

AUTHENTIC

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MEN'S MAGAZINE

'AMPED' FOR JESUS

Pat Buckley shares his story

King David's Palace Uncovered?

CHUCK MISSLER

MURRAY SMITH

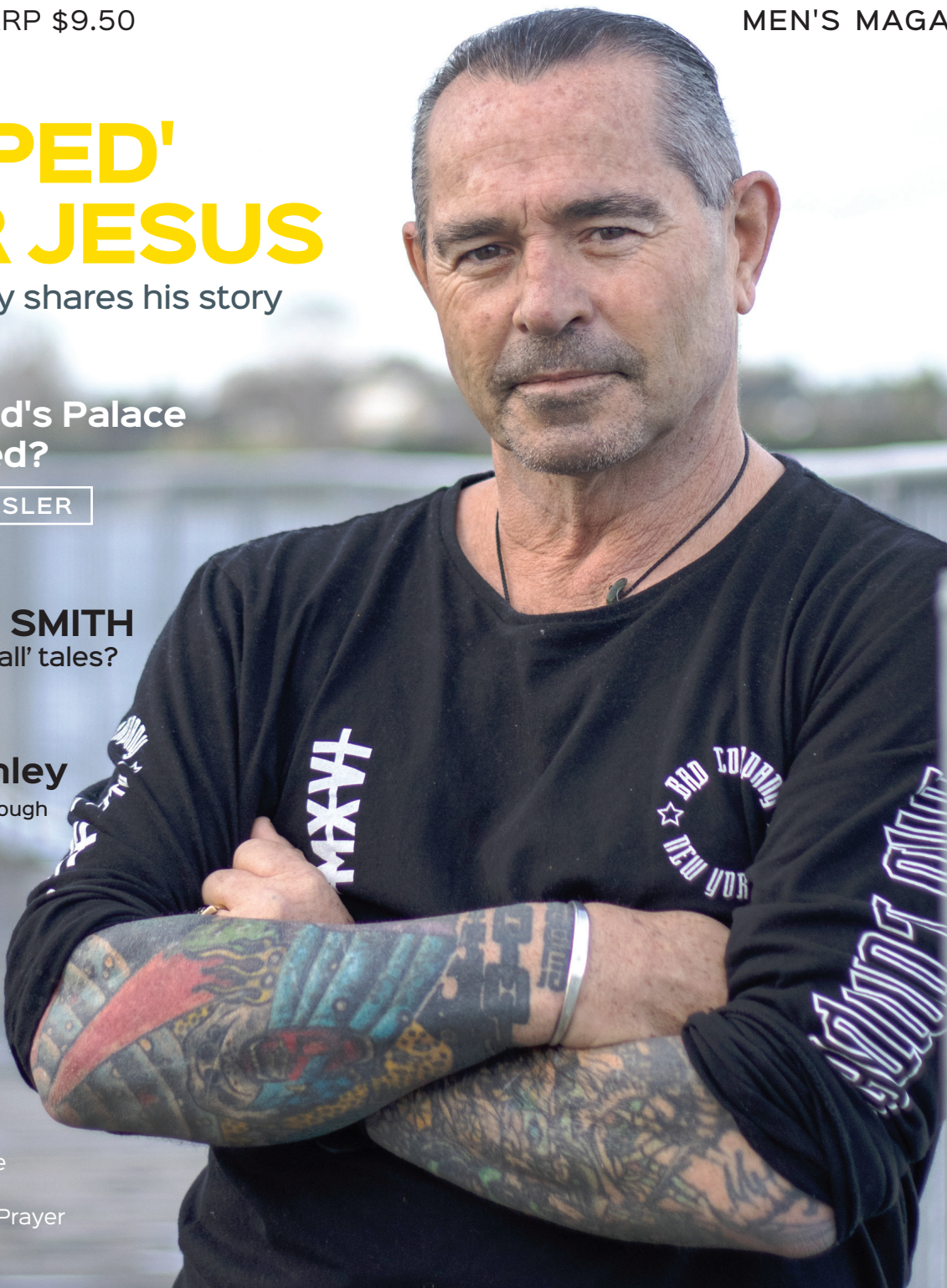
Is he telling 'tall' tales?

Alan Stanley

on journeying through the unexpected

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- In His Presence
- The Gospel of Prayer



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Connecting Faith and Facts

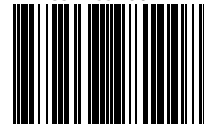


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Talks Christianity and Politics

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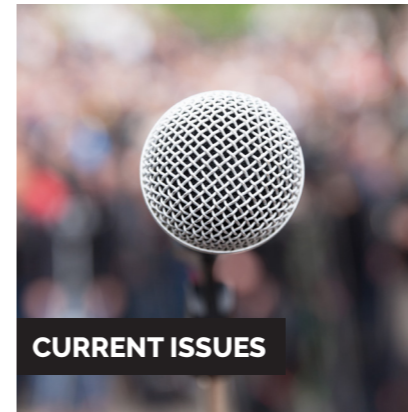
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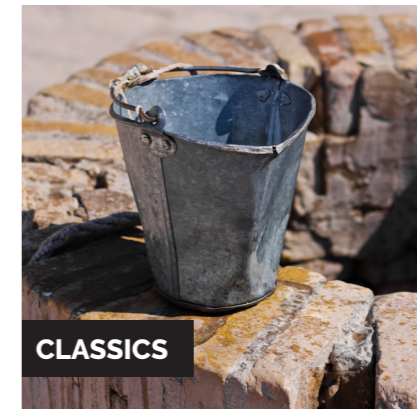
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WELCOME TO THE FIFTEENTH EDITION OF

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE



Springing Into Action!

Jeremy and his dad, Murray.

As you're reading this, we're fast approaching Father's Day and spring is just around the corner!

When we begin planning each issue as a team, we prayerfully seek the Lord as to the direction He'd have us go in and the possible 'shape' it takes. When we reach this end of each production cycle, and reflect on the issue in its entirety, I'm always so encouraged as we see God's leading and guidance in terms of specific encouragement for you, our readers, as content is chosen.

With Father's Day upon us, there's lots of content to uplift and encourage the dads amongst us. Of course, the ultimate expression of Fatherly love is found in God sending His son Jesus. *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* - Romans 5:8 (NIV).

In Matthew, Jesus describes in His own words an aspect of the nature of His Father. *"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven*

give good gifts to those who ask Him!" - Matthew 7:9-11 (NIV). He is indescribably so good to us.

In light of Father's Day, I'm of course reminded of my own earthly Dad, and I have to say, God absolutely blessed me by giving me the Dad he did! He's always up for a laugh, full of Godly wisdom and, I think, a genuine example of what it means to be reliant on Jesus throughout the ups and down of life.

Proverbs 13:22a says, *"...a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children."* (NKJV).

I remember having a chat with my Dad about legacy. I'm not a dad yet myself, but I remember saying, "Dad, if I can be half the father you are, I'll be happy." "That's nice," he replied. "Which half do you want to be? The brains, or the good looks..." He's so humble. And far too witty for me. Joking aside, I often reflect on a phrase he said during that chat. "What we leave 'in' our kids (spiritually) is far more important than what we leave 'to' them (materially)..."

After deliberating as a team, we decided to write a feature on my dad in this

issue. We intentionally penned it as we would any other feature, and you can read what we spoke about on pages 68 through 73. The creative types amongst us might enjoy what we discussed.

Our other features in this issue include Amped4life founder and educator Pat Buckley and former New Conservative party leader Leighton Baker. Guys, thanks so much for chatting!

While they may seem like simple truths, certain other threads which emerged in this issue, which we hope you are blessed by, include reminders that absolutely EVERYTHING in life flows from our relationship with Jesus. And, promptings that we may be people who read, treasure, apply and live out His divinely inspired Word. In a world where it can at times seem that everything else is shifting, He is the Great unchangeable one - our Rock - and in Him we are anchored.

As we remain IN Christ, His promises are sure. *"He will be the sure foundation for your times..."* - Isaiah 33:6 (NIV) and He *"...will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."* - Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV).

I once heard a story of a husband and wife who purchased a yacht they planned to take their family on vacations aboard. On their inaugural trip out on their new purchase, they anchored in a particular bay as evening fell. As time passed, the wife said to her husband, "...are you sure we're properly anchored?" I feel as though we're certainly drifting." Repeated questions along those lines were met with replies of "no, we're fine, we're not drifting." "I definitely feel like we're getting closer to land," she'd say.

Eventually, in the dark of night, as the couple relaxed on board, a particular swell ultimately picked up the yacht and pushed it onto rocks submerged just below the surface.

The yacht was grounded - and totalled. And although they were uninjured physically, it was proof they had in fact been drifting - albeit slowly and almost unnoticed - closer toward the headland as time passed.

In light of some of the encouragements in this issue, it's a good reminder to build our life on the Rock and stay anchored there. Let's never allow drift - which can often be slow and gradual and leave us wondering how we ended up somewhere - in our lives.

Just quickly, on another note, the marketing and communications agency we run - Authentic Media - supports

Christian ministries, churches and businesses by providing Christ-centered media and marketing services. I just wanted to thank the Lord for the wide range of work He provides - including everything from Christian schools and Christian camps and other design work. We are so blessed by your continued prayers over the work we do.

As I say bye for now, it is our prayer as a team here at Authentic that the content which fills the pages of this issue will bless you, and ultimately point you to Jesus, because this magazine is His. In whatever sphere God has called us to, may we prayerfully seek to be Jesus' hands and feet to those around us as we live out our daily lives. It's been said that for those who are beginning journeys toward Jesus, "...they may not read the Bible, but they will read you..." *"...you yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ."* - 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NIV).

Finally, for those of us who have been given the gift and the privilege of fatherhood, let's take time to be thankful to our Heavenly Father! His love for us is bigger and deeper than anything we could ever experience from an earthly father. And He shows us that love in and through His son, Jesus Christ.

■ 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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FLAT TYRES FRUSTRATIONS, and Always Being Ready to Evangelise

BY GREG STIER

A recent experience reminded me that even life's little frustrations can lead to Gospel conversations.

Few things are more frustrating than a flat tyre. A few weeks ago, my wife got one on her way to her hair appointment. I drove there as soon as I could, trying to beat the storm clouds that were rolling in at the same time.

I have to be honest, there's no doubt it was frustrating. She and I had a double date planned that night and the flat tyre threw a wrench - or most likely a nail - into our plans.

Isn't it funny how flat tyres and other frustrating situations never seem to come at a convenient time!

When I arrived on the scene, I looked at my watch like Denzel Washington in *The Equalizer* to see how long it would take me to accomplish my task. As the clock started ticking, I pulled out the jack and the spare tyre and got to work.

As I was finishing up, a young man who worked at a store nearby came up to me and kindly offered to help. I thanked him, told him I was almost finished with the job and put my Denzel-inspired mental stopwatch on hold to chat with him for a few minutes.

This young man's name was Roman. He worked at the shoe store right next to where my wife was getting her hair done. He shared with me a bit about his life and background.

That's when I asked him if he had a church background. He began to open up to me and share some of the struggles he had been facing. Soon, we moved into a full-on Gospel

conversation. I could tell right away it was hitting a chord deep in his heart. Minutes later, right there in the parking lot next to a still-on-the-jack 2015 Jeep Grand Cherokee, he put his faith in Jesus Christ! We prayed right there in the parking lot! Now we are working on getting him plugged into a church.

As we were saying goodbye I told Roman, "You know, I think you are the reason my wife got a flat tyre." He tilted his head a bit quizzically. Then I explained, "If my wife hadn't gotten a flat tyre, then you and I wouldn't be here right now talking about Jesus. God sent me to you through this flat tyre."


"...frustrations may be God's way of sending you somewhere to talk to someone about Jesus!"

It felt like a Phillip and Ethiopian eunuch type situation (Acts 8:26-40). Except in this version the Ethiopian's chariot just so happened to be getting a wheel replaced!

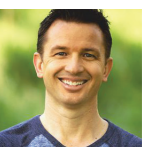
"Then Phillip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Phillip and the eunuch went down into the water and Phillip baptized him." - Acts 8:35-38 (NIV).

Having told this tyre story, may it be a reminder to all of us as to how life's little frustrations can lead to Gospel conversations!

Those frustrations may be God's way of sending you somewhere to talk to someone about Jesus!

"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel." Philippians 1:12 (NIV). | 

■ Greg Stier is president of Dare 2 Share Ministries. © 2021 Dare 2 Share Ministries. Used by permission. Dare 2 Share Ministries is committed to mobilizing teenagers to relationally and relentlessly reach their generation for Christ. Dare 2 Share's youth evangelism training conferences, curriculum and books motivate and equip teenagers to share the gospel with their friends. www.dare2share.org



In His Presence

Seven Ways to Increase Intimacy with Jesus Through the Word

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

Relationships are not microwavable. You can't expect to have a deep and meaningful relationship with anyone in under five minutes. Relationships take time, investment, intentionality, and ... well ... more time.

The same is true in our relationship with God. If you desire greater intimacy with Jesus and long to know Him better, you need to spend time with Him. While prayer and being in community within a local church can be helpful ways to spend time with Him, I want to focus on your time in His Word.

Simply put, Scripture is essential to our growth and maturity as Christians and critical for our understanding of and intimacy with Jesus. Authentic Christian discipleship hinges upon God's Word. And the primary reason we spend time in Scripture is that we want to grow in intimacy, oneness, and relationship with the Author.

If that is true, then how do Christians interact with the Word for growth? How do we build our lives around Jesus Christ by getting into His Word?

I've found seven key ways to interact with God's Word, leading to greater growth and intimacy. If you do them to know Jesus Christ (and not out of obligation or duty), they will lead you into a greater relationship and closeness with Him.

1. READ - Read God's Word

Most of us treat Scripture like a textbook in high school - it's there when we have to use it for homework; otherwise, it makes a great doorstop. But God's Word is not science, Shakespeare, or sociology; it is the very words of our King. And His Word says we should delight ourselves in it (Psalm 119:16, 24) because it is sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10 and 119:103). Charles Spurgeon, the great prince of preachers, once declared: "True Bible-readers and Bible-searchers never find it wearisome. They like it least who know it least, and they love it most who read it most. They find it newest who have known it longest, and they find the pasture to be the richest whose souls have been the longest fed upon it."

Do you read God's Word? If not, I would encourage you to develop a daily habit of basking in the richness of His truth. Even if you are a slow reader, you can read through the entire Bible in a year if you'll commit to about ten minutes a day.

"Beware of saying, 'I haven't time to read the Bible, or to pray'; say rather, 'I haven't disciplined myself to do these things'."
- Oswald Chambers

2. RETAIN Memorize God's Word

Many of us cringe when we hear the word "memorize." I admit it is not one of my favourite words, and memorization has been

difficult for me throughout the years. But one thing I've found is that when I write God's Word upon my heart, it transforms my thinking and daily living. We live in a time when memory isn't needed. We have Google, Evernote, and our smart phones to do the hard thinking for us. And yet, while we may not use our brains as often as we should, they have incredible power to think, reason, and memorize. God made our brains capable of storing information and quickly retrieving it when necessary. We can all memorise, but we typically only memorize things we deem important and valuable.

If you value Scripture, ask God for help, and create a routine where you work on memorization, you'll be amazed at how much Scripture you can memorize.

"Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture." - J. C. Ryle

3. RUMINATE - Study God's Word

Reading God's Word is not a substitute for studying it. Or, as it is said, we read for breadth and study for depth. One of the most rewarding and transformational things I do is study

Scripture - it increases my understanding and love for truth and gives me an increasing passion for Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that studying the Bible isn't for mere academics (or head knowledge) but greater intimacy and relationship with God Himself.

We don't have space in this article to give details on the "how," but you can find additional help and resources I've written at www.deeperChristian.com/Bible

"A readiness to believe every promise implicitly, to obey every command unhesitatingly, to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, is the only true spirit of Bible study."
- Andrew Murray

4. RELISH - Delight In God's Word

God declares that we are to delight and find joy in His Word. Reading and studying the Bible is not supposed to be a punishment; it should be one of our greatest joys. The Psalmist explained this concept using the sweetest thing he knew about: honey. But if I may take the liberty to turn it into 21st-century chocolate language, the Psalmist says...

“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.”

“How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than chocolate in my mouth!” - Psalm 119:103

This is a verse I also mentioned above, and 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.

Jesus declared in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life,” (NIV)* and the Word of God points us to the Way, Truth, and Life (Jesus Christ). Do you treasure God’s Word? Do you come to Scripture with joy? If not, ask God to give you a hunger and passion for His Word. *“The more you love the Scriptures, the firmer will be your faith.”* – D. L. Moody

5. RECITE - Declare God’s Word

When you read, study, and are transformed by the truth of God’s Word, you can’t hold it in! Scripture creates a volcano within your life and has to come out. When we behold an incredible sunset, a “wow” escapes our lips. We don’t try; it just comes out. The same is true when we get into Scripture - when we see Jesus and His Word transforms us, we can’t help but share it. Regardless of how you “recite” it, declaring God’s Word gives language for what God is doing in your life and often becomes a means God will use to encourage and challenge people around you. Our lives as Christians are not to be as a bottle kept on a shelf, a candle hidden beneath a basket, or salt left in a salt shaker. Truth is contagious and should bubble forth out of our lives not because we are forced, but because we can’t help ourselves.

*“What could we do without the Book
That God gave us to read?
No more than any farmer
Who hadn’t any seed!”*
– C. T. Studd

6. REST - Build Your Life Upon God’s Word

If we want to build a house, we first set the foundation. If the foundation is weak, the building is weak. Scripture is our foundation, our bedrock, for living. It is the truth we boldly stand upon. It is the standard the Holy Spirit uses to measure

our lives. It is the very words of God, which all point to Jesus Christ and His work upon the Cross.

As we rest upon His Word, walking in faith and obedience, we discover that our lives are being built upon an unshakable and unmovable foundation. *“He that would be holy must steep himself in the Word, must bask in the sunshine which radiates from each page of revelation.”* – Horatius Bonar


7. RESPOND - Be Transformed by God’s Word

The Holy Spirit desires to conform us to the image of the Son. A key to Christ likeness is to respond to the Word and allow the Spirit of God to transform us. We must approach the Word arms wide open, willing to respond to the truth, desiring the Holy Spirit to do His work within us. Will you approach Scripture with the desire to *“reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ?”* (see Ephesians 4:13 (NIV)).

Will you allow the Word of God to be the measuring rod in your life that the Holy Spirit tests you against? Will you rest upon and respond to Scripture so He can transform your heart and mind (see Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 5:17; 1 John 2:6, 3:2-3)? *“The Bible was not given for our information but for our transformation.”* – D. L. Moody

Start Today

Remember, relationships aren’t made in the microwave. They take time. If you desire to grow and increase your intimacy with Jesus, it begins by getting into the Word. Pick one or two of the seven ideas above and begin to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Don’t try to do them all at once; start small and keep increasing. You’ll soon find your love and relationship with Jesus is growing deeper day by day. Again, you can take any of these concepts deeper by visiting: www.deeperchristian.com/Bible

“Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years.” – Charles Spurgeon | 



■ 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.



Recently, I heard my wife bollocking our teenage son for his untidy room. At the heart of the problem lay a seemingly insurmountable difficulty.

They both hold seriously divergent opinions on what a tidy room actually is. Any discussion on the subject is quite ‘animated’ since he feels that a bursting wardrobe spewing forth its contents upon being opened, constitutes a tidy room, “cos everything has been put away.” Because the balance of power is held by my wife, we have a teenage son who claims it is “hate speech” to be called out (unfairly) for having an untidy room.

I’m being a bit frivolous in my description of our minor domestic incident, but nonetheless it caused me to reflect again on a confusing strategy that the Government is busily promoting. Any idea of controlling a nation’s perspectives and opinions by legislating ‘hate speech’ laws under the Crimes Act should justifiably raise the public’s eyebrows. Unlike a caring, responsible parent training a child, a Government is overstepping the mark when it legislates an authorised or ‘approved viewpoint’ on matters of religion, sexual orientation, politics, age, disability and employment status - leaving no room for freedom of speech.

Of course freedom of speech is never a free pass to abuse, belittle or intimidate anyone on the basis of their opinions. Judgmental bigotry ought to be considered intolerable. But using hate speech law to suppress freedom of speech and muzzle reasonable comment or debate over divergent viewpoints and understandings is control. The key to deterring hate speech is open dialogue that promotes understanding - not suppression. A problem exists with hate speech being

defined in such vague terms. The Minister of Justice’s recent performance was decidedly unhelpful. Under questioning about the scope and implications of the law changes, he appeared completely without answers when plied with reasonable questions regarding potential real-life situations. The public push back isn’t surprising given the potential reach of hate speech laws and the uncertainty of who will yet be determined to be in need of ‘protection’ against prospective ‘haters’ comments.

Someone’s comments are not even necessarily the problem, rather the problem can arise in the way a comment is received and then reacted to. A person expressing a viewpoint may not have had any purposeful intent to offend, but just by someone claiming, “I’m really offended!” a charge of hate speech could be asserted!

You could say Jesus experienced hate speech from the hierarchy of His day. In Mark 7, we see how petty opponents angrily criticised Jesus because His followers didn’t observe ceremonial hand-washing before eating. Those accusers became deeply offended when Jesus responded highlighting their own far greater hypocritical failures to adhere to the laws they claimed to live by - like plundering the poor and arrogantly ignoring truth and justice issues. Their deep offence incubated hatred so intense that it resulted in them crucifying Him - the ultimate failed attempt at suppression!

This quote I heard recently sums things up. “Suppressing free speech is the intellectually impoverished and infantile response of those who have no better argument.”

By the way, my wife and our teenage son are perfectly fine! | 



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

'AMPED' FOR JESUS

BY JEREMY SMITH

"Lord Jesus, I need you. I have nowhere else to go. If you save me, I'll serve You for the rest of my life."

Sitting on his bed alone in a rehab facility, Pat Buckley cried out to God. It was August 1995, and as he sat alone in that moment, a few changes of clothes, an old King James Bible and 90 benzodiazepine pills - which are prescribed as sleeping pills and medication to help treat anxiety and narcotic withdrawal - were all he had to his name.

Truthfully, all Pat - then 30 - had known since he was 14 was that he was reliant on taking 40 such pills, as well as intravenously injecting narcotics like morphine, heroin and other opiates up to four times a day just to function and cope with life. And he drank alcohol heavily.

As he sat praying, he sensed the Lord prompting him to surrender one of the only three things he felt he had left - his pills. So, in obedience, he tipped the last 90 benzodiazepines he had - a few days worth - down the sink.

Going "cold turkey" isn't something he'd necessarily advise anyone in similar situations to do - but he obeyed. "At that moment, I felt it was something specific the Lord was calling me to do in order to surrender every area of my life.

"I said, 'Jesus, You know if I do this in my own strength, and You don't come through for me, I'm going to die'".

More desperate for Jesus than he was for his drugs, Pat tossed the pills down the drain and began to weep from the depths of his soul. It was then he says his source of life literally changed - he went from utter dependence on that daily mix of drugs, pills and alcohol to utter dependence on Jesus. "Jeremy, looking back, I can tell you the Lord absolutely did save me - so, I'm a man of my word.

"From that point on, as I have been willing to trust Him with all my soul, all my strength and all my mind, the Lord Jesus has been helping me rebuild my life from the inside out - taking the absolutely broken pieces of who I was into His hands and reshaping them into a vessel to be used for His glory.

"As I share, I'll intentionally become vulnerable, transparent and real - because even just one person who reads my story might be pointed to Jesus and, with Him, be prompted to start re-writing their own. I want people to know that when you're walking in relationship with Jesus you can never underestimate how He wants to use your life to be a shining beacon for Him.

"No matter where you currently find yourself, when you come to the Lord, God can use everything you've been through - every experience, every trauma, every aspect of brokenness - if you give it to Him and allow Him to redeem and sanctify it."

A large part of God's redemptive power in Pat's story is now evident through an initiative called Amped4Life - a name and vision God laid on his heart in 2002 to be proactive in our nation's fight against drug and alcohol abuse and addiction - and to help New Zealand's young people make informed and wise choices in life.

With between 80 and 110 speaking engagements a year - Pat estimates that in nearly two decades, he's had the opportunity to speak to about 500,000 Kiwis - mostly young people - nationwide. During a particular 3.5 year stretch between 2009-2012, he spoke to up to 50,000 students annually.

He shares his story through multiple avenues - 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.

Amped4Life supports those organisations in dealing with substance use and addiction problems through programs for children and teenagers. It began after a meeting between Pat and his wife Karen and Pat's twin brother Mike and his wife Susan as they prayed about a way Pat could use his story.

"We all have God-given giftings," Pat says. "There was a time when, if you asked me if my history of addiction was something I could use to help point people to Jesus, I would probably have laughed at you. But, as I've placed that journey in Jesus' hands, God has helped me realise its relevance and the impact it can have. When you give what you have to Jesus, nothing is wasted."

Now, nearly 26 years since he came to the Lord, Pat simply marvels at where God has brought him. He wants people to know no-one is beyond the reach - and love - of Jesus.

Pat regularly shares the Amped4Life story at initiatives like Camp Raglan's school holiday Survival Camp. Interestingly, the camp is owned by Children's Bible Ministries (CBM), an interdenominational, non-profit, faith-based ministry running in over 30 nations including New Zealand. Pat's twin brother Mike is CBM's international director.

As he reflects, Pat - now in his 50s - says Christian camps such as that were likely one of the first places he came to know about the Lord. His mum, Maureen, sent Pat and Mike and their older brother Ian to Christian camps when they were kids - particularly Christian Youth Camps, or CYC, in Ngāruawāhia and a camp in Ruapehu. Time at those camps, though, was only a short escape from what became a tumultuous childhood reality.

Pat was born in the United Kingdom in Burnley in Lancashire - his dad, John, emigrated to New Zealand with his family when Pat was two - settling in Auckland.

"Our childhood home was one in which alcohol and my dad's drinking were very prevalent parts of the early days." Pat says. "I think my parents thought shifting geographically would mean a new life and a fresh start, but I've shared before that really the only thing that changed was the weather. Dad's drinking and alcohol wrought absolute carnage in my family life. My parents argued about everything - from my Dad's drinking, to arguments over money, all sorts."

Pat can see that trauma affected him from a young age. As a 'mischievous and energetic' two-year-old, he reached up and dragged a pot of boiling water off the stove.

He suffered third degree burns to his arms and hip and was in Middlemore Hospital for a month while the wounds began to heal. Those burns left him with serious physical scarring, but he says candidly that aspects of his early upbringing left him scarred in other ways.

"I believe adverse childhood experiences can potentially set a child up for developing addictive and destructive behaviours later on in life. I'm sure my experiences were a factor. My world was so uncertain - I was fearful and never knew how my dad would respond to things. At school I was immediately alienated because of the scars on my arms. I was picked on and bullied - school for me was an incredibly lonely place... then I had to go home and face all the chaos Dad's drinking wrought on our family."

When he was eight, Pat's mum broke his heart. "She sat me,

Mike and Ian down and told us Dad was leaving. All I heard was rejection - 'Dad's leaving, he doesn't want us and doesn't love me.' From that moment that rejection affected me profoundly."

Despite all the chaos going on at home, when he looks back now he can see God's hand at work in that his mum sent him and his brothers to the aforementioned Christian camps.

"To an extent as a kid, I recognised the hand of God and His grace towards my family. I said to myself, 'if God is real, the first place I'll see Him at work is in my family'. Other people could trick or 'con' me, I thought, but never them. So, I watched. And the Lord began to restore them as they each gave their lives to Jesus - Mike, then Ian, then my mum.

"The Father's love for us cost Him everything - our love for others should cost our time, our talent, our 'treasure' and those things we hold dear. If it doesn't cost you much, it's not love."

Pat was sitting next to Mike on the way to Ruapehu for another camp when Mike began to cry and give his heart to the Lord. Ian came to Christ at an Anglican youth group. Ian and his wife Kimberley are now pastors at NewHope Community Church in Manukau, Auckland. "I thought, 'that's all very well and good for them,' Pat recalls, '... but how am I supposed to trust a Father I can't see, when the earthly father I did have betrayed and abandoned me?'"

So, in "all the wrong places", Pat continued to search for love and acceptance. By 12, he was sneaking out of the house to attend parties where there was excessive alcohol. "When you drink excessively like I was," he says, "you're impaired.

When you're impaired you're vulnerable, and when you're vulnerable you do dumb things." Pausing, Pat wants to highlight *1 Corinthians 15:33* - "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" (NIV).

He says he's always sure to say to anyone who will listen - both children and parents - that carefully choosing the right type of Godly friends means everything. "Show me your friends and I'll show you your life - because what they do, you do by default.

You become who you hang out with'. "Young people, there's huge importance in surrounding yourself with strong Godly role models, father-type figures and mentors - good influences who support and validate your ability to make good choices and say no to bad decisions. People who ultimately point you to Jesus."

In those days though, Pat's friends were doing anything but that. The first time he tried drugs, he was with a group of nine of them as someone passed around a joint of marijuana.

"It was a Kodak moment - everything froze. All the others turned around to see how I'd respond. And Jeremy, in that moment, I wasn't walking with the Lord and I didn't have the resilience - or even know how - to push back against that peer pressure. So, I took a puff.



"I was acutely aware of the rejection of my dad and so badly wanted to belong and have my friends' approval that I went over and above to fit in. I thought I'd find the love and acceptance I wanted. 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."

By 14, Pat was hanging out with guys five to 10 years older than him - he liked their company because he felt they genuinely cared about him. They seemed 'cool' to him because they rode British motorbikes and just accepted Pat as he was. "I idolised them," he recalls. And that perceived admiration became a factor when those same older guys offered Pat his first opportunity to inject narcotics.

"Foolishly, again because I so desperately wanted acceptance, I thought 'I'll just try it once, it can't be that bad.' Jeremy, it absolutely was that bad." He went to a doctor for help and was prescribed benzodiazepines. Within six months of the first time he injected himself, he was utterly reliant on the concoction of narcotics and pills which subsequently held him captive for the next 16 years. But Jesus. Pat pauses.

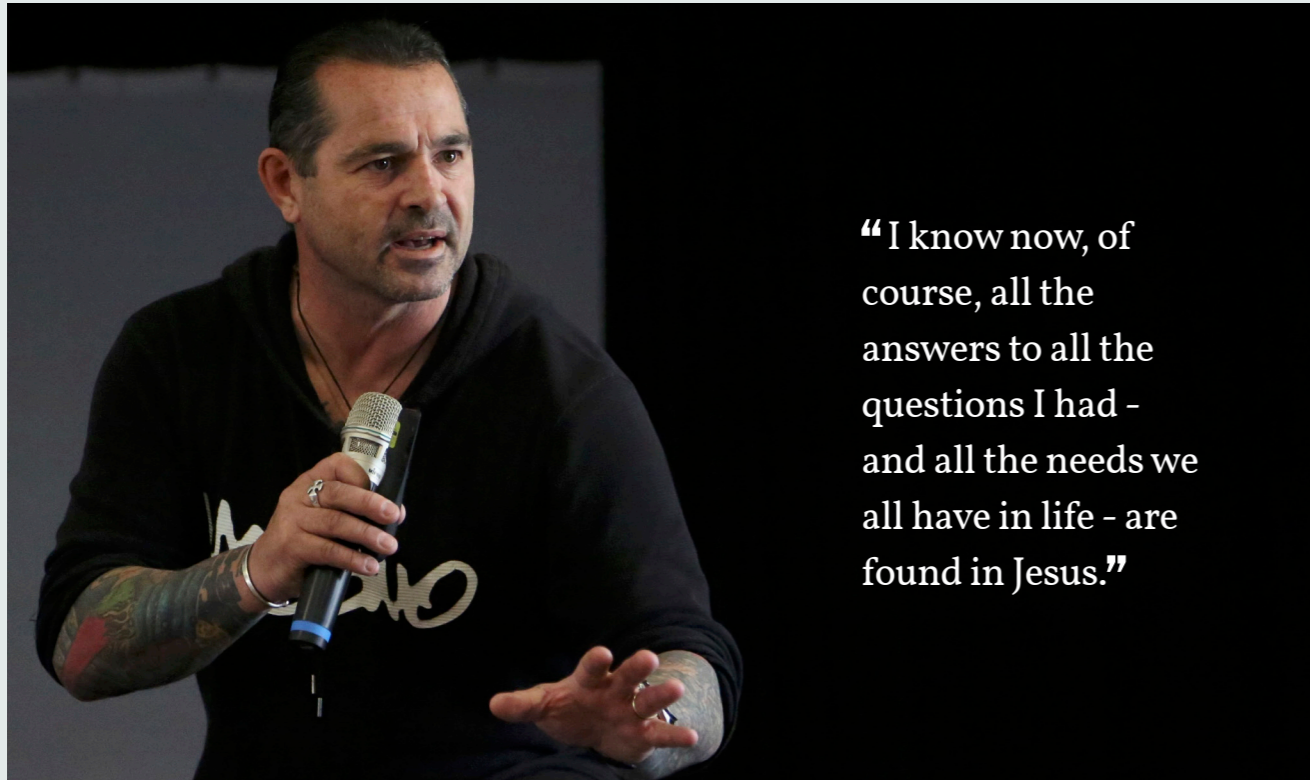
"Many of us have loved ones who aren't walking with the Lord who we're praying will come to know Jesus. Or, we know someone who does. Let's persevere in our prayers for those people in our lives. Sometimes we, myself included, start praying, but stop if we don't think we're seeing things happen

in a certain timeframe - but don't ever stop praying." He offers that encouragement because against the backdrop of those first experiences with drugs, and other destructive life choices he was making, he'd catch glimpses of something.

Since his mum came to the Lord - as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says - she'd been "praying without ceasing" for her son. She did so for many years, and it was only later looking back that Pat was made aware that over time she'd asked hundreds of other people to join her in praying for him.

"She was an absolute prayer warrior. I'd come home from whatever party I was at and hear her praying for me in the other room. Or, when I was out, she'd go into my room and leave Scripture verses in there that I'd find later. She couldn't be with me in those places of danger and vulnerability I was putting myself in, so she got creative and made sure she changed the atmosphere around me when I was at home."

He ultimately credits firstly Jesus and, secondly, the prayers of his mum and those others as the major reasons he's alive. Because the reality is, as we speak, nearly 70 friends he knew throughout his 16-year journey of addiction have died. Pat has flatlined, or clinically died, three times himself - and survived a car crash. As those prayers for him continued, Pat began to have moments of longing to connect with God - and he's under no illusions that there were times God saved his life. "I'd go up Stockade Hill in Howick, still addicted, but desperate for



“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.”

God. Sitting on a park bench, I'd pour out my heart to Him - sometimes crying for hours.”

The car crash he survived happened when his car flipped end on end seven times before hitting a lamp post. He wasn't wearing a seatbelt and had been drinking for the “whole day” before getting behind the wheel. The car was a write-off and a friend following behind him was stunned Pat was alive when he got out.

On another occasion, he rode his motorbike while so impaired that he crashed it 13 times on a 5km stretch of road. “Through all of those low point experiences, as my mum and family were praying, I certainly sensed God's hedge of protection around me constantly. She was my absolute hero and my best friend,” Pat says of his mum - who passed away in Middlemore Hospital in August 2016 after a brief illness.

The catalyst for the “beginning of the end” of his journey of addiction came after he overdosed for the third time in a month. In a moment in which he had never been more aware of his own mortality, he says God gently said to him, “Pat, I love you son, but unless you surrender your life to Me you will be dead in three weeks”.

“I suddenly realised I was playing a game of Russian Roulette that I was certain to lose.” So, he went into a Christian rehab facility in Whakatane - telling only his mum and his brothers he was going. “Proverbs 18:24 tells us, “...there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (NIV),” he says of the moment he surrendered to Jesus while there.

“Jeremy, Jesus became the most real person in my world. Truthfully, I needed Him to be. To begin to walk out of my past,

I desperately needed a real, genuine, authentic encounter and relationship with Jesus.”

One of the early steps on that journey, was to enrol at Tauranga's Faith Bible College - where he studied for nearly five years and is now a board member. As part of his involvement at Faith, Pat undertook volunteer work at nearby schools - work which ultimately saw him become a chaplain at Tauranga Boys' College.

As he considers Amped4life, his heart is that the next generation would encounter Jesus as he did. “Ephesians 4:15 contains the phrase, “...speaking the truth in love...” That's simply the calling I believe He has for me with Amped4Life - I leave the rest to Him.”

While Pat can't specifically mention Christ when speaking in public schools, Biblical themes like forgiveness, honouring your parents, restoring relationships and the importance of good choices are prevalent. “My heart is that when people hear the Amped4Life message they see someone who loves them and speaks truth into their hearts,” Pat says.

“So, what does it mean to live the authentic Christian life?” I ask. For Pat, to a large degree, that looks like mentorship. “People so desperately need to see examples of the genuine, authentic Christian life. Surround yourself with Godly people - maybe a father, another man, or youth pastor - someone who can journey with you, giving you their time and modelling and leading by example - and find people in your life you can do the same for.

“Matthew 16:24 says, “...whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (NIV).

To truly connect with people, there are times we have to lay down our own desires and agendas and walk a mile, or even 10 miles, in their shoes and show people we love them. The Father's love for us cost Him everything - our love for others should cost our time, our talent, our ‘treasure’ and those things we hold dear. If it doesn't cost you much, it's not love.

“There's so many voices and influences in young people's lives today telling them ‘...this is where you'll find what you're looking for...’ And their needs are so complex, but the answers are only found in Jesus.

“What saddens me is if we don't model a real, genuine, authentic and living faith to this next generation we'll potentially lose them to the other things vying for their attention, and they'll fall for lies which ultimately leave them broken and devastated.

“My heart's desire is that the body of Christ continues to demonstrate a living and active faith which points the next generation to Jesus.”

While he thinks God may not reveal the full impact of the Amped4Life journey to him before he sees the Lord in Heaven - Pat does get glimpses of the difference his story is making - and they're powerful. “A young man once approached me to tell me that 15 years prior he'd heard me share my story at Tauranga Boys' College,” Pat relays.

“He said he didn't think he was even listening at the time. In later life he had spent seven years in prison. He told me that as he lay on his bunk ‘...everything you said came flooding back into my memory’.

“He told me he began to realise in that moment that he needed to give his life to Christ and be restored. He said he wanted to be there for his wife and kids and that my story pointed him to the Lord, who had changed his world.” Stories like that impact Pat because Jesus certainly changed his.

Pat and his wife Karen live in Tauranga. They married in 2002 - the same year Amped4Life was established. Pat is stepdad to Karen's three children - Josh, 29, Chloe, 28 and Bianca, 24, and biological dad to Seth, 17, and Ella, 16.

He says fatherhood and family is one of the greatest gifts - and biggest learning curves - God has entrusted him with. “Karen is an amazing, Godly woman and each of the kids are a blessing from God.

“When Josh, Chloe and Bianca came into my life, I knew my calling was to always be there for them. I knew the pain of not having a father - but I didn't have an example of a good earthly father. So, I had to prayerfully learn before God what it meant to be one. I failed many times, but I learned to have the

humility to go to my kids, apologise and say, ‘I'm so sorry, I got it wrong, please forgive me’. My kids saw that I'm human and I make mistakes.” That, he says, is authentic parenting.

“More than anything materially, we absolutely cherish family memories and experiences together,” Pat says - highlighting a recent “most incredible” day spent at a friend's homestead on Motiti Island as a perfect example. The family of a young man he has been mentoring own the property and invited them to stay. On the note of family too, there's a story of forgiveness Pat wants to share.

Pat says the Lord began to impress upon him the importance of forgiving a particular person - his dad. “And so, I went to visit him and simply said, “...Dad, I forgive you...” “Why would you son?” was the reply. “I was able to tell Him it was because the Lord was asking me to and say, ‘...because I choose to Dad.” And the Lord was indeed at work. In later life, Pat's mum and dad had separated, but slowly, over the years, they became friends again because his mum would regularly visit his dad in the rest home he lived in towards the end of his life.

“She led my dad to the Lord and we began to see small incremental changes in him. A short time later, he was diagnosed with tongue cancer. I was overseas when I received news he'd gone to be with the Lord. I know he's with Jesus, he's restored and he's the man he was supposed to be - one day I will see Him again.”

As our chat draws to a close, Pat adds that there should be a degree of urgency with which we seek opportunities to authentically share our faith with others.

He's been a St John New Zealand volunteer ambulance officer for nearly 15 years - a role which has reinforced that importance to him in a powerful way. He got into the role with a desire to, as Galatians 5:13 says, “serve others in love” (NIV).

“There are times when I am most definitely confronted with a sense of our own mortality and that serves to remind me of how important it is that, as Christians, we make the time we have count for Jesus and tell others about Him.”

He's motivated too, to be a good steward. “One day, Jesus will ask me, “...what did you do with what I gave you, son?” If my life is solely about me, and not where Jesus would have me be, I've missed the boat.”

And his final thought. “Every day, I'm reminded of where He has brought me from. My prayer is, ‘...Lord, never let me forget the grace You show me, lest I treat it like a common thing.” |

What a powerful story. Let's pray for the work Pat and his team do through Amped4Life. For more information, visit <https://amped4life.net.nz>, or email pat@amped4life.net.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.





BY NATHAN JOHNSON

I have been freshly pondering the triumph of a believer. Scripture is adamant that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:37), God always causes us to triumph in Christ (2 Cor 2:14), we've been called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9), God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col 1:13), God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:57), He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him (Col 2:15), it is for freedom Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1), Jesus declared He has overcome the world (John 16:33) and that our enemy will not shout in triumph over us (Psalm 41:11). Are you getting the picture?



Isn't it interesting that in the business world, the talk is all about "success" – yet in the spiritual world, success is not mentioned. The word used in the Bible is "victory."

Too often in the modern Church the desire is for a platform of success rather than a position of victory.

What about you? Do you desire to triumph in Christ Jesus (and likely look the fool to the world) or do you want prestige and popularity with the culture?

Are you here for a popularity contest or to see the world turned upside down for the Gospel (see Acts 17:6 NIV). We can't appease and find success in the world's eyes and also walk in the light of victory in Christ. We must choose.

"This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." - Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (NIV)

Know that I am praying for you and cheering you down the Narrow Way of the cross. |  

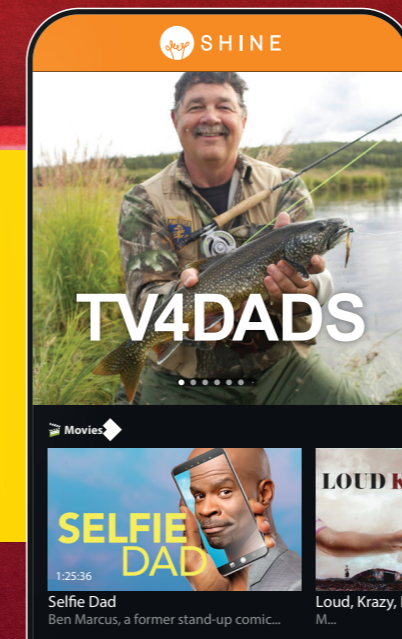
■ Nathan Johnson is program director and an instructor at Ellerslie Mission Society in Windsor, Colorado. Learn and see more at deeperchristian.com. Used by permission.



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Change

It's been said, "...I do not know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future." If it feels like everything around you is changing, Stephen Whitwell has some encouragement - the Lord is our Rock and He does not.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." - Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV).

Change is one consistent fact of life. Some people thrive in times of change, others are challenged by it. The truth is, all around us things are changing. Morals which have stood for centuries are changing. We live in a very different world to that of our forefathers.

Yet Malachi 3:6 says, *"For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."* (NKJV). It is comforting to know the One who remains steadfast, unchanging and immovable as we are buffeted by the winds of change. Don't forget there is a future for us. *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* - *Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*. God does have a great future for us! And He sees it already! For some of us, we need to change in order to enter into that future.

But how do we face change? How can we stay connected and faithful to the One who does not change, yet make any necessary adjustments? And how do we protect our mind in changing times? Here's a few thoughts.

1. Let's not overthink things ...Be anxious for nothing,...

Let's not overthink the issues, and come up with all sorts of amazing scenarios of what might, could, or should happen. Unfortunately, our human mind - as we well know - has this capacity. There are many things we can't and won't understand. Maybe there are things God doesn't want us to understand - but, remember His ways are higher than ours. (Isaiah 55:9). At those times, what we need to do is to put them into the 'I don't understand' box. Or, put them into the 'I don't know just now' box. Put them into the "I don't know what's going on" box. It is not a lack of faith to have these confessions. Then, move to a greater box called the "I AM" box. Put them into the 'I'm happy being in the 'I don't know' box because I know that One who does know'. There's peace and confidence knowing the One who has all things under control. Here's something to think about - how can we unload our mind to receive the peace God has promised?

2. Trust God ...with thanksgiving...

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." - *Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)*. Something amazing happens when we roll off onto Him all the things going on in our mind. In times when we don't understand, we know someone who does! That means we can trust Him.

■ Stephen Whitwell has been a pastor for 33 years. He writes a monthly e-letter, Brief Word, which circulates worldwide. He has a passion for helping people discover who they are, and for writing and speaking about life! He can be contacted at www.goodwords.nz.

Psalm 55:22 says, *"Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you."* (NIV).

Let's trust God to lead us through the changes - whatever they may be for us personally. Transitions are usually unknown territory. We may not have been this way before. But we know He knows the future, and has built a good bridge - the means of transition from here to there - so we can trust that it will take our weight as we move across. Here's something to think about on this note, how can we '...just trust God...', and what does that look like?

3. Let's be prayerful ...in everything by prayer and supplication...

Well, what can be better than bringing stuff to the Lord in prayer? I think it's right that life and its issues drive us to prayer. That's a good thing. Remember, we have a Heavenly Father who loves it when we come to Him, in whatever state we find ourselves.

If it matters to you it matters to Him - because He loves you. A life of prayer brings balance to life's issues. So, what are the benefits of a strong prayer life in changing times?

4. Let's not allow our thoughts to divert our attention from God and His Word ...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus...

It's important that our focus is not drawn away from hearing from God. Nothing should ever draw us away from our regular devotional habits. The routine and rhythm we have to seek His face will sustain us in uncertain times. It becomes a flow of spiritual power and energy and a source of strength and hope.

Some of the best times I've heard from God have been in my most uncertain times. So, in uncertain times, how can we strengthen our personal devotional life?

I once heard it said, "...times of transition are strenuous, but I love them. They are an opportunity to purge, rethink priorities, and be intentional about new habits".

Let's also think for a moment about this - perhaps God is in the changes and transitions we're facing - gently leading and guiding us to become a better person with stronger character, clearer in our calling and more Christ-like.

That person is surely one the world needs. |A



Connecting Faith with Facts

BY CHARLES PRICE

I came across a book recently with huge letters across the cover: 'Faith vs Fact'. It also had the subtitle, 'Why Science and Religion are Incompatible'. The font used for 'Faith' was faint, thin, and skewed in contrast to the bold emphatic font for 'Fact'. The visual message was obvious. Faith is ambiguous and uncertain whilst facts are true and certain. 'Faith' is guess work, a gamble, wishful thinking but not related to objective realities.

But, is that fair and is it true? The Oxford English Dictionary (claiming after more than 150 years to be the definitive record of the English language) defines faith as this: "To have confidence in (a person), and consequently to rely upon". That definition is not the implication of 'Faith vs Fact', but it is a superb definition of Christian faith.

There is a lot of muddled thinking about faith - so here are six facts to help us think clearly.

1. Faith Needs Facts

Faith must have an object. It must be 'in' something, and the object we place our faith in determines its validity. If I put a lot of faith in thin ice, I will step onto the ice and sink by faith! The problem is not the faith itself, but the object in which I placed it. On the other hand, if I put a little bit of faith in thick ice and nervously step out, I will walk on the ice. Not because I had more faith - on the contrary, I had less - but because the ice was strong. Faith is never more effective than the object in which it is placed. The object in which Christian faith is placed is God himself. It is Him we trust, not Christianity.

Scripture and doctrine can instruct and inspire, but they cannot deliver by themselves. They tell us why and how to trust God, but it is the act of trusting God which makes it experiential. Faith essentially says to God about any sphere, "In this, I trust you. Thank you".

“That is how our faith grows, not by accumulating information about Him, but by increasing experience of Him, in day-to-day life.”

2. Faith is a Means to an End

Faith acts in the way a clutch acts on a car. A car may sit with its engine running and a driver at the wheel, yet not be going anywhere. When the driver engages the clutch, the engine connects to the wheels, they start to turn and the car is soon on its way along the road. The engagement of the clutch produces the action, but the clutch has no power in itself. You don't tell your neighbors about the amazing clutch you have in your car! It is the engine that gets you down the road, the clutch is the mechanism to make that end possible. Faith engages God, so that God works, not our faith! The focus ought not to be our faith, but God in whom we place our faith. Whipping up a stronger faith will accomplish little. Becoming more confident in God will accomplish much.

3. Faith is Not Measured by its Volume

People are forever asking God for more faith. When the disciples did that on one occasion, Jesus gave a startling answer. Luke 17:5 tells us, "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' (NIV).

If we were standing nearby listening to the conversation, we would have understood the request perfectly. We have probably made the same request in prayer many times. But listen to Jesus' reply in verse six: "He replied, 'If you have faith

as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

Mustard seed was the smallest seed they knew. They ask for a 'big faith' and He tells them they are asking for the wrong thing! 'Small' faith is enough. Let me illustrate. At 18 years of age, I flew in an airplane for the first time. I had left school in England and went to work on a large farm in Zimbabwe in Southern Africa. Having never flown before I was a little nervous on the one hand, whilst excited on the other.

Aboard the aircraft, my seat was in the middle of three on the left side of the plane, with an elderly Scottish lady seated on my left, by the window, and a South African businessman on my right next to the aisle. The Scottish lady was very nervous. She too had never flown before and was going to visit her daughter, son in law and grandchildren whom she hadn't seen for a long time.

Her family had persuaded her the plane stood a very good chance of arriving safely at her destination and she would be okay! But she had some doubts! I was a little nervous, but nothing like she was. The businessman on my right had probably flown many times and was completely confident and

relaxed in his seat. The three of us each had a different quantity of faith. The Scottish lady had mustard seed-sized faith (enough to persuade her she had at least a 51 percent chance of survival). I had potato-sized faith, and the businessman had watermelon-sized faith. But the remarkable thing was that despite our varying quantities of faith, we all arrived at our destination at the exact same time!

It was not the quantity of our faith that got us there, but the object in which we placed our faith - the airplane!

The disciples hadn't understood the nature of faith when they asked for 'more faith'. They thought it was about volume and levels of confidence, rather than the object in which it is placed - God. Now, of course, there is value in an increased faith. The man on my right with years of experience under his belt was confident and relaxed for the journey. The lady on my left much less so. It is as we know the object of our faith better, that we relax and trust. Scripture speaks of 'resting' in God, with a relaxed confidence of increasing faith. So, how does our faith grow?

4. Faith Increases through Scripture

Paul wrote, "...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ..." - Romans 10:17 (NIV). Simply put, the more we get to know God, the more we trust Him.

That is why faith grows through reading the word of God. But we don't read the Bible to get to know the Bible, but to get to know Christ. The scripture is true, but it is not itself the truth. Jesus said, 'I am... the truth'. (John 14.6). What is the difference?



I may read an airline timetable which tells me a plane leaves Auckland on a Saturday morning at 8am and arrives in Sydney three-and-a-half-hours-later. That may be perfectly true. But it is true only as it bears witness to the truth of the plane. The timetable won't get me anywhere by itself, it only directs me to the time and place where the plane can take me across the Tasman Sea.

We read the Bible to know God better, so we may obey him more completely and trust Him more fully. That is how our faith grows, not by accumulating information about Him, but by increasing experience of Him, in day-to-day life.

5. The Greater our Confidence in the Object of our Faith, the Less our Consciousness of the Faith Itself

If I had the choice to drive the length of New Zealand from top to bottom or vice versa - over both the north and south islands - in a brand-new BMW or a beat-up vintage VW beetle - and I chose the beetle, almost certainly someone would tell me I have a lot of faith! If I chose the brand new BMW no one would comment on my faith. Why?

Because the more confident we are in the object of our faith, the less conscious we are of exercising faith. My faith would actually be greater in the BMW, but I would be less conscious of it. When we are impressed with someone's great faith, what we are really saying is that we don't trust their God and

are impressed that they do. So, the more we know God, the easier and more natural it becomes to trust. It is a growing relationship that becomes stretched more and more to discover His trustworthiness.

6. Faith is not Passive

Faith cannot be separated from obedience. The New Testament speaks of "the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1.5). Obedience and faith are like the two wings of an airplane. Which is the most important wing? Silly question!

Obedience without faith leads to legalism, where I am just doing my best for God. Faith without obedience leads to unhealthy mysticism, where nothing of substance happens.

But obedience coupled with faith leads to dynamism. I do what He tells me to do, and He does what he promised He would do. That is the rhythm of the Christian life, obedience and trust, obedience and trust, obedience, and trust. I learned a song in Sunday School many years ago which went like this,

"Trust and Obey,
For there is no other way,
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey".

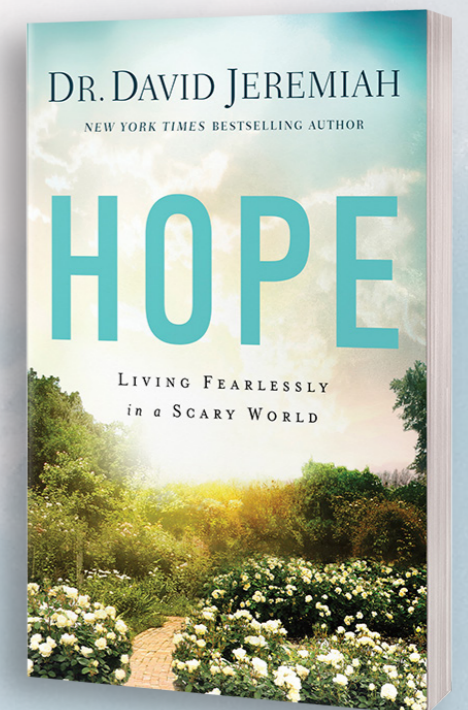
While I did learn it in Sunday School, it is not kid's stuff. That's the real thing! | A

■ 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



FEARS ARE CRIPPLING, KEEPING US FROM THE LIFE GOD HAS CALLED US TO LIVE - NOW IS YOUR TIME TO BE FEARLESS

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He Sees Your Value

BY LOCKY MCNEILL

If you are like me, on most days you can put your hand in your pocket and find those little round metal disks we call coins. I generally remember them when I am getting changed and they fly all around the room.

If you think about these things called coins, there is something they all have in common. While they may be of differing sizes, colours and carry different inscriptions, they all share something.

They have value. In Scripture, Jesus in fact talked about the value of the coins the widow put in the offering. The passage is found in Mark 12:41-44, and the NIV says it this way, *"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents." Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on."* This woman gave all the value she had, God noticed, and God honoured her for it.

Jesus also talked about the value of giving to God what belongs to Him, while at the same time giving to the systems we live in what belongs to, or what we owe, them.

One one occasion, found in Matthew 17, Jesus asked one of His friends to catch a fish. This particular fish was discovered to have a coin in it - worth enough to pay for something Jesus and his friend needed to pay for.

"...go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for My tax and yours."
- Matthew 17:27. (NIV).

In Luke we are also told the following story:

"...suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
Luke 15:8-10 (NIV)

"In fact, God loves and cares for you so much there isn't anything He won't do to find you and to restore you."

Here is Jesus' point... God sees value in you! If you are lost, He does all that is needed to find you and rescue you. In fact God loves and cares for you so much that there isn't anything He won't do to find you and to restore you. Jesus mentions a lamp. Why? Because God will light up the darkest places to find and rescue us, because of the high value He places on each of our lives. Jesus is also described as the light of the world. He lights a lamp of His Son to come and seek us out.

Isn't that awesome? Maybe as you are reading this you are feeling a bit lost or left alone in the dark. If that's the case, please know that is not where God wants you to feel left! Let Jesus light up your world and circumstances and may you have a revelation of your value to Him.

If you are lost, may you know God is looking for you right now. Something to think about. |  

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.





Making Personal Time for God AFTER MARRIAGE

BY ASHLEY DURAND

When I was single, I was deeply aware of my need for God. He was the only other person in my apartment to talk to on quiet evenings. He was the one who gave me peace when I was scared and loved me no matter what. And while those things were still true after I got married, suddenly it was a lot harder to make time for God.

I became a little less desperate for Him since there was another person lying next to me when I fell asleep and woke up, a person who was physically there to talk to, someone to put his arms around me when I was afraid and to love me when I was unlovable.

Part of it was that I didn't know when to carve out alone time for God in our new routine as a married couple. The other reason was that I just wanted to be with my husband as much as I possibly could. My husband faithfully read his Bible every morning and encouraged me to do the same, but it was hard for me not to be distracted. My mind was more focused on what I was planning to cook for dinner and making sure to get out the door on time.

But the Lord didn't let me forget how much I needed Him. Shortly after getting married, I faced several major health crises that ultimately brought my heart back to a desperation for God. *Jeremiah 17:7-8 says, "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."* (NIV).

Life is hard, even when — sometimes especially when — you're married. And if your hope is focused on your relationship with your spouse instead of on God, then you are like a tree with an underdeveloped root system.

When tough times come you have no way to get the strength you need. You have to be intentional; you can't coast by on the relationship you had with God in the past. You have to keep working and seeking Him regularly to know Him.

And so, here are a few ways I have found helpful when it comes to intentionally making time for God - even when, at times, it seemed hard with someone else in my personal routine and space:

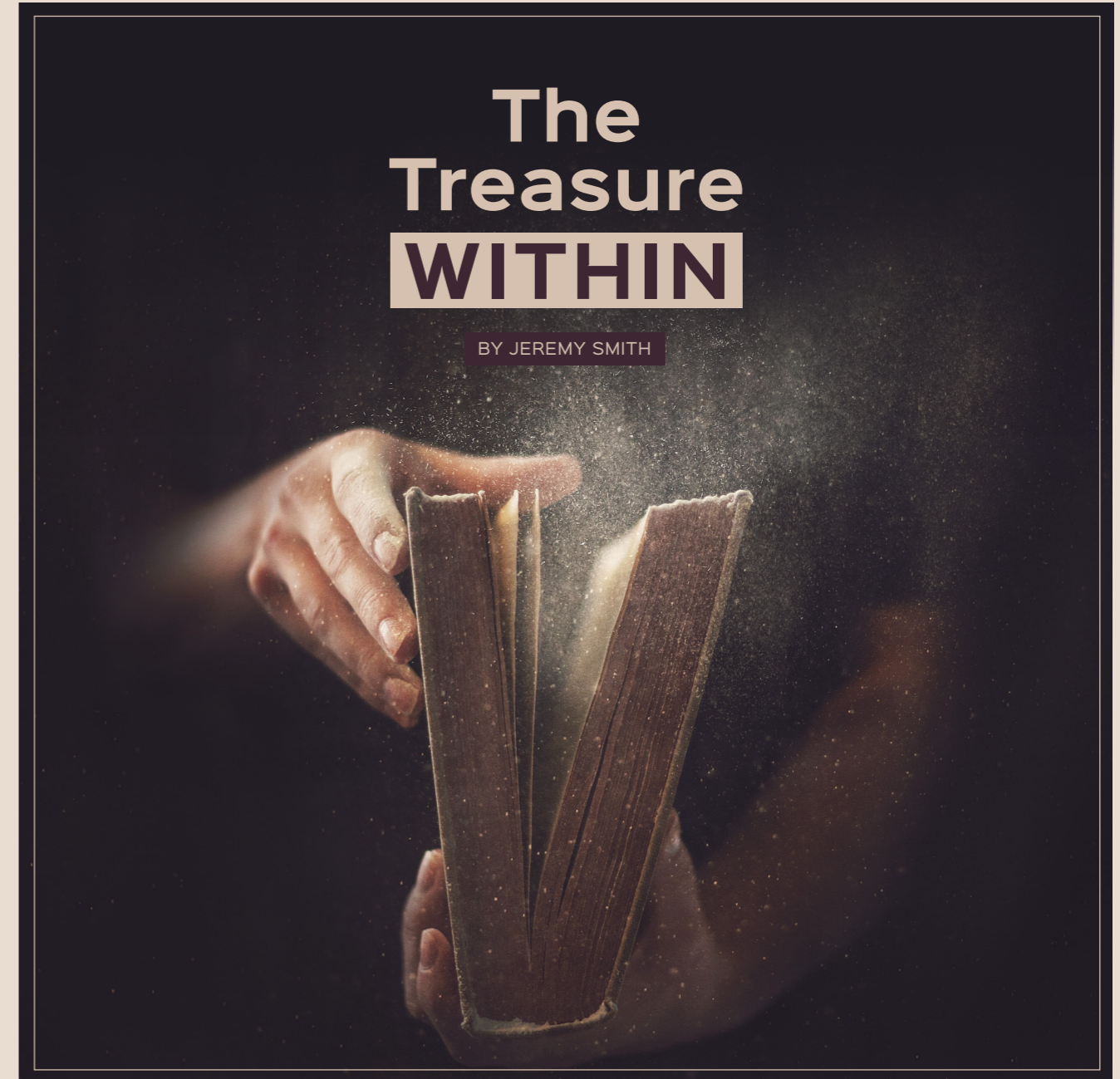
- » Listen to the Bible App while getting ready or driving to work.
- » Read, pray or fast during lunch break.
- » Read the Bible while eating breakfast in the morning.
- » Read the Word or a devotional with your spouse.
- » Set aside an evening to spend some alone time with just you and God - even if that means getting out of the house and going to a coffee shop or on a hike.

Making time for the Lord is incredibly important — don't stop doing it just because your routine and home life have changed. | **A**

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. For more information from Focus on the Family New Zealand, visit <https://family.org.nz>.



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The Treasure WITHIN

BY JEREMY SMITH

Some time ago in England, a young man's Grandmother went to be with the Lord. The wider family was called to her lawyer's office for the reading of her last will and testament and distribution of her assets, according to the document.

When it was the young man's turn, his grandmother had written, "...and to my Grandson, I leave my Bible and all its treasures". Despite his upbringing and Godly heritage the young man had drifted somewhat from his walk with Jesus over the years.

Although he dared not say it out loud, as he heard those words, he thought to himself, "...of everything she had to give me, why is she leaving me this old thing? I know what's in here, I've read it all before. There's no 'treasure'. What does she even mean by that?"

Somewhat begrudgingly, he took his Grandmother's old Bible home. Placing it high up on his mantelpiece amongst several other books, he promptly forgot it was there - never even opening it once.

Some years later, things weren't going so well for the young man. Finances had become an issue and he found himself generally having lost his way in life. He felt as if he had nowhere to turn.

One day, as he decided to do some cleaning and dust his mantelpiece, he bumped into his Grandmother's old, unused Bible. "Wow! This old thing!", he said - taking it down and wiping off a thick layer of dust that had now accumulated on the cover. Somewhat at the end of himself and motivated by the difficulties he was facing in life, he asked, "I wonder what this thing has to offer? Why was it so special to Grandma?"

As he opened her old Bible, he saw on the inside cover the same phrase written to him that his Grandma had stated in her will, "...to my Grandson, I leave my Bible and all its treasures". As he then began to flick through and open the first few pages, to his astonishment, a 20 pound note fell out from between them.

Turning to the next page, another 20 pound note fell out. As he subsequently made his way through his Grandma's beloved book, it transpired that 20 pound notes fell from between each of the pages as he turned to them. The monetary value ended up being thousands of pounds worth of 20 pound notes.

The young man was amazed - all these years he had been sitting on a 'treasure' which he'd been totally unaware he had in his possession. Simply because he'd never bothered to open his Bible.

Thought provoking story, isn't it? And as I read it I was challenged in several ways. Spoiler alert, the 'treasure' to be found in reading the Bible has nothing to do with the value of the money! But, I was encouraged - and as I explain, may you be also.

Firstly, I was reminded there is always room for me to read my Bible more than I often do, and secondly I felt as if God laid something on my heart. He gently reminded me that if I, as a Christian, own a Bible but don't read it then I'm like the young man in our story. I have in my possession something which is immeasurably valuable, but if I don't read it - and subsequently live it - how will I ever fully realise its value and apply the truth of God's Word in my life?

Of course, we know God's Word is a priceless 'treasure' and we need it in our everyday walk with Jesus. And we know, God always speaks and reveals truth to us through His Word when we read it. But we have to read it! *In the NIV, Hebrews 4:12a puts it this way, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.."* That means that every time we pick up the Bible - God's divinely inspired words to us - we learn something as He speaks to us through the truth of His Word.

As Christians, we all know that, don't we? But how many times have we, myself included, been like the young man in our story in the sense that we have an attitude of "I already know what's in there..."

Such an attitude of familiarity perhaps often means we don't, at times, even bother to pick up our Bible. But, isn't it amazing how whenever we do actually read it - perhaps even a passage

we may feel we've seen many times before - God reveals something new and fresh to us?

Here's my simple encouragement. If you only remember one aspect of this piece, remember this - may we be people who value, prioritise and make time to read His Word! And then, not only that, let's be those who live out what we read! Let's never take for granted what it is we actually have in our possession in God's Word. *As James encouraged us, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only..." - James 1:22a (NKJV).*

How do we know if we are people who read, value and then live out His Word? Jesus tells us a hallmark of such people in Luke.

"As for everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

But the one who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." - Luke 6:47-49 (NIV).


Jesus tells us right there in that passage of Scripture that His word anchors us in the storms of life and points us to God Himself. As David put it in the well known passage found in Psalm 119:105, *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* - (KJV)

But, for it to light our path, we have to know, and put into practice, God's Word. If we don't read it, and then act on it and live it out, we are missing out on one of the major ways in which God wants to speak to, reveal Himself and offer direction in our lives.

The above Scripture would suggest that we also leave ourselves open to being tossed about by difficulties and the things life throws at us if Jesus and His Word don't ultimately anchor us.

So, simply put, let's purpose in our hearts to be those who always approach God's Word with excitement and a child-like freshness and anticipation every time we read it.

Let's be open and expectant of the ways in which God wants to speak to us. Then, let's apply what He says to us through His words and live them out in our day to day walk with Jesus.

May we not be like the young man who was in possession of a great treasure all along - but who never realised it. | 

"...every time we pick up the Bible - God's divinely inspired words to us - we learn something as He speaks to us..."

■ 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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Alan and Jackson Stanley.



Uncovering the Unexpected

BY ALAN STANLEY

Displaying candid vulnerability, father and son Alan and Jackson Stanley have written a two-part feature describing a journey they've been walking together in recent years. In this issue, we set the scene with part one.

The year was around 2004 I'm guessing. My wife and I had two sons: Luke, 3, and Jackson, 1. The day was a normal day. I'd been in the car five minutes - it'd be another 40 before arriving at work. I'd often use this time to pray. One of the things I would pray for was our boys.

On this occasion, as I'd frequently done before, I asked God to bring both our boys to faith in Christ. But, that wasn't the end of the prayer. I went on to ask something like: "Please Lord, may you bring this about while they are young and may they continue in that faith throughout their teenage years. May they not 'go off the rails.'"

Then it occurred to me that to pray they would come to faith while young and not go off the rails in their teens was more about me than our boys. My motive, I could tell, was I didn't want the hassle of dealing with wayward teenagers and I was afraid of what people might think of me - a pastor and Bible College lecturer.

That was the last time I ever prayed that prayer. I still prayed that our boys would come to know God. I just didn't put a time limit on it. I'm not suggesting for a moment that one should not pray such prayers. After all, "You do not have because you do not ask God," writes James (4:2). I just knew that, for me, I needed to let that part of the request go.

More than 15 years on, we have a third son, Caleb. Luke and Jackson are coming to the end of their teenage years. The reason I remember 2004 so vividly is not only because of the impact it made on me at the time, but because the fear that generated the prayer actually came to pass.

What follows is the first part of that story. Through it, God taught me the most valuable of lessons. A lesson, as it turned out, I would never want to go the rest of my life without. I'll let Jackson, now 18, begin by telling the first part of the story.

"I was born and raised in Australia. Growing up, I always told myself I would be a Christian - that was that. I'd never turn away from God like so many other people I'd heard about. I simply couldn't imagine life without God. I was surrounded by good Christian friends and there were no temptations to pull me away from Him. However, when I was 14, we moved from Australia to New Zealand, where my parents come from. I found myself in a new world with very few Christian influences

and I struggled to find friends. I began to struggle with depression and anxiety and, in the process, lose faith that God would look after me.

At the beginning of year 12, I started to drink and smoke marijuana to try and be accepted. It worked. I made friends and I was happy again. I'd go out and party Friday and Saturday nights - then go to church on Sunday.

I didn't want to be a Christian anymore, but I put on an act to try and please my parents. For six months I lived this double life. Until I got caught. It was the last day of school - instead of going to school I went to get high with some mates. I smoked the whole day. When my dad picked me up, I hopped in the car and immediately saw disappointment on his face. I'd had some close calls before, but this was it. I couldn't talk my way out of this one.

I wasn't allowed to leave the house all of the following day. I locked myself in my room. The only thing stopping me from running away was that my mum threatened to tell the police on my friends. I didn't feel bad anymore for what I had done. I was just angry. Angry because my parents didn't understand me, or the fact I didn't want to be a Christian anymore.

When my wife and I found out Jackson had been smoking marijuana, we became policemen. Immediately! That lasted approximately 24 hours, maybe 12. It quickly became evident the policeman approach would not work. But what to do? I felt like I was losing my son. Or was I?

Honestly, what I feared losing was my hopes for my son. I didn't mind too much about what career he decided on, but I'd hoped he would choose to follow God. That's how we raised him. I certainly hoped he wouldn't get into drugs. I'd even pray from time to time: "Lord, please keep our boys from drugs."

In a moment, or perhaps moments, of clarity, I knew that I was not in fact losing my son, but rather, my identity. That is, I was losing the sense of worth and value that I perceived came from having Christian sons 'walking with the Lord.'

I was also losing the sense of peace that came from having an 'obedient son'. It felt like a slap in the face - like he was saying, "I want nothing to do with what you've taught me." Of course, that's what he was saying. The fact I reacted so

“As the days and weeks unfolded, I realised that my happiness, my sense of identity and worth, were tied up in being a ‘good’ parent and in having kids who were Christians and followed God.”

strongly though indicated I had a problem. Jackson was merely the mirror I needed to see my problem.

This may sound extremely odd, but it's possible to find our value and worth in any number of good things. The Pharisees are a case in point. They found their worth in holiness - a very good thing - instead of God. Their identity was dependent on how holy, or unholy, they were.

The Pharisees are also an example of people who found their worth and value in their theology. They cared more about keeping the Sabbath than about people who were suffering.

J. I. Packer makes the point of observing "...fellow believers . . . constantly seeking to advance themselves in godliness" and yet "they show little direct interest in God Himself." According to Packer, "There is something narcissistic and, to tell the truth, nutty in being more concerned about godliness than about God." This was the Pharisees.

Brian Rosner, the Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne, has written a book on identity. He lists eleven "essential dimensions" that can have an inordinate influence on a person's sense of identity: race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender, sexuality, physical and mental capacity, family of origin, age, relationships, occupation, possessions, religion, and personality and character. In and of themselves, none of these are problematic." But, Rosner points out, "human beings have the propensity to turn any of these eleven 'essential dimensions' of a person's sense of identity into an idol."²

As the days and weeks unfolded, I realised my happiness, my sense of identity and worth, were tied up in being a 'good' parent - in having kids who were Christians and followed God. How'd I know? Quite simple - although admittedly hard to explain in a magazine article. I simply knew it in my heart.

I knew by my reactions to Jackson. If I thought about Jackson never following the Lord, that thought deeply affected me. I knew it because I felt a sense of despair and hopelessness - I'd failed as a father. I couldn't escape feeling it was my fault.

Jackson's decision to go down this path was an ongoing visible reminder to me of how far I had fallen short. I can't tell you how much pain that caused me. None of this happened in an instant of course, but the dawning of it in my own mind couldn't have been clearer. My fear was more about losing my identity than it was my son.

Ultimately, I realised I was not losing my son at all. I was losing



what I wanted him to be. My reaction - turning into a policeman - showed I was more invested in him following my ways, than I was in him.

In his book on parenting teenagers, Paul Tripp called one chapter "typical parental idols." Idols like comfort, respect, appreciation, success, and control. He points out these things become idols when we demand them from our children. "We reason that we have the right to quiet, harmony, peace, and respect, and we respond in anger when we do not get it."

According to Tripp, this is a "central issue" when parenting. "I'm deeply persuaded that our idols have . . . caused us to strike back at our teenagers with bitter words of judgment, accusation, and condemnation, behaving toward them with intolerance and anger. While God is calling us to love, accept, forgive, and serve, we are often barely able to be nice."³

There's more of me in this description than I care to admit. However, the truth is there's a difference between my sons following God and my sons following my expectations. Only God could lead Jackson to the former. I had to let go of the latter. I thought about these kind of things during these first 12 to 24 hours of discovering what Jackson had been doing.

One thought in particular changed the way I related to Jackson from then on. The father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). What struck me was the father let his son go. He let him leave home for a foreign country to do who knows what. I knew I had to do the same thing - let go of my expectations, the picture in my mind of who Jackson should be or how he should live, and do what God would do: love him, graciously and unconditionally!

What's that look like? What would I have to let go of? It was as much about my own journey as it was Jackson's. |  | 

Part two of Alan and Jackson's feature will appear in issue 16 of Authentic.

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■ 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



Starting to Find Balance

BY JAKE WILMOTH

In many ways life feels like everything has changed, but in others it feels like nothing has changed. We are fast approaching the two-year mark since the world began to feel the effects of what we now call the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regardless of our political, religious or even personal views of the pandemic, we've all been affected in some way, some of us more than others. Yet, despite all of this, we are blessed to live in a country with natural borders, and - for the most part - we as a nation have not been as impacted as other nations have. I don't know about many of you, but for me it has been a roller coaster of various ups and downs, twists and turns through this time of the pandemic. In many ways, this roller coaster is not over, simply because that is the nature of life. So, the question I have had rattling in my mind is "...how are we? What is our current state of mind, body and spirit?" and "How do we

stay strapped into this car without getting flung out?" Well, let's turn to Philippians to hear what the Apostle Paul says.

Philippi was an interesting city in that it was a Roman colony. That meant men who had served faithfully in the Roman military would be sent to a colony (such as Philippi) to retire or sort of have a 'normal life'. They were proud Roman citizens and found their identity in that. That is why, at the beginning of Philippians 3, Paul lists his credentials - or all of the things that hold value in the Jewish world. He basically says that he obeyed the law and obeyed all the rituals and ceremonies.

Then in Chapter 3, verse 7, he says, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." (NIV). All of those credentials he had, all the ceremonies and rituals he performed, meant nothing once Paul came to know Jesus Christ. They had no value to him anymore. To hear Paul say

this would have rocked some in the church at Philippi, because they found identity in their Roman citizenship - they found identity in their past. Now you might be thinking, "...what does this have to do with me?" or "...what does this have to do with the pandemic and the current state of things in this crazy world?"

Well, let's think about this for a minute. Paul has just said that for his whole life he was working towards one goal - being a good Jewish man, observing the Law. But then he met Christ, and all that changed - to the point where he says in Verse 8 that he considers his entire past rubbish in light of Christ and what He has to offer.

"What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ." - Philippians 3:8 (NIV)

Basically, Paul is saying his whole life up to the point of meeting and knowing Jesus Christ is of little value in light of a life in Christ. That is huge! Everything Paul knew changed in a moment. His world was flipped upside down. So, what does he do? In Philippians 3, verse 13, Paul says he has not *"apprehended but one thing."* Meaning he has not grasped, or laid hold of, or even accomplished anything except for one thing. That one thing is forgetting and reaching.

"...I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." - Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV)

Forgetting? - you might be thinking, "well yeah of course Paul has that down he is a man, and men forget!". Yes, he is a man - but that is not the type of forgetting that I am referring to. Biblical forgetfulness, if we can put it that way, means something entirely different.

It does not mean to misplace something like your car keys, and not remember where they are. It has to do with how we are impacted or affected by things. Warren Wiersbe says it best, "To 'forget' in the Bible means to 'no longer to be influenced by or affected by.'"

So, when Paul says he is forgetting, it is not so much about misplacing something - rather it is about not being impacted by those past things. He does not allow those things to have influence or control over his life. And remember, he just gave his credentials, so he is talking about his whole life up to the point of knowing Jesus. He is saying that he is not affected

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or influenced by his past life, because he is forgetting it and reaching forward.

Reaching forward - again, this could be seen as an easy one, and to some extent it is, you press on, you reach for that which Christ has for you. Paul qualifies it by saying he reaches for the things that are ahead, that is the goal of the upward call of Christ. By that, I think he simply means living your life for Christ - whatever that may look like in your context.

Now, a note about forgetting and reaching forward. This is a balancing act, literally. He is saying, "...now that we are in Christ, we need to let the past be the past. Do not let it affect you, and press on towards the things that Christ has for you."


However, you cannot reach forward until you have let go of the past. That's easy to say right, but not so easy to do. There are plenty of examples where people get things out of balance. Some people forget so much that they forget why they are doing what they are doing. Others press forward too hard - so hard that they end up running other people over.

Again, Warren Wiersbe put it this way: "Some Christians are so busy 'dying to self' that they never come back to life again to run the race! And others are so sure they can make it on their own that they never stop to read the Word, pray, or ask for the power of the Lord." So, some questions for us today are, "... have we forgotten too much or have we

pressed on too hard?" And, "...is that balance of forgetting and reaching forward correct in our life?"

You might be thinking, "...what does this have to do with the pandemic?" or "...what does this have to do with our current state of affairs?" As I said at the beginning, things have changed, and yet still feel the same. We are not limited by how many people can meet in public places, we do not have to wear face masks at the store. It is not until we turn on the world news that we see how affected the rest of the world is.

The unsettling change of this present time has caused many of us to be in a state of flux and anxiousness. I know for myself, I am at a place that I have been calling, 'anxiously at peace.' Meaning, I am at peace with what is happening, but I would like to know what God has for us in this time of unsettling. To find that balance we need to ask ourselves, "... have we forgotten enough? Or are we being influenced by the past too much?"

These things can move us or impact us, and we don't even realise it. Let us not take our eyes off of the goal - which is the upward call of Christ. | 

Only Jesus

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL

In Mark 9:2-9 we read of the story of the transfiguration. The text for this piece is very important and there's something I'd like to highlight for you.

Let's look firstly at verse two which tells us, *"Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them."* (NKJV). Did you notice that Scripture tells us Peter, James and John were alone with Jesus when they were led up the mountain and He was transfigured before them?

Sometimes that's exactly what we need to do isn't it? To get away, by ourselves, somewhere away from people and just be with Jesus. No distractions. No technology. Just us and Jesus.

Maybe a routine reset would be good to do too. Because routine determines the road. And revelation comes when we're with Jesus. Perhaps for Peter, James and John it was just another mountain. But, Jesus revealed Himself to them there. Here's the thing; revelation comes from routine.

Back to the story. His clothes became bright. Elijah and Moses appeared there and talked with Jesus. Peter didn't know what to do or say, and wanted to prolong the occasion by building three tabernacles (booths or shelters).

Mark 9:7 says, *"And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!'"* (NKJV). Then, in the next verse it says something incredible. *"Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves."* - Mark 9:8 (NKJV).

Did you catch that? Only Jesus! Wow! As I personally read this passage, I believe there's a powerful lesson here for us. And that is that we need a revelation that Jesus is enough. When we have Jesus, we actually have more than enough. We must understand who it is we have when we have Jesus.

Recently I felt nervous, almost apprehensive, and certainly excited, to start reading Ephesians. I know something about it already. Every verse is packed with truth. It's like a gold mine

packed with explosives ready to detonate and reveal its glory. Look at this passage for example; *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."* - Ephesians 1:3-6 (NKJV).

Looking closely at this passage, we see it tells us we are blessed, "...who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing...", chosen, "He chose us in Him...", holy, "that we should be holy...", blameless, "...and without blame before Him...", predestined, "...having predestined...", adopted, "...us to adoption..." and accepted, "...made us accepted in the Beloved".


It's all in Christ, nothing of ourselves. He is our blessing, He is our blamelessness and our acceptance! He is our everything. Truly He has bestowed grace and favour upon us. Each of those words is a huge subject on its own - and what an amazing thing the Bible is.

Life is always better when we look at what we have, rather than what we don't have. Ephesians is about what we have (Ephesians 1-3), and then how to walk in that (Ephesians 4-6). Jesus has Lordship over all!

"...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth..." - Philippians 2:10 (NIV).

Can I encourage you as you've read this, speak the name of Jesus over your situation. Speak His name over sickness, lack, anxiety, fear, trouble and worry. Speak the name of Jesus over your family, your work, over every issue, every thought.

Some great advice someone once gave me is simply this, "... keep Jesus the centre of your life".

Only Jesus. | 

■ Stephen Whitwell has been a pastor for 33 years. He writes a monthly e-letter, Brief Word, which circulates worldwide. He has a passion for helping people discover who they are, and for writing and speaking about life! He can be contacted at www.goodwords.nz.





Hospitality as a Leader and Beyond

BY CARL TINNIION

What do you think of when you hear the word hospitality? Is it offering a cup of tea? Making sure guests have everything they need? Maybe it's fresh flowers all over the place, a meal, decorated candles on the tables with nicely folded napkins?

These are all great expressions, but they are only outward ones - just the beginning of the journey. Hospitality is also an ethos for everyday life and how we treat people around us. I would suggest that the spirit of hospitality is fundamental to Christ-like leadership and life.

Why? Because Jesus is all about servanthood. As Matthew 20:28 tells us, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (NIV).

Hospitality in its purest form is about creating a space for the stranger or outsider to taste the 'home away from home' - a place to be fully themselves and not have to wear masks of any kind.

It is about creating a safe haven to unwind and be refreshed, a place of blessing and true belonging. Let's quickly look at what the Bible has to say about hospitality and leadership in the below passage.

"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to

be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money." - 1 Timothy 3:1-3 (NIV).

So, why would the word hospitable be included in this list of leadership prerequisites that we've just read? What does it speak of, what power could it have to change the world?

Broadly speaking, I wonder if this word is one of the easiest ways to understand the character and nature of God Himself?

"I would suggest that the spirit of hospitality is fundamental to Christ-like leadership and life."

Think about the creation of the world with Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden. God created mankind out of an act of generosity. He didn't create us to be his servants, or his minions.

Scripture tells us He created us so that the loving communion of His own realm and being could be shared.

"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him..." - Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

Think of it as a widening of His familial circle if you like. He realised that the intimate communion He experienced in the trinity was so wonderful - and He then widened it out so that more beings could be included, invited, embraced, accepted and loved.

Surely this is hospitality and a good foundation for us to build upon? God's gracious and extensive invitation for all of humanity is one of welcoming, unconditional love and acceptance through Jesus.

When Christians fully get their heads around evangelism, mission and all those kinds of words, they should ultimately end up in the realm of Godly hospitality. Welcoming and loving the stranger.

So, how should a leader be living out a spirit of hospitality?

Years ago, when I lived in England as a boy, there was a New Zealand man called Marcus who used to visit our church as a guest speaker. He would stay at our house and I remember when he would arrive, he would dump his bag in his room, put on his slippers and come back down to collapse on the couch. My mum absolutely loved this! She would make him a cup of tea - as English people do of course! - and she loved the fact that he felt free to wear his slippers in her house. What it meant to her was that he felt at home, he felt safe. Safe to be himself. I have often pondered on this and would like to

present the idea of slippers as a metaphor for 'belonging' to you. If you wear slippers, then you can maybe relate to the fact they are usually well worn, pretty ugly and something you only use in the confines of your own home. Definitely not to be shown to the wider world! You put them on to relax and unwind, they are you.

Hospitality then, might be about creating a space in which to wear slippers that is so safe and inclusive that people feel free enough to be themselves. Not worrying about what others think, but knowing they are loved and welcomed just the way they are.

Isn't this the good news of God's Kingdom again!

My encouragement would be to think about this metaphor for a bit and explore the idea in your own practices. Are people free to be themselves in the spaces you manage or curate? While at the same time being pointed to the sense of God's hospitality?

More intimately, do you yourself feel free to wear your own slippers when you are in God's hospitable presence? |A

■ Carl has worked with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) for 26 years, based mainly around Europe. He is now based in New Zealand, working with YWAM running training in churches and organisations and partnering with education projects throughout the Pacific. On the side, he works with Maori charity The Happy Puku as a chef. Check out his Youtube video 'Heavenly Nosh', exploring theology through food. He is also involved in an exciting new arts initiative in Tauranga called Blue Print Arts.





Leighton Baker

'BUILDING' on the Lessons Learned

BY JEREMY SMITH

"I'm far too young to retire," he says with a smile, "...I do think I still have something to offer in politics and I haven't given up. Right now though, in that sphere, I don't exactly know how that looks in terms of a role, or where or how I'm meant to serve going forward.

"What I am passionate about is seeing unity among Conservative thinkers and voters and we are looking at how we can empower people to have a say in the things that they are experienced in or passionate about. - Watch this space.

"But, I'll say this. Two needs I believe we still have as a country are, firstly, we absolutely need Christians in politics being salt and light and a Godly influence. Secondly, we still need to see societal change in New Zealand - until we see that we should keep fighting. If we as Christians relinquish, who will take up the baton?"

It's an honest reflection from former New Conservative party leader Leighton Baker as he looks back on his time in the job he held from 2017 until last year's election. He has contested every general election since 2008, but was removed from his most recent role after the party gained 1.5 percent of the party vote, or 42,615 votes, at last year's election.

"We didn't get where we wanted", Leighton says candidly, nearly a year on. "We were aiming to reach the five percent threshold for Parliament and we didn't, so yes, as leader at the time, I take ownership of that."

While conceding he was disappointed by the poll result, he's far from discouraged. Ultimately, he trusts the Lord, and as he

prayerfully considers what God has for him next, Leighton took time to chat with Jeremy Smith about what it's like being in politics and the level of scrutiny that comes with the job, being bold for, and totally reliant on, his faith in Jesus, getting to spend more time with his family now, running his own business and his love of the outdoors and fishing.

As we begin, I'd love to hear how you first came to know Jesus...

I was brought up in a Christian home. But, in terms of beginning a personal relationship with Jesus, when I was younger my parents used to send me to Christian camps in the school holidays. I came to know Jesus as the Gospel was shared at these camps. When I was a teenager though, my parents separated. That was hard and, for a season, threw a spanner in the works in terms of my walk with the Lord.

Looking back, I think that experience is one of the reasons why these days I'm quite passionate about helping inform young people of the importance of building solid, committed relationships. I made a few very poor decisions for sure, but God was very gracious to me.

In my late teens, I began working with some Godly Christian men. By simply sharing their stories as we worked together each day, they really helped me get back on track. Through them, the Lord gave me a sense of hope again.

That shows the importance of young people having Godly role models in their lives, don't you think?

Absolutely. Having Godly people like that in your life is immensely valuable. They don't necessarily even have to say a lot. In my experience, I shifted from Auckland up north to work on a farm. The guy I worked with there was probably in his 60s at the time, but there's no doubt hearing his story and his experiences really impacted me.

Christian camps are so valuable aren't they? Isn't it amazing how many young lives are impacted positively and pointed towards Jesus by them?

For sure. As I mentioned, I had my own encounter with Jesus while I was at such a camp. They are an amazing avenue through which young people can hear a Christ-centred, alternative message to what is often shared in places like the public school sector. Particularly with programmes like Bible In Schools becoming more and more rare in our current environment.

One of the things we were fighting for through politics was free speech. A major aspect of that was the importance of continuing to be able to share the Gospel. Simply put, I came to Jesus because a Christian camp shared the Gospel. I'm so grateful.

Since those mentors led you back to the Lord, as an encouragement to our readers, what's the biggest thing Jesus has taught you in your walk with Him?

It really is all about Jesus! I'm learning that we must always take our eyes off of ourselves and put them on Him. Everything else is temporary - our work, our possessions, our house, our boat, everything. Life goes so fast!

James 4:14 says "...You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (NIV). We're here on earth for such a short time, then we stand before God. Let's live every moment for Him and be intentional about setting our eyes on things that are eternal, so that when we do stand before Him He says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

You mention politics, so how did you get involved in politics in 2008, and why did you want to?

Crikey, 2008! That's going back a while isn't it! I initially got involved by helping a mate who was standing - at that stage though, I didn't have the time to get involved myself.

Then, I went to a screening of the movie Amazing Grace. Gordon Copeland and Larry Baldock, who were both involved with the Kiwi Party - Larry as party leader, Gordon as president - were showing the movie all over the country. The film demonstrates how powerful it is when people have a voice in Parliament and it really spoke to me. I left my name with Larry and then went back to my day job as a builder. One day, Larry showed up to the building site where I was working and said "... instead of being a bystander, get involved".

As well as having been involved in politics, you run the building firm you've just mentioned, and you're a husband, father and grandfather. Can you tell me about your family life?

Sure! I don't want to make other guys who read Authentic sad, but I really do have the best wife in the world! Her name is Sue and she's amazing. We do everything together, whatever we're putting our hand to, she's there, being 100 percent supportive and challenging and encouraging me. Since last year's election, we've turned more of our attention to running our business, in Rangiora, as well as trying to put legs on some of the policies we spoke about last year. Everything we do is total teamwork. I don't think I could do it without her support.

We have four adult children and five little grandchildren. As any grandparent knows - they're such a delight. Family is so fun, and an amazing support system. They keep me grounded

and encourage me - they're not too shy to challenge me, in love, when necessary either!

The South Island is so beautiful! What's the best part about being based there, and are you a city or country kind of guy?

I love the wide-open spaces of the country and really enjoy working with animals. But I've lived in both the city and the county in various places around New Zealand - Invercargill, Lower Hutt, Auckland, Rotorua and the far north.

We have such a beautiful country and there's wonderful towns and cities everywhere. Living where we live now, it's about the lifestyle really. When the kids were growing up, they had the freedom to ride motorbikes, ride horses down to a nearby river, raise animals, all sorts of things.

Talking of politics again, what was the most satisfying part of the job, and the most challenging?

Politics isn't something I found incredibly attractive, it was just an obvious need in New Zealand for an alternative narrative to what was on offer. I firmly believe that we need to have a crack at the challenges and opportunities we find in front of us. A rudder is useless on a moored ship!

At times, probably the most challenging part was feeling like we were misrepresented in the media, and often painted as something we simply weren't. I felt that at times there was some form of an agenda there.

In my opinion, when that type of reporting happens, it deprives New Zealanders of opportunities to make their own well-informed decisions. To be fair, that's not true of everyone



working in the media, and there are some wonderful people doing so. But it was really hard when people thought that, as a party, we were something we were not, simply because the media said we were.

Unfortunately, at times as humans, I think we're all a little bit prone to believe something we want to believe, when we hear it on the news. The most rewarding part, for me, undoubtedly, was meeting the most amazing people up and down New Zealand - wonderful people doing phenomenal things. New Zealand is such a cool country, we have brilliant people everywhere and I absolutely loved meeting them.

What's it like working in that job as a Christian? Can you think of times when God really sustained you as you undertook the work you were doing in politics?

Absolutely, there's heaps! Particularly towards the end of the campaign. In 2020, I spent about a third of the year at home, the other two thirds I was away working and doing politics. So we were campaigning and building houses while running my building business. But, even towards the end of the campaign, after a long stretch, we didn't feel tired as we went into a long line of meetings or media interviews. We should have been exhausted! But, thanks to the Lord, we really felt energised and had the right answers at the right time, far more so than we should have!

I heard you say in an interview that about 70 percent of New Conservative candidates were small business owners. How did that background and understanding of the business world inform an approach to politics?

New Zealand is a nation of businesspeople who run businesses of all sizes. Many of those - like myself - are self-employed. Statistics New Zealand figures state there are about 530,000 small businesses - those with fewer than 20 employees - in New Zealand, representing 97 percent of all firms. These account for 28 percent of employment and contribute over a quarter of New Zealand's gross domestic product (GDP).

We are a wonderful country for starting up a business - whether it be a builder like myself, who started out as an apprentice, or a cafe, a farmer, or whatever the work might be. It's so important to understand that people like these drive our economy. There's a lot of sacrifice - and at times risk taking - involved in starting and running a successful business. So, having candidates with New Conservative who knew what it takes to do that was so important!

They were familiar with business-related tasks, but they also understood first-hand the effects of Government policies and regulations on those businesses and on every day New Zealanders. Government regulation is not just "one more thing..." Continual legislation and cases of adding "...one more thing..." in fact hurt everyday hard-working New Zealanders because business owners are already trying to comply with a myriad of other 'one more thing' requirements.

How do you reflect on your time as New Conservative leader nearly a year after the party received 1.5 percent of the party vote, or 42,615 votes, at October's election? While you've subsequently left the role, what would you do differently looking back and do you have any regrets?

I didn't go full time with New Conservative during the last election campaign - I was still working full time at my business as well. That's probably one of the biggest things I would do differently. Reflecting now, I'd say that was an error, although a financial necessity, because the nature of my building work meant that, at times I wasn't as accessible as I could have been. When I was building as well, I wasn't able to keep those lines of communication really really clear with people when it came to New Conservative.

Conversely though, what are some positives you've taken away from your experience in politics?

I don't know if many people know this, but Labour and New Conservative were the only parties which had candidates standing in every electorate in New Zealand. And, New



Conservative had brilliant candidates, lovely people up and down the country. Our team was full of amazing hard-working people. I feel our policies were robust. We put a lot of time into them. It did seem though that at times the media just wasn't interested in accurately reporting what we stood for.

I think we were starting to gain some good ground and some real momentum. It's true we didn't get where we wanted results wise, and while I wasn't happy with that, we had built a phenomenal team of people. And that was amazing.

What's the biggest challenge facing New Zealand as a country at the moment?

I think we're currently seeing a lot of divisiveness in New Zealand, and in my view much of that has to do with freedom of speech and media feeding the wedge. When we have laws which encroach on freedoms, I think we are in trouble.

We all know that New Zealand is a wonderful place to live and work and lots of people want to come and be here. What's made it like that is unity and that ability we've had to live and work together really well as a nation - the ability to have free discussions, freedom to worship, freedom to congregate and freedom to have open and honest discussions and to have our beliefs and express our views.

New Zealand is a very unique nation and I believe can do so much better by working together, rather than continually looking at what divides. Injustices must be dealt with, but we must also look to a future of being united as a nation.

Another key area for me was around binding referenda that meant the people of New Zealand would actually have a choice when it came to legislation. In New Zealand, I feel we don't really have any way of holding the Government to account - so when we have a situation now like we do where

the Government is a majority Government, it can potentially be really dangerous. I believe we are seeing some of the effects of that.

Why should men in New Zealand be aware of what's happening in politics and what can Christians do to be a practical support?

The biggest thing is obviously prayer. But practically, in my view, it is to stand with Christians in politics. And by that, I mean when we hear of something negative in the media, let's not be quick to jump on the bandwagon. People are fallible and I understand that. We are humans - we make mistakes.

But as Christians, when we hear something, let's stop and be prayerful, look past the sensationalism that sometimes goes on and really consider the facts. Maybe even if you know someone that something is said about, contact them and see what's actually going on.

When it comes to the Church, unity is absolutely key and as Christians we need to back each other. As a nation let's pray for and lift up Christians in politics.

During the election, did you ever hear the phrase "wasted vote" when people talked about voting for a certain parties or candidates?

Yes. And my response is simply this. If you vote for something for any reason other than it is actually what you genuinely believe in, then you have in fact wasted your vote. If you vote for something that you don't truly believe in, then even if you get what you voted for in that case, it's not really what you genuinely wanted. It sounds simple, but we simply have to vote for what we truly believe in when it comes to the important decisions which shape our nation. Because then we get a say in how we move forward.

What's the value of having Christians in politics?

It's imperative we have Christians in politics who speak the truth and fight for what we believe is right. Western nations were in fact founded on Christian principles and there is such value in that. That value absolutely needs to be represented and reflected in Parliament. If we discard the Christian voice in our nation, we do so to our own detriment. And it's not just about politics.

Christians need to be involved in and contributing to all spheres of life - politics, education, business, health, wherever. As Christians, we're called to be the salt of the earth and bring a different, Godly perspective and His wisdom to situations.

If we abandon that, we are certainly doing a dis-service to our nation. Look at Jesus. He was likely the biggest social reformer of His time and it was incredible how He approached issues that made up the fabric of His nation.

In New Zealand, we have some amazing Christians working in Parliament and we need them there to stand up, first and foremost, for Jesus and the importance of Godly values underpinning our nation.

Changing tack a little bit, now that you're less involved in politics, what's your favourite pastime when you need to rest and recharge?

There's not many days off around at the moment! Last year was so busy that this year is a bit of a catch-up year in which Sue and I are working on some of the things we put to one side in 2020 - as well as trying some of the things we spoke about on the campaign trail, like growing nutrient dense food and building energy efficient buildings.

I do love going out into the bush - the peace I feel out there is beautiful, but it's been a long time between outings. I think my biggest priority is hanging out with my family and my grandchildren, just spending quality time with them. That is so refreshing.

Having been a politician, and given that you are a businessman, husband, father and grandfather, what advice can you give our readers about maintaining a Godly balance while living busy lives?

I think it's critical that as men and fathers we recognise how valuable investing time into our families is. In my world, I made it a priority to try to never work weekends. There was the odd exception, but generally that allowed Sue and I to support the kids in their endeavours. When we guys come home from work,

it's important we intentionally look to serve and be an active part of our family life. Let's be excited and enthusiastic about spending time with our kids too, because then our kids get excited about spending time with us!

One of the things I think we as men need to work on - myself included too of course - is communication. It's important that we learn to communicate effectively with our spouse and family.

Finally, as an encouragement to our readers, the realm of politics is likely one in which you often had to be bold for Jesus. How would you encourage our readers to also be bold in their faith as they live out their lives wherever God has called them to be?

As Christians we do need to be bold, but we can be bold without being arrogant or rude. We absolutely should share our faith, but we can't force our beliefs on anyone, nor are we called to condemn them.

I like the name of this magazine actually! Authentic. Why? Because we absolutely must be that. Our faith in Jesus must be who we really are as people, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our walk with Him should inform everything we do. As men, how do we treat our wives? With honour and respect? Our children see that. What sort of movies do you watch when no one else is home?

Being bold for Jesus is something I believe we can never compromise on. Humanly speaking, I certainly know I'm not perfect. I've spoken of feeling misrepresented at times, but my encouragement is, let's have confidence in who we are in Christ, because of who God has called us to be.

I think the thing that puts many people off Christianity is duplicity - seeing someone acting one way one minute and another the next.

I like the verse which says, *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."* - 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV).

Just by being authentic and truthful in our walk with Jesus we will make a difference in other people's lives, point them to Him and be a sweet fragrance.

Thanks so much for chatting to us Leighton! Let's pray for Leighton and other Christians like him - whether in politics or wherever spheres God has placed them - that they will put Jesus first and ultimately seek to advance His Kingdom in the work they do. | 🙏

■ 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.





Bearing Fruit as a Family

BY RYAN KILFOIL

Ryan Kilfoil writes about an exercise he undertook with his family as he and his kids discussed the fruit of the Spirit...

Recently I was talking to my kids about the fruit of the Spirit. The conversation actually started because it was brought to my attention that perhaps some of these weren't so evident in my life all the time - especially after a long day of work. Annd...[insert excuse here!]

I love how God can use your own children to bring some humility to your life!

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." - Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

As the kids and I thought about each of them, we agreed that there were some areas of improvement needed in each

of our lives! We decided to write them up on our kitchen wall - we have a metre wide strip on one of our kitchen walls that has black chalkboard paint on it. This way, as a family, we can have a daily visual reminder of some of the things that should be evident in our lives as followers of Christ.


Now, when I wake up each morning and head to the kitchen to get coffee, I'm confronted by these words. It's a great reminder that, just like when you're gardening (so I'm told), you need to ensure the plant or tree has the right nutrients and conditions to thrive. Otherwise we're left with nothing but a bunch of weeds!

This then begs the question, which one my kids and I asked too, "...how do we ensure that we're getting the right nutrients into our lives so that we are bearing the fruit we're meant to?"

Well, Jesus tells us. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."* - John 15:5 (NIV).

What does abiding in Christ mean to you? For me, I don't believe it's about striving and doing the work. It's about being connected to Jesus and allowing Him to produce the fruit in us.

So if, like me, you find yourself lacking in the fruit of the spirit department from time to time, why not surrender to Jesus and let Him work in you and through you.

Get into the Word, spend time in prayer, stop, pause and breathe. May God bless you as you seek Him afresh. | 

Ryan writes a blog called *Take Courage*. You can read more from him on his website, www.takecourage.nz/articles



■ 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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More Important Than Believing the Bible? TRUST JESUS!

BY RAY COMFORT

Many people spend years of their lives fretting about supposed Bible contradictions, and they let it keep them from the saving power of the cross of Christ...

That said, there are many reasons that I have no doubts that the Bible is the Word of God. There are fulfilled prophecies as well as the many scientific and medical facts in the Bible, written thousands of years before man discovered them. But they aren't the main reason I believe that the Bible is the revelation of the Creator's will.

I was converted to Christianity in the early hours of the morning of April 25, way back in 1972. I was dumbfounded at what happened to me that night. However, the amazement didn't stop then. Over the following days, the Bible actually told me of my experience. It was like an instruction book that told me what would happen to an appliance after the power was switched on.

I felt as though I was a completely new person. It wasn't simply a change of mind or a change of lifestyle. The transformation was deep within my heart. I was astounded that I had radically new desires. In my 22 years of life, I hadn't given the ways of God a serious moment for five seconds. Suddenly, it was all I thought about.

Then I picked up a Bible and read 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (KJV). It seemed as if I had been 'born again.'

Then I read in Scripture about the new birth. I read that God would write His Law upon my heart and cause me to walk in His statutes. I would normally listen to music in my car, but instead I found myself turning the radio off because I had a peace I couldn't understand and an inexpressible joy. Then I read in Scripture of a peace that passes all understanding and a joy unspeakable. (Philippians 4:6).

However, my salvation wasn't dependent upon my belief in the Bible but on the fact that I had come to trust in the Savior a few days earlier.

To understand this more clearly, let's go back to the year 40 AD. You have heard the message of salvation. It was preached to you. You didn't read about it in the New Testament because there's no New Testament to read. It isn't yet compiled.

Besides, there is no printing press. Like almost everybody around you, you can't read. You simply heard through the foolishness of preaching that you had broken God's Law, that Jesus died to save you from coming wrath, and that you must repent and trust in Him. So you then called upon the name of Jesus Christ.

You suddenly feel as though you are a new person. It's as though you have been born again. You have a peace that you don't understand and an inexpressible joy in your heart. You are not going to have my experience of reading about what happened to you because there's no New Testament, and besides, you can't read.

So, are you any less saved than a twenty-first century Christian who has been born in the printing age, has access to a New Testament, and can read? No. Your salvation isn't dependent on your believing the New Testament, but on your relationship with the Savior.

It is important to understand this because it will save you from feeling as though you have to become an expert in Biblical apologetics before you can talk to someone about Christ.

What Really Matters

I believe the Bible not only because it told me of my experience in Christ but also because it is the only book that addresses my problem of my sinful heart. It gives the origin of sin, guilt, the necessity of atonement, the provision for my forgiveness, and absolute assurance of everlasting life.

Let's say that you are sitting on a plane. I convince you that you have to jump at any moment. You see your great danger and put on a parachute. At that point you are saved from the jump. That problem is totally dealt with. You have the parachute on, and that's all you need.

I then hand you the emergency card from the seat pocket so that you can become further informed about the plane. You look closely at it. It shows you the exits. It reveals the locations of the oxygen masks. It shows the location of the parachute and how to put it on. It even points out a red whistle and the locality of the bright green ripcord.

Everything on the card matches your experience, right down to the red whistle. That convinces you that the card you are holding is the right card for this plane and that it was put there by the plane owners.

Let's say you see something on the card that doesn't make sense. It shows that the carpet is red when it's actually blue. Are you going to rip the parachute off? Of course not! That would be a stupid thing to do. The fact that you don't understand everything on that card has nothing to do with the fact that you're going to have to jump out of the airplane. You

“If you don't understand something in the Bible, that doesn't matter. Trust Jesus anyway.”




are wearing the parachute, and that's all that really matters. Now think of someone on the plane who is not wearing a parachute. He studies the emergency card and sees that the carpet is a different color than the one on his plane, so he concludes that the card isn't valid. Because of this seeming discrepancy, he makes a decision to reject the offer of a parachute. Think of his plight. He is in great danger. If you decide to pick up the card and try to convince him that the color of the carpet doesn't matter, you are wasting precious time - and you have a better way to persuade him. You simply show him the 25,000-foot jump.

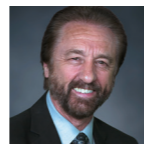
You talk about the law of gravity and what it will do to his frail body if he hits the ground at 120 mph. You make him sweat. When he looks at you with fear in his eyes, you tell him about the parachute. Once he has it on, you can discuss the color of the carpet to your heart's content. And any other information on the card that doesn't immediately make sense to him will be no big deal. All that really matters is that he is wearing the parachute. That's what's important.

Many people spend years of their lives fretting about the 'color of the carpet.' They hear about some supposed contradiction in the Bible, and they let it keep them from the saving power of the cross of Christ.

There are even some Christians who spend a lot of time worrying over things like this, but I have no concerns at all when I see something I don't understand. It's no big deal. Think of the disciples when they heard Jesus say that they should eat His flesh and drink His blood. Such a thought is repulsive, as it was to seventy of His followers. They were offended and left. Jesus then turned to those who remained and asked if they would leave Him also. Peter summed it up for all of us. He said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." *John 6:68 (NIV).*

Trust Jesus Anyway

So, the next time you find something in the Bible that confuses you, don't even think about taking the parachute off just because you don't understand something on the card in the seat pocket. What matters is that you have put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is your salvation. He is your life: "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." - *1 John 5:11-12 (NIV).* If you don't understand something in the Bible, that doesn't matter. Trust Jesus anyway. Cling tighter to Him. Make sure of your own salvation, and then take a long look around you at the millions who are unsaved. You have a job to do. | 



■ 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.



**CHRIST HIMSELF:
The Content of Christian Faith**

BY MAJOR W. IAN THOMAS

There is something which makes Christianity more than a religion, more than an ethic and more than the idle dream of the sentimental idealist. It is this something which makes it relevant to each one of us right now as a contemporary experience. It is the fact that Christ Jesus Himself is the very life content of the Christian faith.

It is He who makes it "tick." *"The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it."* *1 Thessalonians 5:24 (NIV).* The One who calls you is the One who does that to which He calls you. "..."for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose." - *Philippians 2:13 (NIV).* He is Himself the very dynamic of all His demands.

Christ did not die simply that you might be saved from a bad conscience, or even to remove the stain of past failure, but to "clear the decks" for divine action.


You have been told that Christ died to save you. This is gloriously true in a very limited, though vital sense. In Romans 5:10 we read, "If, when we were enemies,

we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." The Lord Jesus Christ therefore ministers to you in two distinct ways - He reconciles you to God by His death, and He saves you by His life.

This, however, is but the beginning of the story. In full, this verse says, "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled (now an accomplished fact) to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved (as a continuing process) through His life!" - *Romans 5:10 (NIV).*

The glorious fact of the matter is this - no sooner has God reconciled to Himself

the man who has responded to His call, than He re-imparts to him, as a forgiven sinner, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and this restoration to him of the Holy Spirit constitutes what the Bible calls regeneration, or new birth.

Titus 3:5-6 (NIV) says, "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." | 

From: The Saving Life of Christ, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. ©1961.



■ W. Ian Thomas was an evangelist, Christian evangelical writer, theological teacher and founder of the Torchbearers Bible schools. You can learn more about the ministry of Torchbearers, at www.torchbearers.org

The Man Talk

BY ERIC LUDY

As is tradition, at the start of every new semester of our classic training at Ellerslie, the ministry I lead in Windsor, Colorado, I gather all the men attending the upcoming semester onto the chapel stage.

"It's time for the 'man talk' with Eric", I say. All the men, young and old, are dressed up in suit coats and ties. Our shoes are polished, our hearts stirred with anticipation, and the occasional bead of sweat can be spied slowly dripping down the forehead of one of the men. The atmosphere in the chapel is sparkling, even regal and bursting with expectancy. The tables are set for our opening night banquet while the flicker of candlelight shimmers enthusiastically about the decorated room.

When all the men arrive onto the stage, I look each one in the eye, then clear my throat and begin. "Men," I say in a serious, grave tone. "You have entered an environment that demands you behave as men. This is not a place for boys. This is not a place for perverts, egotists, fools, and rebels. This is a place that celebrates the dignity and nobility of manhood."

I can visibly see the discomfort in many of the men's eyes. I'm only starting my fourth sentence of the semester and yet I can perceive that some of these men are already wondering if they are supposed to be here.

"If you are planning on spending a season here on this campus," I say, "then you will spend that season behaving as men. Men of honor. Men of purity. Men of truth. Men of holiness. Men of humility. Men of courage. Men of God!"

Every 'man talk' is a bit different. But all carry the same soul searching thunderous commission to rise up and behave as men. Paul had a 'man talk', of sorts, with the Church in the ancient city of Corinth.

I must admit that his particular 'man talk' was a bit shorter than mine. In fact, he packaged his 'man talk' into one very pithy word. He simply growled the word, "Andrizomail!" If someone said andrizomai to you, you might simply shrug your shoulders and say, "Gesundheit!" After all, the word doesn't hold meaning to you, and sounds more like a terrible sneeze than anything else.

But the Church in Corinth knew the strong and historic commission that Paul was issuing with that one singular word. Paul was pressing the ancient words of Moses into their soul. These were the same words, now translated into the Koine Greek, that were originally passed on to Joshua, then passed on to David, then passed on to Solomon, and passed along through Jewish history for 1000 years until they reached Jesus Himself, who passed them on to Peter, James, John and the rest of His disciples.

And now here is Paul walking in this ancient tradition, passing these words of forked-lightning on to the namby-pamby Corinthian Church. And what amazes me is that after 2000 years, somehow here in the present day, that same powerful word of ancient Israel is being passed along to you and to me.

The word is "Andrizomail!" - pronounced 'an-drid'-zom-ah-ee'. Moses, when he gave his manly commission to Joshua, to be strong and of good courage, shouted two words, "chazak" and "amats." But when translated into Koine Greek, those two ancient Hebrew words of manly gusto got packaged into one singular word of thunder and lightning, "Andrizomail!" Simply put, Moses said to Joshua: "Be a man! Do your job manfully! Behave with the courage of a real honest-to-goodness man of God! Go! Do valiantly!"

"Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." - Deuteronomy 31:7-8 (NIV). Joshua then said to the men of Israel as they prepared to set out to conquer the nations of the giants - and I paraphrase - "Be men! March forward manfully! Behave with the guts and determination resident to true honest-to-goodness men that believe in God Almighty! Go! Be fearless in the face of the giants!"

This ancient 'man talk' got passed down through the ages. Typically, this ancient combination of two Hebrew words, 'chazak' and 'amats', was repeated amongst the Jews simply through the emotion-infused phrase of "Rak Chazak!"

And those two words spoken, even whispered, were enough to cause a Jewish soldier's knuckles to turn white with manly purpose, his throat to let out a guttural war cry of determination, and his soul to grip its iron will and pull it from the scabbard.

But as Paul took up his pen, pondered the present weakness of the Corinthian Church, and yearned to see the manfulness of the people of God return full force, he took the burning Hebrew phrase of Rak Chazak and packaged all its grandeur, glory, power, and purpose into one singular Greek word. He shouted to Corinth, "Andrizomail!"

There is a shortage of 'man talks' going around today. What used to be dished from father to son, father to son, and then father to son throughout the flow of generations is now not. The sacred chain seems to have been broken. Most fathers today were never given the 'man talk' by their fathers, and therefore, they struggle to deliver it to their sons. There is a strange paralysis that stymies us as men.

I have a very strong desire to see the formation of strong and godly men in this generation. I want to see the end of chocolate soldiers - those who melt when the heat turns up - and see the arrival of honorable men - those who stand up for truth in our time and in our culture.

God's men have the thunder clap of "Andrizomail!" always booming within their souls. "Rak Chazak" infuses their thoughts, their actions, their attitudes, and their every plan

and design. They are purposely strong, purposely courageous, and purposely brave. They don't accidentally do what they do. They do what they do because it's the "manful" thing to do. Or, as the Christian would understand, they do it because it is the "Jesus" thing to do. It's the way that the Man would do it.

The Man, Jesus, showed us manful living. He lived life with the gusto of love and faced death with the grandeur of courage. He boldly took the lowest seat and humbly served those around Him. He suffered every indignity that others may receive deliverance. He sacrificed His very life to ensure life for others. He was the epitome of that which makes a man manful.

So, imagine yourself at Ellerslie and in the flickering candlelight of the decorated chapel. It's banquet night and anticipation is hanging in the air like a dense cloud.

Imagine that you are on the Ellerslie chapel stage with 50 other men. But instead of measly old Eric Ludy walking up onto the stage to address you, imagine that it is Jesus Christ Himself who strolls up onto the stage and stands before the onlooking, awestruck men.

Imagine that His voice is serious and grave. And out of all the 50 men standing there beside you, He singles you out. He says, "You!" With a bit of panicky shock in your voice, you respond, "Me?" "Yes," He responds gently as He affectionately enunciates your name. "Come forward!"

As you walk forward, your legs feel like jelly and your heart is beating every sane thought out of your head. As you position yourself in front of the Risen King of Kings, He tenderly looks you in the eye and says, "Dear one, it's time for you to become a man!" Now imagine you were to say, "Yes, Lord, I agree wholeheartedly!"

You were called to live manfully just as The Man, Jesus, did while He was here on this earth. You were called to live with the thunder of "Andrizomail" in your heart just as Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, James, John, and Paul did in their day. You were called to have the war cry of "Rak Chazaki" in your chest, Holy Spirit thunder in your soul's fists, and nuclear propulsion in your spiritual heels. You were called to live manfully — to do the work of The Man.

Imagine that this isn't your imagination, but it is very real. And God is saying this to you right now. He's beckoning you to take a step forward in being made into a real honest-to-goodness man of God.

If you are game, I know for certain He is. | A



"The Man, Jesus, showed us manful living... He boldly took the lowest seat and humbly served those around Him."

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



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CONTAGIOUS FELLOWSHIP

BY PAUL CURTAS

Imagine for a moment that you're on a company assignment in a city far from home and your work project has unexpectedly been extended for a few more weeks. Not knowing anyone in the area, you feel stranded. So, you go online to look for a church nearby.

You locate one not too far from your hotel and decide to visit it. When you arrive at the door, you are warmly welcomed. The service starts and you sing along to familiar songs; then the pastor shares an encouraging message from God's Word.

Afterward a few people invite you to lunch, where you end up sharing with each other how God is working in each of your lives. As you go back to your hotel room, you think to yourself "It seems like I've known these people for a long time, almost like family." God designed fellowship for this very purpose.

So, how is fellowship formed? Is it something short lived or something that is developed over time? The word fellowship carries with it the idea of our sharing something in common with others... being partners who participate in each other's lives.

You cannot enjoy yourself by simply being a spectator at an event, as fellowship requires yours and others' participation. You don't have to become best friends in order to enjoy fellowship; Christians enjoy fellowship by simply identifying with those who have received the blessings of God's great salvation and who acknowledge His continuous work in their lives.

Because of this we can enjoy fellowship regardless of whether you've known a person for 30 years or a mere 30 minutes. As Corinthians says, we are called into fellowship with God and we are called into fellowship with one another. *"God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* - *Corinthians 1:9 (NIV)*.

My question is, have we lost the meaning of fellowship because of life's busyness, or have we changed its meaning to attendance by simply being present at an event without any personal participation in each other's lives?

For centuries, authentic fellowship has characterised the awesome connection the people of God have. *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* - *Acts 2:42 (NIV)*.

There is a passage in the book of Hebrews where we are told how some Christians in the first century were being

persecuted because of their Christian faith and literally had their properties confiscated.

"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated." - *Hebrews 10:32-33 (NIV)*.

The depiction of fellowship here is astounding. Other Christians came to stand with the persecuted and became sharers with them in the ordeal. In the original language, the word used here for sharer is the same word that is often translated as fellowship. As believers, we can thus experience true fellowship while enjoying a cup of coffee with each other, and we can also experience it when sharing our deepest hurt and difficulties with tears.


What about our workplace... Is it void of any fellowship due to time restrictions in our workday? This could be true for some, but we hear from many Christians who dedicate their break times to invite their fellow Christians to share what they have in common at the workplace.

We are told they gather for fellowship for a few minutes to encourage one another with God's Word and to pray for one another, the needs of their coworkers, and their company.

They tell us the fellowship is rich and provides support and encouragement in ways they had not imagined. The workplace has its shares of troubles and difficulties that afford Christians an opportunity to share in deep and meaningful ways in each other's lives.

Every Christian brings into their workplace a shared connection through Christ that exceeds their company identity and job position. It allows them to share together in the simplest and yet most profound ways.

Because fellowship is meant to be intentional and inviting, we must be approachable and take steps to engage with others; in doing so we will discover God's design for our having fellowship with Him and with one another. Engage in meaningful fellowship in your workplace ... you'll be amazed what God will do!

"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."
- *1 John 1:3 (NKJV)* | 

“We are called into fellowship with God and we are called into fellowship with one another.”

■ 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





In Christ

BY ERIC LUDY

It's a statement that if you start studying it in Scripture, you will begin to realise that it is replete, or filled with substance. Paul seems to deliberately choose a way of expressing the Gospel to us, which might catch us a little funny if we were to think about it. Paul, though, is always saying, "It's about your position".

Are you IN Christ Jesus? You see, you need to know your position. As a Christian position is everything. And, in faith, you must know that you are in Christ Jesus. When you begin to recognise what is available to you, it's not just salvation from punishment in Hell. Don't get me wrong, of course, that's wonderful! But that is just the beginning of what is available to us in the person of Christ.

Because everything that the Father bequeaths to Jesus, we have access to in Jesus Christ. So, the first illustration we see in Scripture is clothing.

In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul says *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."* (NIV).

It's like he's saying, "put off these garments". He is referring to our old life as if it's clothing. It's true we are in Adam. We are dressed in Adam and as a result, when judgement comes towards Adam and Adam's race there's condemnation, there's separation from God and there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. Paul exhorts us to 'put off' our previous life, our old life. And what we hear in the New Testament is that we must be born again, we must become a second man, we must enter into new clothing.

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again." - John 3:3 (NIV). But, you can't stitch for yourself perfect righteousness. How are you going to stitch for yourself the clothing of a new man? You can't do it.

Jesus did it! That's what His blood is at the Cross. It is literally stitched together at the Cross and handed to us - a robe. Clothing. And when we are dressed in it we are literally made new. "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness." - Isaiah 61:10 (NIV).

That's a picture of the Cross in Isaiah 61. Colossians 2:9-10 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness." (NIV).

So, if you are IN Christ, that means you are complete in Him. I'm not asking you how you feel - if you feel complete. I'm saying, "...what is the truth?" The truth is saying that when you're in Him you are made complete.

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices." - Colossians 3:9 (NIV).

That's just basic Christianity - we've all put off the old man with his deeds haven't we? Some would say, "I didn't even know I was supposed to." But we don't linger in the old life and call ourselves Christians. When you come unto Christ you put off the former and take on the new. It's called 'old' and 'new'. You 'put on' the new man.

"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh." - Romans 13:14 (NIV). You are supposed to put Him on. Isn't that an amazing statement?

Think of an aeroplane, and this is probably my favourite illustration. An aeroplane is able to accomplish something that we as mere humans can't. It can fly. It can defy a law known as gravity. You see, you can try and flap your arms, you mean well, and you say, "God, I want to fly for you," because imagine there was some Scripture in the Bible which said, "You must fly. Unless you can fly, you can have no part with me".

And so you say, "okay, I'm going to fly then". And this is what we do - we flap our arms all the time as Christians, while at the same time asking, "God, is that pleasing to you?" And He replies "No." Why? Because we cannot please God by attempting to do something in our own strength that only He

can do for us. What pleases Him is faith. When we turn to Him and say, "God could you fly for me?"

Many of us have had times of trying to please God by 'flapping our arms'. If you go to an airport and you esteem how that plane works - but just look at it - just looking at the plane does not give, or bequeath, to you the strength of the plane.

While you esteem the plane, there is a secret to flight. And that is that you can't just be near a plane looking at it - you must be IN the plane. And did you know that when you enter a plane and the plane starts moving, you do not need to hold the plane up? You do not need to flap your wings to help it. All you need to do is abide.

You need to rest and allow the plane to do for you that which you could never do for yourself - fly. The secret to overcoming the law of gravity is to enter into the strength, the virtue, the power and efficacy of a higher law.

The law of aerodynamics trumps the law of gravity. We are under the law of sin and death and you can try in your own strength to make it to the Throne Room of Grace. And you will fail. But Jesus Christ has made a way for us. In and through His death, His sufferings on that Cross, He has opened up an avenue that means that when we put our confidence in what He has done and enter into Him, we can rest in His work and say "...it's sufficient".

I don't need to work something up, I just need to remain in faith in Him and actually my life will change and begin to work. I think one of the hardest places to stay is in the position of faith.

Let's look again at our analogy of the plane. Say now we are in the plane flying and you're actually seeing the realities of Christianity at work within you and then at a certain point in your journey over the ocean you say, "Okay God, thank you for giving me a head start, I think I have this flight thing figured out."

You open the plane door and say, "I can do it from here," and jump out. What's the secret to making it through this journey? It's not just entering in at the beginning, it's believing all throughout the journey that Jesus' work on the Cross was for you. When you come to that judgement day, don't reach into your own pockets and come out with some lint.

When God says, "What is the merit by which you can enter into My Kingdom?" What your answer is is very simple. "I'm IN Christ." |A



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

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TELLING 'TALL' TALES?

BY JEREMY SMITH

"God created creativity - and I really aspire to be a good bearer who reflects the divine image God has put within us. Christians should be among the most creative people on the planet - in music, design, the arts, in scientific endeavour and in how we see things.

"Speaking of creativity, I honestly think God had such fun when He made giraffes. Have you ever watched one drinking? They have to splay their legs out and stoop down? It looks so uncomfortable! And their crazy long purple tongues? Wow!"

There's a hint as to something about Murray Smith which you may be familiar with, even if you don't know him personally. While working as a graphic artist in Auckland, Murray drew the giraffe concept for what is now that 'Longest Drink in Town' milkshake cup.

The giraffe he drew - given the name Toby by the company which now owns the brand - is said to have graced the sides of over 120 million paper cups since its inception.

Murray though - now a Waikato-based Pastor - says he doesn't really give the cup much thought these days. The big picture, he says, is simply a desire to be a good steward of the giftings God has given him, in whatever spheres of influence God places him in.

He spoke with Jeremy Smith about coming to faith in Jesus, drawing 'Toby', sensing God's call into ministry, family life, seeking to use his giftings to advance God's Kingdom and what he likes to do with a day off, if he gets one!

To start us off, I'd love to hear your testimony. How did you come to know Jesus and when did your faith become personal?

I'm so thankful I was brought up in a Christian home. I knew a lot about Jesus and the Bible but, in my experience, you can have that and yet still not really have a relationship with Him. As a child, I'm sure my heart was inclined toward God, but on one occasion in my late teens - during the years I spent at art school - I attended a church gathering where I had a deeply personal encounter with the Lord. That truly changed everything about me.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away..." (KJV). I began to sense the Lord at work transforming me and I began to want to follow Him and live my life under His direction. I felt His love and goodness in a tangible way, more than any of the mere head knowledge I'd had could convey.

As you reflect back on that moment now, what has been one of the most helpful things someone has said to you in terms of helping you in your own walk with the Lord? It might encourage our readers too!



Over the years I've had many people I trust speak into my life at key times. I'm very grateful. When I was a young leader, a man spoke to me from the platform in a meeting. He said he felt that God wanted me to learn something from ducks. He said water runs right off ducks backs and that they never get water logged and sink. He said I'd need to learn to let things go to survive - to get over disappointment, hurts and loss of expectation. That is part of the territory of leading. The encouragement was not to brood over stuff but to let it 'run off' and stay buoyant. Given my contemplative, reflective personality that's been invaluable advice over many years.

These days you're a Pastor. Can you tell me when and how you first sensed God's call into ministry?

I don't think you ever really go into a role like pastoring for any other reason than a clear sense God has called you to be there. It's hard work, only sustainable with God's empowering presence. There's tough situations that come as part of the territory in church leadership, but the passion to see God make a difference - because He does make all the difference - and to be a part of something that carries eternal value is rewarding.

I pastored in Auckland for 13 years and began leading Bridges Church in Cambridge 18 years ago in 2003. A saying I think holds lots of truth is "...ministry is not something you come into... it comes into you." By that I mean while I'd done some formal theological training, it's really the calling of God that counts, not the conferral of some title. It is about being faithful with the function and call the Lord Jesus has put on your life.

Tell me a little bit about your family? When you have free time, (do you get that?!), what's your favourite way to spend it?

My wife Michelle and I have six children - Jeremy, Tiffany, Samuel, Rebekah, Aimee and Matthew. Family life matters

so much. I love time with friends and family and I have a few other outlets which replenish me. Time spent in God's creation and on the water is special. I've loved water sports since I was young and still get out for a barefoot waterski when I can. I've got a little vintage car I enjoy driving too - a 1935 Morris 8 Sports. I've owned a few of them now - one of them being my first car ever as a teenager. It was vintage even then too!

What's the balance of being a husband, a father with quite a large family, and a Pastor like?

If a leader's family life lacks authenticity and integrity, you have to wonder about the validity of any call to ministry. Right there is a significant qualifier or disqualifier. We are leaders firstly in our homes. A home operating intentionally under a God ordered set of priorities means we will be careful in the way we demonstrate love, honour, care practically and share within marriage and our natural family.

In order for there to be any reality in our calling to lead an expression of the Church family, there has to be consistency within family life. Too many kids have gone off the rails because they saw a different man up the front or in the pulpit than the dad they saw (or didn't see) around the meal table at home.

Leaders can live out their ministry trying to manage themselves, barely concealing relational brokenness within the home. The pressure to be a perfect model and example can be quite intense, especially as you tend to live your life in a goldfish bowl forever under the scrutiny and comments of others! Living our lives from the perspective that it's God whom we serve in everything we do mitigates against that.

The danger lies in being more in love with the work of the Lord than we are in love with the Lord of the work. Who I really am in my authentic, personal walk with Jesus teaches more than any words I say.

There should be a seamlessness in life, it's not like we put on a 'ministry hat', then take it off for our 'private life hat'. That kind of duplicity in a leader's life is a time-bomb. I think all of life is about balance in a way, but we only get a true understanding or sense of balance and proportion when Jesus totally has first place in our lives - in everything. Genuinely seeking first His kingdom above everything cues life for balance, and it will ensure we are vigilant in eliminating anything that is detrimental in our personal lives - or to our family.

In your 'self-proclaimed' younger days while working as a graphic artist, you drew the concept which became what's now the 'Longest Drink in Town' milkshake cup! How did you discover you had a love for drawing and art?

I was encouraged to draw from a young age. There was a distinct flair for art and design in my family line and I guess that played a part in my own development as an artist, to the point it became my profession. It's my opinion that artistic flair is something inherent in a person but that a huge aspect of that natural talent going anywhere is through elements like tuition, practice, observation, and time to develop and hone skills.

I went to a school that was academically focussed - art was relegated to a low priority - you only took it on the basis of it being an 'extra' subject. Nonetheless, from school I was accepted to train at a tertiary level and then began working as a graphic designer in the packaging industry, then other studios. I eventually ran my own freelance consultancy for quite a few years. That training, background and awareness isn't just something you turn off. In a way it's become a God-given lens I'll always see things through.

It's a buzz seeing the end result of something you've originated, designed and seen through the whole production process. While I'm not working in the industry now, I've kept my hand in a little bit. I still do the odd freelance job and I love the general principles of design, as well as the processes of outworking a brief. I will always have a strong appreciation for design, typeface, colour layout, those types of things.

How did the 'Longest Drink in Town' design come to be?

Well, all the way back in the 1970s, while I was a freelance graphic designer in an Auckland City advertising agency, the art director brought a job to me one day that a local company had commissioned. They produced a range of one-use drinking cups and wanted a novel milkshake container design.

Throwing around some concepts, we came up with what is now the 'Longest Drink in Town' slogan accompanied by the giraffe motif. Following a series of felt pen marker design 'roughs', it went through to the finished art and production stages. Some people might remember the original design,

which began life in an orange and purple colourway. A company buy-out re-presented the same design in its current red and blue colourway.

It hasn't been around as long as it has been claimed, having begun 'life' in 1978-79. Regardless, who would have known that a simple little job I did back 'in the day' would actually take off and assume the place it has today! A big part of that is due to the marketing push that the international owners of the branding have put into it in terms of steps like creating a persona around it. The giraffe now has the fan-generated name Toby and the company has given him a Facebook page so that he's even on social media. Credit to them, they've taken it on and given the design the 'legs' and the life span it now has. I do sometimes get asked what it's like being the originator, but actually I don't really think about it all that much.

Do you think Toby is Kiwiana these days? What's something about the early design process which people may not know?

That question always makes me smile. I remember clearly at the time when this job came across the desk - or shall we say drawing board at the time because computer graphics weren't an established thing. I didn't own the brand - it was just another job which came across the desk and for which I was paid.

I just felt very privileged to be working in and contracted to a design agency. There were a number of high profile clients, including Ford, McDonalds and others. The cup was actually quite an incidental little job. There were other bigger companies which I did jobs

for which came and went. Design does that. The cup though, somehow, has just endured. Looking back now, I suppose I do sometimes think, "wow, that little cup really took off."

Is it kiwiana? Maybe. It's at least recognisable alongside things like the Buzzy Bee, Marmite jars and that sort of stuff. One of the other concepts on the table at the time was a stylised 'sun' which was wearing giant sunglasses. He was doing the thumbs up and the slogan for that design was potentially going to be 'The Coolest Drink in Town'. Actually, it was pretty 'cool' and could readily be picked as an alternative drink container at some point.

Given your love of creativity, what's your reaction when you see the immense scope of God's creation?

God as Creator is a fundamental underpinning for me. His handiwork revealed in nature and in what we know of the universe, informs us about God's power and majesty and inspires our understanding of His goodness. The Bible says in Genesis, that when He surveyed everything He'd made, that "it was very good." For God to say something was 'very good' means it was totally 'mind blowingly' phenomenal. The beauty

“Who I really am in my authentic, personal walk with Jesus teaches more than any words I say.”

and diversity of creation is the Designer's signature. Creation is there because of a Creator. Order is there because God upholds and sustains the cosmos - there is nothing random about it. The order and structure of creation is a testimony to God and as it says in Romans Chapter 1. *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."* - Romans 1:20 (NIV). Things that are 'visible' in the creation of the world provide us with an important revelation concerning God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature. Because creation communicates so clearly, humanity is without any excuse since He is clearly seen.

What would you say to encourage people as they look for ways to use their God-given gifts for His Kingdom in their walk with Jesus?

Oh, great question. Everyone has gifts uniquely endowed to them by God. In Ephesians 2:10, it tells us, *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* (NIV).

The word 'handiwork' in the original Greek is 'poema' which means 'a creative masterpiece'. We get our English word 'poem' from it. Every true follower of Jesus carries the flame of being a 'creative masterpiece' and it says Jesus empowers and ignites this dynamic in order for us to accomplish remarkable things for His glory - things which He planned for us to do before we even existed!

In your role as a Pastor, what's an example of a time you were creative in terms of following God's leading?

To be indwelt by the Spirit of God should produce "God-likeness" within our expressions of doing life. In trying to lead a faith community well, it will mean seeking His inspiration to try and find ways that are creative and relevant in our culture. There's lots of instances where I can see God led us with a strategy or an approach that was out of the box.

Perhaps a notable one was when our church was committing to a building project. We had land but not funds. Michelle and I decided to sell our family home, which had appreciated in value significantly over the nine years we had lived in it since it was built. It was our 'five loaves and two small fish' to give to God for Him to multiply it to fund the construction of our church facility.

However, in trying to sell the house quietly and give the funds to our church, we failed to even get a single bid at auction. After months of deliberation, we felt to create a nationwide promotion to raise funds. Essentially it was a sales promotion whereby people could purchase products on-line and be entered into a draw to win our house. A bit like buying a chocolate bar and being in a draw to win a car, for example. There were those who were not very favourably disposed to this approach, misunderstanding the concept and the goal

in mind. It wasn't an easy time, but we saw God vindicate the effort. We had 50,000 on-line purchasers buy products at \$25 per sale in order to enter the draw. The maths speaks for itself. It inspired many others to come on board and to help get us to the finishing line in building our facility.

Christ is our sufficiency in all things, and there've been times you've walked through deep waters in life. What would you say to encourage others about leaning on God when they are walking through such seasons?

Life has certainly had its difficulties. Psalm 66:12 tells us that it is God who takes us "through fire and through flood". Sometimes we'd much prefer He took us around those experiences! The promise of His nearness and His presence as an objective reality, even if not always a subjective (felt) reality, means everything. His Word reminds me that He will never leave or forsake me, and knowing that as a fact is an anchor. We walk by faith not by sight.

Sometimes what we see happening naturally, might communicate to us that God is not on our case - and we have an adversary who will quickly seek to assure us of that lie being true. Building our lives on the true Rock that is Jesus means we can go through the storms of life trusting Him to sustain us. He'll never abandon me, rather He will perfect that which concerns my life even when what is happening in life is painful and bewildering. Seeking to hear the Shepherd's voice is very important to me and so is resting in the peace He gives.

What encouragement would you offer our readers about living the authentic Christian life?

Karl Barth, a well known theologian, was once asked what he considered to be the most important truth in living the Christian life. His reply wasn't a theological statement, but it was authentic. He said "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so". Staying grounded and simply being real is a big deal. The truth is that we 'play to an audience of One' and nothing is hidden from Him. Is what you are in private consistent with what you are publicly?

He requires truth in the inward parts. Cultivating a complete dependence on Jesus and not trusting our own resources is imperative. Psalm 138:6 says, *"...but the proud He knoweth afar off."* (KJV). I, like you I'm sure, don't want to be known afar off. So, humbling ourselves before Jesus is a means of grace being poured into our hearts.

You have a heart to reach the lost for Jesus. Can you tell me about Christmas at the Lake - the annual community concert organised by the combined churches of your town in past years?

Christmas at the Lake has been an event we've done over the years to take the opportunity to communicate the message of Jesus coming as God's Gift to humanity - the Good News for all people that a Saviour was sent from Heaven. Kiwi



musicians like Dave Dobbyn, Adeaze, Late 80's Mercedes, Rapture Ruckus and many others performed there over time and attendance was always free. Surprisingly, people have less and less understanding of the fact that it is indeed Jesus' Name in the word Christmas!

The goal of the event has been not just to entertain, although it should be loads of fun and have appeal to the community. Through various components including music, multimedia, a Christmas narrative and carols, we've endeavoured to offer a festive occasion that is faithful to the Gospel message and to present the Christmas story for our community. In some places this is no longer possible in an outdoor public setting, so it's been an opportunity to remind people in an increasingly secular culture that Christmas is about Jesus and thousands of people have been impacted with that reminder!

One of the local newspapers Cambridge - knowing you're a Pastor - reached out to you a few years ago asking you to write a regular column for them. How do you find being a steward of that unique opportunity which allows you to speak into people's lives in such a way?

I was asked to write a 'Faith Column' on a monthly basis a long time ago. During the run-up to Covid lockdowns in the early part of 2020 I was asked if I would step up the commitment to producing a weekly column. So for the last 18 months I have been doing that. It is quite a big challenge to create something each week that is captivating in its appeal and has relevance


to an 'unchurched' audience. I'm always thinking about being faithful in upholding a compelling presentation of Gospel truth without reverting to Christian jargon.

The publishers have (so far) gratefully received my contributions and allowed me to be exceedingly 'explicit' at times with certain articles spelling out a very clear Gospel presentation. Other times I'm more 'under the radar' but always trying to keep the topics interesting and the subject matter varied for the sake of sustaining reader's anticipation.

While not everyone will agree with my perspectives, the column seems to be something that is being used to speak to many people and I hear of readers waiting expectantly each week to catch the latest 'offering'. The level and the nature of the feedback confirms the value of my time investment in this - I regularly have readers tracking me down to talk and seek help relevant to something that hit the mark for them.

Any final thoughts or words of encouragement for our readers?

Put Jesus at the centre of everything and live for Him as your absorbing passion. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Don't just live for this life, but for the life which is to come - for that which is eternal. That perspective cues everything if you desire purposeful living.

Thanks so much for chatting to us Murray! | 

■ 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.





Defending the Family

BY RON MATSEN

The attack on the Biblical family unit has never been greater. The pervasive influences of secular philosophy, psychology, and sociology have driven the traditional family unit to the brink of extinction. Like a spiritual tsunami, the influences of modern moral relativism are rapidly eroding the confidence of many Christians in Biblical foundational truths concerning marriage, family and parenting.

In writing to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul warned that *“...you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind.”*¹ Sadly, many Christians are still looking to the *“broken cisterns”*² of the world to find answers for their domestic challenges. Jesus said, *“If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”*³ Therefore, taking instruction from the blind guides of this world destines you to failure.

Your Marriage

The institution of marriage was created by God before the fall of man. Designed within the relationship of marriage is a structure that reflects the unity of the Trinity. When God declares that, *“a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,”*⁴ the term “one flesh” is translated from the Hebrew word *ekh-awd*. The Hebrew Shema states, *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”*⁵ The English word ‘one’ used here is translated from the same Hebrew word *ekh-awd*. This divine relationship enjoys equality within the structure of authority.

Solomon wrote that there are at least five benefits of enduring companionship.⁶ Thus many people seek a life-long partner to achieve these benefits. In the end, most relationships are only as strong as the link that binds them together. Therefore, Solomon adds a third element that binds husband and wife together⁷ to create this mysterious union of being ‘one.’ This “third cord,” as he describes it, provides the stable structure that binds and bonds the two individuals into the oneness that Scripture talks about. Where is this ‘third cord’ found? Again, Solomon gives the answer in his collection of Proverbs, where he refers to the Word of God as a cord that should be bound *“continually upon your heart.”*⁸ Therefore, the third cord (God’s Word) should bind you together and guide you together. The

Bible clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of both the husband and the wife. In chapter 5 of Paul’s Ephesian epistle, he gives one rule for the wife and one rule for the husband.⁹ Paul then goes on to show that the underlying truth in this teaching relates not only to thriving within a marital relationship but its deeper meaning with respect to Christ and the church.¹⁰

Using Jesus Christ as the example, Paul points out that unity (being one) is only achieved through submission and that true submission requires sacrifice.¹¹ There is a Biblical cycle of submission and love that can grow increasingly tighter and tighter over time, which ultimately results in true oneness in marriage. Where there is submission, love is the reward. Where there is love, submission is the reward. How are marital submission and sacrifice actually accomplished? Peter gives some wonderfully practical guidelines in chapter three of his first epistle.¹² Your marriage can be truly blessed if both husband and wife submit to the Biblical cycle of submission and love.

Your Home

The Book of Proverbs often uses the idiom of a walled city to speak of the heart of an individual. Solomon said, *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”*¹³

This idiom can also be used to describe the heart of the family, which is the home. To live safely in this ‘city,’ it should have both walls and gates. Walls define boundaries and gates control access. It is interesting that, in the time of ancient Israel, to sit at the gates was considered the privilege of the elders of that city. They had the responsibility of judging everyone and everything that entered.

At the center of every city was the citadel, or castle keep, which would have been the high-value target of the enemy. Its

“Our homes should operate like walled cities that protect their inhabitants.”

protection was the ultimate responsibility of these gatekeepers. Our homes should operate like walled cities that protect their inhabitants. Imagine your home as a walled city with many concentric inner walls leading ultimately to the castle keep, which is the heart of the family. Each layer of the city is penetrated by entering through defined gates that have wise gatekeepers standing at the door.

Today a hostile invasion is storming into our homes aimed at the most intimate areas of our life. Most homes are truly ‘unwalled cities.’ Instant, unsupervised intimacy is freely available to all family members. From the snare of the easily accessible world-wide-web to the proliferation of personal communication and entertainment devices, the home is overwhelmed with instant access to show and see all manner of intimate material.

Intimacy should be based on trust, trust should be built on commitment, commitment should be established by experience, experience should be gained through exposure, exposure should be obtained by contact, and contact should be made through personal relationships. Sadly, the cry for personal freedom is drowning out the call for personal accountability. Married couples have the responsibility to protect each other. Parents have the responsibility to protect their children. We all have a responsibility to protect each other.

Your Children

The Bible tells us that “children are a blessing from the Lord.”¹⁴ As such, parents are given the awesome responsibility of raising them in the fear and knowledge of God. All children need at least these six things throughout their life: provision, protection, direction, education, correction, and compassion.

The world would like to convince Christian parents today to stop influencing their children with regards to Biblical standards of living. Their motto is “let the child make up its own mind.” The world wants your children, and it will take them from you whenever you decide to give them up. No matter the age of your children, you will still be older and therefore wiser than them. Never, never give up your responsibility as the chief influence for good in your child’s life.

Age should not force a threshold of parental disengagement defined simply as the point after which you stop being the teaching, caring, protective parent of your child. Your children will always need and seek good guidance regardless of their age so why shouldn’t you as their parent be their first port of call when it comes to gaining direction on the uncertain sea of life.

■ Ron Matsen is the President of Koinonia House and Koinonia Institute. He has taught verse-by-verse through the Bible many times, over the last 30 years on the subjects of evangelism, leadership, and end-times topics. Although Ron and his wife are native Californians, they lived in England for 20 years and in 2011 immigrated to New Zealand where they partnered with Chuck Missler based at The River Lodge in Reporoa.



Who is really teaching your Children?

The Bible is the ultimate authority on what is right and wrong. The Bible is the best resource for gaining insight and understanding. The Bible, God’s Word, is the best road map in a world that has lost its way. Where the worldly paths of life meander without purpose, the Bible offers light in the darkness.¹⁵ You, as parent, have this awesome opportunity to plant the Word of God into the fertile hearts of your children. Solomon promises, *“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”*¹⁶

How can you accomplish this with your children? Moses told the parents in Israel concerning the Law of God, *“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your*

hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” – Deuteronomy 6:7-9

“The Bible, God’s Word, is the best road map in a world that has lost its way.”

What is the primary teaching device in front of your child’s eyes today? What life-style legacy will you leave your child? Children are the message that every parent sends to a generation they will not meet. What message from you will your children carry? The Bible tells us that we live in perilous times.¹⁷ Therefore everyone needs to be constantly on guard, repairing our walls, and fixing our gates. Husbands need to truly love their wives. Wives need to honour their husbands. Parents need to lovingly lead their children. Children need to respect and obey their parents.

We need to *“be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*¹⁸ We need to be diligent about the stewardship of our marriage, our home, and our children God has given us. We need to continue to grow in the knowledge and wisdom of the Word, *“for if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*¹⁹ Amen! |▲|

References

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|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
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| 2. Jeremiah 2:13 | 12. 1 Peter 3:1-9 |
| 3. Matthew 15:14 | 13. Proverbs 25:28 |
| 4. Genesis 2:24 | 14. Psalm 127:3-5 |
| 5. Deuteronomy 6:4 | 15. Psalm 119:105 |
| 6. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12a | 16. Proverbs 22:6 |
| 7. Ecclesiastes 4:12b | 17. 2 Timothy 3:1 |
| 8. Proverbs 6:20-22 | 18. 2 Peter 1:4b |
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| 10. Ephesians 5:32-33 | |



King David's Palace Uncovered?

DIGGING UP THE TRUTH

BY CHUCK MISSLER

“David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces inward. And he became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him. Now Hiram king of Tyre sent envoys to David, along with cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David.” - 2 Samuel 5:9-11 (NIV)

Skeptics ridicule and historians mock, but the historical accuracy of the Bible continues to be confirmed by archaeological finds. An Israeli archaeologist named Eilat Mazar has uncovered, in East Jerusalem, what may be the palace of King David.

While excavating in the ancient City of David, Mazar uncovered various Byzantine-era artifacts, including a well-preserved room with mosaic floors. They were found about two meters below ground level and date back between the 4th and 6th century AD. Beneath this room, water cisterns, pools and a purification bath from the Second Temple period were then uncovered.

However, the archaeological find that has sparked debate is the discovery of an ancient building, which Mazar believes could be the palace of King David as described in 2 Samuel. According to the Biblical account, the structure was built by Hiram king of Tyre, after David conquered Jerusalem. Below the pools, Mazar discovered the ruins of an immense 3000-year-old stone structure. Inside the building, archaeologists found pieces of pottery dating back to the 10th century BC - the days of David and Solomon. Mazar has also uncovered a bulla, or ancient government seal, belonging to Jehucal son of Shelemiah, son of Shevi. This government official is mentioned in *Jeremiah 37*: “*And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the LORD our God for us.*” Jehucal is mentioned a second time at the beginning of the subsequent chapter.

It has yet to be proven that this discovery is indeed the ancient palace of King David or some other ancient structure. Numerous skeptics have already voiced their doubts. However, most agree that it is an important archaeological discovery.

The Pool of Siloam

The Biblical Archeology Review has also previously reported the discovery of another ancient site of Biblical importance. Workers repairing a sewage pipe in the old city of Jerusalem stumbled upon the Biblical Pool of Siloam.

In the 8th century BC, King Hezekiah built a 1750-foot-long tunnel under the ridge where the City of David was located.

The tunnel connected Gihon Spring in the adjacent Kidron Valley to the side of Jerusalem that was less vulnerable to an attack. Hezekiah's tunnel was built in order to protect the water supply should the Assyrians lay siege to Jerusalem. The first Pool of Siloam was the reservoir that held the water brought into the city by the tunnel. It presumably was destroyed in 586 BC - when Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar razed the city.

The pool the workers uncovered is believed to be the pool of Jesus' time. It was built early in the first century BC and was destroyed by Roman emperor Titus in about 70 AD. The Gospel of John describes an incident in which Jesus cures a blind man at the Pool of Siloam.

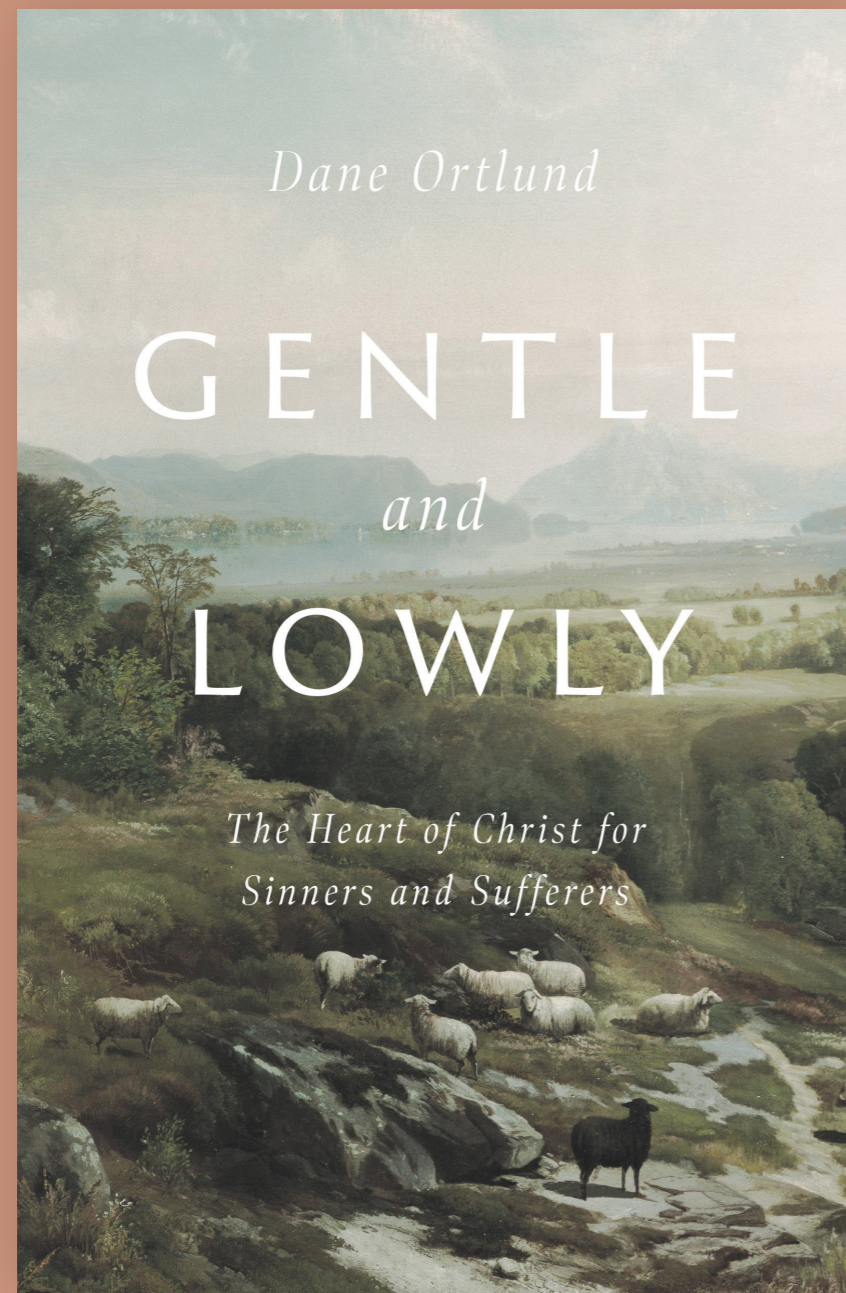
The Battle for Jerusalem

Such archaeological discoveries underscore Israel's long and rich history in the Promised Land. Our faith in Jesus Christ and in the accuracy of the Scriptures is not based on archaeological finds. However, it is exciting to watch as these ancient discoveries are revealed. It also makes us wonder what other treasures from the past are waiting to be uncovered? | **A**

“Our faith in Jesus Christ and in the accuracy of the Scriptures is not based on archaeological finds. However, it is exciting to watch as these ancient discoveries are revealed.”

■ 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.





Gentle and Lowly

DANE ORTLUND // REVIEW BY JOSHUA ENS

Almost 400 years ago, Thomas Goodwin published *The Heart of Christ*. Dane Ortlund's book continues in the same tradition; both books seek to answer the questions, "Who is Jesus? Who is He really?" The author writes because the topic of the heart of Christ has been greatly neglected for some time.

Even as many wonderful books have been published on the work of Christ, relatively few have been written on the person of Christ. These two ideas must be distinguished, but we dare not separate them. Repeatedly, the Gospel writers note that it was Christ's compassion which motivated His actions towards sinners in need. *"And [Jesus] had compassion on them and healed their sick," (Matt. 14:14)*. If we want to understand the work that our Lord came to accomplish, and indeed the work that He continues in Heaven on our behalf, we must understand who He is and what His heart is like.

Ortlund, like Charles Spurgeon before him, observes that *"...in the four Gospel accounts given to us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - 89 chapters of Biblical text - there's only one place where Jesus tells us about His own heart."* (p17) The uniqueness of Christ's words in Matthew 11 only add to the significance of the truths communicated there:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." - Matthew. 11:28-30 (NIV).

Beyond serving as the basis for the book's title, these words point to the author's central thrust: that Christians might know the heart of their Saviour for them. The book is divided into 23 brief chapters, each expounding upon and reexamining Christ's heart for sinners. Ortlund explains his approach as *"...not so much as a logically building argument, but rather looking at the single diamond of Christ's heart from many different angles."* (p15) These angles include Christ's intercession, His advocacy, His tender friendship, and His love to the very end.

One of the most striking elements of the book is how often the reader will reflect on how unusual it is to read about Christ's love for sinners in such a warm and clear manner. This is especially true when the author writes about Christ's ongoing love for His people even when they stumble and fall as believers. The reason why it feels so strange to read these ideas is that they have been neglected for so long. However,

this has not always been the case. Yet another reason to pick up this book is that the author draws heavily on the works of Thomas Goodwin (mentioned above), John Bunyan, and Richard Sibbes. Together, they wrote deeply about who Christ is most naturally toward sinners. In his book, Ortlund takes timeless teachings of these puritans and places them on the 'bottom shelf accessible for everyone'.


In addition to introducing readers to a glorious bibliography of treasures, the beautiful style, and the recovery of a neglected doctrine, the greatest legacy of this book will undoubtedly be the comfort given to sinners from the heart of their Saviour. Ortlund writes that his book *"...is written for the discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanted, the cynical, the empty."* (p13) He continues:

"It is for that increasing suspicion that God's patience with us is wearing thin. For those of us who know God loves us but suspect we have deeply disappointed Him. Who have told others of the love of Christ yet wonder if - as for us - He harbours mild resentment." (p13)

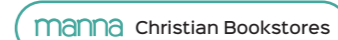
"This book calls sinners to come to Christ as they are, without first attempting to wash themselves clean (as if we could). For the very same Christ who receives sinners will not leave them in their dirty state - but will wash them and change them according to His very nature."

The author certainly achieves his goal; as the reader enters the book he cannot help but feel the warmth of Christ's embrace revealed to us through the Scriptures. I cannot recommend this book highly enough for all Christians, but especially those who fear they serve a stern Saviour or have been disappointing beyond measure. This book calls sinners to come to Christ as they are, without first attempting to wash themselves clean (as if we could). For the very same Christ who receives

sinners will not leave them in their dirty state - but will wash them and change them according to His very nature.

"Whatever is crumbling all around you in your life, wherever you feel stuck, this remains, un-deflectable: His heart for you, the real you, is gentle and lowly. So go to Him. That place in your life where you feel most defeated, He is there; He lives there, right there, and His heart for you, not on the other side of it but in that darkness, is gentle and lowly. Your anguish is His home. Go to Him." (p216) | 

This book is available from

 Manna Christian Bookstores

 Kindle

 A 14-Day Devotional is available on Audible

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TV SERIES

We continue our episodic reviews of The Chosen television series. In this issue, we look at episode eight.



The Chosen

DALLAS JENKINS // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

Episode 8: "I Am He"

As Jesus begins His ministry in earnest, He and His disciples leave Capernaum and head (much to His students' shock) to Samaria, where Jesus meets with a woman at a well.

The episode begins nearly 2000 years earlier, with a guy named Jacob digging that very well - even though a passer-by says there's no way that they'll ever get any water from this rough, dry land. Jacob talks to the stranger about his mysterious God, whom he calls El Shaddai, and admits that God broke his hip. The passer-by doesn't know why anyone would choose to follow invisible gods that break hips.

"We didn't choose Him," Jacob says. "He chose us."

We hear Jesus (obviously) talk about a number of spiritual matters too. But, we also see a sliver of a backstory from the woman before she heads to the well: She tries to exact a divorce from her husband, a document he throws in the fire. "You are my property, Fatima," he says. "I don't part lightly from my possessions." He says this even though, when she first arrives at his house, he wished she was "a thief or a murderer to put me out of my misery." He calls her latest conquest the "latest shade of drooling tomcat." And at the market, vendors won't even turn to face her. Passing Pharisees are equally

shocked by Jesus when they see Him dining with Matthew (a tax collector) and "sinners" from Capernaum's notorious red quarter. "I have come to call not the righteous, but the sinners," Jesus tells them, but they seem unimpressed. Another Pharisee introduces an effort to ferret out false prophets - inspired by the eerie way Jesus read his mind in an earlier episode.

"It's about politics and promotion," Nicodemus sniffs. "On the contrary, teacher, it's about the law," the Pharisee says. "And the law is God."

Simon says goodbye to his wife with a sweet kiss. We hear about acts of violence perpetrated by both Jews and Samaritans against one another. Jesus tells the woman at the well something of her checkered past, including that her second husband's skin "smelled of oranges" on their wedding night. The disciples fret about possible violence as they head through Samaria. A Roman praetor suggests to his Capernaum adjunct that they step up official brutality to teach the Jewish citizens a lesson. "What use are mounted officers if the people have never seen anyone trampled?" he asks. |A

plugged'n Review compiled from PluggedIn.com

So, What's the GOSPEL Message?

Enjoying reading Authentic Magazine? It's our prayer the content filling these pages encourages Christian men, helping them grow in their faith, knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ - while being a light to those living without Jesus. If, having read this issue, you have questions about taking the next step towards Jesus - this Dare 2 Share resource might help.

A GOSPEL acrostic, it's also a clear and precise way to share Jesus with others.

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).

For more resources see www.dare2share.org

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE

Our purpose is to proclaim the Authentic Christian Life - the real, genuine life - where Christ is alive in us!

Authentic Magazine is a quarterly printed magazine, designed to encourage kiwi Christian men in their faith. It is a project of Authentic Christian Trust, a registered charity in NZ.

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You can get in touch with us by emailing info@authenticmagazine.co.nz

Find out more about the other activities of the trust by visiting www.authentictrust.org.nz



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