

# LIVING BULWARK

The online magazine of The Sword of the Spirit  
sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission in today's world

December 2017 / January 2018 - Vol. 95



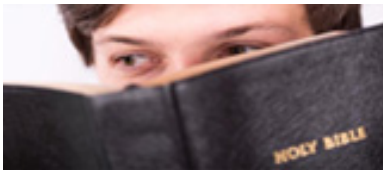
One In Christ Jesus

***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free – for you are all one in Christ Jesus" – Galatians 3:28***

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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.

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## One in Christ Jesus

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free – for you are all one in Christ Jesus” – Galatians 3:28

Intro to this issue

What is the true source of unity that binds us together in a community of love, peace, and friendship with God and with one another? It is the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle tells us that

“Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.. and reconciled us both to God in one body through the cross” (Ephesians 2:14,16).

Jesus died for our sins – including the sins of strife, enmity, and division – to set us free to live together in peace, love, and friendship with God and with one another.

Christian unity is a gift and grace of God which must be sought and lived out each day with faith, hope, and love. By ourselves we are weak and unable to maintain unity and peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our flesh is weak and we must cling to Christ and his word of truth and life. Satan, our enemy, also conspires to trip us up and sow seeds of discord, division, and strife. Only the love of Christ and the healing power of forgiveness can restore and preserve our love and unity together as his disciples and servants of his word of grace and salvation.

We believe that God has called us in the Sword of the Spirit to be a sign of the unity he desires for all Christians today. Let us not flag in zeal for growing in brotherly love, holiness of life, and unity together as a community of disciples on

mission. And let us not tire in praying and fasting for the whole people of God for a full restoration of the unity, love, and mission he has entrusted to all who belong to Christ.

May this issue be a source of inspiration and renewed zeal and prayer for greater spiritual renewal among all churches and Christian traditions, and for growth in love of the brethren among all baptized Christians, and for new open doors to pray and read the Scriptures together, and pursue common mission for the glory of God and the spread of the Gospel to all nations and peoples.

Sincerely in Christ,  
Don Schwager  
editor

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## On the Path Toward Unity

Together we put our hope and trust in God, that he will accomplish in his own time and his own way this great work of unity  
among his people

by Dr. Dan Keating

Do you ever wonder what's going on in the search for Christian unity among the various churches these days? Is there anything happening? Is there good news around the corner? Or has the search for Christian unity stalled?

There is a lot happening, far too much to describe in a short write-up. Yes, there are some very good things going on. No, we are probably not on the verge of being fully united across our churches. But we live and walk in hope, trusting that the Lord Jesus has us all in hand, and confident that the Spirit is constantly at work.

Let me highlight a few of the initiatives between theologians of the churches that display real advances in working together.

- The Joint Declaration on Justification, 2017. Many of us will recall the Joint Declaration between Catholics and Lutherans in 1999. This was a partial but genuine step in agreement on issues that



divided the two churches in the 16th century. What most of us don't know is that the World Methodist Council signed on to this agreement in 2006. And this year, 2017, the World Communion of Reformed Churches also signed on to the joint declaration. This is very noteworthy.

- Representatives of the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Catholic church have been meeting together for many years. The discussions have not been easy. But last year, the two groups produced a common statement summing up their initial findings together. The subject was how the various churches related together in the first millennium, and what this can teach about seeking unity in this third millennium. It's a very modest step, but every small step is appreciated.
- I have been involved over the past four years in the Evangelical-Catholic National Dialogue in the United States to consider the issue of justification. The dialogue has been very rewarding and in fact a great deal of fun. As a member of the Catholic team I have greatly enjoyed getting to know the members of the Evangelical team. We have enjoyed rich fellowship and a clear sense of common life in Christ.

You might ask: "What do these dialogues and discussions accomplish? Do they ever lead anywhere?" Well, we shall see! But it's important to realize that these kinds of discussions cannot on their own produce or create full unity. This must happen through the work of the Spirit in his own time and way.

The discussions between theologians can, however, remove (or lighten) obstacles and hindrances to greater unity. They move things out of the way, and open new avenues to walk down together. They also forge real friendships in Christ and reveal to us that we are all disciples, brothers and sisters in Christ. This is an enormously important thing. All this enables the Spirit to work more easily and accomplish his purposes.

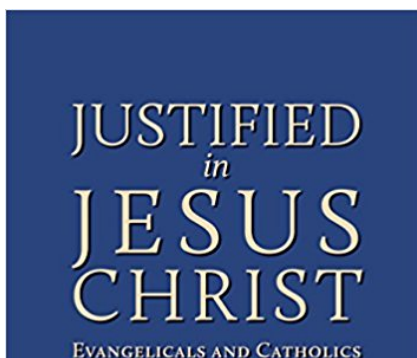
The work we are about in the Sword of the Spirit is hugely important, even if it seems like a few small steps and modest gains. Together we put our hope and trust in God, that he will accomplish in his own time and his own way this great work of unity among his people. What a blessing to have even a small share in this great work!

> See [previous articles](#) in Living Bulwark by [Dr. Dan Keating](#)

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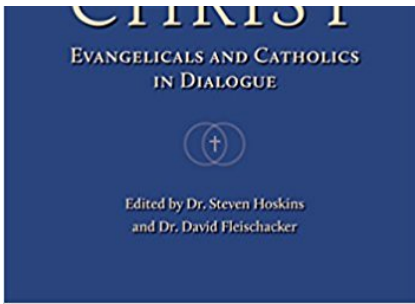
Dr. Dan Keating is an elder in the [Servants of the Word](#) and teaches at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He has authored a number of articles and books, including *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude*, by Baker House 2011, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: James, First, Second, and Third John*, by Baker House 2017, and *Deification and Grace*, by Sapientia Press 2007.

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Dan Keating recently contributed two essays in a new book entitled, [Justified in Jesus Christ: Evangelicals and Catholics in Dialogue](#).

In 2017 the National Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue in the United States sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the University of Mary, Bismarck, North Dakota, completed its four-year round of discussions on the doctrine of justification. Sessions were held each year on the following topics:



2014: Original sin and its effects within the economy of salvation  
2015: Initial justification  
2016: The relationship between justification and sanctification  
2017: The relationship between justification and final judgment

At each of these annual meetings, members presented background papers that formed the basis of that meeting's discussions and became the starting point for constructing a common statement. These common statements and background papers comprise this

book. Quite unexpectedly, the members of the dialogue discovered many points of convergence on the subject of justification. The members of the dialogue hope this book will provide a fruitful starting point for future conversations between Catholics and Evangelicals.

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## In Praise of Ecumenical Courtesy

Let us ask the Lord to lead us in wisdom and give us grace for expressing ecumenical courtesy in our own circles

by Dave Hughes

Ecumenical courtesy is one of the pillars of ecumenical life in the Sword of the Spirit. It is a comparatively simple idea – one that contains profound wisdom. It is one of the things that makes our life as an ecumenical community of communities work, and I believe is an idea whose time has come for broader distribution.

Last year I was speaking at a leadership meeting of a different stream of the Christian world. I spoke on the practical aspects of our ecumenical life in the Sword of the Spirit, especially the notion of ecumenical courtesy. Many of the participants found the concept to be something like the ‘missing link’ in their own work for ecumenism.

In brief, ecumenical courtesy is the idea that we extend simple courtesy to those from different Christian traditions in our words and actions – that we think intentionally in ecumenical settings about how we say things and how we do things. Ecumenical courtesy is essentially like other forms of human courtesy. If I had someone from China in my home, I would choose my words and actions to take account of their culture and background and avoid language and concepts they would not understand or might find offensive. It is rooted in respect for others and a conscious intention not to let superficial matters cause offense or create exclusion. While a relatively simple concept, it serves as both an enabler and a protection for ecumenical common life. It is both a lubricant and a hedge.

Much more could be said about how we apply this principal but for now I’d simply like to ask us to pray.

- First, let us examine our own hearts and ask the Lord to lead us in wisdom and give us grace for expressing ecumenical courtesy in our own circles. It's not always easy to know what to do and we often make mistakes, but we can always do our best. May God give us grace.
- Please pray for a broader renewal and appreciation for this pillar of our life in the Sword of the Spirit. Pray especially for leaders and speakers that they have wisdom as they lead and teach in ecumenical settings.
- Finally, pray for opportunities to share our experience in this area. May God use the Sword of the Spirit by opening doors where we can freely give the wisdom we have so freely received.

> See [previous articles](#) in Living Bulwark by [Dave Hughes](#)

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Dave Hughes is the president of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit.

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many local churches hold joint prayer services during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

## Convergent Ecumenism

Our life and mission together is built on confidence that the Holy Spirit is at work among the Christian people to bring about a greater convergence in the truth in areas of historic disagreement

by Dr. John Yocum

Our ecumenical life in The Sword of The Spirit is grounded in hope, hope that in these days the Holy Spirit is at work to draw together all those who belong to Christ in closer bonds of fellowship, mutual service and common witness.

As a community of communities, we are not engaged in theological dialogue that attempts to overcome historic differences in doctrine. Nevertheless, as brothers and sisters who remain committed to our own Christian churches and to the teaching of those churches, our life and mission together is built on confidence that the Holy Spirit is at work among the Christian people to bring about a greater convergence in the truth in areas of historic disagreement.

Perhaps the chief example of this appeared in the 1970s, when theologians of the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches made a common declaration on the Incarnation, after being divided for more than 1500 years over the precise way in which Jesus Christ is both God and man. As these theologians considered the doctrines of their respective churches, they came to recognize that, while they might still disagree on the best way to express the truth, they professed faith in the same Christ and could offer a common witness to Jesus Christ as true God and true man. Healing 1500 years of doctrinal division? That is nothing short of miraculous!

Similar convergences can be seen on other issues among the Christian churches, such as the nature of salvation, the inspiration of the Scripture, and the sacraments.

May the Lord in his goodness grant us the grace to draw ever nearer one another as we draw nearer to Christ.

Dr. John Yocum is a Regional Elder in the [Servants of the Word](#) and teaches at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA

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**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**  
January 18-25, 2018

**Called to Love, Unity, and Mission Together**

*“All will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another”–*  
**John 13:35**

**Introduction**

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an eight-day observance or “octave” of prayer. It has been this way from the beginnings of this international movement in 1908. Following are a set of daily scripture readings, a short commentary on the readings and a prayer. This set of materials was developed by the Sword of the Spirit for use within local communities and households during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity held around the world between January 18-25, 2018.



Included with the common readings and prayers are some additional questions to help individuals and families participate in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We would encourage families to take some time to engage the readings and prayers for each day and talk about them together, perhaps around the dinner table or in family worship time. Please feel free to adapt or change them as helpful. In particular the ‘questions for reflection’ will benefit from adaptations or expansion to best match the ecumenical reality in each local situation.

We have also included a short Lord’s Day prayer that can be inserted in the section following the Blessing of the Wine which can be used similar to the other seasonal variations in the Lord’s Day prayers.

Please use these materials in any way you find most helpful in your personal and family worship times during this season of prayer.

*Note: The Psalms listed in this booklet follow the numbering of the Hebrew tradition.*

## Thursday January 18, 2018

### Through love we embrace God's word of life and truth together (John 17:31)

- **Exodus 34:6-10** God renews his covenant of love and unity with those who obey his word.
- **Psalms 119:40-48** Love, revere, and speak God's word of truth.
- **John 17:17-26** Consecrated in truth, love, and unity.
- **1 Peter 1:22-2:3** Purified by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren.
- **Ephesians 2:14-22** Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and reconciled us to God in one body through the cross.

#### Commentary:

What is the true source of unity that binds us together in a community of love, peace, and friendship with God and with one another? It is the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle tells us that "Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. and reconciled us both to God in one body through the cross" (Ephesians 2:14,16). Jesus died for our sins – including the sins of strife, enmity, and division – to set us free to live together in peace, love, and friendship with God and with one another.

Christian unity is a gift and grace of God which must be sought and lived out each day with faith, hope, and love. By ourselves we are weak and unable to maintain unity and peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our flesh is weak and we must cling to Christ and his word of truth and life. Satan, our enemy, also conspires to trip us up and sow seeds of discord, division, and strife. Only the love of Christ and the healing power of forgiveness can restore and preserve our love and unity together as his disciples and servants of his word of grace and salvation.

God has called us in the Sword of the Spirit to be a sign of the unity he desires for all Christians today. Let us not flag in zeal for growing in brotherly love, holiness of life, and unity together as a community of disciples on mission. And let us not tire in praying and fasting for the whole people of God for a full restoration of the unity, love, and mission he has entrusted to all who belong to Christ.

#### Questions for reflection:

- Do I regularly pray with expectant faith and fast on behalf of the whole people of God for the unity Christ desires for all Christians?
- Do I actively support and engage in common prayer, witness and mission with Christians from other traditions and denominations, as well as my own church?
- Do I speak with respect, brotherly love, and ecumenical courtesy towards my brothers and sisters from other Christian traditions and denominations?

## Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:

Have mercy, Lord our God, on the people called by your name. Rule us by your Word, sanctify us by your Spirit, unite us in your love, and work through us by your power. May the glory of Christ so shine upon us that the nations may come and behold his beauty, and may the knowledge of you fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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## Additional Reading:

### On the Path Toward Unity

Dr. Dan Keating

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forge real friendships in Christ and reveal to us that we are all disciples, brothers and sisters in Christ. This is an enormously important thing. All this enables the Spirit to work more easily and accomplish his purposes.

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*Dr. Dan Keating is an elder in the Servants of the Word and teaches at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA.*

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## Friday January 19, 2018

### **Through love we repent for the ways we have failed to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** (Ephesians 4:3)

- **Genesis 4:1-16 Cain's anger towards Abel leads to hatred, bloodshed, and family division**
- **Psalms 51 Purge me, wash me, create in me a clean heart, O God**
- **James 4:1-12 What causes division and strife among you?**
- **John 17:6-19 Holy Father, may they be one as we are one... keep them from the evil one.**

#### **Commentary:**

The first sin of division recorded after the fall of Adam and Eve occurs between Cain and his brother Abel. Both brothers sought to please God by offering prayer and sacrifice to him. But Cain's sacrifice was rejected because his heart was bitter towards his brother. God warned Cain, "Sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7)." Cain allowed his bitterness to go unchecked until he could no longer tolerate his brother's presence. Cain's hostility not only resulted in the murder of his brother, it also brought family disunity and strife for generations to come.

We are called to be peacemakers and reconcilers of brother to brother and sister to sister. We must not allow any wall of division or hostility to grow between us and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Satan sows seeds of mistrust, resentment, and strife. The Holy Spirit counters with the fruit of peace, joy, love, patience, kindness, and forbearance. We must guard our minds and hearts against every thought and temptation that would keep us from loving, serving, and living peaceably together.

If we lose patience or fail to love one another, let us be quick to forgive and be reconciled. And let us embrace the call to pray and fast earnestly for Christian unity for the whole people of God.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- Where possible, as far as it depends on you, do you strive to live peaceably with all your brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 12:18)?
- If a brother or sister has a complaint or grievance against you, do you seek to resolve it quickly and be reconciled? And if you hold a grudge and sin against another, do you quickly repent and ask forgiveness?

- Ask the Lord to transform and purify your mind and heart so you can grow in fervent love, compassion, and kindness towards all.
- Pray earnestly on behalf of all the Christian people that all may embrace God's call to peace, reconciliation, and unity together.

### **Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:**

Heavenly Father, God of steadfast love and faithfulness, we confess our sin before you.

You have called us to be the pillar and bulwark of the truth, but we have forsaken your Word and exchanged the truth for a lie. Have mercy, Lord, and forgive our sin.

You have called us to be holy even as you are holy, but we have disobeyed your commandments and defiled your temple. Have mercy, Lord, and forgive our sin.

Lord, You have called us to love one another and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, but we have broken your Son's body with our enmity and strife. Have mercy, Lord, and forgive our sin.

Lord, You have called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, but we have imitated the nations, losing our flavor and hiding our light. Have mercy, Lord, and forgive our sin.

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## **Saturday, January 20, 2018**

### **Through love we lay down our lives for all the brethren** (1 John 3:16)

- **Leviticus 19:17-18 Bear no vengeance or grudge – love your neighbor as yourself**
- **Psalms 15 The blameless shows respect and does no wrong to brother and neighbor**
- **John 15:12-17 Love one another as I have loved you**
- **1 John 3:11, 14-18 We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**

### **Commentary:**

Love of the brethren and living together in Christian community is a sheer gift and grace of God won for us by Christ who shed his blood for us on the cross. Without Christ we are weak, powerless, and subject to our own sinful inclinations, bad attitudes, and hurtful speech and behavior. Being united with Christ enables us to love and serve one another with compassion and meekness and to reject and put to death whatever is sinful and contrary to his law of love. Paul the Apostle writes, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Unless brotherly love, tenderhearted care and concern for one another is exercised daily, we can easily drift into putting our own interests and concerns ahead of our brother's and sister's welfare and concerns. The more we put on love the stronger we grow as a people who love no matter the circumstances and trials that may come our way. And when we sin and fail to love, the surest and quickest way to repair and heal a broken relationship is through repentance, asking and giving forgiveness, showing kindness, mercy, and forbearance towards one another.

Let us pray fervently that the love of Christ may grow in us and that we may excel in showing honor, fraternal love and care for all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Questions for reflection:

- What did Jesus mean when he said to his disciples “love one another as have loved you” (John 15:12)? What did it personally cost Jesus to love his disciples? And what price does he expect his followers to pay in laying down their lives for one another? And what are the rewards of such priceless love?
- Christian love entails full commitment, self-denial, sacrifice, and the willingness to lay down our lives for one another. Where is the Lord calling me to lay down my life for my brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Christian love is other focused – it puts the interests of others and concern for their welfare first. Where do I need to die to self for the love of Christ to grow in me and turn me outward in serving others?
- Where do Christians find the power to love as God loves? Christian love is rooted in God’s love and its source of power is the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (Romans 5:5).
- Earnestly pray that God will renew his people through the purifying action of the Holy Spirit and make them one through the power of his love.

## Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:

Lord Jesus, you said that everyone will know that we are your disciples if there is love among us. Strengthened by your grace, may we work tirelessly for the visible unity of your church, so that the Good News that we are called to proclaim will be seen in all our words and deeds. Amen.

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## Prayer for the Lord's Day

*This prayer may be used after the blessing of the Wine, like the other seasonal variations in the Lord's Day Ceremony.*

**Leader:** Let us thank Him this day especially for the unity we enjoy in the Body of Christ and for our call to Ecumenical Life in the Sword of the Spirit. May we all become perfectly one, so that the world may know and believe. Lord our God, You are bringing us into the fullness of unity through the work of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Group:** Now we live with Him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with Him in Your everlasting kingdom.

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## Additional Reading:

**Back to My Roots**  
by Rami Abou Haidar

I was baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church as an infant, following my family's tradition. As a young student I attended a Catholic school and I regularly attended their liturgy on Sundays and on special seasons. Yet in all that time, I never participated in a Greek Orthodox liturgy.

When I joined the People of God, an ecumenical Christian community in Lebanon [composed of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant members, I began a journey of discovering with my Orthodox roots. Ecumenism is one of the core pillars of our common identity in the People of God community, along with the importance of being faithful members of our respective churches and Christian traditions. But at that time I did not have the understanding nor the courage to return to my Christian origins. Until one day, while leading a household of university Christian men, I was challenged and encouraged by one of the community leaders to discover my original church roots. Looking back now, I am certain that his advice was inspired by the Holy Spirit. His words touched my heart and soul in a remarkable way, and enflamed my heart with a zeal and passion to discover what I had been missing for years.

So, the following Sunday, I started to attend Divine Liturgy at a nearby Greek Orthodox Church. Although everything seemed different, I knew I was home. At the beginning, I put a lot of effort into understanding the prayers, reading different books, and asking many brothers for guidance. Little by little, and with each Sunday, a love towards my Church grew. Each word in the liturgy began to touch my heart, mind and soul. I grew to discover the Lord's work in a new, marvelous way!

Contemplating this experience, I can assert that it has led me to a deeper understanding of ecumenism. I see more clearly how our faithfulness to our individual churches and traditions fortifies our collective unity. I now recognize the work of the Holy Spirit to draw us together, discern the richness that lies both within my Church and within other Churches, and praise the Lord for his stunning work of bringing us together. Indeed, I now see better than ever how the Lord's work in our community is a contribution to the life of all his Churches.

[Rami Abou Haidar lives and serves as a leader in the People of God community in Beirut, Lebanon]

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## Sunday, January 21, 2018

### Through love we freely choose to be servants of one another (Galatians 5:13)

- **Psalm 105:16-45 God worked through Joseph and Moses - his servants – to restore his people**
- **Isaiah 52:1-4 Behold, my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights**
- **Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**
- **Philippians 2:1-11 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others**
- **Galatians 5:1, 13-15, 25-26 Through love be servants of one another and live in unity together**

#### Commentary:

What is the sure path and motivating force that leads to Christian unity and fruitful mission? On the eve of his sacrifice Jesus took a towel and basin of water and began to wash his disciple's feet and then he gave them a new command: love one another as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

The Lord Jesus said that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Jesus was King by right, but Servant by choice. Through meekness, humility, and compassionate love Jesus chose to lay down his life for us - to set us free to love and serve one another (Galatians 5:13). This is the one true path to reconciliation, peace, and unity with all who belong to Christ. And this is the driving force that led the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

The distinctive hallmark and trait of every follower and disciple of Jesus Christ is love – a love that is wholly directed to the good of others – a love that is Christ-centered and ready to forgive and forget past injuries, to heal and restore rather than inflict revenge and injury. The cross of Jesus is the only way to pardon, reconciliation, and peace. Every other way will fail or fall short of the glory and victory which Jesus Christ has won for us through his death and resurrection. The love of Christ is not only a promise but a present gift and reality for all who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul the Apostle tells us that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5).

If we embrace his love and truth and allow the Holy Spirit to purify and transform our hearts and minds, then we will find the inner freedom, joy, and strength we need to love without measure, to forgive without limit, and to serve without reward - save that of knowing we are serving the One who unites us in an unbreakable bond of peace and joy forever.

### Questions for reflection:

- Whose kingdom do you serve? And who sits on the throne of your heart? There is only one King and Ruler who is the Lord of All. The Father in heaven sent his one and only Son as the promised Messiah and Savior of the world. Does the Lord Jesus take first place and precedence in your life?
- How did the Lord Jesus accomplish the mission he was sent to do? Jesus willingly obeyed and served his Father. Jesus told his disciples that he came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). He willingly laid down his life to set us free from slavery to sin and Satan and his kingdom of darkness.
- Paul the Apostle tells us that Jesus “took the form of a servant” and “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). We are called to take on the same mind and attitude which was in Christ.
- Christ has set us free to walk in love, humility, and Christian servanthood. Paul the Apostle writes, *For you were called to freedom brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another* (Galatians 5:1,13). Are you willing to serve as Jesus served and to lay down your life for his sake and for the good of your brothers and sisters in Christ?

### Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:

Lord our God, you are the origin and goal of all living things. Forgive us when we only think of ourselves and are blinded by our own standards. Open our hearts and our eyes. Teach us to love as you love, serve as you serve, and forgive as you forgive. May we love and serve one another in the unity of God our Father, the only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who is the Giver of Life.



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## Monday, January 22, 2018

### **Through love we embrace all baptized Christians as our brothers and sisters in Christ** (Ephesians 2:14,16)

- **Psalm 133 How good and pleasant it is when brethren dwell in unity**
- **John 1:12-13 To all who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God**
- **Luke 10:25-37 True love of neighbor – the Parable of the Good Samaritan**
- **Ephesians 2:14-22 Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and has reconciled us to God in one body through the cross**

#### **Commentary:**

The Lord wants our love to be as expansive and wide as his love is for each of us –individually and corporately as well – since he is our Head and we are members of his body whom he has redeemed and cleansed through the blood he shed for us on the cross. All who are baptized into Christ share the same call and mission to live as his disciples, to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to witness together that he is Lord of all and Savior of all who believe in him.

Today we witness an ecumenism of blood as Christians around the world face unprecedented persecution, violence and martyrdom – not because they are Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, or another denomination – but because they bear the name of Christ.

The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that all who are baptized into Christ are our brothers and sisters. This is the basis for our common witness and common mission to proclaim Jesus is Lord. And this is the reason we love and honor one another as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

- Do you recognize all baptized Christians as your brothers and sisters in Christ? Ask the Lord Jesus to open your eyes and to widen your heart to love, serve, and respect all who bear the name of Christ.
- Do you speak with respect and ecumenical courtesy towards Christians from other traditions and denominations?
- Do you look for and support common ecumenical opportunities to pray together, read the Scriptures, and do common mission – especially to spread the Gospel and bring others to Christ?

#### **Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:**

God our Father, in Jesus you gave us the one who died for all. He lived our life and died our death. You accepted his sacrifice and raised him to new life with you. Grant that we, who have died with him, may be made one by the Holy Spirit and live in the abundance of your divine presence now and forever. Amen.

## Additional Reading:

# Living Our Ecumenical Call

by Mary Rose Jordan

I don't like the smell of hard boiled eggs. I don't think they would be the preferred lunch choice of very many middle school students. But, there I was, 12 years old, with my 2 hard-boiled eggs and lentil soup for lunch. I didn't like Lent. I didn't like having to get out my sulfuric smelling snack and endure the stares and turned up noses of my classmates. My saving grace though, was Elissa- my best friend and fellow hard-boiled egg unenthusiast. We were both growing up in Community together and although she was Baptist and I was Roman Catholic, our families had the same Lenten practices. Because we had each other, we embraced the 40 days of smelly lunches while we proudly told our classmates of the cool 'gatherings' our families attended and the different youth group we were in. My friendship with Elissa is one of the greatest treasures of my childhood.

Fast forward almost 20 years. I still am not a fan of hard boiled eggs. I do, however, realize the gift it was to have a friend who shared the same spiritual practices. It was an especially significant blessing considering our denominational differences. That friendship set a precedent in my life: I learned to be open to and appreciate friendships with people from other denominations, I learned that what I had in common with them outweighed the differences, I learned that other denominations had strengths that I could learn from, I learned that the ecumenical life we have in the Sword of the Spirit is unique and challenging and worth striving for.

In a time when our culture, even within Christianity, seems incredibly divided and focused on differences, I am overwhelmed with gratitude because I have grown up in an ecumenical environment. From a young age I have experienced the richness of ecumenism and have been blessed to have many relationships with brothers and sisters from other denominations that have played a significant role in my walk with Christ. The common way of life and shared spirituality I was a part of in my home community have given me a common witness along with my brothers and sisters, regardless of our denominational, racial or political backgrounds.

Our ecumenical witness is amazing and fills my heart with joy at the goodness of our Lord and his provision for us. Our friendship with each other, in my eyes at least, is a small taste of heaven.

[Mary Rose Jordan lives in the Community of the Risen Christ in Glasgow, Scotland. She is the executive director for The Lovely Commission, a website encouraging young women to follow the Lord.]

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## Tuesday, January 23, 2018

### Through love we pursue common witness and mission for the Lord together (Nehemiah 2:18)

- **Nehemiah 2:17-18 and 6:15-16 "Let us rise up and build." So, they strengthened their hands for the good work.**
- **Psalms 145:10-21 They shall speak the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power**
- **Mark 16:15-20 They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it**
- **Acts 2:43-47 All who believed were together and the Lord added to their number day by day**

## day

### **Commentary:** [excerpt in quotes from *The Gift of Salvation: A Statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, January 1988]

What unites us is greater than what divides us. We believe that the Lord is calling for greater witness and mission together for the sake of the Gospel and Christ's command to make disciples of all nations.

"We confess together one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; we confess Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son of God; we affirm the binding authority of Holy Scripture, God's inspired Word; and we acknowledge the Apostles' and Nicene creeds as faithful witnesses to that Word.

"The effectiveness of our witness for Christ depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls and empowers us to confess together the meaning of the salvation promised and accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Through prayer and study of Holy Scripture, and aided by the Church's reflection on the sacred text from earliest times, we have found that, notwithstanding some persistent and serious differences, we can together bear witness to the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. To this saving gift we now testify, speaking not for, but from and to, our several communities.

"As believers we are sent into the world and commissioned to be bearers of the good news, to serve one another in love, to do good to all, and to evangelize everyone everywhere. It is our responsibility and firm resolve to bring to the whole world the tidings of God's love and of the salvation accomplished in our crucified, risen, and returning Lord. Many are in grave peril of being eternally lost because they do not know the way to salvation.

"In obedience to the Great Commission of our Lord, we commit ourselves to evangelizing everyone. We must share the fullness of God's saving truth with all, including members of our several communities. [Whatever Church tradition or denomination we come from we must speak the Gospel to each other's tradition/denomination] Evangelicals must speak the Gospel to Catholics and Catholics to Evangelicals, always speaking the truth in love, so that "working hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:3, 12-13)."

### **Questions:**

- What is the basis for common witness of the Gospel and mission together? Jesus said, "All will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). In what ways can you and your community pray together and witness together with Christians from other traditions and denominations?
- In what ways can you and your community share in the work of evangelizing and spreading the Gospel more widely with Christians from other traditions and denominations?

### **Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:**

God of love and mercy, look upon our willingness to serve you despite our spiritual poverty and limited abilities. Fulfill the deepest longings of our hearts to be filled with the joy of your presence. Fill our broken hearts with your healing love so that we may love as you have loved us. Grant us the gift of unity so that we may serve you together with joy and share the good news of your salvation with all. This we ask in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

# Wednesday, January 24, 2018

**Through love we humbly and fervently pray for the Lord to reconcile and restore all his people in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**  
(Ephesians 2:14 and 4:3)

- **Genesis 45:4-15 Joseph forgives his brothers and restores them in a bond of peace and unity**
- **Psalms 126 Those who sow in tears [of mourning and repentance] will reap with shouts of joy**
- **Psalms 81 When God's people cry out to him with repentant hearts he restores them**
- **Ephesians 2:14 & 4:1-4 Reconciled and called to unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**
- **Matthew 26:31-35,40 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation and be scattered like sheep without a shepherd**

## Commentary:

Christ died for us on the cross to reconcile us with the Father and to break down the dividing wall of hostility so that we may be joined together in unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:13-14). How does Christ want us to live together in unity? Unity is first and foremost a gift of the Holy Spirit, but like any gift, we need to learn how to grow in using it the way God intended. Paul lists a set of character traits (virtues that make us like Christ) that are essential for living together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lowliness and meekness are companion virtues that curb pride and self-centeredness (preoccupation with self). Lowliness (also called humility) enables us to see ourselves truthfully as God sees us and to rely on God to place us wherever he wills and with whomever he wishes us to serve. Meekness tempers our emotions and drives so we can channel them for good and not for harm or wrongdoing.

Patience and forbearance enable us to persevere in doing good for others, especially when we meet difficulties and trials. They enable us to bear with failure and weaknesses and bear one another's burdens. Love and its companion qualities (kindness and mercy) unite these virtues and direct them to the welfare and service of others.

We are called to live peaceably with one another. Peace is more than just the absence of conflict. It is a full and right relationship of love, mercy, and kindness towards one another made possible through the grace and work of the Holy Spirit who dwells with us. Let us pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to restore the whole people of God in the bond of peace and unity.

## Questions for reflection:

- **Do you strive to live peaceably, as far as it is possible and depends on you, with all your brothers and sisters in Christ?**
- **Do you strive, with the grace and help of the Holy Spirit, to grow in lowliness (humility),**

**meekness, patience, brotherly love, and charity?**

- **Pray earnestly that your community and all Christian communities may grow in love, peace, and unity together.**

### **Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:**

Heavenly Father, grant us humility to hear your voice, to receive your call, and to cooperate with your work of restoring all your people to the unity you desire. Where division and our sin has left us with hearts of stone, may the fire of your Holy Spirit inflame our hearts and inspire us with the vision of being one in Christ, as he is one with you, so that the world may believe that you have sent him. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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### **Additional Reading:**

## **Good Soil and Open Doors**

by Miguel Vargas

Latin America is not the most fertile soil to work for Christian unity. The historical background is grim and can be painful in many ways. Many good Christians have resentment against Christians of other traditions around them. There is, however, also much hope and opportunities where we see growth in ecumenism.

Starting in 2008, in the context of our Summer Mission Program, we began giving a talk on ecumenism to pass on more vision to the youth coming from communities that have only one Christian tradition. In 2012 this evolved into a four-session course that we would teach every summer to groups of young people gathered together from Central America. My main experience talking to young people from all-Catholic communities was finding a big lack of information but at the same time a significant desire to make a change in their hearts and work towards Christian unity.

Many of these young people had never heard about the painful stories of division in the Body of Christ. Neither had they ever heard about the important steps towards unity that many Christians have taken in the past 150 years. However, as we call them on to understand and embrace the reality of historical division and to be convicted about the importance of working for Christian unity, I was struck by the great desire and openness they have to foster Christian unity even in contexts that are hostile towards ecumenism. The mission and way of life of our communities provide an excellent context for our youth to promote Christian unity as we evangelize and work for the needy.

Another experience I've had in recent years is working alongside my father teaching the same ecumenism course in the Central Seminary in San José. We give future priests four lectures about unity and provide opportunities to spend time with leaders of other Christian traditions including an Anglican Bishop, an Orthodox priest and an Evangelical Pastor. This is a very significant experience for future Catholic priests in Costa Rica but also for the leaders of these other traditions as it opens friendly channels of dialogue and fellowship.

We can feel a limitation from our contexts and feel like we don't have much to contribute to ecumenism. However, we can ask the Lord to open unexpected doors to us and to give us the grace to enter then so that we can keep building unity in the Body of Christ.



*[Miguel Vargas is a member of the Servants of the Word. He lives in "Arbol de Vida" community in San Jose, Costa Rica and serves in mission to young people throughout Central America.]*

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## Thursday January 25, 2018

**Through love we call upon the Holy Spirit for renewed zeal and a fresh outpouring of grace for living together in unity and in pursuing common mission** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

- **Haggai 1:4-8 and 2:4-5 Take courage and rebuild my house – My Spirit will be with you"**
- **Psalm 104:30-35 Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth**
- **Ephesians 4:1-7, 15-16 Called to one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism**
- **John 17:20-26 Jesus prays for all Christians to be one as the Father and the Son are one**

**Commentary:** [excerpt from Raniero CantaleMESSA, Rome Ecumenical Gathering, May 2017]

"The Apostle Paul tells us that love is the only 'debt' that we have toward others (Romans 13:8). We can love each other because what already unites us is infinitely more important than what divides us. What unites us is the same faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Lord Jesus, true God and true man; the shared hope of eternal life; the common commitment to evangelization; the shared love for the body of Christ, the Church.

"Another important thing also unites us: the shared suffering and shared martyrdom for Christ. In so many parts of the world, believers from different churches are sharing the same sufferings and enduring the same martyrdom for Christ. They are not being persecuted and killed because they are Catholic, or Anglicans, or Pentecostals or from some other denomination, but because they are 'Christians.' In the eyes of the world we are already one single group, and it is a shame if we are not also that in reality.

"The prophet Haggai has an oracle that seems to be written for us in this moment of history. The people of Israel had just returned from exile, but rather than rebuilding the house of God together, each of them was building and adorning their own houses. God thus sends his prophet with a message of reproof: 'Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ...Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory, says the Lord' (Haggai 1:4-8).

"We need to hear how this same reproof from God might be addressed to us and to repent. Those who listened to Peter's discourse on the day of Pentecost 'were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, ... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:37-38). A renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit will not be possible without a collective movement of repentance on the part of all Christians.

"After the people of Israel set about rebuilding the temple of God, the prophet Haggai was once again sent to the people, but this time with a message of encouragement and consolation: 'Now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you. My Spirit abides among you; fear not' (Haggai 2:4-5).

“That same word of consolation is now addressed to us Christians, not just as a biblical citation but as the living and efficacious word of God that is bringing about here and now what it signifies: “Take courage, all you people of God, and work because I am with you, says the Lord! My Spirit will be with you.”

### **Questions for reflection:**

- Do you believe in the power of repentance and forgiveness to bring healing, restoration, and blessing? Daniel faithfully prayed three times a day and he interceded on behalf of his people for 70 years during Israel’s exile (Daniel 9:2). God heard his prayers and many exiles returned to restore Jerusalem and worship in the Temple.
- God is pouring out his Spirit today to heal, restore, and renew his people in love, unity, and power for new mission and evangelization. Will you commit to pray and fast like Daniel for God to renew the hearts of his people and to restore what has been lost?
- Do you believe the Lord is opening new doors for mission and evangelization in your city, your country, and throughout the world? Pray for God to raise up new generations of people to spread the Gospel in the power of the Spirit and to make disciples in every city and nation on the face of the earth.
- Do you believe that God is equipping you with spiritual power to be a bridge builder, peacemaker, and his ambassador on a mission of reconciliation and peace? With God all things are possible. Trust him, obey him, and let him use you and your community for the advancement of his kingdom. To him be the glory and the power and the kingdom now and forever.

### **Prayer on behalf of the whole people of God:**

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may you give to all Christians, and especially to those entrusted with leadership in your church, the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that with the eyes of our hearts we may see the hope to which you have called us: one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above and through all and in all. Amen.

[photo above: Sword of the Spirit communities in North America hold an annual conference for worship and teaching]



## Devoted to Spiritual Realities of Life Together in Christ

by Bob Tedesco

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. - Acts 2:42*

### Fierce devotion to spiritual realities

One of the results of Pentecost was a fierce devotion to spiritual realities. I say "fierce" because it was more than a little dangerous to embrace the Christian message. "Spiritual" because the elements of Acts 2:42 were either spiritual or contained spiritual elements: 1) *prayer* is spiritual; 2) *breaking of the bread* or the Lord's Supper is spiritual; the *apostles' teaching* was spiritual; and 4) even *fellowship* or *koinonia* (Greek) had a strong spiritual bond as its basis.

Some of these Acts 2 elements deserve a little explanation. The apostles' teaching was not just spiritual, but it had an overall spiritual basis. Even when dealing with everyday matters and relationships, the teaching would be based on the new life in Christ and his eternal perspective. The Lord's Supper, the liturgy, the ceremony would have human expression; but it is founded on the spiritual reality of the life of Christ and how that has spiritual and eternal consequences. Christian fellowship (Greek *koinonia*) certainly has human expression but is based on the spiritual reality of a bond so powerful that we are expected to experience it as a family or as brothers and sisters. When we think of Christian "fellowship" we are likely to picture a group of well-dressed, polite folks having coffee and doughnuts in the church hall. But "*koinonia*" is much more than that. I once heard the great Christian teacher Bob Mumford give a six part series of talks explaining the word "*koinonia*". At the end he seemed to believe that he had not quite succeeded...that it needed to be experienced "spirit to spirit" to be truly understood.





Antioch, an ecumenical Christian community in London, regularly host a Lord's Day meal together

### **The Human Response to Acts 2:42**

Different people prefer or respond to different things. In the Acts 2 list, some of us would be moved by the dedication to prayers; some to teaching; some men to the ceremonial or the Lord's Supper; and some more attracted by the koinonia. In the Old Testament times there were four schools of influence; the Levitical, the Yahwist, the Elohist, and the Deuteronomic (the ceremonial, the poetic, the power-centered, and the law-centered). It's believed to be the reason that we have two versions of creation (Gen. 1 and Gen. 2:4). We benefit most when we move beyond our natural preferences and embrace all of the spiritual realities listed in Acts 2:42.

Groups (churches) more dedicated to the Lord's Supper might benefit by having more devotion to koinonia (Christian bonding relationship). Groups (churches) with strong Christian relationship might benefit by more, strong apostolic teaching; and so on.

### **Devoted to Spiritual Realities**

"I Q", or intelligence quotient is a phrase credited to William Stein (1912), a German psychologist. It uses standardized tests to measure several abilities of the mind such as memory, understanding, attention, etc.

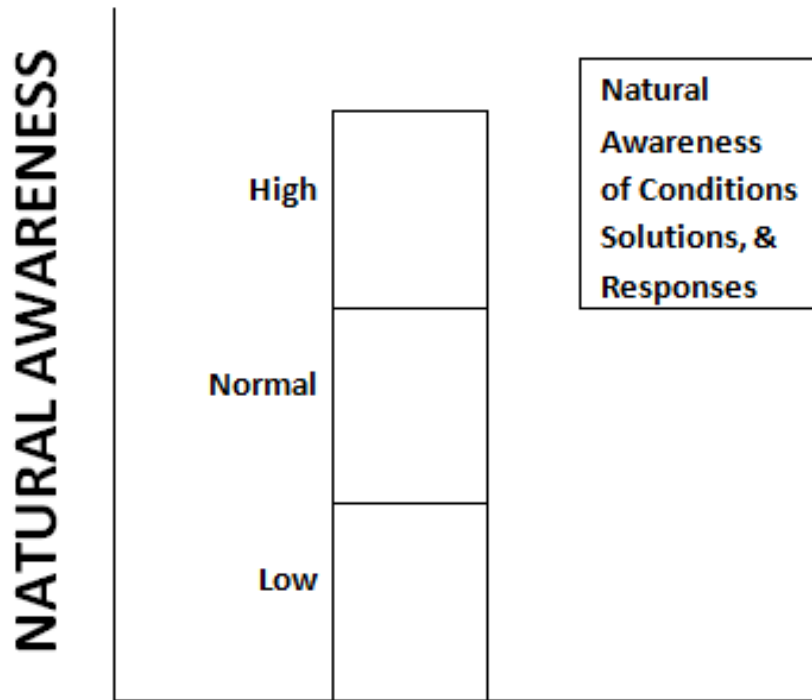
EQ or EI or EQI is a later development (1964 paper, Michael Beldoch) intended to measure emotional "health", the ability to have a balanced emotional response to circumstances, conflicts, and relational challenges. It is an important characteristic for employers attempting to hire people who will fit into their existing teams. Emotional and social functioning are important elements in the workforce and in the leadership of these teams.

For our purposes, let's create a new yardstick: SQ, Spiritual Quotient...the awareness and engagement of spiritual realities. Acts 2:42 says that they were devoted to certain spiritual realities... their SQ was off the charts. IQ and EQ have been important for as much as 100 years. Developing and fostering and maintaining a high SQ could have eternal consequences.

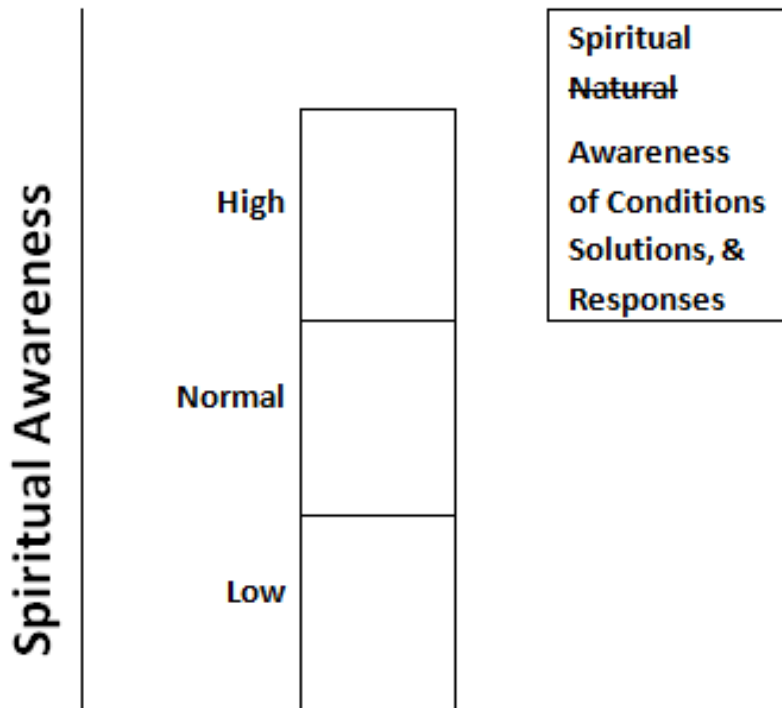
### **Spiritual Awareness of Conditions and Appropriate Responses**

*Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* - 1 Thessalonians 5: 16

We all begin life with a “starter kit”: a set of gifts, abilities and a natural awareness of conditions and solutions or responses. A baby who is highly aware and engaging can capture the attention of most adults.



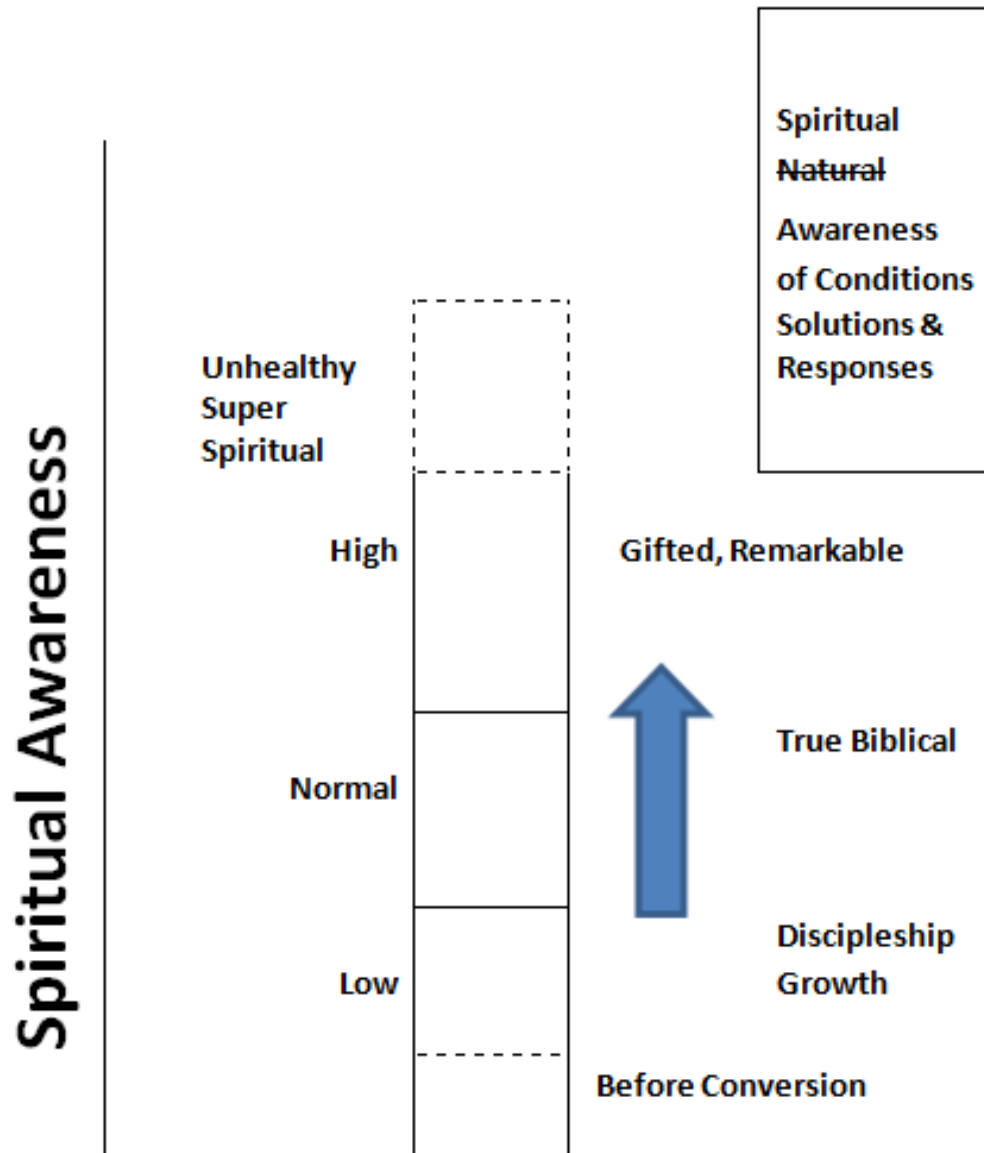
Some types of awareness normally begin on the low side, but can be fostered and developed to higher levels. Spiritual awareness (SQ) is one such example.



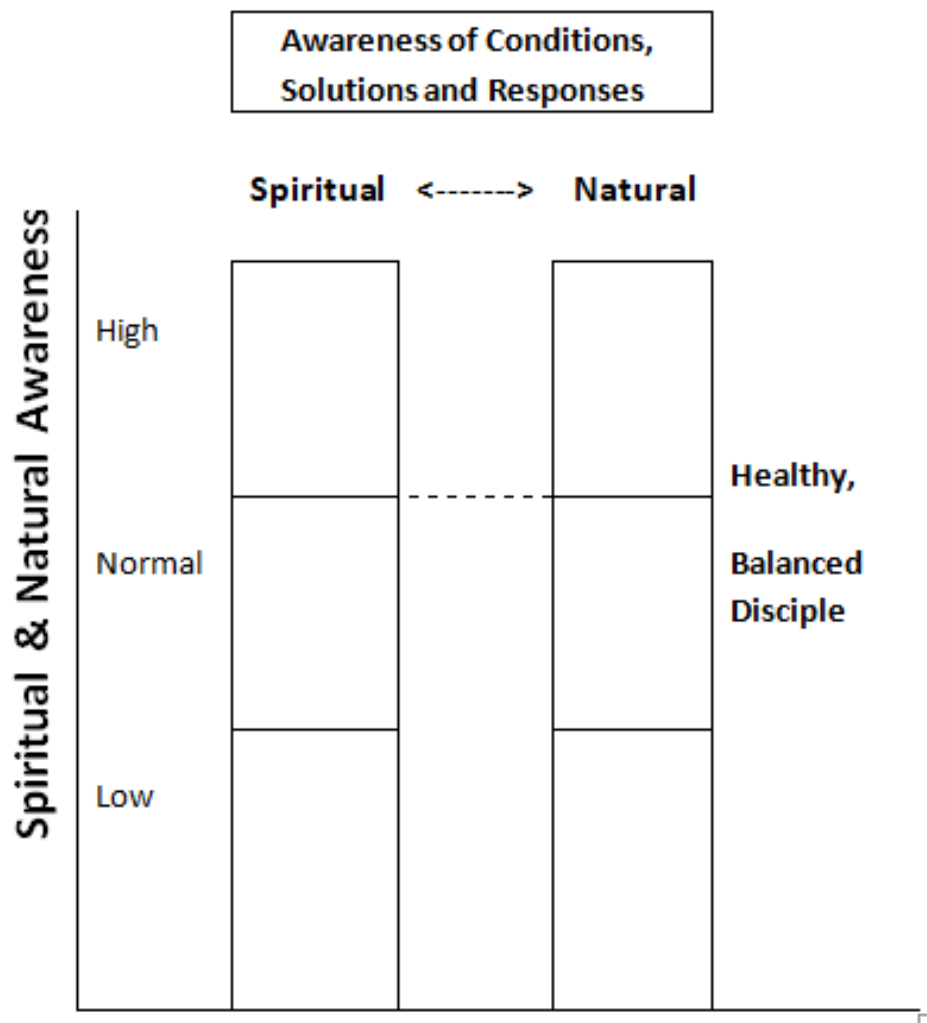
Empathy is one type of awareness that can be grown and can even be grown to an unhealthy, self-destructive



level. Spiritual awareness can also be developed to an unhealthy “super-spiritual” level, and the danger of deception is real.



Yet there is, for the well-developed disciple, a healthy balance of natural *and* spiritual awareness that can serve a life that can bear natural and spiritual fruit.



Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2

Community life has a dedication to spiritual awareness and one of the roles of retreats, gatherings, small groups, prayer time, scripture reading, and cluster life (intentional neighborhoods of Christian households) is to refurbish, renew, and refocus our spiritual awareness. I have friends who “wake me up” just by being in my life (holy friendships). Our denominational life and practices awaken and grow our spiritual awareness.

A disciple who isolates from Spirit-filled people and events loses the catalyst in the relationship and soon loses SQ. Backsliders go from cool to *cold*.

*Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* - Ephesians 4: 22-24

This happens to many of our children who go off to school or move away from family and community. This loss of awareness can be due to courtship, friendships, college disconnect, excessive career focus, or the busyness of getting established.

Bearing fruit is connected to spiritual awareness: having the name of Jesus on the tip of our tongues, active in our hearts.

*Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord.* - Romans 12:11

## Decisions and SQ

We need to have enough spiritual awareness (SQ) to make our daily life decisions based on our “kingdom now” calling. In my daily prayer time when I pray the section of the Lord’s Prayer that honors the names of God (“hallowed be thy name”) there is one Hebrew title that translates, “the Lord is my sanctifier”. Under that title, I pray that our lives would be set apart (holy, sanctified) for the Lord. Then, our hearts, our minds, our jobs, our postures, attitudes, etc. Finally, I pray here that our *decisions* would be set apart for God, and thereby be holy, sanctified. Especially the key ones: where we dig our foxhole: where we are going to live; if and whom we marry; where we work; where we’ll live out our calling. We should make these kinds of decisions corporately, not individualistically...getting help and pastoral care. If our lifetime is a canvas, our decisions should paint a portrait of a life lived for Christ.

Whether we are singles or parents, the children in our body are our “talents”. We need to do all that we can to get them to (multiply) bear fruit. We and they can become lazy in attendance or daily prayer.

*But when Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.* - Hebrews 10:12.

And finally, this spiritual awareness (SQ) calls us and reminds us to live as the new creations that we are!

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.* - 2 Corinthians 5:17.

> [See other articles by Bob Tedesco](#)

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Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit. He is a founder of the [People of God](#) community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 40 years.

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## The Christian Way

### A Statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together

This excerpt is from the statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together entitled, [The Christian Way](#) © 2017. The full statement is published in [First Things](#), December 2017.

Christians freely obey Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. “Come,” he beckons, “follow me.” Being a Christian requires more than intellectual or moral agreement with Christian teachings. Christ asks for our love and loyalty. Following him requires conversion, which leads to membership in the Church, the Body of Christ.

To be a Christian means being a citizen of a city that has a rich inheritance and glorious future. As the Psalmist says, “Walk about Zion, go round about her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels; that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide for ever” (Psalm 48:12–14).

Christianity is a community of faith shaped by the Holy Spirit, by worship and proclamation, by prayer and spiritual discipline, by ancient rites and teachings that are received from those who have gone before. Within this community of faith, we come to know and enjoy the presence of God.

Christianity is not a religion, if by that we mean one among many expressions of the natural human impulse to encounter the divine. The Christian way of life is rooted in the people of Israel. Christians share with Jews a

common heritage reaching back to a time well before the age in which Jesus of Nazareth lived and preached. It begins with God's gracious promise to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Genesis 12:1–3).

**Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house.** The search for God is perennial. Religious beliefs and rites are found in all cultures. Yet Christianity does not arise out of natural human impulses, desires, or instincts, not even of a religious sort.

Just as God calls Abraham out of his father's house and homeland, so Christ calls his followers to live in accord with a new reality. We possess a natural religious sense, but the good news that God is love and desires to bring us to himself comes as an unexpected gift and amazing grace.

We cannot lift ourselves up to the divine; God comes and lifts us to himself. The Christian way is transcendent and supernatural, based in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus reiterates God's call to Abraham when he tells his disciples, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). He speaks with authority over the natural ties that bind us together. He does so not for the sake of destroying or undermining them, but in order to manifest his transcendent authority. He is the Lord over all things. Neither spiritual principalities nor worldly powers override Jesus's call. That holds for our otherwise healthy sense of familial responsibility, just as it is true for career, pleasure, and other gifts that can become idols that pervert and distort our lives.

Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, sharing in the divine life of the Father, the one true God. In the power of the Holy Spirit who searches all things, the Lord Jesus reigns supreme over the Christian way and over all creatures. Those who follow him are to have no other lord.

Christ's lordship gives the Christian way an indomitable character that can turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). As finite beings, we live in a world ruled by many "satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, and officials of the provinces" (Daniel 3:2). In our time, worldly authorities have other names: experts, therapists, managers, bureaucrats, and more. They rule and exercise their authority in the normal course of life, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. Christianity encourages critical assessments of all worldly authorities. And, as a way of life, Christianity fiercely denies their final authority: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

God is one, and as Creator of the world, he exercises transcendent authority. This assertion is expressed with special force in the proposition central to Christian faith: God, the Father, has raised the crucified Jesus from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the affairs of men, death claims final authority. It lords over every magistrate and worldly power, over every culture and civilization. "From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Viewed from a worldly perspective, the annihilating nothingness of death seems all-powerful. "One fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice" (Ecclesiastes 9:2). Yet God lovingly intervenes in history and says otherwise.

The Easter affirmation—"The Lord has risen"—is a joyful acclamation that unseats death from its high throne: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (Romans



14:9).

The dominion of sin is another cruel idol toppled by the risen Lord. The Bible describes the power of sin in different ways. It holds us in chains, enslaves, and imprisons. In the thrall of sin, we become willing instruments of destruction, transgressing against God, our neighbors, and ourselves.

We both choose sin and feel it as an alien compulsion. Our consciences rebel against our wickedness, yet we feel powerless. This produces a heavy weight of shame we cannot cast off, a defilement or stain that cannot be cleansed, and a debt that cannot be paid. Christians throughout the ages have debated the degree to which sin dominates our lives. All affirm, however, that the transgression of our original parents, Adam and Eve, put us under sin's power.

As with death, Christ overthrows sin's supposed everlasting power. In Christ, transgression is not inevitable, and it does not control the future. St. Paul writes, "Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). The First Letter of John: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The Book of Revelation envisions the destruction of Babylon, the city ruled by sin's power.

The precise way in which Christ's cross and resurrection topple the idol of sin has been a subject of reflection and debate for centuries. But all Christians agree that in Christ, the dominion of sin is overthrown. (See the ECT statement "The Gift of Salvation.") The Christian is often still debilitated by sin's ongoing effects, but the Christian way is not governed by its power. In faith, the Christian is enrolled in a pattern of life ordered toward God, and in God there is no hint of darkness.

Christ's triumph over sin and death frees his followers to live in joy and praise. Obedience to Christ's call of discipleship is paramount and overriding. Mammon, the idol of wealth, is another worldly power that seeks to enslave us with promises of security and happiness. But as Jesus teaches, "You cannot serve God and Mammon." These are the words of a jealous God. This jealousy is not petty or self-interested, concerned with protecting divine prerogatives. It is the jealousy of a loving Father who will deliver his children from harm and destruction (Jeremiah 31:33–34).

The commanding authority of Christ frees us from our slavery to sin and death, allowing us to live with joy in fellowship with God. Our delight is in the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:1). His call of obedience is merciful. A self-directed life invariably circles back to sin's bondage. Following the way of Christ, we are empowered to reject Mammon's claims upon our lives, as well as the claims of other idols. "You are slaves of the one whom you obey," writes St. Paul, "either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience [to Christ], which leads to righteousness" (Romans 6:16).

To acknowledge Christ as Lord liberates his followers: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

> See full statement in [First Things](#), December 2017

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## Evangelicals and Catholics Together

Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) is a fellowship of Christian pastors, theologians, and educators in North America. ECT was formed 18 years ago by John Richard Neuhaus and Charles Colson, along with other prominent religious leaders, to deepen the dialogue among their respective Christian communities on issues of common concern, to explore theological common ground, and to

offer in public life a common witness born of Christian faith. Since their founding in 1994, they have addressed together important public policy questions, such as the defense of life, and they have proposed patterns of theological understanding on such long-disputed questions, such as the gift of salvation, the authority of Scripture, and the call to holiness in the communion of saints.

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## Re-Formation Today

What the twenty-first-century Church needs most are witnesses: men and women on fire with missionary zeal

by George Weigel

*Ecclesia semper reformanda*: the Church always to be reformed. Well, of course. But today, as always, the question is, what makes for authentic reform in the Church? Perhaps a rabbinical story recounted in a popular 1950s Catholic novel, *The Cardinal*, helps focus the question.

The scene set by author Henry Morton -Robinson takes place in a New York hotel, where an early attempt at ecumenical reconciliation and interfaith dialogue, a kind of parliament of religions, is meeting. After numerous vacuous statements are made by this, that, or the other Christian cleric, an elderly rabbi gets up and tells a story.

There was a king, it seems, who owned a precious diamond that he cherished more than anything else in the world. One day, alas, a clumsy servant dropped the diamond, which was deeply scratched as a result. The finest jewelers in the kingdom were summoned to the palace, but despite their best efforts they could not repair the king's diamond. One day, however, an exceptionally skillful jeweler wandered into the kingdom and learned of the sad condition of the king's diamond. He volunteered his services – and by his marvelous, almost miraculous, craftsmanship, he carved onto the diamond a beautiful rose, rendering the deepest part of the scratch the rose's stem.

In the novel, the rabbi does not explicate his parable. But its meaning for a proper understanding of *ecclesia semper reformanda* should be obvious enough. All true reform in the Church is by reference to what is deepest in the Church: the “form” or constitution, which I use in its British, not American, sense, given to the Church by Christ the Lord. That deep “form” is the root from which the disfigurement of the Church can be transformed into renewal and reform.

Authentic Christian reform, in other words, is not a matter of human cleverness, and still less of human willfulness. If the Church is willed by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, then authentic reform means recovering – making a source of renewal – some aspect or other of the Church’s “form” that has been lost, marred, misconceived, or even forgotten. Authentic reform means reaching back and bringing into the future something that has been lost in the Church’s present. Authentic ecclesial reform is always re-form....

As in every other moment in the Church’s history, living the motto *ecclesia semper reformanda* in the twenty-first century will mean returning to the sources, the roots, of Christian faith.

### **A constantly re-forming Church is always seeking the face of the Lord**

This means, first of all, deepening the encounter with Jesus Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI never tired of repeating, Christianity does not begin with an idea or a program but with a person: the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who walks along the Emmaus Roads of this century and invites all into the fellowship of his friends. A constantly re-forming Church is a Church always seeking the face of the Lord. Friendship with Jesus Christ is not only the beginning of the Church, but also the beginning of all authentic reform in the Church.

And as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught, not least in their efforts to return the Bible to its rightful place in the Catholic Church’s life, meeting the Lord means meeting him in his word, the revealed word of God in Holy Scripture. For from that meeting, we learn to see the world aright.

Original sin, we might say, is both the original myopia and the original astigmatism. Because of original sin, we see the world askew: the myopia of original sin gives us a squinty-eyed and narrow view of the world and ourselves, while the astigmatism of original sin further blurs and distorts our vision. In order to see the world (and ourselves) aright, we need corrective lenses. Those lenses are ground by an immersion in the Bible, through which we learn to see the world (and ourselves) in proper focus.

This is especially urgent in times of cultural confusion like our own. The culture of Me – the culture of the imperial autonomous Self, the culture of freedom understood as license and willfulness – envelopes the twenty-first-century West like a dense fog. Seeing through that fog requires a visual acuity that the world can not give. Seeing the world through biblical lenses – through the “inversions” of the Beatitudes, for example – cures our personal myopias and astigmatisms so that the deep truths of the human condition come into clearer focus.

Helping the people of the Church see the world aright through biblical lenses is the first task of the Church’s preachers, and thus renewing homiletics must always be part of any authentic ecclesial reform. Preaching-as-therapy, preaching-as-political-education, even preaching-as-moral-exhortation – none of these is adequate to the homiletic task in a reforming Church today. If we would look for models of how expository, biblically rich preaching ought to be done, we can look to another root of the faith once delivered to the saints: the sermons of the great Church Fathers. They, too, sought to help their people see the world of late antiquity, in which old certainties and venerable institutions were crumbling, aright. Their world was not all that different from ours, in which truth is subjectivized and institutions once thought to be built into the human condition (like marriage

and the family) are being deconstructed. And so immersion in patristic preaching can be a way to retrieve another lost element of the Church's form and make it into a source of renewal....

## What the twenty-first-century Church needs most are witnesses: men and women on fire with missionary zeal

All of which is to say that the reformation we need at this quincentenary of Wittenberg is a re-formed Church of saints. The cultural dissolution of the West precludes arguing people into the faith. Very few people are going to be argued into belief in a world that accepts "your truth" and "my truth," but not *the* truth. Yes, the Church needs theologians. Yes, the Church needs fully catechized men and women who can make persuasive arguments, but what the reformed Church of the twenty-first century needs most are witnesses: men and women on fire with missionary zeal, because they have been embraced by the love of Christ and are passionate to share that love with others; men and women who see the world through a biblical optic; men and women sanctified by the sacraments; men and women who know, with Saint Paul, that the trials of the present age are preparing within the *ecclesia semper reformanda* an "eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

[This article is excerpted from Plough Quarterly, Autumn 2017, Number 14, pp 45-49, Walden, New York, USA. See [full article](https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/discipleship/re-forming-the-church) online at <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/discipleship/re-forming-the-church>]

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## Called to Ecumenical Christian Community: Testimonies

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### Living Our Ecumenical Call

by Mary Rose Jordan

I don't like the smell of hard boiled eggs. I don't think they would be the preferred lunch choice of very many middle school students. But, there I was, 12 years old, with my 2 hard-boiled eggs and lentil soup for lunch. I didn't like Lent. I didn't like having to get out my sulfuric smelling snack and endure the stares and turned up noses of my classmates. My saving grace though, was Elissa- my best friend and fellow hard-boiled egg unenthusiast. We were both growing up in Community together and although she was Baptist and I was Roman Catholic, our families had the same Lenten practices. Because we had each other, we embraced the 40 days of smelly lunches while we proudly told our classmates of the cool 'gatherings' our families attended and the different youth group we were in. My friendship with Elissa is one of the greatest treasures of my childhood.

Fast forward almost 20 years. I still am not a fan of hard boiled eggs. I do, however, realize the gift it was to have a friend who shared the same spiritual practices. It was an especially significant blessing considering our denominational differences. That friendship set a precedent in my life: I learned to be open to and appreciate friendships with people from other denominations, I learned that what I had in common with them outweighed the differences, I learned that other denominations had strengths that I could learn from, I learned that the ecumenical life we have in the Sword of the Spirit is unique and challenging and worth striving for.

In a time when our culture, even within Christianity, seems incredibly divided and focused on differences, I am overwhelmed with gratitude because I have grown up in an ecumenical environment. From a young age I

have experienced the richness of ecumenism and have been blessed to have many relationships with brothers and sisters from other denominations that have played a significant role in my walk with Christ. The common way of life and shared spirituality I was a part of in my home community have given me a common witness along with my brothers and sisters, regardless of our denominational, racial or political backgrounds.

Our ecumenical witness is amazing and fills my heart with joy at the goodness of our Lord and his provision for us. Our friendship with each other, in my eyes at least, is a small taste of heaven.

[Mary Rose Jordan lives in the Community of the Risen Christ in Glasgow, Scotland. She is the executive director for The Lovely Commission, a website encouraging young women to follow the Lord.]

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## Good Soil and Open Doors

by Miguel Vargas

Latin America is not the most fertile soil to work for Christian unity. The historical background is grim and can be painful in many ways. Many good Christians have resentment against Christians of other traditions around them. There is, however, also much hope and opportunities where we see growth in ecumenism.

Starting in 2008, in the context of our Summer Mission Program, we began giving a talk on ecumenism to pass on more vision to the youth coming from communities that have only one Christian tradition. In 2012 this evolved into a four-session course that we would teach every summer to groups of young people gathered together from Central America. My main experience talking to young people from all-Catholic communities was finding a big lack of information but at the same time a significant desire to make a change in their hearts and work towards Christian unity.

Many of these young people had never heard about the painful stories of division in the Body of Christ. Neither had they ever heard about the important steps towards unity that many Christians have taken in the past 150 years. However, as we call them on to understand and embrace the reality of historical division and to be convicted about the importance of working for Christian unity, I was struck by the great desire and openness they have to foster Christian unity even in contexts that are hostile towards ecumenism. The mission and way of life of our communities provide an excellent context for our youth to promote Christian unity as we evangelize and work for the needy.

Another experience I've had in recent years is working alongside my father teaching the same ecumenism course in the Central Seminary in San José. We give future priests four lectures about unity and provide opportunities to spend time with leaders of other Christian traditions including an Anglican Bishop, an Orthodox priest and an Evangelical Pastor. This is a very significant experience for future Catholic priests in Costa Rica but also for the leaders of these other traditions as it opens friendly channels of dialogue and fellowship.

We can feel a limitation from our contexts and feel like we don't have much to contribute to ecumenism. However, we can ask the Lord to open unexpected doors to us and to give us the grace to enter them so that we can keep building unity in the Body of Christ.

[Miguel Vargas is a member of the Servants of the Word. He lives in "Arbol de Vida" community in San Jose, Costa Rica and serves in mission to young people throughout Central America.]

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## Back to My Roots

by Rami Abou Haidar

I was baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church as an infant, following my family's tradition. As a young student I attended a Catholic school and I regularly attended their liturgy on Sundays and on special seasons. Yet in all that time, I never participated in a Greek Orthodox liturgy.

When I joined the People of God, an ecumenical Christian community in Lebanon [composed of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant members, I began a journey of discovering with my Orthodox roots. Ecumenism is one of the core pillars of our common identity in the People of God community, along with the importance of being faithful members of our respective churches and Christian traditions. But at that time I did not have the understanding nor the courage to return to my Christian origins. Until one day, while leading a household of university Christian men, I was challenged and encouraged by one of the community leaders to discover my original church roots. Looking back now, I am certain that his advice was inspired by the Holy Spirit. His words touched my heart and soul in a remarkable way, and enflamed my heart with a zeal and passion to discover what I had been missing for years.

So, the following Sunday, I started to attend Divine Liturgy at a nearby Greek Orthodox Church. Although everything seemed different, I knew I was home. At the beginning, I put a lot of effort into understanding the prayers, reading different books, and asking many brothers for guidance. Little by little, and with each Sunday, a love towards my Church grew. Each word in the liturgy began to touch my heart, mind and soul. I grew to discover the Lord's work in a new, marvelous way!

Contemplating this experience, I can assert that it has led me to a deeper understanding of ecumenism. I see more clearly how our faithfulness to our individual churches and traditions fortifies our collective unity. I now recognize the work of the Holy Spirit to draw us together, discern the richness that lies both within my Church and within other Churches, and praise the Lord for his stunning work of bringing us together. Indeed, I now see better than ever how the Lord's work in our community is a contribution to the life of all his Churches.

Rami Abou Haidar lives and serves as a leader in the People of God community in Beirut, Lebanon

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## Why I Joined Ecumenical Christian Community

by Arthur Delargy

I've been a member of [Antioch Community](#) for over 25 years now, having first come into contact with community through one of its outreaches based at the University of London, where I was studying.

I can think of many reasons why I decided to join Antioch, not least the blessing of being able to find "a place to stand" with men and women who were, and are, constant in faith, hope, and love, having a vision to be a bulwark and a place of refuge, and a desire to make Jesus known in this generation. But, I always come back to one thing, something that makes Antioch, though numerically a small community, a significant, unique, and prophetic expression of God's love for his people, and that's our ecumenical call – a call to live out Christian unity with integrity.

I was born in 1968, in Ballymena, Northern Ireland – the year the modern-day "troubles," as they are euphemistically called, began. I was brought up in a strong Catholic family, in a small farming community. All the other villages around us were all Catholic, and also quite strongly believed that Northern Ireland should

become part of the Republic of Ireland, not the United Kingdom. To say that I had a parochial upbringing would be true in its fullest sense. Anti-Protestant feeling was very strong in our local community. The sense of mistrust, suspicion, and hostility was not helped by the segregation of the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. In my case, I was 17 years old when I met my first Protestant. In many ways this was a watershed, the guy was perfectly normal (we went on to be close friends when we went to college in London) so my worldview, such as it was at the age of 17, was challenged for the first time.

A year later, when I left home to study in London, the Lord started to stretch my perspective even further. I became involved in University Christian Outreach (UCO), a student Christian group at the University of London (now called [Koinonia](#)), mainly through the persistence and faithfulness of a few men. Even back in 1986 the university environment was a hostile place for Christians. This group was unique among the student Christian societies in providing a place for Protestants and Catholics to serve and worship together, a place where I quickly felt spiritually at home.

Later on I discovered that UCO was an outreach of the West London Community (now called Antioch), a group of Christians of all denominations, including families and single people, as well as a lay brotherhood of celibate men who were seeking to live out the call to Christian unity in their day-to-day lives. The theologians call this grassroots evangelism – it's a precious thing, which comes from the recognition that as fellow members of the Body of Christ we have a relationship with and an obligation to each other. In 1988, I made a public commitment to join the West London Community. That night was significant for me and for the community too – at the time the senior leader of the community was a Protestant from Northern Ireland, and I was the first Northern Irish Catholic to join. On the same evening a Sinhalese from Sri Lanka joined, crossing another divide, and taking his place worshipping side by side with several Sri Lankan Tamils, who at that time formed a significant contingent of the West London Community.

Regarding reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (2:14-16) wrote:

For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

In Antioch we attempt to live out our life together because of what we've got in common – what we have received from the same person – the Lord Jesus. At the same time we try to understand our differences, showing charity and humility in our dealings with one another, and supporting each other in being faithful members of our own churches and traditions. This is not cheap and not always easy, but as Psalm 133 says, when we dwell in unity, God commands a blessing, and this is my experience of 25 years living in this ecumenical, charismatic, covenant Christian community called Antioch.

[Arthur and his wife Rebecca live in London, United Kingdom with their two children.]

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December 2017 / January 2018 - Vol. 95



## Getting Real With God

### *Hannah's Expectant Plea*

By Jeanne Kun

Hannah stood expectantly before the Lord when she had nothing to give but her anguish. And God, who is rich in mercy, did not disappoint her..

– Craig Morrison, *The Word Among Us*

Hannah was burdened with grief and sorrow: she longed to be a mother yet was childless (1 Samuel 1:2). Her infertility was a source of anguish and misery. Deeply distressed, Hannah was so spent with crying that she couldn't even eat (1:7).

## 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:18-21

<sup>1</sup>There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. <sup>2</sup>He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

<sup>3</sup>Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; <sup>5</sup>but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup>Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>7</sup>So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup>Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

<sup>9</sup>After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. <sup>10</sup>She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. <sup>11</sup>She made this vow: "O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

<sup>12</sup>As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup>Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. <sup>14</sup>So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." <sup>15</sup>But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. <sup>16</sup>Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." <sup>17</sup>Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." <sup>18</sup>And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate



In a society in which infertility was a public disgrace, the failure to bear children was an especially terrible burden. No only did Hannah experience personal grief and heartache, but she also endured shame and the ridicule of Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife. (Having two wives was a practice common and acceptable in the culture of that time.) Peninnah had borne many children and never let Hannah forget her childlessness, taunting and provoking her (1 Samuel 1:6). Yet Elkanah loved Hannah and treated her with compassion and tenderness (1:5, 8). Surely he would have wanted Hannah to bear a child, but he did not reject or upbraid her for not becoming pregnant. As Carmelite Scripture scholar Craig Morrison noted, "[Elkanah's] reaction to her infertility is not typical for men of that culture. When Sarah was unable to conceive, for example, Abraham complained to God that he wanted an heir (Genesis 15). Clearly, Elkanah and Hannah have a unique relationship. Theirs is a love story. Still, Hannah wants to be a mother and cannot be consoled."

Each year the whole family went to the shrine at Shiloh to offer sacrifice to the Lord (there was as yet no temple in Jerusalem). It was especially at those times, when Elkanah would give a "double portion" of the meat from the animal sacrifice to Hannah because of his love for her, that Peninnah—probably out of jealousy—would provoke her. Yet Hannah had not given up hope: this particular year, as she prayed to the Lord in her distress, she was also filled with determination. Weeping bitterly, she asked the Lord to look on her misery and to "remember" her. It was a request insisting that God listen, a prayer reflecting great faith. Then Hannah made an amazing promise: if the Lord would grant her a son, she would, in gratitude, dedicate the child to the Lord from birth and give him to God's service (1 Samuel 1:11).

When Eli, the priest serving at Shiloh, saw how Hannah prayed, silently yet with her lips moving, he thought she was drunk. However, Hannah explained, "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:15). This image reminds us of Job, another who endured intense suffering and likened his anguish to his soul being "poured out within me" (Job 30:16).

Once Eli realized that Hannah was not "a worthless woman" but rather one earnestly speaking to the Lord of her troubles, he said, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him" (1 Samuel 1:17). Then we read in verse 18, "The woman went to her quarters, ate

and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

<sup>19</sup>They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. <sup>20</sup>In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

<sup>21</sup>The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow.

<sup>22</sup>But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time."

<sup>23</sup>Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the LORD establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. <sup>24</sup>When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young. <sup>25</sup>Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. <sup>26</sup>And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. <sup>27</sup>For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. <sup>28</sup>Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." She left him there for the LORD.

<sup>2:18</sup>Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. <sup>19</sup>His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. <sup>20</sup>Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home.

<sup>21</sup>And the LORD took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

(See also 1 Samuel 2:1-11)

## Understand!

1. Note the adjectives and verbs used in 1 Samuel 1:1-18 to describe how Hannah felt

and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.” Author Heidi Bratton points out just how striking this scene is: “Even more amazing than what Eli said is what Hannah did. She changed her attitude and embraced the peace that Eli had offered her.” Bratton continues,

Hannah’s encounter with God in the temple marks the height of conflict in her life story. To the temple she brings her greatest burden, childlessness, and basically throws it at God’s feet. Then without any tangible proof that God will positively answer her prayer, she walks out, leaving her burden behind. Hannah’s peace is restored, not because God has yet answered her prayer, but because, with the help of Eli, she has handed her burden to God and trusted him with it.

This is good news for those of us who are carrying great burdens! If we are as authentic with God as Hannah was in presenting our burdens to him and then leave them with God in faith and trust, we also can have the peace that Hannah experienced. (*Finding God’s Peace in Everyday Challenges*)

Although Eli didn’t know specifically what Hannah was praying for, his response to her—“the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him” • (1 Samuel 1:17)—prophetically anticipated the meaning of the name of the son she would later bear. “Samuel,” as Hannah named her child, means in Hebrew “asked of God,” “heard by God,” or “name of God” (1:20).

After worshipping before the Lord, Hannah and Elkanah returned home to Ramah. Then, “Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son” (1 Samuel 1:19). After Samuel was weaned, Hannah fulfilled her promise to the Lord by bringing the three-year-old child to live with the priest, Eli, at the shrine of the Lord in Shiloh: “For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord” (1:27-28). Hannah didn’t, as we might expect, grieve that she would see her child only once a year (2:19); rather, she proclaimed her joy and faith in God’s goodness in a canticle of praise (2:1-10). And, in the years to come as Samuel grew up “in the presence of the

about herself and her barrenness. How did Hannah respond to her infertility? What did she do about her deep disappointment and her strong desire to have a child?

2. What impression do you gain of Elkanah from 1 Samuel 1:3-5, 8, and 21-23? From 1 Samuel 2:19-20? How did Elkanah respond to Hannah? What does this show about his character? In what particular ways was Elkanah loving and supportive of Hannah?

3. Reflect on the progression of events in Hannah’s life and pinpoint her various postures throughout the course of these events. How would you describe Hannah’s disposition toward Elkanah? Toward the Lord? Toward Eli and his words to her?

4. How did Hannah come before the Lord to make her request to him for a child? What characterized her prayer? What did Hannah promise to the Lord if he would give her a male child?

5. What have you learned about Hannah from her prayers? From her actions?

## Grow!

1. When have you asked the Lord to “look at your misery” and “remember” you? What did God do in answer to your prayer? How have you experienced the Lord’s compassion, even if your prayers were not answered in the way you wanted?

2. Peninnah mocked and provoked Hannah, but Elkanah showed Hannah love and compassion. Have you ever suffered rejection or been ridiculed because of your hopes and dreams? Who in your life right now best understands your needs and desires and is supportive of you?

3. Imagine Hannah’s thoughts and emotions

LORD,” God graciously blessed Hannah and Elkanah with three more sons and two daughters (2:21). We hear echoes of the Lord’s graciousness in Psalm 113:9: “He gives the barren woman a home, / making her the joyous mother of children.”

Hannah’s determined faith in God and the offering of her child to God’s service would greatly impact the course of Israel’s history—and our own salvation history as well. Samuel would grow up to be one of Israel’s greatest judges; it was he who would carry out God’s purposes for his chosen people by anointing Israel’s first king, Saul, and its greatest king, David. And it would be into the house of David that Jesus, the promised Messiah and Savior of the world, would be born.

Hannah found herself in a crisis that seemed to have no end. Yet instead of keeping a stiff upper lip and bearing this cross, she flung herself before the Lord and poured out her anguish to him. Hannah was not afraid to “get real” with God. She was completely honest, letting him know how deeply painful her situation was. Her honesty before the Lord gives each of us the courage and determination to bring our own heartaches, unfulfilled hopes, and disappointed dreams before the Lord. May we have the grace, like Hannah, to hand over our burdens to God and to trust in him, even when we don’t know how God will answer our prayers.

## In the Spotlight

### Is It Time to Let Go?

To whom do children ultimately belong? We think and speak of them as ours, but we know that people are not possessions. Though we view biblical women as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, we know that somewhere in the midst of that web of relatedness a person exists, solitary and simply herself. Not all cultures honor that personhood, but it is a fact of our humanity as abrupt as the cutting of the umbilical cord that began our independent lives. Family relationships, however dear and precious, are finally only roles in which we are called to participate. Jesus would teach this difficult reality with the hard words, “Who does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” He pointed to a deeper kind of kinship when he turned from his family outside the door and said, “My mother and my brother are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:19-21). It’s no surprise that these are among Jesus’ most unpopular sayings.

It is hard to surrender belongings, harder to let go of those who are as close to us as our own breath. How did Hannah, who wept and prayed

when she gave birth to Samuel—and then “gave” him to the Lord. Recall a time when you knew deep joy because of God’s graciousness to you. What did you do to express your gratitude to God for his kindness and mercy to you? Have you ever offered something precious to you to the Lord? What did this sacrifice cost you?

4. If you are a parent, what are you doing to bring your children up in the Lord and to help them know and follow the Lord’s ways? How do you feel as your children make decisions that shape the course and purpose of their lives? In what ways might Hannah’s example help you as a parent to “let go” of your children and entrust them to the Lord?

5. What have you learned from Hannah about “getting real” with God and expressing your true feelings to him? About faith and trusting in God? What qualities of Hannah would you most like to imitate? Why?

## Reflect!

1. *This story of Hannah gives us courage to bring our anguish and sorrows to the Lord. Reflect on how you handle the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations and longings.*

*At this stage of your life, what is your deepest longing and as yet unmet desire? What is your prayer or conversation with the Lord like regarding this desire? Complaining? Bold? Faith-filled? Self-pitying? Take heart, and trust in the Lord who loves, us, hears our cries, and “remembers” us.*

2. *Reflect on these additional instances of how God favored barren women with children: Sarah, with the birth of Isaac (Genesis 17:15-21; 18:1-15; 21:1-7); Manaoch’s wife, with the birth of Samson (Judges 13:2-3; 24); Elizabeth, with the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25; 2:57). Do you identify with these women in any way?*

for and dreamed of a child, ever hand that baby off to the priest of Shiloh? One thing seemed clear to her: Children are finally the property of their Maker, and so she pledged her child yet unconceived to the service of God. Wise parents still make this dedication, early and often, and teach their children by their own example.

— *Alice Camille, God's Word Today*

## In the Spotlight

### The Power of Prayer

In this story Hannah begins the tradition of private prayer. Hers is the first story of someone coming to a shrine, not for public worship or sacrifice, but simply to speak to God from her heart. She knows how to pour out her troubles to God and remain in God's presence. She is not afraid to explain to the official religious representative [Eli] what she is doing. He is persuaded by her words and his scolding ends in a blessing. When she leaves the sanctuary Hannah's prayer is already answered; God has given peace to her heart.

— Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament*

Hannah is indeed the great example and teacher of prayer. Her prayer is the word of her heart (1 Samuel 1:13). It is poured forth from the innermost center of her personality, which has been torn open by her bitterness of soul (1:10). Nevertheless her prayer is not a mere drifting of the heart on waves of emotion. Her lips move (1:13), which means that her prayer consists of definite, formulated thoughts. Deeply significant is the way she addresses God: "O Lord of hosts" (1:11). This is the first time in the Scriptures that a prayer is directed to God under this name. It signifies God as the lord and master, the leader and commander of the universe. . . . Hannah's petition ends in a vow through which she solemnly binds herself never to forget that the child is the fruit of her prayers. Although it has risen "out of the abundance of complaint and grief" (1:16), her prayer brings her already the assurance of God's mercy. "So the woman went her way and ate and her countenance was no longer sad" (1:18).

— Damasus Winzen, *Pathways in Scripture*

Excerpted from [\*Biblical Women in Crisis: Portraits of Faith and Trust\*](#), by Jeanne Kun ([The Word Among Us Press](#), © 2017).

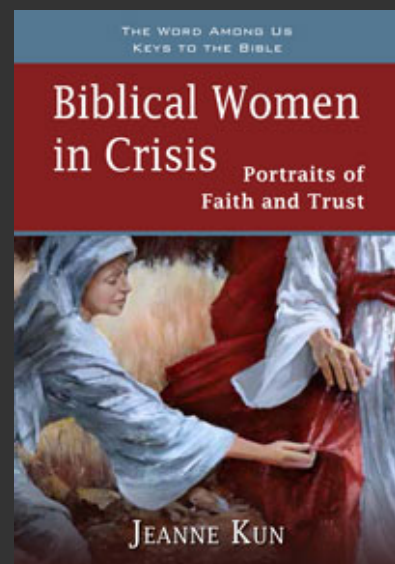
Used with permission. This book can be ordered [online](#).

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

## Act!

Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 anticipates Mary's well-known Magnificat in the New Testament (Luke 1:46-55). Hannah acknowledged and "magnified" the Lord, who looked upon her lowliness and blessed her far beyond what she had expected or anticipated. As Scripture commentator Jean-Pierre Prévost notes, "While {Hannah} celebrates her own happy reversal of fortune as a new mother (1 Samuel 2:5), she testifies to a God who exalts the feeble, the hungry, the barren, the poor and the needy, who brings low the mighty, the satisfied, those with many children, the rich" (*God's Word Today*). Mary echoes these same sentiments centuries later in her own prayer of wonderment, praise, and gratitude to the Lord.

Recall a situation or instance in which you were deeply distressed and you experienced God at work to "raise you up from the dust" (1 Samuel 2:8) and bless you. Now, using either Hannah's canticle or Mary's Magnificat as a model, write your own prayer of praise and thanks to God for his blessings and graciousness to you.





## Finding my Joy in the One Who Satisfies

by Maeve Buganski

I heard about the Kairos GAP program in the summer after my freshman year of high school, and I knew that I wanted to be a part of it. After I graduated, I was going to defer college to do a mission year with the Kairos. I knew the tug at my heart to move away and serve was from God, so I put all my hope in following the Lord and trusted that His plan would bring me joy.

Fast forward to the summer after I graduated high school. I had been accepted to serve with the Kairos GAP program and was moving to Grand Rapids, Michigan for the upcoming year. I was so excited! All I had to do was get through the summer. I had a nanny job for a family with one child, an 8-year-old boy. As much as I loved my job, it was my first time working 40 hours a week and that was difficult for me. But, everyday that I worked was one day closer to leaving for my GAP year. That was a challenging summer for me because I was itching to leave home and start my new adventure with the Lord.

My GAP year started in mid-August and ended in April of the following year. It was definitely one of the best years of my life. My relationship with the Lord flourished, and my daily time in prayer with Him brought about great healing and freedom. I built life giving relationships with everyone I met that year. I lived in household, a living environment where men or women live together, intentionally sharing life through having common meals, praying together, and supporting each other in our Christian faith. I lived with three other women my age that were also doing the GAP program, and two women that were a little older than us and led the household.

These five women became like sisters to me. They were a constant source of encouragement and love that led



me closer to the Lord. There were also five men doing the GAP program who also lived in a household led by the leader of our program. They were all men of strong, Christian character. They encouraged and respected us and became like brothers to all of us women. There were countless other people I met on my GAP year that played an irreplaceable role in my life. Whether it was the elderly we served once a week in the nursing home, our peers who participated in University Christian Outreach (UCO) with us, or the young children we served in afterschool programs, I felt Jesus' love through each person.

My year was an adventure with Christ. He showed me the beauty of service, and that by serving those most in need, I was serving Him. He showed me the goodness of meaningful relationships and investing in them, no matter if those relationships come easy or not. These relationships differed from other relationships, because they showed me they really cared about me on a deep level. They cared about how I was doing in my faith journey, how my family was, and what was important to me. I was able to delve into meaningful conversations, as well as share my struggles with them. They would encourage me and pray for me. The Lord gifted me with these relationships. He had lessons to teach me at every corner I turned, and brought me deeper into his vast love.

My year was so good that I never wanted it to end. If the Lord told me to stay in Grand Rapids forever, I would have- which is saying a lot because I'm a bit of a homebody and missed my family and friends back home very much. Yet somehow, I was abundantly joyful and peaceful in Grand Rapids, and had found a second home there. Most importantly, I had a new and improved relationship with God. Deep down inside, I was afraid that leaving GR and moving back home would affect my new-found strength in God.

In the final month of my GAP year, I served on a high school retreat called The YES Retreat, which had about 300 youth. Though the retreat wasn't necessarily for me, as I was a staff member, it was there that the Lord taught me one of the most valuable lessons of my year. The theme of the retreat was Joy. I couldn't tell you who was speaking or their exact words, but a summary of what I learned is that we so often we put our joy in certain situations or people and are left disappointed. This is because we seek fulfillment in those situations or people, but they are not the source of our joy, the Lord is. We must put our hope in him, and then we will be truly joyful and satisfied.

Ultimately, I realized that no matter what I put my hope and joy in, no matter how good it is, it will never truly satisfy me. Only the Lord will truly satisfy me and fill me with Joy.

I have heard this message countless times in my life. But, this was the first time it really clicked for me. I finally understood why I was just dying to go on my GAP year, and why I dreaded the fact that it was all ending so fast. It was because I was placing my hope and joy in my GAP year. I had poured all my dreams and ambitions into this year and imagined everything that I hoped it to be. I kept seeking fulfillment in the newest exciting event in my life.

Ultimately, I realized that no matter what I put my hope and joy in, no matter how good it is, it will never truly satisfy me. Only the Lord will truly satisfy me and fill me with Joy.

Coming home with this new way of thinking, I've found myself more content and less disappointed. I continue to experience the joy of giving God everything- my hopes and dreams as well as my hardships and failures.

Praying daily at home, the Lord continues to work and speak to me as He did on my GAP year. I would even say my daily prayer has flourished more since coming home and “reemerging” into the world. My GAP year “bubble” popped, and I am now in classes with people who have opposing views to my own Christian beliefs. Though this has been a challenge for me, it has helped me appreciate the time I spend daily with God in prayer, and my friends and family who encourage me in my faith. After my gap year, I nannied for the same family again. Yet this time, I was able to go to work with a joyful heart because I wasn’t placing my hope in what this job was or was not offering me. The Lord is teaching me that He is the one who satisfies my longing heart and is the *Bringer of my Joy*.



My name is Maeve Buganski and I was born and raised in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, located about half hour west on New York City. I’m the second youngest of 7 siblings and grew up in the People of Hope, Sword of the Spirit Community. After my GAP year, I moved back home to Jersey, and am now studying Event Planning at my local Community College. I also work as a nanny and serve in with a high school youth group and apart of Saint Paul’s Outreach (SPO- a college ministry). My favorite things are playing with my 8 nieces and nephews, singing and playing guitar with my family, spending time with friends, and watching the sunset.

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The Lovely Commission is 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.

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## When Trusting in the Lord Doesn't Work

by Sam Williamson

A college friend of mine watched every episode of *Marcus Welby, M. D.* (the American TV series about a small town, family doctor), and my friend wanted nothing more than to be a like-minded, caring, personal physician.

My friend aggressively pursued his pre-med studies, but he also countered the competitive culture of his program by tutoring other pre-med students. His life verse was, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:7). He said he didn’t want to grind through med-school simply by his own hard work. He wanted to “trust in the Lord.”

He and I graduated in 1979 (back around the time the flush toilet was invented). He went off to med-school and I went off to the mission field.

I saw him next three years later. He had dropped out of med-school after a prolonged, unknown illness (probably *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*), and he struggled to pay his mounting bills, not to mention finding a job with any sense of personal fulfillment.

He had also rejected Christianity. He said, “I trusted in the Lord, and look what it got me, illness, exhaustion, humiliation, and grunt work. Not exactly the Promised Land.”

### What Do We Trust?

It’s easy to deceive ourselves by “trusting in the Lord.” It is a command of God, but if we “trust in the Lord” mainly to get us through medical school, then our real trust rests in the letters “M. D.” after our name. We simply use God to get what we most trust in.

We say, “If I were a doctor, I’d be happy. And I’d serve the Lord.” God becomes a means to get what we really think will save us from a humdrum life: the prestige of that title.

The heart of Christianity is salvation. But modern Christianity has skinnied-down that “salvation” to a bread and water diet of life after death. Of course, it does mean that, but it means much more. It’s an abundant life today as well. Jesus said, “This is eternal life, *that they know you the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

My med-school-friend also skinnied-down his life verse. He only remembered the first half. The entire verse reads:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord  
*whose trust IS the Lord.* (Jeremiah 17:7)

Biblical trust in the Lord rests not in using God to get what we most want. It is fulfilled when we discover that God alone is what we most need. Knowing him is our salvation. Not titles, missions, success, or financial peace.

## Maybe It’s More of an Invitation

God commands and encourages us to trust in him. But maybe it’s more of an invitation.

I’ve been reading about Habakkuk’s pain in the face of life-ending adversity. He asks God, “Why?” While God never answers the prophet’s question, God finally does speak to him. And Habakkuk closes his short book with this:

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls,  
*yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*  
(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

Habakkuk doesn’t get his M. D., but he gets God, and his heart melts. He says he will be fine if his fruit trees are barren, his barns empty, and if he is sick, gets laid off, or loses his retirement savings.

While I have not arrived at this place of beauty, I sense God inviting me into such a knowledge of him that “the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.”

Sam

P. S. For many believers, our spiritual lives also seem unsatisfying. We ask, “Is this all there is?” God says that true, abundant, fulfilling life can be found: It is simply in knowing Him (John 17:3).

That overflowing, rich life is found in hearing Him. To nurture that conversational relationship with your Father, I suggest you read *Hearing God in Conversation*.

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## CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



### Being a Light in the Darkness

by Tom Caballes

***"You yourselves used to be in the darkness, but since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light. So you must live like people who belong to the light, for it is the light that brings a rich harvest of every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth. "***

***- Ephesians 5:8-9 GNB***

Walking in the dark can get you into trouble – you can stumble and fall, bang your toe, or bash your head. All of us are drawn to the light because light paves the way for us to move safely. The world we live in, in a way, is very dark – the erosion of core moral values and family life, the “me” mentality, and relativism are among the current trends that are not of God. And the world we live in gets darker every day. The darker the world gets, a small source of light stands out even more – and is more crucial. In the midst of the darkness, God wants us to be the light of the world. So, no matter how dark our environment is, people around us should see some hope and encouragement – if we live like the light in the darkness. Do you see yourself as a light-bearer in this dark world? What happens if there are many “lights” in your situation?

### ***So How Do You Become Light in the Midst of Darkness?***

1. Live a respectable and reputable life – no hypocritical or double life. Little by little, grow in holiness and character like Christ’s. Be patient, kind and loving, but do not aim to be a people-pleaser; be a God-pleaser. Aim to be respected rather than be liked by others. Actions speak louder than words; before you can say anything, people tend to look at your behaviour and attitude. Be able to sleep well at night, knowing you lived the day in good conscience. Live as if you will one day account for your life – because you will.
2. Choose to do the loving thing. Loving others is easy to say but hard to do. Your ability to love is



limited; seek God's love, patience, and forgiveness when yours ran out. See how loving and forgiving God is to you.

3. Avoid arguments; be open to sharing your opinion with others without being apologetic about it – only if your opinion is asked. Do not generalise and be judgmental, but be kind and considerate of others' views. Start your sharing with "this is my view about it..." Your opinion has more weight if you have the reputation and the character – being loving, patient and considerate, etc. - to back it up. Your goal in sharing your view is not to prove them wrong or yourself right, but to bring them closer to Jesus. Consider sharing why you believe in such a way, or how you used to believe the same way as they do, and why you changed.
4. Know your faith well. You do not need to be a theologian or a philosopher to explain your faith, but you need to know the basics and the "whys" of your beliefs. Learn and practice how to share the basic gospel message. Practice sharing your personal testimony with others. Seek opportunities to share your testimony – it is something they cannot dispute or challenge.
5. Know that God calls you to be a light bearer in your unique situation at this time and age. Be faithful to your call. Ask yourself: how can I be a mini-Jesus in my family, work, school, church, and community? How can I work with other light bearers around me, so together we can produce an even bigger light?

### Other Scripture passages:

1. *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. [Matthew 5:14-16 ESV]*
2. *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. [Colossians 4:5-6 ESV]*
3. *Other references: Romans 13:11-14; Philippians 2:15-16; 1 Peter 2:9 and 1 John 1:5-7*

### For personal reflection or group sharing

1. How do you make a difference in your workplace or school? Do people around you see a difference in you, or are you "one of the crowd?"
2. Do people around you see the light of Christ in you?

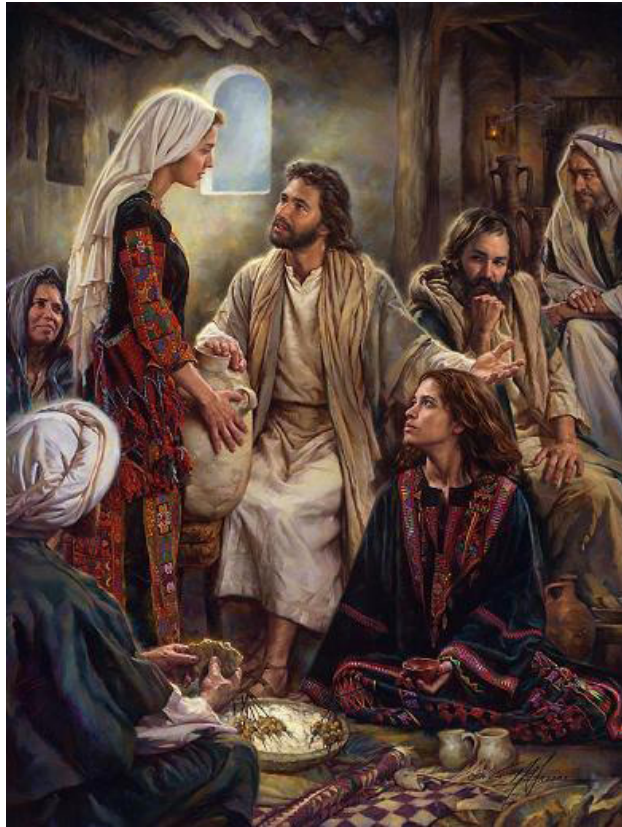


Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the [Lamb of God](#), a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads [Kairos New Zealand](#), an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged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

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

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## CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



### Investing In and Enjoying the Best That Is Yet to Come

by Tom Caballes

***"But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.'"***

***- 1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV***

What was the best thing that has ever happened to you? Was it based on personal success, relationships, career, or something else? But no matter how great was that best thing for you, it was fleeting. It's gone. It seems as if we can never be truly happy and fulfilled in this life. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God has put eternity into our hearts – that's why nothing earthly can truly make us happy. Does your experience of life's best things confirm this view? The truth is that the best things in life can only be found and enjoyed in God; and the truly best things – the ones that will not fade, rot, or be taken away - are still to come!

### ***So How Do You Reach The Place Where You Can Enjoy The Best Things In Life Now and Forever?***

1. Make God your ultimate source of joy. Yes, it is good to enjoy God's blessings, but don't let those

things or relationships be the center of your life. Life without God is futile. It is like chasing the wind. See Ecclesiastes 1:14. No matter how happy or successful you are in this life, you are like grass – here one day and gone tomorrow. Walk with God through life daily to the end. Make God the chief source of your joy.

2. No joy and satisfaction can truly be relished without God – any Narcissistic accomplishment, greedy success, or Hedonistic pleasure. Why? Because one day, we will account ourselves to God. See Hebrews 4:13 –nothing is hidden from the eyes of God. Enjoying something now you will regret later is pointless.
3. What statement should be your motto, mission statement, and guide for your life? *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* [Matthew 22:37 ESV] This phrase should be your first thought as you awake and the last thing you should reflect on as you sleep.
4. *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* [Colossians 3:2-3 ESV] We should not base our hopes, goals, and plans mainly on things that will not matter in the end. Life is a gateway and preparation to things that are eternal. Your priority should be: invest your time, energy, and resources on the things that will have an eternal impact.
5. Our fallen human nature makes focusing on God difficult for us, so we need to *"lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* [Hebrews 12:1]. We are sinners on the way to heaven – that is why we always need to repent and draw near to Him.
6. We are social beings, so the best way we can truly enjoy the best things in life is to share Jesus and His promise of eternal life to others. No matter how good our relationships in this life can be, death will triumph on this side of life. True and lasting friendships can only be found with God in heaven, where we can enjoy friendship with God and all our families and friends forever.
7. Know this: the best things in life now is just a foretaste of what is to come – anticipate it! Revel in it!

### Other Scripture passages:

1. *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.* [Psalms 27:4 ESV]
2. *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* [John 10:10 ESV]
3. *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* [Jeremiah 29:11 ESV]
4. *Other references: Psalm 16:11; Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 6:33; Philippians 3:20, and 1 Corinthians 10:31.*

### For personal reflection or group sharing

1. In what way can your life be more eternal-focussed so that you can enjoy the best things in life that will not fade away?
2. How can you reach out to your friends who do not know Christ?



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.

Top illustration of [Jesus with Martha and Mary](#) by (c) [Nathan Greene](#)

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## Intentional Discipleship and Age Appropriate Goals

by Michael Shaughnessy

### Intentional Discipleship

Intentional discipleship is a hot term in youth work, but in most cases it means little more than trying to help youth grow in their faith. It is “intending to” rather than “intentional.” It usually lacks any clear definition of what a mature young disciple would look like. It’s a free-floating orientation.

Intentional discipleship should mean being able to define what maturity looks like for the age you are working with.

Anyone working with youth knows that a mature 15-year-old disciple is not the same as a mature 21-year-old, much less a mature 25-year-old. Mature discipleship looks different according to a person’s age, especially among youth.

Young teen disciples are at a certain level of maturity. What we should be aiming at for them is different than what we should be aiming at for university-aged disciples.

### Having Goals

In our Kairos work with high-school-aged, university-aged, and post-university-aged young people we recognize that there are age-appropriate discipleship goals. For example, “knowing how to choose the right spouse” isn’t a discipleship goal for a 15-year-old, but it is a key one for someone in their 20s. In contrast, a 25-year-old disciple should have a pattern of consistent daily devotion in place that one might not quite expect of a 13-year-old.

Intending to disciple is good. Knowing specifically what you are aiming at is better. Any math teacher can tell you that it doesn’t make sense to teach trigonometry to a student who hasn’t learned geometry first. Christian discipleship is the same. Each stage of discipleship builds on previous levels.

The ability to walk in God's will as an adult disciple presupposes the ability to discern God's will, but the ability to discern God's will presupposes knowing the principles of discerning God's will. And that only makes sense if one first decides one wants to actually follow God's will.

## God Experiences

I was at a retreat not long ago talking to a 14-year-old girl whom I had known for years. She was one of most "Christian" kids I had ever worked with. She prayed every day, knew her bible and church doctrine, loved the Lord, and was full of the Holy Spirit. She grew up going to camps, retreats, being in a great youth group, and having many great "God experiences."

She knew the Lord better than most kids her age and wanted more. Still, she was smart enough to know that she didn't just need another Wow!

She thought something was still missing and it was. Although she knew that Jesus died so that she could have eternal life, and was very familiar with the phrase "Jesus is Lord," she did not quite know what it meant. She said, "It's like, Jesus is God. King of the Universe, almighty."

Like many high school youth, she understood "Jesus is Lord of all," but not "Jesus is Lord of my own life." After I explained it, she asked, "Does having Jesus as Lord mean that if he wants me to give up volleyball, I would need to do that?"

"Yup! Exactly!" I answered.

"Jesus isn't just Lord of the universe. He needs to be Lord of your life. It means your life belongs to him, not to you. It's his will, not yours, that counts."

## Disciples

The most important goal of intentional discipleship with high-school-aged Christians is moving them from knowing Jesus to knowing Jesus as Lord specifically of their own lives.

Unfortunately, many youth outreaches only facilitate "God experiences" and then stop. But Jesus commanded, "Go therefore and make disciples." What is a disciple? If we can't describe this accurately, it is very difficult to determine whether we are in fact "making disciples."

The simple meaning in Greek, Latin, and English is "pupil." It is the relationship of a student to a teacher. We are trying to make people students of Christ's teaching. This would be adequate if it was all Christ demanded of his disciples: hear my teaching and live it out. But it wasn't. He upped the meaning. His disciples needed to deny themselves and take up their cross. Simply put: they needed to be ready to die, even painfully, for him. He called them to be his witnesses (which means martyrs) to the ends of the earth. Many were.

If we are forming intentional disciples, death to oneself for the sake of Christ is the definition.

Math teachers don't even ask their most devoted pupils to die for them. Jesus does.





## A Solid Christian Worldview and Age Appropriate Goals

by Michael Shaughnessy

### Age Appropriate Goals

The [previous](#) Youth Culture Newsletter noted that intentional discipleship must include age appropriate goals. The foundation of discipleship (at any age) must be the intention to live one's life according to the teaching of the Lord and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The phrase "Jesus is Lord" must be applied to one's own life. This month we will look at another key goal: having a solid, comprehensive Christian worldview.

### What Is a Worldview?

A worldview is the way you make sense out of all reality. How you understand everything altogether. In short: how you view the world. It integrates all the big bits of reality (spiritual, intellectual, moral, emotional, scientific, relational, or physical) into one whole that stands up to serious questioning.

Everyone has a worldview of some sort. A person might be educated or uneducated, liberal or conservative, rich or poor, non-believing or God-fearing, but people act the way they do because they are rational. They justify their behavior based on their worldview. It is our nature as human beings.

Today, most people have some form of postmodern worldview. Some have the lazy version: they see no need for everything to make consistent sense. It's a "whatever" worldview. They are easily deceived. The lack of rationality might be a sign that we are becoming less human.

Other post-moderns just attack any worldviews they don't like. They can't put together their own very well, but they can tear down others.

Many Christians have a cobbled together worldview. Their truths and principles don't fit together very neatly. "As long as you're happy" doesn't sit very well next to "always do the right thing." And "look out for number

one” harmonizes poorly with “love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

Many people hold an incomplete, materialist-scientific worldview that ignores the spiritual. It will debate: “How the universe came into existence,” but not “Why did it come into existence?”

Yet, “Why questions?” are the ones that lead us to want a coherent worldview. By the time we were three years old we were asking “why?” We started with everyday things. Why is the sky blue? Why do cats meow and dogs bark? Why do trees lose their leaves? Why do I have to eat my vegetables? We wanted to understand how every-thing in life fit together and how to relate to it all.

As teens we began to ask: why do I exist? What is my purpose? Our “why” questions got personal! My “self” didn’t know why my self existed!

Teens want a coherent world-view. It is an important and powerful age-appropriate goal.

### The Right Worldview

Almost every culture until recently has believed there is a correct, non-self-contradicting worldview. They may have added, “We don’t know for sure what it is! But everything does work in some kind of order.”

Is there one correct worldview? Yes. It is God’s worldview.

In the beginning was the Word. All things were created through him (John 1) and in him all things hold together (Col 1:7). That is to say, all things do fit together.

If all things were created by a single divine mind, all truth must form a single, coherent, consistent system. Truth has to be unified and universal in order to be TRUE. If there is a God, then there is one correct worldview: his. Our job is now simple. It is to ask what is that world-view and how can I learn it?

I’m not omniscient. My point of view is certainly incomplete. It is likely flawed, but God’s isn’t. Still, my point of view can be far more correct than someone else’s, especially someone who does not have any idea about where to look for the true one.

### Knowing Where to Start

The Irish tell a joke about a man who doesn’t know the way to Dublin. He comes upon a farmer and asks him, “How do you get to Dublin from here?” The farmer replies, “Well, I wouldn’t start from here.”

We all start putting together our worldview as children. It is a marvelous advantage that we are equipped by God with a mind that is inclined toward truth not error. Our first “faith” is in our senses: we react to pain, hunger, etc. We then learn to reason.

As a young boy, my worldview was a “street view.” It was limited to what I could actually see, on foot, on my bike, or in a car. I did not have a view of the whole. Then I learned how to read a map. I had a view from the top. I could see where my road went, where my town was and how things fit together.

Gradually, the map of the world made sense. Then I had to master the global view and finally a view of the universe. My world went from what I saw “right now” to understanding the universe. What in German is called “Das Weltall!”

The world of truth is similar. It is possible to form a coherent worldview that works from any direction, that puts together faith, family, history, science, morality, politics, etc. into one coherent whole, but where do you start?

Typically in our teens, we begin to wrestle with where our fundamental faith will rest. We start putting together our own adult worldview. The key question is whether we will start with faith in God or faith in something less, like science, senses, feelings or myself? The best answer is: any system of thought that is not founded on faith in God is necessarily founded on faith in something less.

### Age Appropriate Goals

One of the most important areas to have age appropriate goals is having a Christian intellect. In Kairos we think it is possible to teach high school youth the foundations of a Christian worldview, one that is rooted in understanding that truth exists and God is its source. And those foundations are the Bible, catechetics, (the ordered teaching of the church), and apologetics (answers to the tough questions of faith).

Age appropriate goals for university aged students build on that foundation. University students should know where to search when confused, and be able to engage new falsehoods with alacrity and worldly people with graciousness and firmness.

Meeting these age related goals can equip our young people to stand firm in their faith.

top illustration by (c) Kevin Carden



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## Your Life Is Not Your Own: Summer Household for University Christian Men in Ann Arbor USA

### An interview with Will Cannon

For nine weeks, beginning last May, fifteen men lived together in two houses in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA for the traditional “summer household.” Will Cannon, Mission Leader of University Christian Outreach (UCO) in Ann Arbor, lived with those brothers and supervised two other [Servants of the Word](#) affiliates in their leadership of the house. Martin Steinbereithner interviewed Will about the time.

**Some of us former members of University Christian Outreach remember our own time in “summer household.” But maybe you can explain what it is for those who have missed out on this experience?**

We invite students involved with University Christian Outreach to take a whole summer as something of a discipleship retreat, as an opportunity to grow in following Christ and in serving others. So even though the men all work or take classes during that time, we approach it as an intense living experience, which includes common meals, daily prayer times, evening activities and weekends away. This year fourteen men took the plunge and signed up for it.

**Nine weeks feels like an awful long time? Couldn’t you pack all the teaching in just a long teaching week?**

The whole point is that we don’t simply want to impart information, but build habits into these men’s lives which will remain with them even after summer household—habits of prayer, service, common life. And



building a habit takes a long time. So we design an intense formative environment which, we hope, changes the participants.

### **And how well does that work?**

We had quite a variety of men living with us, some quite young, some seniors ready to graduate. As you journey together you invariably discover areas in yourself where you are weak: lack of personal discipline, areas of sin, unhelpful patterns of behavior. You are then confronted with the choice of either trying to handle this on your own or to really lean into the grace of God which is so readily available in such a retreat environment.

We had some men make significant life decisions, such as postponing military service or serving as missionaries for a while before pursuing their careers, and that is always very upbuilding to see.

**Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest who has written extensively about the importance of rites of passage, speaks of five truths you need to realize in order to truly become a man—life is hard, you are not that important, your life is not about you, you are not in control, you are going to die. Do you feel like summer household is helping men come to such realizations?**

While summer household is not directly designed as a rite of passage, I do think some of these lessons get learned. Keeping a disciplined schedule is hard. Because we keep a common life, you are encouraged to submit your preferences to those of the group and so acknowledge that life is not all about you. And the very essence of being a disciple is the realization that you are not in charge of your life, but the Lord himself is. In that sense summer household does help you become more of a man.

### **Any particular high points of the time?**

We decided to end our time by participating in a “Tough Mudder” race in Minnesota. This required regular 6:30am training, quite a discipline in itself. And the race itself is designed as a team event, so you need to help each other scale walls, make it through pools of mud and the like. All that leads to a profound sense of comradery and team work.

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Top photo: members of the men's summer household gather on the front porch of their house

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## Forming University Aged Men in Discipleship A summer Mission Household Program in Lebanon

an interview with Tadhg Lynch

In July of this year, five [Servants of the Word](#) brothers from Europe and the USA spent three weeks in Beirut, Lebanon, in order to facilitate an outreach called “Men on Mission.” It was the third time it took place. It is aimed at university-age men, and this year the participants included four men from Belfast and London and about 14 Lebanese. Martin Steinbereithner interviewed Tadhg Lynch, a life-long [Servants of the Word](#) brother based in Belfast, Northern Ireland about the time.

### **Explain the summer Men on Mission program: What is “Men on Mission” like?**

It is a highly formative environment where, for three weeks, young men set aside pretty much everything else in order to live with other young men in households, to receive a lot of discipleship teaching and to engage in practical service during the day. In that sense it is a cross between a summer household and a mission trip. These young men live in a busy city, have busy lives and are used to pretty much running their own lives. So the choice to fit into a schedule and forego the many other attractive options of what they could do with their summer is a radical step and not one which all of them manage to take successfully.



Tadhg

and young men pitch in together on a construction project

### **What roles do the service projects play?**

I think they play a crucial role. Most university students don't spend a lot of time working with their hands, so physical labor can bring you to your limits in somewhat unforeseen ways. At the same time, after three weeks you can point to something tangible you have achieved: a wall has been built, a ditch has been dug—and that is highly satisfying. Lastly, the participants see us older brothers as we struggle with heat and exhaustion as well, and that also is an important experience.

### **What was your experience leading this program?**

It was interesting serving with seven other Servants of the Word brothers, some of whom were older than me. It is a somewhat new experience to lead when older brothers are present who are possibly more qualified for the job than I. So I have to psyche myself up before the program starts. But when it is actually running, I feel this deep satisfaction of serving alongside my brothers, building the Lord's kingdom. That gives me great energy, because that is really what drew me to the brothers in the first place. And the comradery we experienced was quite special.

### **What is the long-term fruit of such a program?**

You can of course never fully gauge what impact these weeks have made. But let me point you to one example. One of the men had just graduated from university and needed to find a job. Somebody suggested he first participate in this program and then start job hunting. He did, which was a huge step for him (and probably even more so for his parents who were anxious that he got on with life). He was present at everything and put aside the distraction and anxiety of needing to find employment. Shortly after the end of "Men on Mission", he found an excellent job. I am not trying to say that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship here. But I do believe

that this brother learned a valuable lesson, that God is never outdone in generosity, a lesson he will never forget, I think.

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Top photo: “Men on Mission” participants on an outing to Tyre, Lebanon

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## Frontline Mission: Summer Outreach in Malaysia

An interview with Peter Legaspi

Over the past three years, Kairos Asia has been working actively with the youth from the Covenanted for Christ Community (CfCC) based in Penang and Taiping. This past summer Peter Legaspi, a [Servants of the Word](#) brother from the Philippines went with a team of brothers and sisters to lead two-week households for men and women in Penang. We interviewed him about his experience.

**What numbers are we talking about for this summer outreach?**

They were very modest, and you could be tempted to ask whether it was worth it. Five men and two women from Malaysia together with fifteen Filipinos and one Singaporean actually participated in the households. We originally had twenty on the list, but many dropped out. But that is pretty typical when you just break ground in a new area. People have yet to catch the vision before making the necessary sacrifices for such a program.

But we had other activities such as evangelistic events, parties, picnics, sports events, and those drew larger crowds. We have to remind ourselves that we are at the beginning, and winning a stable core takes time.

**What was the goal of the visit?**

We wanted to help this fledgling group in Penang gain vision to reach out and become attractive as a group to people who don't know Christ. So we chose the topic "Widen the tent pegs of your heart" from Isaiah 54. Malaysia is a free country, but there are still some cases when Christians are experiencing discrimination. That can make them reticent to speak to their friends about the Good News. A very different situation from the

Philippines!

Do you think your work was successful?

It is sometimes hard to say at the time. But after we left I heard that the core group has begun to meet regularly and they are starting to reach out to their fellow students. God is clearly at work in these young people. One man even expressed to me his interest in investigating living single for the Lord. And a number of them are planning on visiting Manila in the not too distant future, in part thanks due to friendships they established with Filipino members of our team. Such a visit will surely help broaden their vision.

What is your long-term goal?

We want to establish a university outreach modeled on CYA (Christ's Youth in Action) in Manila. So we are also going back and giving a retreat this November. But we have to be realistic: getting established in a new country brings cultural, linguistic and religious challenges, and it will take us a while to overcome them and get firmly rooted. This is real front-line mission so please pray for us!

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Top photo: members of the men's summer household gather on the front porch of their house

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## Serving Until It Hurts: Summer Outreach in Mexico

An interview with Malaquías García and Angel Santiago

A team of seven [Servants of the Word](#) brothers from Monterrey, Mexico, spent three weeks last July in Xalapa for a series of very intense summer events. It included two tracks, one for university-age and one for high-school age youth and it drew a total of 620 people from Mexico and the Caribbean. Our brother Malaquías García oversaw the university side of the program, our brother Ángel Santiago the high school part. Here are some of their reflections on this very busy three weeks:



Give us a feel for what the events looked like.-

M: It all started with a ten day leadership training course for the people who were then going to staff the conferences and camps for high-schoolers and university students. There they would learn to give their testimonies, lead small groups, be an example in daily life. Then those people split up into two groups: the university track, which had a conference for participants of a number of university outreaches across the country and even beyond, and a youth track.

A: The Youth track included a conference called Tu Momento (This is your chance!) and two camps, one for boys and one for girls.

[This sounds like a lot to squeeze into such a short period of time.](#)

A: Most of these young people don't get a lot of opportunity to be together, so when we have such a summer program, we want to make it count. But yes, it was very stressful to accommodate so many participants and organize multiple parallel events. Suffice it to say, we did not sleep very much.

M: Most of us brotherhood men have been used to working together for a long time, so even under pressure we function well as a team. But for the participants it can become a challenge to live in such an intense environment. You have to make sure you look after them well.

[Apart from the intensity of the time, what would you consider the biggest challenges?](#)

A: The battle for the souls of the young is becoming ever more intense. We encounter ever more serious pastoral challenges, be it addictions, the force of social media, psychological problems. We constantly need to find new ways to counter those influences. And we rely on God's power to bring freedom and healing during these times apart.

[Were there any particular highlights during the time?](#)

M: The quality of the young people participating impressed me greatly. They display a genuine readiness to learn and a willingness to serve which are very inspiring. God honors that and in turn speaks powerfully to them.

A: During the high school conference we had a four-hour prayer meeting where the Lord brought a lot of things to the light and stirred genuine repentance in many of the participants. The testimonies were beautiful.

[Which part did you enjoy the most?](#)

A: The boys camp was called "Desert Storm" and involved a lot of outdoor activities for the men. It was very satisfying to see them enjoying themselves and growing as men.

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Top photo: Tu Momento Kairos Youth Conference in Xalapa for young men and women from the region

2nd photo: Outdoor activity for the young men's camp

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## Emmanuel Community in Aleppo

*“God does not elect the excellent but brings the elect to excellence”*

A November 2017 Update Report

by André J. Codouni

Hardened by five years of battle in their city, the brethren from Emmanuel Community in Aleppo Syria, exhibit a new sense of selflessness and trust in the Lord’s providence. They just finished a quarterly retreat for teaching, inspiration and character building; and if one hears their praise reports, it is now almost completely about the victory and the transforming power of the Words of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Following the retreat, a dozen community members shared about this new confidence in the Lord. A young woman shared an insight to the vibrant sound of “Amen” in the room she was addressing: “God does not elect the excellent but brings the elect to excellence”. Amen!

This exuberance is coupled with realism. “Our battle is a spiritual one” exclaims a man, the spiritual protections that they experience by being with each other in mutual support, dwindles quickly if not nurtured by constant vigilance and prayer.

New opportunities are opening up for members to share their faith. Members, young and old, enthusiastically look to tell their friends and relatives about the sweetness of living for God. “My atheist classmate whom I had not seen for a while, surprised me when he asked me about my faith and told me of his desire to change” tells a young student.

Members have also learned how to sacrifice important things in their lives for spiritual gain. For many, personal comfort, worry about the future and even career, take backstage for the sake of selling all to buy the “pearl of great price”.

From what they spoke about, it is obvious that at this stage, members of Emmanuel are experiencing a renewed sense of the vision and mission they have from the Lord. They are ready to hold fast even when the “going gets tough”. With continued hardships, such as prohibitive prices of commodities, one does not hear them complain. They are consumed with the desire to see God’s “kingdom come and His will be done”. One senses a new boldness in their voice and a greater faith for facing the future. Small group meetings, formation courses and evangelistic prayer events continue to be important parts of their regular schedules.

Emmanuel is a beacon of light for many who are battling the “demons” in their lives, even among friends and relatives. It is a garden of hope planted amidst the devastation of war. It is serving as both a lifeline of solid Christian wisdom and “renewed” day to day instruction for many in need. It is bound to be a place of renewal for the Christian church in Aleppo for many years to come.

Let us continue to support them by prayer and generosity!

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André J. Codouni is a member of the [People of God](#) community in Beirut, Lebanon.

photo credit above: photo of candles with cross in background by (c) [berkay](#) at [www.bigstock.com](http://www.bigstock.com)

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## What Led Me to Write a Book on Divine Time Management

by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

Writing a faith-based book was never in my plan for my life.....

I experienced God's guidance for me in writing two previous books, *The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment*, and *How to Invest Your Time Like Money*, but they were firmly in the business time management space. I appreciated how they made a positive impact in many people's lives and helped expand my influence and credibility in the business world.

### **Giving glory to God in my business**

But then everything started to change in the summer of 2015, when I felt God commanding me to give Him the glory in my business.

I really wasn't sure what that meant. I had been a business owner for 10 years and I was never ashamed of my faith, but I didn't advertise it. Now in regard to God's command, I wasn't sure how to respond. Did He want me to stop doing anything with time management, my area of expertise? Or was there another solution?

What ended up emerging after about a month and a half of wrestling with this question was God prompting me to start a Divine Time Management group coaching program as part of my business as well as writing a book proposal for my first Christian inspirational book.

How the process works with non-fiction books is that you write a book proposal, then your book agent pitches that proposal to publishers. If one of the publishers chooses to offer you a contract then you write the book.



I started on the proposal for *Divine Time Management* in January of 2016. I believed God had called me to this work, but from a practical perspective, it didn't make much sense. I didn't have an established Christian network to help with marketing. This is one of the most important considerations for publishers—how will you sell the book?

But God told me that He would give me favor and to not worry about the fact I didn't have as large a Christian platform as I had a business network.

And He came through, I got a publishing contract in the summer of 2016 with FaithWords, a publisher of authors like Joyce Meyer and John Maxwell.

### **A journey of faith**

Since then, it's been a journey of faith in writing the book, editing the book, creating the video book trailer (you can view it at [www.DivineTimeBook.com](http://www.DivineTimeBook.com)), narrating the audiobook, and preparing for the release of the book.

God has given me courage and favor each step of the way and continues to do so.

One of the biggest things that I've seen in the process is that you need to walk in obedience and as you do, God provides exactly what you need exactly when you need it. From providing time to do the extra work to write and edit a book to connecting me with Christian videographers who could create a film to giving me favor with people who could promote my book, I didn't have the resources when I started the journey but the resources appeared along the way.

My encouragement for you is that if God is calling you into new territory in business or in other parts of your life that you will have the courage to move forward in trust that God will provide. When we're willing to do things that don't make sense and that may even look foolish to the world but are God's call for our lives, we will experience the most blessings possible and bring God's kingdom to earth.

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### **A New Book to Help Christians Put God at the Center of Time Management**

Most time management is about getting control by putting our plans first and our plans at the center. Elizabeth Grace Saunders in her new book, *Divine Time Management: The Joy of Trusting God's Loving Plans for You*, turns the order upside down. She demonstrates how to recognize wrong approaches to time management and how God wants us to learn to surrender control of our plans by putting God first and aligning our plans with his loving plan for us. She challenges us to think of time management in terms of our identity and relationship with God, and how we align with God's purposes for us.

This book is an excellent introduction for Christians who want to grow in stewarding their time well and purposefully for daily life, work and mission.

- Don Schwager, editor



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> See previous article, [Embracing a God-Centered Approach to Time Management](#), by Elizabeth Grace Saunders in the [October 2017 Issue](#) of Living Bulwark



Elizabeth Grace Saunders is an internationally recognized expert on effective time management and the founder of Real Life E Time Coaching and Speaking. Her company partners with individuals on the journey from feeling guilty, overwhelmed and frustrated to feeling peaceful, confident and accomplished.

FaithWords published her third book on *Divine Time Management: The Joy of Trusting God's Loving Plans for You*. Find out more about the book on [www.DivineTimeBook.com](http://www.DivineTimeBook.com) now available for purchase on Amazon or wherever books are sold in print, e-book, and audiobook edition.

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## Some Spiritual Reading Resources for the Advent Season

### Reflections and Meditations

- [“Maranatha!” - “Come, Lord Jesus!”](#) by Don Schwager
- [O Antiphons of Advent](#) and [Praising the Names of Jesus](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [Weekly Advent Prayers](#) and Advent wreath
- [The Day of the Lord Draws Near: Reflections on Upbuilding Love](#)
- [To watch with Christ](#), by John Henry Newman
- [A threefold coming of the Lord](#), by Bernard of Clairvaux
- [The Two Comings of Christ](#): An Orthodox perspective by Thomas Hopko
- [Christians Have Lost Touch with Heaven!](#) by Christoph Schonborn
- [The Eternal Spring-time Will Surely Come](#), by John Henry Newman
- [The Real Meaning of Christmas](#), by Steve Clark
- [Reply to the Skeptics Concerning the Lord’s Return](#), Commentary on 2 Peter 3:1-7, by Dr. Daniel Keating
- [Living in the Last Days: A Commentary on 1 Peter 4:7-11](#), by Dr. Daniel Keating
- [The Promise of the Lord’s Return, A Commentary on 2 Peter 3:8-16](#), by Dr. Daniel Keating
- [Seeking God More Earnestly: Advent Themes in the Letter of James](#), by Dr. Mark Whitters
- [We Will Be Judged by Our Fidelity to Christ](#), by Romano Guardini
- [Jesus the Coming Judge](#), by Tom Wright
- [What If This Present Were the World’s Last Night](#), by C.S. Lewis
- [Christians Have Lost Touch with Heaven](#), by Christoph Schonborn

- [The Wonderful Exchange](#), by Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen
- [Waiting in Hope for Christ's Return](#), by [Cyril of Jerusalem](#), [Ephrem of Edessa](#), and Irenaeus of Lyons
- [God Shows Us with Gifts](#), and [God Will be Seen](#), by Irenaeus of Lyons (130-200)
- [The Spirit Prepares Us to Receive the Son of God](#), by Irenaeus of Lyons (130-200)
- [The Wonder of Christ](#), by Origen
- [The Great Little King](#), by Gregory of Nyssa
- [The Redeemer - What God Wanted](#), by Steve Clark
  
- [The People of Advent](#), Meditations for Advent written in prison by Alfred Delp
- [True Happiness: Prison Meditations](#), by Alfred Delp
- [Prisoners of Hope: Reflections for Advent](#), by Dave Quintana
- [Scripture Reflections on the House of David](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [David, Prototype of Jesus the Anointed Messiah](#), by Damasus Winzen, OSB
- [Jesus: A Portrait of Kingship](#), by Jeanne Kun
  
- [The Eternal Springtime Will Come](#), by John Henry Newman
- [The Son of Man](#), by Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979)
- [The Only Person Ever Pre-Announced: Born to Die to Give Us Life](#), by Fulton J. Sheen
- [Let us not resist the first coming, and the second will not terrify us](#), by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)
- [The Two Comings of Christ](#), by Thomas Hopko
  
- [When Heaven Explodes With Color](#): We await our blessed hope, by John Yocum
- [The Finality of Christ and Religious Pluralism](#), by Donald Bloesch
- [The Advent Banquet](#): A Selection of Daily Reflections, by Dave Quintana
- [Aliens and Exiles?](#) What can 1st century Christianity teach us about 21st century living? by Bruce Yocum
- [Homeward Bound: But Where Are We Headed?](#) by James Munk
- [Reading the Stars: Signs of Hope from the Creator of the cosmos](#), by David Mills
  
- [O Antiphons of Advent](#) and [Praising the Names of Jesus](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [Reform Your Lives](#): the message of John the Baptist, Forerunner of the Redeemer, by Jeanne Kun
- [Prepare the Way of the Lord](#): a meditative poem on Isaiah 40:3-4, by Jeanne Kun
- [Pilgrims, Travelers, and Citizens of Heaven](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [The Hope of Heaven](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [Awaiting the Messiah](#) by Jeanne Kun, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
- [You Shall Call his Name Jesus](#), by Jeanne Kun
  
- [The voice is John, the word is Christ](#), by Augustine
- [The Two-fold Coming of Jesus Christ](#), by Cyril of Jerusalem
- [The Reason the Word of God became Man](#), by Irenaeus
- [A Voice Crying in the Wilderness](#), by Eusebius of Caesarea
- [God's Promises Are Held Out to Us by His Son](#), by Augustine

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Links to other seasonal spiritual readings:

- Spiritual Reading for [Christmas and Epiphany Season](#)
- Spiritual Reading on the [Cross of Jesus Christ](#)

- Spiritual Reading on the [Resurrection of Christ and the Easter season](#)
  - Spiritual Reading for [Pentecost and the Gift of the Holy Spirit](#)
  - Spiritual Reading for [Advent Season](#)
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## Some Spiritual Reading Resources for Christmas and Epiphany Season

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- [The Revealing of the Hidden Mystery](#), from Treatise of Hippolytus against the heresy of Noetus (170-236 AD)
- [Feast of Epiphany and Theophany](#)
- [God Showers Us with Gifts](#), by Irenaeus 200 A.D.
- [The Wonder of Christ](#), by Origen (185-254 AD)
- [If Christ had not been born of woman](#), by Proclus of Constantinople (446)
- [When Christ comes, God will be seen by men and women](#), by Irenaeus 200 A.D.
- [The Word made flesh deifies us](#), by Hippolytus (170-236 AD)
- [Life itself appeared in human form](#), by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)
- [Our desires will be completely fulfilled in the vision of the Word](#), by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)
- [The Wonderful Exchange](#), by Athanasius (2980373 AD) and Gregory Nazianzen (330-389 AD)
- [Truth sprang from the earth and justice looked down from heaven](#), by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)
- [O Christian, be aware of your nobility](#), by Leo the Great (died 461 AD)
- [The Wisdom of God was made flesh](#), by Peter Chrysologus (400-450 AD)
- [The Magnificat](#), a commentary of Bede on St. Luke's Gospel (672-735 AD)
- [The fulness of the Godhead came in the fulness of time](#), by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)
- [The Word of God will Come Within Us](#), by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)
- ["The Word was made flesh,"](#) by Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626)
- ["There came wise men from the East,"](#) by Lancelot Andrewes (1620)
- [The God in the Cave](#), by G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

### Contemporary authors

- [The Real Meaning of Christmas](#): what it means for us, by Steve Clark
- [The gifts of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:1-5](#), by Steve Clark
- [And He Lived Among Us](#), Therese Hilario Andres
- [Glory Cry the Angel Choirs, God on earth and man in heaven](#), a Christmas song by Ed Conlin
- ["You shall call his name Jesus,"](#) by Jeanne Kun
- [Jesus: a portrait of humility](#), by Jeanne Kun
- [God in Bethlehem's Cave](#): a meditation by Don Schwager
- [The Gift of the Magi](#): a short story about unselfish love, by O. Henry

### ***Poems for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany***

- [Born This Eve](#), poem by Lynne May
- [Hope Revived](#) (Isaiah 11), poem by Jeanne Kun
- [Advent Overture](#) (Annunciation), poem by Jeanne Kun
- [The Word Made Flesh](#), poem by Jeanne Kun
- [Anna's Heir](#), poem by Jeanne Kun
- [Journey by Starlight](#) (Epiphany), poem by Jeanne Kun

manuscript illustration (top) by Don Silvestro dei Gherarducci's Nativity in an Initial P (Morgan Library, c. 1392-1399)

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Links to other seasonal spiritual readings:

- Spiritual Reading for [Advent Season](#)
  - Spiritual Reading for [Christmas and Epiphany Season](#)
  - Spiritual Reading on the [Cross of Jesus Christ](#)
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### Meditation 17:

## For Whom the Bell Tolls and No Man Is an Island

by John Donne (1572-1631)

**Note:** John Donne wrote a series of meditations called, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and several steps in my sickness*. They were written in December 1623 as Donne recovered from a serious but unknown sickness. Having come close to death, he described the illness he had suffered from and his thoughts throughout his recover with "near human speed and concentration." Meditation 17 is considered one of his most memorable pieces of prose and verse.

*Nunc Lento Sonitu Dicunt, Morieris* (Now this bell, tolling softly for another, says to me, Thou must die.)

### For Whom the Bell Tolls

Perchance, he for whom this bell tolls may be so ill, as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me, and see my state, may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that body which is my head too, and ingrafted

into that body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another. As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness.

There was a contention as far as a suit (in which both piety and dignity, religion and estimation, were mingled), which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined, that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his, whose indeed it is.

The bell doth toll for him that thinks it doth; and though it intermit again, yet from that minute that this occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? but who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world?

## No Man Is an Island

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Neither can we call this a begging of misery, or a borrowing of misery, as though we were not miserable enough of ourselves, but must fetch in more from the next house, in taking upon us the misery of our neighbours. Truly it were an excusable covetousness if we did, for affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough that is not matured and ripened by it, and made fit for God by that affliction. If a man carry treasure in bullion, or in a wedge of gold, and have none coined into current money, his treasure will not defray him as he travels. Tribulation is treasure in the nature of it, but it is not current money in the use of it, except we get nearer and nearer our home, heaven, by it. Another man may be sick too, and sick to death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels, as gold in a mine, and be of no use to him; but this bell, that tells me of his affliction, digs out and applies that gold to me: if by this consideration of another's danger I take mine own into contemplation, and so secure myself, by making my recourse to my God, who is our only security.

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## Brief bio:

John Donne (1572-1631) was a metaphysical poet and clergyman from London, England. He was one of the most influential poets of the Renaissance. He was just as famous for his witty cutting poetry as he was for his enthralling sermons. John was born to a prominent Roman Catholic family from London in 1572. Not a healthy child, John Donne would lead a life plagued with illness.

He received a strong religious upbringing until his enrollment at the University of Oxford at the age of 11. After only three years at Oxford it is believed that he transferred to the University of Cambridge for another three years of study, never obtaining a degree at either college. In 1590 John made a decision that would shape his life: he converted to Anglicanism.

[\[bio source\]](#)

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### A commentary on the meditation:

In this two-paragraph meditation, Donne meditates upon the sounding of a church bell signifying a funeral and connects it to his own present illness. He wonders if the person is aware that the bell has sounded for him. (Obviously, if someone is dead, he does not know and it is too late for him to meditate upon it.) Donne then applies the idea to himself, using the bell to become aware of his own spiritual sickness, and to everyone else by noting that the church is a universal establishment. Every human action affects the rest of humanity in some way. The church's universality comes from God, who is in charge of all "translations" from earthly to spiritual existence which occur at death. Although God uses various means to achieve this changeover, God is nonetheless the author and cause of each death. Donne also compares this death-knell to the church bell calling the congregation to worship, as both bells apply to all and direct their attention to matters more spiritual than material.

Donne uses an interesting image when he considers how God is the "author" of every person and every death: "all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated." Whether a man dies of old age, in battle, from disease or accident, or even through the actions of the state dispensing its idea of justice, God has in a sense decided the terms of each death. As universal author, God will bind together these various "translated" pages, each man a chapter, into a volume which is open to all. In the new universal "library" of mankind, "every book shall lie open to one another." Yet all of this imagery takes up only one sentence, and Donne returns in the next sentence to the meaning of the bell.

Donne also recounts how the various religious orders disagreed about which group should be given the privilege of ringing the first bell calling everyone to prayer; the decision was made to allow the order which rose first in the morning to ring that bell. Again Donne connects this to the death-knell and urges himself and his readers to take its imminence into account when deciding what to do each day. After all, the bell really tolls for the person who has the ears to hear it.

At the opening of the second paragraph, Donne returns to his idea that "no man is an island," indicating that everyone is connected to every other human being in some way. Just as dirt and sand clods are part of the European continent, so too is each man part of the entire human race; the removal of a clod diminishes the continent, and the removal of a human life diminishes mankind. Since every death diminishes the rest of mankind in some way, when the bell tolls for a funeral it tolls in a sense for everyone.

Donne concludes by stating that his meditation is not an effort to "borrow misery," since everyone has enough misery for his life. He does, however, argue that affliction is a treasure in that it causes men to grow and mature; therefore we inherit wisdom from perceiving another's suffering. Although a man may not be able to make use of that wisdom himself as he suffers and dies, those who observe it can better prepare themselves for their own fate.

[\(commentary source\]](#)

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top photo: *Eternal Believer*, photo taken in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by [Nadav Dov Boretzki](#)

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The Nativity, Rembrandt, etching 1654

## Born This Eve

by Lynne May

He reigns, content,  
High King, dressed in rags,  
As stars and angels praise,  
He draws our gaze,  
He hems us in  
By his own peaceful state.

In manger stall,  
Weary, they sigh, finally,  
Reclining on gracious hay.  
Dirt, hay,  
Smell of animal,  
Is nothing now;  
Having Him, they laugh,  
They smile, they sing,

Forgetting all else but He.

This Prince of Peace,  
Human, fragile, small,  
Contented now, soon shall be  
Crowned with thorns,  
Counted least of all,  
Happy to suffer,  
Mocked and scorned,  
At peace to die for all.

Oh, I worship You!  
My King and Lord,  
Resting on this hay,  
Teach me yet  
How to bend and bow  
Unto your every way.

For, how often  
I bend and bow,  
Scrape and scorn,  
The path toward holiness,  
In doubt and rage,  
With weary sighs,  
I turn away  
From You, True Humility.

In my doubt,  
My fear, and tears,  
Let me remember this:  
My King, my Lord,  
My Heart's Desire  
Found rest on manger hay,  
Not in riches,  
In fear, or pride.

In true simplicity,  
My King, He loved,  
Content to live,  
Content to die  
And rose again.

O, happy night!  
That saw him born,  
Our hearts' delight,  
True Rest and King,  
We love Him so,  
We bend, we bow,

Our lives surrendering.

We surrender full  
Unto this, Beauty,  
Resting on manger hay,  
See! Content, He is,  
And with Him  
Content are we  
To bring our lives  
To Jesus Christ,  
This Holy One,  
Born to us this eve.

Our suffering is nothing;  
Having Him, we laugh,  
We smile, we sing,  
Forgetting all else but He.

He is Jesus Christ,  
The Promised One,  
Born to us this eve.

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Lynne May is a member of The Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan USA.

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