

The background of the cover is a photograph of a stone wall on the right and tall green plants, possibly irises, on the left. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white grid pattern.

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*Equipping the church to reach the world
for the glory of God through Christ*

The Sovereign God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sovereignty, Grace and Glory 2

Mission to Orange 4

Pablo and Martha Garcia 5

Meet the Staff: Ed Nilsen 6

Sovereignty, Grace and Glory

2

By Pastor Bob



The secret to real estate: location, location, location. The secret to learning: review, review, review. The secret to the Christian life... we've heard them before, but maybe not enough in unison: glory, grace and sovereignty. Three words which summarize a mature view of living the life of Christ. Pain and pleasure, the daily experience of all believers, must be understood in the light of those three bedrock words: sovereignty, grace and glory.

The Cross: Sovereign Grace over Pain

Let's begin with pain. God sovereignly controls (not necessarily causes) all pain so that it works for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28). He does so by His grace (the work of Christ on the Cross, Ephesians 2:10; Romans 5:1-5; Galatians 6:14-15). "[E]very good thing – indeed, even every bad thing that God turns for good – was obtained for us by the cross of Christ. Apart from faith in Christ, sinners get only judgment...everything that we enjoy, as people who trust Christ, is owing to his death. His suffering absorbed all the judgment that guilty sinners deserved and purchased all the good that forgiven sinners enjoy. Therefore all our boasting in these things should be a boasting in the cross of Christ," writes John Piper.

Pain: For the Glory of God

That doesn't make pain in and of itself pleasurable; however, knowing the final result of the pain, and the God of all grace working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, helps us in enduring the pain. That means that not all pain is bad; or better, no pain is bad... no pain has its ultimate results as bad, but good (Genesis 45:4-9; 50:20; Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-30). Take a moment and read these well known verses again. God is able to use pain, pain which comes from sinful motives and actions, and by His sovereign control, graciously cause Himself to be glorified. When the playground bully hits me in the arm, wishing to hurt me and make me afraid, his intentions and the results of his actions are sovereignly changed so that I become more like Jesus and better able to serve him: I am ultimately happier and serve the ends of God (His glory) with more vigor.

The Glory of God: Our Pleasure

If your heads hurts, that's alright. You may want to reread the paragraphs above and do some thinking about the circumstances that God allows to come your way. However, there is much more to life than pain. God sends much good our way. In fact, all pleasure, all joy and love and kindness come as a gift from Him. The grace purchased by Jesus in saving us are the source of all our joys. And He wants us to enjoy and rejoice in his good gifts: flowers, rain, friendship, love, juicy steaks, cool orange juice, cozy sweaters, the athletic achievements of the Olympics, marriage, children, laughter, prayer, color, light, cool breezes, warm sunshine. They all point us to our Sovereign who loves us immeasurably. Of course, the good King wants happy subjects – they reflect on His good reign and glory. Remember, the party is not ultimately about us, but Him. Purchased by His grace, He sovereignly gives and gives for our pleasure and His glory. Our pleasure is glued to His glory as surely as roots are to a tree. Our ultimate pleasure is in living for what we were designed, His glory (Isaiah 43:7).

Better than Dark Pleasures: Sufferings Transformed into our Good

But just as pain has its good and hard sides, so does pleasure. We must be careful. In the words of David Henderson, "Not all pleasure is good and not all pain is bad. Much that gives us pleasure is bad, a self-destructive and self-serving reflex deserving of God's harsh denunciation (See Ephesians 2:1-3). Neither the pleasure we find in vengeance for raw wounds of the heart, nor the fulfillment we find in sexual expression divorced from love or commitment – nor any of the thousand other destructive pleasures into which we so readily fall – is good. Because of our fallen nature we often find pleasure down the dark alleys of sin instead of in the bright boulevards of God's grace. At the same time, much that gives us pain is actually for our own good. Like

the growing 'Youch!' that comes screaming up our arm as a warning when we touch a stove, pain can be used by God for our benefit. The very things we most want to run from are often the things he has a way of turning to our good. He uses our struggles with sin, our losses, and our hardships in two main ways: to deepen our faith and develop our character. 'We also rejoice in our sufferings,' writes Paul, 'because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us' (Romans 5:3-5).

Glory, Grace and Sovereignty – much to ponder and rejoice and live by.

Mission to Orange

By Steve Hicks

The Taft Avenue missions team hopes that everyone had a wonderful Christmas, and the new year will bring exciting discoveries of God's love and grace. We thank you for your support during 2011.

One of the most exciting and fun things to occur in December was the neighborhood caroling on the 18th and 21st. Most of the missions team participated in going door to door, singing Christmas songs and inviting our neighbors to church to celebrate Christmas with our congregation. Our neighbors responded to the caroling in many interesting ways: many came out onto their porches and sang with us, some thanked us, saying that they missed this Christmas tradition, while others told us that, although they had their own church, they would pass along our church information to friends who didn't have their own church.

Our desire, of course, is that many would come to know Christ in a way that brings salvation. And, for those who are believers, we hoped to bring the joy that only knowing Christ can bring. We will continue to go into our surrounding neighborhood in 2012, praying that the Holy Spirit would use us to bring folks to Christ, and to make our church available to those without a church home.

Missionaries in Mexico: Pablo and Martha Garcia

By Bill Petersen



Pablo and Martha Garcia

Pablo and Martha write that this year they have been learning to give thanks and to stop to name both the blessings of the Lord and the hardships that they and others around them have lived through. In naming, they feel that they purposely recognize God's hand "in the mix" and are called to thanksgiving.

They thank God for those who have passed through our doorway for short- and long-term lodging whom we have been honored to invest in.

They thank God for discipleship, creating strong believers in Mexico, for the new believers in the Sunday morning class and the men who attend Pablo's small group. The men are diving deep into the principles of discipleship and embracing the concept of Christ not only being their Savior but also the Lord of their lives.

They thank God for Cuba, for the two mission trips taken to the Provinces of Pinar del Rio and Santiago de Cuba during 2011 to equip leaders for the implementation of discipleship in their churches.

And finally, they thank God for family. It has been a special year in which they welcomed their first grandbaby, sweet Mischa. Martha's mother came for seven months and while here, celebrated her 70th birthday and became a Great Grandma. Jake got his first car. Ben and Jeanelle celebrated their first year anniversary. Countless people have come through their door to be ministered to. Finally, they thank the Taft Avenue family for continuing to faithfully support them in prayer and in financial gifts.

Pablo and Martha send their greeting: "May you be richly blessed this Christmas season, with every heavenly blessing."

Meet the Staff: Ed

with Ingrid Chung

Who is the man who leads us into worship on Sundays? Discover here!



Ed, Roxanne and Irina Nilsen

What brought you to Taft Avenue?

It was a long road. After many years of volunteering in the church, I felt a call to be in a staff position. I had always felt qualified, but didn't have "the call" until 2003. That's when I first went 'on staff' with a local church. As time progressed I felt a greater call and passion to be in a leadership role, in music, in partnership with my wife, Roxanne. In 2008, I heard of a position open at Taft Avenue. We both felt strongly that the Lord had provided and guided us to this opportunity, and after four months of interviewing and "auditioning," we started in July 2008.

What do you like about working here?

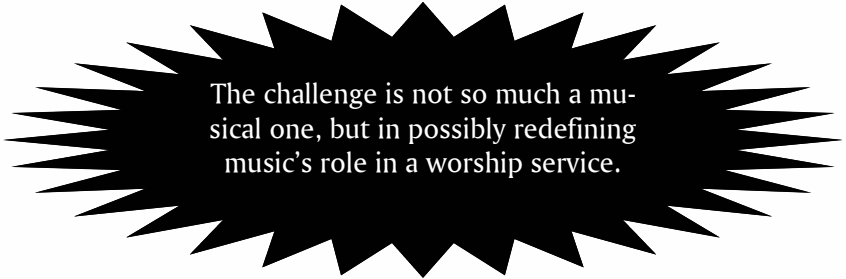
I'm very passionate about what I do – playing, singing, leading. So just having a place to call home where I get to do what I do is a tremendous blessing to my family and me. I also enjoy the leadership side of things – getting people to do things they might not otherwise do without leadership present. All leaders are unique, I think, and I appreciate the church's openness and willingness to give me an opportunity to demonstrate my own unique leadership style. Part of this includes teaching and mentoring others, so that they can be leaders some day, too.

Tell us about your family.

I have been married to my wife, Roxanne, for 28 years. We met after being asked to sing together by a mutual friend while living in the dorms at Pacific Christian College in Fullerton, California. We have two daughters, Irina and Natasha, ages 21 and 19. Both girls were adopted seven years ago from St. Petersburg, Russia.

What do you do in your spare/non-Taft Avenue time?

I teach guitar at my studio in Mission Viejo 4-5 days per week. I've been teaching since 2003 and really enjoy it. A few times per month, Roxanne and I try to go on 'date nights' where we sing and perform at local venues. We love being together and singing together, so anytime we get a chance to do it – it just seems like we're on a date. I also like to exercise at the local gym and enjoy late night neighborhood walks with our dog (a beagle named Rhonda), and my iPod. I usually listen to music or self-made recordings of scripture readings. In the summer, when it's warmer, Roxanne and I enjoy kayaking. Roxanne likes to go on "cruises," so I bought a double kayak for our 20th anniversary. It's a bit smaller than a regular cruise ship, has no sleeping accommodations AND requires self-propelling, but it's readily available (parked in our garage) whenever we want to take it out for a spin, or a splash.



The challenge is not so much a musical one, but in possibly redefining music's role in a worship service.

What's a particular challenge about working here?

I think a challenge for anyone in music ministry is meeting and satisfying the various 'tastes' for music that exist in a local church body, especially in a smaller, intergenerational congregation like Taft Avenue. The challenge is not so much a musical one, but in possibly redefining music's role in a worship service – to encourage and facilitate the church to wholly and actively participate in the worship of Jesus, in unity and love.

Who are your favorite musicians/songwriters? Favorite genre?

My favorite is anything written or produced by John Schreiner. I always find that his music ministers to my soul and leaves me encouraged. I met John in 2004 and we've become good friends since then. I also love songs written by Walt Harrah. We do some of his songs at Taft Avenue, and Roxanne and I have recorded some as well.

What's one thing you're looking forward to this year?

I'm looking forward to seeing our church grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the number of non-believers being saved.