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## The Son Risen with Healing

### *Biblical Aspects of the Easter Revolution*

by Patrick Henry Reardon

From the beginning of Christian history, the feast of Easter (called by the biblical word *Pascha* in most languages spoken by Christians) has been the most important in the liturgical calendar of the church. Simultaneously ending the season of Lent and inaugurating the fifty days until the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost, this feast of the Lord's resurrection is what chiefly gives structure to the liturgical year as a whole. That is to say, Easter occupies in the Christian calendar that unifying and culminating place that the mystery of the resurrection holds in Christian theology. The Apostle Paul indicated that place when he wrote, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Everything in the Christian year hangs on Easter, because everything in the Christian church depends on the resurrection.

Because it is so central and unitive in the faith, it is not surprising that the Lord's resurrection is the object of deep reflection in all parts of theology. There are various theological aspects of Easter on which it seems appropriate to meditate explicitly at this season of the year. Without too much attention to the logic of their sequence, perhaps we may reflect on a few of these, limiting our consideration to Christology, soteriology, apologetics, anthropology, history, and psychology. Finally, in order to reflect further on the church's experience of the risen Christ present in her midst, we will conclude by considering the forty days during which he lingered on earth prior to his ascension into heaven.

### Easter and Christology

We should begin by remarking, I think, that the resurrection is proclaimed by a straightforward Christological formula. It says simply, “Jesus is Lord!” Thus, the message of the resurrection directly addresses the fundamental Christological question, “Who is Jesus?” The Lord’s resurrection, in other words, is the key to his identity. We should look at both of them together.

First, the resurrection is the core substance of the “good news.” It is not just *one of the things* that Christians believe, but the heart and kernel of the *evangelion*. For this reason, as we have seen, the earliest, shortest version of the creed asserted simply, “Jesus is Lord,” an assertion explained in the first apostolic sermon: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses....Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:32,36).

The Apostle Paul, in his sermon at the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, proclaimed the same gospel of the resurrection: “And we declare to you glad tidings (*evangelion*) – that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus” (Acts 13:32-33). The resurrection *is* the gospel.

Hence, “Christ is risen” is just another way of affirming, “Jesus is Lord.” His lordship and his resurrection are synonymous, forming the fundamental thesis of the faith, through the confession of which we are saved. “If you confess with your mouth,” wrote Paul, “that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). These two salvific assertions – Jesus is Lord, and God raised him – are substantially identical.

It is by virtue of Jesus’ resurrection, the apostles went on to say, that we are justified. In fact, the first time the noun “justification” (*dikaiosis*) appears in the New Testament, Paul proclaims that Jesus “was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). He had earlier written, “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:16-17). Very simply, no resurrection, no justification.

It is through Jesus’ resurrection, moreover, that we are begotten as children of God. St. Peter wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has *begotten* us again to a living hope *through the resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). No Resurrection, then, no salvation.

Second, the resurrection is the key to the identity of Jesus, because it is by his resurrection that he is constituted as God’s Son. This is not a denial of his eternal sonship in the bosom of the Father, nor a rejection of the doctrine of the hypostatic incarnation. This thesis of Sonship-by-Resurrection has nothing to do with “adoptionism.” It affirms, rather, that the redemptive sonship of God’s eternal Son, the very man Jesus, includes his perfection through death and the resurrection from the dead. Thus, St. Paul wrote of “Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and established [*horisthentos*] as the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:3-4). This statement concerning Christ’s sonship does not refer to his eternal generation by the Father, nor does it mean simply the incarnation. It is specifically a reference to the Lord’s resurrection from the dead.

In what sense does God establish Jesus his Son by the resurrection? St. Paul says, “in power.” By his resurrection, Jesus is established as God’s Son “in power” – *en dynamei*. Through the resurrection from the dead, that is, something really new happened to Jesus. He is different from before. This divine Person incarnate has gone through, tasted, and been transformed by the experience of dying and rising again as a human being. He has thus been “made perfect” (Hebrews 2:10; 5:9). His perfected sonship is established now “in power.”

It is the risen Lord, therefore, the perfected man Jesus, who declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been

given to me” (Matthew 28:18). It is a human being, God’s Word in the flesh, who claims all authority, both in heaven and on earth, by reason of his resurrection from the dead. Because God raised him from the dead, Jesus became something that he was not before. By his resurrection from the dead, he is constituted God’s Son in power, having universal authority in heaven and on earth. Through his resurrection, he becomes the head of creation and the medium of humanity’s union with God. This is the meaning of the glad expression of our faith, “Jesus is Lord.” Jesus is Lord, inasmuch as “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”

In short, the proclamation of the resurrection is a specifically Christological affirmation. Consequently, there is no adequate treatise *de Verbo Incarnato* [of the Word Incarnate] that fails to give attention to the resurrection.

## The resurrection and soteriology

Because of this biblical relationship between Christology and the resurrection, it is not surprising that Christian thinkers rather early linked the mystery of the incarnation, not only to our Lord’s obedient death on the cross (as in Hebrews 2:6-18), but also to his rising from the dead. One of the earliest to do so was Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century.

The approach of Irenaeus to the incarnation is twofold. The Word became incarnate in order to die for us for our sins, but he also became incarnate in order to rise for our justification. Irenaeus treats both subjects explicitly.

First, according to Irenaeus, the Word’s assumption of the flesh was required for our salvation because Adam’s sin had been committed in the flesh. Sin in the flesh required salvation in the flesh. He explained, “So the Word was made flesh in order that sin, destroyed by means of that same flesh through which it had gained mastery and taken hold and lorded it, should no longer be in us,” and “that so he might join battle on behalf of our forefathers and vanquish through Adam what had stricken us through Adam” (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching 31*).

In this doctrinal development Irenaeus is clearly the heir to St. Paul, who contrasted Christ and Adam in terms of “disobedience unto death” and “obedience unto life” (Romans 5:12-19).

In his treatment of salvation, however, Irenaeus also stresses the resurrection, and this emphasis in turn colors his approach to the incarnation. Thus, he writes of “our Lord’s birth, which the Word of God underwent for our sake, to be made flesh, that he might reveal the resurrection of the flesh and take the lead of all in heaven.” In this way, explains Irenaeus, Christ becomes “the first-born of the dead, the head and source of the life unto God” (*op.cit.*, 39).

In his development of this idea, of course, Irenaeus is still following the lead of St. Paul, who contrasted Christ and Adam with respect to death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:22,45).

In tying the soteriological intent of the incarnation to the Lord’s resurrection from the dead, Irenaeus advances an important doctrinal perspective. We may contrast this perspective with the soteriology of some later Christians, who concentrated entirely on the Lord’s atoning death as the means of our redemption, with scarcely any attention to the soteriological significance of the Resurrection.

Thus, Irenaeus, not neglecting the biblical theme of “obedience in the flesh,” sets himself to provide a more ample answer to the question “Why incarnation?” His larger answer to this question, an answer that includes the Lord’s resurrection, colors his soteriology with a dominant concern for the total transformation of humanity, and all of creation, in Christ. As we shall see presently, this became a major theme in the theology of Irenaeus.

## The resurrection and apologetics

In addition to Christology and soteriology, the resurrection of Jesus is also a proper theme of Christian apologetics, that theological discipline which defends the faith and supports its proclamation to the world.

An inspection of the New Testament, moreover, shows that the apologetics approach to the resurrection came first; the early believers proclaimed the *fact* of it before they reflected on its soteriological meaning. In the earliest Christian preaching, the resurrection was emphasized as probative before it was pondered as redemptive.

St. Peter's first sermon demonstrates this. With respect to the resurrection, Peter stressed two points in that sermon: the historical fact that God raised Jesus from the dead, and the fulfillment of biblical prophecy by that fact (Acts 2:24-31). In that sermon, the apostle said not a word about the redemptive meaning of the resurrection. He concentrated entirely on the historical fact itself, "of which," he said, "we are all witnesses" (2:32).

The apostolic writings likewise record that the resurrection was the point at which the first enemies of the gospel directed their attack. In order to explain Jesus' empty tomb, those responsible for his murder "gave a large sum of money to the soldiers," bribing them to claim that Jesus' disciples came, while the guard was sleeping, to take away his corpse. This explanation of the empty tomb, Matthew wrote, "is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matthew 28:12-15).

Early Christian apologists recognized, of course, that the empty tomb itself proved nothing. So much was this the case that the first Christian to find the tomb empty presumed, not that Jesus had risen, but that his body had been stolen (John 20:1-2,13-15). Common sense testifies that this was a normal assessment; if we find a grave empty, it is not our first thought that the dead person arose. We suppose, rather, that someone took away the body. Hence, Jesus' empty tomb by itself had no probative value, which is why it receives relatively little attention in the New Testament.

Alas, there are modern critics who draw a completely skewed inference from the New Testament's comparative lack of interest in the empty tomb. The empty tomb is not emphasized, these critics claim, because it was not important to the early Christians. Nor, they often enough go on to assert, should the empty tomb be important for us. It is not uncommon for such critics to avow, in fact, that the "essence" of the Christian faith is quite compatible with the tomb's *not* being empty!

It should be obvious that suggestions like this are incompatible with the proclamation of the apostles. In fact, these assertions are a kind of delirium. Even the earliest enemies of the gospel did not dispute that the tomb was empty. If the New Testament lays no special stress on the empty tomb, therefore, the reason must be sought elsewhere. And the reason surely has to do with the fact that an empty tomb doesn't prove anything to anybody. It not only has no theological significance; it also has no apologetic weight. It doesn't explain anything. On the contrary, it must *be* explained.

The correct explanation for Jesus' empty tomb came through the physical experience of those who testified that Jesus, risen from the dead, had been seen (1 Corinthians 15:4-8; Mark 16:9,14) and touched (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27) by them. Far from being hallucinations brought on by wishful thinking, these physical manifestations of Jesus went directly contrary to the commonsense expectations of those who saw him. The most important thing to observe about that evidence is that it was conveyed to – indeed, overwhelmingly forced itself upon – those who were deeply reluctant to believe it. To a man, the first witnesses of the risen Jesus were at first skeptical of their experience. They could be convinced only when the risen Jesus "presented himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). They came to believe in the resurrection only when the undeniable evidence coerced their assent.

## The resurrection and anthropology

The themes of Christology, soteriology, and apologetics introduce that of anthropology. That is to say, what does the resurrection of Christ say about *the human being*?

A common complaint against the proclamation of our Lord's resurrection is the claim that this story is only a variant of the ancient fertility myths about dying and rising gods. According to this objection, the risen Christ is just a Galilean version of Osiris, as it were. It is convenient to this argument, of course, that both Jesus and Osiris rose again in the spring, and their celebrations make endless references to vernal themes like renewal and rebirth; they are reasonably regarded, therefore, as variations of a common and nearly universal motif. Of course, usually those who make this point also mean to imply that Jesus is to be taken no more seriously than Osiris.

This argument is very far off the mark. In fact, the paschal mystery is not about the death and resurrection of a god. The church proclaims the resurrection of Jesus as the resurrection of a dead *man*. According to the Christian faith, it is as a *human being* that Jesus was raised from the dead. He arose in his humanity, just as he died in his humanity. It is a human being, then, who is transformed and glorified by victory over death.

Consequently, the first time the world heard the proclamation of the resurrection, no mention was made of the preexisting divinity of the one who rose. St. Peter did not say, "Well, Jesus was God, after all, so there was no way to keep him down." On the contrary, he proclaimed, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made *this Jesus*, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"(Acts 2:36). The Lord is called "Jesus," the name by which he was known among men with whom he dwelt on earth.

With respect to the dying and rising of pagan divinities, no one ever announced, "of which we are all witnesses" (2:32). Strictly speaking, no one ever testified to the death and rising of some historical character named Osiris, and no one was ever invited to believe in Osiris. And it is very certain that no one ever laid down his life for preaching about Osiris.

In contrast, the resurrection of Jesus was proclaimed as a historical fact, which involved a real man, a person recently deceased, someone whom everyone knew to have died. "This Jesus" was the one who rose.

The difference between these two cases is important, not only as a point of apologetics, but also as a concern of Christian anthropology. In the man Jesus the human race commenced its journey through death to life. In the "faith of Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22,26), "the author and finisher of faith," humanity passed from the power of death to eternal life. It was *this Jesus* "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

As "forerunner" (*prodromos*), Jesus became our high priest and mediator (Hebrews 6:20; 9:15; 12:24). Opening the way for us, he was the first to pass through every stage of human existence and experience, including the stage of death resultant from the fall of Adam, and to attain mankind's new and definitive stage, the resurrection. Rising from the dead, he became the true and efficacious head of the human race.

This doctrine is what Christian theology calls humanity's *anakephalaiosis*, or "re-Heading" (in Latin, *recapitulatio*). This term means that God's eternal Son, who became man, took unto himself the fallen race of men, in order to re-create all humanity through his own humanity. Jesus Christ did this by passing through every stage of human experience and development – the first to do so – restoring to union with God what had perished in Adam.

An early expression of this theology comes from St. Irenaeus, whom we have already considered. Irenaeus wrote of God's Word: "When he became incarnate and was made man, he re-headed in himself ( *in seipso recapitulavit*) the

long line of human beings, providing us with salvation in a brief, comprehensive manner, so that what we had lost in Adam we might recover in Christ Jesus – that is, our being in the image and likeness of God” (*Against the Heresies* 3.18.1).

In his assumption of our humanity, God’s Word took to himself, not only our nature, but also the personal experience of history that is proper to human beings. He sanctified our personal histories by gaining a human, first-hand, personal familiarity with life and death, adding thereto the utterly new experience of eternal life gaining victory over death. His resurrection was of the essence of man’s redemption, his consecration of human experience from within.

## History and psychology

Our reflections on the anthropology of the resurrection would be incomplete without some attention to history and psychology, because these two subjects are integral to our understanding of what it means to be a human being.

First, then, what does the resurrection of Christ mean to human history? In truth, it begins an entirely new and defining phase of history, because it introduces into human experience, for the first time, a transcendent and utterly certain foundation for hope. It is the absolute *novum quid* of history.

With God’s vindication of Jesus of Nazareth, there was posited into history, through the preaching of the apostles, an entirely new thesis with respect to human destiny. For those who put themselves under the sway of the gospel, history could no longer be “more of the same,” or “business as usual,” because the resurrection of Christ conferred on history something it had never known before – a metaphysical *telos*, a goal, a directing and energizing purpose deliberately placed into the process itself.

Since that first Christian Pascha, the resurrection of Christ has worked as yeast in the dough of the human enterprise, actively kneading that history toward its final shape. Those who confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God has raised him from the dead stand most literally “on the side of history.”

For this reason it is worth mentioning that the Orthodox Church celebrates Pascha by beginning with the first book of Christian history, the Acts of the Apostles, and all through the Paschal season regular readings from this book replace the normal reading from the New Testament epistles during the Divine Liturgy. This Book of Acts records the first 30 years or so of mankind’s new history, church history. We appropriately commence our reading of it in the liturgical context of the resurrection, because it enunciates to the world the “new thing.”

Throughout the history of the church, the resurrection of Christ is the perennial source of power and renewal. This is the reason the church has survived its worst enemies and always will. All of Christian history thus becomes a revelation and extension of the resurrection. Christians live and thrive on the compound interest of the paschal mystery, a limitless font of joy, strength, perseverance, and victory in the face of the myriad demonic forces raised against them.

Second, the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ is the announcement of true human “psychology,” this term being understood in its ancient and etymological sense as “the study of the soul.”

Classical philosophy, regarding the human soul as the permanent and essential part of a man, did not understand its relationship with the human body, which is manifestly impermanent. There were various theories on this subject of the soul’s relationship to the body, but scarcely any philosopher regarded the soul as “incomplete” without the body. Some, in fact, thought of the union of body and soul as an aberration, a fall from the soul’s proper spiritual state. Many even regarded the soul and body as mutual enemies, and those who, like Plato, believed in the soul’s native

immortality, were not disposed to think its departure from the body as much to be mourned. Such was the argument that Socrates elaborated for Phaedo and his friends as he prepared to drink the hemlock.

The doctrine of the resurrection, which posits the reunion of soul and body as man's permanent and proper state, stands as an affront to pagan theories of that sort. It is no wonder that the Athenians and others treated this doctrine with derision and as a species of madness (Acts 17:32; 26:23-24; 1 Corinthians 15:12). They laughed, because pagan philosophy was overly taxed by the preaching of the resurrection; "Our reason cannot conceive such things as the resurrection of bodies," wrote St. Bonaventure. Consequently, those pagan philosophers "were unaware that the world had an end and that bodies would rise from their dust" (*In Hexaemeron* 7.6).

Apart from the resurrection, that is to say, philosophy rather deeply misunderstood the very nature of the soul, thinking of it as a separate and independent entity, maintaining its essential being apart from the body. This was a serious aberration characteristic of much of classical philosophy. According to the Christian faith and hope, in contrast, the final perfection of man will include the reunion of his soul and body, and the soul itself will remain incomplete, even in heaven, until that reunion at the final resurrection.

In the thirteenth century, when much of the Scholastic movement tried to treat philosophy as an autonomous source of wisdom, a *scientia separata*, a font of understanding independent of divine revelation, St. Bonaventure appealed to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection as part of his ongoing critique of that Scholastic effort. Taking his cue from Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, Bonaventure refuted the philosophers with the message of the resurrection. Without the gospel of the resurrection, he argued, philosophers were unable even to understand the human soul. "Assured eternity," he wrote, "is incompatible with the possibility of loss, and it is certain that perfect peace is possible only in the reunion of body and soul. If, then, the soul is essentially disposed toward the body, the soul is fully at peace only after the body has been returned to it" (7.5). For this reason, heaven itself will be incomplete until the resurrection of the dead, the fulfillment of history, and the restoration of man's psychological integrity.

### The forty days of lingering

During the forty days following his resurrection, we find Jesus acting very differently than he did before. During this period when, says St. Luke, "he presented himself alive . . . by many infallible proofs," our Lord seems to be only half on earth. He appears in one place, then appears somewhere else, but he does not seem to travel from the one location to the next. He comes on a scene without warning, passing mysteriously through doors, and then making it a point to demonstrate the solidity of his flesh and bones. Then, just as abruptly, he takes his leave, we know not how. Jesus' behavior – if the word be allowed – during this time is strange, unpredictable, and certainly inconsistent with normal expectations.

Just as he passes spatially through the closed door of the upper room, our Lord seems also, without actually rending it, to make repeated openings into time. The various post-resurrection stories, which are notoriously difficult to reconcile as parts of sequential history, indicate that Jesus' new existence does not display what we normally think of as sequence. It is as though his life is set free from the limitations of time and space. Indeed, we Christians believe this to be the truth.

The unpredictable absence and presence of the risen Jesus during this time convey the impression that he is living partly in eternity, partly in time, half in heaven, and half among mortals. It is as though he is hesitant to take his physical leave of history, and we believe this, too, to be the truth.

In fact, he prolongs his stay on this earth so that the church may be further strengthened. For forty days he fortifies in his believers the sense that he is gone but is still with them. In sundry ways he acquaints them with a new mode of his presence.



During this time, he appears repeatedly to speak of things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Certainly in his earlier days on earth, Jesus discoursed on this very subject times out of mind, but now the teaching of the kingdom is contoured and nuanced by the new condition of the Teacher. In some sense the kingdom itself is different now; at least it is experienced differently, as the risen Lord delicately accustoms his church to a new way of his being with them.

Sweet indeed are these forty days, and unique beyond any period in the history of the world. Jesus of Nazareth has died, has descended into hell and triumphed over death by coming forth from the tomb, but he has not yet taken leave of history. He prolongs his sojourn among those who love him. These days are not only tender and loving, but also exciting.

Indeed, there is something about this time that one dares to describe as jocose. Is there not something exceeding playful, for instance, in our Lord's incognito appearance to Mary Magdalene, just before revealing himself in a single word? Again, still playing the stranger, he walks some seven miles with two disciples, using the grammatical third person to question them about his own death, lecturing them at length on the Holy Scriptures, and then finally disappearing at the moment they recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

If we look for a term to describe such conduct, the words "hide and seek" may come to mind, and this is the name of a game. Is he not in some sense playing with his friends? There is a delicate touch of frolic in all this, a quiet celebration among these intimates of the Victor over sin and death.

Thus, there is an element of mirth and teasing in the Lord's invitation to skeptical Thomas to inspect the wounds of the passion, and irony is perhaps the word that best describes the way our Lord presses Simon Peter three times at the lakeside: "Do you love me?"

Just what is our Lord about during this time? He is putting the final touches on his church. And I use the word *touches* on purpose. Touching us here is exactly what he does. He employs this brief period to impress an immediate and final shape on the memory and imagination of his people. Yes, *touch* is the word we want.

Indeed, when the gospel was preached to the world not long afterwards, that preaching was shaped by the events of these forty days (Acts 2:32). When, decades later, the Gospels were written, they were composed in the warm light shed quietly upon the church during this brief period. The church would never be able to look back at the life of Jesus except through the post-resurrection lens. Indeed, the very attempt would be irreverent, like analyzing the physics of a kiss. (This is the reason why, by the way, there is a radical frustration built into later attempts to find "the historical Jesus." The church rightly reacts against such efforts. Those forty days were an essential component, even a defining part, of that history!)

The Lord's final act on earth is to raise his hands in blessing, as he ascends into heaven, after which we faithful return to the upper room for a prayerful retreat to assimilate in our hearts the mystery so recently, so gently too, and so deftly revealed.

How long will it last? We have no idea. "When" is none of the church's business. It is not for us to know the times or seasons that the Father has put in his own authority (Acts 1:7). Concerns about God's schedule are a great distraction and open to terrible deceptions.

And this is perhaps the most important lesson that we learn during these forty days of the Lord's mysterious lingering with us. He will do what he will do, and he will pick the time and place of doing it. Until the end of the

world, our task, according to the earliest page of the New Testament, is simply “to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

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## There And Back Again

### Around the world with Kairos New Zealand

By Tadhg Lynch

Tadhg Lynch, a Kairos Mission Leader serving in Belfast, Northern Ireland, travelled to the Lamb of God Community in New Zealand this past January to visit [Kairos New Zealand](#).

New Zealand is a very long way away from everywhere. To reach “the land of the long white cloud” from its nearest neighbour New Caledonia takes however long it takes you to travel 1229 miles, which, I’m guessing, takes you quite a while. To reach the city of Christchurch from Belfast in Northern Ireland takes a little longer. Extending no less than eleven thousand-six hundred and forty seven point zero six four (11,647.064) miles, the plane journey through Heathrow, Los Angeles, and Auckland finally terminated about two days after it had begun.

The reason for travelling this mammoth distance around the circumference of the world was twofold. Kairos (the youth and student organisation of Sword of the Spirit) New Zealand was hosting its annual [Oasis conference](#) for young people in Christchurch, and by some terrible mistake someone thought that my presence there would be of use. The second reason was a little more sensible – in the midst of the worst freeze in over sixty years, the UK was running out of salt, and the roads were becoming slippery around Northern Ireland, while in Auckland the temperature was an average of 22 degrees Celsius (71 Fahrenheit) and balmy. Travelling and serving with two long time leaders in Sword of the Spirit, Bruce Yocum and Dave “Q” Quitnana, was also a blessing. Sometimes when the Lord calls, though it may be tough, we have to experience some sacrifice...



Participants at the Oasis Conference held in Christchurch, NZ

The main Sword of the Spirit presence in New Zealand is the Lamb of God, a national community with seven branches located around the islands. The range of ages, church denominations, locations, cultures, and ethnicities which comprise the Lamb of God brought the words of the gospel writer Luke in Acts to my mind as I met, “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2) at Oasis and shared life with them during the 10 days of the men’s household which ran in Auckland afterwards.

Nowhere else but in the Sword of the Spirit could this sun-burnt Irish Catholic share such common vision with a Pentecostal Fijian who found New Zealand’s summer a bit “cold” during the Oasis conference. Malasians, Tongans, Indians, Philipinos and Americans rounded out the international experience which I have come to expect at Sword of the Spirit events as the common life which the Holy Spirit brings to those who know him and live their life in his power was once again evident to me in the South Pacific. The Christian call does not promise perfect life or an end to all problems – indeed it involves suffering and sacrifice (as I had ample time to reflect upon while getting intimately acquainted with Christchurch hospital, waiting for one of our small team to recover from nausea and kidney stones). What it does promise, however, and bring in abundance, is joy. It was pure joy to be with over fifty young people for five days of teaching, recreation, fellowship, and fun. To learn how to bowl a cricket ball against the side of a school building aiming at a school bag, to pray with a group of young people from nations seemingly everywhere upon the earth, to discover that “heaps” is the correct way to describe “a lot,” and to experience, once again, being cared for by mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters whom I did not know, while sickness conspired to make life difficult for our small team.



Household of men with Tadhg (3rd from right, Bruce (far right), and Q (center)

After a number of days at the Oasis conference in Christchurch, the show moved north to Auckland for Bruce Yocum and me, while we left our sick brother Q to the tender ministrations of the Canterbury District Health Board at Christchurch Hospital. Spending ten days in a household with young men from all over New Zealand was a

different, but no less blessed, experience.

Sports, service projects, teachings, films, fellowship and prayer were some of the things which went into our daily round as we learned about how to live in household and fundamentally how to belong to the tribe to which Christ has called us. The hearers at the miracle of Pentecost questioned themselves as they understood the apostles each in his own tongue: “And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?” A common language and common customs, culture and way of life are what God has blessed us with in Sword of the Spirit, and it was a joy to forge a common bond with a group of men from differing backgrounds and experiences.



chefs-in-training under the watchful eye of Tadhg

To be part of a people or tribe because of race, class or creed is one thing – but to hear a call from God to join one’s life to a people because he wants you to – this is another matter entirely. This call is often a little harder to discover and, consequently, when finally found is the richer and the sweeter for the journey and the effort that has been required to respond. Kairos is what this is about, as one of the young men from Auckland describes, “Hearing about community abroad really lit a fire in me. I had thought that for me, Lamb of God in Auckland is my community, and that is it. I never thought beyond these walls. I decided that this year or next I am going abroad. I want to experience community in different places just to see how God works there” (Nikhil Thakur).



Ten young men, from all over New Zealand, learned how to live in household together

The world is big, God designed it that way, but we are small. Wandering through Hong Kong airport on the return journey, emailing our small mission team back in Belfast about next week's staff meeting while I watched thousands of people whom I will never know flow past me, I could see some of the plan of God in bringing us, a small and insignificant group of people from far flung corners of the world to try, and live together in community. Our divisions, races, classes, and countries are as nothing to him who formed and shaped the earth out of nothing. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can, and do, live community across, despite, and sometimes through, these barriers. We live it in the power of the same Spirit which breathed on the waters of the Tasman and Irish Seas before they were separated and in whom they will once again be united. The fruit of a life lived in that same spirit is joy, which attended me on the way back across the world from our visit to the Lamb of God.

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## On Being Transgenerational

By Jerry Munk

A brother recently said to me: “I don’t agree with the Sword of the Spirit goal of transgenerational community. Some parents just cannot manage this, and some of our kids probably do not belong in community.” The comment keeps rolling around in my brain, and I would like to share a few thoughts on the subject.

Perhaps I should start by saying that I agree with part of what he said: some parents cannot (or at least do not) manage the transgenerational goal very well. And it is probably true also that some of our kids do not belong in community. Even so, I think that having a goal of transgenerational community is integral to the Lord’s call to the Sword of the Spirit.

Note: I am going to use the word “integral” a lot in this article. Integral means that which is needed to be complete. Just as people can survive with incomplete bodies (missing arms, legs, eyes, and the like) so people can be Christian, even though their Christianity lacks some important ingredients. Similarly, when I talk about community being integral to the Christian life (below), I am not saying that someone is not a Christian if they do not live in community, all I am saying is that something important is lacking. It is in this spirit that I say the call to be transgenerational is integral to the call of The Sword of the Spirit.

### I Want My Children to Live in Christian Community

I assume some community parents fail to embrace the goal of community for their children because they have not really embraced Christian community for themselves. Although they are members, they may see community as optional: an extra that is nice to have – one option in a sea of nice Christian options. I do not see things this way.

First, I see Christian community as integral to the full Christian life. If a Christian is not living in community (please note that I am not saying “in a Sword of the Spirit community”), they are not living a full, integral Christian life. My main reason for this conviction is scripture. We see in God’s word, especially in the New Testament, a call to live our Christian life in particular relationship with other Christians. It is instructive to do a Bible study on the phrase

“one another.” By looking at passages containing “one another” we begin to see the kind of relationships God intends us to have with our brothers and sisters in Christ. For example...

- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).
- Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Speak the truth in love to one another (Ephesians 4:15).
- Teach one another (Colossians 3:16).
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32).
- Admonish one another (Romans 15:14).
- Comfort and edify (build up) one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13).
- Stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).
- Confess your trespasses to and pray for one another (James 5:16).
- Be hospitable with one another (1 Peter 4:9).
- Minister to one another the spiritual gifts you have received (1 Peter 4:10).
- Restore a fallen brother (Galatians 6:1).

This list gives a picture of Christian relationships: we call it community, others call it fellowship, one could call it integral Christianity. My job is to pass on to my children full and integral Christianity. I want them to hold the doctrines of the faith firmly. I want them to worship God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – correctly. And, I want them to live biblical Christianity – and that includes having the kind of Christ-centered, brother-and-sister relationships we have in the Sword of the Spirit. I want my children, our children, to live in Christian community.

Second, I look to my own experience in community. It was the community I am part of, the Work of Christ in Lansing, Michigan, that aggressively reached out to me, that supported me, that gave me practical, Christian teaching, that corrected and restored me. Yes, we have had our problems and frustrations, but through it all my brothers and sisters in the community have been true brothers and sisters in Christ to me. They have actually done those “one another” things mentioned above. I do not think that the Sword of the Spirit is the only place one finds this kind of Christian relating, but I do think it is rare. It is especially rare to find a group of Christians who are committed to living in stable community relationships long term – spanning all phases of human life. I want my children, our children, to have the same kind of support for their Christian life, their whole life long, that I have had for mine.

Third, there is the specific call of the Lord. I have a conviction that the Lord has called me to the Work of Christ and the Sword of the Spirit. This sense of call comes from scripture (as mentioned above), from prophetic words, and from my own day-to-day walk. I have found this life good and helpful for me, for my marriage, for my family (immediate and extended), and for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Similarly, I have a conviction that the Lord’s call extends to my children. Over 30 years ago, before I had any children, the Lord spoke to our community about the powerful work he would do in our children. That word has also been received in many other communities throughout the world. In the same way that I have a personal conviction that I am called to this community, we – the Sword of the Spirit – have come to the conviction that the work the Lord has done in us is not just for us, it is for our children too.

Over and over again, the Lord has called us to be “a people.” He constantly addresses us as “my people.” In that word “people,” I believe, resides a call to transgenerational community. A people includes parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren – a people passes its values, its patterns, and its life (both literally and figuratively) from one generation to the next. A group of 20-somethings (what we were when our community came into being) is not fully and completely a “people” in the same way that a transgenerational community is. Thus, by building



transgenerational community, we are responding to God’s prophetic word to us as a group, a community.

Finally, here in the Work of Christ and in the Sword of the Spirit, my children have brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers in the Lord, with whom they have had loving relationships going back to their earliest years. In our increasingly mobile society, the dynamic of established, supportive relationships is not much valued – and we are beginning to see the impact of individuals who have no roots. I value for my children these long-lasting and stable relationships which provide tangible support for their Christian walk. This is why my first choice is for my children to share life in Christian community right here in the Work of Christ. My second choice is for them to share this life in another Sword of the Spirit community. I realize that the Lord may call them to something different – the Lord is sovereign and he can put his servants where he wills. But, no matter how or where they serve the Lord, I want them to live in Christian community – because community is integral to the full Christian life.

## What Is a Goal?

We have a “goal” of transgenerational community, but the word “goal” can be a slippery thing. Someone can say that they have a goal when in reality they do not. I fell into this a few years ago. Over many years, my weight crept up until it started to impact my health. My doctor told me that I had to make some changes or diabetes and heart disease would dominate the remainder of my life. So, I established a “goal” to lose weight. Please be clear, I really wanted to lose weight, I talked about losing weight, I calculated how much weight I needed to lose, I even prayed for grace to lose weight. The problem was that I did not actually do anything to lose weight. Because I had no action, I did not really have a goal. A “goal” without action is not a goal, it is a wish.

In time I became convicted about my lack of action. I changed my diet and started exercising. Wonder of wonders, I began to lose weight. Because I began to take action, my “goal” was no longer a wish – it became, in reality, a goal. I have not become a skinny guy, but I eventually hit my target weight and am much healthier than I was a few years back.

In the Sword of the Spirit we have a goal: to become transgenerational. For this to be a real goal we need to have a plan and take action. Taking action does not guarantee that we will always achieve our goal, but at least it means that we have a real goal and not just a wish. In addition, the actions required to pursue this goal, as we will see below, are in and of themselves good things to do: they are good things for parents to do, good things for our community to do, good things for the region to do, and good things for our children to do. Just like watching what you eat and getting regular exercise are good things to do even if you do not need to lose weight, the actions that move us towards the goal of transgenerational community are good, important, and necessary – even if we did not have the goal. But, we do have the goal, so right actions are especially important. As I get into the specifics, please ask yourself: “Wouldn’t these be good things to do even if we did not have the goal of transgenerational community?” I think you will find the answer is yes.

## Doing the Right Actions

In 1 Corinthians 9:26, the Apostle Paul says: “I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air.” Paul had a life full of actions, but those actions were not random, they were deliberate, thoughtful, and led by the Lord. Similarly, the actions we choose to help move us steadily towards the goal of transgenerational community need to be thoughtful, deliberate, and led by the Lord. We need to think about what we are doing; we need to do some research; we need to keep our eyes open and see what has worked well for others; we need good counsel; we need to seek the Lord.

A while back I was watching an interview with an education expert. “What can parents do,” she was asked, “to insure their children get a good education?” The answer was surprising: “First, have dinner with your children at

least five times each week. Second, take your children to a religious service every week.” The reason these actions were listed first and second, the expert explained, was the multiple studies that show family dinners and regular worship are consistent elements in the lives of children who do well academically. It would not be self-evident that the two most important things you can do to improve your child’s educational success are dinners and religious services. This kind of information only comes from carefully examining what has worked. Similarly, we need to look carefully at the elements that have successfully brought previous community kids into a full Christian life and then we need consistently to do those things.

Because we have been working towards the transgenerational goal for more than 20 years now, we have a growing understanding of what works and what does not. We have a great deal of teaching on the area, and more refined teaching is on the way. Much of our teaching reflects clear Biblical instructions to parents (e.g., “Fathers, bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4). Some of it reflects the experience of families and communities throughout the Sword of the Spirit who have had good success bringing their children into community life. There is wisdom available, but we need to be teachable: we need to hear the teaching and apply it well.

## Have Confidence in Our Spirituality

Note: A more detailed presentation of our spirituality can be found in the community course presentation on Community Membership in the section labeled “Our Spirituality.”

Some of our members seem almost apologetic about the spirituality of charismatic, Christian community. True, our spirituality is not very normal in most Christian circles. I see this as a matter for those Christian circles to deal with, not as something that should make us timid. If we fail to give witness of full commitment to Jesus Christ, the power, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit, the communal dimension of the Christian faith, and the call of the Lord to ecumenical love and cooperation, how will the larger body of Christ (and our children) ever be challenged and come to see that there is something in this for them? I have great confidence in the spirituality we experience, and I have good reasons for this confidence.

It is a biblical spirituality. Yes, charismatic and community life needed renewal. What the Lord brought about in us was not a new invention. He was renewing what can be clearly seen in Scripture, and it was clearly central to the life of the early Christians. It is an effective spirituality. Each one of us, perhaps in different ways, was drawn into a deeper experience of the Lord and a deeper walk in Him through charismatic renewal and Christian community. If this spirituality worked powerfully in my life, it will probably work powerfully in the lives of others. I could go on, but you can see where I am going. Please note, I am not saying that we should not embrace particular spiritualities from our church tradition. I am saying that we should actively promote what the Lord has given us – what has been effective in our own life. And we should work to form our children in this biblical and effective spirituality. “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly” (Acts 20:20). If we – we who have experienced the power of this way of life – do not promote our spirituality with our children, who will?

## Parenting Success

Successful parenting is the result of several factors: knowing what to do, having an adequate plan, using good teamwork, following through, and the child himself cooperating.

We have some really good and helpful teaching on Christian parenting in the Sword of the Spirit. I grew up in a family with some gaps and dysfunction, so I found the teaching especially helpful. All of us can, at least, learn the basics. Some moms and dads go home from the Christian parenting course and ask, “What can we do to apply this knowledge in our family?” They make a plan to put teaching into action. Others go home, toss the outline in the trash, and never give the principles another thought. Some parents work together, some work at cross purposes. In

some families there is good follow through – they actually do what they plan to do. In other families, there is a good start, but the pressures of life dominate, and the good patterns never take root. I established a pattern with my family early on: after every meal we would read a little from the Bible, talk about it, and then have a short time of family prayer. Let me be honest, we did not do this 100% of the time – in fact, we probably did this only 50% of the time. But, we did our 50% steadily year after year, and I think it had a profound impact on our children. We do not have to be perfect parents, but we do have to keep at it.

The final factor, the child himself, is a tough one. We had cooperative children, and that helped. Some people have un-cooperative children, and that is a challenge. To complicate things further, some children may be un-cooperative because of poor parenting, but some children remain un-cooperative in spite of overall good parenting – they seem to have been born with a chip on their shoulder. In addition, our children are created with free will: they can choose to personally embrace the integral Christian life of their parents; they can also choose to reject it.

Why do I go into all of this? First, I think it is important to avoid judgmentalism in the area: e.g., “Their children are not with the program, so they must be bad parents.” In a small group or pastoral relationship, it may be helpful to ask if others think your approach to parenting is adequate, but “drive-by condemnation” is always unhelpful (and unholy). Second, I want to be really clear, we do not parent well because we are always guaranteed good results. Jesus was the perfect teacher, but even one of his disciples rejected him. I try to parent well, not because I think that it guarantees success, but because I want to (1) do what a good Christian parent is supposed to do, and (2) I know that overall good parenting will increase the odds of my children embracing an integral Christian life.

## [Work for the Community and the Regions to Do](#)

Let us turn our attention to doing the work of transgenerational community. First, let’s look at what the local community and the region can do.

Most importantly, communities need to be living Christian community well (all those “one another” items listed above). If we hope to give community to our children, we must first possess it ourselves – you cannot give what you do not have. Living community is not just the job of the leaders, it is the responsibility of every member. We need to do what we said we would do, because it is right to keep our promises and because our children are watching. If our life does not match our words, the difference will be noted by the very ones we hope to win.

The leaders of the community must also engage the transgenerational call. Thirty-four years ago I visited the People of Hope, a community in New Jersey, to learn about their youth ministry. I was leading our high school group at the time and the People of Hope’s high school group was the gold standard. Bob Gallic, of blessed memory, was the senior coordinator of the People of Hope and he said it was vitally important for the coordinators, particularly the senior coordinator, to see the community youth as a primary focus and responsibility. He explained that the coordinators need to assign resources, oversee programs, and make a place for children in the life of the community. If they do not make the youth a central focus of their ministry, it simply will not happen. Again and again I have seen the truth of Bob’s wisdom. When the coordinators have the vision and take real responsibility, that is when the youth program really takes off.

The Work of Christ is a good-sized community by Sword of the Spirit standards: about 280 adults and about that many children. We have several programs for our community youth: pre-school, elementary, middle school, high school, college-age, and post-college-age youth – and we have a good percentage of community kids join the community. But, some of our communities are small, and I have heard a few leaders of small communities say something like: “We only have two high school kids, so we don’t do anything for them.” I believe we need thinking more radical than that if we hope to have our children join us in this call. If there is only one high school aged person, a community can still serve him or her. Ask a gifted person to set up a program for one: get together with

that one for Bible study and prayer; take him or her out for a social event every month; do what is necessary to plug him or her into the regional youth program; and include that one as a line item in the community budget. The Good Shepherd spent time and resources on one sheep; if we have only one, we are not exempt; we still have work to do.

Many of our communities pray with their children to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. My community does this at our summer camp (camp is another wonderful thing communities can do). In addition I also prayed over each of my children at home. Yes, they are prayed over four or five times while still in elementary school. (You can read the introduction to my book, *Life in the Spirit Seminars for Children*, for an explanation of how this works: [http://www.sos-nar.com/tabor\\_files/LSS\\_Intro.pdf](http://www.sos-nar.com/tabor_files/LSS_Intro.pdf)) I wanted my children to experience the presence, power, and gifts of the Holy Spirit at work within them from an early age. I also wanted them to participate fully in community worship. Imagine coming to community gatherings week after week, year after year, and not being able to pray charismatically. Most of the children in our community are baptized in the Holy Spirit, they pray with us charismatically, and some offer word gifts. In other words, they participate fully in this central aspect of community life. I think this is something every community should work towards.

Communities can also help to plug each child into the regional youth events. Here in the North American Region we are blessed with a well-developed youth program. We have several summer camps for elementary children; high adventure trips for middle school boys and girls; conferences, retreats, weekend events, and mission trips for high school kids; conferences, retreats, training seminars, and the GAP program (gapers spend a year serving in another community) for college-age young people; and we have On Holiday for the post-college crowd. All of these activities cost money, require transportation, and usually need chaperones. One way the community can show commitment to its children is to help meet these tangible needs: hold a fundraiser (or six), organize transportation to every big event, beat the bushes for people to serve – and encourage parents and youth to make these programs a high priority.

Note: There are some special challenges for our immigrant communities. In addition to all of the stuff above, immigrant communities need to deal with issues relating to culture and language – transitioning from the old culture and language of mom and dad to the new culture and language of the children. I will leave the discussion of this issue to others, but seeing the transgenerational goal as integral to our call and mission is a good place to start.

## Work for Parents to Do

I am going to hit a few high points here. There is a new series of mini-courses making their way through the Sword of the Spirit development process: the Christian Parenting Mini-Courses. These will cover the area in considerable depth. So, be on the lookout.

This may seem obvious, but it needs to be said. Mom and dad need to be committed to the Lord, living the Christian life well, living their community commitment faithfully, and have a loving, Christ-centered, and well-ordered marriage. In many years of community pastoral experience, I have encountered several (a small but noteworthy percentage) community marriage relationships that have had significant problems: lack of love, anger, resentment, wrong priorities, and the like. Weak marriages rarely lead to strong family life. Good, Christian family life is a complex and challenging thing to build. It requires love, unity, planning, and commitment over a long period of time. At the beginning of this article I said that some parents cannot or do not manage the transgenerational goal very well. Sometimes the root of the problem is a marriage that is not working well. It is hard to pull together as a team when there is strife.

In addition to the challenges of building an effective family life, consider the witness to our children of poor relating in the marriage. Christian marriage is supposed to give witness to the love between Jesus Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:24-25). We hear this so often our ears are calloused. But, this is a radical call and requires our full

attention. Consistently poor relating in marriage not only fails to give witness to the love between Jesus Christ and his church, it tells our children that the power of Jesus Christ, the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and the support of the Christian community is not enough to get mom and dad to relate decently to each other. Why wouldn't they look elsewhere? If you have consistent relationship problems in your marriage, please get some help and work on building a better marriage.

One more negative thing, and then on to positives. If we hope for our children to live in community, we have to be faithful to our own community commitment. We do not talk much about this, but in most of our communities, some (a small but noteworthy percentage) of the members are not very faithful: they miss a lot of gatherings, they miss a lot of small group meetings, they do not serve much. There is a major gap between what they have promised to do and what they are actually doing. A couple of years ago I pulled together data on what has happened to children from our community who had graduated from high school over the previous 10 years. Overall, an encouraging 65% of young people who grew up in community remained active in the Sword of the Spirit. I noticed, however, a disturbing pattern: of the fathers who had major participation problems, less than 16% of their children remain in community. We see two forces at work: (1) these children grow up experiencing less community, and (2) children grow up with a witness that community – integral Christianity – is not very important. There are many good reasons to be faithful to the commitments we have made; one of these good reasons is the impact of our witness on our children.

## Some Positives

OK, I promised some positives and here they are. I will mention a few and give a brief comment. Each one could generate a whole article, so please think beyond what I say here.

Have family dinners. Spending time with your children over dinner communicates that your children are valuable; our family is valuable; we (Mom and Dad and each of you kids) need to schedule our lives so that we actually do what is important – a life-changing skill if ever there was one. Family dinners also provide a time and a place to do other stuff: share our lives, have family prayer, and learn the basics of the Christian faith.

Have your husband and wife meeting. If you hope to raise your children in the Christian faith and bring them into Christian community, you will need to have a plan. Mom and Dad need time to strategize, evaluate, budget, and otherwise scheme. Do this in your meeting – do other stuff too – but certainly do this. Also, take time to pray for each of your children. Ask for God's blessing and seek his direction.

Create a family spiritual life. Have family prayer regularly, using a pattern that is appropriate for the children – and that reflects the spirituality of the Sword of the Spirit. Teach the basics of the Christian faith. It is important for fathers to take the lead here. Not only are fathers commanded in scripture to do this, but by doing this they communicate to their children, "This is important stuff." Go to church together. Participate in community together.

Plug them into the community youth program. This consists of three complicated skills: (1) knowing what is going on, (2) getting them there, and (3) keeping other stuff (school activities, sports, friends, and the like) from interfering with community youth activities. In our community, the coordinator in charge of the youth program has kept careful records going back about 15 years. He tells me that of those community children who did not participate in the youth group, not one became an adult member of the community. In some cases the children were in rebellion. In some cases other activities, poor planning, or an overly-busy life was the culprit. In a few cases the parents disagreed with the idea or the vision for our youth group – they had a different or a better plan. No matter what the reason, not one of these young people became an adult member of the community. Do not underestimate the power of a consistent connection between your children and the community.

Govern and limit worldly influences. A major concern is media: television, books and magazines, the internet, music, movies, and the like. The world has some powerful and attractive messages for your children, so keep on top of its main delivery systems. Also, know your children's friends and social activities. Take appropriate steps here as well.

Help your children make wise decisions. This becomes a major concern in the later highschool years. For example, choosing to attend a college far from community almost insures that they will not end up in community (do not underestimate the power of maintaining a consistent connection). Parents who want their children to become adult members of the community, do well to encourage (with both words and financial resources) their children to attend a college served by a Sword of the Spirit university outreach. Likewise, they can discourage (with both words and financial resources) their children from attending a college not served by a Sword of the Spirit university outreach chapter. Of course, learning to make good decisions does not start in late teenage life. By teaching our children how to make wise decisions when they are young, they learn a process (and their parent's place in that process) that will serve them well as the decisions become more and more important.

Build a relationship and communicate with your children. Do you sit down and talk with each child individually? Have you shared with your child why you are committed to Christian community? Have you shared with them that you want them to live in Christian community too – and why? Do you help them make wise decisions that will make this goal more likely to happen? These (and many others) are good things to do.

Grease the skids. Some of our youth events are costly: they require time, money, and transportation. They also have a powerful impact on our children, so it is worth the investment. I always told my children, "I will take care of the money and the transportation, your job is to reserve the time."

Attend community teaching on parenting. Our family was tremendously blessed by the teaching we received in our community: some of it given in formal courses, some in less formal parent forums. The information and ideas helped us to build a stronger family life and better lead our children to the Lord. If you have teaching for parents in your community, please attend it faithfully. If your community does not have it, please encourage your coordinators to get on the ball.

As mentioned previously, doing all this stuff (and more) will not guarantee transgenerational success. It is, however, good and important stuff to do and it dramatically increases the odds that our children will grow up to live a full and integral Christianity.

### [Work for Community Kids to Do](#)

There is a lot of work for community kids to do as well – give their life to Jesus Christ, plug into church, community, and youth group, receive Christian formation and apply it well, make wise decisions in the Lord, go on mission trips, do a GAP year – lots and lots of good stuff. I do not imagine, however, that this article will be read by many of our youth, so I am not going to address them here. I will leave that instruction for a different forum: a youth-oriented, forum.

### [Why Some Parents Do Not Engage the Transgenerational Goal](#)

Some parents fail to engage the transgenerational goal because of problems or disunity in their marriage. Others may lack the knowledge, planning, and follow through necessary to successfully form their children in this life. Some parents (and/or their children) are un-plugged from community life in significant ways, and this keeps them from engaging the transgenerational goal well. A few parents have become timid about our spirituality (or have shifted much of their attention to a different spirituality) and this hinders engagement with the goal. Some parents simply

hold a different goal (e.g., financial success) for their children. Others have the “goal” but without sufficient action – and so it is more of a “wish.” Finally, some children are very challenging and their parents are unwilling or lack the ability to manage the situation well.

## Why Some Children Do Not Engage Community Life Well

Some of our children may have a genuinely different call from the Lord: a call to Christian ministry in another venue. This is something the Lord gets to do – to direct his servants to something else. When our children have discerned such a call responsibly and in good order, we do well to support them in it. If, however, a community kid is called to a different life and ministry, I sincerely hope that they will do that with a solid foundation of full commitment to Jesus, the power, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit, life in Christian community, and love for brothers and sisters in Christ from other Christian traditions. Full participation in community life as a child and teenager is an excellent foundation for any call the Lord would lead them to.

Some of our children may genuinely want to live in Christian community, but they are not willing to live our way of life at an acceptable level. As a coordinator, I run into this once in a while. An adult who has grown up in community really enjoys community life: this is where his friends are, he enjoys community programs, and has many loving relationships. He does not, however, come faithfully to community gatherings, he does not attend community formation (“I have heard it all before”), he does not attend small group very often, he is not serving much. To be a member of the Sword of the Spirit, people (even community-kid people) need to actually live our way of life well. If they do not, they should not become members – even though we love them to pieces.

A few community children, with or without realizing it, may choose a path that is incompatible with community. Let me offer an example. Imagine a young adult from my community (central-Michigan location) who desires, eventually, to become a full member of this community where she has many wonderful family and community relationships. She embarks, however, on a college course that ends with an advanced degree in marine biology. I am sad to say that these two paths are pretty much incompatible – one simply does not pursue a marine-biology career from central Michigan.

Life-orienting decisions (e.g., whom to marry and where to look for that first real job) have a huge impact on whether young people remain in community. There are incredibly complex issues surrounding these decisions and I cannot do justice to the topic in the little space I can devote to it here. I will say, however, that as young people who have grown up in community approach these decisions, it is especially helpful if they are in a position to receive godly counsel from their parents, their pastoral worker, and their small group. Sometimes, it can be a right decision in the Lord for a person to leave community to pursue a career or marriage. Sometimes, however, the Lord invites young people to make a profound sacrifice to live in Christian community. Those who accept this invitation should be held in honor by their brothers and sisters in community.

Finally, a few community children simply reject Christian community for a more worldly life, others remain Christian but choose not to live in community. This choice highlights that God created each of us with free will. Community children can choose to follow the Lord or not; they can choose to follow the Lord in community or not; they can choose to embrace our call and mission or not. Their choice is not necessarily the result of what the region, the community, or the parents have done or not done – it can be simply a choice they as individuals have made. Still, we (region, community, and parents) should do what is right to do, should do what we can do, and should do what increases the odds that our children will embrace Jesus Christ and his life fully.

## You and Your Children

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter quoted the Prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy and your young men shall see

visions” (Acts 2:17). Just as the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon adults, God intends that our sons and daughters – his children – will experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives as well. We have been blessed to see this prophecy come true in our day.

The Lord generously provided a place of refuge for Jacob, but also for his children: “You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children” (Genesis 45:10). Similarly, the Lord has provided for us and for our children a bulwark of protection – the Sword of the Spirit. What a blessing to be near the Lord, together with our sons and daughters, and to be charged with a call to be something together for him in this age.

The Lord has spoken a word to us. He has called us to knit our lives together as a people: a people who will live for him, love him, and serve him – together. I heard this call for my own life many years ago and have experienced tremendous blessing in responding to it. I believe that God’s call extends to many of the children who were born into and grew up in the Sword of the Spirit. As with any call from the Lord, a response is required. Parents can respond by embracing the vision for transgenerational Christian community and by doing those things that lay the groundwork for their children to embrace this call. The ultimate response, of course, is our children’s choice to make. My desire is for many of our children to experience the blessings that I have known living for Jesus Christ as a member of the Sword of the Spirit.



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[April 2010 - Vol. 39](#)



## There Are No Ordinary People

by C.S. Lewis

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations -these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the

Clive Staples Lewis (November 29, 1898 – November 22, 1963), commonly referred to as C. S. Lewis and known to his friends and family as Jack, was an Irish-born British novelist, academic, medievalist, literary critic, essayist, lay theologian and Christian apologist. He is also known for his fiction, especially *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Space Trilogy*.

Lewis was a close friend of J. R. R. Tolkien, and both authors were leading figures in the English faculty at Oxford University and in the informal Oxford literary group known as the "Inklings". According to his memoir *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis had been baptised in the Church of Ireland at birth, but fell away from his faith during his adolescence. Owing to the influence of Tolkien and other friends, at the age of 32 Lewis returned to Christianity, becoming "a very ordinary layman of the Church of England". His conversion had a profound effect on his work, and his wartime radio broadcasts on the subject of Christianity brought him wide acclaim.

merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner – no mere tolerance, or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat* – the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself is truly hidden.

[quote from *The Weight of Glory*, by C.S. Lewis. Lewis delivered this sermon at Oxford University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, on June 8, 1941. It was originally published in January, 1942.]



Portrait of C.S. Lewis by Arthur P. Strong, 1947

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## I Have My Mission

by John Henry Newman

God was all-complete, all-blessed in himself, but it was his will to create a world for his glory. He is Almighty, and might have done all things himself, but it has been his will to bring about his purposes by the beings he has created. We are all created to his glory – we are created to do his will. I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has; whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by man, God knows me and calls me by my name. God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for his purposes, as necessary in my place as an archangel in his. – If indeed, I fail, he can raise another, as he could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work: I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do his work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep his commandments and serve him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; he may prolong my life, he may shorten it; he knows what he is about. He may take my friends, he may throw me among strangers, he may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me – still he knows what he is about.

O my God, I give myself to you. I trust you wholly. You are wiser than I – more loving to me than I myself. Deign to fulfill your high purposes in me whatever they be; work in and through me. I am born to serve you, to be yours, to be your instrument. Let me be your blind instrument. I ask not to see, I ask not to know – I ask simply to be used.

[source: entry for March 7, 1848, *Meditations and Devotions*, by John Henry Newman]

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## Do We Really Have to Pray Every Day?

By Vic Gutierrez

If we just stay away from sin and dedicate ourselves to doing good, can we not be good Christians, good neighbors? Do we really need to pray daily?

Agnes Sanford (1897-1982) was a woman who prayed a lot. She was the daughter of a Presbyterian missionary in China and the wife of an Episcopal priest. She spent a lifetime of ministry in praying for healing from the late 1940s through the 70s. Many Christians from a variety of Christian denominations learned to pray for healing from her books and teachings.

Agnes Sanford, in her last few years on earth in the 1970s, moved to San Francisco, California because of her sense that God wanted her to pray for the healing of nature. She bought a home at the heart of the San Andreas Fault, the earthquake zone, and prayed for it everyday.

She spent most of her time praying in her new home. She prayed in her room, prayed in the garden over her plants and flowers, and prayed for the weather. One day as she was walking in the neighborhood, she met some of her neighbors. One neighbor said, "Oh, so you are the new neighbor who moved into that house. We were wondering what you do. Are you a chemist or a scientist?"

She replied, “No, but why do you ask that?”

The neighbor said, “Oh, it’s because we notice some kind of glow forming over your house everyday at a certain time of the day. We thought you might be making some kind of laboratory experiments there.”

She thought about that and figured out that at the times that the neighbors had mentioned, she was taking her regular prayer time, which tended to last for some hours. But she was never aware of the glow that the neighbors spoke about.

When I read about this in one of her books, it inspired me to continue praying every day because it told me that something really spiritual happens when we pray.

### “Come to me and you will have life”

So, do we really have to pray? Why don’t we just avoid sin, dedicate ourselves to doing good and be content that we can count ourselves as good Christians? We can do all those good things, but those are not what God wants us to do first. He has another idea. He says: “Listen now, my people, and come to me; come to me and you will have life!” (Isaiah 55:3).

The first thing that God wants us to do is come to him. Coming to God means taking a time of prayer. That’s what it is all about. Prayer is time spent with God, being with him, conversing with him. It is a time of developing our personal relationship with him.

We see from the example of Agnes Sanford that something really spiritual happens when we have our private meeting with God. That’s what we call our personal prayer time. People may not experience the glow over our house or room, but we know that during our prayer times God is with us in a very personal way. It’s an important time for each of us. That’s why we as a Sword of the Spirit community have put that in our essentials of membership.

### Prayer is God’s invitation to be with him

Now, I ask you, why wouldn’t we want to spend time with God? It is God’s idea in the first place. It is his personal invitation. Let’s not miss those daily opportunities to be with God!

There is a very special reason why we have to seek our Lord in daily prayer. In Scripture, God says, “My thoughts are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours” (Isaiah 55:8-9). When we spend time with him, we grow in familiarity with his word, his thoughts, and his ways.

God wants us to learn his ways and his thoughts and he wants us to be familiar with his voice. Daily personal prayer time is the key to becoming accustomed to hearing the voice of God in our hearts.

Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States during its Civil War in the 1860s, must have been a prayerful man. He said, “I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do a particular thing, he finds a way of letting me know. I talk to God and when I do my mind seems relieved and a way is suggested.”

God wants us to learn his thoughts and know his ways so that the good things we try to do everyday will be motivated, guided, and empowered by his Spirit. Many well-intentioned people are trying to do good to improve our world, but many of them get frustrated and discouraged. Others get burned out, and some start quarreling bitterly among themselves about how to do God’s work. So, don’t just go about trying to do good. Seek God first in daily prayer.

At the height of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines three and a half decades ago, many Catholic priests and nuns who were engaged in promoting social justice fled to the hills, took up arms and joined the rebels. Why? A study done during the post-Marcos era showed that these priests and nuns became bitter and angry at the sight of people suffering and dying at the hands of abusive military personnel and corrupt public officials. In deep frustration they stopped praying, lost hope, and turned to violence. We can't give up prayer. It is our lifeline with God especially in our bleakest moments?

But do we have to have a personal prayer time? We already pray in our weekly men's and women's group meetings, community gatherings, and we also go to Sunday services in our respective churches.

Yes, even with all that we have to have our own personal prayer time. This is a personal time when we can come to God in an exclusive way and stay in God's company for as long as we want. He desires that. It's a very private conversation when God can speak as a Father to his son or daughter. We can speak to him of anything that's in our hearts. We can confide in him the most private and most intimate issues in our lives. And this is also a time when we can grow in our Christian convictions and worldview.

Our daily personal prayer time is also a time of cleansing our minds and emotions, our goals and aspirations, so that they are right with God's mind and heart. Sometimes, we can get burdened by cares and frustrations. Being faithful to our daily personal time is a good way to prevent us from being overwhelmed. When some brothers and sisters come to me burdened about a lot of things, I usually ask them, "How's your prayer time?" Quite often their prayer life is not in order.

But we are all busy, working people, not like the priests and ministers who are dedicated to prayer and life in the church. What should we do?

Take the advice of the late Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila: When you foresee a very busy day, spend more time than normal praying at the beginning of the day. It sounds ironic or counter-productive to be spending more time praying when you need more time to work. But some people including myself have tried that advice and it works.

### Don't have time to pray?

You don't have time? Sometime ago a very busy business executive told me how busy he was and how his daily schedule left him with no time for personal prayer. I believed him. I advised him to sit quietly and pray in a corner of his room for just 5 minutes before going to work everyday. He followed my advice and when he and I talked again after several months, he said that in the first week he struggled with doing 5 minutes of prayer every morning. Then he found 5 minutes too short and he had to take 15 minutes until his prayer time grew to 30 minutes each day. Where did he get that additional time? It looked like he gradually recognized the necessity of starting the day with prayer and soon he made the necessary adjustments in his daily schedule.

If you really don't have time, try waking up earlier than usual. Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian author, advised in his book, *The Normal Christian Worker*, that normally it is reasonable to allow our bodies 8 hours of rest each day, but when the Lord's interests require it, we may have to do with less. Try it. But if you have health issues, you should see your doctor first.

What if I have nothing to say to God during some days? Come to God anyway. He is delighted to be with us at all times. Another well known author on prayer, Basil Pennington, a Benedictine monk, writes: "A father is delighted

when his little one, leaving off his toys and his friends, runs to him and climbs into his arms. As he holds his little one close to him, he cares little whether his child is looking around, his attention flitting from one thing to another, or if he is intent upon his father, or just settling down to sleep. Essentially the child is choosing to be with his father, confident of the love, the care, the security that is his in those arms. ... [in prayer] essentially we are choosing to remain for this time intimately with our Father, giving ourselves to him, receiving his love and care, letting him enjoy us as he will. It is very simple prayer. It is very childlike prayer” (From *Centering Prayer*).

## Pray as a disciple on mission

Finally let’s take a quick look at prayer from the perspective of being a community of disciples on mission.

- Each time we do our personal prayer, we are being formed as disciples. The character of a Christian is being stamped in our hearts during our daily encounters with the Lord. Our goals and intentions eventually get purified, and our zeal for service increases.
- It is important to seek God before doing anything else. We seek God at every step, at the beginning and end of every project. We rely on the Lord for guidance, for empowerment, and for the ability to sustain our interest in God’s work.
- Prayer is part of our mission. God is looking for partners on this earth – those who are willing to work with God. He expressed his dismay this way in the book of the prophet Isaiah: “Appalled at seeing that there was no one to intervene, his own arm brought about the victory” (Isaiah 59: 16).
- Intercessory prayer is part of what God expects us to do. “Christ actually meant prayer to be the great power by which his church should do its work, and that the neglect of prayer is the great reason the church has no greater power over the masses in Christian and pagan countries.” (From *The Ministry of Intercession* by Andrew Murray.)
- Daily personal prayer is an essential part of being a member of the Sword of the Spirit. Considering the importance of our life and mission, it is essential to pray daily for at least 15 minutes, and find additional time for Scripture reading and study.



Vic Gutierrez is one of the founding members of the 35-year old [Ligaya ng Panginoon](#) community in Manila, Philippines. He retired as its Senior Coordinator in 2004 and four years later, moved to Southern California, U. S.A. with his wife, Agnes. He is currently serving as a coordinator in the City on the Hill, a Filipino-American community of the Sword of the Spirit, which he helped to establish in 1993.

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## Praise and Thanks

a scriptural orientation to worship - Part IV

by Mike Shaughnessy

Praise the Lord!  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
Praise him in his mighty firmament!  
Praise the Lord for his mighty deeds;  
Praise him according to his exceeding greatness!  
Praise him with trumpet sound;  
Praise him with lute and harp!  
Praise him with timbrel and dance;  
Praise him with strings and pipe!  
Praise him with sounding cymbals;  
Praise him with loud clashing cymbals!  
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!

- Psalm 150



### What does it mean to praise the Lord?

One gets the impression from the last of the psalms – Psalm 150 – that we are *meant* to praise the Lord. But what does it *mean* to praise the Lord?

In Hebrew, there are two main words which get translated “praise” in English. The first, “yadah,” literally means to hold out one’s hand. This was a posture of worship, one we still use today. The second word, “halal,” is the basis for the word hallelujah, which literally translated is “praise the Lord” (halal-yadah). Two other words for praise in Hebrew mean “to jump for joy” and “to shout.” So, not surprisingly, a time of praise for us would normally include: lifting one’s hands, cheering, and clapping our hands – or even jumping for joy!

In English praise means:

1. To express a favourable judgement, to commend;
2. To glorify especially by noting perfection. Thus, a mother expresses a favourable judgement, or praises, her new-born child simply for being and later commends her six year-old for faithfully brushing his teeth.

When we praise the Lord we speak or sing of his perfections. We honor or commend. When we look for synonyms for praise we find: acclaim, adore, applaud, bless, cheer, exalt, extol, exult, glorify, hallow, honor, laud, magnify, rejoice, revere, thank, venerate, and worship. These synonyms can help us understand what we should be doing when we praise the Lord in our worship and will give us the vocabulary to do it! We can actually prepare a sacrifice of praise.

## What's involved in worship?

To worship intelligently, we should know what each of the above words actually means. Here is a chance to learn. Take the following test and see how well you do. Match the words in the right hand column to their correct meaning, numbered at left. The correct answers are in the footnote. \*

1. a shout of applause or joy	acclaim	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. applaud loudly, hail	adore	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. to effect even greater respect and esteem	applaud	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. commend for their perfections	venerate	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. express approval especially by clapping	cheer	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. express gladness	exalt	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. express gratitude	extol	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. express God's importance, worth, and value	exult	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. express our respect and esteem for God	glorify	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. give God the highest position	hallow	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. hallow by showing deference and respect	honor	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. leap for joy (literally) rejoice (Psalm 68:3)	laud	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. to note God's splendour, beauty, or greatness	magnify	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. praise above others	revere	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. praise the Lord solemnly	rejoice	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. reverence with deep, unquestioning love	praise	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. set apart as holy, unique	thank	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. show devotion with tenderness of feeling	bless	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. tell of God's goodness	worship	<input type="checkbox"/>

Above we see that the words we use in describing the praise of the Lord are closely related but have different shades of meaning. It may be helpful to spell these out more clearly.

Worship is the key word we build on. To worship, as we noted above, is to express the Lord's importance, worth, and value.

## The meaning of praise

Praise is another key word. When we praise someone, including the Lord, we acknowledge or commend them for their perfections, that is their good qualities, or deeds. The words most closely related to praise are laud, extol and bless. To laud is to praise the Lord solemnly. To extol the Lord is to praise him above other things or gods. This is also closely related to the word exalt, which means to give the Lord the highest position. To bless the Lord is to tell of his goodness, a particular perfection. To thank him is to express gratitude, but it is also a form of praise for what he has done.

We often distinguish between praise and worship. "Praise" is characterized by more joyful, louder, or more

expressive ways of acclaiming God and his perfections. The songs we sing are more upbeat. “Worship” tends to be less loud, more reverent and profound. It is a more serious veneration or adoration of God. In our common worship, it is often accompanied by singing in tongues.

### The meaning of honor

A couple of words are synonyms for honor. To honor the Lord is to express our respect (awe) and esteem (appreciation of his value or worth). To magnify the Lord is to cause the Lord to be held in even greater respect and esteem, thus to increase his honor. Glorify is a very closely related word. It means to magnify (or in this case, to increase) his splendour, beauty, magnificence or greatness.

### The meaning of reverence and adoration

Several of these words pick up on the idea that God is holy, that is, utterly unique and set apart from all others, not least due to his righteousness (or rightness). To hallow is simply to acknowledge that God is holy, set apart, unique. To venerate is to hallow by showing deference, that is, to be humble relative to that which is great. It is an expression of respect. To revere is to show devotion or commitment to that which is holy. It also has an aspect of tenderness of feeling. To adore the Lord is a similar type of awe or respect, but implies even deeper affection and unquestioning love.

### The meaning of rejoice

Several words are related to the word rejoice. Rejoice means to express gladness and approval. To applaud is to rejoice or approve especially by clapping. Acclaim intensifies this and means to applaud loudly often while hailing or cheering. To cheer is to give a shout of joy. To exult literally means to leap for joy. It is a word for a stronger expression of joy.

### The meaning of thanksgiving

Finally, we come to thanksgiving. When I was a child, I was taught to say please and thank you. It was drilled into me! It was simply considered good manners.

Saying, “Please,” shows that we do not presume upon another to favor us. Saying, “Thank you,” expresses the same, but is gratitude that the other person has favored us. When we give thanks to God, we are acknowledging that we have no right to his favor and that we are grateful that he has bestowed it.

Note that thanksgiving is the word we use, not *thankstinking* or *thanksfeeling*. *Thanksgiving* is an action. Of course, good thanksgiving also involves mentally acknowledging one's debt and feeling grateful. However, it's not enough just to feel thankful; we are to give thanks to God, just as we should thank someone for a gift, not just feel thankful or think: that was nice.

### God's honor is our first concern

The scriptures teach us that we should honor God for who he is and what he has done. So praise and thanks constitute a significant portion of corporate prayer. We want God's honor to be our first concern. Our needs and the needs of others are also important, but they take second place to honoring the Lord with praise and thanks.

*I will give thanks to you,  
O Lord, among the peoples;  
I will sing praises to you  
among the nations.  
For your steadfast love is great  
to the heavens,*

*your faithfulness to the clouds.*

*- Psalm 57:9-11*

\* acclaim = 2, adore = 16, applaud = 5, bless = 19, cheer = 1, exalt = 10, extol = 14, exult = 12, glorify = 13, hallow = 17, honour = 9, laud = 15, magnify = 3, praise = 4, rejoice = 6, revere = 18, thank = 7, venerate = 11, worship = 8.

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Prayer and Worship Series by Michael Shaughnessy

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Part III: [Inspired Psalms and Songs](#)

Part IV: [Praise and Thanks](#)

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## An Unexpected Promised Land

By Ruth Gryniewicz

Two years ago I strongly felt that the Lord was leading me on a journey through the wilderness. (I wrote an article about this experience in the [April 2008 Issue](#) of *Living Bulwark*.) He had asked obedience of me, obedience that went against my inclination, puzzled my intellect, and required the renunciation of my will. And I chose to surrender and obey, because she who seeks the Lord's will and then rejects it is foolish indeed. This is where I left you, embarked upon a Masters in Education program, finding unforeseen grace to obey, but still praying daily that something, anything, would intervene and rescue me from what I considered a fate worse than death – teaching.

However, no knight on a white horse obligingly appeared, no alternative job was dropped into my lap, and no Mac truck released me from my misery and sent me to the Lord. Instead I interviewed and received a job at the local Catholic high school, and from my view, my doom was sealed. The dreaded day finally arrived, and holding as onto armor the faith that God has good plans for me, I entered the classroom. At this moment my world turned right side up and I unexpectedly entered what I can only describe as a Promised Land.

For a year and I half I had been blindly obeying the Lord's command because he was God and if I did not obey him I knew that my life had no purpose. Therefore I was willing to walk into what I was fairly certain was going to be personally devastating, because I knew that, like Job in the Bible, I had no other choice than to trust, even if the Lord slay me. What I was completely unready for was a paradise when I had been preparing for hell. I had not taken into account that the Lord might know me better than I know myself and could be leading me into something that was both personally fulfilling as well as fruitful for the kingdom.

Now 20 months into my teaching career I have realized that it is an important part of God's purpose for me. Never before have I been so content or experienced my talents and abilities being so completely drawn upon to serve others and do God's work. Every day is a joy, like a land flowing with milk and honey. At times I sit back and ponder the greatness of God's plan and the fact that I would never have entered this wonderful land had I not been led to it like an unhappy but obedient mule.

This journey to the Promised Land has taught me much about the wisdom and the mystery of God. I was brought to a clearer understanding that I serve a God who does ask obedience of his servants, but who regards his servants as sons and daughters, and cares for them as such. While I was expecting the reward of a slave, he was preparing blessings for me as his daughter. Nothing is too much for him to ask, but nothing is too much for him to give as well. I serve a loving Father, a mysterious Lord who works all things for the good of those who love him, and whose ways are far beyond mine. Never once in those many months of obedience did he tell me that in teaching I would find fulfillment. He never hinted that it would be anything other than what I had feared. He only called me on to trust and obedience. I can speculate about the reason for this silence, but in the end all I know is that this obedience and trust have been rewarded far beyond what I expected or deserve. There was weeping as I planted the seeds of obedience, but I am full of joy as I experience the rich harvest in this Promised Land.



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## Standing Out

### Being a Christian Among My Peers in the World

By Theresa Smith

In 2008, I graduated from high school in Middletown, Maryland, USA and I did a year of college, living at home. Then I decided to join the Sword of the Spirit GAP program for a year of service abroad. I am now half way through my year of service, living with a five other girls in household and serving in Charis Community in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The experience of living and serving here has helped me to recognize more clearly the kind of secular culture and world we live in and the challenge it poses for living as a Christian. Growing up as a Christian in this generation I have always heard, “Be in this world but not of it.” How possible is that in reality?

Working for a Christian youth program is the main part of my Gap service this year. I have been privileged to observe close-up a group of young people searching for God’s love and a personal relationship with him. It has amazed me to see so many of them choosing to attend the prayer meetings every other week and constantly searching for answers to their questions about God. Many of them now seem torn between the world they live in and the new longing they have to grow in their relationship with God.

#### Living for God's purpose or for my own?

Many of the young people in the youth program stand out to me. One person in particular has an interesting story. When I initially met a girl, I’ll call her Kara, not her real name, I had no idea she was seeking a relationship with God because it seemed clear to me that she was living a very worldly life. She is very outgoing and unique and we both got along right away. However, she was struggling with a few issues, including a bisexual lifestyle. It puzzled me for a while to see her coming regularly to the prayer meetings and worshiping with us, but without seeing much

change in her lifestyle. I could see that she was genuinely praying and seeking a deeper relationship with God. After a few months of conversations with her about the issue of living a bisexual life-style as being contrary to God's commandment, she gradually began to see that the wrong behavior she was struggling with was starting to make her want to change. God was both calling her and challenging her to continue following him every day. It amazes me to see a young person with that kind of struggle continue to fight for God's love and try each day to turn away from the world's influence.

I recognize that many young people who want to live the Christian life struggle with the double life syndrome. Growing up, I have had to make a choice whether to live for God's purpose or for my own. This decision is not just a onetime thing; every day I have to make that same decision.

How do I live in the world as a Christian and still relate to my non-Christian peers? Does that mean I have to reject the culture around me?

I think no. Rejecting the culture only puts me in a bubble and that keeps me from sharing my Christian faith with other people. The reality is that we do live in this world! We cannot just discard the influences around us – If you know the culture but still stand up for what you believe in as a Christian, then many people around you will hopefully see in you God's light, a light they can't find in the world. I think that people are naturally drawn to the happiness that God wants for them, but many just have a hard time recognizing it.

### [Live in the world but not of it](#)

But how can I live out my choice every day to “live in this world but not of it?”

Honestly, I don't find it easy. The first thing I try to do, though, is to make it a conscience choice and then share that choice with the people around me. Openly telling my friends and family that I want to live out God's plan and admitting to them areas I recognize I have to change are a big help for me.

I still experience setbacks and challenges. Habits and ways of life are not easy to change. But when I do fall, I try to pick myself back up. I don't need to give up and go back into that torn feeling of living the double life.

One other thing I have learned is that some situations seem to always have a way of bringing me down. It might be an addiction, or self-pressure, or even, at times, a friend I realize may be having a bad affect on me. I try my best to break with those situations and surround myself with people and activities that help me to live in the world but not of the world.

No one, including Jesus, guaranteed that the Christian life would be easy. But to use the cliché, “What is easy is not always right, and what is right is not always easy.” In the end, I believe that you will be happy when you choose God's plan.

I am grateful to God for the opportunity to serve young people in Belfast and for the lessons I am learning about living as a Christian among my peers right in the world.

“And the world passes away and disappears, and with it the forbidden cravings of it; but he who does the will of God and carries out his purposes in his life abides forever” (1 John 2:17).





Theresa Smith is from the Triumph of the Cross Community in Middletown, Maryland, USA. She is currently volunteering as a staff worker for [Youth Initiatives](#) in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

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Jesus appears to the holy women, by Tissot

## Majesty Within Limits

By Origen (c. 185-254)

Of all the marvelous and splendid things about the Son of God there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very Word of the Father, and the very Wisdom of God, in which were created “all things visible and invisible,” can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judaea; yes, and how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a child and uttered noises like those of crying children; and further, how it was that he was troubled, as we are told, in the hour of death, as he himself confesses when he says, “My soul is sorrowful even unto death”; and how at the last he was led to that death which is considered by men to be the most shameful of all—even though on the third day he rose again.

When, therefore, we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the ... nature of deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself. If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death.

For this reason we must pursue our contemplation with all fear and reverence, as we seek to prove how the reality of each nature exists in one and the same person, in such a way that nothing unworthy or unfitting may be thought to

reside in that divine and ineffable existence, nor on the other hand may the events of his life be supposed to be the illusions caused by deceptive fantasies.

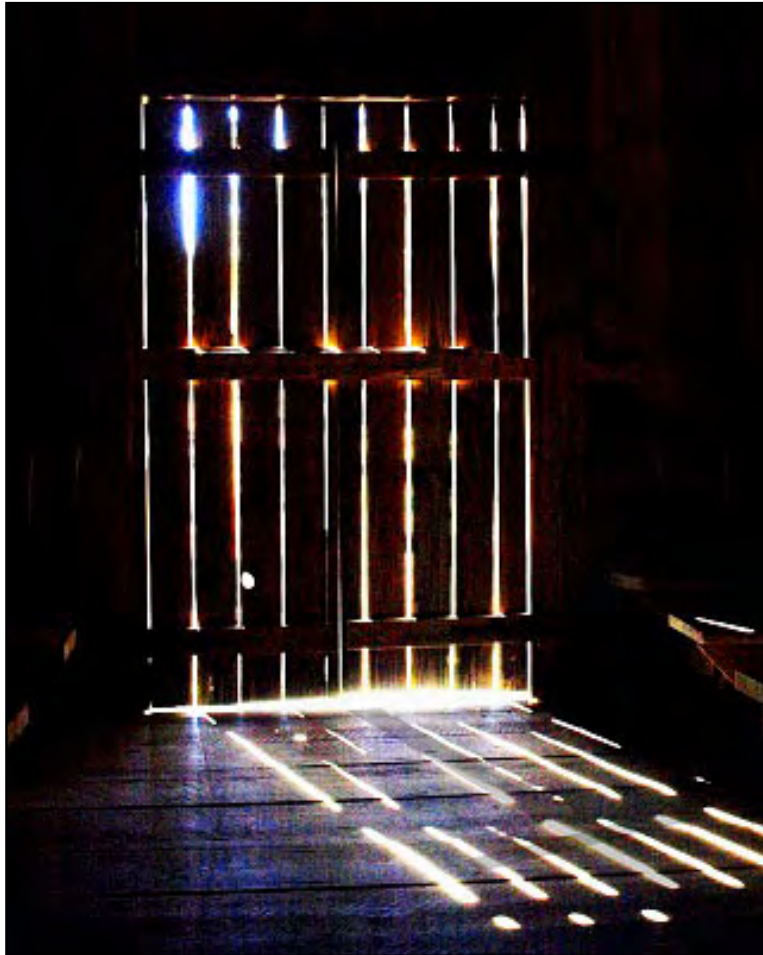
But to utter these things in human ears and to explain them by words far exceeds the powers we possess either in our mortal worth or in mind and speech. I think indeed that it transcends the capacity even of the holy apostles; nay more, perhaps the explanation of this mystery lies beyond the reach of the whole creation of heavenly things.

[Quote from *On First Principles* by Origen, translated by G.W. Butterworth, (Gloucester, Maine, 1973, vi, 2.)

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## On His Blindness

by John Milton (1608-1674)

When I consider how my light is spent  
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide,  
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"  
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:

They also serve who only stand and wait."

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"Noli Me Tangere" (*Do Not Touch Me*) by Titian, 1511-12

## Awakened to Eternity

a poem by Jeanne Kun

I  
The day of rest past—  
rest prescribed by law,  
rest that refreshed her body  
and eased the fatigue of the harrowing day spent at Golgotha,  
yet brought no relief to her grief—  
Mary [Magdalene] made her way early  
to the garden where the priceless treasure of her master's body lay,  
that tabernacle so cruelly ransacked and emptied of the glow of life.

Night's veil was not yet lifted from the earth,  
but already a faint glimmer spilled over the horizon's edge,  
pushing back the shadows  
and spreading its soft light through the garden as Mary entered there.  
Yet even as the dawn began to break,  
desolate darkness and black fear blinded her eyes,  
for she'd come in one last act of kindness

to anoint her Beloved with sweet spices—  
and found the tomb and grave cloths empty  
and his body gone!

“O Gardener, tell me where you’ve laid my Lord,  
that I might see him once again!”

Then Mary heard her name  
as only he could speak it  
and knew him in the sound of it.  
Joy rushed in upon her,  
and in the morning sun,  
her heart was filled  
(like the garden ’round about her)  
with new life and vitality.

II

I too seek my Lord with love’s longing.

Now go to him, my soul.  
You’ll find him (as Mary did so long ago)  
waiting for you in the garden as in a lovers’ trysting place.

In that fair place  
where seed has fallen to its death  
(buried in its own earthen grave beside his tomb)  
and now springs forth in fruitfulness and fragrance,  
he wipes away all tears  
and speaks my name in voice my ears have ever strained to hear,  
restorer of my life  
and herald of my wakening into eternity.

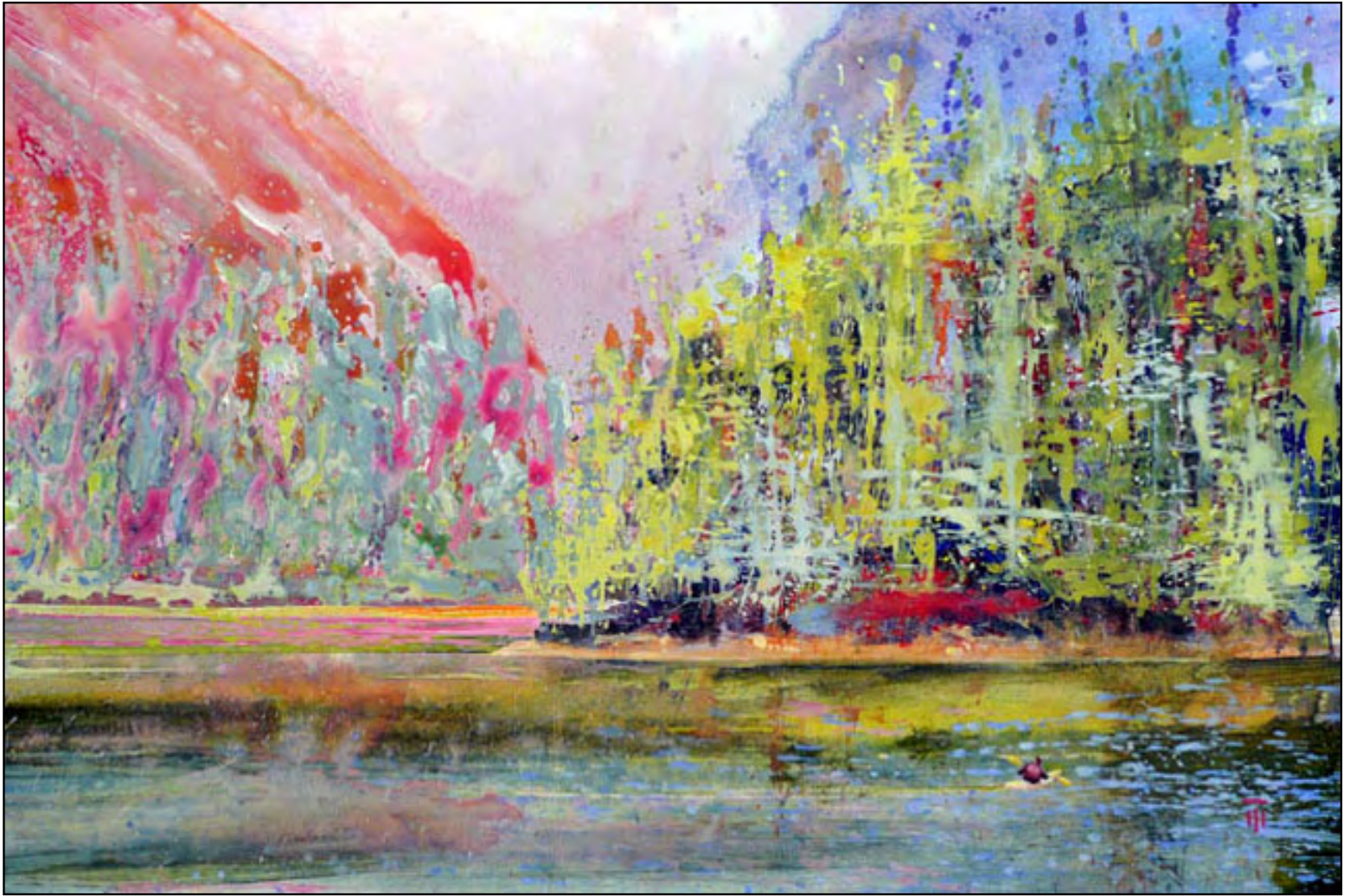
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[Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior womens' leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.]

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## Unless Your Presence Goes with Me

acrylic painting by Jamie Treadwell

Where does adventure start? A lone kayaker turns and surveys the wilderness that stretches before him. He is at the point of decision – to turn and enter into an unknown adventure, or to hold back and stay in the comfort of the calm and familiar waters. For this kayaker, the distant landscape is both beautiful and intimidating. He appears as a fragile speck against the immensity of the wilderness.

Adventure starts in the heart, a decision for courage. And each one who sets out on an adventure faces a choice – to move forward in hope or to hold back in fear.

This painting is a metaphor for our life journey, and the choices we face on that journey. The title refers to Moses' response to God as he faced his future as a leader, and his insistence that he could not go into it alone: "Unless your presence goes with us, do not send us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). Moses knew the strength and guidance of his walk with God. This promise of presence is the same promise that Jesus gives his disciples at



the end of his earthly ministry “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The imagery of this painting draws from my experience exploring the Inland Passage of Alaska in the summer of 2006. The landscape was wild and beautiful, awesome and inspirational – a landscape that captured something about the adventure of life.

[Jamie Treadwell is a noted [artist](#) who works in pastels, watercolors and acrylics. He is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#), a lay missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord, and mission leader in the Sword of the Spirit. He is currently based in London, UK. Visit his [art website](#) to see more of his work. ]

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