

FEATURE ARTICLE

Modern Hedges

by Bill Moller

"What is a hedge and why does it exist?" A professor in one of my college courses once asked a very similar question. While attending a 100-year old agriculture college with over 600 acres of grounds and farmland surrounding the campus, I became acutely aware of hedges. They lined the walks and the gardens and the roads. They helped define where the orchards ended and the pastures began -- where the ball fields stopped and parking lots started. Some were low and spreading and others were tall and seemingly insurmountable. A few had thorns and others had flowers. While most were designed either to protect the casual stroller or the vegetation planted nearby, a few were intended as frames for beautiful landscapes.

Not one of these horticultural barricades was formed naturally. All were planned and planted by human hands with positive, useful intentions. Many were constructed so long ago that the gardeners who planted them were no longer alive. On one side of campus lines of boxwood trailed off a road and ended abruptly in the middle of a field; around the corner privet rows suddenly turned as if to avoid an unseen structure. At one time the design of these hedges made sense, but now their purposes provoke a mystery, their presence an obstacle and an occasional hindrance.

Thousands of years ago the leaders of the Jews developed a hedge of their own known as the "oral

law." It wasn't a physical barrier intended to direct movement or focus attention. Instead it was a set of rules – hundreds of rules, which were intended to protect and preserve a belief system and a way of life that had been handed down to them through the centuries. According to the website *HistoricJesus.com* these rules went above and beyond the commands listed in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. The site noted the example of Moses' command that his people should not work on the Sabbath. However, the subsequent hedge listed over 39 kinds of prohibited work. Cultural traditions expanded the list even more, though Moses had not, himself, documented them.

In Jesus' day the religious leaders, the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, used the hedge of rules to direct precisely the manner in which they conducted their lives. Sadly, however, this hedge which was supposed to preserve their religious purity became more important than the faith on which it was based. It became vital that they follow the hedge rules in an effort to avoid sin, and doing what was right was almost incidental.

A clear example of the hedge obliterating faith can be found in the biblical passage of Matthew 12, which describes Jesus and his hungry disciples picking and eating heads of grain, as they walked through a field one Sabbath. Here the Pharisees confronted Jesus with the statement "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." But Jesus, voicing a

(Continued on page 2)

BOOK REVIEW

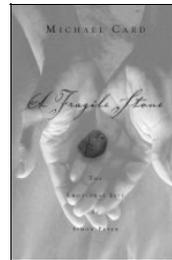
A Fragile Stone

The Emotional Life of Simon Peter

by Michael Card

Some of you may be familiar with Michael Card as a talented musician and creative singer/songwriter, but did you know that he was an insightful author as well? Among a number of books he has written are *The Parable of Joy*, a 1995 compilation of devotional writings he had prepared for a Bible study on the gospel of John including his own

(Continued on page 3)



MUSIC REVIEW

PHILLY LIVE!

by Phil Keaggy

It was a long time coming, but last year Phil Keaggy finally released his eagerly awaited DVD, *PHILLY LIVE!* Originally filmed in October of 2001 in Philadelphia, PA, this performance contains all the trademark stylings and solos one would expect to experience when attending a concert by one of the finest guitar players in contemporary music.

Listening to a Phil Keaggy CD is always a pleasurable experience. His melodies (often reminiscent of the Beatles or Cream) and his moving lyrics meld together to create a delightful

(Continued on page 3)



(Continued from page 1: Feature Article)

clear rebuke, instructed that they would not have "condemned the innocent" had they understood that God desires "compassion, and not a sacrifice."

Another excellent example of the hedge effect can be observed in Jesus' words to the lawyers and Pharisees described in Luke 14. In this passage Jesus was visiting the house of one of the Pharisees on the Sabbath and he saw, lying before him, a "man suffering from dropsy." Aware that his actions were being watched carefully by the others, he asked them "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" Their silence was a clear indication of the hedge rule. Jesus went on to heal the man and admonished the leaders for their hypocrisy.

Our modern hedges are much less obvious. They take the form of tradition, routine and habit. Attend one church business meeting and you will witness modern hedges at their most powerful. Try to suggest that the Lord's Supper be observed in a manner which more closely resembled the first event (lying around a table, breaking bread and drinking wine while leaning on each other) and you will probably be humored and smiled at, but there is little chance that the "traditional" method will be changed. Or, propose an open prayer request time be added to the Sunday service and you may hear the reply, "That can't be done. It might cause the service to run past noon."

Today, the almost ritual eating of fish on Fridays has all but disappeared from the lives of many Catholic believers. Those in most denominations have watched casual attire replace the nearly ceremonial donning of our "Sunday Best" before going to church. Even the widely venerated King James

Version of the Bible has, in many cases, given way to a plethora of highly accurate and easily understood modern translations. Some changes were fought with passion while others were enthusiastically ushered in.

Renovaré, a Christian organization that emphasizes spiritual balance, has compiled two books: *Devotional Classics* and *Spiritual Classics*. One focuses on the writings of prominent figures from the past 20 centuries of Christian history and the other is centered on the Spiritual disciplines (i.e. prayer, simplicity, worship, silence, etc.). Both reference individuals from many denominational backgrounds. At a conference I attended a few years ago, Richard Foster (founder of Renovaré) talked about the importance of gleaning the best from Christian practices that have developed over the years while looking past the traditions they came from to see their true value in worship.

In Henry Blackaby's book *Experiencing God*, he writes about the way God communicates with us through his Holy Spirit by means of the Bible, prayer, circumstances and other believers. If we assume this to be true, and I believe it is, then we have to start looking for any hedges we may have around us that might keep us from experiencing God -- hedges that lead us into empty fields or around obstructions that don't exist.

When we look down the road at another church do we see the good they do? Do we admire their dedication to Christ? Or do we point an accusing finger because one of their practices cuts across one of our hedge rules. But wait! Aren't they "believers," too? Don't they read the Bible and pray and experience circumstances orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, just



as we do? Maybe there is some truth to what they say and do, and maybe our hedge has grown a little too high.

If at this point you are a little uncomfortable with these ideas, relax! I'm not suggesting another confederation of denominations, and I am definitely not saying we should compromise the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. What I am saying is maybe we need to come out of our "whitewashed tombs" (Matt 23) and start tearing down those hedges.

Next time you sit in a Bible study or a Sunday school class or a prayer meeting take note of how you are worshipping. Are you performing by rote, or moving in the Spirit? Are you reading books and studying topics that will help grow your faith or simply repeating the same things you discussed last week? Are you open to learning more about God even when the lesson challenges your traditional understandings? Or, are you leaning on a hedge that is keeping your neighbor out and you isolated?

And what about the hedges we erect around ourselves that keep us from building relationships so necessary for authentic community? We often display an "I've-got-it-all-together" facade, pretending that we have everything worked out, that we need no outside help. John Ortberg in his book, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*,

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 1: Book Review)

translation of the gospel from the original Greek text. The 2002 book *Scribbling in the Sand* explores the vital role Christian creativity plays in our lives and worship. His latest book *A Sacred Sorrow: Meeting God in the Lost Language of Lament* has just appeared on bookstore shelves. But this is a review of his book *A Fragile Stone*, a personal and intimate look at Simon Peter.

This very clever and often touching book takes an unconventional tack. Because of Michael Card's artistic background, the author is able to illustrate details about Peter which the average researcher might overlook - little bits and pieces that help define Peter's emotional life. Some examples include the fact that Jesus gives Simon the new name Cephas (which translates as Peter) but never calls him by that name. Or, that Peter had a distinctive Galilean accent (Mark 14:70 KJV). Or, that he was married and his wife accompanied him on at least one of their missionary journeys (1 Cor. 9:5). These Scriptural references along with the many extra-biblical sources are carefully woven together by Card to form a fascinating work of art that paints a vivid and fully formed interpretation of Simon Peter.

An old adage goes something like this, "If you want to get to know someone, talk to his or her friends." This concept is the basis for Michael Card's study of Peter. If you want to know Jesus, studying Simon Peter is a good place to start. Peter was there from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when his brother Andrew told him "We have found the Messiah." Peter witnessed the Transfiguration, experienced walking on water, was included in the washing of the feet, and

observed many of Christ's miracles. He also faced Christ's most powerful rebuke, "Get behind me Satan," (Matt 16:23), and arguably His most touching reconciliation, "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15.) Who was closer to Jesus than Peter? Some might argue that John was closer, but Michael Card presents a credible case for suggesting, Peter.

Increasingly I am seeing in books such as this one, a new way to study the Bible. The traditional method is to read, study, meditate upon, and reread Scripture until you know it better than your own name. This is an invaluable process. Nevertheless, reading a book such as *A Fragile Stone*, which is steeped in Scripture chapter and verse, can be an excellent complement to the traditional method, provided cross-references and footnotes are read as part of the textual material. It is also a way to place the life of Jesus in context.

Michael Card walks the reader through the life of Peter, examining key points of interest along the way. In the process Card reveals facets of Peter's personality and faith most of us would seldom observe on our own. And, at each step along the way we see Jesus. The One we really want to know. ♦

More info at: www.michaelcard.com

(Continued from page 1: Music Review)

sound. The term "unique" is often overstated, but one would be hard-pressed to find two Keaggy collections that are at all similar. Each has a special feel all its own. However, the one constant throughout his music career of more than thirty years of writing and performing is his ability to soar into the stratosphere and back again on a six-stringed craft from Gibson, or

Langejans or *Olson* or *Zion*.

It has been my privilege to witness Phil Keaggy's masterful guitar work a number of times over the past several years, and I am consistently astonished by the ease with which he pieces together elaborate arrangements using little more than a guitar and his beloved *JamMan* looping mixer. In the first sixty seconds of the DVD, watching a split-screen, we are treated to close-up shots of Phil's hands moving effortlessly over the strings of his guitar, and his feet shifting from one "effects" pedal to another -- changing and capturing different rhythms, baselines and riffs with incredible precision. Then, as one watches his face carefully, a subtle transformation seems to occur. His weight shifts on his feet, his head cocks ever so slightly, his posture adjusts, and with a fleeting glance to the audience he's off the ground into full flight -- to the sheer delight of everyone present.

Song after song of matchless chord and melody combinations fill this DVD and truly express the genuine flavor of a Phil Keaggy concert. But, in addition to that are the bonus tracks which include a special piece called "Back to Youngstown" (Phil's home town in Ohio) Here he describes the accident that injured his hand when he was just a young boy. We are treated, as well, to a great conversation with Phil in his studio, and observe interviews with other artists, producers and friends he has worked with over the years. Finally, a fascinating "comment" track has been included in which Phil and company talk over the concert footage, discussing their thoughts and feelings about the various songs, equipment and methods used to produce the DVD. ♦

More info at: www.philkeaggy.com

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(Continued from page 2: Feature Article)
reminds us of the necessity -- and the risk -- of self-disclosure when he states, "Risk is an indispensable aspect of authentic self-disclosure... If we try to handle our fallenness on our own, if we try to keep it a secret, eventually it will destroy us. God has made a better way. He has formed a community in which people can live with unveiled [hedgeless] faces. It really is possible to do life without hiding. All it takes

is trust." And, I might add, the assurance that God loves you, no matter what!

Whether hedges sprout on a college campus, settle in a church pew, or become part of your personality, most will grow beyond their original intended purpose and become detrimental barriers. The BBC Gardening website contains very practical information about how and when to prune hedges; consider, if you will, the spiritual implications:

Even the best-kept hedges sometimes need reducing in size. Few [hedges] tolerate hard pruning, but [some] respond well to renovation. However, make sure this is done in stages and in the right season.

So, let's get out our garden (of Eden) tools and begin the ongoing process of skillfully pruning our Hedges. ♦

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