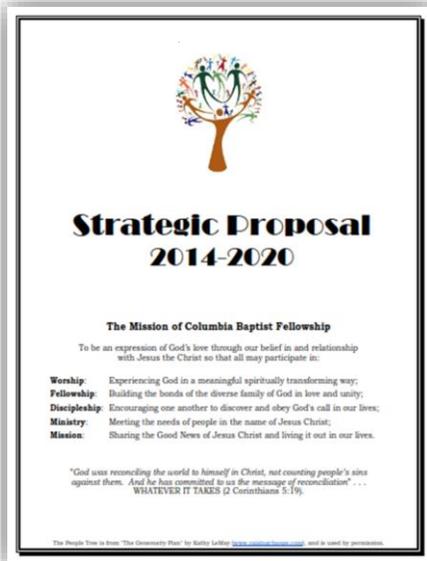


The L.O.V.E. Tea on Sunday was a wonderful event with fancy hats, fancy food, a full house, and lots of money raised for college scholarships! We even had guests who travelled from Pennsylvania (Carolyn Ericson) and South Carolina (Debbie McCustion-Kahl) for the gala event. Many THANKS to the many hands and hearts that carried out that labor of love!



Please find attached with this *Laptop* the proposed Strategic Plan for 2014-2020 and beyond. While hard copies will be available, it would be a great help if you would print out your very own copy. The initial set of congregational discussions of the proposal will be as follows. It will be very important for you to be present for at least one of these times:

- Wednesday, May 14: 6:15 p.m.
- Sunday, May 18: 11:30 a.m.
- Monday, May 19: 7 p.m. (Church Council)
- Sunday, June 1: 11:30 a.m.
- Sunday, June 8: 11:30 a.m. (Quarterly Meeting)

I expect that most of you know that extensive renovations of the office area at The Meeting House are about to begin. These renovations are expected to begin shortly after Peggy retires at the end of May, and they will

require Neville and me to work from home for several weeks, so leaving phone messages at church will not be very effective. We may not even have access to those phones during this period. Consequently, the best ways to reach us once construction begins will be as follows (these are also the best ways to reach us now ☺):

Pastor Neville: cbfyouth@verizon.net; 443-996-3699
Pastor Dave: dcestancil@verizon.net; 301-801-8535

Last Sunday's message included two powerful stories of God's redeeming activity as recorded by my friend and fraternity brother, Nik Ripken (pen name) in his amazing book, *The Insanity of God*. The second story had to do with a European physician who was working in Muslim countries in Asia. Here's the rest of that story as Nik recorded it. It's well worth your time to read

While I was in that part of the world, the European doctor helped arrange a number of other interviews. Some of those encounters took place in major cities in neighboring countries.

One man agreed to let me interview him if we could meet in a secure, non-public setting where I would not even be able to see his face or attempt to learn his name. I accepted his conditions. I had learned to let those in the greatest danger set the security parameters.

I followed his instructions and traveled to another city. Finding the specified apartment building, I climbed three sets of stairs, knocked on a door and walked into a small, unfurnished living room. I saw

only the silhouette of a man. He stood in total shadow behind a large potted plant in the far corner. A bare light bulb hung from the ceiling between us; its glare in my face further obscured my vision.

Those were the ground rules.

I could not really see the man at all, but I could hear him perfectly. So I had no problem taking notes. He told me that I was permitted to record our interview. He insisted, however, that I not try to identify him, find out where he lived, or use his real name.

I listened to his story for about six hours. I quickly concluded that he was probably the toughest man I ever met in my life.

During an earlier invasion of his country, the man told me that he had led a squad of fifteen soldiers committed to repel foreign invaders. He calmly recounted his experience: "I took great joy in the name of Allah when I could sneak up behind an enemy soldier at night, silently cut his throat, and allow his blood to wash over my hands as an offering to Almighty God."

His descriptions were so graphic, yet so matter-of-fact, that at one point I almost unintentionally asked a question: "How many people have you killed?"

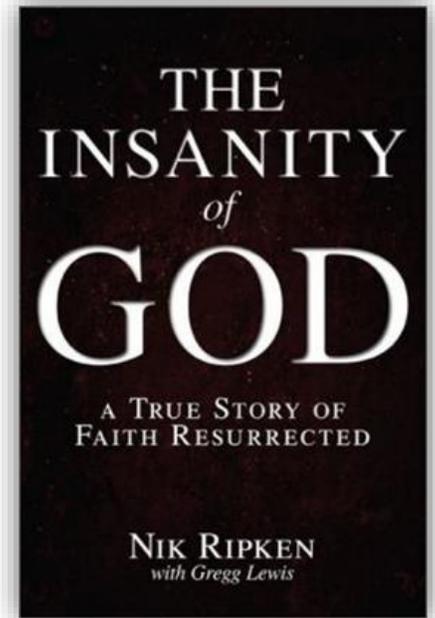
"I stopped counting when the number reached one hundred," he confessed. "Those were people that I killed personally, not in battle."

My mind boggled at that number. He went on to tell me that, after a time, he started to have a dream. It was a recurring dream that came to him over and over again. He dreamed of spots of blood on his hands. Night after night, he would have the same dream. Over time, the spots of blood grew larger. Eventually, he was dreaming that the blood was running down and dripping off his arms.

He realized, early on, that in his dreams he was imagining the blood of all those people he had killed. The dreams were so vivid and so disturbing that he dreaded falling asleep at night. "I really thought that I was going insane," he told me. "When I began to see the blood during my waking hours, I was even more upset. And no amount of washing or scrubbing with sand or pumice could get the blood off."

"I soon became convinced that I was going absolutely insane," he went on. "Then one night the dream changed. As I stood there helplessly watching the blood run down my arms, I also saw in my dream a man standing before me. He was a man clothed in white with a scarred head. He also had scarred hands, a scarred side, and scarred feet. The scarred man said. 'I am Jesus the Messiah and I can get the blood off—if you will just find me and believe in me.'"

The dream told him to find Jesus. He had no idea how to do that. Still, he began his search. It took him over a year to locate a copy of the Scripture. It took even longer for him to understand what he was reading. From time to time, he would find people who could answer some of his questions. And, finally, this man said that he had found Jesus. When he had invited Jesus into his heart, the man said, "I got the blood off. Jesus took that blood onto Himself."



Immediately, his dreams ended.

At that point, he didn't have anybody to disciple him. In his country, there was no church that he could attend, no Bible study that he might join. On his own, he kept reading and studying the Bible. And he did everything that the Holy Spirit told him to do.

Eventually he began to smuggle Bibles, Bible portions, other Christian materials and even the *Jesus* film over the mountains from another country into his own. He did that for two years. One day, he rounded a bend in one of the high mountain passes and found himself face-to-face on a narrow trail with the squad of fifteen men that he used to lead. They had been on the lookout for their old commander ever since he had deserted them and disappeared. It had even been reported that he was now a traitor to Islam.

Now they had found him. They threw him to the ground and began to beat him. It was their plan to beat him to death.

In that squad of Muslim militiamen, however, there was another new believer in Jesus Christ. No one knew about his faith. That man boldly spoke up to caution the others. He said, "Stop! Let's think about this! Maybe we're being foolish. If we kill our old commander here and now, we may never know who he is working with, who the traitors are on this side of the border, or on that side of the border."

"So let me take him down to the town at the bottom of the mountain," the man continued. "I can get him patched up and hold him prisoner. When he is well enough to talk again, we can interrogate him, torture him slowly if we have to, until he tells us what we need to know. We might learn something important if we are patient and do this right."

His suggestion was convincing. The other men thought that his plan sounded reasonable. They left their old commander with this secret, believing Good Samaritan. He loaded him on a donkey and smuggled him down and out of the mountains. He patched him up and saved his life by letting him resume the work that he had been doing.

As I listened to this incredible story, I assumed that this storyteller would never be more than a shadow and a voice for me. And I was fine with that.

But I had interviewed so many people that I could sometimes hear what people were not saying and what things they were uncomfortable talking about. At the end of almost six hours of listening to this man's life story, I expressed my respect and appreciation for his willingness to talk with me. I told him how inspired I was by his testimony and I praised God with him for all that the Lord had done in and through him. I told him that, because of his testimony, my life and faith would never be the same again.

At the same time, I probed just a bit into his story. I said, "You have told me that you are married, that you have sons, that you have led your wife and your children to Christ, and that you have even baptized them. What I'm wondering is this: Where do they fit into your ministry? You haven't talked about that. How do they help you? What is happening with your family?"

I was not expecting what happened next.

The man leapt out of the darkness and suddenly stood face to face with me. He clamped his scarred hands down tight on my shoulders, and his fierce dark eyes bored like lasers into mine. I instinctively thought of my earlier question about the number of men that he had killed.

For hours, I had listened to his inspiring story. But, now, I was terrified as he shook me and demanded to know: **“How can God ask it? Tell me! How can God ask it?”**

I think maybe that’s when my heart started beating again. I realized that maybe he was angry at God, not me. My confusion cleared up even more as he went on to exclaim, “I have given Him everything! My body has been broken. I have been jailed. I have been starved. I have been beaten. I have been left for dead!” His words sounded a lot like the Apostle Paul’s recitation of all that he had suffered in the service of Christ.

“I have even been willing to die for Jesus,” he pleaded. “But do you know what I fear? When I go to bed at night, what keeps me awake, and what actually terrifies me, is the thought that God might ask of my wife and my children what I have already willingly given Him.”

“How can He ask it? Tell me! How could God ask that of my wife and children?”

I paused for a few moments and prayed that the Lord would guide my words as I responded: “Brother, my wife is safe in Kentucky,” I said. “My two living sons are in school, doing well.” I told him a little bit of Timothy’s story [Timothy died in Kenya]; we had already talked together about my time in Somalia.

Finally I told him, **“I personally cannot answer your question. But I would ask you another question that I have had to ask myself: ‘Is Jesus worth it? Is He worth your life? Is He worth the lives of your wife and your children?’”**

He was undoubtedly the toughest man I ever met. He began to sob. He wrapped his arms around me, buried his face in my shoulder and wept. When he finally stopped, he stepped back and wiped away his tears. He seemed angry at himself for this display of emotion.

Then he looked me in the eyes again, nodded, and declared, **“Jesus is worth it. He is worth my life, my wife’s life, and He is worth the lives of my children! I have got to get them involved in what God is doing with me!”**

With that, the toughest man I ever met said good-bye. He turned and walked out of the room.*

*My encounter with this man was more than a dozen years ago now. The last I heard, he and his family were still doing for the Kingdom of God the work that he described to me. And he is still the toughest man I have ever met!

Next week I’ll have one more installment from Nik that follows up on that haunting question, **“IS JESUS WORTH IT?”**

Dave

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week eighteen: Life's Bottom-Line Question

*"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. **Do you believe this?**"* (John 11:25-26).

This one statement is among the most bold and definitive acknowledgments of our Lord's deity. The resurrection is what separates our Lord from a thousand other gurus and prophets who have come down the pike. This bold declaration is then followed, in the next verse, by life's bottom-line question. After declaring Himself to be the resurrection and life, the victor over death, our Lord turns to His hearers—and to us—and asks, "**Do you believe this?**" (John 11:26).

LIFE'S BOTTOM-LINE QUESTION IS PERSONAL: "Do YOU believe this?"

Perhaps the Lord put the inflection on the *you* in His question in order to drive home the fact that it is personal. After all, when it comes to saving faith in the finished work of Christ, what I believe is what matters most . . . not what my mother or my wife or anyone else believes. My faith is a personal matter between my Lord and me. . . . It might well be that Jesus is still asking today: Do *you* believe this?

LIFE'S BOTTOM-LINE QUESTION IS POINTED: "Do you BELIEVE this?"

It is one thing to know the gospel story intellectually. It is one thing to attempt to conform ourselves to its claims and seek to take on the new set of moral standards that accompanies its truths. It is even one thing to argue for it apologetically and reason about it. It is, in fact, possible to conform to its claims without being transformed from within by grace and through faith. Life's bottom-line question is pointed. Jesus wants to know if you have transferred your own trust from human efforts to Him alone. Has this saving faith, this resurrected life, this "Christ in me" experience made a difference in your life?

LIFE'S BOTTOM-LINE QUESTION IS PRECISE: "Do you believe THIS?"

Now we arrive at the real heart of the issue. True faith must rest on objective truth. Thus, life's bottom-line question is precise at four very specific points related to Jesus' claim:

Do you believe Jesus' claim about *deity*? The most fundamental belief in the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is God Himself clothed in human flesh. He is not merely some figure out of history or the object of some sentimental story from our childhood. He is God. Do you believe *this*?

Do you believe His claim about *death*? Jesus said, "Though he may die, he shall live." But none of that can stop the fact that I continue marching toward an appointment with eternity. Do you believe *this*?

Do you believe His claim about *destiny*? Jesus said, "Though he may die, he shall live." It is strange how so many today live their lives as if this life is all there is. We have an eternal destiny. Do you believe *this*?

Do you believe His claim about *deliverance*? Jesus says, "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). The Lord makes it perfectly plain here. Eternal salvation is through faith in Him alone and not through human effort or our own good works or intentions. Do you believe *this*?