

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."—Ephesians 5:1-2

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God Works in Mysterious Ways

By Daniel Fitzpatrick

Who would have thought I would have to leave my country to find a church that existed in my own city? This experience took me to Africa and back. And I returned home with two sweet rewards.



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED, “Why did God choose me?” Or if you are not yet baptized, “How do I really know that this is my calling?” Let me tell you a little story that may help you to think about both of these questions in a slightly different way. This story takes place in the far-off land of Burkina Faso!

First, where in the world is Burkina Faso? That’s what I said eight years ago when I was sent an invitation to join the Peace Corps. I looked at a globe and to my amazement; Burkina Faso did not even appear to exist! How could I go to a place for the next two years that didn’t even exist? I called my recruiter and she calmly explained to me that the name of the country had changed from Upper Volta in 1987.

Burkina Faso is located in West Africa. It’s a landlocked country of 12 million people bordering Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Benin and Togo. This little country was where I first heard about the Church of God. I met the one woman out of 12 million people who was part of the Church there, and she later became my wife. What are the odds? Clearly, to me, God made this happen.

I left my home in Boston, Massachusetts, in June of 1997 to join the Peace Corps. At the time, my spiritual life was in shambles. I was a member of a major Christian denomination but was not a good “practicing” Christian.



How could I go to a place for the next two years that didn't even exist? Growing up, I had attended church every Sunday with my family. On graduating from high school, however, I was spiritually thirsting for more. A few years passed, and I decided that I wanted to be a priest. I know, pretty crazy, huh? After deciding against the priesthood (since I wanted to get married and have kids), I still didn't know what to do with my life.

In the fall of 1996 I heard about the Peace Corps. I would have a chance to travel the world, learn about a new culture, live with this new culture for two years and truly get to know a different people. How was I to know that God was steering me halfway across the world to learn of the true faith? In fact, it was also available in my own backyard, but God has a sense of humor.

Meeting my future wife

Six months into my service I met a wonderful lady. Up to that time I had been attending the church I grew up in almost every Sunday. I felt I was connecting with God somehow. It was kind of like getting a fix or trying to satisfy a need.



After a few weeks of getting to know each other, my future wife started showing me the Bible. It was a new revelation for me! I think I may have opened a Bible maybe one other time in my life!

She continued to tell me about things her father had learned through a magazine he had received back in 1970 through a *Reader's Digest* ad. He was baptized in 1972 and remains to this day the only known baptized member of the Church of God in the entire country! Again, how incredible it was that I was led to this particular woman in Burkina Faso who knew God's truth!

God knows each and every one of us. He gave us all the power of choice right from the beginning. When God calls us, we have two choices: We can live our lives according to His Word or we can ignore His admonitions and live our lives according to the ways of this world.

Deuteronomy 30:19 tells us that we will live if we choose God: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

Filling the emptiness

If we follow God, we cannot go wrong. I didn't realize that the need and emptiness I was feeling in my youth was a craving for God's true Word.

I was gradually made aware of teachings I had no idea existed. Some of these included the fact that God's Ten Commandments are what make life work and that He *really* expects us to live by them. And that God has special Holy Days He wants us to keep, special times that do a wonderful job of explaining why mankind exists in the first place and what's in store for us all. And that He has other laws, like tithing (this was a tough one for me, but I eventually came around!), that He expects us to obey.

God knows each and every one of us. He gave us all the power of choice right from the beginning.

If you'd like to learn about these instructions, simply request, download or read online our free booklets [The Ten Commandments](#) and [Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?](#)

I started following God when I learned of His expectations. Looking back now, it feels as if I just kind of slipped into His way of life. But I know better. I know that all the time when I was groping around for something I didn't know existed, He was working with me. I believe He even had this crazy plan to send me to Africa to find Him!

How about you? Do you find yourself feeling there has to be something more meaningful or fulfilling in your life?

How about you? Do you find yourself feeling there has to be something more meaningful or fulfilling in your life? Some of you—like me—are learning for the first time about the biblical Christianity practiced by the first-century Church, which is the same Christianity that God expects of us today.

For those of us responding to God's call, 1 Peter 2:9 explains that He is calling us "out of darkness into His marvelous light" so that we will become His "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people." How great is that?

I believe that if you are reading this magazine, you are thirsting for the answers to big questions, like "Why are we here?", "Who is God?" and "What makes this Church different from all other churches?" My advice to you is to keep thirsting for that truth and never stop until you have found it!

Remember, God works in mysterious ways. He did with me, and He may be doing the same with you right now. He is an awesome God who can make anything happen for anyone.

Spiritual Distractions

By Robert Nettles

In today's world, it is easy to get distracted. In fact, distractions are the cause of most accidents. But what about our spiritual life? Can distractions get in the way there as well?



HOW MANY OF US HAVE BEEN DRIVING down the road, maybe talking to the other person in the car, listening to the radio or just looking at a beautiful sunset, when suddenly we realize we missed our exit? This is a classic example of being distracted. If this hasn't happened to you yet, don't worry—it will one day.



“What Causes Most Car Accidents?” This was the title of an article in *The Washington Post*. The article said that cell phones have become a common cause of car accidents. However, the largest study to date on crashes involving distracted drivers found that rubbernecking causes far more accidents than does cell phone use.

Drivers looking at other accidents, traffic or roadside incidents caused the largest number of accidents. Comparatively, cell phone use ranked as the sixth highest cause. The study included data on more than 2,700 accidents involving distracted drivers between June and November 2002. Distractions from inside the vehicle accounted for 62 percent of the distractions reported, while distractions from outside the vehicle accounted for 35 percent (3 percent of the distractions were undetermined). There were many more details and statistics, but I believe you get the drift here. Distraction is the culprit.

The definition

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913) defines distraction as follows: **Distraction** \Dis-'trac-tion\, *n.* [L. distractio: cf. F. distraction.] **1.** The act of distracting; a drawing apart; separation. To create distractions among us. **2.** That which diverts attention; a diversion. "Domestic distractions." G. Eliot. **3.** A diversity of direction; detachment. (obs.) **4.** State in which the attention is called in different ways; confusion; perplexity...That you may attend upon the Lord without distraction. 1 Corinthians 7:35. **syn.** perplexity; confusion; disturbance; disorder; dissension; tumult; derangement; madness; raving; franticness; furiousness.

What is spiritual distraction?

As God's people, we have a responsibility to be good examples to those around us. If we lose sight of this responsibility even for a moment, we are in danger of having a spiritual accident. We don't have any statistics for the leading cause of our spiritual accidents, but I would venture to say that, much like car accidents, it would be distractions.

So just what is a spiritual distraction?

Many of us can relate to driving on the freeway and trying to obey the speed limit as people rush on by us. This can be a serious distraction. A spiritual distraction could be the boss that rides you harder than your coworkers. It could be that coworker who takes credit for the work that you do. Maybe it's the neighbor who makes too much noise when you are trying to sleep, or lets his trash blow into your yard. What if you own your own business? It could be that one customer who is never happy.

You could probably add many more ideas to this list, but when these types of trials and distractions happen, are we focused on Jesus?

Distractions from inside the vehicle accounted for 62 percent of the distractions reported, while distractions from outside the vehicle accounted for 35 percent.

The point is that when we allow these things to get to us, we are led into sin. Sin and bad attitudes are not good examples of how God wants us to be. Although it may often be difficult, we must maintain our cool and not allow ourselves to be caught up in what is happening around us.

Let's take the example of the neighbor's garbage that blows into our yard and consider some of the options you have. You can:

1. Take the garbage back to your neighbor's yard and shred it to tiny pieces on their doorstep.
2. Call the police.
3. Go to your neighbor's house and scream terrible things at him.
4. Knock on the neighbor's door and explain the situation in a kindly fashion.
5. Cut off all contact with the neighbor and sneer when they look your way.



Which scenario would you choose? While it seems an easy answer, it is not what most often occurs. We often let our human nature kick in, and throw both common sense and God's way right out the door.

Matthew 6:23 tells us; "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

It's only human

Are we focused on the Kingdom and God's plan, or do we get sidetracked and become angry just like the world around us? It's human nature to retaliate when someone hurts us, but is that what we should do?

As God's people, we have a responsibility to be good examples to those around us.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says we must focus on Jesus: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

And 1 Corinthians 7:35 says, "And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction." The interesting thing about distractions is that when they happen, we are totally unaware. We have no idea that anything at all is happening to us, and we simply react.

Focus

The opposite of distraction is focus. We must focus to keep ourselves from becoming distracted. But what does the Bible have to say about being focused?

Psalm 86:11: "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name."

Romans 12:17: "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men."

Colossians 3:1-2: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

Also in 1 Timothy 4:16 we are told to "focus on your life and your teaching" (God's Word).

While it is inevitable that we will become distracted in life, it is most important that we remember to stay focused on God and His ways. We learn to do this by studying His Word and praying for His guidance. We then put it into action by following His Word and, whenever possible, steering clear of the areas and ways that lead us to distraction. It's not always easy, but we can have God's help.

While it is inevitable that we will become distracted in life, it is most important that we remember to stay focused on God and His ways.

Recommended reading

For more informative reading, please request our free booklets: [Making Life Work](#), [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#) and [You Can Have Living Faith](#).

Forgive

By Monte Knudson

There is a parable that leads us to the goal of forgiveness.



THERE IS A PARABLE IN MATTHEW 18 of a king who was owed 10,000 talents by one of his servants. The servant begged for the mercy of the king—that the king would be patient until he could repay his debt. And the king finally relented and forgave the debt.

Later in the parable, we learn that the servant went to a fellow servant trying to collect a debt owed him, and when the man asked that it be forgiven, the servant refused. This servant refused to forgive another, even after he had been forgiven.

*Just as the king
forgave the servant,
our God forgives us.*

This is a good lesson for us. We need to be forgiving, just as we are forgiven.

We, in fact, are commanded to forgive

Matthew 18:35 says, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” We ask God for forgiveness and He gives it to us so that we may also learn to forgive. To continue walking with the Holy Spirit, we must forgive others!



If a friend sins against us, we are to go to him or her alone (Matthew 18:15-17). And if our friend sins against us again, we are to continue to forgive him or her (Matthew 18:21-22).

Just as the king forgave the servant, our God forgives us. In turn, we are to forgive others who ask to be forgiven, even those who may not forgive us in return.

Jesus Christ is showing us that our sins can be forgiven if we ask God. So, we ask for forgiveness and we are forgiven, which teaches us and encourages us to forgive others.

Jesus Christ is basically saying, "I'm forgiving you. You forgive your brother. You can do it with My strength." Even though we have a different type of relationship with those outside our faith and family, we should still forgive them. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:17, "Honor all people. Love the [brethren]. Fear God. Honor the king."

When the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, Christ said, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Luke 11:2-4).

Though we may sin against each other, we really sin against God (Psalm 51:4), so we ask that our sins be forgiven first and that we not be led into temptation (Luke 11:4). We ask for forgiveness because we are sinners. We forgive others who sin against us so that we may be more like Christ who was forgiving.



Remember Matthew 18:21: "Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"

Are we forgiving?

Christ teaches us to forgive and to be forgiven. We are called to live God's way. A true friend to Christ will embrace God's ways and, in turn, Christ will embrace us back. We must always be willing to turn the other cheek when hurt and to try to make amends when we have hurt someone else.

Read more about relationships in our free booklet [Making Life Work](#).

Africa's AIDS Crisis: A Doctor's Firsthand Account

By Cecil Maranville

“Then it hit me, ‘I’m playing God,’” writes a doctor treating AIDS patients in Africa. Read the doctor’s sobering account of the horrors of the unending calamity.



DUE TO THE SHOCKINGLY CANDID DETAILS related in the letters below, the writer, a doctor, has asked that we delete any comments that might reveal his identity. Warning: His account is extremely sobering and distressing.

Sub-Saharan Africa, early 2001—“The main reason I can’t wait to get out of here is that my personality is suddenly altering. They say it’s called, ‘becoming a doctor.’ [Here] that means your main emotion when a patient dies is relief.

“The AIDS [epidemic] down here is becoming alarming. *Most of our beds are filled with HIV-positive patients.* They talk about the ‘package deal’ down in the emergency department. An extremely skinny patient comes in, coughing, complaining of tiredness. On examination, they have oral thrush, often so bad that even their lips are covered with a white fungus, as it climbs out of their mouths. And immediately, you know that they have HIV, TB [tuberculosis] and oral candidiasis [a fungal infection].

“We go through the motions of testing them, but I don’t know why. We admit them, rehydrate them and all that we succeed in doing is prolonging their death by a week or two. *We are now at the point where we refuse to give them any active treatment (antibiotics, antifungals, even blood), which includes resuscitation.* It’s quite simple—even with active treatment, the only difference you make is a few weeks. (They always wait until they are terminal before arriving at the hospital.) So, why waste money you don’t have to begin with?

“The other day, I caught myself saying out loud that we should start refusing to admit HIV-positive patients, since we’re only prolonging the inevitable. *We’re turning away patients with*



asthma and diabetes, patients with controllable diseases who could contribute to the economy, because AIDS patients are taking up all the beds.

Playing God

“And then, it hit me, *‘I’m playing God.’* If we start doing that, we might as well start denying medical care to old people and premature babies, because they no longer contribute to society. We might as well start turning away patients with other terminal illnesses, like cancer and multiple sclerosis, because we’re only prolonging the inevitable.

“You walk through rooms of skeletons, their chests rattling with each cough...”

“You have no idea what kind of hell it is to do ward rounds in [the name of city where the doctor was working when he wrote this account] in the morning. You walk through rooms of skeletons, their chests rattling with each cough... Many of the patients lie in beds [soaked with] their own urine... Their lips are caked with white fungus, their faces mottled with blood-flecked sputum. They watch you from their beds, their eyes often the only body parts they can still move. Some of them still beg with their eyes for help...

“Some are beyond caring. Their eyes are already dead, which is why you check each patient’s pulse before discussing them. We use pseudonyms like ‘retrovirus’ or ‘high five’ for HIV and ‘Koch’s bacillus’ for TB in an effort to maintain privacy. But they all know the telltale wailing following the post-test ‘You have HIV’ speech.

Haunting experience

“Not all of the deaths here go unnoticed. One of my patients will always haunt me. As I mentioned, most of the AIDS patients have pretty typical appearances (skinny and coughing).

“Some (especially the children) never reach that stage. This particular young girl (19 years old) didn’t fit the typical profile at all. She was educated, eloquent and still looked very healthy. She had known she was HIV-positive for three years prior to her admission. (Her boyfriend had told her that he was monogamous, and so he was. Unfortunately, his previous girlfriend had not been.) She came after she suddenly started battling to breathe, rather like a severe asthma attack. In well-fed HIV-positive patients in Africa, this normally is due to pneumocystis pneumonia. This was the diagnosis in her case.



“If we could pull her through the pneumocystis pneumonia, she could still have a few good years left. So we put her on oxygen, nebulizations and antibiotics. For two days, I had to walk into the ward and watch her struggling to breathe. For two days, she couldn’t sleep for fear of forgetting to breathe. The [nurses] were unfortunately ‘forgetting’ to give the full dose of antibiotics. On the morning of the third day, she looked worse than ever when I arrived. I can’t describe the feeling of powerlessness when you realize that you can’t give anything to ‘make it go away.’ The only option

left to us was to give her small doses of opioids to make the struggling for each breath at least seem less painful.

“When we came round later in the day with the consultant, the patient had finally fallen asleep. He was impressed by her improvement and decided to forgo the opioids. As we moved on to the next patient, I suddenly knew that I would never see her alive again. She died that night.

But for the grace of God

“Most of all, you wander between the patients and know that, but for the grace of God and a single needle-stick wound, that could be you.

“I’m beginning to hate medicine [here].

“Diagnostically, it’s no challenge, because they all have HIV. Therapeutically, it’s no challenge, because we do nothing. *Emotionally, it takes you to places where you simply don’t care about life anymore.* And still we work... a full day plus after hours for no pay and the constant danger that the next time you draw blood or put up a drip, you could get HIV.

“As we moved on to the next patient, I suddenly knew that I would never see her alive again. She died that night.”

“And, the state doesn’t [care]. They no longer even provide us with free anti-HIV drugs (AZT, etc.), following a needle-stick injury... We can’t afford that.

“And... they wonder why we’re leaving the country.

“I hope [these letters get] people thinking twice, whether it’s about unsafe sex or an awareness of human fragility” (end of letters; emphasis added throughout).

No easy way to say it

There’s no easy way to describe the desperate situation gripping Africa. A 2001 South African government report revealed that one in every nine of its citizens and nearly 25 percent of pregnant women are HIV positive. The same report forewarned that, by 2016, the country’s population would begin to shrink, because the number of deaths due to HIV will surpass the number of births.

A single faint glimmer of hope appeared in statistics that show a marginal decline in HIV infection rates in regions where there have been sex education campaigns—no easy task, given the centuries-old taboos and traditions.

Promiscuity alone is not the reason for the rapid spread of AIDS on the African continent. Many diseases that have been largely controlled in the West by advanced medicine are rampant in Africa. They include malaria, syphilis, gonorrhoea, tuberculosis and pneumonia. Diseases that involve open sores and exposure to bodily fluids boost the proliferation of AIDS.

Statistics show a marginal decline in HIV infection rates in regions where there have been sex education campaigns.

In December 2000 the United Nations announced its estimate on the African-AIDS condition. It said *24.5 million people in the sub-Saharan region are HIV positive*. Contrast that with the total figure worldwide of 34.5 million infected. More than 7 out of every 10 cases in the entire world are in the sub-Saharan countries of this plague-stricken continent.

A race to develop an AIDS vaccine is underway in the international medical community. Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates has personally donated \$100 million to the research, challenging other wealthy people to contribute generously as well. Mr. Gates' Microsoft Corporation has raised nearly a quarter of a billion dollars for the project so far.

AIDS drugs are notoriously expensive, literally out of reach for the average African government or private citizen. However, cheaper, generic versions of the patented drugs are available.

No effective anti-AIDS drug has yet been developed. Even if it were, and could be made available in generic form to the afflicted African nations, could AIDS be stopped?

No one to run between the dead and the dying

Numbers 16:4-48 tells of a plague that struck Israel when Moses and his brother, Aaron, governed it. At Moses' urging, Aaron literally ran between the dead and the dying with the means to stay the plague. African governments do not work as efficiently.

Michael Ledeen, who spent many years in sub-Saharan Africa and saw AIDS firsthand, wrote in his March 27, 2001, column—titled “Fighting AIDS Is a Losing Proposition”—that distributing medicine through African governments would never work.

“There is no infrastructure capable of delivering medicine to those who need it, nor to ensure that patients take the full course of treatment.

Unless the West virtually creates and imposes the missing infrastructure, Mr. Ledeen continues, “No matter how generously we donate medicine to Africa, a huge bloc of Africans will never receive it...”

Many African leaders, he warns, would enrich themselves by selling cheap medications at a markup. Further, they would probably use medicine as a political weapon. Those who ally themselves with the leaders would receive medication, while those who did not would be frozen out of any supplies. Witness that type of political manipulation in the distribution of food relief in famine-stricken African countries.

“Is it hopeless, then?” Mr. Ledeen asks. His answer: “*Most likely, it is*, at least in the sense of ‘solving the problem.’”



Hope for the hopeless

We sincerely hope that Mr. Ledeen is wrong, and that ways will be found to bring relief to the millions suffering from this dread disease. However, our hope doesn't rest in man's capabilities.

The example of Aaron mentioned above is, in some ways, a forerunner of the coming Christ who will be forced to intervene in a devastated, sin-sick world to prevent the extinction of human life. As He warns us in Matthew 24:22, "If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Revised English Bible).

*Jesus the Messiah
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nations.*

As Aaron interposed himself between the dead and the dying, Jesus the Messiah will intervene at His return to bring healing to the nations (Isaiah 35:5-6; Luke 4:17-21).

Clearly our world desperately needs two kinds of healing—an immediate intervention to restore physical health and soundness to the millions who suffer, and a spiritual healing of the character of individuals and their governments that have brought on the dark days in which we live.

Therein lies the hope of Africa. God speed the dawning of that day of healing.

Hurricane Rita—A Mass Exodus

By Marilyn E. Braley

The hurricanes of 2005 affected many people in varying ways. This is one family's story during a difficult time.



Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2005

IN JUST A FEW HOURS WE WILL FLEE HURRICANE RITA, the fourth-most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and the most intense tropical cyclone ever observed in the Gulf of Mexico. Going with us is our daughter Karen, son-in-law Frank and dear granddaughters. Brianna, our youngest granddaughter, was so sweet. On the way home from school, she and sister

Madison talked about the hurricane. She grabbed me and said she wanted me to come too! School is now closed until after the storm.

Rita looks monstrous, packing category-5 winds of 150 mph, at least as powerful or worse than Katrina was. I withdrew emergency funds from the bank. Behind me stretched a long line back to the front door of the bank. A security guy came in wheeling stacks of money. An eerie feeling made me ponder the similarities between the panic of the Great Depression and now. It was calm panic. People were seemingly calm outwardly, but the air of panic was there. After seeing signs posted stating the credit union would be closed tomorrow until further notice, I withdrew more money than planned.



Rita looks

monstrous, packing category-5 winds of 150 mph, at least as powerful or worse than Katrina was.

I just logged onto the Internet. Hurricane Rita is now up to 165-mph wind speeds. Forecasters said Rita could be the most intense hurricane on record to ever hit Texas and easily one of the most powerful ever to plow into the U.S. mainland. Category 5 status is the highest, and Rita qualifies. With its breathtaking size—hundreds of miles across—and terrible wind speeds, practically the whole western end of the Texas Gulf Coast is in peril. “We hope and pray that Hurricane Rita will not be a devastating storm, but we’ve got to be prepared for the worst,” said President George Bush. God will provide.

Friday, Sept. 23, 2005

We’re now at Aunt Do Do’s, Frank’s sister. It is surreal. For years the media spoke of what would happen when the “Big One” hits Galveston and Houston. We are now finding out. Rita is lumbering towards the coast. Can you imagine evacuating 2 million people? It is happening at this moment, as I write this. Some people panicked early and left Tuesday before mandatory evacuations, but most began leaving on Wednesday. A mandatory evacuation is issued for our area of Houston and Clear Lake City, unheard of for at least the past 30 years.



The highways were parking lots Wednesday. Karen and Frank decided to leave at 4 a.m. Thursday, thinking leaving before daybreak would help. But no way. It took 18 hours to arrive, when normally it would have taken four hours. Madison and Brianna were fabulous, but I felt for them on the long car ride. There were virtually no gas stations or restaurants—and no bathrooms—open until we arrived in San Antonio. Cars were parked along the freeways and people were walking along the road and using the bushes for a bathroom.

After arriving last night, the TV showed massive gridlock on I-10, even after authorities finally opened the opposite contra flow lanes. It is a weird feeling, wondering if we will have a house or neighborhood when we get home, but I trust God. That's all I can really say, I trust God.

The girls are beyond excited. Brianna was so sweet and very determined to keep track of her Grandma. Cousin AJ stayed home from school so the girls played with him all day.

The news said 3 million people were told to evacuate. What an amazing sight! Traffic today was still awful.

Sabbath, Sept. 24, 2005

This is the most unusual Sabbath we have ever spent, watching the news to see if our house was being flooded or blown away! We are hurricane refugees thanks to Hurricane Rita. Later today, the hurricane was downgraded to a Category 1 with 75-mph winds. We are thankful for that! I still say we can see God's mercy. It could have stayed at maximum strength, Category 5, 400 miles across, with gusts up to 190 mph and sustained winds of 175 mph.

I marvel at how well the evacuation worked. The radio deejays were really good, telling people to work together and be patient. They had hot lines so people could call in and give tips on better routes and vent their frustrations at being stuck in traffic.



I noticed almost no indication of need for or gratitude towards God. It was, "Mankind can handle anything Mother Nature throws out!" Sure, it is good to work together, but everything leads back to God above the earth. If God wanted to punish us, then He certainly could do so and none of our man-made rescue and reporting systems would help.

The storm isn't over yet by a long shot. There could still be wind damage, flooding and trees falling on our house as the hurricane continues inland. It is by God's mercy that scores of nearby oil refineries are not wiped out by explosions, resulting in gas shortages and blazing gasoline prices!

Sunday, Sept. 25, 2005

I keep wondering if our mail and newspapers are piling up, letting looters know we are away. Despite Mayor Bill White's "Zero Looters Tolerance" policy, if God allowed it, looters could really get rich from all the empty houses.

It was a relief when someone turned the channel to football. I am not fond of football, but it is better than constant hurricane coverage with the same images shown over and over again.

I feel for our dear little Brianna. Nonstop hurricane news on TV is upsetting her. It was on this morning and Brianna seemed to be very tired. Last night she was asked if she was having fun and she said, "No." She pointed to the TV. God intervened and soon a movie CD was started. Immediately, Brianna became her usual sweet, happy self. A young child cannot tell us when she is suffering media overload and Hurricane Rita stress.

I noticed almost no indication of need for or gratitude towards God. It was, "Mankind can handle anything Mother Nature throws out!"

Monday, Sept. 26, 2005

We left for home around 8 p.m. last night and arrived home about midnight. There were signs warning of massive delays to Houston and no fuel available. However, traffic was steady with no delays. The city was well lit and most gas stations were open!

What a relief to see the power on and no damage at either house. Madison and Brianna were elated and were lying happily on the carpet while Mom and Dad unloaded. School won't start until this Thursday, which is a good thing, as the girls need some downtime. I was also relieved to see almost fully stocked grocery stores.

Although we made it through this without much damage, it made me realize what could have been and I could see God's hand. For those who experienced worse events, I am sure they also saw how much worse it could have been except for God's mercy.

What an experience! But God saw us through.

Letters to the Editor

To Soar Like Eagles



Hi. My name is Helena Wisby. I'm from the Tasmanian congregation in Australia.

I just wanted to say how much I loved reading this article. Very inspiring and put in such a wonderful way. May God bless you and inspire you further to write such powerful messages as this.

— Helena Wisby

[Deciphering the Rosetta Stone](#)



Not to be picky or anything, but according to the Wikipedia entry in regards to the Rosetta Stone, it was realised very quickly the value of the stone in regards to the fact that Egyptian hieroglyphics could be deciphered, and much of the work was carried out in the first few decades after its discovery. The translation was more or less complete by 1822.

Also, it's very hard to fathom why one soldier would keep the stone; it weighed about 760 kg and therefore would have taken several men (minimum) to move it. For a soldier on the move, to keep this stone would have been impossible.

— Patrick

Thank you for your research and added information about the Rosetta stone. We will correct the information about the dates on the Web site. You are right in the "hard to fathom" comment as to why or even how a soldier could keep a stone that weighs almost a ton. Thank you once again for reading the article and for your comments.

[Sauerkraut—More Than Cabbage](#)



Terrific parallel to the Christian walk. An awesome challenge. I would sure like a complete recipe on how to make sauerkraut. I've never done it before.

— Mike

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity