The grace of god that surpasses all understanding pdf



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Theater review by Helen Shaw The title of Aleshea Harris's excellent revenge fantasy Is God Is sounds like a line from the Louis Jordan song "Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby." There's syncopated swing in both the play and the song—and accusation, too, all pivoting around the terrifying changeableness of women. Harris's eerie text adopts other
musical references; the script's cover page says the play "takes its cues from the ancient, the modern, the tragic, the Spaghetti Western, hip-hop and Afropunk." Cardi B plays after the final blackout, but the underlying structure is that of some old ballad: Two women wreak continual vengeance in stanza after stanza. Anaia (Alfie Fuller) is savagely
burned, with scars covering her face; her twin sister, Racine (Dame-Jasmine Hughes), has suffered too. (Racine's "the rough one who still got some pretty to her," because her scars only crawl down one arm.) The twins escaped the fire they think killed their mother 18 years ago, when they were three, but today She (Jessica Frances Dukes) has finally
summoned them to hear the truth. Lying in a hospital bed, turned into "an alligator" by her own burns, their mother tells about the day their father set her on fire—and she gives them a task. They must kill everyone around him. The women leave for the West (a television displays chapter titles in the Gunsmoke font), where
they draw closer and closer to their prey: their father's new "bougie" wife, Angie (Nehassaiu deGannes); his hilarious twin sons, the self-styled poet Scotch (Caleb Eberhardt) and the arugula-loving Riley (Anthony Cason); and finally, the Man himself (Teagle F. Bougere), who enters with his black hat tipped down over his eyes like Lee Van Cleef in The
Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Characters crack jokes, but the play is far more tragedy than comedy: Racine's chosen weapon is a rock in a sock, because it reminds her of the story of Cain and Abel. (No one gets out of that one well, either.) Although the action in Taibi Magar's excellent Soho Rep production happens in two planes—either in a thin slice
of stage right against the front row or in the flat space seen through a long horizontal window in the back wall—it feels appropriately epic. Set designer Adam Rigg and sound designer Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste create a whole landscape out of a single white wall, and the performances are strong, particularly by the two pairs of twins. Harris writes so
blisteringly that the actors could just let the language's flames carry them along. But the masterful Hughes proves to be the perfect kindling for it, and Fuller is heartbreaking. So is God is or is God ain't? The desert bleakness of Harris's quasi-biblical fable exists in the awful space between the two. Racine, flipping her hair, calls their mother god:
"Well she made us didn't she?" The cautious Anaia replies, "You gon' get struck down." They're both right. Deny her or worship her, but the cost is the same: blood, tribute, dust, pain. There's a reason Harris doesn't put a question mark in the title. In a work this furious and incandescent, there's no space for answers—only prophecy. Soho Rep (Off
Broadway). By Aleshea Harris. Directed by Taibi Magar. With ensemble cast. Running time: 1hr 30mins. No intermission. Follow Helen E ShawFollow Time Out Theater facebook page. During Operation Desert Storm, there
was an anthem that came to define the war: Lee Greenwood's country song "God Bless the U.S.A." When Greenwood originally released the song in 1984, it was moderately successful. The song peaked at #7 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart July 28, 1984. However, the song took on a renewed life during Operation Desert Storm. Greenwood
played a one-hour special for the troops Feb. 3, 1991. That concert - from Walt Disney World - saluted the troops, and was broadcast to Navy ships at sea and military personnel in over 130 countries. In an interview at the time, Greenwood said, "...we, here within the safety of our country's shores, send this gift of entertainment to hopefully lighten
the hearts and brighten the days for all of America's sons and daughters, particularly those participating in Operating Desert Storm." A specific line in the song expressly calls out a thank you to those who served. In the chorus after Greenwood sings "And I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free," he follows that with, "And I won't
forget the men who died, who gave that right to me." Greenwood said in an interview with The Boot, "I called my producer, and I said, 'We just need to be more united.'" Song lives on Greenwood's anthem lives on. Following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the song
again became a hit, uniting the country. During 2020, Greenwood released a new version, working with the U.S. Air Force Band to inspire a new generation. Singers from the band in Washington, D.C., joined singers in Los Angeles, California, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Greenwood joined from his home in Nashville, Tennessee. Watch the video on
YouTube | Car ReviewsAug 23, 2004See all 2 photosThe God of Driving: How I Overcame Fear and Put Myself in the Driver's Seat With the Help of a Good and Mysterious ManAUTHOR: Amy Fine CollinsPUBLISHER: Simon & SchusterFORMAT: Hardcover, 352 pagesPRICE: $23.00 AVAILABLE: Sept. 8, 2004 AUTHOR: Amy Fine CollinsPUBLISHER:
Simon & SchusterFORMAT: Hardcover, 352 pagesPRICE: $23.00 AVAILABLE: Sept. 8, 2004 For many of us, driving is a natural, expected, and essential part of every day. Cars can be not only a means of getting
somewhere but also a way to escape the daily grind. In the relaxing cocoon of leather and wood inside a fine automobile, the world outside stops--nothing else matters. But Amy Fine Collins, a correspondent for Vanity Fair, was one of many Americans with a driving phobia. Her father had nearly died in three car accidents, and two of her
grandparents were killed at the hands of horsepower. Besides, do cars really make sense when you live in Manhattan? See all 2 photos Aturn-of-the-century resolution finally pushes Collins to earn her New York driver's license, but she ends up receiving more than a simple piece of plastic. Her instructor, a dark, mysterious Turk named Attila, quickly
proves to be more of a psychiatrist than a simple driving teacher; he has a superhuman ability to get into the heads of his students, find their fears, and extract them. Collins discovers that good driving teacher; he has a superhuman ability to get into the heads of his students, find their fears, and extract them. Collins discovers that good driving teacher; he has a superhuman ability to get into the heads of his students, find their fears, and extract them.
falls deeper and deeper into automotive addiction. She trades Beene for Bentley and Manolo for Mercedes. "Driving a stick shift," she proclaims, "was one of the greatest joys on this earth. There was something immensely satisfying about the harmony between flesh and machine-no messy emotions in the way, I suppose, as there inevitably were when
two bodies met." She begins to cut short her attendance at posh parties in order to attend luxury-sedan debuts and driving schools, explore the East Coast in Vipers and AMG Benzes, and rent Harleys and Ducatis for weekend excitement. She even travels across the Atlantic for a ride in the ultra-luxurious cabin of a Maybach 62. The climax of the
book comes when Collins ventures to a Pennsylvania road that had haunted her in nightmares since childhood and finally buries her phobia with one swift motion of her right foot, top down in a Bentley Azure convertible. Collins's story is intriguing. Her writing is sexy, her style smooth. Car enthusiasts will relate to Attila's daring and confidence but,
at the same time, can reminisce through Amy's growing automotive passion; non-enthusiasts will love her entertaining passenger-seat observations and philosophical realizations. The style community and the automotive world mesh with special beauty through the warm friendship of an unlikely duo, while the gifts of life lessons during the ride make
the story more captivating. This is a must read for anyone in search of a fresh, amusing look into the world of driving. Share on Twitter Who will lift us up from crushing credit-card debt and resetting mortgage payments and impending foreclosure, from increasing gas prices and decreasing health-insurance
coverage? We are a nation stumbling through our worst financial crisis in a generation and our worst financial crisis in a generation and our worst housing market in a lifetime. And so we come, seeking gentle salvation, inspiring prayers, steadying words, soothing notions, and calming thoughts that will allow us to become, in Joel Osteen's words, receiving market in a lifetime. And so we come, seeking gentle salvation, inspiring prayers, steadying words, soothing notions, and calming thoughts that will allow us to become, in Joel Osteen's words, receiving market in a lifetime.
North Carolina, making our way into the downtown arena through the hot, buggy air, to worship with the pastor who will save us, the man anointed, by one of his congregants, as "Reverend Feelgood." Sixteen thousand will file in this evening, as have millions more to coliseums, concert venues, and baseball stadiums around the country-all, in a way
his churches. We are a diverse, representative swath of troubled America: families struggling under debt, husbands and wives seeking reconciliation, young couples on first dates, children dragged by pious grandparents who promise them popcorn and BibleMan action figures. It is religion as escapism, criticized throughout the Bible Belt as
"Christianity lite" or "prosperity gospel." But this murmuring crowd, slouching toward a kinder, gentler salvation, is a more telling indicator of the state of our union than consumer durables purchased or capital goods ordered. Unemployment they know; they don't need to wait for the Bureau of Labor Statistics to publish a monthly number. O, but
come to Joel, lift your hands to Jesus, banish your negative thoughts, and you can find in these dark times a beacon. If, in this country, there is great hurting, then Osteen is here to soothe that suffering. He does not wish that pain on any of us, and the sight or thought of it will bring forth from him great torrents of tears-his eyes clamped shut, his
fingers pressed into narrow eye sockets, his lips pulled back over pink gums as he grimaces. The crying has become a visual touchstone of an Osteen sermon, the born-again equivalent of James Brown's pre-encore collapse from "exhaustion." Joel feels our pain and has made himself wealthy (reportedly earning $13 million for his last book advance
alone) and his church prosperous ($75 million and counting in annual revenue) by urging us to let go of it, to turn it over to God, to accept God's favor so that we may be as prosperous as Joel. There was always a strain of American Puritanism that pointed to Scripture as justification for asserting that we alth is somehow godly. But ever since
evangelical Christianity separated from the mainline faiths in the early 20th ecentury, some preachers have gone further and linked their focus on personal piety to finding Jesus and their next meal just by listening to a fire-and-brimstone message
By the late 1970s and early 1980s, televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart made prosperity gospel big business, capitalizing on that era's economic uncertainties to win over a new generation of acolytes, before those ministries were brought down by scandal. Osteen is one of a new breed of televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart made prosperity gospel big business, capitalizing on that era's economic uncertainties to win over a new generation of acolytes, before those ministries were brought down by scandal. Osteen is one of a new breed of televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart made prosperity gospel big business, capitalizing on that era's economic uncertainties to win over a new generation of acolytes, before those ministries were brought down by scandal. Osteen is one of a new breed of televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart made prosperity gospel big business, capitalizing on that era's economic uncertainties were brought down by scandal. Osteen is one of a new breed of televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart made prosperity gospel big business, capitalizing on that era's economic uncertainties were brought down by scandal. Osteen is one of a new breed of televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart made prosperity gospel big business.
Dollar are also rising stars-who are preaching a less sanctimonious, more inclusive message. His church is in that part of the economy that thrives in troubled times, that can count on full pews when wallets are empty and an ever more receptive audience if we do go into a full-on recession. Osteen hasn't necessarily tailored his message for the
downturn. Instead, he has continued his feel-good preaching, his exhortations to focus on the positive and banish negative thoughts, his reminders that God wants you to have a good job, a beautiful home, and decent cash flow. His vast ministry has become, in effect, shelter from the storm. "God wants you to have a good job, a beautiful home, and decent cash flow. His vast ministry has become, in effect, shelter from the storm."
"That is his blessing. God has a big dream for your life."We live in a time of miraculous congregations. Osteen's Lakewood Church, in Houston, is the largest in the United States, with 45,000 regular weekly attendees and 7 million more tuning in. His television show is the most-watched inspirational program in America and is seen in 100 countries
around the world. He has sold 7 million copies of his two books, Your Best Life Now and Become a Better You. Podcasts of his sermons are downloaded 4.5 million times a month. He preaches to more than 15,000 people at a time in the basketball arena turned sanctuary that is Lakewood Church. His pulpit stands near the spot where Hakeem
Olajuwon helped the Houston Rockets win two consecutive N.B.A. titles. But the Rockets, who have since moved across town, never put as many people in the seats as Osteen does. Osteen will tell you that his success is a result of God's favor, that his message, and that all that he has achieved is a blessing from God. Clearly, he is
more than just an inspiring pastor; he is also a master marketer and-pardon me for saying this, Joel-a damn good chief executive. He presides over an empire that takes in tens of millions of dollars a year and has been growing at a boom-time pace. (Though Osteen gives a significant portion of his book and CD earnings to the church, his take is still
ample enough to allow him and his family to live in 5,000 square feet of leopard-skinned luxury in one of Houston's tonier neighborhoods.) Rough economic times, Osteen believes, make the business of saving souls that much richer. "I would think that our message would have increased relevancy in a time of economic uncertainty. I think people want
to know that God is taking care of you. As it gets darker, I think the brighter message shines. "Joel's father, john osteen, was a pastor who dissociated himself from the Southern Baptist Church to start his own congregation, Lakewood, in an abandoned feedstore in 1959. It was John who started the family march toward a more gentle Jesus, focusing on
the goodness and love of God and downplaying the Old Testament anger and wrath. One of John's prevailing themes, and the underpinning for much of Lakewood's current message, can be found in one of his sermons: "It's God's will for you to live in prosperity instead of poverty. It's God's will for you to pay your bills and not be in debt. It's God's will
for you to live in health and not in sickness all the days of your life. "Joel is the second youngest of six siblings, and the one considered least likely to take the pulpit. To say that he was a quiet child would be an underestimate. As his lifelong
friend Johnny McGowan says, "On the basketball court, guys would take a look at Joel and say, 'I'll guard him,' and then Joel would go right by them." After a year at Oral Roberts University, Osteen dropped out to return to Houston, in part to care for his mother, Dodie, who was then recovering from cancer (a miracle regularly cited at Lakewood
Church). He then married his wife, Victoria, and took a formal position at Lakewood, helping out with the television show and the platform, as the stage around the pulpit is known, and eventually becoming the producer of Lakewood's Sunday service. "Victoria would kid me because I would spend four hours adjusting a light," Osteen
says. "I learned you can't separate the message from the presentation of that message." It was perfect training for a 21st-century televangelist. Osteen developed a keen understanding of the television market-time slots, lead-ins, cost per rating point-and to this day can tell you the top stations in most of his major markets. So passionate was he about
the medium that he invested $2 million of Lakewood's money for a stake in a television station, KTBU, in 1998, and an additional $6 million for the remainder in 2005. The independently operated station would turn out to be a wise purchase, returning $32 million when Lakewood sold it in 2006. Even as he was making his father's church more
successful than ever throughout the mid-1990s, Osteen quietly grew frustrated with his father's reluctance to expand as aggressively as Joel would have liked. "My dad didn't have it in him. He just wouldn't feel comfortable with that." (In fact, Lakewood's rapid expansion has put it $45 million in debt, thanks to a $75 million bank loan that is still far
from being paid off.) Nevertheless, though three of his siblings were actively involved in the ministry, Osteen never considered taking the pulpit. "He was so uncomfortable in public. He always loved being behind the scenes." One Sunday, Osteen agreed
to deliver the sermon. He doesn't know why and to this day asserts it was a kind of divine intervention, "a strong feeling of God" that compelled him to say yes to his father after saying no so many times. The story is often told of how Osteen gave his first sermon on January 17, 1999, as his father, who was suffering from kidney failure, lay in a hospital
bed listening to it over the telephone. John Osteen passed away less than a week later. Joel Osteen's ascension to the pulpit was fraught with uncertainty. He was so nervous about taking over the ministry that he canceled the time slots he had purchased for his father, assuming that no one would want to watch the telecast anymore. Victoria vetoed
that. "You call them back right now," she told him. He did and stayed on the air. At first, Osteen explains, he just wanted to maintain Lakewood's 5,000-person congregation not shrinking, but the television audience was actually growing. Osteen was proving himself a natural, more
personable than his father, easy on the eyes, with a kinder, softer voice. While Osteen's message wins over the moderate masses, he has become anothema to more-traditional Southern Baptists. His appearance on Larry King Live in 2005, during which he waffled as to whether heaven was barred to Jews, Muslims, and atheists, was posted on YouTube
as proof that Osteen doesn't embrace the Gospel. And while Osteen is steadfastly Christian, he defers to God on the more contentious issues, recusing himself from condemning gays, for instance, or women who have had abortions. Spending time with Osteen and his team, one can sense their discomfort when issues that could anger more-doctrinaire
Christians are raised. Don Iloff, his brother-in-law and chief of communications, almost winces when I ask Osteen his views on intelligent design versus evolution. "I believe that God created it all," Osteen says as he stakes out his usual middle ground. "I don't know if it's six literal days or 6 million years." Osteen his views on intelligent design versus evolution.
go over well either. Fellow megapastor Rick Warren has called the idea that God wants everybody to be rich "baloney." And some conservative Christian ministers have been quick to dismiss Osteen as a lightweight or, worse, a heretic. Osteen adamantly believes that "God wants to give you your own house," explaining, "He's not having financial
difficulties. He owns it all. "Much of the criticism of Lakewood, no doubt, stems from resentment at Osteen's ministering to the largest and most financially successful church in America. He certainly makes an easy target, with the talk-show-host grin, the bleached teeth, and the jocular manner. But there is no denying that his message
and his marketing of that message, is getting out to the world while so many other pastors are preaching to empty pews. Osteen dismisses the notion that he has watered down the Scriptures to win over worshippers. "It's who we are," he says. "The accessibility of my message doesn't bother me a bit. Look, we deal with people who are fighting
cancer, fighting to save their marriages, dealing with the death of loved ones. I don't think they need to be beaten down. And I think the success of the message in the marketplace is because we are optimistic, encouraging. "Phil Cooke, a longtime colleague and the author of Branding Faith, says, "Oprah has a brand, Nike has a brand, and Joel Osteen
has a brand. Joel has made his brand the inspiration brand. In person, the 45-year-old Osteen is certainly both optimistic and encouraging. As he sits in the family suite after Sunday services, taking a break before heading up to the editing bay, he has the calm, gentle gravity of a man who never raises his voice and never has to. Everyone leans in to
hear Osteen. With his too-small eyes, a sharp nose, and thin lips with parenthetical dimples on each side, his long, drawn face is like a happy, joyous, and free version of Munch's Scream. In his preacher's slacks, yellow tie, and blue striped shirt, he has a disconcerting habit of seeming to run out of words before finishing his sentences; the effect is
that you're always left hanging, waiting for another word that might or might not come. "Have you read Good to Great?" Victoria asks me at one point, referring to the phenomenally selling business book. "Joel is a level-5 leader. He knows there is more than one way to get to a point, and he lets his people get to the point their way. He's a true level-5-
great delegator, great empowerer, great big-picture thinker. "Osteen's boldest brainstorm was leasing the Compaq Center from the city of Houston in 2002 and investing $98 million to renovate it. For Osteen, who had always put a premium on the look and feel of the church, renovating and refitting a basketball arena as a sanctuary was both a great
opportunity and a daunting challenge. The scale of the renovation-a five-floor office annex, two 30-foot waterfalls, and a children's facility capable of hosting 5,000 kids while their parents are in the main sanctuary-was a logistical challenge better suited to Halliburton than a house of God. Osteen's brother-in-law Kevin Comes, the chief operating
officer and a former construction executive, was the point man on the project, but like almost all of Lakewood's top executives, he deferred to Osteen: "Joel made the decision to do it right the first time. We gutted the place and started over."
presented with, for example, the new lighting scheme or platform design. The resulting church is a modern technological marvel and perhaps the most family-friendly worship venue in the world. Kidslife, the $25 million children's facility, was designed by a group of former Disney staffers and provides care and religious services for the children of
parents attending Lakewood. It has the look and feel of a giant version of a McDonald's play area, only with neon lettering that refers to a verse in Philippians on the walls. Such a sterling facility is the logical extension of the Osteen brand. Last year, Lakewood generated $76 million in revenue, which amounts to just over $1,600 for every member of
its congregation. Its take includes $44 million donated directly by congregants, who are asked to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million two years ago. The church's greatest expense is the TV airtime it buys: $22 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million two years ago. The church's greatest expense is the TV airtime it buys: $22 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million two years ago. The church's greatest expense is the TV airtime it buys: $22 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million two years ago. The church's greatest expense is the TV airtime it buys: $22 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million two years ago. The church's greatest expense is the TV airtime it buys: $22 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent of their gross income; $10 million to give 10 percent 
last year to broadcast the show in more than 100 markets, a 10 percent annual increase in spending that is easy to justify. "Cutting back on airtime would be like saying we won't be sending any trucks to deliver our product," Comes says. An additional $13 million goes to administrative costs and salaries, and $9 million a year is spent on facilities and
maintenance. Osteen hasn't drawn a salary from the church since 2005. He bought his own home, for $331,500 in 1994, and pays to have his kids homeschooled. The considerable income from his first book) goes to Osteen, who gives much of
that-people inside Lakewood say more than 50 percent of his income-to Lakewood ministries and other charities. That still leaves Osteen with plenty of "God's favor." The operation-the TV time, the basketball arena, the worship events staged across the country-should all simply be considered as, Comes points out, the delivery system for getting the
product, Joel's message, out to the marketplace. The goal of Lakewood's 350 employees is to facilitate and spread that message out there more efficiently; in that way, we're no different from any other big brand, a Coke or a Starbucks," Iloff
says. But it takes revenue to win souls, and within the organization are consistently rank in the top 10 on iTunes, and Comes wonders aloud about how to monetize that. The team is not shy about dreaming big-and commercially. "We sit and try
to imagine what our program would look like with a Coca-Cola logo on the front. We're just looking into it," Comes says. Still, when it comes down to "message and revenue," Comes says, "message always wins." At Lakewood, message and revenue tend to work in blessed harmony. Duncan Dodds, Lakewood's executive director, took the podium
recently in Greensboro to make a few announcements before Osteen, the choir, the entertainers, and the rest of the Lakewood, "Dodds told the crowd of 16,000 still settling into their seats, "and that worship is for sale on CDs out on the concourse level." One hears certain words
repeated constantly by the Lakewood team. Meals, services, meetings, and even smoothly flowing traffic over on I-45 are described as awesome. The goal of every operation, sermon, television production, and even expenditure is excellence. And the ultimate purpose of all staffers is to spread the message. That message, functionally, serves as
Lakewood's core product. Sure, it is repackaged into books, CDs, DVDs, Bible covers, scented candles, cross necklaces, JESUS FREAK T-shirts, and coffee mugs, but those are all just ways to deliver the message. The Osteens, like so many American families during the recent real estate boom, spent the better part of the past decade buying,
renovating, and selling homes, and became so proficient in the process that Osteen and his wife were able to skip hiring a contractor for their last renovation and go directly to the subcontractors to complete their mansion. Coming off the boom, during which the average American dwelling doubled in size, the Osteens' digs are more modest than one
might guess. The house is decorated in a rococo style that Victoria has called "French" and Osteen calls "fancy." Their son, Jonathan, 13, and daughter, Alexandra, 9, are homeschooled, in part because their parents' schedule requires that their weekend be shifted to Monday and Tuesday. During breaks in their lessons, they can play in the elaborate
treehouse or the fenced-in rabbit pen behind the house. As the actual weekend nears, Osteen rises at 5:30 a.m. to work on his sermons, which he delivers twice weekly. Osteen labors over them, speaking the words aloud as he types them into his computer. He considers the writing, shaping, and memorizing of his sermons to be the single most
important part of his job. The message supports the whole enterprise, and he frequently turns to God to quide him when the burden of Lakewood, his success, or the scale of the church and business threatens to overwhelm him. "It's just in me, God's favor, faith, and hope." He believes, resolutely, in the value of the product he is crafting in his office on
those quiet mornings. "Very rarely will you find a company that produces a widget where everyone is mentally and spiritually into producing a better widget. We're doing more than giving people a good time or a better toothbrush, because it's hard to put in your
heart and soul and sacrifice so much to make a better toothbrush. "Being backstage at a Joel Osteen worship event is remarkably similar to being at an N.B.A. game or a rock concert. Beefy security guards tell you where you can and can't go. Crew members chow down on a buffet laid out by a local caterer and bark into walkie-talkies between bites.
At some point, black Town Cars head down the long, curving driveway into the belly of the arena and drop off the pastors and performers, who retreat into private suites. The night is a celebration of music, state-of-the-art visual effects, and, of course, Christ. Lakewood spends a great deal of money attracting top gospel and Christian talent, and music
minister Cindy Cruse-Ratcliff leads a team of Grammy Award winners, including gospel singer Israel Houghton. It's a thumping occasion, with people dancing in the act. His mother, wife, and children often play parts
in the service. But it's Osteen himself we have come to see. He wins the crowd over with wholesome jokes and inspires with his sweet-voiced message. The sermon today is based on the notion of "hitting the DELETE button when you have those negative thoughts." He urges us to banish that voice telling us. "I'll never get that great job. I'll never meet
that special someone. I'll never get married." Hit the delete button, he urges, and reprogram your mind. "Just one inferior thought can keep you off balance and away from your God-given destiny." The crowd is eager, multiracial, and well-intentioned. We want to hear good words, have uplifting thoughts, be inspired by a positive message. Who
doesn't? We are here to escape our worries, or even better, to overcome them with hope. These are uncertain times, and we all feel the pangs of doubt. Can we pay our mortgage? Will we keep our job? When will we finally achieve thoughts.
Focus on the positive. We are victors, not victims. The highlight of every service is when Osteen asks those who are willing to turn their lives over to Jesus to stand up in the vast arena and make their commitment right then and there. It is an inspiring moment, filled with raised Bibles and palms outstretched to heaven; Osteen and some of the
congregation are in tears. If we have been in pain, if we have been in 
/ we'll lay down our armor / the victories all won," and the orange, red, and purple stage lights are flashing, and a halolike luminescence surrounds Osteen as he promises to free us from our fears, to lift us above our doubts, to lead us to prosperity and joy, I think about my own worries, my debts, my career, my woes. How tempting it would be to just
stand and turn my will and life over to Jesus if, in exchange, I will be led down a righteous path of prosperity, taken in hand by Jesus, and Joel, and delivered to my gilded acre of the American dream. Yes, yes, why shouldn't I stand? Because who am I not to want to be saved? Who doesn't need a little bit of Joel in their life, tonight, every night, forever,
leading us from this dark place to our promised land? Together, hands joined, shoulder to shoulder, we will march forward into our glorious future. Delete the negative thoughts, Joel preaches. Yes, yes, delete them. Visit Portfolio.com for the latest business news and opinion, executive profiles and careers. Portfolio.com © 2007 Condé Nast Inc. All
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