

Notes from TOaD HaLL

Issue #1 - 2009
Still Winter



N

Never Too Late

Margie,
I've adopted the "Shirkers & Slackers" program recently after failing yet again at another more sequential organized plan. I don't need the burden of such at this time in my life--been there, done that. Blessings, Doug.

Doug should know that last August I finished reading through the Bible. Not because I finished way ahead of schedule. No. No. It took four and a half years this time, so long that the chart with little squares checked off, dotted, dashed, folded, smeared with something brown--coffee or chocolate, I hope--looks like I've been living under a bridge, which is what happens when it takes months, even years.

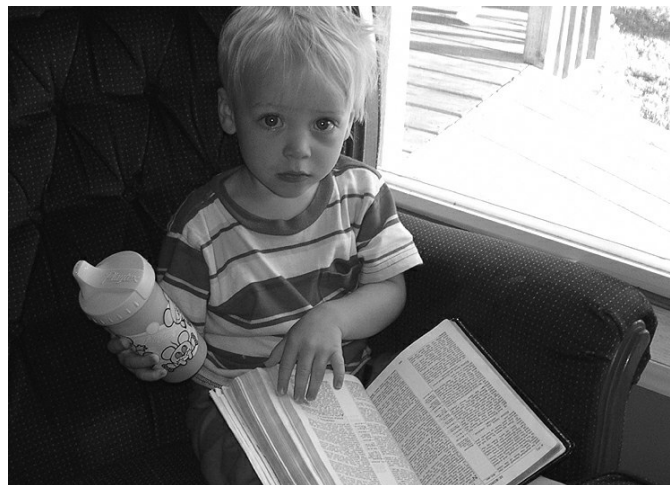
You know how in January churches, small groups, and ministries across Christendom try to recruit us to their read-through-the-Bible programs with all kinds of charts, promise keeps, and certificates of honor? And you, in a moment of naivete, guilt, or chagrin for your negligent, piggish ways, said this year I'll do it? Well, now it's February and you are already hopelessly behind, you wretch. You are skipping days, cheating by checking off all of Leviticus, and lying as you tell yourself tomorrow I'll catch up. You are working out, talking on your cell, updating Facebook, anything but reading the book of Habakkuk. Finally you just give up. If you are not one of us, please just skip this whole page. You are a good person and far more disciplined than us.

Some years ago I published a schedule I called *The Bible Reading Program for Shirkers and Slackers* because it changed the whole thing for me. (You can find it on our website along with my original arguments: www.ransomfellowship.org; or you can clip out p. 3-4 of this issue.) I think it would be good to revisit this.

Now, I have good friends of a younger generation who detest daily Bible reading as a fake gauge of holiness among Christians; they see it as a legalism. There is also the question of why read a book over and over again when I've only read, maybe five books more than once, one being C.S. Lewis' *Til We Have Faces*, which I read four times. Oh, and Francis Schaeffer's *Escape From Reason* three times because I didn't understand a word he said the first two tries. Of course, this is minus the endless repetition of children's

books that nearly wore me out and caused me to burn all of Dr. Suess' books. Naw. Just kidding, I probably took them to Salvation Army.

I agree there is nothing magical about reading through the Bible in a year. It won't subtract years in Purgatory or obligate God to favor you over the next guy. I understand this because at one time I did read to chastise myself, hoping God would love me more. I was eventually freed when for more than a year I didn't pray or read a single word and wouldn't have attended church except that Denis was on the staff of a church at the time, and I didn't



have the guts not to. It was *Being Human* by Randal Macauley and Jerram Barrs that helped me understand the acceptance of Christ; his love for me was not dependant upon anything I added to my salvation. Redemption was complete. Some of us find this more tricky if we've habitually worked to win the love of significant people, like, say, a father and not received it.

The big difference between this plan and any other I've tried is that it isn't tied to any particular date of the year. On any day of the week, say, Friday, I read the assigned portion and happily check it off. Fridays are good days and it is

true I finished all of them before I finished the Saturdays, but then I simply read wherever I was behind. I also like that reading chunks from different parts of Scripture throughout the week gives a clearer picture of the entire narrative of God's steadfast love through thousands of years of history helping me see that we are part of a story that is, yes, complete in some ways, but we still live in an unfinished chapter.

Wherever I look in life, whether globally or the most private rooms of my heart, I need a bigger picture to maintain hope. This is where the magic and the mystery of God's

Word lives: listening to his story gives me courage to keep on doing my small part, even as we wait for the final renewal and consummation of God's kingdom. I desperately need reminders of the absolute basics of who I am and where I am headed. Though it sometimes ticks me off, knowing *why* is usually not something God gives. I read, too, because it sustains and blesses not just in areas of the heart, but

in our very vocations and callings, which bring glory to God whether it is to plant a garden, map a gene, write a book, manage a financial portfolio or stumble our way through personal relationships.

So then, the next two pages are meant to be clipped, trimmed and kept handy. If you're so inclined. And if you have a story, a response, or a comment (even if negative) send it to me via the Ransom's website www.ransomfellowship.org and I will publish them later this year in an article or on my blog: <http://toadsdrinkcoffee.blogspot.com>.



Read through the Bible Program for Shirkers and Slackers

Sunday

O.T. Poetry

Psalms

1,2,3,4,5
6,7,8,9,10
11,12,13,14,15,16
17,18,19,20,21
22,23,24,25,26,27
28,29,30,31,32
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126,127,128,129,130
131,132,133,134,135
136,137,138,139,140
141,142,143,144,145
146,147,148,149,150

Proverbs

1,2,3,4,5
6,7,8,9,10
11,12,13,14,15
16,17,18,19,20
21,22,23,24,25
26,27,28,29,30,31

Ecclesiastes

1,2,3,4,5,6
7,8,9,10,11,12

Song of Solomon

1,2,3,4
5,6,7,8

Monday

Pentateuch

Genesis

1,2,3
4,5,6,7

8,9,10

11,12,13

14,15,16

17,18,19

20,21,22

23,24,25

26,27,28

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32,33,34

35,36,37

38,39,40,41

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45,46,47

48,49,50

Exodus

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38,39,40

Leviticus

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25,26,27

Numbers

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Deuteronomy

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31,32,33,34

Tuesday

O.T. History

Joshua

1,2,3,4
5,6,7
8,9,10
11,12,13,14
15,16,17
18,19,20,21
22,23,24

Judges

1,2,3,4
5,6,7
8,9,10,11
12,13,14
15,16,17,18
19,20,21

Ruth

1,2,3,4

I Samuel

1,2,3
4,5,6,7
8,9,10
11,12,13,14
15,16,17
18,19,20
21,22,23,24
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II Samuel

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11,12,13,14
15,16,17
18,19,20,21
22,23,24

I Kings

1,2,3,4
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12,13,14
15,16,17,18
19,20,21,22

II Kings

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24,25

Wednesday

O.T. History

Job

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7,8,9
10,11,12
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16,17,18
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I Chronicles

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II Chronicles

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33,34,35,36

Ezra

1,2,3,4,5
6,7,8,9,10

Nehemiah

1,2,3,4
5,6,7,8
9,10,11
12,13

Esther

1,2,3
4,5,6,7
8, 9,10

Thursday

O.T. Prophets

Isaiah

1,2,3
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7,8,9
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58,59,60
61,62,63
64,65,66

Jeremiah

1,2,3
4,5,6
7,8,9
10,11,12
13,14,15
16,17,18

Read through the Bible Program for Shirkers and Slackers



19,20,21 22,23,24 25,26,27 28,29,30 31,32,33 34,35,36 37,38,39 40,41,42 43,44,45 46,47,48 49,50,51 52	Obadiah 1 Jonah 1,2,3,4 Micah 1,2,3,4 5,6,7 Nahum 1,2,3 Habakkuk 1,2,3 Zephaniah 1,2,3 Haggai 1,2 Zechariah 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14 Malachi 1,2,3,4	Luke 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14,15 16,17,18 19,20,21 22,23,24 John 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14,15 16,17,18 19,20,21 Acts 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14,15 16,17,18 19,20,21 22,23,24 25, 26,27,28	8,9,10 11,12,13 Galatians 1,2,3 4,5,6 Ephesians 1,2,3 4,5,6 Philippians 1,2,3,4 Colossians 1,2 3,4 I Thessalonians 1,2,3 4,5 II Thessalonians 1,2,3 I Timothy 1,2,3 4,5,6 II Timothy 1,2 3,4 Titus 1,2,3 Philemon 1 Hebrews 1,2 3,4 5,6 7,8 9,10 11,12,13	James 1,2,3 4,5 I Peter 1,2 3,4,5 II Peter 1,2,3 I John 1,2,3 4,5 II John 1 III John 1 Jude 1 Revelation 1,2,3 4,5,6,7 8,9,10 11,12,13 14,15,16 17,18,19 20,21,22
Lamentations 1,2 3,4,5 Ezekiel 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14,15 16,17,18 19,20,21 22,23,24 25,26,27 28,29,30 31,32,33 34,35,36 37,38,39 40,41,42 43,44,45 46,47,48	Friday N.T. History Matthew 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14,15 16,17,18 19,20,21 22,23,24 25,26 27,28 Mark 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 13,14,15,16	Saturday N.T. Epistles Romans 1,2,3 4,5 6,7 8,9 10,11 12,13 14,15,16 I Corinthians 1,2 3,4,5 6,7,8 9,10,11 12,13,14 15,16 II Corinthians 1,2 3,4 5,6,7		
Daniel 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9 10,11,12 Hosea 1,2,3,4,5 6,7,8,9,10 11,12,13,14 Joel 1,2,3 Amos 1,2,3 4,5,6 7,8,9				

Source:

Adapted with the help of Luis Veiga and Christine Harwood from *Why Pray?* by Douglas F. Kelly (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt; 1989) pp. 191-195.

Ransom Notes

This year our board of directors met here in Rochester despite some who complained bitterly about the January weather. (See our website for bios <http://www.ransomfellowship.org/people.asp>) Henry T. couldn't make it as he was hospitalized with a vicious infection. (This is what you get, we say, when you practice pathology and live around all those dangerous bugs. Tsk.) My good friend, Peggy was coming with him to prepare meals, but also needed to cancel. We suffered, but managed with help from simpler menus and local friends who pitched in. I managed my control issues with exhortations from Denis who said, "I'm in no mood to tell you to sit down."

We love our time together with these friends who've walked beside us for many years, who bear our burdens, but also share their own hearts - their own joys and griefs. We find both accountability and security with them. Denis and I marvel not only at their love, but are pleased, challenged, and sometimes even amused when they don't hesitate to change our plans and priorities. Isolation and independence in ministry is not a safe thing and we've seen how it can wreck lives and callings.

During our two days together we spent mornings reflecting on topics that have a broader application to life, not just board business. The following isn't a thorough summary, but more a "providential crapshoot," (Which became a theme when we decided next year's meeting would be in St. Louis, and everyone moaned "Will it be WARMER there?" And Mary Guthrie replied, "it will be a providential crapshoot.") ...and because I can't stop thinking about our discussion.

The first was led by Donald Guthrie, professor at Covenant Seminary. We looked at I Cor. 1: 4-9, focusing on what it means that God will make us strong or "sustain" us to the end. If you are in a ministry what would that take? Steve commented that as he talks nationwide to successful Christian leaders, a common theme is expressed: "My ministry is going pretty well; I am doing horribly." According to Donald's research, ongoing, unresolved conflict is the primary reason people leave ministry. But isn't that often why any of us leave people and situations in life?

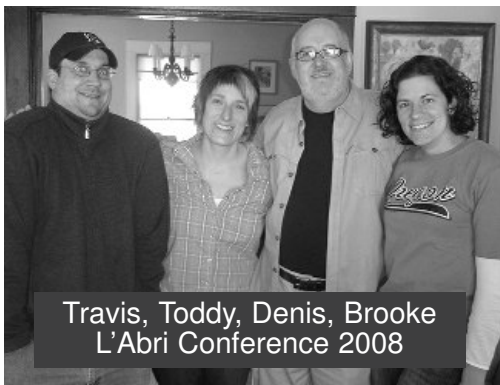
Donald proposes five factors that contribute to sustainability. One area he mentioned struck me because of my personal struggle with it: "Self Care." Self-denial and martyrdom seem way more godly. And yet, before God, I sense the truth of this comment: "If you cannot look someone in the eye with a legitimate need and say I cannot help you, you'll be dead." Really? Well, if not dead, then pretty sick. There is a finiteness to our giving and a point where we can pass from serving into sin when we assume the burden of all that's wrong with the world. Only God sustains us to the end.

The next morning Steve Garber, Director of the Washington Institute for Faith <http://www.washingtoninst.org> led a discussion about the tension of being found by God but often feeling like, to us, it is too late to make much difference.



Ransom Notes continued

Daniel 9 was read and we discussed the pronouncement from God to Daniel, "You are greatly loved." Daniel is assured of this on three different occasions. Here is the truth that we are not lost, we have a home, that God is for us. And yet it is also true that "desolations are decreed" (Daniel 9:26). So why, he asked, Ransom Fellowship? What does the word "Ransom" mean in the midst of this tension? Because the deepest of human longings is to be in a place where we are accepted; where we are home. We want Ransom Fellowship to represent the hidden reality that desolation is not the end of the story. Instead the orphan's wildest dream will come true - we will be ransomed, rescued and led by the hand to our true home.



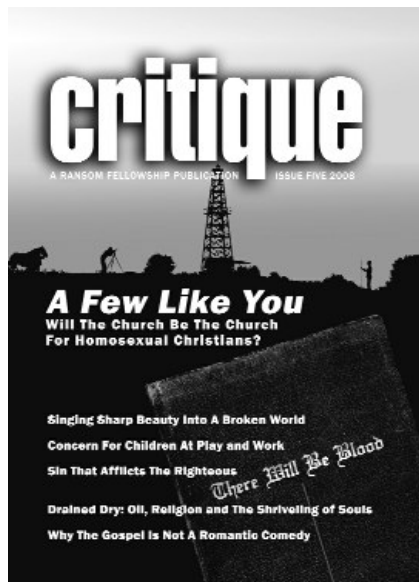
Travis, Toddy, Denis, Brooke
L'Abri Conference 2008

At year's end Ransom squeaked through financially and we have a bit to start the year. We caught up on expenses. It was pretty amazing. Many friends have faithfully cared for us, some for years, others who are new to us. How can we thank you for praying and for giving? We

don't take it for granted, and we don't say God is good because of this or that, he is always good. When or if we get down to "chewing bones" we'll keep praying and watching how God changes our course or provides in ways we hadn't imagined. Trusting God shouldn't be new to any of us, nor should we be discouraged when the future is unclear; he requires trust from all of us whether in a ministry or not.

This year the board said it was anguishing to make decisions about budget cuts. (We get to leave during that part. Conflict of interest.) But, I can't emphasize enough how comfortable we were with the process, and how eager we are to see what will happen this year. We are comforted by belonging to a community of friends and new possibilities for flourishing in uncertain times. Is that crazy?

One necessary cut will be in publishing *Critique*--fewer issues and pages, but if we stay on time with our print schedules you'll still hear plenty from us. The most crushing cut will be giving up our Learjet and the Greek island I'm so fond of.



Coming Up

February 13-15.

Rochester L'Abri Conference.

"Proclaiming All God's Wondrous Works: Creation, Redemption, and Future Glory." Denis will give a plenary ("Creation as Glorious Ruin") along with workshops on the unlovely, or ugly in art & life. I will have a conversation with a young couple - organic farmers. Hope to see many of you there.

March 13-15.

Concord, NC, Providence PCA.

Denis will do a weekend conference on engaging culture. Check their website for details. <http://www.ppcnet.net/>.

March.

My first column on food "Comforts and Delights" will be published by *Comment Magazine*. <http://www.cardus.ca/comment/>.

Praying about:

Dates for Denis to teach classes at BEAMM, a Texas/Mexico border ministry. Possibilities and dates to do a film festival in Knoxville.

Keeping up with our printing schedule, getting publications out on time.

Understanding and taking the time to write. Quiet time in one spot.

Balance between writing responsibilities and reaching out to others.

Thanks to God for the wonderful time Denis had teaching a class on small groups at Covenant Seminary with Dr. Guthrie.

Thanks for some prof-guys who want to take a road trip with Donald to Toad Hall and replace some kitchen cabinets! Really?!

Thanks for continued friendship with younger generation that inspires us being just who they are. And, ya, you older guys, too.

F Family Notes

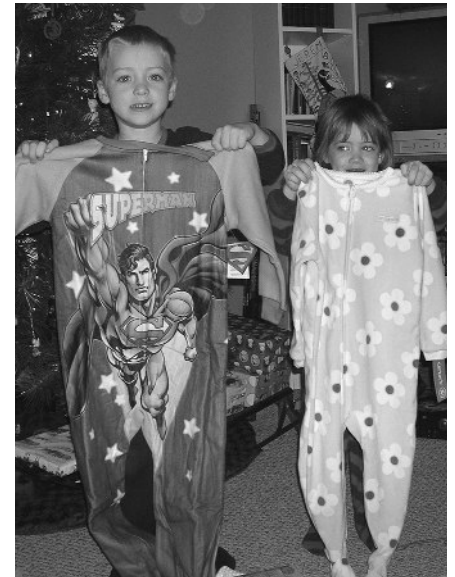


For you.
From Isobel.



Last year was our 40th wedding anniversary! I know! Much grace has been required for two flawed people to love each other this long. We spent 2 weeks alone in CO.

Our grandchildren amuse, delight, and call out fierce and fervent prayers from us.



Ansom & Paige
get footie PJs.



Movie night at the LaRose house.



We're thankful for the way Marsena & Jeff have made Denis' Aunt Ruth a part of their home & lives.



Our oldest granddaughter, Manessah.



Superboys: Lishy, Kaiden, Mason.

F

Final Notes

The Lord is My Shepherd

Last night I had trouble sleeping and watched the clock from 1:08 a.m. to 5:30 or thereabouts. At 2:15 I put lotion on my hands--they were dry and annoying. I shifted pillows. I snuggled to Denis' warm back and got too hot. I folded the blanket back and waited for chill air to settle. I watched the black pine sway against the night sky. At 3:10 I ate a tiny bowl of granola and raisins, watching the darkened neighborhood from the kitchen window. I slipped back into bed. I tried not to think or even pray for Shaun who is having a severe asthma attack, or for friends whose marriage has imploded, or Dad who needs his foot amputated, or any other thing that needs to be left in God's hands while I sleep. Cautiously turned on the bedside lamp and worked a Sudoku, hoping the light wouldn't wake Denis. He didn't stir. I solved it by cheating a little.

My dreams are vivid. Sometimes troubled. Men intending evil get in the house....ah, well, that's another topic. So then, finally fell asleep reciting the 23rd Psalm, not counting sheep, but imagining I was one. What sort of hillside would it take to make me drowsy, sleepy? Two hours later I woke and remembered leaving a familiar house, someone was calling me out. I stepped into a field of bright grass dotted with flowers and grazing animals. A row of ducks filed past. Then another. A familiar and beloved dog romped beside me. I scolded him for snapping, in his doggy fashion, a bumble bee hanging from a clover blossom. He spit it out looking chagrined. An old ewe, black-faced and square, her gray fleece scruffy and stuck with bits of straw approached. My fingers twined in the wool of her back as she led me toward a group of Percherons grazing across the field. One of them, a dappled mare, lifted her head and walked toward me. I knelt down, waiting, a handful of offering in my hand. Towering above me, she lowered her head, her lips quietly popping, and gently pulled the alfalfa from my hand and ate. I woke wondering what is this place and who has called me here?

Even, perhaps for some, only in dreams our lives track through the nights, through the years toward God, toward true home, toward inevitable joy and lightness of being.

Wishing you shepherded to green pastures.

Warmly,



Margie Haack



Toad Hall is the name of our home, christened by our children. It is from the book *The Wind in the Willows*, a favorite of ours. In it Mole, a shy yet daring character, and Ratty, who is much nicer and more sensible than his name would imply, have many adventures along the river. One of their friends is Toad of Toad Hall. Toad is something of an aristocrat and lives in a mansion. Otherwise, he has very little to commend him and really doesn't deserve friends since he is a callous liar, lacks common sense and, well, he lives for the pleasure of the moment—which brings him no end of trouble.

When we moved to Minnesota in 1981, our children had rarely seen such tall homes with their imposing three stories. They were used to one-story adobes which rambled along in the hot New Mexico sun. So, to our children, a midwestern Gothic four-square looked amazingly like a mansion. Possibly even as great a house as Toad Hall.

Managing Editor - Matthew Hundley

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