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Editorial

The Ledgers

The First Ledger

Travis Jacobs is an industrialist. To say he is a successful industrialist is an understatement. He ranks in the top 20 percent of the Forbes 500 annual listing. His worth is calculated in billions.

Jacobs is in his middle sixties. When he began his career as a young man, there were no computers. In fact, the now omnipresent pocket calculator didn't exist. Thus it is no surprise that all he needed when doing long math problems was a sharpened pencil. We mention this because even though his business today has the latest and best in computers, he still uses a common ledger for personal transactions. When he loans his own children money he uses the ledger. Generous at heart, he often notices when his close friends are in a tight. He then spontaneously offers a loan, and makes an entry in the ledger.

Jacobs enjoys being in big business. He gets a thrill out of closing a million-dollar deal. He looks forward to board meetings when strategy is discussed. He listens carefully to his subordinates and they know that if they come up with a good idea, he will pick it up. They enjoy working for him.

As much as Jacobs enjoys the agitated industrial world, his greatest satisfaction comes from his ledger. Some of the entries are only a hundred dollars; others a thousand, or ten thousand. Some—a few—much larger. Don't get the idea he is a pushover, that because he deals in hundreds of millions that he forgets a hundred dollar loan to his son. The money he loans is almost a personal extension of his character. He believes that money loaned in good faith should be repaid in good faith. His big business has a legal department and bill collectors that seem to have been educated in a hydraulic jack factory. He knows how to put on the squeeze when bills are overdue.

Recipients of his personal loans are very much aware that these benevolent loans that

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involve no liens nor long contracts with a lot of small print, are very serious. Actually, much more than one in which the creditor has protected himself with mortgages and other legal instruments. Those are business loans; a loan from Jacobs is an honor loan. And should be treated thus.

Jacobs is a born businessman. One of the reasons his business has been inching its way up on the Forbes 500 list is that he chooses his chief executives very carefully. He handpicks them. In the final stage of interviewing a prospective executive, he makes a startling announcement: “Young man, I see you want to get ahead in life. And I want to see you get ahead. Your workday with me will be from 7:30 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon. There will be no overtime, nor Saturdays. On your time off you may do whatever you please, including starting your own business—so long as you don’t compete with me. Just make sure you are wide awake when on my job. Agreed?”

What he didn’t tell the new executive at this point was that if they lived up to his standards, the day might come that he would even loan them money for their own enterprise... Which would be annotated in his ledger. Not on the company computer. And yes, this would be a very special loan. A simple note would be signed and locked in his personal safe.

Enter Ramsey Patterson.

When Patterson came to work at Jacobs he was fresh out of Yale Business School. He was spotted by one of Jacob’s talent scouts. His business acumen was immediately evident and he rose rapidly. By age 36 he was a junior vice-president.

Jacobs and Patterson had a cordial relationship, a deep respect for their mutual professional capacities. Yet in all fairness it must be pointed out their friendship was a 7:30 to 3:30 friendship. Not that they were distant, or even disliked each other after hours. Let’s just say it wasn’t in their chemistry to be really close friends. They were professional friends. And were making a lot of money. Patterson was one of the highest paid executives in North America.

The fact that the friendship of these two men was pretty much professional didn’t keep Jacob from quietly saying to Patterson at the end of an important meeting, “Ramsey, I’d like to see you for just a few minutes.”

What he had to say was simple and direct. “Ramsey, I understand you have some business ventures of your own in progress. I am pleased by this. If sometime you want to expand and need a loan, a personal loan from me, talk to me.”

Graciously Patterson thanked his boss and promised that if the occasion should ever arise, he would look him up.

Several years went by. The first loan Patterson requested was a mere ten thousand dollars, which was paid off well before the due date.

The next loan he hesitantly requested was for 50 thousand. This too was paid off before the due date.

A year later Patterson asked for 200 thousand. He paid it off.

Then 500 thousand, which he paid off.

Jacobs never asked how Patterson was investing his money. That was his business. So long as the red turned black on his ledger, he was happy.

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Several more years and then one day, at the end of a board meeting, Patterson reversed the roles and requested Jacobs to see him personally. This time he went into detail on his personal project. He was, he said, building jet skis. The opportunity had arisen to buy out his main competitor, and thus dominate the market. But for this he would need a million dollars.

Jacobs had basically one question: How much time did he think it would take to repay him in a lump sum? Patterson didn't hesitate, "Five years, sir."

"The money is yours."

No contract was drawn up, only a simple note was signed. An annotation was made in the ledger.

Jacobs never questioned Patterson about his investment. He trusted him.

There were two things Jacobs didn't know. He didn't know that for the last two years Patterson's business had been losing money. And he didn't know that Patterson had acquired an extravagant lifestyle. To keep both the business and his lifestyle afloat, he mortgaged everything he owned, including his house and car. Not only was he running out of money to pay his suppliers, but much less the million Jacobs had loaned him.

Jacobs detested water fountain talk. Anyone taken in the act of gossiping, in the very act, found himself headed down the fire escape. So it was that no comments were made on the job, but after work, in tight little circles, it was rumored that Patterson's financial health was failing.

As most men floundering in financial distress, Patterson always hoped for a miracle, for that big sale that would reverse failing fortunes. And interestingly, that is sort of what happened. A large order came in. It wasn't the miracle order, but it was substantial enough to infuse new hope. If he would cut his extravagant life style and apply what remained of his wages to the business—which was a substantial amount—there was hope.

Patterson enthusiastically set about reorganizing his company. He didn't forget the annotation of one million dollars in the ledger. The note was due in a week and there was positively no way he could pay up. Strangely, he wasn't losing sleep over this. His reasoning is simple: I am now a senior vice-president and Jacob's right-hand man. Maybe his successor. He does nothing great nor small without consulting me. He CAN'T afford to lose me. I will ask to speak to the old man and then simply announce, "Look, I need more time on that note."

On the due date, that is exactly what Patterson did. He asked to speak to Jacobs. When they were seated behind closed doors, this is the conversation that followed, with Jacobs speaking first.

"Patterson, you would like to speak to me?"

"Yes, Mr. Jacobs. It is about that note..."

Jacobs reached into his desk and pulled out his ledger. He found the right page.

"A million dollars, is that right, Patterson?"

"That's right."

"And due today, is that how you understand it?"

"That's right..."

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It was here that Patterson planned to give his speech to “the old man.” Jacobs spoke first.

“You are here to pay off the loan...”

Something in Jacob’s tone of voice told Patterson that maybe, just maybe, his speech might not be quite as easy to deliver as he had imagined.

“Well...ah, you see...”

Again Jacobs interrupted. This time the tone of voice was unmistakable.

“Do or do you not have the money to pay off the note?”

“No...I don’t. But if you will permit me to...”

“In that case, you are fired!”

Somehow, this possibility had never occurred to Patterson. Fired? No! Without his salary there was no way he would pull his ailing company out of its slump. He would lose everything.

“You ungrateful scoundrel! You know perfectly well that when I make a personal loan to someone, I EXPECT IT TO BE PAID OFF ON TIME!”

Definitely, the well-prepared speech was down the drain. So was he.

“Mr. Jacobs, please Mr. Jacobs...”

“GET OUT OF HERE!”

The arrogant Patterson was now down on his knees:

“Mr. Jacobs, what can I say? I have been unworthy of the trust you placed in me. Please, please, Mr. Jacobs, give me just a chance. If I must leave here, my wife and children will go hungry...”

Now in tears, Patterson became hysterical—and was babbling. Not knowing whether to be irritated or moved by compassion, Jacobs ordered: “Patterson! Get up and pull yourself together. I don’t know why I’m doing this, but I’m going to keep you on as my senior vice-president. And forgive your debt.” He then turned to the open page on his ledger, Patterson’s page, and wrote, “Forgiven.”

Needless to say, when word got around that Jacobs had kept Patterson as his senior vice-president, and forgiven his debt, a sullenness settled over the entire office complex.

To make matters worse, once Patterson realized he had not only retained his job, but that the million dollar loan had been pardoned, he became arrogant. His see-what-I-have-pulled-off attitude made him the most detested man in the company.

Some three weeks after having his debt pardoned, an incident happened that upset the entire staff so thoroughly that Jacobs couldn’t help but notice. Each query as to what was happening brought non-committal replies. It wasn’t until while working late one evening that Jacob struck pay dirt. The cleaning lady came into his office and seeing that he was still at work, began backing out. Jacob had a sudden brainstorm. He called, “Mrs. Stanford, I’d like to speak to you just a moment.”

Hesitantly, she came and stood before his desk. “What is it, Mr. Jacobs?”

Mrs. Stanford, everywhere I look in the office, people seem to be upset about something. What is it?”

Mrs. Stanford nervously shuffled her feet. Jacobs made it a quasi order. “Go ahead. Tell me what is going on.”

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“You don’t know, Mr. Jacobs?”

“No I don’t. That is why I am asking you to tell me.”

“Mr. Jacobs, you know that I don’t...”

“I know, I know, Mrs. Stanford. I know you don’t like to gossip. Just tell me what I want to know. Please be seated”

After being seated, the cleaning lady began: “Mr. Jacobs, people in the office were quite upset when you pardoned Patterson’s debt and kept him on as your senior vice-president. You see...you see...”

“Go on. Say it.”

“Well, from what I have been able to pick up, one of the reasons Mr. Patterson went broke is that he began taking trips to Las Vegas. He gambled and lost a lot of money. Not only on the poker table and at the slot machines, but...well, you know what goes on in Las Vegas...”

“Please continue.”

“Well, there is a lot of talk that Mr. Patterson has been...well, has been doing some rather illegal things. Or like some say, he has been doing some stuff that could land him in prison.”

“I see.”

“But what really has upset the office staff is that sometimes after work some of the men go to a bar to drink and play cards. In one of these games one of the fellows who had too much to drink lost and owed Patterson a hundred dollars. He didn’t have the money, but told Patterson he would pay him when he got his next pay check. Patterson agreed. That was a week ago.

“Now, several days ago Patterson jumped him, right here in the entrance to the building, and told him he either pay up right there and then or he was going to call the cops and tell them about something that he had done several years ago that was illegal. The fellow told Patterson that it was only three days to payday, when he would pay up in full. When Patterson reached for his cell phone, the man actually fell to his knees and told him that if he went to jail his wife and little girl would go hungry. He cried, but it did no good. The police showed up and picked him up. Now he’s in jail.”

When the cleaning lady finished, Mr. Jacobs merely said, “Thank you so much Mrs. Stanford, I appreciate what your willingness to give me these details.”

The following morning Jacobs was seen walking into the police department. Fifteen minutes later he left. But it was time enough to request that police detectives leave absolutely nothing unturned in Patterson’s life. What they found was enough to place Patterson in prison for life.

That afternoon, while Patterson was in Mr. Jacobs’s office, there was a knock on the door, which immediately opened and heavily armed policemen entered.

“We’re looking for Mr. Ramsey Patterson.”

Jacobs didn’t hesitate. Pointing to Patterson he said, “This is your man.”

The senior officer said, “Mr. Ramsey Patterson, you are under arrest. You have the right to remain...”

Terror stricken, Patterson looked at Jacobs and implored, “Oh, help me please...!”

“HELP YOU?! HELP YOU? You scoundrel, I forgave you a million dollars and yet you have had no pity on a poor man who owed you a mere ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS! I am going to pay the best prosecuting lawyers in this country to keep you in prison until the day of your death. May you never again see the light of the sun”

Turning to the policemen, he ordered: “Get him out of here. I hope to never again see his face. Put him in a cell with the worst scum of this earth.”

The Second Ledger

Ramsey—yes, we will reuse his name as a matter of convenience—was not born in a Christian home. His parents divorced when he was four and thus began his via crucis, being jostled from one unpleasant situation to another as his mother lived first with one man and then with yet another. . .

From a troubled childhood he proceeded to a troubled adolescence and then to a troubled adulthood. In his turbulent life there was never a stronghold, a rock, something to cling to. In a word, he was adrift in an inhospitable world.

When Ramsey was 23, he got a job on a construction crew. The moment he came to work on a Monday morning, he sensed something different. No one shouted at him. No one cursed. His boss courteously explained what he would be doing. At break time when the men all sat down on boxes, or on the floor, and opened their thermoses, he noticed that no one smoked. The conversation was pleasant, animated, without the vulgarities that he associated with a coffee break.

Each day was a new surprise. Once, when through an act of carelessness he broke a piece of equipment that cost at least three hundred dollars to be replaced, he expected to be fired. When he reported to his boss what had happened, he was totally unprepared for what followed. His boss glanced at the broken equipment and said, “I’ve done it myself. We’ll replace it. You needn’t worry.”

Three things impressed Ramsey: First, his boss didn’t swear at him; Second, he wasn’t fired; and third, he wasn’t expected to pay for the damages. For the first time in his life, Ramsey permitted himself to believe that maybe such a thing as love still existed.

Then something else happened. One of his coworkers brought up the subject of salvation. It began something like this: “Ramsey, I’m sure you don’t know this, but I lived in the world and didn’t get converted until I was 25. . .”

Ramsey interrupted. “I don’t understand. We all live in the world, don’t we?”

The answer came with a chuckle. “Yes, yes, you’re right. But you see, the Bible talks about the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of the world, or what we call ‘the world,’ is made up of people who haven’t been saved. The kingdom of heaven is made up of people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior.”

“OK, you say you lived in the world until you were 25. Ah, you probably don’t want to talk about this, but. . .but, how shall I ask it, did you do things that were wrong?” he lamely finished.

Before his coworker could answer, break was over. “Hey Ramsey, would you like to come over and have supper with my wife and me? I could tell you my story.”

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Several evenings later, during and after supper, Ramsey and his coworker discussed their “life in the world.” When he got into his car to leave, Ramsey was in a daze. Never, never would he have believed that the gentle man he worked with had been his equal in sin. What had happened?

Several more supper invitations followed and the message became clear: “Ramsey, you must repent of your sins. Take them all to Jesus and place them at the foot of the cross. He will pardon you.”

It was easier said than done. Ramsey tried to do exactly what his coworker had told him to do. He knelt by his bedside and began telling the Lord all he had ever done wrong. But instead of being pardoned, like he had expected, a weight so heavy settled over him that he felt he would be crushed. Plaintively he cried out, “Don’t you love me Lord? I’ve told you my sins and you act like you couldn’t care less.” Finally he drifted into a fitful sleep.

Suddenly he was jolted in his sleep. The room was dark. Very, very dark. Far darker than the darkest night he had ever seen. The darkness was palpable. It seemed to strangle him. And then he saw it. A plaque on the far wall with raised letters in crimson red. It said: THE SOUL THAT SINNETH IT SHALL DIE.

Ramsey was paralyzed. He couldn’t move a finger or a toe. Not even his tongue. Indeed, he couldn’t even close his eyelids, thus shutting out the terrible bloody letters. The only words his feverish mind was able to articulate were: I’M LOST! I’M LOST! I’M LOST.

To admit he was lost brought no relief. In fact, just the opposite seemed to be happening. The darkness became even heavier and now began dragging him down with a gravitational force. Feeling he was about to be swallowed up by the bowels of the earth, his eyes were drawn again to the plaque, except that in its place was a book—a ledger. And a hand.

A voice, stern and foreboding, announced, “You have confessed a few sins that you remember and now accuse the Almighty God of Heaven and Earth of indifference, of not caring less, because He doesn’t cave in to your selfish demand for forgiveness. I ask you: What have you done to deserve forgiveness? What can you offer me in exchange for forgiveness?”

The hand now opened the ledger. The first page which he understood to represent the first year of his life was white, a radiant white. So were the second and third pages, and succeeding pages. Approximately halfway down the thirteenth page everything changed and there now appeared lines filled with writing. The index finger of the hand pointed to the first line that read: “Struck classmate on playground at school.”

Ramsey remembered the incident. He not only remembered it. It was replayed before his eyes. He heard his own angry words, as well as the impact of his fist striking the startled face of his classmate. And he heard the groan as he fell to the ground. The voice intoned: “This sin is not covered by the blood.”

Time seemed to stop as the finger went down page after page of the ledger. Each time he relived the sin, just as if he had committed it for the first time. And worse, with each successive page, the entries became grimmer. There were lies, there were

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immoralities, there were deceptions, there were shameful scenes, like the time he heard himself swearing at his own mother.

Suddenly regaining the use of his tongue, he fairly shouted: “Stop! Stop! Aren’t you getting to the end?”

The voice replied, “I have just begun.” And indeed, what remained in the ledger was far more than what had been read.

There now followed a dialog with the Voice.

“I am lost, lost, lost, eternally lost...”

“Do you wish to be saved?”

“I cannot be saved. I have sinned, and I have nothing to offer for my salvation.”

“Nothing? Absolutely nothing?”

“No, Lord. Nothing! And if I did I couldn’t offer it, for my sins are far greater than anything I could possibly offer.”

“You have spoken truly. There is nothing you can offer for your sins. No amount of praying or pleading will save you from your sins.”

“Then I must die...”

“Look and live,” the voice said, now with great kindness.

Ramsey’s eyes were drawn to the wall where the ledger was still visible. Above it another scene appeared.

A cross!

And on the cross a bleeding man.

The hand that held the ledger now returned to the first page with the handwriting and slowly extended it to the cross to catch a drop of blood from the pierced feet. The page instantly became white. WHITE! Such a white that the darkness began to flee. The page was turned and the next page placed under a pierced hand to catch another drop of blood. The page turned white and the room became lighter...

Ramsey awoke with a start, wet with sweat. In a second he was kneeling beside his bed. And like the Publican, he smote his breast and cried out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”

The loving Savior heard the prayer and all the pages of the ledger were turned. As each one became whiter than snow the word PARDONED was written on it.

When Ramsey appeared at work the next day everyone immediately knew something had changed. For he had changed.

This little allegory does not have a lived-happily-ever-after ending. Ramsey became a Christian and served the Lord faithfully for some ten years.

Then one day something happened that changed everything. It started out as a misunderstanding with a coworker. The coworker, his spiritual brother, came back and apologized. Ramsey believed the apology was insincere and refused to forgive him. The incident soon took on a life of its own and mushroomed into a noxious cloud of offense. The years went by...

The offense became a dominating force in Ramsey’s life. He broke fellowship with those who loved him most and rejected the help of his spiritual brothers and sisters.

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Then one night after he had lain down on his bed of bitterness and finally fallen asleep, he had another dream.

Again he saw the ledger on the wall. The hand slowly turned the pages—white pages with the word PARDONED written on them. Then, as it got toward the end of the ledger, the white pages came to an end. The finger pointed toward an entry which read, “Became offended at his brother.”

The Voice did not read on. It asked, “Did your brother ask for pardon?”

“Well, yes, but...”

“But you did not accept it, is that right?”

Ramsey realized things were not going well.

“That’s right. I didn’t accept his apology, but I know now I should have. I will forgive him, I promise. Yes, I promise!”

The scene on the wall now changed.

He saw a man, whom he knew to be Jesus, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out evil spirits. Among those who praised Him for His great works, there often appeared well-dressed men, scribes and Pharisees, to condemn him. Sometimes to kill Him. Strangely, He always saw himself among those men.

He saw when men came to arrest Jesus. He was one of those who helped bind His hands.

He saw Jesus in Pilot’s hall and heard the shouts of “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” He was one of those who shouted the loudest.

He saw when Jesus was mocked and a crown of thorns placed on his head. With a heavy stick he struck the crown so as to embed the thorns more securely in the sacred head.

He saw when men, filled with a satanic hatred, spat on Jesus’s face. He too spat.

When the crowd began to call for Barabbas’ release so that Jesus could be crucified, he saw the face of the condemned criminal when he was led out of prison a free man. As he studied the leering face more closely, he realized it was his own.

He saw when Jesus submitted himself to the cross and was astonished to see he was one of the Roman soldiers who hammered the spikes through His flesh.

He saw when Jesus’ garments were divided among the soldiers. He walked away with a piece.

After Jesus was placed in the tomb, guards were placed to make sure no one stole the body. The earth shook and the guards fell as dead men. When they were able to stand to their feet again, they saw the tomb was empty and were sure He had arisen. Yet when the religious leaders offered them money to lie and say they had fallen asleep and the body was stolen, they lied. He was one of the guards who was paid off.

Then Jesus was standing at the foot of his bed. He was not dressed in the robe of a peasant; He was no longer an humble shepherd. His robes were regal, those of a judge. When He spoke, no tender words came forth. Rather His words were as a mighty thunder.

“Wretched man! You accused me of being possessed by a devil. You picked up stones to stone me. You denied me. You bound me. You spat on me. You pierced my

head with a crown of thorns. You demanded I be crucified. When you found out you would go free so that I would be crucified, you leered, thought you had really pulled off something important. You picked up one of the hammers and plunged a heavy spike through my feet. You lied about me and said my body had been stolen when you well knew that I had risen.

“Yet I died for you. I forgave your sins. All of them. You tasted of my love and I gave you a Christian home. I gave you the promise of eternal life.

“Then when your brother, in a moment of weakness, said something you didn’t like—no, he didn’t try to stone you, he didn’t spit on you, he didn’t pierce your brow with a crown of thorns, he didn’t pierce your hands and feet with cruel spikes, he didn’t even lie about you.

“This same brother came back and asked your forgiveness. You refused to forgive him. You turned your back on him. You turned your back on your spiritual brothers and sisters. YOU TURNED YOUR BACK ON ME! You wicked servant, depart from me, cursed one, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!”

Ramsey did not awaken the following morning. On the last page of the ledger, the Hand had written: CONDEMNED FOREVER. ▲

Readers Contribute

I Visit My Grandmother

by Loren Burns

[Loren is the grandson of Emma Burns, who moved to Brazil in 1968.]

We will always remember 2008 as the year we went to Brazil. In June we drove to New York City, with an overnight stop in Fleetwood. 10 hours after we left the US’s largest metropolis, we found ourselves in Brazil’s—surrounded by new smells, sights, and sounds.

Our first introduction to the collective Brazilian personality was there, at São Paulo’s Congonhas airport. Utterly clogged by a morning’s worth of fog-cancelled flights, the airport was incredibly full of jovial, noisy, smiling people. Toronto’s airport in such a setting would have seethed with tension and frustration, but the Brazilians won’t let such a trivial matter as a half-day’s delay upset their equilibrium. I have never met a people so beautiful, friendly, warm, and upbeat as the Brazilian people.

It was so good to see Grandma again. In my memory, she has changed very little. 86 years old, she still lives alone in the house Grandpa built for her. She weaves rugs, reads her Bible, and prays for her children and grandchildren every day. The bica still runs past her porch, just like it did when I was 5 years old. The anaconda that lives (she supposes) in her pond and swallowed (she supposes) her unsuspecting terrier – was he just a little snakeling when I was a tiny manling?

The burrowing owls stare unblinkingly from the entrance to their underground nests, the seriemas cry their haunting round song, the macaws glide past in vivid

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pairs, and parrots fill the trees with teeming, chattering colour. We disturbed tens of thousands – nay, hundreds of thousands – of termite slaves in our search of a termite queen. Some of us pursued emu on motorcycle and horseback, while others sought the elusive alligator who lives silently in the mysterious depths of clear, still water. The monkeys stirred in the trees, the southern constellations arched noiselessly across the sky, but the Burns tribe lit a fire and feasted on grilled steak and thick-sliced avocado, complemented by roasted cheeses and washed down with Guaraná. Children slept in piles and on them, while grownups sang the old songs by the fire till voices grew hoarse and memories failed. Who can describe the eloquent majesty of a palm tree silhouetted by the flickering light of a midnight fire?

Poinsettias in full flower grow beside the houses, their crimson blooms as high as the eaves. Bougainvillea trace the roads with rainbows. Oranges, kumquats, tangerines, papayas, bananas, and more hang from the trees. (And this is the dry, unproductive time of the year.) Vast prairies of sugar cane ripple in the wind, their iridescent silver plumes 15 feet above the dusty earth. Yet beside them are fields of corn planted as straight and true as a German and a John Deere can plant them, and if there are not bougainvilleas on every roadside, you will surely find less poetic roads lined with some prosperous farmer's 2nd crop of the year.

You think that a churrasco is the ultimate in eating, as filet mignon, cupim (the flavourful meat from a brahma's hump), picanha (indescribable), chicken hearts, sausage, pork chops, bacon-wrapped chicken breast, smoked provolone cheese, and more make swift transition from a smoking charcoal grill to waiting plates and eager forks. You drink Coke that tastes like the first Coke must have tasted, and find that your helping of potatoes cannot possibly be potatoes. There are amazing cheese buns that have no flour in them, and strange and bitter herbs that will send you hurrying back to the grill for more meat.

And then someone takes you to a *rodizio* in town, and you find that you know nothing at all about how much food you can actually fit in till 15 well-dressed young men alternate their offerings at your side every minute or so, each new skewer more tempting than the last. Each waiter carves a few choice bites into your plate, but you cannot possibly swallow them all before another temptation knocks. The salad bar buffet has a mere 80 items or so, but you came for the meat, and you find that when you cannot possibly hold more meat, there is still room for grilled pineapple slices glazed with cinnamon and sugar. The espresso curls your toes and straightens your ears, and for a few moments you think (incoherently) in Portuguese. And now you'd better take a long, long walk down the colourful streets of Rio Verde, because there are rumours of another churrasco coming up.

You meet men whose first language was Portuguese speaking English by preference, and blond and blue-eyed folk who prefer Portuguese. The youth group sings Portuguese, then English, and their singing is beautiful in any language on earth. You listen to a light-skinned preacher speak in Portuguese, while his dark-skinned interpreter conveys his inspiration in English. The benches you sit on creak a bit (Grandpa built them, and he's been gone for many a year), but hundreds of souls have

heard the gospel preached in Monte Alegre's country church, and the Spirit still moves among them, warming and inspiring those who heed His voice.

Place a map of the world on your living room carpet. Put a tack in at the place you live, then fasten a string to it whose length equals 6000 miles on the map's scale. Allow yourself to be blindfolded, then turn around 3 times. Now stretch that string to its full length, pack up your children and move 500 miles beyond the end of the string. Teach the people you find how to love God and let them teach you how to cook. Learn a new language. Absorb (or be absorbed by) a new culture. In 40 years, you should have something resembling the church in Brazil today.

God and the Mennonites have transformed the grassy plains of Goiás. The church in Brazil is a beautiful, vibrant church, beset by the devil for her very vibrancy. The same is true of the church in Canada and in the US. What of the church in Costa Rica? In Argentina? In Thailand? ▲

Simplified Tax Lesson

Suppose that every day, ten men go out for beer and the bill for all ten comes to \$100. If they paid their bill the way we pay our taxes, it would go something like this:

The first four men (the poorest) would pay nothing.

The fifth would pay \$1.

The sixth would pay \$3.

The seventh would pay \$7.

The eighth would pay \$12.

The ninth would pay \$18.

The tenth man (the richest) would pay \$59.

So, that's what they decided to do.

The ten men drank in the bar every day and seemed quite happy with the arrangement, until one day, the owner threw them a curve. 'Since you are all such good customers,' he said, 'I'm going to reduce the cost of your daily beer by \$20.' Drinks for the ten now cost just \$80.

The group still wanted to pay their bill the way we pay our taxes so the first four men were unaffected. They would still drink for free.

But what about the other six men - the paying customers? How could they divide the \$20 windfall so that everyone would get his 'fair share?'

They realized that \$20 divided by six is \$3.33. But if they subtracted that from everybody's share, then the fifth man and the sixth man would each end up being paid to drink his beer.

So, the bar owner suggested that it would be fair to reduce each man's bill by roughly the same amount, and he proceeded to work out the amounts each should pay.

And so:

The fifth man, like the first four, now paid nothing (100% savings).

The sixth now paid \$2 instead of \$3 (33% savings).

The seventh now pay \$5 instead of \$7 (28% savings).

The eighth now paid \$9 instead of \$12 (25% savings).

The ninth now paid \$14 instead of \$18 (22% savings).

The tenth now paid \$49 instead of \$59 (16% savings).

Each of the six was better off than before. And the first four continued to drink for free. But once outside the restaurant, the men began to compare their savings.

‘I only got a dollar out of the \$20,’ declared the sixth man. He pointed to the tenth man, ‘but he got \$10!’

‘Yeah, that’s right,’ exclaimed the fifth man. ‘I only saved a dollar, too.’

‘It’s unfair that he got ten times more than I got’ ‘That’s true!’ shouted the seventh man. ‘Why should he get \$10 back when I got only two? The wealthy get all the breaks!’

‘Wait a minute,’ yelled the first four men in unison. ‘We didn’t get anything at all. The system exploits the poor!’

The nine men surrounded the tenth and beat him up.

The next night the tenth man didn’t show up for drinks so the nine sat down and had beers without him. But when it came time to pay the bill, they discovered something important. They didn’t have enough money between all of them for even half of the bill!

And that, ladies and gentlemen, journalists and college professors, is how our tax system works. The people who pay the highest taxes get the most benefit from a tax reduction. Tax them too much, attack them for being wealthy, and they just may not show up anymore. In fact, they might start drinking overseas where the atmosphere is somewhat friendlier.

For those who understand, no explanation is needed.

For those who do not understand, no explanation is possible. ▲

A Drug Problem

The other day someone at a store in our town read that a Methamphetamine lab had been found in an old farmhouse in the adjacent county and he asked me a rhetorical question: “Why didn’t we have a drug problem when you and I were growing up?”

I replied...

I had a drug problem when I was young. I was drug to church on Sunday morning. I was drug to church for weddings and funerals, drug to family reunions and community socials no matter the weather.

I was drug by my ears when I was disrespectful to adults. I was also drug to the woodshed when I disobeyed my parents, told a lie, brought home a bad report card, did not speak with respect, spoke ill of the teacher or preacher, or if I didn’t put forth my best effort in everything that was asked of me.

I was drug to the kitchen sink to have my mouth washed out with soap if I uttered a profanity. I was drug out to pull weeds in mom’s garden and flower beds and cockleburs out of dad’s fields. I was drug to the homes of family, friends and

neighbors to help out some poor soul who had no one to mow the yard, repair the clothesline, or chop some firewood, and, if mother had ever known that I took a single dime as a tip for this kindness, she would have drug me back to the woodshed.

Those drugs are still in my veins and they affect my behavior in everything I do, say or think. They are stronger than cocaine, crack, or heroin and, if today's children had this kind of drug problem, America would be a better place.

God bless the parents who drugged us. ▲

Life in Brazil

You Have Heard...

You have heard that the church in Brazil is going through a real shake-up, that a number have left the church and that things are looking pretty bad.

There's some truth to that.

Yet, crises cannot be measured simply by their intensity, but much more so, by what is left when pieces have quit falling.

Everything indicates that the crisis in Brazil has bottomed out and recovery is now in progress. As King David, we have wept over our losses while they were occurring. But now, as we look over the survivors, we realize it could have been much worse and that there remains a strong army.

A crisis shakes us up. Maybe that is one of the reason the Lord permits crises. Unless we are shaken up periodically, we tend to become arrogant, or stagnant. One of the first lessons the student of history learns is that there is no such thing as progress without crises, not in the secular nor in the ecclesiastical world.

Truly disastrous crises are those that teach us no lessons. Without a doubt, what we have just been through has taught us some very painful lessons. And has drawn us together. There is a feeling of hope in the air. ▲

The Other Crisis

We now refer to the financial crisis that is sending seismic shocks through the industrialized world. So far the tremors felt in Brazil have been fairly mild, which doesn't mean they won't develop into a quake.

Because of the US political and economical world dominance, it becomes the natural epicenter for what is taking place. It stands to reason that other lesser players with a solid financial basis on the world economic scene will be hit with less intensity. Brazil has a number of factors in its favor:

- 1) A stable economy with low inflation,
- 2) Limited housing loans, which means there is no mortgage crisis,
- 3) Compared with the US, very low public expenditures,

Brazil ¹⁵ News

4) Low wages, which means Brazilian industry can remain competitive,

5) Brazilians have retained their ability to tighten their belts when necessary. They complain and carry on, but they get by on less.

Locally we feel virtually no effects of this crisis. Nation-wide, there is no sense of panic, or even of great consternation.

But, this crisis is not over and a lot can still happen. Even the most prepared country may not be equal to what could happen.

It would be well to not perfunctorily chalk this crisis up to a mere unfortunate turn of events on the world economic scene. It could be the scalpel God has chosen to perform a painful surgery to excise a malignant tumor that is causing man to think he is the master and in control of his destiny.

This crisis has the potential to drastically change our life style. We, of course, hope it won't. Which shows us how malignant the tumor really is. ▲