

Disciple Magazine

Equipping believers for deeper life

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A Scripture You Don't Believe: LESS CAN BE **MORE**

Also in this Issue:

by Joe McKeever

Page 1

Page 3

The "Sheer Goodness" of God

by Shea Oakley

Page 3

Bought with His Blood

by Charles H. Spurgeon

Page 9

The Certainty of Answer to

Prayer

by Andrew Murray

Table of Contents:

A Scripture You Don't Believe

The "Sheer Goodness" of God

Bought with His Blood

Exegetically Speaking

Following God

Words to Stand You on Your Feet

Jewels from Past Giants

Marks of the Master

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Book Reviews

News Update

Sermon Helps

Puzzles and 'Toons

A Scripture You Don't Believe: Less Can Be More

By Joe McKeever

*“Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, ‘Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, **for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few**” (1 Sam. 14:6).*

It doesn't matter to the Lord whether He saves by the many or the few. Now, you could make an argument that that is not an authoritative statement since the line was uttered by Jonathan, son of King Saul, and not by a prophet or some inspired writer. But you would be fighting a losing battle on that, since it's a truth found all through scripture from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation.

God has His crowds, to be sure. In Heaven, the guest list—the family reunion, choose your metaphor—seems endless. “...a great multitude which no one could number” was standing before the throne praising the Lord (Rev. 7:9). That was sure some crowd Moses led out of Egypt, whether a few hundred thousand or two million as some say. Either way, God knows how to work the big numbers.

However, being God, He does not need big numbers. He does not call off anything (so far as we know) because only a handful of nobodies showed up. In fact, God told Gideon he had too many soldiers in his army. Defeat the Midianites with that crowd, He said, and your people will take credit for the victory. So the Lord had him whittle the assault team down to a manageable 300 (Judges 7).

God loves small things—ordinary people, insignificant gifts, and undramatic

acts. It does not matter to the Lord whether He saves—and works, transforms, and wins the victory—by a few people or by a crowd. It's all through Scripture.

The only problem is that you don't believe it, and something inside me resists it, too. Somehow or other, we have got it through our brains that, in order to do anything significant for God in this world, we have to have big numbers. Crowds. Celebrities. Large offerings. Miracles.

A preacher friend here in New Orleans still talks about the time all of us evacuated in advance of a hurricane said to be headed our way. He was thrilled about one thing: that Sunday in a nearby city, he would be able to hear someone else preach. That Sunday morning they got dressed and went to the nearby Baptist church filled with anticipation. Since many of their members had left the area also, the crowd was maybe a third its usual size, perhaps 50 people.

The pastor walked out in front of the sanctuary and said, “Since there are so few of us, I’m not going to preach this morning.” He did something else instead, but I don’t know what. My friend was pretty disgusted with this lazy unbelieving pastor who would pull such a stunt.

I said “unbelieving”, and I mean it. Faith in God means we believe He is sovereign and omnipotent. He can do anything He pleases (Ps. 115:3) and does not require us or our tricks and methods or our crowds and gimmicks.

Few things disgust me more than pastors who decide to pack the church by bringing in a celebrity. Some of the shallowest messages ever have been delivered by “names” who were brought in at great expense and fanfare. They came, received a carnal adulation from the crowd, signed autographs, sold books and CDs, gave a little talk, and went on their way.

Pastors justify it to their deacons and finance committees by reasoning that some people in the crowd will come back to church the next Sunday. In your dreams. If they came to see Drew Brees or Bobby Jindal or Denzel Washington, what makes you think they'll come back next Sunday to hear you?

I heard a television preacher say it: "You can't do anything without money." Unbelief. That's what it is. Whatever we have to have other than God Himself in order to do God's work is sin. (My variation of Romans 14:23 "*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*") So, a question: "What would we do if we really believed that little things matter in big ways to God?" Here are some answers found in Scripture.

I. We Would Honor Ordinary People

James chapter 2 delivers a knockout blow to the practice of church members who

fall all over themselves to roll out the red carpet for the owner of the factory, the local celeb, the rich family, when they deign to show up at our church. James says, “*God has chosen the poor of this world...*” (2:5).

Paul wanted the leaders of the Corinthian church to look around their congregation one Sunday. “*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise...*” (1 Cor. 1:26-27) Why did He do this? “*That no flesh should glory in His presence*” (1:29).

Look at the disciples whom Jesus called. See any celebrities among them? Any powerful, influential, wealthy? A bunch of nobodies—God’s favorite kind.

II. We Would Treasure Small Gatherings

Jesus stated it in an unforgettable way: “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst*” (Matt. 18:20). Pow! Take that, crowd-addicted preachers and leaders. It does not matter to the Lord whether He saves by the few or by the many. I posted this on Facebook and several people responded by telling me of congregations of 10 or 20 people who are doing significant things in the Kingdom.

There is an inferiority complex that haunts small churches. The mantra is “We can’t do anything; we’re not large enough.” It’s baloney, of course. You can do anything God wants you to do which you have faith to claim and cooperate with. Ask churches with small groups meeting in homes if tiny numbers have a certain power and authenticity of their own.

III. We Would Encourage and Welcome Small Offerings

As the widow dropped her two small coins into the Temple treasury and went on her way—clueless that the Son of the Living God had seen her offering, noted her faith, and complimented her commitment—Jesus said, *“I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury. For they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood”* (Mark 12:41-44).

Pastor Jim Henry told in one of his books of the moment early in his ministry when an older poor woman taught this lesson to her young stupid pastor. She handed him an envelope. “Brother Jim, I want this to go toward the new building.” Jim took her hand in both of his. “Now, Miss Elsie,” he said. “You keep this money. You need it worse than we do. And you let those

who have the money pay for that building.” Through teary eyes, she said, “Pastor, do not deny me the privilege of giving to my Lord.” Every gift is precious in His sight, and some of the smallest are the largest of all.

IV. We Would Celebrate Small Deeds of Faithfulness

A little boy gave his lunch to the Lord’s disciples and saw it multiplied to the point of feeding many thousands (John 6:9). Elijah received from a widow the last morsel of food in her house (1 Kings 17), but God blessed her gift in incredible ways.

“Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42). A cup of water, a little flour and oil, a boy’s lunch. Nothing much by human standards, but given to the Almighty, they become

major instruments for unforgettable blessings.

V. We Would Cherish Our Little Places

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Something spectacular came out of Bethlehem, from a stable, a manger even. One place is as good as another, if the Lord is in that place.

“Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God! The gate of Heaven!’ (Gen. 28:16-17).

And yet, I know preachers who want to leave their little isolated town in favor of a big city where they can do a great work for God and—let’s be honest here—build a reputation in the Kingdom. Lord, help us. Give us faith to believe your word. *“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that*

we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid' (Heb. 13:5-6).

A Prayer

“Dear Lord, it is my privilege to be ordinary and to do my small acts of faithfulness to You. We recall our Lord Jesus saying the one who is faithful in small things is faithful also in much (Luke 16:10). He said the Kingdom is built on small acts of faithfulness, and pointed to the mustard seed to make the point (Matthew 13:31). Our problem is not that we do not know these things; the problem we have is believing them and acting upon them.

“Help us to give our offerings no matter how small; to share our faith no matter how weak; to give our testimony no matter how undramatic; to encourage our neighbor, no matter how small, young, ungifted, or ordinary.

“Help us to start believing You today.
For Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

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The “**Sheer Goodness**” of God

By Shea Oakley

“...none has ever returned to the divine favor except through the sheer goodness of God.”

This quote from A.W. Tozer’s classic little book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, was a deep comfort to me recently. It reminded me in no uncertain terms that my salvation comes only from the very nature of my Savior and in no way from my own “flesh-righteousness” (an oxymoron, by the way, if there ever was one!) I was especially

captivated by “the sheer goodness” part of this 20th century Christian thinker’s statement of the truth.

The word “sheer” is often used in conjunction with another word, “strength.” When so used, it conjures up an image of a strength that is singular and perhaps unlimited. The term “sheer strength” can certainly be applied to God as well, but there is something about the idea of His sheer goodness that somehow is a far greater boon to my sense of well being. That God has unlimited power is one thing, but for Him to also possess unlimited goodness is wonderful beyond words.

The fact that our Lord has both is a blessed source of joy to those who love Him. This is mostly because we know deep inside ourselves that we would not be able to love Him if he had not first loved us and that this love is a function of His goodness. It is good

to love, and no one is better (and thus more loving) than Jesus Christ.

For me, sheer goodness also defines a particular attribute of the divine. By definition, all attributes of God are linked with all others. In this case, His goodness is most linked in my mind with two in particular, the infinite and the eternal attributes of deity. As such, God's goodness neither runs out nor ends in the lives of His children—not ever. This is good to know when we find ourselves frightened by our own seemingly endless reservoir of darkness and wrong belief. We were initially saved from both by our encounter with our Lord's sheer goodness, and we continue to be delivered from the tenacious but dying remnants of both by that same sheer goodness.

“Sound Theology 101” tells us that it is God who makes us acceptable to Him, not us. Salvation by grace through faith in the Son of God is the cardinal distinctive of

Christianity, and we spiritual workaholics need to be constantly reminded of this fact. Otherwise we continue to get caught up in “works-righteousness” and forget who we are in Christ in the most tragic way. Every so often (and perhaps more often than that) we need this truth to be communicated to us in some fresh new way in words we have not heard before.

The Tozer quote I shared at the beginning of this essay was such a new word for me. Somehow the idea of God’s “sheer goodness” seemed to transcend and dissipate some of the spiritual anxiety I happened to be feeling in a way which, for instance, a purely theological declaration that “salvation is by faith alone” would not have.

This is why I rejoice in many extra-biblical writings that are biblically faithful but express the truths of scripture in different ways. The Bible is the only book I read

every day, and may it never be otherwise, but I am also so thankful for men like A.W. Tozer and C.S. Lewis and Oswald Chambers who help me to see the singular truths of the Word of God from new angles. I am indebted to them for the many times some insight they have shared in a fresh way has lessened the burden of my fearful heart.

So perhaps that is why I am referencing this particular quote of Tozer's so freely and often in this article. Maybe it will free you in a difficult moment the way it freed me. If so, let us both presume that it was the sheer goodness of God acting on my heart that made me want to share it with you.

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including *Disciple Magazine* (and *Pulpit Helps Magazine*), *The Christian Herald*, *The Christian Post*, *Christian Network* and *Crosshome.com*. In 2003 he graduated from Alliance Theological Seminary with a Certificate of Theological Studies. Shea and his wife Kathleen make their home in West Milford, New Jersey.

Bought with His Blood

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

This is the voice of unalterable truth. In none of the Jewish ceremonies were sins, even typically, removed without bloodshedding. In no case, by no means, can sin be pardoned without atonement. It is clear, then, that there is no hope for me out of

Christ; for there is no other blood-shedding which is worth a thought as an atonement for sin.

Am I, then, believing in Him? Is the blood of His atonement truly applied to my soul? All men are on a level as to their need of Him. If we be never so moral, generous, amiable, or patriotic, the rule will not be altered to make an exception for us. Sin will yield to nothing less potent than the blood of Him whom God hath set forth as a propitiation.

What a blessing that there is the one way of pardon! Why should we seek another? Persons of merely formal religion cannot understand how we can rejoice that all our sins are forgiven us for Christ's sake. Their works, and prayers, and ceremonies, give them very poor comfort; and well may they be uneasy, for they are neglecting the one great salvation, and endeavoring to get remission without blood.

My soul, sit down, and behold the justice of God as bound to punish sin; see that punishment all executed upon thy Lord Jesus, and fall down in humble joy, and kiss the dear feet of Him whose blood has made atonement for thee. It is in vain when conscience is aroused to fly to feelings and evidences for comfort: this is a habit which we learned in the Egypt of our legal bondage. The only restorative for a guilty conscience is a sight of Jesus suffering on the cross.

“The blood is the life thereof,” says the Levitical law, and let us rest assured that it is the life of faith and joy and every other holy grace. “Oh! How sweet to view the flowing of my Savior’s precious blood; with divine assurance knowing He has made my peace with God.”

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom. 8:12). As God’s creatures, we are all debtors

to Him: to obey Him with all our body, and soul, and strength. Having broken His commandments, as we all have, we are debtors to His justice, and we owe to Him a vast amount which we are not able to pay. But of the Christian it can be said that he does not owe God's justice anything, for Christ has paid the debt His people owed; for this reason the believer owes the more to love.

I am a debtor to God's grace and forgiving mercy; but I am no debtor to His justice, for He will never accuse me of a debt already paid. Christ said, "It is finished!" and by that He meant that whatever His people owed was wiped away forever from the book of remembrance. Christ, to the uttermost, has satisfied divine justice; the account is settled; the handwriting is nailed to the cross; the receipt is given, and we are debtors to God's justice no longer.

But then, because we are not debtors to our Lord in that sense, we become ten times more debtors to God than we should have been otherwise. Christian, pause and ponder for a moment. What a debtor you are to divine sovereignty! How much you owe to His disinterested love, for He gave His own Son that He might die for you.

Consider how much you owe to His forgiving grace, that after ten thousand affronts He loves you as infinitely as ever. Consider what you owe to His power; how He has raised you from your death in sin; how He has preserved your spiritual life; how He has kept you from falling; and how, though a thousand enemies have beset your path, you have been able to hold on your way. Consider what you owe to His immutability. Though you have changed a thousand times, He has not changed once.

You are as deep in debt as you can be to every attribute of God. To God you

owe yourself, and all you have—yield thyself as a living sacrifice, it is but thy reasonable service.

Two selections from *Morning and Evening*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), “the Prince of Preachers,” was a renowned pastor and author who served as pastor of London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle for 38 years. His works are still widely read today.

Exegetically Speaking

by Spiros Zodhiates

The Parable of the Ten Virgins—Part 2

Matthew 25:8-13

From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers

At the sudden appearance of the Bridegroom (who represents Christ), the 10 virgins were awakened, and the five foolish one at once recognized their error.

[8] The five foolish virgins said to the wise virgins: “*Give us some of your oil; for our lamps are being extinguished*” (a.t.). This was a presumptuous request since they already had the opportunity to bring their own oil. True believers, conscious of the imminent return of the Lord, and dependent on the oil of the Holy Spirit, work and sacrifice, always alert and ready. They know that no other believers—pastors, doctors, psychologists, or friends—can give them what they need when the Bridegroom returns. When He comes, He will come for His own, not strangers. We believers should prepare by purchasing things of eternal value and forgoing the excessive consumption of the transient goods and services of a perishing world (2 Cor. 4:18).

Rewards in heaven will not be transferable; they are earned individually and uniquely. True believers do not borrow oil. A relationship with Christ cannot be begged, borrowed, or stolen from someone else. We must have our own oil, and we must have it now. The time to solidify our relationships with the Master is not at the moment of His return: *“Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation”* (Heb. 3:15). *“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Cor. 6:2).

[9] The response of the prudent virgins may appear to run contrary to the spirit of Christ’s generosity, but, in fact, it was the only real advice they could give: *“Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell (from pōléō [4453]), and buy (from agorázō [59]) for yourselves.”* The “sellers” could illustrate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The ascended Lord so addressed the church in Laodicea: *“I counsel thee to buy (also from agorázō) of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see”* (Rev. 3:18).

According to the Lord’s counsel, the purchase is not mediated through the church’s ministers. It is a direct transaction between the believer and the Lord.

Simon the sorcerer tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, and Peter severely rebuked him: *“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God (i.e.,*

not the Holy Spirit but the power to bestow the Holy Spirit; v. 19) *may be purchased with money*" (Acts 8:18–20).

Some things cannot be shared, and the fact that the ascended Lord told the church of Laodicea to "*buy of me*" means that the goods—"gold tried in the fire" and "*white raiment*"—are not transferable, just as the Holy Spirit is not transferable. We cannot make others believe, and we cannot sell or give them either God's Holy Spirit or our own personal faith. They must purchase their own "*oil of gladness*" (Ps. 45:7), their own "*gold tried in the fire,*" directly from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The cost is personal repentance and faith: "*I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God from that which has cost me nothing*" (2 Sam. 24:24; a.t.). A morally pure and religiously obedient life will not merit salvation. This comes through Christ alone.

[10] The shut door closed down the opportunity to participate in the wedding festivities of the bridegroom: “*And while they went to buy (from agorázō), the bridegroom came; and the readied (from the adjective hétoimos [2092], prepared) went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut*” (a.t.).

Was the advice of the five prudent virgins heartless? Did they know the bridegroom was coming so soon after the messenger’s first “cry” (v. 6)? No, they did not. They gave sound counsel to their foolish counterparts. We should counsel people to turn directly to the Lord, whether His coming is near at hand or far off, for none of us knows the precise time of His return (Mark 13:32). John the Baptist was “*continually crying (a present participle) in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord*” (Matt. 3:3; a.t.). He warned the Pharisees of “*wrath to come*” (3:7), although

the wrath did not come until A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

The five prudent virgins could not know the time of the groom's return since he did not reveal it (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32). So it was not their fault that the bridegroom came so quickly after the "cry" of the messenger. Neither was it the bridegroom's lack of wisdom. Many people will expect some delay between the cries of the Lord's prophets and His return. But then one day, "*The Lord...shall suddenly come to his temple*" (Mal. 3:1). Toward the end of this age, ministers of the Gospel will issue stern warnings to repent, and many will consider it. But then, unexpectedly, the Lord will come, whether people are prepared or not.

Notice how true believers are called "*the readied*" or "*the prepared*"—a full adjective used substantively as the subject. When we do things from time to time, they can be described by verbs, and when we do

them habitually, by participles; but when those things are part of our natures, then only an adjectival noun does justice to the reality. Believers are “*the prepared*,” conforming to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

[11–13] The foolish virgins cry out desperately when the door was shut. The spiritual implication of the answer is terrifying: “*Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know (oída, the perfect tense of eídō [1492], the aorist of horáō [3708], to perceive; here used to know innately, i.e., “I have known”) you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*” Like the evil subjects of prior parables, the five foolish virgins were neither alert—because they rejected the bridegroom’s imminence—

nor prepared, because their works corresponded with the falsity of a delay.

The figure of a door being shut is strong, naturally suggesting that the five are closed out of whatever the prepared five received on the other side of the door (v. 10). If we add to this the metaphor of Christ being the “*door of the sheep*” (John 10:7), it is obvious that salvation issues are at stake. To those who claimed to have prophesied and have done mighty works in His name, Jesus will say, “*I never (from oudépote [3763]) knew (from ginōskō [1097], to know by experience) you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt. 7:22-23). This would seem to have the same impact as the bridegroom’s statement here, “*I know you not*” (*ouk oíde* contrasted with *oudépote égnōn humás*, “*I never knew you*” of Matt. 7:23). No salvation takes place at or following “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*” (Rev. 19:9).

Jesus used the term “*virgins*” to describe the five foolish persons. In the Old Testament, Babylon and Egypt in their worst states were called “*virgin*” (Isa. 47:1; Jer. 46:11) as was apostate Israel under God’s judgment (Jer. 18:13; Lam. 1:15; 2:13; Amos 5:2). It is neither scriptural nor logical to deduce absolute moral purity from virginity.

A virgin can be a liar, a thief, and a murderer but still a virgin. As James says, “*Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10). We also learn from this parable that “clean” lives of good works (they were virgins and had trimmed their lamps) are not enough. God’s Holy Spirit must indwell us and make us grow (*auxánō* [837]; 1 Cor. 3:7). Ultimately, those who do not believe the Lord is “*near*” and do not prepare themselves accordingly for His sudden appearance are not true believers.

Their grievous sin has led to irreversible consequences.

The parable, then, conforms to others in which persons profess faith but ultimately distance themselves from the Lord of truth (John 6:66). In this case, the lack of oil was a rejection of the Lord and His teaching, the imminence of His return, and the importance of watching and waiting. Those who disbelieve this teaching do not watch and behave foolishly. In the prior parable, Jesus called the unprepared servant (*kakós* [2556], evil or bad) who assumed a delay in his lord's return and beat his fellow servants (Matt. 24:48).

It is unlikely that Jesus was shifting from the dichotomies of belief and unbelief, good and evil, and integrity and hypocrisy to two types of believers. Surely, it is unlikely He would call believers by the same "*fools and blind*" He called the Pharisees (Matt. 23:19) or that He would shut the door on

them with the words, “*I do not know you.*” If this latter statement reflected a timeless innate knowledge (*eídō*), then He never knew these five (cf. Matt. 7:23).

Congruently, Jesus did not say, “I have not known your faith (i.e., some aspect of you)” but rather, “*I have not known you*” (*ouk oída humás* your whole person). This is strong language indeed, but it cannot equal the *oudépotē égnōn humás*, “*I never knew you*” of Matthew 7:23. Belief in the imminent return of Christ, watching for that return, and living a holy life in accord with this belief, therefore, are not options for us as believers. Both faith (Rom. 16:26) and actions that correspond to the faith (James 2:26) represent obedient love.

Spiros Zodhiates (1922-2009) served as president of AMG International for over 40 years, was the founding editor of *Pulpit*

Helps Magazine (Disciple's predecessor), and authored dozens of exegetical books.

Following God

by Wayne Barber

Believers Are Set Free from the Law

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, March 2003.

Freedom is the divine ability in Christ to be and to do what He desires of us! There is no freedom in the Law. In Philippians chapter 3, Paul warned the believers that there were those (the Judaizers) who threatened their joy by seeking to add Law to Grace. In verse 2, after commanding them to keep on rejoicing in the Lord, Paul says “*beware*” three times!

Three terms figuratively describe the Judaizers who were threatening their freedom in Christ. Paul calls them “*dogs*,” because they preyed on tender flesh. He also warned of “*evil workers*” who disguised themselves in the body of Christ. Finally, he also called them “*the false circumcision*,” because they completely destroyed the message of Christ. These false teachers were spiritual terrorists to the body of Christ.

Then, in contrast, Paul offers three powerful statements about believers. First of all, he reaffirms that believers are the only true people of God (“*we are the true circumcision*”). He continues and says that believers are the only true worshipers of God (“*which worship in the Spirit of God*”). Thirdly, he says that believers are the only ones who truly depend on God (“*and put no confidence in the flesh*”).

In explaining his last point, Paul expounds on the fact that, if religious works

and heritage could qualify one to be spiritual, then he had to be way up there. He begins with his own pure heritage as a Jew. Then he uses three statements that show without a doubt his pure Jewish blood.

First, he points out his pure stock: “*of the nation of Israel*” (v. 5). This was the badge of honor to a true Israelite. This was the name of the covenant people of God. Second, he highlights his precious stock: “*of the tribe of Benjamin*.” Benjamin was the son of Jacob and Rachel. He was the only child born to Jacob in the Promised Land. Benjamin was the smallest tribe, but was very precious. The Temple stood in the land that Benjamin and Judah inhabited. Third, he mentions his proud stock: “*a Hebrew of Hebrews*.” This was a very proud statement! It meant that both of his parents were Hebrew. It also meant that he was brought up in the strictest of Jewish traditions. Then Paul also shows his prestige when it came

to the Law: “As to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (vv. 5-6).

Not only had Paul been brought up in the strictest of Jewish traditions, he had chosen to be a Pharisee. These were the ones who not only obeyed the ceremonial law of Moses, but also added over 600 additional commandments. No one was as religious as these people! The Judaizers could not touch them. As for zeal, he had been a persecutor of the church. Paul had stood by as Stephen was stoned to death. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians when Christ arrested him! Christianity is the biggest threat to religion because it is not built on works. It is built on faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, he says he was “*blameless*,” in that he had obeyed every law the Jews had that could be obeyed.

Isn't it interesting that God chose someone who could have been the most religious man that ever lived to preach the message of God's grace to the Gentiles? "Hey, Judaizers, you want to talk about works?" Paul says "I've been there, done that!" Then he makes the most devastating statement yet to the Judaizers: "*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ*" (v. 7). He uses the perfect tense! "I made a choice when I became a believer in Christ," Paul says. "I am today what I am because of that choice. I turned my back on religion! I walked away from the performance mentality. Why? To receive Christ as my Lord and Savior. I'm not going back!" You can hear his plea to the Philippian believers: "*keep on rejoicing in Christ.*"

Don't pay any attention to those who would seek to put you back under law!

Aren't you glad that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship with God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ? In Christ we are free to be all that He has ever desired us to be! Beware of those who would put you back under the Law or their "law."

Wayne Barber is senior pastor of Woodland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Words to Stand You on Your Feet

by Joe McKeever

The Fruit of the Spirit Is: Faithfulness

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

Some translations have “*faith*” and others “*faithfulness*.” The Greek word *pistis* doesn’t give us much help, since it is translated in a dozen or more ways. Sometimes “faith” refers to a body of doctrine, sometimes to confidence in Jesus, sometimes to the message of Jesus, and so forth.

In the context of the fruit of the Spirit, I’m going with *pistis* referring to faithfulness, that is, fidelity and loyalty, the quality of being true and steadfast—reliable. The Holy Spirit in trust of your life and mine will consistently and increasingly make us true to the Savior, true to the Word, and true to each other.

A phrase every believer serious about his life in Christ would do well to commit to memory is this: “A long obedience in the same direction.” The expression originated (as far as can be known) from Friedrich Nietzsche in his book *Beyond Good and*

Evil: “The essential thing in heaven and in earth is...that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.” The phrase later formed the title of a popular work by Eugene Peterson on Psalms 120-134.

That expression does not sum up what “faithfulness” means to followers of Jesus Christ, but it encompasses three essential parts: 1) obedience; 2) steady, tenured obedience; and 3) obedience the same direction, that is, with a goal in mind.

The great Apostle told young Timothy, “*The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Faithful men. Disciples of Jesus Christ who live up to the name. Men and women of integrity. True blue, as we say. All the way

down, they are the same. The Holy Spirit takes men and women who have faith, then gradually and increasingly makes us faithful.

1) The longer we live and work under the Spirit's reign, the more we will be true to Jesus Christ. Someone will ask us to speak at a function where we would normally be honored to be included, but they will ask us to "leave Jesus out of it." They will not put it that crassly. They will speak in euphemisms: "Make it all inclusive." "Non-offensive." "Keep it general."

What they mean is: "leave Jesus out of it." "Sorry," you reply. "He means more to me than you do."

2) The longer we live and work under the Spirit's reign, the more we will be true to the Word of God. You find yourself in a situation where the Bible is not silent but you would prefer to be. Someone puts you on the spot and asks you to bring a message for the hour. Your quandary is

whether to be true to the Word or to give in to your need for approval from that group. *Pistis* will determine what you do.

3) The longer we live and work under the Spirit's reign, the more we will be true to each other. Being true to you means I love you and do the right thing for you, regardless of what it costs me or how it may offend you.

Recently, I had my regular checkup with my ENT doctor. Daniel once put me to sleep and sliced off a sizeable portion of the underside of my tongue. I was sore for days. Then, he ordered—he did not suggest—that I undergo six weeks of radiation for the head and neck area. It was a miserable thing he put me through. Nothing at all was enjoyable about it. Yet I treasure this man. He was true to his calling as a physician, true to the God to whom he prays in his church every morning for direction and blessing, and true to me his patient. “*Faithful are the wounds*

of a friend; deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Prov. 27:6).

For the Holy Spirit to produce *pistis* in my life, I must consistently do my part.

1) Obedience. Jesus said, *“He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me”* (John 14:21). This principle—that obedience is the critical factor in a disciple—is repeated several times in that Upper Room discourse (John 14:23-24; 15:10,14). Obedience tells the tale, Paul wrote the Corinthians. *For this purpose I wrote to you, that I might know the proof of you, whether you are obedient in all things* (2 Cor. 2:9). The Lord said, *“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them”* (John 13:17).

2) Continual obedience. No take-one-little-religious-pill and go on your merry way for disciples of Jesus, thank you. It’s daily, every day, from now on.

In early 2005, when he was preparing me for a lifetime of battling any recurrence of mouth cancer, Dr. Jacob reinforced what the orthodontist had said: I was to do a 50 minute fluoride treatment on my teeth every night for the rest of my life. The doctor told of one fellow who did the treatment periodically but not regularly and developed such cavities deep under his gums that all his teeth had to be extracted. That did it for me; I've not missed a night in over six years now.

3) In the same direction. A seminary student approached me after a recent class. "I wish I had the grasp of the Word that you do," he said. I was a little surprised. No one ever says that to me. After all, on a seminary campus one is surrounded by men and women of such talents and skills, such academic accomplishments and knowledge, that what I know of the Word is shallow in comparison.

And, yet, that being the case, I still know what he means, because I was once where he is. As a beginning pastor, the Bible seemed like a closed book to me. When I wanted to bring a sermon on a particular theme or subject, my experience in life and Scripture study was so limited that few things came to mind. I was reinventing the wheel, starting from scratch.

I've thought about great professors like George Harrison who taught us Hebrew and the Old Testament for two generations here in New Orleans. In his mid-80s now and in poor health over in Spanish Fort, Alabama, he will one day go to Heaven and take that incredible learning with him.

"Too bad he can't leave it here," I've thought. And yet, it doesn't work that way. Each new generation has to enroll in spiritual kindergarten and do the hard work of learning to read the Word, working to understand it, studying to connect its themes

and stories, and devoting ourselves to seeing how it applies to our day. The Holy Spirit does a new thing in each generation. More, He does a new thing with each person who enrolls in His class in each new generation.

The news is all good, though. The delights of learning to walk in the Word and to grasp the things of God are well worth any amount of study and effort. Do not drop by the wayside, believer. You will lose everything you have learned if you do, and what a scary thought that is!

Joe McKeever is a retired Southern Baptist pastor from New Orleans, Louisiana. He blogs regularly at www.joemckeeper.com.

Jewels from Past Giants

The Certainty of Answer to Prayer

By Andrew Murray

Originally published as a chapter in With Christ in the School of Prayer, in 1885.

Edited slightly for modern spellings.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt. 7:7-8).

“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

Our Lord returns here in the Sermon on the Mount a second time to speak of

prayer. The first time He had spoken of the Father who is to be found in secret, and rewards openly, and had given us the pattern prayer (Matt. 6:6-16). Here He wants to teach us what in all Scripture is considered the chief thing in prayer: the assurance that prayer will be heard and answered.

Observe how He uses words which mean almost the same thing, and each time repeats the promise so distinctly: "*you shall receive,*" "*ye shall find,*" "*it shall be opened unto you;*" and then gives as ground for such assurance the law of the kingdom: "*For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*" We cannot but feel how in this six-fold repetition He wants to impress deep on our minds this one truth, that we may and must most confidently expect an answer to our prayer. Next to the revelation of the Father's love, there is in the whole

course of the school of prayer, not a more important lesson than this: Every one that asks receives.”

In the three words the Lord uses, “ask”, “seek”, “knock”, a difference in meaning has been sought. If such was indeed His purpose, then the first, “ask”, refers to the gifts we pray for. But I may ask and receive the gift without the Giver. “Seek” is the word Scripture uses of God Himself; Christ assures me that I can find Himself. But it is not enough to find God in time of need, without coming to abiding fellowship: “knock” speaks of admission to dwell with Him and in Him.

Asking and receiving the gift would thus lead to seeking and finding the Giver, and this again to the knocking and opening of the door of the Father’s home and love. One thing is sure: the Lord does want us to count most certainly on it that asking, seeking, and knocking cannot be in vain.

Receiving an answer, and finding God, the opened heart and home of God, are the certain fruit of prayer.

That the Lord should have thought it needful in so many forms to repeat the truth, is a lesson of deep import. It proves that He knows our heart, how doubt and distrust toward God are natural to us, and how easily we are inclined to rest in prayer as a religious work without an answer. He knows too how, even when we believe that God is the hearer of prayer, believing prayer that lays hold of the promise, is something spiritual, too high and difficult for the half-hearted disciple.

He therefore, at the very outset of His instruction to those who would learn to pray, seeks to lodge this truth deep into their hearts: prayer does avail much; *“Ask, and it shall be given you;”* *“every one that asketh receiveth.”* This is the fixed eternal law of the kingdom: if you ask and receive not, it must

be because there is something amiss or wanting in the prayer. Hold on; let the Word and Spirit teach you to pray aright, but do not let go the confidence He seeks to waken: *“every one that asketh receiveth.”*

“Ask, and it shall be given you.” Christ has no mightier stimulus to persevering prayer in His school than this. As a child has to prove a sum to be correct, so the proof that we have prayed aright is the answer. If we ask and receive not, it is because we have not learned to pray aright. Let every learner in the school of Christ therefore take the Master’s word in all simplicity: *“every one that asketh receiveth.”*

He had good reasons for speaking so unconditionally. Let us beware of weakening the Word with our human wisdom. When He tells us heavenly truths, let us believe Him: His Word will explain itself to him who believes it fully. If questions and difficulties arise, let us not seek to have them settled

before we accept the Word. No, let us entrust them all to Him. It is His to solve them; our work is first and fully to accept and hold fast His promise. Let in our inner chamber, in the inner chamber of our heart too, the Word be inscribed in letters of light: *“every one that asketh receiveth.”*

According to this teaching of the Master, prayer consists of two parts or two sides, a human and a divine. The human is the asking, the divine is the giving. Or to look at both from the human side, there is the asking and the receiving—the two halves that make up a whole. It is as if He would tell us that we are not to rest without an answer, because it is the will of God, the rule in the Father’s family: every childlike believing petition is granted.

If no answer comes, we are not to sit down in the sloth that calls itself resignation and suppose that it is not God’s will to give an answer. No; there must be something in

the prayer that is not as God would have it, childlike and believing; we must look for grace to pray so that the answer may come. It is far easier to the flesh to submit without the answer than to yield itself to be searched and purified by the Spirit, until it has learnt to pray the prayer of faith.

It is one of the terrible marks of the diseased state of Christian life in these days that there are so many who rest content without the distinct experience of answer to prayer. They pray daily, they ask many things, and trust that some of them will be heard, but know little of direct definite answer to prayer as the rule of daily life.

And it is this the Father wills: He seeks daily intercourse with His children in listening to and granting their petitions. He wills that I should come to Him day by day with distinct requests; He wills day by day to do for me what I ask. It was in His answer to prayer that the saints of old learned to know

God as the Living One and were stirred to praise and love (Ps. 34; 56:19; 116:1). Our Teacher waits to imprint this upon our minds: prayer and its answer, the child asking and the Father giving, belong to each other.

There may be cases in which the answer is refusal, because the request is not according to God's Word, as when Moses asked to enter Canaan. But still, there was an answer: God did not leave His servant in uncertainty as to His will. The gods of the heathen are dumb and cannot speak. Our Father lets His child know when He cannot give him what he asks, and he withdraws his petition, even as the Son did in Gethsemane.

Both Moses the servant and Christ the Son knew that what they asked was not according to what the Lord had spoken: their prayer was the humble supplication whether it was not possible for the decision to be

changed. God will teach those who are teachable and give Him time, by His Word and Spirit, whether their request be according to His will or not. Let us withdraw the request, if it be not according to God's mind, or persevere till the answer come. Prayer is appointed to obtain the answer. It is in prayer and its answer that the interchange of love between the Father and His child takes place.

How deep the estrangement; of our heart from God must be that we find it so difficult to grasp such promises. Even while we accept the words and believe their truth, the faith of the heart that fully has them and rejoices in them comes so slowly. It is because our spiritual life is still so weak, and the capacity for taking God's thoughts is so feeble. But let us look to Jesus to teach us as none but He can teach. If we take His words in simplicity, and trust Him by His Spirit to make them within us life and power,

they will so enter into our inner being that the spiritual divine reality of the truth they contain will indeed take possession of us, and we shall not rest content until every petition we offer is borne heavenward on Jesus' own words: "*Ask, and it shall be given you.*"

Beloved fellow-disciples in the school of Jesus, let us set ourselves to learn this lesson well! Let us take these words just as they were spoken. Let us not suffer human reason to weaken their force. Let us take them as Jesus gives them and believe them. He will teach us in due time how to understand them fully. Let us begin by implicitly believing them. Let us take time, as often as we pray, to listen to His voice: "*Every one that asketh receiveth.*" Let us not make the feeble experiences of our unbelief the measure of what our faith may expect. Let us seek, not only just in our seasons of prayer, but at all times, to hold fast the joyful

assurance: man's prayer on earth and God's answer in heaven are meant for each other. Let us trust Jesus to teach us so to pray that the answer can come. He will do it, if we hold fast the word He gives today: "*Ask, and ye shall receive.*"

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

O Lord Jesus, teach me to understand and believe what You have now promised me! It is not hid from You, O my Lord, with what reasonings my heart seeks to satisfy itself when no answer comes. There is the thought that my prayer is not in harmony with the Father's secret counsel; that there is perhaps something better You would give me; or that prayer as fellowship with God is blessing enough without an answer. And yet, my blessed Lord, I find in Your teaching on prayer that You did not speak of these things, but did say so plainly that prayer may and must expect an answer.

You assure us that this is the fellowship of a child with the Father: the child asks and the Father gives.

Blessed Lord! Your words are faithful and true. It must be because I pray amiss that my experience of unanswered prayer is not clearer. It must be because I live too little in the Spirit that my prayer is too little in the Spirit, and that the power for the prayer of faith is wanting.

Lord, teach me to pray! Lord Jesus, I trust You for it; teach me to pray in faith. Lord, teach me this lesson of today: "*Every one that asketh receiveth.*" Amen.

Andrew Murray (1828-1917) was a South African pastor, author, and missions mobilizer. The son of Scottish missionaries, he was educated in Scotland and the Netherlands before returning to South Africa. He pastored churches in Bloemfontein, Worcester, Cape Town, and

Wellington. In 1889, he was a co-founder of the South African General Mission, which later merged with SIM, a U.S.-based international missionary organization.

Murray's legacy of written works has influenced generations for Christ. His best known books include *The True Vine*, *With Christ in the School of Obedience*, and *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, from which this piece was excerpted.

Marks of the Master

by The Old Scot

Envyng the Birds

Originally Published in Pulpit Helps, May 2006.

Until the last couple of centuries, man has been an earth-bound plodder—watching birds soar above him and wishing he could

emulate them. The ancient Greek legend of Icarus recalls our long earth-bound frustration. Icarus supposedly flew so high, using wings created by his father, Daedalus, of feathers fastened with wax, that the heat of the sun melted the wax, and he fell to his death.

Actually, it takes a lot more than a few borrowed feathers to fly, so we've turned to mechanical aids—from hot-air balloons to space-traveling rockets. And we've done pretty well, too—for aliens invading a hostile environment. But wouldn't it be nice if we could fly as naturally as birds do? How do they? God prepared them especially for flight. For example:

Bone Structure

God gave birds very special bones—bones that are hollow to save weight—very different from the heavy, marrow-filled bones of other animals and man. Weight,

remember, is very important, because every ounce must be accounted for, with each flap of their wings. Now, hollow bones sound like weak bones, but these aren't. They have special internal bracing to keep them strong. Strength without weight—quite a modification, don't you think?

Feathers

Feathers are the supreme creation that makes flight possible. They are made of the same basic stuff that horns and hooves (and fingernails) are made of. It's tough and it's durable. And like their bones, birds' feathers are hollow (thus very light), yet also strong (more about feathers next month).

Birds generally have 10 large "flight feathers" at the outer end of each wing. Corresponding in man to the hand, these flight feathers provide most of the lift that birds get from flapping their wings. Every bird starts flying by flapping, but some (like

the eagles) stay aloft by soaring—that is, using their wings to ride the air currents. If you could observe an eagle close-up while it is soaring, you might notice little shifts in the flying feathers and tail feathers, moment by moment. The bird is fine-tuning its wings to respond to every change in the wind, much as a pilot trims his airplane for flight, but much better! The albatross, which lives in the far southern ocean areas, has perfected the art of soaring to the point where it seems to come down while on patrol only to eat. It apparently is capable of sleeping on the wing, and stays aloft for weeks at a time—except when it stops for dinner!

Flapping

Other birds must flap constantly to stay in the air—and some of them can stay aloft a very long time. Consider the hummingbird: a mere fingerling of a bird, weighing only ounces, and flapping its wings

so fast they seem just a blur to us. Yet some hummingbirds fly non-stop for more than 500 miles across the Gulf of Mexico during yearly migrations. Talk about fuel efficiency! Hummingbirds get nearly all of their energy from sipping flower nectar. If a man could do what hummingbirds do, he would have to eat something like 285 pounds of hamburger every day, to generate about 155,000 calories.

We're looking at a mighty wonder every time we see one of these colorful little creatures. How can we account for such marvels of creation, other than as God's handiwork? Teachers of the theory of evolution would have us believe these things developed by tiny incremental changes over an immense period of time—but this is foolishness.

Think of the poor changeling creature trying to fly with half-developed wings; or hopping about uncertainly on front legs that

are becoming wings. And how on earth could reinforced hollow bones “just happen”? Ridiculous! Others assert that evolutionary “accidents” brought about huge beneficial changes, which just happened to fit each species for its niche.

The only reasonable answer is the Bible's: “*And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind*” (Gen. 1:21). In other words, they were birds from the very first, designed by the Master. “*And God saw that it* (all of His creation) *was good.*” It gives us a fresh appreciation of nature, knowing it's all by God's design, doesn't it?

The Old Scot (Ted Kyle) lives in Newberg, Oregon, with his wife, Marga.

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Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

To All Generations: Reaching Youth through Camping

By Justin Lonas

This column highlights the ministries of Disciple's parent organization, Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International, a non-denominational missions agency.

Most of us who have grown up in the United States share a common memory from our childhood and teenage years: summer camp. The canoeing, archery

lessons, horseback riding, ping-pong tournaments, s'mores and campfire songs are a part of the national experience.

Many of those camping experiences were at church or ministry-run camps designed to get kids away from familiar surroundings so that they can hear the call of God in their lives. I can personally attest to friends and ministry partners who came to Christ through such camping ministries.

As widespread as Christian camp ministries are in America, children and teenagers in most other parts of the world seldom have access to the same opportunities. If lives are changed by the Gospel message through camping here, why couldn't those same ministries reap a harvest for Christ in other countries as well?

One of AMG's core missions has always been ministry to children, and for several years we have worked to reach

youth through camping ministries in some of the countries where we minister.

In Guatemala, AMG's **Camp Canaan** serves as an oasis for the children from AMG's childcare centers who come for a week and participate in spiritual and recreational activities to develop skills and abilities that will help them in the future. In the morning there are devotionals, Bible studies in small groups, educational activities, bonfires, crafts, swimming, other games, singing, and time for the campers to be alone with God. In a typical year, over 2,500 campers visit Camp Canaan, and many have come to know Christ there.

In Thailand, **Camp Joy** serves as a youth camp for those in AMG's childcare ministries, but also as an outreach facility for youth and adults. The camp has hosted "English Camps" where participants learn and practice English and hear the Gospel. Camp Joy also has served as a retreat

center for churches and pastors in the region.

In the Philippines, AMG's **Living Hope Beach and Adventure Camp** on the island of Samar serves a similar purpose to Thailand's Camp Joy, reaching out to youth and also hosting pastor training and church retreats. Additionally, our staff in the Philippines has conducted special outreach camps at other facilities on Luzon and Cebu within the past year.

In Greece, the **Cosmovation Center** serves as a center for youth outreach for Greece's evangelical minority. Through sports events, ropes courses, music, and other activities, AMG's staff shares the Gospel with teenagers and young adults in this highly secular, post-Christian culture. The ministry in Greece is particularly important these days in the midst of the country's crippling financial crisis.

Ministries like these have a tremendous impact. Our workers in the Philippines report that at one recent evangelistic camp in Luzon, 69 out of 97 campers professed Christ as Savior and have been referred to local churches for ongoing discipleship.

Somphong Kongpirak, a Camp Joy alumnus, shares the following:

“Camp Joy has become my second family. Bible studies, learning new songs, celebrating birthdays, participating in sports competitions, involvement in camping activities, working on the campsite, repairing the road..., and other [activities] both helped in developing my skills and introducing me to the basics of Christian Service.

“One of the things that God has blessed me with during my stay with Camp Joy was the burden for the

salvation of others. Two years ago, one of my brothers came to stay with me, and he has now trusted Jesus as his Savior. My other brother came to stay with me last year, and last month, he trusted Jesus as Savior during one of the Sunday Bible studies at the Camp Joy Fellowship Center.”

As powerful as Christian camping can be for impacting children and youth around the world, it is severely underfunded and underappreciated by most Americans. Even at AMG, as we strive to develop these ministries, we struggle to find partners willing to support camping.

Looking to the future of God’s Church around the world, reaching children, youth, and young adults is crucial—it has been well observed that “the church is always only one generation away from extinction.” If we don’t share the great love of Christ with the youth

of the world, others with false beliefs are always ready to win them to their side.

Think back to the spiritual growth you or your children experienced through Christian camping and the lessons from those times that still resonate today. Think about the value you would place on sending your kids or grandkids to a solid camp this summer where they would be taught Scripture and encouraged in their relationship with God.

For just a fraction of the cost of sending someone to a Christian camp here in the U.S., you can make a tremendous difference in the life of a youth through AMG's camping ministry. Please consider partnering with AMG to help extend this blessing to thousands of kids in Europe, Asia, and Latin America through your generous gift. When the life of a child is changed by the Holy Spirit, the Lord can do

amazing things for his whole family, community, and nation.

To learn more about the AMG's camping, youth, and childcare ministries, and how you can help support this work, please visit www.amginternational.org or call 1-800-251-7206.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International is a non-denominational, international missions agency based in Chattanooga, Tenn. AMG's distinctive has always been its reliance on national workers to carry the Gospel in their own cultures. Today, they operate ministries in over 40 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.

Justin Lonas is editor of *Disciple Magazine* for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Book Review—2/13/2012

Editor's Note: This review is a "blast from the past", a review of a genuine Christian classic originally published in Pulpit Helps in 2008.

The Everlasting Man, by G.K. Chesterton.
Best Recent Reprint: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007, ISBN 9781598560169, 262 pages, 14.95, softcover.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936), one of the eminent thinkers of early 20th century Britain, was a man of many talents. He was trained as an artist, made a career of journalism, and wrote philosophical/theological works on the nature of God and belief that continue to inspire. The *London Times* said that "Chesterton [had] a quite unusual power of

seeing the obvious.” Indeed, the strength of his work was always its common-sense approach to things which men obscure and overcomplicate in effort to find a reality apart from God.

Among his works are the couplet of *Heretics* (in which he tackles the modernistic notion of equally valid viewpoints and critiques the false ideas of his contemporaries) and *Orthodoxy* (in which he puts forth a rationale for taking Scripture and truth at its face value based upon its continued strength after nearly 2,000 years). He is also remembered for his moralistic mystery fiction; the *Father Brown* series and *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

In *The Everlasting Man*, Chesterton builds a case for the truth of Christianity based upon the fact that Jesus’ resurrection and continued life flies in the face of modern anthropology and social theories. C.S.

Lewis, among others, listed this book as a turning point in his own journey to Christ.

Chesterton in large part conceived this work as a refutation of H.G. Wells' *Outline of History*, which was immensely popular at the time. Wells' work approached the whole of human existence from an evolutionary, naturalistic standpoint and included Jesus merely as another mortal human. Chesterton's book, therefore, sets out to establish a "common sense" of human history with Christ at the center.

Everlasting Man is broken into two parts—"On the Creature Called Man" and "On the Man Called Christ". The first half builds the case that even "primitive man" was fully man (complete with art, religion, and government) and never could've been otherwise. He shows that secular philosophy and pure paganism lead to the same end of despair and angry misunderstanding of Christ and His Gospel. In this, he confirms

that the intervention of God in human history was the only thing that could set men straight.

The second half illustrates beautifully how the mystery of Christ and His resurrection stands all other worldviews on their heads. In his words this is “an enormous exception. It is quite unlike anything else.... It is nothing less than the loud assertion that this mysterious maker of the world has visited His world in person...there did walk into this world this original being about whom the thinkers make theories and the mythologists hand down myths: the Man Who Made the World” (p. 253). The fact of His existence before, during, and after the world, Chesterton proposes, is enough to prove His deity.

Chesterton was hardly an evangelical (he was raised as a nominal Anglican, and converted to Catholicism in 1922), but his logic in most of his apologetic and

theological works is sound and biblically informed. For this reason, he continues to find a wide readership in many branches of Christianity.

This classic apologetic is a bit of a difficult read (Chesterton's witticisms and tangents tend to distract the reader from his main themes at points), but well worth the effort for its still-brilliant arguments against a Godless view of existence. Just as the same old destructive accusations about the reliability and accuracy of Scripture rise up in each generation, so the same biblical and logical refutations must be reused to hold up the beacon of truth.

Justin Lonas

Target: All

Type: Apologetics/Christology

Take: Highly Recommended

News Update—2/13/12

11-Year-Old Ex-Muslim Boy Clings to Christian Faith despite Beatings

An 11-year-old former Muslim boy in Turkey named Hussein has remained strong in his Christian faith despite beatings, bullying and assaults, CBN News reports.

Hussein accepted Christ at the age of 9 after his father—once an Islamic scholar—became a Christian and began taking his family to church. Wanting to share his faith with others, but unaware of the potential dangers he faced for leaving Islam, Hussein began publicly professing his faith at school by wearing a silver cross necklace.

His Muslim classmates taunted him, spitting on him and calling him names, and his religion teacher beat him regularly with a two-foot-long rod because he wouldn't recite Muslim prayers. Because of the stress and

trauma, Hussein began experiencing grand mal seizures; he now takes medicine to treat the condition and attends a new school where he suffers fewer attacks. However, he insists he will never recant his faith, no matter what.

“Christ said, ‘You would suffer for me,’” Hussein said. “So it’s okay to suffer and we should be happy to suffer for Him. The Lord is with me.” With or without the cross necklace, he said, he will continue to tell others about Jesus.

Religion Today Summaries

Attacks Spark Revival in Nigeria

Increasing violence in Nigeria has strengthened the faith of local Christians, even sparking a revival at the Deeper Life Bible Church in Gombe, where nine Christians were killed in an attack on the church on Jan. 5, according to *Voice of the Martyrs*.

During a funeral service for those killed, many accepted Jesus and many other believers rededicated their lives to Christ. The crowd of about 500 then joined in intercessory prayer for the church of Nigeria, the country as a whole, Muslims in Nigeria, and the Islamist extremist group Boko Haram.

Ever since Boko Haram issued an ultimatum on Jan. 3, ordering Christians to leave northern Nigeria or face violence, the group has claimed responsibility for the murders of at least 44 Christians, including another church attack on Jan. 22 that killed seven. “We have the legitimate right to defend ourselves,” said Ayo Oritsejafor, head of the Christian Association of Nigeria. “We will do whatever it takes.”

Religion Today Summaries

Poll: Most Americans OK with Religious Groups in Public Schools

As the New York Department of Education prepares to evict more than 160 religious organizations from public schools on Feb. 12 to comply with a ban on churches in schools, a new LifeWay Research study shows that two-thirds of Americans are in favor of renting public school space to churches and other community groups, *WORLD New York* reports.

However, in New York, 49 percent believed schools should rent to churches and organizations. Twenty-seven percent were okay with schools renting to community groups but not churches, and almost 20 percent said schools should not rent to any organizations.

LifeWay Research president Ed Stetzer said the new New York City ban had considerable implications for churches in urban areas. "Historically, schools have been welcoming locations to churches,

especially in larger urban centers where schools are in the heart of the community,” he said. “A trend of banning church use of public schools could have significant implications.”

Religion Today Summaries

Bombs Strike Evangelical Bible School in Sudan

A Bible school backed by the American ministry Samaritan's Purse was destroyed in the latest bomb attack to hit Sudan's South Kordofan state, CNN reports.

On Feb. 2, Heiban Bible College's first day of classes, at least eight bombs were dropped in the area, destroying two of the school's buildings and starting fires. No injuries were reported. Franklin Graham, president and CEO of Samaritan's Purse, blamed Sudan's air force for the strike, and called on the international community to establish a no-fly zone in the region. “We

are deeply concerned for the welfare and lives of the people of South Kordofan, and we condemn the bombing of...Christian facilities,” he said.

At least four churches in the area have also been destroyed in recent months, and more than 78,000 people have fled South Kordofan and the neighboring Blue Nile state since clashes between Sudan’s government and an armed rebellion broke out in August.

Religion Today Summaries

Sharia Court in India Expels Church Leaders, Hinders Ministry

A self-styled *sharia* (Islamic law) court in India recently expelled three pastors from Kashmir state on allegations of “forced conversions,” and is continuing efforts to silence the gospel in the area, according to Mission Network News.

The sharia court is not a government court, but “simply a group of Muslim clerics who set themselves up and say, ‘We will dictate what happens because Kashmir is Muslim,’” said David Bast of Words of Hope. The Muslim clerics issued a *fatwa* against the Christian leaders in January for “luring the Valley’s Muslims to Christianity” after videos surfaced of a pastor baptizing Kashmiri Muslim youth. The pastor, facing death threats, was arrested soon afterwards, along with two other Christian workers accused of being accomplices. Since the incident, “Christian ministry has shut down in Kashmir...and [Christians] have had to flee for their lives,” Bast said.

The area’s last remaining above-ground church has since disappeared, and the sharia court has also called on the government to take over the management of missionary schools. Kashmir is India’s only Muslim-majority state; Muslims make up 67

percent of the population and 97 percent of the Kashmir Valley.

Religion Today Summaries

‘Tebow Bills’ Abound

Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow’s faith and success on the football field this year hasn’t just captured the attention of sportswriters nationwide or sparked the use of a new verb (“Tebowing”) this year.

If some legislators have their way, it could pave a whole new avenue for homeschooled students to be able to play on organized sports teams at their local public schools, *WORLD News Service* reports.

Tebow, now 24, grew up in Florida, one of 24 states with “equal access” laws that allow homeschoolers to participate in extracurricular activities at public schools. But in recent years, at least three other

states—Alabama, Arkansas and Kentucky—have introduced bills specifically named after Tebow to have the same privilege, and Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell said he would support similar legislation introduced there this year.

“Homeschool parents pay taxes just like everybody else,” McDonnell said. “It’s just fair.”

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps

from SermonHall.com

Sermon Outlines

Promised Life

John 3:16

- I. Personal: *“For God so loved the world”*
 - A. Eternal love (Rom 5:8).
 - B. Example of love (1 John 3:1).
 - C. Enduring love (Jer. 31:3).

II. Provision: “*that He gave His only begotten Son*”

- A. Salvation (Eph. 2:8).
- B. Satisfaction (John 4:10).
- C. Security (Rom. 6:23b).

III. Plan: “*That whosoever believeth in Him*”

- A. Plan (Mark 16:16).
- B. Promise (Rom. 10:13).
- C. Provision (John 3:17).

IV. Promise: “*Should not perish, but have everlasting life*”

- A. Life—not death (John 5:24).
- B. Life—not destruction (John 11:25).
- C. Life—not damnation (John 3:36).

Croft M. Pentz

Four “B’s” for Funeral Messages

I. Be Brief

- A. Grieving families are exhausted by the stress. They don’t need to sit through a long, drawn-out service, nor will they appreciate too much

attention being given to the one who officiates.

B. Remember, they won't remember any of what you say unless it is memorable. The total time invested should probably be less than a half hour.

II. Be Biblical

A. God's Word is a balm to the wounded spirit and people need to hear His Word (Rom. 10:17).

B. All of the positive themes of Scripture such as hope, love, compassion, etc., can be emphasized, but it is a poor preacher who leaves no room for the really Good News.

III. Be Biographical

A. Be an investigative reporter before the service—dig up all the worthy material on the deceased you can

provide room for, and make room if you have to.

B. A funeral service which misses this personal touch is, in a word, impersonal.

IV. Be Sensitive

A. Don't be so tied to your notes that you allow no room for surprises or for extemporaneous opportunities.

B. Relatives and friends of the deceased or the family have been known to make their own particular, sometimes peculiar, contributions to the service—so be on your toes.

C. You can also carry solemnity too far...way, way too far.

J. A. Gillmartin

Illustrations

Our Survival Kit—At Hand

On June 2, 1960, an 8-year-old-boy, Walter Sedor, was found sitting on a rock

three-fourths of a mile from Tarton Lake, twelve miles north of Flin Flon, Manitoba. He had been stranded on this rock for fifteen days after he and his father suffered a plane crash in which his father was instantly killed.

For fifteen days the boy had been without food and his emaciated and weakened condition showed that starvation would shortly have overtaken him. One of the tragic aspects of this accident was that there was no need for the boy to be hungry, for near the plane was a survival kit containing 24 day's rations. It had been thrown clear when the plane crashed, but the lad was unaware of what it contained.

Many people today are like Walter. They are lost in the wilderness, not of the North Country, but of doubt and fear, and their starved souls suffer from malnutrition, hunger and starvation while right beside them is a survival kit with abundance of the bread of life to nourish their starving souls.

The Bible contains the daily rations we need but so often it lies unopened and unused and we remain unaware that it contains the Bread of Life for which our souls hunger.

How unfortunate it was that little Walter hadn't opened that survival kit and satisfied his hunger. But it is even more tragic when mature adults fail to avail themselves of the Bread of Life which is theirs simply by opening their Bibles and feasting on the Word of God.

Sublette Spirit

Rocks Can Improve Yield

After my wife, Jackie, and I were first married, we lived in Galena, Missouri. Our first year together, we decided to plant a garden. Wow, how rocky it was! We felt like Stone County was appropriately named. We had to work so hard to eke out a crop.

Later, we moved to Springfield. There we also planted a garden. This time there

were no rocks in the soil. But do you know what happened? We grew a lot more vegetables on that rocky garden site in Galena than we ever did in Springfield without any rocks. All the care, attention, and compost we lavished on our “rock garden” made the soil a feast for the plants; when that level of work wasn’t needed, the plants suffered because we took their health for granted.

Sometimes it’s the rocks in life that make us productive by driving us to pour spiritual care and food into the soil of our hearts.

Steve D. Eutsler

Bulletin Inserts

General and Humorous

Give every man your ear, but few your mouth.

Three hints for making a speech: 1) be sincere, 2) be brief, 3) be seated.

One minute of keeping your mouth shut is worth an hour's explanation.

An egotist is person who is always me-deep in conversation.

He who controls not his youth will not enjoy his old age.

Always telling the truth means you have to remember less of what you have said in the past.

Why should we expect to be given more knowledge if we do not use what we already have?

A tea kettle, although up to its neck in hot water, continues to sing.

Life is about 10 percent of what you make it and 90 percent of how you take it

If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving definitely is not for you.

These 11 Anonymous

No matter what happens, there's always someone who knew it would.

The Old Union Reminder

Puzzles and 'Toons

Church 'Toons by Joe McKeever

"LOOK, BROTHER FRED - THEY JUST NEED YOU TO BE THEIR PASTOR. DON'T TRY TO BE A SUPERHERO."





"HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE GRAND, POP?"

Answers to last issue's puzzles:

ANSWERS

1. Seventy-five years old (Gen. 12:4).
2. In the plain of Mamre, in Hebron (Gen. 13:18).
3. Eliezer of Damascus (Gen. 15:2).
4. Ninety-nine years old (Gen. 17:24).
5. Jehovah-jireh (Gen. 22:14).
6. Forty years old (Gen. 25:20).
7. Gerar (Gen. 26:1, 6).
8. Seven years (Gen. 29:20).
9. Galeed (or Mizpeh) (Gen. 31:46-49).
10. Succoth (Gen. 33:17).

ACROSTIC #44: ANSWERS

PHILIPPIANS (4:6) — "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"

- A. **K**NAVE
- B. **P**REFERRING
- C. **H**EWERSOFWOOD
- D. **I**NNER
- E. **L**OGARITHM
- F. **I**CHABOD
- G. **P**YGARG
- H. **P**ATHETIC
- I. **I**NKBLOT
- J. **A**UGUSTUS
- K. **N**INETY
- L. **S**QUINT
- M. **D**EVOUTLY
- N. **B**ENNY
- O. **B**UNT

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, March
1995

Father Abraham's Question Box

"THE TABERNACLE AND ITS CONTENTS"

1. How many curtains covered the inside of the tabernacle?
2. Of what material was the outside covering of the tabernacle made?
3. What kind of wood was used for the boards of the tabernacle?
4. What were the colors of the tabernacle's veil?
5. What was the length of the altar of the tabernacle?
6. What was the length of the court of the tabernacle?
7. What type of oil was to be burned in the tabernacle's lamp?
8. What was used to overlay the altar of incense?
9. What ingredients went into the making of the anointing oil?
10. What ingredients went into the making of the incense placed before the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle?

See answers on page 27.

Hidden Wisdom on next page

HIDDEN WISDOM: BIBLE ACROSTIC # 45

BY MARK A. OSHMAN

Solve the acrostic by using the clues listed below to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, or instruction. Further, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. Happy hunting!

HAPPY SOLVING!!

1G		2F	3B	4A	5L		6D	7J	8N	9E	10B	11A		12I	13J	14H	15C
		16M	17B	18K		19J		20L	21N		22F	23K	24J	25B	26I	27M	28D
29N	30H		31G	32E	33L		34A	35N	36G	37J	38D	39H	40K	41C	42E	43F	44M
	45L	46B	47A	48D			49H	50L	51M	52G	53J	54E	55A	56B	57F	58I	
59C	60N	61A		62J	63D	64C		65E	66N	67M	68B	69H		70F	71A	72L	
	73H	74B	75I	76G		77J	78H		79E	80L	81I	82C		83B	84N	85A	86K
87E	88J	89G			90B	91N	92E	93J	94D		95B	96K	97M	98G			

- A. Commendation given by the master in the parable of the talents (2 words.) 34 11 4 55 47 85 71 61
- B. Disease caused by a severe protein and vitamin deficiency 83 95 46 10 74 3 56 90 68 17 25
- C. The late Mr. Brynner 64 41 82
- D. His son rebelled against Moses and Aaron 6 38 28 48 94 63
- E. "How wilt thou do in the _____ of Jordan?" 79 65 87 54 42 9 32 92
- F. Extremely bad 70 2 22 57 43
- G. His scales are his pride (Job 41) 98 15 52 1 59 76 89 31 36
- H. Literary genre of Simenon, et al. 49 30 69 73 14 39 78
- I. Mephistopheles' erstwhile protégé 26 75 81 58 12
- J. Treasurer under Cyrus of Persia. 77 19 62 13 7 53 37 24 88 93
- K. Smaller number than 40 96 86 23 18
- L. Joktan's son (Gen. 10) 50 5 45 80 72 20 33
- M. Sudden commotion 16 97 27 51 67 44
- N. One way to get to Epcot Center from Disney World 21 66 84 35 60 8 91 29