekeeping venture began four years ago. He felt a desire to “produce something” that would fit within his budget and time constraints as pastor of Wyatt Baptist Church in El Dorado, Ark. He purchased his first outdoor hive in 2017. Yellowish-green and about 3 feet tall, it resembles a filing cabinet. Thomas has since added three more, populating one with wild-caught bees he trapped behind the church, populating another by persuading his mother to invest in a box and hive “nuc” (a queen and small colony of bees): Mom gets half the honey.

Thomas named his small apiary “Shepherd’s Gold,” a reflection of his role as a pastor. Keeping bees also requires a shepherd’s care: Invasive beetles are a constant threat, and in the spring he watches carefully for “swarming,” the bees’ tendency to leave the growing hive in search of more room. If he can entice a number of bees to settle with a queen in one of his traps, he could sell the nuc and invest the money back into his own hives and supplies.

The four outdoor hives stand on homemade wooden platforms at the back of the family’s property on the outskirts of town. Oak and pine trees rise 30 feet into the sky behind the boxes, slim and straight. The outdoor hives survived the cold weather, but mysteriously his indoor one—built so Thomas could conveniently watch bees and learn more about how they thrive—did not. Despite this failure, Thomas is already considering how to recolonize the observation hive.

A week after the snowstorm, temperatures reached the upper 70s. Piles of dirty snow stood in heaps along the roads, and the igloo that all six Thomases had squeezed into now resembled a miniature ice sculpture of Stonehenge. The outdoor hives were audibly awake, and a few bees danced and warmed themselves in the sun, unharmed by the week of freezing weather and precipitation.

Now, the trees down the road at Paul’s Mayhaw Orchard are bursting into white blooms. The bees will be the orchard’s first customers. Local residents will collect the mayhaw’s red berries in May to make into a pale pink jelly, but Thomas and his family will collect their first batch of “Shepherd’s Gold” in early June—the golden honey their bees produce from the nectar of the mayhaw blossoms.

—Julie Spencer is a World Journalism Institute mid-career course graduate
"THESE ONIONS ARE SO MILD," caterer Catherine Woodcock, 63, thought as she tearlessly chopped yellow onions in her Blairstown, N.J., home in late December. Yet the smell of sautéing onions drew her husband, Stan, into the kitchen, where he remarked on their pungency.

That night, the chicken divan tasted bland to Woodcock. She wondered: Did it need more curry powder? Stan, on the other hand, said it had plenty of flavor.

That meal marked a sudden change in Woodcock’s sense of smell and taste, a tell-tale symptom of COVID-19. Three days earlier Woodcock’s mother-in-law had pushed her plate away, saying the food tasted bad. She tested positive for COVID-19 two days later. Now Woodcock couldn’t smell anything. Mint tea made her lips tingle, a sensation caused by a chemical sensitivity called chemesthesis, but it tasted like lifeless water.

Studies show more than 80 percent of COVID-19 sufferers experience a change in their ability to smell or taste. The majority are women. Most, like Woodcock, lose their sense of smell and taste entirely, sometimes for months. A small number experience heightened taste and smell, causing nausea and vomiting.

Taste, smell, and chemesthesis normally work together to produce a panoply of flavors. Without one or more of those, taste goes flat. COVID-19 interferes with those normal processes, and researchers are trying to figure out why.
A Harvard Medical School study last year pinpointed the cause of smell loss: A disruption in the nasal epithelium, a skinlike layer of cells responsible for registering odors. The good news is those cells regenerate every six to eight weeks. One study showed more than three-fourths of COVID-19 patients who completely lost their sense of taste and smell recovered it within one month.

But 4 percent showed no improvement. With more than 120 million positive cases worldwide, this leaves perhaps 4.8 million people unable to smell or taste, more than the population of Los Angeles.

That loss not only affects pleasure but can make recovery harder. Greg Poland, director of the Vaccine Research Group at the Mayo Clinic, said our God-given senses are integral to our desire for healthy food, which aids healing. Losing the sense of smell and taste is “a really difficult problem, and we don’t have any treatments for it. It’s frustrating for clinicians, patients, and their families.”

Woodcock previously lost her sense of taste in 2007 during chemotherapy for breast cancer. Before the treatment, her doctor had warned it could happen, but she was still surprised when all the food at a party she attended tasted the same. At the time, she wasn’t worried because the loss had a predictable reason and a definite end: “It’s God’s will,” she thought. “It will come back when it comes back.”

But this time, there’s much scientists don’t know about COVID-19. Woodcock might, like millions of others, need to wait months before she can once again smell laundry fresh off the line, rotting garbage, or burning toast. Not only can she no longer smell the soap she uses to bathe her mother-in-law—she can’t even smell when her mother-in-law needs to bathe. “How unpleasant for others,” she said with a laugh.

She’s experienced hopeful signs: a whiff of vanilla just after she opens the bottle and the smell of beef stew as she lifts the lid. Even if her smell and taste don’t return, Woodcock plans to continue catering, perhaps with an official taste tester in tow.

—Amy Lewis is a World Journalism Institute mid-career course graduate

MISSISSIPPI GOV. TATE REEVES signed into law a bill on March 11 that would prevent biological men from competing in women’s sports in public schools and colleges. The law follows in the footsteps of similar legislation Idaho passed last year. South Dakota’s Legislature has also passed a similar bill, which Republican Gov. Kristi Noem said she would sign.

The issue has gained such prominence that currently about half of all states are considering bills to protect women’s athletics. Yet LGBT activists call the bills “anti-transgender”: More than 500 student-athletes signed a March 10 letter to the NCAA calling for the organization to stop holding championship games in states that pass the bills.

Civil rights groups filed a lawsuit against Idaho’s law on behalf of two student-athletes—one transgender and one cisgender. The lawsuit claims the law violates the equal protection clause of the United States Constitution and the Idaho Civil Rights Act.

The lawsuit argues that the law discriminates against transgender athletes by depriving them of the opportunity to compete in women’s sports. The plaintiffs seek a preliminary injunction to prevent the law from taking effect until the lawsuit is resolved.

The lawsuit was filed on March 10, just two days after the Idaho bill was signed into law. The plaintiffs are represented by the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) and the ACLU of Idaho. The defendants are the Idaho State Board of Education, the Idaho High Schoolactivities Association, and the Idaho State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The lawsuit also includes an anonymous plaintiff who is a transgender high schooler and a member of a club team at a large, private university. The plaintiff is seeking to compete in women’s sports but faces barriers due to the law. The plaintiff seeks an order enjoining the defendants from enforcing the law and allowing the plaintiff to continue competing in women’s sports.

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one biologically female—and in August, a district court judge temporarily halted the Fairness in Women’s Sports Act from going into effect. Other states also expect to face legal challenges from transgender students, and some observers wonder whether judges will ultimately strike down such laws.

Yet a solid constitutional argument supports the side of the female athletes: Legal precedent suggests the Constitution’s equal protection clause protects women as a group with very real distinctions from transgender athletes who identify as female.

The debate hinges on the meaning of one three-lettered word: “sex.” Does it strictly mean a person’s chromosomes, physiology, and biology? Or does it include one’s “gender identity,” the gender a person claims to be? Last summer, in Bostock v. Clayton County, the U.S. Supreme Court defined “sex” to include the latter in a case about Title VII, the federal law prohibiting employers from discrimination against employees and potential new hires.

In dissenting from the majority, Justice Samuel Alito foresaw “sex” being redefined for purposes of Title IX, the federal law aimed at providing equal opportunities for women and girls in educational settings—including interscholastic athletics.

Not two months later, Alito proved prophetic when U.S. District Court Judge David C. Nye issued a preliminary injunction on Idaho’s bill. Nye relied on Bostock to assert that Title IX, like Title VII, prohibits discrimination against transgender individuals. Nye argued this even though Title IX’s sponsor, the late Sen. Birch Bayh of Indiana, made clear in the early 1970s that the bill’s purpose was to advance the rights of biological women.

Attempting to quiet debate on the meaning of “sex” once and for all, the Democrat-controlled House passed the controversial Equality Act in February. If the Senate likewise passes the bill (unlikely as long as the filibuster is in place and Democrats hold only 50 seats) and President Joe Biden signs it into law—as he has promised to do—the Equality Act would amend Title IX to apply with equal force to discrimination based on both biological sex and gender identity. This would undermine Title IX’s purpose of providing equality to women.

However, the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment applies whenever laws draw distinctions between classes of persons. The Supreme Court has upheld gender-based classifications that serve important government objectives and reflect reasoned judgments rather than prejudice.

Courts have held that maintaining sex-segregated sports programs serves the government’s legitimate interest in ensuring greater athletic opportunities for women. Also, accounting for biological realities reflects reasoned judgments rather than prejudice for two reasons:

First, girls typically cannot compete fairly with boys. A look at several states’ high-school track-and-field records reflects this: In the shot put, for instance, boys’ marks are frequently 20 feet longer than those of their female counterparts—and that’s with boys throwing a metal ball that’s 4 pounds heavier.

Second, medical studies show that even male athletes who take hormones to “transition” to female retain many of their physical advantages. Studies found that biological males who undergo testosterone suppression for a year still have advantages in strength and muscle mass.

The equal protection clause does not require that things that are different be treated as though they are legally indistinguishable. Transgender athletes are indeed different from athletes whose gender identity matches their biological sex. While some activist judges may choose to ignore biological realities, state legislators working to ensure fairness in interscholastic sports are by no means laboring in vain.

—additional reporting by Angela Lu Fulton
April fool

Careless words, foolish talk, and the fear of the Lord

KIP THIS COLUMN if you have never made a joke you regret. In my house that would be just the cat, although my husband is more admirable than most in this regard. Nor let me diminish his virtue by saying that his sense of humor does not admit of censurable excess.

In 1981 (as we remember these things by recalling how old our kids were at the time) a woman I recall only as “Kyu’s wife” rebuked me for an offhanded remark I made about my then-husband. Stung, I defended myself: “It was a joke,” I said. “Even as a joke it’s not good,” she said. I hated her for a while.

The ensuing years proved her admonition prescient.

Then last week my own son, who wasn’t even born in the aforementioned time, gently upbraided me for a joke I told at our weekly Sunday Bible study about growing up in my father’s house. I didn’t defend myself with “It was a joke” this time, which is very little progress to boast of over 40 years.

“Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, ‘I am only joking!’” (Proverbs 26:18-19).

Particularly regrettable is that I am well aware from Scripture of the deficit to the accrued capital of one’s good name (Proverbs 22:1) that even an instantaneous stumble will cost. “Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (Ecclesiastes 10:1).

Irksome disproportion indeed, but there it is.

My first husband (the one Kyu’s wife was concerned with) once said to me in what I took at the time to be merely a general and nondirective observation about mankind, “People will laugh at your jokes at the moment, but afterward they will think less of you.”

Humor and joking have been my lifelong bane, like crack or gambling for others. Once a Christian, my personal perennial challenge became to sort out what is allowable humor versus humor displeasing to God. Life is just so funny, in a tragic sort of way, and invites running commentary on its perverse ironies. But is that edifying? That’s the question.

Because in evil times the “prudent will keep silent” (Amos 5:13), social commentary is forced underground and packaged in jokes. Satire becomes more instructive than much journalism, its priest the YouTube comic. Like the court jester Feste in Twelfth Night, he learns the art of concealing while revealing, of reviling without penalty—until he is caught and deplatformed. No buffoon but a complex character, the jester stands above the play to point out the follies of men under the sun.

The Word of God says, “Be sober-minded” (1 Peter 5:8). What does that look like? Does it preclude joking? Was Jesus Himself never sardonic?

Evan Roberts, a key figure in the 1904 Welsh Revival, went around exhorting the revived with four admonitions, among which was: “Get rid of everything doubtful in your life.” It’s the word “doubtful” that gives me pause.

“I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matthew 12:36). “Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving” (Ephesians 5:4).

What is a “careless word”? And what is “foolish talk”? In moments of intense personal fear of the Lord, usually after some rebuke, I think I know. Oh, for an abiding spiritual clarity.

“Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit” (Psalm 34:11-13).

If it is commanded by the Lord to guard one’s lips, then it is doable.

Besides, who wants to be shown up by the cat?
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Once more unto the breach
The new/old poverty debate

WHEN IT COMES TO REDUCING POVERTY, particularly among children, I suspect most WORLD readers share some goals. Give each child the advantage of growing up with a father and a mother. Let children learn that work, even amid thorns, is important, necessary, and good for us. Prepare academically inclined children for college and the nonacademically inclined for work that will glorify God.

Proposals for increased federal poverty spending should be weighed against those goals. Some of them cut against other goals. Since poverty is a factor in some decisions to abort, the feds could give each pregnant woman a wad of cash, but would that buy more single parenting? Child support payments would help those with good work and parenting attitudes, but would they discourage work and encourage irresponsibility among others? School officials could assign high-school students to particular occupational tracks, but don’t parents usually know best?

Since I was heavily involved in Washington welfare reform debates during the 1990s but have been out of them for the past 15 years, I’ve been reading lots of abstruse think tank proposals and then taking some Tylenol. Names and numbers have changed, but the public policy battle is still a fight for love and glory—and the fundamental things still apply, as times go by. Fundamentals: God made man in His own image. God worked six days, and on the seventh day He rested. God created us male and female. A man shall hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Train up a child in the way he should go.

The complicated public policy plans are full of assumptions, calculations, permutations, and combinations. Pictorially, they require ascending to the top branches of a tall tree. Meanwhile, we have not plucked the low-hanging fruit many street-level observers, including me, spotted 25 years ago.

Naomi Schaefer Riley and Angela Rachidi of the American Enterprise Institute recently summarized some commonsense ways of helping: “What if we had occupational licensing reforms and allowed people to run small businesses out of their home? … What if we changed zoning rules so that families could rent out extra rooms in their homes, or allowed extended families to more easily live together? What if zoning rules didn’t keep residential properties so far away from commercial properties, in turn requiring that children be driven everywhere?”

While politicians propose trillion-dollar plans, Riley and Rachidi propose educational improvements that would be priceless, not pricey: What if “we had real school choice? What if parents didn’t have to worry about buying a more expensive home in order to get their children access to a better school district? Or what if we allowed them to choose a charter school or private school? … What if instead of continuing to subsidize the bloated higher education industry, we simply offered flexible vouchers to low-income students, letting them spend the money in a way that would allow them to gain job skills?”

On that last point Brad Wilcox, a University of Virginia professor, notes that “current federal and state funding for higher education totals about $150 billion. But only $1.9 billion in funding is devoted to vocational education in high schools and community colleges. … Too many of our schools discount the potential of less academically minded children. … Far too many high school students—especially young men—spend critical years of their development struggling in classes that bore or overwhelm them and fail to offer them a path to a stable career—much less a clear sense of vocation and direction.”

That’s a tragedy for young adults who “move in and out of dead-end jobs without accumulating the self-confidence and salary that would make them good candidates for marriage. Others drift out of the workforce entirely. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly seven million prime-age men were not looking for work.”

The high branches: Create a “universal basic income” that everyone gets, and hope 18-year-olds use it well. The low branches: Create career academies that offer apprenticeships to academically struggling teens.
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