

Disciple Magazine



Equipping believers for deeper life

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Faithful All the Way Home

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Faithful All the Way Home

By Joe McKeever

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10b).

One morning in September, a phone call informed me of the death of Dr. Clarke Bozeman. This good man, nearly 90 years old, a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Columbus, Mississippi (where I served as pastor from 1974-86), and a veterinarian in that city for 50 years or more, had been in declining health for some time. His home-going was not unexpected. The funeral was a celebration of a life well-lived.

Two hours later, another call came from the same city; J. C. Perkins, longtime member of the First Baptist Church, prominent businessman, husband of Margaret Perkins (who has headed the church’s library and media center for a generation or longer), had an accident while working with his boat at the lake. Alone and unable to summon help, he died there.

Two good men, two supportive and loving families, two lives well-invested in service for God and mankind leaving a church and city filled with sadness.

At moments like this, we find comfort in a hundred places: in remembering a thousand events and incidents, in notes and mementoes around the house or in the office, in the hugs and soft words of friends, and in the nearness of those we love most and best. For disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing comforts like the assurances and promises of God’s word to His children.

Throughout this weekend, those two families will be opening God’s Word from time to time to claim anew His words to those who love Him. Friends who appear only for a few minutes of comfort will whisper scriptures which they have found most assuring. *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

The following Sunday, September 11, was the tenth anniversary of what shall ever be known in American history simply as “Nine-Eleven”. Pastors everywhere were sharing their own stories of that fateful day as spiritual applications for their people. I love to tell the story of Al Braca. This brother in the Lord has been in Heaven for a decade now, but his example and inspiration linger.

Al came to know Christ perhaps 30 years ago after the Lord healed their little daughter of a serious disease. He was so overcome by God’s goodness he gave his life to Jesus and was radically changed.

Al worked for the brokerage firm of Cantor Fitzgerald, occupying (I believe) the 104th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. It’s fair to assume that his co-workers were a religious mixture of every faith, doctrine, ideology and theology, located as they were in Manhattan. When Braca began sharing his faith openly, not everyone appreciated it. They quickly branded him “The Rev.” To most, it was not a compliment.

An odd thing began happening, however. From time to time, individuals in the office would slip privately to Al for counsel or prayer on a personal issue, a marital crisis, or a problem with a teenager at home.

On that day a decade ago when the planes hit the towers, no one knew the buildings would collapse and that nearly 3,000 people would perish before sundown. Those above where the planes hit had an hour or more to learn what had happened and realize the precarious nature of their predicament. What they did at Cantor Fitzgerald is the good part of this story.

After 9-11, families of victims began calling one another to offer what comfort they could as well as to learn more about what had gone on with their loved ones. Mrs. Braca began getting calls about Al.

A man called. “I talked to my wife before the towers fell. She said, ‘Al has us all in a circle. We’re holding hands and he’s leading us in prayer.’”

A woman called. “My husband said, ‘The Rev is up here praying for us all.’”

Lisa Chilson Rose, who chronicled Al’s story in her book *As the Towers Fell*, has no doubt that when those buildings fell to earth that day, Al Braca took a lot of people to Heaven with him. That’s what faithfulness will do. *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”*

“Be faithful...;” this is our command. What does it mean to be faithful? It means to live by faith, by a confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ that sends us into the world to represent Him, to serve Him by loving and serving

others. To live by faith means to obey Him and remain steadfast for Him against overwhelming odds, in the absence of good feelings, even when circumstances force us to stand alone.

The Lord said, “*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*” (Luke 18:8). When Jesus returns to earth, will He find people still serving and obeying Him? Will He find people who worship Him by faith? People who are giving to Him by faith? People who love their enemies, pray for those who spitefully use them, and bless those who curse them (in the language Matt. 5:44). Will He find anyone being faithful?

“*Be faithful until death...*” this is our goal. I’ll be sketching someone (most of you know I’m also a cartoonist) and even though the whole process is over within two minutes, often the subject will say, “How much longer do I have to smile?” My response is always the same: “For the rest of your life! You have a great smile. The rest of us love to see it.” Parents on a trip grow tired of hearing the same question from the back seat: “How much longer?”

The Lord told the church at Smyrna, “*Be faithful all the way home—unto death.*” And how much longer is that? No one knows. For Dr. Bozeman, death came in his 90th year. That’s a long time. For J. C. Perkins, it was 15 or 20 years sooner than that. Pick up the newspaper for any major city today and turn to the obituary page. I can guarantee you two things: 1) at least half the people on these saddest of all pages did not know one week ago they would be featured here, and 2) if you are old enough to read, you can almost always find someone there younger than you.

Do not assume, my friend, that you will be given 90 years on this earth and thus have plenty of time to prepare for the final exam. No one knows. It’s far better to be ready and live every day prepared for whatever the future holds. Writer William Saroyan once said, “I always knew that people live, they get old, and they die. But somehow I just always felt an exception would be made in my case.” No exception. He died in 1983.

“*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life;*” this is our promise. The crown mentioned here was not the glittering thing we generally think of, like those seen in the Tower of London. Rather, it was a small

garland of leaves given to victors in athletic competition. And the “*crown of life*”? **Life is the crown.** The reward we are given in Heaven is eternal and abundant life with the Lord in Heaven. We could ask for nothing better, nothing greater.

The greatest pain death brings to the living is separation from those we love most. But, likewise, the best reward we could ask for in Heaven is to live forever with those we love most, and no one fits that category more than the Lord Jesus Himself.

“*And so we will be with the Lord forever*” (1 Thess. 4:17). What’s the greatest thing about Heaven? The Lord is there. “*I saw no temple in [Heaven], for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb*” (Rev. 21:22-23).

There were tears shed at Dr. Bozeman’s funeral services. Even though the family called it a celebration of his life, they will miss this gentle soul who was their mast, their patriarch, their rock. Tears were at Mr. Perkins’ funeral, even though they too gave thanks to the Lord for the character of the man, his faith in Christ, and the promises of God. In both cases, those who gathered in the First Baptist Church of Columbus lifted their voices in praise to God and in thanksgiving for His faithfulness.

Interesting, isn’t it? He promises eternal life’s blessings to all who are faithful to Him “*unto death*” and we celebrate the faithfulness of the Lord to us in this life and after death. That’s why the Gospel is and always has been good news.

As Ken Chafin used to tell his preacher boys in seminary years ago, “*Fellows, when you stand at the funeral of a godly man or woman, say it loud and make it strong. Because you’ve got the only word in town.*” Amen. Thank you, Lord.

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Expositional Preaching Changes Lives

By John Meador

Originally published as two separate articles in Pulpit Helps, August and September 2006.

Expositional preaching has fallen on hard times. In an entertainment-hungry world, and with an increasingly entertainment-hungry Church, it would appear that there is

just too much serious stuff in exposition for it to appeal to anyone today. We think it doesn’t have the pinpoint “zing” that we can create by delivering “message candy” of hot topics and controversial issues, so pastors are rejecting exposition in growing numbers, it seems.

One state-wide church leader of a major denomination recently shared with me that he could name only three pastors in over 1,000 churches in his state that to his knowledge used exposition on a regular basis. The result, he says, is growth without depth. It means a growing number of people are not being equipped to deal with life, yet are in church week after week.

It means that Christ-followers have little more success than the world in overcoming the challenges of life, because their leaders are doing little more than touching the surface of the truth that sets men free. Believers cannot handle the serious stuff of life, because they aren't hearing the serious stuff of the Scripture. Faith still comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

It is hard to argue with the statistics that demonstrate how little difference there is between the world and the church in America. George Barna's research reveals an alarming trend. When surveying "born-again" Christians, that is those who state that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and who believe they'd go to heaven when they die because of Christ's death on the cross for them, here are the results:

- Half of born-again Christians (46%) agree that Satan is "not a living being but is a symbol of evil" (2005).
- About one-third of born-again (33%) believe that if people are good enough they can earn a place in heaven (2005).
- 28% of born-again agree that "while He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins, like other people," compared to 42% of all adults (2005).
- Born-again Christians are more likely than non-born again individuals to accept moral absolutes. Specifically, 32% of born-again said they believe in moral absolutes (2002).

As leaders, we must answer to that problem, one way or another. These are the kinds of people that are in our churches, so why would **less than half** believe that Satan is a literal being, **and over a third** believe that works will get one into heaven? How could **over one fourth** of those folks surveyed believe that Jesus committed sins? Why is it that **only one third** of those who are born again believe in moral absolutes?

Need I answer that question? Oh, well, I will anyway: they are not being taught what the Scripture says by their pastors and leaders where they worship! And, by default, if it is not important to the leaders, the followers don't believe it is important for them to go to the Scriptures at home for themselves.

Years ago, while pastoring a church that was experiencing slow, but steady growth, I found myself at the crossroads of life and ministry. Just down the road, less than one mile away was a burgeoning mega-church that was doubling in attendance every year. I knew the pastor was a good man, as creative a communicator as you can find, and

I knew their growth was at least in part due to his style of communication.

I found myself wanting to either criticize his methods or copy them. Why? Because I wanted his results! My ultimate decision, however, was not to criticize him, nor to emulate him, but to ask: "What has God called **me** to do? What has He promised to bless?"

The conclusion, brought on by many other factors as well, was life-changing, both for me and the people I lead. Isaiah 55:11 was a verse God branded onto my heart: "*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*" Reading the entire passage, Isaiah 55:6-13, brought me to realize that God's ways of reaching and changing men are far better than mine. His thoughts have far more significance and power than even the best of my ideas and efforts. His word is like the seed that is planted—it sprouts true fruit that demonstrates changed lives.

His Word does what only the Word can do. The Word builds faith; it increases one's knowledge of God; it builds endurance in times of temptation; it gives direction and guidance for everyday living. It convicts of sin and corrects into the right way of living. In a word, it transforms.

If we are to address these challenges of belief through the preaching of the Word, I believe it is important to recognize that we live in an "X-Rated" world. In other words, very little is censored today. It is all hanging out there for everyone to see and experience. Explicit movies and pictures sell. Whether we're talking about sex, war, violence, or politics, people want the raw edition. They want to see what has been forbidden. They want to look, then decide for themselves whether it was good or bad. This is the world we live in—it is what it is.

How do you think "G-Rated" preaching fares in such a world? I mean preaching that covers only the safe stuff. It is preaching that avoids the controversial issues of the Word, and preaching that tries to make everyone happy. In my estimation, this kind of preaching doesn't fare too well. It introduces a "blah" factor to the service, and it fails to equip people to deal with what they have to face every day (as evidenced by the belief statistics above).

The Church of the 1960s was criticized for not taking on the issues of the day. While the Vietnam War raged overseas, and the national response created division at home, the Church seemed silent. While sexual freedom began its rampage, little was being said from the pulpits of our land about such things, even though the Word has much to say about each of those issues. Did God give us a bland Bible that is ill-suited for communicating with a world hungry for answers? God forbid we think that!

I believe it's time for "X-Rated" preaching. That is, we need to learn to preach with very little censored. Every word, every key thought, every nuance of the passage

should be laid out for all to see and experience. Explicit preaching convicts! Whether we're preaching a text that speaks to sex, violence, marriage, or money, the attention of people in the congregation will be riveted to the Word as it pierces like a sword and cuts like a surgeon's scalpel.

Preaching this way involves three key elements:

1) It is eXpositional. By that, I mean that this kind of preaching takes the systematic or general approach of going word-by-word, and verse-by-verse through a text, unpacking the truth—and leaving no ideas out. When a preacher takes his people through a book, chapter, or text, he is bringing more than what he himself chooses to bring to the pulpit. He is bringing what the Lord has chosen. It is sometimes awkward, but never boring.

2) It eXposes the text in every way. It exposes the culture, the context, and the people to whom it was first written. It allows the text to come alive, with specifics and examples that rivet the listener to how God addressed the issues of that day. When we honor the text, we keep from dumbing-down the power of His Word. We prevent the practice of steering clear of controversial issues. We equip our people to take on the tough stuff, and remind them that God has something to say about everything.

3) It eXegetes the words of the text. The words themselves have incredible meaning. Paul noted that “*All Scripture is inspired [God-breathed]...*” (2 Tim. 3:16). Simply, this means that every single word God gave us was a carefully chosen word issued forth by the Holy Spirit Himself as He spoke through yielded men. To exegete the words means to take the direction of the message from the actual words and the actual text. People would far rather hear about what God says about the subject than hear someone say what they think God may have said. There is nothing blasé about “*thus says the Lord*”!

In the same way explicit pictures leave mental images in people's minds that stay with them for many

months and years, the explicit images of the Bible are designed to help people remember what God has said and done. The original languages that we work with when we prepare sermons are languages that flavor and color words in far greater ways than our own modern language. They create a vivid imagery that God intended His people to see.

For example, in preaching through the Book of Joshua, I brought our people to one of the most unforgettable images in the Old Testament. After crossing the Jordan, God asked Joshua to circumcise the entire younger generation, then called the place Gibeath-haaraloth, or “the hill of foreskins” (Josh. 5:3). Take a moment to think about that one. I don't believe anyone in the congregation was dozing off when I unpacked that Hebrew name. They were all pretty much awake and most of their mouths were open at the stark picture God Himself painted. And I'm **really** sure that those Israelites remembered.

Now, I could have skipped that part, but what better image could be found to remind people of the importance of circumcising the flesh of their hearts before going forward with God? I would have never, in all my creative life, come up with that word picture. But God did. We should never be ashamed to speak about what God has written to us.

My point is this. God's Word is filled with creativity and powerful word pictures, and is **in itself** the truth that people need. When we are as serious about using it all as He intends for us to be, people hear, remember, and are transformed by the truth we preach.

I challenge you today to make thorough, uncensored preaching your practice. By doing so, you honor God's Word for what it is—the all-sufficient Truth that sets men free.

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Remembering the Great Commission: Seven Thoughts on Christ's Biggest Point

By Justin Lonas

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, February 2007.

“*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’*” (Matt. 28:18-20, NASB).

From the very first Sunday school class we attend to the very last missionary presentation we listen to, the verses of Christ's “Great Commission” are drummed into

us. Is it possible that we've forgotten the powerful meaning of this passage through its frequent repetition?

To treat the final words of Mathew's Gospel as anything less than the crucial command of the entire Bible is to misunderstand the theme of reconciliation that runs through both the Old Testament and the New. God promised reconciliation almost immediately following the Fall (Gen. 3:15), and His plan culminates in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the subsequent disciple-making by the church (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20). I'd like to offer seven points of exposition from this passage that all believers would do well to remember.

I. The Great Commission Is Made Possible by God's Sovereignty

We are told to "*make disciples of all nations*" because we are under Jesus' authority (v. 18). He was sent to reconcile all humanity by the Father, and in turn He commissions us as His "foot soldiers" to continue the mission as we see in the 2 Corinthians passage. In doing so, He reminds us that the task is not ours alone, but that He is using us as tools to complete God's divine plan—He enables the "*go*."

II. Disciple-Making Is Natural to the Christian Life

In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur makes a just comparison of this command to the dominion mandate in Gen. 1:28 ("*Be fruitful and multiply...*"): "Reproduction in kind is natural to life. The call to make disciples is stated only once because it is natural for the new creation to be reproductive." In other words, the Commission should almost be "second nature" to believers. Making disciples should follow as naturally as baptism and taking communion once a person is saved—we should stop treating outreach like an activity in our churches and start reinforcing it as a way of life.

III. Discipleship Is Coaching, Not Sales

You cannot "close the deal" on someone's salvation—only God has the power to do that. Understanding the Greek word translated as "*make disciples*" in verse 19 ("*teach*" in the KJV) can shed some light on this. *Mathēteuō* in its transitive form means "to enroll as a scholar," or "instruct." This illustrates the idea that disciple-making is both a process and an event, just as the first day of school is both a specific time and the beginning of a much larger process of education. The word provides a fuller understanding of evangelism as an active guiding of someone toward Christ, rather than viewing it as simply "depositing" the Truth in their ears and asking for an immediate response. This active call is made more so by its coupling with the command to "*go*"—we are not asked to simply sit back and wait for unbelievers to come to us but rather told to seek them out and pursue their reconciliation.

IV. The Great Commission Is a Standing Order, Not a Goal to Be Attained

Much has been made of the interpretation of 2 Peter 3:12, "*looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God*", which some read as implying that we can speed up the Lord's return by evangelizing all people. While some scholars agree that this can be an acceptable reading of the text, many believers have latched onto it to the detriment of real disciple-making.

If we see Christ's command as a goal, our tendency is to rush to its completion, spending our resources and time to spread the Gospel to the four winds with little thought to the results of our sowing beyond a numerical representation

of "decisions." When we attempt to rush the outcome, we deliver a product that may not actually represent what is desired.

This approach has largely hijacked the nature of evangelism—many Christians are intimidated out of disciple-making when they aren't seeing immediate results. The biblical model is one of longsuffering personal interaction and real conversion—i.e., cultivating a lifestyle of growth and learning in Christ that leads to future disciples being made. It is not as simple as a head count at a church service.

While there is never a drawback to the hearing of God's Word, we cannot abandon the personal nature of conversion. It is often not enough that people hear the Word but that they see it make a difference in our lives, especially in regards to what lengths we are willing to go so that they can understand it more fully.

V. The Great Commission Is for Every Christian

Another unintended side effect of the goal-oriented approach is the division of the church into "those who go" and "those who send." While it is very true that the body is variously gifted (Eph. 4:11-13), the command to make disciples is one that applies to all of us. It is perfectly right for the body to send out those who are especially equipped to bring the Gospel to another culture, but not at the expense of the larger command. When we put support for world missions in the place of (rather than alongside) our own responsibility to the ongoing ministry of reconciliation, we are not honoring the fullness of God's command.

VI. Disciple-Making Should Be Taught from the Pulpit Often and by Example

Pastors have to lead the way in bringing the Great Commission to life for the church. Unless church leaders continually remind the church of its responsibility, Christians will not turn from complacency to action. Just preaching it is not enough. Pastors should lead by example in witnessing to the lost, and actively engaging in friendships, conversations, and social interaction with those who have not yet received Christ.

VII. Discipleship Starts with Prayer

Many Christians today are so cloistered within the church and parachurch social groups that they have little to no meaningful contact with nonbelievers. This will change only if we pray for the Lord to open our eyes to opportunities to become involved with those who need Him. Truly loving our neighbors as ourselves has to involve disciple-making. All too often, we forget the Commission (for a variety of reasons), and we cannot commit to make it a daily priority without the Lord's guidance, insight, and careful prodding to remember His commands.

These seven points are by no means exhaustive. They are, however, a reminder of the crucial importance of

this command to our lives. May we never allow the meaning of our mission to be lost on us for any reason. May we work to allow our churches to sift through all their programs to return to the central focus of the Christian experience. May we be faithful to make disciples for Christ.

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

Threats of Betrayal and Martyrdom

Matthew 24:9-14

From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers

[9] The false notion that believers are exempt from affliction (*thlipsis* [2347], squeezing, suffering) is being spread today. In this section, Jesus said this is not true. Here *tóte* (5119), “then,” covers the whole period from Christ’s first coming to His triumphant return in glory to reign on earth after the tribulation (Matt. 25:31).

Given the nature of the persecution that follows and the reference to endurance to the end (v. 13), the “then’s” in verses 9 and 10 extend through the time of the “Great Tribulation” specified in verse 21. But the emphasis of *thlipsis* without the definite article (as in v. 21) is on the quality of persecution as opposed to its identity or duration. It is then that “they (an undefined subject but presumably agents of the Antichrist) will deliver (from *paradidōmi* [3860], to deliver)” (a.t.) believers into affliction by superior but temporary physical force. As the devil focuses on earth, having been cast out of heaven, he “knows that he has only a short time” (Rev. 12:12; a.t.). Panic sets in, and he will rage against the victorious “saints” (Rev. 13:7).

His agents will “kill” (from *apokteinō* [615]; in this context, murder) many believers unjustly during this time. As all nations hated the Jews, so the world will “hate” (from *miséō* [3404]) Christians during this season (Matt. 10:22; John 15:18, 19). Believers do not need to do anything to incite hatred. Resentment is aroused simply by bearing and declaring the name of Christ before unbelievers. During this time of intense persecution, believers will rise to the call of the hour to be on a polite but an assertive offensive.

The last persons saved in the tribulation period are the fruit of assertive believers that includes two special “witnesses” from heaven (Rev. 11:2-3). The beast rises out of the abyss to war against these two witnesses and kills them (Rev. 11:7). During this time, the devil furiously attacks believers (Rev. 12:17). Hatred and persecution will be intense against the physical church, which will be sifted to separate true believers from false (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). All offenses (from *skándalon* [4625]) will be uniquely dealt with by divine intervention (Matt. 13:41).

[10] Hypocrites will be “offended” (from *skandalízō* [4624], to trip up, to scandalize) as their secret unbelief is exposed when they desert Jesus Christ. Persecution brings out publicly those who “have no root in themselves, but are temporary (from *próskairos* [4340] from *prós* [4314], toward, pertaining to; and *kairós* [2540], a season)” (Mark 4:17; a.t.). These will be “offended”, quickly falling away under trial. By contrast, true believers are snatched away by (1 Thess. 4:17), but never from (John 10:28), the omnipotent hand of Christ.

[11] From within the ranks of the deceived multitudes, false leaders will arise. Here they are called “false prophets” (*pseudoprophētai* [5578]) who “shall deceive” (*planēsousi* [4105]) many of their own kind. They will be blind guides of the blind.

[12] Jesus warned His disciples that lawlessness will be “multiplied” (from *plēthunō* [4129], to increase, to make full). Anarchy, the casting off of legal and moral restraints, is the most detrimental attack on society. The increase of sin will correlate with an objective relaxation of the law. We see this in our society today. Our laws condone both homosexuality and abortion (see Rom. 1:26, 27). More and more people will follow such “death styles” where “iniquity (*anomia* [458], lawlessness) shall abound.”

Can you imagine what human behavior will be like when no enforceable laws will govern conduct? The result will be chaos and anarchy, a great milieu for a campaigning Antichrist’s promises of peace, stability, and prosperity. When people become a law unto themselves, they will clamor for a universal dictator. Even satanic order is preferable to the evil apex of anarchy, and from Jesus’ words that imply that Satan is not against Satan, we can infer that Satan himself would prefer evil rule to an evil anarchy that would pit every demon against every other demon.

“The love (*agápē* [26]) of many (i.e., the majority)” probably refers to the unbelieving majority. We should not be distracted by the term *agápē*, which Jesus (using the verb form *agapāō* [25]) said exists between “sinners” (Luke 6:32) in the Pharisees’ love for the “chief seats” of the synagogue (Luke 11:43), and between a person and an evil master like money (Luke 16:13). Accordingly, “shall wax cold,” translating a verb form of *psuchō* ([5594], to render

cool, to chill, akin to *pnéō* [4154], to breathe or blow on in order to cool), refers to the degeneration of what little love exists between unbelievers. Possibly their love moves from cold to colder; certainly nothing implies that it was “hot” (Rev. 3:15-16) in the first place. Moreover, with lawlessness and sin abounding, even some believers’ first love for Christ will cool (Rev. 2:4).

[13] However, a minority will exist whose first love for Christ does not cool off. This group is introduced by the adversative particle “but” (*dé* [1161]), followed by the expression “he that shall endure (*hupomeínas*, the aorist participle of *hupoménoō* [5278], to persevere against adverse circumstances).”

The adversity of this time is highlighted in verses 9–14. Believers will be “hated of all nations” (v. 9). At that time, many will be offended (v. 10). Many false prophets (religious leaders) shall arise to deceive many (v. 11). Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold (v. 12). In the midst of this, however, a minority endures: “But the one who endures...” (NASB). God saves individuals even out of wicked generations (Acts 2:40). John 1:12 says, “As many as (from *hósos* [3745], as many individuals) received him, to them gave he power to become the sons (children, from *téknōn* [5043]) of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

Personal admission to the kingdom of God is secured by personal faith. “Every one” (*hékastos* [1538]) stands alone before the Lord in judgment (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:13). To emphasize personal victory in the end of the age, the demonstrative pronoun “this one” (*hoútos* [3778], the masculine demonstrative pronoun), translated “the same” in the King James Version, is used, followed by the future verb “shall be saved” (from *sōzō* [4982]). The verb does not refer to salvation from sin but, specifically, salvation from the persecution of the end times (Matt. 10:22; 24:22; Mark 13:20).

God’s rescue is accomplished even if believers are killed (v. 9). In 2 Timothy 4:17-18, Paul uses both verbs, *rhúomai* ([4506], to deliver), and *sōzō*. They have the same meaning, which is to deliver from some objective danger. Paul, for example, “was delivered (from *rhúomai*) out of the

mouth of the lion” (2 Tim. 4:17). He says also that the Lord will deliver (also from *rhúomai*) him “from every evil work...unto his heavenly kingdom” (v. 18). This will be the ultimate victory for Christians who are rescued from the oppression of wickedness and spiritual death (2 Cor. 1:10).

The word “end” (*télos* [5056]) in the phrase “unto the end” certainly means the end of this life. This seems to be the case when we compare Revelation 2:10, “Be thou faithful unto death,” with verse 2:26, “He who overcomes and keeps My works to the end” (a.t.). It is a simple inference that “unto death” is equivalent to “until the end.” If “the end” meant when Christ returns, then the Lord would expect a first-century believer to be faithful not just “unto [his] death” but millennia beyond it.

[14] The Gospel will be “proclaimed (from *kērússō* [2784]) in all the inhabited earth (*oikouménē* [3625])” (a.t.). In Revelation, John gives us a glimpse of the impact of this preaching in the scene of an innumerable crowd from all nations victoriously coming out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:9, 14).

The Greek word for “witness” here is the neuter noun *martúriōn* (3142) and probably refers to positively witnessing for Christ, but it could refer to a negative witnessing against the nations, pointing out their sins. Nations may reject the Gospel, but an innumerable crowd of individuals out of every nation will exit the tribulation in victory (see previous paragraph).

In the day of condemnation, all nonbelievers will be faced with the testimony (*martúriōn*) that they had an opportunity to receive Christ but rejected it. Since “the Gospel of the kingdom” will reach the entire inhabited earth, no one will be able to claim ignorance.

“And then shall come (from *hēkō* [2240]) the end (*télos* [5056])” (a.t.), that is, the consummation (*suntéleia*) of the age. After these successive events, the end will occur at a specific time (*tóte*, then; see v. 9).

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.

Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

How Blessed: The Promises of God to Those Who Fear Him

Psalms 127 & 128

Editor’s Note: Originally, I had planned for last month’s article on Psalm 90 to round out our series on selected Psalms. These two psalms have been on my mind lately as our family grows, so I’m extending the series to include them. Next month will begin a new study of a New Testament book.

If we learn nothing else from the Old Testament, three things at least should be crystal clear to us. 1) God is holy, omnipotent, and exists from eternity past. 2) God created all that there is and is actively involved in His creation and with His people. 3) God is the source of all good things in heaven and on earth and freely blesses those who trust in Him.

Two psalms, 127 and 128, succinctly and eloquently bring out these truths, particularly as they relate to human society and the family. The first is attributed to Solomon, the second is anonymous, but of a similar enough theme that it makes sense to look at both together. Both of these are “Songs of Ascents”, part of a group of psalms the Jews sang together as they made their way up to Jerusalem for the Passover and other festivals. They would have served to remind the people of their provision from the Lord and their call to fear and serve Him.

Psalm 127 begins, *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain”* (127:1). Simply and beautifully, Solomon reminds us that God is sovereign over all the affairs of men. If we set out to establish ourselves without the Lord’s leading and provision, we are forgetting the very foundation of prosperity, and will surely fail. By the same token, if we cling to what the Lord has already blessed us with rather than to Him, our best vigilance will not keep our possessions secure. Solomon here also bursts the bubble of false security that physical structures and human government offer, urging us to rest in God alone.

James states this idea more imperatively in the New Testament: *“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be life tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’”* (James 4:13-15). The message of both passages is that God is the author and keeper of all things and the source of all good gifts. We should acknowledge Him as such and shape our lives to His will through prayer, trusting Him in all things.

James’ exhortation equally parallels the next verse of the psalm: *“It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep”* (127:2). All the effort we undertake to gain wealth and security in this life is a *“chasing after the wind”* (in the language of Ecclesiastes) if we do so outside of God’s plan. Moreover, Solomon reminds us that the well-being and provision God gives to those whom He loves is not due to their merit but due to His grace.

This is not to say that those who follow the Lord are to be slothful—God gives to them *“even in...sleep”* not *“because they sleep.”* That is, the blessings of the Lord come on His timetable, not on the basis of our earning them. An analogous New Testament passage is Jesus’ promise from the Sermon on the Mount: *“...do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap*

nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?... Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these” (Matt. 6:25-31). When we follow the Lord, we are to be about His business; then He will take care of all the things we need to live.

Solomon then moves from observations about the structures of society to the structure of the household, and from how we should trust God for present security to how we should trust God for future security. *“Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate”* (127:3-5).

His statement stands in stark contrast to today’s prevailing philosophy that views children as a hindrance to the “good life”, a problem to be solved, and nothing more than an option for married couples. Scripture, exemplified in this passage, is emphatic that children are a gift from God to be treasured. Why? As Solomon’s metaphor of the warrior and his arrows displays, our godly children are our defense *“in the gate”*—when others despise our testimony, the heritage of righteousness passed from generation to generation speaks loudly. Our children, whom God has blessed us with, honor and defend us when they persevere in the faith of their parents.

More than that, our children serve to strengthen our own faith. They confront us by their innocent ignorance with our own ignorance of God’s ways; they try us by their disobedience and show us how we ourselves treat the Lord; they drive us to prayer for their health, safety, and maturity; they demand a God-honoring level of honesty, consistency, and morality from us that we are slow to pursue on our own. Even from a purely practical standpoint, children provide assistance in the household and family business; they are our protection in old age and the legacy of our hopes and dreams in this life. One only need look at the demographics of Europe, Japan, China, and (to a lesser extent) the United States to see the devastation that waits for a society that disdains and destroys its offspring.

This part of God’s good provision is new to my own life (my wife and I have two very young daughters), and something I had given little thought to until recent years. Now, I find that *“children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward,”* is my constant prayer when trying to console our newborn at 3 a.m. or telling our toddler to stop whining for the 47th time. I’m sure it will continue to be on my lips when I lay awake worrying about them as teenagers and adults.

I have to remind myself of the promise of this psalm just as often as I am confronted with the secular lies about how much better life would be without the frustrations of parenthood. These truths encourage me to

take the long view and recognize that these precious girls are a direct result of God's grace and part of His plan for my wife and me. "Children are a gift of the Lord" to be enjoyed and cherished, not a hassle to be endured or a cross to bear.

These gifts of God are reaffirmed in Psalm 128. Whereas the wording of Psalm 127 is distinctly Solomonic—observational, reminiscent of the pithy wisdom-literature of Proverbs & Ecclesiastes—Psalm 128 has the feel of a priestly oration. Psalm 127 looks at mankind and shows the virtue of acknowledging God in all things; Psalm 128 proclaims the blessing of God on all who fear and obey Him.

The first four verses of this psalm state the facts of God's blessing: "How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord" (128:1-4). This clearly mirrors the statements of Psalm 127, declaring that God provides for those who seek to do His will (though adding that it is through the blessing of work), that peace and joy result from following God, and that children are a great blessing.

In the closing verses, the psalmist moves to call for a specific blessing on the follower of God: "The Lord bless

you from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!" (128:5-6). The Israelites at the time this was written would've made the connection between blessing and Jerusalem, the center of temple worship where God's work among His people was most clearly displayed. Also, the blessing of long life and peace was a common cultural benediction.

Looking back at both these psalms with New Testament eyes, I believe there is a prophetic significance to this closing. Through Jesus Christ, who came to make an eternal sacrifice for the sins of men at Jerusalem, the Lord indeed will "bless...from Zion" all who call upon His name. Through Him also we are given the gift of eternal life, so that we may see our "children's children" not just in this life, if we live long enough, but to a thousand generations in the presence of our Lord.

Through both these psalms, we are exhorted to strive after the things of God, to honor Him by our lives of obedience, and to rejoice at His manifold good gifts. He is the Creator, sustainer, preserver, provider, and ruler of all. When we recognize this and place our trust in Him, He will share with us every good thing as He sees fit. "How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways."

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

Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

We Persuade Men

Editor's Note: David was unable to provide a column for this issue, so we have pulled this piece from our archives. Originally published in Pulpit Helps, August 2005.

Text: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences" (2 Cor. 5:11).

Thought: The Apostle Paul stressed the costliness of the ministry in terms of trials and travail, but here he proceeds to remind the readers of the mission of the church in the world, namely, to "persuade men" of the validity of the Gospel. He points out that there must be:

I. The Revealing Power of Divine Light

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (v. 11). The word "therefore" reminds us that the apostle was still defending against his critics, who charged him with lack of integrity. But he reminds them that he needed no outward evidence to prove his honesty of character; his occasion of glorying was based upon what

God had done in his heart. His enemies labeled him as "mad", but the sheer sanity of his conduct effected a revealing light—exposing sin, on one hand, and exalting righteousness on the other.

II. The Redeeming Power of Divine Love

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). The apostle is speaking here not of his love for Christ, but rather of Christ's love for him. He discovered that the redeeming love of Christ not only compelled the surrender of the Christian but also impelled him into service. The substitutionary character of Christ's death is the fact that He "died for all," and when we have identified ourselves with His death we shall find that self no longer dominates our lives, for the Spirit of God has filled us with a love that must flow out in service to others.

III. The Renewing Power of Divine Life

"Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ

according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:16-17). In these two verses Paul illustrated how this determination to live no longer for self but rather for Christ finds practical expression. When a person is identified with Christ in His death and resurrection, there is a new conception of man. He will no longer judge an individual by external appearances—

"according to the flesh"—nor indeed will he think of Christ in that manner, as he once did.

Thrust: "The most unanswerable argument for Christianity is a transparent Christian."

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

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

He Looks Out of a Different Window

Song: "People Need the Lord"

"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17). *"I will sing of lovingkindness and justice, To You, O Lord, I will sing praises"* (Ps. 101:1).

Both Greg Nelson and Phill McHugh grew up in the Midwest: Greg is from Bismarck, North Dakota, and Phill from Aberdeen, South Dakota. As a team they have written scores of songs, some of which have already become standards and will be sung by Christians around the world until the Lord returns.

Greg said of Phill, his co-writer, the master poet, "He is a songwriter who has that certain 'something' that you can't put your hand on—a gift from God. Wishing and hoping for his ability is fruitless. You can hone it, but you can't own it completely, apart from God's endowment. He looks out of a different window."

Greg was born in 1948 into the home of musical parents, Corliss and Irene Nelson. He learned piano and theory from his mother. By age twenty-one Greg was conductor of the Bismarck Civic Orchestra, a position he maintained for several years.

Phill, born in 1951, to Frank and Beatrice McHugh, had very little formal music training outside of a few piano lessons. As a college-age young man, he became involved with the culture of the late 1960s, traveling and performing in clubs of various kinds. Phill said, "All of this affected me a great deal and drove me to look for answers. I began to read the Bible on my own, which started a process that led to my conversion."

In an interview in 1989, Greg told me that he and Phill, at that point, had written more than fifty songs together. Greg and Phill gave me the story behind what is unquestionably their most popular song to date.

"We were trying to write a song one day and spent most of the morning talking about ideas. We decided, about lunchtime, to go to a restaurant near my office in Nashville. After we were seated, a waitress came to our table, and as she approached us, she smiled. Yet it seemed that her eyes

were so empty. She was trying to convey a cheery attitude, but her face seemed to say something else. She took our order and walked away.

"We looked at each other, and one of us said, 'She needs the Lord: We then began looking around the restaurant at all of the people. They, too, seemed to have an emptiness in their faces. We sensed a real heaviness in our hearts as we watched them.

"Suddenly we realized that all of those people needed the Lord. Just as quickly, we both thought, 'We need to write that—people need the Lord.' We finished our meal and went back to my office and sat down to write what was in our hearts. The pictures from the restaurant that remained in our minds, coupled with the realization that millions of people around the world are also groping for some ray of light, gave rise to 'People Need the Lord.'

"God has His own timing, and He orchestrates all things under His control. Consequently, it was three years before the song was recorded. We had tried to interest several people in the song, but they just didn't 'get it.' The song was finally presented to Steve Green—he 'got it.'"

Phill agrees that it is the most often used of all of their songs. I remember that I heard it sung by two teenagers on New Providence Island, about 150 miles off the Florida coast, in a small church made up mostly of Haitians. As Amy and Tina stood to sing the song that often seems to missionaries to be the most meaningful song ever written, I remember that I had never "really" heard that song until that occasion—as I looked into the faces of those poor, needy people.

The element that makes the song meaningful to almost every Christian who hears it is the infectious melody that carries its lyrics, driving the heart cry of lost humanity right into our very souls.

I hope you "get it". You and I don't have to go to a foreign land, such as Africa, Asia, South America, or China, to find people who are without Christ. We need only to go across the aisle at work, at school, at the office, or

across the driveway to the house next door. People Need the Lord!

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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

Francis Schaeffer and L'Abri

Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984) was “among the most influential conservative evangelical leaders in recent decades.” His 23 books were translated into more than 25 languages. He lectured throughout Europe and the U.S. at major secular and Christian universities.

His “unique gift was his ability to proclaim biblical truth and the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that combined spiritual and intellectual integrity with practical loving care.”

Born in Philadelphia, he grew up attending a liberal Presbyterian church, but actually became an agnostic during high school. After reading widely in philosophy he turned to the Bible and discovered that it is truth “and the only adequate source for answers to life’s basic questions.”

In 1930 he came to know the Lord and the direction of his life changed decisively. He began attending Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, graduating magna cum laude in 1935. He was named the “outstanding Christian” in his class.

During his college and seminary years the modernist-fundamentalist controversy raged. His own denomination, the Northern Presbyterian Church, was torn by bitter conflict when theological liberals took control. In one meeting a youth speaker “preached on why the Bible is not God’s Word and why Jesus is not the Son of God.” Francis, still a young Christian, rose to defend orthodox Christianity.

Then another student, Edith Seville, “gave an articulate defense based upon the Scriptures and the view of renowned scholar and apologist J. Gresham Machen.” Three years later they were married; their life over the next 49 years was characterized “by the common defense of the faith.”

Next Schaeffer entered Westminster Theological Seminary, the conservative alternative to his denominations liberal Princeton Theological Seminary. He studied under Machen, Cornelius Van Til, and others. He later transferred to Faith Theological Seminary (Wilmington, Del.), and after graduation, he began a series of pastorates in Pennsylvania, then was called to the Bible Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri.

In 1947 Schaeffer was granted leave to tour Europe, still recovering from World War II. There he observed the

spiritual needs of the Church. Next the Schaeffers moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, where they established Children for Christ, a missionary work for boys and girls. Schaeffer also ministered throughout Europe, warning against the dangers of liberalism.

In 1955 he founded L’Abri (French for “the shelter”) Fellowship to aid men and women who were searching for help. This faith venture operated on these principles: 1) They would not ask for money, making their needs known only to God. 2) They would not recruit staff, depending on God to send them the right people. 3) They would plan only short-range to allow for God’s sovereign guidance. 4) They would not publicize themselves but trust that God would send them those in need.

“People from all walks of life would travel to Chalet les Melezes to hear the message of Christ and receive direction for their lives.” Schaeffer “argued the necessity of biblical Christianity as the one adequate answer to the problems raised by the fact of human personality and the nature of the external world....”

Some of his influential books include *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There*. He developed his theme further in a 10-part film series, *How Should We Then Live?* (1977), and an accompanying book of the same title.

In the 1970’s Schaeffer’s teaching “became much more sociological and political with subjects including ecology, church and doctrinal purity, abortion, euthanasia, war and peace, and civil rights.

“Perhaps the most prominent theme in Francis Schaeffer’s life and work was his emphasis on ‘the Lordship of Christ in the totality of life’....If Jesus Christ is indeed Lord, He must be Lord of all, in every area.

“Schaeffer helped untold thousands find Jesus Christ as Savior and as the Lord of all life. Many have gone on to become intellectual leaders and accomplished artists. But in addition...the lives of countless unborn children have been saved in response to his militant pro-life activism.”

Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing for *Pulpit Helps Magazine*. He continues to serve in this

capacity as a volunteer contributor to *Disciple*. He lives in West Liberty, Ohio.

Reference: “Francis Schaeffer and L’Abri”, by David Porter, in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*; excerpts used by permission of Moody Publishers.

Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Growing Old

Editor’s Note: Due to an illness, Rudy was unable to provide a column this month. This piece is from our archives, originally published in Pulpit Helps, February 2004.

It is no secret that the American population as a whole is growing older. The 60-year period between 1960 and 2020 has a projected increase of 410% for the 60-plus age group. The projected increase for the total population is 157%.

What does that mean to Christian people-helpers? It means we will be serving more and more senior adults more often. Counselors will face some interesting challenges and opportunities in the coming years.

Some gerontologists break the senior adult population (60-plus) into three distinct groups: young old (60-75); old (75-85); and oldest old (85-plus). About 50% of those in the oldest group require some form of assistance with the normal daily activities of living. Only 5% of the 60-plus group live in nursing homes. In fact, the majority of older adults live independently, never spending any time in a nursing home.

Women outlive men. In the 60-plus age group, there are approximately seven women to every man. Women typically live considerably longer as post-marriage singles. Things like chronic health problems, disability, and the death of a loved one can occur at any age in life, but a person in the older adult age bracket is more likely to accumulate more of these experiences. About 73% of the 2.3 million annual deaths in America are in the 65-plus age group.

Another interesting fact about our aging population in America is that the older adult group is the highest at risk group for suicide. The national average is 12 suicides per 100,000 but for the 75 to 84 age span, it is 24 per 100,000. In the 85-plus age level it increases to 27 per 100,000. Emotional difficulty knows no age limits. It is a myth that older adults cannot benefit from sound Christian counseling. We all have heard the phrase “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” However, when we talk about our senior adult population we are not talking about dogs or tricks!

Helen Devries, writing in *Christian Counseling Today*, reported that when older people are involved in counseling the “rates of improvement and the extent of

gains are often similar to those found among younger groups.”

Alzheimer’s disease, which currently affects nearly 27 million people worldwide, puts enormous pressure on the primary caregivers. In fact, these caregivers have become known as the second victims of the disease. Frequently the Alzheimer’s patient outlives the caregiver. Elder abuse is another growing problem in our society. The abuse (physical, verbal, emotional, mental, neglect, etc.) is most often inflicted by family members.

The 76 million Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) are just beginning to enter the “young old” age category. Their presence as older adults will present a dramatic challenge for society at large and the Social Security system in particular. Economists predict that aging boomers will still retire, but most will continue to work also.

This group also faces the task of caring for their parents. Gerontological counselor Kathie Erwin writes, “For Christian Baby Boomers, parenting their parents is more than an economic necessity; it is an expression of faith.” She quotes 1 Timothy 5:8: “*But if anyone does not provide for his own, especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*”

Psalm 71:9 says, “*Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.*” We live in a culture that does not typically respect the elderly, as other cultures have done in the past and many still do in the present. That must change. Growing old is a vital and natural part of life. Christian older adults should be honored by Christians—especially those who are called to counsel others. Statistically, a Christian older adult may be closer to heaven than a younger adult, but heaven is a destiny all Christians share.

I came up with a phrase a few years ago. I am not sure it is original but I believe it a good motto for living the way God meant life to be lived: “Live until you die!” So many senior adults give up on life before they die. We need Christian people-helpers who will take the time to understand the particular traits of each older generation and strive to serve God effectively with each opportunity He gives us to help them.

Of all people, Christians can best believe the poet Browning’s words, “Grow old along with me; the best is yet

to be.” Heaven is ahead for believers, but all God’s people must be taught and encouraged to live until they die.

member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He serves as the pastor of Utica Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.

James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a

Book Review—9/26/11

Reverberation: How God’s Word Brings Light, Freedom, and Action to His People, Jonathan Leeman, 2011, Moody Publishers, Chicago, ISBN 9780802422996, 197 pages, \$12.99, softcover.

There are some books that find their strength in saying new things—the original thoughts or perspectives we’ve simply never heard before. There are other books that find their strength in saying old things—things we’ve heard before but just need to hear again, whether that’s because of lack of faith or lack of memory or just because every time something is said it’s said in a different way. Jonathan Leeman’s book *Reverberation: How God’s Word Brings Light, Freedom, and Action to His People* falls squarely into the latter category for me. I have heard it before. And I desperately needed to hear it again.

Reverberation is a book about God’s Word. It’s that simple. But maybe it’s not that simple. Churches and Christians are looking all over the place to find a source of light, freedom and action, to find whatever it is that will stir people, fire them up, lead them to do great things.

Some try the latest and greatest programs; some work on dynamic small group ministries; some work toward the best worship by the best musicians; some look to justice. In the midst of all these options Leeman sets the Word of God, the one thing Jesus declared to be necessary in the life of the church and the one thing necessary for the growth of the church. While none of these other things are necessarily wrong, none of them can be central; rather, each must flow out of the centrality of the Word.

“One thing is necessary in our churches—hearing God’s Word through preaching, reading, singing, and praying.” When the Word is central it echoes out into all parts of the life of the church.

“Picture it this way. The evangelist or preacher open his mouth and utters a word, God’s Word. But the Word doesn’t sound just once. It echoes or reverberates. It reverberates through the church’s music and prayers. It reverberates through the conversations between elders and members, members and guests, older Christians and

younger ones. God’s words bounce around the life of the church, like the metal ball in the pinball machine.” But that is not all. It also reverberates into people’s homes and workplaces, their families and neighborhoods, out onto Facebook and blogs and anywhere else these people go. And what *Reverberation* seeks to do is to follow this path.

And so Leeman follows the Word. He begins with evangelism and the preaching of the Gospel where the Word invites and divides, acts, frees and gathers. Then he looks to the sermon which exposes, announces and confronts with the Word. And then he shows how the Word reverberates through singing, prayer, discipleship and more evangelism. So this is not the kind of echo that bounces around and fades into the distance, but the kind of echo that increases and grows, getting louder and more urgent as it reverberates through the church, through the world.

At the end of it all, Leeman has written a book that is not about mechanics or programs, not about how to do church. Instead, it’s about what needs to be at the heart of the Church. He simply focuses in on the role of the Word, that central component to all the Church is called to be and do. The Word is spoken at the beginning, the Word is spoken centrally, and it echoes throughout the life of the church and throughout the lives of each of its people.

This book is for pastors, teaching them again that the Word must be central and that they are charged to make it central. The centrality of the Word begins with the pulpit and the preaching ministry. But this book is also for laypersons, for those who need to be expecting and demanding the Word from their pastors and who then have the great privilege and responsibility of making it reverberate loud and long.

Tim Challies

Originally published at www.discerningreader.com

Target: All

Type: Scripture, Ministry

Take: Highly Recommended

News Update—9/26/11

Messianic Jews Singled Out in Israeli Town

Messianic Jews in a suburb west of Jerusalem continue to be harassed for following their faith, this time by anonymously placed flyers in public areas singling out members of Messianic congregations, Compass Direct News reports.

The flyers began appearing two weeks ago in the town of Mevasseret Zion, with the addresses, phone numbers and even some photographs of the Messianic Jews, as well as allegations about “soul stealing” and “brainwashing.”

Asher Intrater, leader of the Ahavat Yeshua Congregation, said he thought the flyers were “an effort to drive us out of the neighborhood.” This is the second time in three months that Messianic Jews in Mevasseret Zion have been singled out for ridicule. On June 26, members of Yad L’Achim, an ultra-Orthodox, anti-Christian group, protested outside the home of a Messianic couple. It is unclear who posted the flyers, and Intrater declined to speculate.

Religion Today Summaries

Court Orders Teacher to Remove Christian Banners

A federal appeals court rejected the claim of a San Diego-area high school math teacher that his 1st Amendment rights were violated when the school’s principal ordered him to take down classroom banners that referred to God, the *Los Angeles Times* reports.

Bradley Johnson had displayed banners in his classrooms for two decades that celebrated the religious heritage of America, including “In God We Trust,” “God Bless America,” and “God Shed His Grace on Thee.” But after he transferred to a new school in 2007, a principal ordered the banners taken down.

Johnson thought he was being singled out because the phrases involved Christianity, and he filed a lawsuit. A federal judge last year sided with Johnson, but the school board appealed. The federal appeals court reversed the judge’s ruling, saying the principal and school board had the same authority as any employer to set limits on the speech of employees, and also ordered Johnson to pay the school district’s legal expenses.

Religion Today Summaries

Moody Radio Affiliate Drops David Barton’s Show over Defense of Glenn Beck

According to Dr. Warren Throckmorton’s blog on Crosswalk.com, an affiliate of the Moody Broadcast system in East Texas, KBJs-FM, canceled David Barton’s

Wallbuilders Live radio show during the show while Barton was discussing Glenn Beck’s religious beliefs.

Randy Featherstone, KBJs manager, said the show was dropped because of Barton’s failure to distinguish between Mormon theology and Christianity. On the September 13th program, Barton said he believed Beck was a Christian, dismissed Beck’s Mormonism and asserted that Beck used the same Bible.

“When David Barton said it doesn’t matter whether you are a Mormon or a Baptist or a Methodist, we felt we had to do something,” Featherstone said. “We don’t want to confuse listeners into thinking that Mormon doctrine and Christianity are the same.” He added that the station had received many calls during the broadcast from people objecting to Barton’s views. All but two callers supported the decision of the station to drop the show.

Religion Today Summaries

State Department Chides Eight Countries on Religious Freedom

According to the Religion News Service, the State Department designated eight nations as the most serious violators of religious freedom, naming the same countries as the Bush administration: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan. All but Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan also received sanctions.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has issued previous reports on religious freedom, but it was the first time the Obama administration has published its list of the worst violators. “It is our core conviction that religious tolerance is one of the essential elements not only of a sustainable democracy but of a peaceful society that respects the rights and dignity of each individual,” Clinton said.

The Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook, the administration’s new ambassador at large for religious freedom, has plans to visit China and Saudi Arabia and work on a U.N. resolution to counter religious intolerance through education, interfaith dialogue and public debate.

Religion Today Summaries

Obama Warns of Growing Religious Intolerance in Post-Revolt Mideast

The Obama administration warned Tuesday of growing religious intolerance and violence in Arab nations undergoing popular revolts that could undermine fragile democratic transitions, the Associated Press reports.

While the overthrow of longtime authoritarian rulers in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya has given millions hope

for freedom, and additional rebellions are underway in Syria and Yemen, they have also opened up religious and ethnic minorities to new threats. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged countries not to “trade one form of repression for another” and to embrace the freedom to worship for all faiths as they embrace political pluralism for the first time in generations.

The U.S. has publicly expressed concern about post-revolt sectarian violence and the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities in Egypt and Libya. It has also condemned attacks on religious minorities in Syria as the government continues a months-long brutal crackdown on opponents, and has taken aim at abuses of religious freedom in Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Religion Today Summaries

More Americans Tailoring Religion to Fit Their Needs

Newly released research reveals America’s drift from clearly defined religious denominations to faiths cut to fit personal preferences, according to a report by *USA Today*.

Religion statistics expert George Barna’s new book on U.S. Christians, *Futurecast*, tracks changes from 1991 to

2011 in annual national surveys and shows that all the major trend lines of religious belief and behavior ran downward except two: More people claim they have accepted Jesus as their savior and expect to go to heaven, and more say they haven’t been to church in the past six months except for special occasions.

In 1991, 24% were “unchurched.” Today, it’s 37%. Barna blames pastors for those oddly contradictory findings: “Everyone hears, ‘Jesus is the answer. Embrace him. Say this little Sinner’s Prayer and keep coming back.’ It doesn’t work. People end up bored, burned out and empty. They look at church and wonder, ‘Jesus died for this?’”

The consequence, Barna says, is that for every subgroup of religion, race, gender, age and region of the country, the important markers of religious connection are fracturing. When he measures people by their belief in seven essential doctrines, defined by the National Association of Evangelicals’ Statement of Faith, only 7% of those surveyed qualified. Barna lamented: “People say: ‘I believe in God. I believe the Bible is a good book. And then I believe whatever I want.’”

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines

The Rich Young Ruler: Uneasy with Jesus!

Luke 18:18-30

I. “Why Do You Call Me Good?”

A. Drop the façade. Cut the schmoozing! I see right through it!

B. Every attempt to clean up for Jesus will fail!

II. “One Thing You Lack”

A. If keeping the rules is the point, there’s always one more rule to keep!

B. I’ll never work myself out of the hole!

III. “Sell It All. Give Away the Proceeds, Then Follow ME”

A. When we approach Jesus on our own terms, He only makes things worse.

B. Jesus always asks me to do the hard stuff!

IV. “You Give It Away.” The Money Is Your Problem

A. Jesus wants me, not my stuff or my standing!

B. I’m required to face what I really am!

V. “Who Then Can Enter?” What Hope Do We Have?

A. “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

B. Walking by faith is a lot harder that I realized!

VI. “He Became Very Sad, Because He Was a Man of Great Wealth”

A. Jesus makes His point clearly, but I must decide!

B. I can run but I cannot hide!

Conc.: What I can do about my discomfort in Jesus’ company: “*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Bob Gerow

The Word of Christ

Colossians 3:16

I. His Word Is Simple (Is. 35:8)

A. Simple to acknowledge (Acts 8:37).

B. Simple to accept (Acts 8:38).

II. His Word Is Significant (John 5:39)

A. Exciting life (John 10:10).

B. Eternal life (John 3:16, 11:25).

III. His Word Is Saving (Rom. 15:4)

A. From sin (2 Cor. 5:17).

B. From Satan (1 John 4:4).

IV. His Word Is Satisfying (Jer. 15:16)

A. Eating it (v. 16a).

B. Enjoying it (v. 16b).

V. His Word Is Sure (Matt. 24:35)

A. In teaching (Matt. 7:24-29).

- B. Timelessness (Is. 40:38).
 VI. His Word Is Secure (Ps. 119:11)
 A. Hiding His Word (2 Tim. 2:15).
 B. Help in His Word (Ps. 119:9).

Croft M. Pentz

Illustrations

How to Shine for Jesus

Two plowshares were made from the same pig iron. One was sold to a farmer who used it constantly. The other remained on the shelf of the hardware store, unsold until it was covered with rust.

The farmer brought his worn-out share to get another like it. The rusty share was brought out, and there was its brother shining like a silver mirror.

“How is it,” the rusty one asked, “that your life has been so wearing and yet has made you so beautiful? Once we were alike: I have grown ugly in spite of my easy life.” “That is it,” replied the shining share, “the beautiful life is the sacrificial life.”

Anonymous

Correcting Faulty Lighting

Perhaps you have sometime visited the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. In this white marble structure millions of people have stood and looked upon the overpowering statue of Lincoln by sculptor Daniel C. French.

When the statue was unveiled in 1922, it was discovered that the facial features of Lincoln were grossly distorted by faulty lighting. Corrections were later made so that viewers may now see that face as it really is.

Lighting is so important in seeing a thing clearly. If we view life solely in the light of competition and conflict, we are not seeing all of it. If we look upon all other persons strictly in the light of some mean thing somebody once did to us, we are not seeing them as they are.

Grotesque caricatures can be made when distorted lights are used. We can color what we see by the light in

which we choose to see it. We should seek to see all things in all the light there is—the illumination of the Spirit and the word of Scripture.

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts

On Happiness

Remember this, that very little is needed to make a happy life.

Marcus Aurelius

Some never find happiness because they are looking in the wrong places.

None is so poor as he who has nothing but money;
 None is so rich as he whose heart is full of love.

Pain and suffering are inevitable, but misery is optional.

Happiness depends on happenings—joy comes from the Lord.

It is only possible to live happily ever after on a day-to-day basis.

Happiness isn't perfected until it's shared.

Happiness is not a station you arrive at, but a manner of traveling.

These seven via the *Old Union Reminder*

God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not here. There is no such thing.

C.S. Lewis

Puzzles and 'Toons

Church 'Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:

ANSWERS

1. Bitter water (Num. 5:18, 24).
2. "Sweet to a man" (Prov. 20:17).
3. The meat offering (Lev. 2:13).
4. The hungry soul (Prov. 27:7).
5. The white of an egg (Job 6:6).
6. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2).
7. He threw a cruse of salt into the spring (2 Kings 2:19-22).
8. Salt water and fresh water (Is. 3:11, 12).
9. Stolen waters (Prov. 9:17).
10. "It was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter" (Rev. 10:20).

ACROSTIC #34: ANSWERS

JOSHUA (11:15) — "As the Lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua, he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses."

- A. LODGED
- B. FOOTSTOOL
- C. SHEAF
- D. HOLMES
- E. CORNERSTONE
- F. MAMMOTH
- G. DISCUSSED
- H. JEMIMA
- I. ODDS AND ENDS
- J. SODOM
- K. HAMLET
- L. UNDAUNTED
- M. ADONIJAH
- N. MOLOCH
- O. HANDS

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, June 1994

Father Abraham's Question Box

The Life & Ministry of Peter

1. Where was Peter's home city?
2. What was Peter's Hebrew name?
3. Which apostle was Peter's brother?
4. Where did Peter heal Aeneas of the palsy?
5. On what occasion did Jesus Christ ask Peter to go to the sea and catch a fish?
6. During what holiday was Peter arrested by Herod the king?
7. What was the name of the man whose ear Peter cut off in the garden of Gethsemane?
8. Who was Peter sent to see at Joppa?
9. Where did Peter confess Jesus Christ to be the Son of God?
10. What did Peter tell the lame man at the Temple gate?

See answers on page 27.

Hidden Wisdom on next page

HIDDEN WISDOM: BIBLE ACROSTIC # 35

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!!

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

- A. What Christians are to be (Col. 3). 50 40 78 29 46 16 89 67
- B. Shaggy 31 94 59 10 74 39 63
- C. An aquatic carnivore 2 84 76 24 18
- D. Family name of Eng. novelists Charlotte (1816-1855 and Emily (1818-1848) 23 3 61 75 81 45
- E. "I know that my _____ liveth" 70 32 60 44 6 95 17 49
- F. What Zebul was to Abimelech 91 1 15 68 85 28 43
- G. Full, rich 55 8 66 88 48 26
- H. A son of Elpaal (1 Chr. 8:24) 65 37 25 77 4 93 14 33 83 51
- I. Shiftless person (colloq; hyph.) 92 41 27 7 13 58 35 52 80 87
- J. Jesus Christ applied this term to Himself 69 82 19 90 5 56 64 38
- K. A legal affirmation 12 54 30 73
- L. His seven sons were overcome by an evil spirit 53 21 34 62 86
- M. "Give diligence to make your _____ and election sure" 72 36 57 79 9 20 42
- N. Elegant 47 71 11 22