SPOUSAL ABUSE

... is a widespread sin that churches often ignore at their—and their members’—peril

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ON THE COVER: “G” photographed in her western Washington home; photo by Benjamin Brink/Genesis
Notes from the CEO

’ll be frank: I realize we at WORLD ask a lot of you.

Occasionally, I’ll receive an email that says as much, and then some: “I’m tired of all the requests,” someone will say. Leave me alone!

I didn’t put that last part in quotation marks, because no one’s ever said that. That’s my reading between the lines. But I suspect there are a number of you who sometimes feel put upon.

I want to acknowledge that we do ask a lot, and so many of you are generous to respond by giving a lot. You give hours of attention to our content. You share our content with others, sometimes even by giving gift memberships to people you care most about. You give concern, encouragement, and prayers. You give helpful criticism and encouraging praise. You read, listen, and browse, and then apply what you learn.

On top of all that, you give charitable contributions to support our work.

With all that in mind, when I say that we couldn’t do what we do without you, it may sound like sloganeering, but it’s profoundly true. We try to walk the fine line between regularly reminding you of that fact and annoying you. I worry about it may sound like sloganeering, but it’s profoundly true. We try to walk the fine line crossing that line, and I’m sorry if we do.

But I’m asking for your forbearance on this point. When you receive an appeal from us, please don’t instinctively toss it aside. Take 30 seconds to look at it, then another minute to consider it. You can’t always give when we ask—but perhaps the next time you will be able.

We’re approaching the end of our fiscal year, June 30, a time of year we ask you to consider giving a contribution to WORLD’s work. You may receive an appeal in your mailbox or email inbox, in the magazine, online, or on the podcast.

You may grow weary of our asking, but please remember—we’re all in this together.

Kevin Martin
Kevin@wng.org

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A political grid

TRY THIS HELPFUL WAY OF EVALUATING POLITICIANS AND NATIONS

The dawn of yet another political season can no longer be denied. When you hear Nancy Pelosi boast that she's already decided on the people she expects to appoint as the new leaders of Congress next January, you know we're back in the political thicket again.

So as you restart the process of sizing up, evaluating, and then backing candidates for office—whether local, regional, or national—let me suggest an admittedly oversimplified grid. Keep in mind that virtually everyone running for office fits somewhere on this spectrum, which I first proposed in this column 25 years ago:

1) Mostly wrong about issues—and not very nice about it.
2) Mostly wrong about issues—but nice about it.
3) Ambivalent toward right and wrong.
4) Mostly right about issues—and nice about it.
5) Mostly right about issues—but not very nice about it.

To be sure, you might well find yourself shuffling the candidates around on the grid as the campaign season progresses. That's just fine. It means you're studying them carefully, getting to know them better along the way, and appropriately accounting for the nuances of statecraft.

In my experience, those candidates scoring somewhere between 4 and 5 deserve special attention and support. It means they're headed in the right direction and are sufficiently winning some to win some important political battles.

When enough of those victories are won along the way, something else of significance occurs. Whole nations begin to demonstrate those same characteristics. Take a few minutes, for example, and apply the grid suggested above to the countries of the world:

There's (1) order rooted in error, and intolerant of anything but that error. Think of evil totalitarianism, of which history has been full. Try Hitler, Stalin, or Mao.

But there's also (2) order rooted in error—yet tolerant of other points of view. Modern Japan may be a good example, with a government whose leaders are committed Shintoists, but where there is significant freedom for many other points of view.

In the middle, there's (3) order rooted in so-called pluralism. Whether such a structure—providing equal allowance for every point of view—is durable through the centuries remains to be seen.

How about (4) order rooted in truth—but tolerating significant error? The great American experiment, from its earliest days, generally fits this description. The commitment to truth hasn't always been faithful, and the toleration of error not always clear or consistent. But the approach has usually been sincere, and perhaps more long-lasting than anyone might reasonably have expected.

Examples of nations (5) ordered in truth while intolerant of error probably exist more in people's minds than in actual history. We all know individuals like this. But nations? Calvin's Geneva is often pictured that way, along with perhaps New England under the Puritans. But such pictures are caricatures, not faithful photos.

There's a huge difference, to be sure, between individuals who live their lives in such a manner and nations that order themselves in similar fashion. The individuals may just be nuisances. Nations might drastically affect how we live our lives. Think of Andrew Brunson, the American pastor sitting right now in a Turkish jail, whose very life is in the hands of a nation that can be placed only in Category 1 above.

Many folks will argue, of course, that this is a pointless exercise. It all depends, they say, on who's doing the talking. One person's “truth” is simply another person's “error.” Such is the dogma of our century. The only thing this era considers important to believe is that all beliefs are equal. That is why Category 3 is so popular. But why, then, have Muslims, at least in modern history, tended to fare so much better in Christian societies than the other way around? Such examples can be multiplied.

Civil order and personal freedom don't happen in vacuums. Take a map of the world and, using the grid above, categorize all the nations you see. Then grab a history book and do the same with all the nations and civilizations that no longer exist.
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A slow but deadly flow
Lava from the Kilauea volcano moves across Makamae Street in the Leilani Estates subdivision near Pahoa, Hawaii. The volcano erupted through 12 fissures in the ground and destroyed dozens of houses and buildings. The 2,200-degree molten rock, toxic gas, and steam forced thousands to evacuate as authorities could not predict how long the danger would last.

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY VIA AP
A busy fortnight

ALFIE, BROKAW, CALIFORNIA, PATTERSON, WOLF

by Marvin Olasky

An alphabet soup of provocative news filled the two weeks before this issue’s May 9 go-to-press date:

A is for Alfie Evans, who died at April's end, 11 days short of his second birthday. Maybe he would have died then anyway had Britain’s High Court of Justice allowed his parents to move Alfie to the hospital in Rome that was eager to accept him, but we’ll never know. Thirty British police officers guarded Alfie to keep his supporters from rescuing him. How odd for a hospital to treat a toddler like a roach: He can check in but he can’t check out.

B is for Brokaw, the 78-year-old retired NBC news anchor suddenly treated like a tomcat, one of those sexually mature felines prone to fighting over females. Retired journalist Linda Vester said Tom Brokaw had forcibly tried to kiss her 23 years ago. The Washington Post said another woman also accused him, but did not disclose her name. Brokaw said Vester “had failed in her pursuit of stardom” and accused her of playing “more Look At Me than Me:Too.”

C is for California, where one of its legislative branches passed a bill to prohibit words or actions designed “to change behaviors or gender expressions, or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same sex.” If the California Senate displays a similarly cavalier attitude toward freedom of speech and religion, the left state’s march toward dictatorship will accelerate. The likelihood of passage, unless legislators show some understanding of liberty, has already contributed to cancellation of one conference where students would have heard affirmation of Biblical standards of marriage and criticism of homosexual behavior.

D is for a disastrous dinner, the White House Correspondents’ Association’s annual bash. The headliner, “comedian” Michelle Wolf, verbally knifed any conservative politician within reach, and even reached into wombs: She complained that Mike Pence “thinks abortion is murder, which, first of all, don’t knock it till you try it. And when you do try it, really knock it—you know, you’ve got to get that baby out of there.” She made these comments without looking at her cue cards, which could have read, “I hate troublesome unborn children and a hundred million American adults. Admit it, elite journalists: So do you.”

E and F are for Education First (EF), a 46,500-employee company founded in Sweden and now headquartered in Switzerland. EF will use the property to open an expensive non-Christian boarding school. The overlapping boards of Frontier Ventures and what has been the William Carey International University have not divulged specifics on how they will use the tens of millions of dollars generated by the sale.

G is for “global citizens” who will receive “life-changing education” on the former training ground for missionaries, some of whom called the prospective sale a “massive betrayal” (see “Dueling visions, gnawing suspicions,” March 3, 2018). A Frontier Ventures/Carey U. press release acknowledged that the boards had received offers from 11 Christian organizations: “Perhaps the most difficult question arises from the fact that after so much deliberation, the purchaser is not a faith-based organization.”

H is for holy matrimony, and what happens when something that should be heavenly turns hellish. Sophia Lee’s cover story (see p. 34) describes problems in one church, but leaders in hundreds of others are also in water over their heads. Amid our cultural tsunami, comments overlooked for years get fresh attention.

That happened starting at the end of April regarding a vivid story Southern Baptist leader Paige Patterson told 18 years ago. He spoke of advising an abused woman to go home and pray at
bedside for her husband. She did so, came to church with two black eyes, and asked Patterson, “Are you happy?” He said he was, because her remorseful husband came to church that day for the first time.

A blogger reported that story five years ago, but it received little pickup. This time, it went viral. Early in May headlines like “The Scandal Tearing Apart America’s Largest Protestant Denomination” appeared, but this may actually be a unifying moment. Egalitarians who do not see a Biblical distinction between men’s and women’s roles condemned Patterson’s endangering advice, as did complementarians who see men and women as equal before God but delightfully different.

Patterson also received criticism for a sermon illustration in which he spoke approvingly about teenage boys saying a 16-year-old girl was “built.” Patterson and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the institution he heads, issued a press release in which Patterson said, “Any physical or sexual abuse of anyone should be reported immediately to the appropriate authorities. I have no sympathies at all for cowardly acts of abuse toward women.”

Patterson added, “I do not apologize for my stand for the family and for seeking to mend a marriage through forgiveness rather than divorce. But I do greatly regret that the way I expressed that conviction has brought hurt.”

Beth Moore, founder of Living Proof Ministries, said, “I’m pro marriage. Nearly 40 years of ups and downs to back that up. But when we are a church culture demonize divorce as the worst possible outcome—the sin of all sins—we truly have no clue on this ever loving earth what some people are enduring. We do not submit to abuse. NO.”

Thousands of Southern Baptist members vigorously criticized Patterson’s remarks.

The good news in this sad news may be the growth of a new evangelical consensus based on very old Biblical teaching: God calls husbands to sacrifice themselves when necessary to protect their wives. Those who do the opposite deserve no protection.
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Protected
The Iowa Legislature passed a bill banning the majority of abortions around 6 weeks, or the time when a fetal heartbeat is traceable. Exceptions include rape, incest, and pregnancies where the life of the mother is endangered. Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds signed the bill, and supporters hope the law will force the U.S. Supreme Court to review the legality of abortion restrictions. Legislators in Kansas and Oklahoma, meanwhile, passed bills to protect adoption agencies that wish to place children only with heterosexual parents.

Died
Dust storms killed more than 100 people and injured dozens more in the northern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Hemant Gera, secretary for disaster management in Rajasthan, told the BBC the storms were the worst he had seen in 20 years. Trees, electric poles, and homes were blown away by the intense winds in Alwar, the district hit the worst, according to officials. India’s Meteorological Department predicted storms would return across a wider area.

Renamed
The Boy Scouts is changing its name next year to Scouts BSA, dropping the word boy in an attempt to appeal to more girls. The Scouts have already opened this summer’s Cub Scouts programs to girls and more than 3,000 have enrolled. Now the older program, for children 11-17 years old, will also be open to females. The president of the Girl Scouts appears to be less than pleased with the BSA’s decisions, as she has asked her counterpart to stay focused on recruiting boys, according to The New York Times. The changes follow the Boy Scouts’ decision in 2017 to accept transgender members.

Died
Skiers, climbers, and a guide have died after a bout of bad weather in the Alps. Major windstorms and freezing temperatures hit the area after a period of oddly warm weather. In one incident a group of 14 skiers was unable to reach a cabin on a high-altitude hike and spent the night outside. The manager of the cabin called for helicopters, and searchers found the group. One died in a fall, three died of hypothermia, and a fifth died later in the hospital. Other incidents included two Swiss climbers dying when weather delayed a rescue attempt, the disappearance of a Russian climber in the Pennine Alps, and the death of Italian mountaineering guide Mario Castiglioni.

Unintimidated
Utah teenager Keziah Daum inadvertently started a cultural firestorm with her choice of a prom dress. Daum, a high-school senior, chose a traditional Chinese qipao and showed it on Twitter. A commenter named Jeremy Lam tweeted his profane and balkanizing response: “My culture is NOT your [profanity] prom dress.” The exchange went viral, with many accusing Daum of racism and “cultural appropriation.” But Daum decided not to apologize or delete the tweet, insisting that she was showing respect to China’s culture. Her stance drew support—including widespread praise in China. “It is not cultural theft,” said one Chinese commenter. “It is cultural appreciation and cultural respect.”
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‘Andrew is not a victim. Andrew is an instrument.’

PAM BRUNSON, 75, mother of Andrew Brunson, 50, the American pastor jailed in Turkey since 2016. Andrew Brunson’s May 7 trial ended in another continuation, and his next court appearance is scheduled for July 18.

‘You cannot be a champion of women when you are hitting them and choking them.’

MICHELLE MANNING BARISH, one of four women who told The New Yorker that New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman had physically abused them. He resigned on May 7.

‘We haven’t previously rescinded an honorary degree.’

Yale University spokesman THOMAS CONROY after Yale University’s Board of Trustees voted to rescind the honorary degree it conferred on Bill Cosby in 2003. A jury on April 26 found Cosby guilty on three counts of aggravated indecent assault for drugging and sexually assaulting Andrea Constand in 2004.

‘There’s nobody who can put their arm around him and say, “For the good of the cause, my friend, your time has come.”’

Former Missouri Democratic Chairman ROY TEMPLE on Eric Greitens, Missouri’s GOP governor, who faces two felony charges and perhaps impeachment. Greitens had no party affiliation or ideological ties before running for governor in 2016, and he has resisted calls from Republicans for him to step down. “You can’t threaten him with what it’s going to do to the party or the movement,” said Missouri Republican strategist Gregg Keller.

‘I did not put in 18 months of work to lead up to this moment, just to be told it didn’t matter anymore.’

Sophomore cheerleader JADA ALCONTARA of Hanover Park High School in East Hanover, N.J., on the school opening up cheerleading to all interested students when one parent complained that her daughter didn’t make the team after April tryouts. Alcontara and others who had made the team voiced their opposition to the new policy at a school board meeting.
Firing line
Repeated false alarms from a smoke detector reportedly led a frustrated Leroy Mason of Barton, Vt., finally to fire two shots from a shotgun at the device in his apartment. The shots also hit a wall adjoining another apartment, causing no injuries but prompting emergency workers to respond and disarm and arrest Mason. Police say he had previously asked fire crews to relocate the smoke detector, a request they denied.

Musical solution
Concerned that panhandlers and loiterers were making customers feel unsafe, the 7-Eleven convenience store chain has turned to Mozart and Bach. Stores with problem loiterers are using outdoor speakers to blast classical music, and it seems to be prompting noncustomers to leave. Manuel Souza, a homeless man in Modesto, Calif., told The Modesto Bee that the music makes it difficult for noncustomers “to hang out and gossip and joke around” at 7-Eleven. The chain reports “very positive feedback” from customers about “the atmosphere created by the music devices.”

Monkeying around
A federal appeals court tossed out a lawsuit filed on behalf of a monkey attempting to collect on a copyright violation. Animal rights group PETA sued a British photographer last year after he took payment for a selfie photograph snapped by an inquisitive crested macaque in 2011. According to PETA lawyers who brought the suit, the copyright for the photograph belongs to the creature that pressed the button to drop the shutter on David Slater’s camera. Slater claimed the photo belonged to him because he set up the shot. A district court ruled in Slater’s favor and the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed PETA’s appeal on April 23, stating that monkeys lack standing to sue and that animals cannot hold copyrights.

On your marks …
The runners may have been slow, but the event sold out fast. Event organizers for the inaugural Boerne 0.5k race announced April 18 that there were no more tickets left for the unusual May 5 race stretching just 546 yards. “Join your fellow underachievers for a day (actually more like 10 minutes) of glory, celebration and participation trophies,” the event website advertised. The half-kilometer race also featured a rest stop at the halfway point where runners could refuel on coffee and doughnuts, or light one up in the designated smoking area. Runners who completed the event got a T-shirt and what the website called “a pretentious oval Euro-style 0.5k sticker.”

A big deal
It would usually be safe to assume that an egg weighing 3 pounds and measuring 28 inches around isn’t real. That’s what curators at the Buffalo Museum of Science thought about a model they had of an extinct elephant bird—until they realized while cataloging their collection that the egg wasn’t a model. The mislabeled egg in Buffalo, N.Y., is one of the relatively few real eggs left by the extinct elephant bird, a flightless creature that was native to Madagascar and typically grew to weigh about 1,000 pounds. The egg is now on display at the museum.

Monkeys were also involved in a federal court case, but the outcome was different. A British photographer sued PETA after the group took payment for a selfie photograph snapped by a monkey. The court dismissed the suit, stating that monkeys lack standing to sue. However, some animal rights groups are calling for stronger copyright protections for animals.
Renter beware

The trial of a “landlord” accused of breaking into a stranger’s home to rent it out began April 19 in Snohomish County, Wash. Police say Matthew Robert Paul, a 35-year-old Marysville, Wash., resident, played the long game. He’s accused of breaking into a home, staging it with photographs of himself, lighting the fireplace, and attempting to rent the home out to the general public in 2017. According to police, victims of the scam paid Paul nearly $6,000 to rent the home. During the time that police say Paul was renting to unsuspecting victims, the homeowners were on an extended vacation to Mexico.

School in the stands

When fourth-grader Tucker Speckman cut class and attended the Chicago Cubs’ matinee home opener with his brother on April 10, he made a sign with a special message: “Skipping school... Shh! Don’t tell Principal Versluis.” The sign caught the attention of broadcasters and social media—and Principal Patrick Versluis, who had taken the day off to be in the stands with his own son. Versluis eventually decided to go greet the Speckman brothers, signal his approval, and pose for a picture with the sign. “Attendance is important. But, we also learn from these experiences in life,” Versluis told WQAD. “Who’s giving up opening day? Come on.”

Driven to help

A group of 13 truckers helped the Michigan State Police defuse a potential suicide attempt on April 24. Police were called to an overpass of Interstate 696 near Detroit at 3 a.m. to negotiate with a man threatening to jump. While officers talked to the man, Michigan State Police shut down the interstate and rallied more than a dozen truckers to park their rigs underneath the overpass. If the man had fallen from the bridge, the trailers would have prevented him from falling far. Eventually the man was persuaded to climb down from the edge of the bridge and was transported by police to a local hospital.

Animal house

Many Americans have long considered the University of California, Berkeley, to be a campus full of nuts. So it makes sense that a squirrel would become a university leader. Last month, sophomore Stephen Boyle’s joke candidate “Furry Boi” garnered more than 500 votes in student senate elections, enough to earn one of the body’s 20 seats. Boyle, who appeared in a squirrel costume on social media advertisements as Furry Boi, said he plans to take the legislative seat. Editors at the student newspaper, The Daily Californian, were not amused: “It’s a shocking display of privilege to vote for a squirrel over candidates who have actual plans to help students.”
Old ‘legal person’ river

GRANTING RIGHTS TO NATURE ONLY GRANTS POWER TO SELF-APPOINTED GUARDIANS

Two months ago our electric co-op magazine reported on the efforts of volunteer linemen from Missouri to bring electric power to a remote village in the Bolivian Andes. It was no small effort. At 13,000 feet, with no auxiliary power, the volunteers set poles and strung lines while willing villagers dug placement holes by hand and helped lift heavy cables. All received their reward when a single bulb washed the village leader’s home with light. For the people of Chapasirca, life is brighter now.

For some other people, perhaps an environmental activist scrolling through before and after pictures on her laptop, the stark beauty of the Andes might now be scarred by ugly poles and power lines. What right have men to meddle with nature? Or to put it another way, does nature have a right to be left alone?

Last month, the Constitutional Court of Colombia granted “personhood” to the Atrato River, with the right to be protected, preserved, and restored by the state, with representatives chosen from the people and the government to speak for it. That’s worthy of note, but the Atrato is actually the fourth river or river system to receive legal standing in court.

The first was the Vilcabamba in Ecuador (2008), where a judge established nature’s right “to exist, to be maintained and to the regeneration of its vital cycles, structures and functions.” A Maori tribe in New Zealand won its case for the Whanganui River last year when the river was declared an “entity in its own right” and an “ancestor” of the Maoris with two court-appointed guardians. That same year, the Uttarakhand High Court in India declared the Ganges River and its tributary, the Yamuna, as legal entities entitled to bring suit.

Granting personhood to geographical features isn’t so far-fetched, argues Lidia Cano.

Rivers are the source of boundaries, battles, and ballads, the bloodstream of a nation: vital to early human flourishing, but not human.

Not to be outdone, the Earth Law Center (self-described as “a global force of advocates for the rights of nature”) issued a draft of the Universal Declaration of River Rights on its website. The document defines a right to flow, to feed and be fed, and to perform essential functions—making a river sound something like an office manager. Fresh from triumphs in India and South/Central America, the ELC and other environmental groups are searching for new streams to conquer—that is, adjudicate.

Rivers form the front line of environmental activism because they were the front line of civilization. Human culture first developed and thrived along their banks. They are the source of boundaries, battles, and ballads, the bloodstream of a nation: vital to early human flourishing, but not human. That’s the distinction advocates miss: Rights have expanded to include women, children, and minorities because all of those are humans. Corporations can be understood as persons because they are made up of persons. Nonhuman entities should be protected, but they can only be protected by humans. That’s our calling: to take care of Earth, not to referee between ourselves and nonhuman entities over competing claims.

God-given rights are indeed “timeless and immutable,” and humanity rises to the responsibility—at least sometimes. But rights granted by men are arbitrary and uncertain, and humanity sinks under the domination of a few. If a mountain receives legal personhood, who decides if the mountain’s right not to be defaced trumps a villager’s right to power? The self-appointed guardians, that’s who: Big Brother disguised as Mother Earth.
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When I first saw director Jason Reitman and screenwriter Diablo Cody’s 2011 collaboration Young Adult, I spent weeks mulling over it. In the years since, I’ve thought of it often. Mainly because it’s one of the few offerings in American pop culture to examine the grotesque tragedy of arrested adolescence.

In that movie, which starred Charlize Theron, 30-something Mavis has achieved none of the milestones that typically attend adulthood. She has no husband, no children, and serves no one else with the greater freedom of her singleness. Beautiful, with a seemingly glamorous job, she’s really a twisted, pitiable person whose life is entirely self-focused.

In Tully, Reitman and Cody have teamed up for a third time (the first was on the excellent Juno) to examine the issue of maturity from the other side of the coin. Pregnant, 40-something mom Marlo (Theron) does almost nothing but serve others. This is one of the few movies that knows how to use a montage—not as shorthand for plot or character development but to illustrate relentless sameness.

Marlo is in a rut. She’s in one of the deepest ruts a person can get into—the exhausting, day-in and day-out repetitiveness of caring for a newborn while simultaneously trying to give her other two children and husband the attention they need. And she’s doing it in a messy house with spills on the carpet and sticky smears on the walls that she doesn’t have the time or energy to do anything about even though they make her feel like a failure. When someone tells her she’s a good mom, she scoffs, “Good
moms volunteer for class parties and make cupcakes shaped like Minions.”

It’s not even clear that Marlo has postpartum depression. Her sadness goes deeper, as she discovers when Tully (Mackenzie Davis), the night nanny her wealthy brother hires for her, arrives on her doorstep like a Zen millennial Mary Poppins.

As she forms an unlikely friendship with 26-year-old Tully, Marlo begins to realize that she’s not just tired, she’s in mourning for other routes her life might have taken, for the other Marlos she might have been. Along with realistic breastfeeding, most of the film’s R rating comes from Marlo’s increasingly bad language and the way she anesthetizes her pain with a steady diet of trashy reality television. Thanks to a late plot twist, an odd bedroom encounter that doesn’t include nudity turns out not to be as salacious as it at first seems.

While all of this will understandably keep many Christians away, it’s fascinating how much Biblical wisdom is nonetheless contained within this profane, at times painfully authentic picture of depressed midlife. Christians might particularly ponder just how much the Bible’s warning not to give up meeting together should be viewed as a mental and emotional health prescription rather than a command.

Unfortunately, a clumsy revelation near the end of the film feels a lot like a cop-out that fails to offer a long-term remedy to Marlo’s feelings of loss. But then, what can a filmmaker who doesn’t know the substance of eternal hope offer a character like her?

Cody and Reitman do as they have in previous films—honor selflessness, maturity, and (more subtly) the sanctity of life, even when it pops up unexpectedly in your 40s. Tully tells Marlo that the very thing that makes her feel invisible and purposeless—her steady, menial, uncelebrated presence in her family members’ lives—is exactly what they will cherish one day. And yet Marlo’s vague sense that her life is leaking away in headaches and worry can’t be brushed aside so easily.

The finiteness of our time on earth—our sadness over wasted potential, deferred dreams, and options narrowing as we grow older—is part of what makes the promise of heaven so precious to the Christian. Only there will we at last be all that we might have been. ☮

### The Rachel Divide

Filmmaker Laura Brownson has a theory: Your reaction to Rachel Dolezal, the white woman from Spokane, Wash., who identifies as African-American, is a Rorschach test for issues of race. But if that’s true, Brownson’s documentary strongly suggests everyone is seeing the same thing in this sad ink blot—except Dolezal herself.

*The Rachel Divide*, available on Netflix, follows Dolezal and her two mortified sons for more than a year. No employer will give her a chance, Dolezal explains, so she’s braiding hair for income. We can only presume she’s also earning money for media appearances and her book deal.

The film, which contains strong foul language, does speculate about how a young Dolezal might have rejected her own identity after watching her white biological family cover up the alleged abuse of her black adopted siblings. But those issues have been well-covered in the media. Brownson instead gives special attention to the reactions of Dolezal’s friends and family (and social media followers) to her newfound fame.

One son comments that Dolezal could make everyone happy by giving up her charade. Instead, she clutches harder after every nasty online comment. Meanwhile, the film’s audience is an omnipresent camera in the home, embodying the watching eye of the internet, while these two poor teens are just trying to survive adolescence. The intrusion is awkward for everyone.

One son groans from under the covers as his mom offers him fruit and eggs for breakfast, in front of the camera. “I’ll have a side of life invasion,” he says. The other chooses to take a gap year in Spain rather than deal with the media attention created by a simple college visit to his dream school, Howard University.

If there are other Dolezals out there, living as “trans-black,” the film doesn’t hint that Dolezal has found them. She’s an island, ostracized by both white and black communities. Yet she continues to feed the two-headed media and social media beast. —by LAURA FINCH

### BOX OFFICE TOP 10

For the Weekend of May 4-6

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<th>Rank</th>
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*Reviewed by WORLD*
After Auschwitz

The wickedness remains unfathomable: Six million Jewish people murdered by Germany’s Nazi regime. One million lost their lives at the Auschwitz concentration camp alone. Liberation did come for some survivors, including six women who, in the new documentary After Auschwitz, tell how they tried to put their lives back together.

The unrated film combines narration, recorded interviews of the women at advanced ages (some are now deceased), and historical video footage (including images of mass casualties). It begins in the weeks right after the women were freed from Auschwitz and other concentration camps. The women’s newfound freedom, though, could be as uncertain and dangerous as their captivity: As survivor Linda Drexler explained in one recording, Russian troops raped many young women who were left behind.

Returning home posed other problems. “The Polish people wouldn’t let us [back] in our house. They were wearing our clothes,” said Rena Firestone. She and other survivors wandered from city to city across a decimated Europe in search of food, jobs, and missing family members.

The six women eventually all came to America. The documentary becomes like a perusal of photo albums—marriage, children, careers. But the upbeat memories always had a downside. Renee Firestone’s train ride from New York to Los Angeles brought flashbacks of being packed into a cattle car. She started a family, but had to explain one day to her young daughter why she didn’t have grandparents as her school friends did.

Erika Jacoby “couldn’t get over” the abundance she found in her new country, but racial segregation and the Kennedy assassination “destroyed my fantasy about America.” Genocides in Sudan, Rwanda, and Cambodia left Eva Beckmann discouraged.

“You would have thought this overwhelming tragedy would be the last,” Beckmann said. “I don’t think teaching about the Holocaust will make the slightest difference.” (Abortion advocates deny the lesson applies to them.)

Still, most of the six women dedicated years of their lives to telling younger generations about the Shoah. Their voices prove there is life after Auschwitz.

—by BOB BROWN

11AM

With recent events like those in Ferguson and Charlottesville, Christian leaders from Russell Moore to John Piper have encouraged believers to repent of the passivity that has prevented us from being the light we should be in this period of resurgence racial strife. How Christians with different skin colors can do a better job loving one another is the question on which the documentary 11AM: Hope for America’s Most Segregated Hour seeks to shed light.

The film follows a Richmond, Va., ministry called Urban Doxology that brings together a diverse group of college-age musicians so they can blend their musical styles and compose praise songs.

In a refreshingly open tone, its leader, Pastor David Bailey, points out that it’s not surprising for believers of different backgrounds to see the troubling events of our day differently. What we can’t do is shout at, belittle, or foment resentment against one another. We also can’t avoid the uncomfortable issue with an excuse of “It wasn’t my sin” if we wish to obey Christ’s command to bear one another’s burdens.

In contrast to the snark and quick-draw outrage invading social media and cable news, Christians should feel emboldened by the early church’s example to enter into loving if sometimes spirited conversations. Doing otherwise, Bailey says, discredits the gospel in the eyes of a watching world.

The film does such a good job offering a Biblically grounded call for racial reconciliation at a broad level, it sometimes neglects to show how that messy process works at a close one. It would have been instructive to see the students hashing out their different perspectives rather than simply hear them describing them.

Despite that, 11AM effectively reminds us that as believers we stand outside the world, and our ability to ask for and offer forgiveness should seem as alien as our citizenship. Then the world may pause from screaming at each other in the streets to say, as the Greek pagans did of the early church, “Behold, how they love one another.”

—by MEGAN BASHAM

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Welcoming others

VIEWS ON IMMIGRANTS AND OUTSIDERS by Marvin Olasky

Matthew Kaemingk’s *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Eerdmans, 2018) has both good specific detail and thoughtful abstractions. He praises attempts in Amsterdam to break down walls between citizens and refugees by cooking and sewing together. Kaemingk also understands that neutrality doesn’t exist, and we often learn more from reading strong positions than from attempts to be value-free. He criticizes panels on immigration that either exchange sweet nothings or debate theology without first preparing the ground through hospitality. Kaemingk also tries to apply to Christian-Muslim relations the thought of Dutch theologian and journalist Abraham Kuyper, who died in 1920. Here, Kaemingk seems to miss Kuyper’s prophetic warning, given at a time when the Islamic world was weak: “It would be a serious miscalculation to regard Islam as fallen from power. What people have repeatedly feared in its summons to holy war is no phantasm…. If zealotry were to take on a more general character… the impact could be horrifying.”

While Kaemingk rightly advocates peace whenever possible, pluralism might not be possible when radical Islamists, like Nazis and Communists before them, feel they have not only a license but an obligation to kill. Gandhi was skillful at torturing the British via civil disobedience. Had he tried that on the Nazis, they would have tortured and killed him. Kaemingk’s proposed pluralistic strategy would work with many American Muslims but not with ISIS devotees.

Libby Garland’s *After They Closed the Gates* (University of Chicago Press, 2014) documents illegal Jewish immigration to the United States during the decades of tiny quotas for Eastern Europeans. Some used smugglers to enter from Mexico, as scholars said “Jews, Slavs, and Italians were of a lower racial order that threatened to pollute the nation’s racial stock.” Such thinking, especially as Adolf Hitler put his Final Solution into practice, left some would-be immigrants only with a right to die.

Obianuju Ekeocha’s *Target Africa: Ideological Neocolonialism in the Twenty-First Century* (Ignatius, 2018) gives specifics on how liberal Americans and Europeans are trying to force Africans to accept population control, radical feminism, abortion, and homosexuality. Graham Allison’s *Destined for War* (Houghton Mifflin, 2017) is a political scientist’s plea that China and the United States find a way to avoid that “destiny.” His advice is good—clarify vital interests, increase understanding, strategize—but he leaves out the most important potential difference-makers: increasing Christian influence in China, stopping the decrease of Christian influence in America.

BOOKMARKS

Bennet Omalu’s *Truth Doesn’t Have a Side* (Zondervan, 2017) tells how a doctor from Nigeria bravely fought the medical-industrial complex to reveal the dangers of youth tackle football. Ibram X. Kendi’s *Stamped from the Beginning* (Nation Books, 2016) argues that America has always been racist; Kendi criticizes Barack Obama from the left and lavishes praise on communist Angela Davis. Jeffrey Engel’s *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (Houghton Mifflin, 2017) is 494 pages of praise, much of it warranted.

James Dolezal’s *All That Is in God* (Reformation Heritage, 2017) points out problems of “theistic mutualism,” where God shares sovereignty with those He created. Tim Chester’s *Bible Matters* (IVP, 2018) clearly explains why the Bible is not just a part of culture, since it is the record of “The God Who Speaks.” Jeremiah Johnston’s *Unimaginable: What Our World Would Be Like Without Christianity* (Bethany House, 2017) is a good book for high-school graduates heading to a college where they’ll hear that Christianity is an evil reactionary force.

Gary Moulton’s *The Lewis and Clark Expedition Day by Day* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018) exhaustively shows what the great explorers did all day from 1804 to 1806. Frank Holt’s *The Treasures of Alexander the Great* (Oxford, 2016) lays out all the bling the young general plundered following his triumphant battles. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius (Oxford, 2018) includes biographical information on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many more. —M.O.
BOOKS ABOUT THE 1918 FLU
reviewed by Susan Olasky


New York Times reporter Gina Kolata approaches the 1918 flu pandemic, which killed tens of millions worldwide, through the eyes of scientists trying to discover what made it so virulent. The result is a medical detective story. Kolata zeros in on particular researchers and the lightbulb ideas that drive them. The search for clues leads to bodies buried in permafrost in Alaska and an almost forgotten medical archive in Washington, D.C. She takes the reader into the Oval Office as President Gerald Ford in 1976 orders a scientifically popular, nationwide program of swine flu inoculation—and shows how support for it rapidly craters.

THE GREAT INFLUENZA: THE STORY OF THE DEADLIEST PANDEMIC IN HISTORY John M. Barry

Barry sets his history within the broader context of other trends, including the development of modern science and medicine and the consolidation of government powers during World War I. After extensive scene-setting he gets to the fall 1918 reappearance of the flu in its more virulent form. One notable thread in this broad story about experts responding to and mismanaging disaster: Ordinary citizens distrusted official pronouncements and press reports, and the result was widespread fear. Barry is a fine writer, although the book’s broad scope lessens its narrative punch.

PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER Katherine Anne Porter

This collection of three novellas by Porter, a Pulitzer Prize winner, shows how she uses specific detail to recreate a particular time and place. The title story comes from her own almost-fatal bout with flu. The main character—a female reporter in Denver—falls in love with a soldier headed to war. She gets sick and hovers between life and death, her dreams increasingly terror-filled. At one point she awakes and realizes she’s been screaming foul insults at her German doctor. Through that kind of detail, Porter conveys the horror of the flu and the tenor of the times.

AS BRIGHT AS HEAVEN Susan Meissner

In this novel, Thomas and Pauline Bright move to Philadelphia after their infant son dies. Thomas joins his uncle as an undertaker, but the 1918 flu hits the city, throwing it and the family in crisis. Meissner’s decision to use an undertaker’s family lets her depict the scale of the epidemic as bodies piled up outside. Four female characters narrate events, trying to make sense of the epidemic, the war, and women's changing roles. At the end of the book, one of the daughters muses: “We are all doing the best we can with what life hands us. That’s all we’ve ever been able to do.”

AFTERWORD

Alfred W. Crosby’s landmark America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918 (Cambridge University Press edition, 2003) first came out to little notice in 1976. Crosby had dug through public health records, newspaper accounts, letters, and journals to compile a detailed and highly readable account. He estimates the flu killed 30 million persons worldwide—though more recent estimates say 50 million. Among those were up to 600,000 Americans, many of whom were in their 20s. Crosby traces the pandemic’s spread. Some quick numbers from one fort, Devins in Massachusetts, where the 1918 influenza began its second wave: By Day 18 of the flu’s appearance, about 6,700 soldiers, nurses, and doctors had come down with it—and up to 90 a day died. —S.O.
Breaking the rules

JIM COMEY'S DISREGARD FOR FBI NORMS SHOWS HE DOESN'T HAVE 'THE RIGHT STUFF'  by Jim Long

Jim Comey's A Higher Loyalty is one of the most reviewed books in recent years. Pundits, political scientists, and psychologists have all weighed in. But one group has been mostly silent: Comey's fellow FBI agents and leaders.

I know from my 20 years in the bureau that it has a distinctive culture with a firmly established set of ethics, policies, and practices. The FBI summarizes those values with a helpful acronym, "FBI": Fidelity, Bravery, Integrity. These ingredients are "the right stuff" for an FBI agent.

Like the test pilots Tom Wolfe wrote about in The Right Stuff, FBI agents control their emotions, put aside self-interest, and don't crack under pressure. An FBI agent, like Chuck Yeager in The Right Stuff, may crash his jet, but even if ejected mid-mission with his helmet on fire from vicious attacks, he still manages to float to earth, pack his chute, and walk upright, as he's been trained.

Here, based on my reading of A Higher Loyalty, are eight FBI right stuff rules that Comey broke.

FBI Rule 1: Good agents serve the country, not themselves. They avoid self-serving statements. Comey writes that a free weekly Richmond newspaper "put a picture of me on its cover, calling me 'One of the Good Guys.'" He writes, "One New York journalist captured the views of many of my colleagues when he wrote a piece titled 'Mr. Comey Goes to Washington.'" We also learn that Comey "never cut the line" in the FBI headquarters cafeteria, although as director he could have, and that Donald Trump "said more nice things about me.... He thought very highly of me and heard great things, that the people of the FBI really like me."

Comey shows himself to be like Sally Field at the Oscars saying, "You like me!" FBI agents should not act like high-school students signing yearbooks.

FBI Rule 2: Since investigations can change in an instant as new information appears, FBI agents do not comment publicly about cases. An investigative team is always just one email click, one subpoena return, one internet hit, one search warrant, one wiretap intercept from apparent innocence becoming apparent guilt, or vice versa. Comey's job during the Hillary email investigation was to be silent during the investigation, pass on results to the U.S. Attorney's Office, then follow its lead. FBI agents let the wheels of justice grind at their own pace: They do not declare the subjects of investigation innocent or guilty.

Nevertheless, on July 5, 2016, Comey disregarded a century of precedents and announced he was closing the Hillary Clinton email investigation without recommending prosecution. Then, in early October 2016, Comey learned of "hundreds of thousands" of new emails found on the laptop of Anthony Weiner, the husband of Clinton's top aide, Huma Abedin. This was the sort of development an FBI director with the right stuff should have anticipated.

FBI Rule 3: Good FBI agents recuse themselves from matters involving a conflict of interest and do not act politically. Comey allowed FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe to participate in the Clinton case though McCabe's wife had received major contributions for her 2015 Virginia Senate campaign from a top Clinton ally. Two months before interviewing Clinton, Comey told McCabe to begin drafting a statement announcing the FBI wouldn't recommend prosecution. Comey also undermined FBI independence when he agreed to use Attorney General Loretta Lynch's scripted term and refer to the Clinton case as a "matter," not an "investigation."

After learning of the Weiner emails in early October 2016, Comey did nothing until the FBI team investigating Clinton forced his hand on Oct. 27, by pushing for action and a search warrant. Comey realized the news would get out: On Oct. 28, 11 days before the election, he announced he had been premature in closing the investigation. Then, two days before the election, Comey made another premature announcement about the emails, telling Congress that an FBI review of the new ones would not change his previous recommendation of "no prosecution" for Clinton—even though the review was still going on.

FBI Rule 4: FBI agents with the right stuff listen more than they talk. Comey frets over Trump speaking "an overwhelming amount of the time" during their meetings—but that's exactly what FBI agents want: Let the subjects talk. The more they talk, the more we learn. Comey also complains that during their 80-minute private dinner, Trump "asked very few questions that might prompt a discussion," but he then lists seven open-ended questions Trump asked, including: "What do you want to do?" and "What are your thoughts?"

A good agent listens, then asks clarifying questions—and Comey certainly should have done that at least twice. When Trump requested loyalty, Comey should've asked, "Mr. President, when you say you expect loyalty, exactly what are you asking of me?" When Trump reportedly asked him to drop an examination of Michael Flynn's conduct, Comey should have asked, "Sir, let what go? Are you talking about his contacts with the Russian ambassador or his lying to FBI agents about it? One is a..."
crime and one isn’t.” Trump’s answer to those questions would have been the “make or break” on an obstruction case. Instead, Comey agreed that Flynn was a good guy.

FBI Rule 5: An FBI agent with the right stuff does not make catty remarks. In A Higher Loyalty, Comey said he told Barack Obama after Donald Trump’s victory, “I dread the next four years.” FBI agents, even if they disagree with a president’s policies, refer to him as “my president” and never disparage an incoming president, especially when talking to a leader from the opposing party. Comey writes about fighting bullies his entire life and regretting being a bully in college—but he makes remarks about Trump’s face and clothing. He stoops to the “hand-to-genital-size” formula Trump disgracefully used on the campaign trail—noting his hand was bigger.

**FBI Rule 6: Good FBI agents are precise in their reporting.** Comey writes that his White House dinner with Trump began with them “four feet apart” at a dinner table, but moments later (after Trump asked him for “loyalty”) Comey was suddenly “inches from the president, staring him directly in the face.” On May 10, 2017, one day after Comey was fired, his goodbye letter was circulated to FBI employees on the bureau’s email system—but he now claims his testimony to the Senate a month later was his chance to say goodbye, something “President Trump did not have the grace or charity of spirit to allow me to do.”

Comey in A Higher Loyalty wrote Trump “gave me the sense he was defending himself to me.” Agents are not mind readers. They should only report what they heard. They should be like Jack Webb in Dragnet: “Just the facts, ma’am.”

**FBI Rule 7: Any information obtained in the scope and course of FBI employment, or any document prepared in connection with bureau duties, belongs to the FBI and must be submitted into bureau repositories. Classified documents must be secured in FBI space. Any classified documents an agent discovers in his possession upon separation from bureau employment must be promptly returned.** Comey reports that he made memos of his FBI-related conversations with
Trump in 2017. He “shared” them with FBI leaders (including his chief of staff, Jim Rybicki) and “locked up at home” a paper copy. Comey called the memos personal property and likened them to a diary—but four of the memos the Department of Justice (DOJ) released to Congress in April contain classified information that cannot be declassified until the year 2042.

Particularly important is the Jan. 6, 2017, memo he pasted into an email shared with Rybicki, McCabe, and FBI legal counsel Jim Baker on the FBI’s classified email server. Comey used his power as FBI director to classify the entire email “Secret,” then failed to mark properly which portions of the document were classified, in keeping with FBI policy and annual refresher training. On April 19, 2018, prior to releasing the email, the DOJ determined three of the eight paragraphs in that memo also contained classified information that cannot be declassified for another 24 years.

If Comey copied and maintained classified information in his home after he separated from government service on May 9, 2017, he may face criminal liability for holding on to memos containing classified information. Comey told Trump that prosecuting a “leaker of classified information...would serve as an important deterrence signal.” If Comey leaked such information to the media, he has condemned himself.

**FBI Rule 8:** When an FBI agent may have to testify about something he witnesses, he describes what he saw in an investigative report (not an informal email, memo, or personal “diary”). He places his notes within a special envelope and submits them within five business days into FBI record systems to establish, among other things, a chain of custody for trial. Above all, FBI agents with the right stuff don’t leak materials and make no pretrial comments on pending matters. If Comey understood that he might be called on someday to testify about his meeting with Trump concerning the Steele dossier, Russian prostitutes, etc., he needed to write an FD-302 report, not an email. This is basic procedure taught in new agent training.

When President Trump reportedly requested loyalty, Comey said he did not “do sneaky things. I don’t leak. I don’t do weasel moves.” Months later Comey leaked a memo of his meeting with Trump to the press. Knowing he is likely to be a key witness in the Mueller investigation, Comey has brought out his book and gone on a media tour while the investigation is still pending.

—The views and opinions expressed above are strictly those of the author and not of the FBI or any other federal agency
STRAYS  Remy Wilkins
Rodney feels abandoned when his parents divorce and his mother leaves him with “weird” Uncle Ray for the summer as she attempts to start their new life. But the summer takes an unexpected turn when Rodney encounters a demon named “Birthless” and discovers that Uncle Ray has a secret connection to a demonic underworld. Evoking C.S. Lewis’ The Screwtape Letters, Wilkins’ debut novel portrays cleverly named demonic characters who converse, plot, and war against angels, earthly beings, and even critters who are subject to “The Name.” Chapter titles include words from the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and questions about the unseen realm abound. (Ages 9-12)

THE CROOKED CASTLE  Sarah Jean Horwitz
Magician’s apprentice Carmer and his faerie princess companion Grit detect mysterious magic at work when they discover a connection between a popular aerial circus show and a string of recent airship disasters. The thrilling quest that ensues involves unexpected allies, magical snowstorms, and an under-the-sea evil kingdom. This fantasy follow-up to Horwitz’s 2017 The Wingsnatchers goes deeper into faerie factions and introduces new friends and villains while maturing a timid Carmer and a fiery Grit. But it still delivers the same clever combination of a magical underworld and steampunk machinery, conveying that—at the height of human inventions and achievement—a battle for the mind exists. (Ages 9-12)

HELLO, UNIVERSE  Erin Entrada Kelly
A recluse Virgil Salinas, nicknamed “turtle” by his boisterous family, longs for the courage to talk to a confident and deaf classmate, Valencia Somerset. The two share incessant taunting from bully Chet Bullens and a budding friendship with self-proclaimed middle-school psychic Kaori. One summer day the lives of these four sixth-graders converge when a heartless act leaves Virgil stranded and helpless. Told from each character’s perspective, the story gives insight into diverse families, worldviews, and the common longing for worth and friendship. Kelly’s 2018 Newbery winner will hook readers immediately, but it credits vague spiritualism—a “big, mysterious, fickle” universe—instead of an all-knowing God. (Ages 8-12)

THE SCHOOL STORY  Andrew Clements
Natalie Nelson’s first novel is good. So good her best friend Zoe Reisman believes she can get it published at the company where Natalie’s mom works. But how can two sixth-graders navigate the adult world of publishing while keeping Natalie’s manuscript out of the slush pile … and her mother oblivious? With the help of some trustworthy adults, Zoe orchestrates a plan that will carry them both on a wild ride to publication. Although the outcome for this golden oldie (published in 2001) is far-fetched, The School Story portrays clever characters with lots of determination and creativity. (Ages 8-12)

AFTERWORD
Airplane travel is so commonplace now that the exhibition flyers who paved its way are all but forgotten. Lawrence Goldstone’s Higher, Steeper, Faster (Little, Brown, 2017) attempts to acquaint young readers with the daredevils behind modern aerial achievement.

The book opens in 1915 with Lincoln Beachey performing his famous “Dip of Death” maneuver in front of crowds at the height of exhibition flying. It backtracks to early flight attempts, including gliders, parachutes, and balloons. Set mostly in the United States, the story focuses on flight’s first decade and male and female personalities who reached celebrity status as they broke records and awed crowds. Hundreds died, though, while performing dangerous stunts. Goldstone’s journalistic writing and passion for aerial history bring his subject to life. The book, suited for ages 9-12, contains a helpful timeline and archival photographs, documents, and newspaper clippings. —M.J.
Kay Coles James on Jan. 1 became president of the Heritage Foundation, America’s premier conservative think tank. Her previous leadership roles: secretary of Health and Human Resources in Virginia, director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management in George W. Bush’s administration, and many more. Here are edited excerpts of our interview in March.

You’ve written that you wanted to become a capital-M Mother, which within the black church community means “a well-respected woman with worn knees, a well-used Bible, candy in her purse for children, who has earned the privilege of saying exactly what she thinks.” Can you do that as Heritage president? I certainly can, and you may call me Mother James.

Mother James, I was impressed with your candor five years ago when we also did an interview here at Patrick Henry College and you commented, “I met recently with young African-American conservative professionals and said, ‘I have a newsflash for you. The cavalry is not coming. There is no one coming to save us. The conservative movement, the evangelical movement, and the Republican Party don’t care about us anymore.’” Do they care now? They are learning to care. They understand how important it is to care. To maintain freedom and liberty, we must spend time, energy, and resources in various communities, including cultural elites, minorities, women, and millennials. Many of our wonderful conservative organizations are comfortable just staying within and preaching to the choir instead of being evangelical, with a small “e.” The Heritage board chose someone who has as a passion growing our movement.

How will you appeal to the cultural elites? I have to appeal to their intellectual honesty.

How much of that is there? Not a lot, I must confess. So I ask, “Are you prepared to be intellectually honest? Will you give me the freedom to call you on it when you’re not? You’re entitled to your opinions but not your own set of facts.” Heritage researchers write papers, and I’m excited to be with Patrick Henry students today because this is the farm team. They learn to rely on data and defend what they believe. Elsewhere, we hear, “I feel, in my opinion.” Those feelings and opinions are typically not based on anything other than some talking points pulled off Facebook.

Thinking of a member of the cultural elite who emphasizes feelings a lot and is also from a minority group, Oprah Winfrey … Oh, I’m looking forward to that one.

What would you say to her? We could find a lot of common ground. I don’t want to see poor people poor. She doesn’t either. I don’t want to see kids trapped in failure factories and unable to get a great education. Neither does she. I don’t want to see access to quality healthcare denied to those who desperately need it. Neither does she. The difference comes in our approach to how to solve those problems. So with Oprah I would lay out the common ground, appreciate who she is, and say, “Are you willing, Oprah, to set everything aside and let’s look at things that work?”

Education is a prime example? When I am dealing with young progressives on college campuses, I like to put up a picture of a kid who is obviously from an impoverished background, and I tell them that my children and my grandchildren have someone who’s crazy about them and that’s me. That poor kid whose picture I put up deserves someone who is crazy about them as well and who’s willing to take on teachers unions and school administrators. Are you willing to do that and set aside politics, set aside labels and talking points, set aside advocating on behalf of anyone other than that kid? If you lock Oprah Winfrey and me in a room, I’ll bet we could come out with some solutions for that kid.

Let’s say Oprah Winfrey responds to that persuasive argument by saying, “Donald Trump. No compassion.” Then what? Heritage is not an arm of the Republican National Committee or the Trump administration. We promote conservative philosophies, ideas, and policies. Whenever the RNC or the Trump administration veers from that, we take them on. I would say to Oprah: When someone is dying in a desert and a hand reaches out to give a cup of water, would you knock it away? Take Trump out of the picture and look at the cup of water. Is it real? Will it quench the thirst? I don’t care who it’s coming from, if it’s a real solution, I’ll take it.

So Oprah then says, tell me about the cup of water you’ve offered to DACA kids. I have compassion for kids brought here by their parents. They had no say in that. I get that they have hopes and
dreams and aspirations. But you know what I also get? That there’s a kid in Appalachia who has hopes and dreams. There’s a kid in inner-city Chicago who has hopes and dreams, and in a country with limited resources, I’d just like to say Americans have dreamers too. Let’s take care of our American dreamers, and we can get to the DACA ones eventually. There should be a pathway to citizenship for those individuals, but I also have compassion for folks that I know that stood in line, went through the processes, and respected our laws.

On education, did the Bush administration make a mistake in not pushing school choice but instead emphasizing testing? We made a mistake in not pushing both. If school choice were enacted and people took their resources and money and picked better schools, you would see the public schools improve because they are going to want to keep those kids. I don’t support school choice because I want to see public schools shut down. I want to see poor kids have choice—and the competition will improve public schools.

Clarence Thomas in his autobiography writes about when he was nominated for the Supreme Court and underwent enormous abuse: “We asked four of our friends, Elizabeth and Steven Law and Kay and Charles James, to come over the next morning and join us in prayer. They showed up bright and early, carrying bags of doughnuts and bagels past the reporters camped outside the house. The six of us chatted for a little while, then sat in a circle, held hands, and asked the Lord for help. Both couples came back each day until the battle was over, and their company was a priceless gift. ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name,’ Jesus said, ‘I am there among them.’ He was among us now.” Can you just tell us a bit more about that experience? Only that it’s been repeated more times than I’d like to think of with friends going through difficult times. We need to be a people with the audacity to believe in prayer. We need to be a people, when we see overwhelming challenges, who know we serve a mighty God and can go to Him in confidence and in prayer, knowing that the battle is not ours: It’s His. Amen.
Broadway melodies
MP3 COLLECTION OFFERS TREASURES FROM THE PAST by Arsenio Orteza

Happening upon the Bach Guild’s Big Broadway Box (eOne Music) at a time in which Kendrick Lamar wins a Pulitzer, one can’t help feeling like the Lerner-Loewe characters Tommy Albright and Jeff Douglas when they accidentally find themselves in Brigadoon: thrilled to discover that access to wonders from a more felicitous era still exists.

The collection isn’t a box at all but 89 MP3s available for downloading (for just 99 cents on one website) or streaming (via Amazon Music Unlimited). It’s a textbook case in creative cross-licensing, restoring to circulation four long-forgotten or never-much-noted albums in their entirety: the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra’s An Evening with Rodgers and Hammerstein (1982), William Bolcom and Joan Morris’ Night and Day: The Cole Porter Album (1988, the year, incidentally, that Bolcom won a Pulitzer for his 12 New Etudes for Piano), and the pianist George Feyer’s The Essential Cole Porter (1976) and The Essential Jerome Kern (1993) (both of which gather recordings made in the 1950s).

The collection also includes more than half of the Royal Philharmonic’s Bernstein (2000), and cherry-picks five Gershwin selections from four other albums. If such block compiling seems unimaginative, even lazy, the music itself is anything but.

The 14 numbers that open the program find the late Erich Kunzel conducting the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra through the best-loved songs of State Fair, The King and I, Oklahoma!, South Pacific, Carousel, and The Sound of Music. The tenor Mark Dubois and the soprano Deborah Milsom take turns singing lead, and although more famous vocalists have braved the emotionally rich ins and outs of “People Will Say We’re in Love” and “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” none have done so more convincingly.

The Bolcom-Morris piano-and-vocal recordings, however, supply the highest highlights. Bolcom’s refined but hardly stuffy accompanist’s instincts adorn and support the interpretive gifts of his mezzo-soprano wife, whose readings of “Nobody’s Chasing Me,” “The Physician,” “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” “You’re the Top,” and “Miss Otis Regrets” match Porter’s incomparable gift for conflating, compressing, and interweaving the comic, the tragic, the audacious, and the witty until it’s impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins.

Granted, 32 consecutive instrumental numbers by George Feyer and his small combo are one or two dozen too many (especially since some of the Porter tunes occur earlier in Morris-sung renditions) and threaten to turn the “box” into a Leave It to Beaver-era dentist’s waiting room. But the 12 Leonard Bernstein numbers that follow, especially the eight symphonic dances from West Side Story, reinvigorate the proceedings and make sure that a bang is just one of the good things with which the Big Broadway Box goes out.

SOMBER JAZZ
A rather different take on “Miss Otis Regrets” from the one recorded by Bolcom and Morris opens You’re Driving Me Crazy (Exile/Legacy), the new album by Van Morrison and the jazz organist Joey DeFrancesco. The lyrics and therefore the plot remain the same (spoiler headline: HIGH-SOCIETY MADEMOISELLE COMMITTED CRIME OF PASSION, LOSES LIFE AT HANDS OF LYNCH MOB), but the focus is on the subdued, somber jazz to which Morrison and DeFrancesco set it rather than on the narrative.

Other subdued tracks follow (“Trav’lin Light,” “Goldfish Bowl,” “Magic Time”). But, on the whole, You’re Driving Me Crazy is the swingiest of the three close-enough-for-jazz albums intermingling rerecorded Morrison originals and jump-blues and Big Band standards that Morrison has released since September.

It also sounds the most spontaneous—probably because, recorded in just two days, it is. —A.O.
NEW OR RECENT RELEASES
reviewed by Arsenio Orteza

JOHNNY CASH: FOREVER WORDS
Various artists
Just when the exploitation of the Johnny Cash brand seemed to have run its course, here comes this masterpiece by committee, in which 16 mostly famous acts take poems and lyrics that Cash never set to music and not only give them melodies but also arrange and record them with posterity—theirs and Cash’s—in mind. From performers who knew and/or were related to the man, such triumphs might seem inevitable, but even the outliers (Jewel, Elvis Costello, I’m with Her, Robert Glasper, Ro James) make good.

BELIEVE Lilian Dinma
Dinma testifies to her Christian faith in Nigerian Pidgin atop Afro-pop so bubbly that it may as well be carbonated. But she has a less-fizzy register too. “Sing Praises” is a Jesus song as simple as it is sweet, with “Na You Be the One” not far behind. There is, however, an elephant in the room. “If chocolate fudge cake could sing,” someone once quipped, “it would sound like Barry White.” Well, if a tube of aluminum foil could sing, it would sound like Auto-Tune.

I’LL BE READY WHEN THE GREAT DAY COMES John Johanna
Meet John Johanna, a young singer-songwriter whose curiosity encompasses Eastern and Western folk musics (particularly those hospitable to waltz tempi) and who isn’t afraid to mention that he’s an Eastern Orthodox Christian. Not that he needs to—anyone who would write a 2½-minute rocker whose only lyric is “Maranatha” (iambically pronounced), assay arrangements of “Rock My Soul” and Charles Wesley’s “And Am I Born to Die?” and then drench the results in otherworldly lo-fi has obviously spent time pondering ancient verities.

PROVIDENCE Phil Madeira
The basis for the Randy Newman comparisons greeting this engaging and overtly autobiographical album is the whiff of Dixieland coming off the Deep South melodies of “A Rhode Island Yankee on Jefferson Davis Court,” “Back in the Ocean State,” “Native Son,” and “Gothenburg.” The basis for the Mose Allison comparisons is the bluesy, piano-centric lope of “Rich Man’s Town,” “Crescent Park,” and “Wide Eyed Dream.” As history has shown, Newman’s and Allison’s approaches lend themselves well to the universalizing of particulars. Madeira’s lyrics are full of ‘em.

ENCORE
Amanco Prada’s 1977 recording of John of the Cross’ devotional classic Cantico Espiritual has been reissued many times, and now the French label Editions JADE has brought it out again. Following the lead of EMI’s 1997 edition, it breaks up Prada’s arrangement of the poem’s 40 quintets into nine tracks with recurring titles such as “Esposo” (“Bridegroom,” or Christ) and “Esposa” (“Bride,” or the believer’s soul) that emphasize the text’s dialogic nature. (There’s also a trilingual libretto, but the English, in preferring fidelity to rhyme scheme instead of fidelity to meaning, reads clumsily.)

Accompanied by the violinist Jesús Corvino, the cellist Eduardo Gattinoni, and his own eloquently plucked guitar, Prada enunciates John of the Cross’ mystical verses impeccably and sings them in a yearning tenor commensurate with their lofty themes. The Song of Solomon is an obvious forerunner, but the experiences were John’s own. Thanks in part to the durability of Prada’s rendition, they can be others’ as well. —A.O.
A terminal trap
DENIED U.S. ENTRY, IRANIAN CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS ARE RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS

Since January we’ve closely watched the plight of about 100 Iranians invited to apply for asylum in the United States under a special U.S. law, then denied U.S. entry (see “A terminal wait,” March 17). The applicants—mostly Christians—remain trapped in Austria, their once-open door to America shut, and unable to return to Iran where most would face imprisonment or even execution.

We now know more about this group, thanks to a team from the Nazarene Fund that read our coverage and decided to help. The team traveled to Vienna last month, meeting with Austrian officials, church leaders, and the asylum-seekers themselves. What they learned amplifies the needless upheaval and tragedy these Iranians continue to face.

The injustice is reflected in a lawsuit filed last month in federal district court in California on these families’ behalf. It charges officials at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with failing to follow the law governing their cases and also sheds light on their plights.

Of about 108 individuals who arrived 18 months ago singly or with their families, two-thirds are Armenian or Assyrian Christians and the rest are Zoroastrians, Mandean, or others. At least one is 8 years old and one is 74, cut off from family now living in America. About 20 need medical care, for diabetes and other chronic diseases, and aren’t receiving it. The 74-year-old grandmother is going blind due to untreated macular degeneration.

One of the young women was attacked in Iran by “fanatical Muslims” because she wore a cross. Another girl, 15, and her family claim she was sexually abused and tortured by an imam in her school for refusing to convert to Islam. One young male applicant is a Muslim convert to Christianity who came to Austria from Iran on foot, and another applicant, a father of four, has died in Vienna while waiting.

What all these have in common: Their relatives, who are legal permanent U.S. residents or citizens, applied for their asylum under the Lautenberg Amendment, a law granting special processing to specific classes of persecuted religious minorities. Under Lautenberg provisions, the Austrian government issues transit visas to approved cases at the invitation of the U.S. State Department. In Vienna applicants are processed for U.S. entry—900 in 2016-17.

But instead of granting the applicants U.S. visas, DHS denied admission to nearly 90 applicants “as a matter of discretion” early this year and later denied their appeals. About 20 applicants received no word on their status.

In the lawsuit filed April 18, the International Refugee Assistance Project claims DHS violated the law by not disclosing the reason for denial “to the maximum extent feasible.” Without stated reasons, applicants had no way to provide evidence in appealing the denials. This leaves all the applicants in a costly limbo. Their transit visas having expired, some have received $600 fines from the Austrian government, and a few have faced threats of deportation. They receive no government assistance and cannot obtain Austrian work permits. Their U.S.-based families are trapped too, providing thousands of dollars in support.

With America turning its back on the families, that leaves future support to a few Austrians and the Nazarene Fund—a nonprofit launched under the auspices of television and radio personality Glenn Beck to rescue victims of ISIS. The Lautenberg applicants “need immediate and effective support, as there is no organization or coordination of their care,” said the Fund’s Zeno Gamble. Long-term asylum in Austria, meanwhile, may prove impossible as Austrians last year elected an anti-refugee government.

Austria, not surprisingly, has announced it will no longer grant transit visas for Lautenberg applicants. Congress should take that seriously but, as one church worker in Vienna said, U.S. lawmakers “are unwilling to expend political capital to change the refugees’ status or champion their cause in any meaningful way.”

Trump officials, for their part, informally cite as the reason for the denials new DHS protocols that came into effect under Obama—presumably vetting procedures. But in perhaps no other way has the Trump presidency bound itself by Obama-era hostility to persecuted Christians. That’s something President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence had pledged to correct.
A Biblical, non-insurance approach to health care

As believers in Christ, we are called to glorify God in all that we do. Samaritan members bear each other’s burdens by sharing the cost of medical bills while praying for and encouraging one another. Members can choose between two membership options for sharing their medical needs: Samaritan Classic and Samaritan Basic.

Monthly costs:
(Ranges based on age, household size, and membership level)

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As of March 2018

Find more information at: samaritanministries.org
Hidden
Spousal abuse is a widespread sin that many churches ignore at their—and their members’—peril

by SOPHIA LEE | photo by Jim Mone/Genesis

On Jan. 27, 2015, T—to protect privacy we are using only an initial—emailed leaders of her nondenominational church in western Washington state: “I’m asking for HELP! I’m desperately asking for help.” She said her husband had abused her with threats, lies, blame-shifting, and manipulation throughout 24 years of their marriage. She felt lost, afraid, broken.

For the elders, this email was more perplexing than surprising: For seven years, T and her husband had been active church members with marital problems, and many people had devoted hours of marriage counseling with them. The couple even flew to Missouri to participate in an intensive four-day marriage conciliation program. Now T was saying that after all that effort, things had become worse—and she was now claiming “abuse.”

The elders were facing a challenge that’s increasingly common in churches, though many leaders choose to ignore it. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime. Some say the statistics are even higher for emotional abuse. The elders of this suburban evangelical church have now dealt with at least six cases of claimed domestic abuse in the last 10 years.

To learn more about how churches work through such cases, I visited what had been T’s church—until it excommunicated her. I interviewed elders, listened to five women who had accused their spouses of abuse, verified their stories with the elders, met with two families that had confronted the elders about the way they had handled past abuse cases, read through pages of documents and
email exchanges, and conferred with abuse specialists. I found out what the elders themselves had realized: Dealing with domestic abuse charges is ugly and messy, full of hurt and brokenness and sin.

Like many other Christian couples, T and her husband met at church. At the time, she had just left her second marriage. She had a baby son and was unsure about ever marrying again. But, as T tells the story, for three years the man who became her third husband wooed her, telling her all the things many women yearn to hear: You’re beautiful. You’re such a godly woman. You’re everything I want in a wife. I want to take care of you and your son.

When they married in 1991, T thought her new husband was a wonderful, sensitive man who was crazy about her. She says all the lovely words and affection ceased three months into their marriage. One day, she and her husband argued: She says he shut her up by lifting and slamming her onto the ground. The impact snapped her ankle.

Her husband told the elders a different story. He said he did not intentionally break T’s ankle—they were horse-playing, and what happened was an accident. The elders believed him. (I repeatedly sought a meeting with T’s husband to get his side firsthand, but he refused. At his request I emailed him a list of questions. He never answered them.)

T says she kept quiet about the unhappiness inside her home for two decades: “I wanted to look good. I idolized marriage and wanted to appear like I had everything together.” Once she started saying she had been abused for all those years, the elders wondered why she had been silent about her marriage dynamics during so many years of marriage counseling. They say her husband accused T of mentally and emotionally abusing him by criticizing, manipulating, and falsely accusing him. Now the elders were in a bind: Who was telling the truth? Who was abusing whom?

One elder said he and his colleagues were at their “wit’s end,” stuck in a “he-said/she-said situation.” He said he knew the husband as a “kind person with a servant’s heart” and T as a faithful women’s ministry leader for years. The church’s family pastor said the elders were trying to separate the weeds of so many years of counseling from the sudden abuse claims. It’s like different-colored Play-Doh that’s been mashed together. You can’t separate them.”

T says it took her a long time to use the language of “abuse” because she didn’t know what it was. In 2014 she started reading books about domestic abuse: She says the stories of depressed and distressed women sounded like her own story. Then during a counseling session in Missouri, the counselor suddenly sent her husband out of the room and told her what she had just described was sexual abuse. She burst into tears.
T: “I idolized marriage and wanted to appear like I had everything together.”

the church had spiked a scarlet letter to her chest. Meanwhile, the elders stand by their judgment. They said they had “poured heart and soul” into the couple, but ultimately, T chose to “stretch out [claims of abuse] to justify her way out of a really tough marriage.”

Today, almost two years after the excommunication, T’s story is still stirring confusion, division, and hurt in the church. Congregants took sides. Several church members confronted the elders asking for answers: One couple left the church because they disagreed with the elders’ decisions. Another couple, part of the church for 14 years, circulated a letter calling the elders to repent.

After T left the church, two more women came to the elders with claims of abuse. One of the women—G, a mother of five—suffered abandonment by her first husband and had been married to her second husband for 10 years when she asked to meet with church leaders. She printed out a chart outlining various forms of abuse and circled the ones that she’d experienced from her husband. She also jotted down a 20-page-long list of abusive incidents.

When she showed a pastor and his wife the chart, they said they had experienced conflicts in their own marriage and recommended a marriage communications class. “I was crushed,” G told me. “I was pleading with them for help, and it felt like they were saying, ‘Oh, it’s not that bad.’” After the meeting she sat in her van at the church parking lot for a long time, weeping and praying, “God, You’re sovereign over this. I don’t know why they’re responding this way, but this is not OK.” (The pastor is no longer at the church and did not respond to my interview requests.)

One day, when G and her husband argued, their daughter called the police. The church elders told her husband to move out of the house temporarily. They got together with the husband to set up some rules and boundaries, then sent him to anger management counseling. When he seemed to show signs of repentance, the elders suggested that G and her husband move forward into marriage counseling. G refused: She wasn’t seeing any changes in her husband’s behavior.

The husband eventually admitted that he had been abusive to his wife, but then accused her of abusing him too. The elders floundered and agonized: Whom to believe? Finally, they decided they needed professional help and suggested the couple see abuse counselors. But it had been more than a year since G had first asked elders for help, and she had lost trust in them. She left the church. Her husband is still a member and is seeking to divorce her.

The elders examined themselves. The church’s executive pastor declared, “We may be trained Biblically, but we lacked practical wisdom.” In September 2017, the church invited a Biblical counselor who specializes in abuse training to teach them how to do better. They then identified what they could have done differently with G and her husband: They should have met with them separately and invited another woman into the room with G so that she felt safe. They could have asked better intake questions to draw out patterns of abusive tactics.
The elders concluded they also could have answered emails more promptly and sent church members to care for her and walk alongside her. While G was frustrated that nothing seemed to be happening, the elders were spending dozens of hours in elder meetings discussing the case. The executive pastor says, “We were working for her, but not with her.”

Three months after the church leaders' domestic abuse training, a church member one night yanked his wife by her hair, whipped her with his belt, and punched her several times. He then acted like nothing happened and asked if she’d like to go out for dinner. The woman, D, refused, so her husband took two of their kids out for burgers. When he left, D called a deacon and a family friend. They came over immediately and called the police.

The elders quickly got involved. They didn’t start with marriage counseling, but asked the wife what she needed first. An elder welcomed D and her children to his home. A deacon invited her husband to stay at his home for as long as he needed. The elders set up a team of church members who took care of practical needs such as picking up the kids from school, meeting the husband at the courthouse, and checking up on D. Today D and her husband are still living apart, but the husband has confessed abuse and they have begun marriage counseling with the goal of reconciliation.

That one potential success is not enough for other church members who say the leaders should re-evaluate every past case. Recently, the elders asked to meet with G again, and one pastor apologized to her for not having been better equipped to care for her.

As these three cases suggest, refereeing domestic abuse situations is not easy. They often do not provide obvious evidences of broken bones or bruises. Most of the damage from domestic abuse is invisible: It involves repetitive behaviors that terrorize, dehumanize, objectify, degrade, and control spouses. Such abuse is a hammer to the soul, pounding over and over at the personhood, dignity, and freedom of a spouse.

Many church leaders don’t understand the dynamics and effects of domestic abuse, or don’t even believe that such evil exists in their pews (see sidebar). Instead of addressing the deeper heart issue behind abuse, church leaders typically address the behaviors by recommending anger management counseling, couples therapy, confession, and forgiveness.

One problem, though, is that when one spouse is unrepentant and unchanging, the other may shoulder the extraordinary burden of constantly asking for forgiveness, offering forgiveness, and repairing the relationship. Often, the victim then reacts out of anger, hurt, and bitterness, which provides the abuser grounds to frame the victim as an unstable, delusional, and malicious henpecker. The victim who keeps emailing, calling, and texting the pastors for help may be perceived as an irritating, relentless commotion-maker.

When that happens, who else will care to listen to the victim’s cries?
Bethlehem Baptist Church Pastor Jason Meyer learned something shocking in 2015. Three women in his Minneapolis congregation were victims of domestic abuse. They claimed the church wasn’t helping. Leaders heard whispers of victims afraid to come forward. “It was a wake-up call,” Meyer said. “We didn’t know this was happening.”

Many pastors don’t. LifeWay Research surveyed 1,000 Protestant pastors last year: Forty-seven percent didn’t know of any victims of domestic violence in their churches during the previous three years. Another 15 percent said no one had experienced domestic violence.

Sociologist Christopher Ellison found that “men who attend religious services several times a week are 72 percent less likely to abuse their female partners than men from comparable backgrounds who do not attend services.” With national numbers of women in physically abusive relationships hovering between 25 and 33 percent, that still leaves a lot of abuse, but few church leaders know how to handle such problems. Sometimes their help actually hurts.

Bethlehem elders invited Biblical counselor John Henderson, author of *Abuse: Finding Hope in Christ*, to train them. They started a Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART), led by a survivor of domestic abuse. Meyer presented the joint elders’ statement in a sermon, “Fooled by False Leadership.” He denounced “harsh lordship” by husbands and male leaders, called abusers to repentance, and offered help to victims. He called all forms of domestic abuse a “satanic distortion of Christ-like male leadership because it defaces the depiction of Christ’s love for his bride.”

Since then, Bethlehem has walked through roughly 27 cases on its three campuses. Chris Moles, a Biblical counselor and pastor who has counseled abusers for more than 10 years, helped Bethlehem develop strategies to hold abusers accountable and avoid common missteps. Moles used an adage to describe the lack of preparation within churches to address domestic abuse: “When you hear hoof steps, you think horse, not zebra.”

Most pastors and counselors are familiar with the common “horse steps” of marital problems, but few are trained to recognize the “zebra steps” of abuse. When a woman (or occasionally, a man) approaches them with marriage turmoils, they conflate the symptoms of abuse with normal marital sins. In other cases, church leaders may endanger a victim by alerting an abuser that she is seeking help. Moles also exposes faulty theology: If pastors convey an unbalanced view of submission without requiring a husband to love his wife, abusers feel empowered and victims imprisoned.

Still, Bethlehem refuses to write off those who abuse—and this part of the program is not without its critics, says Kirsten Christianson, who manages DART cases. Statistically, few abusers will repent, but God hasn’t made us privy to who the select few are, she says. “We pursue the hearts of those who abuse until they reject being pursued.”

At Bethlehem Baptist, the learning curve has been steep, volunteer burnout is a problem, and discipleship is key. The church pairs new volunteers with experienced ones. Together they check in regularly and pray with a victim and develop a safety plan. Training is hands-on. Meyer says elders now do more pavement-pounding and know their people better: “Our elders are out there more, being shepherds. ... Not just addressing messy situations, but all situations.” —Christina Darnell
Recently freed school girls from the Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, pose for a photo after a meeting with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in Abuja on March 23.

PHOTO BY AZEES AKUNLEYAN/AP
DAPCHI’S LAST CAPTIVE

Leah Sharibu’s family continues to search for answers months after her kidnapping

BY ONIZE OHIKERE IN ABUJA, NIGERIA
In her home about 20 minutes away, Rebecca Sharibu received word that the militants were invading the school where her daughter, Leah, attended. She rushed to the school along with several other parents to search for their children.

“Some of the women found their children, but me, I didn’t see Leah. I was crying.”

Boko Haram kidnapped 110 girls from the school. The group later released 104 of them after five others died in captivity. Now, more than two months later, Leah—the only Christian among the girls—remains the lone captive from Dapchi, held for refusing to renounce her faith. The 15-year-old’s courageous stance drew international admiration, but her family increasingly grows worried for her safety, afraid she has been forgotten, as they receive no word from the government on her rescue.

On the morning of the attack, the militants asked for directions to the Government Girls Science and Technical College as soon as they arrived in Dapchi. “In the town, they didn’t touch anybody. Their purpose was to take away the girls,” said Auta, who is the pastor to Leah and her family.

The militants opened fire on the school’s compound, sending the girls fleeing for shelter. Some jumped over the fence and went to hide in the surrounding bush. Several others ran out through the school’s main gate and into some of the waiting militants, who took them.

Many parents in the town waited for their children, hoping they would emerge from hiding in the coming days. Rebecca said she waited three days, hoping that Leah was not among the abducted girls. “Up till now I haven’t seen Leah,” she said.

A month after taking the girls, the militants drove back into Dapchi on March 21 in a convoy and returned 104 of them. Videos from the village showed ecstatic villagers thanking and shaking hands with the militants for returning the girls. The insurgents said they returned the girls after discovering they were Muslim, and warned the villagers not to return their children to school. The name Boko Haram loosely translates as “Western education is forbidden.”

Nigerian Information Minister Lai Mohammed later said the government neither paid ransom nor swapped prisoners with the extremist group to ensure the girls’ safe return. He claimed the government reached an unconditional agreement for their release, since the abduction breached ongoing cease-fire talks. “When the girls were being brought back, an operational pause was observed in certain areas to ensure free passage and prevent loss of lives.”

But five of the captured girls died in captivity, their deaths witnessed and confirmed by their classmates who were released. Auta said the girls informed the community that Leah remained with the militants because she refused to convert to Islam.

Aisha Wali, deputy director of the Yobe state Women Affairs Ministry, said the girls revealed in their meetings...
They tried to protect Leah, the only Christian among them. “The students said they were calling her Ladi and they gave her a hijab to wear, but she refused.”

Her mother fainted upon hearing the news, and she had to be hospitalized.

Rebecca’s husband, Nathan, who works as a policeman in northeast Adamawa state, told reporters he was happy Leah stood for her faith. “As a father, I wish she returned home as the rest,” he said, “but God is in control.”

At the time of her abduction, Leah was a 10th-grade student who dreamed of becoming a nurse. Her decision to stand for her faith drew widespread support and commendation.

The Christian Association of Nigeria declared a day of prayer for her release. ECWA Nigeria President Jeremiah Gado called on congregants nationwide to pray and fast from April 27 to 29 for “God’s intervention toward freeing Leah.”

In Dapchi, Auta said some mosques joined the Christians to pray for Leah’s release during their Friday prayers.

Auta has known the Sharibu family for more than three years and watched the family attend Sunday services, Wednesday prayer meetings, and other church events. Leah’s stance is a great encouragement, he said: “This is how I taught my members, and they went back and taught their children to hold Jesus Christ firmly and not to deviate from His teaching.”

At the family home, several Christians continue to visit with gifts and prayers. Leah’s 13-year-old brother, Donald, who learned about Leah’s kidnapping from teachers at his own school, said, “We are very happy because she defended our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But the family continues to struggle. Following the release of the kidnapped girls, the government vowed that Leah “will not be abandoned.” But since then, Rebecca Sharibu told me in mid-April, no government official has briefed the family on its efforts to rescue Leah. “As they brought the other ones safely, let them bring my daughter safely,” she said. “That’s what I want from the government.”

Following an April meeting with Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in a statement said the government would continue to handle Leah’s case quietly because “making noise would not help.” But Buhari insists the government isn’t ignoring it: “We are collecting as much intelligence as possible, working with the Red Cross and other international organizations.”

Taking an understated approach won’t quell fears, though: The Dapchi kidnapping is the largest since Boko Haram militants in April 2014 kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from a school in Chibok in Borno state.
Boko Haram launched its insurgency in Nigeria in 2009 with bomb attacks and killings in the country's northeast. In 2011, the extremist group extended its reach to Abuja, where it staged attacks on police headquarters and on a United Nations building. Nigerian authorities in 2016 regained control of Boko Haram's stronghold in northeast Borno state, but the group continues with sporadic attacks. Boko Haram has killed more than 20,000 people and displaced more than 2 million others.

The Chibok kidnapping attracted global attention and sparked a #BringBackOurGirls Twitter campaign that featured first lady Michelle Obama. In Abuja, Nigeria's capital, a group of campaigners continues to organize protests seeking the release of the remaining 112 Chibok girls. Authorities also mandated the rescued girls spend at least nine months at a reintegration center.

After militants released the Dapchi girls to their families, officials took the survivors to Abuja. There, they met with Buhari and received medical treatment and counseling. Authorities then handed over the girls to their parents, Yobe State Police Commissioner Sunmonu Abdulmaliki confirmed.

Despite the varying lengths of abduction, girls kidnapped by Boko Haram face similar struggles to readjust. In Chibok, some of the girls who completed the mandatory reintegration program still battle with flashbacks and nightmares, said Friya Kimde Bulus, the deputy director of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.

Some rescued Chibok girls had narrated how the militants forcibly married off some of their class-mates. Boko Haram also released multiple proof-of-life videos that showed some of the girls holding babies. Bulus said the ministry is working with other partners to provide more regular psychosocial sessions.

Wali said the state women affairs ministry in Yobe has started counseling sessions in Dapchi for the families and other community members, which has become even more necessary as the girls start to face stigmatization. “People are saying since it’s Boko Haram that took them away, they must have used them.”

The rescued girls’ families also refused to return them back to the school in Dapchi and demanded the government either tighten security or give them the option to attend as day students. School authorities transferred the grade 12 students who already registered for their national examinations to a school in another local government area.

In the meantime, the state ministry said it’s working with partners to open a safe space where the girls can partake in skill acquisition activities until they return to school. “If they’re not immediately taken back to school, they could face gender-based violence, hawking, early marriage,” Wali said.

Back in Dapchi, life may appear normal, but the attack left its mark. On the bridge leading into the town, soldiers and police officials man a checkpoint. The school Leah and her classmates attended sits empty. Policemen guard the entrance. In the town’s market, traders hawk calendars with pictures of the abducted girls. Some show the released girls posing by security officials as they celebrate their return. But Leah’s picture signals the story isn’t over. In one of them, she sits beside her mother, who embraces her.

At the Sharibu’s home, Rebecca and Donald read the Bible every day at 6 o’clock in the morning and evening, then they pray for Leah’s return. Knowing Leah remains in the hands of Islamic militants, her brother said, “It encourages us so we would not be worried.”

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The tournament room is silent. Surrounded by the intense gazes of the watching crowd—and those of chess greats past and present staring down from photos on the walls—Wesley So, 24, prepares to defend his title of U.S. chess champion at the St. Louis Chess Club and Scholastic Center in April. Eleven other top-rated players are there to try to take it from him.

Game 1 of the 12-round, round-robin tournament pits So, the third-ranked male player in the United States and the seventh-ranked in the world, against Yaroslav Zherebukh, 23, a Ukrainian-born grandmaster now playing for the United States. Zherebukh, playing white, comes out strong, but So’s black pieces soon push back, eventually driving Zherebukh into an untenable corner position that seals a victory for So and puts him in first place.
So, who grew up in the Philippines but now lives in Minnesota, is unusual in the rarefied atmosphere of international chess: a professing Christian who is open about his faith. He grew up in a country where few care about chess—“on the whole, people prefer basketball”—and many believe in God “but are unwilling to claim much more than that.” His road to becoming both a world-class chess player and a follower of Jesus Christ was long and sometimes bumpy.

So began playing chess at age 6 or 7 with a plastic set he got for Christmas. Inspired by study of the games of Bobby Fischer, he was soon “dabbling” in tournaments. Over the next few years, he progressed rapidly to International Master (at age 12) and Grandmaster (at age 14) status, becoming the youngest Filipino to hit both of those goals. He also won two Philippine Chess Championships.

Minimal funding and limited access to professional coaching made it difficult for him to get advanced training. In 2012, he came to the United States on a chess scholarship and began playing for Webster University in St. Louis. He hoped that, if his chess dreams did not pan out, at least he’d be able to earn a degree and get a decent job.

While playing in a tournament in Minnesota, So met former Filipino film star Lotis Key and her husband, former basketball player Renato “Bambi” Kabigting. Both are Christians and chess enthusiasts who had been following So’s career online. Their friendship and support led to So’s decision to leave Webster University and turn pro in 2015, with Key serving as his manager. He also switched his affiliation to the U.S. Chess Federation from that of the Philippines, a move that surprised his manager. He also switched his affiliation to the U.S. Chess Federation from that of the Philippines, a move that surprised many but made sense given the greater number of opportunities available to him in the United States.

Since then So has won tournaments around the world. From the 42nd Chess Olympiad in Baku, Azerbaijan, he brought home the U.S. team’s first gold medal since 1976. He is the 11th player in history to earn a rating above 2800 as computed by the World Chess Federation (officially Fédération Internationale des Échecs, known as FIDE).

So openly credits his Christian faith as a major factor in his perseverance and success. In a field where few talk about such things, So's willingness to utter the name of Christ has sometimes brought him opposition and criticism—and some nasty comments on social media—from those who think he should keep his religion to himself. The upside: “I get a lot of support from Christian fans. It’s very cool. I didn’t know there were so many Christian chess players out there. It’s so great to get emails from them telling me they are praying for me.” Last summer, when So lost badly in a major tournament in St. Louis, a Christian fan drove 100 miles to talk with and encourage him. “I am happy to be a Christian,” So says: “Who gets love like that?”

So also finds many opportunities to use his prominence for the good of others: “My favorite aspect of being a professional chess player is having the ability to encourage others who are struggling. Most young players don’t have the money or the support system to train and compete. I didn’t either, yet by God’s grace I am here. I hope that inspires kids to not give up in the face of adversity. You never know what He has for you just around the corner.”

As inspiring as chess can be for some, So says that the life of an elite player can be grueling: “You really have to want it. You have to be ready to give up everything to study, train, and compete. I usually study eight to 10 hours most days. Chess is not a team sport, so you are very much on your own physically and emotionally. Some matches can run up to eight hours or more, and once the clock starts there is no stopping or going back. Your mind is involved in solving problems as quickly as possible, and that motor keeps running until the game is done. I don’t think there is any professional ballplayer who is asked to play continuously like that.”

In the rare moments between tournaments and training, So likes to “forget about chess and do something completely...”

The competition is fierce as the U.S. Championship heads into Round 8. So now faces perhaps his most difficult challenger: Fabiano Caruana, 25, currently the top-rated U.S. player and the one slated to challenge reigning World Champion Magnus Carlsen for that title in London in November. The game is hard-fought, with So (white) and Caruana (black) vying back and forth, back and forth, for control of the board but neither player getting the upper hand. An exhausting battle ensues, resulting ultimately in a draw.

So has dropped a bit in the standings by now, but he remains unflustered. There is still ample opportunity to pull himself back up. All it takes is clear thinking, nerves of steel, and the right combination of moves—while battling against a series of challengers just as determined as he is to find and exploit even the smallest weakness in an opponent’s position.

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In the rare moments between tournaments and training, So likes to “forget about chess and do something completely...”
different. I don’t play chess for ‘fun.’” He bicycles, watches movies, reads, and plays with his pets—two Birman cats. When he’s not on the road he attends Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Minneapolis. He doesn’t own a cell phone and doesn’t use the internet except to analyze chess games. Others manage his official website and social media accounts, though he does see and respond to messages when he has time.

U.S. Chess Championship, Round 11: So faces Hikaru Nakamura, 30, a four-time U.S. champion and currently the second-highest-rated U.S. player. The game is fairly short for championship play, going only 30 moves, with both players gaining generally solid positions but no clear advantage either way. Another draw.

So says one of the most important things he’s learned as a Christian is that “neither I nor chess are the center of the universe.” He knows that no matter how good he gets or where his career may take him he always has more to learn: “I have a very high respect for all my opponents and am always grateful because I feel they teach me so much. Everyone has different strengths. Each one has taught me something at one time or another.”

He also knows that he has many fans who follow his every move—both personally and professionally—online or on the chess circuit. The pressure that comes with that can sometimes be overwhelming, but So keeps it in perspective: “I play one game at a time. I’m just an ordinary human being trying to have a good career and a decent life. I want fans to enjoy my games—just don’t expect me to win every one. I promise not to lose every one either!”

After two early victories, a series of draws, and no losses, So ultimately finishes the championship tournament in third place. Second place goes to Fabiano Caruana, while the first-place honor goes to another rising star in the U.S. chess world, Sam Shankland, 25, of Orinda, Calif. (The U.S. Women’s Chess Championship took place at the same time, with 12 top-rated women players facing off in similar round-robin fashion across the hall from the men’s tournament. The winner there, in a final-day, rapid-chess playoff with 15-year-old Annie Wang, is 24-year-old Nazi Paikidze, who also won the title in 2016.)

As is his way, So takes the tournament results in stride: “I would like to have done better, but that is the way tournaments are—up and down. It’s hard to say why. I can’t pick out any game where I really struggled. Sometimes life just doesn’t flow smoothly.”

He won’t waste time dwelling on the past, though. So is too busy preparing for what comes next: tournaments in Norway, Belgium, Paris, and Spain in the next few months. Then the Chess Olympiad in Batumi, Georgia—the Eastern Hemisphere country—in September, the Isle of Man International in October, and potentially the London Chess Classic after that.

Such is the life of a chess grandmaster: Win, lose, or draw, he’s always thinking several moves ahead.

—Rick Matt is a graduate of the World Journalism Institute’s mid-career course
He decided to start working through the list, renting DVDs from a local video rental store. Several of the films near the top of the list at the time were written and directed by the Dardenne brothers, a Belgian directing, writing, and producing duo. Mayward became obsessed.

Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne are not widely known in the United States, but they are household names in Europe—in France they are sometimes simply called “the Brothers.” Mayward compares their status to the Coen brothers, who like the Dardennes work somewhat out of the mainstream but have mainstream accolades.

Of the Dardenne’s eight major feature films, two films won the elite Palme d’Or and one took the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. Only nine directors have ever won the Palme twice. They’ve also won the Bresson Prize from the Vatican for films depicting the “search for spiritual meaning.”

Aside from their success with the few films they have written and directed, they have also carefully selected films to produce. This year a film they produced had its U.S. premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival, which concluded at the end of April. The film, The Elephant and the Butterfly, will hit U.S. theaters in July.

All of their films wrestle with straightforward moral and spiritual questions: In Two Days, One Night, a woman has to convince her co-workers to forgo a bonus so she doesn’t lose her job. The Dardennes focus on those at the bottom of the heap, like a family struggling to survive in a postindustrial town. They address difficult social issues and such themes as wrongdoing, hurt, and...
redemption. Critics often call their films “moral fables.” Mayward says they’re parables.

Mayward has watched the The Kid with a Bike at least a dozen times. As a former youth pastor, he loved the Dardennes’ coming-of-age stories of middle schoolers, an age that he thinks is often overlooked in cinema. Mayward is now pursuing a Ph.D. in theology at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. His dissertation is on the spiritual parables of the Dardennes.

“What they’re trying to do is address political and ethical and religious things without going at it directly,” he said. The Dardennes are part of what he calls a “post-secular” trend in cinema, “swing- ing the pendulum back away from the Enlightenment.”

The Dardennes were raised Roman Catholic but do not say they are Christian, though some of the films they’ve produced have overt Biblical symbolism. Interviewers often ask about the Christian themes in their work, and the brothers typically insist that they are simply telling stories about real life. They’re both big fans of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

At one point the Dardennes listed their 79 favorite films (yes, 79). Many of them were cinema elite classics from directors like Roberto Rossellini and Robert Bresson, but they also listed It’s A Wonderful Life. They included as well Krzysztof Kieślowski’s The Decalogue—a series of 10 films about the Ten Commandments set in Soviet Poland. Mayward says the Dardennes’ style uniquely “addresses the head and the heart at the same time.”

The brothers still live in the town they grew up in, Seraing, Belgium, and they have filmed all their features in that postindustrial area—so the films have a feeling of a place and people that have been abandoned.

Many of the Dardenne films deal with the relationship between parents and children, and especially fathers and sons. Their films are often about children’s moral formation “when adults aren’t necessarily the models for being good,” said Mayward.

The Son of Joseph, or Le Fils de Joseph, is a French film they produced that also had U.S. distribution (see “French resistance,” Nov. 12, 2016). In this dry comedy full of Biblical imagery, a son who is searching for the father he never met is obsessed with a Baroque painting of the sacrifice of Isaac. When he finds his father and sees the man is a terrible person, he decides to enact a reverse Isaac sacrifice. Enter Joseph, an alternate father figure.

In Mayward’s favorite, The Kid with a Bike, which the Dardennes wrote and directed, an 11-year-old boy in a group foster home is desperately searching for his father, who wants no part in his life. You can feel the rejection and hurt on the boy’s skin, the way he ferociously turns away from every person who tries to help him. A hairdresser, who has no connection to the boy and no ostensible reason for loving him since he is such a prickly pear, takes him in and pours unmerited kindness and mercy on him at every point. The film won the Grand Prix at Cannes.

When I say, ‘the Dardenne brothers,’ in Europe all the doors open,” said Belgian director Amélie van Elmbt, the director of The Elephant and the Butterfly. With the Dardennes producing, her feature launched onto the Top 10 lists from critics who were covering the festival. It’s a wonderful film on its own. The film now has U.S. distribution, a rarity for the nearly 100 films at the festival.

Van Elmbt was sitting on a sunny rooftop in Chinatown at the end of the Tribeca festival, recalling how she met the Dardennes. She is a young director, but she had worked with the Dardennes’ director of photography, Benoît Dervaux. At one point financing fell through for The Elephant and the Butterfly, and Dervaux suggested she ask the Dardennes to produce the film. They will like the story, he said, which is about an estranged father meeting his 5-year-old daughter for the first time.

Dervaux was right. She sent the Dardennes the script, and a few months later they responded: Of course they would finance the film! “Like it was completely normal,” laughed van Elmbt. “They have their taste, you know. I’m sure if I’m coming with a robot story, they won’t say yes,” she said. To that point, she’s now working with them on another film about adoption in Romania.
The Elephant and the Butterfly begins with the single mother of 5-year-old Elsa rushing to catch a plane for an important meeting, and the babysitter is nowhere to be found. The estranged father has shown up at her door at this moment, the last person she wants to see. But, desperate, she asks him to stay with Elsa until the babysitter arrives. The girl doesn’t know that this man is her father (but you can tell from the first scene, she knows). With the babysitter still missing, the dad has three days with his daughter.

Van Elmbt is herself a single mother, and the film stars her daughter Lina, who is completely wondrous and seems unaware of cameras around her. Single motherhood is a common story now in Europe and the United States—many of the children at Lina’s school don’t know their fathers, and van Elmbt says not enough films address this trend.

The Elephant and the Butterfly was shot chronologically—which is how the Dardennes shoot all their movies—and you see a real relationship grow between the two actors, who had never met before. At first, the father has no idea how to behave—what food Elsa eats, what jacket she might need when they go out for groceries, or how to make sure she listens to him. The genuineness of their relationship is the best part of the film.

“I was asking myself, what does it feel to be a father?” said van Elmbt, an interesting question for one of the few female directors with a film getting U.S. distribution. “To be a father, it starts from the words of the mother, of a woman, that says, ‘I’m pregnant.’ That’s the first step, after that, when the child is born, the father has to recognize himself as the father of this child. But the child has to also recognize himself as the child of the father. It’s like a kind of double recognition. So it’s very interesting to me, this process, because it’s not like that”—she snapped her fingers—“it takes time for them both to recognize each other.” Her film tries to capture that process.

At Tribeca, American audiences reacted warmly to the film, laughing at some comedic scenes that left Belgian audiences stoic. “I was surprised, it is easier here even than in Belgium,” van Elmbt said. In Belgium her film had been described, almost in derision, as a “feel-good movie,” which she said takes away the depth of the relationship portrayed.

The elite film world often has a cynical atmosphere, she said, but she wants to keep hope in her films. Sometimes there is a sense among critics that a film has to be bleak to be good. While the films the Dardennes write and direct are not as lighthearted as The Elephant and the Butterfly, they still lack despair. Luc Dardenne (who studied philosophy in college) published in 2012 a long essay, “On the Human Condition.” It is full of philosophical discussions and questions, zipping from Franz Kafka to Friedrich Nietzsche.

One question he asks at the beginning: “How to announce the death of God without hearing the whispering that He is still alive?” One film at a time, the Dardennes are whispering that question. ☩
News without the noise.
When people ask Little Rock, Ark., resident Roosevelt Simmons about his five children, few are prepared for his answer. “I have a 20-year-old, a son and a daughter who are both 18. I’ve got a 13-year-old and a 10-year-old.” When a follow-up question about the 18-year-olds comes, he explains they are two months and 10 days apart, but they’re not twins. The startled questioners “don’t know where to go after that,” he says.

When Roosevelt Simmons married his wife, Shannon, he already had two children from previous relationships. The Simmonses have now been married for 18 years, and while the Christian couple says they made some “disobedient choices” in regard to past relationships, they know their family of seven is no mistake in God’s eyes. They are among the many American couples seeking to navigate life as a stepfamily, or “blended” family.
Ninety percent of blended families form after one or both spouses have experienced a divorce. Twenty million Americans have gone through a divorce, and about 3 out of 4 remarry. The average wait time is four years, which means that about one-third of all weddings produce stepfamilies—and close to half of those stepfamily unions also end in divorce.

All of that can lead to social chaos. Unrealistic expectations, unexpressed loss and grief, battles with ex-spouses and stepchildren, and problems in combining holiday and family traditions are among the common pitfalls that threaten stepfamilies.

Andrew and Kari Miller, from Cumming, Ga., married four years ago after their spouses died. Their blended family includes five boys and four girls—all between the ages of 8 and 20. “When a parent dies,” says Kari Miller, “that person is held up to a very high standard because they’re not here, they’re just this magical, perfect being.” Kari says that’s a hard act to follow—and it’s one of the biggest issues facing families like hers.

The Millers say their Christian faith has been a key ingredient in the strength of their family. “Galatians 2:20 [“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”] has been with me since I first became a new believer at the age of 21,” Kari says. “Sometimes it feels as if I’m being crucified, because in order to stay in this family I have to give up myself…and the dreams I thought were going to come true.”

Contentment, she adds, comes from “knowing God has a different plan and every single day I have to trust Him.”

Roosevelt and Shannon Simmons credit faith for supporting them as well: “Because we are on the same page, we are able to navigate through our blendedness,” says Shannon. “We rely on the Holy Spirit to help us apologize and forgive each other when we fail.”

‘When a parent dies, that person is held up to a very high standard because they’re not here, they’re just this magical, perfect being.’ —Kari Miller

REBIRTH AND REMARRIAGE

Buford, Ga., resident Ron Sheintal’s first marriage lasted five years and produced two children. Not long after his divorce, he married again and had another child. His second wife also brought two children to the union from a previous relationship. That marriage also ended in divorce: “Things seemed to be crashing in on me pretty hard.”

Sheintal, who is Jewish, says a co-worker took notice: “This gal, Mary, started sticking Scripture notes in my mailbox. … She seemed to recognize I had some pain and was pretty confident she had the solution.” Mary invited him to church, and he eventually went: “I had the distinction of being the only Jewish guy, the only white guy, and the only guy with a ponytail in the church.”

Sheintal became a member of the First Baptist Church in his suburban Atlanta community. There he met his third wife, Dianne. She says she remembers him walking down the church aisle at his conversion “with tears in his eyes and that ponytail. I thought that was neat that he was Jewish and got saved.” The couple has been married now for 23 years—and that has made an impression on Sheintal’s other family members.

“My siblings knew me before I became a Christian,” he says. “They knew my insanity, my foolishness. So as I became a new creation, the Holy Spirit was working in me.” Sheintal says family members attributed his transformation to external factors: “That Dianne is pretty good; look at all the changes going on in Ron.” But, he says, “I told them Jesus changed me before she would even have me.”

Sheintal says, “Two of my three kids are also walking with the Lord.” He says when they were younger, his faith in Jesus made the difference. “It would have been a battlefield to have my first two kids on the holidays.” Instead of fighting with his ex-wife, Sheintal found Jesus showing him a better way: “It didn’t mean we wouldn’t have Thanksgiving. It just meant we might not have dinner on Thanksgiving Day.” —M.B.
Cybersecurity researchers have identified a software vulnerability in the locking systems that secure millions of hotel room doors worldwide, a flaw that could allow an attacker to clone a master key card for an entire building.

International cybersecurity firm F-Secure uncovered the software design flaw for digital keys produced by VingCard, a manufacturer of hotel locking systems. The brand of locks, F-Secure reports, are used at more than 40,000 properties in 166 countries.

Although attempts to clone electronic hotel key cards are not new, according to tech website Gizmodo, the hack designed by F-Secure can produce a master key for the entire hotel in just minutes using a regular hotel room key—even an expired one.

“It can be your own room key, a cleaning staff key, even to the garage or workout facility,” F-Secure researcher Tomi Tuominen told Gizmodo. “We can even do it in an elevator if you have your key in your front pocket; we can just clone it from there.”

Tuominen and fellow researcher Timo Hirvonen began researching ways to hack hotel room locks in 2003 after a colleague’s laptop was stolen from a hotel room during a security conference. The hotel dismissed their concerns since there was no sign of forced entry, so they began what turned into thousands of hours of research targeting a brand of locks known for their high levels of quality and security.

“We wanted to find out if it’s possible to bypass the electronic lock without leaving a trace,” said Hirvonen in a post on F-Secure’s website. “Building a secure access control system is very difficult because there are so many things you need to get right.”

F-Secure notified the parent company of VingCard—now known as Assa Abloy Hospitality—about its findings and has been working with the lockmaker’s R&D staff over the past year to implement software patches at affected properties.

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**LET’S FLY, COWBOYS**

The trade-off for a super-cheap flight in the near future might require you to—literally—saddle up. A saddle-style seat called the Skyrider 2.0, created by Italian aerospace interior design company Aviointeriors, positions the passenger nearly upright, trading legroom for head space. The saddle and a foot panel combine to support the passenger’s weight. The company claims its new design allows for a 20 percent increase in the number of passengers per flight, according to the website CoDesign. Weighing half as much as a conventional economy seat, the saddle seat could lower the fuel cost per passenger. Although no airlines have announced plans to install such seats, Aviointeriors claims interest is “really strong.” —M.C.
Kansas City Royals general manager Dayton Moore believes pornography can poison men’s minds. In an era when powerful men are falling from grace due to sexual misconduct toward women, Moore hopes to use his position of power to teach ballplayers throughout the Royals organization to view and treat women properly. That starts with addressing men’s mindsets, in Moore’s view, and he sees porn as a feeder problem, if not a root cause—even if secular society won’t acknowledge it as such.

Moore thus had Fight the New Drug (FTND), a nonreligious anti-porn organization, host a seminar about the evils of adult entertainment during spring training at the Royals’ training complex in Surprise, Ariz. Attendance was mandatory for the Royals’ minor leaguers but optional for major leaguers.

“To me, educating our players about the harmful effects of pornography is similar to the importance of honoring women, respecting women and looking at them as human beings and not as sexual objects,” Moore told USA Today. “Most of these young men are going to be husbands and fathers. It’s our job to educate them.”

Many in the national media disagree: Lisa Ann, a former pornographic film star who hosts a fantasy sports show on satellite radio, says the Royals have no business telling players how to spend their free time. National sports-writer Charles P. Pierce wrote for Sports Illustrated that “part of me wonders where the management of a baseball team gets off promoting what may well be camouflaged quackery to its players.” (FTND’s research concerning the adverse effects of pornography on the brain has come under fire from some scientists—a 2016 op-ed in The Salt Lake Tribune accused FTND of “systematically misrepresenting science.”)

Still, Moore, a devout Christian, recalls the lasting effects of his own experiences viewing porn in his 20s as well as those that young men between the ages of 16 and 25 have recounted to him. That includes the story of a prison inmate who committed rape at age 15—after he started viewing porn at age 12.

Most professional baseball players, especially in the minors, fall into the 16-25 age range. Neuroscientists generally believe the brain is still developing in one’s teens and early 20s and doesn’t fully mature until roughly age 25.

This means the adolescent brain is still being hard-wired, and the damage from viewing pornography at that age can be lasting. According to a 2011 Psychology Today article, viewing porn during the brain’s developmental stages “has the potential to lead to great problems in sexual compulsivity and sex addiction throughout the adolescent boy’s life because his brain gets shaped to expect the ‘heroin-like’ porn dopamine rush from all his real-life sexual experiences.”

It doesn’t help that porn is readily accessible at no cost via electronic tablets and smartphones—or that ballplayers often have long hours to fill while traveling. Also, should a player suffer sleep deprivation while feeding his porn addiction, as porn addicts often do, it could adversely affect his performance: “In a game that requires concentration and focus over 162 games, I’ve yet to run into a player where their personal life doesn’t affect their play on the field,” Moore told the sports website The Athletic.

Moore won’t go so far as to ban porn from the Royals’ clubhouse, as the Colorado Rockies reportedly did under then-General Manager Dan O’Dowd in the mid to late 2000s. Still, Moore seems to have his players’ support: “The porn thing is a big deal,” Royals outfielder Alex Gordon said. “And with the outlet to social media and everything, people don’t realize how much it affects people.”
Primary election season is now upon us. State after state will hold its party nomination contests over the next five months starting in May. While most nominees will be fair representatives of the respective parties, occasionally parties nominate candidates whose personal problems or extreme political stances cause them to lose eminently winnable races. California’s unique rules also pose a problem for Democrats trying to unseat some of the state’s seven GOP members of Congress holding seats carried by Hillary Clinton in 2016. Avoiding those self-inflicted wounds will be job No. 1 for each party over the summer.

Republicans recall with horror how flawed nominees cost their party five very winnable Senate seats in 2010 and 2012. Sometimes the issue was political extremism and maladroitness, as with the case of Nevada ultraconservative Sharron Angle, who lost to Democratic Senate Leader Harry Reid in 2010. Sometimes it’s sheer wackiness, as with the case of self-described witch-craft “dabbler” Christine O’Donnell, who beat liberal Republican favorite Michael Castle in Delaware’s 2010 U.S. Senate primary only to crash and burn against Democrat Chris Coons.

In 2012 the problem was statements socially conservative nominees made about abortion during the races. Indiana State Treasurer Richard Mourdock had defeated incumbent Richard Lugar during the primary, and still looked set to win a Senate seat until a debate on Oct. 23. His statement that pregnancy arising from rape was something “God intended to happen” was meant to explain why he opposed abortion even in the case of rape, but it took on a life of its own. Polls taken before the debate showed Mourdock ahead of or tied with his Democratic opponent, but those taken afterward showed him losing by double digits. Joe Donnelly, who is running for reelection this year, won by 6 percentage points.

So far Republican candidates in targeted Senate races appear to be normal conservatives. The one glaring exception was West Virginia’s Don Blankenship. Blankenship is a former coal mine owner who was sentenced to a year in prison for his role in a deadly mine explosion in 2010. He has also attacked Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell’s Chinese-American father-in-law, and even recently labeled McConnell “cocaine Mitch” because of an incident involving cocaine smuggling on a ship registered to the father-in-law’s company (there’s no evidence the father-in-law, much less McConnell, was involved in that). He lost in the GOP primary on May 8, giving Republicans hope that they can defeat Democrat Joe Manchin in November.

Democratic problems in California stem from the Golden State’s unique “top two” primary system. California runs a primary in June and the top two candidates advance to general election regardless of the party they identify with. Thus, it is possible two Republicans could take the top two slots in seats Democrats are targeting, freezing them out of the general election entirely.

In California’s 48th District, 30-year Republican incumbent Rep. Dana Rohrabacher has come under fire for his pro-Russian views, and Democrats think he is vulnerable. So much so that eight Democrats filed against him, at least five of which initially raised enough money to be taken seriously. But a serious Republican challenger also emerged, former Assemblyman Scott Baugh. The prospect that Baugh and Rohrabacher could take the top two slots has already caused two of the Democrats to unofficially withdraw, although their names will still be on the ballots. But unless another Democrat drops out, it’s still possible that Democrats will divide their vote three ways while Republicans divide their votes only two ways, ensuring that a Republican will hold the seat in the general election.

Smart politicos know that the most important votes don’t always happen in November. The real campaign season is kicking off now, and what happens in the spring and summer often determines who wins in the fall. •
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‘Starting from zero’

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APRIL 14 | May these Christians’ faith be a bright light that brings many Iraqis to Jesus. May God bind up the broken and give beauty for ashes, and may we who live in comfort not forget our brothers in their suffering.

—JENNY BETH ALFORD on wng.org

‘Boys will be girls’

APRIL 14 | Am I reading this correctly? A boy wants to play on boys’ sports teams but have access to the girls’ locker room? It’s hard to read this stuff without laughing. How can adults pretend this is reasonable?

—JAMIE JORENZ on Facebook

APRIL 14 | This gender nonsense is preposterous, yet while we are laughing, activist judges are legislating from the bench. Things will get tougher for those willing to speak the truth, but that is not entirely bad.

—RICK FLANDERS on wng.org

I keep thinking that I’ve heard it all, but “gender fluid” just flabbergasted me! There is such a simple answer, especially in the sports arena: Compete against your biological sex. Is there enough backbone out there to make such a stand?

—J.S. WALKER / Newburgh, Maine

Where is the outrage from feminists because real girls and women are now sure to lose to stronger, faster, fake-female competitors? Why are they not incensed that a woman could get seriously injured competing against a male posing as a woman?

—REBECCA RABON on Facebook

LGBT claims for “rights” are disturbing, but we should not give up. Parents should pull their kids out of public schools for as long as it takes to get administrators’ attention. Accommodations should make sense for everyone, not just the “transgendered.”

—JANET SEAGRAVES on wng.org

‘Ze said, xe said’

APRIL 14 | Good for Andrée Seu Peterson for critiquing the new use of they, them, and their in place of the generic he, him, and his for a person of either gender.

—MAYNARD EYESTONE / Mead, Wash.

I suppose sacred and profane language have this in common: They lose their meaning when carelessly peppered into conversation.

—PAULINE MARIE FERRILL on Facebook

‘Counting the cost’

APRIL 14 | The Republicans’ failure to defund Planned Parenthood makes me so angry. I’m seriously contemplating leaving the GOP for a third party. Evangelicals vote for candidates who say they will defund the organization, and then the politicians just quietly let it thrive another year, and then evangelicals go back to them. It’s gross.

—JESSE COOK on wng.org

The idea that life is for us to shape to our advantage explains so much, from the push for LGBT rights to safe places on college campuses. That is not our path; God will use our difficult experiences to shape us into the people He desires us to be.

—LARRY D. RUDDELL on wng.org

I am always interested in the continuing Christian awakening in China. It helps me see that my great-grandmother Margaret Melrose’s 46 years as a Presbyterian missionary to Hainan were seeds well planted, even

—DAVID NEAL / Fort Atkinson, Wis.

‘What the world needs now’

APRIL 14 | I am deeply moved by Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame’s ultimate sacrifice in exchanging himself for a hostage. May God give us all such a sacrificial love, and the courage when our time comes to stand in faith no matter the cost.

—TODD TAYLOR / Eastvale, Calif.

After reading of the selfless French policeman, I paused to meditate on my Savior. The old hymn says it well: “Bearing shame and scoffing rude / In my place condemned He stood / Sealed my pardon with His blood / Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

—DAVID NEAL / Fort Atkinson, Wis.

‘Missing their points’

APRIL 14 | ‘Counting the cost’ offers a clear and compelling argument against defunding Planned Parenthood. It does, however, make a fundamental error regarding Evangelicals, which has shaped the Republican Party over the last 40 years.

—MAYNARD EYESTONE / Mead, Wash.

‘Foreign missions at home’

ESL classes are a wonderful way to reach people from foreign lands. My mother developed long-term relationships with people from different cultures and religions. The students may not return to their homelands, but they still communicate with friends and family.

—BRENDAN BOSSARD on wng.org

‘Great awakenings’

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—BRENDAN BOSSARD on wng.org

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during the difficult times of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.
—MARK MELROSE / Charles City, Iowa

‘A Christian tap dancer in New York’
APRIL 14 I love Andrew Nemr’s quote about how our choices “have to be informed by, I believe, something greater than just, ‘Where’s the money?’” This Christian artist’s perspective is especially meaningful to me as our young adult son tries to carve out a life as a professional violinist.
—K. FARIS on wng.org

‘Hedonistic strains’
APRIL 14 I am amazed that masses of otherwise intelligent people blindly and even eagerly drift toward their own slaughter. They are aware of their sin and will bring judgment on themselves. It’s tragic.
—GREGORY SAMSON on Facebook

Comment
Thank you for all you do! We have never had a TV and I cannot abide the liberal spin in the newspaper, so I am overjoyed to have found your podcast and your publications! You have become my No. 1 reliable news source.
—JENNIFER PEARSON / Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Corrections
The name of the Parkland, Fla., school where a mass shooting occurred in February is Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (“Lead us not,” May 12, p. 14).
In Genesis 3, Eve told the serpent that touching the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would lead to death (“Marx, Moses, Messiah,” May 12, p. 20).

Vietnam officials in 1977 closed up the churches serving the Montagnard ethnic groups (“After the fall,” March 31, p. 32).

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Unsweet sorrow
APOLOGIZING TO THOSE WE’VE WRONGED IS A PAINFUL BUT IMPORTANT THING TO DO

In 2006 I wrote a column on forgiveness and why it’s the hardest thing we ever do, accounting for why we hardly do it.

Recent currents in American life have shifted my focus to that correlative activity to forgiving: apologizing. Apologizing is surely the runner-up for the most difficult of human activities, and I would venture this reason: Your problem in forgiving is my problem in apologizing.

What I mean is that if you were better at forgiving, it would be much easier for me to apologize. Your reluctance to do that brutal work of forgiving (that is, of canceling my debt and bearing in your own person my past wrong against you) makes it all the harder for me to work up the nerve to apologize to you.

That sounds like the height of hutzpah, doesn’t it? Like wounding you twice—first in the initial slight, then later in the request that you suck up my injustice and no longer hold it against me.

But there you have it, ladies and gentlemen—Jesus’ command to do the 70 times 7. And it stands to reason that God should underscore the duties that are most against the grain. He exhorts the wife, for example, to “respect your husband,” and the husband to “live in an understanding way with your wife,” because these are the very areas they are respectively weakest in.

Just think of how hard apologizing is. First of all, to apologize with honor entails refraining from mentioning the fact that the person or persons one is apologizing to may also not be entirely innocent in the matter. Right? Thus the more honorable potentially becomes prey to the less scrupulous, and casts his pearls to swine. While onlookers revile the apologizer for the horrible thing he did, no one is allowed to mention that the party being apologized to has done wrong too—and indeed may be continuing to do wrong.

To apologize in any situation is to hand over power to the person one has hurt. You are placing your immediate fate in his hands. The ball is now in the offended party’s court, and you know very well how heady the taste of newfound power can be. There is nothing like a little moral leverage to make us swell into cruel lords extracting a “pound of flesh.”

Then there is the little-apprised logical fallacy which can be stated like this: “A wrong has been done. Therefore the wrong can be fixed.” This is illogical because, as a matter of unpleasant fact, there are plenty of problems in life or history that cannot be fixed. Or whose fixes cannot ever be 100 percent complete, equivalent, or satisfactory. All of us have been sinned against in the past, and we bear the scars of another’s wrongs. That’s just life.

Or sometimes persons A, B, and C have done an injury, but they cannot make good on it because they are long dead and buried. Indeed, even if they were alive, they could not make the injury be as if it never were—which is the unreasonable insistence of some injured people. These people will give us no peace until the past is rendered nonexistent. This is a fantasy.

Those of us who have been sinned against by another (and that’s all of us, to one degree or another) have a choice: We can do the hard work of overcoming (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:12, 21)—which always has something to do with duty, values, lifestyle, daily moral choices, and presently available resources. Or we can be perpetual victims, lighting our votive lamps to the patron saint of Unappeasable Victimhood, never lifting a finger to improve our own lot. But if I run over you with my car, you may get all my money—and may deserve to—but you yourself must still do the hard work of daily physical therapy to get your life back.

The CEO of Starbucks flew from Seattle to Philadelphia to apologize in person to two men reportedly badly treated by the manager at the coffeehouse at 18th and Spruce. The issue may be complicated, but anger continues. Good luck with apologizing.
Pulpit privilege
REPEAL THE JOHNSON AMENDMENT?

Last year I was in a car for three hours with a person I care about deeply. He is theologically adrift. Like an idiot, I talked with him about politics, instead of about what’s really important. I’m still kicking myself about that wasted time.

Last month I gave a lecture on journalism and worldview, leaving half an hour for the questions, and the first question was, “What do you think of the Johnson Amendment?” Lyndon Johnson’s amendment, passed in 1954, gives all 501(c)(3) nonprofit groups, including churches, a simple command: Don’t endorse political candidates.

My first thought: Why would a Christian pastor ever want to do that? The week has 168 hours. If blessed, a pastor gets half an hour to teach his congregation how to think through a particular passage from the Bible or think about a particular topic. Given our desperate need to learn what the Bible teaches, why would a pastor want to give up even a minute of that to endorse a candidate?

Donald Trump has advocated repeal, and I’ve heard two arguments for it: Leaders are important, so shouldn’t a pastor do his best to get the right ones into office? Churches still perform a public service even if their pastors do endorse a candidate, so why should that be a tax deduction killer? But every endorsement will offend some church members: The cross is a stumbling block to many, so why should we add a relatively unimportant offense?

This is a judgment call, not one where the Bible gives clear instructions, but it seems to me that today’s key religious liberty battles are outside church walls. Will doctors have to pledge allegiance to abortion? Will pharmacists have to prescribe what their consciences rebel against? Will photographers, florists, and cake bakers have to celebrate unholy matrimony? Will chaplains have to withhold words of grace? Will Christians everywhere be free to follow Biblical teaching?

Presidents should use political capital on what’s important. Preachers who desire to wax political should make protection for their sheep a higher priority than latitude for themselves. 

Lead us not into tests—but what if they’re good for us?

If you’re reading this in May, some college students at this moment are sweating their way through final exams and thinking unholy thoughts about their persecutors, I mean professors: “They say they care about me. Why are they making me suffer?”

Late last year Pope Francis said that the line in the Lord’s Prayer translated as, “Lead us not into temptation,” should be retranslated to make it clear that “it’s Satan who leads us into temptation.” Francis explained that God acts like a father when we fall: “A father helps you to get up immediately.”

Pastor John Piper, though, looked more carefully at the Bible. He pointed out Matthew 4:1: “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Piper noted that God does “bring us into the presence of many tests and temptations. … Every step we take is a step into the presence of temptation. … That’s what life is: endless choices between belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience.”

The book of Job shows how God is not Job’s adversary—Satan is—but God is like a trainer who leads his fighter toward the ring. Nineteenth-century theologian Albert Barnes had a key insight into what happens there: The word “temptation … means sometimes trial, affliction, anything that tests our virtue.”

As a professor for many years, I certainly saw the importance of testing. Many students implicitly implore their teachers: Lead us not into testing, but if you do, deliver us from evil by grading on a curve, or throwing out our worst score. But good professors will hold firm, for a test that doesn’t have clear consequences will not push students to study hard. Without exams, study lags.

So, students, do not be like the cheaters nailed late last year by Britain’s Daily Mail: “One pupil had tiny notes stuck under their fingernails. … Another wore a pair of shoes that had the periodic table printed across them. A woman tucked her cheat sheet into her bra.” And, my fellow old folks, let’s remember Proverbs 3:11-12: “Do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Marvin Olasky
VOICES
One thing I love about Union is that I don’t have to choose between faith and intellect. Students are taught to acknowledge and explore our Christian beliefs as they relate to what we learn in the classroom. It is a gift to be able to learn from Christian professionals in my field.

JANEY BERENDS, ’18
Spanish and Applied Linguistics major
First Union undergraduate to receive Fulbright award

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