

Online Magazine of The Sword of the Spirit
LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission

[August / September 2019 - Vol. 105](#)

Covenant Relationships and Life Together

"I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" – Isaiah 42:6



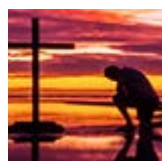
- [In This Issue: Covenant Life Together - A Prophetic Sign of Restoration](#)
- [Restoring Covenant Life & Relationships: The Lord's Response](#), by Bob Tedesco
- [Covenant Community & Church - A Work of the Spirit](#), by Steve Clark
- [Our Beginnings in Covenant Community - A Worldwide Work of God](#), by Bruce Yocum
- [Walking Toward the Covenant](#), by Jean Vanier, and [The Covenant of Grace](#), by Peter Toon



- [Something Old, Something New: Grandparents on Mission](#), by Pili Galvan-Abouchaar
- [Becoming a Man: Grandfathers Helping Boys Become Responsible Men](#), by James Munk
- [On Being Inter-generational](#), by Jerry Munk, & [Why Early Christians Celebrated the Lord's Day](#)
- [Feast or Famine](#), and [How Should We Celebrate?](#) by Bernard Stock



- [Back to the Future: What Will Determine the Shape of the Future](#), by Mike Shaughnessy
- [Grace To Be](#), by Stephanie Smith, and [Do You Not Care, Jesus?](#) by Lynne May
- [God's Grace Abounds](#), and [The Sum of All Fears](#), by Tom Caballes
- [Trusting Doubt](#), and [Don't Believe Your Own Headlines](#), by Sam Williamson



- [Reaching Out in Faith - The Woman with a Flow of Blood](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [Prayer Before a Difficult Task: From Prayer Poems for Every Occasion](#), by Sean O'Neill
- [A New Spirit](#), A new worship song by Joseph Mathias and Will Cannon
- [Homage to God's Beautiful Creation](#), Watercolors by David Kurani

Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.



Covenant Life Together - A Prophetic Sign of Grace and Restoration

"I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations"
– Isaiah 42:6

In This Issue

This issue focuses on a fundamental aspect of our relationship with God. Our God is a covenant making God. It is part of his nature to unite himself with a people who will love and obey him and serve him together, not only as individuals but as a community of disciples who want to follow and serve the Lord together as a people.

The Apostle Peter reminds us, "For once you were no people, but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10).

In sending us his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has established a New Covenant of grace purchased for us through the atoning blood of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and he has put his seal upon us by the Holy Spirit who dwells with us as the guarantee and pledge of everlasting friendship with God as his adopted sons and daughters.

Beginnings of covenant communities 50 years ago

Fifty years ago in 1969, God led a charismatic group of university students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (USA), on a journey of discovering what it means to be a covenanted people who are joined together in a shared life of commitment, community and mutual care for one another - not just for a season but for the entirety of our lives. God spoke to us as we gathered in prayer one evening and he said to us, "I want to make a covenant with you... but your must first smash your idols..." This call to live in committed relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ resulted in a mutual decision to share our lives together in covenant community. During our first commitment ceremony in 1970 we each in turn stood and promised to follow and serve the Lord together as a covenant community. The Lord spoke and said this was "an historic night and a beginning of a work of restoration for his people." The community covenant commitment we made together marked the beginning of a new wave of grace and work of the Spirit as many other groups of charismatic Christians began to form covenant communities around the world. See Bruce Yocum's article in this issue, [Our Beginnings in Covenant Community - A Worldwide Work of God](#), and Steve Clark's article, [Covenant Community & Church - A Work of the Spirit](#)

We believe that the formation of covenant communities is meant to be a prophetic sign of God's work of

grace and restoration for the Christian people today. Many churches have been under attack and many Christians are divided, confused, and many are being swept away in a tide of moral confusion, apathy, division, and isolation. We are called to stand, fight, and build bastions of faith, hope, and love together so we can proclaim the Good News and extend God's kingdom of peace, joy, and righteousness.

Signs of hope and restoration

Bob Tedesco's article, [*Restoring Covenant Life & Relationships: The Lord's Response*](#), analyzes some of the key problems and challenges for the Christian people today, along with the Lord's response to these problems and challenges. He traces the roots of these problems back to the massive social and moral unraveling that took place in the 1960s.

There are many signs of hope, renewal, and restoration. We believe that charismatic renewal and covenant community is a key part of God's plan of restoration for his people today. May this issue inspire, encourage, and call you to a renewed commitment to follow and serve the Lord together to rebuild and strengthen marriage, family life, and community life empowered by the grace, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Restoring Covenant Life and Relationships: The Lord's Response

by Bob Tedesco

Background

Each of our communities, as well as the whole of the Sword of the Spirit, could be described by a long list: we are a Christian community; a *lay* Christian community; an *ecumenical* Christian community; a *covenant* community; or perhaps a *Pentecostal* community. From the beginning, these types of communities were called covenant communities. In describing and identifying what we are, *covenant* is the best word to pull out of that long list. It is distinct from other types of communities such as a prayer community or a religious community. *Covenant* is the best descriptor.

There are many things that we as Christians hold to that are only mentioned a couple or a few times throughout all of Scripture. Covenant, however, is mentioned 298 times in the Scriptures. Clearly, God is a covenant-making God. It is part of his nature, and in covenant community one of our intentions is to reflect that part of his nature.

Societal Unraveling

The sexual revolution was one part of a larger cultural revolution that began in the 1960s. Major mores as defined by ways of acting or cultural norms were shed. Modesty of dress, modesty of speech and common sense seemed to disappear. People began to think that they could go bar-hopping at two o'clock in the morning and not get into any trouble! There were many signs during that time to indicate that society was beginning to unravel: eliminating prayer in the schools, the acceptance and promoting of abortion, the rise in divorce and promiscuity to name a few. Also, during this period, legal agreements *began* to lose credence. We might say that a person's word carried much less credibility and became much less reliable than in times past. People would say things or make statements that had little substance or of which they had little intention of holding to. Some of the Christian denominations had religious orders that had been in place for centuries. Even many of these also began to unravel as promises were taken less seriously. Many of them began to decline before the 60s, and religious orders did have promises

as a part of their intended way of life.

Restoring Covenant Life and Relationships

One element of the Lord's responses to these declines was to begin to restore covenant life and relationships especially among lay people. We see the Lord divinely responding to the situation by initiating and restoring covenant life. Today, everything is voluntary and you can walk out of just about everything. If your word is good, the promises that you make are serious and they can bring cohesion to intentional relationships.

A covenant is a tool to support any significant relationship. Marriage is one example. A religious order is another. If you get hired for a new job there is usually a written description of what that job entails; how the company will relate to the employee; how the company expects the company to relate to them. If you researched the applications of agreements, promises, and contracts you would discover that these are all tools which become relevant and weigh heavily in decisions handed down in a court of law. Contracts give evidence that a person or persons have adhered to or reneged on their given word or promise. There are many, many legal cases that are based on covenants, promises and agreements that were broken by one of the parties involved.

It is easy to look back at the last 50 years or so and see how people's words just don't mean as much as they used to. Part of our decline as a society is because we can no longer count on people to do what they said or to adhere to a given promise. We, in the Sword of the Spirit are part of a worldwide network of communities that the Lord has raised up to give a divine response to this societal unraveling. We are, to be sure, one network among many that God has called forth.

Covenants are not that unusual. Some ministers, for example, may have a particular goal they wish to accomplish and will establish a "covenant of understanding" with their associates. Some of the more well-known ministers have written covenants dealing with how they want to work together; how they want to protect one another from the onslaughts of the enemy in our culture as well as working together to protect Christianity.

Our Recent History

Although it might seem to our younger members that we've been around for a very long time, by all accounts, if we consider history in its totality, covenant community, and more specifically, the People of God community, is a very recent development.

Our history with the Sword of the Spirit began when we intentionally aligned with the Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1974. We recognized the value in receiving teaching and wisdom from those who have gone before and to learn from them.

From 1973 to mid-1974 the People of God worked on writing our covenant. That was preceded by some covenant work done with the Pittsburgh Charismatic Renewal, particularly the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and a priest named Fr. Mike Salvagna. Fr. Mike was instrumental in gathering leaders from the Pittsburgh area together to study the idea of covenant that was coming to us from other places. We were sensing a call to covenant, but we really didn't know much about what that meant. Several of our early leaders were part of that group.

While the wheels of covenant were turning in Pittsburgh, my wife Bobbie and I made a trip to the Alleluia Community in Augusta, Georgia. We visited them in order to study community but also to study covenant because our own covenant was still a work in progress. I was given a copy of their covenant during that visit and consequently, our covenant in the People of God is structurally very similar to theirs.

There are different types of communities, one of which is referred to as common sharing, residential community. Alleluia Community was that type of community. Their neighborhood was called Faith Village. There are common sharing communities with folks who live in

clusters. There are also communities where some folks live in clusters, while others do not, but all have separate incomes. Some communities are a mix of various types of community living experience. Both the Word of God and the Alleluia community were ecumenical. The Alleluia Community remains so to this day.

The People of God Covenant Structure

[Covenant Statement printed in italics]

Opening Scripture

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my Laws into their minds and I will write them on their ears, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.” Hebrews 8:10

Opening Prayer

Father, we recognize and accept the covenant to which you have called us. Jesus, we accept your lordship in our lives. We accept your call to be disciples, your commission to teach and make disciples of all people. Holy Spirit, we dedicate ourselves to allowing you to sanctify us, to work the Father’s will in us, to form us as individuals into what we were meant to be and to form us into a people of God. You have destroyed our isolation and joined us together.

There is much to consider in that paragraph and it’s worth reading over and meditating upon from time to time. It begins by saying, “We recognize and accept the covenant to which you have called us...” **We were sensing a call from the Lord to be more serious and more stable about our relationships. We were sensing that our isolation was being destroyed or eliminated and that God was joining us together to become his people.**

How We Want to Live the New Way of Life

Faithful to our churches and to our primary vows such as marriage, we commit ourselves as brothers and sisters in the Lord, entrusting our lives to him and to each other in him.

This statement acknowledges that we do indeed have other covenants, other serious relationships such as marriage or the relationship we have with our denominations. In light of those, however, we are entrusting our lives to one another together in this covenant agreement. Some specific ways we agree to do that are the following:

We promise to build up, exhort, admonish and to listen to one another...

We could do a little better at building each other up or encouraging one another, but also exhorting and admonishing each other. Someone once said, “You have two ears and only one mouth!” We should listen to one another a little more; to be slow to speak and quick to listen as it says in James 1:19.

...to communicate, or call for help when we have a need...

Now, that specifically put the onus on the *individual* to be speaking up and asking for help when there is a need. If you have a need and you just wait to see who might meet your need, that’s not what we agree to in our covenant. The responsibility is on each of us to call for help when it is needed.

...to be quick to forgive, and to ask forgiveness...

This is essential! At the risk of being too simplistic, you could almost say that the entire Bible, the entire work of God is the work of forgiveness. That little piece of a sentence really taps into the greatness of Christian revelation. For all time, God has been planning to build a family from flawed people and correspondingly needed a plan to help us fulfill his vision. We need to see that to be quick to forgive and to ask forgiveness is a **fundamental**, Christian bedrock foundation stone that we cannot get around, step over or ignore!

If you remember, the chosen people wandered around in the desert for 40 years. There is a saying about taking another trip around the mountain. In other words, if you've not formed this principle of forgiveness in your life well enough, it may require another trip around the mountain, perhaps another year in the desert in order for you to get it! We need to be quick to integrate this point into our lives, and we need to be determined to live this way!

...to be a mutual support to one another...

Here, it says 'mutual'. Here the onus is not all on me, but we want to be a support to one another.

...We commit ourselves to loving one another...

If you want to understand how corporate our life in Christ really is, search the Bible for how many times the phrase 'one another' shows up in scripture. It's quite amazing!

... as brothers and sisters in Christ, to faithfulness to our commitments...

One way of describing commitment is this: Commitment is doing what you said you would do after the feeling in which you said it has passed. For example, after a year of marriage one of the partners might discover they have a serious illness. Circumstances and perhaps your feelings about that other person may have changed. Will you still keep your commitment? You should, because that's what it means to make a commitment; faithfulness to your decision even after the feelings have passed or the circumstances have changed. We are called to be faithful to our commitments.

...to regular community prayer, daily prayers...

It's corporate, personal and family, small groups, etc.

...fellowship, teaching, and to our financial responsibilities to the community...

The area of financial responsibility is one that we should review every so often because it's not natural to give away your money. Just as your children are not yours but God's, neither is it *your* money! The agreement we have made to tithe can easily be compromised if we begin to use it to pay the babysitter, or tuition for school, or to put gas in our car so we can get to work. We need to protect the *Lord's* money and use it for *his* work.

...We agree to recognize the authority of the coordinators and to support, to pray for and to submit to them...

Anytime you have a significant relationship or a significant network of relationships there will be a need for someone to be responsible for oversight. In a family the buck stops at the desk of the father. Working together in a covenant of serious relationships

necessitates an authority to govern the covenant and those relationships. It will work much more smoothly when the authority is recognized, supported and covered in prayer.

...We will foster the growth of the community by supporting the programs of Christian initiation and formation in community life...

This is something we want to support from the very beginning, from the earliest stages of our members lives; from children's ministry all the way across the youth bridge into adulthood. As community members who have agreed to live our covenant, should we really be saying we'd prefer not to serve in children's ministry? It is stated in our covenant that we agree to foster and support every stage of growth in our members' lives, including children's ministry!

Sword of the Spirit ties

...We recognize by virtue of our membership in the People of God we are also members of the Sword of the Spirit, an international community of communities. We commit ourselves to love and support our brothers and sisters in the Sword of the Spirit throughout the world and to serve them in common mission...

There are many ways we serve together in common mission with our brothers and sisters in the Sword of the Spirit, among them are Summer Camp, University Christian Outreach, our men's and women's retreats, serving our mission communities as outside coordinators and Senior Women Leaders, visitation teams, hosting regional groups and events, and perhaps most importantly, by praying for one another. We are, in fact, by intent a living bulwark!

...We agree to be held to this covenant and to hold one another to it. We regard this as a serious commitment which we enter prayerfully. Once we were no people, but now we are God's people.

Amen!

Bob Tedesco is the founder of the [People of God](#), a Sword of the Spirit community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA where he served as Senior Coordinator for 26 years. He has been involved in lay ministry for over forty-five years, serving in the Sword of the Spirit as the North American Regional President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the North American Executive Committee.

Bob is also the author of two books, *Essays on Christian Community* and *Choosing Discipleship*. and forty-one Christian life articles published in the Sword of the Spirit international online magazine, *Living Bulwark*. He has a BS in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Pittsburgh and worked as a consulting engineer for twenty years. He and his wife, Bobbie, have been married for nearly sixty years. They currently have ten children, thirty-seven grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren. They reside in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, USA.

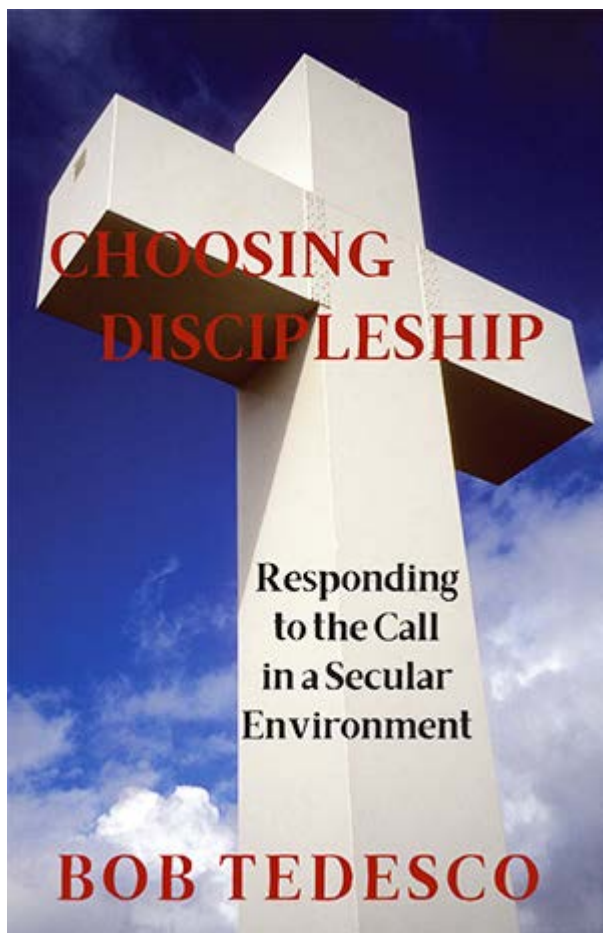
Choosing Discipleship

Embracing the Call in a Modern Culture

by Bob Tedesco

163 pages

Published in 2019 by [Credo House Publishers](#), Grand



Rapids, Michigan, USA

The book is available in print at Amazon and [Credo House Publishers](#).

Choosing Discipleship is an excellent book and very helpful for keeping some key issues before us in a compact way. It is very useful, easy to ponder, and easy to teach from. It is a great resource... personally; I liked the style you used... it relates to the busyness of our culture.

Bill Durrant, Founder, People of God's Love Community, Columbus, Ohio

Excellent pastoral material and also well written. It's a tremendous contribution to the Sword of the Spirit worldwide and the wider church as well... Seasoned leaders, parents, pastoral workers, and community members need to be refreshed and learn again (and again) the vision and sound principles and wisdom

you have taught over the past few decades... It will continue to be circulated to many communities and individuals for generations to come.

Don Schwager, Editor, The Living Bulwark, international online magazine of the Sword of the Spirit

Typing the manuscript for *Choosing Discipleship* over the course of a summer felt like being on an extended retreat! My own life of discipleship and my understanding of what God is doing in the world today has been significantly influenced by Bob's clear vision, insight, and wisdom... The impact he has had both as a community builder and author has stretched across continents, and I suspect his influence will be felt for many years to come.

Joanie Nath, Senior Women's Leader, People of God Community, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Top illustration: Christians worshipping together (c) Paul Shuang at bigstock.com
Stock Photo ID: 251603902

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Covenant Community and Church

A Work of the Spirit – New Forms of Christian Life in Community

edited by Steve Clark

[The following article is an excerpt from a booklet entitled, *Covenant Community and Church*, which was edited by Steve Clark and published by Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA in 1992. It was originally written to provide a short general summary of what a Covenant Community in the Catholic Church should be. Its subject is simply covenant community life. It includes references to current Catholic Church documents.

Covenant communities have flourished in great variety since their beginnings nearly 50 years ago. While this document is addressed to Catholics involved in lay led renewal movements, it can be beneficial for many other Christian renewal groups as well. - ed.]

Covenant Community

As throughout the ages the Holy Spirit has been active among the Christian people to bring about renewal, groups of Christians have come together to respond. Many Christians have come together to perform some special services or foster spiritual growth with no further bond among themselves than that necessary for achieving particular goals.

But the human race is naturally social, and it has pleased God to unite those who believe in Christ in the people of God (cf. 1Peter 2:5-10), and into one body (cf. 1Corinthians 12:12, AA 18). Therefore, the very nature of the Christian people is to be brothers and sisters in the Lord, one in the Spirit in the bonds of peace and mutual love (Ephesians 4:8). Consequently, when the Holy Spirit renews his people, he often leads groups of Christians to join themselves to one another to live more fully the life together of the Christian people. Such a coming together is not intended as an alternative to the life of the Church. Rather, it is a renewed living out of what the life of the Church should be and so signifies the communion and unity of the Church of Christ (AA 18).

In our day, desire for such coming together is felt with greater strength because of the loss of natural community in society and in Catholic parishes. With this has come the weakening of mutual help for the needs of human life and of mutual support for Christian living. The Catholic Church has recognized the existence of such a spiritual impetus among the Christian people and has sought to encourage it. Consequently, the formation of new Christian groupings is now canonically recognized by the Church. It is protected by the right to freely establish and direct

special associations to foster the Christian vocation in the world (*CIC*, c 215).

In recent years the Lord has brought into existence new forms of Christian life that are called covenant communities. They are covenantal because they are based on the voluntary commitment of members to one another in a serious way that is not necessarily lifelong and does not necessarily partake of the nature of a vow. The commitment is in the form of a personal covenant of brothers and sisters one to another that supplements and strengthens the relationship that comes from being baptized members of the Church. They are communities because they share together their spiritual and material goods as a way of expressing their relationship as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The relationship together of the members of covenant communities is personal and family-like, with a concern that extends to the whole of their lives. In that it contrasts to the partial and functional relationships that predominate in our society and tend to increasingly prevail in Catholic parishes and organizations. At the same time, the members' relationship to one another is not normally the kind of commitment that is found in religious communities and secular institutes, a commitment which puts the whole of each person's life under obedience to the leadership of the community. In this sense, the commitment together is a limited commitment. Those in authority in the community have the role of helping the members to live an active Christian life and to fulfill the commitments to one another they make in the covenant.

There are many types of covenant communities. Some are together primarily for mutual support in Christian life and service, while others are missionary bodies, established to be available to the work of the Lord for particular services. Some are together for the renewal of the parochial or diocesan life of the Catholic Church, while others engage primarily in an evangelistic or social apostolate in the wider society. Some are together to live a special spirituality, while others have no other spirituality than the common one of the Church. All these communities are at one in their desire to live together as brothers and sisters their Christian way of life.

To the degree that covenant communities arise out of a desire to live more fully the life of the Church, they are patterned upon that life. They look to scripture for instruction in how Christians live together and how Christian leadership functions. They likewise look to the tradition of the Church for models of how to live Christian life together and how to relate to the broader Church. They desire to live the life of the people of God in communion with the hierarchy of the Church within the limits of what Catholic teaching, Catholic canon law and special hierarchical approval allows to them.

Relations to Others

While there are covenant communities whose members have a special life together in one location with common ownership of goods, most covenant communities are made up of Christians who live among non-Christians in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life. They engage in secular professions and occupations (*LG* 31). They are commonly involved with others in a variety of relationships outside the context of the covenant community.

Insofar as members of covenant communities live in secular nations, they should be subject to the government of the nation they belong to and should abide by its laws (Romans 13:5, Titus 3:1). They should be ready for any honest work, including work to improve the temporal order (AA 7, 5, Titus 3:1). They should seek to do good to all, including those not of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10). They should be especially zealous to shoulder the splendid burden of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men and women throughout the world (AA 3).

Members of covenant communities, as members of the Christian people and of human society, should see no necessary conflict in belonging to both at the same time. Rather they should strive to harmonize the rights and duties that belong to their membership in the Church and in human society, including their responsibilities to the two authorities (*LG* 36). At times they may engage as members of their covenant communities in special services to society joined with others who

are not Christians. In such cases, it is preferable to do so in a way that allows joint supervision to be exercised by responsible Christians along with others.

Members of covenant communities should also recognize the great importance of unity among all Christians, one of the chief concerns of the Second Vatican Council. They should desire to cooperate in that movement which was fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit for the restoration of unity among Christians. They do so by prayer, brotherly love, and concern for renewal in the Catholic Church, as all members of the Catholic Church should (UR 4) . They also can do so by living their Catholic life in a way which, while preserving the essentials, expresses in the most effective way possible a Catholicism which is now accessible to other Christians. It therefore should appear in as Christ-entered, scriptural, and patristic a light as possible (UR 11, DV 21).

Sometimes members of covenant communities join with their brothers and sisters in the Lord who are not Catholics for joint works of Christian outreach and service. They especially join in that evangelistic and missionary outreach that can be fostered by unity among the followers of Christ. It is preferable to engage in such works with joint supervision by Catholic leaders and others. Such works should follow the ecumenical guidelines of the Catholic Church and the local dioceses.

Members of covenant communities also at times enter into brotherly relationships within a broader ecumenical community, relationships involving a bond of charity, prayer and witness with Christians or groups of Christians belonging to other confessions. When they do so, they normally form, with the approval of the bishops, Catholic associations or fellow ships. The leaders of such associations share with other leaders in the supervision of the ecumenical body.

Members of covenant communities sometimes make those in mixed marriages a special concern. They help the partners to see how there can be a life together that reaches to all things and a respect for the authority of the husband as head of the family without weakening the Christian faith of the family, compromising the faith of the Catholic partner, or failing to respect the authority of the leaders of the churches the partners belong to. Sometimes they reach out to Catholics involved in Christian outreaches led by non-Catholics, teaching them the value of their Catholic faith and supporting them in living it. In all this they seek to confess before the whole world with all Christians their faith in God, one and three, and in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord (UR 12).

Finally, members of covenant communities as members of the wider Catholic Church seek to be a benefit to the whole Church. Some work in and contribute to dioceses, parishes and church organizations that are not sponsored or led by the covenant community. Some promote renewal or stand for integral Christian truth in the crisis of faith in our day. All pray for the Church and live the life of members of the one Church whether within the context of the covenant community or within other contexts.

The covenant communities themselves sometimes serve corporately within the Church, although more commonly their contributions come through their members engaging directly in Church life and organizations. Even where the community as a whole does not serve corporately within the Church, they should always seek to strengthen the Church by the testimony of a renewed Christian life. The communitarian spirit of covenant communities should lead them to seek to contribute to the unity and common good of the broader people of which they are a part.

Index to Abbreviations of Catholic Church Documents

AA The Decree on the Laity
 CIC The Code of Canon Law
 DV The Constitution on Divine Revelation
 LG The Constitution on the Church
 UR The Decree on Ecumenism

This excerpt is from *Covenant Community and Church*, Chapter One, edited by Steve Clark, and published by Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA in 1992.

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Our Beginnings in Covenant Community - A Worldwide Work of God

by Bruce Yocum

Over the past several years in the Sword of the Spirit, we have presented a conference on “Our Call and Mission.” Its title is not accidental, for any God-given mission begins with a call from God. The initiative is always with God, and he takes that initiative by addressing his word to particular people at particular times and places.

The spirit of my reflections echoes what is repeated every year at the Jewish Passover meal, as the Jews recount the history of their life as a people who are called by God. At one point in the ceremony the leader says, “Let no one say ‘God called them (in the sense of those others).’ For if you belong to this people, it is because God called you.” A prophetic word given 50 years ago, perhaps even before some of us were born, is part of the living heritage of the Sword of the Spirit. It is as much a call to you personally as it was to those who first heard it.

In 1969, when I was at university in Ann Arbor, Michigan, about 30 of us prayed regularly together. We had not become a community at that point, just a loosely-knit group of Christians, mostly university students, who had been baptised in the Holy Spirit and were trying to take our faith seriously. We would meet each Monday evening in the large living room of a rented house to pray and seek the Lord.

During a meeting early in the summer of 1969, the Lord began to speak to us about repentance, about clearing away the obstacles to God’s work, obstacles which we had created through our unacknowledged and unrepented sin. In prophecy after prophecy during that meeting, we heard of the areas that needed to change, and the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of many of us to see what he was seeing. Mostly the sins were not big, but things that occupied a place in our life that God wanted for himself – our career plans, our cherished possessions, our immoderate

interest in food, and so forth. This “prophetic examination of conscience” lasted several weeks and created in many of us a sense of anticipation: what was God preparing us for? He seemed to be addressing us as a group even as he was addressing us as individuals. He seemed to be “doing something with us.”

Midway through that summer we found our attention drawn to many passages in Scripture about covenant. That was the beginning of a year of discovery, as we learned about the covenant love and faithfulness between God and his people and between brothers and sisters who are part of the same people. So the Lord’s call to covenant community had begun – with a corporate call to repentance.

God’s Way of Living

One of the most striking things about being part of the community in the early days in Ann Arbor was the strong conviction that we had been caught up in a great action of God. We saw the evidence everywhere we looked: men and women were hearing God’s word and were being changed by it. God speaking and was bringing about what he had spoken. And before our very eyes this work of God grew with astounding speed.

Those who had attended a tiny prayer meeting in Ann Arbor in December 1967 (there were perhaps 15 people present) heard a remarkable prophecy.

You will reap a harvest you did not sow. You will sow, and in years to come will see the harvest. The work you have seen begun here will spread....I will bring many to you...and I will baptize them in my Holy Spirit. I will raise up spiritual sons and daughters for my work. A shining cross of my body will be raised up among you...I will send people to you from all across the nation to receive a message they will take back [with them]....

Within a few short years this prophecy was fulfilled, as hundreds of people came every year to visit the community, not only from across the nation, but from around the world. Less than eight years after that prophecy was given, the community had to maintain guesthouses to care for the 1500 people who were coming each year to visit the community and see what God was doing there.

Just as had been prophesied, many came to Ann Arbor and caught a vision for Christian community lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, returned to their homes to pursue that vision themselves. In those very early years, the seeds were being planted which later produced a harvest of Christian community life around the world.

[This article was previously published in the May / June 2010 Issue of Living Bulwark.]

Bruce Yocum has been involved in leadership, teaching, and community building in the charismatic renewal from its earliest years, and has served in the Sword of the Spirit for many years in North America, Europe and the Middle East, Latin America and the South Pacific. He was Presiding Elder of the Servants of the Word for thirteen years.

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Walking Toward the Covenant

Quotes from the writings of Jean Vanier,
founder of L'Arche Community

A birth of hope

I realise more and more how many young people are wounded in their capacity to live in relationship and remain very immature emotionally. Perhaps they lacked a warm, emotional environment when they were young and, above all, genuine and trusting relationships with their parents. So they are on an emotional quest, frequently confused and lost, particularly in the area of values and of the meaning of sexuality. They need a community in which to grow towards greater maturity and healing and wholeness; they need a secure and emotionally warm environment where they can establish the relationships they need without danger. They need older people who have time to listen to them.

Some young people will find healing and meaning to their lives in these communities, and then will move on and put their roots down in another soil. Others will put down roots in one of these communities, which then becomes the earth in which they grow and bear fruit. But between the initial call to community and the final rooting, there are many passages, moments of doubt and crises of all sorts. **The final rooting is the recognition and acceptance of a covenant, a bonding between people that is holy and sacred because it is given by God. And this covenant between people is founded on the bonding or the covenant between the individual person and God...**

Communities whose members live faithfully a life-long covenant with God are signs of the fidelity of God.

In our time, when there is so much infidelity, when there are so many broken marriages, so many disturbed relationships, so many children who are angry with their parents, so many people who have not been faithful to their promise to love each other, more and more

communities need to be born as signs of fidelity. Communities of students or friends who come together for a short time can be signs of hope. But the **communities whose members live faithfully a life-long covenant with God**, among themselves and with the poor, are more important still. They **are signs of the fidelity of God**.

The Hebrew word *hesed* expresses two things: fidelity and tenderness. In our civilisation we can be tender but unfaithful, and faithful without tenderness. The love of God is both tenderness and fidelity. Our world is waiting for communities of tenderness and fidelity. They are coming.

Commitment in a community is the recognition by its members that they have been called by God to live together, love each other, pray and work together.

The first call

Commitment in a community is not primarily something active, like joining a political party or trade union. Those need militants who give their time and energy and are ready to fight. A community is something quite different. It is the recognition by its members that they have been called by God to live together, love each other, pray and work together in response to the cry of the poor. And that comes first at the level of being rather than of doing. To accept being rooted in a community is more or less preceded by a recognition that you are already 'at home', that you are part of its body. It is rather similar to marriage; couples recognise that something has been born between them and that they are made for each other. It is only then that they are ready to commit themselves to marriage and remain faithful to each other.

So in community everything starts with this recognition of being in communion one with another; we are made to be together. You wake up one morning knowing that the bonds have been woven; and then you make the active decision to commit yourself and promise faithfulness, which the community must confirm.

It's important not to let too much time pass between this recognition that the bonds or the covenant are there and the decision. That's the best way to miss the turning and end up in the ditch!

...If a community puts pressure on its members to decide before their time has come, this is because the community itself has not yet found its freedom. It is too insecure; it clings to people. Perhaps it has grown too quickly, forced by an expansionist pride. If our communities are born from the will of God, if the Holy Spirit is at the heart of them, our Heavenly Father will send the people we need. A community has to learn how to be cheerful about letting people leave and how to trust that God will send other brothers and sisters. 'Oh people of little faith! Seek first the Kingdom of God and all the rest will be given in superabundance.'

There is nothing attractive about mediocre communities - they disappear.

The focal point of fidelity

Communities are born, flourish and then often degenerate and die. You only have to look at the history of communities and of religious orders to see this. The enthusiasm, the ardour, the generosity of their beginnings disappear as they gradually become comfortable; they become mediocre, and rules and law take precedence over spirit. There is nothing attractive about mediocre communities; they disappear.

It is important for communities to discover the focal point of fidelity which enables the spirit to stay strong, and what makes for deviation from it. There seem to me to be two essential – and linked – elements which lead to deviation: the search for security, or a weariness of insecurity, and a lack of fidelity to the initial vision which gave the foundation its spirit.

When a community is born, its founders have to struggle to survive and announce their ideal. So they find themselves confronted with contradictions and sometimes even persecution. These conditions oblige the members of the community to emphasise their commitment; they strengthen motivation and encourage people to go beyond themselves, to rely totally on Providence. Sometimes, only the direct intervention of God can save them. When they are stripped of all their wealth, of all security and human support, they must depend on God and the people around them who are sensitive to the witness of their life. They are obliged to remain faithful to prayer and the glow of their love; it is a question of life or death. Their total dependence guarantees their authenticity; their weakness is their strength.



Jean Vanier (1928 - 2019)

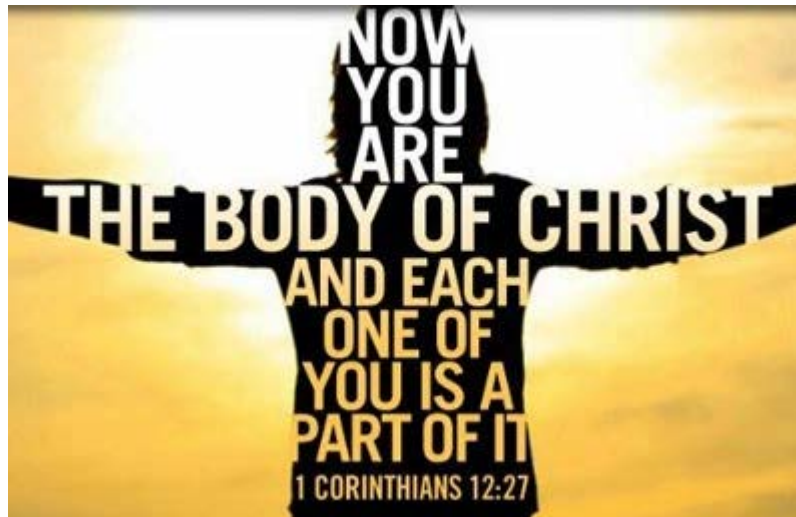
Excerpts from *Community and Growth, Revised Edition*, by Jean Vanier, Copyright © 1979, 1989. First published in Great Britain in 1979 by Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London, UK.

Jean Vanier, (September 10, 1928 – May 7, 2019), was a Canadian Catholic philosopher, theologian, and humanitarian. In 1964, he founded L'Arche, an international federation of communities spread over 37 countries, for people with developmental disabilities and those who assist them. Subsequently, in 1971, he co-founded Faith and Light with Marie-Hélène Mathieu, which also works for people with developmental disabilities, their families, and friends in over 80 countries. He continued to live as a member of the original L'Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, France, until his death.

Over the years he wrote 30 books on religion, disability, normality, success, and tolerance. Among the honours he received were the Companion of the Order of Canada (1986), Grand Officer of the National Order of Quebec (1992), French Legion of Honour (2003), Community of Christ International Peace Award (2003), the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award (2013), and the Templeton Prize (2015).
[source: Wikipedia]

Top image: Christ meets two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, film clip from BBC miniseries "[The Passion](#)" 2014

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



The Covenant of Grace and Family of God

A biblical theological reflection on being members of God's Family in the Body of Christ

by Peter Toon

Many people believe that the essence of Christianity is “a personal relationship with Jesus” (or “the Lord Jesus Christ”). Conversion is seen as entering into such an arrangement, and the Christian life is felt to be the experience of this relationship.

Such a way of speaking seems to be so sincere and so meaningful that few question its authenticity. Thus it has been granted a kind of orthodoxy by Christians of various backgrounds and theological traditions. “A personal relationship with Jesus” has become a standard form of expression for conservatives and liberals alike.

Few of those who encourage the use of this descriptive expression seem to realize that it is found neither in the Bible nor in classic theology. It is relatively recent and owes its origin and popularity to particular developments in Western culture—individualism, for example. Within evangelicalism, it is usually part of a popular theology that, claiming to be straight from the Bible, emphasizes that “God loves you as an individual” and that “Jesus Christ died for you as an individual” and that, therefore, “you as an individual can have a personal relationship with God or Jesus.” When a model of “a personal relationship with Jesus” is sought in the New Testament then, one is pointed to the disciples who followed Jesus in Galilee and Judea or the disciples who met with the risen Lord Jesus in the forty days before his Ascension.

In the New Testament, baptized Christians are described as being in the family of God as adopted children, within the Body of Christ as members and under Christ the Head, as branches of the vine whose trunk is Jesus Christ, as sheep following the Shepherd, as travelers in or on the Way to the Father, as members of the royal priesthood, as soldiers in the army of the Lord, and via many other images. They are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and they are to adorn and commend the gospel by what they are, what they do, and what they say.

Certainly the call to become a Christian is addressed by the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit (in the preaching of the gospel) to each person, for God loves the whole world. Further, the response to this call in repentance and faith is personal, made individually by each believer. Then, also, the gift of the indwelling Spirit who comes to live in the soul is a gift to a

real person, which he individually experiences, for “the Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God.” Christianity certainly involves and includes an encounter with the Holy Trinity by each Christian. It is personal and experiential.

However, the act of personal decision and commitment to the Father through the Son is only possible because of the invisible and secret activity of the Holy Spirit within the mind, heart, and will. It is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son who unites the repentant believer to the Father through the Son for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. And it is the same Holy Spirit who places the new Christian in the Body of Christ, the family of God, and the royal priesthood as he brings that person into union with Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior. Therefore, there is never an individualistic union of a believer with God. The fellowship, union, and communion are truly personal and very real (as the saints testify), but are always also together with all others who are in Christ Jesus by faith and love with the Holy Spirit.

It is not within the power and capabilities of any human being to place himself in friendship with God or in communion with the Holy Trinity. The Bible speaks of God establishing his covenant with man. The Lord Jesus Christ established the new covenant by the shedding of his blood—his propitiatory and expiatory sacrifice of himself on the cross. Only when God has established his covenant of grace is it possible for people to enter into it. So this action is not to be seen merely as God taking the initiative and man responding, as if it were a contract between a major and a minor partner. It is the Holy Trinity actually establishing the way and the means for sinful human beings to be reconciled with their Creator and Judge and brought into the fullness of life everlasting.

Through and in Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, God the Father created and maintains a gracious relation with the human race. This is his covenant of grace. It is all of mercy, for even the response of sinners to the invitation of the gospel is by the assistance and power of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, the acts of repenting and believing and confessing and obeying and trusting and loving are the acts of free human persons, but the freedom to act is only possible through the presence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, who indwells the soul and quickens the faculties.

A careful reading of the classic *Book of Common Prayer* (1928 in the United States) and of the other Anglican formularies (the Ordinal, the Thirty-nine Articles) will confirm that sinful human beings can only have fellowship with the Holy Trinity because the same Holy Trinity has established a covenant and created a relation with mankind through the new Man (Adam). This covenant and relation has its center and its meaning in the Lord Jesus Christ, the new Adam, who is the Word made flesh and the Mediator and the High Priest.

In the Common Prayer tradition, the Collect for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity reads:

O God [our Father], forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee;
Mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And a Collect that may be used with any public service reads:

Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us
with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued and ended in thee,
we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

These with other Collects point to the truth that salvation is wholly by grace. (It may be noted that the general approach of the 1979 Prayer Book is to suggest that the covenant is more like a contract between a major (God) and a minor player (man) than a covenant that is wholly established by the one party, the Holy Trinity. Thus there is much talk in the ECUSA of “the baptismal covenant,” meaning what we must do on God’s behalf for our neighbors in terms of peace and justice.)

On the basis of the biblical theology as this is known within the Anglican way in the tradition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, it may be said that any talk that suggests that I can negotiate the terms of the covenant with the Father through the Son and by the Holy Spirit is to be rejected. Further, any talk that suggests that there is such a thing as a one-on-one union of the individual Christian and the Holy Trinity is also to be rejected.

We need to be very clear that any union that we sinful creatures have with God the Father is, always and only, through and in Jesus Christ. He, as the Son of God incarnate, has an eternal union with the Father within the Godhead, and we are united with the Father by being enclosed within the Son—that is, within his vicarious and sacred humanity. This is why the apostle Paul speaks often of Christians being “in Christ.” There is a perfect, personal relation of the Father and the Son and of the Son and the Father, and on the basis of this relation and within this relation there is a relation of all who are “in Christ” with the Father and of the Father with all who are “in Christ.” All these relations exist in and by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

To use the word “relation” (Latin, *relatio*) is to follow the vocabulary created by the early Fathers to denote the way in which the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are united and connected to each other within the perfect unity of the one Godhead. Here relation carries the strong sense of that which is objectively in existence and necessarily true of the reality of God, the Holy Trinity. Without relations of order there would be no Holy Trinity.

To translate *relatio* by the modern word “relationship” is to make a major mistake. While “relation” points to a fixed order or a precise union, “relationship” (strictly speaking) points to experience—experiencing what the relation actually is.

Based on the relations of order within the Holy Trinity, there are relations of order within God’s creation and redemption of the world. Thus both the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant (by Christ’s blood) are expressions of a relation with man established by God as the God of all mercy and grace. The origin, nature and content of these covenants or relations of order are created, fixed, and guaranteed by the Holy Trinity, and there is no room in them for negotiation from the human side. Ours is to love the Lord our God with all our being.

Again, to speak of these relations of God to man and of man to God as “relationships” is to invite confusion of thought.

Adding “ship” to the end of a noun changes the meaning to denote the state or condition of being so-and-so. So “relationship,” strictly speaking, is the state of being related. First there is the relation between persons; then there is relatedness of those in the relation, and finally there is the relationship, the experience or reality of the relation.

However, while the word “relation” seems to have kept its traditional meanings (which include of course the blood-ties of a family—thus relatives), the word *relationship* has taken on a meaning that is much broader than the one it had earlier this century. A “relationship” now refers to any kind of association or union, temporary or permanent, licit or illicit, moral or immoral, between two or more persons (or two or more groups of persons). Thus I have a relationship with my therapist, butcher, doctor, broker, dentist, friend, acquaintance, brother, lawyer, senator, pastor, daughter, teacher, plumber, baker, and wife—to name but a few! If I am gay, I have a relationship with one or more persons of the same sex. If I am heterosexual and committing adultery or fornication, I have a relationship with my “lover.” And so on.

Apparently the use of “relationship” in the modern sense began in the 1960s as a way of making neutral what was known as “having an affair.” It is perhaps one of those words (such as “interesting”) that is intended to have no moral connotation. It simply refers to some kind of association between persons, and it creates the impression that all such associations are of similar value—temporary and transient. Further, it belongs to the culture of modern, autonomous individualism.

“A personal relation to God” is a correct way of speaking if it is understood that this relation is of grace and is always and only through and in Jesus Christ, that is, in his Body, and with the Holy Spirit. “A personal relation to Jesus Christ” is an acceptable way of speaking if it is understood that this relation is that of the disciple to the Master, of the sinner to the Savior, and of the servant to the Lord, and is alongside and with other such disciples in the kingdom of God.

It is best, however, to avoid speaking of “a personal relationship with Jesus,” even though it can be given a sound meaning by those who have a right theology. In today’s environment and culture, as we have seen, “relationship” is a word that points to temporary and even immoral associations of persons. And whatever it is that unites the forgiven sinner to the gracious God, it is certainly not ephemeral, temporary, or immoral! We do not want to give the impression that becoming a disciple of Jesus is only for a short time while you or I feel good about it!

To make clear that being a Christian truly involves communion with the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity within the household of God, one ought to use biblical and patristic terms. Thus one should say that one is a child of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ, a member of the Body of Christ, a soldier in the army of the Lord, a patient in Christ’s hospital, a lamb in the flock of Christ the Shepherd, a friend of God, a brother of Jesus Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a servant in God’s household, and so on. One can say with the apostle Paul, “I know in whom I have believed,” and one can say with the apostle John, “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.” What one cannot claim is an individualistic relationship with either the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit or with the Three in One.

If we allow our minds to be formed by classical theology (in our case as Anglicans, using the Rites, Offices and Collects of the classic Book of Common Prayer), then we shall not fall into questionable modern ways of speech. Rather, by grace, we shall speak joyously and faithfully of our relation to the Holy Trinity grounded in his relation to us. Because the Father through the Son and by the Holy Spirit has come to us (each one of us), so we (each one of us) approach the Father through and in the Son and with the Holy Spirit. We have a personal and corporate relation to the Holy Trinity because our individual and corporate union is through and in the One Person of Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

Communion with the Holy Trinity and the communion of the saints is experienced uniquely on earth by the faithful at Holy Communion. The very elements used, which become for us the sacramental body and blood of the once crucified but now exalted Lord Jesus Christ, have an innate symbolism that points to the nature of our communion with God.

The bread is the composite of many grains of wheat that were first mingled and then changed by forces outside of themselves. Likewise the wine is the composite of many grapes that also have been united and then changed by forces outside of themselves. Each of us, as born from above by the Holy Spirit, is related to God by grace and is in communion with him, but that relation of grace and that communion of love only exist and are only known within the unity of the Body of Christ. There is no autonomous individualism in the covenant of grace, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. However, in this unity of the Body every member is precious.

This article was originally published in the September/October 1998 Issue of [Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity](#), copyright © 1998 the Fellowship of St. James. Used with permission. Touchstone is a monthly ecumenical journal which endeavors to promote doctrinal, moral, and devotional orthodoxy among Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox.

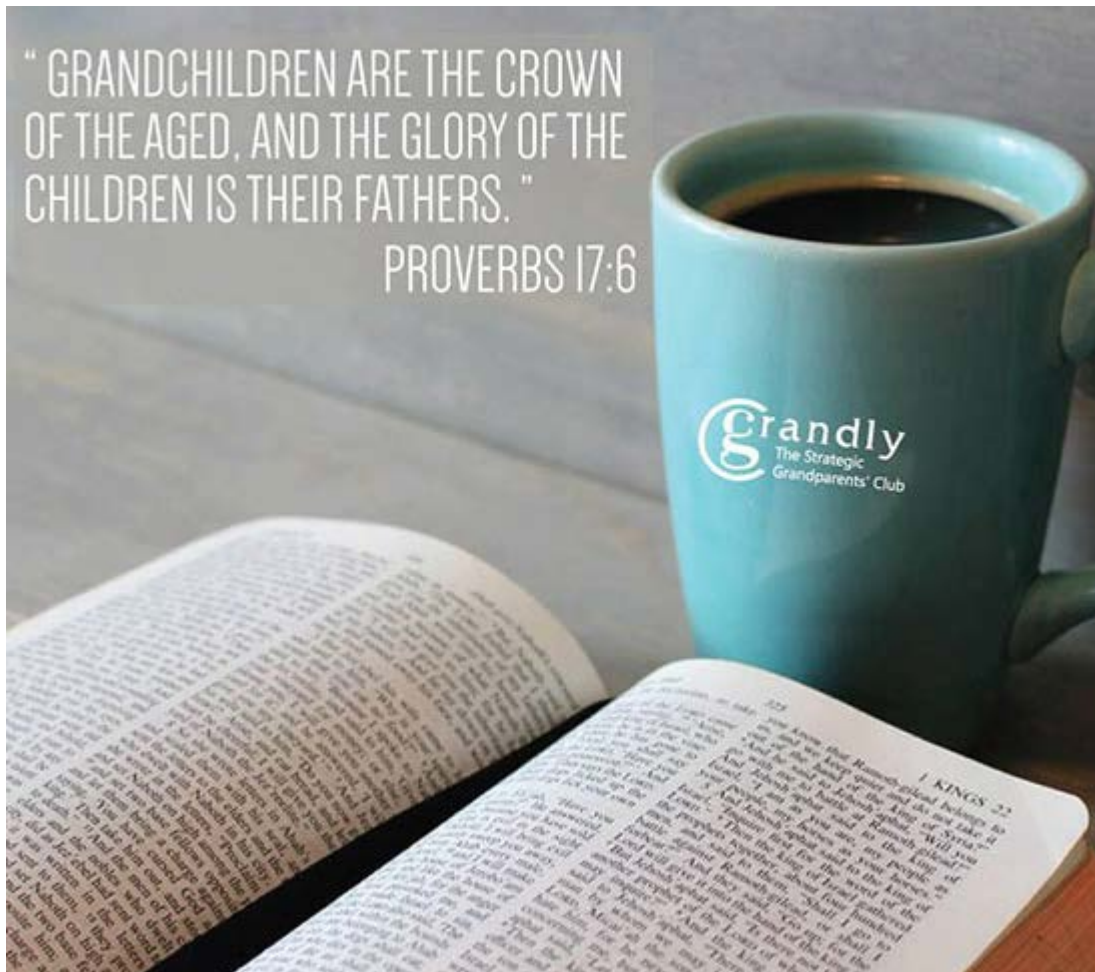
The Reverend Dr. Peter Toon, was an Anglican priest and author of many spiritual books, including [Protestants and Catholics: A Guide to Understanding the Differences among Christians](#), published in the United States by Servants Books, Ann Arbor, 1984

Many of his books, including [Protestants and Catholics](#), and [Meditating as a Christian](#), can be read online for free at: <http://newscriptorium.com/toon-collection>

Peter Toon was born in Yorkshire, England, October 25, 1939. He was a graduate of King's College, London, and Christ Church, Oxford, with a Doctor of Philosophy from Oxford (D.Phil.). He was ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1973. He taught theology in both England and America, and was also a visiting professor and guest lecturer at a variety of seminaries and universities in Asia, Europe, and Australia. Dr. Toon was a parish priest and was in demand as a visiting preacher and lecturer. He was a recent past-President of the Prayer Book Society of the U.S.A. He and his wife lived in San Diego where he died April 25, 2009. [[bio source](#)]

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

Grandparents On Mission



Something Old, Something New...

Grandparents have a God-given role in their grandchildren's lives

by Pili Galvan-Abouchaar

Are you a grandparent who is concerned about the spiritual welfare of your grandchildren? If you are, you are not alone. It only takes a brief look at the circumstances of the modern world to draw the conclusion that your grandchildren won't be growing up in the world you did.

Grandparents have a God-given role in their grandchildren's lives as Moses defined in Deuteronomy 4:9:

"Take heed and be diligent not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen. As long as you live, do not let them pass from your memory but teach them to your children and to your grandchildren."

As grandparents, you have a great influence in the lives of your grandchildren. Just like youth workers, you often complement the role of parents without having the responsibility of being the primary authority figure.

Similar to youth workers, grandparents seem to have time to spend with youth that other adults generally don't. You can just be there. You know how to play and, at the same time, you are

responsible adults.

Yes, you can trustingly ask him. But trust more in him who is ever with you. Answer his gentle invitation to join him in resting in the security of knowing that you are a dearly beloved son or daughter of the heavenly Father.

You can also be a role model to your grandchildren as youth workers often are. Teenagers, especially, look for role models. Yes, they usually look to someone who is young and cool. They know that Grandma and Grandpa aren't interested in the latest trends or fashions and nor do they understand all the new technology or latest music. Oddly, you can be a role model simply because you don't conform. You are above the pressure to fit in. You don't care what other people think. You are independent and in charge of your own time. And that makes you cool!

Not all youth workers can be grandparents, but all grandparents can be youth workers. Grandly is a "youth workers" organization, made up of grandparents! It is just one more way that Kairos does youth work like no other organization.

Grandly: one of the newest, oldest, and coolest youth work organizations on the planet.

Pili Galván-Abouchaar is the Program Director of [Grandly: The Strategic Grandparents Club](#). Pili is from Xalapa, Mexico, has a degree in Industrial Engineering, and began her professional career as a quality control coordinator. She has done missionary work in seven countries across three continents. She became the first program director for Grandly-The Strategic Grandparents Club in February, 2016.

About Grandly: The Strategic Grandparents Club

Grandly: The Strategic Grandparents Club is a program of the Sword of the Spirit. This program was founded in 2016 by Mike Shaughnessy as a resource to equip grandparents to share their faith with their grandchildren. Grandly teaches grandparents to "Think, Pray, and Act Strategically" in the lives of their grandkids. It recognizes that grandparents occupy a special role in the lives of their grandchildren, and if properly trained, can make an outsized impact on their spiritual lives.

As a youth minister, Mike knew the difference grandparents could make in the lives of their grandchildren. He wondered if it could happen more often. It wasn't that they lacked the faith. What they lacked was a strategy. If grandparents learned how to think, pray, and act strategically, the way youth workers did, something marvelous would happen. It has. Strategic grandparents have become missionaries to their own grandchildren.

We equip grandparents to be "youth workers" to their own grandchildren. When we ask grandparents, "What is your biggest concern?" Most answer "our grandchildren," not their retirement or the next vacation. Many see that their grandchildren are not getting the spiritual and moral formation they need, and feel equally unable to address that need. We currently equip grandparents to be youth workers through two venues: our website ([grandly.org](#)) and our "Do It Grandly" Seminars.

Our website reaches a network of grandparents who are interested in learning how to think, pray, and act strategically. We publish bi-weekly online articles that provide encouragement, motivation, and practical tools on how to pass on their faith to grandchildren. Through our "Do It Grandly" seminars, we help grandparents to grow in their relational skills while providing insight into contemporary youth culture, giving them valuable tools for building impactful, Christ-centered relationships with their

grandchildren. These seminars provide a way for Sword of the Spirit grandparents to re-enter internal (their own grandchildren) and external (their own peers) mission. *Grandly* has hosted five seminars this past year in Michigan, Minnesota, Maryland, and Ireland.

For access to inspirational articles, sign up for a free membership at www.grandly.org.

Interested in hosting a seminar in your local community or learning more? Please email Pili Galvan Abouchaar at grandlydirector@gmail.com.

Grandly is recruiting 10,000 youth workers, all of whom are over the age of 55!

top illustration (c) copyright by Grandly:The Strategic Grandparents Club

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

Grandparents On Mission



Becoming a Man

We need to help boys become responsible men, and grandpa can help!

by James Munk

I have two pictures that I find instructive: one is a picture from my first year in college; the other is a picture of my grandfather at about the same age. Mine was taken at an 80's throwback party; I'm wearing a teal leisure suit with an ostentatious dress shirt. My grandfather's was taken in China around 1945 during what I assume was *Operation Beleaguer*, the US occupation of China after the surrender of Japan in World War 2. He's in uniform.

Now, I'm neither ashamed of my time in college nor of my attendance at that 80's party. I was a pretty good student, and a fairly moral young man – but my grandfather and I had pretty different mentalities at the same age. Why? In large part, because the response needed from my grandfather was high, costly, and obvious. Not so from me. What great things did I need to respond to? Homework? Chores? Negative peer pressure? My grandfather was worried about the Third Reich and Imperial Japan. We had different concerns, and so responded differently.

When people say, "He's a responsible young man," they might mean, "He's a good steward of his belongings." Or, "He's a man of his word." But responsibility is more than that. Consider the composition of the word itself: "responsible" is "response + able": able to make the right response in a given circumstance; to be able to do the right thing.

Many say that young men are growing less responsible. This is not a good trend. We need young people – especially young men – that know what the good of a situation is, and who rise to do it, regardless of the personal cost. I work full time as a missionary to high school and college students. We teach our men that one of the primary marks of masculine character

ought to be responsibility. This is critical for a healthy family, community or society.

If young men today are less responsible, it might be because less is asked of them. There's not currently a world war, but our nation, our society, is facing some major threats: dissolution of marriage, loss of fatherhood, secularization, technological uncertainty – and no one really knows how these things will turn out, but good men able to respond will be part of what is needed.

That means we need to help boys become responsible men, and grandpa can help! How?

Help his eyes actually see. Youth benefit when they learn to see, not just watch. One youth work exercise commonly used is called “observation training.” For example: look at this picture for one minute.

Now, answer these questions... What color was Darth Vader's light saber? How many humans were in the photo? Teaching kids to look and see can be fun but it also equips them to identify what needs to be done.

A grandparent, like a youth-worker, walks beside the youth and then asks, what should **we** do to help? It's tempting to complain about politics and sports, taxes and cultural collapse. It's better to talk about the things you and he **can** affect. Help him identify what is necessary to bring order or beauty to a room, a closet, the garage. Then help him work towards implementing his vision.

Give him real work. Midway through college, I participated in a program called Detroit Summer Outreach. I showed up, was given a 15-passenger van, 3 assistant staff, and a team of 8 high-schoolers. My job was to get them to various work sites all over the city, plan our work day, and motivate the team. When I got the keys to the van, I felt the real weight of responsibility: if I couldn't figure out how to make this thing work, it wasn't going to get done. That was the first time I had a job with real consequences.

Grandpa, your grandson isn't growing up on a farm with lots of ready opportunities for real work – but there are many amazing opportunities like the one I experienced. Look for them, and offer to help pay for the ones that will give your grandson real work, real authority, and real responsibility.

Encourage him. Literally: give him courage. Don't just tell him he's a good kid, impress upon him your belief that he has an important part to play in your family, your country, and the Kingdom of God. Help him to see the challenges of his day and that he has a role to fill in overcoming them.

For Discussion: What was your history of gaining responsibility?

For Action: How can you give your grandson a responsibility that will help him mature? How can you help him take greater responsibility right where he is in his family or school?

This article was first published in [Grandly: The Strategic Grandparents Club](#), copyright © 2019 Grandly: The Strategic Grandparents Club. Used with permission.

For access to other inspirational articles in *Grandly*, sign up for a free membership at www.grandly.org.

James Munk lives with his wife Michelle in Lansing, Michigan. He is the director of [Kairos North America](#), works with University Christian Outreach, and is a Coordinator for the Work of Christ community.

Top photo of grandfather and grandson working together, by (c) copyright [Zinkevych](#)



On Being Intergenerational

By Jerry Munk

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

I Want My Children to Live in Christian Community

First, I see Christian community as integral to the full Christian life. If a Christian is not living in community (please note that I am not saying "in a Sword of the Spirit community"), they are not living a full, integral Christian life. My main reason for this conviction comes from Scripture. We see in God's word, especially in the New Testament, a call to live our Christian life in particular relationship with other Christians. It is instructive to do a Bible study on the phrase "one another." By looking at passages containing "one another" we begin to see the kind of relationships God intends us to have with our brothers and sisters in Christ. For example...

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

This list gives a picture of Christian relationships: we call it community, others call it fellowship, one could call it integral Christianity. My job is to pass on to my children full and integral

Christianity. I want them to hold the doctrines of the faith firmly. I want them to worship God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – correctly. And, I want them to live biblical Christianity – and that includes having the kind of Christ-centered, brother-and-sister relationships we have in the Sword of the Spirit. I want my children, our children, to live in Christian community.

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

Third, there is the specific call of the Lord. I have a conviction that the Lord has called me to the Work of Christ and the Sword of the Spirit. This sense of call comes from Scripture (as mentioned above), from prophetic words, and from my own day-to-day walk. I have found this life good and helpful for me, for my marriage, for my family (immediate and extended), and for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Similarly, I have a conviction that the Lord’s call extends to my children. Over 40 years ago, before I had any children, the Lord spoke to our community about the powerful work he would do in our children. That word has also been received in many other communities throughout the world. In the same way that I have a personal conviction that I am called to this community, we – the Sword of the Spirit – have come to the conviction that the work the Lord has done in us is not just for us, it is for our children too.

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

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

What Is a Goal?

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

In time I became convicted about my lack of action. I changed my diet and started exercising.

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

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

Doing the Right Actions

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

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

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

Have Confidence in Our Spirituality

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

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

It is a biblical spirituality. Yes, charismatic and community life needed renewal. What the Lord brought about in us was not a new invention. He was renewing what can be clearly seen in Scripture,

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

Parenting Success

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

We have some really good and helpful teaching on Christian parenting in the Sword of the Spirit. I grew up in a family with some gaps and dysfunction, so I found the teaching especially helpful. All of us can, at least, learn the basics. Some moms and dads go home from the Christian parenting course and ask, “What can we do to apply this knowledge in our family?” They make a plan to put teaching into action. Others go home, toss the outline in the trash, and never give the principles another thought. Some parents work together, some work at cross purposes. In some families there is good follow through – they actually do what they plan to do. In other families, there is a good start, but the pressures of life dominate, and the good patterns never take root. I established a pattern with my family early on: after every meal we would read a little from the Bible, talk about it, and then have a short time of family prayer. Let me be honest, we did not do this 100% of the time – in fact, we probably did this only 50% of the time. But, we did our 50% steadily year after year, and I think it had a profound impact on our children. We do not have to be perfect parents, but we do have to keep at it.

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

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

Work for the Community and the Regions to Do

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

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

The leaders of the community must also engage the intergenerational call. Forty-four years ago I visited the People of Hope, a community in New Jersey, to learn about their youth ministry. I was

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

The Work of Christ is a good-sized community by Sword of the Spirit standards: about 280 adults and about that many children. We have several programs for our community youth: preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, college-age, and post-college-age youth – and we have a good percentage of community kids join the community. But, some of our communities are small, and I have heard a few leaders of small communities say something like: "We only have two high school kids, so we don't do anything for them." I believe we need thinking more radical than that if we hope to have our children join us in this call. If there is only one high school aged person, a community can still serve him or her. Ask a gifted person to set up a program for one: get together with that one for Bible study and prayer; take him or her out for a social event every month; do what is necessary to plug him or her into the regional youth program; and include that one as a line item in the community budget. The Good Shepherd spent time and resources on one sheep; if we have only one, we are not exempt; we still have work to do.

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

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

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

Work for Parents to Do

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

This may seem obvious, but it needs to be said. Mom and dad need to be committed to the Lord, living the Christian life well, living their community commitment faithfully, and have a loving,

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

In addition to the challenges of building an effective family life, consider the witness to our children of poor relating in the marriage. Christian marriage is supposed to give witness to the love between Jesus Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:24-25). We hear this so often our ears are calloused. But, this is a radical call and requires our full attention. Consistently poor relating in marriage not only fails to give witness to the love between Jesus Christ and his church, it tells our children that the power of Jesus Christ, the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and the support of the Christian community is not enough to get mom and dad to relate decently to each other. Why wouldn't they look elsewhere? If you have consistent relationship problems in your marriage, please get some help and work on building a better marriage.

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

Some Positives

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

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

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

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

Plug them into the community youth program. This consists of three complicated skills: (1) knowing what is going on, (2) getting them there, and (3) keeping other stuff (school activities, sports, friends, and the like) from interfering with community youth activities. In our community, the

coordinator in charge of the youth program has kept careful records going back about 15 years. He tells me that of those community children who did not participate in the youth group, not one became an adult member of the community. In some cases the children were in rebellion. In some cases other activities, poor planning, or an overly-busy life was the culprit. In a few cases the parents disagreed with the idea or the vision for our youth group – they had a different or a better plan. No matter what the reason, not one of these young people became an adult member of the community. Do not underestimate the power of a consistent connection between your children and the community.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Work for Community Kids to Do

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

Why Some Parents Do Not Engage the Intergenerational Goal

Some parents fail to engage the intergenerational goal because of problems or disunity in their marriage. Others may lack the knowledge, planning, and follow through necessary to successfully form their children in this life. Some parents (and/or their children) are un-plugged from community life in significant ways, and this keeps them from engaging the intergenerational goal well. A few

parents have become timid about our spirituality (or have shifted much of their attention to a different spirituality) and this hinders engagement with the goal. Some parents simply hold a different goal (e.g., financial success) for their children. Others have the “goal” but without sufficient action – and so it is more of a “wish.” Finally, some children are very challenging and their parents are unwilling or lack the ability to manage the situation well.

Why Some Children Do Not Engage Community Life Well

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

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

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

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

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

You and Your Children

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter quoted the Prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy and your young men shall see visions” (Acts 2:17). Just as the gift of the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon adults, God intends that our sons and daughters – his children – will experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives as well. We have been blessed to see this prophecy come true in our day.

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

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

[This article originally appeared in the April 2010 issue of *Living Bulwark*.]

Jerry Munk is a member of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church and senior coordinator in the [Work of Christ Community](#), Lansing, Michigan, USA. He and his wife Jan have three grown children, all actively participating in the community.

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Christian Agape Meal - late 3rd century AD

Why the Early Christians Celebrated the Lord's Day

edited by Mark Kinzer

In the Book of Nehemiah, there is a passage which is puzzling to many people today:

“And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Nehemiah 8:9-10

It is puzzling because we have lost an understanding of celebration (and of mourning as well). The people described in the passage had just heard and understood the words of the law, and they had discovered that they were not keeping them. They began to mourn out of repentance when Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people not to mourn. They said that the people should rejoice because the day was holy to the Lord (the first day of the seventh month, “the feast of trumpets,” cf. Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1-6). So the people began to celebrate.

This passage illustrates some important truths for us. It shows, first of all, that joy or rejoicing is more than feeling happy. When the Levites told the people to rejoice, they told them to hold a feast. They told them, in other words, to celebrate. Rejoicing (or joy) for the Israelites was not just a feeling, but it was something they did. To rejoice is to celebrate, to express the goodness of the occasion in a joyful way. We can see this also in the Book of Deuteronomy when it instructs the people to celebrate the great feasts like Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles. It tells them to come to Jerusalem, make an offering, and “rejoice before the Lord your God” (16:11), that is, it tells them to celebrate in God’s presence.

We celebrate certain days or events because it is good and right to do so. It would not have been proper for the Israelites to mourn on a festival day. We celebrate because celebrating is a way of honoring God. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people that the day was “holy to the Lord your God.” That meant that it was set apart (holy) to honor the Lord. The people, therefore, were supposed to celebrate in order to honor the Lord. Finally, we celebrate as an expression of gratitude for the good things God has done for us.

Celebrating is also a great benefit to us. “The joy of the Lord (rejoicing in the Lord) is our strength.” When we celebrate God’s goodness and what he has done for us, we are strengthened and refreshed. Our God is a God who wishes us to share his joy (and his strength) when we worship him. To be sure, sometimes we should worship him soberly, humbling ourselves in repentance and mourning. But the main times of worship under the old covenant and the new covenant are times of celebration—rejoicing in God’s presence. The Lord’s Day is one of these times of celebration.

The Early Christians Celebrated the Lord’s Day

We can see in the Scripture indications that the early Christians observed the Lord’s Day. John, in the Book of Revelation, says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (1:10). Likewise, we read of Paul gathering with the Christians at Troas on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and instructing the Christians at Corinth to set aside contributions for the community at Jerusalem on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). Sunday seems to have been a special day for the first Christians and was used as a day for gathering together. Probably it was the day of assembly because it commemorated the resurrection of the Lord which had occurred on Sunday.

The earliest writings from within a hundred years of the death of the last apostle indicate even more clearly the way the Christians marked Sunday. Some of these writings explain what they understood the Lord’s Day to be:

The celebration of the resurrection: Ignatius of Antioch, writing within twenty years of the death of the apostle John, said, “every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days of the week and on which our life sprang up again and victory over death was obtained in Christ.”

To the Magnesians, 9

The celebration of creation and the new creation: Justin Martyr, a convert who was born and raised near Jacob’s well, writing about forty years later, said, “But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ, our Savior, on the same day rose from the dead.”

First Apology, 67

The celebration of the beginning of the age to come: The Epistle of Barnabas, written about the time Ignatius wrote, says, “I will make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, the beginning of another world. Wherefore, also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose again from the dead.” *section 15*

Since Sunday was the day after the seventh day, it was the eighth day as well as the first day. Since the seven days symbolized God’s original creation of the world, the eighth day can be seen as the beginning of the new creation, the world to come. In the New Testament as well (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5) the number eight seems to have been seen as a symbol of the new creation. The early Christians knew that they were participating through the Spirit in the age to come and prayed on the Lord’s Day that Jesus might come and bring in the new age completely: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Sunday Is the Lord's Day for Christians

Sunday, then, is the weekly celebration of the Christian people. It is the day on which they gather together to celebrate the resurrection, the completion of the work of redemption, the day in which the new creation was inaugurated and therefore the day on which the age to come was opened to the human race. It is the day on which the true sun of righteousness rose with healing in his rays (Malachi 4:2). Just as Easter is the major yearly celebration for Christians, so Sunday is the major weekly celebration for Christians. It is a day to rejoice in our hope (Romans 12:12).

The celebration of the Lord's Day holds a similar place for Christians to the place the celebration of the Sabbath held for Jews. Christians who were not born or circumcised as Jews were not obligated by the New Testament to keep the seventh day (cf. Colossians 2:16; Galatians 4:10). That was the day of celebration for those who were under the Mosaic law. However, Christians since then have usually seen a connection between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

Some Christians have said simply that the Lord's Day is the Christian Sabbath. Christians keep the Sabbath commandment on Sunday rather than Saturday, and so Sunday is the new covenant Sabbath. Others have said that the Sabbath commandment was given to teach that one day a week should be set aside for the worship of God. Christians have to keep the commandment, but they do not have to do it on the seventh day. Taking a day of rest and worship is part of God's purpose for the human race and therefore obligatory, but doing it on the seventh day was only obligatory for the Jews. For Christians, it is more fitting to do soon the first day, the day of the resurrection. Finally, other Christians have said that setting aside a day of rest and worship is not obligatory at all, but nonetheless it is very valuable to do, and one of the purposes of the Sabbath commandment is to teach us the value of such a custom. Although these views show some difference among Christians as to the relationship of the observance of the Lord's Day to the Sabbath commandment, almost all Christians see the importance of having such a day and accept the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, as the weekly day of celebration for Christians.

What Christians have learned about the Lord's Day

There are many truths that Christians have learned from the Sabbath celebration and applied through the centuries. They have, as we have said, learned first of all the value of setting aside one day for the worship of God. They have also learned the value of the day of rest. The true rest is to cease from our sins, but that rest is symbolized by a day of rest in which we cease from our work. Rest is not inactivity, but it is a change of activity. In this case, rest is ceasing from the work by which we support ourselves and maintain our life and instead taking on the activity of worshiping. It is therefore a day of gathering together, of prayer and Christian study, of giving alms and doing good (like visiting the sick). It is a day for the Christian community and for the family. It is not so much a "day off," though it can be that, but a day in which we do "not go our own ways or seek our own pleasure or talk idly" (Isaiah 58:13), a day to honor God.

Finally, Christians have learned from the Sabbath that the Lord's Day is a time of celebration, a time to "take delight in the Lord." It is a day in which the joy of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord, can be our strength. Here, especially, modern Christians need to learn something. They need to learn how to celebrate again. There was a time when Christians knew how to take a feast day and celebrate, and Christians in many places of the world still do. But for most Christians modern life has eroded an understanding of how to keep a feast. For that reason, we can learn again an old truth from the celebration of the Sabbath.

The article is adapted from *Family Worship*, edited by Mark Kinzer and Jim Berlucchi, previously

published by Servant Publications in 1990, and a new expanded edition published in 2004 by (c) The Sword of the Spirit.

Top image: Christian Agape Meal, late 3rd century AD, from the sarcophagus of Baebia Hertofilae

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Feast or Famine?

*Have we lost our ability to feast?
And what can we do to recover this important part of
Christian culture?*

Part one of a two-part series

by Bernhard Stock

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished,
and all the host of them.
And on the seventh day God finished his work
which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day
from all his work which he had done.
So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.
(Genesis 2:1-3a)*

The Origin of Feasting

Right at the beginning of all, we see that God is active – he creates a vast universe. But then he finishes his work, and he establishes a day of rest – the seventh day, the Sabbath. Of course, this is not the end of God acting, as if, after this he has been just leaning back and watching what mankind does with his world.

This idea of God as a passive deity who no longer interferes with the world was, by the way, a theological position called Deism. Many Christians still think like Deists, as if God were no longer active – a mere philosophical principle. But God is still at work. He is a living God, who intervenes, acts in our lives, and speaks to us.

A Glorious Interruption

When God inaugurated the Sabbath, he actually interrupted his work and established a feast. And for us also, following his lead, a real feast is to be an interruption of day-to-day-life.

For there to be an interruption, there has to be something to interrupt – such as the normal day-to-day-life and activities, the hard work, the worries of life. We can only celebrate well and enjoy a feast if it is something special – something set-apart from the daily routine of life. And this means that people in our times, especially in the Western world, are in danger of losing our ability to celebrate. In a world where almost everything is special, where we can live in material abundance, where we can have almost everything we want, and some people don't even have to work for it – in a world like this nothing becomes special. Can we who are wealthy by historical and current world standards really celebrate? No! If our lives are one ongoing party, in the long run, they become dull, shallow, and boring.

Sometimes I hear people complain about the work they have to do in preparing a celebration – the decoration, the cooking – but this is part of the real feast! It gives you all the more joy if at the end of all the work you can sit down and look around and say (like God did): behold, it is very good.

Eternal Roots in God

Scripture also teaches us that the genuine feasting has its origin in God – it has eternal roots. In fact, we cannot create a real feast. We cannot sit down and find a cause for celebrating and then celebrate. The cause of the real feast is already given to us. It's not something we achieve on our own.

All major feasts in the Jewish and Christian tradition have at their root something which God did – he delivered his people from Egypt, he gave the commandments, he sent his Son, and the Son, Jesus, rose from the dead, bringing us the promise of our own resurrection in him. We can see that as more feasts become secularized, they lose their eternal origin and meaning (some modern feasts don't even have an eternal origin), they lose their attraction and become distorted and perverted.

For example, Christmas is no longer a joyful celebration of our Savior's birth. It has been replaced as the "feast of the family" or, even worse, the "feast of giving gifts", and an "orgy of consumerism". The more man celebrates himself and his achievements (such as the mass celebrations which many communist and totalitarian regimes have put on each year), the more this becomes a mere flexing of muscle and less a real feast.

If a genuine feasting needs an eternal cause, we Christians should be the experts in celebrating, because we have more than enough reasons to celebrate. My personal conviction is that if Christians really learn to celebrate well, the people of this world will take notice and will want to learn from us how to celebrate the real feasts, such as Christmas. The world has lost the art of celebrating because it has lost the real cause for feasting.

[This article first appeared in the October 2007 Issue of Living Bulwark.]

[See > Part II - How Should We Celebrate?](#)

Bernard Stock is a gifted teacher in the Sword of the Spirit and a founding leader of [Brot des Lebens](#) (Bread of Life Community) in Munich, Germany. See other articles by Bernhard Stock in Living Bulwark archives.

Top illustration: Celebrating the Lord's Day by Jamie Treadwell

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Feast or Famine?

Part II: How Should We Celebrate?

by Bernhard Stock

*Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said:
“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Let my people go,
that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.”
(Exodus 5:1)*

A feast in the wilderness

Isn't this amazing? The Israelites have been an occupied people for 400 years in Egypt and now they ask Pharaoh to let them go so they can hold a feast to the Lord! When God was about to set his people free from slavery, he told them to prepare a feast!

As we saw in Part I, scripture teaches us that genuine feasting has its origin in God – it has eternal roots. The Book of Genesis tells us that when God created the universe, he interrupted his work on the seventh day, the Sabbath, and established a feast. All major feasts in the Jewish and Christian tradition have at their root something which God did – he delivered his people from Egypt, he gave the commandments, he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus, who died for our sins and then rose again to bring us new, unending life with him.

What can we learn from the scriptures about how to celebrate well, especially as families? In the Exodus account of the Passover, we can see a model or pattern for how God wanted his people to celebrate. The Passover (or Seder), which is celebrated every year in Jewish homes, is known in Jewish tradition as the feast of all feasts because it celebrates God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. I want to pick out three important elements for our consideration about feasts: commemorating, giving thanks, and celebrating.

We feast to commemorate

God instructed the Israelites to commemorate – to remember, recall to mind, and recount by retelling the story of the first exodus when God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt.

Why do we come together, as families and community, for feasts? First to commemorate. We need to remind ourselves of the eternal reason for celebration; we have to “tell the story” – his story – and point it out to one another.

And it can be really helpful to tell it. In our community (the Bread of Life in Munich), we celebrate a big Christian passover seder every year. And at this celebration, we ask someone to “tell the story” – the story of our deliverance, our exodus, in a new and fresh way. Over the years, we have discovered more and more about the exodus, since each storyteller has his different version of it. And then, we ask someone to tell the story of our community during the last year – what God has done with us.

As a community we encourage all of our families to regularly have a Lord’s Day celebration meal in their homes on Saturday evening as a way of preparing ourselves to mark Sunday as the Lord’s Day – a day set-apart, sundown to sundown, to rest from our normal work and activities so we can honor the Lord in a special way and worship together. In the Lord’s Day celebration meal we can tell each other the stories of what God has done for us in the last week, or so. And of course, whenever the gospel is read in a celebration, it is also “telling the story”: Remember, O people of God, what great things he has done for each one of us!

When we remind ourselves of the deeds of the Lord, we should think of ourselves as participating in it again, since as Jewish tradition says, “if you don’t consider yourself as being part of it, you are not celebrating well.” This also gives us a guideline for our emotions: they should not be an expression of our personal mood, but rather an appropriate answer to the “eternal reason” of our celebration: awe in the presence of God, joy about the work of salvation, mourning for sin, attentive while hearing about his deeds (see Nehemiah 8:9-10).

We feast to give thanks

Secondly, we should give thanks. Since the origin for a real celebration is not in ourselves or in something we did or achieved, it is only appropriate to give thanks and honor to the “originator,” the Lord. This is true even if we are celebrating a birthday and honoring a person, since the person could do nothing about being born, and not exist except with God’s help. So it’s appropriate also to honor not only the people, but also their parents and the Lord, who brought them into existence, and made them the wonderful people they are now. This will also keep us from sliding into a “cult of personality”, which is actually a perversion of a real celebration.

We feast to celebrate

And last, of course we celebrate. Many things can work together to make a good and joyful celebration: clothing, decoration, music, arts, a good meal, dance, fellowship, talking with one another. These look different at a big occasion, than they do at a small one; but they should always strive to foster a culture of celebrating. To celebrate well, we need good preparation, good order, a sense for what is real beauty, and also discernment: for instance, dancing before the Lord (as David did before the ark of the covenant) is one thing and dancing around a golden calf is something altogether different.

When the Queen of Sheba, who did not believe in the one God, visited King Solomon, she was impressed: by the food, the clothing of his servants, the way they served, the order at the table (2 Chronicles 9:3) – she was impressed by the way he knew how to celebrate! And she ascribed Solomon’s wisdom to his God. If Solomon’s court is so wonderful, he must have a wonderful God! Could others say this about us?

Observing the Lord’s Day

As an example for celebration, let’s look at the Lord’s Day. In a traditional society (like the one I grew up in northern Bavaria), the Lord’s Day started on Saturday afternoon. Everything was cleaned, the children had their baths, and normal work ceased until Sunday evening. People really rested – no chores around the house, no washing the car, especially no shopping, and no other work. Sunday was genuinely a day of rest, a glorious interruption. And the reason for this

was obvious as we all went to our respective church services on Sunday mornings. The “eternal reason” was clearly the center of the whole feast. And, of course, within the church service or liturgy, we remembered the deeds of the Lord, and we gave thanks to him. Afterwards, there was a special family meal, people wore special clothes, and there was a solemn but not stiff atmosphere, and there was fellowship with the whole family – a real celebration.

In our communities, we have the great blessing of renewing the culture of the Lord’s Day, starting it with our Lord’s Day celebration on the eve of Sunday.

Observing the Lord’s Day and celebrating it well are not only “good things”. They are vital. Scholars say that Judaism owes its survival through the centuries, and all the persecutions – and in the diaspora without a temple for almost two thousand years – to the Jews’ faithful and continuing observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath celebration in families, and then the meeting in the synagogue and the strict adherence to keeping a day of rest.

We could also have a look at other celebrations during the year: the big feasts of our salvation (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), celebrations in our communities, and personal occasions (anniversaries, birthdays, etc.). As we learn to celebrate these well, we are only anticipating the one, ultimate, and eternal celebration: the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Revelations 21) which is pointed to throughout the scriptures:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.

Isaiah 25:6-8

[This article first appeared in the November 2007 Issue of Living Bulwark.]

See > [Part I - Have we lost our ability to feast?](#)

Bernard Stock is a gifted teacher in the Sword of the Spirit and a founding leader of [Brot des Lebens](#) (Bread of Life Community) in Munich, Germany. See other articles by Bernhard Stock in Living Bulwark archives.

Top illustration: Celebrating the Lord's Day by Jamie Treadwell

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Back to the Future

What will determine the shape of the future?

by Michael Shaughnessy

What will determine the shape of the future? Technology, wealth, fear, power, population growth, media, government, global warming? There are probably four main scenarios. They all result in a future very different than the present.

The first scenario is more of the same, but even that will yield very different results! More people, who are better educated, will produce more wealth. They will have more leisure time and consume more. People will continue to move from "I work just to survive" – to "I live to play."

The second is a have-and-have-not world, but having won't be primarily about money. The have-not population will be the victims of the breakdown of family and character. Already there is a growing population that doesn't have the intellectual, relational or moral skills to hold a steady job.

The third is the big accident: nuclear war, global ecological disaster, an unstoppable epidemic that decimates the population ...or maybe even aliens. Survival will be the key concern.

The fourth is the continued, rapid advance of technology, especially in genetics and bio-engineering. We might see a Matrix-like world where gaining knowledge requires no effort. It is directly downloaded to your brain. How much should we form the mind, body, will and emotions (either chemically or genetically) and who will control this?

Parents possibly, but that is unlikely. They might have the power to prevent this from happening to their own children, but possibly at the cost of their children being left behind intellectually, physically or even morally. Expect business to be in it for the money. Expect media to want to control the eye and mind. Expect schools to believe they, not parents, are responsible for

children. Governments will want to determine what happens to its citizens. The church won't have much say if it remains weak, confused and divided. In any case, a lot more power will be in the hands of fewer people.

Responding with fear is exactly the wrong response. Responding with faith, hope and love is the right response. Faith, because God knows what he is doing; everything is ultimately under his mighty hand. Hope, because it helps us respond joyfully in all circumstances. Love, because it guides us in doing the right thing toward God and others.

We are called, like Queen Esther was, for such a time (*kairos*) as this (*Esther 4:14*). We can expect God's help to do the right thing at the right time, and that is what makes all the difference. It may be that the future of youth culture will be up to us.

[This article is adapted from a talk given by Michael Shaughnessy to Kairos International Leaders in May 2008. It was first published in the [Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter](#).]

Mike Shaughnessy is a life-long member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and a regional missionary coordinator of the [Sword of the Spirit in North America](#). He is a prolific [writer](#), teacher, and editor for the Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter

Launched in December of 2007, the Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter (KYCN) is a monthly publication produced by Mike Shaughnessy for Kairos International. The KYCN aims to update parents and youth workers on some of the main people and trends affecting youth. It also seeks to teach about youth and youth culture: its past, current ramifications, and possible future. Visit their Google Group to subscribe or see past newsletters at <https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/kycn-subscribers>.

Top illustration: close-up of a poster illustration for the film *Back to the Future*

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

The Lois Project for Moms and Mentors



Grace To Be

by Stephanie Smith

As the last glowing remnant of the sun dipped below the horizon, the sky grew more and more gloriously colored – reds and oranges, greys and purples mingled to spread a coloured banner across the western sky. The reflection of the sky, in turn, painted the sea in hues of burnished copper and gold. We sat and watched as the twilight sky grew darker and the stars slowly began to peek out, one by one. It was a moment to savor and remember. We sat quietly, side-by-side, my husband and I, thinking our own thoughts in companionable silence.

My thoughts grew nostalgic. Here we were, celebrating our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary on the idyllic Cycladian island of Paros in the middle of the Aegean Sea, at the end of a day spent swimming, reading, and exploring the island. And my thoughts were winging home, wondering how our kids were doing and realizing they had grown up and no longer needed me to plan their meals, check in on their homework, wash their clothes or go to parent-teacher meetings. At twenty-four, twenty-two and nineteen years old respectively, our children are all officially adults with their own lives to live, plans to make and dreams to pursue.

In one way, the glorious sunset was an allegory for a phase in our lives that is gone and will not come again – parenting children to adulthood. We spent twenty-three years pouring our lives into theirs, guiding and directing, striving to teach them the ways of the Lord and a Christian way of life. Now that job was done. A door closed. A sun set.

I gave a big sigh. A tear or two trickled silently down my cheeks. I felt empty somehow, deprived of purpose. “Who AM I now?” I whispered to the darkness. Almost as if I heard a voice speaking to me, the answer came to me, I am still their mother! OK, so they don’t need the same things as they once did from me but I still have a job to do, a role to play in their lives.

You know, it is funny how much alike a sunset and a sunrise look at any given moment. Only when you are experiencing them can you really tell the difference. Maybe, as the sun set on one

phase of our parenting experience, it was rising on another. Maybe this new role we would have would be just as important and impactful, maybe it would feel as rewarding.

I turned to my husband, “We should pray!”

“What?” clearly, his thoughts had not been tracking mine!

“For our kids,” I said. “We should pray.” And I meant so much more than just praying at that moment, I was beginning to have an inkling of what might be a major part of our new role. We would stand vigil in prayer for them as they made huge life decisions – what job to do, where to live, who to choose as a life partner. We would proclaim the goodness of the Lord over their lives and choose to believe and hope that God’s good plans would unfold in their lives. Our prayer for them would be that they “would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

I am still sad in some ways that the nurturing and guiding phase of our relationship with our children is past. I will always have fond memories (as well as challenging ones) of that time. But I am also eagerly anticipating the new phase we are entering, determined to be the best mother of adult children that God gives me the grace to be.

This article was originally published by the (c) [Lois Project](#). Used with permission.



Stephanie is a mother of three grown children, currently works as a high-school science teacher and enjoys writing on subjects she is passionate about. She grew up in India and Bangladesh as the daughter of British missionaries. After returning to Great Britain in her mid-teens she attended university in Belfast, Northern Ireland, worked as a college professor and research scientist before marrying and moving to Ann Arbor. She worked for Michigan Family Forum, a pro-life group based in Lansing, before having children. She home-schooled her children up to high-school after which she returned to teaching. Stephanie and her husband, Dan, are members of the Word of Life community in Ann Arbor.

Lois Project is a Missional Motherhood Collective that aims to empower moms and mentors in their Christian faith. We seek to share real stories and insights from women around the world as a means of connection and encouragement and to cultivate a sincere faith that influences future generations.

The Lois Project is a group of Christian women from various cities, countries, and church backgrounds who feel a common call to be disciples on mission in all seasons of life. Most of us find ourselves in a season of care-giving as mothers, grandmothers, mentors, or teachers.

Many of our writers are part of an international, ecumenical Christian community called *The Sword of the Spirit*. Although we come from Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant traditions we seek to foster unity among these groups and work together.

<https://www.loisproject.com>
Instagram: @theloisproject
facebook.com/theloisproject

Photo of seaside sunset: Copyright: [weera Prongsiri](#) on Bigstock.com ID: 302833123

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Do You Not Care, Jesus?

by Lynne May

Scripture tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything (Philippians 4:6)" and "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you" (1 Peter 5:6). The habit of anxious thinking has tricked me into believing I can't overcome it. **But from the Scriptures I have discovered the truth that I can learn to overcome it and kick it out of my soul, mind, and heart, because Jesus Christ has given me the authority to do so.** When I experience anxiety, I know that it has often led me to either consciously or unwittingly welcome it into my thought life and opened the front door of my soul to it.

It's a habit that began at a young age, though I didn't realize I was developing it: welcoming anxiety into my life when I wanted to see a problem solved. Somewhere along the way, as a child, I came under the false belief that if I just *strived and strived and anxiously strived*, my life would become easier, and my problems would go away. Peace was not easily come by and 'letting go and letting God' transform and change me was a foreign concept.

When I think of the Scriptures, and moments when there could have been legitimate cause for anxiety, I think of the disciples in the boat with Jesus during the intense storm (Matthew 8:23-27). As one friend put it, it's like they were saying to Jesus, "Master, do you not care that we are going down?" And Jesus is asleep in the boat. "What's up with that?!" Is my raw gut reaction. Yeah: to all appearances, it looks like they were about to go down. Yeah: Why didn't Jesus wake up and calm them, before they couldn't seem to help themselves from waking him up?

In my humanity, it boggles my mind. But the truth is, if they had believed in who he was in the midst of this storm, that they had the Messiah, the Lord of the Universe, the One who created and even separated the waters, they would not have been anxious. They could have put more faith in the safety and identity of Jesus than in the storm they saw, the storm they experienced. They had that choice, in their free will. Their circumstances were to some degree dangerous and somewhat bleak. But even if that was the case, **they had THE Messiah, they had God, sleeping by their side. True Safety. True Comfort.**

So what does this teach me? That Jesus Christ is with me, too. He's always in the boat. And why is he asleep? Not because he disregards my cause, but because he trusts and finds comfort and peace in belonging to his heavenly Father, and because he knows he has dominion over creation. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Why do you complain? . . . Why do you say, Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? . . . The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 40:27-28).

This teaches me that I can "fall asleep" and rest easy, too. I can be at peace, even in the storm, because Jesus is with me. I can get my eyes off my circumstances, not focus on my problems and storms, because they will surely come, but fix my inward gaze, my emotions, my mind, my soul on who is with me in the "boat": Jesus! And when the storms seem to be edging on overwhelm, and water begins to trickle in and slop over the sides of my little boat of life, I can rebuke them, in the name of Jesus, and invite peace and calm into my life. I can declare that he is in the boat with me, and I will not be afraid or anxious.

I can repent and say: "In the name of Jesus, I repent of anxiety. Jesus, the truth is that you are in control, you are the Lord, and you are with me, even if there are storms." Next, I can say, "In the name of Jesus, anxiety get outta here! Go to Jesus. I renounce you." Then, I can pray, "Father, bring me peace. Give me your supernatural peace. Thank you that you are with me."

So let's choose not to let anxiety rattle our chain. Someone once said that the evil one is like a dog on a chain, firmly chained to a tree. He can't actually bite or get at us unless we begin to enter into his territory.

So we have a choice. *It's a choice of will to not let anxiety have power over us.* It's not all on us, we do need to turn to Jesus for his help, but *we do have the free will* to choose to turn to him, and that's our part in all of this. Now this is not to say that professional counseling and medications cannot help us in this area of anxiety, that God cannot use them. But it is true that each of us has a mind and a will that play a part in the fight for peace in our souls.

Let's try not to allow our problems, our circumstances, other people, our bosses, our neighbors, and not even the driver in front of us holding up traffic at the most inconvenient of times, anyone or anything else have control, power over us, but Jesus Christ.

This isn't easy stuff. This is real soul work that the Holy Spirit wants to help us with. If you wrestle with getting easily stressed or anxious, you know that it takes real effort to relax. It is a real discipline to be cultivated over time. But this is what it means to let him be Lord of all of our lives. New habits take time. Yet old ones really can become totally undone and replaced.

We really can let him remain on the throne and acknowledge that he is with us in the boat, always. It's most tempting to take control back or believe the lie that he is not with us when we're either under high stress or maybe, when things are going really well. To stop praying, to stop talking to him, to quit making eye contact with him. To stop turning to him. To stop keeping him at the center of our gaze. But this is not how we have learned Christ. In the words of the apostle Paul, we have learned that our call is "to be made new in the attitude of our minds" and to "put on the new self, created to be like God" (Ephesians 4:20, 23, 24). This "new attitude of our minds" tells us that Jesus loves us, he has a plan for us – every day, every moment of every hour, he has a perfect plan, a good plan. Let us choose to stake our lives on

this truth more than what we may see in our everyday lives during a difficult season.

So today, take a few moments and close your eyes, and hold your breath for a few seconds: let this remind you that you cannot even take a breath without God's life in you! Every breath, every moment you're alive is GIFT from him and irrefutable evidence of his deep love for you.

Then let your breath out: let this remind you that whatever you're trying to hold onto, tempted to hold onto, anxiously and fearfully, more than Jesus, is not worth it. Let it go. *Just let it go.* Don't you want to get some rest, and lay your weary little soul and heart down in the boat next to Jesus? Go for it. Dare to let the storms rage; he'll rebuke them, in his time. He'll calm them. Yes, you can trustingly ask him. But trust more in him who is ever with you. Answer his gentle invitation to join him in resting in the security of knowing that you are a dearly beloved daughter of the heavenly Father.

No storm can shake my inmost calm

While to that refuge clinging

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth

How can I keep from singing?

[Lynne May is a member of the [Work of Christ Community](#) in Lansing, Michigan, USA]

This article first appeared in [The Lovely Commission](#), a publishing venture and brand of [Kairos North America](#). Used with permission.

The Lovely Commission is run by Molly Kilpatrick and Mary Rose Jordan and a team of contributors from various Christian communities in North America and beyond. Together they are working to build a culture of radical love, femininity, modesty of heart, mind, and body amongst young women.

Their aim is to inspire and equip young women to embrace and promote a culture of Godly femininity in which we live out our rich identity as daughters of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.

top illustration: Christ Asleep on the Storm-tossed Sea, by Eugene Delacroix

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



God's Grace Abounds

by Tom Caballes

"For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."

John 1:16 12:9 ESV

Have you ever thought how your life would have been if God did not touch your life and called you from darkness and into His marvellous light? I have. I was a very self-centred, selfish, proud, greedy, and ambitious person. I was willing to do anything to get what I want. I could have been a drug addict or even a dealer. I could easily have been a thief or a con artist. I would have probably been divorced or separated, and possibly have children from other women. I could have been in prison. My life could have been a huge complicated mess - I just know my capacity to do evil too well. But God's grace touched my life and changed my hell-bound direction to draw near to Him. How about you – what could your life have been like without God? We are what we are due to God's lavish grace - His grace abounds in all of us. Thanks be to God for His lavish love and grace to you and me! They are totally and freely given – unearned, unworthy of, and undeserving of God's love and grace.

So How Do We Appreciate the Grace that God Provides to All of Us?

1. Live a life filled with gratitude to God. Each day as you awake, thank God for another day. Thank God for the big and small things – your food, health, family, relationships, etc. - you have due to His goodness. Each night before you sleep, thank God for the blessings of the day. Thank God for the challenges you face every day, too. Out of those challenges we grow in our faith and draw closer to God. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 ESV)*
2. Live life in humility – your gifts and talents, your riches, your abilities, and so on – everything you are and you have comes from God. You cannot be proud for the things God has gifted you with – you did not earn your gifts. You are what you are is part of the grace of God. You could have been another person easily, yet you are who you are and you have what you have. Sincerely thank God and be humble for what you are and have.

3. We are all sinners in the process of being redeemed. We are not yet perfect. Although we will struggle against sin for the rest of our lives, we are being transformed from glory to glory by and in God's grace – see 2 Corinthians 3:18. Be patient with yourself as you struggle to grow in holiness and be thankful for the gift of repentance and forgiveness. Focus on God, and not on your failings. Avail of that grace that is available to you in repenting and in growing in Christ-likeness.
4. Be an agent of God's grace to all people you meet. As much as you have received God's grace, be also a giver or dispenser of God's grace. Show in the way you treat others that God lives in you. Be patient and forgiving with others as God is patient and forgiving with them. God wants to use you to be a messenger – an ambassador - to those who do not know Him. See 2 Corinthians 5:20.
5. Desire to live a grace-filled life. Bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life so that others can see God in you. Grow in being loving, gentle, patient, kind, peaceful, and so on. Grow to be more Christ-like daily.
6. Desire to share God's grace with others. Share your story of God's grace to the people around you who do not know God. Desire to pass on God's life that is flowing in you through His grace.
7. At the end of our lives, we can look back and see how God has been lavish with His grace. But that is not all – His grace also paves the way for us to have eternal life with God. What a wonderful destiny we have in Christ

Other Scripture passages:

1. *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8 ESV)*
2. *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:14 ESV)*
3. Other Bible verses: *Ephesians 2:1-10; James 4:6; 1 Corinthians 15:10; and Hebrews 4:16.*

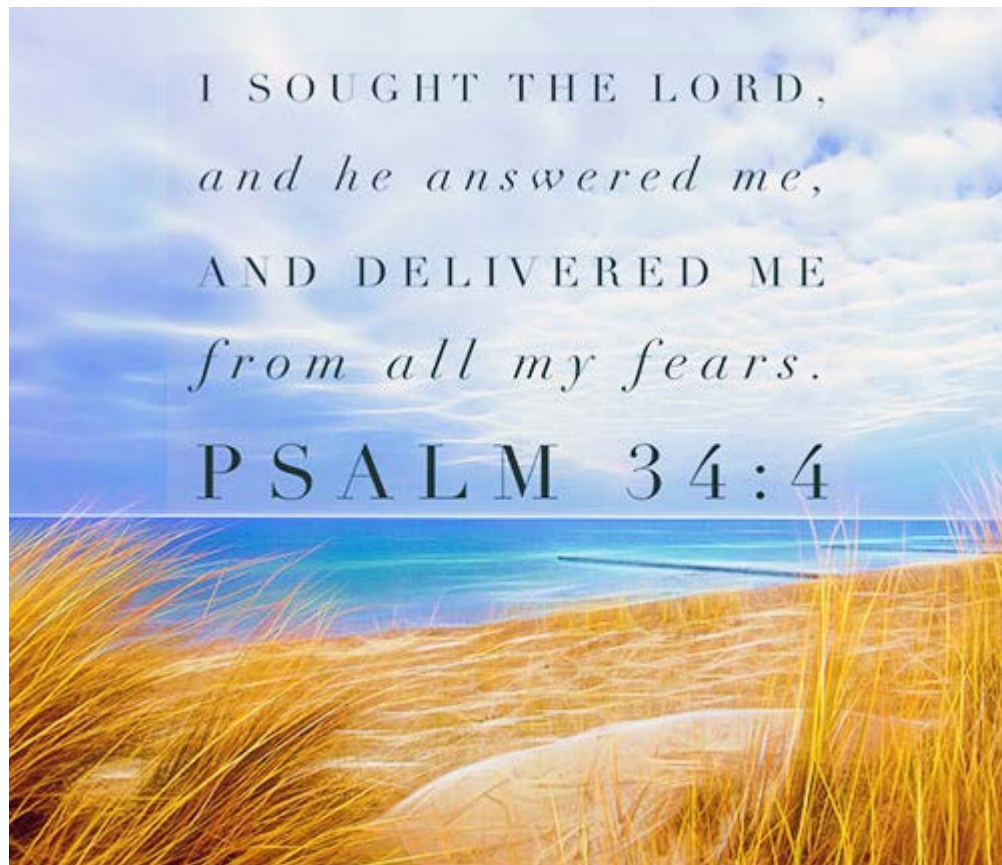
For personal reflection or group sharing

- How thankful are you for the grace given to you by God?
- What were the moments in your life where you saw God being gracious to you?



Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the [Lamb of God](#), a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads [Kairos New Zealand](#), an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.



The Sum of All of Our Fears

by Tom Caballes

"I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed."
Psalm 34:4-5 ESV

In life, there is always something we can be afraid of – being made redundant at work, becoming sick from a deadly disease, being involved in a car accident, natural calamities, financial ruin, etc. So, how can we walk through life without giving in to fear all the time? The key is to find THE reason not to be afraid of – God: He knows everything, and He is in control of everything; if we have God in our lives, we can fully trust Him with big and small things. Every fear that we can have boils down to the fear of death – but through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have already conquered death. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalms 27:1 ESV) If Jesus has conquered our greatest fear, why can't we walk and live in radiance, without shame, and without fear?

So How Do We Live a Faith-Filled Life and not a Fear-filled one?

1. If we follow and obey God, know that there is no reason for us to live in fear. *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or*

- famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* (Romans 8:31-35 ESV)
2. When you commit your life to God, He makes a two-way deal with you: You focus on following God, and God will take care of your life and needs. *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:33 ESV) It does not mean all your prayers will be automatically answered from now on, but God will provide everything you need according to His will. Believe that God is taking care of you all the time. *Turn all your anxiety over to God because he cares for you.* (1 Peter 5:7 GW)
 3. Even at the darkest, saddest, and most fearful situation, God will never abandon you. God's ways are not yours – *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28 ESV) God can redeem your most gruelling experiences in life for good – because He loves you. God can turn your saddest experiences and memories for your good. Trust Him.
 4. Living in fear of anything prevents us from loving and serving God fully as He deserves. Instead of living our lives in radiance and confidence, knowing that God is always there for us, living in fear robs us of joy, peace, and contentment that only God can give. *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 ESV)
 5. Know that God has prepared for you a special dwelling place in heaven [See John 14:2] No matter what life throws at you, even death itself, cannot separate you from God. *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38-39 ESV). So live a life in confidence! You will, one day, win – and your prize is an eternal life of joy and bliss with God.
 6. Ultimately, who is in control of your life – you or God? If your life is in God's hands, be at peace. You are in the best place you can ever be. God knows everything; He cares deeply for you and will never abandon you.

Other Scripture passages:

1. “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.” (Isaiah 12:2 ESV)
2. Other Bible verses: Psalm 91; Psalm 56:3-4; Philippians 4:6; Isaiah 43:1-3

For personal reflection or group sharing

- In what ways has fear prevented you from living a full life and giving your all to God?



Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the [Lamb of God](#), a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads [Kairos New Zealand](#), an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.



Trusting Doubt

by Sam Williamson

My friend was recently fired from a job when his boss blamed him for a mistake the boss had made. He said to me, “All is good.” The next week his wife totaled one of their two cars. My friend said, “I trust God that everything will work out for the good.”

When we met for coffee, I asked how he was doing, and he snapped, “Of course I’m okay. I’m keeping a positive attitude. I have faith.” The thing was, he didn’t seem as peaceful as he claimed. He seemed anxious.

A few weeks later his transmission died, and he phoned me saying, “What the hell is God doing!” He no longer seemed anxious; he was angry. It was not an improvement.

Why are we so reluctant to admit our doubts? I have met scores of believers who try to keep a stiff upper lip, or refuse to voice a negative thought, or speak only positive platitudes; many even deny they are getting sick in the midst of chills, fever, and a hacking cough.

The thing is, our doubt is never improved by our self-deceit.

Doubts Meet Reality

Nearly seventy years ago, Norman Vincent Peale published one of the most influential self-help books of all time: *The Power of Positive Thinking*. And its message infected our culture like the plague. Christians and atheists alike confused faith with the self-hypnosis mantra of repeating “I can do all things in Christ” ten times a day. Twenty times would be better.

The Power of Positive Thinking is heretical, but every successful heresy works only when it resembles the real thing. Peale’s version has faith, but it rests its faith in “faith” rather than in God. And it ignores Scripture. When all sorts of terrors inflict Job, he screams, rips his robes, shaves his head, and sits in a pile of ashes. And Scripture says, “In all this, Job sinned not.”

Maybe Job should have read *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Probably not.

Real faith looks at reality with eyes wide open, and whenever we honestly examine reality, we will find doubt. If God's nature is infinite, then our limited understanding of him always falls short of his reality. Which means our *sense* of reality and his *real* reality are in conflict..

Jesus Always Reveals Our Doubt

Spiritual growth only takes place when God's *ultimate* reality confronts our false reality. That is why Jesus constantly exposes our doubts. He provokes our spiritual growth—not that he makes us to doubt, but because we already *do* doubt. We just won't admit it.

When Jesus tells his disciples that they should forgive their repenting brother seven times in one day, what was Jesus doing? He revealed a true-spiritual reality that differed from the disciples' limited-spiritual reality. How do we know? When they hear his command, they cry, "Increase our faith!" Which means they admitted their doubts.

Which is exactly what Jesus wanted in the first place.

The disciples' dinky reality led them to forgive their brother, but only with limits. Jesus shows them a spiritual reality of unworthy humanity, repeatedly rebelling against God; and yet of such value to God that he himself comes down to absorb its sins at infinite cost.

Jesus does not fear our imperfect sense of reality. Instead, he constantly incites reactions in us to reveal our doubts so we can grow into a deeper and truer spiritual understanding.

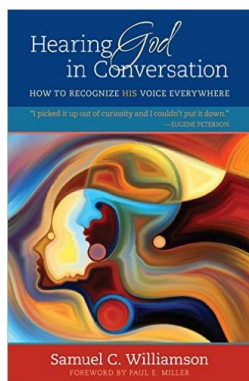
We will always grow most when we take our most perplexing questions to God and look to him to stretch our minds beyond our doubts—our dinky realities—into a new understanding of Him.

As Einstein once said, "Never lose a holy curiosity." Even when we doubt.

Sam

P. S. Jesus stirs up those doubts in us so we bring them to him; so we can grow in intimacy with him. So we can hear his voice.

article © Copyright 2019, [Beliefs of the Heart, Ltd.](#) All rights reserved. Used with permission.



Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.

[Hearing God in Conversation: How to Recognize His Voice Everywhere](#), by Samuel C. Williamson, published by Kregel Publications, 2016, available from [Amazon](#)

top photo of two guys having coffee and talking, by (c) [alexey sinelnikov](#)
photo at bigstock.com ID:159072416

Return to Table of Contents or Archives • (c) copyright 2019 The Sword of the Spirit
[Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Don't Believe Your Own Headlines

by Sam Williamson

In ninth grade, my brother Andy's locker partner (the school drug supplier) had a bad trip on LSD. The bad trip continued in a small series of scary flashbacks, and Kevin asked Andy if God had anything to say about it.

My brother had just had a Sunday school lesson about the Four Spiritual Laws. He even had a copy of the tract. Together Andy and Kevin read the pamphlet, and Kevin prayed the prayer on the last page: *Lord, I want to know you personally ... Take control of the throne of my life.*

Kevin's life abruptly changed. He told everybody at school that Andy had just introduced him to God. Kevin's old customers came to Andy to meet God, and Andy took them through the pamphlet, and they met God. Soon they asked Andy questions, like: how do you pray? how do you read Scripture? how do you handle temptation?

Andy didn't know how to respond, so he asked my parents. My parents made suggestions which Andy repeated to his new friends, and their lives changed even more.

One day someone asked a question he couldn't answer. On the way home from school, Andy slipped into a telephone booth (you can find an example in the Smithsonian History Museum), and he really prayed for the first time in his life.

And Andy met God. And his life totally changed. I'm his little brother, and I'm a witness.

Fruit Is a Bad Litmus Test

My brother Andy is not the first person to bear fruit without a relationship with God. God used him to convert dozens of students before he himself was a true disciple. It is so tempting to

measure our spiritual stature by our converts, followers, or Facebook likes. But Scripture forbids us to trust our headlines:

- A donkey prophesied to Balaam, but nobody has ever suggested the donkey was anything other than an ass.
- Jonah's sermon convicts 120,000 people who repent, but Jonah himself is an intolerant, grace-lacking bigot; he probably would have disdained St. Francis too.
- Scripture says "many" will prophesy, cast out demons, and do mighty miracles, and Jesus himself will declare, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."
- Paul says, we can speak in tongues, exercise great prophetic gifts, understand spiritual mysteries, and even die as martyrs, all for naught.

If we minister to thousands of followers, or if our kids are perfect or our marriages exemplary, it might be all for naught; we're looking at faulty report cards. God is merciful, so he gives rain to both the just and the unjust. And since he sees the neediness of this world, he also works *through* both the just and the unjust.

We Need Simpler Technology

When the disciples return from a mission trip, they rejoice at all the miracles they performed. Jesus tells them to rejoice rather in the relationship they have with him. *We injure God's work in us through our conscious focus on the work he does through us.*

God often works mightily through us, but in his mercy, he also pursues us with mysteries that drive us to him. He sends each of us on detours, to a phonebooth, where our headlines are stripped away, and we stand naked before him. Jonah had the puzzle of the mystifying love of God, and my brother Andy had the spiritual question he couldn't answer.

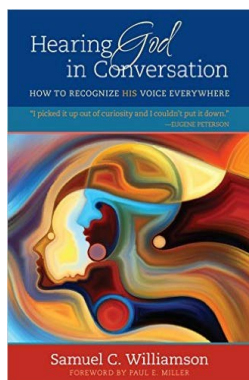
We can enter that phonebooth as humble Clark Kent and emerge with the super-natural power of God that glorifies his name (not ours), or we can enter the phonebooth carrying our superman headlines.

And emerge as an ass.

Sam

P. S. Jesus stirs up mysteries so we bring them to him; so we can grow in intimacy with him. So we can hear his voice.

article © Copyright 2019, [Beliefs of the Heart, Ltd.](#) All rights reserved. Used with permission.



Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefssoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefssoftheHeart.com.

[Hearing God in Conversation: How to Recognize His Voice Everywhere](#), by Samuel C. Williamson, published by Kregel Publications, 2016, available from [Amazon](#)

top image of guy in red phone booth, photo by Daniels Joffe on Unsplash.com

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)
[Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Reaching Out in Faith

Moved by expectant faith (and courage), the woman with a flow of blood reached out to Jesus, confident that she would be healed simply by touching his clothes!

by Jeanne Kun

A large crowd followed [Jesus] and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Mark 5:24-34 (See also Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-48)

Chronic illness can be so devastating—and can make one desperate enough to try anything! Just look at this woman with the flow of blood. For twelve years she had futilely sought a cure for her bleeding disorder, only to be disappointed time and time again (Mark 5:25). Who wouldn't have been discouraged, even hopeless, after spending so much money on one doctor after another, only to have gotten worse (5:26)? Yet this woman hadn't given up hope. Moved by expectant faith (and courage), she reached out to Jesus, confident that she would be healed simply by touching his clothes!

It's not clear exactly what physical disorder this woman suffered from, but whatever the cause, her ailment was chronic. In addition to enduring the painful discomfort from such steady bleeding, she probably experienced debilitating anemia, weight loss, and weakness. No medical treatment had relieved her symptoms or cured her.

However, much more than this woman's physical well-being was affected by her condition; she had known years of loneliness, grief, and isolation. According to Mosaic Law, a woman was considered "unclean" each month for seven days during the "regular discharge from her body" (Leviticus 15:19). The purpose of this law was not to demean or disparage women; rather, it reflected the high regard the Israelites had for the sacredness of life and for a woman's contact with that sacredness in reproduction. But the nature of the ailment of the woman in this Gospel scene—a continuous flow of blood—would have rendered her constantly impure nonetheless (cf. Leviticus 15:25-27).

If this woman were relatively young, her condition would have made marriage and childbearing impossible. If she were already married and had borne children before the onset of her disorder, its chronic nature would have severely restricted her relations with her husband and family. Regardless of her age or marital status, her continual "uncleanness" would have curtailed her activities and cut her off from her friends, since any contact with her would have made them ritually unclean too—just touching a cup she drank from or a chair she sat on would "defile" them. Consequently, the afflicted woman could not participate in the social life of her village or in the public worship of God.

Encouraged by reports of how Jesus had already healed so many people (Mark 5:27), this woman dared to hope the same for herself. Emboldened by her belief in Jesus' power, she was determined to reach out to him for help. Just coming in contact with the fringe or hem of Jesus' garment would be enough to heal her, she thought (Matthew 9:20; Luke 8:44). "Her desire for connection and healing broke through the fear from isolation and disgrace," noted Anglican priest David Giffen. "She came to experience faith as both a verb and an action, touching Jesus, and asking him to take away her pain." But because she was legally unclean and embarrassed by her illness, she wanted to slip through the crowd and touch Jesus' robe without attracting any attention.

When she touched Jesus' clothing, the woman's bleeding ceased and she immediately felt that she had been healed (Mark 5:29). After so many years of suffering, she was well; her body was healthy and free of pain, and her hope had been fulfilled! But when she tried to disappear into the noisy throng unnoticed, Jesus gave her away.

Jesus was certain that he hadn't simply been jostled accidentally in the press of the crowd. He'd been touched purposefully by a hand reaching out in eager faith, and he felt energy go out from him (Mark 5:30). When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" (5:31), he wanted to know who had drawn upon his power with such firm confidence in him.

The woman must have trembled, ashamed to admit that in her uncleanness she had dared to touch the teacher. Yet she was sure of his mercy, for hadn't he just granted her healing? So falling at his feet, she told "the whole truth" (Mark 5:33). Her story, so long one of repeated disappointments, now culminated in joy and gratitude. She "declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed" (Luke 8:47). In reply, Jesus commended and affirmed her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5:34).

Not only did Jesus restore this woman's health; he also restored her place in society. When he called the woman to come forth from the crowd to publicly acknowledge her healing, Jesus established her as clean in the eyes of all. By his gracious affirmation of her, she was freed from her "civic death" and given full and abundant life.

The evangelists don't tell us the name of this woman. Since she remains unnamed, each of us can more easily put ourselves in her place—and follow her example. When we are facing challenges or a crisis, Jesus is eager to answer us with miraculous signs of his presence and love and healing power—but we first have to reach out to him. As Pope Francis declared in an address urging us to be as daring as this woman, "This is faith: to touch Jesus is to draw from

him the grace that saves. It saves us, it saves our spiritual life, it saves us from so many problems” (Angelus Address, June 28, 2015). Today God continues to work miracles in our midst to bring us healing, wholeness, and deeper conversion to him.

This is a selection from *Biblical Women in Crisis: Portraits of Faith and Trust* by Jeanne Kun (The Word Among Us Press, 2017). Available at wau.org/books Used with permission.

Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Jeanne Kun is also an active member and past president of [Bethany Association](#).

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)



Prayer Before a Difficult Task

from Prayer Poems for Every Occasion

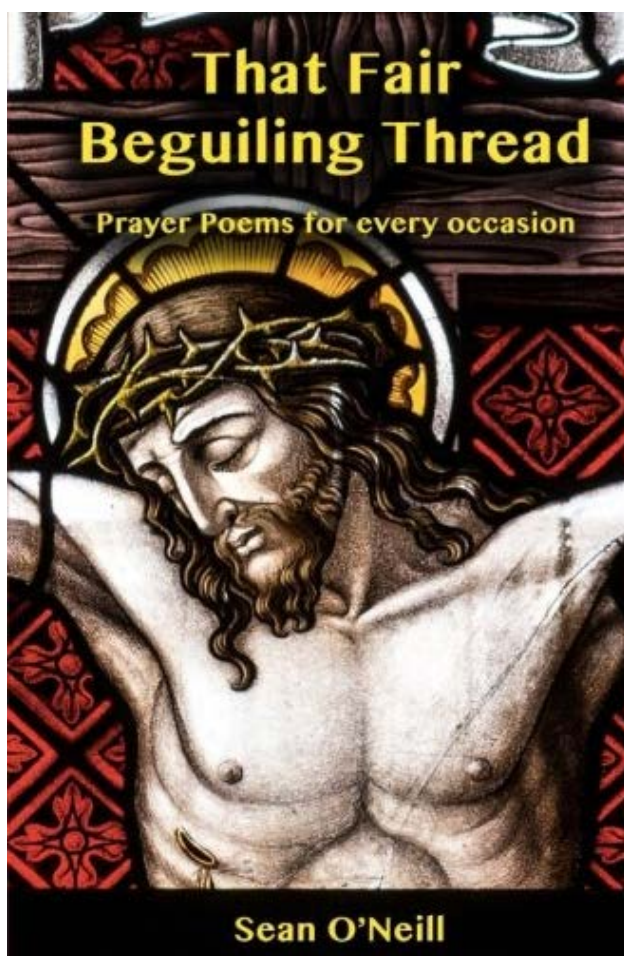
by Sean O'Neill

On this way through the foothills of life
You, Lord, steer into my onward path
greensward and boulder, valley and peak,
broad metaled road and broken cattle track.
In the conjunction of a million threads of will,
here and now I face the fording of the river,
the task that must be tackled to proceed.
Lord, You know everything, the story and outcome,
keep my wits clear and my mind sharp
to bend lithely to every nuance and gradation;
Give strength of body and steadiness of hand
and confidence that You are with me as I strive.
Give me joyful trust in Your care for me
that I may broach this present task

with courage, whatever the result.
Your hand is at work in my life
to bring to fruition Your light in my heart,
Your longed-for perfection and gentle bliss.
Give me success and may it usher in
the glorious procession of Your kingdom.
And if my enterprise should come to naught
let me accept, joyfully, my cross united to Yours.
May Your precious will be done in my life always.

(c) 2017 Sean O'Neill, from *That Fair Beguiling Thread - Prayer Poems for Every Occasion*

For many years Sean O'Neill was a leader in a lay Christian community in Glasgow, Scotland. Along with his wife, Liz, he is currently involved in offering healing prayer to all-comers in his parish in the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, USA..



That Fair Beguiling Thread - Prayer Poems for Every Occasion

by Sean O'Neill

Each of the prayers in this volume uses imagery to express ideas and petitions in a lyrical and finely-crafted way. This affords the person praying a more heartfelt time of prayer which, in turn, gives greater glory to God. The book is intended for anyone who is sincere about their relationship with God and wishes to express that in ways that reflect their own experience of life and the cry of their heart.

The book contains 57 prayer poems spanning a wide range of themes, including prayers for family members, for work, for driving, in a difficult task, in sickness, distress, bereavement, for an addict, etc.

The book is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) in both print and ebook format.

Top photo of a prayerful man on bended knee before a cross at the river praying,
(c) [rghenry](#) bigstock.com Photo ID: 117191801

A New Spirit

"A new Heart I will give you," says the Lord,
"and a new Spirit I will put within you."

worship song by Joseph Mathias and William Cannon

Sorry, this player does not support your browser.
Please [upgrade](#) to a newer version.

Original Song by Joseph Mathias
Produced by the Servants of the Word
Featuring the UCO Ann Arbor Worship Collective

To contact us, please visit: servantsoftheword.org/contact-us

released June 4, 2019
Lead vocals, bass, and guitar: William Cannon
Lead vocals: Madison Miller
Violin: Samantha Simonetti
Flute: Tabitha Faber
Flute: Lisa Gudan
Trumpet: Paul Gudan
Piano: Annaliese Schindel
Drums: Brett Ivey
Group vocals: UCO Ann Arbor Chapter

(c) all rights reserved

> See other [Worship and Praise Songs](#) in [Living Bulwark archives](#)

Joseph Mathias is a lifelong committed brother of the [Servants of the Word](#), an international, ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. Joseph was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. He graduated from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan with a concentration in Russian. He currently serves in University Christian Outreach at Michigan State University, while pursuing a Master's degree in Theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.

Will Cannon is a fully committed brother in the Servants of the Word. Originally from Norcross, Georgia, he moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 2008 to attend the University of Michigan where he graduated with a degree in Audio Engineering and Electrical Engineering. He now serves with UCO Ann Arbor as the chapter's Mission Director. With what remains of his time he fills it with playing music, running, and backpacking.

Homage to God's Beautiful Creation

A watercolour series by David Kurani

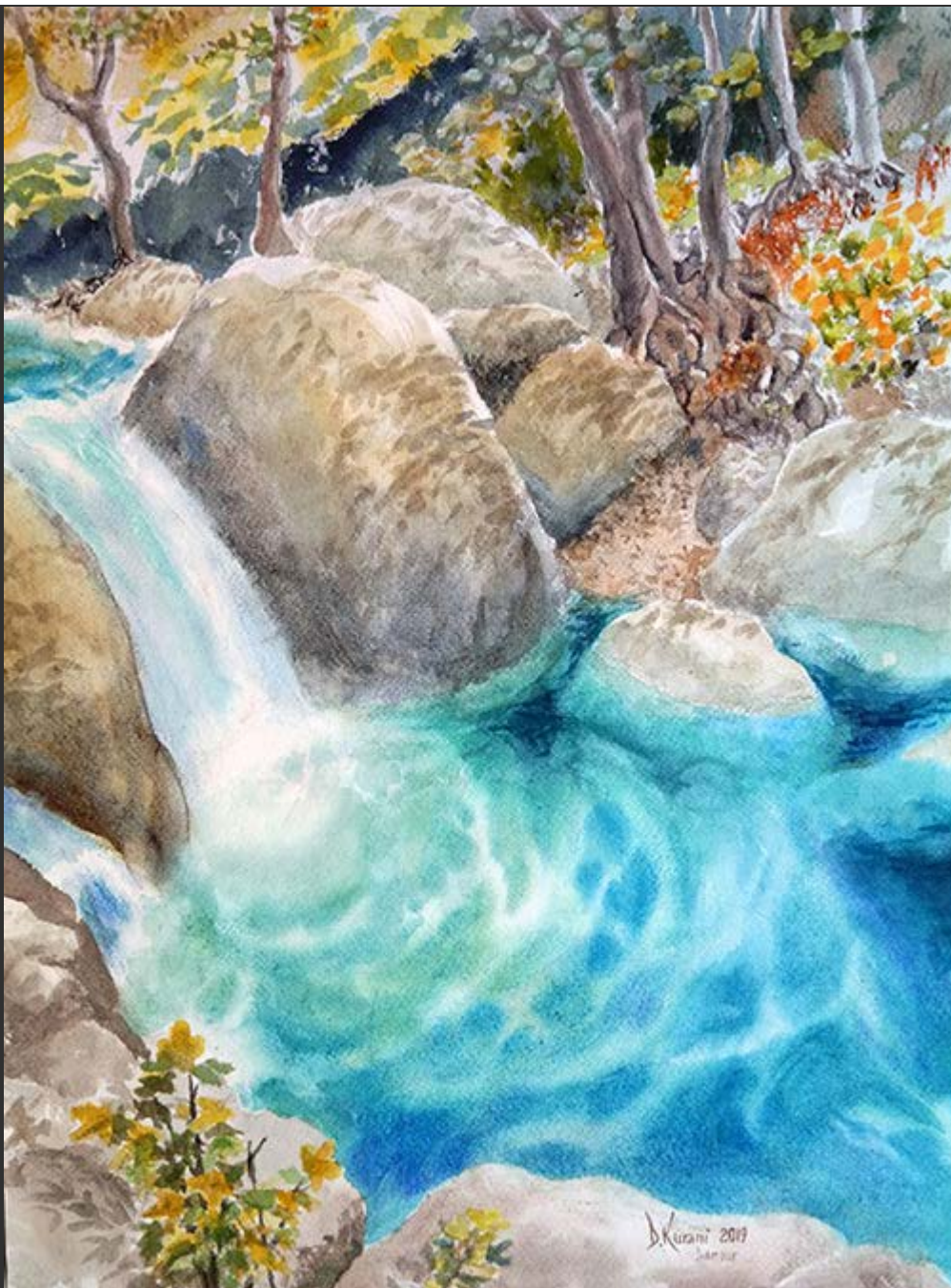


View of Michmich -north Lebanon, nearest village to the monastery of Saint Charbel

A noted Lebanese landscape artist shares his faith and vision for extolling God's handiwork

"I think it was John Singer Sargent who said, 'An artist is he who has to paint.' If that is the criteria, then I qualify, although I'm not a full-time painter. I teach classes in art and theatre in the American University of Beirut, Lebanon/

"Painting landscapes, I feel, is my way of paying homage to the beauty of God's creation. With the inclusion of buildings and roads, etc., I feel I can celebrate, on paper, the relation of God and Man. That is a favorite theme of mine. I believe that art is a gift from God in the first place. So, isn't it appropriate to use it to extol his handiwork?"



A mountain pool in the Damour River, Lebanon



Gold mountain, Black mountain in Tadjikistan, with a Lebanese donkey added



Trout pools in a mountain river, Baatuta, Lebanon



View of Beirut from the mountains, Bzoummar (Armenian Catholic) Monastery on the right



Winter View of Beirut from the North- East



View of the secluded and mostly Greek Orthodox village of Douma, Lebanon

David Kurani is a noted Lebanese landscape artist. He teaches classes in art and theater at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. David has exhibited widely in art galleries and private collections throughout Lebanon, Europe, and the USA. He and his wife Gisele are active members of the People of God in Lebanon, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit.

> See [previous art works](#) by [David Kurani](#)

Return to [Table of Contents](#) or [Archives](#) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)