The Influence of Godly Mothers
By Chuck Colson

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Around Mother’s Day we hear the old saying, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” But is that true? Well, here are three examples of mothers with great influence, from the book Moms Who Changed the World by Lindsey O’Conner.

Augustine was a fourth century scholar who is considered one of the greatest thinkers of all time. He was born under Roman rule in North Africa, what is now the country of Algeria. His Christian mother, Monica, was married to a pagan who lived an immoral lifestyle. Even so, she gained a reputation as a peacemaker and counselor in turbulent times.

At 23, Monica had her first born, Augustine, and she dedicated her life to raising him as a Christian. Despite their pagan culture, Monica won her husband to Christ just before his death, and her mother-in-law as well.

Augustine was 17 when his father died and he was sent to the university at Carthage for a classical education. But Carthage was a decadent place, and he wallowed in carnal pleasures. Monica cried and continually prayed for his soul. When Augustine did come to faith years later, Monica rejoiced and told him her work was done. A week later she died.

Augustine, who went on to become a great saint of the church, wrote this prayer, “My mother, Your faithful servant, wept to You for me, shedding more tears for my spiritual death than others shed for the bodily death of a son. You heard her.”

Amy Carmichael was born in 1867, oldest of seven, raised in a comfortable home in Northern Ireland. Her family prayed daily and read the Scriptures. Amy’s mother, Catherine, taught her children to pray, and value the small acts of kindness, sending them with hot soup to the village poor.

When Amy’s father died, they lost everything, but Catherine trusted the Lord. In 1892, Amy felt God calling her to India, saying, “Go ye.” Though sad to see her daughter leave, Catherine wrote God “has lent you to me all these years, I can trust you to Him and I do. Go ye.” Amy, though in a wheelchair, went, and became one of the great missionaries, poets, and hymn writers of the Christian church.

George Washington, “father of his country,” was a Christian gentleman, of whom Thomas Jefferson said, “he was, indeed, in every sense of the word, a wise, a good, and a great man.” George’s father died when the boy was just eleven, but a Christian mother, Mary Ball Washington, molded his character with Bible reading, and with Contemplations Moral and Divine by Sir Matthew Hale.

He wrote later: “All that I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual, and physical education I received from her.”

So what did Monica, Catherine and Mary have in common? They saw motherhood as a mission from God, and they immersed their children in the Bible and prayer, and never gave up on them. They taught them morals, and to care for the less fortunate and they loved them unselfishly.

In times like these, we need to remember that God looks with favor on mothers who nurture small hearts and minds, and train up children to impact our world. What profession, and what job is more important than that? For truly, a mother’s work has eternal consequences.

Chuck Colson (1931-2012) served as an advisor to many American political figures, including President Richard Nixon. He served a prison term for his involvement in the Watergate Scandal, but came to know the Lord during that difficult season. Colson went on to found the Prison Fellowship ministry, and wrote several books on Christianity and culture, including Born Again (his autobiography), Kingdoms in Conflict, Loving God, and How Now Shall We Live?. The radio program he started, BreakPoint, is still heard daily on hundreds of stations across the world.
Integrity in Pastors: a Deal-Breaker
By Joe McKeever

“I was the student minister in a fine church many years ago,” Will told me. “We had a wonderful ministry. The single negative about the entire experience was the pastor. You never knew what he would do next.

“Case in point. One night in a church business meeting, the pastor announced that the property the church owned, including the former pastorium, was being offered for sale. At the time, my wife and I were living in that house! And now we learn they’re selling it. This was the first we had heard of it.

“That night, my wife was angry because she thought I had known about it and not told her. But that was the way this pastor worked. Staff members were nothing to him. Just pawns to be manipulated.”

I sat there listening to my longtime friend Will tell of that experience some 20 years previously and thought once again that the number one trait a staff member is looking for in his new pastor—his employer, his supervisor, and hopefully his mentor—is integrity. Without integrity, nothing matters.

Will said the only thing that really counted for the Kingdom in that preacher’s mind was the mission work he was doing overseas. Everything in church either served it or had no use. The ministerial staff could be manipulated, violated, and emasculated by the pastor if it served his purposes.

Is this extreme? Thank the Lord, it is. But there is enough dishonesty, misrepresentations, and deceit in the pastorate to make every potential staff member take great care before accepting an invitation to join a church team.

How does a person inquire about the integrity of a pastor who is considering inviting you to work for him?

1) Ask around. Former staff members will usually tell you freely whether the man keeps his word, whether he looks out for his staff members, whether he is dependable. Ask denominational people who know him. Ask the pastor who preceded him at this church or the one who succeeded him at his previous church. Most will tell you enough that you can feel you know the answer. A clue: if they hem and haw, nothing more is needed; they’ve told you all you need to know. Remember: you’re not looking to build a case for or against the man. All you want to know is whether legitimate questions about his honesty and dependability have been raised. If so, you are gone.

2) Ask the Lord. Seriously talk to the Father about the preacher. If you have concerns, tell Him. If you have seen nothing but good, tell Him that too, but ask Him in so many words to stop you if this is not going to be a good match.

3) Ask your wife. Wives tend to be more sensitive about subliminal messages other people send out. So, assuming she meets this minister, pay close attention to her impression afterwards. And never ever move your family to a church without your wife being in on the interview—at some point—and the decision.

Do not ask in a letter or email. Those things take on a life of their own and people are afraid to put negatives in writing. This must be done in person or by phone. Do not join a church staff where the pastor is a liar or cheat or con man, or is rumored to be such.

This sounds so obvious, saying it may insult your intelligence. But not so. In fact, there are two problems with vowing you will not go where the pastor is deceitful and untrustworthy.

A) It’s such a good opportunity. Say, for instance, the young minister is eager to join the staff of a sizeable church and get to work pouring himself into teenagers. He has a passion for reaching kids for Jesus. And now, to his elation, he has been approached by a church’s “student minister search committee.” This is too good to be true. He is impressed by the wonderful people as they are with him. There is, however, one little snag: A couple of friends keep telling him the pastor is a bear to work for and that the previous staff members could not wait to leave. That’s where the second concern comes in.

B) The committee gives such assurance. When the young minister raises the issue of the pastor’s questionable reputation, the chairman assures him that all of that has been taken care of, it’s ancient history, it’s overblown, and/or “the fellow you probably talked to was fired and didn’t like it.” Most of all, the chairman assures the young man that he will indeed be able to work with this pastor because (ahem) “we will stand with you and take care of you.”

No, they won’t. They may mean well, but they are promising what they cannot deliver. You will work with and for the pastor. You will see him daily, and the laypeople perhaps weekly. Think of that. Furthermore, if you ran to the chairmen with details of every conversation with the pastor, a hundred things could result from that, all of them bad.

Search committees go out of business once they have done their job. This committee will no longer be an entity in the church; its members will not meet regularly with the young minister they recommended, and if they did
it would raise serious questions within the rest of the membership (like, “Why can’t they turn him loose? They’ve done their job.”).

Once you join a church staff, you will work under the pastor. And unless this is a mega-church, you will relate to him more than anyone else in the church. He will define almost every single aspect of your ministry. So, choose your pastor carefully.

One final caution. Sometimes, the alert you sense in your spirit comes from the Holy Spirit and is not the result of a phone call or a bad reference. As a young minister, I was a staffer of a large Baptist church and being contacted regularly by search committees. One day, the pastor of an equally large church in a nearby state called to inquire if I would consider joining his staff as his assistant. A few days later, he was in our city and came by my office. At the end of an hour, I knew this was not going to happen. Why?

The Holy Spirit put a “hold” on my spirit. And that is all it should take for any of us. We don’t need a reason and we definitely do not need to give the other person an explanation. But the crowning event came for me when this pastor, a man perhaps the age of my father, wrapped his huge arm around me as we walked down the hallway. I knew at that moment that were I to join his staff, I would feel like a child with him as the grandfather. And that is one thing no minister needs.


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

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When It Is Wrong to Be Nice
By Shea Oakley

Christians are called to love their enemies. For fallen human beings this is one of the hardest messages Jesus preached. The old man’s desire is to do anything but love those who have caused us pain. For many believers, learning to be loving towards enemies is a slow and difficult path that lasts a lifetime. However, for some Christians, this is not the problem at all. For them the problem is the opposite one. Some of us have trouble not being “nice” to individuals who need to be confronted about negative conduct. When we should be appropriately assertive about wrongs that have been done to us, or others, we instead continue to treat the wrongdoer as if nothing has happened.

There is more than one problem with this kind of behavior. To begin with, it is dishonest. When we are angry with someone it is hypocritical to pretend we aren’t. While it is not appropriate to indiscriminately unleash our wrath against another person, it is also wrong to act as if everything is sweetness and light in a relationship that is at risk. God desires truth in the innermost parts. He desires that truth be manifest in the outer parts as well. There are times we must lovingly, but firmly, confront people. If we don’t, we are pretending to be at peace with someone with whom we are not. We are living a lie.

Another negative result of always being “nice” to someone with whom we have reason to be angry is that the other person is not given a chance to realize and repent of whatever the wrong is. You cannot repent from what you do not know you are doing. There are many individuals who are not aware that their actions towards others are destructive. There are others who are aware, but think that what they do or say is minor. In both cases being properly confronted could be beneficial to such individuals because the confrontation may lead to their eyes being opened. They then have the opportunity to humble themselves and ask for forgiveness. In the best-case scenario this can build Christian character in that person.

However where the issue of character most comes into play is with the one who is pretending everything is OK. Former U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld said, “It is easy to be nice, even to an enemy—from lack of character.” What he was getting at is that being accommodating towards one who is offending is often a result of weakness in the one offended.

We fear confrontation and conflict. It is frightening, especially if we are insecure with our self-worth vis-à-vis others. All of us know people who never stand up for themselves or for what is right. They may try to justify their lack of assertiveness by couching it in spiritual language about “dying to self” or “turning the other cheek” but this is a cop out, a dishonest dodging of personal responsibility and a sure sign of a flaw in character that needs mending.

There are times in the Christian life when we will be called to go the extra mile with a difficult person for the sake of his potential salvation. The Word of God urges us to do this when we are dealing with someone who is not yet a believer. This is not always the case, however, when the circumstance involves another child of God. Scripture makes it clear that confrontation is required when a Christian sins against others or us and refuses to stop. This is actually the core purpose of the corporate church discipline instructed by the Bible.

In the end, both the offender and the one offended lose when the latter takes the path of least resistance.
Assertiveness and Christian love are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the command to love that all believers are called to obey cannot fully function unless sin is confronted in individuals as well as in the larger Church. May we all have the courage to give up weakness in the form of kindness that is not ultimately kind.

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past there could be no present actual and appropriated redemption of man, and without this present relationship with Jesus Christ there could be no future eternal co-existence with Him. Christians should never make the mistake of thinking that the goal is everything. There is enjoyment to be had on the way. There is some kind of perfection to be had down here. That is why the word “perfect” is repeated. It is used first in relation to the work of patience, but it is used also in relation to the individual to whom James is writing: “That ye may be perfect and entire.”

This verse concerns our present life in the midst of adverse circumstances. To be perfect and entire is the wish of James and the wish of God Himself for His people. But how can we be perfect? Is perfection really possible? Well, this depends again on what we mean by these terms used in relation to the individual. We are reminded of the words of the Master: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). I want to make it clear that this word “perfect” is absolute when used in relation to God or Jesus Christ and is only relative when used in relation to man. In its relative sense it refers to maturity set over against the babyhood in Christ of which the Apostle Paul speaks quite often (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13, 14; etc.).

This concerns our present behavior. We must become spiritual adults, and one important means to that end is the trials and tribulations of life patiently used. Oh, how we need mature Christians today! Our churches are full of babies. That is why we have so much clamoring and fighting. How would it feel to have children who never grow up? It would bring great sadness to your heart. Just imagine how the Lord feels with so many babies in His family. He requires maturity of character and understanding, and one school where we can acquire this is the school of hard knocks. A Christian who has had no hardships in his life is lacking in spiritual maturity.

The next word used is also quite interesting and instructive. It is holoklēroi. Holoklēros is a compound word composed of the word halos, which means “whole, complete, all its parts,” and the word klēros, meaning “lot,” that which is “assigned or allotted. It is the same root from which the noun klēronomia or “inheritance” comes.

The thought here is beautiful. Try to catch it and you will be blessed by it. It is the desire of God that we should be “entire.” What is this, anyway? You and I, when we believed on the finished work of Christ, received a great “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 1:4). Holoklēros, therefore, means that which retains all that was allotted to us at the first when we believed, and to which nothing necessary for its completeness is wanting. Let all the trials come, they will in no way take away anything from us. Our completeness in Christ will be preserved, no matter what happens. Though poverty may assail us from without, the riches of the soul which Jesus Christ gave us shall remain intact.

Then we find this word holoklēros employed also to express that integrity of body in which there is nothing redundant, nothing deficient. In the next step of its history the word was transferred from bodily to mental and moral entireness. Christ is not satisfied with less than our full-rounded personality. He wants us to be mature in our bodies, in our minds, and in our hearts.

Who of us can deny that the Christian life is a race? In the acquisition of perfection we have many competitors. There are others running alongside us. James is afraid lest some of the burdens of life shall cause us to lose speed in the race. This is why he adds the last phrase of our verse, “wanting nothing.”

The strict meaning of the original Greek here is “being left behind by none.” In the Christian life there should always be the desire to be the first among many in the demonstration of Christian virtues, and especially the virtue of patience and its resultant ministry. Of course, the other meaning of the word, “wanting nothing,” is that it is an explanation of the word “entire.”

Since through all our trials and tribulations we shall be able to come out intact and unaffected, we shall lack nothing from our original possessions in Christ. Oh, how wonderfully complete we are in Jesus Christ! There is absolutely nothing that can rob us of His inheritance.

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.

Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

Our Prayer Assumptions

“...they suppose they will be heard for their many words” (Matt. 6:7).

We all suppose we will be heard for one reason or other, otherwise we’d stop praying. What assumptions are you making? Here are a few erroneous positions we sometimes take.

I. We Expect to Be Heard for Our Many Words

I’ve actually seen books devoted to teaching us how to pray several hours a day. As if the Lord needs this and we gain some kind of medals by piling up the hours. Our Catholic friends are known to pray the Rosary
hundreds of times in order to do something—convince God of our sincerity or earn His favor, or something.

That said, I confess that often in the mornings when I am trying to get my mind awake and focused on the Lord in order to do some serious praying, I will repeat the Lord’s Prayer several times. This is not in order to build up anything with the Lord, but to break through my foggy brain.

II. We Expect to Be Heard for Our Religious Words

Some prayer “experts” (how I despise that term, as though some children are better at talking to our Father than the rest of us) teach us to “pray Scripture,” and there is a lot to be said for that. However, piling up quotations from God’s word in our prayers does not impress the Lord, does not improve our prayers, and does not guarantee any kind of response. The main reasons for adding Scripture to our prayers are to help us focus better, teach us what to ask for, and to purify our minds so we can have a clear channel, so to speak.

III. We Expect to Be Heard for Our Intense Words

Doesn’t Scripture promise that the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16)? A large segment of the Christian community seems to hold strongly to the view that intensity in prayer—usually interpreted as volume, emotion, and tears—is the ultimate evidence of our faith. Faith is the element we should be striving for, not contrived emotion or practiced fervor.

IV. We Expect to Be Heard for Our Sincere Words

Someone says, “Why didn’t God hear my prayer? I was so sincere!” The answer in most cases is a simple, “He did hear your prayer. And the answer was ‘no.’” I’ve known of people who walked away from their Christian profession because they did not get what they asked for in prayer. They wanted their child to be healed, but she died. Their mother died prematurely, in spite of all their sincere prayers. A certain job they longed for and had prepared for did not come through. God failed them, they decided, and so, what’s the point in being a Christian if you are not going to get what you want. They don’t phrase it so crassly, but that’s what they are doing.

You have to wonder if such church dropouts don’t think the Lord might have plans they know nothing of, that He might have wisdom they don’t, that He may be up to something which He hasn’t told them about, and therefore they should trust Him even when they cannot see His purpose. There are plenty of good ideas we may have about the effectiveness of prayer, and this is by no means a full list, but here are a few assumptions that I start from.

1) I assume the Lord is there and He sees, hears, and cares. It’s what a loving parent does. 2) I assume my prayers are being dealt with on a heavenly realm even if I do not see the results. In fact, as we have dealt with elsewhere, most of the things for which I pray, I never know if they are granted or not. I am not alongside my missionary friends in Portugal or Italy, not in the Oval Office with the President, and not in the classroom with my grandchildren. So, I take by faith that my prayers are heard and answered. 3) I assume that my stumbling, bumbling attempts to communicate with the Father are acceptable to Him even though they are pitifully inept. 4) I assume that even when I don’t feel like praying, but go ahead and pray anyway, it’s the right thing to do. 5) I assume someone is praying for me. They must be, since the Lord’s hand is so clearly protecting and blessing me far beyond anything I ask or think.

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

Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

Cutting Straight: Working Hard in the Word
2 Timothy 2:14-19

Midway through chapter 2 of 2 Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy to stand fast in the Gospel, and to endure whatever suffering and persecution may come to Him for the sake of Christ. He punctuates this by reciting an early church creed or hymn: “For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 11-13).

Paul then pivots, urging Timothy to faithfully maintain this Gospel message to the church of Ephesus: “Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers” (2:14).

Timothy’s charge to the church and its leaders, according to Paul’s instruction, is to “keep the main thing the main thing.” They are to remember the Gospel message they have received, and avoid getting distracted by secondary issues, petty theological fights, and misinterpretations that come from wrangling about words instead of seeing the big picture of God’s work in the world.
Paul’s concern was both for the clarity of the Gospel and for the health of the body. He knew that when church leaders dispute over inconsequential things and neglect the Gospel message the rest of the body suffers. The word “ruin” here is the Greek katastrophē, showing the serious consequences of missing the point—fighting over words by the leaders of the church can lead to a total collapse of the faith for those who follow them.

Of course, there is a kind of theological wrangling that is healthy and necessary. Satan makes sure that the truth of the Gospel is always under attack, and he has filled the world with competing stories. Our sinful hearts are quick to latch onto these, and we only reluctantly relinquish them for the true message of salvation. God, in His grace, gives us the Law to convict us, has sent His Son to save us, and has given His Spirit to guide us. When Satan attempts to co-opt churches through false teaching, those who hold fast to God’s Word will be led by His Spirit to take a firm stand.

If in verse 14 Paul is focused on avoiding trivial and distracting squabbles, his exhortation to Timothy in verse 15 is instruction in how to hold on to, teach, and defend Scripture. “Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2:15). Those who lead the church must be diligent workman, studying hard and praying harder to be able to rightly teach His Word. The Greek behind “accurately handling” is orthotomounta, literally “cutting straight.” The idea is that of laborers clearing the way for a road or of a farmer plowing a straight furrow—the tools are sharp, and must be carefully handled to accomplish their purposes, but the result of skilled workmanship is a straight path ready for travel or a straight row ready to receive seed and produce a harvest. In the same way, mature believers who have worked hard at learning God’s Word, who serve as pastors or elders in a church body, should handle its truth carefully to cut a path to salvation, understanding, and obedience that the rest of the church can follow.

This is not the first time Paul has exhorted Timothy to this work. Recall that Timothy was commissioned to stay in Ephesus so that he could “teach certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:3-5). As Paul wrote again, it seems the Ephesians were still being distracted by speculations, and Timothy’s work remained the same—faithfully teach God’s Word from a heart of love in order to build their faith. Two millennia later, the ministry of the Word is still God’s means of correcting error and drawing people back to Him.

Paul continues his admonition, drawing distinction between the approved and unashamed workman and the careless and dangerous deeds of false teachers. He further encourages Timothy to focus on the truth and put aside the things that contend for its rightful place in men’s hearts and heads: “But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene” (2:16-17a). Paul’s warning is not merely against false teachings that present themselves clearly in theological terms, but also against the subtle ways that worldly ideas filter into the church through conversation, gossip, and cultural influences. He doesn’t mince words about the danger of this “gangrene” that rot a church as surely as any overt attack on doctrine.

As in 1 Timothy 1:20, Paul “names names” here to point out to Timothy some of the key offenders whose shoddy teaching and sinful influence needs to be addressed. “Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some” (2:17b-18). Interestingly, Hymenaeus is mentioned in both letters, suggesting an ongoing evil influence in the church that Timothy has for whatever reason failed to root out. Paul highlights some of their specific falsehoods, and shows the effect this is having. These men taught that the end of the ages had already come, squelching the hope of those who had trusted Christ and longed for His appearing.

Paul quickly refutes this notion with a message of assurance for Timothy to deliver as a corrective: “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness’” (2:19). Regardless of the false message of Hymenaeus and Philetus, Paul and Timothy knew that the Lord had not yet returned. Jesus will not leave any of those who trust Him behind, and those who know Him will know His voice when he comes (John 10:14). Moreover, Paul equates these men with those who, just as Christ prophesied about in Matthew 25 and Luke 13, purported to follow Him and do works in His name, but will be rejected by Him. God knows the hearts of men—those who know Him will obey Him; those who purposefully “cut a crooked path” to faith and misinterpret and mishandle Scripture will be shown in the end to be wicked.

The epistles of the New Testament resound with passage after passage very similar to this one. Getting the Gospel right is serious business. Staying focused on its message is vital. Steering clear of and correcting false teaching (from any and all sources) is difficult, but it essential and ongoing part of church life. Nothing less than eternal life is at stake.

Justin Lonas is editor of Disciple Magazine for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tennessee.
Following God—by Wayne Barber

The God of All Comfort

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The Apostle Paul was a man who loved Christ and lived as His “bondservant.” Consequently there were those, particularly the religious minded, who did not treat him very nicely. In fact, they criticized him and sought to discredit him in any way they could. But Paul knew where to find the comfort he needed. He ran to the God of all comfort!

In 2 Corinthians, Paul starts his letter with thoughts of God’s comfort. One of the most meaningful things about the truth of God’s comfort is that it is available all the time. God is always there to comfort us in the times of distress that we will go through down here on planet earth as His children. “Who comforts us in all our affliction” (2 Cor. 1:4).

Paul speaks from his own experience. The word for “comfort” here is parakaléō, meaning “to come alongside, to be called alongside.” God comes alongside in our times of need to help us get through the difficult times. The beautiful thing is that it is in the present tense and the active voice. Thus Paul gives testimony to the fact that the God of all comfort was always near him, comforting him in times of need; the active voice means that this is God’s choice to do so. What a glorious truth! Christ lives in us to always be there to comfort us in all situations that we face. Paul is giving a testimony of what he has discovered.

*Thilipsis,* the word for “affliction,” is used 34 times in the New Testament. *Thilipsis* conveys the meaning of severe emotional distress that is caused by external pressure. Paul went from one stressful trial to another. He records some of these in 2 Cor. 11. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that God was always there, giving him the help he needed to get through.

“All our affliction” refers to each and every trial and all of them put together! We must get used to the fact that it is not always popular to walk with Christ and to allow Him to live through our lives. Hard, stressful, difficult times will come on us, caused by people who want only to please their flesh. But God will be with us, just as He was with Paul. Hebrews 13:5 tells us that He will never leave us nor forsake us. There is no trial for which there will not be His comfort!

Paul also speaks in verse 4 of the ministry of our comfort: “who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.” It’s amazing how going through difficult times and turning to God for our comfort opens our eyes to those around us who are also suffering. It is so exciting to know that God never wastes experiences in our lives, but instead, so orders them that we might learn to be sensitive to others in their times of distress.

“Able” is from the word δυναμένη, which means to have the ability to do something. My trials are not just for me to get through, but for me to be comforted by God so that I might learn to comfort others; “so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.” Paul covers all manner of stressful, hurtful situations one might be going through. He shows us that unless we have been there and received the comfort of God ourselves, we aren’t going to be sensitive to those who are around us who are also going through affliction.

The key is not just the fact that we all suffer but the fact that we have turned to God and received His comfort. This makes us candidates to minister to others who are hurting. Open your eyes! There are people all around you that are hurting. If you have been there and have received the comfort of God, ask Him to open your eyes so that you might be sensitive to those around you.

No man is an island. We need one another.

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

Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

Go to the Desert

**Text:** “‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. ‘This is desert” (Acts 8:26).

**Thought:** The Book of Acts recounts historically and presents thematically the spreading of the witness to Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Rome. This witness to Jesus was commanded by the Risen Christ before His Ascension, and this witness was empowered continually by the Holy Spirit who came so dynamically on the day of Pentecost. These words quoted above, spoken by the angel of the Lord to Philip, direct him specifically and geographically to a
new place for witness to Jesus and the gospel. And the text makes it clear that Philip was to go south into the desert.

We first read of Philip in Acts 6:5; he was a man of “good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” Then, we read of Philip involved in powerful ministry in Samaria (Acts 8:5). The witness to the Risen Lord Jesus Christ is already moving outward from Jerusalem and has reached Samaria. But the Lord had another assignment for Philip, which is found in our text. As we consider this specific historical record, I think it is appropriate to view this account as an example of the empowered witness to Jesus Christ that is the focus of The Book of Acts. More specifically, I want us to consider Philip himself as an example of an empowered witness to Jesus Christ. Let’s note, first of all, that Philip was:

I. Obedient to the Lord (Acts 8:27, 29)

Philip obeyed the directive that came to him from the angel of the Lord (Acts 8:27). He, also, was obedient to the Spirit’s leading as he approached the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:29). These texts clearly indicate that Philip heard and responded without hesitation to the Lord’s leading. Philip was attentive to the word he received and he acted on it. Philip, therefore, headed into the desert to do what the Lord wanted him to do, and he approached the Ethiopian eunuch when he was told to do so. Philip was obedient.

We know that the Lord has called us to spread His Word throughout the earth. The witness to Jesus is to go everywhere. Have we responded to His command? Furthermore, are we attentive to the Lord’s leading in our daily lives through His Word and His Spirit? An empowered witness must be an obedient witness, even if the Lord leads us into a desert place. An obedient witness must be obedient, even if the Lord leads us to interact with a person very different from ourselves.

II. Faithful to the Word (Acts 8:30-35)

As Philip approached this official, this man “of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians” was reading the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8:28). So, when Philip heard him reading, he asked him if he understood what he was reading. Luke recounts the exact place in Isaiah’s prophecy where the Ethiopian official was reading (Isaiah 53:7-8). Luke also provides the actual question that the official had concerning the passage of Scripture, “Of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” (Acts 8:34). Then, Philip, “beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35). Philip was true to the message, indeed, he was true to the “witness to Jesus” that needed to be shared with this man.

When we say that Philip was “faithful to the Word,” we are saying that he was true to the Gospel; he was a faithful witness to Jesus. This witness here was specifically based on the Word of God, and evidently Philip explained how this classic Old Testament text pointed to Jesus. On the practical level, it is good to know how the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus.

III. Sensitive to the Opportunity (Acts 8:30-40)

Philip was not only obedient and faithful, he was sensitive to what was taking place. When he heard the man reading the Scripture, he asked a helpful question (Acts 8:30). When the man invited Philip to come up into the chariot, Philip did so. When the man asked Philip a question, Philip responded directly to the question, and Jesus was the answer to his question. When the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized, Philip responded to his desire, being assured of the official’s understanding of Jesus and the Gospel (Acts 8:35-37). Lastly, Philip assisted in the baptism itself before the Lord moved him on to Azotus (Acts 8:38-40).

At each point in this account Philip was being helpful and sensitive rather than being rigid, unhelpful or manipulative. God was at work. God had led Philip to this desert place, and Philip was sensitive to what was taking place. And in so doing, Philip played an important role in this man’s salvation, a man who could take the Gospel to his own country. The account ends beautifully by noting the joy of the Eunuch and the next phase of ministry for Philip. The mission goes on, and the witness to Jesus continues.

Thrust: Don’t be surprised if God leads us to a “desert place.” We may have special experiences as witnesses to Jesus, if we are obedient to the Lord, faithful to the Word, and sensitive to the opportunity.

David L. Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University’s Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

Jewels from Past Giants

The Preacher’s Blessing
George Milligan

From a sermon by Milligan reproduced in the 1907 book Great Texts of the Old Testament.

“The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num. 6:24-26).

Few words from the Old Testament are more familiar than these. And yet perhaps our very familiarity
with them may blind us sometimes to their deep and far-reaching significance, and just because we have heard of them so often, we fail to grasp the full extent of the divine blessings which are here offered. Even at the risk, then, of doing little more than repeat a few old and obvious truths, I would ask you to look with me for a little at this great benediction, and see what are some of the lessons of comfort and hope it has to teach us all.

The benediction falls, you will notice, into three parts, corresponding to the three verses into which, in our English version, it has been divided. Each, too, of the three parts is symmetrical, consisting of a divine attitude and its consequent result. Thus in the first verse, the first part, we have the Lord blessing His people in the most general sense of the word, followed by His keeping them, or by the sense of security which His blessing ought to impart. In the second, we have the Lord making His face to shine, with the consequent assurance of the divine grace and favor resting on those who sun themselves in His light. And in the third, we have the Lord lifting up His countenance, as a token of the divine approval, and so imparting a sense of inward and abiding peace in the hearts of all true worshippers.

Or, to put it more shortly, to the man on whom this blessing rests, there are imparted the protection, the forgiveness, and the peace of Almighty God. What greater gifts can anyone either ask or desire? What promises better fitted to meet his deepest needs in this life, as well as to hold out a triumphant assurance of the life that is to come?


That is an assurance that we all require. On all sides we are surrounded with uncertainties, changes—changes in the outward surroundings of our lives, changes in the home and family-circle—changes, it may be, in our religious faith and love. None of us stand to-day exactly where we did twelve months ago; while, as we look forward into the future that is stretching before us, how dark and unknown it all is. Is it to be wondered at if the old cry is constantly rising from many hearts?

“Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; let me know how frail I am. Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths; and mine age is as nothing before Thee: surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity” (Ps. 39:4-5).

But then it is, just when we are most conscious of our own utter weakness and the insufficiency of all earthly things, that there comes in this promise of the divine protection. We are not left alone; we are not called upon to stand alone; but we are “kept.” And if you ask what is meant by that, I do not know that any better answer can be given than is contained in the familiar words of another psalm—a psalm which is little more than an inspired commentary upon the words of our text:

“My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall keep thee from all evil; He shall keep thy soul. The Lord shall keep thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and for evermore” (Ps. 121:2-8).

That is to be kept: to be conscious that the eyes of the Lord, who never slumbers nor sleeps, are upon us from the beginning of the year to the end of the year: and that whatever it may have in store for us, be it good or ill, be it joy or sorrow, be it life or death, He, our divine Helper, will keep our going out and our coming in, both now and forever.

There is a simple child’s story which always seems to me to convey a profound and too often forgotten truth. It is the tale of the boy, who, with his father, was climbing some steep and dangerous place, and to whom a voice from below suddenly called up: “Have you fast hold of your father?” “No!” was the immediate answer; “but he has fast hold of me.” That is the first, the main thing. Not the sense of our keeping hold of God—if that were all, how weak, how ready to fall we all should be—but rather the sense that our Heavenly Father has hold of us, and that because He is greater than all, no one is able to pluck us out of His hand (John 10:29).

“And so I go on, not knowing. I would not, if I might. I would rather walk in the dark with God, than walk alone in the light. I would rather walk with God by faith, than walk alone by sight.” It is the LORD, who made heaven and earth, who will bless and keep us.

II. Great, However, Though This Promise Is, It Is Followed by Another Equally Great

The Lord who blesses is the Lord also who makes His face to shine upon His people; and who not only keeps them in the way, but is gracious, forgiving towards them, even when they have wandered out of it. For that this is the root idea underlying the thought of the grace of God, one or two passages from Holy Scripture will again make abundantly clear.

Take, for example, the Lord’s own proclamation of Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exod. 34:6). Or this passage from the prophet Joel: “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil” (Joel 2:13). Or, once more, these words from the Book of Nehemiah: “Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (9:17).
All these passages, you will notice, are taken from the Old Testament, that part of the Bible which we sometimes think presents God only in His infinite majesty and power, but which, as truly as the New Testament, is one long record of the infinite patience and unwearied grace of God.

And yet how much more abundantly manifest is that grace to us “upon whom the ends of the ages are come” (1 Cor. 10:11)! Upon us the light hath shined out of darkness; to us God has spoken no longer as to the fathers in the prophets, but in a Son, “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3). Surely as we think of the grace of Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, we can no longer have any doubt as to God’s loving purposes regarding us. And if conscious of our own utter sinfulness and need, our prayer still is: “God be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13), is it not only to hear Christ’s own answer coming back to us: Son, daughter, “be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven” (Matt. 9:2).

It is not only as those who remember their sins that we stand before God at this solemn season, but as those to whom the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation, and who, as Christ’s professing followers, have been set apart “a people for His own possession, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14). For us, as for all upon whom the Lord has made His face to shine, “the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

III. Upon This Sense Of Forgiveness, There Follows The Sense Of Peace

“The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” The figure is derived from the thought of some earthly sovereign seated upon his throne, and who, as his subjects appear before him, lifts upon them a countenance so full of approval and goodwill, that no longer have they any fear, but enjoy the utmost confidence and peace.

Even so with those to whom the Lord has shown Himself as their friend. A peace which the world can neither give nor take away fills their hearts—a peace that casts out fear—“the fear of the guilt that we own, of the evil we have done, of the death that we deserve.” Outward calamities may disturb, but they cannot really shake it; for it is rooted in the inward relation of the soul to God, in the consciousness that God Himself is with us. And though, so long as we are in this world, we cannot expect wholly to escape fightings without and fears within, still, is not the universal experience this, that the more completely we learn to lean ourselves on the strong arms of Everlasting Love the more do we discover that “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” will keep, will guard, will garrison our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7)?

When Horace Bushnell was dying, he murmured one day slowly, and in great weakness, to those around his bed: “Well now, we are all going home together: and I say, the Lord be with you, and in grace, and peace, and love—and that is the way I have come along home.” It is the only way for us all—the way we must all tread—if from amidst the temptations and the trials and the sorrows of earth, we hope to find our way home together.

George Milligan (1860-1934) was professor of divinity and biblical criticism at the University of Glasgow from 1910 to 1932. He was awarded an LL. D. in 1932. Born in Aberdeen, Milligan was the son of William (1821-1893), a minister who became Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University there. He studied at the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Göttingen and Bonn before becoming a minister in 1883. He was a prolific author of articles and text books, the most influential of which was The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (1914-1929), with J.H. Moulton. Among many offices in the Church of Scotland, he was Moderator of the General Assembly in 1923.

Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

The Bible in Today’s Culture

A version of this article appeared in The Baptist Courier. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Over 13 million people viewed the premiere of the History Channel’s miniseries, The Bible, this March. The cable TV production had twice as many viewers than any program on NBC for February. The final episode was seen by 11.7 million viewers, helping to make the History Channel the top cable network for March. This success had critics stumped because the overwhelming majority had predicted a dismal failure for the series.

The Hollywood Reporter called it “a mishmash of the historical, and the honeyed.” It seems Hollywood, and the mainstream media in general, have lost touch with anything even resembling godliness in our society. The networks and movie producers, for the most part, are not supportive of biblical principles, morals, or values.

The condition of our country reflects our loss of a genuine God-consciousness based on Scripture and not on public opinion. According to a recent Barna research report, 77 percent of Americans say the values and morals of
America are declining. Why? The number one answer, given by 32 percent of those surveyed, was “because of an absence of Bible reading.” In that poll, 46 percent believe the Bible has little impact on American youth and 56 percent believe the Bible has little impact on American society. However, 89 percent own at least one Bible (down from 92 percent in 1993). Even 59 percent of the people who “have no faith or are atheists own a Bible.” Sixty-one percent of adults “say they wish they read the Bible more” (down from 67 percent in 2011).

The tremendous response of the public to the mini-series and the Barna research give us some hope. While the Bible does not hold the place of respect and honor it once did in our society, a large number of Americans are still interested in the bestselling book in history. This is good news for evangelicals.

The Bible mini-series on TV contains some inaccuracies and omissions. But something that touches this many people can open the door for conversations that Christians might otherwise never have, especially since 27 percent of non-Christian adults tuned in to at least part of the series. This opportunity could open the door for discussing the Bible, leading to a conversation about the way to salvation. From that a relationship could develop where a disciple of Christ is used to help someone know the truth, experience the new birth, and begin a personal journey of discipleship with God.

A book, A Story of God and All of Us, based on the mini-series and written by husband and wife producers, Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, has already become a best seller.

When Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to Satan, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

People need direction and meaning. God can give it to them through His Word. When we are given opportunities like a television program that attracts the attention and curiosity of so many, we must respond with great love and share the truth of God with people who are interested. Our opinions will not work. It is the Truth, written and incarnated, that sets people free from the bondage of sin and unbelief. One media critic wrote of the mini-series, “People are hungry for something like this.” It may be that more people than we can imagine are open to hear God’s truth. Things may not be as bleak as they could be and opportunities may be better than we realize.

James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He serves as the editor of The Baptist Courier, the official newspaper of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

“I Was Floored Right There in the Grass”
Song: “Holy Is the Lord” by Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3).

In a November 2006 TIME magazine article, Belinda Luscumbe estimated that more people were regularly singing songs written by Chris Tomlin than any other songwriter in the world.

Louie Giglio, founder and director of the Passion Conferences for college-age young people, was instrumental in the birthing of the worship song “Holy Is the Lord.” While flying from Waco, Texas, to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1997, the Lord spoke to Giglio’s heart about starting this national ministry to students. Thousands of young people flock to these meetings. Chris Tomlin is one of the major worship leaders.

In an interview in 2005, Chris told me the following story about the writing of “Holy Is the Lord”:

“I was reading Isaiah 6 in my home during a devotional time. As I read in verse 3, ‘Holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory,’ I picked up my guitar and began to sing those words. Those lines and the melody that came to me were all that I had.

“Sometime later—the year was 2003—I was preparing to lead worship at a Passion Conference that was to be held on a large ranch outside of Dallas, Texas. I sensed that God was putting this song, though incomplete, on my heart for this particular meeting. They were expecting between 20,000 and 30,000 people for that conference.

“Louie Giglio, who I sometimes write songs with, and I had gotten together for a weekend. I said, ‘Louie, I have this song, “Holy Is the Lord,” and I feel that it is for the upcoming Passion Conference.’ He was in the throes of planning for the meetings. After I sang the chorus for him, he began to give me a number of ideas that were in his heart. Among other things, he helped me with the phrase, ‘It’s rising up all around. It’s the anthem of the Lord’s renown.’

“I took his suggestions and ran with them. Although I was having some questions in my mind, I
basically felt that this song was from the Lord and should be used for the meetings. I had never played it completely through at that time, and I really didn’t know if it was a good song.

“I arrived at the Passion Conference and found that I was to follow a sermon from John Piper, a gifted communicator and writer. I was to lead worship following his message. While he was on the stage speaking, I was behind the platform on my knees in the grass. I was praying, ‘Lord, I want to lead these people in the right way, with the right songs. You just show me what to do.’

“John Piper walked onto the stage, took the microphone in his hand, and said, ‘Students, God has put a message for you on my heart. It is from Isaiah chapter 6— “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”’ That floored me, right there in the grass. I thought, God put a song in my heart two months ago. He knew I will follow John Piper, and he put the same message on both our hearts. At that moment it was confirmed in my heart that I was to use that song. We played it for that day, but it is a song for all days. It seems to be a repeating anthem of heaven.”

When you and I see God, through his Word, in all of His holiness—as Isaiah saw him—we, too, will say, “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

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Lindsay Terry has been a song historian for more than 40 years, and has written widely on the background of great hymns and worship songs including the books I Could Sing of Your Love Forever (2008), from which this piece is excerpted, and The Sacrifice of Praise (2002).

Church Builders—by Bernard R. DeRemer

Philip Doddridge: Pastor and Author

Philip Doddridge (1702-51) was born at London, the youngest of 20 children. Only he and a sister survived infancy. Though he was of infirm constitution, his parents gave him good care and education, but both his mother and father passed away within a few years of each other, leaving him an orphan at 13. Later, loving friends cared for him, giving him a foundation in the Christian faith and an example of sacrificial love.

He was offered a university education if he would prepare for the Anglican Church ministry but he refused the generous offer. Friends provided for him to attend the Dissenter’s Academy at Kibworth in Leicestershire. There he became a teacher as well as pastor.

In 1729 he was called to the nearby town of Market Harborough as pastor and head of an academy, and later that year went to a nonconformist congregation in Northampton. He took his students with Him and labored there for 20 years as teacher, pastor, and author, helping train many young men for the ministry.

Doddridge was “a man of deep piety, scrupulous in habits of study [and] love and charity.” His sermons were said to be “mostly practical in character, and his aim was to cultivate in his hearers a spiritual and devotional frame of mind.”

Doddridge’s work as a pastor and seminarian led him to develop close relationships with many of the prominent Christian thinkers of his day, including theologian and hymn writer Isaac Watts. Doddridge became a prolific hymnist in his right, composing such tunes as “How Gentle God’s Commands”, “O Happy Day”, “Grace!

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Shining the Light of the Gospel through Media

By AMG International Staff

Think of the ways we have in the United States to hear and be encouraged by the message of the Gospel through the media. Almost every city and town has at least one Christian bookstore overflowing with Bibles, study manuals, and all kinds of books, music, and videos. Most of us can pick up two or three different Christian radio stations while driving around in our cars. Anyone with access to the internet has at their fingertips thousands of blogs, podcasts, and video sermons from pastors all over the country.

If we value this for our own spiritual walk and the countless opportunities Christian media provide for the lost to hear and respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, how much more should we support these outreaches in parts of the world with little or no Christian influence?

Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, AMG International’s longtime president, understood the value of proclaiming the truth through various media outlets. For over 50 years, his voice was heard on hundreds of radio stations around the United States and Canada, exhorting Christians to dig deeper into Scripture and sharing insights from exegeting the Greek New Testament. AMG still uses radio today in a number of countries to reach people with the Gospel.

In Uganda, AMG national director Reuben Musiime is currently on air on Radio West, which covers about 10 districts in the Western part of Uganda with a listenership of more than 10 million. Reuben and two others launched the radio program in 2000, after Uganda was rocked by the news of several people who were burned to death because of a false cult’s teaching about the end of the world. Their goal for the broadcast was and is to help people understand the true message of salvation and to give believers confidence in who God is and what He desires for them so that they would not be led astray. Through the program, Reuben teaches from Scripture on daily Christian walk, family relationships, church life, social issues, health, education, and many other areas.

In Cyprus, our ministry partners operate the only Christian radio station for the island nation’s 1.1 million residents and visitors. After nearly 20 years operating as a local station in the capital city of Nicosia, they received a license to broadcast nationwide in 2012. Now, thanks to funds from AMG’s supporters, they have procured the necessary equipment improvements to take advantage of the license. God’s truth is being broadcast across the island, and in the future that goal is to reach the coasts of several Middle Eastern nations from Cyprus.

Beyond radio, AMG uses many other media channels to spread the Good News. In the 1950s, AMG began placing Gospel ads in local periodicals around the world to provoke readers to consider the claims of Christ. Readers who responded to the ads would typically receive a copy of the Scriptures and a correspondence course on basic Christian teaching. Through the years, thousands of people (many from closed countries) have come to Christ because they first saw His truth in the morning newspaper!

Our newspaper evangelism outreach continues today in many countries. As people’s reading habits have changed in the digital age, we now also pursue the same type of ministry through internet ads and social media.

This testimony from Gawpo, one of our national workers in Thailand, illustrates the opportunities this outreach brings to start spiritual conversations in difficult cultures: “Thailand is a Buddhist society, filled with idol worship, but also drugs, immorality, sexual abuse. We have many natural disasters such as floods and drought. These events are great opportunity for the good news of salvation of Jesus Christ and Thais to get freedom from evil power.

“We advertise in the newspaper once a month. We receive responses cut out from advertisements, we send booklets to readers. Some are interested in Bible correspondence course, but some are not and stop contacting us. We send follow-up letters to those who stop contacting while others are doing Bible correspondence. These letters help some readers open their hearts and discuss their problems such as family, job, health and feelings. It’s really a chance to tell about the truth of Jesus Christ. Many invite Jesus Christ in their life. Then we introduce and give direction to the nearest church for them to attend for getting nourishment and growth of their soul.”

All of the ads we place and the Bible correspondence courses we provide are funded by gifts from our supporters. This has always been the case, and God has provided for, blessed, and sustained this ministry for over 70 years to reach so many corners of the globe with the only message of life and hope—the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We continue to work through media evangelism so that God’s name can be praised by those who do not yet know Him.

To learn more about AMG’s ministries around the world and how you can support media evangelism, 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.

Marks of the Master—by the Old Scot

Trees’ Daily Burden

Editor’s Note: Our longtime friend and colleague Ted “The Old Scot” Kyle went to be with the Lord last week. We thank God for His faithful service, and our prayers are with His family during this time of loss. Ted lived to “a good old age, an old man, and full of years” (Gen 25:8), and his work continues through his written words.


Bring to mind, please, a tall tree which you admire—a monarch of the forest, perhaps. There it stands, a magnificent specimen, towering against the sky.

Now, if you please, image that you must climb that tree to the very top, with a 60-pound pack on your back. As soon as you reach the top, you must leave your burden and descend, only to start up again with a fresh load. And you must repeat this cycle a total of 12 times during the day—and every day in the future.

Awesome to contemplate as our fantasy assignment may be, it is no more than the tree itself must perform daily, if it is to live and thrive. The weight which every tree must lift is water, and it can amount to quite a lot. A large birch tree, for instance, requires about 90 gallons of water per day during the growing season. That means lifting 720 pounds up to 100 feet or more—as much as 300 feet or more, in the case of the really tall trees.

Trees manage this task very efficiently and without fuss. But how do they do it? Scientists have pondered this question for years, and still face mysteries.

Four possible solutions have been investigated: First, the water might be pushed up from below, either by “root pressure” or by capillarity (the tendency of water to rise in very thin tubes, or capillaries. But neither root pressure nor capillarity can provide anything like enough force to push a water column to the top of tall trees.

The second possibility is that the leaves at the top of the tree suck up the water from the roots. But suction pressure is limited by atmospheric pressure, and can only lift a column of water about 33 feet.

A third possibility might be that trees raise the water by stages, with cells acting as miniature pumping stations. But this was found to be just an empty idea when one experimenter introduced picric acid into test trees. This poisonous substance killed the cells as it passed through them, and thus would have shut down their supposed pumping activity. But the tainted water kept rising anyway.

Scientists studying the problem know of only one other possible mechanism: molecular attraction—the force with which water molecules cling to each other. This cohesive force has been measured, and was found to be more than enough to lift water to the top of the tallest trees.

The theory is that as water is evacuated from leaves into the air as vapor, it exerts a cohesive tug on the column of water stretching down the twig and branch to the trunk, and thence to the root.

There are, however, grave problems. For one thing, it depends on the water column being continuous from leaf to root. But very often gaps have been found in the water columns. This difficulty was highlighted in an experiment in which the tree trunk was sawed more than halfway through on first one side and then, a short distance above, from the other side, so that the cuts overlapped, and no cellular channel could continue without interruption. But the trees so abused continued to live, though they needed structural support.

So, after many decades of study, the precise system trees employ to meet their need for water eludes our deepest inquiry. Yet trees have no mind at all!

Can it be that non-intelligence can create such living wonders as we see trees to be? Impossible! They were obviously designed by a great intelligence. We know that intelligence to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The poet Joyce Kilmer had it right: “Only God can make a tree.”

The Old Scot (Ted Kyle) served as managing editor for Pulpit Helps magazine (Disciple’s predecessor publication) from 1993-2008. He was always fascinated by the natural world, and readily saw God’s hand in every detail. Ted went to be with His Creator and Savior in April 2013.

One undeniable phenomenon in today’s evangelical churches (particularly among the younger generation) is “Crossing the Tiber” (to use Carl Trueman’s phrase)—professing born-again evangelicals joining the Roman Catholic Church. The reasons for this are many (certainly not least among them is a growing frustration with the glibness of much evangelical preaching and worship routines).

This trend, coupled with increased cooperation between evangelicals and Roman Catholics in the public square on social and religious freedom issues, leads many to downplay or reject the historic divisions between Catholics and Protestants. Many who are the inheritors of the tradition and doctrine of the Reformers no longer understand exactly what it is that their forefathers were protesting against nearly 500 years ago.

R. C. Sproul has for decades been one of America’s best-known theologians and one of the staunchest defenders of the principles of the Reformation, so it seems natural for him to take up his pen to address the growing forgetfulness in the American Church and to outline the basic distinctions between Protestant and Catholic beliefs in simple language.

Sproul carefully analyzes 6 key areas of dissent (the authority of Scripture, the nature of Justification, the role of the Church, the Sacraments, the Papacy, and the place of Mary) with thorough biblical exposition. He takes great pains to accurately represent Roman Catholic theology and to correct common evangelical misconceptions about what Rome actually believes and teaches. He does not argue against straw men or dismissively reject core tenets, but digs deeply into papal encyclicals, the statements of Church councils, and the writings of prominent Catholic theologians to carefully refute their conclusions from Scripture and make a firm declaration that the Reformation is not over.

The book is succinct, but Sproul’s arguments are weighty. This is not merely a polemic, tearing down without building up, but a robust case for a biblical understanding of the Church grounded in the five rallying cries of the Reformation: Sola Scriptura, Sola fide, Sola gratia, Solus Christus, and Soli Deo Gloria. He carefully shows that the issue of disagreement between Rome and the Reformers was never about the existence and importance of Scripture, faith, grace, Christ, and God’s glory, but about the sola. He maintains that Rome’s insistence on adding to the truth (Scripture + tradition, faith + works, grace + sacraments, Christ + Mary, etc.) is the true fault line, and that nothing of substance has changed to bring the two sides closer since their separation.

In particular, Sproul wrestles with Justification. He notes that both Catholic and Protestant doctrine is that God is the justifier of men, but stresses the key disparity in understanding how He works that out—Catholic teaching is that God justifies the just (that is, those who have received an infusion of righteousness from the sacraments and their own good works); Protestant teaching is that God justifies the sinner on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. On this point, Sproul shows that the Reformation concept of justification and Rome’s concept are incompatible and mutually exclusive. He argues conclusively that there can be no common cause, only surrender by one side or the other—if one concept is the Gospel, the other cannot be.

Sproul concludes that it is good and right for Bible-believing Protestants to cooperate with Catholics (or Mormons & Muslims for that matter) on social issues that reflect God’s design for man (such as opposing abortion and supporting religious freedom). Still, he maintains that as long as the Catholic Church adds to the Gospel (as outlined in Scripture), we can have no true cooperation in mission and worship, and he continues to advocate faithful Gospel witness to and prayer for the salvation of those who give allegiance to Rome.

Even though Sproul does not mince words here (Catholics and Catholic sympathizers will be offended, convicted, or both), his pastoral heart shines through. What bubbles forth in his scholarship and bold assertions is not in any way a hatred for Catholics, but an abiding passion for the truth of Scripture and the wonder of God’s work in saving sinners. This is an important and helpful restatement of the reasons for the Reformation in an age when so many doubt its necessity and effectiveness.

Justin Lonas

**Target:** All  
**Type:** Theology  
**Take:** Highly Recommended
News Update—4/22/13

Texas Fertilizer Plant Explosion Levels Town

A massive explosion at a fertilizer plant in West, Texas on April 17 has reportedly killed over a dozen people, wounded more than 160, left dozens unaccounted for, and damaged 50 to 60 homes in a 5-block area, CNN reports.

Described as a nuclear-like blast by those who witnessed it, the explosion rocked the West Fertilizer Co. at around 7:50 p.m. (8:50 p.m. ET). The explosion is being treated as a crime scene until investigators determine whether it was an accident.

“Nothing at this point indicates we have had criminal activity, but we are not ruling that out,” said Sgt. William Patrick Swanton. Patients were rushed to several surrounding hospitals, while fire and rescue units were being called in from neighboring cities.

The blast shook houses 50 miles away and measured a 2.1-magnitude seismic event, according to the United States Geological Survey. Meteorologists are warning that an approaching storm system could complicate rescue efforts, as winds are forecasted to be gusting up to 35 miles per hour.

Gospel Music Legend George Beverly Shea Passes Away at 104

George Beverly Shea, soloist of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), died the evening of April 16 following a brief illness. He was 104.

Since George Beverly Shea first sang for Graham in 1943 on the Chicago radio hymn program, “Songs in the Night,” Shea has faithfully carried the Gospel in song to every continent and every state in the Union. Graham’s senior by ten years, Shea devotedly preceded the evangelist in song in nearly every Crusade over the span of more than one-half century.

Shea was the recipient of ten Grammy nominations, a Grammy Award in 1965, and was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Grammy organization in 2011. He was also a member of the Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame (1978), and was inducted into the Religious Broadcasting Hall of Fame in 1996. Shea was also inducted into the inaugural class of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists’ “Hall of Faith” in 2008.

“I first met Bev Shea while in Chicago when he was on Moody Radio,” said Billy Graham. “As a young man starting my ministry, I asked Bev if he would join me. He said yes and for over 60 years we had the privilege of ministering together across the country and around the world. Bev was one of the most humble, gracious men I have ever known and one of my closest friends. I loved him as a brother. My prayer for his wife, Karlene, and his children, Ron and Elaine, is that God will strengthen them during this time.”

As North Korea threatens Nuclear War, More Christians Suffer

As the world turns its attention to North Korean threats of nuclear war, human rights groups are bringing attention to the extensive human rights violations in the country. Long considered the world’s worst persecutor of Christians, estimates place the number of imprisoned Christians at between 30,000 and 70,000, the ICC reports.

Once known as the Jerusalem of the East and a center of Christianity in Asia, the Communist regime run by

“Then I knew what I had to do,” Cunningham said. “I just wanted her to know that ‘you’re worth it.’ With everything that has happened, our world is looking for hope. My whole life is about loving God and loving others. That’s who I am.”

Religion Today Summaries

Boston Marathon Good Samaritan Motivated by Faith

In a story that quickly went viral, 46-year-old Bill Cunningham of Sitka, Alaska, is the formerly unknown Good Samaritan who gave away his Boston Marathon medal in a spontaneous gesture of kindness, the Toronto Star reports. He is also the regional director of Alaska Young Life, and it’s clear his faith motivated his generosity.

25-year-old Laura Wellington was half a mile away from the finish line when the two bombs went off Monday. After learning that her boyfriend and family, who were waiting at the finish line for her, were fine, she sat on the edge of a street and wept out of relief. That’s when Cunningham appeared. He and his wife gave Wellington a blanket, and Cunningham asked her if she had finished the race. She said no.

“You’re a finisher in my eyes,” he told Wellington, taking off his medal and slipping it around her neck. Stunned by the stranger’s compassion, Wellington later posted the story to her Facebook page in hopes of reconnecting with him, and her post went viral.

“This couple reassured me that even though such a terrible thing happened, everything was going to be okay,” Wellington wrote.
the Kim family has tried to crush Christianity into oblivion for more than half a century.

On Friday, the North Korean government said it would not be able to guarantee the safety of embassies after April 10, and suggested that Russia, China, and Great Britain consider evacuating their diplomats. While the situation appears to be serious, governments are playing down the rhetoric from North Korea, assuming it represents yet another tantrum by a regime starving for attention, legitimacy, and economic aid.

Christians in North Korea are routinely tortured, imprisoned, and murdered. Private, non-state-sanctioned religious activity is prohibited. Anyone discovered engaging in clandestine religious activity is subject to arrest, torture, or even public execution. As many as 100,000 believers are thought to worship secretly in the country. Possessing a Bible, saying the words God or Jesus, and meeting together are all offenses punishable by death.

Republican state Rep. Jim Boyd asked Alisa Laport Snow, a lobbyist representing Florida’s Alliance of Planned Parenthood Affiliates, what would happen if a baby was born as a result of a botched abortion.

“We believe that any decision that’s made should be left up to the woman, her family and the physician,” Snow responded. When asked what Planned Parenthood physicians would do if the baby was “alive, breathing on a table, moving,” Snow said she didn’t know because she was not a physician.

She later reiterated her position that the decision should be “between the patient and the healthcare provider,” but Rep. Jose Oliva asked, “I think that at the point the patient would be the child struggling on the table, wouldn’t it?” Snow replied: “That’s a very good question. I don’t really know how to answer that.”

Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, abortionist Kermit Gosnell is currently on trial for doing exactly what Snow recommended—killing babies after they were born alive. Gosnell faces murder charges in the death of a 41-year-old woman who suffered a botched abortion, as well as the deaths of seven babies who were born alive through induced labor, then killed by Gosnell or his untrained staff. The abortionist is accused of snipping the babies’ spinal cords with scissors and other atrocities.

Planned Parenthood Lobbyist Champions Killing Babies Born Alive

A Florida Planned Parenthood official made a case for post-birth abortions last week at a hearing for a state bill requiring abortionists to provide medical assistance to a baby born alive, WORLD Magazine reports.

C. Trustworthy (Prov. 31:11).
D. Teacher (Prov. 31:26).

II. The Rewards of a Godly Mother
A. Honor (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-2).
B. Blessing from children & husband (Prov. 31:28).
C. Praise from all (Prov. 31:30).

Illustrations
Mom, the Preacher

Of all the proclamations of the Gospel someone may hear in his lifetime, perhaps the most frequent and most powerful is that of the ongoing faithfulness in word and deed of his mother.

There were four preachers in the family of famed pastor and author G. Campbell Morgan. Once, at a family reunion, a cousin asked, “Which Morgan is the greatest preacher?” One son looked at his father, then promptly replied, “Mother!”

Via Harry Van’t Kerkhoff
Not a Curse but a Blessing

Dr. Thomas Lambie, for many years a medical missionary in Ethiopia, said that while he was in Africa he learned something very significant from the natives. They often had to cross bridgeless streams, a difficult procedure because of the danger of being swept off their feet and carried downstream to great depths or hurled to death against the hidden rocks.

Dr. Lambie learned from the natives the best way to make such a hazardous crossing. The man about to cross found a large stone, the heavier the better, lifted it to his shoulder, and carried it across the stream as ballast. The extra weight of the stone kept his feet solidly on the bed of the stream so that he could cross safely without being swept away.

Thus, the spiritual man regards the heavy stones, the burdens he has to carry in life, not as curses as the natural man would tend to interpret them, but as steadying influences, as God's provisions enabling him to cross safely to the realm beyond.

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts

On Family

The family altar would alter many a family.

If your children look up to you, you’ve made a success of life’s biggest job.

These two anonymous

The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

Theodore M. Hesburgh

Time invested in children will always reap big dividends.

Old Union Reminder

The main problem in our society is that people are expected to raise children in their spare time.

Book of Living Quotations

It is a wise father who knows his own child.

William Shakespeare
Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever

Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

Father Abraham’s Answers from p. 16

1. Zedekiah (Jer. 34:1, 2).
2. Jeremiah: their ancestors had commanded them not to drink wine (Jer. 35:5, 6).
3. A scroll (Jer. 36:1–2). King Jehoahaz had the scroll burned (Jer. 36:22, 23); after which God commanded Jeremiah to write a second scroll addressed to King Jehoiakim, containing all the information on the first scroll (Jer. 36:27, 28).
4. They lifted the siege to fight the army which Pharaoh, king of Egypt, sent against them (Jer. 37:6).
5. Illed melach: an Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs in King Zedekiah’s palace (Jer. 39:6).
6. His sons were killed in his presence; his eyes were put out; he was bound with chains, and was carried to Babylon (Jer. 39:6, 7).
7. Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan (Jer. 40:5).
8. Ishmael, the son of Netamiah, the son of Hilkiah (Jer. 41:1, 2).
10. Baruch, the son of Neriah (Jer. 45:1, 5).

Answers for Acrostic Number 66

MICAH 7:8 - “Wisdom not against me. It multiplies when I fall. I shall arise when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.”

A. THEOREM
B. DOWN
C. MEMO
D. MINUS
E. CALLED
F. AMALGAM
G. STIRRED
H. JERUSALEM
I. GEM
J. LIST
K. SENDING
L. NORTH
M. SAVIETY

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, April 1997

Hidden Wisdom on next page
Hidden Wisdom: Bible Acrostic #68
by Mark A. Oshman

Solve the acrostic by using the clues 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 solving!

A. Equal to 57.2958° on the circumference of a circle
B. Arcadian king who helped Aeneas defeat the Rutilians
C. King Amaziah killed 10,000 Edomites here (3 wds.)
D. City in the territory given to the tribe of Judah (alt. spell.)
E. A helping theorem
F. One of King Ahasuerus’ wise men
G. “Neither give place to _______” (2 wds.)
H. City in central India
I. A son of Simeon
J. Hahum prophesied against this city
K. Engaged in peddling.
L. American Labor Leader (1913-1975)
M. “_______ thy cause with thy neighbor himself”