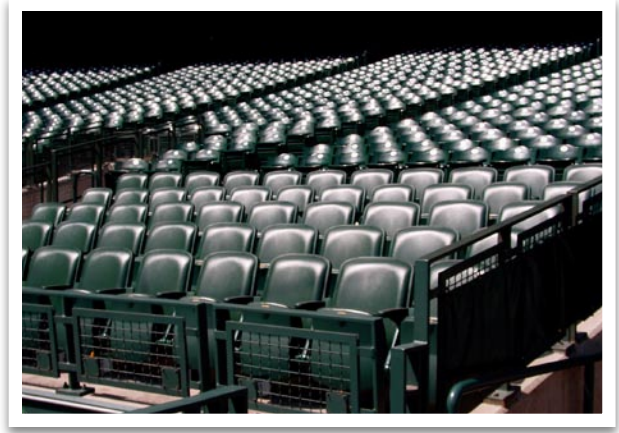


Lost in *New Orleans*

By C. Baxter Kruger, Ph.D.

When I was 12 years old, my parents took me and my two brothers and my best friend to New Orleans to see the Minnesota Vikings play the Saints. Being from a small town in south Mississippi, I considered the chance to go to New Orleans a great treat in itself. But given that the Vikings were my all-time favorite football team, this trip was one of the highlights of my youth. The three hours it took to drive to New Orleans seemed to me an eternal day. But we finally got there, and my dad parked the car. We took a trolley to the old Tulane stadium. It was a magnificent afternoon, and the game was everything I had dreamed it would be, including a Viking rout.



Twelve years old, New Orleans, Tulane Stadium, and it was getting dark. I was a long way from being street-smart, but I knew to the roots of my soul that I was in trouble. At some point it dawned on me to find a policeman, but there were none. I could not find another person, let alone a policeman, and I walked around that entire stadium at least three times.

“As I sat there, lost and alone, my 12 years of life flashing before my eyes, the stadium lights suddenly went off!”

After the game, we were walking down the exit ramp when I looked over the rail and saw three busses lined up, and I recognized the huge men boarding the busses as the Viking players themselves. Without thinking, I ran down the ramp and somehow made my way to the players. I actually shook hands with Carl Eller and was inches away from Alan Page and Wally Hilgenberg. And I got to touch Coach Bud Grant's hat. Needless to say, I was in heaven.

Then one by one, the busses began to drive away. I remember watching them roll alongside the stadium and turn left, out of sight. When the last bus was gone, I looked around and there was not another person in sight, not one. The greatest of all fears seized my little heart. I suddenly realized that I had no idea where my parents were, and worse, that they had no idea where I was. Sheer panic gripped me. I did not have a clue as to what to do. My heart was racing so fast I could not even think.

By this time I was frantic and crying my eyes out. There were plenty of houses around, but I was not about to go to one for help. The only thing I knew to do was to try to find my way back to the car. I thought of the trolley that we had taken to the stadium, but which one? North and south were meaningless to me on the streets of New Orleans, and I had no idea which direction to go anyway. I did not even remember any street names. But I had some money in my pocket, so I found a trolley car and got on and told the driver that I was lost. He told me to get in the back of the trolley and keep my eyes peeled, and if I saw anything, to pull the cable and he would stop.

As the trolley made its way around New Orleans, I jumped from one side to the other, pressing my face against the cold windows, hoping, just hoping, that I would see something that I recognized—a tree, a building, a street, a parked car, who knows—maybe even my parents. But it did not happen. I rode that car all the way around its circuit until it got back to the stadium. Not knowing what else to do, I got off and walked around the stadium all the way back to where the busses had been. Alone and scared to death, I sat down under an oak tree in a pile of leaves. I remember

fiddling with a stick and crying, but there were no more tears. It was pitiful.

But things got worse. As I sat there, my 12 years of life flashing before my eyes, the stadium lights suddenly went off. I have never experienced darkness like that. Nearly 30 years later, I can still see the darting, haunting shadows of that place and still smell the concrete and hear the leaves rustling in the cold wind. I don't know how long I sat there, but it seemed like hours, certainly longer than the eternal ride to the stadium. It was so dark. I was so alone and cold.

And then suddenly, the stadium lights came on, and before I knew what was happening, I was on my feet running around the stadium. Someone had to have turned the lights on, and I was determined with the fire of the universe to find that someone. And then it happened. Over the noise of my footsteps and the pounding of my fears, I heard the most blessed sound in all of New Orleans, the most blessed sound I had ever heard in my life. One shouted word.

"Baxter!" It was my father.

No one had to tell me what to do. No one had to tell me what that word meant. No one had to tell me how to apply the word to my life. My name, shouted by my father, spoke the hope of a thousand volumes. As with a great geyser in Yellowstone National Park, the unbearable tension was instantly relieved. The overwhelming fear, the frantic searching took a left turn like the busses and were gone. And in their place arose the simplest and most

wonderful of all things: security, assurance, rest.

This story is a living picture of how Christianity works. It is not about rules and regulations or frantically trying to save ourselves. Christianity is about being found. The Christian life is about hearing Jesus' Father speak our names, because in hearing him speak our names, we experience something that we could never create or maintain for ourselves—unearthly assurance.

The question is, Why is it so hard for us to hear Jesus' Father call our names? After all, he's been speaking to us all our lives, and nothing thrills the Father more than to see us live our lives out of this baptism of unearthly assurance. The problem, as you might imagine, is on our end; it has to do with our own mindset. But more on our fallen minds next issue. For now, here is a prayer for us:

Lord Jesus Christ, beloved, eternal and faithful Son of the Father, share your own ears with me. Give me your eyes, your mind, your fellowship with your Father, that I may know him with you and live and work and play in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. •



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In Other Words

Now wash your hands

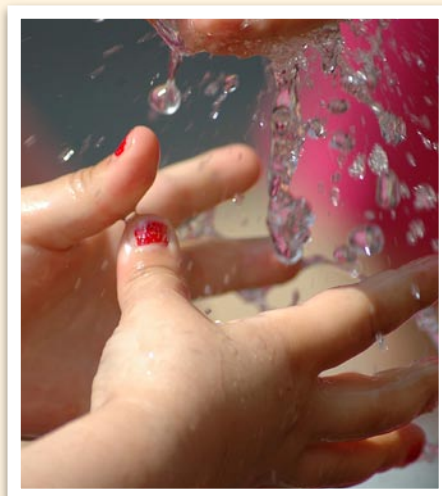
By James R. Henderson

Do you lend a helping hand? Togetherness is a strong tradition in African society. The idea is that no one stands alone, uninvolved and isolated from others.

The Xhosa tribe of South Africa has a proverb that illustrates the tradition. It is, "Izandla ziyahlambana," which means "the hands wash each other."

Have you ever tried to let your right hand wash itself without the assistance of the left hand? It's hard, isn't it? Our hands are designed to wash each other.

Taking care of each other is a foundational Christian value. We are to "carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).



It's easier said than done.

In today's selfish world, it seems that we are far more concerned about what others can do for us than we are about what we can do for others. The idea of sacrificing our time or effort for someone else seems terribly old fashioned; yet Christ teaches us that we should serve others as he serves us.

Next time you wash your hands, and you see your right hand wash your left and vice versa, why not pause for a second and let this action, which seems second nature to us, remind you of your Christian values. "Dear friends, since God

so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).