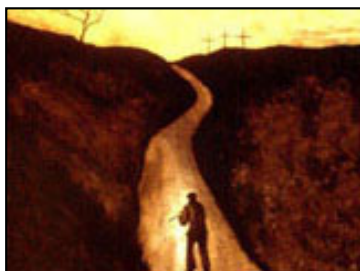


LIVING BULWARK

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

February 2008 - Vol. 16



[True Holiness](#)

God does not accept excuses – he gives grace
by Bruce Yocum, Belfast, Northern Ireland

The holiness we seek does not consist of human perfection or strength of will, but God's grace

Feature Articles

- [Digesting God's Word](#): Do you act on it or hide from it? by Tadgh Lynch, Ireland
- [Simon Peter](#): Transforming weakness into strength, by Jeanne Kun, USA

God's Word Alive

- [With Jesus in the Wilderness for Forty Days](#) by Don Schwager, London, UK
- [Confronting Apathy with the Burning Bush](#): Lessons from Exodus, Mark Whitters

Way of Life

- [Humble Pie](#): Pride blinds us to the good around us, by James Munk, London, UK
- [Parents, Keep Your Kids in the Real World](#), by Mike Shaughnessy, USA

Community Life

- [Thirty Years Jerusalem](#): God's call to a community, by Sam Geleyn, Belgium
- [Choice and Pressure](#): radical discipleship, by John Hughes, Ann Arbor, USA

Verse and Spirit

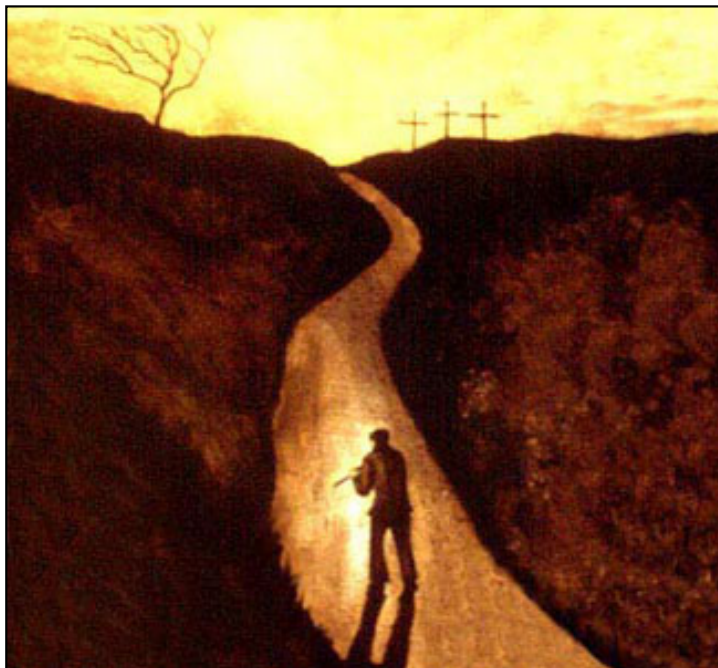
- [A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent](#):
scriptural reflections by Jeanne Kun, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

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.

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



painting by [Michael O'Brien](#)

True Holiness

*The holiness we seek does not consist of human perfection
or strength of will, but God's grace*

by Bruce Yocum

Surely God must know I can't change this area of sin in my life!

A while ago I was counseling someone who had been battling with a particular area of sin for years. At one point in the conversation this person said, in some real anguish, "But surely God must know that I cannot change this!" In that brief sentence he revealed both the root of his problem and its ultimate solution.

This man wanted God to be merciful to him, but it was clear in our conversation that he thought God's mercy would come in the form of an exception: Yes, it is wrong to do this, but God will just have to excuse me for it, make an exception in my case, because I cannot change.

At least he was not choosing the more radical solution, a solution all too popular today, which goes something like this: No matter how hard I try, I cannot seem to conquer this area of sin. And a lot of other people are just like me. We are goodhearted, try to be decent, make efforts not to (fill in the blank with your own favorite unconquerable sin), but cannot master this problem. Therefore, it must not really be wrong. Or at least, it isn't wrong for me.

No, this man was not taking *that* fatal turn in the road, but he was, just the same, surrendering to sin. His surrender did not involve a complete redefinition of sin, but it did give up a part of his life to its power. He realized that he did not have the strength to defeat this sin, so, in the place of obedience to God, he would offer his excuses ("I am too

weak”).

The overpowering mastery of sin reveals our weakness

Haven't we all found ourselves in this same position at least once in our life? Haven't we all encountered the strength of sin in such a way that we finally cry out, "Surely God must know that I cannot change this?" Anyone who has sincerely decided to follow the Lord and live a life of righteousness has encountered the overpowering mastery of sin, and in that encounter discovered, as well, his or her own weakness.

Well then, isn't that a pretty good excuse? "The problem is not only with me, everyone else has failed, too. Let's face it, even though we do our best, and on the whole live a pretty decent life, we are just going to have areas where we have to accept that we can't avoid sin. In the place of complete obedience, God will have to accept some sin, for which we have a pretty good excuse."

When I was a child [some 50 years ago], biographies of heroic and virtuous Christians were pretty popular among kids (and adults) who had some religious upbringing, and I read my share. Those people were amazing. I admired them greatly, but the flickers of holy zeal to be just like them were quickly snuffed out by my almost daily failures. I admired those people, but I could not be like them because I just *wasn't* like them. Somehow, they managed to get born, or raised, or something, without the weakness I had.

Whether because of the way they were written, or because of my own ignorance, I drew the wrong lesson from those books when I was a child. I assumed they were spiritually invincible, but I realized now that all of those people were just like me in their weakness. Some of them had perhaps greater weaknesses than I. But they understood an important principle.

God does not accept excuses – he gives grace

The man I was counseling a few weeks ago said, "Surely God must understand that I cannot change this!" And he was right. God does understand that. But God gives grace to change what we cannot change – if we are willing to ask, if we are willing to maintain the ongoing battle against sin, despite all the humiliating defeats. Ten or 15 or 30 years of continuous, unsuccessful struggle against sin may seem to us to be a record of failure – the complete opposite of a life of holiness. But if we resist the temptation to abandon the struggle, if we refuse to make excuses for our sin and, instead, repent each time and ask God for grace, then God in his mercy will make us holy.

The holiness we seek does not consist of human perfection or strength of will. It is a gift of God, a share of his own nature, a union with him that only he can produce. It is as far above and beyond our best efforts to obey and live righteously as the heavens are above the earth. Nothing that we can do and no effort that we can make is sufficient to produce true holiness. Only God can do that.

We have been put in a crucible, every one of us, a purifying test by fire which God uses to do what we cannot do. For in the circumstances of our daily lives, again and again we must choose to believe in and obey God's word, and to confront the humiliating reality of our own sinfulness, which is revealed in our failures. We can escape this struggle if we wish. We can avoid the humiliation of repentance by making our excuses. But if we do that, we will find in the end that we have surrendered ourselves to a far more humiliating slavery to sin.

"Surely God must know that I cannot change this!" Yes, God knows it, and he knows that in this you are no different than every other man, woman, and child, yet he has called us nonetheless to holiness. We do not have to offer God excuses for not being holy. We need simply to continually turn to him in humble and trustful repentance, and let him, through his grace, clothe us in his own holiness.

[Bruce Yocum is President of Christ the King Association and a member of the International Executive Council of the Sword of the Spirit. This article was originally published in *New Covenant Magazine*, February 1989.]

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



Digesting God's Word

Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 3:1)

by Tadgh Lynch

Nourished with the word of God?

How do we hear the word of God? What motivates us to act upon it, and what do we use to hide from it?

There was, and still remains, a time honoured tradition in my parents' household in Dublin. Around about 8.30 every evening my father will rise from his paper, or from the homework he is going through with one of his children, or the film he is pretending to watch with his wife. He will leave for the sitting room to collect his bible, his commentary, and the daily Catholic missal. As he does so there is a scum as his offspring try desperately to reach the downstairs bathroom. There is an unwritten rule that family prayers can be dodged by being "otherwise engaged" by the time the bible hits the table in the back room of our house. For 24 years I have sat through times of enlightenment, prayer and sometimes what was just pure messing around with my siblings at the long Oak table as we made faces, laughed and learned through Dad's efforts to teach us about the word of God. The greatest thing I remember (and still experience when I'm home) was the uncontrollable urge to laugh when you would catch someone's eye. As Dad expounded the word, fired questions and sought insights from his recalcitrant children, half of them would be trying desperately not to laugh at the funny passages in the bible or whatever happened to be the cause of merriment that day.

On one memorable occasion the reading was from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, chapters 2 and 3.

"But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe (Ezekiel 2:8-10).

Valiently my father tried to keep order and explain the significance of the passage, as one by one, his kids succumbed to the giggles at the picture of a single hand from heaven, trying to simultaneously hold and unroll a scroll without any assistance.

And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them” (Ezekiel 3:1-4).

When we heard that the prophet subsequently ate the scroll, the entire table dissolved in mirth. Whoever made it to the bathroom first that evening had missed out. These were times of great joy and fun in our family as well as times of prayer. My father’s love of Scripture was palpable. His face would light up and he would become animated in a different way to the other things he loved in life. He did a good job teaching us how to read and understand the Bible. So often, however, the language of the Scripture would blind me to what was actually being said, what the real import of the message was my dad was explaining. I would end up wondering what kind of bread Jesus turned the stones into in the desert into, or what weapon Moses used to kill the Egyptian, rather than seek to understand what lay behind the facts. I think I didn’t listen too well. I could remember that Ezekiel ate the scroll, but I couldn’t remember what the message on it was.

To hear and believe

A fairly recent prophecy in Sword of the Spirit has made me think quite a bit. “I tell you, you are unprepared for the number of young people I will send to you. I will make your eyes water and your ears tingle.” As I have grappled with my skepticism and looked objectively at the demographics of our communities in the Sword of the Spirit, I have struggled to see how this word could be fulfilled. Recently, young people in our communities in Europe and the Middle East have spoken about a new stirring in their hopes and dreams for the Sword of the Spirit. At the most recent regional gathering, which took place in August 2007, they talked about a new vision for being dynamic and radical in evangelism. They observed among their peers in the Sword of the Spirit new courage to reach out and new enthusiasm for growing in radical discipleship, and they called on us to re-examine the way we think and act as we reach out. As I sat and listened, I thought about the generations before having similar words and enthusiasms, dreams and visions, holding similar conferences and retreats, seeking similar “radical” steps. Were their dreams also fulfilled, I wondered? Is this a bunch of kids warbling about their feelings or is this God speaking to me? What is he trying to say?

To hear and obey the word of the Lord is not an easy task. The stories of the prophets in the Bible are filled with harsh situations and unenviable choices, when God places his hand upon them. Elijah “came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, Lord,’ he said” (1 Kings 19). Jonah ran from the Lord, was shipwrecked and swallowed by a whale before he could stomach the message the Lord wanted him to deliver. Ezekiel writes that he was taken by God and “went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the Lord upon me. I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days – overwhelmed” (Ezekiel 3: 14-15). When the word of the Lord is bad news it can be difficult to deliver and hard to hear. When it is good news it is perhaps easier to hear, but there is still a response to be made. What is easy to do is to examine the context, the language, the syntax but drown the message itself in laughter, analysis or whatever the defence of choice may be. God’s word does not come for no purpose: it necessitates a response. This is the challenge to the “young generation.” What will I do to respond? What will I change? If I have eaten the word, what does it motivate me to do?

Nike community

I believe the Lord is speaking to us in Europe and the Middle East, as well as to the wider Sword of the Spirit throughout the world. I believe my peers are correct – we must be more radical. We need to change our courses and be more “different” – a movement needs dynamism or it will die. God is calling us to be more open and to seek to

win others to his kingdom. He wants us to share the rich life we have been given in Sword of the Spirit – how could we not? – but in some ways I think we need to stay the same. There is a danger in swinging wildly to that which seems different and radical today and leaving yesterday’s big idea half finished. To make a statement, I think God is calling us to Nike community. Have those visions, dream dreams and wait upon his word, but when we catch it, “Just do it” as the Nike motto says. Talking, planning and seeking legitimacy is a defence mechanism too. Find that radical step and take it in your own life first – if it’s the right one God will bless it, bring fruit and people will be queuing up around the corner to hear your thoughts. What daily areas in my life are not radical? When do I meet God and for how long? What do I do well? – Could I ask the same questions about my participation in community? Those would be radical steps as well.

To hear and obey

To hear and obey is not an easy concept. I find hearing and “believing” difficult enough without having to “digest” and “enact” the word of God as well. He will bring it about though – there will be an influx of young people and they will come in Europe and the Middle East as well. He’s said it, so he’s gonna do it. Will we be a part of it though? Will I believe enough to act on it? Will you take a break at 60 to look back and see your dream a reality – or will you be chasing the next one? I invited a guy to our spring weekend retreat tonight, will he come? Most of it is in the Lord’s hands of course – but I think he may want me to do a few things too. Believing could be a start.

[Tadgh Lynch is a leader in outreach to university students and a member of [Nazareth Community](#) in Dublin, Ireland.]

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



The Crucifixion of St. Peter, painting by Caravaggio, c.1600/01

Simon Peter

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

by Jeanne Kun

God calls sinners to make them saints

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

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

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

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

At your word

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

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

Peter's fears and failings

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

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

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

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

Accepting the grace to pick ourselves up

When the cock crowed and Jesus looked at him (Luke 22:60-61), Peter realized again – as he had earlier in Galilee – that he was a sinful man. But he also knew that Jesus loved him unconditionally, and his humility saved him from despairing of forgiveness. We can learn from Peter to face our sins and failings humbly and cling to the Lord: "Peter

shows us how to respond to our inevitable stumbles and falls along the way: by accepting the grace to pick ourselves up, stick close to Jesus, and exchange self-reliance for trust in God” (Louise Perrotta, “From Fisherman to Friend of God”), After the resurrection, Jesus encountered Peter again at the Sea of Galilee. There the risen Lord provided his fishermen – disciples with another wondrous haul of fish (John 21:1-14). There too he gently probed the heart of the man who had denied him, three times asking “you love me?” and calling from his humbled friend a new declaration of love. Accepting Peter's affirmations – “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” – Jesus entrusted to him the work of shepherding his flock: “Feed my lambs....Tend my sheep” (21:15-17).

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

God wants to transform our weakness into strength

Becoming a follower of Jesus led Simon Peter on many journeys, but the most significant one was, as author Louise Perrotta noted, “his inner journey of transformation from. . .one who was convinced of his own strength to one who learned that he could only please the Lord as he learned to draw strength from Jesus, his beloved Master.” We are called to be disciples of the same master as Peter was –and we can do much for the Lord if we, like the fisherman-apostle, acknowledge that we are not perfect and rely on the Holy Spirit at work in us.

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

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



the desert wilderness of Judea (photo by Don Schwager)

With Jesus in the Wilderness for 40 Days

a Lenten meditation by Don Schwager

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry” (Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4, verses 1-2).

A place of testing, encounter, and renewal

What motivated Jesus to spend 40 days and nights of solitude, prayer, and fasting in the Judean wilderness? This desert landscape was largely uninhabitable and was full of dangers for anyone who dared to venture in it for long. Danger from scorching heat by day and extreme cold by night, danger from wild animals and scorpions, plus the scarcity of food and water.

For God’s chosen people Israel and many of their leaders, the desert was a place of testing, encounter, and renewal. When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. This was seen as a time of purification and preparation for entry into the promised land. [Moses](#) went to the mountain of the Lord in the Sinai wilderness and stayed there for 40 days and nights in prayer and fasting ([Exodus 24:18](#)). [Elijah](#), after he was fed with bread from heaven, journeyed through the wilderness without any food for 40 days to the mountain of God ([1 Kings 19:8](#)). Jesus was without any food in the wilderness for 40 days to prepare himself for the mission that the Father had sent him to accomplish.

Why did Jesus choose such a barren, lonely place for an intense and long period of prayer and fasting? Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us in their gospel accounts that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark states it most emphatically: “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12). What compelled Jesus to seek solitude, away from his family and friends, for such a lengthy period? Was it *simply* to test himself and prepare for his mission? Or was he also allowing himself to be tempted by Satan? The word *tempt* in English usually

means to entice someone to do what is wrong or forbidden. The scriptural word used here also means *to test* in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if they are ready for the task at hand. We test airline pilots to make sure that they are fit to fly under all conditions, including times of adverse turbulence and poor visibility. Likewise God tests his servants to see if they are fit and ready to be used by him. On many occasions God tested Abraham to prove his faith and to strengthen his hope in God's promises. Abraham obeyed willingly even when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. When the Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt for more than 400 years, they did not forget God. They kept God's word and remembered his promise to bring them freedom from their enemies.

Jesus was tempted like us

Jesus was no exception to this pattern of testing. He went to the desert without food. Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the Garden of Paradise. But they ate of the forbidden fruit out of disobedience because they trusted in themselves rather than in God. They were cast out of Paradise and driven into the wilderness. Jesus freely enters the wilderness in order to regain Paradise for those who lost it. Jesus refuses food to show his dependence on the bread of heaven, the word of God, that would sustain him not only in his physical hunger, but in his hour of temptation as well.

When Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replies with the words of Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (quote from Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:4). Jerome, the great bible scholar who lived near the Judean desert (347-420 AD), comments on this passage:

The Lord responded in this way, for it was his purpose to overcome the devil with humility and not with power. At the same time, it should be noted that unless the Lord had begun to fast, the devil would not have had an occasion, in accordance with the passage: "My son, as you embark upon the service of God, prepare your soul for temptation." (Sirach 2:1) But the Savior's very response indicates that it was as man that he was tempted: "Not by bread alone shall man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." So if anyone does not feed upon God's Word, that one will not live.

Where did Jesus find the strength to survive the desert's harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on God's word and found strength in doing his Father's will. Satan will surely tempt us and he will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us.

Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame sin not by his own human effort but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. Luke says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). When tempted by the devil Jesus did not try to fight his adversary on his own human strength alone. He relied on the power which the Spirit gave him. Jesus came to overthrow the evil one who held us captive to sin and fear of death (Hebrews 2:14). His obedience to his Father's will and his willingness to embrace the cross reversed the curse of Adam's disobedience. His victory over sin and death won for us not only pardon for our sins but adoption as sons and daughters of God.

The Lord gives grace to the humble

How can we overcome sin and moral weakness in our personal lives? The Lord Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26) and to be our guide and consoler in temptation and testing (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord gives grace to the humble who acknowledge their dependence on him (James 4:6) and he helps us to stand against the attacks of our enemy, Satan, who seeks to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8-10; Ephesians 6:10-18). The Lord Jesus is ever ready to pour out his Spirit upon us so that we can have the strength and courage we need to resist sin and to reject the lies and deceits of Satan. God wants us to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12) with the power and strength which comes from the Holy Spirit. Do you rely on the Lord for your strength and help?

“Lord Jesus, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it.”

[Don Schwager is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and the author of the [Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation](#) website.]

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)

Scripture Study and Reflection on the Life of Moses - Part II



Moses and the Burning Bush by Arnold Friberg

Confronting Apathy and Complacency with the Burning Bush

What Lessons Can We Learn from the Life of Moses?

By Mark F. Whitters, Ph.D.

This is the second in a series of Scripture meditations on the life of Moses as presented in the Book of Exodus. The struggles of Moses as savior of the children of Israel prefigure Jesus Christ, savior of the world.

Dr. Whitters is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#), an ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He leads the Servants of the Word household in Detroit, Michigan, USA, which serves urban youth and seeks to foster racial dialogue in the inner-city. He is a lecturer in ancient history and religion at Eastern Michigan University and a regional coordinator for a scholarly guild called the Society of Biblical Literature. In 2005 he was selected as one of five "Regional Scholars" by the Society.

Background: [see [last month's introduction](#)]

After the story of Reuel and his hospitality, for the first time God is directly mentioned (2:23-25). Now the text says that God heard the groaning of the people and he remembered his covenant. This short passage is the bridge to an epiphany between Moses and God, which is the heart of the second story about Moses in the narrative of Book of Exodus. All along the reader has suspected that the hand of God was present, but at no point is there outright reference to him.



The Burning Bush - [print by Jeanne Kun](#)

The second story: Exodus 2:23 - 3:6

23 In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition. Exodus 3:1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

What can we read between the lines of this new information about Moses? In this tradition, he has been in the land of Midian for quite a while, serving his father-in-law's household as a shepherd. (Notice the name change from Reuel to Jethro. For the rest of the Pentateuch, this latter name will be used – another name for this man is sometimes given as Hobab – but never again Reuel.) Moses seems to be minding his own business, not looking for a divine revelation. It takes a wondrous sight to catch his attention, to make him realize that God's hand has been upon him since his birth.

In this passage we encounter the incarnation of God in the burning bush. The sight of the burning bush attracts Moses, and now the plan of God involving Moses' direct participation springs into place. First the text acknowledges God's concern, and now there is the implication that Moses can respond. Before this point Moses was merely on the receiving end of miraculous events, but he was not really an active player in the plan of divine deliverance.

Nowhere in the Torah is there a description of such an intense and pure divine summons. The only comparison is Jacob encountering an angelic wrestler almost in a dream world (Genesis 32), or perhaps Elijah much later on this very mountain, hearing the divine whisper after a theophanic storm (1 Kings 19). In the New Testament, it is the transfiguration of Jesus himself that compares to the burning bush.

Career and complacency

In the desert scene at the start of Exodus 3, Moses has been wandering "to the west side of the wilderness" (3:1): the Hebrew can also mean "behind the wilderness" (The Schocken Bible, Everett Fox, 269n.), implying an isolated or

far-off place for his shepherding life. Like Jacob fleeing his brother's wrath, Elijah tiring of God's call, or Jonah refusing to cooperate with the divine imperative, Moses seemingly dodges the draft of God's Egyptian plan by shepherding sheep in Midian. He is off in another world, apparently trying to forget his past-life experiences. Or perhaps Moses is unwittingly participating in a divine pilgrimage.

This new account of Moses is perhaps symbolized by Reuel's name change: now he is Jethro. The welcome he received from Reuel as "friend" devolves into Jethro as employer and ruler. We can imagine that Moses has settled into a life of comfortable obscurity and relative apathy. We get an illustration of this when Moses objects to God's call five times (3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), even after the powerful divine vision of the burning bush.

Moses sees the bush, and what is remarkable is its "inextinguishability" (Fox, Schocken, 268): it burns but is not consumed, it does not die in its energy. Now that the Lord has Moses' attention, he invites him to respond by worship and obedience. Nonetheless, this prophetic call is met with less than enthusiasm, recalling the calling of other prophets who preferred not take on the mantle of divine choice. Moses has apparently settled into a midlife routine and does not suffer changes and challenges willingly.

Impervious to the burning bush, impervious to Jesus

If in the first story – see last month's meditation – Moses encountered God the Father in Reuel (his father-in-law whose name means "friend") and God the Holy Spirit in Zipporah (his wife, whose name means "bird"), then this must be Moses' encounter with God the Son, the messenger of God that is incarnate – the uncreated energy of God that comes into human sensory realms so that divine energy is released and human history is inalterably changed. God the Son calls Moses by his name; and then Moses, by saying "here I am," now enters into relationship with the living God. The burning bush shows that the inexhaustible divine zeal is able to ignite every apathy and dullness.

Jesus cites this passage in his dispute with the temple authorities (Matthew 22:29-32) as evidence for the eternal relationship that God invites all humans to enter into. The Sadducees represent the "status quo," the conservatives of their day who were determined to maintain the institution of the temple. By their determination to hold on to their position in the temple, they showed their dullness to the words of the Scriptures and their resistance to the power of God as symbolized in the burning bush. If they would have been impervious to the burning bush, then they would not see anything special in Jesus either. Jesus in effect connects his own resurrection – and all humans who will be resurrected – with the burning bush.



Jethro and Moses - by J. Tissot

Merging of the two stories: Exodus 4:13-26

13 But he said, "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person." 14 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart. 15 And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. 16 He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. 17 And you shall take in your hand this rod, with which you shall do the signs." 18 Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back, I pray, to my kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." 19 And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt; and in his hand Moses took the rod of God. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 And you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.'" 24 At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to kill him. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. Then it was that she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

The burning bush encounter continues, as Moses and God debate the wisdom of the plan. Moses objects that he does not have any special powers to make people listen to him; then he objects that he is not capable of public leadership skills. God will only debate so much, before his anger is kindled at Moses' objections. The equipping of a superhero, so normal in other ancient classical stories (e.g., Gilgamesh's taking of the branch of the sacred tree, Odysseus' potion called "moly" from the underworld, Hercules and his club, Beowulf and his sword), is almost comic here. Moses is like an anti-hero in this episode. He wants nothing to do with leaving his comfortable life in Midian. The weapons are not much mentioned for the rest of the book, and Aaron is not much featured as Moses' mouthpiece. The real issue here is whether Moses can overcome his complacency and slothfulness and accept the divine call as prophet and deliverer.

Moses does accept God's mission. The words to his father-in-law (v. 18) show that he is resolved to return to Egypt. Again note the name change (from Reuel to Jethro) which suggests this story is separate from the earlier one about his arrival in Midian. Moses leaves Midian like Jacob left Paddan-aram, packing up his donkeys with wife, kids and possessions. We will see that, like Jacob, he also has to fight a divine being along the way.

Mention of this fight returns us to the first story of Reuel and Zipporah, who welcomed Moses and gave him a home. But instead of a homecoming, we come now to God revealing that Israel is metaphorically the "first-born" of the nations (vv. 22-23). Immediately following, God seeks to kill Moses! The encounter is like Abraham ordered to sacrifice his first-born Isaac. Both Isaac and Moses in some sense represent the first-born sons of a future people, metaphorically the first-born among the nations.

What is the point of all this? Both sons are elect, and represent Israel (also elect), but God demands a blood sacrifice for the redemption of these sons and this people. For Isaac the demand satisfied with the blood of a ram, for Moses by the blood of his son's circumcision, and for Israel it will be the blood of the first-born of the Egypt. (For Christians, it will be the blood of Jesus.)

Once the blood price has been paid, "God let him alone" (4:26). This could be translated, "God let him loose" or "God let him free." The blood has been paid, and only then can the redemption or the "glorious liberty of the sons of God" (Romans 8:21) occur.

Questions for reflection:

1. How does the burning bush serve as a good image for Christ?
2. Has there ever been a burning bush experience in my relationship with God?
3. Do I long for God's call and mission even when I am comfortable? How do I fuel my longing in busy seasons of life?
4. Am I fleeing from God's call and mission? What are my excuses?

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



Humble Pie

Pride blinds us to the good around us and causes us to turn-up our noses at the spiritual food we don't recognize

by James Munk

painting by [Michael O'Brien](#)

Two beggars kept me coming back

I would wager that after the priests the two beggars outside my church are its most regular attendees. An older man with tattooed knuckles and his red-haired wife, they flank the church's entrance at the top of the steps. They have only once asked me for money (just before Christmas) but their outstretched hands are, on a weekly basis, difficult to ignore. He is Irish, she is English, the church is Greek – very Greek.

I started going to this church a few weeks after moving to London. I came to England to do some service for the local Christian community [Antioch](#) and its outreach to university students, [Koinonia](#). I still had not found a local church that felt like my church back home. Before, I worshiped with the Arabs and the Russians – I came back to the Greeks because I was homesick.

I'm Orthodox by tradition. I might be considered Greek Orthodox, being raised in a Greek church, but I don't feel comfortable with this term, as I'm not at all Mediterranean. However, Orthodoxy tends to be ethnically flavored so I try to adopt the culture when I can. In this regard, I've found it more challenging to do so in London than at home. In the States, English is fairly prevalent in the services and in everyday church business; it's not so common in this city of immigrants. On top of that, it's easy to get lost in the crowd in a city the size of London. For the first few months at church, it felt like no one realized I was there.

I kept coming back to the Greek church because of its two sentinels; I had taken to making and bringing them sandwiches. I wish I could say I was motivated by compassion, but to be truthful it was the result of a judgment on the church. "If the beggars received the same welcome I had, surely they were on their way to starvation."

Why do I have to be a spiritual beggar?

I sympathized with the homeless couple: they were natives of these islands, they had a right to be here. Why did they have to come begging at the doors of this foreign church? I knew how they felt: I'm a community kid, on a Gap year, an affiliate with the Servants of the Word; why should I have to come spiritually begging to a church were it

seemed no one had the courtesy to say “hi” let alone pray in a language I could understand. I didn’t come to church to get spiritually fed, but to feed the beggars.

The Lord’s correction came close to the American holiday Thanksgiving. One Sunday, a woman finally spoke to me. She was a convert to Orthodoxy and noticed that I didn’t look Greek. I confirmed her doubts and took her invitation to join her for coffee in the church basement. Entering the hall, I noticed the homeless woman. She was in a corner surrounded by three members of the church who were serving her coffee and giving her supplies for the week. Later, when we left, my host spotted the Irish man. She immediately went over to him and held his hand, asking him how he was and telling him how welcome he was at her church. The only contact I had had with him was through a plastic sandwich bag. My early notions of “righteous” resentment and holier-than-thou superiority seemed slightly inappropriate.

Pride blinds us to the good around us

Pride is funny that way: blinding us to the good around us and causing us to turn-up our noses at food we don’t recognize. Because I didn’t fit in, I wrote off a church where the Spirit of God was present and moving. In our churches and communities we don’t always like where we are, feel at home, or think we’re getting our fair share of the spiritual meal. But I think my homeless teachers have a word for us all: be thankful for being fed, even if the menu’s not always to our liking. Our Host is gracious and merciful, feeding us in ways we may not always like or understand.

[James Munk, age 23, has grown up in [The Work of Christ Community](#) in Lansing, Michigan, USA. He recently graduated from the University of Michigan School of Architectural Design. He is presently an affiliate in training in the [Servants of the Word](#) and is serving for a year as a staff worker for [Koinonia](#), an outreach to university students in London, United Kingdom.]

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



Parents, Keep Your Kids in the Real World

by Mike Shaughnessy

The following article was originally published in the North American [Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter](#). If you would like to subscribe to this monthly newsletter, please visit their website at: <http://www.kairos-na.org/youthculturenewsletter.htm>

World of Virtual Reality

Last month a woman sued her husband for divorce due to adultery. He had been married for the last two years to someone else – someone he had never met. His second wife was on *SecondLife*! He was spending 10 hours per day "with" her. Welcome to the world of virtual reality.

What is SecondLife?

Think of *MySpace* cubed. *MySpace* allows me to profile myself on-line for the world to see. In *SecondLife* I create a new identity through which I lead a second life. I create my name and choose my body. I then buy my skin color, physique enhancers and clothes. Then I get myself a voice ... and some dance moves. Now I can walk, talk and order a virtual beer sitting at a virtual bar talking to my virtual friends. I am living my life "in-world."

I spend real money buying fake flowers for a virtual girlfriend who is actually a 35 year-old, twice-divorced man in real life.

My virtual community is set up by me. It's exciting, convenient, self-affirming, narcissistic, fast-paced. I "have it my way – my songs, my friends, my shows, my values. It's a Burger King heaven as sung by Frank Sinatra. I can leave it when I want and change it how I want.

Imagine a church where you pick the leaders, the songs, the preacher and the topic. That's also already available to Christians in-world. Now all you need is a push-button God to answer your prayers.

Future SecondLifers

SecondLife, due to its complexity, appeals to the twenty-plus age group, but everything just said about *SecondLife* exists for six- to fourteen-year-olds at *Club Penguin* in a simplified form. *Club Penguin* looks cute. It averages 500,000 children on-line per day. Many are future *SecondLifers*.

E-marketer predicts that 53% of children will be in-world by 2011 - in three years. Why? Barbie, Nickelodeon, the

Cartoon Network and Bratz have all just launched virtual worlds for children. Lego and Ty Girls are about to and McDonalds can't be far behind. Think of their combined impact on the world of six to eleven year olds and shudder!

Youth face increasing pressure to live in-world at an ever younger age. Slowly, the real world is left behind: the world of church and chores, pimples and parents, siblings and sinners, to be replaced with the iPod, cell phone, X-box, and *MySpace*. Life is lived more and more "inside the Matrix." Young people today are handling technological dynamite at the age their parents played with matches.

TO THE POINT: Parents, keep your kids in the real world. Delay their connecting to the virtual world and its portals until you know they can handle it. Give them a great experience of *FirstLife* instead. Oh, and who owns *Club Penguin*? Disney! "It's Disney, Jim, but not as we knew it."

[Mike Shaughnessy is an elder in [The Servants of the Word](#) and the Director of [Kairos in North America](#). Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.]

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



Thirty Years Jerusalem

The story of God's call to a covenant community in Belgium

by Sam Geleyn

children in the community youth program prepare some art work for the 30th anniversary celebration

Does God still call people these days?

Many people would argue that often God seems very distant. Wouldn't life be a lot easier if he just told us what to do, with a loud and audible voice, in the way he called Abraham and Samuel? Maybe. The story of the [Jerusalem community](#) in Belgium, however, is a clear example that thousands of years after Samuel, God has not stopped calling people together for a clear purpose and mission.



Jerusalem is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual community

Brief history

The early beginnings of [Jerusalem](#) go back to January 1977, when the Belgian Cardinal Suenens invited a group of Americans from the Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, to come to Belgium and work with

him. As they tried to discern whether God wanted them to start a community in this small country, God answered very quickly and clearly, bringing a lot of people together. Only eight months later the first Belgians made their underway commitments during the first community weekend. During the following years, the Lord continued to add people to them and revealed more of his call. In 1980 the community, until then called “Word of God Belgium”, received a new name from the Lord: **Jerusalem**, a people called to be a sign of peace and unity across races, cultures, and languages.



Despite serious difficulties during the 90s, when a lot of people left the community because of a leadership crisis, the Lord has continued to build his house. The last five years have been years of rebuilding, regaining strength, and rediscovering our call. The community now has 100 members, but more importantly, God’s joy and power are ever more visible. Faithful to its early call to unity, Jerusalem still has members of different races, cultures, and tongues, all living in different places in Belgium. The recent political crises and division between the different parts of the country have strengthened the conviction for this call to be a sign of unity.



Part of a region

Being part of a community of communities in the Sword of the Spirit has been a rich blessing. The support and

prayers from other communities throughout the European and Middle East region have made a big difference. Our students and young professionals especially have benefited a lot from regional events, like winter retreats and summer activities, where they have received a lot of formation and found strength in building lifelong friendships with peers from various Sword of the Spirit communities and outreaches. This support has been and continues to be an invaluable gift from the Lord and has helped people to press on in times of spiritual dryness and struggle. As a community we have had the honor of hosting a few regional activities over the last few years (Kairos Weekend, the regional council meetings, On Holiday – a weeklong regional summer vacation for 650 people). Serving our brothers and sisters, experiencing the unity we have with all of them in our common call and living it out together has been a tremendous source of joy and strength.



The guys' garage (after a couple of days of painting and cleaning) is now the new base for reaching out to university students in Leuven

A new call to mission

Recently, we have felt the Lord calling us to put more effort and thought into evangelism. The “Lighthouse Project” has given way to five Alpha courses being set up in the various home towns of community members. A “flying” outreach team of speakers is supporting these local initiatives by giving the talks in the different places. We experience God giving us a desire to invite more and more people into a deeper relationship with him and into the richness of community life. We are hoping that our dispersion throughout the country, usually regarded as our main obstacle to strong community life, might actually allow us to reach a lot more people! It is remarkable how God is also using this new project to bring us closer to each other, young and old, French speaking and Flemish speaking.



university students enjoy a meal during a recent Alpha course

For the past seven years, another important mission field has been our student outreach. This has been a place for community members who have recently become adults to grow in their personal relationship with the Lord and to discover his call for their lives. Over the last three years the Lord has sent us a few new students, and we experience his call more and more to reach out to students in Leuven who are seeking the Lord. With a new name, Pharos (lighthouse), and an enthusiastic team running the outreach, we are hoping we can shine his light ever more clearly into the Leuven university scene.



And so we are confident to say that God is a living and present God, calling and equipping people to be a witness of his love and glory. We are thankful for what he has given us and look confidently toward the future with hearts full of hope and joy for what he is about to do.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

[Sam Geleyn, age 24, has grown up in [Jerusalem](#) and has been an underway member of the community since a year and a half . He graduated from the Catholic University of Leuven in Commercial Engineering in 2006 . He teaches Secondary School in Brussels and leads the university outreach *Pharos (Lighthouse)* in Leuven.]

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)



Choice and Pressure

Helping young men choose for radical discipleship

by John Hughes

Blessings and challenges of growing up in Christian community

As one who grew up in the Sword of the Spirit and now considers himself “on board” as a disciple of Christ, I offer a perspective in the hope that it will be of help to parents, youth workers, and pastoral leaders as they guide young men and women in choosing for radical discipleship. My conviction is that it is difficult for those of us who were born into community (especially young men) to choose for it in a radical way. The reasons surrounding why this is the case might, in themselves, make for an interesting article, but here I mainly want to offer a thought on one of the common parental (and fraternal) responses to a young man’s hesitations about community life and discipleship in general: pressure.

As oblivious as we young men may often be, pressure is one thing we sense very keenly. The choice to be a disciple of Christ and to remain in community, particularly for young men, is often reduced to a choice between yielding to pressures from parents and “blazing one’s own trail.”

Growing up in Christian community has its blessings and its challenges. I grew up in a family where prayer, reading the Bible, going to church, and participating in community life were the expected norm. I knew that my parents and those around me wanted the best for me as they challenged me to choose for what God might want for me and for the call he had on my life.

When faced with the decision of where to attend college, I remember how my father waited until I came to him seeking advice before he gave me any direction on the matter – having this room to choose was important for me, and the Lord used it to lead me to a good environment.

When the Lord took hold of my life in my early college years, I knew that the way of life in the community I had grown up with was a good one. However, even if the best possible option was set before me, and I still had to

understand that it was within the realm of possibility to choose another option. I knew I had to choose for something, and deep down I yearned to be decisive, but choosing for that which was already set before me somehow didn't seem like a choice at all.

Freely choosing for discipleship

Thankfully my parents and those around me recognized this need for my personal choice in the matter and gave me some room – free from pressure – so I could make it freely. What I needed to know was this: despite everyone around me having already made up their minds about my living in Christian community as a disciple of Christ (or so it seemed), the decision to commit was entirely up to me – It had to be. I didn't want to simply be a malleable guy, or a “yes-man”.

It would have taken me longer to mature and become autonomous, I think, if I had experienced the decision-making process as a mere weighing of opposing pressures put on me by those around me. Naturally, the call of Christ to “come, follow me” involved a response of faith and obedience, but a life of faith and obedience has to be chosen for, not be pressured into. We want men who, with the Apostle Paul, can say, “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a servant to everyone” (1 Corinthians 9:19).

The only true way to freedom and abundant life

As I begin to take on responsibility for serving young men as a mission leader for our Kairos outreach in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Lord has been confirming this conviction in me: our task as laborers in this work is to show young people that a life of discipleship is not only a good option but the only true way to freedom and abundant life in Christ. Yet the invitation to follow Christ and to obey the gospel must be freely accepted, without coercion or undue pressure. If we give young men a choice, some – hopefully many – will choose for discipleship. Others will choose another way, like the rich young man in the gospels who went away sad because he thought the cost was too much for him. But we have to let them choose. The Lord wants his sons to choose freely. Ultimately he will be the one who leads them to himself.

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.
I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'
Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth-
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”
- Isaiah 43:5-8

[John Hughes is a mission leader for [Kairos outreach](#) to university students in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA and a member of the [Word of Life](#) community.]

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)

A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent

scriptural reflections on the followers of Jesus

by Jeanne Kun



The Kiss of Judas by Giotto

- [With Healing in His Hands](#)
- [Eternity's Bright Vision](#)
- [The Judas in Me](#)
- [Lord, I Am not Worthy](#)

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

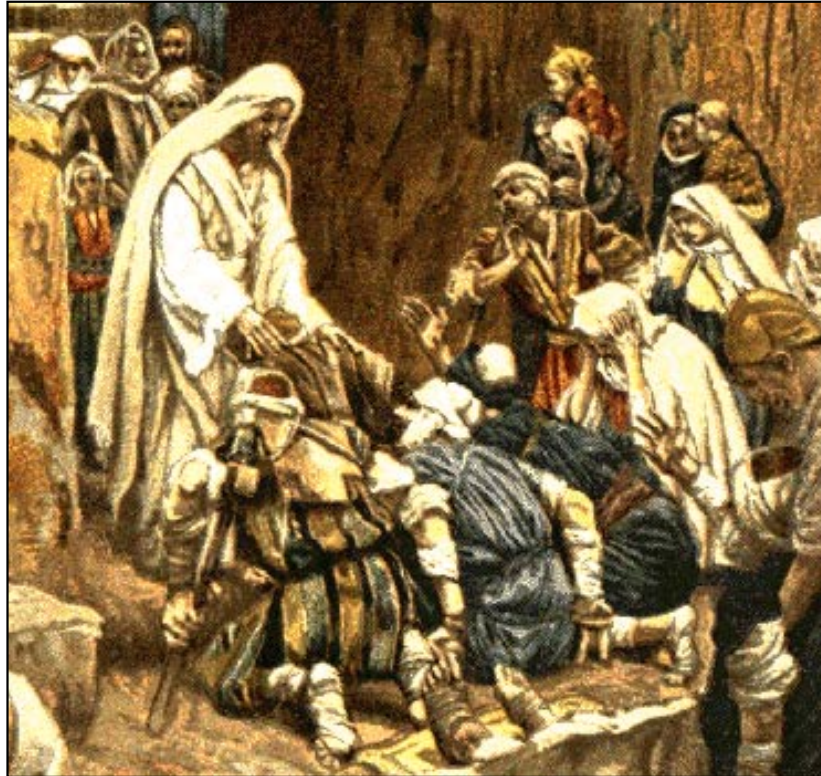
publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)

[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent](#)

by Jeanne Kun



Jesus laid his hands on the sick

With Healing in His Hands

He laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.

Search me through and through, O Lord.
Explore my sin-bruised being
and bind up my injuries
(whether gained through fault or folly).

As I surrender to your skilled hands and healing touch,
your fingers strip away my protections and self-illusions,
probing the wounds of my heart,
the raw sores of my soul,
my aching disappointments and mutilated hopes.
And then with patient care and Spirit's balm,
you nurse me back to sound wholeness in you,
restoring my vitality
and giving new exercise to my so-long-crippled love.

Copyright (c) 2006 by Jeanne Kun

> next poem: [Eternity's Bright Vision](#)

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)

[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent](#)

by Jeanne Kun



Transfiguration by Raphael

Eternity's Bright Vision

*And he was transfigured before them,
and his face shone like the sun,
and his garments became white as light.*

My frail and fragile frame cannot contain you yet, O Lord.
Seeing but your shadow takes away my breath
and a glimpse of your splendor overwhelms me,
your burning beauty engulfing me like fire.

More of you I cannot bear to see,
though my heart longs for that day
when I shall gaze upon you face to face.

And so I ask you:
Prepare me for eternity's bright vision.

Purify my eyes
that I might behold your unveiled glory.

Cleanse me of my sin
that I might stand upon your holy mountain.

And fortify my soul

that I might endure the full force of your radiance
and wholly satisfy the claims you make on me.

Copyright (c) 2006 by Jeanne Kun

> next poem: [The Judas in Me](#)

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)

[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent](#)

by Jeanne Kun



The Kiss of Judas by Giotto

The Judas in Me

Forgive my betrayals, Lord:

Those countless times
when I've slighted you
and turned away at your approach;
denied any knowledge of you by my nervous silence,
too embarrassed to stand up or speak for you;
or feigned false ignorance and bland disinterest,
failing to admit my allegiance to you and all my heart's devotion.

Forgive the Judas in me
(and the Peter, too)
when I fall short
and save me from despair
as I shed now these tears of shame and sorrow
for my disloyalties to you.

Copyright (c) 2004 by Jeanne Kun

> next poem: [Lord, I Am not Worthy](#)

[February 2008 - Vol. 16](#)

[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent](#)

by Jeanne Kun



The centurion asks Jesus to heal his servant

Lord, I Am Not Worthy

Lord, I am not worthy.

With the startling humility
of one who knows himself in truth
and with faith so bold and sure that you marveled,
the centurion won your favor, Lord,
(and your praise as well).

I too have found grace
(and the largesse of your favor)

as often as I've followed suit
and made his plea my own:

Lord, I am not worthy.

Now I am wholly in debt to you,
for there is no just nor fair return
that I can make, O Lord,
for all your kindnesses to me:
not for the abundant mercies tender and severe
you've shown to me,
nor for pardon granted me
(that plenteous redemption releasing me from all my sin),
nor for provision
you so wisely weigh and measure to my need.

Lord, I am not worthy.

Unequal is the gift I bring to you
for all these gifts you've given me,
and yet I offer all I have:
my gratitude and gladness,
the tribute of a humbled heart.

Lord, I am not worthy.

Copyright (c) 2004 by Jeanne Kun

> return to: [A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent](#)

(c) copyright 2008 [The Sword of the Spirit](#)

publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: living.bulwark@yahoo.com