



A Living Hope

"I am with you always, to the very end" (The Gospel of Matthew 28:20)

- [Receiving Redemption](#): With Christ we pass from death to new life, by Steve Clark
- [New Birth into Living Hope](#): A commentary on 1 Peter 1:3-9, by Dr. Daniel Keating
- [The Resurrection of Christ Is God's Yes to Us](#), by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- [The Ascension of Christ](#), by Fulton J. Sheen
- [A Light That Never Sets](#), by Lancelot Andrews

Path to Life

- [Land of Awesome Beauty, Land That Can Take Your Life](#), by Roger Foley
- [The Promise of Peace](#): Reflections for the Easter season by Dave Quintana

Love & Suffering

- [When Your Worst Fear Becomes Reality](#), by Myriam Torres
- [Dependence on God: Quotes from godly men & women](#), edited by Myriam Torres

Transformed

- [What's the Secret of Connecting with Another Soul?](#) by Sam Williamson
- [Simon Peter: God's power transforming weakness into strength](#), by Jeanne Kun

Gift of Unity

- [Syriac-Orthodox bishops bless Lebanese community association](#), by Fady Noun
- [The Fruit of Unity](#), by Bob Tedesco

Holy Living

- [Keeping the Lord's Day Holy, Part 3](#), by Nico Angleys
- [Growing in the Skills of Listening – and Loving](#), by Tom Caballes

In His Presence

- ["Entering In" to Prayer](#), by Joanie Nath
- [Removing the Veil](#), by AW Tozer

Grace and Truth

- [When Grace Rains Down](#): New art work by Jamie Treadwell
- [Beatitude](#), poem by Sean O'Neill

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Receiving Redemption

by Steve Clark

The time is the evening of Easter, somewhere toward the end of the second century A.D. The place is the city of Rome. Christians are gathering together from all over the city to celebrate the true passover, the resurrection of the Lord. In the capital of the ruler of the known world, they gather to honor the true ruler of the universe and the passing away of “this world,” the fallen state of the human race.

While the Christian community keeps the vigil that marks the passage of Christ from death to life, new converts gather to be initiated. They have come to believe in Christ; they have been instructed in what it means to live as a Christian; they have turned away from serious sin. Now they are ready to be baptized and to take their places as full members of the Christian people.

These new Christians come from all sections and all strata of Roman society, men and women alike. There are hundreds of them, because Rome is a great city. Together, their presence is a testimony to the hunger of the human race for redemption and to the reality of the new life witnessed to by Christians of all kinds.

One by one the new converts are brought into the place of baptism. They are separated by sex. As they enter, they put off their clothes as a symbol of putting off their old ways of life. They turn to the West, the place from which they have come, and renounce Satan. They then turn around and face East, the direction from which they believe

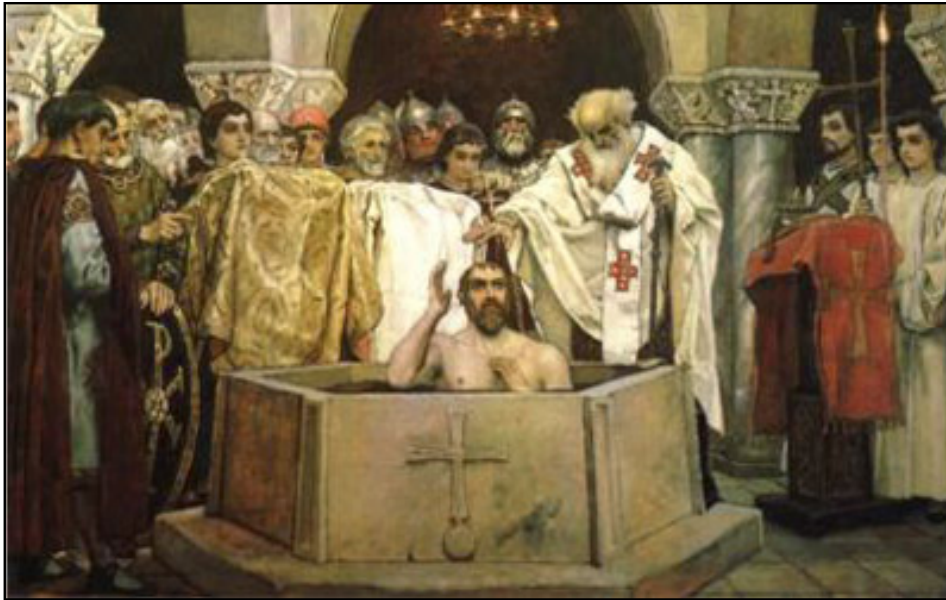
Christ will come the second time and also the direction of the assembled Christian community, keeping vigil in faith in Christ. The new converts then profess their own faith in the one God, his only Son, and his Holy Spirit.



They are then led into the baptismal pool. As they are covered with water, they are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The baptismal waters pass over them, signifying the flood of judgment that destroys the old, fallen human being and signifying the death they die with Christ to the old life and the birth to the new. As they emerge from the pool, they are anointed with oil, signifying their consecration through the gift of the Spirit. They are given white garments to wear, a symbol of the new life they will live.

As the sunrise begins, itself a symbol of the risen Christ, the new converts enter the assembly of the Christian people. There they celebrate together the Eucharist or Lord's Supper in honor of his resurrection. When the new Christians take part in communion for the first time, they are also given a cup of milk and honey, symbol of their entry into the promised land of the new life in Christ.

This description of the baptismal service of the early Christian community is drawn from the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus. The ceremony itself vividly represents the transition of the convert from the old life to the new life in Christ. Because the baptismal ceremony occurs while the Christian community is celebrating the passage of Christ from death to life, it witnesses to the way the death and resurrection of Christ makes possible the transition of the convert to new life.



To help us understand this transition, we will use the imaginary example of one of those Roman converts who takes part. His name is Gaius, a veteran of the Roman army. He was a man of some strength of character and personal capacity. Over the years, he has not been very scrupulous about whether the disorderly people he killed really deserved death, nor whether the taxes he demanded were strictly due. As a Roman soldier, Gaius had regularly sacrificed to idols to ensure personal protection and success in military operations. He had regularly engaged in what Christians consider adultery while away from his wife. As a veteran who had been honorably discharged at the end of his term of service, he was an eminently respectable man according to Roman custom. According to the old covenant law, however, he should have been a candidate for execution himself.

Gaius came into contact with Christians when he settled down after leaving the army. They were a conspicuous group, friendly and helpful, but living lives that were disciplined in a way his was not. At the invitation of one of these believers, Gaius attended sessions conducted by a Christian teacher. He learned about the truly wise way to live, about the only true God, and about the Son of God who came to bestow immortality. Gaius believed what was said and presented himself to become a Christian.

Considering an example like Gaius allows us to focus on how an individual is redeemed without raising many ecumenical issues. He is an adult pagan with a record of seriously sinful actions that need to be forgiven and a way of life from which he needs to be freed. He is not an infant, a young person raised in a good Christian family, or a nominal Christian without many signs of spiritual life. All such cases would raise some ecumenical divergences.

We are also going to consider Gaius at the point when he leaves paganism and is joined to Christ – not at the last judgment or at a point when he might fall into serious sin and be restored. Such cases would also raise some ecumenical divergences. Finally, we are not going to raise questions about the relationship of conversion and baptism in the transition from paganism to Christianity, because this will also raise some differences. We will simply look at the transition itself.

In this final chapter, then, we will consider the way redemption comes to those who turn to Christ. We will then raise the question of how fully Christ reverses the fall for those who believe in him now and how much we have to wait for, since we are saved in hope (Rom 8:24). This chapter will not describe a further benefit of Christ's redeeming work, but will complete the picture by looking at how forgiveness and new life come to those who turn to Christ.

The Transition

There are several ways in which the New Testament describes the transition Gaius underwent in order to become a Christian. They can all be related to a judicial understanding, a ceremonial understanding, and a personal transformational understanding. We will first consider the aspect of his transition that is described in Scripture and much of Christian teaching using judicial terms.

Gaius was released from the entire penalty due to sin. He had deserved or merited the sentence of condemnation by his own actions. He was also subject to the penal consequences due to the state of the human race, the way anyone shares in the consequences of the actions of the group to which they belong. To some extent, he personally deserved those as well, partly by his role in furthering the sinful condition of the race, partly in simply not deserving anything better. Those penal consequences included both the kind of death he would undergo at the end of his life as well as the spiritual death he was in as a pagan.

Gaius needed to be freed from the consequences of his sinful state. This required redemption from his “debt of punishment”, that is, the way in which those consequences were due to him. Scripture, as we have seen, most commonly describes that freeing as forgiveness of or release from sins. It also describes it as “justification”, a word primarily used by Paul or those associated with him and picked up by later Christian teachers.

There is debate over the meaning of the word “justification” as used in Scripture. Some hold that the word means being made just or righteous in the sense of being changed in character. Others hold that it means giving new life. Others hold that it means forgiving or pardoning guilt. Almost all would agree that it concerns restoration to right relationship with God.

These different meanings are not necessary mutually exclusive. Since, however, “to justify” often meant in scripture to acquit those who have been charged with wrongdoing, the use of the word in contexts concerned with becoming a Christian was probably at least partly based upon the idea of a judge acquitting a defendant. Since Gaius was not innocent when he became a Christian, God, the judge, did not say that his previous life was acceptable or that he did not deserve punishment. Rather, God simply said that he was freed from punishment and from the debt of punishment. This process was like acquitting a defendant rather than condemning him. It meant that Gaius was granted life rather than condemned to death. In this sense Gaius was justified by the supreme Judge.

We would be more likely to use the word “pardon” for what happened to Gaius. Paul probably used the word that means acquittal to emphasize the fact that Gaius was freed because of what Christ did. In his sufferings and death, the death of a righteous, innocent man, obedient to God, Christ underwent a punishment that God accepted instead of the one Gaius deserved. To use the technical theological term, Christ made satisfaction for Gaius so that no penalty was due to him anymore, especially not the death penalty. He was released to life. Consequently, once justified, Gaius was in a good or right relationship with God, treated by God as a just or innocent man. In short he was acquitted because no penalty was due to him, although not because his actions deserved it but because of what had been done for him by another.

The second understanding of the transition Gaius underwent in becoming a Christian is ceremonial. While the judicial understanding focuses on the release from the obstacle in the way of Gaius’ new life, the ceremonial understanding includes the way Gaius was positively established in that new life as well. In both old and new covenant teaching sin is understood to be a kind of uncleanness or impurity that defiles sinners. Unclean people or things are unfit to be in God’s presence and cause offense to God when allowed to be in his presence. Therefore, someone like Gaius had to be cleansed in order to be put into a condition where he could come into God’s presence, that is, enter into a relationship with God that involved any closeness or direct access.

At the same time, the positive side of what happened to Gaius is also described in ceremonial terms. When he became a Christian, he was not only cleansed but also consecrated or sanctified or made holy, to use three different translations of the same word. Christians are made holy the way a sacrifice is, the way a temple is, and the way a priest is.

As sacrifices, they have been given to God or made over to God for his honor or glory (Romans 15:16). As temples, they are places in which God dwells and in which he is glorified (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As priests, they have access to God so that they may come into his presence and worship him (Ephesians 2:18). Therefore, Christians are holy. They belong to God, are set apart for him, with access to him. They are filled with his presence, and as a result they are like God and have a similar character or holiness of life to his own (1 Peter 1:14-16).

The third understanding of the transition Gaius underwent is the personal transformational one. He went from death to life, and in the process he was made a new kind of human being. The focus here is on the result, the new life, not on the release from sin that is the necessary precondition. But the New Testament presents this transition as closely tied up with freedom from sin. Gaius was dead because of sin, since sin itself is destructive of life and since it cuts people off from the source of true life, God himself.

A number of passages concerning the death of Christ also concern the transition of human beings from death to life by becoming a Christian. They assert in one way or another that Christians have died in or with Christ and that that “death” has produced a new life in them. “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that...we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). “You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him... You, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him” (Colossians 2:12-13). There are many similar passages, almost all in Pauline writings.

These passages can only be understood in light of what it means to be in Christ. Gaius can be said to have died “with Christ” because he was joined to him and left behind his old life. He can be said to have risen “with Christ” because he received new life in him. In other words, Gaius left behind the old kind of human existence and became a new kind of human being. To describe this as dying and rising is to emphasize the radical nature of the change.

The change is so great, in fact, that Paul understands it as giving Christians a new identity, at least in the eyes of God. The old Gaius has ceased to exist. As a consequence, he no longer has to live according to obligations contracted in his previous life, at least his “spiritual” obligations (Romans 7:1-6). As a new person in Christ, he is freed from the past.

The change is great enough to be described as death. Gaius died to the life he had before. Even more he, along with all other Christians was “buried...with him by baptism into death”. That does not mean that he killed himself. He was put to death by another, God, and put to death so completely that he was also buried. In short, the death penalty was inflicted upon him, but inflicted on him in such a way that he was freed from the old person he was and the sinful nature that characterized that old person, and reborn into a new life.

Because Gaius is now in Christ he can share in the results of Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension. To say that when he became a Christian Gaius died, rose, and ascended with Christ does not mean that Gaius went back in time and joined Christ on the cross. Nor does it mean that Christ died a second time (or a millionth time) at the point of Gaius’ conversion or baptism so Gaius could die with him.

Rather, it means that Gaius became identified with Christ when he became a Christian. Because of this personal

union, Christ's past became his own past and the benefits of what Christ did became his own inheritance. To say Gaius died, rose, and ascended with Christ means that he is incorporated into the one who died, rose, and ascended. Now he can be treated as one to whom those events happened and properly share in what those events produced.

These three descriptions – condemnation to justification, uncleanness to holiness, and death to life – all describe the same transition from a state of death, uncleanness, and condemnation due to sin to a life of holiness in a reconciled relationship with God. Each is an analogous description. Together they describe what happens when someone becomes a Christian.

Christian teachers have a variety of views about how these descriptions go together. These differences cannot be stated adequately without introducing considerations that go beyond the scope of this book. All would agree, however, that the transition to fully becoming a Christian involves a change expressed by the three understandings. Taken together these descriptions speak about a transition that involves both release from the debt of punishment or penalty due to sin and an internal change that gives people the power to live without sin. The two aspects of release and change are spoken about in different terms and related to one another in different ways, but all Christian traditions recognize them.

All orthodox Christians recognize that Gaius was helpless to save himself. He was spiritually dead, in slavery without any means to purchase his freedom, under a just condemnation to death. He did not deserve new life, but could only look to the mercy or grace of God. Gaius needed a redeemer.

Christ was that redeemer. He paid the price, underwent the punishment, and offered the sacrifice that allowed the debt to be taken away and new life to be given. He also in his own person underwent the process of self-lowering and exaltation that gave Gaius a new kind of life, freed from the power of fallenness. To those who would come to Christ and seek redemption from him, he could give it. He could join them to himself, releasing them from the penalty due to sin and sharing his own life with them by pouring out upon them the Holy Spirit.

Gaius needed the grace or mercy of Christ. He did not deserve the new life, but deserved the opposite. He could not earn the new life, but had to turn to Christ to receive it. He did so because he understood from the gospel that Christ was offering it. At the same time, to receive the new life Gaius did not have to do anything other than turn to Christ. To turn to Christ, he had to turn in faith to Christ as his Lord and Redeemer. He had to repent of his sins and his old way of life. He had to be baptized, being joined to the Christ who died and rose and being joined to his body, the church.

To consider everything involved in turning to Christ would take us beyond the topic of this book. Here we can simply say that Christ is the Redeemer, that Gaius could turn to Christ and be joined to him to receive redemption, and that once he did, he became a new person.

Already...Not Yet

Two Comings and Redemption

In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul gives us an image of the completion of the redemption:

You, who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and unblemished [RSV: blameless] and irreproachable before him. – Colossians 1:21-22

Paul is probably speaking here about Christ as a priest because his reconciling work is described in the previous verse as “making peace by the blood of his cross”. Christ is standing “before” God, before the throne of his Father in the heavenly temple and presenting an offering to him. His redeeming work has been completed, and he can now present the restored human race as an offering that truly honors God. The surrounding angelic beings raise the song and blow the trumpets that accompany such an offering, a song both to honor and thank God for what he has done and to proclaim the victory he has won.

Paul calls us “holy and unblemished”, words commonly used to describe something consecrated to God. Christ could be presenting us as a body of priests, people who will now be able to be in God’s presence and worship him (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 5:10; Ephesians 1:4). More likely, he is presenting us as a sacrifice, a gift to God, acceptable to the Lord (Romans 15:16; 12:1; Philippians 2:17). He might be doing both.

But in what state are we being offered? Is Christ offering the Christian people who, joined to him, are living holy and unblemished lives before their earthly deaths? Or is he offering the Christian people after his second coming when he presents the kingdom to the Father, when all his enemies are defeated, and when sin and death are completely gone?

In this passage from Colossians Christ is here pictured as presenting the members of his body at the end. The next verse indicates that offering will only happen “provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard”. Earthly endurance is necessary for the Christian people to achieve complete victory and fully become God’s possession. But if that is so, what have we received by becoming Christians? Are we even redeemed now or do we have to wait for a future time?

Four major events demarcate human history. The first two occur at the beginning: the creation of the human race in the state God wanted and the fall away from that state. The second two events occur at the end. Both could be described as the coming of the Redeemer to raise up the human race from where it has fallen. Christ came the first time “at the end of the age to put away sin”. Some day he will come again “to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:26-28). Each of his comings is a redemption, a freeing from bondage. Each of his comings is a raising up of the human race and a giving of life.

It can be difficult to tell whether particular Scripture passages are referring to the results of the first coming or the second coming. They are purposely described in much the same words. Scripture scholars at times use the phrase “already...not yet” to describe the relationship between the two. There is only one redemption that is given to us through the two comings of Christ, so that we already have it to some extent, but do not yet have it in its full extent.

What Christians are given after the first coming is the same reality that they will have after the second coming: justification, union with God, holiness, victory, and freedom. The pardon or freedom from condemnation we receive now is the same one we will have at the last day. We will be found “in him” with a righteousness or justification that comes through faith in him (Phil 3:9). The new life we have now is the same life we will have at the last day. “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). “We know that when he appears, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

We do not have to wait until the last day for redemption to come. We already experience the life of the age to come. Even now the presence of the Spirit in our hearts is a down payment or first installment (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 5:5) of what is to come. The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). As some Christian teachers have put it, we have an assurance through faith that we have already received the relationship with God that will be ours in the age to come.

Yet there is certainly a difference between what we are experiencing now and what we will experience after the second coming. Although for Christians the age of this fallen world has already passed away so that they now live in the age of the new creation, the old has not yet completely passed away and Christians are not completely free of it. To experience the full results of the redemption, they will have to persevere until a further deliverance comes.

Redemption Now

A full discussion of the second coming, the final judgment, and the restoration of all things is beyond the scope of this book. But in order to look at the reality of redemption in this fallen world, we need to consider what redemption will be when fully manifest. That look will reveal a certain modesty to the benefits we now enjoy, but also a success whose importance could be underestimated.

To begin with the success, those who have received the risen Christ after his first coming have already been given new life fully enough to achieve the purpose of human beings. The reversal of the defeat and ruin of the human race as a whole has already occurred. It is now possible for human beings to be freed from sin and live in friendship with God. Those who “continue in the faith...not shifting from the hope of the gospel” will some day make up the human race as God originally intended it to be. At the end the redeemed race will be everything God planned it to be in the beginning.

The passage in Colossians states that we will be “holy and unblemished”, blameless with the holiness of an offering that is truly acceptable to God. That means that the redeemed race will be in a good relationship with God, living the way God intended it to live. Paul implies that this description can also be true now when he exhorts the Philippians to be “blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Philippians 2:15-16). The very fact that he needs to exhort them indicates that they need to persevere in living a life pleasing and acceptable to God, but it also implies that it is possible to do so. Ephesians even uses the Colossians phrase “holy and unblemished”, but probably applies it to our life now as priests to God (Ephesians 1:4; 5:27), indicating that such a state is possible here on earth.

Christians, then, can live a life that is pleasing to God as the result of the redemption. They can not only be freed from the guilt of sin, but also from the power of sin. That means at the least that it is possible for Christians to live free from the kind of serious wrongdoing that would lead to their being ineligible to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galations 5:21). It does not mean, however, that they can be free from all defects in the way they live, much less completely free from their fallenness or “flesh”. It also does not mean that they will necessarily be heroic or even outstanding in virtue.

The claim that Christians can live a life pleasing to God is a somewhat modest claim. It simply means that they need not murder people nor deliberately cause serious injury, that they need not steal, rob, or defraud people of significant financial or material possessions, and so on. It also means that they will worship God, observe the Lord’s Day or sabbath, support their parents in old age, and so on. Although some fail, many do live in such a way.

Freedom from such serious sin may not be a high standard. The claim, however, that Christians do live such lives is a claim of immense importance. It means that in Christ the human race can live in a way that achieves the purpose for which it was created – imperfectly perhaps, but truly. It also means that the human race is on the road to bringing all of creation to where God wants it to be.

The Two Stages

Because of the very way Christian redemption happens, the results of Christ’s redeeming work will never be other

than imperfect or incomplete until his second coming. Paul describes the current state of the redeemed in Romans 8:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

– Romans 8:18-24

This passage is notable for the way in which it connects the fate of all material creation with what happens to the human race. When the human race fully becomes what God wishes it to be, all of creation will be changed in a way that we would not expect. Death will be banished for every creature and nothing will exist that will not attain the purpose for which it was created. Such a world is beyond what we can fully imagine.

For our purposes, the passage is more notable for the way it describes the two stages in the life of Christians. They now have the first fruits of the Spirit; they will some day receive the full harvest. They now have the spirit of adoption who makes their spirits know that they are sons of God; they will some day “come of age” and be able to fully live as sons of God. They now, in other words, have to some extent what they will some day receive fully. The change will happen in an event Paul here describes as “the redemption of our bodies”.

Paul seems to be contrasting here what will happen to our bodies with what has happened to our spirits (Rom 8:16, 23). Elsewhere he speaks about what will happen to “the outer man” in contrast with what has happened to “the inner man” (2 Cor 4:16). In brief, the writings of Paul teach that through the first redemption, something changed inside of us. This change has liberated us so that we can live in a new way, be in a good relationship with God, and not be under the domination of sin. Only in the future will we be changed in such a way that we will be able to enjoy the fullness of the life God intends. Redemption has rescued the human spirit, in Paul’s terms, the ultimately controlling element in how we act, but it has not yet liberated “the body”.

We therefore now live in a “body” that is still part of the fallen world and consequently is still to some extent determined by it. We are subject to physical decay, disease, and death. Fallenness also affects us in nonphysical ways. We still live “in the flesh”, the fallen nature. We still experience what Western Christian teachers, using a Latin translation of a scriptural word, have often termed “concupiscence”, the desires that come from the fallen human state. These desires are not just disordered bodily desires; they are also disordered “desires...of mind” (Eph 2:3). They do not need to prevail since we are no longer enslaved to them (Rom 6:12-14). But such desires will not be gone until the physical body dies and is glorified, and consequently they affect our ability to live the life of Christ as well as we may desire.

The fallen world around us also affects the way our lives go. While Satan has truly been defeated, he has not yet lost all hold on most of the human race or on most human events. Those who have not yet been redeemed in Christ are still “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). Satan’s action makes the fallen world a place where God’s rule is not acknowledged. Consequently, much of what happens to us here and now is more like Christ’s path to the cross than like his glorious resurrection triumph.

In the crucifixion and resurrection Christ has won the victory over Satan, but the effects of the victory likewise come

in two phases. At his first coming, those who believe in Christ are “delivered...from the dominion of darkness and transferred...to the kingdom of [God’s] beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). At his second coming, Christ will “put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25), and the devil, along with death and Hades, will be “thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10, 14).

In between, much the same is true of the external source of sin, Satan and “the world”, as of the internal source of sin, the “flesh” or our fallen desires. We are free from them “in the inner man”, but subject to them “in the outer man”. Satan can hinder us (1 Thessalonians 2:18) and keep us from achieving what God wants us to achieve. He can harass us (2 Corinthians 12:7), cause us to fall sick, persecute us, and even put us to death.

We confront Satan in our weakness just as Christ did on the cross, with bodies that have not yet been glorified (2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 13:4). We live in a time of spiritual warfare. Like Christ, we have to be prepared for suffering, defeat, and death. Those “enemies” come our way simply as the result of the weakness of our fallen natures, but are also inflicted on us by the evil one, especially as we seek to free others from his dominion.

Yet our inner man has genuinely been delivered. We are free from Satan and the world. He cannot destroy our good relationship with God or make us sin – unless we, like Adam and Eve, give in to temptation and choose to follow him. “Provided we continue in the faith, stable and steadfast,” we are safe from him. Even more, we are not just helpless in the face of Satan’s attacks, but we can deal with them by the power of God because we live with Christ (2 Corinthians 13:4). Christ has taken up residence in us in the midst of this fallen world. His death on the cross has already won a great victory, only not yet a complete victory.

The correct balance in our understanding of the “already” and the “not yet” is difficult to achieve. Some Christians are so centered on the “not yet” that they do not seem to have gotten much past the cross. They experience no genuine freedom from sin, no operation of resurrection power in healing and miracles, and little victory other than endurance. Life is simply a vale of tears, a way of the cross.

Some Christians, on the other hand, are so centered on the “already” that they believe the full transformation can be realized now, that they cannot sin, the sons of God can already be manifested, all diseases can be healed, and all satanic attacks can be ordered away. Such views are less common but in various combinations have been held throughout the centuries.

The truth does not lie somewhere in between the already and the not yet as a kind of compromise. It lies in seeing that both are true at the same time. We are already/not yet redeemed. The victory of Christ is already/not yet accomplished. In other words, we have resurrection life but live it in fallen bodies in a fallen world.

Even though the victory is incomplete, the most important part of it has already been won. The results of the second phase of redemption will surpass the first in regard to what most preoccupies fallen man. What has not yet happened – full immortality, freedom from pain, suffering, disease, and frustration – seems to fallen human beings more momentous. But in regard to what most preoccupies God, and hopefully those who have come to living faith in Christ, the first phase of redemption is much more important – release from sin, new life in Christ, and a good relationship with God.

The realities of the redeemed life are important in themselves, but they also make possible the benefits that come with the second phase of redemption. Only those who have been joined to the Redeemer in this life will experience the full deliverance he will bring in the age to come. We are warned not to “be conformed to this world” but to be “transformed by the renewal of our minds”. As this happens, we will begin to see reality with the wisdom of God and so know what is truly good (Romans 12:2) living in the light of the age to come.



The Consummation

The last pages of the Scriptures contain a vision of the end of human history. It is the end not simply in the sense of a conclusion but in the sense of a completion. As a mature tree brings to completion the process begun with planting the seed, this final vision presents the completion of what was planted in this world by Christ's victory.

An end can be the cause of what comes earlier in time. What an architect envisions as the final building produces and unifies the process of construction. In such a way, the vision of the new Jerusalem, the completed human race, is the motive force of history, because God follows it as he brings human history to its completion.

John is taken to a "great, high mountain" (Revelation 21:10) by one of the angels who brought the seven last plagues. Because this mountain is the successor to Sinai, to Zion, to Eden, it is the highest mountain on earth (Isaiah 2:2). Next to this mountain, Everest is insignificant. This is the mountain of God.

As John looks, he sees the new Jerusalem, the city of God coming down out of heaven. It is not built up by human means, no tower of Babel reaching up to heaven. The holy city comes from heaven to earth. The new Jerusalem is grace from God, a dwelling place not claimed and established by human beings but given to them by God.

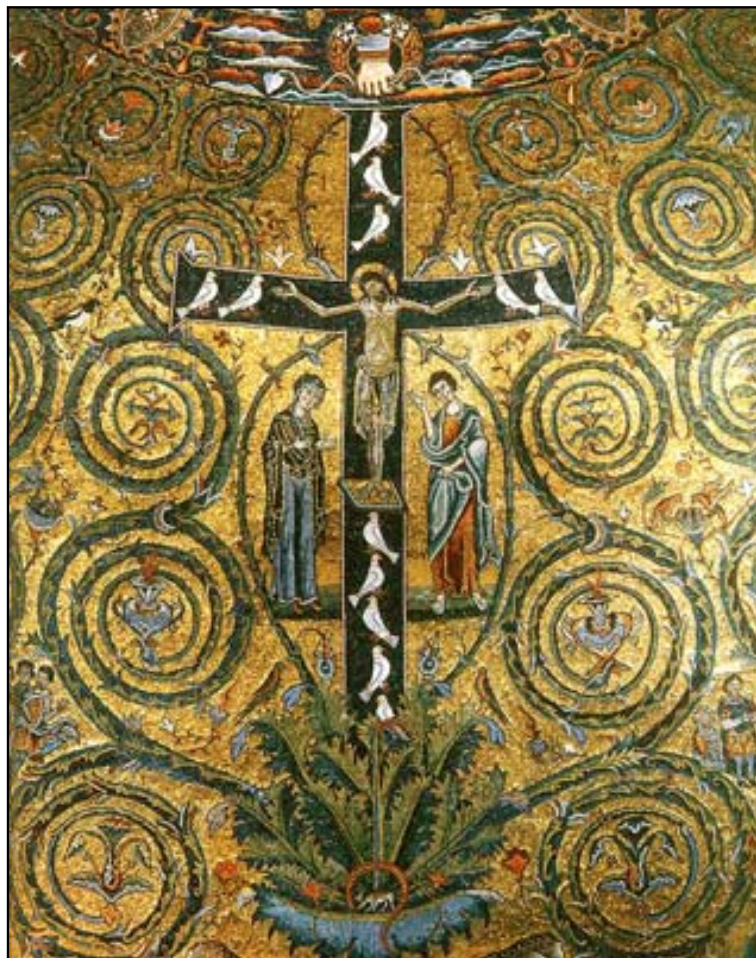
A jewel beautiful in substance and shape, pure gold, a perfect cube like the holy of holies, this new city is a reflection of the glory of God. Because sin has passed away, weakness, corruption, and defectiveness no longer keep creation from being a transposition of God's glory into a new medium. In a way we can now only dimly perceive in the created world around us, the beauty and goodness and truth of the new Jerusalem will be a clear reflection of God's own beauty and goodness and truth.

The new Jerusalem will have no temple. The holy city itself will be a temple, filled with the presence of God, the

Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The presence of God will not be found in a special place or building, but will be mediated to the whole city by the Lamb. He will be the lamp, the translucent being from which streams the glory of God. Like a good lamp, the light he provides will be brilliant without being blinding.

The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are enthroned together in the city. They are one in their reign, under which human history can finally fulfill its purpose. God's will is done on earth as in heaven. From that throne, the symbol of that reign, comes life. Simply to be united to God, to be under his reign, is to receive life. The Holy Spirit, the water of life, flows into this new creation from the Father through the Son. The city of God is paradise restored, the place where life is unmixed delight. By the river of the water of life grows the tree of life, bringing healing and restoration for those who have been wounded by sin.

In the New Jerusalem, it is no longer the human race that is banished, but the curse that is banished. The flaming sword of God's wrath is gone, quenched by the blood shed on the cross, and paradise is now opened. The human race has returned home. There human beings see God the Father face to face, and to see him is happiness itself. In his presence, filled with his life, in his image and likeness, they reign over material creation and make it a temple to the glory of God.



This final vision of human life brought to its completion is not essentially different than what God had in mind when he first created the human race. Yet the new Jerusalem will not be the simple unfolding of a well-tended, protected seed to its complete development. The holy city of God had to be attained by a redemption that cost the blood of the Son of God himself. It is the Lamb who has been slain from whose face the glory of God streams and from whose throne the water of life flows.

Early Christian pictures depict the cross of Christ as a tree with its branches filling the city of God. These pictures make explicit what is implicit in the vision of the new Jerusalem. The tree of life was replanted in the midst of the human race when Christ was lifted up on the tree of the cross. By his death he made new life possible. In his resurrection, the cross sprouted, and its branches filled the whole earth. At the end of time, those who have eaten the fruit of that tree will be the citizens of the new Jerusalem.

[Steve Clark](#) is a founder and former president of the [Sword of the Spirit](#), a noted author of numerous books and articles, and a frequent speaker. This article is excerpted from chapter 12 of Steve Clark's Book, [Redeemer: Understanding the Meaning of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ](#), copyright © 1992, 2013. Used with permission.

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New Birth into a Living Hope (1 Peter 1:3–9)

by Dr. Daniel A. Keating

The following brief commentary from the First Letter of Peter, Chapter 1 is excerpted from the book, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude*, by Dr. Daniel Keating, published by Baker Academic, 2011. While it was written from a Roman Catholic perspective, the material can be beneficial for Christians from other traditions as well. Dr. Keating explains the aim of his commentary in the introduction to 1 Peter: “The First Letter of Peter is a hidden gem, tucked away among the catholic epistles, just waiting to be discovered. Overshadowed by the longer and weightier letters of Paul, 1 Peter has often been neglected or undervalued. My aim in this commentary is to aid the reader in discovering the riches of this letter, in the hope that he or she may hear its proclamation of the gospel anew and follow the call to suffer joyfully with Christ.” – ed.

Opening blessing and proclamation

The opening blessing of 1 Peter is one of the most inspiring passages in the New Testament. Even in English translation, the powerful language and dynamic movement of the text are striking. Just as in verse 2, Peter offers his blessing in terms of the activity of the Father (vv. 3–5), the Son (vv. 3, 7–8), and the Spirit (vv. 10–12). The blessing is at one and the same time an offering of praise to God for his works and a proclamation of God’s works. It is both a prayer and a proclamation, announcing key themes that Peter will unfold in the remainder of the letter.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you ⁵ who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹ as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls.

OT references: Exodus 20:6; 34:7; Proverbs 17:3; Sirach 2:5
 NT references: Matthew 25:21; John 20:29; 2 Cor inthians 4:17

v. 3: Peter opens with a Jewish prayer form called a *berakah* (Hebrew for “blessing”), **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**, offering praise to God the Father, the source of mercy, for the benefits Christians have received.²³ It was precisely God’s mercy that was the basis for his covenants with Moses and David.²⁴

By speaking of God’s mercy as the basis for the blessings received in Christ in the New Covenant, Peter strongly indicates continuity with the action of God in the Old Covenant.

Peter gives praise to God the Father for two specific benefits. The first is a **new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**. God the Father has given us a new birth²⁵ through the resurrection of Jesus. Why the link between our new birth and Christ’s resurrection? Because the resurrection of Christ is the cause and source of our new birth into God’s people and household. This is why baptism was normally celebrated in the early Church at Easter, the feast of the resurrection.

Peter speaks of a **living hope**, a theme that recurs throughout the letter (1:13, 21; 3:5, 15). This hope refers to the object of our hope, namely, the full inheritance (v. 4) that we will receive when Jesus Christ comes again (vv. 5, 7). It is a *living* hope because Jesus Christ himself is alive, and we have come to life in him. As Peter says in 2:2, we are like newborn babes, drinking pure spiritual milk, so that we “may grow into salvation”: this is our living hope.

vv. 4–5: The second benefit is **an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading**. The triad of adjectives powerfully conveys the security of our inheritance in Christ.²⁶ Whereas all earthly treasure is subject to decay, Peter assures us that we have an inheritance – eternal life in heaven – that cannot perish, that has no stain or defect, and that will never lose its glory. Why? Because it is **kept in heaven** for us by God himself, where no moth and rust consume (Matthew 6:20).

Peter gives further assurance that even in this life we are **safeguarded through faith by the power of God**, so we should not be afraid. It is not only our future inheritance in heaven that is secure. Even now on earth we ourselves are safeguarded through our faith in Christ, safeguarded, that is, for **a salvation that is ready to be revealed**. Peter is referring here to the second coming of Christ (see v. 7). “Salvation” is the general term in 1 Peter that sums up all that we receive in Christ. In some cases it refers to our present status in Christ that comes through faith and baptism (3:21), but here it points to our future destiny that will be ours when Christ

returns (see also 1:9, 10; 2:2). For Peter, our salvation is both present and future; it is something that we have already entered into through faith and baptism but that will be completed only when Christ comes again.

The **final time** refers to Christ's return and the end of the world. "Final," or "last," translates the Greek *eschatos*, from which we derive eschatology, the account of the last things that will occur when Christ comes again. "Time" translates *kairos*, a word that often means God's timely intervention according to his plan. In 1 Peter, *kairos* clearly carries this sense (see 1:11; 4:17; 5:6); it refers to God's providential time when he will act. The "final time," then, is that moment in human history when God will intervene decisively through the return of Christ and bring our salvation to completion.

Reflection and application

Peter tells us further (1:23) that we have been "born anew, not from perishable seed but from imperishable seed, through the living and abiding word of God." What does this mean? The logic is this. Every kind of seed produces something of its own kind. Grass seed produces grass. Human seed produces humans. In an analogical way, divine seed, the Word of God, produces a new birth that brings about the fruits of divine life in us. This rebirth is a remarkable thing: it is what makes us capable of being holy, of loving one another, and of enduring suffering for Christ's sake. But we have to nourish and cultivate this seed, so that it might bear all the fruits of God's life in us.

Joy in the midst of suffering

vv. 6–7: Peter now introduces a profound paradox: the presence of inexpressible joy in the midst of suffering. He says first that **we rejoice in this** living hope, which is our salvation, present and future. Who would not rejoice? But then he tells us that **now** we must be ready to **suffer through various trials**, even if only for **a little while**. This echoes Paul's reference to the "momentary light affliction" that is preparing us for "an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Using a metaphor found frequently in the Old Testament (Job 23:10; Proverbs 17:3; Wisdom 3:5–7; Zech 13:9), Peter compares the testing of our **faith** to the purification of **gold by fire**. The sentence structure is difficult to follow, but the point of the comparison is perfectly clear. If gold, the most precious of earthly substances, requires purification, how much more does our faith – more precious than any earthly gold – benefit from the purifying fire of our trials. "For in fire gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation" (Sirach 2:5).

The term **genuineness** is difficult to capture in one English word. It really means "the genuine quality produced through testing." The point is this: through various trials faith is made more pure, just as gold in the fire. When Jesus is revealed in his coming again, all these trials will result in **praise, glory, and honor** for those who have endured faithfully. They will hear the Lord say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

vv. 8–9: Peter knows that the Christians he is addressing have **not seen** Jesus with their own eyes. Nonetheless, he reminds them that despite not seeing him, they came to **love him**. And **though they do not see him** in the present time either, yet they continue to **believe in him**. As Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29). Faith and love are not dependent on seeing the risen Lord with our eyes.

More than this, Peter says that they **rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy** in the present time. Despite serious trials, the living hope they have in Christ brings profound joy. This is not the stoic, cheerless attitude sometimes ascribed to Christians, but rather the deep joy that comes from already possessing a foretaste of our heavenly inheritance. And it is joy that has the upper hand here. Structurally, Peter surrounds the promise of suffering (vv. 6b–7) with joy on either side (vv. 6a and 8). Suffering and trial are fenced in, so to speak, by the overwhelming reality of the great joy that is ours even now in Christ.

Even though Christ is not yet seen, they **attain the goal** of their **faith**, which is the **salvation of** their souls. The verb is best rendered by the English present progressive tense: they *are attaining* the goal of their **faith**, even as they move toward that final goal. And the goal is salvation, the full inheritance that will be ours when Christ returns again. But what does Peter mean when he says “the salvation of your souls”? “Soul” here should not be understood in contrast to the body, as if only the spiritual part of us will be saved at the last day. To the contrary, “soul” represents the inner and essential life of a human being but does not exclude the body. The salvation of our souls is the salvation of our entire lives, including our resurrected bodies.

Reflection and application

How can joy coexist with suffering? In the natural order of things, joy and happiness are equated with the *absence* of suffering. When suffering arrives, sadness and grief naturally follow. Is Peter then being incoherent when he speaks in one breath of “indescribable and glorious joy” and the suffering of “various trials”? No, not if we take into account the power of the gospel. Only through the gospel can we experience true joy in the midst of suffering. Since we have a “new birth” and a “living hope” within us, the trials of life need not quench our joy. Saint Francis of Assisi is a remarkable example of this. He experienced what he called “perfect joy” right in the middle of his most intense trials.

Peter is simply recasting here what Jesus said to his disciples: “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven” (Luke 6:22–23). Knowing profound joy even in the midst of genuine suffering is a mark of the disciples of Jesus; it shows that we possess more than transient enthusiasm. Even though we haven’t seen the risen Jesus with our eyes, we do have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and so we can “rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.” As we experience and display this paradoxical joy in the midst of trials, we give witness to those around us that the gospel gives power to engage and overcome the sufferings of the world.

Notes

[23](#) The *berakah* is the standard form for Jewish blessings. For examples in both the Old Testament and New Testament, see Gen 14:20; 1 Sam 25:32; Ezra 7:27; Ps 31:21; Dan 3:28; Luke 1:68; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3.

[24](#) See Exod 20:6; 34:7; Deut 5:10; 2 Sam 7:15; Ps 89:28.

[25](#) The ESV translates this “caused us to be born again,” whereas the RSV has “we have been born anew.” The verb here, “to give new birth” (*anagennao*), is unique to 1 Peter in the Bible (occurring here and in 1:23), but it is synonymous with the phrase in John 3:3, “to be born from above,” or “to be born again.”

[26](#) In Greek, the three words display a delightful alliteration: *aphtharton*, *amianton*, *amaranton*.

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The Resurrection of Christ is God's Yes to Us

Reflections on Easter by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and a founding member of the Confessing Church. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews and the evils of the Nazi ideology. In spring of 1935 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was called by the Confessing Church in Germany to take charge of an "illegal," underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). He served as pastor, administrator, and teacher there until the seminary was closed down by Hitler's Gestapo in September, 1937. In the seminary at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer taught the importance of shared life together as disciples of Christ. He was convinced that the renewal of the church would depend upon recovering the biblical understanding of the communal practices of Christian obedience and shared life. This is where true formation of discipleship could best flourish and mature. Bonhoeffer's teaching led to the formation of a community house for the seminarians to help them enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community. In 1937 Bonhoeffer completed two books, *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*. They were first published in German in 1939. Both books encompass Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of what it means to live as a Christian community in the body of Christ. He was arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943. On April 8, 1945 he was hanged by the Gestapo as a traitor in the Flossenburg concentration camp. As he left his cell on his way to execution he said to his companion, "This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's yes to Christ and to his atoning work.

The cross was the end, the death of the Son of God, curse and judgement upon all flesh. If the cross were the last word on Jesus, then the world would be lost in death and damnation without hope, and the world would have been victorious over God. But God, who alone effected salvation for us all — "all this is from God" (2 Cor. 5:18) — raised Christ from the dead. That was the new beginning following the end as a miracle from above, though not like the springtime according to a fixed natural law, but rather according to the incomparable freedom and power of God that shatters death. "Scripture has proclaimed to us how one death devoured the other" (Luther). Thus did God commit himself to Jesus Christ. Indeed, as the apostle is able to say, the resurrection is the day that Son of God is begotten (Acts 13:33, Rom. 1:4). The receives his eternal divine glory back, and the Father receives his Son back. Thus is Jesus confirmed and glorified as the Christ of God who Jesus was from the very beginning. But so also does God acknowledge and accept the vicariously representative, atoning work of Jesus Christ. On the Christ, Jesus cried the cry of despair and then commended himself into the hands of his Father, who was to make of both him and his work whatever he pleased. The resurrection of Christ confirms that God said yes to his Son and his Son's work. And so we do now call upon the Resurrected as the Son of God, the Lord, and as Savior.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's yes to us.

Christ died for our sins, and was resurrected for our righteousness (Rom. 4:25). Christ's death was the death sentence over us and our sins. If Christ had remained in death this death sentence would still be in effect; "we would still be in our sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). But because Christ was raised from the dead, our own sentence has been repealed, and we have been resurrected with Christ (1 Cor. 15). This is so because we are ourselves in Jesus Christ by virtue of God's acceptance of our human nature in the incarnation. What happens to him, happens to us, for he has accepted us. This is not a judgement from experience, but God's own judgment that seeks acknowledgement in faith in God's word.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's yes to the creature.

It is not a destruction of the embodiedness, but rather the new creation of embodiedness that takes place here. The body of Jesus leaves the tomb, and the tomb is empty. Just how is it possible or conceived that the mortal, perishable body is now present as the immortal, imperishable, transfigured body remains a mystery to us. Perhaps the different versions of the disciples' encounter with the Resurrected help to make clear that we ourselves are unable to imagine what is meant by this new bodiliness of the Resurrected. We do not know that it is the same body — for the tomb is empty; and that it is a new body — for the tomb is empty. We do know that God has judged the first creation, and has created a new creation in the exact image of the first. It is not an idea of Christ that lives on, but the real, physical Christ. That is God's yes to the new creature in the midst of the old creature. From the resurrection we know that God has not abandoned the earth, but has reconquered it, has given it a new future, a new promise. The same earth that God created bore God's Son and his cross, and on this earth the resurrected appeared to his disciples, and to this earth Christ will return on the last day. Whoever affirms Christ's resurrection in faith can no longer flee the world, but neither can they fall prey to the world, for in the midst of the old they have recognized God's new creation.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ demands faith. The one consistent witness of all these accounts, as divergent as they are in telling what occurred and was experienced here, is that the Resurrected appeared not to the world, but only to his followers (Acts 10:40f). Jesus did not present himself to some impartial authority to attest before the world the miracle of his resurrection, thus coercing the world to acknowledge him. He wants

to be believed, proclaimed, and believed again. The world as it were, sees only the negative, the earthly impression of the divine miracle. It sees the tomb and explains it (albeit in conscious self deception) as a pious deception on the part of the disciples (Matt. 28:11ff.) It sees the disciples' joy and message, and declares it to be a vision or an auto-suggestion. The world sees the "signs" but does not believe the miracle. Only where the miracle is believed do the signs become divine signs and thus an aid to faith.

For the world, the empty tomb is an ambiguous historical fact. For believers, is the historic sign — one following necessarily from and confirming the miracle of the resurrection — of the God who acts in history with human beings. There is no historical proof of the resurrection, only a plethora of facts that are extremely peculiar and difficult to interpret even for the historian. For example, we have the empty tomb. For if the tomb had not been empty, this strongest counter-argument against a physical resurrection would certainly have become the basis for an anti-Christian polemic. Nowhere, however, do we encounter this objection. In fact, the opposing side confirms the empty tomb (Matt. 28:11). Or we have the sudden turn of events two days after the crucifixion. An conscious deception is excluded psychologically by virtue of the disciples entire earlier and subsequent behavior, and also by the divergent nature of the resurrection accounts themselves. Self-deception through visionary states is rendered virtually an impossibility for the unbiased historian, given the disciples' own initially quite unbelieving and skeptical rejection of the message (Luke 31:11, et passim.), together with the considerable number and manner of appearances. Hence the historians' evaluation of this matter, which from a scientific perspective remains such a riddle, will be dictated by presuppositions contained in their worldview. But this robs their conclusions of any interest or import for faith, which is grounded in God's acts in history.

So for the world an insoluble riddle does remain, but not one that in and of itself could ever coerce belief in the resurrection of Jesus. For faith, however, this riddle is a sign of the reality which it already knows, an imprint of divine activity within history. Research can neither prove nor disprove the resurrection, for it is a miracle of God. Faith, however, to whom the Resurrected attests himself to as the living Christ, recognizes precisely in the witness of scripture the historic nature of the resurrection as an act of God which in its miraculous nature can only be a riddle for science. Faith receives the certainty of the resurrection only from the present witness of Christ. It finds its confirmation in the historic imprints of the miracle as recounted by scripture.

It is the blessing of Jesus Christ that he does not yet reveal himself visibly to the world, for the very moment that happened would be the end and thus the judgment on unbelief. So the Resurrected withdraws from any visibly salvaging of his honor before the word. In his hidden glory he is with his community, and is attested through the word before all the world, till at the Last Judgment he will come, visible to all human beings, to judge them all.

– Theological Letter on "Easter," commissioned by the Pomeranian Council of Brethren, Berlin, March 1940, translated by Douglas W. Stott

Overcoming death means resurrection

Easter? We focus more on dying than on death. How we deal with dying is more important to us than how we conquer death. [...] Learning to deal with dying, however, does not yet mean we have learned to deal with death. Overcoming dying occurs within the realm of human possibilities, while overcoming death means resurrection. It is not from the *ars moriendi*, but from the resurrection of Christ that a new, purifying breeze can blow into the present world. [...] If even a few people were really to believe this, allowing this belief to

move them in their earthly actions, much would change. To live from the perspective of resurrection: That is Easter.

– Letter to Eberhard Bethge, Tegel Prison, March 27 1944

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The Ascension of Christ

by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979) was an American theologian and bishop, first in New York City and then in Rochester, New York. He became well-known for his preaching, especially on television and radio. He hosted the night-time radio program *The Catholic Hour* for twenty years (1930–1950) before moving to television and presenting a weekly program called, *Life Is Worth Living*. The show ran from 1951 until 1957, drawing as many as 30 million people on a weekly basis. He wrote 73 books and numerous articles and columns. Mother Theresa of Calcutta always kept a copy of Sheen's book, *Life of Christ*, with her wherever she travelled for daily reflection and meditation.

For those forty days after his resurrection, our Divine Savior was preparing his Apostles to bear the loss of his presence through the gain of the Comforter who was to come.

Throughout the course of forty days
he had been appearing to them,

and telling them about the kingdom of God.

– Acts of the Apostles 1:3

It was not a period when he dispensed gifts, but rather one in which he gave out laws and prepared the structure for his Mystical Body, the Church. Moses had fasted days before the giving of the Law; Elijah fasted forty days before the restoration of the Law; and now for forty days the risen Savior laid the pillars of his Church, and the new Law of the Gospel. But the forties were about to end, and the Apostles were bidden to wait upon the fiftieth day—the day of jubilee.

Christ led them out as far as Bethany, which was to be the scene of the last adieu; not in Galilee but in Jerusalem, where he had suffered, would take place his return to his heavenly Father. His sacrifice being completed, as he was about to ascend to his heavenly throne, he raised his hands bearing the imprint of nails. That gesture would be one of the last recollections the Apostles would have, save one. The hands were raised first to heaven and then pulled downward to earth as if to draw down its blessings on men. Pierced hands best distribute benediction. In the Book of Leviticus, after the reading of the prophetic promise of the Messiah, there came the high priestly benediction; so too, after showing that all prophecies were fulfilled in him, he prepared to enter the heavenly sanctuary. Hands that held the scepter of authority in heaven and on earth now gave the final blessing:

And even as he blessed them he parted from them,
and was carried up into heaven...

– Luke 24:51

And is seated now at the right hand of God.

– Mark 16:19

So they bowed down to worship him,
and went back full of joy to Jerusalem,
where they spent their time continually in the temple,
praising and blessing God.

– Luke 24:52, 53

Had Christ remained on earth, sight would have taken the place of faith. In heaven, there will be no faith because his followers will see; there will be no hope, because they will possess; but there will be love for love endures forever! His leave-taking of the earth combined the cross and the crown that governed the smallest detail of his life. The ascension took place on Mount Olivet at the base of which is Bethany. He led his Apostles out through Bethany, which meant passing through Gethsemane and the very spot where he wept over Jerusalem! Not as from a throne, but from a mountain elevated above the garden with the twisted olive trees crimsoned with his blood, did he give the final manifestation of his divine power! His heart was not embittered by his cross, for the ascension was the fruit of his crucifixion. As he said, it was fitting that he suffer in order to enter into his glory.

In the ascension the Savior did not lay aside the garment of flesh with which he had been clothed; for his human nature would be the pattern of the future glory of other human natures, which would become incorporated to him through a sharing of his life. Intrinsic and deep was the relation between his Incarnation and his ascension. The incarnation or the assuming of a human nature made it possible for him to suffer and redeem. The ascension exalted into glory that same human nature that was humbled to the death.

A coronation upon the earth, instead of an ascension into heaven, would have confined men's thoughts of him to the earth. But the ascension would cause men's minds and hearts to ascend above the earth. In relation to himself, it was fitting that the human nature which he took as the instrument for teaching, and governing, and sanctifying, should partake of glory as it shared in shame. It was very hard to believe that he, who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, was the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased. It was difficult to believe that he, who did not come down from a cross, could ascend into heaven, or that the momentary glory that shone about him on the Mount of the Transfiguration was a permanent possession. The ascension put all such doubts away by introducing his human nature into intimate and eternal communion with God.

The human nature which he took was mocked as a prophet when they blindfolded him and asked him to tell who struck him; he was mocked as a king when they put upon him a mock-robe of royalty and gave him a reed of straw for a scepter; finally he was mocked as a priest when they challenged him, who was offering himself as a victim, to come down from the cross. By the ascension his triple office of Teacher, King, and Priest was vindicated. But the vindication would be complete when he would come in justice as the Judge of men in the human nature which he took from men. No one to be judged could complain that God knows not the trials to which humans are subject. His very appearance as the Son of Man would prove that he had fought the same battles as men and endured the same temptations as those standing at his bar of justice. His judgment would immediately find an echo in hearts.

Another reason for the ascension was that he might plead in heaven to his Father with a human nature common to the rest of men. He could now, as it were, show the scars of his glory not only as trophies of victory but also as emblems of intercession. The night he went into the garden he prayed, as if he were already at the right hand of the Father in his heavenly abode. He uttered a prayer that was less that of a dying than that of an exalted Redeemer.

So that the love you have bestowed upon me may dwell in them, and I, too, may dwell in them. – John
17:26

While in heaven, he would be not only an Advocate of men with the Father but he would also send the Holy Spirit as man's Advocate with him. The Christ at the right hand of the Father would represent humanity before the Father's throne; the Holy Spirit abiding with the faithful would represent in them the Christ who went to the Father. In the ascension, Christ took our necessities to the Father; thanks to the Spirit, Christ the Redeemer would be brought into the hearts of all who would believe in him.

The Ascension would give Christ the right to intercede powerfully for mortals:

We can claim a great High Priest, and One who has passed right up
through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.
It was not as if our High Priest was incapable of feeling for us in our humiliations.
He has been through every trial, fashioned as we are, only sinless.
– Hebrews 4:14

Excerpt from [Life of Christ](#), Chapter 61, (c) by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen 1958, published by [Ignatius Press](#), San Francisco, with forward by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR. Used with permission.



A Light that Never Sets

devotional prayer reflections by Lancelot Andrews

Lancelot Andrews (1555–1626) was a Church of England clergyman and scholar during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. During King James' reign, Andrews served successively as Bishop of Chichester, Ely, and Winchester, and oversaw the translation of the Authorized Version (or King James Version) of the Bible. Andrews was noted for his ability to compose prayers that "lift the mind up to God." The following selection is taken from a book that Andrews wrote for his own "private devotions" and never intended to publish. It consists of written prayers that Andrews used as daily devotional aids.

The sun's radiance

Through the tender mercy of our God, the dayspring from on high has visited us. Glory be to You, O Lord; glory to you, Creator of the light, Enlightener of the world. God is the Lord who has shown us the light.

Glory be to you for the visible light: the sun's radiance, the flame of fire; day and night, evening and morning. For the light invisible and intellectual: that which may be known of God, that which is written in the law, oracles of prophets, melody of psalms, instruction of proverbs, experience of history's light which never sets.

By your resurrection raise us up into newness of life, supplying to us frames of repentance. The God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will. Work in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

You who sent down on your disciples your Thrice-Holy Spirit, do not take the gift from us, but renew it, day

by day, in us who ask you for it.

I have sinned, Lord

Merciful and pitiful Lord, long-suffering and full of compassion: I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned against You. O wretched man that I am, I have sinned, Lord, against you grievously, as I have participated in false vanities.

I conceal nothing from you, Lord. I make no excuses. I denounce against myself my sins. Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord in the following ways, and call to mind those particular sins I wish to confess.

I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me nothing. And what shall I say now? Without plea, without excuse, I am self-condemned. I have destroyed my own self.

O Lord, righteousness belongs to you, but in me there is only confusion. You are just in bringing sentence upon me. And now, Lord, what is my hope? Is it not you, Lord? Truly my hope is in you, if I have hope left, if your loving-kindness will abound in the face of all my sins.

O Lord, remember what I am made of and who made me, for I am the work of your hands. I was made in your image, I am the reward of your blood, a name from your Name, a sheep of your pasture, a son of your Covenant. Do not forsake the work of your own hands. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving-kindness, according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

Incline my heart

I will lift up my hands into your commandments which I have loved. Open my eyes and I shall see, incline my heart and I shall desire, order my steps and I shall walk in the way of your commandments.

O Lord, be my God, and let there be no other before you. Grant me to worship you and serve you according to your commandments: with truth in my spirit, with reverence in my body, with the blessing upon my lips – both in private and in public.

Help me to show honor and submission to those who have been put over me. Help me to show affection for and care for those who have been put in my charge. Help me to overcome evil with good, to be free from the love of money, and to be content with what I have. Help me to speak the truth in love, to be desirous not to lust, or to walk after the lusts of my flesh.

O Lord, help me: To bruise the serpent's head. To consider the end of my days. To cut off occasions to sin. To be sober. Not to sit idle. To shun the company of the wicked. To make a covenant with my eyes. To bring my body into subjection. To give myself to prayer. To come to repentance.

Hedge up my way, O Lord, with thorns that I may avoid the false path of vanity. Hold me steady with the bit and the bridle so that I do not pull away from you. O Lord, compel me to come in to you.

This most holy faith

I believe in you, O God, Father, Word, Spirit – one God. I believe that by your Fatherly love all things were created; that by your goodness and love all things have been gathered into one in your Word, who for us and for our salvation became flesh, was conceived, born, suffered, was crucified and was buried, descended, rose again, ascended, sat down, and will return and judge.

I believe that by the operation of your Holy Spirit you have called the whole world into a commonwealth of faith and holiness. I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins in this world, and the resurrection of the flesh and life everlasting in the world to come. I believe this most holy faith, once delivered to the saints. O Lord, help me in my unbelief.

Help me to receive faith from his miraculous conception, humility from his lowly birth, patience from his suffering, power to crucify the sin in my life from his Cross, burial of all my evil thoughts in good works from his burial. Grant that I might be able to meditate on hell from his descent, to find newness of life in his resurrection, to set my mind on things above from his ascension, to judge myself in preparation of his returning judgment.

One heart and one soul

O God of truth, establish all who stand in truth, and restore all who are sick with sin and false beliefs. Remember your congregation which you purchased and redeemed long ago. Grant to all who believe that we may be of one heart and one soul.

O Lord of the harvest, send forth laborers into the field. Grant unto our clergy the ability to proclaim your word of truth and to live their lives according to those truths. Grant that these ministers who love you would obey and submit to your word of truth.

Profound and perpetual peace

O Lord, King of all nations, strengthen all the states and the leaders of the inhabited world who have been given authority from you. Scatter all the people who delight in war. Make all war cease unto the ends of the earth.

And remember especially our divinely guarded king, and work with him more and more. Prosper his ways in all things; speak good things to his heart for your Church and your people. Grant to him profound and perpetual peace, that in his tranquility we, too, may lead a quiet and peaceable life.

Grant unto farmers good seasons. Grant unto the fishermen good weather. Grant unto the tradesmen a desire not to compete with one another. Grant unto all merchants to pursue their business with lawful integrity.

O Lord, you have called us to overcome evil with good and to pray for our enemies. I ask, Lord, that you have pity on my enemies, just as you have pity on me. Lead them, together with me, into your heavenly kingdom.

Remember my family and my kin

O God, not of us only, but also of our seed, bless our children that they may grow in wisdom as in stature, in favor with you and with all people. You have called us to provide for our families, and you despise those who do not care for their households. Remember my family and my kin according to the flesh. Grant me to do all I can for their good.

Bless all who have blessed me, Lord; bless all from whom I have received blessing. Grant me, Lord, to love those who love me: my friends and my family's friends, and all of the children of my friends. Never forsake them.

Remember the lonely

Remember, Lord, all the infants, the children, the youth, the young, the middle-aged, and the elderly who are hungry, sick, thirsty, naked, captive, or friendless in this world. Be with those who are tempted with suicide, those who are sick in soul, those who are in despair.

Remember those who are in prison, all those who are under sentence of death. Remember the widows and widowers, the orphans, and those who travel in a foreign land. Remember all who this day will work under oppressive conditions. Remember the lonely.

You are the Fountain of Life

It is right and good that we, for all things, at all times, and in all places, give thanks and praise to you, O God. We worship you, we confess to you, we praise you, we bless you, we sing to you, and we give thanks to you: Maker, Nourisher, Guardian, Healer, Lord, and Father of all.

You are the Fountain of Life, the Treasure of everlasting goods to whom the heavens sing praise – all the angels and heavenly powers, crying out to one another – while we, the weak and unworthy join with them singing:

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, the whole earth is full of the majesty of your glory"

Blessed be the glory of the Lord for his Godhead, his mysteriousness, his sovereignty, his almightiness, his eternity, and his providence.

The Lord is my strength, my strong rock, my defense, my deliverer, the horn of my salvation, and my refuge. Amen.

[Excerpts from *Lancelot Andrews and his Private Devotions*, translated by Alexander Whyte, 1985.]

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Mount Taranaki in New Zealand

“Land of Awesome Beauty, Land That Can Take Your Life”

by Roger Foley

As I write I am both working away from home, and taking some overdue leave. The location is stunningly beautiful, an isolated location, yet just thirty paces from the waters of a pristine ocean Bay. Everyday Veronica and I walk for miles and literally see almost no other people. Rather we see exquisite shells with each turn of the tide, fascinating driftwood, distant high peaks, and landscapes sculptured by wind and water.

We also enjoy the wildlife and have our regular daily visits from a large family of quail. They are fascinating to watch in their natural environment – they have a cycle to their busy days which includes a time of rest in a small hollow under trees but always with a couple of lookout guards ‘on watch.’ Then last night, near midnight, we heard what we had anticipated- the arrival of a family, or several families, of small penguins. They are seasonal and when they come they set up ‘house’ under the house. The noise lasts for hours as they seem to bicker and argue and grumble at each other. Then the sudden silence as somehow someone decides ‘we all sleep now’, and so they do. Tonight I will be on watch to see if I can spot them waddling out of the waves and heading uphill to the house!

Yes, Aotearoa is an awesome land of great natural beauty, but it is also a place in which you can so easily lose your

life. Physically and spiritually.

Physically

Take a look at the summit crater of Mt. Taranaki in the photograph. It is quite a high mountain, a dormant but not extinct volcano, but access to ascend it is easily gained. It is approachable. But unlike many world peaks, the easy approach is much the same for many of our mountains. Easy to access does not necessarily mean easy to climb. Many have lost their lives on Taranaki, this beautiful to look at mountain.

When I climbed it I recall partnering with a German on the Lizard Ridge. We went well together except that as we neared the top we simply could not decide 'which way' for the final several hundred feet, and so we agreed to split left and right, me taking left. As I ascended it got harder and despite it not being a winter climb the higher I went the more ice sheen appeared on the rocks. Eventually I decided I should turn and descend but then I found I was in trouble as the ledge I was on was simply too narrow to make a turn. I started to feel anxious but then I heard a voice yelling at me and way down below me was the German. His direction had taken him into the actual crater, whereas my direction had stranded me on the inside face of a jagged peak known as the Shark's Tooth, which you can easily see towards the right in the photograph. Thankfully my climbing buddy could see what I could not. I just needed to carry on as there was a way down to him that I could not see. He verbally guided me down into the crater. I learnt a lot from that climb into the classic crater of Mt. Taranaki.

Spiritually

But how can we lose our lives spiritually because of the beauty of the land? Yes we can because the world changes the topography of the physical into a landscape called money, power and wealth. The Scriptures speak of the broad road which if taken leads to destruction, and of the other way, the narrow way, which with the Lord leads to life. The voice of the world speaks a seducing language we often long to hear, the great and beautiful way! With the riches of man you can have so much and enjoy so much: wealth, health and a nice suntan, the latest car, the biggest TV, annual holidays in paradise locations, power and prestige, money and more money [and more money] rolling into your bank account. You have gained success, you are fulfilled. Or are you?

Who owns your allegiance? Who watches over your family? Who forms your children's path? Who has your commitment? Who owns your soul? And who do you call 'Lord?' Or is your allegiance in other directions- to a job, a career, a relationship, or to possessions and money?

Are you praying and seeking God? Do you spend time with and seek to form your children for God? We are given so much, let is not wander onto that broad road that leads to destruction.

Our country, in its headlong journey to redefine Christian Marriage, is fast taking that path, but we are called to embrace the narrow way and embrace the life of a disciple of the Lord. And so, as I enjoy the great natural beauty of this place on this quiet evening, I am 'fed' by the words from Judith:

'Hope in any other have I never had save in Thee O God of Israel.'

And the music of our brother, Ed Conlin:

'There is a love stronger than death, a passion deeper than this life. In the heart's purest longing, lives the Pearl of Great Price...'

That is what I desire. Do you? Come, let us walk this way together.



Roger Foley is the senior coordinator of the [Lamb of God Community](#). He and his wife Veronica live in Christchurch, New Zealand.

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Reflections for the Easter Season

by Dave Quintana

The promise of peace

Jesus' post-resurrection greeting is a powerful one – "Peace be with you." Life will not always be smooth, life will not always be easy, everything will not always go our way, but we do have Christ's peace. Not "happy-happy feel good peace" but true peace – that is "right relationship" with God, with others, and with self. He offers peace to us who have remained silent, peace even to those of us who have failed, denied, or even rejected our Lord. Jesus looks upon each of us with forgiving eyes, longing that we would be in full relationship with him and deeply at peace with him. So when we fall, let's get back up again, be restored, and return to full fellowship ("peace") with him.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

John 20:19-21 ESV translation

Living life from the center

Life is meant to be lived from the Center, a divine Center. Each one of us can live such a life of amazing

power and peace and serenity, of integration and confidence and simplified multiplicity, on one condition – that is, *if we really want to*. Do you want it enough? Do I want it enough?

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7 RSV translation

Free from the dark

Many children, of course, are quite afraid of the dark. And not without reason – bad things can happen in the dark! But as Christians, while we seek to rid the world and our lives of darkness, we know that Christ's light is greater than our darkness. That allows us to live in peace and in freedom. We know that the power and grace of God can turn our stumbling blocks into stepping stones. We know that sin and death and darkness have been defeated – that Christ stands victorious and so do we. Let us strive to live free from all darkness and shadows, liberated by the light of the world.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:5-9 ESV translation

Free to whisper

One area in which we all desperately long to be free is our relationship with God, being able to freely and confidently come before him. To be able to be ourselves, warts and all, before him, and not to feel that we need to hide in shame. Cardinal Hume puts it well as he talks about “being free enough to whisper into the ears of a compassionate God a story I never dared to tell.” Now that is freedom! Yes we're sinful, and yes we ought to be repentant and seek God's mercy and power to change. But may we also live in the perfect freedom and glorious liberty of the sons of God, as we speak to him of the story of our lives which we never dared to tell.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8:14-16 RSV translation

Free to love

If in your relationships with others you are very concerned for yourself, or if you are concerned that you might “lose out” or be taken advantage of, let me suggest that you best be mighty careful, and you best not give of yourself very generously. But please recognize that you are trapped; you are not free. In fact, as Methodist spiritual writer William Sangster notes, “Only the free can love, and only the completely free can love unreservedly.” I believe that the power of Christ's resurrection, made manifest in our lives, is meant to free us to love others generously from the heart. It allows us “to soar with the lightness of true inner freedom” as we lose ourselves, and as we find God and others, in love.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-33 RSV translation

Free to ask

Why not take some time today to ask God that he would expand your borders? That he might bless you with more opportunities to live for him, with more chances to bless others, with more "appointments to keep" (that is, God-orchestrated encounters). And remember, living his way is a part of the deal! How about making this prayer your own?

Oh, that You would bless me indeed,
and enlarge my territory,
that Your hand would be with me
and that You would keep me from evil.

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!" And God granted what he asked.

1Chronicles 4:9-10 RSV translation

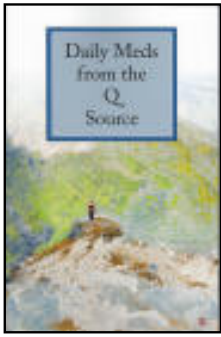
Finding God in all things

I truly desire to have my life, in each aspect of it and in every aspect of it, to be given over to God as fully as possible. But my life is filled with so many different things and such a wide variety of things – some more "spiritual" and some more "human", some more "holy" and some more "mundane". There are many keys in the spiritual life that unlock certain things for us. I was given a key a while back from a dear friend and brother who was writing about "finding God in all things". I quickly found it a helpful expression of, and goal for, what I thought the Lord was looking for from me. Certainly my life would be more centred on him and on the life that is found in him if I could but find him a bit more in all the normal, human, mundane aspects of life.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Colossians 2:16-17 ESV translation

[Dave Quintana is an elder of the [Servants of the Word](#), a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He is also a regional coordinator for the [Sword of the Spirit](#) in Europe and the Middle East. He currently lives in London, England.]



Daily Meds from the Q Source

by Dave Quintana, published by [Tabor House](#), 2012, 250 pages, \$11.00

Dave Quintana's daily meditations and Bible readings to stir our minds and kindle our hearts in 2013. He explores themes important to all who search to be wise men and women in the Lord, and provides a wealth of personal experience from living and ministering in Central America, Asia, Europe, and the United States. Expect to be challenged. Expect to be inspired. Expect to meet the living and loving God. [Order](#) from Tabor House.

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When Your Worst Fear Becomes Reality

I can't think. I can hardly pray. But I can trust and love.

by Myriam Torres

My first big clue that something was very wrong came in February 2009. I was on a Christian mission trip to Costa Rica, meeting with a small group of women. Suddenly I couldn't understand a word they were saying.

I didn't let on, but I was totally at a loss. All I could do was make a comment every now and then and hope it was all right. I got some puzzled looks, but somehow I made it through the next hour. Afterwards, I reverted to normal.

Things weren't normal, though, when I got back home. I cried all the time without knowing why. In my job as a high-level statistician, I found myself struggling to analyze data and needing to delegate my work to other analysts.

"Could be menopause," a friend suggested. I was fifty-six and had already gone through that stage, so it didn't seem likely. "Stress," thought someone else. I took a month off from work, but things only got worse.

A nurse practitioner urged me to see a doctor, and so began two years of medical tests. Early on, after a psychological test revealed "significant" mental impairments, one specialist noted: "probably Alzheimer's disease." If I ever read his comment, I dismissed it right away.

That diagnosis wasn't confirmed until May 2011. By that time, because of my increasing confusion and forgetfulness, I had left the job I loved. And I was wrestling with God in a very serious way.

But I'm your bride!

For most of my adult life, I've lived "single for the Lord" as part of an ecumenical group of women who have chosen not to marry in order to dedicate ourselves to a life of prayer and Christian service. And so, though we work at various professions and don't take religious vows, I see myself as a bride of Christ, deeply loved and deeply in love with Jesus.

Every day before work, I used to get up to spend an hour with him. I loved it. I'd praise and worship God – singing, reading Scripture, reflecting, and writing down things that struck me. But as I felt myself declining, I became very angry with the Lord.

"Is this the way you treat your bride?" I'd ask him. But he was silent.

Deep down, I knew that if I refused to choose "your way, not mine," I was the one who was going to be the loser. Still, for nearly two years I fought and struggled. I denied what was happening, tried to cover up, refused to discuss it. With all my heart I wanted to believe that my problem was sleep deprivation, stress, or even depression – anything but Alzheimer's.

This wrestling went on and on, but at least I kept talking to the Lord. Then one day, during my prayer time, he gave me an unexpected grace. I suddenly realized that I could really trust him with my future. "I accept this," I told Jesus very simply.

The peace I felt got me through the final medical consultation, which left no doubt that I have progressive dementia: Alzheimer's disease, according to one last test. Sherry, a close friend who is also single for the Lord, was with me as I got the bad news

"Myriam, you're too quiet," she said, when we were back in the car. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm okay. I worked it out with God last night. And I told him it's okay, whatever it is."

Sherry couldn't believe what she was hearing. I could hardly believe it myself. It was pure grace – and so freeing to be able to admit what was happening and to talk about it.

Loved and loving

After a couple of weeks, I felt like the Lord was asking something more: Thank me. Again I wrestled. Accepting my situation had been hard enough. Did I really have to do this too? It was hard, very hard, but again there came the grace to say yes.

Months later, I realized that I was truly grateful for some of the changes I saw in myself. "I'm relating to people differently, in a softer, more loving way. Thank you, Jesus, for this opportunity." And as I prayed, I sensed a call to go deeper – not just to accept and give thanks, but to embrace the journey with trust in God's love and wisdom. This time my response came easily: I embraced it like a gift from heaven.

This may sound strange, but even as I'm losing my abilities, I'm seeing the "gift" side of what's happening. More and more, all I can do is love and be loved. And I feel so much love from so many people! They're praying for me, telling me what I mean to them, thanking me for ways I've helped them.

And God is still using me to speak words that people need to hear. When women I've counseled over the years call and ask my advice, I usually know what to say. I say it more directly, too, because along with Alzheimer's comes a lessening of inhibitions! I noticed this recently, when a woman in my Zumba exercise class said how worried she was that her husband might have dementia. Not only did I tell her how to get medical help, but right there, with other people listening in, I prayed with her. "I feel so much better now," she said afterwards.

Suffering servants

Don't get me wrong, though. Embracing this journey isn't the same as embracing the disease. I'm doing all I can to stay fit and slow my decline – speech therapy, exercise, social contacts, a good diet. If God chooses to heal me, I'll be ecstatic.

And although I've arrived at a basic peace, there are still struggles and tears. I loved being a statistician, being savvy and capable. Now I can't even count. I can't tell time without a lot of effort. If people talk fast, I can't understand what they say. I have a hard time focusing to pray. It's hard to accept help, too, hard to let go.

An experience I had at the airport last year drove home this sense of loss and helplessness. I was traveling with Sherry, but she went through security just ahead of me and couldn't help when I got confused at the guards' directions. I couldn't understand where they wanted me to place my luggage. I didn't know which hand they wanted me to raise. "Don't you know one from the other?" one guard jeered.

I stumbled out of the checkpoint crying. I felt so humiliated. "This is what's coming," I was thinking. "This is the way I'm going to be – all the time." Explaining it to Sherry later, I could only say I'd had a taste of what it was like for Jesus, when he was stripped of everything and people were mocking him. I take comfort in the fact that I am being conformed to him. As I wrote in my journal: "As time goes on and I lose all I have – the ability to communicate, my memory, being able to do my daily functions – I see that all this is making me more like Jesus, the suffering servant."

St. Ignatius Loyola put it more eloquently in words that I now pray from the heart:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my will, all that I have and possess.

You have given all these things to me. To you, Lord, I return them. All are yours. Do with them what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.



Myriam Torres is a lay pastoral worker and founding member of [Bethany Association](#), an ecumenical group of women living single for the Lord. She told her story with a little help from her friends.

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Quotes to Live By

compiled by Myriam Torres

In the autumn of 2001 I embarked on a year of a much desired spiritual sabbatical. My goal was to engage more time in prayer, on retreats, on spiritual reading and study, and pilgrimage. I intended to meet God and draw near to him. I had no expectations of how much he would meet me as well. I should have known he would desire my year dedicated to him much more than I did. I was not disappointed.

The following excerpts are taken from a compilation of quotes that I have been compiling since 2001. Many saints, those who have gone before us, and some still on this side of heaven, have more clearly conveyed the Word of God to me through these quotes. *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* (Psalm 119:103). I believe most of these quotes would appeal to Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox readers. I hope you will find true inspiration in these quotes as much as I have.

Cross

The Christian who desires to follow Jesus carrying his cross must bear in mind that the name "Christian" means "learner or imitator of Christ" and that if he wishes to bear that noble title worthily he must above all do as Christ charges us in the Gospel: We must oppose or deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow him.

– Anthony Mary Claret

Glory be to You, who laid your Cross as a bridge over death, that souls might pass over it from the dwelling of the dead to the dwelling of life!

– Ephraem the Syrian

Whoever doesn't seek the Cross of Christ doesn't seek the glory of Christ.

– John of the Cross

A man shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called to perform.

– John Paul II

He who embraces the cross and bears it with patience lightens the weight of the cross. Indeed, the weight itself becomes a consolation; for God abounds with grace to all those who carry the cross with good will in order to please him.

– Alphonsus Liguori

The cross will not crush you; if its weight makes you stagger, its power will also sustain you.

– Padre Pio

Put a good bunch of grapes under the winepress, and a delicious juice will come out. Under the winepress of the cross, our soul produces a juice that feeds and strengthens us. When we haven't got any crosses, we are dry. If we carry them with resignation, what happiness, what sweetness we feel!

– John Vianney

Dependence on God

Entrust the past to God's mercy, the present to his love, and the future to his providence.

– from Writings of Early Church Fathers

Do not be afraid to throw yourself on the Lord! He will not draw back and let you fall! Put your worries aside and throw yourself on him; He will welcome you and heal you.

– Augustine of Hippo

God is not a deceiver, that he should offer to support us, and then, when we lean upon him, should slip away

from us.

– Augustine of Hippo

Expect much of God, and he will do much for you.

– Bernard of Clairvaux

God never forgets [you]. He knows your needs. Show that you are generous in accepting whatever he may send you in the future. Nothing will happen to you without him knowing it.

– Andre Bessette

It is not a question of our equipment but of our poverty, not of what we bring with us, but of what God puts into us.

– Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

My secret is that I need God - that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.

– Dennis Copeland

Have no fear for what tomorrow will bring. The same loving God who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. He will either shield you from suffering or give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.

– Francis de Sales

It is we who need you, above anything in the world. You give yourself to us with such total generosity, that it might almost seem that you need us. There never was a king like this before!

– Ephraem the Syrian

My Jesus, if you uphold me, I shall not fall.

– Philip Neri

Entrust yourself entirely to God. He is a Father and a most loving Father at that, who would rather let heaven and earth collapse than abandon anyone who trusted in him.

– Paul of the Cross

The heart of God invites all to put it to the proof. The more he gives, the more he desires to give. He loves to see the trust which makes us persist in knocking unceasingly.

– Placid Riccardi

You pay God a compliment by asking great things of him.

– Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes.

– Teresa of Avila

To be conscious of one's weakness and to trust in God's help is the way to authentic strength and victory.

– Alice von Hildebrand



Myriam Torres is a lay pastoral worker and founding member of [Bethany Association](#), an ecumenical group of women living single for the Lord. She told her story with a little help from her friends.

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What's the Secret of Connecting with Another Soul?

by Sam Williamson

Twenty-five years ago a client asked me to meet with her president for an hour-long lunch. Her president was an industry innovator. But, she told me, the president was also almost wordlessly introverted. She proposed I come prepared with a stockpile of stories to fill the conversational void.

The night before my visit, I talked with my father. He suggested an alternate plan.

My father said there is nothing people like more than to hear the sound of their own voice. Instead of telling amusing anecdotes, he suggested I ask questions.

The next day (at lunch with a reticent president) I asked question after question. The one-hour lunch stretched beyond two, and he talked almost non-stop. He waxed eloquent of his fly fishing hobby. He explored the mysteries of different fly rods. He told tales of the intricacy – and successes and failures – of tying fish flies. After two and a half hours, he glanced at his watch astonished. He was late for his weekly executive board meeting.

A board member later laughed about that board meeting. He said that the reclusive president practically bubbled with passion about our lunch. He wanted each executive to meet me. He said I was the greatest conversationalist he had ever met.

The thing was, I hadn't told a story. Not one. I just asked questions.

Helping someone find their voice

Within each person dwells an inner life. We mostly see their outer shell – their green eyes or narrow nose, their title, or their introverted or extroverted exterior.

But within that shell, hiding just beneath the surface, resides the true person.

Each inner self possesses a treasure trove of wisdom and experience that is longing to express itself; it observes and understands the world with a rich and unique perspective.

Inside every heart is an ache to be heard. But the world is a noisy place; iPods and iPhones – and headlines and headphones – saturate the stage and deafen our ears. There's no room for another voice.

Every human has an inner voice that aches to be unleashed. We have inarticulate, unformed thoughts that are desperate for expression; there is something deep we wish to communicate, but we can't find the words. Until someone asks questions. Questions are the tools of the explorer; they are the treasure maps and flashlights of the heart hunter. By them we find the trails and tunnels into the inner life of another human heart. Questions unlock that voice in another person. We give them a stage on which to speak. Questions lead to more questions, as a kind of "Encore, encore; we want to hear more."

And something magical can happen

Every once in a while something magical happens – something almost divine. Our soul touches another soul. We encounter the real inner person.



During my lunch with the president, I asked what he liked so much about tying tiny flies. He paused, as though he had never verbalized this thought before. Then he softly breathed, "I love the perfection, the tiniest of details; I simply love the craft of it."

His eyes widened in wonder, "I've never told this to a soul before. Not even to my wife."

He saw my shared wonder. Somehow, in some way, something inarticulate from within him was expressed. While simple – tying fish flies – the shared experience of wonder connected us. He had found a voice, an ability to express an inner compelling.

Over the years

He and I began to meet a couple times a year for lunch. He told me of his first love, of getting married, of seeing his children born, of difficulties, and of successes.

He frequently marveled, "I've never said this before." I shared his wonder at his own expressions. Our hearts connected. Not every time, but often.

He began asking me questions. He grew curious about my curiosities. He became fascinated with skiing, while hating the cold. He took interest in my family, though he never met them. He marveled at computers, but he still used a typewriter.

The secret ingredient

Questions can give another person a voice, but they don't always.

An often forgotten spiritual truth is we must *have* before we can *give*. We must *be* loved before we *give* love (1 John 4:19); we can only *offer* comfort with the comfort we've been *given* (2 Corinthians 1:4).

It's an easy to ask questions for our own sake, to think, "My, what a profound question I just asked." That is, we use them to find our own voice. The only way to really help others find their voice is to let someone else help us find ours first.

The president began asking me questions only after his voice had been heard.

The surest way to find our voice is to let God ask us questions, and answer them back as he listens. Someone once suggested I take every question God asks in scripture, and answer it back to God. I began to make a list.

Questions Jesus Asks

Here is a list of questions Jesus asked of others. As I've answered them back to God, I've sensed his attention on me, almost his curiosity at my inner reflections. And when I finally get to the bottom of an issue, I've sensed his delight in my wonder.

- Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life? (Matthew 6:27)
- Why are you anxious about clothes? (Matthew 6:28)
- Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye yet fail to see the beam in your own eye? (Matthew 7:2)
- Why are you terrified? (Matthew 8:26)
- Why do you harbor evil thoughts? (Matthew 9:4)
- Do you believe I can do this? (Matthew 9:28)
- What did you go out to the desert to see? (Matthew 11:8)
- Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? (Matthew 12:48)
- Why did you doubt? (Matthew 14:31)
- Why do you break the commandments of God for the sake of your tradition? (Matthew 15:3)
- Do you not yet understand? (Matthew 16:8)
- Why do you ask me about what is good? (Matthew 19:16)

- What do you want me to do for you? (Matthew 20:32)
- How are you to avoid being sentenced to hell? (Matthew 23:33)
- Why do you make trouble for the woman? (Matthew 26:10)
- My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)
- Why are you thinking such things in your heart? (Mark 2:8)
- Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed rather than on a lamp stand? (Mark 4:21)
- Why this commotion and weeping? (Mark 5:39)
- Why does this generation seek a sign? (Mark 8:12)
- How many wicker baskets full of leftover fragments did you pick up? (Mark 8:19)
- [Speaking to the Blind man] Do you see anything? (Mark 8:23)
- What were you arguing about on the way? (Mark 9:33)
- Why were you looking for me? (Luke 2:49)
- What are you thinking in your hearts? (Luke 5:22)
- Where is your faith? (Luke 8:25)
- What is your name? (Luke 8:30)
- Will you be exalted to heaven? (Luke 10:15)
- If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? (Luke 12:26)
- If therefore you are not trustworthy with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? (Luke 16:11)

[You can [download](#) a PDF copy of the questions [here](#).]

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Simon Peter

*God manifests his power by transforming weakness into strength
and sinners into saints*

by Jeanne Kun

God calls sinners to make them saints

How often God chooses the most improbable people to move forward his purposes! A cowardly Jonah fled from God's commission to preach to the Ninevites (Jonah 1:1-3). Israel's great King David committed adultery (2 Samuel 11:2-5). Again and again God has manifested his power by transforming weakness into strength and sinners into saints. And so God chose a brash fisherman to become his instrument to "catch" men and women for his kingdom (Luke 5: 10). For Simon Peter, what began with the invitation to become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) would result in the spreading of Jesus' message far beyond the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Simon BarJona, that is, son of Jona or John (Matthew 16:17; John 1:42; 21:15), and his brother Andrew were originally from the village of Bethsaida on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). At some point they moved to Capernaum on the lake's northwestern shore, where Simon lived with his wife and in-laws (Mark 1:29-30). It's likely that he ran one of the commercial fishing cooperatives that flourished then around the Sea of Galilee (also

known as Lake Gennesaret) and sold their catch to local salters and to wholesalers in Jerusalem. Famous throughout the Roman Empire, Galilee's fisheries generated a prosperous export trade.

Now Galilee was astir with the extraordinary deeds of a young rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, who was going about the region declaring, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). One day while Jesus was preaching to the crowd that had gathered near the lake to hear him – so Luke recounted vividly, perhaps drawing on the disciples’ own memories – he used Simon's fishing boat as a “floating pulpit.” When he ceased teaching, Jesus told Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:1-4).

At your word

Simon Peter was an experienced fisherman who knew his business well. He had worked unsuccessfully the whole night – the best time for net fishing – and didn’t think that he’d catch anything now. Nonetheless, he did as Jesus directed, saying, “At your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5).

Simon's obedience was remarkably rewarded as he took in a great shoal of fish. So huge was the catch that the nets were breaking, and he beckoned to his partners’ boat for help (Luke 5:6-7). Overwhelmed and astonished, Simon “fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (5:8). In his study of the apostles entitled *The Twelve*, C. Bernard Ruffin wrote of the fishermen’s reaction “Peter’s awe and that of his companions James and John was so immense that it bordered on fear. They knew the sea well enough to know that there was no natural explanation for their extraordinary catch.” A devout Jew, Simon Peter “realized that he was in the presence of a higher being and felt totally inadequate,” added Ruffin.

Peter’s fears and failings

But Jesus calmed Peter's fears – “Do not be afraid” (5:10) – and seemed to simply ignore Peter's declaration that he was a sinful man. When Jesus called, Simon and his fishing partners left everything – the fresh catch of fish, their boats and nets, even their families. In following Jesus, they entered into a unique personal relationship with him as his disciples and began to participate in his mission.

The miraculous draught of fish was only one of the remarkable experiences that Simon Peter shared with his Lord. Peter, James, and John made up Jesus’ intimate circle of followers and were present at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:51-56), and Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:33-42). Additional events in the gospels show Peter as a man of great love and loyalty, but also one with very human failings. He was the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, and Jesus entrusted to this “rock” the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:13-19). But that didn’t mean that Peter understood the Lord: Appalled at Jesus' prediction of his passion and death, Peter cried, “God forbid, Lord!” and Jesus sharply corrected him (16:21-23).



By nature Peter was bold and confident, proud and outspoken. He frequently acted impetuously, as when he exclaimed, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water” (Matthew 14:28). “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death,” he rashly boasted (Luke 22:33). Then he was quick to reverse his brash assertion under pressure, claiming, “I do not know the man” (Matthew 26:72). Indeed, a fearful Peter denied knowing Jesus not only once but three times. Art historian Sr. Wendy Beckett wrote of Peter's fall:

“Will he lose all heart, perhaps even kill himself, as Judas did (another man wracked by grief)? But while Judas felt only remorse, which consumed itself in pointless repining, Peter feels contrition, a healing sorrow that will lead to repentance and a change of heart. (Sister Wendy's Nativity)

Accepting the grace to pick ourselves up

When the cock crowed and Jesus looked at him (Luke 22:60-61), Peter realized again – as he had earlier in Galilee – that he was a sinful man. But he also knew that Jesus loved him unconditionally, and his humility saved him from despairing of forgiveness. We can learn from Peter to face our sins and failings humbly and cling to the Lord: “Peter shows us how to respond to our inevitable stumbles and falls along the way: by accepting the grace to pick ourselves up, stick close to Jesus, and exchange self-reliance for trust in God” (Louise Perrotta, “From Fisherman to Friend of God”), After the resurrection, Jesus encountered Peter again at the Sea of Galilee. There the risen Lord provided his fishermen – disciples with another wondrous haul of fish (John 21:1-14). There too he gently probed the heart of the man who had denied him, three times asking “you love me?” and calling from his humbled friend a new declaration of love. Accepting Peter's affirmations – “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” – Jesus entrusted to him the work of shepherding his flock: “Feed my lambs....Tend my sheep” (21:15-17).

Filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the gospel far and wide and cared for the fledgling church. During the final years of his life, the chief apostle – “the rock” – headed the Christian community in Rome and, true to his master's call to the end, was martyred there during the reign of the emperor Nero. Even with his imperfections, Peter faithfully fulfilled the commission Jesus had given him.

God wants to transform our weakness into strength

Becoming a follower of Jesus led Simon Peter on many journeys, but the most significant one was, as author Louise Perrotta noted, “his inner journey of transformation from. . .one who was convinced of his own strength to one who

learned that he could only please the Lord as he learned to draw strength from Jesus, his beloved Master.” We are called to be disciples of the same master as Peter was –and we can do much for the Lord if we, like the fisherman-apostle, acknowledge that we are not perfect and rely on the Holy Spirit at work in us.

Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. This article is excerpted from [My Lord and My God: A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus](#) by Jeanne Kun (Copyright © 2004 by The Word Among Us Press). Used with permission. This book can be purchased from [The Word Among Us Press](#).]

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Syriac-Orthodox bishops bless association in Sword of the Spirit community in Lebanon

a news report by Fady Noun

The Syriac-Orthodox members of the People of God community and its associated movements in Lebanon now have their own association of the faithful, just like their brothers and sisters from the respective Catholic and Greek-Orthodox churches.

On Sunday the 3rd of February 2013, two bishops of their church, Bishop Georges Saliba, bishop of Mount Lebanon and Tripoli and Bishop Daniel Kourie, bishop of Beirut, granted their apostolic blessing to the members of their church who are part of the ecumenical community, the People of God.

The written text of this blessing was signed by the two bishops during a community meeting held in a school hall in Mtayleb (Lebanon). The bishops explained that they were granting their blessing to church members “known to them personally for their faithful service in the Christian formation centers of their dioceses.” Such a commendation by their bishops speaks of the ongoing efforts of those community members to be in good communication with their bishops and to serve at the parish and diocesan level .

The text reads: “Dear sons and daughters, we are here because you have asked us to bless your apostolic association. In light of our personal acquaintance with you and with the personal service you render in the Christian formation centers of our dioceses, and [we do so] after having studied the rules which govern your presence as Syriac-Orthodox within this charismatic movement, we grant you our blessing. We also note your serious efforts to live out a Christian life of virtue according the principles of the faith of our holy Syriac-Orthodox Church, its tradition and history, and its holy sacraments. We urge you therefore to guard the deposit of faith and the bonds of charity and to be witnesses to and apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in this our beloved and troubled Middle East, through the intercession of Our Lady and all the saints.”



Bishop Georges Saliba (standing) spoke words of blessing and encouragement to members of the community

The joyous occasion was marked by the brothers and sisters from this oriental church chanting in the Syriac language a few hymns and canticles from their church tradition.

The bishops were welcomed by Jean Fahd, senior coordinator of the community, and by members of its pastoral council, including Malko Dunia, himself Syriac-Orthodox. The bishops were also welcomed at the event by the Greek-Catholic Archbishop of Tyre, Archbishop Georges Bacouni, who is a member of the community.



Two Syriac-Orthodox bishops – Bishop Georges Saliba and Bishop Daniel Kourie (fifth and seventh from the left respectively) – with Syriac-Orthodox members of the People of God as well as dignitaries from their own and other churches.

In a short message of welcome, Jean Fahd described to the guest bishops the principles which govern the life of the People of God, its missionary dimension, and its ecumenical calling – principles which respect the church traditions of all the community's members.

Speaking to the assembly, Bishop Saliba underlined that the Syriac-Orthodox Church was one of the first to

get involved in the ecumenical movement after the Second World War, through the World Council of Churches, and in the 1970s through the Middle East Council of Churches. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, Bishop Kourie said, “Do not be afraid to follow him. His wisdom has overcome the world....Guard the deposit of faith and the doctrine of the holy fathers of the Syriac Church, serve the church of Christ which he has purchased by his precious blood...and know that the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.”

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The Fruit of Unity

By Bob Tedesco

This article is addressed primarily to members and leaders of the [Sword of the Spirit](#), an ecumenical international network of communities. The practical wisdom and principles addressed here can be helpful for any group of Christians who seek to grow in the *fruit* of unity.

In naming a discussion about unity, several titles could be used, and this springs from the similarities found in a set of words: unity, union, communion, and community. It is difficult to address the overall topic of community without drifting at some point into a discussion of unity. The scriptures address unity in both specific and general terms, and in some cases, the fruit of unity.

[Scriptures on unity, togetherness and body life](#)

One of the most foundational scriptures addressing unity is found in Ephesians 1:9-10

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

The importance of this scripture cannot be overestimated since it presents God’s plan from before the foundation of the world.

“...even as he chose us in him **before the foundation of the world**” (Ephesians 1:4).

We might say or hear someone saying, “I wonder what the Lord is doing?” In a broad way, at least, we have an answer: he is “uniting all things in Christ.” Togetherness in worship supports God’s plan; togetherness in mission supports God’s plan. We do not always know *exactly* what the Lord is doing, but he has revealed his overall plans and purposes to those who want to live for Christ.

On the other hand, his enemies – the world, the flesh, and the devil – are diligently working to divide us and to disintegrate individuals, families, groups, denominations and even cities and nations. The world and the flesh are used by the devil to create chaos, division and disintegration. God integrates; the devil disintegrates. God brings us together in life; the devil disintegrates, takes us apart in death. A decomposing corpse is the tapestry of his best work. The resurrected body, united with Jesus, is the work of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Good fruit

“A healthy tree bears good fruit, but a poor tree bears bad fruit” (Matthew 7:17 Today’s English Version). What does bad fruit look like? It looks like disunity, disintegration, and death. Of the Ten Commandments, the positive-sounding (“You shall!”) examples present behavior that unites. The negative-sounding ones (“You shall not!”) warn about behaviors that divide and disintegrate. Murder (and violence), stealing, adultery, lying and coveting all cause trouble and divide human groupings. So we see in all of this a *tool for discernment*: does my decision, or behavior, or action bring God’s people closer together or further apart? Does my new house or new job mean more community? Or does it mean less community? Matthew 12:33c (Today’s English Version) says, “A tree is known by the kind of fruit it bears.”

Unity and prayer

“Again I say to you, if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19).

Some have said, “When two people agree about anything, it’s already a miracle!” This scripture is at least stating that people gathered together (even two!) are God’s plan for how we should intercede. It is often the case that sickness and calamity can have a unifying effect on God’s people, as they gather to bring the Lord’s power into a difficult or even impossible situation.

In my own family, when leukemia struck my grandson, all petty differences and disagreements suddenly were eclipsed by the need for unity in fasting and prayer which brought us closer together. Thirteen years later and defying all odds (including an episode with Ewing Sarcoma), he graduated from high school! Our family came together in prayer and we were joined by brothers and sisters in community, in the Sword of the Spirit worldwide, and in the broader church. One fruit of unity is *power in prayer*.

Signs of the times

“He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening. ‘You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (Matthew 16:2-4).

My wife and I love to watch the weather channel. For her, it is like a great adventure. “When Weather Changed

History!” is one of her favorite shows. As a show, it symbolizes man’s interaction with the supernatural: 1) we are immersed in it; 2) we ignore it at our peril; 3) it can bring both blessing and calamity; 4) it can be studied but not mastered; 5) you can run but you cannot hide; 6) man’s machinations are subordinate to and far inferior to its power.

The weather can be embarrassing. At one time, I lived near our TV weatherman. One Sunday, while driving to church, I saw him shoveling four inches of “sunshine” (his prediction) out of his driveway. I tooted my horn and smiled in a pleasant (yet teasing) way.

On another occasion, I took two of my friends and their son out for a short boat ride on the lake. The wind came up and we never got out of the lagoon before we were swamped by the choppy water. Fortunately, it was only three or four feet deep and we were able to find their son who had slipped under the boat! I was (and still am) more embarrassed than the weatherman. Decades later, we are still friends and I have a much deeper boat!

The scripture verse warns that we can predict the weather but we cannot interpret the signs concerning these times. It warns that people can be evil and godless and yet ask for a miracle. To be evil and godless is often to be sinning against the Ten Commandments, against God’s plan. His plan is to unite; the world the flesh and the devil are disobedient, divisive, and block the power of God for the miracle that is needed. Some hallmarks of our society are: negativity, slander, disobedience and division... godless evil. So, to obey is to unite and usher in the power of God. To disobey is to divide people and to block the power of God.

Wait...together

“And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, ‘You heard from me..’” (Acts 1:4).

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1).

Two of the most difficult things for modern, independent, individualistic people to do is to wait, and worse, to wait together. Our fast food culture teaches us that waiting is bad, fast is good. Doing it “my way” is better than doing it “our way.” No one getting to tell me what to do is seen as better than being “bossed around.” Even good leadership can be interpreted as “lording it over us.” These postures or mindsets leave us hopelessly incapable of dealing with God who: 1) has tons of time on his hands; 2) wants to be together with us; 3) thinks that he is in charge of this family of his; and 4) thinks that he gets to decide how it is ordered. Because the first disciples were able to “wait... together,” we have Pentecost, the birth of the Christian church.

Unity a gift...to be preserved

“Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call” (Ephesians 4:1-4).

Clearly, unity is a gift of the Spirit, and it is a gift that we preserve and we maintain. We make decisions in our lives in a way that respects unity and protects it. Again, we use the little discernment test: *Does this decision yield more community (unity), or less?*

One modern approach to Scripture

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will

seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

A number of years ago, I had a long, serious, almost fatal battle with knee surgeries, infections, etc. My daughter, Jeanette, gave me a poster inscribed with the scripture shown above. It was quite encouraging hanging from the wall where I could see it from my bed. My friend, Bill, sent the same scripture to me in an email assuring me that the Lord had more for me to do.

Another encouraging scripture that often gets on posters is Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

Personal at the expense of the corporate

Most scriptures can have a beneficial, encouraging effect on the individual (as in my example above). Due to our great division, isolation, and individualism, we often personalize scriptures at the expense of the corporate. The scriptures cited were actually written to groups or to a people. In Jeremiah 29, verse 14 says, “I will gather you in from all the nations.” So it is not originally intended just for my bedroom wall! Revelation 3:20 (Today’s English Version) is written to the church at Laodicea...Christians! Verse 21 follows: “To those who win the victory, I will give the right to sit beside me on my throne.” Verse 22 says, “Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

One more example: it is *Our* Father, not just *my* Father, at the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer. Keeping the sense of “our” in my prayer orientation has a joining and a uniting effect on the body of Christ. It deepens our awareness and appreciation of the familial nature of Christianity and diminishes the tendency to over-personalize and isolate the individual. Because of the culture we live in and the *way* we live (often isolated in our homes), it would be difficult to over-emphasize the corporate nature of Christianity and the unity that is at the heart of God’s plan. There is something mysterious about unity and fruit, as in Jesus’ story about the farmer who plants a seed, does his part, and then does not really understand why or how it grows (Mark 4:26-27).

God’s plan, as scripture reveals, is corporate, with unity in Christ as its goal. Yet, it has personal effect, application, and responsibility.

The fruit of unity

The fruit of unity can be assessed and evaluated from different perspectives. For example, I can examine the fruit of Christian unity in my own life, my own spirituality, etc. I can also evaluate it based on how my personal life has affected other groupings, the kingdom of God, or all of mankind. In the Fruit of Unity, different perspectives are intermingled in the rather long yet incomplete lists of fruit at the individual, family, community, regional, and international levels of our community life. The lists were compiled at a community forum of my community, the People of God. That is to say, after 35 years of community life, we were stepping back to see what fruit we could see in our life together. The lists were compiled in a one-hour session, and are not prioritized or defined.

Some examples of fruit

We will look at a few examples at each level, but it is worth noting that some of the identified fruit mentioned could be seen as “worthy of the investment” of time, money, etc.

Fruit of personal maturity

At the personal level there are a number of things that could be listed under the heading of discipleship: self-knowledge, character formation, teaching, accountability, etc. These are noteworthy effects on the individual, whether married or single, and are specifically intended results of the way our community is structured: initiations [in Christian formation] courses, small groups, pastoral care, etc. The maturing of the Christian disciple is one of the

main objectives.

This is a two-part process: there is maturity that we gain from simply receiving the teaching and training, and then there is a second level of maturity that comes from putting the principles into practice in loving and serving our brothers and sisters in the Lord, as well as advancing the kingdom of God in the world.

The second level of maturity cannot be done for you by any leader or teacher, but must be personally engaged in to take effect. Sadly, many brothers and sisters level off after the first stage of maturity and never reap the full effects of Christian maturity that come from engaging the cross of service. In that sense, community life serves us by providing a good place for us to die to self. The phrase “a place to live, a place to die,” describes these two levels of personal maturity.

Another fruit of unity: Family life

At the family level, marriage support, children (protecting the value of life), parenting support, peer support for kids, and understanding of the roles of husband/wife and mother/father are all significant fruits of community life. If we existed just to help marriages to stay together, it would be worth the investment.

For family life to have its full effect, children must be involved in both levels of maturing presented above: 1) formation; and 2) dying into family life. Refusing the second step retards their maturity.

As with the individual, families are also invited to go beyond the first stages and “die into” the broader life and mission of the community. This approach for family life helps to keep the membrane of the nuclear family receptive to the nutrients and support that can flow into the family, protecting it from a self-centered stagnation.

A third fruit: Local community

Because we stay together in unity, we are able to do things as a community that none of us can do separately: men’s retreats, men’s breakfasts, women’s retreats, conferences, summer camp, community retreats, University Christian Outreach, Life in the Spirit courses, healing weeks, etc. Our unity produces fruit that is not only beneficial to us, but to the wider church and to the world. As a group, we are a witness to the Lord, a reflection of the unity that has its root in the Trinity and is a gift of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). Additionally, our denominational life is supported as we celebrate weddings, baptisms, communions, etc.

As with the family, the local community also gets to serve and sacrifice at the regional level as we serve in trans-local community building, regional youth work, summer conferences, etc. Our local life and schedule are often disrupted for the good of serving and participating at the regional level.

Fourth fruit: International cooperation

Our North American region is one of the five regions that make up the Sword of the Spirit. The fruit of that international unity is first of all a bulwark: a community of communities that share a common way of life and a common mission. We are blessed with a global vision, teaching resources and courses, music gifts, mission trips, government, etc.

Further comments and summary

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that this could have several titles. One could be, “What happens when Christian individuals, families, clans and tribes stay together?” The answer is, “A lot!” Another title could be, “What happens when Christian people stay to themselves?” The answer is, “Far less.”

Two words

Our local community was initially inspired by two words from the Lord: 1) “Gather my people together”: and 2) “Build to last.” The first word implies community or some kind of body and not just a threshold ministry. The second implies some kind of approach or order or structure that serves the ongoing unity. We have tried to do that and we think that the initial fruit identified encourages endurance and faithfulness to the call and mission.

Discipleship: a change of plans

One of the hallmarks of a disciple of Christ is his ability to handle “a change of plans.” This shows up several times in the life of Joseph of Nazareth. He plans to “put Mary away” but is instructed in a dream to change his plans (Matthew 1:20). He plans to stay in Bethlehem awhile but is told to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:13). He plans to stay awhile in Egypt but is told to return to Israel (Matthew 2:20). We don’t know a lot about Joseph, but we *do* know that he followed the Lord and that he could lead his family in obedience to the Lord. Who among us could ask his wife to take a trip to Egypt as a new mother (Matthew 2:14)?

Being gathered together in a way that lasts involves a life of changing our plans, first for the new disciple, then for the new Christian family, and finally for the mature disciples and Christian families. Simply said, “Our ways are not his ways;” “Our plans are not his plans,” and the sooner we realize that, the sooner we can move freely in the life of a mature disciple.

To see or not to see

All of this having been said, it really does seem that *those who give the most get the most*. Those who die into the Lord’s will get the most life. Those who see the most light and move toward the light seem to see even more clearly. Those who are most committed and determined to stay together seem to enjoy the most fruit of unity.

Evidentiary fruit

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made So they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

The Bible says that God’s invisible qualities are perceived in the things that God has made. So, creation is *evidentiary* to the nature and existence of God. It is to be presented at the trial of the wicked and the godless. *We would say, in a similar way, that the fruit of unity is evidentiary to the power and presence of God in our midst.*

The gap

Even though we see a gap between the ideal of Christian community and the reality of its human expression, the fruit is astounding! So, we must get over any differences that we may have, stay together, and continue to produce fruit that is pleasing to the One who created us.

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Keeping The Lord's Day Holy

Part 3: The Significance of the Third Commandment for the New Evangelization

by Nico Angleys

This three part series was originally written as a Master's Thesis for a degree requirement at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA. While it was written from a Roman Catholic perspective, the material can be beneficial for Christians from other traditions as well. The author welcomes input and questions. -ed.

The Oxford English dictionary defines evangelization as the act of “proclaiming the Gospel” or “preaching the Gospel.”¹¹⁸ To evangelize is to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ. The process of evangelization involves both a proclamation and a reception of this Good News in the life of the hearer. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI writes that evangelizing is at the heart of the Church’s identity, yet it is a “complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.”¹¹⁹

The work of evangelization encompasses much of the activity of the Church in the modern world. In *Redemptoris Missio*, Blessed John Paul II writes of a “new evangelization” or a “re-evangelization” of countries that once had Christian roots but are no longer living and practicing their faith. Thus the task of evangelization is not simply to the nations “out there” (to the East and to the South)¹²⁰ but also to the peoples of the once Christian nations and the newer nations. What then does the third commandment contribute to the understanding of this New Evangelization? The answer lies in examining how this commandment re-invigorates and strengthens a Christian culture in the

modern age. As Benedict writes, “the fight for Sunday is another of the Church’s major concerns in the present day, when there is so much to upset the rhythm of time that sustains community.”¹²¹ Sigve Tonstad proposes that the seventh day has a theological, historical, and existential meaning for man and thus is a “meaning-making resource, capable of meeting the challenges of the human quest for purpose and hope in the present.”¹²² Bass writes that “there has rarely been a time when awareness of the human need for Sabbath has been greater, or the church’s call to address that need more urgent.”¹²³

In this section I will examine five ways in which the third commandment could contribute to the new evangelization. First, pertaining to time, this commandment offers insight for handling the fragmentation of life, the challenge of new technologies, and the search for meaning of the passing of time in the modern person’s life. Second, this commandment helps people remember their roots and the importance of relational connectedness. Third, keeping the Lord’s Day holy proposes a fresh understanding of the meaning of work. Fourth, this precept presents opportunities for growth in character, namely in generosity and in expressing joy. Fifth, and finally, this command offers an opportunity for dialogue and proclamation of the Good News to the other monotheistic peoples, the Jews and the Muslims.

A. Time

1. Fragmentation of Life

The command to worship and to rest has something very significant to say to the modern person who lives a fragmented life. The harrying nature of multitasking and of multiple forms of communication can lead the young especially to lose track of their purpose and direction in life. The ever-present and relatively low-cost forms of available entertainment further accentuate the fragmented experience of life for modern people. Thus the multitude of voices and the frenetic pace of technological society are significant factors in fragmenting normal life for the western person. The commercializing trends of a culture where time is money¹²⁴ and consumption its currency also contribute to the fragmented experience of life. Bass notes that “it is not the lack of time but rather its formlessness that is the troubling scenario. One can see human lives becoming ever more fully detached from nature, from community, and from a sense of belonging to a story that extends beyond one’s own span of years.”¹²⁵

A day that is clearly and consciously set apart can provide an antidote to these dehumanizing influences. In the act of worship, believers are prompted to lift their gaze towards God and his heavenly dwelling place. The rest achieved by ceasing their constant productivity allows men and women to re-center their lives on their true end: relationship with the living God. Time set aside for that relationship is tremendously needed in this day and age.

2. New Technologies

The advent of the Internet and numerous new technologies¹²⁶ in the world of communication and productivity have increased the individualizing trends in western culture. Blogging promotes the tendency to highly value oneself and one’s opinions. Social networking increases a solitary form of relating by confining the interaction with others to a screen and by removing the need for simultaneous connection. Tweeting has a narcissistic effect: people care about the things that I do so I need to inform them of the minutia of my schedule. Internet search engines cater to advanced personalized profiles to match the individual’s preferences. Cell phones, and smart phones in particular, regularly detach a person’s attention from the environment he or she is in. Email blurs the natural barriers of work and personal life for many individuals in the workplace. The positive effects and benefits of these technologies are numerous; however, one cannot ignore the individualizing and atomizing effect these have on people.

The various practices involved in keeping the Lord’s Day holy can also address the challenge the young face in handling new technologies and media. The relevant wisdom of this commandment abides in its emphasis on worship and relationships with others, neither of which are inherent in the new technologies. The day that calls for

communal activities centered on prayer, reflection, and relationships is an aid to reverse the cultural trends of individualization. Keeping the Lord's Day holy requires a spiritual power that is far more sustaining to human life than the battery, the screen, and the network. A day that is focused on the relationships close at hand, in the flesh, will counter the isolating work of six days spent tethered to the information superhighway.

3. Finding Meaning in the Passing of Time

Many an observer of modern life notes the increasing pace of life in the West. The historian harkens to past societies when time seemed to move "slower" than now. The scientist welcomes the increased pace of discovery as progress. The philosopher remarks that new ideas are revolutionizing. Sociologists Peter and Brigitte Berger worry about "the homeless mind" of modern man and note that the superimposition of the wristwatch and the calendar on more ancient modes of temporality contributes to the destabilizing of enduring human time-consciousness. ¹²⁷ Ancient modes of keeping time relied on the natural rhythms of agrarian work (hours of daylight and the seasons), on the rhythms of the community (shared space with extended family and the relationships with those in close proximity), and on the rhythms of the local customs (religious or social). This is observable today in the traditional societies of Latin America and Africa where the two modes of temporality are still distinguishable. Non-western societies observe the frenetic pace of life in many industrialized western nations and are puzzled by this. Fast, instant, new, quick, busy, hectic, full are many of the adjectives used to describe the passing of time. Jacques Ellul proposes that efficiency has become the sole criterion of value in technological society, yet he perspicaciously notes that "leisure is the respiratory function of the system. It is the function that lets us breathe, the escape hatch that gives the illusion of freedom."¹²⁸ The meaning of time is seemingly lost in the West.

The human heart needs to punctuate its rhythms and its sense of time. The regular ceasing from the humdrum and tedium of ordinary life offers an opportunity to contemplate the meaning of its passing. Perhaps more importantly, the observance of the Lord's Day enables the Christian to accept and receive the truth that all time belongs to the Lord. It provides a redeemed perspective to the notion that *tempus fugit* ("time flies"). This practice can induce hope in an area where despair at the futility and purposelessness of time's passing has the upper hand in western culture. Tonstad examines the negative impact of the prevalence of "clock time" in modern society and proposes that the sabbath "interrupts the routine of clock time and the obligation of work by calling creation to a day of rest according to the great clock of nature."¹²⁹ The sabbath allows the modern people to overcome the de-theologizing of life induced by the dominance of clock time and to return to creation time which gives them meaning for life.

B. Connected to One's Roots

1. Remembering

Socrates is famous for having said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Pascal wrote about his generation that the cause of man's unhappiness could be linked to one single cause: "they do not know how to remain at rest in their own room."¹³⁰ This observation made three hundred and fifty years ago holds true all the more today. The present generation is neither connected to its own personal past nor to its collective cultural history. The modern person does not take the trouble to look back and reflect on the lessons learned, but rather idealistically and romantically gazes forward in time towards the future. The young especially have little regard for the past.

One of the practices of keeping the Lord's Day holy is to recounting God's blessings in one's life as well as a recollection of God's work in the past week. At the heart of the sabbath command is the injunction to remember: "Remember to keep the sabbath holy" (Exodus 20:8). Childs observes that the text on the sabbath command contains a "theology of memory."¹³¹ The act of remembering the small blessings and deeds of God's deliverance on a weekly basis is a small habit that can increase the virtue of remembering the more existential blessings of life, namely God's work of salvation from sin and death. Keeping the Lord's Day holy counteracts the distorting effect of the future-oriented perspective.

2. Relational Rootedness

One of the traits of western culture is the high mobility of families and individuals. In a global economy, geographical stability is not a common pattern for one's lifelong career. The Bergers note that individuals are often and easily uprooted from their normal social milieu which leaves them "homeless," socially speaking. They note that religion used to provide a grounding for human beings and in the modern context, "social 'homelessness' has become metaphysical."¹³² This is observed when focusing on the changes in family life in modern culture. The sense of family over the course of the twentieth century has gone from having strong relations with the extended family, to mainly relating to one's immediate family.¹³³ Currently the trends in family life are even more dire as the very structure of the immediate family is slowly imploding with the rise of divorce.¹³⁴ Men and women are less and less rooted relationally.

The family is the domestic church, the place where a significant relational dimension of the Christian life is to be experienced and taught. As Benedict explains, "from her very inception, the Church that emerged, and continues to emerge, has attached fundamental importance to defending the family as the core of all social order."¹³⁵ Keeping the Lord's Day holy contributes to the New Evangelization in the sense that it proposes a set of practices that strengthen and protect family life. The emphasis on family life and relationships that the Church recommends in the application of this commandment gives the modern person a context for multi-generational relationships. Children, even adult children, stand much to gain by spending time getting to know their parents, grandparents, and other older members of their family. Extended families, as dysfunctional as they may be as a consequence of the Fall, are God-given relationships intended to test and try the faithful in their practice of charity and fidelity. Keeping the Lord's Day holy provides a place in time and in relationships to strengthen family life.

C. The Meaning of Work

Work in western cultures over the course of the twentieth century has become an antidote to boredom. As a result, as Fromm puts it, "work has become alienated from the working person."¹³⁶ Thus the modern person must search and filter through the chorus of voices of these pluralistic societies in order to find the true meaning of work. The loss of a unified view of the meaning of work makes it more challenging for the modern person to discover and foster the human dignity found in labor. Work is often relegated to yet another one of the fragmented and disjointed elements of a person's life which has no metaphysical purpose or substance. For philosopher Josef Pieper, the myth of Sisyphus has become the "mythical paradigm of the 'Worker' chained to his labor without rest, and without inner satisfaction."¹³⁷ The true meaning of work can only be found in the proper understanding of leisure as the basis for culture. Leisure, as Pieper defines it, is a "receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation."¹³⁸

In keeping the Lord's Day holy, the worker comes to understand and experience properly the place of human work in ordinary life. As Benedict XVI expresses it in *Sacramentum Caritatis*: "This is highly significant, for it [the day of rest] relativizes work and directs it to the person: work is for man and not man for work. It is easy to see how this actually protects men and women, emancipating them from a possible form of enslavement."⁽⁷⁴⁾ The keeping of the Lord's Day is a protection against the slavery of work. This practice is therefore a means by which the New Evangelization can effectively transform and preserve authentic human culture.

D. A Disciple's Character

1. Generosity

a) Giving Time

In observing the command to keep the Lord's Day holy, the believer is taught to relate to time in the proper perspective: time belongs to God. The Christian makes a day holy every seven days by consecrating it to the Lord and choosing to do things for others rather than for oneself. Keeping the Lord's Day holy is training in the virtue of generosity. If one can be generous with time, generosity in relationships and in material resources will perhaps more easily follow. This commandment fortifies the growth in character of the Christian people by providing the context for a set of practical activities that require generosity. Worship, rest, solidarity, and family relationships all require a disposition to be generous with one's time. Generosity itself is an important part of the character of a disciple, as it is understood to be one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁹

b) The Gift of Good News

Modern western cultures, due to their increased materialism and individualism, are often lacking in generosity. One of the compelling methods of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in the New Evangelization is through the voice of generosity. The emphasis on generosity can be a potent witness of the aroma of Christ to the members of these cultures. In the context of the Lord's Day, generosity is expressed relationally through hospitality and through celebration. John Paul II calls the Church "to hospitality, dialogue, assistance and, in a word, fraternity"¹⁴⁰ in places that once were Christian but are now increasingly non-Christian. The hospitality expressed in a spirit of dominical celebration offers to reach out to one's neighbors for a Sunday dinner. Is not this generosity a fitting response to Paul VI's concern regarding the prevalent obstacles to evangelization: "fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope?"¹⁴¹

c) Giving to Those in Need

The consumer orientation of our western societies has readily turned many religious feasts into opportunities for purchasing, acquiring, and owning. Christmas, Easter, Halloween, St Patrick's Day all seem to be very commercially visible today. The sabbath, as Dawn puts it, contains a paradox: "both a special appreciation of possessions and a desire not to be dominated by them are part of keeping the sabbath day holy."¹⁴² Materialism is an excess which can be curbed by the practice of giving.

Thus, one aspect of keeping the Lord's Day is to practice giving and generosity instead of requiring and taking. Paul is concerned that the poor in Jerusalem are being neglected and thus he asks the Galatian and the Corinthian churches to give financially to remedy this situation (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and then again 2 Corinthians 8:11-15 and 9:6-15). In 1 Corinthians 16:2, the reference to the "first day of every week" suggests some form of tithing as a Lord's Day practice in the New Testament.¹⁴³ The act of giving to fellow Christians in need in Jerusalem teaches the Corinthians through a Sunday practice that generosity is a mark of the Church. John Paul II speaks of Sunday as a "day of solidarity"¹⁴⁴ in highlighting the need for generosity towards the poor and those in need. This dimension of the Lord's Day emphasizes a more horizontal other-oriented set of practices which shows the breadth of this command.

In the giving of time, the believer is called to grow in generosity towards God. In the giving of resources to those in need, the believer is called to grow in generosity towards neighbor and love of others. As this growth in generosity takes place in the disciple's life, the quality of human relationships will increase. The kingdom of God, brought about through the new evangelization is built on such transformed human relationships.¹⁴⁵

2. Joy – A Command to Celebrate!

Paul Lehmann writes about the impact of the blue laws ¹⁴⁶ in the nineteenth century in this country, which regulated the activities on the Lord's Day: "the pious regard for the Lord's Day had slowly but surely [by the early twentieth century] been despoiled of celebration, the making of a holy day, in flagrant violation of the precedent set by the Creator, who took time off to enjoy all that he had made, and of creation's own way of replenishing its energies."¹⁴⁷ Even among Christians, the practice of the Lord's Day has lost some its joy and celebrative characteristics. Keeping

the Lord's Day holy reveals the importance of celebration. The third commandment in some ways is a command to celebrate and practice one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), namely joy. The practice of this commandment calls to mind the many reasons for the joy inherent in the Christian life. The salvation obtained by Christ and the worship offered to the Triune God on Sunday in church is sufficient cause for tremendous joy to be expressed. The practice of joy on the Lord's Day extends far beyond the liturgy however. The activities and the relationships of Sunday are meant to be marked by joy. "Sunday is the day of joy in a very special way, indeed the day most suitable for learning how to rejoice and to rediscover the true nature and deep roots of joy."¹⁴⁸ Families that mark the day with joy inculcate in their children some of the truth of the Christian faith: in Christ's work there is great cause for celebration. Joyful celebrating can strengthen strained relationships by making present the reality of God's work of healing and deliverance.

The character trait of generosity manifested through celebration, hospitality, and gift-giving, tithing, and helping those in need on the Lord's Day bears witness to the generosity of God. In a culture turned in on itself, on the individual, and on material things, this generosity can be the means of a powerful witness of Christian love and by extension the love of God Almighty.

E. Dialogue and Proclamation

1. Dialogue

Keeping a day holy for the Lord was first presented historically to the Chosen People as the sabbath. As history has unfolded itself, Islam in the practice of Jumah¹⁴⁹ and Christianity in the practice of the Lord's Day have developed this ancient command differently.¹⁵⁰ The commonality of a holy day in all three monotheistic faiths suggests a place for dialogue. In 1991, in a document issued by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, the Church summarized several forms of dialogue with other faiths. Two of these are relevant to keeping the Lord's Day holy. First, the "dialogue of life"¹⁵¹ is the form of interreligious dialogue that allows the common human experience to be a place of discussion. This is the dialogue where members of these faiths share a neighborhood and living space in such a manner that "it leaves room for the other person's identity, modes of expression, and values."¹⁵² That all three monotheistic faiths have a holy day could open the way for deeper respect and mutual care with regards to how each faith observes this day of worship. The importance of the practices of keeping the Lord's Day holy can be the grounds for the Christian to foster solidarity and mercy towards members of the human race different from themselves. While the difference in holy days could also be the grounds for division and distinction, from the perspective of seeking dialogue, the Christian has more in common in the West with the Muslim and the Jew than the secularized atheist or the New Age pagan. Second, the "dialogue of religious experience"¹⁵³ is the form of interreligious dialogue that allows for a sharing and discussion at the level of religious traditions and spiritual experience. This dialogue proposes a sharing of faith at a deeper level in the "ways of searching for the Absolute."¹⁵⁴ The discussion at the level of practice and understanding of the Lord's Day and its riches could open the way for followers of Jesus Christ who are faithful to this commandment to have a persuasive voice at the interfaith table of dialogue. Tonstad writes that the meaning of the seventh day has a unified origin that leads to a common end, the sabbath has unifying power.¹⁵⁵ This form of dialogue might prove particularly helpful with the Jews, since much of Christian Lord's Day practices have their roots in Judaism.

2. Proclamation

Worship is the purpose for which human beings and creation exist. Benedict XVI, in his comments on the creation account in Genesis, writes that "the creation accounts of all civilizations point to the fact that the universe exists for worship and for the glorification of God."¹⁵⁶ This universal existential purpose suggests that the modern human heart seeking for answers about the human *raison d'être* might recognize the Good News of the Creator as it is expressed in the worship of Sunday. To say that worship is evangelizing is perhaps too simplifying, naïve, or bold, yet the seeker-friendly mega-church phenomenon in the Evangelical world is an attempt to test the veracity of

evangelizing worship. In these churches, the Sunday assembly is oriented towards a culturally-sensitive preaching of the Gospel of Jesus for an audience with little Christian background and language. These churches often have a weekday assembly that is oriented towards discipleship and communion, aimed at the core (non-seeker) membership. The success of the proclamatory impact of this experiment on our culture is by no means conclusive,¹⁵⁷ yet the innovative use of Sunday worship might open the door to other evangelizing forms of Sunday assembly.

The Christian employer who understands the importance of keeping the Lord's Day holy might earn a voice in the lives of his Muslim or Jewish employees by making some accommodation for them to worship on their holy day. Neighborhoods and schools that are influenced by an understanding of this commandment might also earn the respect of these monotheistic neighbors which could be a door to witnessing further to the love and saving power of Jesus Christ.

Since in Western nations Sunday is still considered a day off work, the hospitality of Christians on this day can be a venue for the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ to one's Jewish and Muslim neighbors. John Paul II presents Sunday as a day of light that comes from Jesus Christ ¹⁵⁸ and from the a day of faith which lends itself to being a day of proclamation that brings light, Christ, and faith to those who are seeking.¹⁶⁰ Might not these spiritual aspects of the Lord's Day make it a prime day for the generous proclamation of the eternal kingdom it represents? In one of the concluding paragraphs of *Dies Domini*, he writes that "Sunday has the additional value of being a testimony and a proclamation"¹⁶¹ and then launches into an inspiring crescendo of reasons for this proclamation that culminates in the unending Sunday of the heavenly Jerusalem described in Revelation 21.¹⁶² Keeping the Lord's Day holy contributes to the New Evangelization until the Lord of the Sabbath completes his Father's work.

IV. Conclusion

I return now to Jesus' activity on the sabbath. As observed above, he taught, he healed, and he rested. I propose in conclusion that keeping the Lord's Day holy will in turn teach, heal, and bring us rest.

A. Teaching

The Lord's Day is our teacher. Attending to the third commandment allows the Lord of that Day to teach his sons and daughters several noteworthy things: holiness, worship and rest, joy and generosity. The practices of this day teach us to evangelize by slowly and faithfully acting as leaven in our needy culture. While not directly evangelizing, many of the practices of the Lord's Day propose to reveal the truth about the nature of time, the centrality of worship, the necessity of true rest, and the importance of generosity in Christian life. Keeping the Lord's Day holy is at the heart of a Christian culture. The way of life gained by this practice ¹⁶³ draws people to the Lord as it presents a humanly compelling vision of existence.

B. Healing

The Lord's Day can heal us. Christ, in our keeping the Lord's Day holy, would heal the modern person of many an illness. This healing is less like the miracles he performed on the sabbath that brought about instantaneous results and more like the application of a balm that brings about restoration over time. The believer's practices to keep the Lord's Day holy are a participation in the iterative process of entering into the rest of the Master. A proper understanding of time, of one's place in creation, of one's work, and of the virtues of generosity and joy will undoubtedly accomplish much in the healing of the nations that is part of the New Evangelization.

C. Eternal Rest

As God rested on the seventh day, the work of evangelization will prepare His creation for the eternal rest that awaits those whom He has redeemed. Keeping the Lord's Day holy through worship, rest, and joy is a participation

already in the life of the age to come. The practices of this day declare in many ways the truth that the work of creation is complete, our salvation has been won. “Eternity utters a day,” as the Jewish sabbath prayers propose, and a day utters eternity, as the Lord’s holiness invites us into his realm.

[Part 1. Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy in the Old Testament](#)

[Part 2. Keeping the Lord’s Day in the New Testament](#)

Notes

- 118 “evangelize”, Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford: O.U.P. 2002.
- 119 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24.
- 120 *Redemptoris Missio*, 40.
- 121 Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 121.
- 122 Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 13.
- 123 Dorothy C. Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 59 (January 2005), 31.
- 124 Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 28-29.
- 125 Bass, “Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest”, 32.
- 126 “New technologies, in living rooms and in editing studios, are helping drive the pace of art and entertainment, just as they are driving the pace of virtually everything else in our work lives and our leisure time.” James Gleick, *Faster: the Acceleration of Just About Everything* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 174.
- 127 Peter L. and Brigitte Berger, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 149-151.
- 128 Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System* (New York: Continuum, 1980), 250.
- 129 Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, 382.
- 130 “Tout le malheur des hommes vient d’une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre.” (Pensée #139) Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Nouv. éd. Paris: Hachette et cie, 1904), 54.
- 131 “Memory does not serve to arouse a psychological reaction of sympathy for slaves, rather quite a different theology of memory is at work. Israel is commanded to observe the sabbath in order to remember its slavery and deliverance. This connection is even more explicit in Ex 16:3. The festival arouses and excites the memory.” Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 417.
- 132 Berger, *The Homeless Mind*, 184.
- 133 These trends have been studied and discussed from many different perspectives. I cite a few sources here but the literature on this is fairly extensive: Frank S. Furstenberg, “Coming of Age in a Changing Family System,” in *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent*, ed. S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 148-159; Arlene Bowers Andrews, “Children and Family Life,” in *Globalization and Children: Exploring Potentials for Enhancing Opportunities in the Lives of Children and Youth*, ed. Natalie Hevener Kaufman and Irene Rizzini (New York: Kluster Academic Publishers, 2004), 73-75.
- 134 Secular research shows that marriage rates have fallen over the past century and the divorce rate has increased substantially. In addition, the social changes in the sixties and seventies have brought about the rise of cohabitation – a new form of “family life.” Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, “Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces,” *PSC Working Paper Series*, University of Pennsylvania: Scholarly Commons, 2007, http://repository.upenn.edu/psc_working_papers/8 (accessed 18 April 2012), 1-2.
- 135 Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 121.
- 136 “Modern man does not know what to do with himself, how to spend his lifetime meaningfully, and he is driven to work in order to avoid an unbearable boredom. But work has ceased to be a moral and religious obligation in the sense of the middle-class attitude of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Something new has emerged. Ever-increasing production, the drive to make bigger and better things, have become aims in themselves, new ideals. Work has become alienated from the working person.” Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Rinehart, 1955), 179-180.
- 137 Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, 73.
- 138 Josef Pieper, *Leisure the Basis of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 51. Note: I used the older translation here because I felt that the newer one lacked some of the precision and beauty of this definition.

139 CCC, 1832.

140 *Redemptoris Missio*, 37.

141 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80.

142 Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 36.

143 According to some commentators, this passage suggests that the early Christians may have had a Lord's Day tithing practice. "The direction to the church of Corinth, as to the Galatian churches, is that Sunday by Sunday each member should set aside a portion of his weekly income, so that when Paul arrives the money will be ready." F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 158. And also: "The fact that Paul makes such a reference at all implies that there is some significance to their setting money aside on this day rather than, for example, 'once a week.'" Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 813.

144 *Dies Domini*, 69.

145 "The kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another." *Redemptoris Missio*, 15.

146 The blue laws were of Puritan origin, in the first colonies, but over time the term came to refer to all "Sunday closing laws." They were meant to preserve the sanctity of Sunday by preventing commercial activities on that day. Peter D. Weinstein, 'Blue Laws,' in *Encyclopedia Americana International Edition* (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Academic Reference, 2003), 107.

147 Paul Louis Lehmann, *The Decalogue and a Human Future: the Meaning of the Commandments for Making and Keeping Human Life Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 145.

148 *Dies Domini*, 57.

149 The term is derived from the Arabic word for 'general assembly' and has come to mean the 'day of assembly.' For Muslims this day is Friday when they are summoned to remember God and cease from business. "Many modern Muslim states have declared Friday an official day of rest." Patrick D. Gaffney, 'Friday Prayer,' in *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Claude Gilliot, and William Graham (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2002), 272.

150 Christopher D. Ringwald, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy On the sabbath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 125-126.

151 Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 41.

152 Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, 29.

153 *Ibid.*, 35.

154 *Ibid.*, 35.

155 "The need for belonging, the necessity of rest, and the encounter with something larger than oneself all find expression in the blessing of the seventh day. The Sabbath roots of our common humanity are beckoning all to join in the final homecoming. In the prophetic vision of the end, the Sabbath is put forward as a great unifier, transcending entrenched divisions, boundaries, and barriers (Isa. 56:1-7)." Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, 505.

156 Benedict XVI, *In the Beginning...*, 28.

157 The critique of a prominent Evangelical leader and writer on the methods of the megachurch movement certainly suggests that this experiment has not been entirely successful. Os Guinness, *Dining With the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Hourglass Books, 1993).

158 *Dies Domini*, 27.

159 *Ibid.*, 28.

160 *Ibid.*, 29.

161 *Ibid.*, 84.

162 "Sustaining Christian life as it does, Sunday has the additional value of being a testimony and a proclamation. As a day of prayer, communion and joy, Sunday resounds throughout society, emanating vital energies and reasons for hope. Sunday is the proclamation that time, in which he who is the Risen Lord of history makes his home, is not the grave of our illusions but the cradle of an ever new future, an opportunity given to us to turn the fleeting moments of this life into seeds of eternity. Sunday is an invitation to look ahead; it is the day on which the Christian community cries out to Christ, 'Maranatha: Come, O Lord!' (1 Cor 16:22). With this cry of hope and expectation, the Church is the companion and support of human hope. From Sunday to Sunday, enlightened by Christ, she goes forward towards the unending Sunday of the heavenly Jerusalem, which 'has no need of the sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb' (Rev 21:23)." *Dies Domini*, 84.

163 "This practice offers to Christians a set of activities (or nonactivities), done together week after week and century after century, that enact central Christian beliefs, shape specific patterns of communal life, and impart openness to the grace of God. Engaging in this rich and complex practice can shape persons and communities in distinctive ways and foster a way of being in the world that spills over to affect an entire way of life." Bass, "Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest", 26.



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Growing in the Skill of Listening – and Loving

by Tom Caballes

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. - James 1:19-20

Many of us are not naturally gifted with the skill of listening. Many of us are eager to speak our minds first and seek to be understood rather than to listen and try to understand first. We are relational beings and the key part of relationships is communication. This ‘imbalance’ can cause problems, as listening is very important part of loving others. Added to our weakness in the flesh, our selfishness and our ‘me first’ attitude – it really becomes a challenge to live as men and women of God in the modern world in the context of Christian community. It is said that God gave us two ears and only one mouth, so we should listen twice more than we speak!

So how do we grow in the skill of listening?

1. What is the goal of listening? Is it to give a good advice? In our relationships, *the goal of listening is to love and understand the person*. They may not need our advice after all – they may instead need our hugs or words of love or comfort.
2. When listening, avoid all distractions. Learn to listen with complete attention. With so much disturbance around us, we need to carefully give our 100% undivided attention to those who we want to listen to. This might mean leaving for a quieter place to speak, or unhooking the phone, turning off cell phones or the computer.

3. Learn to listen with our ears, but also with our eyes and most importantly, with our hearts. Learn how to listen also for feelings – for joys and sorrows, for fears and anxiety, for hurts and disappointments. Ask yourself: what is he or she feeling now?
4. Learn to withhold any advice you want to give until you fully understand the person. You may ask more questions for you to understand more. Ask yourself as you listen: what does this person need – an advice, a loving embrace, a specific action, or a word of encouragement? In what way can I support him or her?
5. In order for us to truly understand the one we are listening to, are we able to put ourselves in their own shoes? What is really in his/her mind and heart? Learn to listen emphatically.
6. We are not to manipulate, judge or condemn anyone. We are there to love them. Even if people make mistakes, we are there to lift them up, not put them down.
7. When our goal as we listen is to love, it makes the process much simpler. As we learn to listen, we learn how to understand others better. We become more emphatic, more encouraging, and more loving – and become more like Jesus.

Other Scripture References

1. If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. [Proverbs 18:13]
2. When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. [Proverbs 10:19]
3. Other Scripture references: Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 14:29; Proverbs 17:27.

For Personal Reflection and Group Sharing:

1. From a gauge of 1 [lowest] to 10 [highest], how would I grade myself in listening to others? What are my strengths and weaknesses in listening?
2. In what way can I improve in learning to listen emphatically? What do I need to change?



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“Entering In” to Prayer

by Joanie Nath

The subject of prayer can be an endless topic for Christians desiring to grow in their relationship with the Lord. Many people look for resources to help guide them through the sometimes mysterious pathways of prayer. From the wisdom of the early church fathers to more contemporary spiritual writers, many holy men and women throughout the ages have taught us much about prayer. Whatever form of prayer we choose to engage in – such as rote or vocal prayer, spending some quiet moments in meditation, or crossing over the threshold into more contemplative prayer, everyone must first “enter in” if they wish to pray well.

Entering in to prayer is not just a matter of disciplining ourselves to pray on a regular basis. The Lord wants us to grow in our understanding of what it means to take time with him in prayer and what we are “entering in” to as we engage the Lord, seeking to understand what God wants of us, and how he wants us to respond to him.

The teaching of Jesus

In the Gospel of Matthew we find the disciples asking Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus responds by saying, “When you pray *go into your room*, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:6 RSV).

The Living Bible translation says, “...*go away by yourself*, all alone, and shut the door behind you...”

The Amplified version reads, “...*go into your most private room*, and closing the door, pray to your Father...”

And finally, the King James Version says, “...*enter into your closet*, and when you have shut your door...”

Here we have four different ways of expressing the idea that when we pray we should enter into a secluded place where we can give our full attention to our Father who sees us and who will reward us. Three of these versions

suggest entering into a private place; a room that is removed from the routine and busyness of our daily life activities. The Living Bible version suggests that this place we enter into may not be a “room” at all, but rather an interior place of solitude where we “shut the door” on everything outside so that we can be alone with our Father.

What is the “closet”?

In considering this verse, the use of the word “closet” from the King James Version particularly grabbed my attention. To my way of thinking it seems an odd way to describe a room you might enter for prayer. But there are several meanings for the word “closet” that shed much light on Jesus’ instruction to his disciples.

The Greek translation of the New Testament defines the closet as a place for storage. It is not the type of storage we typically think of when we use the word in connection with the word closet as in “storage closet”. We store our clothes, the broom, the mop, maybe the vacuum or some other household items in the closet. It’s not a very welcoming or desirable place to go for prayer. Most of us would probably not choose to go into one of our closets to have a prayer time!

The meaning of this word in the Greek more closely relates to that of a storehouse in which you would keep provisions. This type of storage room would be situated in the interior of an individual’s house and would most likely be located on the ground floor making it easily accessible. It has some parallels to our understanding of the storehouses or storage rooms that were located in the biblical temple in terms of what they might contain, such as grain or flour, olive oil and water or wine. These items would be the “daily bread” sorts of food items that would sustain life on a regular basis. In biblical days people might have used this “closet” to keep these types of food items on hand in much the same way we store food in our kitchen cabinets or pantry. They would have used this storehouse not only for the purpose of meeting their own need, but for gathering surplus or extra so that others’ needs could also be met. They might also have some of these same items stored in anticipation of and preparation for a time of famine.

In today’s culture many people typically have stored away some emergency supplies in the event of a sudden power outage, a hurricane or a heavy snowstorm. Your storeroom might contain some non-perishable food items, bottled water, a flash light or battery-powered lantern; all the things you might need to sustain life for a short period of time.

The word “closet” also means “a defense” or a private place of escape. It would be a place where you could find refuge from the threat of intruders or enemies; people wanting to cause you harm, or a place where you would be protected from terrible storms or other disasters. If you combine the idea of a storage closet or storehouse and the idea of a defensive, protected place it begins to look more like you might imagine a “panic room”, more commonly called a “safe room” in a house today. The website of a modern safe room builder describes the most popular, contemporary style of safe room as a “*ground floor closet* whose foundations have been reinforced with steel and concrete.”

A safe room is easy to get to yet it’s closed off from the rest of the house. It is impenetrable by enemies, and it provides shelter and protection. It contains provisions so that you can stay there for a while and not worry about going hungry or dying from thirst. It is a place that allows a person to contact outside help and to be at peace while waiting for them to arrive; to be kept safe, regardless of what is happening around them. This defensive kind of storehouse would be a place of sanctuary, a place where you would feel secure and where your needs would be met. You would go into the storehouse, into this defensive shelter, to access what is *already* there. If the provisions were not there, it would not be a storehouse. Neither would it provide a defense for you but rather it would be just another room in the house.

A parallel to this type of defensive place is a third meaning for the word “closet,” namely “a magazine,” a place where goods are stored, especially ammunition. You are likely to find this type of storeroom in a fortress. Here we have a place where weapons of war or munitions capable of destroying an enemy are readily available. These weapons are intended to completely avert, and if necessary, demolish whatever threatens the life and security of those who have taken refuge in the fortress.

Another definition of “closet” is “dispensary,” a room or a place where medicines and treatments are prepared and given out to those who are sick or injured. A well stocked dispensary will have on hand whatever might be needed for treating injuries, healing wounds, and remedies for various types of sicknesses.

In the King James version of the Bible, the word for “closet” is used once in the Old Testament passage from Joel 2:16c, “Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet.” The Hebrew word for “closet” here refers to a place of privacy, especially a person’s *most private room*. Other translations of the Bible use the term “secret chamber” or simply “chamber”. The King James’ use of the word “closet” has elements of the protective, defensive definition which we find in the Greek usage of the term. So, here we can see a distinction between the bridegroom’s chamber and the bride’s closet. The bride is afforded a special place of protection – a defensive shelter which the bridegroom does not necessarily require. When referred to in context of the bride and groom together we can understand that this “closet” or “secret chamber” is the bridal chamber, that place where no one else but the bride and bridegroom are allowed to enter. It is exclusive to them. It is a place where there is no disturbance; a guarded place that is closed to the outside world. It is a place of uninterrupted communion.

And finally, the term “secret chamber” is frequently used interchangeably with the terms “inner chamber”, “inner room” or “inner sanctuary.” These terms are used in the Old Testament to describe the Most Holy Place in the temple, the place where the presence of the Almighty God dwells in all his glory. The Most Holy Place was inaccessible to the average Jew of his day. As Christians we know that it is only through the death of Jesus Christ that this inner chamber was opened to ordinary human beings. Only through Jesus can we enter into that Most Holy Place where God dwells in splendor and majesty. This is the inner chamber, the throneroom of God where we are invited to enjoy intimate fellowship with him, to gain an audience with the King of Kings and Lord of all Lords. There is no higher place than this inner chamber!

What is God calling us to?

The term “prayer closet”, and it’s many nuances, shed much valuable light on what God is calling us to as we enter into prayer with him. If we understand this verse from Matthew and the word “closet” as it is defined here, then what God calls us to in this place is almost beyond our ability to describe; it is much more wonderful than our words can say. It is most certainly far beyond what we deserve. If we begin to think of our place of prayer as this type of room, then it takes on a whole measure of rich meaning for us.

C.S. Lewis’s classic children’s tale, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, describes the adventures of four siblings who, while playing hide-and-seek, unwittingly discover a whole new world as they step out the back of an old, musty wardrobe. God is calling us to approach our time with him by stepping over the threshold that allows us to enter into a vastly different environment from the one in which we live. He wants us to see this place of prayer as an easily accessible, protected, private place; a place that is already filled with his provision for us; gifts and graces that he is ready to pour into us; a place of quiet refuge, built on a strong foundation, where we are kept safe from the storms that often rage outside. In this storehouse, this safe room, he is our daily bread and the living water. He is also our source of light, providing wisdom and spiritual sight, inspiration and revelation. He wants to care for us as a father cares for his children by providing everything *we* need for life, but also that we might have a *surplus* to give to others. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with

every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). He wants to be our refuge from trouble. He is our defense and with his word as our weapon of war we are equipped, ready to fight against any enemies. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). He is waiting to dispense his healing balm so that we might be restored to wholeness. We enter into prayer and we are in a safe, restful, warm and secure place (Psalm 23: 1-6).

In addition, he wants us to come to him in this secret chamber to gain intimate knowledge of him; he wants to reveal himself to us; to be close to us. He ultimately wants union with our souls, something we find unimaginable and hard to fathom. What he desires is to give himself totally to us. And when we consider our unworthiness and fallen state it becomes a thought so big, so grand, and so unreasonable that we cannot wrap our brains around it!

Finally, we are given the astonishing privilege of entering into the very throne room of God, to have an audience with the Great King; to enter free of fear into the inner sanctuary. In this room, “...we are raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms...” (Ephesians 2: 6), and called to enter into the very presence of the Almighty God, the Creator of all that is, whose greatest and all-consuming desire is to love us without limits!

Our Lord Jesus is saying to us, “When you pray, enter all alone into your room, your closet, your storeroom, your safe room, your secret chamber, the inner chamber that is the throne room of your King, and closing the door behind you, shut out the rest of the world and pray to your Father who is unseen. And your Father who has provided everything you could ever need, the One who heals you, who is your defense and protector, the One who sees to the very center of your soul, who alone knows your heart and who sees all that is done in this secret place, will *reward* you.”

What is the “reward”?

The writer of Hebrews tells us that “...anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he *rewards* those who *earnestly* seek him” (Hebrews 11:6c). If the reward is for those who seek him *earnestly*, then we should ask ourselves, “What does it mean to seek the Lord “earnestly”? It is to seek him with a zealous determination to know him; to approach the Lord in all seriousness, with a thoughtful and sober recognition of who he is, who you are, and a heart full of gratitude for the great privilege we’ve been given that allows us to enter into his presence.

The writer of Psalm 63 understood what it meant to seek the Lord “earnestly”.

“God, you are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you,
my body longs for you,
like a land that is parched,
weary and without water.
I long to gaze on you in the sanctuary
and to see your power and your glory.
Your love is better than life itself!
My lips will recite your praise.
All my life I will bless you
and in your name I will
lift up my hands.
On my lips there is a song of joy
and in my mouth, praise.
My soul feasts most richly.

On my bed I think of you;
I meditate on you all night long
for you have always helped me.
I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.
My soul clings close to you;
your right hand upholds me.”

The writer of this psalm is consumed with desire for God. He is suffering from a spiritual longing that can only be compared to the pain of dying from thirst. He wants to be lifted up into the higher place where he can “see” the glory of the Lord. He has known the love of God and is desirous of more of him, even to the point of preferring God to life itself. There is a profound ache within him to be in the Lord’s presence, to worship him, to keep him in the forefront of his mind at all times. He finds the same satisfaction in the presence of the Lord as feasting at a great banquet table. Even as he prepares for sleep his thoughts turn to the Lord, and throughout the night he is moved to give thanks for the help God has continually granted to him. He is determined to remain in the Lord’s providential care, trusting that God will take care of him. There is nothing casual about his relationship with God; he does not take it lightly. When he speaks with God it is with the utmost respect, honor, sincerity and solemnity. He is seeking the Lord “earnestly”.

In all earnestness we enter into our prayer “closet” believing the words of Jesus that “your father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:6).

So what is the “reward”? As it is used here, “reward” is a term that means to deliver, to give, to restore and to pay. But in this sense it is not a “one time” deal. It connotes a broader, ongoing intent to deliver *again*, to give *again*, to restore *again* and to pay *again*. Every time we enter into prayer, our Father is there waiting to give us again what we need, to deliver us from our sin and our enemies, and to restore us again to right relationship with him! And as we seek him in earnest our “payment” is the possession of God himself. He rewards us by allowing us to come into his presence – into the secret, exclusive, and private chamber where we can have the full attention of our King!

It would seem appropriate and reasonable for us to spend *as much of our time as we can* in this place with awe and wonder at our God and Father who has provided so abundantly for our needs. Here in this room he seems to be disinterested in our whimperings of unworthiness, but rather, he waits eagerly for us to come with an excited anticipation to receive his extravagant grace, mercy and love. Praise, worship and thanksgiving should be our primary occupation in this place.

Our Father certainly wants us to ask him for the things we need and to intercede for the needs of others. His storehouse has been opened to us and “he gives generously to all without showing favoritism.” Everything he has is ours for the asking. But in Matthew we see Jesus admonishing his hearers to, “Seek *first* the kingdom of God and all these other things will be added to you” (Matthew 7:6). Seek the higher things and the lesser things will be given as well. Seek the eternal and trust him for the temporal. Seeking God, wanting God, loving God *for his own sake*, in all earnestness, without any other agenda, is what he calls us to strive for with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 22:37). Giving glory and honor to the One who has so generously provided for our needs from his abundance is what is most fitting in this room set apart for our exclusive time of prayer with God.

Let us open the door!

If we would enter into prayer with our heavenly Father we need to be the ones who open the door. The Lord has issued the invitation, “behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, and I will come...” (Revelation 3:21). Our Father has made provision for us; he has provided for all of our needs. We can come into the storehouse which he has provided or remain outside, defenseless and needy. It is our choice to either

access and receive his gifts or refuse his provision. He awaits his beloved in the secret chamber, in the exclusive closet. We make the decision whether to embrace him or to remain at a distance; to engage our King or to settle for less than he offers. Jesus makes a promise to those who open the door, “And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). God himself is our great reward – our greatest treasure and possession. What could possibly be more important and worth the investment of our time?



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Removing the Veil

by A.W. Tozer

*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter
into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.
- Hebrews 10:19*



Among the famous sayings of the Church fathers none is better known than Augustine's, "You have formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

The great saint states here in few words the origin and interior history of the human race. God made us for Himself: that is the only explanation that satisfies the heart of a thinking man, whatever his wild reason may say. Should faulty education and perverse reasoning lead a man to conclude otherwise, there is little that any Christian can do for him. For such a man I have no message. My appeal is addressed to those who have been previously taught in secret by the wisdom of God; I speak to thirsty hearts whose longings have been awakened by the touch of God within them, and such as they need no reasoned proof. Their restless hearts furnish all the proof they need.

God formed us for Himself. The Shorter Catechism, "Agreed upon by the Reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster," as the old New-England Primer has it, asks the ancient questions what and why and answers them in one short sentence hardly matched in any uninspired work. "Question: What is the chief End of Man? Answer: Man's chief End is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." With this agree the four and twenty elders who fall on their faces to worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

God formed us for His pleasure, and so formed us that we as well as He can in divine communion enjoy the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities. He meant us to see Him and live with Him and draw

our life from His smile. But we have been guilty of that "foul revolt" of which Milton speaks when describing the rebellion of Satan and his hosts. We have broken with God. We have ceased to obey Him or love Him and in guilt and fear have fled as far as possible from His Presence.

Yet who can flee from His Presence when the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? when as the wisdom of Solomon testifies, "the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world?" The omnipresence of the Lord is one thing, and is a solemn fact necessary to His perfection; the manifest Presence is another thing altogether, and from that Presence we have fled, like Adam, to hide among the trees of the garden, or like Peter to shrink away crying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

So the life of man upon the earth is a life away from the Presence, wrenched loose from that "blissful center" which is our right and proper dwelling place, our first estate which we kept not, the loss of which is the cause of our unceasing restlessness.

The whole work of God in redemption is to undo the tragic effects of that foul revolt, and to bring us back again into right and eternal relationship with Himself. This required that our sins be disposed of satisfactorily, that a full reconciliation be effected and the way opened for us to return again into conscious communion with God and to live again in the Presence as before. Then by His prevenient working within us He moves us to return. This first comes to our notice when our restless hearts feel a yearning for the Presence of God and we say within ourselves, "I will arise and go to my Father." That is the first step, and as the Chinese sage Lao-tze has said, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step."

The interior journey of the soul from the wilds of sin into the enjoyed Presence of God is beautifully illustrated in the Old Testament tabernacle. The returning sinner first entered the outer court where he offered a blood sacrifice on the brazen altar and washed himself in the laver that stood near it. Then through a veil he passed into the holy place where no natural light could come, but the golden candlestick which spoke of Jesus the Light of the World threw its soft glow over all. There also was the shewbread to tell of Jesus, the Bread of Life, and the altar, of incense, a figure of unceasing prayer.

Though the worshipper had enjoyed so much, still he had not yet entered the Presence of God. Another veil separated from the Holy of Holies where above the mercy seat dwelt the very God Himself in awful and glorious manifestation. While the tabernacle stood, only the high priest could enter there, and that but once a year, with blood which he offered for his sins and the sins of the people. It was this last veil which was rent when our Lord gave up the ghost on Calvary, and the sacred writer explains that this rending of the veil opened the way for every worshipper in the world to come by the new and living way straight into the divine Presence.

Everything in the New Testament accords with this Old Testament picture. Ransomed men need no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His Presence and live our whole life there. This is to be known to us in conscious experience. It is more than a doctrine to be held, it is a life to be enjoyed every moment of every day.

This Flame of the Presence was the beating heart of the Levitical order. Without it all the appointments of the tabernacle were characters of some unknown language; they had no meaning for Israel or for us. The greatest fact of the tabernacle was that Jehovah was there; a Presence was waiting within the veil. Similarly the Presence of God is the central fact of Christ's tainity. At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself waiting for His redeemed children to push in to conscious awareness of His Presence. That type of Christianity which happens now to be the vogue knows this Presence only in theory. It fails to stress the

Christian's privilege of present realization. According to its teachings we are in the Presence of God position, ally, and nothing is said about the need to experience that Presence actually. The fiery urge that drove men like McCheyne is wholly missing. And the present generation of Christians measures itself by this imperfect rule. Ignoble contentment takes the place of burning zeal. We are satisfied to rest in our judicial possessions and for the most part we bother ourselves very little about the absence of personal experience.

Who is this within the veil who dwells in fiery manifestations? It is none other than God Himself, "One God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible," and "One Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father," and "the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified." Yet this holy Trinity is One God, for "we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal and the majesty coeternal." So in part run the ancient creeds, and so the inspired Word declares.

Behind the veil is God, that God after Whom the world, with strange inconsistency, has felt, "if haply they might find Him." He has discovered Himself to some extent in nature, but more perfectly in the Incarnation; now He waits to show Himself in ravishing fulness to the humble of soul and the pure in heart.

The world is perishing for lack of the knowledge of God and the Church is famishing for want of His Presence. The instant cure of most of our religious ills would be to enter the Presence in spiritual experience, to become suddenly aware that we are in God and that God is in us. This would lift us out of our pitiful narrowness and cause our hearts to be enlarged. This would burn away the impurities from our lives as the bugs and fungi were burned away by the fire that dwelt in the bush.

What a broad world to roam in, what a sea to swim in is this God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is eternal, which means that He antedates time and is wholly independent of it. Time began in Him and will end in Him. To it He pays no tribute and from it He suffers no change. He is immutable, which means that He has never changed and can never change in any smallest measure. To change He would need to go from better to worse or from worse to better. He cannot do either, for being perfect He cannot become more perfect, and if He were to become less perfect He would be less than God. He is omniscient, which means that He knows in one free and effortless act all matter, all spirit, all relationships, all events. He has no past and He has no future. He is, and none of the limiting and qualifying terms used of creatures can apply to Him. Love and mercy and righteousness are His, and holiness so ineffable that no comparisons or figures will avail to express it. Only fire can give even a remote conception of it. In fire He appeared at the burning bush; in the pillar of fire He dwelt through all the long wilderness journey. The fire that glowed between the wings of the cherubim in the holy place was called the "shekinah," the Presence, through the years of Israel's glory, and when the Old had given place to the New, He came at Pentecost as a fiery flame and rested upon each disciple.

Spinoza wrote of the intellectual love of God, and he had a measure of truth there; but the highest love of God is not intellectual, it is spiritual. God is spirit and only the spirit of man can know Him really. In the deep spirit of a man the fire must glow or his love is not the true love of God. The great of the Kingdom have been those who loved God more than others did. We all know who they have been and gladly pay tribute to the depths and sincerity of their devotion. We have but to pause for a moment and their names come trooping past us smelling of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces.

Frederick Faber was one whose soul panted after God as the roe pants after the water brook, and the measure in which God revealed Himself to his seeking heart set the good man's whole life afire with a burning adoration rivaling that of the seraphim before the throne. His love for God extended to the three Persons of the Godhead equally, yet he seemed to feel for each One a special kind of love reserved for Him alone. Of God the Father he sings:

*Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought, to breathe the Name;
Earth has no higher bliss.*

*Father of Jesus, love's reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee*

His love for the Person of Christ was so intense that it threatened to consume him; it burned within him as a sweet and holy madness and flowed from his lips like molten gold. In one of his sermons he says, "Wherever we turn in the church of God, there is Jesus. He is the beginning, middle and end of everything to us There is nothing good, nothing holy, nothing beautiful, nothing joyous which He is not to a His servants. No one need be poor, because, if he chooses, he can have Jesus for his own property and possession. No one need be downcast, for Jesus is the joy of heaven, and it is His joy to enter into sorrowful hearts. We can exaggerate about many things; but we can never exaggerate our obligation to Jesus, or the compassionate abundance of the love of Jesus to us. All our lives long we might talk of Jesus, and yet we should never come to an end of the sweet things that might be said of Him. Eternity will not be long enough to learn all He is, or to praise Him for all He has done, but then, that matters not; for we shall be always with Him, and we desire nothing more." And addressing our Lord directly he says to Him:

*I love Thee so, I know not how
My transports to control;
Thy love is like a burning fire
Within my very soul.*

Faber's blazing love extended also to the Holy Spirit. Not only in his theology did he acknowledge His deity and full equality with the Father and the Son, but he celebrated it constantly in his songs and in his prayers. He literally pressed his forehead to the ground in his eager fervid worship of the Third Person of the Godhead. In one of his great hymns to the Holy Spirit he sums up his burning devotion thus:

*O Spirit, beautiful and dread!
My heart is fit to break
With love of all Thy tenderness
For us poor sinners' sake.*

I have risked the tedium of quotation that I might show by pointed example what I have set out to say, viz., that God is so vastly wonderful, so utterly and completely delightful that He can, without anything other than Himself, meet and overflow the deepest demands of our total nature, mysterious and deep as that nature is. Such worship as Faber knew (and he is but one of a great company which no man can number) can never

come from a mere doctrinal knowledge of God. Hearts that are "fit to break" with love for the Godhead are those who have been in the Presence and have looked with opened eye upon the majesty of Deity. Men of the breaking hearts had a quality about them not known to or understood by common men. They habitually spoke with spiritual authority. They had been in the Presence of God and they reported what they saw there. They were prophets, riot scribes, for the scribe tells us what he has read, and the prophet tells what he has seen.

The distinction is not an imaginary one. Between the scribe who has read and the prophet who has seen there is a difference as wide as the sea. We are today overrun with orthodox scribes, but the prophets, where are they? The hard voice of the scribe sounds over evangelicalism, but the Church waits for the tender voice of the saint who has penetrated the veil and has gazed with inward eye upon the Wonder that is God. And yet, thus to penetrate, to push in sensitive living experience into the holy Presence, is a privilege open to every child of God.

With the veil removed by the rending of Jesus' flesh, with nothing on God's side to prevent us from entering, why do we tarry without? Why do we consent to abide all our days just outside the Holy of Holies and never enter at all to look upon God? We hear the Bridegroom say, "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." We sense that the call is for us, but still we fail to draw near, and the years pass and we grow old and tired in the outer courts of the tabernacle. What doth hinder us?

The answer usually given, simply that we are "cold," will not explain all the facts. There is something more serious than coldness of heart, something that may be back of that coldness and be the cause of its existence. What is it? What but the presence of a veil in our hearts? a veil not taken away as the first veil was, but which remains there still shutting out the light and hiding the face of God from us. It is the veil of our fleshly fallen nature living on, unjudged within us, uncrucified and unrepudiated. It is the closewoven veil of the self-life which we have never truly acknowledged, of which we have been secretly ashamed, and which for these reasons we have never brought to the judgment of the cross. It is not too mysterious, this opaque veil, nor is it hard to identify. We have but to look in our own hearts and we shall see it there, sewn and patched and repaired it may be, but there nevertheless, an enemy to our lives and an effective block to our spiritual progress.

This veil is not a beautiful thing and it is not a thing about which we commonly care to talk, but I am addressing the thirsting souls who are determined to follow God, and I know they will not turn back because the way leads temporarily through the blackened hills. The urge of God within them will assure their continuing the pursuit. They will face the facts however unpleasant and endure the cross for the joy set before them. So I am bold to name the threads out of which this inner veil is woven.

It is woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit. They are not something we do, they are something we are and therein lies both their subtlety and their power.

To be specific, the self-sins are these: self-righteousness, selfpity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love and a host of others like them. They dwell too deep within us and are too much a part of our natures to come to our attention till the light of God is focused upon them. The grosser manifestations of these sins, egotism, exhibitionism, selfpromotion, are strangely tolerated in Christian leaders even in circles of impeccable orthodoxy. They are so much in evidence as actually, for many people, to become identified with the gospel. I trust it is not a cynical observation to say that they appear these days to be a requisite for popularity in some sections of the Church visible. Promoting self under the guise of pro-3 moting Christ is currently so common as to excite little notice.

One should suppose that proper instruction in the doctrines of man's depravity and the necessity for justification through the righteousness of Christ alone would deliver us from the power of the self-sins; but p, it does not work out that way. Self can litre unrebuked at the very altar. It can watch the bleeding Victim die and not be in the least affected by what it sees. It can fight for the faith of the Reformers and preach eloquently the creed of salvation by grace, and gain strength by its efforts. To tell all the truth, it seems actually to feed upon orthodoxy and is more at home in a Bible Conference than in a tavern. Our very state of longing after God may afford it an excellent condition under which to thrive and grow.

Self is the opaque veil that hides the Face of God Z from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. As well try to instruct leprosy out of our system. There must be a work of God in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its -deadly work within- us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment. We must prepare ourselves for an ordeal of suffering in some measure like that through which our Saviour passed when He suffered under Pontius Pilate.

Let us remember: when we talk of the rending of the veil we are speaking in a figure, and the thought of it is poetical, almost pleasant; but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil is made of living spiritual tissue; it is composed of the sentient, quivering stuff of which our whole beings consist, and to touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, to hurt us and make us bleed. To say otherwise is to make the cross no cross and death no death at all. It is never fun to die. To rip through the dear and tender stuff of which life is made can never be anything but deeply painful. Yet that is what the cross did to Jesus and it is what the cross would do to every man to set him free.

Let us beware of tinkering with our inner life in hope ourselves to rend the veil. God must do everything for us. Our part is to yield and trust. We must confess, forsake, repudiate the self-life, and then reckon it crucified. But we must be careful to distinguish lazy "acceptance" from the real work of God. We must insist upon the work being done. We dare not rest content with a neat doctrine of self-crucifixion. That is to imitate Saul and spare the best of the sheep and the oxen.

Insist that the work be done in very truth and it will be done. The cross is rough, and it is deadly, but it is effective. It does not keep its victim hanging there forever. There comes a moment when its work is finished and the suffering victim dies. After that is resurrection glory and power, and the pain is forgotten for joy that the veil is taken away and we have entered in actual spiritual experience the Presence of the living God.

Lord, how excellent are Thy ways, and how devious and dark are the ways o f man. Show us how to die, that we may rise again to newness o f life. Rend the veil o f our self-life from the top down as Thou didst rend the veil o f the Temple. We would draw near in full assurance o f faith. W e would dwell with Thee in daily experience here on this earth so that we may be accustomed to the glory when we enter T by heaven to dwell with Thee there. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Excerpt from [The Pursuit of God](#), Chapter 3, originally published in 1948, by A. W. Tozer. In the public domain.]

Aiden Wilson Tozer (April 21, 1897 - May 12, 1963) was an American Christian pastor, preacher, author, magazine editor, Bible conference speaker, and spiritual mentor. For his work, he received two honorary doctorate degrees.

Among the more than 40 books that he authored, at least two are regarded as Christian classics: *The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy*. His books impress on the reader the possibility and necessity for a deeper relationship with God.

Living a simple and non-materialistic lifestyle, he and his wife, Ada Cecelia Pfautz, never owned a car, preferring bus and train travel. Even after becoming a well-known Christian author, Tozer signed away much of his royalties to those who were in need.

Tozer had seven children, six boys and one girl. He was buried in Ellet Cemetery, Akron, Ohio, with a simple epitaph marking his grave: "A. W. Tozer - A Man of God."

Prayer was of vital personal importance for Tozer. "His preaching as well as his writings were but extensions of his prayer life," comments his biographer, James L. Snyder, in the book, *In Pursuit of God: The Life Of A.W. Tozer*. "He had the ability to make his listeners face themselves in the light of what God was saying to them," writes Snyder.

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When Grace Reigns Down

oil on canvas, 106cm x 106cm, 2013

by Jamie Treadwell

I thank You God for this amazing day
When Grace rains down from heaven
The trees rise high to sing
and fragrant grasses spread their joy
while tears drain from the sky

Faithfulness springs from the earth and righteousness from heaven.

To see more [art work](#) by Jamie Treadwell and [limited-edition prints](#) visit www.jamietreadwell.com/artist/

Jamie Treadwell is a [life coach](#) and a noted [artist](#) who works in pastels, watercolors and acrylics. He is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#), an ecumenical 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.

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Beatitude

poem by Sean O'Neill

I am walking down the tracks
In the bright sun.

The steel worker
Who emptied the crates of beer
And rolled out the barrel to the staging depot
Is asleep under his own belly
Covered over with the leaves of sweet excess.

The bent cleaning woman,
Advertising her rock bottom prices
From her truck on the boulevard,
Creeps in and out
When the bankers' wives are not looking,
As though to see her upsets the economy.

And the three stand-ups
Who came to pick up the old CRT set
Were a breath of fresh soap.
Operatic but avoiding longer contact.

The mutter of the tree-bearded garbage-sifters
Along deserted highways
Has everything to do with death
And their fearlessness of it
And pain.

The cranial capacity of the ant
Dwindles with the weight of brawn needed
To tug a leaf
Beyond the threshold
Of the shed's rotting larch door.
I watch him
Quietly overcome
Physics.

All along these tracks
Across the warehouse culverts,
In the overgrown sidings,
Under the backs of wholesalers',
Between the oil-fired boilers,
The radio masts, the pylons,
And behind the concrete electrical substations,
Railroad riders do this very thing:
Carrying the weight of humanity's conscience
For the simple indictment:
Blessed are the poor.

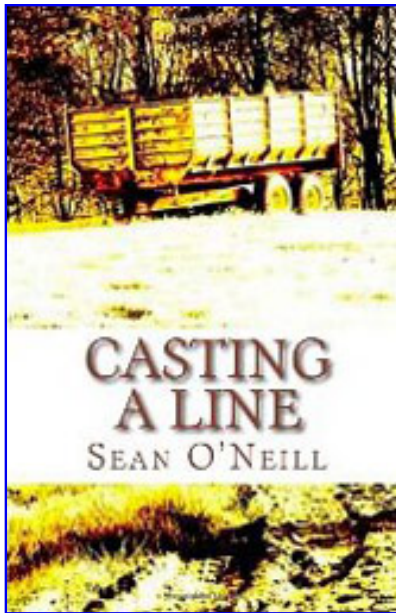
They are
The least of my brothers.

.

> See other poems in Living Bulwark by [Sean O'Neill](#)

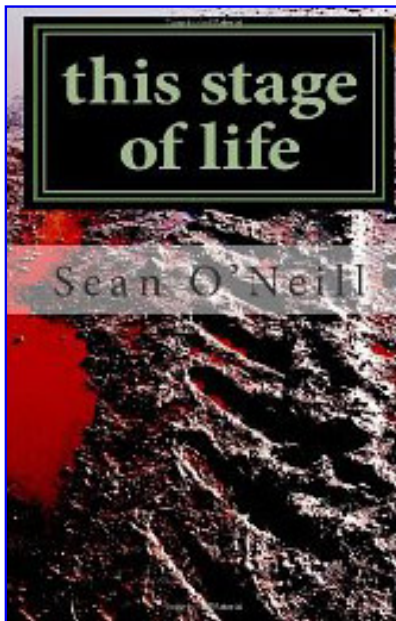
[Sean O'Neill is originally from Glasgow, Scotland, and currently lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.
He has published two books of poems and several novels.]

With this new collection of poems Sean O'Neill explores the relationship between the child, the youth and the adult. What are the key moments that have contributed to the construction of a fully-formed human being? Here a number of poems masquerade as memoir but have a deeper message, sometimes wistful,



sometimes humorous. Here, too, he draws on his Celtic upbringing and the questions of identity that it raises. Some of the nature poems are a new departure and celebrate the complexity and beauty of animals, insects and the weather. This book of poems is more playful than O'Neill's first book "this stage of life", and uses a more accessible idiom to convey mood, but nevertheless offers a coherent voice full of color and depth.

Book available at [Amazon](#).



This collection of Sean O'Neill's poems is his first. The poems cover periods when the poet lived or worked in London, England; Milan, Italy; Drummole, a small fishing village on the West Coast of Scotland; and St. Paul, USA. The subject matter of the poems therefore varies from the grittily descriptive 'Bridges' and 'Sweet Thames', which are set in London, to the pastoral 'The Hill' and 'in this atlas of headland' set in the South Rhins peninsula. The poems cover several years and a multitude of situations and yet a consistent voice emerges finding meaning in apparently insignificant details, and clothing mundane events in a tapestry of rich wordplay. Several poetic sequences are contained in this collection including the four-part 'this stage of life' a wry commentary on modern life and 'Winter 2011' which centers on the view from a window during the harsh weather conditions of that year. Some of the poems are satirical; others celebrate the joy of simple things. Some are dark while others are full of hope. Whatever the reader's disposition he or she will find something valuable in this volume that echoes the mood of the moment or the season of life. Book available at [Amazon](#).

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