

AUTHENTIC

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CELEBRATING OUR 20TH ISSUE



PAGE 10

Logan Mills
Hitting the Waves



PAGE 44

Howard Gold
Transforming Aotearoa

PLUS

- Five From Five: A Look Back
- Staff Snapshot - Our Stories
- Quick Quotes from the Journey

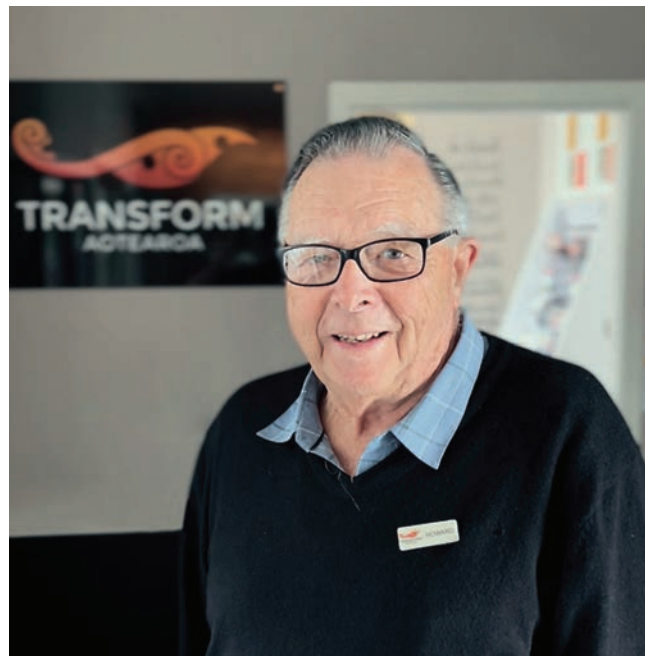




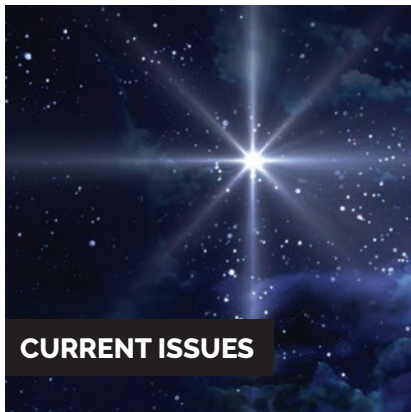
10 Surf's Up: A Chat With Logan Mills



28 Five From Five: 'Authentically' Our Journey - Ultimately 'His' Story



44 Howard Goold's Heart To See Jesus Transform Aotearoa



CURRENT ISSUES

- 06** “Lo!” - A Little Word, A Big Meaning!
- 22** Make Room
- 34** Staff Snapshot: A Look Back
- 50** Charles Price - Our Christmas Inheritance
- 62** Immanuel! God With Us!



MEN & FAMILY

- 08** Trust His Still, Small Voice
- 18** The ‘Perfect’ Family
- 42** Honour Your Father And Your Mother!
- 54** The Enabling Power
- 59** God Knows And Understands



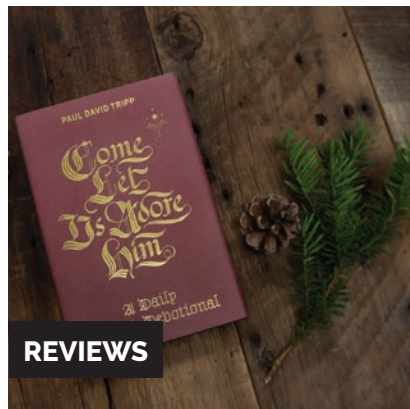
LIFE

- 20** Am I Pulling Down My Barns?
- 26** Ten Reasons Christians Should Share The Gospel
- 38** The Kernel of Christ
- 56** Weathering the Storm: Clouds Ahead?
- 65** Why is Grace so Amazing?



BIBLE

- 16** It Must Not Go Out
- 60** Study Scripture With The Author



REVIEWS

- 66** Book Review: Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional
- 68** Movie Review: Lifemark

WELCOME TO THE TWENTIETH EDITION OF

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE



Merry Christmas from the Authentic team - Lee, Joel, Sharon-Louise, Tania, Jeremy and Blake.

Five Years Of His Faithfulness!

Five years, 20 issues, 1680 pages of content.

Welcome to our commemorative 20th issue of Authentic Magazine. This month - December 2022 - marks our fifth anniversary. What a journey so far. To celebrate, you'll find some 'special touches' in here - including our commemorative front cover, some Authentic staff highlights and a special feature interview with some of the people we've spoken to - or who have contributed content - since 2017.

In reflecting, perhaps Watchman Nee - on one of our 'classics' pages - expressed it best, "...to be carried through by Christ is to be left wondering afterwards how it all happened!"

Since Authentic's inception, we've had a simply-stated vision. It anchors our team, of which - all told - there've been something like 11 people. We pray Authentic encourages Christian

men, helping them grow in their faith, knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ. We also pray it's a light to those living without Him.

Authentic isn't 'ours' - it's His. God leads and guides as we steward the work we're entrusted with. I joined the team in August 2020, becoming editor in June 2021. I wrote then that the sufficiency for this work is found in Christ alone - nothing, and no one, else. Indeed, anything we do is only possible - and sustainable - in and through Him.

As we remain IN Christ, we're upheld by Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 6:10, "...be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." (ESV), and we can know with confidence, "... Your right hand upholds me." - Psalm 63:8 (NIV).

It's not our strength or ability, it's HIS might, His strength, His resources and His life at work in us.

I read Genesis 24 recently - and no, not

for the reason you might think! It's the account of Abraham's servant being sent to find a wife - Rebekah - for Isaac. The servant's words in Genesis 24:27 resonated with me. *"I being in the way, the Lord led me."* (KJV). As he considers what's unfolded, having been out prayerfully seeking God's will - and direction - and putting one foot in front of the other, he stops to thank the Lord for the fact God was in control.

How true of Authentic Magazine! With each issue, yes - as a team - we plan, commit our steps to Him and give God our best. But, ultimately, as it becomes a reality - filled with specific encouragement for readers - it takes the specific shape God determines. *"A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."* - Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV). What a promise!

The same goes for Authentic Media - the marketing and communications agency we run which supports Christian ministries, churches and businesses. At the outset of issue 20, I too want to pause and say thank you. Magazine wise, while we can't name everyone, we simply honour the myriad who have followed God's leading in 'giving' to Authentic in the past five years.

Whether that 'giving' has been support, finances, encouragement, prayer, advertising in, writing for or being interviewed or photographed (everyone's favourite!), we're so grateful.

Thanks also to the many clients who have worked with - and supported - Authentic Media. We simply feel buoyed, carried and uplifted by those who cheer us on in such ways.

Speaking of interviews, as well as speaking - once again - to a handful of specifically-chosen people who we've connected with over these past five years, I was also excited, stoked as they

say, to sit down with Christian Surfers New Zealand's national director Logan Mills before he hits the waves this summer.

I also chatted with Howard Gool, Putaruru-based Transform Aotearoa's CEO. It exists to provide free community-based initiatives, helping ensure those most at risk, or in need of community support, can access help, personal development and growth opportunities.

We'd also love to hear from you! A special readership survey is live at www.authenticmagazine.co.nz/feedback and - If you can take a few moments to fill it out and give us your thoughts - that would be awesome! The results will play a part in helping shape the way we prayerfully approach 2023.

With Christmas nearly here, this is the last issue of Authentic for 2022. Having spoken of gratitude, above all else, the greatest reason we all have to be thankful is because of the most amazing gift of all - God loved, so He gave His Son Jesus.

May Paul's sentiment in *2 Corinthians 9:15*, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (NIV), be the same gratitude which fills our hearts as - amongst all the other great things the Christmas season affords us - we walk in the reality of a living Christ and the knowledge that Jesus is, and will always be, the reason for the season.

"...this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. - John 17:3 (NIV) for, *"...we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. - 1 John 4:14-15 (ESV).*

Andrew Murray wrote of the ongoing reality of God being with us in The Spirit of Christ. He reminds us the gift of Christ to humanity was not one with an expiration date. "In His name and through Him, the Holy Spirit descends as a person to dwell in believers and to make the glorified Jesus a present reality within them."

Jesus is alive and is still Immanuel, a present reality within us. His presence remains as tangible now as it was when He came to earth as a baby about 2000 years ago.

So, whatever the summer break holds for you - rest, relaxation or time with loved ones and friends - I pray we ultimately know, walk in and display for others the reality of a living, ever-present Saviour - remaining anchored in Him as we look to 2023 and beyond.

Until next time!



■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.

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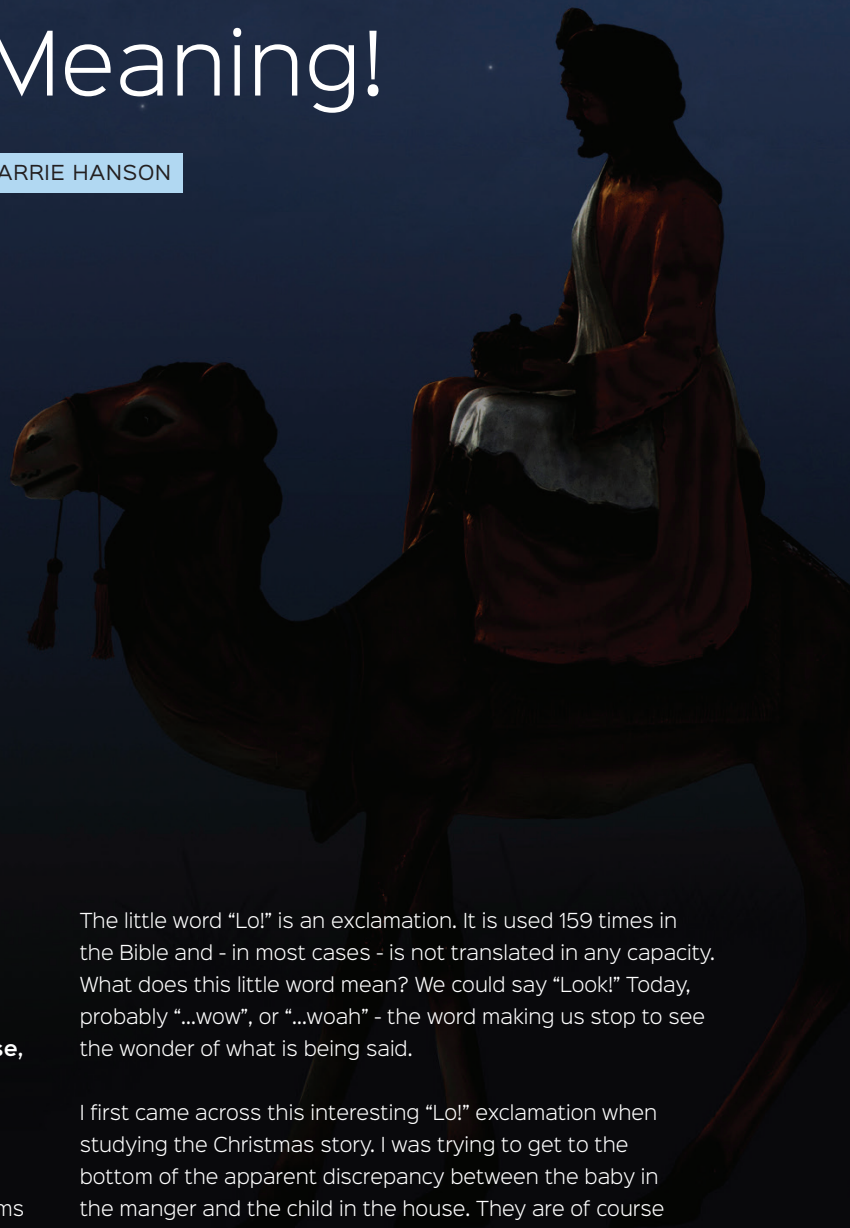
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“Lo!”

A Little Word, A Big Meaning!

BY BARRIE HANSON



I make no excuse - I love my King James Bible. I love the language, and when you study those scholars of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek you can see how they devoted themselves to making the most accurate translation into the English words of the day. Of course, the English language has changed dramatically since then - so it takes effort to fully appreciate why they used certain words.

I'm a big fan of Sir Winston Churchill, so I think this quote sums it up for me, "...must everything in our age be pre-digested? Does the Bible have to be reduced to pabulum? I refuse to believe that modern man, who split the atom and is exploring space, is unable to cope with the grandeur and glory of the King James Version."

The little word "Lo!" is an exclamation. It is used 159 times in the Bible and - in most cases - is not translated in any capacity. What does this little word mean? We could say "Look!" Today, probably "...wow", or "...woah" - the word making us stop to see the wonder of what is being said.

I first came across this interesting "Lo!" exclamation when studying the Christmas story. I was trying to get to the bottom of the apparent discrepancy between the baby in the manger and the child in the house. They are of course two different accounts, one from Mathew and one from Luke, and are not sequential. You may remember that in Luke's account, following the presentation of Jesus at the temple and sacrifices made and Simeon declaring he has seen the Lord's Christ, that they departed back to their home in Nazareth.

“Fear God and keep His Commandments – this is the whole duty of man.”

At this time, hundreds of miles away in what was probably Babylon, the magi - or wise men - saw the star signalling the royal birth. They put together a significant caravan with provisions and protection to follow the star.

It seems they knew of the prophecy that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. We do not know how long they travelled. From Babylon to Jerusalem via the ‘spice road’ was about 1000 miles - or at a caravan’s pace, probably about 14 or 15 months.

At some point, the star stopped leading them and they went to Herod in the palace at Jerusalem - where, of course, you might expect to find a new king. Herod was advised of the prophecy by his wise men and told the magi to go to Bethlehem and bring him word. You will remember that later he ordered the killing of all babies under two years old in Bethlehem.

But, that is not where Jesus was after all these months. He was back home in Nazareth. Look at Matthew 2:9, *“When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.”* (KJV).

So, not to Bethlehem then, but to Nazareth. How amazing is this? We should say: “...look at that!” or “...whoa, awesome!” God is a God of miracles, a God of amazement - and we should look for the “lo” of the Bible and say, “...lo God is in control.” God’s wonder and miracles are often prophesied, yet the events surrounding the prophecy are sometimes taken for granted. Take Abraham as an example.

“And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground. - Genesis 18:1-2 (KJV).

Here we have a “lo” that could easily be missed, but how important it is! Notice the impact.

Abraham looked up and ‘wham’, or ‘lo’, out of nowhere three men appeared. Look at his reaction - he ran immediately and bowed before this miraculous appearance. The news they brought was amazing. His aged wife was going to have a baby! This was so ridiculous, Sarah laughed at the idea.

“And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.” - Genesis 18:10 (KJV).

How old was Sarah? Way past the age where she could conceive naturally. This was to be a miraculous baby. I stop every time I see ‘lo’ now, and I reflect on what I should be wondering about.

Another amazing ‘lo’ is found in Ecclesiastes. I love this book. Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, and he experienced everything he could. He was at the height of his empire, the greatest in the world with wealth, power, prestige and learning and - of course - wisdom. In the pursuit of satisfaction, he tried everything earthly.

Yet, this was his conclusion, *“Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” - Ecclesiastes 7:27-29 (KJV).*

“Lo!” Look, listen and behold the conclusion of everything. Fear God and keep His Commandments – this is the whole duty of man. Keep ourselves from the world. An amazing find.

Finally, my last “lo” is from Christ Himself.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” - Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV).

A little “lo”, but it should be shouted and followed by a great Amen. He has promised us He will never leave or forsake us. How great is that! And, even unto the end of the world.

Lo – it’s such a little word, yet I hope next time you see it in your Bible you will stop and really take notice. | A

■ Barrie Hanson lives in Bluff, Southland. He has been a Christian for over 40 years and in that time he has been a preacher, Pastor and a church helper in both Auckland and Hamilton.



Trust His Still, Small Voice

BY RYAN KILFOIL

I have been reflecting on this verse recently. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."* - Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV).

Being obedient can sometimes push us out of our comfort zone. It might be a little bit scary, make us nervous or even - at times - be embarrassing.

Sometimes, we can't even work out why it is we felt to do something - it doesn't even make sense to us.

However, looking back at some key moments in scripture, part of our world history, don't we see that seemingly small acts of obedience have ultimately been the catalyst for massive change?

We've probably heard stories of people being prompted by the Holy Spirit to do something which may seem 'foolish' at the time. Maybe it's kneeling down on the sidewalk in public, giving something of great value away to a stranger, or even stopping to ask someone you don't know how they're doing.

Remember this verse. *"We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong."* - 1 Corinthians 4:10 (ESV).

And, here's the point. We don't necessarily know how God is going to use us in a particular situation, but we have to decide whether or not we're going to trust Him.


"We don't necessarily know how God is going to use us in a particular situation, but we have to decide whether or not we're going to trust Him."

Then, if we decide to trust Him, my encouragement is let's do so wholeheartedly, seek Him and be guided by the Holy Spirit - who God has given to those who believe in Him.

Jesus told us so in His own words. *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."* - John 14:26 (ESV).

The amazing thing is that this way of living, in Him, applies to every area of our lives. And, to the life of every believer in Christ. Whatever sphere of influence in life God has given you, you're called to trust your Heavenly Father, listen to the Holy Spirit and be obedient.

All for the purpose of glorifying God.

So, may this article encourage you - take a moment to seek that small still voice of the Father, and then be obedient to what He is asking you to do. Simply trusting in Him, remembering that His ways are higher than our ways. | 

■ Ryan Kilfoil lives on a small lifestyle block in Tauranga with his wife, children and extended family. He has a deep passion for God's Word and loves sharing life and faith with people.



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SURF'S UP!

A CHAT WITH LOGAN MILLS

BY JEREMY SMITH



Logan Mills with his wife Carmen and their daughter Selah.



Papamoa's Logan Mills will always remember the way his youth pastor phrased a question he once asked the group.

"If you took money out of the equation, how would you describe your ultimate dream when it comes to using your God-given giftings and talents to glorify Him?"

And, that's because Logan - just 10 at the time - had already settled on his answer.

"I'd love to be able to use my surfing and skating as a means to point people to God."

Now, more than 20 years later - as he and I sit across the table from each other - Logan has been Christian Surfers New Zealand's national director for almost seven years.

He has no doubt that, thanks to the Lord leading him "full circle" in His timing - and using each previous season of his life - he's now living his "God-given dream".

"I feel so blessed to be sitting here in this role. It is absolutely a door God opened for me."

World-wide, the Christian Surfers ministry is in more than 30 nations, and here in New Zealand there are now 18 Christian Surfer 'missions' - or local community groups - running nationwide.

Collectively, those groups are in contact with thousands of people through weekly, fortnightly or monthly gatherings, the heart being that every surfer - and every surfing community - has the opportunity to know and follow Jesus.

So, I sat down with Logan to hear more about the ministry and how he came to be involved, to chat about his heart for people and to hear where in the world he thinks there just might be the 'perfect' wave...



So Logan, how did you first get into surfing?

I grew up in Hamilton, which is obviously pretty landlocked. But every year as a family, we'd go to either Hot Water Beach in Coromandel or Whananaki - north of Whangārei - for two weeks. Whenever we were there, I'd have a go at surfing. Although I mostly grew up skating, whenever I was at the beach, I'd think to myself, "...man I want to be a pro surfer!" Thinking about it, I probably started getting into surfing a lot more when I turned 16 - mostly because I got my driver's licence and could road trip it to Raglan!

If we're talking about here in New Zealand, where's your favourite spot to hit the waves?

When there's a good swell on the east coast, I'll always try to make the most of it. Typically, I'd say I try to get into the water for a surf at least once a week. And, if we're talking close to where my wife Carmen and I - and our young daughter Selah - live here in Papamoa, I'd say Matakana Island is a highlight. It's an amazing, barrelling wave. It's pretty advanced - depending on the conditions - but I'd say that's my favourite.

Where's the best place you've surfed so far in the world, and what places are still on your bucket list?

One I've surfed so far, which was absolutely amazing, was a place called Jeffreys Bay in South Africa's Eastern Cape. The International director of Christian Surfers in South Africa - Roy Harley - lives there. Maybe every couple of years, Christian Surfers' International directors have a chance to get together. One year, we met in South Africa, in Jeffreys Bay. It's an amazing right hand point break - I loved getting to surf it!

When it comes to a bucket list, I've actually got a massive list of places on my 'want to surf' list to be honest. One which comes to mind is a place called Teahupo'o in Tahiti - the site of the annual Billabong Pro Tahiti surf competition and part of the wider World Championship Tour (WCT). I wouldn't want to surf it too big though, because it can be pretty gnarly, but there's no doubt it's an amazing wave.

I've always wanted to ask this, maybe because I've always liked the idea of finding my own. But, what is it that makes the perfect surfboard? Have you ever shaped - or made - one?

Wow, that's a big one! I sure have, I've shaped a couple and it's a bit of an art for sure. I'd say I'm a bit of a rookie though, so the process of making a board probably took me about a month. It's definitely something you can't rush. Some surfers do talk about owning a board which is their 'magic' board, if you will. Of course, heaps of them own more than one board too, depending on what kind of waves, or conditions, they typically surf. There's definitely so many factors which contribute to having the 'perfect' board - it probably just comes down to an individual's style, and stance, when surfing. It's absolutely true though, one board doesn't fit everyone!

How did you come to know Christ?

I'm blessed with an amazing, Godly heritage which goes back three generations. So, I was raised in a Christian family. This is an amazing thought too actually, but in terms of a personal relationship with Him, God has literally brought me full circle.

I came to Christ when I was eight through an outreach group I saw at Hot Water Beach. During the day, they would run a range of surfing events and at night they would facilitate ministry. Years later, I remember asking my mum where I was when I gave my heart to the Lord, and she told me it was a Christian Surfers outreach! Isn't that incredible to consider now!

I'd love to hear more about your family...

Sure! As I mentioned, I'm married to Carmen and our daughter - Selah - turned two last month. We've lived here in Papamoa for about seven years and we love it. We like to say we're a family 'on mission'. Carmen is a huge blessing and support to me and is heavily involved in Christian Surfers herself.

I love the story of how she and I met. One year, I took 12 months off to go and serve at a particular camp in Canada. It was actually through both of us being individually connected to that camp that we got to know each other. We weren't actually at the camp in Canada at the same time though - but there was a reunion for people who had been there which was held at Parachute Music Festival one year. We first met there, at that reunion. Long story, short she and a whole bunch of others were planning a surf trip up the coast and invited me along. When I knew she loved God and she surfed, I knew she was someone I was keen to get to know more!

So, are you teaching Selah to surf yet?

She already loves the ocean! She's jumped on the front of one of my bigger boards a few times and - in the shallow water - we've surfed some smaller waves together.

When did your involvement with Christian Surfers New Zealand begin?

I can see God's hand every step of the way in bringing me here. I've been national director for nearly seven years. Prior to this job, I'd done lots of other things - including being a builder for about eight years. I'd worked at - and helped run - surf, skate and snow camps with Scripture Union. And I know that - in His timing - God has been faithful in using all of that experience to prepare me for what I'm doing now.

I'll always remember a moment I had as I was prayed into this role at an Easter Camp gathering Christian Surfers runs in Taranaki. I had a speech sorted, but as soon as I got up on stage, God brought to mind an experience I'd had when I was 10. Right there on that stage, I remembered my youth pastor asking our group a question - "...if you took money out of the equation, how would you describe your ultimate dream when it comes to using your God-given giftings and talents to glorify Him?" I've always wanted to use my surfing and my skating. It's as though - as I stood there beginning this role - the Lord said to me, "...here's the dream you gave to Me when

you were 10." It's simply amazing to me that right from giving my life to Jesus two years earlier at the Christian Surfers gathering when I was eight, to that experience on stage and everything He's subsequently brought me into and through, God's hand has been at work in bringing me to my current role. At Scripture Union, part of my role was to help oversee all the Christian groups in various high schools. That's similar to what I'm doing now at a national level. My time as a builder really instilled a strong work ethic in me too. And now, here I am in my early 30s, blessed to do what I love. God knew that in His perfect timing, this is where He'd have me be. He is an amazing provider.

How did Christian Surfers get started and can you describe the heart behind it?

It began in the 1970s in Cronulla, Australia and was founded by Brett Davis. He has such a powerful story of coming to Christ as a teenager. He, of course, has always loved to surf. But, when he first gave his life to God, he initially gave it up. Simply because - more than the love of surfing - his heart was to follow Jesus. As Brett recounts, it was several years later when he began to sense the Lord telling him that surfing was actually a powerful tool God had given him in order to point people to Jesus. And so, he started surfing again.

Now, Christian Surfers is in more than 30 nations around the world. Here in Zealand, we're approaching our 40-year anniversary. Christian Surfers New Zealand was launched in 1984 by Marc Dyer. We currently have 18 local missions, or places where local Christian Surfers groups run - from as far north as Whangarei to as far south as Dunedin. We have roughly 100 local leaders nationally, each facilitating groups in which they're reaching anywhere from 20 to about 50 people. Collectively, that's thousands of people of all ages. It's actually amazing to consider that scale. Of course, not everyone who surfs with us is a Christian, but that's what we're here for - to point people to Him.

Each of those groups, while being specific to meeting the needs of the community God has them in, simply has a heart to reach every surfer - and every surfing community - in their area with the opportunity to come to know Jesus. We have surfers of all ages, right from mums and babies, our 'groms', or grommets, groups through to what we call our Old Salts. In Gisborne, there's an Old Salts group in which all of the surfers are in their 70s! As well as surfing, they get together to do things like watching surf movies! So cool. Having meals together often proves to be a really effective way of bringing everyone together, and - as you know - surfers love road trips! So, many of our groups make time for those too. Really, at its core - the purpose of our gathering is about creating memories and having fun, while at the same time



intentionally - and authentically - sharing Jesus. There's connection, community, discipleship and opportunities to surf.

What do you most enjoy about your role?

It's honestly the ultimate job - I love it. I have such a heart for surfers and I love the surfing community. How can you go past getting the opportunity to surf and share Jesus? It's an honour to get to regularly catch up with all our missions leaders around New Zealand too.

Here in Papamoa, I help support the local Christian Surfers group. I get such a kick out of seeing guys and girls find - and get connected to - a community they love. And then, ultimately, coming to know Jesus. Around our nation, we hear so many stories of young kids and teenagers - and others of all ages who surf with us - coming to know God. It's unreal. With that, there's also the awesome opportunity to journey with them, discipling them for the long run.

Actually, on the note of discipleship, what's CSALT?

CSALT - Christian Surfers Advanced Leadership Training - is a new discipleship and internship programme for up and coming Christian Surfers leaders. It's designed so young surfers can develop their leadership skills, grow in their faith and serve

practically on the ground in existing surfing communities. Each CSALT module runs twice a year for five months. It's typically for school leavers between the ages of 17-24 who are perhaps considering university, or a trade. It's been running for about two years now, so it's still relatively new. But, it's something we're loving seeing grow - and we're keen that it keeps doing so. In its two years to date, nearly 20 people have gone through the programme, and I love seeing them all now plugged into their local communities and serving God. Simply put, seeing them flourish and coming to know Jesus in a personal way is so rewarding.

I've also heard about other gatherings that Christian Surfers runs, like Easter Camp and the Jesus Classic. Can you tell me about them?

Easter Camp is in Taranaki at Ōakura. We encourage all our local missions to try and bring their crews, so we'd typically have between 200 and 300 surfers from all over New Zealand there. Our focus is a family-orientated gathering, with outreach at its heart. There are opportunities to explore the coast, and during the day we run both skate and surf competitions. In the evenings we come together for some corporate worship and guest speakers. It's neat to think Easter Camp has now been running for about 25 years!

When it comes to the Jesus Classic, we see that as an outreach too - the majority of surfers who come along aren't Christians. The ultimate goal competitor wise would be to have every top surfer there, and we try to secure some good funding in order to have an awesome prize pool. The prize-giving ceremony is often the context in which we're able to share Jesus. This year's Classic was held just last month.

Looking back over the years, we've been so blessed as we've prayed that God would provide some amazing waves - because that draws the competitors. Last year's Classic was in Wellington, and some of the locals told us that, throughout the course of the event, we had some of the best waves they'd seen there in about a decade!

A clear thread coming through our chat is the desire that Christian Surfers' ministry would, ultimately, point people to Jesus. How would you encourage readers when it comes to the importance of having people in our own lives who do that?

Great question. It's actually a conversation I regularly have with our Christian Surfers leaders too - because everyone, no matter who they are, needs accountability in their lives. I call as many of our leaders as regularly as possible, and I'm always interested in hearing what mentors they have in place.

In a personal sense too, I have two key influences in my life at the moment - and I'm praying that God would provide a third. One is Brett Davis, who I mentioned earlier. Although he's based in Australia, we're intentional about jumping on Skype once a month. I chat with my other mentor once a month on Skype too. I'm also part of a men's group at my local church. I see that as really important, because we do become like those we hang out with.

My encouragement for readers is, just like I'm prayerfully doing at the moment, be intentional about finding people who can journey with you and keep you accountable.

What's your advice in terms of living a life which displays an authentic example of what it is to be a Christian?

One question I've perhaps been wrestling with a little bit recently is that, at times, as Christians we may find that all our friends and connections are Believers. That's not a bad thing, of course - it's awesome to have Christians as the majority of our friends. But, I suppose my question is, can you think of people in your life who you're rubbing shoulders - and doing life - with who don't yet know Christ? Because, in those interactions we're called to be a Godly influence.

I've heard it said that in our walks with the Lord, He gives us spheres of influence. You're naturally going to have people in that 'sphere' which you can perhaps reach because God has put them there for that purpose. Obviously, one of the things I love, and am passionate about, is surfing. So, a question that's always in the back of my mind is, "...who else will reach the surfers?"

I'm fortunate obviously that I'm in a position where my passion is also my job. Regardless though - even if God hadn't



“Take some time to consider what He’s equipped you with in order to be that authentic representation of God to those around you in your community. Use what you love - the passions God has given you - for Him.”

provided my role as national director - surfers are a group of people I can help reach for God, because that's one of the communities He's placed me in. Maybe you're a mountain biker or a skydiver. If you are, then your question is, "...who else will reach the mountain bikers and skydivers?"

My encouragement is to ask what's in your hand, and where's your God-given sphere of influence? Then, how can you reach those people? I think that's probably the easy way to be authentic, because it becomes an outflow of operating where God's already called you to be.

As I prepared for our chat, it was so cool to consider how many surfers have either been, or still are, involved with Christian Surfers who have since gone on to achieve great things in the sport. Bethany Hamilton is one. Can you think of some New Zealand examples?

Yes lots! One example which comes to mind is Larry Fisher in Raglan. Larry came to know Jesus at a Jesus Classic competition. Now, he runs the Raglan Surf Academy, which has a lot to do with Raglan Area School. When I think of awesome, positive influences on the up and comers of the Kiwi surfing scene, he's undoubtedly one. In fact, I'd say pretty much any good surfer in New Zealand wants to go over to Raglan to go through the academy. It's therefore amazing to think that so many of our top surfers in New Zealand have all been influenced by that environment, which - at its heart - is to invest in students.

Recently too, the Junior World Surfing Games were held at California's Huntington Beach. When I looked at the roster of competitor's names, all but one were surfers who - somewhere around the world - have somehow been connected with Christian Surfers over the years. That's pretty awesome.

Where are we likely to find you during the 'perfect' day off?

Would you be surprised if I said you'd most likely find me in the waves? When we get the chance to go on family holidays, we regularly hit up surf spots. We like to snowboard too. If I was



Logan hits the waves.

to describe our ideal family holidays, I'd say we're a family of 'active relaxers'.

How do new 'missions' or Christian Surfers groups typically start and how do people go about getting involved?

Typically, people hear about us through word of mouth, or through a connection with one of our missions or groups. In lots of cases, our Christian Surfers leaders are surfers themselves, with a heart to reaching people for Jesus in the parts of the country they live in.

If people do have that heart, and want to reach out, we are happy to meet with them to chat about what that might look like. More than just starting new groups, our heart is always that God would provide the right people who can lead new missions. A recent example is the relatively new Christian Surfers group which started in Dunedin about four years ago. Yes, Dunedin! It's cold, but there's some stunning spots to surf.

We were praying for quite a while that God would provide some awesome leaders down there who wanted to serve in that way. We knew of quite a few surfers who were going to Dunedin to - in many cases - study and who were looking for a way to get connected to, firstly, other like-minded Christians they could do life with, and - secondly - who loved to surf. It seemed like we were praying about that area of need for ages. But then, almost all of a sudden it seemed, God provided an answer. On one of my trips down there I went and met some amazing, Godly people who now facilitate the local mission there. Now, when we hear of any of our surfers heading down to Dunedin to work or study, we're able to point them in the direction of that group so they can connect with others who love Jesus, surf and, ultimately, journey together encouraging each other in Christ.

What's on your heart as you consider the future of Christian Surfers?

Of the 18 areas we currently operate in, 15 of those are in the North Island, three in the South Island. As I said, the southernmost point is currently Dunedin. So, there's lots of scope down south. Also, north of Whangarei is an area in which - at the moment - we don't have any local missions or groups. Although, we have facilitated CSALT programmes up there before. All of those things are prayers we're committing to the Lord regarding how, where and when we grow. Our prayer is that - in His timing - if that's what He'd have us do, He'd provide the right people as leaders in those regions.

Any final thoughts?

As we wrap up, I honestly feel blessed to be in the position I'm in - serving God with my passion for - and love of - board sports and, particularly, surfing. I guess my final encouragement, as I mentioned earlier, is to prayerfully consider what it is that God's placed in your hands, which you can use to glorify Him. Take some time to consider what He's equipped you with in order to be that authentic representation of God to those around you in your community. Use what you love - the passions God has given you - for Him. They're a great starting point for building bridges with others. There's a sphere of influence God has given each of us, and He's placed people in your life for a reason. In your life, pray that He would show you who those people are, and then, how He'd have you reach them.

Thanks so much Logan! | A

To get in touch with Christian Surfers New Zealand, visit www.christiansurfers.org.nz

■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.



It Must Not Go Out

BY LOCKY MCNEILL



One day recently, as part of my Bible reading plan, I came across a particular verse - and it was as though it leapt off the page.

I believe it is a 'rhema' word - or a reminder - directly from the Lord for me. And, maybe as you read this, it will stir up something afresh in you too.

The verse was Leviticus 6:13 - *"The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out."* (NIV).

Once you have a fire going, the biggest shame is to see it flicker and - eventually - die out. Consider all the time, effort and resource which goes into building and lighting a fire - and then maintaining it.

Here's something to think about. When we light fires, what are some of the main reasons they go out? Well, to a large degree, they die out simply because they were not given attention. If no one tends to, or looks after, the fire it runs out of fuel.

Having read the above verse, God laid an encouragement on my heart to share - let's be purposeful in ensuring that the fire on the altar of our lives continues to burn for Him. Let's be absolutely passionate when it comes to opening and reading His Word, passionate about living out what we read and passionate about sharing Jesus with others.

"...let's be purposeful in ensuring that the fire on the altar of our lives continues to burn for Him."

In my life, I have found the Word of God - reading scriptures and meditating on them - and praying to God regularly about anything and everything to be two of the main ways in which I fuel the fire which keeps my life burning for Him.

Consider the apostle Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (NIV).

So, do you need to find ways in which to keep the passion for His Word burning in your life? Maybe that's through serving others, finding a creative outlet, or getting out into God's beautiful creation this summer to spend time in His presence.

Consider what that outlet is for you, just for a moment. Because that will fuel the 'fire' of your life as you display Christ in you to those around you. Then, my encouragement is to tend to those flames - keep your passion for His Word alive.

May I ask how your Bible reading time is going? Are you regularly in His Word? Or, are you aware that the altar of your life is currently feeling a lot like cold, grey and dusty embers?

Then, maybe this reminder has been for you, right now. Seek Him with all your heart. And remember, we have God's word that we will find Him when we do such a thing.

"You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart." - Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV).

Take some time to wipe away the embers - open and spend time in His Word and He will begin to blow on the coals of the altar of your life. |

■ Locky McNeill is a faith-based entrepreneur living in Taupo, New Zealand. He is a father to two young sons and a husband to one talented wife who can bake up a storm of goodness. He splits his time between being a digital Pastor, event director, MC, performer, writer and host of the Real, Raw & Relevant with Locky McNeill online show.



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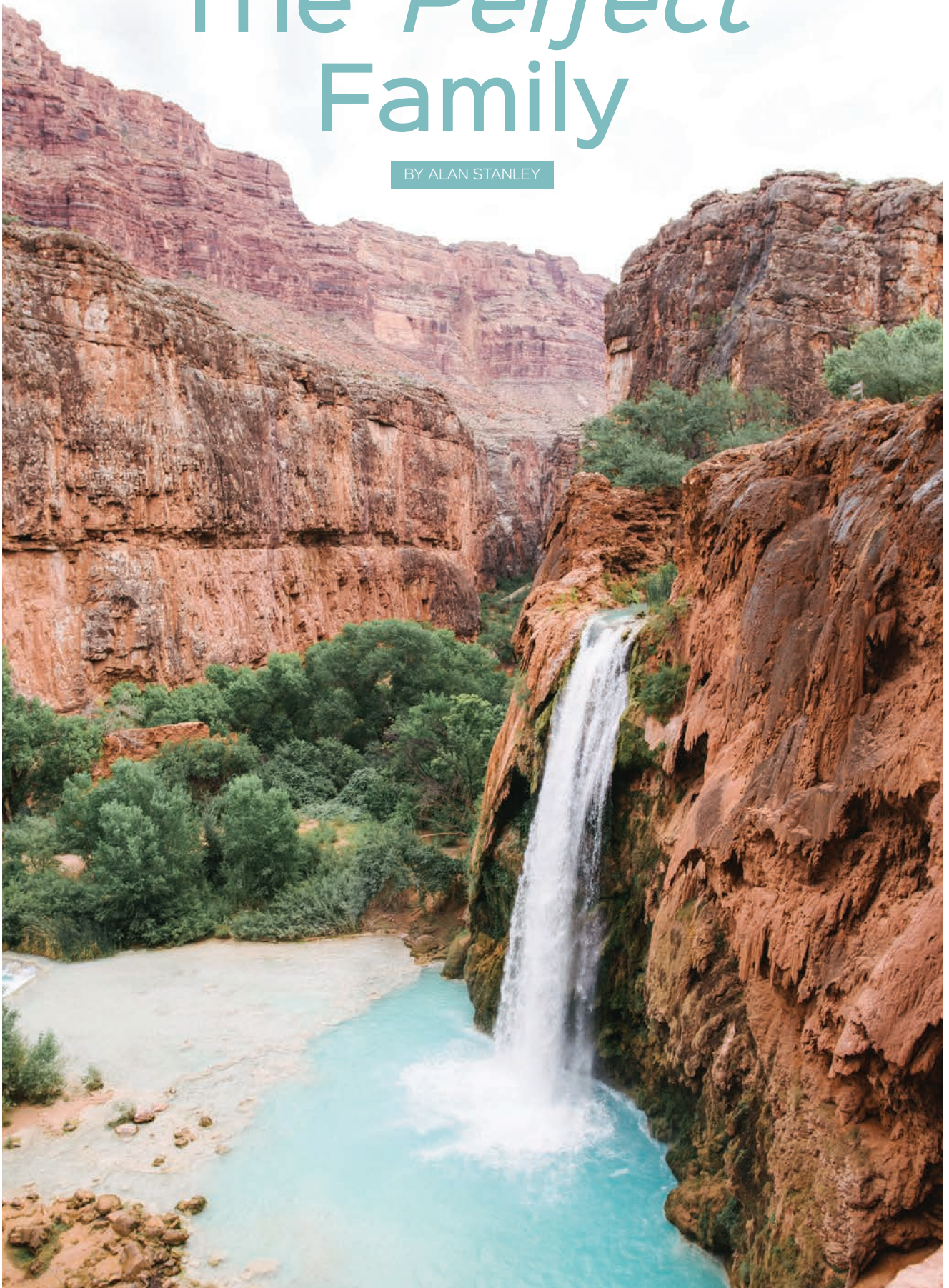
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The *'Perfect'* Family

BY ALAN STANLEY



When my wife Kathleen and I started having kids I thought, ‘...right then, I’ll only let them see my good side’. Well, I can tell you that hasn’t worked. I just can’t keep it up. They’re around me too much. Maybe if they only saw me once a week I could pull it off. But every day? Too hard.

Church though, well, that’s a different story. Those people do only see me once a week, so keeping up the façade of being ‘a good Christian’ is a little easier. And, don’t we all - at times - try to do that? Don’t we all wear masks sometimes? We know we’re supposed to be ‘holy’ and ‘righteous’, and we don’t want to admit that, in our own strength, that’s actually incredibly hard. Nor do we want to admit that sometimes there are incredibly hard things going on in our lives.

So, we glide on the all-too-common surface level-friendliness that church can provide and refuse to let anyone see the real us. But the thing is, it’s been on my heart recently that church isn’t supposed to be that way. God portrays His people, the Church, as a family. Through Christ we are brothers and sisters.

And, Jesus was actually the one who started this analogy. Look at Matthew 12:48-49. “He replied to him, *“Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?”* Pointing to His disciples, He

“Being with God’s people should be like finding an oasis in a desert.”

said, *“Here are My mother and My brothers.”* (NIV).

The New Testament writers followed suit. We are a ‘family of believers’. Consider Galatians 6:10, which tells us, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”* (NIV) and 1 Peter 2:17, *“Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God...”* (NIV).

Ephesians 2:19 calls us God’s household. *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household.”* (NIV), as does 1 Timothy 3:15 - *“...you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”* (NIV).

Consider also Titus 1:7, *“...since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless...”* (NIV). And, of course, we are ‘God’s family’. *“In fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more.”* - 1 Thessalonians 4:10 (NIV). That said, family, by its very nature, is messy. It’s messy, simply because people are messy, sinful and broken. And, when we

pretend that we’re not, we’re simply lying to one another. Yet, there are so many things we’re still too scared to talk about in church, and so many people who don’t feel free to be honest about their ‘messy humanity’. Yes, there are things about ‘messy humanity’ which may make us feel uncomfortable, but we can’t escape it - we’re sitting right next to those people in church. In fact, we are those people!

But, we should not feel, at all, that we need to wear masks. Coming together as God’s people should be a time where we can be encouraged, embraced, cared for and prayed for. It should be a place where we can take off those masks. Being with God’s people should be like finding an oasis in a desert. It should provide respite from the world. Of course, it doesn’t relieve us of the need to seek forgiveness from God for our sins, or of the need to seek and save the lost.

But, being part of a church family should relieve us of the pressure of struggling with our sin alone.


It should cause our souls to cry “...finally, a place where I can go where people who will love me unconditionally. Finally, a body of people who I can trust. Finally, a community who will walk with me through my problems. Finally, a family!”

Now, what I’m not suggesting is that we should stand up in front of the whole church and read a list of everything bad we’ve done during the week. But, what we are called to be is godly. And, as Psalm 32 tells us, a godly person is one who confesses their sin.

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” - Psalm 32:5 (NIV).

They don’t hide it - they’re authentic! Sure, this means they confess their sin to God, but we’re also told in James 5:16 - *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”* (NIV).

My encouragement is that we need to take off the nice ‘Sunday masks’ and begin sharing the difficult, frightening and ugly bits of our lives. Do you have anyone in your church who you can lay your sins before and ask for prayer from? If not, try and find one or two, or talk to your small group leader about how to better create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable opening up and asking for prayer.

You don’t have to share everything with everybody all the time, but if you’re in a situation where you feel you can’t talk openly with anyone at your church, then something needs to change. Let’s stop trying to be the perfect family and let our heart’s desire be to be a real family. A messy family. A loving family. God’s family. 

■ Alan Stanley is a Waikato-based preacher, writer and lecturer at Pathways College of Bible and Mission. He has started a new initiative - PreachIt! - aimed at training, equipping and mentoring preachers. See, www.preachit.nz



Am I Pulling Down My Barns?

BY BARRIE HANSON

The heading of this article is a question I regularly ask myself. It may seem a strange one, but the parable in Luke 12 is very applicable today in a nation where there is so much wealth and prosperity compared to past generations.

"And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." - Luke 12:16-21 (KJV).

Just before this parable, Christ was asked a question about a financial dispute. He challenges the listeners about covetousness, about envy of others' possessions and about trust in possessions and wealth before God. So, the question is, in what do we trust?

Do we trust in our own strength? I am sure this man believed he deserved blessings. No doubt he had worked hard and now reaped the rewards of his labour. Can we criticise him for that? Surely he deserved a holiday. Surely he deserved to enjoy himself for years to come? Don't we? So then, what was the problem here? Why did God call him a fool? There is no acknowledgement of where the blessings came from. This is the problem.

Look at James 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (KJV). And, at Deuteronomy 26:11, *"And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house..."* (KJV).

This man trusted in his own strength, not that which God had provided. We all must recognise our Maker and Provider

in all that we do. We are all dependent on God for our very existence and nothing is ever certain.

"Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." - James 4:13-15 (KJV).

Why is it that the richer a person or country becomes the further they end up from God?

This is no new problem. The rich man was not content with the wealth he had, he wanted more. Are we not all guilty of that?

We see a 'new' thing and we want it. We are like children at Christmas. The new toy is abandoned by New Year and we chase after something more.

We should never trust in what we have, and certainly not in wealth. A good test of our reliance on God is our attitude toward wealth.


"We all must recognise our Maker and Provider in all that we do."

Remember this challenge - *"Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." - Luke 12:33-34 (KJV).*

If we leave this earth today, for we have no promise of tomorrow, then "...whose shall those things be?" Like they say, you can't take it with you. Scripture tells us the rich man was not rich toward God. So, how can we be rich toward God?

We must not trust in ourselves, or in earthly things.

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" - Matthew 16:24-26 (KJV).

Think very carefully before you pull down your barns. | 

■ Barrie Hanson lives in Bluff, Southland. He has been a Christian for over 40 years and in that time he has been a preacher, Pastor and a church helper in both Auckland and Hamilton.



As you pause to focus on the Birth of Christ this Christmas may it also launch you into a new season of discovery!

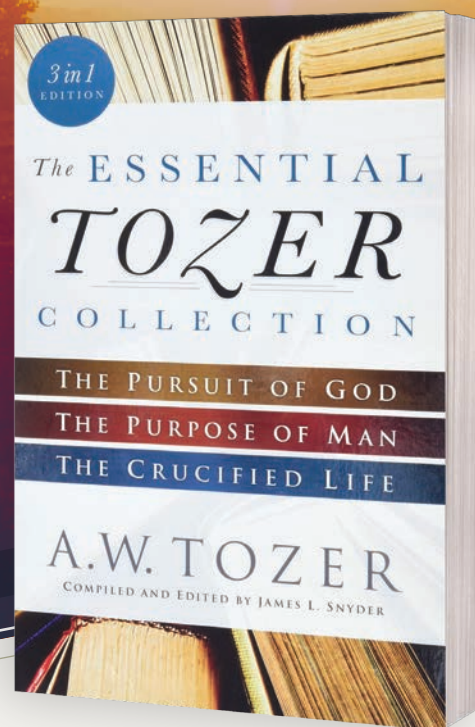
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Make Room

BY LOCKY MCNEILL

**“Give Him the very best
- give Him your all. He is
worth it and He is worthy!”**

Consider this striking thought. About 2000 ago, there was no room for Jesus. So, He was born in a stable. And now, He is still looking for room.

Will we simply give Him the left over space in our lives? Or, will we give Him priority - allowing Him into each and every area of our lives?

I found that thought deeply confronting as it came to me recently - and as we fast approach the end of another year, the question this Christmas remains. How much room do we have for Jesus? How much room do we have for God in our lives? It's actually a fundamentally - and extremely - important question to ask yourself, perhaps especially at this time of the year. Yes, so much is happening. Life is busy and life is fast.

And, if you are not careful, the most important reasons for the season can be missed in the business. Yet, He is the entire reason for the season!

I am always struck by *John 1:11-12* - “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” (NIV). My earnest prayer is that we would be alert and be those who receive Him. Truthfully, God asks us for all our life, not just some of it.


As Luke 10:27 tells us, Jesus tells us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” and, “Love your neighbor as

yourself.” (NIV). Honestly, that's no simple request - and we can't do that in our own strength. It's only possible as Christ lives His life in and through us. And, as we allow Him to.

Perhaps many people may have found they can live out aspects of this verse for a season, before then letting other things crowd that passion for Him into a corner, or a ‘spare space’ in their life. But, when I look at the times I've felt closest to Him, it was when I was the most passionate and dedicated to my relationship with Him above all else. The more room - and time - I gave Him, the better things got. I'm reminded again of *James 4:8* - “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (NIV). And He keeps that promise!

This truth can't help but change us. The Father gave us everything in sending His Son Jesus to die for us. Consider again the magnitude of the following verse. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” - *1 John 3:1* (NIV).

So - and I'm speaking to myself too - why do we sometimes only allow Him into the spaces of our lives we feel we have left? Let's purpose in our hearts to honestly take inventory. If there are things in our lives we need to ‘shift’ in order to make room for Jesus - and to give Him the pre-eminence - let's do so with no hesitation! Give Him the very best - give Him your all. He is worth it and He is worthy!

As the days until Christmas fast roll by, my simple challenge is this. How much room do you have for Jesus? 

■ Locky McNeill is a faith-based entrepreneur living in Taupo, New Zealand. He is a father to two young sons and a husband to one talented wife who can bake up a storm of goodness. He splits his time between being a digital Pastor, event director, MC, performer, writer and host of the Real, Raw & Relevant with Locky McNeill online show.



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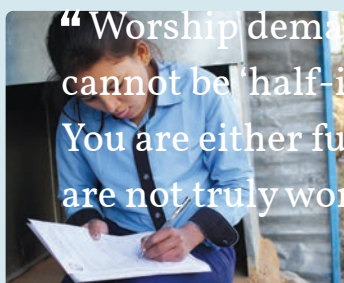
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Ten Reasons Christians Should Share The Gospel

BY RAY COMFORT

1. Because We Have Been Commanded To Do So

We have been commanded to preach the Gospel to all creation. In Mark 16:15, Jesus said, *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."* (NKJV). We need no other reason.

2. Because Hell Exists

Jesus said, *"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"* - Luke 12:5 (NKJV).

If Hell didn't exist, we would have a legitimate excuse for passivity. But, we have God's Word - and motivating reason - to tell us what awaits guilty sinners. How coldhearted would we be to not warn of its reality!

3. Because We Strive To Love Our Neighbour As Much As We Love Ourselves

A firefighter rescuing people from a burning building may be fearful and prefer to be home with his family, but he ignores his fears and denies himself. Like him, our thoughts are not on ourselves but on the fate of the perishing. *"And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."* - Jude 1: 22-23 (NKJV).

4. Because Obedience Is Evidence Of Salvation

In Hebrews 5:9, we're told, *"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."* (NKJV). We are not saved by our obedience - we are obedient because we are saved.

“As we continually preach the cross, it will deepen our understanding of what it is that God did for us in Christ.”

interacting with the lost results in greater confidence and faith in God. *“...hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”*

- Philemon 5-6. (NKJV).

7. Because It Causes Us To Search The Scriptures

Wanting to know how to answer every man will send us to God's Word. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* - 2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV).

8. Because It Deepens Our Gratitude For The Cross


As we continually preach the cross, it will deepen our understanding of what it is that God did for us in Christ. We will find ourselves practising what we preach and, ultimately, we will be frequently thinking about the cross. *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”* - 1 Corinthians 2:2 (NKJV).

9. Because It Deepens Our Prayer Life

We reveal our love for the lost by pondering their fate, and - as a result - we cannot help but cry out to God for them. *“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”* - Romans 10:1 (NKJV).

Our fears and sense of inadequacy will also drive us to our knees - the safest place for a Christian. *“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* - 2 Corinthians 12:10 (NKJV).

10. Because We Have Been Commanded To Imitate Paul

Paul showed his love for God - and for sinners - by his obedience to the Great Commission. And so should we. *“...just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”* - 1 Corinthians 10:33, 11:1 (NKJV). 

In Luke 6:46, Jesus said, *“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”* (NKJV).

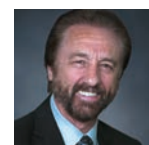
5. Because To Remain In Silence Is A Sin

As soon as the Holy Spirit was given, the apostles began to preach the Gospel. God had granted everlasting life to dying humanity! They could not stay in the Upper Room, because God's love provoked them to reach out to the lost. *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”* - James 4:17 (NKJV).

6. Because Evangelism Deepens Our Walk With God

Nothing teaches a fisherman like fishing. In the same way,

■ Ray Comfort, the founder and CEO of Living Waters Publications, is an internationally recognized evangelist and author. Ray is the host of the award-winning Way of the Master television program and radio program. He is also a best-selling author of over 80 books.





FIVE FROM FIVE

Since 2017

'AUTHENTICALLY' OUR JOURNEY
- ULTIMATELY 'HIS' STORY

BY JEREMY SMITH

"The Lord has done great things for us..." - Psalm 126:3 (ESV).

That's the key reflection which comes to mind when considering the fact we're marking our five-year anniversary and 20th issue. And, it absolutely rings true for us on our Authentic journey to date. He has opened doors in His strength, paving a path step by step as we trust Him. It's one we could have never walked in our own strength.

I chose five people we've connected with in the past five years since December 2017 - be they either feature interviews or long-standing contributors - to chat with again to hear how the Lord is at work.



Ray Comfort, Living Waters Founder and CEO, Los Angeles, California, Issue 1 Feature, December 2017

You were in our very first issue back in 2017 - what do you think about the fact we've reached our 20th issue - and five year anniversary?

It was a privilege to be interviewed! A double-honour really. I'm more of a Kiwi living in the United States than I ever was in New Zealand. Every night, we watch the news to find out what's going on back home. Though we've been living in the United States for more than 30 years, New Zealand is still very special.

Credit to the team. It's not difficult to start a Christian magazine, but it takes something special to reach the 20th issue. Anyone can launch a boat, it's another thing to keep it afloat in a storm.

Jeremiah 2:13 tells us many have "...dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water..." (NIV). Tell me about the heart behind Living Waters and your desire to point people to Jesus?

The name itself is interesting. Back in 1974, a well-known itinerant minister - Marcus Arden - and I became friends. He asked if I'd like to take over a paper called Living Waters. He'd laid out the first issue, but hadn't printed any. Our ministry automatically became known as Living Waters as we made gospel tracts available through that paper.

Since I became a Christian on April 25, 1972, I don't think I've gone an hour without being overwhelmed by the thought that those who die in sin are headed for Hell. If there was no such place, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing. I'd have probably moved to Queensland and been a long-haired, tanned surfer on a longboard.

I look back on 50 years of ministry thankful that - in Christ - I

haven't wasted a moment. In all sincerity, I've followed in Jesus' footsteps with every ounce of energy to "...seek and save that which is lost." That should be normal for every Christian. It's certainly the focus of Living Waters. And, I'm also surrounded by an amazing team who - ultimately - want to see the unsaved come to know the truth. We're in a lifeboat surrounded by drowning people. How could anything but their being saved be our priority?

Our culture is incredibly 'noisy'. Many 'voices' purport to be 'truth'. What's your encouragement to hold solely to Godly truth?

It's good to be informed about what's going on in the world, yet careful not to let it soak into your soul. We should be both salt and light. Many Christians try to influence

the world without the light of the gospel. Yet, if we aim to bring change simply by 'outlawing' things without boldly proclaiming the gospel, the cart is before the horse. Many who don't know Jesus love darkness with a passion. It's the gospel which transforms - and by upholding it - we help get the 'horse' in the right place. Loving righteousness not sin means we no longer serve sin. That's the Biblical way to end 'darkness' in our world.

Knowing and focussing on our agenda is key. It's not to produce a harmonious society, but to share with those who don't know Jesus the reason He died. Not to improve lives, but to save them from death. That should be a worldview we maintain by meditating on God's Word daily.

I once asked a crowd at a church how many read the Bible daily, without fail. I honestly thought it was something every Christian did. The answer was about five percent. I was shocked. In my journey, I've read the Bible every day for more than 50 years because it's my priority. There's no intention to 'boast' here, but many Christians don't. When I ask why, the response is regularly "I try to." I ask, "Do you try to eat food every day?" Of course not. They eat every day because they prioritise eating. A wise man once said our testimony should be, "...no Bible, no breakfast, no read, no feed."

Fear of man is one reason people often cite as a deterrent for sharing the gospel. What do you say in response? As someone who regularly faces scrutiny, how do you keep your eyes on Jesus?

The fear of man certainly is a snare. But, the fear of God is the number one antidote. Evangelism is a moral obligation. Like doctors who've found a cure, "...we cannot but speak the things we've seen and heard," - Acts 4:20 (KJV).

I battle fear. Every time I share the gospel, I face a taunting 'Goliath'. But, Goliath is reduced to Zacchaeus when I remember sinners are heading for Hell. And that - perhaps today as I share - God will use me to reach them.

As I said earlier, a fire fighter who finds himself at the base of a burning building, with a woman and children crying out on the fifth floor, knows the flames are engulfing. He forces himself to climb a massive ladder. Would he rather be home with his family? Sure. What he's about to do is terrifying. Yet, he's not thinking of his fears, but of that poor woman and her children.

So should we deal with our fears. We're fearful of not being able to answer questions, of rejection or of approaching strangers. But, they're minor concerns compared to the fate of the ungodly. Jude says, "...on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." - Jude 22-23 (NKJV). Note the motivation - 'compassion' - which evangelism is another word for. If we don't love people, we won't evangelise. That's the root cause of failure to overcome our fears. Charles Spurgeon said, "Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you're not saved yourself..." Harsh words, yet so needed in the contemporary Church.


Cultural 'noise' would often like Christian voices to be quiet. What has walking with Jesus taught you about authentically and boldly sharing our faith?

Perhaps most important, as Christians, is that we're careful of our tone. People can tell if we're authentic by the depth of our earnestness. Years ago, I had a drug prevention centre in the Regent Theatre building in Christchurch's Cathedral Square. One day, I received an early-morning phone call from a friend, "Ray! The Regent Theatre is on fire!" I believed him the very second he spoke. Why? Because of his tone.

When we plead with the ungodly, reasoning with them about sin, righteousness and judgement, we should see them react as Felix did to the Apostle Paul. *"...that's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."* - Acts 24:25 (NIV).

One of the best suggestions when approaching a stranger is to non-threateningly ask, "Do you think there's an afterlife?" I do so in almost every video on our YouTube channel - which now has more than 200 million views. It's a wonderful way to reach the lost and an effective way to equip Christians to share. If you'd like to, watch our channel for tips on how to witness, and for tapping into the longing the lost have for the life that is in Jesus alone. The problem isn't the world's antagonism, but perhaps our unbiblical gospel presentation. We've found everlasting life! If they only knew what we have in Christ, they'd ask us for it! See John 4:10.

It's been said you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Not true. Simply salt his oats. So, 'salt the oats' for the ungodly, so they thirst for righteousness. You can view a free teaching called 'Hell's Best Kept Secret' on <https://livingwaters.com>, or our Down-under agency is <https://livingwatersdownunder.com/>

Finally, please pray for our 'Operation London' initiative - <https://livingwaters.com/london/>. It's an exciting outreach with the potential to reach millions with the gospel. 



Nathan Johnson - Ellerslie Mission Society, Windsor, Colorado - Contributor since Issue 1, December 2017

Tell me about Ellerslie. It must stir your heart to see lives eternally changed?

Ellerslie is a short-term discipleship training programme equipping Christians to practically experience - and live out - the Gospel. It's sad to see a modern Church which may esteem scripture, but doesn't live it out. Our heart is to train up believers who don't just know God's Word, but who also share it with the world.

I have an odd assortment of roles, including overseeing our main discipleship programme and teaching alongside Eric and Leslie Ludy. But, I also do a lot of administrative activities and preach and serve. Yes, it's deeply stirring to see people discover the centrality of Jesus Christ and make Him the focus of their lives. It's an incredible testimony of the gospel, and the power of God, to see people set free from addictions and sin and give themselves fully to Jesus Christ, walking in His victory.

You've had articles in Authentic since issue one. What's it like to consider what God's done in His faithfulness through the Authentic journey?

It's been a tremendous blessing and joy to be part of Authentic - even though I live 12,000 kilometres away! I deeply love the passion and focus Authentic has in sharing the truth of Jesus. I'm continually stirred when I hear how God has used the ministry and magazine to impact and change lives for the Kingdom. Five years is a grand testimony to the goodness and glory of God. He started, has sustained and will continue to use Authentic.

Paul's statement in Romans 11:36 is true to how Authentic has been *"...from Him, through Him, and to Him for His glory."* What a beautiful picture of God's faithfulness.

How valuable is the role of Christ-centred publications such as Authentic whose heart it is to lead people to Jesus?

We live in a day in which lots of Christian publishing is “tickling ears”. Paul warned as such in 2 Timothy 4:3. It’s sad when the Church is in a weak, passive state - submitting to culture, not standing for truth. Sadly, it’s rare to find a Christian publication that’s truly Christ-centred. Authentic has been a breath of fresh air in declaring truth with love, making Christ the centre and focus of everything. Only Jesus can save and transform lives, so, why would we want ‘self-help’ encouragements which merely tickle our ears, rather than bold gospel truth that transforms lives? I’m thankful Authentic has stayed true to the course of providing resources which invite men to make Jesus Christ first in their lives. The world is getting darker, we need publications like Authentic which stand as a light.

Here's a bit of a selfish one. I know you've visited New Zealand - what was your highlight from being here?

Words cannot express how much I love New Zealand! I visited a few years ago, ministering alongside Dave Firth. I loved every minute. The landscape is breathtaking - it’s like God took extra care when creating New Zealand. My favourite highlight was the people. There’s something extra special about the people in New Zealand - I was blessed to spend time with them.

You run a website called Deeper Christian - with a desire that it's a place where intentional Christians seeking to grow in their walk with Jesus can experience and discover a deep love for God and His Word. What would you say to readers as an encouragement to simply seek - and trust - Jesus above all else?

It’s often easy to say how much we want and need Jesus - to seek and trust Him. But then we don’t do so practically. I’ve found that myself far too many times. That’s often because we put Jesus in a corner, rather than having His life as the focus of our own. We may spend time in Bible reading or prayer, but we go about our day and wait until bedtime to interact with Him. Yet, the psalmist says we are to ponder, delight and reflect upon God’s Word all throughout the day and night. If we want to make Christ first in our lives and build our lives around Him, He must be at the centre all throughout. Not just for a few minutes in the morning. Invite Jesus into life’s everyday moments - talk to Him about what’s going on. Continually turn your heart and mind toward Christ - you’ll find you get to know Him more and it’s far easier to trust Him. ☺



Graham Burt - Festival One Executive Director - Issue Nine Feature, December 2019

What's it like to consider all that God has done in leading and guiding the Festival One team since we last spoke?

What a question! We constantly talk about Festival One not being ours, but God’s. So many quite miraculous things happened to get us to where we are. We talk of the need to remember those, rather than the difficulties and disruptions. Exodus is a stunning reminder. God guides and leads. His timing, not ours. There are obstacles - perhaps to our eyes - but He’s leading perfectly.

It's our five year anniversary and our 20th issue?! How cool to think about all the doors God has opened for us here at Authentic...

Amazing! Thinking of all the weirdo’s you’ve had on the cover - present company included! Seriously though - what a blessing to have solid, thoughtful Christian content delivered so well. Keep it cranking. God is good.

Festival happens next month at its new venue - Hartford - for the very first time. How excited are you to welcome people back after it couldn’t go ahead in January?

Truthfully, it’s a weird feeling. We got so close last time which has ultimately been super helpful! There were more than a few kinks in the organisational hose, so to speak. It’s just around the corner now and we can’t get over the anticipation we sense. There’s a longing to get together! Perhaps partly the

OUR JOURNEY -
FIVE FROM FIVE
Since 2017
ULTIMATELY 'HIS' STORY

idea of getting things 'back to normal', but also simply wanting to be together as God's family - hanging out, encouraging each other and worshipping our God and Saviour.

What stirs in you as you consider what God has ahead for Festival?

Man, simply the privilege of hosting a part of God's family in this way. The privilege of being able to bring together so many different churches, denominations and people at different

stages of their pilgrimage towards God. It's delightful seeing God's people together. It's an honour to provide opportunities for so many unstructured moments in which people meet each other and their Heavenly Father in deeper and Holy-Spirit inspired ways. The privilege of hosting an event centred around our Saviour, Jesus Christ, is never lost on us. That's truly what motivates us for the years ahead. And, with such a beautiful new site, we're working hard towards seeing a deepening connection between God, His creation, and His people. God bless Authentic for five solid years! 🌀



Luke Collis - UNASHAMED - Issue 13 Feature - March 2021

What's been happening at UNASHAMED since we last chatted?

It's so clear as my wife Jess and I look over the years before UNASHAMED that God was preparing us for this. We're told in Ephesians 2:10 that we were "...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (ESV). Man we've seen that!

Jesus never said living for Him would be comfortable - it's definitely stretched Jess and I - and it's come with significant sacrifice. As a family, we've had to trust God for things like finance and obey Him when others thought we were crazy! Believe it or not, especially in the early days, we even faced opposition - not even from outside the Church, but within! Not to mention the spiritual opposition. Yet, these experiences only served to cement the dream in our hearts. There have been many late nights and early mornings, long trips away from family and faith steps! It's required big faith too - choosing not to give up and continually seeking God. Then, when you see even just one teenager encountering Jesus and finding freedom, for His glory, it's all worth it.

Can you believe that here at Authentic we're approaching our five year anniversary and our 20th issue?!

Totally! It just starts with faithfulness, right? As we seek God and walk in obedience to His call, He'll use us! Boy, is He using Authentic! You guys have interviewed some legends, and those stories are having an impact. These magazines are montages and records of God's power at work in people's lives here in New Zealand! Awesome!

What has God laid on your heart - when you look to the future and consider UNASHAMED?

The needs of Aotearoa's young people grow by the day. The enemy's having a field day and it's getting desperate, Jeremy. Our young people - and our whole nation - need Him. The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy but Jesus came that they may have life. I sense we're on the verge of a huge harvest! As people's foundations are shaking, they're asking the hard questions. I've seen hunger developing. *"When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.'"* - Matthew 9:36-38 (ESV).

At UNASHAMED, we're in a time of positioning and preparation for the coming harvest. Those who do the reaping have to be ready, so we're seeking passionate believers, helping raise them up. We're also working on new initiatives we sense God's hand in in order to reach young people in a whole new way. We're really excited. The dream is as clear as ever, "...every young person in Aotearoa reached with the message of Jesus."

How then would you encourage readers when it comes to reaching people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Sometimes I think we overcomplicate it. Firstly, fall in love with Jesus! In Acts we read about two disciples who'd just seen a lame man healed. We're told, *"...when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated,*

common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” - Acts 4:13 (ESV).

Secondly, spend time with those who don't know Him. Too often we perhaps get confined to our 'Christian church bubble', hardly even rubbing shoulders with anyone who doesn't yet

know Him. Jesus spent time with the broken, the sick and the hurting. He wasn't afraid of dark places or hanging out with the outcasts of society. Imitate Jesus. As you pursue Him, you'll catch His heart beat for the lost and grow to be sensitive to His leading. Spend time with those who don't know Him, His message will flow out of your mouth! 🌀



Pat Buckley - Amped4Life Founder and Educator - Issue 15 Feature, September 2021

“My heart is to impact even one life each day, for good - and for God.” It's a calling Pat Buckley lives and walks in primarily because one key reflection anchors him. “Every day, I'm reminded of where He's brought me from. My prayer is, ‘...Lord, never let me forget the grace You show me, lest I treat it like a common thing.”

Since he and I last chatted in September 2021, Pat and the Amped4Life team celebrated a major milestone - its 20th anniversary three months ago. Pat and his wife Karen and his twin brother Mike and his wife Susan first sat down in June 2002 to reflect on all the experiences, lessons and principles life had taught Pat throughout his journey of recovery.

Amped4Life was subsequently formed as the group “dared to dream” about opportunities to use that pain and brokenness to educate, equip and empower young people with tools

and skills they need to make healthy and informed life choices. With between 80 and 110 speaking engagements in a typical year, Pat estimates he's spoken to about 500,000 Kiwis - mostly young people - nationwide in the past 20 years.

He speaks at camps, community groups and in both Christian and public high schools - being led by God as to how he does so when speaking in public schools.


“As I reflect, it was a risk, sure, but our whole journey is one of trusting God. If I'd listened to my own fears and - at times - self doubt instead of trusting Him, I'd likely never have stepped out of the boat into what God was calling me to.

“I could've chosen to bury all my pain, hurt and brokenness in the basement of my life. But, I chose to harness what God restored in my journey to minister to others who may be walking through similar experiences.”

As Pat considers an encouragement for Aotearoa's young people, he mentions *Isaiah 49:4* - “*But I said, ‘I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God.’*” (NIV). “If it were up to our own strength and ability, Amped4Life wouldn't be possible. It's His work, we steward it.

“My encouragement is, while there's life, there's hope. No matter how far you feel you've fallen from grace, as you read this, there's a loving God who wants to take, and use, your life. “As you submit to Him, He'll begin to redeem the broken areas, your hurts and pain and give you true purpose.

“I've received amazing feedback from thousands of people, yet it remains true that even if I can point to one life which was impacted through our work - one person who met Jesus and began to walk in relationship with Him and in who He's called them to be - it's all worth it.

“For any of us, if we keep focussed on Jesus, and persevere even in tough times, we can know the impact will be eternal.” | 

■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.





STAFF snapshot

A Look Back

For our 20th issue, we asked each Authentic staff member to reflect on a particular aspect of our journey so far which has impacted - or encouraged - them. Here are their responses...

Jeremy Smith, Editor

As straightforward as it sounds, since I joined the Authentic team in August 2020, one reminder has been key as we compile each issue. The Lord has proven time and time again that He is in control. Issue 20 is the 10th edition I've been part of and, as we've always said, this magazine is not ours, but Christ's.

Therefore, ultimately, as we've prayerfully committed each step to Him, I simply reflect on each issue with gratefulness. God has consistently been faithful in opening doors and providing opportunities which we - try as we might - could never have facilitated in our own strength. And, all in His perfect timing, not ours! It's a reminder too that each issue looks the way and contains the content He would have it contain.

I'm reminded of *Isaiah 55:8*, *"...My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.*" (NIV). In putting one foot in front of the other where He's called me to be, He constantly proves Himself faithful as I trust Him and allow His life, and strength, to be at work in and through me.

Blake Adams, Designer

Over the course of 20 issues, I've read about a range of amazing and inspirational individuals and organisations that have been featured in Authentic. As a designer of the magazine, I've enjoyed bringing these features - and other great articles - together to create a resource that God uses to speak to, and bless, people. One of these great articles was in the first issue - a portion of Charles Spurgeon's sermon "The Man of One Subject". In it, Spurgeon declares there is one great focus in Christianity - Jesus Christ Himself. Any other

message, emphasis or focus pales in comparison and must be secondary to the centrality of Jesus Christ. A great read and a reminder of the focus of what we do at Authentic.

Also, a feature which comes to mind that I really enjoyed was an interview with the entrepreneurial-minded Guy Howard-Willis. Guy was the creator of the popular New Zealand websites, 1-Day and Torpedo7. In the article, he told the story of how - on one occasion - 1-Day sold 6.5 tonnes of marshmallows in only a few hours, and 50,000 cans of Red Bull in half an hour. Maybe Authentic should have been put on 1-Day!

Lee Hanson, Manager

My journey with Authentic started at the beginning, as God turned the idea of a professional, Christian men's magazine into a reality. The magazine has come a long way since the first issue, put together by Dave and I in the early hours of the morning at the kitchen table. I haven't been involved in all the issues though - a change of direction, and some time serving overseas, meant there were a few issues I missed out on being part of. When I was catching up on some of these, I thoroughly enjoyed Charles Price's article "When All You Can Do Is Push".

The example he gave is impactful. His wife was trying to mow the lawn with a heavy lawnmower, pushing it with all her strength. However, she couldn't keep it up, and was exhausted after only a few rows.

She then realised the lawnmower was self-powered - meaning it had the ability to cut the lawns for her. All she actually had to do was follow along behind it. Charles likened this to the way we sometimes walk as Christians. Often trying to do it all ourselves, in our own strength, instead of letting the One with all the power do the work ahead of us. I'm guilty of this, and have to remind myself constantly to let Him do the work, while I just hold on. *"The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him."* - Psalm 28:7 (ESV).



The Authentic team - pictured left to right - Joel, Tania, Jeremy, Sharon-Louise, Lee and Blake with a range of the issues we've produced so far.

Sharon-Louise Good, Administrator

How awesome it is that Authentic has featured so many different people, from all different walks of life, yet all while sharing the same gospel message of Jesus Christ. There are articles written over 100 years ago, right through to articles written for this most recent issue. All of them containing amazing testimonies of Jesus at work in people's lives

Andrew Murray (1828-1917), one of our classics writers, wrote over 100 years ago - in a piece called God Blesses When You Surrender which featured in Issue 12 - of "...the sad state of the whole Church... of hundreds and thousands of honest, earnest Christians who are not living a life in the power of God, or to His glory. ...with so little perception of the truth that a Christian is a man utterly surrendered to God's will."

Yet still, in present day 2022 over 100 years later, we might not have to look far to see something similar to that which Andrew Murray noted. Wouldn't you have thought we'd have learnt by now? Yet, what he also wrote over a century ago in that same article seems to still apply as you read this. "Come and cast this self-life and flesh-life at the feet of Jesus. Then trust Him. Do not worry yourselves with trying to understand all about it, but come in the living faith that Christ will come into you with the power of His death and the power of His life; and then the Holy Spirit will bring the whole Christ - Christ crucified and risen and living in glory - into your heart."

Praise God for His unchanging nature - as noted in both Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8 - and for the fact He continues to lift up people to share His life, His abundant life. As we read in Jesus' own words found in *John 10:10* "...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (NKJV).


Tania Samuel, Designer

Before designing my section of the magazine, I do like to read the articles, it's a great 'work perk!' There are many which have challenged me, and often stick in my mind. I love the features because it's so interesting to hear - and be encouraged by - other's faith journeys. They're often so practical.

A very recent read - a feature in this edition in fact - is our chat with Logan Mills, the national director of Christian Surfers New Zealand. I felt it highlighted some really good advice which was actually a great reminder in my own walk. "Take some time to consider what He's equipped you with in order to be that authentic representation of God to those around you in your community," he said. "Use what you love - the passions God has given you - for Him."

In our last issue - issue 19 - there was a thought-provoking statement from Bob McCoskrie which also hit home. "At the end of the day, it's the truth which sets us free, isn't it? Even if you feel like the truth is becoming unpopular, if you've got good news, shouldn't you share it?"

Casting your mind all the way back to issue one, you may remember our catch up with footballer Tyler Boyd. I re-read it recently and hearing from this young man - who I thought was really insightful - was refreshing.

On our individual faith journeys God's Word is always relevant, no matter our age. As you read the feature, Tyler's absolute resolution - and determination - to give God all he has, while also purposing to practically apply and live out God's Word, is clearly evident. "I want to give 100 percent," he told us. "I know it says in Colossians 3:17 that "...whatever you do you should work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord." | 



Quick Quotes!

Over the course of our 20 issues, we've been so blessed that - thanks to God, some awesome contributors and other content, as well as fantastic opportunities for feature interviews - each of those editions have been filled with amazing, Christ-centred content. We delved into the Authentic archives to hand select just a few examples...

"You have been busy trying to do for Me all that only I can do through you."

- Major W Ian Thomas, Issue 2

"I wanted to reach people with the saving Gospel. After all, that's the most important message in the entire universe!"

- Ken Ham, Issue 2

"It was only after several years of a frustrating Christian life that I realised that when I became a Christian, God had only given me one thing - Himself."

- Charles Price, Issue 9

"God simply tells us there is a difference between His wisdom and the world's wisdom."

- Paul Curtas, Issue 5

"I'm a microwave type of guy, but I serve a crockpot type of God. I want instant answers, but He delivers slow ones. I live by the stopwatch, He lives by the calendar."

- Greg Stier, Issue 9

"With a heart full of joy, no work can weary and no burden can depress. God Himself is strength and song."

- Andrew Murray, Issue 5

"Be true to the calling God has for your life. Our potential to do great things begins with the simple things in front of us."

- Alfred Ngaro, Issue 7

"No soul is too far gone for God to bring back. No heart is too hard for God to soften. No son or daughter is too lost for God to rescue. Keep praying."

- Francis Chan, Issue 11

"There's a great passage in the Bible where God says He'll never leave us, nor forsake us. If I'm ever feeling a bit lost or distant from God, I just remember that He's always there, His grace is unending and, no matter where I am, I can find peace in His presence."

- Brad Dring, Rapture Ruckus, Issue 11

"I know now, of course, all the answers to all the questions I had - and all the needs we all have in life - are found in Jesus." - Pat Buckley, Issue 15

"Sometimes it's about realising there's nothing more we can do in our own strength. It's okay to accept that - because that's where God comes in."

- Strahan, Issue 13

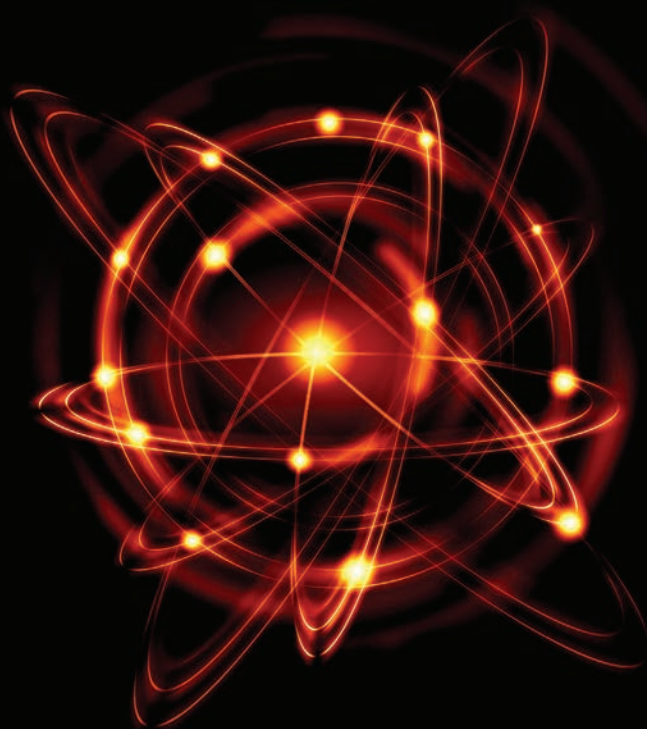
"..in regards to our individual walk with the Lord, I think it's important to have other Christian friends around who can encourage and support us, because this automatically builds accountability."

- Wynton Rufer, Issue 13

"Once you were dead in sin, now you are alive in a relationship that is eternal." - Alan Redpath, Issue 18

"When we have a proper understanding of God's Word, we discover that we are to relish it. It is our delight and joy because it reveals Truth - Jesus Christ - and, thereby, gives us life." - Nathan Johnson, Issue 15

"Looking to His face - and walking towards Him - is the direction we should maintain no matter the terrain." - Locky McNeill, Issue 18



The Kernel of Christ

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

A 'kernel' is defined as, "...the central part of any thing." Therefore, if Jesus is both the focus of - and the 'why' behind spiritual disciplines - then the 'kernel', or central part, of our daily schedule should be built around Him.

I was exhausted. The day had been long, the work gruelling and every muscle ached for rest. I longed for the relaxing spray of a hot shower. Even the thought brought a smile to my face and relaxation to my tight muscles.

Some kids have an aversion to baths and showers, creating elaborate excuses as to why they might melt if touched by the cleansing liquid. But I've always loved them and 'disciplined' myself to shower daily.

Discipline. It's a word which stirs up images of correction for bad behaviour, unending painful workouts or that 'thing' I'm supposed to accomplish daily - whether I like it or not. But, while we often see discipline as a negative, the concept is actually a positive one. What feels like correction or pain at the moment produces healthy behaviour and Godly living in the long run. The writer of Hebrews explained the blessing of discipline by contrasting God's discipline with that of a father.

"They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." - Hebrews 12:10-11 (NIV).

Discipline is good for us, if we allow it to do its work in us. And, this is especially true when it comes to the 'spiritual disciplines.'

The Heart of Spiritual Discipline

When we use the term 'spiritual disciplines' we often refer to the activities in the Christian life that help us grow spiritually and know God more - such as prayer, Bible reading and study, stillness, worship and so on. While such spiritual disciplines are beneficial and needed in our lives, the modern Church has often associated them with legalism. A simple definition of

legalism is, "...trying to be spiritual and accomplish a Godly life in my own strength and ability." It's all about self-effort, rule-keeping and a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts'.

Legalism never leads to life or spiritual growth - it's, simply, bondage. This is why the focus and motive for the spiritual disciplines must be Jesus. He is the 'why' behind all spiritual activity. To know Him should be a delight, not a duty. An obsession, not an obligation.

We are called to seek first His Kingdom - *"...and all these things will be given to you as well."* - Matthew 6:33 (NIV), and His presence - *"My heart says of you, 'Seek His face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek."* - Psalm 27:8 (NIV). We are to also seek Him with all our heart and soul - *"But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul."* - Deuteronomy 4:29 (NIV) - and to believe He rewards those who diligently seek Him - *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."* - Hebrews 11:6 (NIV).

But, our motivation must be Him. We are to seek after Him, not what we can get from Him. If we merely check things off a list, we can quickly fall into the trap of obligation and legalism. We can easily find ourselves doing spiritual disciplines just to get them done, somehow thinking God will be pleased. But, He longs for more than rituals from us, He desired relationship with us. The centre of our lives must be Christ. Paul declared that Jesus is to have first place in everything. He is to be preeminent. *"And He is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy."* - Colossians 1:18 (NIV).

And, one of the best ways to keep Him at the centre - and the focus of our lives - is to engage in spiritual disciplines. Let me quickly clarify that the spiritual disciplines don't produce life, just as the discipline of eating doesn't produce life. You can take an apple and put it in the mouth of a dead person, and it will never cause them to have life. Food doesn't create life, but it does help sustain it. Similarly, spiritual life comes solely because of Jesus Christ - He is life itself.

While the spiritual disciplines don't produce life, they do help nourish, sustain and deepen it. Just as you can't expect to live long physically without eating, we also need a regular diet of the spiritual disciplines for our souls.

The Kernel

Webster, in his 1828 dictionary, gives one definition of 'kernel' as: *"...the central part of any thing."*¹ Here at Ellerslie Mission Society, we've used this term to describe the spiritual disciplines in our lives. If Jesus is both the focus of - and the 'why' behind the spiritual disciplines - then the kernel, or central part, of our daily schedule should be built around Him.

What would happen if you built every day around Jesus? What if He was the core, the central part and the kernel of your life? What if your desire every day was to know Him more, seek Him

"...one of the best ways to keep Him at the centre - and the focus of our lives - is to engage in spiritual disciplines."

more, obey Him more and share Him more with others? And, what if your motivation for doing so wasn't out of obligation or duty, but out of a place of love for Him?

Spiritual Kernels

Again, one of the best ways to keep Jesus at the centre of our lives - and for us to grow spiritually - is to cultivate the spiritual disciplines, or kernels. For simplicity, I want us to examine the kernels as two groups - those being both 'personal' kernels and 'community' kernels.

Personal kernels

These include those activities which are done by yourself, such as prayer, Bible engagement - reading, study, memorisation and so on - stillness, silence, journaling, private worship, evangelism, fasting, simplicity, solitude, serving, gratitude and generosity.

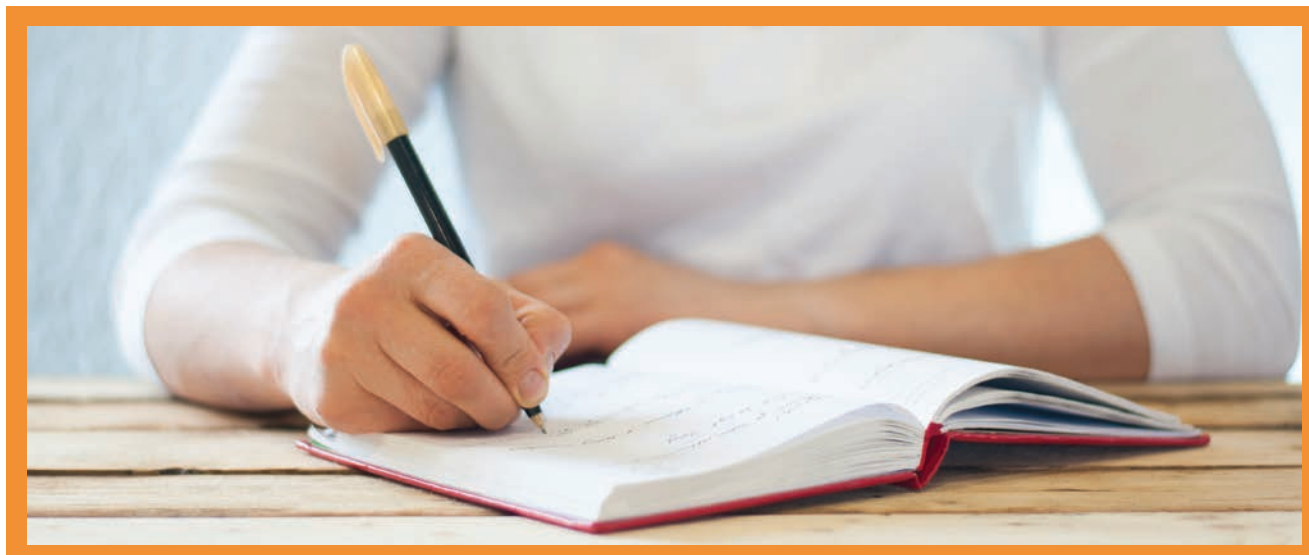
Community Kernels

These are those that are done with others, like worship, confession, public reading of scripture, prayer, encouragement, exhortation and fellowship. Both personal and community kernels are essential to cultivate in our lives. And, while some kernels may be practised on occasion - consider solitude and fasting - others should be a daily rhythm in our lives, like prayer and time in scripture.

We could spend an entire article looking at each kernel, but for an illustration, let's examine one - journaling.

One of the most repeated commands in the Old Testament is to 'remember'. While we presume we will never forget something, sadly, we are prone to forget even the important things in our lives. This can be seen clearly in the life of the Israelites - God did miraculous works for them, such as parting the Red Sea. Yet, one month later, they grumbled, complained and did not trust Him.

"The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron." - Exodus 16:1-2 (NIV). Remembering requires a diligent effort to hold something in your mind. And, unless you have a system to help you remember, it is easy to forget. In the Old Testament, the Israelites built piles of stones as



memorials - something to help them remember what God did. *"...and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever." - Joshua 4:3-7 (NIV).*

While you could grab rocks, a pen and paper could do the same thing for you. Putting pen to paper - or fingers to keyboard - gives you the opportunity to build a metaphorical pile of stones to help you remember what God has done in your life. You can look back and recall His goodness, faithfulness and provision - even if it doesn't make sense at the time.


Here are a few suggestions and helpful hints to get you started:

- » Choose your medium: paper, computer document, journaling or an app.
- » Find a consistent time to think and write.
- » Don't just write about what happened, but rather process the day. It's the thinking and processing time which will prove most valuable.
- » Date each entry - it's also helpful to list the day of the week.
- » Review and reflect on past entries.

Finding Refreshment

We need to continually cultivate the kernel of Christ in our lives. If I discipline myself spiritually because I feel I have to, there will always be a pain involved, a dread when thinking about the activity. That's how many within the Church feel about time in prayer or the Bible - we do it because we 'have' to. But, what if the kernels were more like taking a delightfully hot shower at the end of a long day? I'm 'disciplined' in taking hot showers - I've only missed a handful in the past two decades. Yet it's not a burden or duty, it's a delight.

When Jesus is our focus and motivation, when our heart longs to seek after and know Him more, the kernels become something we enjoy doing. They become refreshing and restful. We look forward to our time with God and anticipate our spiritual growth. As Paul told Timothy, *"...rather, train yourself to be godly." - 1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV).* The reason we build the spiritual disciplines at the centre - or kernel - of our lives is to grow in Christlikeness and deepen our intimacy with Him.

As AW Tozer is frequently quoted, "The man - or woman - who would know God must give time to Him."² I encourage you to incorporate the daily kernels of prayer and scripture into your life. Consider exploring one of the other kernels to practice this week. Give time to Jesus, build your life around Him and discover the richness of His presence - for, again, as is promised, He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. | 

References:

- 1 <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/kernel>
- 2 Aiden Wilson Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2007), 5.

■ Nathan Johnson is program director and an instructor at Ellerslie Mission Society in Windsor, Colorado. Learn and see more at deeperchristian.com. Used by permission.



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Honour Your Father & Your Mother!



Exodus 20:12 is a powerful verse. *“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you. (NKJV).*

Don't we seem to live in a rather 'up and down' culture? On one day each per year - Mother's and Father's Days respectively - we honour our parents. But, sadly - it seems to me - it doesn't appear to last.

Where is honour these days?

For fellow human beings. For those in authority. For those who truly deserve it by virtue of who they are and their

accomplishments. For those who work in the background holding things together. And, of course, honouring God. Do you remember those old fashioned movies in which men would die, for the honour of serving King and country?

I'm all for honour - particularly too at this time of year as we remember Jesus Christ, the Saviour, born unto us. And, as I said earlier, when it comes to our parents I'm all for the truth that a culture of honour should continue as a lifestyle all year round.

As I reflect, it's true some who read this will think they're not able to honour their parents because they've passed away. But that honour can still be verbalised, and act as an excellent example to future generations.

“The fifth commandment reminds us that if we are to have a right relationship with God, we must have a right relationship with our parents.”

You may also say, “..but you haven’t seen my parents”. It’s true, I haven’t. “You don’t know what they did to me”. It’s true, I don’t. “You don’t know how they treated me”. It’s true, I don’t. But, it’s also true that I do know that God does! Parents aren’t perfect, but they are ‘our’ parents, and they will be for all eternity.

The truth remains - where it is needed, and by God’s grace, we can be healed of all the ‘parent-caused’ hurts. And, as we are healed by Him, we can then - in turn - freely honour our parents. The fifth commandment reminds us that if we are to have a right relationship with God, we must have a right relationship with our parents.

We need to honour them no matter our age and stage - whether we’re living with them in the family home, they’re living with us or somewhere else.

The Bible - God’s Word - teaches us to honour people. And, in 1 Timothy 5 we are given examples of those who we should honour - such as widows in verse three, and elders who rule well, verse 17.

Additionally, for our benefit, it has accounts of sons and daughters who either honoured, or dishonoured, their parents. As just a few examples, Samson dishonoured his parents by lusting after a Philistine woman (Judges 14:3) and Jacob, with the help of his mother, deceived his father to get the blessing meant for his brother (Genesis 27).

Esther honoured Mordecai, and became Queen - thus saving the Jews. Moses honoured his father-in-law, listening to his advice to delegate decisions (Exodus 18). David honoured his father Jesse by being faithful to shepherd his sheep, even though he was from a wealthy family (1 Samuel 16) and Ruth honoured her mother-in-law, Naomi, and God blessed her with a wealthy husband (Ruth 1).

So then, how does one really honour one’s parents? Because - I should state here - honouring your parents does not mean

endorsing irresponsibility, sin or wrongdoing. Honouring your parents as an adult son or daughter does not place you again under their authority, nor is it seeking their approval. Here’s three things.

1. Allow God’s Grace to Heal Past Pains and Hurts

Let’s not stop the honour due to them because we have hurts in our own heart. It’s one very powerful relationship that needs tending and time, hugs and health.

If we truly value our parental relationships, we can receive God’s help to forgive, forget, and move on from being judge and jury, to friend and family. My friend, there is healing available. There is forgiveness and there is release.

2. Recognise What They’ve Done Right In Your Life

Write those things down. If you can, write regularly, send information, cards, news and photos. Most of the older generation still love a real physical card and letter. In fact, why not write a tribute, especially while they’re with us, but even if they’re gone.

Some years ago I wrote a piece called ‘Tribute To My Mum’, presenting it to her on her birthday. It was a special, tear-filled emotional moment for us both! Why do we often wait until their funerals to say nice things about our loved ones?

There are many things we can find to be grateful for - and yes, even things like when our parents took us to Saturday sports every weekend, regularly read the Bible to us and when they raised us with solid, Biblical values.

3. Praise Them For Their Legacy To You

Praise them, make them feel special. If we’ve grown up and left home, they can’t do the parenting thing again, it’s all over - they’ll never have that opportunity again.

And, we don’t know what regrets they may be carrying about their parenting. So, build them up, lift them through the things we say to them. Have we maybe thought of ways in which we can honour our parents, thanking them for the legacy they’ve left in us?

Consider Ephesians 6:1-2. *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honour your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise.” - (NKJV).*

Therefore, honouring our parents is not only the right thing to do, but in doing so - as His word instructs us to - it also carries with it the promise of reward. |A

■ Stephen Whitwell is a husband, father of two and a grandfather of eight. He loves God, the Bible, his family, life, fine food, writing, living in the Bay of Plenty and helping people discover who they really are in Christ. A retired pastor, he writes and publishes Brief Word - a free e-letter and blog - and also serves as a trustee for Authentic Christian Trust. He can be contacted at: www.goodwords.nz





Howard's Heart for a Transformed Aotearoa

BY JEREMY SMITH

"What does a 'transformed' Aotearoa look like? Great question." As Howard Goold and I sit having coffee near Putaruru-based Transform Aotearoa's office, the organisation's CEO reflects for a moment.

"Transformation starts with individual lives. Like a ripple effect, transformed people, and those transformed lives, will result in transformed families, transformed communities and - ultimately - a transformed nation. "A good question is, "...are you operating where you know God's called you to be?" When you are, you can be there simply pointing people to Jesus and trusting Him with the results.

"As we sow seeds wherever it is God has us, let's remember it's not us who changes people. And, we can't transform them.

"That's the Holy Spirit's work and God gets all the glory. At Transform Aotearoa, the team and I simply know we're called to be there. I'm delighted to work with such a great team and see God move as our collective heart is to be His 'agents' - His hands and feet."

Transform Aotearoa - which has been operating for nearly nine years - offers free community programmes with people at its heart to ensure those most at risk, or in need of community support, can access the help, personal development and growth opportunities on offer.

In 2022, more than 400 people were connected to Transform Aotearoa services and courses which - among others - include everything from driver licensing to computer literacy classes and barista training.

I sat down with Howard for a wide-ranging chat - discussing his heart for Aotearoa, being born into a missionary family, serving with YWAM in Spain and his time as a pastor. Among everything else was an implicit encouragement to - in every season of life - wholeheartedly trust the Lord as He directs our steps.

Firstly, I'd love to hear about your background. I read that your parents were missionaries and you were born in India. What an amazing heritage!

Absolutely. My father was born in China. My grandparents were missionaries with China Inland Mission (CIM), founded by Hudson Taylor. It's now Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) International.

The first time my father came to New Zealand, he couldn't return to China so he served in Palestine. He returned to New Zealand again in 1939 and, this time, met my mother. After they were married, they'd intended to return to Palestine, but - because of war - they ultimately stayed in India. My siblings and I were all born there. Reflecting on that upbringing is amazing. Missions has been in my bloodline for a long time and I really value that. To think my grandparents first went out to China in the 1870s! You can't help but be shaped and grounded by that background - it instils in you the understanding that people are people and everyone simply needs Jesus.

You were farming for many years. How and when did you come back to New Zealand?

I came to New Zealand in 1959, and let's just say the Kiwi school system and I never got on very well! I didn't even sit school certificate, let alone fail it! Our schooling in India was quite different. Ultimately, I went farming. I was in the industry for nearly 40 years from 1960 to 1997. I began my time as a farm labourer, progressing through to ultimately owning our own farm.

What's been an experience that has shaped your personal walk with Jesus?

Good question. I remember someone saying, "...a mouse born in a biscuit tin is not a biscuit." Similarly, a boy - like myself - born into a Christian home is not automatically a Christian. Those of us with that upbringing are obviously taught the scriptures and foundational truths of our faith right from a young age. At some point though, we have to make the choice that our walk with Jesus is our own - no one else's on our behalf.

That moment for me was when I was about 16. Billy Graham came to New Zealand and I went and listened to him speak. After he returned to the United States, back here in New Zealand, I went to listen to another man who - at that time - worked for the post office. He'd been responsible for ensuring landlines were in place all around New Zealand so people could hear Billy Graham's messages during his visit.

As this gentleman talked, he shared 3 John 1:2 - *"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."* (KJV). Essentially, John's hope is that our outward, physical health would reflect our spiritual health. A question was then put to us, "...what would we look like if our outward appearance suddenly reflected our current spiritual condition before God?" In my case, I knew then that although I'd been raised in a Christian home, I wasn't - at that stage - right with God. So, I made a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ.

...what would
we look like if
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appearance
suddenly
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current spiritual
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before God?



Wow. On that note, can you tell me about your family?

Sure. I was working on a farm in Manawaru when my wife Jill and I first met. We married 55 years ago in 1967. We have three children - our daughters Catherine and Val and our son Andrew. Jill is a qualified nurse and, over the years, she's also spent time helping me on the farm. She's a very gifted person and a huge blessing. Reflecting on the many facets of life the Lord has led us through over the years, Jill has been such an amazing support to me.

I'd go as far as saying I'd never have got anywhere if it hadn't been for that love and support. She has a huge heart for people herself - she currently drives for Franklin Family Support Services in South Auckland - taking people to medical appointments which they would be otherwise unable to get to. We also have six grandchildren.

When you left farming, what was the next door God opened for you?

We ended our farming career in 1997 and moved to southern Spain. There, we worked with Youth With a Mission (YWAM) North Africa for almost seven years. Jill and I were hostel managers at their facility which allowed missionaries in the region to have some rest and relaxation. Each year, about 2000 people would come and stay at the 15-bedroom facility she and I looked after. In October 2022, we were blessed with - and very excited by - the opportunity to actually go back to Spain for a month for a reunion of sorts.

So, how did Transform Aotearoa get started?

Nearly nine years ago, a group of Putaruru business people interested in establishing a faith-based response to community issues decided they wanted to invest initial funding into a locally-run organisation which would help address needs in the community at grassroots level. At the time, the then Government was facilitating its nationwide Social Sector Trials - a multi-agency, high level Government youth and community transformation initiative. Here in South Waikato, a lady named Jade Hohaia had been the project manager for that initiative in the district. Her primary role was to facilitate communication between Cabinet Ministers and community leaders, allocate funding accordingly and initiate grassroots strategic action to best meet the needs of youth and families.

At the meeting Jade shared how, as she carried out that work, She had not only identified many local gaps in provision, but discovered that those 'gaps' did not receive Government funding. The late Ian Elliott was also present at that meeting - he had a big influence in Christian circles. Based on that discussion, God stirred in his heart - and the heart of his wife Margaret - a desire to facilitate a place where people knew they belonged and were accepted. He wanted to help people build a sense of manna by equipping them with life skills. Ian was a wonderful man of God, and as some readers may know, he went to be with the Lord very quickly. I think in a way, a challenge to those of us who valued Ian - and so many did - is let's carry on his vision. Essentially, in part, that's what we're

doing every day through our work here at Transform Aotearoa. Jade wrote Transform Aotearoa's flagship programmes and when Lamen Hohaia - who was living in Christchurch working as a senior prison officer - and his wife Belena shifted to Putaruru, Transform Aotearoa was established. Lamen and Belena continue to be two of our Putaruru community liaisons today.

How would you describe Transform Aotearoa's aim, and how did you come to be involved?

We arrived back in New Zealand from Spain in 2003, and the Lord opened the door the following year for us to become pastors at Putaruru Gospel Chapel. We served in that capacity for a decade until retiring in 2014. By that stage, God had placed it on my heart that my stepping aside would allow opportunities for other people to serve in that way. So, Jill and I retired to Pokeno.

It's quite a long story as to how we ended up there, but God provided amazingly along the way. I also had the opportunity to volunteer as a prison chaplain at Spring Hill Corrections Facility - a season which came to a close after three years. Literally within 45 minutes of returning from my last day at the prison, I got a call about my current position. I have absolutely no doubt it was God opening the door - being at Transform Aotearoa has proven to be fulfilling in a very special way.

Simply put, our aim is to love people, inspire change and honour God. We're dedicated to building healthy whānau and to providing practical tools and support to help those in our provincial communities achieve that. We believe that in changing the home-base, the resulting benefits are far-reaching throughout the community. We're committed to journeying with - and supporting - people until they reach a point where they're able to make positive changes in their own lives.

Many of those referred to us are perhaps living life doing things the way they've always known to do them, yet they are on a journey of change. A big part of our focus is on encouraging people that genuine change starts in the home.

What are some of the community initiatives facilitated through Transform Aotearoa then?

We have a wide range of free programmes for both men and women. Te Kaupapa Whakamana - what we call a 'stage 1' men's leadership and development programme - was the first to be established. That initiative, and the women's Whakahonohono Mai programme, are designed to focus on personal development and on empowering people with practical tools to make better life choices and decisions. There are usually between 10 and 12 participants in each class, allowing facilitators to create a safe learning environment with high



levels of trust and confidentiality. Our stage two men's and women's leadership programmes are called Te Ana Raiona and Te Moana Kura respectively. Our stage three women's course is Tū Māia. Then, as a snapshot, we also have things like a weekly men's life group known as Iron Sharpens Iron and a weekly Women of Worth gathering. We facilitate parenting and whānau modules, including our six-week Building Awesome Whānau course and a course of the same length for teenagers called Toolbox Teenage Years. Our Te Mana O Roto course is based on a desire to journey through life with our younger men. A module called Shine Girl is also run to journey with young girls and remind them they are fearfully and wonderfully made. People can also make use of our Christians against Poverty (CAP) Release Group, Te Reo classes and even a Cooking on a Shoestring module.

Various driver licence-related courses - including defensive driving, HT class four truck licensing and HT class two licences - are also available. We can teach basic computer skills to those who want them and offer barista training courses. Upon completion of certain modules, participants can re-enrol in others if they want - no one is turned away.

“...we're intentional in sharing Christ as an essential part of the picture as we point people to their God-given potential, but we're not about 'making' people change or forcing them to do anything. God outworks that change.”

It must be really encouraging to you and the Transform Aotearoa team when you consider lives being impacted by your work. How do people come to know about you?

Participants come from far and wide - Mangakino, Tokoroa, Tirau, Matamata and even Hamilton. Some are referred by agencies like the courts, the Department of Corrections, the police or Work and Income. We have a lot of connections with organisations like that who refer people to us and - like us - they're so excited to see the positive changes people make in their lives. Perhaps the main way is probably self-referral and word of mouth.

We currently employ four people either full or part-time, with another six part-time contractors. In 2022, more than 400 people have been referred to us and subsequently been

through one or more of our programmes. Our encouragement is always, "...do not define people by their past, but rather by their potential for the future." In that light, hearing the practical testimonies of men and women who have walked through, in some cases, incredibly difficult backgrounds and now become completely different people is so powerful. They are walking new paths and caring for their family - and we've seen many practical examples of people demonstrating that change.

How powerful. That's how God saw us in giving Jesus to die on the cross. Considering the work of Transform Aotearoa, what advice do you have for readers about authentically sharing Jesus with those we come across each day?

I consider Romans 5:8, *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (NIV). At Transform Aotearoa, we're absolutely purposeful in sharing the gospel regularly, but we're not called to put pressure on anyone to receive it. I like to think of it like this. If you're baking a loaf of bread and leave out the yeast or the baking powder, you'll end up with a nice flat bread.

But, it won't be the bread it could have been. Our approach at Transform Aotearoa is that yes, we can provide lessons and courses, and people can get qualifications, but if we leave God out of the equation and don't tell them about Him, we won't find ourselves living the abundant life Jesus came to give us. So, we're intentional in sharing Christ as an essential part of the picture as we point people to their God-given potential, but we're not about 'making' people change or forcing them to do anything. God outworks that change.

I think authentically sharing Jesus comes down to getting to know how - and where - Jesus would have you be His hands and feet. And, to a large extent, that understanding comes by spending time with God in His Word. By having that regular time, we'll then be able to discern where Jesus would have us move,

and when. Let's accept that people around us have areas of need we may be able to meet. Then, even if we can't personally meet that need, maybe we can play a part in facilitating a solution? We should never think, "...my name's not on it, so I won't do it..."

Reflecting back on my own story - the seasons of my life - I can see God's hand at work through all of it. For example, when I came to Putaruru, there were two main aspects of my role as a pastor - to build connections with people in the fellowship and to go out into the marketplace and create better links with the community.

I intentionally looked for a church in which I could get to know everybody and where they would know me. In my experience, building God-ordained connections is simply one of the key ways in which you make yourself available to be His hands and feet. We are the body of Christ. He is the Head, we're the rest of His body. The hand doesn't try to be the foot and the foot doesn't try to be the ear. But, each part does what it was ordained to do by design. In

seeking to authentically represent Jesus, regularly ask yourself if you're walking in the sphere He'd have you walk in. And, if so, you will see fruit - in His time.

Being a faith-based initiative, what's it like to reflect on how God has provided Transform Aotearoa so far?

I heard an Elisabeth Elliot quote along the lines of, "God's work done God's way will never lack God's provision." Because we're 100 percent a faith ministry, we don't have the ability to earn a profit and receive no Government funding.

Truthfully, we are here through both God's provision and the generosity of Christian trusts, individuals, churches and businesses. We absolutely don't take that lightly and are so grateful. We're also 100 percent transparent in terms of ensuring that funding that is entrusted to us is put to use in the way God intended when it was given. I can only simply say that as we trust each step to Him, God has provided all that we need.

You're currently based in Putaruru - do you think doors may open in the future to expand into other areas of Aotearoa as well?

Well, our name - of course - is Transform Aotearoa, not just Transform Putaruru. And, we do regularly get people expressing interest in the work we do being accessible in other parts of the nation. We're absolutely open to that. And honestly, while the sky is the limit in one sense, it's a question we ultimately leave with God, in His timing. Perhaps one of the biggest considerations is that - over and above simply offering programmes - you must have the right staff and volunteers,

"It became very clear that what the Lord had in mind was so much better than anything that I could devise. Since then, I've had a great sense of satisfaction in knowing that trusting God's direction is the safest, and wisest, way to go."



each of them with a God-given passion for what they do. Here in Putaruru, I can absolutely say we're so blessed, and that - in every case - our people are just spot on. Naturally speaking, I wouldn't even really know where to begin in terms of replicating that. I'm always telling people that, as CEO, I'm so blessed to work with the people we have here.

That said, we are expanding and growing and, as we do so, our role is to ensure we get the balance right. We are not here to become 'bigger' than we ought to be and we're not interested in orchestrating anything in our own strength. Not that we could! We do have a threefold criteria with which we think about new areas of need, or additional programmes we could facilitate. Firstly, is it necessary, secondly, have we got the right, qualified, person to facilitate it who is also passionate about doing so and, lastly, is this something for which we can source funding? Then, ultimately, we leave it in God's hands.

It was neat to discover that you're on the Māori Postal Aotearoa board! We chatted with them in issue 19. Can you tell me about how that ties in with a regular spot you have at your local Pokeno Market?

Sure! As I mentioned, when Jill and I retired, we were able to shift to Pokeno, and now - on most Sundays of the year - I have a stall at the local market. There, I have Māori Postal Aotearoa resources available to the public, as well as other reading material and scripture verses. I know the Holy Spirit can take and use this material in ways far more powerful than just my natural words. To many of the stall holders, 'The Spot', as my site is now called, is referred to as the church in the market - and that in itself leads to great discussions and, often, prayer.

Howard, this has been an awesome chat. Is there anything else you'd like to add as we finish?

I'm reminded of the story of the young boy bringing Jesus his lunch before the feeding of the 5000. The reality is that, for any of us, when we bring Jesus whatever it is we have to give, He will take it and do with it as He chooses. Sometimes, things aren't going to look exactly like what we thought, and they may not fit our 'timeframe' - but our job is to trust His plan and His timing.

Truthfully, I'm nearer to 80 than I am to 75 now, but I will continue to serve here until God says there's something else for me. In my life, the process of observing God opening doors as we prepared to move to Pokeno is now one that absolutely anchors me. I can see He'd been preparing things some years in advance of our arrival and ordered those things to happen in the right sequence and timing. It became very clear that what the Lord had in mind was so much better than anything that I could devise. Since then, I've had a great sense of satisfaction in knowing that trusting God's direction is the safest, and



wisest, way to go. To anyone reading this, it is the same for anyone who will commit their ways to walking in relationship with Him.

Recently, I was reading Romans 12:1-2. In doing so, I noticed something I'd never really taken note of before - the word 'acceptable'. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (KJV).

Not only is what we seek to be holy, right and honouring to God and all He stands for, but it must also be acceptable to Him. In other words, we must know we're walking in the plans He has for our lives. Whatever season of my life I now reflect back on - be that returning from Spain, my season as a pastor, or working in the prison, I can absolutely see it was God who opened the door to each of those chapters - and to this current chapter now. If I'm honest, I can say I'm somewhat embarrassed by the times I was perhaps frustrated because I felt my plans were better. But it simply comes down to this - as we walk with God, let's trust Him - and His plan - implicitly. For His ways are higher than ours.

Thanks so much Howard!

For more, see www.transformaotearoa.org.nz

■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.



Our Christmas Inheritance

BY CHARLES PRICE

With Christmas fast approaching, Charles Price discusses the powerful truth that - in giving His Son, Jesus Christ - God has given, and made available to us, the entirety of that which He has to give...

Two events merge together on Christmas Day.

The commercial event, with its huge revenues into the coffers of retailers, manufacturers, card producers and outlets for food and drink, and the baby in the manger - to whom we seem to 'tip our hats' with a few carols, nativity scenes and presents.

Presents? Yes, the practice apparently has its roots in the gifts the wisemen brought to Jesus - though I have yet to receive any gold, frankincense or myrrh in my stocking!

Giving gifts seems appropriate at Christmas - for the words 'gave', 'gift' and 'given' are all used when describing the coming of Christ. Not as a one-time gift however, but as an inexhaustible gift that keeps on giving.

When God gave His Son to the world, wrapped up in Him were - and still are - all the spiritual resources human beings need. The New Testament asks the question, *"...how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" - Romans 8:32 (NIV).*

Elsewhere, we're told God, *"...has blessed us in the Heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."* - Ephesians 1:3 (NIV), and *"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him..."* - 2 Peter 1:3 (NIV).

There's actually a lot more to this gift than what initially meets the eye. For, included in this gift, is an 'inheritance in Christ' - see Ephesians 1:14.

But, it's possible to believe in Jesus, yet still simply sit on resources which remain unutilised in our day to day living! I read of the son of a wealthy aristocratic woman in Portugal. He never married or had children, but he owned a large house in the centre of Lisbon, another property out in the country and numerous investment portfolios. With no immediate family to leave his riches to, he invited his lawyer - and two witnesses from the street previously unknown to him - to his home. Around

his dining room table, he took a copy of the Lisbon telephone directory and randomly selected 70 people with whom he would share his fortune upon his death. His lawyer and the witnesses attested that he was of sound mind in doing so and that he had, of his own volition, made this will.

The document was deposited in his lawyer's safe, remaining there until his death. About 20 years later, he died. The 70 previously unknown people were contacted to be informed that they were now the beneficiaries of the will.

Of those still alive, most thought it was a scam. Only two in fact followed through to claim their inheritance. The rest, refusing to believe, never enjoyed the wealth that had become legitimately theirs. There may be many genuine Christians who regard the idea that we have 'every spiritual blessing in Christ', a rich 'inheritance', and 'everything we need for life and for Godliness', as hyperbole at the least and - at most - a 'scam'.

Perhaps we regard such scriptures with suspicion, hesitancy and cynicism. And, if there's any truth in it at all, we have no idea how to appropriate it. So, we continue to live in spiritual poverty, while assigning any such inheritance to a future time and place in Heaven. But, suppose those statements are true. What difference would that make in our lives? How would we live differently tomorrow morning if we knew - and took hold of the fact - that, in Christ, we have available to us every spiritual resource we need in order to live a fruitful and meaningful life?

How would it affect how we face crises, anxieties and fears? Paul includes in his statement about our portfolio of *"...every spiritual blessing..."*, being *"...chosen, redeemed, forgiven and indwelt by his Spirit..."*.

Peter includes in his statement of *"...everything we need for life and Godliness..."* that we participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. These are generalities so, leaving aside the particulars, how do we appropriate such riches?

Obviously, the only legitimate response to receiving a gift is to say, "Thank you". We teach our kids to say "Thank you" when someone gives them something, don't we?. At Christmas, we

remind them, "...don't forget to write and thank Aunt Agatha who sent you a book, again...". Giving thanks is actually a fundamental disposition of Christian living. *"...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* - 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV).

Note that it doesn't say, give thanks 'for' all circumstances - because, of course, some circumstances are bad, nasty and have their origins in evil. We are in fact told to give thanks 'in' all circumstances, whatever their nature.

Give thanks to who? To God. For what? For Himself. Why? Because He is sufficient for our needs! There's nothing that threatens me that He is afraid of. Nothing that causes me anxiety that makes Him sweat. Nothing that outwits me that causes Him to scratch His head. His invitation is to relate everything to Him, in confident thankfulness for His presence and resources. And, in doing so, to exchange natural anxiety for divine peace.

Hence Paul writes in the New Testament, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* - Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV).

That 'prayer and petition' is accompanied by 'thanksgiving', because we are confident that we have in Christ the resources - His resources - to meet our needs. This "...peace of God which transcends understanding..." is the natural consequence of passing the situation to - and then leaving it with - Him. The problem for many of us is that, having given situations to God 'by prayer with thanksgiving', we conclude with a polite 'Amen' yet then continue as though we'd never given it to God at all! Let alone left it with Him.

Rather than our anxiety being replaced by the peace of God, we feel temporarily relieved by having prayed at all. But, very quickly we return to the state of being as anxious as we were before. We prayed about it, but never actually gave it to God. When we really give it to Him, we thank Him that He has accepted it from us and that the ball is now in His court.

Hence, we give it "...by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving". "Thank you" is the language of faith. "Please" is the language of a beggar asking in the hope some crumb may fall from the table. "Thank you" is confidence in His sufficiency, "please" is merely hopeful. Jesus never said "please" to His Father. When faced with

5000 hungry people with insufficient food, He simply said, "Thank you". That was the key to His miracle. We know that because when He crossed back over Galilee the next day after feeding the 5000, John reports that His boat landed, *"...near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks."* - John 6:23 (NIV).

If I was writing that report, I'd have reported that He came, "...near the place where Jesus fed 5000 with five loaves and two fish", or "...near the place where Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand".

That's what would've impressed me. But to John, who had been an eyewitness, the significance of the event was that Jesus had "given thanks".

That's what triggered the miracle. He acknowledged the sufficiency of His Father to do what was humanly impossible and said the obvious thing to say when you know that - "Thank you".

In other words, "...I'm passing this responsibility to You, and thank You in advance for whatever it is You are going to do..."

Likewise, faced with another 4000 hungry people, He "...gave thanks". At the tomb of Lazarus, He said to his Father, *"...I thank You that You have heard Me..."* - John 11:41 (NIV).

At the last supper, offering bread and wine which spoke of His soon-to-be broken body and poured out blood, He "...gave thanks". Can you imagine

that? Pointing to His impending suffering and death, He gave the situation to his Father and "...gave thanks". In each situation, He's passing the situation to His Father, with the confidence He's going to handle it according to His will and purpose.

The 'buck has been passed', if you will, and He can rest in the sufficiency of His Father. Never in all of scripture are we exhorted to say 'please' to God. But, everywhere we are encouraged to, "...give thanks to the Lord". Not for past things He has done, but for His sufficiency in the present, and in anticipation of His working.

Christmas is a celebration of the gift of God's Son, Jesus. But, don't just say 'thank you' at Christmas. Instead, go on enjoying the gift that keeps on giving by constantly acknowledging His sufficiency in your life. Say, "...thank you..." for your inheritance in Him. Then, we have grounds to face every situation - crisis, fear and event - having given it to God and trusting Him to be present and active. What He does in that situation is His business - ours is to trust Him and thank Him in advance. |A

■ Charles Price serves as 'Minister at Large' with The Peoples Church, Toronto, Canada. He is also an itinerate speaker and preacher and author of several books. For more information please visit: www.livingtruth.ca



Christmas

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In every country we serve, wherever we look, we can see challenges, hardship, suffering. Yet, right there in the midst of it all, we see something else: radiant faces driving powerful life-change, beacons of comfort and relief in the midst of affliction. You see, GFA World missionaries have had manifold opportunities to extend a helping hand, expressing Christ's love in tangible ways, through the support of our donors and sponsors.

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Yours for those in need,



K.P. Yohannan
(Metropolitan Yohan)
Founder and Director



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-Pastor Marty, a GFA missionary serving on one of Asia's slums.

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And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Matthew 25:40 NKJV

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GFA World NZ is dedicated to the most effective and efficient stewardship of resources, according to 1 Corinthians 3:12–14. Contributions to GFA World NZ are NOT income tax deductible. All gift options represent GFA World's actual ministry efforts to meet the diverse needs of individuals and communities. Regardless of particular preference, moneys are raised for ministry purposes, and GFA World NZ retains discretion to use donated funds in any manner that serves our charitable objectives and subject to our gift acceptance policy at www.gfa.org.nz/giftpolicy.

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THE ENABLING POWER

BY ERIC LUDY

Grace. Grace in the Bible is power - it's enabling power. It's God's life. And - more specifically - it's the labour of God on man's behalf. What are we saved by? We're saved by His work. However, His work isn't just 2000 years ago.

It's important that we catch this, because I think it's one of the most important things you'll ever grasp. His work is grace, and it works today. Look at Ephesians 2:8 - *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (NIV).*

So, how are you saved? By grace. Not just 2000 years ago. How are you saved from temptations right now? By grace. Where is it that we access that grace? In Christ. The truth is that grace is there for the taking, but you need to be in Christ to access the throne room of grace.

The throne of grace is the very presence of God. In and of ourselves, we have no business in the presence of God - we'd have to be perfectly righteous - you'd have to bear the nature of that very presence.

What is the nature of that presence? "Holy, holy, holy". That literally means "...other than this world", "...other than this world", "...other than this world". The tri-fold otherness and holiness of God.

While the throne room of grace is obviously where God's grace is, in our sin, we've been cut off from it. Yet, because of the cross, we've been clothed in Christ, and because we're in Christ we've been brought near by His blood. We've been brought to the throne room of grace. And, in Christ, Hebrews 4:16 tells us, *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne*

of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (KJV). And, there's no doubt that in the times we live, we absolutely have great need. Therefore, we are in great need of the labour of God on man's behalf - His grace..

Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:10 - *"But by the grace of God I am what I am..."* (KJV). So, why is he what he is? By the grace of God. Many of us tend to think of grace as perhaps God looking at us as humans and thinking something like, "...you poor thing..." That though is actually more accurately described as perhaps mercy, or kindness.

Grace is literally us being stuck in a mud pit with the pigs, and God leaning down, picking us up, cleaning us off, setting our feet upon a rock, filling us with His power and saying, "...live!" He is working. He worked. And, He is working. That's grace. The next line of 1 Corinthians 15:10 says, *"...and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain..."* (KJV).

Consider that. His grace was bestowed upon Paul - and then, *"I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* (KJV).

His grace enabled Paul to labour more abundantly. It's the labour of God on man's behalf. It's the Spirit of God - the life of Jesus imparted. He comes into our lives to live His life in and through us. There are then things required of us. Firstly we accept that as impossible and respond, "I need to do that, but I can't."

And so, then, we step into Christ. Through Him you have access into the throne room of grace. What does Jesus say? *"And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* - John 14:13 (NIV). Isn't it powerful

“...because of the cross, we’ve been clothed in Christ, and because we’re in Christ we’ve been brought near by His blood.”

to consider that as we are in Christ, God the Father will treat our requests as He would treat a request from Jesus.

A prayer you might simply like to pray if this is you is, “Father, thank you for the Holy Spirit, through whom to live this life. May I have your life in me and may I live by grace.”

When we do pray a prayer like that, God’s response is amazing. He loves to bestow upon us His grace - that’s why He sent Jesus. He delights to give us what we need. So, how do you live? By grace. What saved you? grace. God picking us up out of our sin from which we could never free ourselves.

But then what enables you to live? God living inside of you. It’s called the manifold wonder of grace. Grace is not just evidenced at the cross, but has been made eternally available through the cross. It is ever-present, always available, always accessible and amazingly sufficient for every good work. Grace works. *“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” - Ephesians 3:20 (KJV).*

What a statement. It’s not referring to us being able, it’s unto Him who is able. Has anyone told you about the sacred entrustment of grace? We have been given power and might,


in Him, to live an impossible life. This is called the gospel of grace. Can I ask, do you have His power working in you? Do you have the strength and might of the army of Heaven working within you?

Taking your hands and causing them to heed, and to do the work of God Almighty, on this earth?

To take your eyes and look solely at what God is looking at? To cause this heart not to be moved by human emotion, but to be genuinely caught up with the burden of God?

Our feet should no longer walk in the darkness of the ‘broad’ way, but be able to walk the narrow way. Do you have the strength of God in you?

Has anyone told you that if you believe in Christ, you have access into the throne room of grace? And, if you come unto the throne room of grace, in Jesus Christ, you can make petitions of the Father.

He will give you the strength of God - the Holy Spirit - the very person of God to dwell in you. The very Christ who clothes you is also the very Christ who enables you within - to live the same life He lived while here on earth. | 

■ Eric Ludy is the president of Ellerslie Mission Society and the bestselling author of eighteen books on Christian thought and living. Eric Ludy functions as the director of Ellerslie Discipleship Training in Windsor, Colorado and serves as the teaching pastor at Ellerslie’s campus church. For more from Eric visit www.ericludy.com



Weathering the Storm: Clouds Ahead?

BY CHUCK MISSLER



Paul certainly knew sufferings, and he regarded them as opportunities. This same reasoning is also why James could sincerely admonish us to “count it all joy.” “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...” - James 1:2 (NKJV).

As you read this, are you feeling as though you're headed into a threatening 'storm'? Do you feel as though you're headed for rocks and shoals? - 'dark times' as it were?

If so, I write this piece with some encouragement for you specifically in mind - and it is simply this - Romans 8:28 is still operative.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (NIV).

Probably the three most important words are the first three: “And we know...” Therein summed up, it is the confidence in this commitment that sees you through the deepest of valleys.

I'd also encourage us to remember that we are in a 'boot camp' of sorts for Heaven. Look at Romans 8:17 - *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” (NIV).*

Trials are an expected part of the Christian life. And, like all storms, preparation - and awareness - can be a critical element in therefore successfully enduring them. Jesus suffered trials. And, Jesus promised us trials. And yet, I believe the first of two common

mistakes we make regarding trials is failing to anticipate them. I would also suggest a second mistake is to harbor a morbid fear of trials. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 10:13.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (KJV).

So, let's take a moment to consider why Christians have trials. Simply put, the trials in our lives present many opportunities. Here are just a few.


1. To glorify God (Daniel 3:16-18 and 24-25).
2. Discipline for known sin (Hebrews 12:5-11 Romans 14:23 and 1 John 1:9).
3. To prevent us from falling into sin (1 Peter 4:1-2).
4. To keep us from pride. Paul was kept from pride by his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
5. To build faith (1 Peter 1:6-7).
6. To cause growth (Romans 5:3-5).
7. To teach obedience and discipline (Acts 9:15-16 and Philippians 4:11-13).
8. To equip us to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
9. To prove the reality of Christ in us (2 Corinthians 4:7-11).
10. For testimony to the angels (Job 1:8, Ephesians 3:8-11 and 1 Peter 1:12).

As we encounter serious trials, we need to also remember Job. The secret to the book of Job is - simply - to gain and maintain the divine viewpoint. When you and I endure trials with this perspective in mind, we do so aware of the promise

found in 1 Corinthians 2:9. *“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. (KJV).*

A powerful verse is also found in Romans 8:18 - *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (KJV).*

As Paul develops in the eighth chapter of his letter to the believers in Rome, he ends with the crescendo of Romans 8:31-39. My final encouragement is that you read it and apply it to whatever situation you are walking through. *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*

“Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (KJV). | 

■ Chuck Missler was an author, Bible teacher, engineer, and former businessman. He was also the founder of the Koinonia Institute. Chuck went to be with the Lord in May 2018.





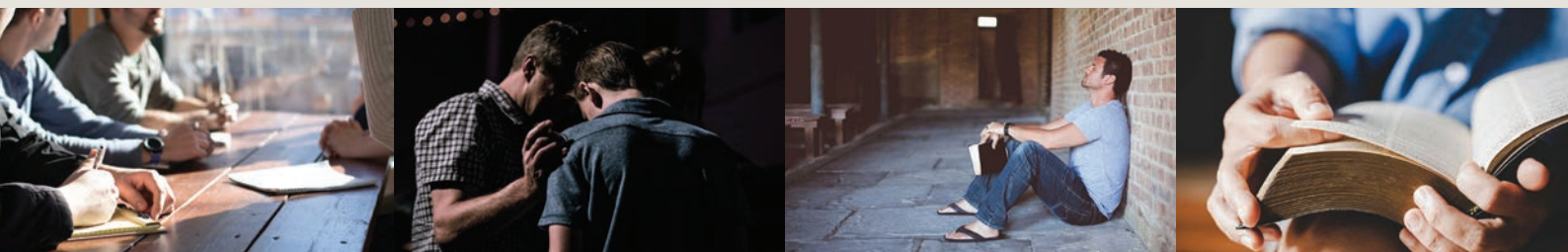
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God Knows and Understands

BY PAUL CURTAS

I have a question for you. How well do you know yourself? Sometimes I think I understand myself well, until something surprisingly happens and I find myself reacting in a way I think is unlike me. And, additionally, how would you feel if you knew someone was aware of every detail of your life?

The physical marks and scars on your body, the emotional scars of your soul, your mental strengths and weaknesses, the situations you find yourself in every day and all the decisions you've both made and will make? Wow. Isn't that mind boggling! There's a good summary, in Psalm 139:1-9, of what God says about His knowledge and understanding of you. God does not need to find facts to make His conclusion. He knows all things equally well, and not one thing does He know better than another. You'll never hear God say, "If I really knew him, or her, I might have a different opinion of them." Why?


Well, firstly, God knows us inside and out. As humans, we look on the outward things to evaluate a person's life. But, God's knowledge penetrates to the depth of the human heart. You can read verses such as 1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Chronicles 28:9, Psalm 44:20-21 and Hebrews 4:12 to find out more.

God is actually nearer to you and I than our own thoughts are. And, God knows the progress of all events in our lives, the timing and when they actually come to pass. With exactness, God knows their real relation one to the other. There's no surprise, or 'Plan B', with God. See, for example, Romans 11:33-36. And,

consider Job 28:23-24 - "God understands the way to it and He alone knows where it dwells, for He views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens." (NIV).

Isn't it the case that it's often hard for us to understand why bad things happen. Or, when we've messed things up by our own bad choices, we wonder if God's overall purposes can still be worked out in our lives. Yet, God knows the hidden meaning of things. The story of Joseph shows us that he faced great difficulties through the bad choices his brothers made against him. Yet, when things turned in his favor years later, Joseph saw God's providence.

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done." - Genesis 50:20 (NIV).

The truth is, we really don't know ourselves as well as God knows us. And, though we may think knowing about things can make us free, it cannot. God actually places greater value on our response to Him, than He does on our comprehension of - or understanding of - everything in life. Even if we don't understand, will we still trust? He simply asks us to draw near to Him, and - in response - He will draw near to us. | 

■ Paul M. Curtas is the General Director of FCAP. He is also the author of the book "When God Shows Up at Work", which is now available in German and Spanish, as well as English. Visit his website for more details - www.godinwork.com





Study Scripture with the Author

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

I've often talked about some of the ways in which we can get more out of studying - and reading - the Bible. And, here is a key consideration - involve the Author. Studying the Bible is not like studying any other literature. The Bible is unlike any other book in the world, for not only is the Author alive, He lives inside Christians through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. This radically changes our engagement with scripture! You can read, study, memorise and meditate upon God's Word with Him.

Reflect on that for a moment. Do we realise how phenomenal it is that when we study scripture, not only is the Author of that book - The Bible - alive, but He lives within us?

Truthfully, there is a lot of complexity in the Word of God, and yet as we come to scripture and we are reading, meditating upon, studying it and 'wrestling' with things there is an amazing reality at play.

And that is that I can come to the Author of scripture and say, "God, what did you mean by this? What were you intending to communicate?" Perhaps He won't respond with a loud booming voice, but - by His Spirit, God will use things that you read and hear, conversations and other interactions to reveal to you the truth in - and meaning of - His Word.

As we prayerfully approach scripture, it is simply phenomenal that - over time - God begins to reveal truth and revelation about His Word. It astounds me the ways in which God, time and time again, proves Himself faithful in doing so.

I know it's His work, not mine, because I'm - simply - not that smart! There is an amazing promise which Jesus gives to His disciples in John 16. He is in the upper room telling them about how He will soon depart. But, when He departs, He will send the Holy Spirit.

"When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you." - John 16:13-14 (ESV).

I love this passage. Two chapters prior - in John 14 - we have the well-known verse in which Jesus declares that He is the truth.

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" - John 14:6 (ESV).

And now, Jesus again says He is going to send forth the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit.


What does Jesus say the Holy Spirit will do when He comes? Jesus tells us He will guide us into all truth. Ponder this. Here is Jesus - who is truth, sending forth the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, and when He comes the Spirit will then guide us into all truth. These very passages tell us that the truth is not information, it's a person - Jesus Christ. Do we grasp how stunning it is to realise that we have the indwelling Holy Spirit in us - and that one of the major roles of the Spirit of God is to lead us to Christ?

“Do we realise how phenomenal it is that when we study scripture, not only is the Author of that book - The Bible - alive, but He lives within us?”

Look at John 16:14 again. To glorify Jesus Christ. Incredible. When we apply that to Bible study, we have this idea that when I come to scripture - God's very Word - the Holy Spirit will be leading and guiding us evermore unto Jesus Christ. He will reveal truth and He will glorify Jesus. So, if I come to a passage of scripture which just doesn't make sense, why wouldn't I want to involve the Author?

Why wouldn't I want the interaction between my life and the Author Himself, through the Holy Spirit? I will leave you with a question. What if we always intentionally involved

the Author every time we came to scripture? What if our prayer every time we read, study, memorise and meditate on His Word was that the Lord would come and speak truth to us? If we ask Him to stir our hearts and - if we bend our knee under His authority as we read His Word - He will ultimately give us insight and reveal to us the very things He wants to speak to us as we read the Bible.

So, don't ever come to scripture outside of the Author - let us always involve Him. What an amazing opportunity we have to come to the greatest Book of all time, with Christ. The Holy Spirit is living and active inside of us - so interact, communicate and engage with Him as we engage with God's Word. | 

■ Nathan Johnson is program director and an instructor at Ellerslie Mission Society in Windsor, Colorado. Learn and see more at deeperchristian.com. Used by permission.



Immanuel!

God With Us!

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” - Matthew 1:23 (NKJV).



The story of Christmas should never bore us! And, we should never tire of hearing the timeless, Biblical account of Christmas. Yes, we do get overwhelmed and bombarded with the commercialism, the hype and the glitz and the glitter of a carnal Christmas. The media presents Christmas as ‘Xmas’, devoid of its true meaning. It’s Christmas without Christ! But, there is no Christmas without Christ! He is the reason for the season.

We know the fact of the virgin birth of Christ. That doctrine alone is one of the most important in the Bible. Any rejection of Christ’s supernatural origin leaves His supernatural life, His supernatural death and His supernatural resurrection inexplicable. You have to have it all, in order for any of it to make sense. And, if Jesus wasn’t born of a virgin, then the claim that He can save is highly questionable. So, at the very outset, Matthew affirms the virgin birth. An understanding of that truth gives rise to the amazing statement in Matthew 1:23 - that Jesus Christ is called immanuel, God with us.

Have we stopped in recent years at Christmas time to think about how big that thought is? Or, how wide ranging its implications are? Consider, for a second, what it really means to have God with us. To fully understand how an infinite, majestic, loving, just and merciful creator God can be with us really is beyond the finite human mind. But, that’s part of the promise of Christmas. The Son born to Joseph was called

Jesus – meaning Saviour, and also Immanuel. God with us. Here, we have the perfect God as Saviour, and as God. Jesus Christ is fully God – Immanuel, Christ. And fully man – Jesus, the Son of man. He who existed before the world was created is now born into that world to be its Saviour. The Holy Spirit, who produced the world, now produced the Saviour of the world. Wow!

He was none other than God in human flesh, and Matthew tells us He came to dwell with the sick to heal them, with the demon possessed to liberate them, with the poor in spirit to bless them, with the care-ridden to free them from care, with the lepers to cleanse them, with the diseased to cure them and with the hungry to feed them.

But, most of all, He says He came to dwell with the lost. *“...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” - Luke 19:10 (NKJV).*

Immanuel, God with us, infinitely rich, became poor. He assumed our human nature, entered our sin-polluted atmosphere without ever being tainted by it, took our guilt, bore our grief, carried our sorrows, was wounded with our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, went to Heaven to prepare a place for us and sent His Spirit to dwell in our hearts.

And, right now, He makes intercession for us, and will someday come to take us to be with Him! No wonder the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (NKJV).*

Consider it this way, in the words of Herbert Lockyer. “He was poor, that He might make us rich. He was born of a virgin, that we might be born of God. He took our flesh, that He might give us the Spirit. He lay in a manger that we might lie in Paradise. He came down from Heaven, that He might bring us to Heaven.”

An account from WW1 tells that on Christmas Eve in 1914 - in the battlefields of France 50 miles from Paris - the British and German armies held their battle lines. About 800,000 men had already died, the war was five months old and there was misery on both sides. The Germans began singing Christmas carols and then the British joined in. The fighting stopped and

they all climbed out of the trenches and into what was known as “...no man's land”. Or, the area between the two trenches. On Christmas Day, both sides exchanged belongings and held a football match. The German team won 3-2. The day after Christmas - Boxing Day - the fighting did not resume. Both sides had to bring in fresh troops to start the fighting again. Such was the influence of that one man, Jesus Christ, the peacemaker, and sole reason for the season.

Yes, in life it's not always easy to be thankful 'for' the unpleasant and painful things we face. Yet we know His Word encourages us to be thankful 'in' all things.

“...In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV).

Knowing the God of creation, our Saviour, our Lord, our Deliverer, the One who has forgiven our sins, the One who empowers us to live in His will and the One who has promised a place with Him in His Heavenly glory is with us gives fresh energy and freedom to be able to do just that.


“To fully understand how an infinite, majestic, loving, just and merciful creator God can be with us really is beyond the finite human mind. But, that’s part of the promise of Christmas.”

To thank and worship Him 'in' all things, no matter what is happening around us. The question arises again for us at this time of year. Is the Christ of Christmas the focal point of our thoughts and celebrations? Are we aware again of the immense promise that God is with us?

We know those words so well written by the Apostle Matthew

at the end of his gospel in Matthew 28:19-20, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (NKJV).*

So, let's reconnect again with the Christ of Christmas! Let's take a moment amidst the madness of this season to reflect and assess where we're at and then make a fresh commitment to the One who has already done everything for our salvation and committed Himself to being with us.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV). | 

■ Stephen Whitwell is a husband, father of two and a grandfather of eight. He loves God, the Bible, his family, life, fine food, writing, living in the Bay of Plenty and helping people discover who they really are in Christ. A retired pastor, he writes and publishes Brief Word – a free e-letter and blog - and also serves as a trustee for Authentic Christian Trust. He can be contacted at: www.goodwords.nz



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Why is 'Grace' so Amazing?

BY MURRAY SMITH

“

His words carry much deeper meaning, touching on the awakening that took place in his soul and the peace he found in relationship with Christ.

”

I was asked to lead a funeral once where a family wanted some input related to Christian faith - but they did not want it 'religious'. Their point was understandable to me, because there is a difference! The irony was, having stated they did not want any old hymns for the service, they chose Amazing Grace - a hymn written two-and-a-half centuries ago in 1772.

Chances are, you're familiar with its melody and some of the lyrics? If so, it's little wonder - given that some estimates claim it is performed roughly 10 million times annually. Amazing Grace is easily one of the most recognisable hymns in the English-speaking world.

Over the years, musicians and singers from Elvis Presley and Andrea Bocelli to Celine Dion, Aretha Franklin, Destiny's Child, Judy Collins, LeAnn Rhimes and Dave Dobbyn have performed this quintessential song.

The song was used at marches during the civil rights movement and gained popularity among those protesting the Vietnam War. Its haunting sound has resonated from Massed Pipes at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo - as well as throughout sporting grandstands around the world.


But, knowing where the song came from allows us to appreciate it in a new and

more profound way. The story behind the hymn Amazing Grace has to do with Englishman John Newton. As the writer of that hymn in later life, his childhood - and into his early adulthood - was full of pain and abuse. Becoming a slave trader, Newton captained multiple journeys shipping slaves from Africa to England. Who he was is evidenced by how much his crews disliked him.

He once fell overboard and, instead of throwing him a rope, they speared him in the hip with a harpoon to bring him aboard. He would limp the rest of his life from that injury. Newton admitted to treating the slaves abhorrently and was, later, deeply ashamed of his deeds. Knowing something of Newton's former life before coming to Jesus, and before his subsequent Christian journey began, allows us to understand the depth of his words and his gratitude for God's truly amazing grace. We see how he could pen words like,

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

Newton was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1764 and, in later years, fought alongside William Wilberforce - the leader of the parliamentary campaign to abolish the African slave trade. Describing its horrors in an article he wrote assisted the successful abolishment of slavery throughout the British empire in 1807. In spite of a tumultuous past, or perhaps - more accurately - because of it, Newton wrote words which expressed more than a sinner's gratitude for forgiveness. His words carry much deeper meaning, touching on the awakening that took place in his soul and the peace he found in relationship with Christ. Words which countless people have related to, and found to be true in their own experience.

“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.” | 

■ Murray Smith is a husband, a father to six children and the senior leader at Bridges Church Cambridge in the Waikato.



BOOK



Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional

PAUL DAVID TRIPP // REVIEW BY JOSHUA ENS

Every year, new Advent or 'December Devotionals' line the shelves of Christian bookstores and occupy the central place on book-selling websites. It is difficult to navigate such an oversaturated market, both to find a worthwhile book, but also to read something that makes a unique contribution to how we think about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a tragic danger with the stories behind the major holidays of Christmas and Easter: people treat them as little more than stories. Instead of recognising the most significant acts in the redemptive narrative, namely the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, it is far too easy to view them as isolated events. During the Easter season, the passion week can become unhinged from everything else that God has done to bring history to that momentous point. Similarly, in December, it can be difficult to understand how the first chapters of Matthew and Luke relate to the rest of the Gospels, much less to the rest of scripture.

In his introduction, Paul Tripp writes that he was motivated by the "danger of familiarity in our lives as the children of God." (10) He admits that, at one level, familiarity with the gospel is a sign of God's gracious work in one's life. However, "often when we become familiar with things, we begin to take them for granted... Familiarity tends to rob us of our wonder." (10) Come, Let Us Adore Him aims at the negative side of familiarity by approaching the birth of Jesus through the lens of the gospel. Tripp is not merely concerned with the good news of Jesus as it unfolds through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Rather, he seeks to place the birth story within the redemptive narrative that begins in Genesis and finishes in Revelation. As a result, readers cannot help but think deeply through questions like why did Jesus come to earth? Why was he born in a humble manger? How could he be truly God and truly man? And, why was his perfect life so important?


As familiar as the birth story of Jesus is, Tripp argues that the overarching story of the Bible may be equally unfamiliar. With 66 books written by different human authors, in different times and places, within different literary genres, it is easy to miss the fact that "the core content of your Bible is one single story, a grand redemptive story." (63) Within this redemptive story, there are four major acts: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The first advent of Jesus relates to each of these movements in the plan of God. Galatians 4:4 reminds us that *"...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..." (ESV)*. The Son of God's arrival in Bethlehem was not a reaction by God, but part of the grand redemptive story.

"The Christmas story loses its meaning and beauty when it is ripped out of the great redemptive and historical march. It

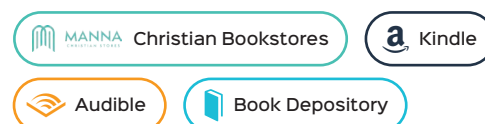
is more than a story of a family with nowhere to stay, singing angels, amazed shepherds, searching wise men, and a jealous monarch... It's a story that is rooted in real history, real acts of God that are intended to provide for you and me the one thing we desperately need: moral rescue. The Christmas story is about a God of glorious grace on the march, invading human history with the grace of redemption." (65-66)

Tripp writes the daily devotions with the gospel as the central theme. The coming of Jesus is an expression of the grace of God to deal with the sin of the world so that the fellowship enjoyed in the garden might be perfected and elevated as we look forward to the world to come. Related to this, the author regularly reminds the reader that Jesus came to address humanity's greatest problem: sin. This sin-problem is not limited to the world outside of us, but arises from within us. "The Christmas story confronts us with our inability, because if we had any ability whatsoever to save ourselves from sin, the birth of Jesus would not have been necessary." (93)

Additionally, because of his approach, Tripp exposes the reader to a wide range of Biblical texts through the lens of the incarnation. Familiar 'December Scriptures' such as Isaiah 7 and 9 are included, as are less familiar passages such as Isaiah 53 which focuses on the sufferings of the Messiah from the manger to the cross. The passages provided at the end of each day's reading reinforce the message that the birth of Jesus did not originate in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, but in Heaven before the foundation of the world. Also included at the end of a section is a guide for parents and children to discuss the devotion. Here, thought-provoking questions and summaries help children to apply and relate the ideas to their lives. Like the rest of the book, these small sections are saturated with reminders of God's grace toward us in Jesus Christ. It is refreshing to read a Children's application that primarily points them to Christ rather than only focusing on how to be better children.

In preparing for this review, I read Come, Let Us Adore Him over the span of a few days - certainly not the intended mode of consumption. This condensed reading experience highlighted the great themes of redemption, grace, sin, and salvation; however, I was looking forward to December 1 so that I can re-read the book and meditate daily on the greatest miracle ever performed: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) | 

This book is available from



■ Joshua Ens is a Canadian currently residing in New Zealand. As well as a book reviewer for Authentic he is a Youth Pastor at River City Bible Church and a full-time Secondary School Teacher. Recently he has begun studying theology at Knox Theological Seminary.





Lifemark

THE KENDRICK BROTHERS // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

Released in New Zealand in October, The Kendrick Brothers' latest movie venture tells the touching true story of an adopted teen's reunion with his birth mother. Film-maker brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick lead the team at the Kendrick Brothers film production company alongside their brother Shannon.

They were initially filmmakers for Sherwood Pictures - founded by Alex and - among other work - perhaps best known for its 2006 release *Facing The Giants*, *Fireproof* two years later and 2011's highest-grossing independent film *Courageous*. Another well-known Kendrick Brothers title is 2019's *Overcomer*.

This time around, Kirk Cameron - who additionally stars in the film - also serves as an executive producer on *Lifemark*, and - as we begin - we meet high school senior David Colton. He's a lot like most kids his age. He loves to wrestle, he's looking forward to college and he spends a lot of time goofing off with his best friend, Nate - a budding videographer who films literally everything.

Then again, David's different. He knows it. Nate knows it. But, not many other people are in on his secret. David, you see, is adopted. It's not something he's ashamed of. After all, his adoptive parents Jimmy (Kirk Cameron) and Susan are about the best a teenager could hope for as they love, support and encourage him. Then again, it's not something he really wants

most people to know either. At David's 18th birthday, his mother reminds him that he's now legally old enough to try to contact his birth mother, a woman named Melissa, if he'd like to do so.

At the very same moment, Melissa is wondering if he might just do that. She's thought about him every day for 18 years, and she fears that he has no interest in reconnecting. "I don't think he'd want to talk to me," she tells her husband, Shawn. "He probably hates me for what I did."

But, Melissa takes a leap of faith anyway to update her contact information at the adoption agency - just in case. And, with just a bit of nudging from his adoptive mother, David does indeed get in touch with Melissa.

Ever so slowly, through texts and social media posts, Melissa and the young man she gave up for adoption nearly two decades before begin to get to know each other. One day, David makes his decision - he's going to meet his birth mother, face to face. And, maybe his birth father, a man named Brian who split from Melissa years before and who has been more hesitant to reconnect. And, at every step of the way, Nate will be there to chronicle David and Melissa's tender story - one based on real-life events. | **A**

plugged'n

Review compiled from [PluggedIn.com](https://www.pluggedin.com)

GOD

created us to be with Him. (Genesis 1-2)

God created the universe (Genesis 1:1) - including the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Created to be in complete fellowship with Him and each other, God wanted them to care for the earth and the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). He said they shouldn't eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but His plan was disrupted when they evilly did so.

OUR

sins separate us from God. (Genesis 3)

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree (Genesis 3:6), they sinned. Becoming aware of their error, there were both immediate and future consequences. Immediately banished from the garden, they'd physically die in the future. Their offspring - everyone including you and I - was born sinful, selfish and subsequently deprived of God's fellowship (Romans 5:12-14).

SINS

**cannot be removed by good deeds.
(Genesis 4 – Malachi 4)**

Humanity attempts to remove sin through good deeds, but the 10 Commandments God gave the Israelites (Exodus 20:1-17) showed they couldn't live up to His perfect standards (Galatians 3:23-24). A sacrificial system involving goats without blemishes (Leviticus 4:27-31) foreshadowed the Lamb of God, Jesus, who'd take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

PAYING

the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again. (Matthew – Luke)

Jesus came to earth, fulfilling the law (Matthew 5:17). He was the ultimate sacrifice (Luke 24:46) - living the perfect life we couldn't live, dying in our place for our sin. His payment was infinite and complete. He rose from the dead after three days (Mark 16:6), being seen by over 500 witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6) on at least 12 occasions in 40 days (Acts 1:3).

EVERYONE

who trusts in Him alone has eternal life. (John)

Eternal life is a free gift of God through faith, not by our good deeds (Ephesians 2:8-9). It's not trying, but trusting. Jesus paid the price - all we must do is receive the gift of forgiveness through faith. When we believe Jesus died for our sins and trust in Him alone, we receive eternal life and we pass from death to life (John 5:24, Romans 10:9).

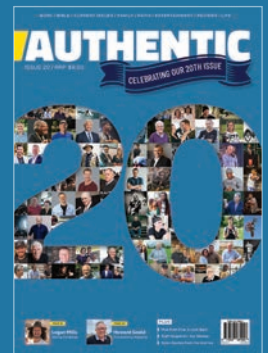
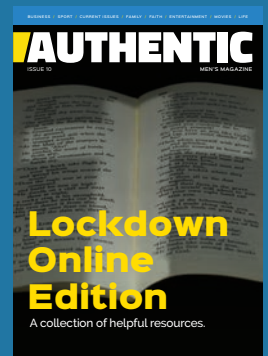
LIFE

with Jesus starts now and lasts forever. (Acts – Revelation)

Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, we'll be with Him forever in Heaven. When we trust in Him, we enter into a personal, permanent relationship with God. Eternal life doesn't start after you die, but when you believe (John 10:10). A real relationship with Jesus is through prayer, worship and the strength God gives us through His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).



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