

FREE ON THE INSIDE

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Perhaps the most dramatic deliverance of our time is what God has done for a nationally known, nationally feared criminal called “Son of Sam” or “The .44-Caliber Killer.” To set the stage for this spiritual rescue, I take you back to the summer of 1977. We had recently moved our Sunday services from the tiny building on Atlantic Avenue in downtown Brooklyn to a nearby YWCA, which had an auditorium that seated about five hundred. Carol and I were happy for the extra space, but with no air conditioning in the building and with all the windows painted shut, the months of July and August offered special challenges. I still remember one outreach service when the temperature must have reached 110 degrees in the densely packed room.

Things were blazing in New York City that summer, and I am referring to more than the weather. It was open season for a crazed gunman who shot young women and then wrote sick letters to the newspapers about his homicidal spree. He said he was getting his orders to kill from a dog, and the entire city was terrified.

The word on the street was that he targeted brunettes. All kinds of women bleached their hair to avoid becoming his next victim. New York City is probably the most sophisticated metropolis in the world, but one anonymous man had brought it under a palpable cloud of terror. It was the topic of conversation every day and everywhere, from affluent Upper East Side tearooms to the alleys of Skid Row. Newspaper headlines each day brought new information—or guesses—about how the killer operated. The pressure on the New York Police Department to apprehend him was tremendous.

Suddenly the killer struck again, and another family mourned the loss of their daughter. Again, not a trace of evidence was left for the authorities. Again, the vice of fear tightened around a seemingly helpless city. What kind of fiend was this, we wondered, randomly shooting young women for no apparent reason?

After thirteen months the case finally broke. David Berkowitz, a twenty-four-year-old postal worker living in Yonkers, a suburb just north of the city, was arrested. A parking ticket issued

near the site of his last shooting led the police to him at last. For days all you could see on television was “Son of Sam,” handcuffed and surrounded by officers. His eyes had a spaced-out look, but there was also a strange smirk on his face. We all slept better those nights in the Big Apple.

When taken to court, David Berkowitz openly pleaded guilty to killing five women and one man as well as wounding many others. Only New York State’s ban on the death penalty kept him alive. His prison sentence ran to hundreds of years as he was shipped off to Attica.

I gradually forgot about him . . . until a few years ago when a woman I didn’t know called the church office and asked to speak to me. After introducing herself, she said, “Do you remember the



name David Berkowitz—the serial killer from the late seventies?”

“Of course,” I replied. “I was living right here in New York during all that.”

“Well, David has become a believer,” she said. Carol and I had seen a brief news story about his putting his faith in Christ, but we had no details.

“A Christian group is trying to publicize his testimony, and he’s uncomfortable with the way they’re going about it. But he knows of you by watching your choir videos there in prison, and he trusts you. Do you think you could help him?”

“Have him call me,” I replied.

And that is exactly what happened. In the subsequent months I developed a telephone friendship with a man I never dreamed of meeting under any circumstances, much less as a fellow Christian. We talked several times on the phone and exchanged letters. Gradually I heard about his early life, how he had grown up in the Bronx as an adopted child in a Jewish home.

“I was troubled psychologically and emotionally from early on,” David told me, “and I proved to be a real handful for my parents. I felt somehow drawn to evil and occultic things—was fascinated by it, in fact. It seemed that even as a child I was marked and cultivated by Satan for evil purposes.”

School was nothing but one problem after another. David’s disruptive behavior had all the officials trying to bring him under control. At home he would crawl under his bed for hours at a time. Late at night he would use the fire escape to leave his bedroom and roam the dark streets. Horror movies were his favorite.

David’s adoptive mother was a practicing Jew who kept a kosher house and celebrated Jewish holy days. Gentile kids in the neighborhood occasionally taunted David with anti-Semitic remarks, but he didn’t really identify with any religion. The person and name of Jesus Christ meant nothing specific to him. “I honestly thought he was just some kind of Catholic guy! I had no idea Jesus claimed to be the Messiah of Israel.”

Somehow David finished high school and joined the army. Three years later, he returned to the Bronx to find old friends. But most of the guys he used to know were gone now, and some had not survived the mean streets of the city. “I was lonely, just looking for someone to hang out with. I got a job, rented an apartment, and furnished it with the hope of maybe meeting a nice girl. I just wanted to live some kind of normal life. But that was not to be.” David was vulnerable, and his emptiness of soul began drawing him to people and things that were increasingly dark. The satanic group he joined was bent on creating mayhem. Armageddon was soon to happen anyway, they figured, so why not start the chaos right now; David began hauling big rocks onto overpasses and tossing them into the traffic below just to watch the accidents that would result. He then escalated into setting fires of all kinds—2,000 of them altogether, which he carefully logged in a journal.

“I started praying and talking to demons,” he sadly recalled. “Gradually I became very delusional. I was convinced that demons were talking to me and trying to guide me through barking dogs. I was losing my mind.”

In time David began picking off young women on dimly lit streets and in lovers’ lanes with their boyfriends, using a .44-caliber handgun. “Nothing could control me. I was like the tormented Gadarene demoniac—anguished, inflicting pain on myself, and driven into dark and lonely places.”

With his arrest and conviction, David’s reputation preceded him to prison, of course. In 1979 he almost died when a razor-wielding inmate slashed him, apparently trying to

make a name for himself. The attack opened up the left side of David's neck like the flap of an envelope. The medical personnel who stitched him up couldn't understand how his carotid artery had not been severed. A major scar remains today.

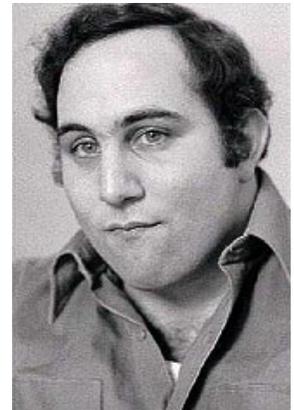
In 1987 David was moved to Sullivan Correctional Facility, about two hours' drive northwest of my home. One cold December night while walking in the exercise yard, he was approached by a young prisoner named Ricky Lopez. "He said he wanted to tell me something—that Jesus loved me and had a purpose for my life. I laughed him off and said he didn't know who he was talking to. I added that no one could love someone who had committed such horrible crimes.

"He said he knew exactly who I was, but it didn't matter. Jesus still loved me and wanted to have a personal relationship with me."

Ricky kept walking alongside David day after day, becoming his friend. Then one day he presented him with a small New Testament with Psalms and suggested that, since David was Jewish, he might start reading the Psalms.

Back in his cell, David began to read. Psalm 18 especially struck him:

I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I am saved from my enemies....
In my distress I called to the LORD;
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears (vv. 3, 6).



Another poignant verse was Psalm 34:6: "This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles."

The Word of God penetrated David's heart. He soon knelt by his bunk and asked Jesus Christ to be his Savior and Lord. He wept as he laid aside the tremendous condemnation he felt for what he had done, which was bearing down upon him all the more clearly now. The Word was working in him, and he cried out for mercy.

Over the past decade and more, David Berkowitz has progressed in his faith. He is a diligent student of God's Word. He is now the chaplain's assistant at Sullivan. He has coordinated more than one concert by the choir from Manhattan Grace Tabernacle, one of our daughter churches. On their first visit, as they were setting up equipment and adjusting the sound system, David happened to walk in from the back and quietly asked if he could help them or get anything they needed. Several choir members who had lived through his reign of terror began to weep at the sight of him and the obvious change in his personality.

Eventually Carol and I went to see him ourselves. We found him to be one of the kindest, gentlest Christians we have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Carol asked him, "David, how can we help you? Can we bring you anything from the outside that you need?"

All that this humble, now middle-aged man could answer was "Just pray for me. I sometimes get lonely. The cellblock is so noisy sometimes that it's hard for me to read the Word or to pray. But I know that I need the Holy Spirit to keep me strong in the Lord."

We told him how our church's drama team had put together a presentation of his life to communicate the gospel, and it had twice packed our building. He just dropped his head and softly said, "Thank you, Jesus. All praise to you, Jesus."

David has now spent half his life behind bars. He will never be paroled. In fact, he

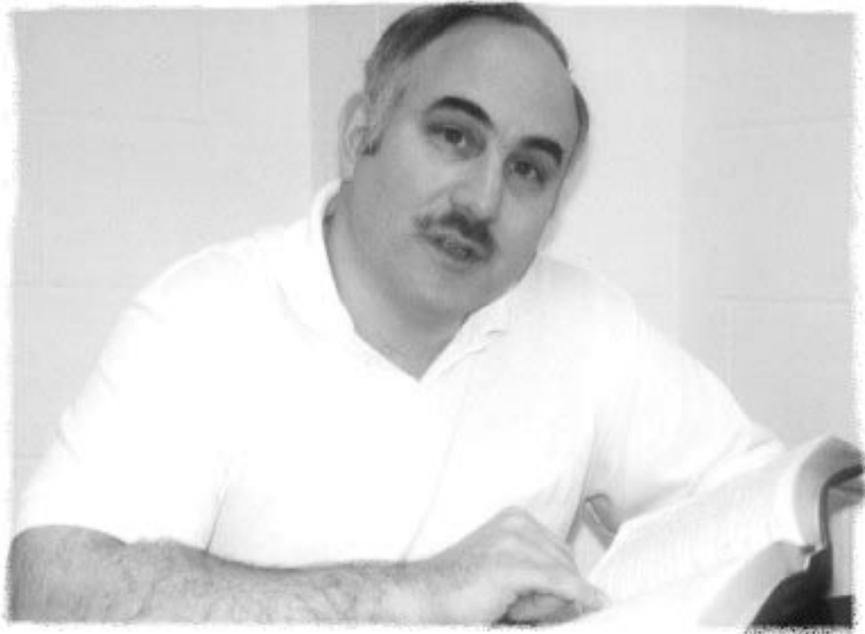
has never asked me or any other minister or organization to plead for his release. He knows his crimes were so serious that he deserves to be locked up for life, and he says the prison is his God-ordained sphere of ministry. Sometimes the chaplain or the inmate worship leader will allow David to lead a Bible study or a service, even to preach at times when a scheduled civilian minister is unable to come. To leave this setting, he says, would be to run from the call of God on his life, the way Jonah did. “There’s plenty to do here,” David says.

“But it’s dangerous as well. God has warned me many times when something was about to ‘go down.’”

David has become a dear friend to Carol and me. Not only that, but he is my brother in Christ, for God has changed the very “chief of sinners”—a demon-controlled serial killer—into a precious child of God. The strongest satanic chains have been broken by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the two thousand years since Christ’s death and resurrection, has there ever been such a miracle of deliverance? God broke those fetters for “Son of Sam.” He is free in his spirit to follow the Savior he loves. In the corridors of heaven you and I will be mingling with him, our brother in Christ.

What chains have formed in your own life? What son or daughter is too far away from God? In what prison of depression or guilt are you locked? “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).



A Recent Testimony of Divine Healing

Roderick A. Graciano

November 2000

Three years ago, Bill Sullivan, staff member of Clover Creek Bible Fellowship (CCBF) in Spanaway, Washington, realized that something was seriously wrong in his physical body. In time his doctors would conclude that he was dying from “PSP, or Progressive Supranuclear Palsy. PSP is a rare form of Parkinson’s Disease that has an average life expectancy after diagnosis of five to eight years; with death coming as a result of complications of immobility.” I was told of Bill’s illness about a year and a half ago and spoke to him briefly at his church office. I sensed the stress in his demeanor at that time. Last January (2000) Bill’s condition was announced to the CCBF congregation. He had begun to fall down occasionally and had to walk with a cane. He reportedly suffered severe back pain. At times he was constrained to a wheel chair. I’m told he began to look like a *very sick man*. His lung capacity diminished to 65%; at 50% he would have had to use a respirator. An infection like pneumonia could easily have ended Bill’s life.

About nine months ago, I had lunch with my brother Jon, an elder at CCBF. Jon described to me the character-building that God had done in Bill’s life as Bill came to terms with an early death and departure from his wife, Jean, and young family of six children. I commented to Jon that it seemed God had accomplished His purposes in the illness and might now be willing to heal Bill in answer to the ongoing prayers of many. Two months ago, the Lord impressed upon one of the intercessors at CCBF that He would soon heal Bill, and that the healing would impact the community.

Meanwhile, Bill’s condition continued to deteriorate. He was falling constantly. He couldn’t drive because of memory loss and vision problems. He could only read for two minutes at a stretch. He was spending up to twenty hours at a time in bed. In his own published testimony, Bill wrote:

In September and October of 2000, things got pretty bad....Mealtimes were complicated by my inability to swallow, and more times than I’d like to count, Jean had to help me at the dinner table because I was choking....I had stopped exercising entirely, as the energy to stretch or take a walk was simply not there anymore. I could not ride more than a few miles in a car without experiencing severe nausea and dizziness....Our house was like living in an infirmary....My time in bed just increased more and more due to dizziness, nausea and pain....

Then, Friday night, October 27, 2000, as the congregation of CCBF met for special teaching and worship services, they were moved to pray in concert for Bill’s healing. Saturday morning, October 28, Bill woke up and knew in his body that something had changed. In his own words,

I woke up and immediately knew something was different. First of all, even lying there in

bed, I could tell that I could breathe again! When I got up, I wasn't dizzy or nauseous, and my left side no longer hurt or was weak! I told Jean, "I'm either having the best day I've had in three years, or I'm healed!" As joyous as this was, we wanted to be cautious that we not claim healing, especially in front of our kids, and then have me get sick again and add frustration to their disappointment. So through the day, I pushed myself. I went to two soccer games with my kids, fixed a couple things around the house, and still felt wonderful.

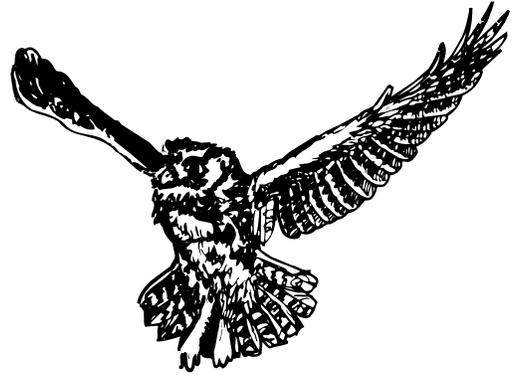
At about 1 p.m., as a small group prayed at the church, they discerned that God had granted a spiritual victory in the intercessory battle for Bill. Bill phoned the church office that same evening and said to pastor Mike Riches, "I have something to tell you." Mike Riches replied, "Well, if you're calling to tell me you're healed, I already know."

The next day, Sunday, October 29, I attended the evening service at CCBF and saw Bill walk up onto the stage with his family and give glory to God for his healing. I spoke to Bill after the service. He appeared healthy in every way and eagerly anticipated his next doctor visit.

Bill went to his General Practitioner on Tuesday, October 31, and shared that he had been healed. The Christian doctor was willing to entertain the notion of divine healing, but ran a complete battery of tests on Bill to be sure. When all the tests were done, the doctor *wept*. "In twenty years of practice," he said, "this is the first authentic divine healing I've seen." I understand that this doctor is preparing a statement attesting to Bill's miraculous healing. Bill's skeptical neurologist had a somewhat different response. I'm told that after Bill passed all this second doctor's tests, the neurologist said, "Hmm, this is the first time I've ever missed a diagnosis." When Bill shared his belief that God had healed him in answer to the prayers of the church, the neurologist was shocked. "After a bit more discussion, he basically said, 'I don't need to see you anymore.'"

Pete Gray Eyes And The Owls

by George Otis Jr.



The text of this story is from *The Twilight Labyrinth* (Baker, 1997), pp. 31-35. I have inserted my own annotations from a personal phone interview with Mr. Herman Williams (June 23, 2001) in brackets. —R. A. Graciano

The first time I heard Pete Gray Eyes' story was during an April 1992 visit to Tom and Betty Dologhan's lovely, cabin-like home in Flagstaff, Arizona. Leaning across the dinner table, Tom held my wife, Lisa, and me spellbound with a remarkable narrative that included human "shapeshifters,"¹ talking owls, paralytic curses and supernatural deliverances. I had never heard anything like it before. And were it not for Tom's well-deserved reputation as a man of integrity, and his thirty years at the helm of the Navajo Gospel Mission, it would have been easy to dismiss the entire account.

Five months later Tom made arrangements for me to meet Pete Gray Eyes face to face. At NGM headquarters he introduced me to Mike Hendricks, an experienced mission worker who would drive me out to Pete's hogan in the rugged Navajo mountain area.

Our first objective out on the reservation, although it was getting late in the evening, was to rendezvous with the third member of our team, Navajo Alliance pastor Robert Dayzie. A long-time friend of both Mike and NGM, he had agreed to serve as our local guide and interpreter.

Robert's church was situated in a small box canyon carved out of hundred-foot brown sandstone cliffs. Although they were difficult to see at night, I could feel their presence.

After being ushered into a small room that served as the Dayzies' kitchen, sleeping quarters and living room, I was questioned by five Navajo Christians who had gathered to hear about our mission. When I explained that the research would provide Anglo believers with a better understanding of the spiritual dimension, they nodded approvingly. Bolstered by an assortment of high-calorie refreshments, we spent the next three hours exploring the touchy subject of Navajo witchcraft. It was a disturbing discussion, especially revelations about a shapeshifting cult known as "skinwalkers."

By seven the next morning Mike, Robert and I were off to find Pete Gray Eyes. The scenery was magnificent. Great vistas replete with multi-hued buttes and mesas opened up around every bend. The scent of sage and juniper filled the vehicle through my open window. Overhead a squadron of hawks, unfettered by gravity, described majestic circles in the air.

Around 8:30 A.M. we arrived at Pete Gray Eyes' hogan. It was a resourceful home site. Nearly all the gnarled branches of nearby piñon trees had been converted into makeshift shelves accommodating a collection of fiber ropes, tin cans, rubber tubes and wooden boxes. One box, suspended just out of the reach of wild animals, contained chunks of chewy-looking cornbread and sheep fat from a recent butchering. During the winter, Robert explained, the

box served as an inexpensive refrigerator. A sheepskin was drying on the roof of the octagonal hogan, along with blue corn and apricots.

After exchanging greetings in Navajo, Pete, a small, handsome man in his early seventies, invited us to gather under his *cha ha óoh*, or shade house. Well-preserved except for some missing front teeth, and sporting a long, gray braid and baseball cap, he had a storytelling face and lively, blue-gray eyes. His frequent gestures revealed dark, weathered hands and a silver watchband embellished with two turquoise horseshoes.

For the next 45 minutes or so, while Mike, Robert and I listened, Pete unfolded his story in characteristically clipped Navajo phrases. Listening to him speak, I could understand why this peculiar assemblage of sounds so bedeviled enemy code-breakers during the last World War. But Robert, wearing his translator's hat, had no such difficulty. Absorbing the story impassively, he interrupted only rarely with what I assumed were clarifying questions. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, he leaned forward to translate.²

"In the early 1970s," he related, "Pete was doing traditional medicine work on the reservation. His healing ministry was so effective that he began to draw business away from some of the other medicine men. Out of spite, they decided to cast an evil spell on his family. To do this, they bundled up some of Pete's personal effects with baling wire and buried them as witchcraft fetishes."³

"About that time, Pete and his wife became seriously ill. Her symptoms included blood clots, lung lesions and partial paralysis, while Pete contracted painful sores in his throat. In addition to their physical problems, the Gray Eyes also lost seventy goats to coyotes, and watched their sheep corral catch fire spontaneously and burn halfway to the ground. All the while, Pete and his wife were tormented by a flock of owls that loitered at night outside their hospital window and around their hogan."

The owl, I knew, is a notorious messenger of death and darkness. Owls reportedly screeched before the deaths of Julius Caesar and the emperor Augustus. Even then the bird was associated with witchcraft. In Scotland the owl has long been known as the "night hag" and the "corpse bird."⁴ Much of this historical uneasiness is undoubtedly due to the creature's nocturnal habits, mournful cry and semi-human face. But the Navajos have an added concern. They believe the owl is a favored form assumed by members of the demonically empowered skinwalker cult.

"When Pete couldn't cure his wife," Robert continued, "he turned to other medicine men. Most of them operated out of the Paiute Mesa area. They performed many ceremonies, but none of them produced any results."⁵ With growing concern, Pete extended his search for help into the Hopi reservation, and finally into the Kayenta area. Some of these medicine men were able to retrieve the buried witchcraft bundle, but his wife continued to deteriorate. As a last resort, Pete took her to the hospital in Tuba City. Unfortunately, this also proved fruitless. [The physicians sent her home to die.]

"By now Pete had begun to despair. It got to the point where he just wanted to get drunk and drive off a cliff, which he saw as preferable to the agony of these spells. The owls that were flocking around his hogan at night began speaking to the family. They screeched obscenities and taunted, 'These people are going to die. These people are going to die.'

"In fact, death did come to their home. One of their daughters, thirty-year-old Lina, passed away here."

"Was her death linked to the curse?" I asked quietly.

Robert nodded. "She got sick and died very quickly. To this day Pete doesn't know what the illness was."

“One night in the wintertime, things got really bad. The dogs started barking as if someone were outside, but when Pete went to look around, no one was there. Then the coyotes started howling and the owls began screeching their death threats. Mrs. Gray Eyes’ condition became so desperate that Pete called the Adventist hospital near Monument Valley to pick her up in a helicopter. From there she was transferred to Fort Defiance, and finally to see specialists in Albuquerque.

“Fortunately, Pete’s wife came in contact with some Christians who began to intercede on her behalf. As a consequence of this prayer support, her condition improved, to the extent that she was allowed to return to Paiute Mesa. The bad news was, dark forces were still bewitching their home site.

“About this time the Gray Eyes met an itinerant Navajo evangelist named Herman Williams. After a few months of visitation, they decided to attend one of his camp meetings. [It was Peter’s wife, apparently, who influenced Peter to go to the church.] There the entire family came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and gave their lives to Christ. When the service ended, Pete asked what he should do about all the commotion still plaguing his household. Brother Williams responded that he should just preach to those owls.”

An interesting piece of advice. But what did it mean?

A few months after my encounter with Pete Gray Eyes, I decided to contact Herman Williams, the Navajo evangelist, to get his perspective on this amazing story. After twice missing him at his home in Tuba City, we finally connected by phone in June 1994. Herman was able, as I had hoped, to add rich detail to the account.

“We first visited Pete’s home around 1974,” he began. “His wife was still quite ill at the time, but being traditionalists, they never told us exactly what was wrong. She would get up and make us coffee, while Pete just sat there not saying much. Still, we came around every month or so to see how they were doing. Mostly we prayed and read the Word. We also talked to them about the Great Medicine Man who has great powers—greater than all the medicine men on the reservation. Speaking to them in Indian terms, I said, ‘Jesus can be your Chief, and also your Great Medicine Man.’ That’s the way I put it.

“A few weeks later, on a Sunday night, we were winding down a long service at the Navajo Mountain Alliance Church. It was almost 11:30 PM. when, lo and behold, Pete and his whole family walked into the meeting. Since there were no other seats left, the ushers escorted them up to the front row. I had nearly completed my message and was in a bit of a quandary over what to do. Finally I decided to read the message over again briefly, then give an invitation. To my surprise, Pete and his whole family stood up. Our womenfolk took Pete’s wife and the girls to one room, while the elders counseled with Pete.

“When they returned to the sanctuary, I asked Pete, ‘Can you tell us what happened tonight?’ Taking the microphone, he said, ‘You people all know me. I’ve been a medicine man for many years. I’ve gone to many homes and doctored their families. But lately my family has been suffering. I’ve realized that I need the Great Physician, the Great Chief. For this reason my family and I have come tonight— to dedicate our lives to the Lord.’

“Hearing this, I tell you, the people began to celebrate and praise the Lord! After everyone was dismissed, Pete asked if he could come over to the parsonage for a little while. When we sat down, he shared with me that for many months he had been visited by owls

that spoke to him in Navajo saying, ‘We are going to kill you.’ This occurred not only with the owls, but also with coyotes. It is very possible that skinwalkers were tormenting the family. [Mr. Williams explained: Having made a pact with the dark powers, medicine men receive “servant” spirits that do their bidding and “can speak in any language.” The medicine men send these spirits into animals.]

“Pete said to me, ‘I know when we go home tonight, those owls are going to be there. What can I do?’ So I thought a while. Finally I said, ‘You go right back and speak to them. Give them your testimony. Tell them what happened to you tonight.’ Pete and I looked at each other, nodded, and then he left.

“When they arrived back at their hogan, sure enough, the owls were sitting in the trees—a bunch of them. So Pete stepped out of his pickup and said, ‘Hey, you owl people, we’ve got some good news to tell you. This evening we went to church and heard about the Great Chief. And I’ll have you know that we have all given our lives to this Great Chief. We belong to Him now. I have given up my medicine bag. I’m not going to do that anymore.’

“Then Pete proceeded to outline the specific boundaries of his property that were being dedicated to the Lord. The way it sounded, he must have talked a whole hour or so to those owls, explaining that his land, grass, hogan, family, sheep, cats and dogs had all been given to the Lord. When he completed his list, Pete told the owls directly, ‘You have no business here. Every one of you must leave and never come back—in the name of the Great Chief, Jesus Christ.’

“After he said this, Pete told me he couldn’t hear a thing. It was completely silent. Then all of a sudden, high in the tree, he heard an owl take flight. And then another, until they had all gone. To this day they have never returned.

“Shortly after this, two things happened. First, the sores and paralysis that had been plaguing Pete and his wife vanished completely. This was something our elders had prayed for fervently, and it was quite dramatic to witness the symptoms disappear.⁶

“The second shoe in this amazing story dropped when the medicine men who had bewitched Pete’s family all died! [Herman Williams estimates that 5 medicine men died within a few weeks. They had banded together, joining their spiritual “gifts” to use the cumulative power to destroy Pete.] After this,” Herman concluded, “divine fear struck the area. People streamed forward day and night to get saved. I strongly believe these developments marked the beginning of the great Navajo revival.”

[I questioned Mr. Williams about this revival. He shared: “Six months after Pete’s conversion, we found out that people were coming night and day to various churches. We started having to deal with situations of demonic deliverance. Representatives from the Christian and Missionary Alliance headquarters in NY came to visit and they were surprised by the deliverances going on. They made a film strip entitled, ‘The Navaho,’ that deals with Pete’s story.

“I’m still in contact with Peter; I disciplined him for years. Pete is now about 75., and is a good preacher. He speaks at camp meetings during summer months.”

When I asked Mr. Williams about the duration of the revival, he replied: “Revival kept on for a number of years. Our congregation increased to over 200. I trained leaders, and then felt I was hindering the work, so I moved to Tuba City. The church up there (Navajo Mountain, near the Utah border) is now indigenous; they had problems for a while, but now are doing fine.” When I asked what dampened the revival after a time, Herman replied, “The arrival

of the credit card. The biggest problem now is credit card debt. We're living in the end time, and Satan knows that his time is short.”

Rev. Herman Williams, himself a Navajo brought up in the traditional way, is 73 and still lives in Tuba City, AZ, where he is training a native pastor. Mr. Williams is still affiliated with the CMA.]

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- ¹ Shapeshifting is the demonically inspired ability to temporarily assume the form of another object or creature (most commonly birds and animals). In earlier times this practice was common among Siberian and Celtic shamans. More recently it has been documented among Tibetan lamas, African traditionalists, Native American shamans and followers of Haitian Voudon. For an interesting case study on the relationship between owls, witchcraft and shapeshifting, see Gersi, *Faces*, pp. 194-196.
 - ² Some of the details in this account were verified in a follow-up interview with Mrs. Gray Eyes, conducted in August 1994 by Robert Dayzie, Mike Hendricks and Betty Dologhan; and in a June 1994 phone conversation with Navaho evangelist Herman Williams.
 - ³ It is customary in such cases for personal excreta—mainly hair, nails or feces—to be buried near “dangerous” sites like graves or trees that have been struck by lightning.
 - ⁴ Richard Cavendish, *The Powers of Evil* (New York: Dorset, 1975), pp. 95, 101. See also J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), p. 124.
 - ⁵ Complex Navajo healing ceremonies are called Chant Ways. Some of these ceremonies can last for upwards of ten days and involve mastery of hundreds of songs (chants), herbal medicines and sand paintings.
 - ⁶ Pete’s wife had a dream at this time in which a bright being, probably an angel, removed some traditional jewelry from around her neck, then proceeded to heal her body.

Buying A Haunted House

A True Testimony By Rick Hirst

I purchased my first home back in 1979; I was only 22 years of age. I Worked for a glass company from which my income was \$400.00 a week at that time. So making \$360.00 House payments became a challenge at times. I moved in with all kinds of ideas on how I was going to change everything in my new home. This home was built in the 40's, had hardwood floors, curved ceilings and plaster-paris walls. Lots to do in this old place.

Well the first six months I didn't do much, it was winter and I still was getting used to the high house payments. Spring time came faster then I expected and it was time to start improving the home. I started with painting the outside of the house, putting a new roof on and new gutters. The place was taking shape. Then things started to happen. I started to notice that every time I went outside to do something and went to come back in I would be locked out. Well I started to keep track and this one week I was locked out about twelve times. Now this one day I was working on something inside the home when I needed to go out to the garage to get a tool. The garage was detached from the house. So when I started to go out to the garage something struck me and I said WAIT! I am going to test this door to make sure I am not the one locking myself out. I unlocked and opened the door and shut it twice, just to make sure it was unlocked. Then I ran out to the garage and grabbed a wrench and ran back to the door only to find it was locked. This got me thinking someone was in my house. I had been locked out so many times before I always kept a window unlocked so I could crawl through and that is what I did that day. I searched the whole house to see if someone was in there.

Weeks went by and it was now summer. I was lying in bed sleeping and at exactly 3:10 a.m., I was awakened by the sound of a man snoring in my closet. I had two closets in my bedroom; in one I kept a loaded gun. The snoring was coming from the other. I wanted to make sure the breathing was not coming from me. To know for sure if I was awake or not I looked out my window to identify something in the back yard without lifting my head from my pillow. I knew if I could focus on something in the yard I would know for sure I was awake and the breathing was not coming from me. Now that I was assured I was not making the noise I raised my head to slide out of bed to get my gun. The things that were going through my head at this time were that someone had broken into my home while I was gone and when I came in he had hidden in the closet and then fallen asleep. As soon as I moved my head the snoring stopped. So I hurried and got my gun and moved swiftly to the other closet to see if this person was inside. I turned on the overhead light and opened the closet and nothing was there. I then checked throughout the whole house, closets, behind the couch, love seat



and anywhere I thought someone could hide. NOTHING, all the doors were locked, I found nothing, no signs of someone even being in my home. Well I went back to bed and fell back to sleep. This happened on a Wednesday or early Thursday morning. I told nobody about what had happened, because I was still running it over through my head trying to make sense of it all. I would ask myself if it was real or maybe I was dreaming, but no, I had looked outside and identified things in the yard.

As I was struggling with what had happened that night, the week went by fast and here it was Wednesday again. I went to bed and at exactly 3:10 a.m., I was once again awakened by the same noise “A Man Snoring”. This time I moved my eyes about the room to see if I could see anything without moving my head. I began to count the breaths and when I got up to ten I was so scared I raised my head and it stopped. I got the gun looked in the closet searched the whole house checked the doors same routine. This went on for the next four to five Wednesdays. Then One night (I don’t think this was a Wednesday night/Thursday morning, I really don’t remember what night it was), I was in bed asleep when I was awakened by the sound of people running in my living room on the hardwood floors. I was stunned when I first opened my eyes then my mind started going a million miles an hour. Thoughts like how many are there? They are coming in and out to rip me off, they are taking my stereo and television. I could not believe what was happening. I finely counted three persons running in the living room. I got up very quietly and got my gun. The noise of running was still going getting louder and louder, my heart was beating a mile a minute, my mind could not stop racing with all the different thoughts about what I needed to do to stop them from stealing from me. My thoughts focused in on I must shoot and kill them because if I don’t they will come back and kill me. My mind had taken over it was telling me to make sure to shoot them in the chest (the biggest part of their body) so I couldn’t miss and that I only had one chance. I cocked my gun and moved a shell in the chamber and raised the gun towards the ceiling and said “God Be With Me”. I was not a Christian at this time. I turned the doorknob slowly. This door always creaked and snapped when opening it. But not this time, I could not even hear myself opening it, the noise in the living room was so loud now that it was penetrating my body. With the gun in one hand, I reached around the living room door way with the other trying to feel for the overhead light switch. My heart trembling, my mind racing faster and faster, the noise seemed so much louder now and my grip on the gun was so tight my knuckles turned white. I took a deep Breath and flipped the switch to on—DEAD silence took over the whole house. My heart still beating faster then I could even image I walked along the walls looking behind furniture and keeping one eye on the other rooms in case they jumped in there. I checked every window and door to see if they were locked; they were. I did the usual checking the closets, under the beds etc. NOTHING.

The next day I went over and told my parents. They were Christians and my mother said you have a demon in your home we need to have the pastor come over and pray throughout the house. I said, “Don’t tell me that I have to live there.” That night I went home around 10:00 p.m. I didn’t turn on more than one or two lights in the house. I sat on the couch and began to say to this thing, (now I understand more of what it really was, a demon), I said, “You know who I am because you have been locking me out, snoring in my bedroom and running with your friends in my living room. Now I think it is only fair that I know who you are.” I had to keep a strong mind when I would go into this house because I thought if this thing (demon) could read my mind and know that I am afraid of him, he would really terrorize me. I waited looked around to see if I could see anything; nothing again. I began to say, “OK I

know you have probably been here a lot longer than I, but I am not moving out. I can't I, just moved here. So you live in the attic and I live down here, you don't bother me and I won't bother you..." Now things settled down as far as the demon harassing me, locking me out and stuff.

He was still active, though, and he would get stirred up when I worked on the house or had friends over. One evening a girlfriend came over and we were watching TV and she asked, "Is someone else in the house?" She said she kept seeing someone walking back and forth in the kitchen. I said, "no," and I got up and went in the kitchen to prove to her that there was no one there. But I said in a low voice so she wouldn't hear me, "Get out of here!" because I knew who it was. When I came home from work the next day I realized that the presence was gone. Then about two months later I got a phone call from the girl and she told me that she had moved because strange things had started happening in the house she'd been living in. She had begun waking up in the night with the sound of a man breathing, as though someone were sleeping on her couch. She described exactly what I had always heard in my house. The presence had obviously moved from my house to the one she had been living in. Then one day I came home from work and I immediately sensed that the presence was back.

Some time later I invited my brother to come home from up state New York and live with me. I never mentioned the demon. He came and moved in. I would go out fishing in the Puget Sound all night and day and he would think I was home. In the mornings my brother would hear me laughing, turning the newspaper pages. When I told my brother I had been gone all night and day, he could not believe it that I was gone. There was a time when my brother and I were sitting watching a TV program and we heard this loud noise, it sounded like someone took a two-by-four and slammed it down on our kitchen counter. We looked at each other and said, "Can you believe this..." I got up and yelled at this thing to stop it. I also had a friend stay with me for a month. One morning I came home from fishing and my friend asked me why I had come into his room the night before. He said that I had come and stood over him and looked down on him and then walked over to the window of the bedroom and looked out. I and asked, "Did you see my face?" "No, it was too dark, I just saw a silhouette."

Finally I got married and continued to go to church and this demon finally left. This experience taught me a lot about the Spiritual realm we live in. I didn't know anything on spiritual warfare then, but had I known, things would have gone quite differently. I have repented and renounced any attachments that would have come from those demons. NEVER make deals with the enemy. Remember he comes as an angel of light, a wolf in sheep's clothing and a roaring lion. God's word says to always be aware and be watching. God Bless those who read this testimony.

Rick Hirst
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TRACKING DOWN IDOLS & FINDING JOY



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Jackrabbit Tracks

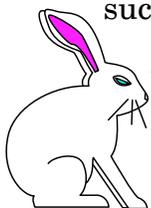
One early morning at the ranch in Mexico, I hiked into the hills with Uncle Hector in search of his wandering mule. Hector amazed me with his ability to spot the mule's tracks in the dusty trails, amidst the crisscrossed prints of countless cows and other animals. He admitted that cow prints are difficult to tell apart, but explained that beasts of burden tend to have distinctive hoof marks. As we marched through a narrow canyon, Hector suddenly slowed his gait and pointed out fresh jackrabbit tracks to me. He unslung his ancient .22 and crept forward, scanning the brush with his narrowed eyes. Sure enough, a jackrabbit promptly hopped out of the brush and onto the trail. Hector immediately began an oscillating whistle and the rabbit stopped to listen—to its doom. Hector quickly found the mule, too, though it was two kilometers from home and hidden in a thicket. Once Uncle Hector found tracks, game was as good as “in the bag” and livestock was quickly retrieved.

We can't all learn to be the outdoor trackers that Uncle Hector is, but I hope that the following article will sharpen your spiritual tracking abilities. I hope to put you on the trail to some idols that we all struggle with. I want to help you to “bag” some idols, and bring joy back to the home corral.

Tracking Idols

What's An Idol?

I became a Christian when I read 1 John 5.21 in Ken Taylor's Living Bible paraphrase: “Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.” As I read that verse, I realized with a sudden and profound conviction that I was a sinner in need of salvation simply because I had no interest in my Creator. Later, when I read a standard translation, I discovered that what John had actually written was, “Dear children guard yourselves from *idols*.” Forever after, I've been grateful for Ken Taylor's insight. Whereas before I had thought of idols only as golden calves worshipped in antiquity, Taylor made me realize that anything that takes precedence over God in my life is, in effect, an idol, be it a sports car or success in business.



Idols Behind Idols

It's important to realize, however, that sports cars or any other *things* that we idolize are usually only the facades of our true idols. Even the golden calves of antiquity were only lustrous symbols masking darker realities. The apostle Paul

explained that when people sacrificed to idols it was blasphemous, not because the idol itself was anything, but because the sacrifice actually honored demonic entities represented by the idols (1 Corinthians 10.19,20). While our idols don't necessarily represent demonic spirits, they usually do mask the "inner demons" of our instinctive longings. For example, no one really idolizes money, although we often speak as if they did. We realize that the most greedy miser would not hoard currency that had no purchasing power. The miser's real idol is something behind the money. What he really longs for is something like security or happiness. This brings us to two realizations: our real idols are *nonmaterial* things, and they are *good things wrongly pursued*.

The Heavenly Idol of Romantic Love

Let me illustrate by imagining a single woman—let's call her Jane—who "just has to have a date on Friday night." We might be tempted to think that Jane idolizes guys, when in fact the real idol is something much less tangible, like romantic love. She feels a giant ache in her heart, an ache called loneliness, and she's looking as hard as she can for the remedy which is intimacy. Does this mean that romantic love or intimacy is wrong? No, far from it! Romantic love and intimacy are **virtuous things**, but if that's true, how can they be idols? The answer is that romantic love, like security or peace or any other **such ideal condition**, becomes an idol when we seek its ultimate realization in anything temporal, whether that temporal thing is material or relational. What Jane seeks is actually a virtuous thing, a thing God has designed her to seek, but whether or not it is an idol for her depends on how and where she seeks it.

Let's imagine that Jane finds a loving man and gets married. When the honeymoon's over she'll discover that while the ache in her heart has subsided, *it hasn't disappeared*. As a matter of fact, in some ways the ache has deepened, and this is when the real test of idolatry occurs. Jane can respond one of two ways to the continuing ache: she can blame her new husband



for not curing it completely, or she can recognize that she's on the right track because the ache *is* partly cured. If she blames her husband for not curing the ache, she is an idolater, because she is demanding that her deepest need, in fact an infinite need, be met by something apart from her Creator, the only infinite Person. She has in fact idolized intimacy or romance by saying, "Give me the cure to this ache, but leave God out of it!" On the other hand, Jane could reason another way. She could say to herself, "My husband has partially alleviated the ache; this implies that *relationship* is the answer, but I apparently need relationship with someone even greater than my husband." This line of reasoning could put her on the right track, if she can realize further that she does indeed need someone *greater* than her husband, not just someone different. If she can realize that she needs someone greater than *any man*, she will realize that the ultimate answer to her ache is God. If she can then embrace this realization, she can rejoice that her marriage gives her a taste of God and points her toward ultimate union with Him (Psalm 34.8). If Jane takes this latter course, she is no idolater for she fastens her heart on the eternal rather than temporal satisfaction of her inner longing.

Hunting Down Our Idols

What if we're still pursuing temporal answers to our longings, though? How on earth are we going to recognize idolatry in ourselves? How can we track down our idols if true idols are

actually *virtuous things* like peace and security? Even if we're wrongly pursuing something like security, won't we just rationalize our pursuit by the fact that everyone needs security? "How can it be wrong when it feels so right?" The answer is that virtuous things betray themselves as idols when they produce anger or anxiety within us. The first thing that an idolatrous pursuit produces is disappointment, the inevitable result of seeking our happiness in temporal things that can slip through our fingers. Disappointment is not wrong, however, it is only the "Dead End" sign posted on a wrong path to ultimate satisfaction. Imagine again how our Jane is disappointed after her honeymoon when she discovers that the inner ache still persists. As in her case, it is our *response* to the disappointment that shows whether we are idolaters or not.

If our response to disappointment is the realization that our deepest hungers can only be satisfied along another path, by something beyond the temporal, well and good. If, however, our response to disappointment is anger, resentment, or bitterness, it proves that we are insisting on the path of our own choosing, and have been seeking to satisfy our deepest hungers with temporal and vulnerable things. Along with anger and resentment, anxiety is another sign of idolatry; not the momentary anxiety of a crisis that prompts us to appropriate action, but the chronic worry or fear of temporal loss.



Since our temporal sources of security, peace, happiness, etc., whether they be things or relationships, are constantly being frustrated or lost to us, looking to them for our happiness inevitably breeds anxiety. In contrast, the Eternal Source of peace, security, acceptance, love, and joy cannot be frustrated or taken from us, and a focused pursuit of Him defeats anxiety (Romans 8.37-39). Therefore, whether we appropriately worship the Eternal Source of happiness, or idolatrously "worship" temporal sources of happiness is demonstrated by whether our life is characterized by joy or by anger and anxiety.

Anger and anxiety, then, become the footprints of our idols. To hunt down our idols, we need only follow these tracks. We *must* track down the idols in our lives, because until we identify our idols, we will never repent of them. We will never repent of unidentified idols because we will rationalize them and mistake them for justified pursuits. Until we identify our idols, we will blame other people and circumstances for our unhappiness, rather than recognize the affliction brought upon us by our own idolatry.

Since we must identify our idols, we pick up the trail of our resentments and our anxieties and go through a little process. We need to follow the path of our anger or anxiety to that good thing that we are seeking in the wrong place. Suppose we have anger. We analyze it and realize it is anger toward our spouse for the way they fail to reassure us of their love. We ask ourselves why that makes us angry. What is it that we're really after and not getting? Perhaps it's security. Having once identified that virtuous thing we're after, we can ask God to show us the problem with our pursuit: "God, if I'm not supposed to find security in the love of my spouse, then where?" If we will go this far in the process, God is faithful to show us our problem *and the solution*. God will show us that He never intended for us to find ultimate security in our spouse, but only in Him, and His grace will move us to repent at His feet for having ever sought to satisfy our longings apart from Him who is the only Eternal Satisfaction.

Finding Joy

A Giant Idol Pops Out Of The Brush

This point of repentance should be the end of the idol trail, and we should find joy right here. At the moment we repent of our idols, we should experience a renewed sense of God's presence, and the exhilaration of knowing that we are winning the game of life even when it may look like we are losing. However, it's also at this point that we may come face to face with one of the greatest idols of all. Like Hector's jackrabbit, it pops suddenly out of the brush and onto our path, but it is a giant and it blocks our way to the joy waiting nearby. This idol is so much a part of our being that we have to cast aside our lesser idols before we even suspect its existence. It is so much a part of us that we never see it, but always look through it. It is the unconscious combination of all our false ideas about how to satisfy our longings. It is the idol of our false "world view," the sum total of our most fundamental but erroneous assumptions about what the universe is about and how it should work.

The Problem Of The Self-Centered Universe

It is part of the curse upon our world that, in the course of life, none of us fully escapes the deception that we ourselves are the center of the universe. With that self-centeredness comes a list of inalienable rights that we imagine ourselves to have. While the list varies slightly from person to person, perhaps the most ubiquitous of our assumed rights are that:

1. We should be the proprietor of our own life, choosing our own agenda without any compulsion or determination by another.
2. We should be the beneficiary of whatever purpose there is to our existence.
3. Life should not include suffering as an inevitable component.

It's this list that bars us from joy. God's arms open to embrace us as we repent of our lesser idols, but we stop short of His embrace *because we don't want to embrace His agenda for the universe*. Instead we embrace the warm and fuzzy idol of our own world view and wonder why joy eludes us.

Why Joy Eludes Us

Joy slips from our grasp because joy requires reality as a basis. No one feels joy when they try to believe something that isn't true, and our conception of a self-centered universe isn't true. You see, the Bible declares plainly that we are not the proprietors of our own being. The Bible says that God owns everything, whether in heaven or on earth (Deuteronomy 10.14; Job 41.11; Psalm 50.12), and specifically that He owns every soul (Ezekiel 18.4), and particularly the souls that He has purchased with the blood of His son, who are therefore *not* their own (1 Corinthians 6.19,20). Furthermore, the Scriptures are quite plain about the fact that everything there is exists *for* God (Romans 11.36; Colossians 1.16), and that He ultimately is the beneficiary of even our existence (1 Corinthians 3.22,23; 8.6). As for whose agenda will prevail, Proverbs 16.9 tells us that "The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord [imperceptibly] directs his steps." Lest there be any ambiguity, Philippians 2.13 tells us that God is the indiscernible impetus even behind our supposedly "free" will. Since God is the invisible author of our very thoughts, it should not surprise us that we have "been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will..." (Ephesians 1.11), and "that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose" (Romans 8.28). Finally, and quite distastefully for our selfish selves, suffering *is* an integral component of God's agenda for life in this present age. Because we

are members of a fallen race, we observe that “man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward” (Job 5.7). It is particularly true for Christians that “in the world you have tribulation” (John 16.33), because anyone pursuing righteousness discovers that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14.22). The apostle Peter was compelled to warn believers, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, *as though some strange thing were happening to you*” (1 Peter 4.12).

The Death We Have To Die

We discover to the deep chagrin of our self-centered selves that God has designed the human experience of this age in a way wholly contrary to our most cherished assumptions. This brings us to the great crossroads. To have joy, we must embrace God. To embrace God, *we must embrace His agenda*, and embracing His agenda means embracing the fact that *His agenda is better than my own!* The crucial decision is whether or not to die in order to experience joy, and the death that we must die is the death to self, i.e., the death to our own agenda. This is what Jesus meant when He said that we must “take up our cross” daily and follow Him (Luke 9.23). Only by trading our agenda of self-advancement for God’s agenda of redemptive suffering can we experience joy in this life.

Trading Agendas In Real Life

What does this taking up of the cross and trading of agendas look like in real life? Only rarely does it look like foreign missionaries martyred at spear point. More often, redemptive suffering takes the form of an endless series of inward transactions that occur at the moments of our little disappointments. At the moment that we wreck the car or at the moment when unwanted company arrives at the door, we have the choice of trading our own agenda for God’s providential and redemptive plan. If we accept our circumstances grudgingly, it shows that we still cling to the idol of a self-centered universe and our own imagined rights. But if we have overcome that great idol and come to believe that God really is working “*all things*” together for our good (Romans 8.28),

we realize that our car wreck or unpleasant company is the best thing that could possibly happen to us at that juncture, and we’re suddenly flooded with a joy that almost feels conspiratorial as we share God’s secret of saving our life by losing it (Luke 9.24)!



A Hasty Qualification

I hasten to reassure you, dear reader, that I don’t propose living in denial! Tragedies demand grief. There is a time to weep and mourn (Ecclesiastes 3.4; Romans 12.15). What I am insisting upon is that genuine joy shines even through sorrow (2 Corinthians 6.10). Neither do I negate our imperative to work for the alleviation of all kinds of suffering. I don’t propose that a person in a dysfunctional marriage seek only an inner peace without pursuing appropriate counseling, nor that a person with an oppressive job never seek a better career. I only emphasize the fact that ultimate happiness does not depend upon external circumstances, and that unhappiness will follow us even into an ideal marriage or career *if* we continue to carry our idols with us.

Conclusion

So what is it that you're really after? I can assure you that what you really desire deep down inside is exactly what God has for you, but it is only fully found in Him. Only the Infinite and Eternal One can satisfy the deepest longings of your heart. Track down your idols and repent of them so that you can fully embrace Him. Let God fill you with joy. Taste heaven.

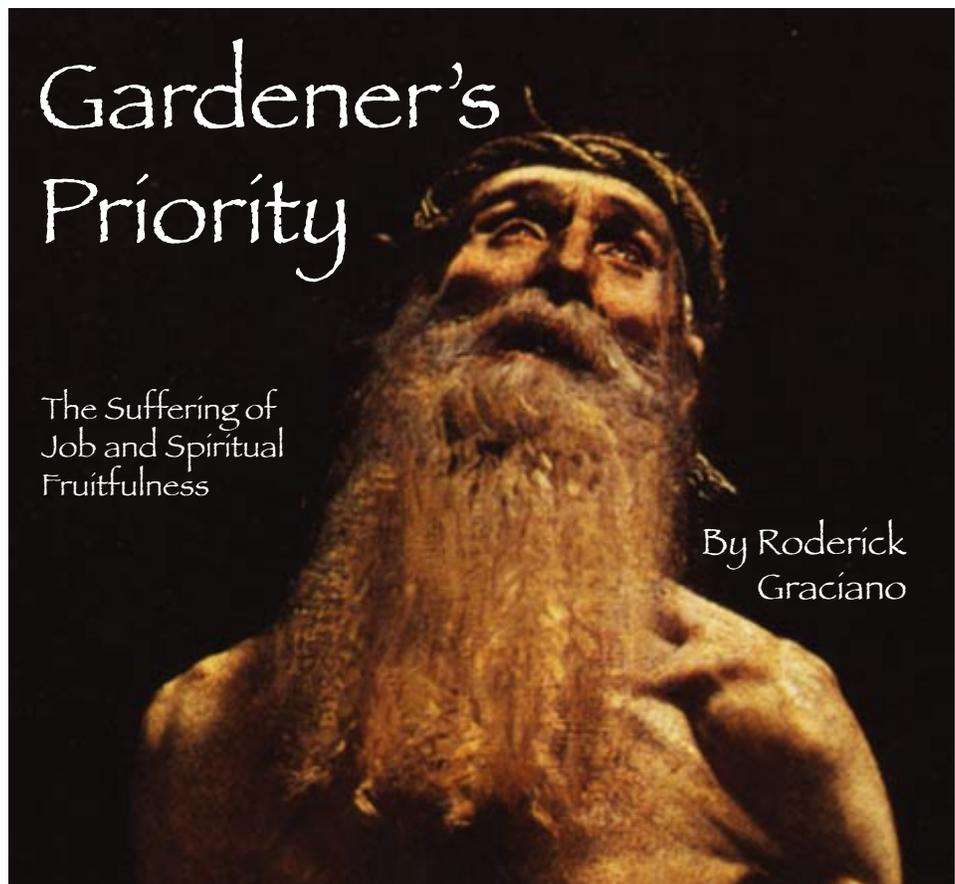
The book of Job tantalizes and frustrates scholars because it probes the most profound questions of life and theology, but then doesn't answer those questions, at least not in a conventional way. You know the story: God allows Satan to inflict horrible suffering on Job, a "perfect" man, but after a time of trial God heals Job and restores his fortunes. *Why?* ask the students of this book. Why would a loving, almighty God allow the devil to torment anyone, let alone a good man like Job? We could understand God letting Job suffer if the old guy

had committed some iniquity, but God Himself declares Job "blameless and upright" at the beginning of the story (Job 1.8). Job also insists upon his own integrity throughout his time of trial, and at the end of it, even though Job repents (Job 42.6), we are at a loss to understand what it is he repents of. Then, at the conclusion of the story, God justifies Job again when He rebukes Eliphaz the Temanite saying, "I am angry with you and your two friends, *because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has*" (42.7). So *why* would God allow the devil to kill Job's children, alienate Job's wife and cover Job's body with boils? We know there is evil and injustice in the world, but hasn't God promised to protect His people? If God would allow Satan to afflict a "perfect" man, where does that leave me? This book seems to hold some important secrets about suffering, but what are they? What is really going on in this story?

The Counter-intuitive Truth

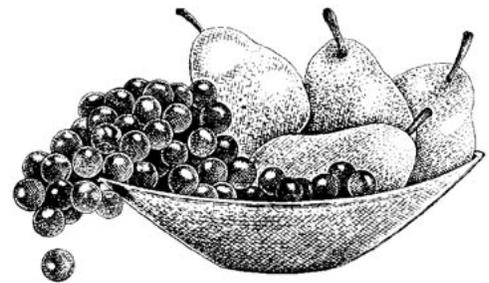
The main point of the book of Job seems almost obvious to me now, but it's taken 29 years and a lot of hard knocks for the light to snap on. I can see why secular scholars continue to puzzle over the message of the book. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2.14). It turns out that the message of Job is not so difficult to understand—it's just hard to accept. What is that message? The Lord Jesus spelled it out in John 15.

While not explicitly alluding to Job, Jesus nevertheless summed up Job's story in the final clause of John 15.2. Let's look at a portion of this teaching of the Lord's:



- John 15.1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
 John 15.2 He lifts up every branch in me that bears no fruit, while **every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful...**”
 John 15.5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...”
 John 15.8 “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

To teach about spiritual fruitfulness, Jesus used the metaphor of pruning. The first clause of John 15.2 is severe, but we suppose it’s reasonable: religious people who are phonies, who don’t really have the life of Christ in themselves and who show no fruit of the Spirit in their lives will in the end be cut off from any relationship with Him. It’s second clause of the verse just doesn’t sound right though! Why amputate fruitful branches? When something is working well, doesn’t it make sense to leave it well enough alone? Yes, in many areas of life, but not in gardening and not in spiritual ministry. When it comes to our spiritual lives, God’s response to our fruitfulness is counterintuitive to our natural way of thinking. We would like to think that when Job prospered as a “blameless and upright” man, God would respond by patting Job on the back and saying, “Well done, just keep doing what you’re doing.” Instead, God saw fit to lop off Job’s children, possessions, health and reputation so that Job would become even more fruitful in his love for God and in his witness to his neighbors. **God’s priority for Job was not greater comfort, but greater fruitfulness**—and He has the same priority for us.



The Fine Print Of The Gospel

God’s priority of fruitfulness over comfort is like the fine print that is rarely read in our gospel presentations. Evangelists preach that “God has a wonderful plan for you life,” and that is true, but they rarely explain how the “wonderful plan” involves pruning, breaking and dying. Jesus, on the other hand, was straightforward with His disciples about the spiritual process illustrated by these three metaphors. “Every branch that does bear fruit [my Father] prunes,” Jesus said. “Everyone who falls on that stone [i.e., the Messiah] will be broken to pieces,” He taught in Luke 20.18. “Whoever loses his life for me will save it,” Jesus declared on another occasion (Luke 9.24). We don’t usually emphasize these promises in our altar calls, but just as surely as God fulfilled them in Job’s life and in the lives of the apostles, He will fulfill them in any true child of His.

What do these promises mean, practically speaking? Well, most of us understand what pruning is all about. Parts of a vine or fruit tree that would tend to drain nutrients away from the fruit are lopped off. Careful pruning allows greater energy to go into producing the fruit. When we first come to Christ, we all have possessions and priorities that unnecessarily drain energy away from spiritual fruitfulness as they distract us from the work of the Kingdom. In time, by inner conviction or by external pressure, God will prune those possessions and priorities from our lives.

What about the being “broken to pieces”—what’s that all about? Jesus was actually enunciating the same pruning principle, but taking it a little deeper, and in this case declaring it to people that were actively resisting Him. The context of this teaching was the parable of the wicked tenants (Luke 20.9-16). The point of the parable was to warn the Israelite religious

establishment that they were about to reject the Messiah, and as a consequence lose their favored position in the land as they came under God's judgment. "When the people heard this, they said, 'May this never be!'" (Luke 20.16). So, "Jesus looked directly at them and asked, 'Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"'" (v. 17). Jesus explained—for those who had the ears to hear—that it was inevitable according to the Scriptures that many would reject the very most important stone in God's building. That stone was the Messiah, whom Isaiah prophesied would be "a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (Isaiah 8.14). It was then that Jesus stated the principle in Luke 20.18:

Everyone who falls on that stone
will be broken to pieces,
but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

The underlying structure of the Greek text for this statement is exactly the same as that of Christ's saying in Luke 9.24:

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

The comparison of these two passages is helpful. Notice that at first glance the passage about the stone appears to offer two bad options: being broken or being crushed. Both these options are painful, but I don't think they are both bad. The similar passage about saving one's life or losing it alerts us that Jesus is probably presenting both a bad option and a good option in His proverb-like saying about the stone. What then does it mean? Well, it's clear that the second option in this saying is the bad one: "he on whom it falls will be crushed." According to the prophet Daniel, the Messianic stone or rock is destined to become a mountain that fills the whole land (Dan. 2.34,35). One does not want to be crushed by it. The one crushed by this Stone will not be able to crawl out from under, will never stand again, will never recover, but will become like chaff that the wind sweeps away without leaving a trace. On the other hand, as unpleasant as it is to be broken to pieces, the one who falls *upon* the Stone does have hope of recovery. The picture presented by the saying is of a person stumbling over the large stone and falling upon it. The metaphor describes people stumbling ideologically over the character and mission of Jesus. There may be things we don't like about Jesus, but those things are nonetheless as solid as rock; they are not going to change. Rather than the rock conforming to our wishes, we will sooner or later be conformed to its contours as the shape of our character and priorities is broken to pieces against it. However, this kind of stumbling and breaking need not be fatal for the individual, even as it will not prove fatal for the nation of Israel. "Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?" Paul asks about his people in Romans 11.11. "Not at all!" he answers. God has a redemptive purpose in the breaking of Israel and He has a redemptive purpose in the breaking of individual believers. All of us, believers and unbelievers, stumble sooner or later over the profound holiness of Jesus. To the degree that any of us embrace the breaking process as we stumble, we will discover that God delights in a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51.17) and hugs us back. Thus, while the person on whom the Stone falls is lost, the person who falls upon the Stone may find redemption in the very process of being broken to pieces and conformed to the contours of the Stone.

The thing that I most dislike about the principle of being "broken to pieces" is the "to pieces" part. It's hard enough to be broken one time or in one place (say a fingernail), but to be broken to pieces describes the thoroughness of God's redemptive restructuring of our

character. That's why the third metaphorical saying about losing one's *life* fits in this same vein of Christ's teaching. It is not enough in God's eyes that *some* wasteful branches be pruned off or that *some* unholy attitudes be broken. He intends to do away with *all* the dross of the old life so that only the gold remains. It is *all* the fleshly life, *every* unheavenly aspect of our life that must be dispensed with. In short, the old self-centered, self-indulgent, temporal and earthly minded me must die. It will be a thorough pruning and a thorough breaking. Why? Because, as Job discovered, God's priority for us is *fruitfulness*.

But must we really *die* to be fruitful? If we believe the teaching of Jesus, the answer is *yes*. "I tell you the truth," He said in John 12.24, "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." It's easy to read this passage in its context and take it as only biographical, in other words, as Jesus talking about Himself and His crucifixion. Jesus certainly fulfilled these words about dying and producing many seeds, but He did not state them biographically. In other places He made plain biographical predictions:

We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!
(Matt. 20.18,19)

In John 12.24, on the other hand, Jesus states a principle that applies to all: *unless* a person dies he will remain unfruitful, but if he dies he will bear much fruit.

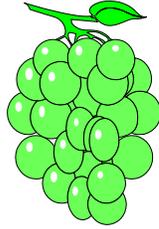
The Promise

This is what the story of Job is about. While the book of Job is a treasure-trove of insights on various subjects, its overarching theme is the redemptive work of God in pruning, breaking and killing a good man to make him even more fruitful. No wonder it's difficult for us to understand what Job is repenting of at the end of the story. He isn't repenting of any sin specifically but of his fleshliness in general. The only answer God gives to all Job's questions is a fresh vision of Himself, and that is all the answer Job needs. He sees the Rock with his own eyes (Job 42.5,6) and is made overwhelmingly aware of how out of plumb his character is with the contours of that Stone. Job sees why the dismantling work was necessary in his life and repents of having resisted that work.

God's priority for Job and for us is fruitfulness. I'm sorry I did not really understand this earlier in my life. I'm sorry I did not teach it more clearly to my children. I fear that many of us have encouraged our children to adopt a different priority than fruitfulness for the divine Gardener. So often we've told them, "I just want you to be happy," or "I just want you to be safe," or "I just want you to receive Jesus as your Savior and go to heaven." As sensible as these parental pleas sound, they can encourage a self-centered worldview, and make our children vulnerable to all the worldly temptations that promise happiness now, safety now and heaven now. I've come to realize that these parental desires for my children spring so readily to my mind because they reflect my own selfish inclinations toward personal peace and comfort. I see now that these desires are a far cry from the call to fall to the ground and die. They are the very desires that are slowly being broken to pieces on the Stone.

As hard as this teaching is, it has helped me through some painful times of dismantling in my own life. Just the knowledge that such a dismantling is normal to the Christian life is a great comfort as it helps us realize that we are not being abandoned or punished by God when trials come. Furthermore, the promise taught hand in hand with the *priority* of

fruitfulness brings great encouragement (John 15.2). The older we get, the more we want our life to count for something. The *promise* of fruitfulness makes the pruning, breaking and dying worth it all.



Personal Notes