

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

January 2012 - Vol. 56



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We shall be changed through the victory of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

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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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[Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 18-25, 2012](#)



pilgrims on Good Friday enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem

Pentecost: The Way to Conversion and Unity

By Raniero Cantalamessa

When people want to start a pilgrimage, they need to first establish the destination, just as people who want to shoot an arrow need to know what their target is. We would like to make a kind of pilgrimage toward unity at this time, but we must first understand what kind of unity we are seeking.

In Acts of the Apostles we read:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–48)

[Ecumenism from the ground up](#)

This text describes the kind of unity for which we aim. There are various kinds of unity between Christians. There is a doctrinal unity, which official ecumenism is actively pursuing through dialogues and meetings on various levels today in the Church. However, this vertical kind of ecumenism is not enough; it needs to be accompanied by what Paul VI called an ecumenism from the ground up....

The reality is what we hear described in the Acts of the Apostles at the end of the account of Pentecost: People lived together in simplicity and joy, sharing everything. People came from different strata of society, and yet they were sharing meals and praying together.

Only a few days before they were profoundly different, and each person may have had many things about which to reproach one another. Among those who lived together now there were also some who had crucified the Lord but had recently converted. Executioners and victims, sinners and righteous, now find themselves reconciled. It is a miracle of the Spirit....

Proclaiming God's great deeds

The second stage of our pilgrimage through Pentecost is the proclamation of God's works:

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. [Acts 2:5-6]



We need to see what really happened at Babel in order to fully understand Pentecost. When the builders were ready to erect the tower, they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (see Genesis 11:4).

“Let us make a name for ourselves!”—this was the sin. The men of Babel were not atheists who wanted to scorn heaven. No, they were devout religious men like all the men of antiquity. ... They wanted to erect a temple to God but not for God; they wanted to make a name for themselves, not for God. They were using God.



Pentecost by El Greco, 17th century

At Pentecost, instead, everyone understood each other because they had forgotten about themselves. The apostles did not want to make a name for themselves but for God. They were no longer discussing among themselves who the greatest was. They were turned upside down by the Holy Spirit, dazzled by the glory of God. Everyone understood them because they did not speak about themselves but about “God’s great deeds.”

What unites us is greater than what divides us

The apostles experienced the Copernican revolution: They became “decentralized” from themselves and were “recentralized” on God. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to perform this Copernican revolution in us too. Let’s make him our center and proclaim his great deeds. Only then can we say that the revolution has happened!

Today we have an opportunity to demolish the various towers of Babel in our midst. Woe to him who thinks he has nothing in common with the builders at Babel!

Pope John Paul II, in his letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* about preparing for the third millennium, affirms that Christians of all denominations need to “come together.”⁴ What unites us is far more than what divides us. Let us come together, then, around the thing par excellence that unites us: the Lord Jesus...

...Our evangelization should be Pentecostal: It should cause heartstrings to vibrate. In the place where the towers of Babel were first erected and people wanted to make a name for themselves, those towers are demolished and every one’s name is forgotten. Let us, therefore, lift up the name that is above all names and proclaim Paul’s words,

“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (see Romans 10:9).

[This article is excerpted from the book, [Sober Intoxication of the Spirit: Filled With the Fullness of God](#), Chapter 7,

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 18-25, 2012



We will be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ
(1 Corinthians 15:51-58)

Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an 8 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 8 daily scripture readings and commentary on the readings. These materials were developed by a group of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant leaders in Poland and were sanctioned by the [Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity](#) and the [Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches](#). These readings and prayers are intended to be prayed in common by all those participating in the Week of Prayer around the world.

Additionally, we have added a reflection for families and a specific daily intercession for various aspects of our ecumenical life and mission in the [Sword of the Spirit](#). For Saturday’s observance, 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 similarly to the other seasonal variations in the Lord’s Day prayers if you find this helpful.

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

Daily Prayers for Christian Unity • January 18-25, 2012

- Day 1 - January 18 [Changed by the Servant Christ](#)
- Day 2 - January 19 [Changed through patient waiting for the Lord](#)

- Day 3 - January 20 [Changed by the Suffering Servant](#)
- Day 4 - January 21 [Changed by the Lord's victory over evil](#) and prayer for Lord's Day Ceremony
- Day 5 - January 22 [Changed by the peace of the Risen Lord](#)
- Day 6 - January 23 [Changed by God's Steadfast Love](#)
- Day 7 - January 24 [Changed by the Good Shepherd](#)
- Day 8 - January 25 [United in the Reign of Christ](#)

Introduction to the Theme for the Year 2012

“We will all be changed by the Victory of our Lord Jesus Christ”
(cf. 1 Cor 15:51-58)

The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2012 was prepared by a working group composed of representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and Old Catholic and Protestant Churches active in Poland.

Following extensive discussions in which the representatives of various ecumenical circles in Poland took part, it was decided to focus on a theme that is concerned with the transformative power of faith in Christ, particularly in relation to our praying for the visible unity of the Church, the Body of Christ. This was based on St. Paul's words to the Corinthian Church which speaks of the temporary nature of our present lives (with all its apparent “victory” and “defeat”) in comparison to what we receive through the victory of Christ through the Paschal mystery.

Why such a theme?

The history of Poland has been marked by a series of defeats and victories. We can mention the many times that Poland was invaded, the partitions, oppression by foreign powers and hostile systems. The constant striving to overcome all enslavement and the desire for freedom are a feature of Polish history which have led to significant changes in the life of the nation. And yet where there is victory there are also losers who do not share the joy and triumph of the winners. This particular history of the Polish nation has led the ecumenical group who have written this year's material to reflect more deeply on what it means to “win” and to “lose”, especially given the way in which the language of “victory” is so often understood in triumphalist terms. Yet Christ shows us a very different way!

In 2012 the European Football Championship will be held in Poland and Ukraine. This would never have been possible in years gone by. For many this is a sign of another “national victory” as hundreds of millions of fans eagerly await news of winning teams playing in this part of Europe. Thinking of this example might lead us to consider the plight of those who do not win - not only in sport but in their lives and communities: who will spare a thought for the losers, those who constantly suffer defeats because they are denied victory due to various conditions and circumstances? Rivalry is a permanent feature not only in sport but also in political, business, cultural and, even, church life.

When Jesus' disciples disputed over “who was the greatest” (Mark 9:34) it was clear that this impulse was strong. But Jesus' reaction was very simple: “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). These words speak of victory through mutual service, helping, boosting the self-esteem of those who are “last”, forgotten, excluded. For all Christians, the best expression of such humble service is Jesus Christ, his victory through death and his resurrection. It is in his life, action, teaching, suffering, death

and resurrection that we desire to seek inspiration for a modern victorious life of faith which expresses itself in social commitment in a spirit of humility, service and faithfulness to the Gospel. And as he awaited the suffering and death that was to come, he prayed that his disciples might be one so that world might believe. This “victory” is only possible through spiritual transformation, conversion. That is why we consider that the theme for our meditations should be those words of the Apostle to the Nations. The point is to achieve a victory which integrates all Christians around the service of God and one’s neighbour.

As we pray for and strive towards the full visible unity of the church we - and the traditions to which we belong - will be changed, transformed and conformed to the likeness of Christ. The unity for which we pray may require the renewal of forms of Church life with which we are familiar. This is an exciting vision but it may fill us with some fear! The unity for which we pray is not merely a “comfortable” notion of friendliness and co-operation. It requires a willingness to dispense with competition between us. We need to open ourselves to each other, to offer gifts to and receive gifts from one another, so that we might truly enter into the new life in Christ, which is the only true victory.

There is room for everyone in God’s plan of salvation. Through his death and resurrection, Christ embraces all irrespective of winning or losing, “that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3,15). We too can participate in his victory! It is sufficient to believe in him, and we will find it easier to overcome evil with good.

Eight Days reflecting on our change in Christ

Over the coming week we are invited to enter more deeply into our faith that we will all be changed through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical readings, commentaries, prayers and questions for reflection, all explore different aspects of what this means for the lives of Christians and their unity with one another, in and for today’s world.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 1 • January 18, 2012



Jesus Washing Peter's Feet, by Ford Maddox Brown (1865)

Changed by the Servant Christ

Readings

- [Zechariah 9:9-10](#) A king righteous and victorious—and humble
- [Psalms 131](#) My heart is not proud
- [Romans 12:3-8](#) We have different gifts with which to serve
- [Mark 10:42-45](#) The Son of Man came to serve

Commentary

The coming of the Messiah and his victory were accomplished through service. Jesus wants a spirit of service to fill the hearts of his followers as well. He teaches us that true greatness consists in serving God and one's neighbor. Christ gives us the courage to discover that he is the one for whom *to serve is to reign*—as an early Christian saying has it.

Zechariah's prophecy concerning a victorious and humble King was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He, the King of Peace, comes to his own, to Jerusalem—the City of Peace. He does not conquer it by deceit or violence, but by gentleness and humility.

Psalm 131 briefly but eloquently describes the state of spiritual peace which is the fruit of humility. The picture of a mother and child is a sign of God's tender love and of trust in God, to which the entire community of believers is called. Paul the apostle challenges us to make a sober and humble assessment of ourselves and to discover our own abilities. While we have a diversity of gifts we are one body in Christ. In our divisions each of our traditions has been endowed by the Lord with gifts that we are called to place at the service of others.

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45). By his service, Christ redeemed our refusal to serve God. He became an example for repairing all relationships between people: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant”—those are the new standards of greatness and priority.

In the Letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us that the diverse gifts given to us are for service: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership and compassion. In our diversity we are always one body in Christ, and members of one another. The use of our diverse gifts in common service to humanity makes visible our unity in Christ. The joint action of Christians for the benefit of humanity, to combat poverty and ignorance, defend the oppressed, to be concerned about peace and to preserve life, develop science, culture and art are an expression of the practical ecumenism which the Church and the world badly need. The imitation of Christ the Servant provides eloquent testimony to the Gospel, moving not only minds, but also hearts. Such common service is a sign of the coming Kingdom of God—the kingdom of the Servant Christ.

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God, by travelling the royal road of service Your Son leads us from the arrogance of our disobedience to humility of heart. Unite us to one another by Your Holy Spirit, so that through service to our sisters and brothers, Your true countenance may be revealed; You, who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Family Reflection on Serving

Serving others is not always what we want to do. Sometimes we have to choose to do what we know is right, and not do what we would prefer to do. Sometimes when we do that, no one even notices us do it, but God always notices. Imagine...you are on your way home from school and you see an old lady struggling to carry her shopping bags. Quite a few adults pass by ignoring her. You know she cannot be far from her house but you also know if you stop and help, you will miss the beginning of your favorite TV program. What *should* you do? What *would* you do?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

As we consider the pathway of humility and service to one another, we need to see that we ourselves must change in order to live out our ecumenical call. Let us pray that God change our hearts to be open towards our brothers and sisters. May we be quick to listen and quick to understand one another across the differences that seek to separate.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 2 • January 19, 2012



Simeon and Hannah in the Temple, by Rembrandt (1627)

Changed through patient waiting for the Lord

Readings

- [1 Samuel 1:1-20](#) Hannah's trust and patient waiting
- [Psalms 40](#) Patient waiting for the Lord
- [Hebrews 11:32-34](#) Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice
- [Matthew 3:13-17](#) Let it be so now, for it is proper to fulfill all righteousness

Commentary

Victory is often associated with immediate triumph. Everybody knows the taste of success when, after a difficult struggle, congratulations, recognition, and even tributes are paid. At such a joyful moment, hardly anyone realizes that from a Christian perspective victory is a long-term process of transformation. Such an understanding of transformative victory teaches us that it occurs in God's time, not ours, calling for our patient trust and deep hope in God.

Hannah witnessed to such patient trust and hope. After many years of waiting to be pregnant, she prayed to God for a child, at the risk of having her weeping prayer dismissed as drunkenness by the priest at the doorpost of the Temple. When Eli assured her that God would grant her prayer, she simply trusted, waited, and was sad no longer. Hannah conceived and bore a son, whom she named Samuel. The great victory here is not that of nations or armies, but a glimpse into the realm of a private and personal struggle. In the end, Hannah's trust and hope results not only in her own transformation, but that of her people, for whom the God of Israel

intervened through her son Samuel.

The psalmist echoes Hannah's patient waiting for the Lord in the midst of another kind of struggle. The psalmist too sought deliverance from a situation which remains unknown to us, but which is hinted at in the language of the "desolate pit of the miry bog." He gives thanks that God has transformed his shame and confusion, and continues to trust in God's steadfast love.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews recalls the patience of people like Abraham (6.15) and others who were able to be victorious through their faith and trust in God. The realization that God intervenes and enters into the narrative of human history eliminates the temptation to be triumphant in human terms.

In the gospel, the voice from heaven at the baptism of Jesus announcing *this is my Son, the Beloved*, seems to be a guarantor of the immediate success of His messianic mission. In resisting the evil one, however, Jesus, does not succumb to the temptation to usher in the Kingdom of God without delay, but patiently reveals what life in the kingdom means through His own life and ministry which leads to His death on the Cross. While the Kingdom of God breaks through in a decisive way in the resurrection, it is not yet fully realized. The ultimate victory will only come about with the second coming of our Lord. And so we wait in patient hope and trust with the cry "Come, Lord Jesus."

Our longing for the visible unity of the Church likewise requires patient and trustful waiting. Our prayer for Christian unity is like the prayer of Hannah and the psalmist. Our work for Christian unity is like the deeds recorded in the Letter to the Hebrews. Our attitude of patient waiting is not one of helplessness or passivity, but a deep trust that the unity of the Church is God's gift, not our achievement. Such patient waiting, praying and trust transforms us and prepares us for the visible unity of the Church not as we plan it, but as God gives it.

Prayer

Faithful God, You are true to Your word in every age. May we, like Jesus, have patience and trust in Your steadfast love. Enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit that we may not obstruct the fullness of Your justice by our own hasty judgments, but rather discern Your wisdom and love in all things; You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Family Reflection on 1 Samuel 1-20

We are always supposed to pray, but sometimes as with Hannah, God does not give us what we want straight away. Hannah longed for a child but it was not until after she had cried out to the Lord many times that she saw God's answer to prayer, a baby boy called Samuel. God does not always give us what we pray for immediately and we need to be patient. Sometimes we do not see the answer to our prayers and we have to have confidence that God has heard us and is listening to us even though we have not seen an answer. We need to be patient as Hannah was patient.

Are there things you have prayed for where you have not yet seen God's answer? Are you confident He is hearing you even if you can-not see the answer? God is always faithful and hears our prayers, but sometimes we do not recognize the answers since they are different from the ones we thought would come; so we must not give up praying.

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Ecumenism requires patience. Let us pray for God to do a work in us to grow patience and faith as we intercede for unity in our midst. May our hearts be faithful to persevere in our ecumenical call in the Sword of the Spirit.

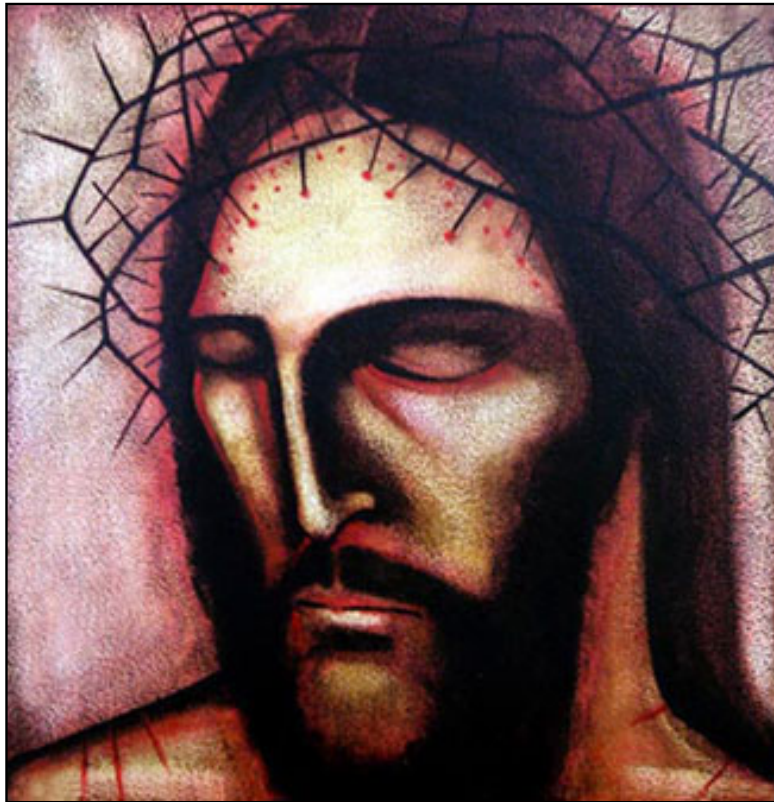
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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 3 • January 20, 2012



Ecce Homo, by [Michael O'Brien](#)

Changed by the Suffering Servant

Readings

- [Isaiah 53:3-11](#) The man of sorrows accustomed to suffering
- [Psalms 22:12-24](#) He did not despise the affliction of the of the afflicted
- [1 Peter 2:21-25](#) Christ suffered for us
- [Luke 24:25-27](#) Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things?

Commentary

The divine paradox is that God can change tragedy and disaster into victory. He transforms all our sufferings and misfortunes, and the enormity of history's pain, into a resurrection that encompasses the whole world. While appearing to be defeated, he is nevertheless the true Victory whom no one and nothing can overcome.

Isaiah's moving prophecy about the suffering Servant of the Lord was completely fulfilled in Christ. After suffering enormous agony, the Man of Sorrows *shall see his offspring*. We are that offspring, born from the Savior's suffering. In this way we are made one family in him. One can say that Psalm 22 is not only about Jesus, but also for Jesus. The Savior himself prayed this psalm on the cross, when he used its desolate opening words: *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?* Yet in the second part of the psalm the lamentation, the

implored full of pain, changes into praise of God for his works.

The apostle Peter is *a witness of the sufferings of Christ* (1Peter 5:1), which he presents to us as an example: it is to this suffering for the sake of love we are called. Jesus did not curse God, but submitted to him who judges righteously. His wounds have healed us, and returned us all to the one Shepherd. Only in the light of the presence of the Lord and his word does the divine purpose of the Messiah's sufferings become clear.

Just as for the disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus is our constant companion on the stony road of life, stirring our hearts and opening our eyes to the mysterious plan of salvation. Christians experience suffering as a result of humanity's fragile condition; we recognize this suffering in social injustice and situations of persecution. The power of the cross draws us into unity. Here we encounter Christ's suffering as the source of compassion for and solidarity with the entire human family. As one contemporary theologian puts it, the closer we come to the cross of Christ, the closer we come to one another. The witness of Christians together in situations of suffering assumes remarkable credibility. In our shared solidarity with all who suffer we learn from the crucified suffering servant the lessons of self-emptying, letting go and self-sacrifice. These are the gifts we need from his Spirit on our way to unity in him.

Prayer

God of consolation, you have transformed the shame of the cross into a sign of victory. Grant that we may be united around the Cross of your Son to worship him for the mercy offered through his suffering. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes and our hearts, so that we may help those who suffer to experience your closeness; You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Family Reflection – Doing the right thing sometimes costs

Being a school kid is not always easy. Imagine...one day you walk out onto the school play area in a break. There is a younger kid crying with a bunch of older children teasing him. You know the kid, he is two years younger than you, and he lives next to your house, and your family is friendly with his, but he is not a cool kid, and it does not surprise you that he is being teased. What do you do? You know that if you step in to help him, and get the other kids off his back, you may be teased by them. But you also know that you should help him, that is the right thing to do. Sometimes doing the right thing costs, and might even cause you some suffering. What would you do?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let us pray today for growth in the ecumenical composition of our communities. May God be gracious and bring men and women from many traditions in the Christian world to join with us in the Sword of the Spirit.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 4 • January 21, 2012



Temptation of Christ on the Mountain, by Duccio (1308-11)

Changed by the Lord's victory over evil

Readings

- [Exodus 23:1-9](#) Do not follow the majority in wrongdoing
- [Psalms 1](#) Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord
- [Romans 12:17-2](#) Overcome evil with good
- [Matthew 4:1-11](#) Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only

Commentary

In Jesus we learn what ‘victory’ really means for human beings—that is, happiness with one another in God’s love through his overcoming of all that keeps us apart. This is a sharing in Christ’s victory over the destructive forces that damage humanity and all of God’s creation. In Jesus we can share in a new life which calls us to struggle against what is wrong in our world with renewed confidence and with a delight in what is good.

The words of the Old Testament give a categorical warning against engaging in wrongdoing and injustice. The attitude of the majority must not in any way provide an excuse. Neither do wealth or other situations in life

entitle a person to do wrong.

Psalms 1 draws attention not only to the need to observe the commandments, but especially to the joyful fruits of doing so. A person who loves the law of the Lord above all else is called happy and blessed. The word of God is a sure guide in adversity and is the fulfillment of human wisdom. Meditating on the word of God day and night enables a person to lead a life full of fruitfulness for the good of others.

In the apostle's admonitions we find encouragement to overcome evil with good. Only good can interrupt the endless spiral of hatred and the human desire for revenge. In the struggle for what is good, not everything depends on human beings. However, the Apostle Paul calls for every effort to be made to maintain peace with others. He understands our continuous struggle against our instincts to harm those who hurt us. But Paul appeals to us not to let ourselves be overcome by these destructive feelings. Doing good is an effective way of combating wrong-doing among us.

The gospel reading describes the Son of God's struggle against Satan—the personification of evil. Jesus' victory over the temptations in the desert is fulfilled in his obedience to the Father, which leads him to the Cross. The Savior's resurrection confirms that here God's goodness ultimately wins: love overcomes death. The risen Lord is near! He accompanies us in every struggle against temptation and sin in the world. His presence calls Christians to act together in the cause of goodness. The scandal is that because of our divisions we cannot be strong enough to fight against the evils of our time. United in Christ, delighting in his law of love, we are called to share in his mission of bringing hope to the places of injustice, hatred, and despair.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your victory over evil and division. We praise you for your sacrifice and your resurrection that conquer death. Help us in our everyday struggle against all adversity. May the Holy Spirit give us strength and wisdom so that, following you, we may overcome evil with good, and division with reconciliation. Amen.

Family Reflection – Calling each other names

“Can you believe it! She called me a smelly pig! That was just so mean—so typical of her. She is just like that always saying stupid things. It is not surprising that she loses her friends so often. What do I care; I will just ignore her and pretend that it does not matter”. But deep down you know it does matter, and it bothers you; you start thinking really nasty thoughts about her, and don't want to be around her, so you avoid her. However one day she comes to you and asks you for forgiveness for the times she has called you names. She feels really bad about it she says. But something in you does not want to forgive her—you want her to suffer first, so you say that it is too late, and you cannot be friends any more. She goes away crying.

What do you think about the story? When we fail to forgive each other and make up, we hurt each other more deeply, and the wounds take longer to heal. Prayer for Christian Unity week is about Christians deciding to make up. We have called each other names in the past, and now we want to give each other one name, just one name that unites us all together, the name that links us to Christ, Christians, so that we can be friends again.

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let us pray today for growth in ecumenical charity and courtesy in our midst. May our hearts be open to one another, to understand and appreciate the work of God in each of our traditions.

Prayer for the Lord's Day Ceremony

This prayer may be used after the blessing of the Wine similar to the other seasonal variations in the 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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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 5 • January 22, 2012



First Resurrection Appearance of Jesus to the Disciples, by William Hole

Changed by the peace of the Risen Lord

Readings

- [Malachi 4:5-6](#) He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents
- [Psalms 133](#) How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
- [Ephesians 2:14-20](#) To reconcile both groups to God in one body, putting to death hostility
- [John 20:19-23](#) Jesus stood among them and said: Peace be with you!

Commentary

The final words of the last book of the Old Testament convey the promise that God will send his chosen one to establish harmony and respect in all households. Usually we fear strife between nations or unexpected aggression. But the prophet Malachi draws attention to one of the most difficult and enduring conflicts: the heartbreak in relations between parents and their offspring. This restoration of unity between parents and children is not possible without God's help – it is God's emissary who performs the miracle of transformation in people's hearts and relationships.

The psalm shows what great joy such unity among people can bring. The human person was not created to be alone, and cannot live contentedly in a hostile atmosphere. Happiness consists in living in a human community in harmony, peace, trust and understanding. Good relations between people are as dew upon the dry earth and

a fragrant oil which furthers health and pleasure. The psalm refers to the goodness of living together as a blessing and undeserved gift from God, like the dew. Living together in unity is not restricted to family members only – this is rather a declaration of the closeness between people who accept the peace of God.

The epistle tells us of him whom the prophet Malachi announced. Jesus brings unity, because he has demolished the *wall of hostility* between people in His own body. Generally, a person's victory involves the downfall and shame of those who have been defeated, who prefer to withdraw. Jesus does not reject, or destroy, or humiliate; he puts an end to alienation, he transforms, heals and unites all, that they may become *members of God's household*.

The gospel recalls the gift of the risen Lord, given to his uncertain and terrified disciples. *Peace be with you* – that is Christ's greeting and also his gift. It is also an invitation to seek peace with God and establish new, lasting relationships within the human family and all of creation. Jesus has trampled down death and sin. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Risen Lord invites his disciples into his mission of bringing peace, healing and forgiveness to all the world. As long as Christians remain divided, the world will not be convinced of the full truth of the Gospel message that Christ has brought about one new humanity. Peace and unity are the hallmarks of this transformation. The Churches need to appropriate and witness to these gifts as members of the one household of God built upon the sure foundation of Jesus as the cornerstone.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your victory over evil and division. We praise you for your sacrifice and your resurrection that conquer death. Help us in our everyday struggle against all adversity. May the Holy Spirit give us strength and wisdom so that, following you, we may overcome evil with good, and division with reconciliation. Amen.

Family Reflection

You were playing your favorite computer game, when mom, who had been working in the kitchen, came in and said that grandma had called and needed some help, and she was going to run out to see her. "Could you finish the dishes" she asked, since she would have to get straight on with preparing dinner when she got back she explained. She was clearly very tired. You said yes, and as she left you walked into the kitchen to find a huge pile of pots and pans waiting to be cleaned. You decided to run a large bowl of water to wash them in, and turned the taps on. It was going to take a few minutes to fill the bowl, and so you ran back to your game in the other room. 25 minutes later you remembered you had turned the taps on. You dashed round to the kitchen to see water flowing along the floor into the hall. At that moment mom walked back into the house and shrieked at the mess. You tried to explain, but there was nothing to say. She was really angry and said some things that hurt. You started crying while trying to explain that you had only been trying to help. You went to your room sad.

Later that day, mum came and apologized to you for what she had said. You also said sorry for your forgetfulness. It was so good to be back in good relationship with mum.

What do you think about this story? What difference did it make that mum apologized to you? God wants us in right relationship with one another and we need to sort out things that go wrong, asking for-giveness where we have done and said bad things. Most of all he wants us in good relationship with Himself and that is what Jesus came to do.

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let us pray today for our efforts to plant or grow ecumenical communities in various places around the world. Let us pray as well for those single-denomination communities that are actively desiring and working to grow ecumenically in membership. May God graciously anoint our efforts in these places and go before us.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 6 • January 23, 2012



Jesus Walks with Two Disciples at Emmaus

Changed by God's Steadfast Love

Readings

- [Habakkuk 3:17-19](#) God, the Lord is my strength
- [Psalms 136:1-4.23-26](#) His steadfast love endures forever
- [1 John 5:1-6](#) This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith
- [John 15:9-17](#) No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends

Commentary

In the Old Testament text, it is faith in God that keeps hope alive in spite of all failure. Habakkuk's lamentation turns to joy in God's fidelity that supplies strength in the face of despair.

Psalms 136 confirms that the memory of the marvelous deeds of God in Israel's history is a proof of God's steadfast love. Because of God's intervention, the people of Israel experienced extraordinary and surprising victories. Recalling God's great works of salvation is a source of joy, gratitude and hope, which believers have for centuries expressed in prayer, hymns of praise, and music.

The epistle reminds us that that which has been born of God is what overcomes the world. This does not necessarily mean victories which can be measured by human standards. Victory in Christ involves a change of heart, perceiving earthly reality from the perspective of eternity, and believing in the final victory over death. This victorious force is faith, the bestower and source of which is God. And its most perfect manifestation is love.

In the words of the gospel, Christ assures his disciples of God's love, the final confirmation of which is the Savior's death on the cross. At the same time, He invites and challenges them to show love to one another. Jesus' relationship to his disciples is based on love. He does not treat them merely as disciples, but calls them his friends. Their service of Christ consists in conforming their lives to the one commandment of love, resulting from internal conviction and faith. In a spirit of love, even when the progress on the way to full visible unity seems slow, we do not lose hope. God's steadfast love will enable us to overcome the greatest opponent and the deepest divisions. That is why the victory that conquers the world is our faith and the transforming power of God's love.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by your Resurrection You have triumphed over death, and have become the Lord of life. Out of love for us You have chosen us to be Your friends. May the Holy Spirit unite us to You and to one other in the bonds of friendship, that we may faithfully serve you in this world as witnesses to your steadfast love; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Family Reflection

I was in the high Alps this summer, and on one occasion we looked up to the highest ridges of the mountains in front of us, and there we saw the tiny outline of two goats against the sky, balancing on the rocks in the wind. If you have watched goats or deer in the mountains you will know that they travel along narrow ledges and paths that to us seem very dangerous, and very risky. But God has made them with an amazing sense of balance so they can go to places we would never dare to. Our lives as Christians can be like those of deer in the mountains. On occasions everything can seem to be going wrong around us. But internally, because God is with us and has changed us, we are peaceful and secure. It is like God has given us special feet to climb the difficulties and challenges, the mountains, of our lives.

Where in your life are there things that are like difficult mountains to you? Have you asked God to give you his help to deal with them? Have you invited him into all areas of your life, where He can be with you day by day, hour by hour?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let us pray today for a blessing on all those who labor in the churches for ecumenical unity: theologians, church leaders, and lay members. May God in His mercy grant wisdom, patience and charity as they work for unity.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 7 • January 24, 2012



The Good Shepherd, by Harold Copping

Changed by Good Shepherd

Readings

- [1 Samuel 2:1-10](#) Not by might does one prevail
- [Psalms 23](#) You are there with Your rod and Your staff
- [Ephesians 6:10-20](#) Be strong in the Lord
- [John 21:15-19](#) Feed my sheep

Commentary

Those who prevail over suffering, need support from on high. That support comes through prayer. We read about the power of Hannah's prayer in the first chapter of the Book of Samuel. In the second chapter, we can find Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving. She realized that some things happen only with the help of God. It was through his will that Hannah and her husband became parents. This text is an example that strengthens one's faith in what would seem to be a hopeless situation. It is an example of victory.

The Good Shepherd of Psalm 23 guides his sheep even through the darkest places, comforting them with his presence. Those who place their trust in the Lord have no need to fear even the shadows of dissolution or disunity, as their shepherd will lead them into the green pastures of truth, to dwell together in the Lord's own house.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul urges us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power by putting on spiritual armor: truth, righteousness, proclaiming the Good News, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer and supplication.

The risen Lord urges Peter (and in his person each disciple) to discover in himself a love of him who alone is the One True Shepherd. If you have such love, then feed my sheep! In other words, feed them, protect them, care for them, strengthen them because they are mine and belong to me! Be my good servant and tend to those who have loved me and who follow my voice. Teach them mutual love, cooperation, and boldness as they go along the twists and turns of life.

As a result of divine grace, the witness to Christ that has been confirmed in us obliges us to act jointly for the sake of unity. We have the ability and the knowledge to bear such witness! But are we willing to? The Good Shepherd, who by his life, teaching and conduct strengthens all who have put their trust in his grace and support, invites us to cooperate with him unconditionally. Thus fortified, we will be able to help one another on the road to unity. So let us become strong in the Lord, that we may strengthen others in a joint testimony of love.

Prayer

Father of all, You call us to be one flock in Your Son, Jesus Christ. He is our Good Shepherd who invites us to lie down in green pastures, leads us beside still waters, and restores our souls. In following him, may we so care for others that all see in us the love of the one true Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Family Reflection

A girl had a dream. And in that dream she saw her life like a path along a beach. She could see her footprints in the sand on the beach, and each footprint marked an event, a part of the journey of her life. And she noticed that for most of the way there was another set of footprints. In the good times the footsteps seemed to have gone for a dance, since the sand was so stirred up; but in normal life the other pair of footsteps would just be close beside hers'. She realized that the other footprints were those of Jesus, the good shepherd, walking with her in her life; and she was very happy. But then she noticed something odd. In the most difficult times of her life there was only one pair of footprints in the sand, and so she turned in her dream to Jesus and asked him where he was in those difficult times, and why he had not stayed with her. Jesus turned his warm and loving eyes on her and said "I was with you in those times, but I carried you, for you did not have the strength to walk".

When have you found Jesus to be close by your side? Do you pray to him to help you through the day, and give your strength, and carry you, when you are going through a difficult time?

When each of us walks with Jesus then we are all walking together.

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

Let us pray today for a blessing on all of our churches: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. May God strengthen and bless His Body around the world. Pray a blessing for your own church as well as those of your brothers and sisters.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • Day 8 • January 25, 2012



Illustration by Gerry Rauch

United in the reign of Christ

Readings

- [I Chronicles 29:10-13](#) It is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all
- [Psalms 21:1-7](#) You set a crown of fine gold on his head
- [Revelation 3:19b-22](#) To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne
- [John 12:23-26](#) Whoever serves me, the Father will honor

Commentary

Jesus Christ is the first born from the dead. He has humbled himself and been exalted. Christ is not covetous of his victory, but shares his reign and exaltation with all people. David's hymn, born of the joy of the king and the people before the Temple was built, expresses the truth that everything happens by grace. Even an earthly monarch can be an image of the reign of God, *in whose hand it is to make great and to give strength to all*.

The king's psalm of thanksgiving continues this idea. Christian tradition also gives it a Messianic sense; Christ is the true King, full of blessing and life, the perfect presence of God among people. In a certain sense this image can also refer to people. Are not human beings the crowning achievement of creation? Does not God want us to become 'co-heirs with his Son' and 'members of his royal household'?

The letters in the Book of Revelation to the seven local churches constitute a message to the Church in all

times and places. Those who admit Christ into their homes will all be invited to share with him in the banquet of eternal life. The promise regarding sitting on thrones, previously announced to the Twelve, is now extended to all who are victorious.

Where I am, there will my servant be also. We can link Jesus' *I am* to the unutterable Name of God. The servant of Jesus, whom the Father honors, will be where his Lord is, who has sat on the right hand of the Father in order to reign. Christians are aware that unity among them, even if requiring human effort, is above all a gift of God. It is a share in Christ's victory over sin, death and the evil which causes division.

Our participation in Christ's victory reaches its fullness in heaven. Our common witness to the Gospel should show the world a God who does not limit or overpower us. We should announce in a way that is credible, to the people of our day and age, that Christ's victory overcomes all that keeps us from sharing fullness of life with him and with each other.

Prayer

Almighty God, Ruler of All, teach us to contemplate the mystery of Your glory. Grant that we may accept Your gifts with humility and respect each person's dignity. May Your Holy Spirit strengthen us for the spiritual battles which lie ahead, so that united in Christ we may reign with him in glory. Grant this through him who humbled himself and was exalted, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Family Reflection

In my town, at 10:30am on Good Friday, the Christians—adults, youth and children—gather to march down the main street carrying crosses and singing songs. The march mostly starts out with Protestants and some Orthodox, but half way down the street we time it so that we pass the Roman Catholic Church just as their mass is finishing, and they stream out to join us. Our town has many people who are not Christians: Muslims, Hindus, and many who do not believe in any God. But they look on at us as we carry our crosses, marching together with smiling faces, and I sometimes think they envy our unity. It is as if the march is a sort of practice for heaven! In heaven there will not be any divisions between us. We will all be united. In heaven we will be like princes and princesses under the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we will no longer fight each other.

Do you know Christians of a different denomination from you? Even though they may do different things from you in church, in most things you think and act the same way. Can you think of some of the many things that all Christians think and do the same?

Intercession for our Ecumenical Call and Mission in the Sword of the Spirit

As we close our week of prayer, let us return to the subject of the change that is needed in our own hearts to embrace our ecumenical call. Living out ecumenism is a spiritual activity and spiritual transformation is required for us to do it well. Let us pray for God's grace to transform and soften our hearts to the unity he has for us.

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Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stand before King Nebuchadnezzar

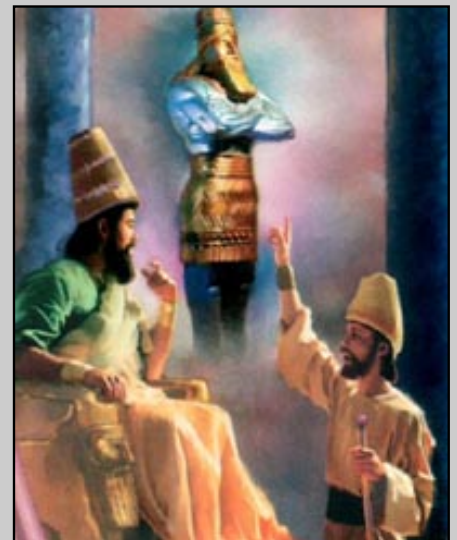
Faithfulness and Courage Under Fire – Testing of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Lessons from the Book of Daniel – Part 2

Adapted from a presentation by John Keating given during the [Adelante Conference](#)

In Chapter 2 of the Book of Daniel, the great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar has a disturbing dream, which none of his wise men can recount to him or interpret. He is enraged and threatens to kill all of his wise men. Daniel responds to a difficult and dangerous situation in faith and courage, boldness and humility. He promises the king that he will reveal to him his dream and its correct interpretation (even before he yet received them). First, he goes to his three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and asks them to pray. Then he seeks the Lord in faith and humility and receives from the Lord both the knowledge of the dream and its interpretation.

Daniel recounts the dream and its meaning to the king, who is completely blown away, and places Daniel over his government, much as Pharaoh had in the case of Joseph. Daniel's three friends are also



given major roles in government, in which their considerable abilities and their high character give them increasing prominence.

[See text from Daniel 2:47-49] But the prominence and influence make others jealous, and they become the objects of an attack – upon themselves and upon their people. The issue is not small or peripheral, but one of fundamental loyalty to the Lord. They are threatened with the possibility of losing not only their positions and their influence, but their very lives. Let's look at what happened in Babylon at that time.



Daniel 3:1-13 [see text in sidebar box]

In Chapter 3 verses 12 and 13, we read that Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are accused of breaking the king's commands. In fury the King demands that they be brought before him to hear his verdict. It often happens that when someone is placed by the Lord in a position to stand out in society, that person becomes a ready target for those who are jealous of the blessings and the success. Those who experience such blessings can sometimes make the great mistake of getting attached to them for their own sake, or of seeing them as the proof that the Lord is pleased, while seeing difficulty and attack as an indication that they are making big mistakes. While this can certainly happen (we can all too easily cause our own problems by our own foolishness), it is also true throughout the Scriptures that those of God's people whom the Lord blesses and causes to prosper are also often attacked and put to the test by his enemies. In such times of testing, the blend of fidelity, boldness, courage, and humility are the response of faith that the Lord is seeking from those who belong to him.

From the Book of Daniel

Chapter 2:47-49

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoi'akim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoi'akim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

Chapter 3

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to assemble the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, were assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; 6 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." 7 Therefore, as soon as all the



Daniel 3:14-18 [see text in sidebar box]

With great courage, these young men choose to be faithful to the Lord. Far more so than was the case about keeping the Lord's dietary laws we previously looked at in Chapter 1 [see previous article, Part I here]. Now these guys really have something to lose: their good reputation, their position and influence, their wealth, and even their lives. We might say to ourselves "Yeah, but how nice to be able to take such a radical stand, knowing that God is going to intervene in a miraculous and spectacular way, completely vindicate you, totally defeat your enemies, and bring you into greater honor and position than ever." But it wasn't like that for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They didn't know what God would do. They left that question entirely up to the Lord. This was about embracing the spirit of martyrdom, not about doing a spiritual "bungee jump." They weren't saying: "No sweat. It looks really scary, but in fact, nothing bad is actually going to happen to us." So you get this adrenaline rush without ever being in true danger.

They also weren't taking a desperate stand of saying "OK, Lord. We're doing our part. Now you better step up here and do yours." With the courage of martyrs, they chose to be faithful to the Lord come what may, and simply left it to the Lord to decide how he would act on their behalf. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were clearly ready to be martyrs for the glory of God – and through the centuries, the Lord has seen fit more often to be glorified through the death of his saints than in rescuing them. On this occasion, however, God willed to bring glory to his name through the miraculous protection of his servants.

I believe that the Lord is looking for a similar response from each of us in similar circumstances: accepting with courage and boldness whatever will bring most glory to God. Ready to pay the price to be faithful.

peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 Therefore at that time certain Chalde'ans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live for ever! 10 You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image;

11 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no heed to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up." 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. Then they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well and good; but if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace; and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?"

The obvious “wise” thing to do (as far as worldly wisdom goes) would have been to “lay low” and at least give the appearance of giving in, so as to not lose their positions of power and influence (as well as their lives): Perhaps even to give in, justifying the compromise with the idea that in this way one could stay in favor and in a position of influence that might prove useful to the Lord’s cause in the future. This response, of course, would have totally compromised their integrity and would have constituted a serious sin of idolatry, as well as a failure to give testimony of their faith before their own people. The three young men don’t fall into these traps. They rise to the test, and prove faithful and true.



Daniel 3:19-25 [see text in sidebar box]

The king himself, the very man they were seeking loyally to serve, has put them to the test. He has made an issue of whether their first loyalty is to him or to God. They respond respectfully, but with absolute conviction and without hesitation. They make very clear where their first loyalty lies. The king is infuriated, and orders their destruction – and not merely the extraordinarily painful death of being burnt alive, but at an intensity of heat that destroys the men who throw them into the fiery furnace. The king is a personal witness to two extraordinary things: the three young men are seen walking about in the furnace and praising God, and a fourth man is seen to be in there with them!

Daniel 3:26-29 [see text in sidebar box]

God has acted miraculously to glorify himself through the three young men. The power of God is revealed through the boldness of faith and

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20 And he ordered certain mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their mantles, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. 22 Because the king's order was strict and the furnace very hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who took up

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king." 25 He answered, "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego, servants

the humility of his servants, in such a way that even those who were seeking to punish them are left praising God, and honoring his people.



[Daniel 3:30](#) [see text in sidebar box]

The Lord uses the faith and courage of his servants to exalt them, to place them even higher in the worldly society in which they find themselves. Is it always like this? No – it depends entirely upon the will and purpose of God. His servants put themselves in a place to give witness to his truth, and to be used for his glory.

This final verse of Daniel 3 brings me back to some of my comments from the first presentation: These young men represent a way of living in the society in which the Lord places his people along the lines of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

Babylon is a society which does not know him, or that refuses to acknowledge him. Yet, God cares for his people and is concerned for their welfare. He has used King Nebuchadnezzar and the empire of Babylon as his instrument for the purification of his people, and now he intends to bless his people as they live in the midst of Babylonian society and culture.

Many faithful Jews in Babylon were probably living very quiet and rather hidden lives, earning their bread and raising their families. But God called others of his faithful servants in Babylon to live and serve actively, and even prominently, in the midst of that society. He called them not only to serve their own people, but to work for the good of all those among whom they live.

God did not send them there as “undercover agents” of an enemy that is working to subvert the reigning order. Nor to be an inert lump in the midst of the wider worldly society, which has essentially “dropped out”

of the Most High God, come forth, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their mantles were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

28 Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set at nought the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

of any meaningful contact, interaction, service to the broader people among whom they live. Rather, they were to live as God's people in exile, living and serving in a foreign culture, genuinely working for the true good of those among whom they live and serve, not assimilating into that broader culture and its ways and values, not dropping out of it, not working to subvert it, but being completely faithful to God within in, and working to bring the broader foreign culture into greater relationship to God and his truth and his ways in whatever ways they can.

Their mission in the broader society does not appear to be specifically spiritual or religious – they are to work and to serve and to love, and to bring good to the people among who God has placed them. As they do so, the Lord will give them opportunity to witness to him and his goodness. Often, as they do what the Lord is asking of them, they are given the opportunity to have significant impact in their society, as were Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego. Some of his people may become prominent and respected and influential. In becoming so, they do not in any way compromise their faith, and they remain perfectly willing to lose any and all benefits, reputation, and influence in order to maintain their faithfulness to God and to his call. They suffer for this, and are ready to pay the price. The Lord is able to take the power of their faithful witness and turn it into even greater glory for himself, greater victory for his truth and his people.

Lessons for today

In closing I offer the following considerations for your reflection:

1. Testing in our lives always looks like a huge hassle and a great misfortune, especially when we're right in the middle of it. The enemy, who is also testing us, wants to overwhelm us with difficulty, or at least with fear of difficulty, and to talk us out of fidelity. It can look like we're all alone, taking the heat. But often, the Lord has his own purpose for allowing the test to take place. Just as he can glorify himself in and through our successes and accomplishments, so he can also glorify himself through us as – with his help and grace – we pass the great tests that are given to us.

When testing comes, our first instinct is often: "How do I get out of this with the least loss and damage?" The Lord is looking for the response of the three young men: faith and faithfulness, courage, boldness, humility. He can use these responses to win a great victory in and through our lives. Are you also being tested? How? Where is the Lord in the midst of your test – have you found him? Are you looking for him? What response is he asking of you in the midst of your trial?

2. I believe that many of you will be called by the Lord to have influence and to exercise leadership where you are – not only in the

small world of your community, of a Christian group you are serving, but more broadly. Some of you are probably already experiencing a certain success, a prominence, a popularity among your circle of friends in school, at university, at work. It might be because you are a good athlete, or that you're smart in a way that wins the respect of others, or that you are especially pretty and vivacious. In some cases, the experience of a certain prominence or popularity in the broader world we live in can lead us to be more careful, more concerned, more timid, less free to express who we really are in Christ, more fearful of losing what we've gained.

But these three young men are a great example of a different response in that situation. Enjoying influence, leadership, and popularity in their society, they didn't allow these to make them compromise their fundamental principles, or to be timid and fearful in the face of an attack on their more important commitments and principles. They were free to be who they really were. They didn't compromise, even though they knew that it could cost them to hold their ground. They were ready, if need be, to put all on the line for their faithfulness to God.

See [Part 1: Going Against the Tide: Lessons in Faith and Courage from the Book of Daniel](#), by John Keating

John Keating is Vice-President of the Sword of the Spirit and a frequent speaker for Kairos and Sword of the Spirit conferences and retreats. He is an elder in the Servants of the Word, a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He currently lives in Manila, Philippines.

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LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission

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Say "Yes" to God

sharings from young people who attended a YES retreat in Ireland

God's gracious invitation to young people by Phil Morrison

The YES Retreat brought together 50 young people from all over Europe. This first gathering of 14-16 year-olds in the European region of Sword of the Spirit was a milestone, as our young people responded in deeper ways to following Christ – to saying "Yes." Youth came from various cities (London, Dublin, Glasgow, Belfast, Leuven) to Rostrevor, Northern Ireland. The purpose of the weekend was to encourage the young people to say a wholehearted "Yes" to following Christ, not to simply lean on the faith of their parents, or their friends, but to take on and deepen a personal faith. This was done through small groups, games, a prayer meeting, talks, entertainment, testimonies and meals.

Because this was the first YES Retreat, most of us really didn't know what to expect, including myself. It became very apparent that my expectations of how God was going to use this weekend were greatly surpassed by God's.

God delights in using anyone who says "Yes" to him. He has no age restriction. The more and more I spend doing youth work, the more God teaches me that he uses people of all ages to advance his kingdom. Just as God used Joshua, David, Esther, Ruth, Gideon, and Samson he calls and equips those today who are available, those who say "Yes". This is what happened on the YES Retreat. Many of the youth were freely responding to the call to follow Jesus Christ.

Serving at the YES Retreat was a privilege and a humbling experience, to stand beside my younger brothers and sisters and

Some retreat highlights

Making friends for life

by Hannah Sewell

(age 15, Antioch Community, London, UK)

When I heard about the YES retreat I didn't really expect much. My parents had told me there was going to be a youth conference in Ireland, and some of my friends were going so I thought why not?! However I didn't really know anyone else apart from my friends at Antioch. One of my other friends had been to the Dublin football tournament and running up to the yes retreat she couldn't wait to see all of her friends again. However I hadn't been to the Dublin football tournament and I pretty much didn't know anyone. I would sit with my friend and try to learn the names of these people I had never met.

When we got there I kind of stood awkwardly in the corner and headed up to my dorm room to put my bags away. When I saw the names on my dorm door my heart dropped. Two of the Dublin girls whom I had never met before were in my dorm, and they had already claimed their beds, which left me with a little camp bed by itself in the corner. I assumed that they would leave me alone and just talk to each other without including me. How wrong was I! When I headed back down to the main room, people would just come up and introduce themselves, and quickly I had this overwhelming feeling of acceptance. We got into our new sharing groups, and soon after everyone was treating each other like brothers and sisters which in a way we were.

The next day was crazy! In the morning we were split into girls and boys and each group received a talk. The girls'

say Yes to the Lord. I will remember this weekend as one where God powerfully acted and took deeper root in many of the young people's lives (and my own!), and I am already greatly anticipating the next YES Retreat!



Phil Morrison is a [Kairos](#) mission leader and youth leader for [YouthLink](#) in London, UK. He is originally from Downpatrick, Northern Ireland.



Making Big Decisions for God by Stephen Bick

"I lay a choice before you, before the youth of the Sword of the Spirit and the multitude who will join you, and I ask you to say 'YES.' Say 'Yes.'"
— a prophetic word given at a
Sword of the Spirit Youth Conference in 2008

Despite preparing and recording every relevant prophetic word as part of prep for serving on the first ever YES retreat in October of this year, I wasn't really expecting much to happen. A fun weekend in another country, see some old friends, try my hand at youth work, etc. Not only could I not have been more wrong, I was deeply filled with hope by the weekend and the generation I see emerging from it.

These kids are making big decisions for God, stuff I hadn't dreamt of doing at their age. They are full of the Holy Spirit and power and maturity and wisdom beyond their years. Watching words you halfheartedly typed into your computer a week previously become true before your eyes is an exciting and humbling experience. I often have a spiritual high after these events. It's a cyclic thing in

talk was about courage, and it was amazing to hear about the situations that some of the leaders had experienced. Then we were put in teams for the wide game. Now by this time it had started raining. Heavily. And it was freezing cold. I assumed being a Christian retreat and all they would let us stay inside the warm cozy center and they would postpone the game until the weather was better. I was mistaken. My team bonded by huddling under a tree for warmth.

Later on in the day we had a Lord's Day celebration. Now, being a "community kid" and someone who's grown up in community hearing these words repeatedly again and again, you get to learn them off by heart. At the Lord's Day celebration it was so amazing to look around the room and see that no-one really needed the pamphlet and that we all knew the words off by heart. Again when we worshipped everyone knew the songs because we've grown up hearing them and listening to our parents singing them. Being at the YES retreat gave me a real feeling of community and what the Sword of the Spirit is all about. I went there not knowing anyone and I went home knowing I've made friends for life, and I can't wait to see them again!



God surprised me
by Michael Potter
(age 16, Antioch Community, London, UK)

my spiritual life: you go to a big Sword of the Spirit event and feel great, go home and gradually get back into your old way of doing things, and just as you are despairing another conference comes along.



a skit from the Saturday evening entertainment event

This was different – it hit me at a much deeper level and really gave me a core of faith and wonder at God and what he's doing now in plain sight among us!

Being on the giving rather than receiving end of youth work is strange and wonderful. You are suddenly a role model, a leader, an adult (I had only been 18 for a month before the YES retreat). These really stretching experiences are vital for me and people my age to have, so please don't just send your youth to these things, send your university-aged people so they can learn how to lead. I just had a blast, leading a small group, prayer ministry, being a "mentor," and no one complained or was damaged by anything I did, which is always a plus.

Most importantly, the weekend showed me how wrong my expectations are about anything God does. He's always on another level, working behind the scenes, and occasionally I see a tiny, tiny part of the whole picture and just stand with my mouth open, even if the rest of the time I have to trust that something is going on. Good thing for us that we have such a loving God, and that he is so active today. I am filled with hope.

I went on the YES retreat in Ireland during the October half term, and in the run-up to it, I had really been coasting in my faith. I had convinced myself that I was in a good place with God, and that it was alright to stay there. But God really had some surprises in store for me. The first evening was a bit of a blur because the London contingent arrived quite late on the Friday evening. So after a quick worship time, we met our sharing groups and were then bundled off to bed.

My first clear memory of the weekend was being woken up on the Saturday morning by the leaders, one of whom had a very loud bell. But the rest of the day proved to be very good. During the day we split up into guys and girls and were given separate talks. The men's talk was on courage and making war on the devil, which was very enlightening because it dispelled the illusion that as Christians we have to always be meek and mild, but we can be strong men too. The talks were accompanied by some very powerful sharings.

That evening, Dave Quintana gave a talk on saying "Yes" to the Lord and to taking a step forward in your faith. This was followed by a time of worship and prayer ministry, in which I reluctantly got some prayer, and I'm glad I did. God really spoke to me and many others that evening in new and powerful ways.

The whole weekend was a fantastic experience for me. Seeing God at work through prayer and prophecy, as well as seeing the other young people there were both hugely encouraging for me and really gave me hope for this generation.



Stephen Bick is a [Kairos](#) team worker and member of [Koinonia](#), a university student outreach in London, UK.

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The Healing of the Ten Suffering from Leprosy

“Jesus, Master, Have Mercy!”

By Jeanne Kun

Gratitude makes us see the good. When we are grateful, we acknowledge that we are indebted, that we have received more than we deserve. . . . What we need is to have some “Samaritan” in us; what we need is to follow our natural instinct to be grateful. The first characteristic of the Christian is to be grateful.

– Archbishop Marcel Gervais, Homily at Notre Dame Cathedral, Ottawa, Canada

In the Spotlight
Giving Thanks – and Joy – to
Jesus

It is evident from the whole teaching of scripture that the Lord loves to be thanked and praised just as much as we do. I am sure that it gives him real downright pleasure, just as it does us and that our failure to thank him for his gifts wounds his loving heart, just as our hearts are wounded when our loved ones fail to appreciate the benefits we have so enjoyed bestowing on them.

What joy it is to receive from our friends an acknowledgment of their thanksgiving for our gifts, and is it not likely that it is a joy to the Lord also?

– Hannah Whitall Smith,
Daily He Leads Me

Understand!

1. With what attitude do you think the ten people with leprosy approached Jesus? What does Jesus’ command to them (Luke 17:14) suggest to you about the relationship between obedience and faith? Did Jesus always require that those he healed have faith?

2. List the verbs that describe the Samaritan’s successive actions in response to his healing (Luke 17:15-16). What do these actions say about the man’s relationship to God? Think of others in the gospels who prostrated themselves at the feet of Jesus, for example, the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:25), Jairus (Luke 8:41-42), and Mary of Bethany (John 11:42; 12:3). What did they express by their posture?

3. Jesus asked the Samaritan, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine,

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

Leprosy was a dreaded disease in biblical times. Besides suffering physical disability and disfigurement, a person afflicted with leprosy was considered ritually unclean and was forbidden to come into contact with healthy people (Leviticus 13:45-46). Segregated from society, those suffering from leprosy lived on the outskirts of towns and begged for alms, relying on charity for their survival.

The ten whom Jesus healed in the gospel story were drawn together by their common affliction. Since Jews despised Samaritans as apostates – people who rejected the faith – the two groups usually avoided each other (2 Kings 17:24-41; Matthew 10:5; Luke 9:52-55; John 4:90). But in the desperation of their condition, these people ignored this customary animosity and shared a fellowship of suffering.

Conscious of their “uncleanness” and the risk of transmitting their contagious disease, the ten were careful not to approach Jesus too closely when they cried, “Master, have mercy on us” (Luke 17:13). The distance they kept, however, presented no barrier to Jesus’ compassion and power.

Jesus didn’t heal these people on the spot; instead, he commanded them to show themselves to the priests (Luke 17:14). Mosaic law stipulated that a cure of leprosy had to be certified by the priests (Leviticus 14:1-32) – in this way, a person was declared clean and was no longer a social outcast. Sensitive to every aspect of their pain, Jesus’ intent was not only to restore these people to health but also to ensure that they would be fully restored to normal society by officially receiving a “clean bill of health.”

Perhaps this group of people had heard about the wonders Jesus was performing throughout Galilee; their cry for mercy was filled

where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:17-18)? In what tone of voice do you think he asked these questions? Why? What do Jesus’ questions add to your understanding of him? Of his relationship with the Father?

4. Why was it significant that it was “this foreigner” (Luke 17:18) who gave thanks to God? What does the Samaritan’s presence in this story indicate about Jesus’ mission? About Jesus himself?

5. What similarities do you see in the healing of the ten people with leprosy and the healing of the paralyzed man (Luke 5:17-26)? What differences? What do the differences as well as the similarities suggest to you about Jesus, the Great Physician?

In the Spotlight In the Words of the Saints

What better words may we carry in our heart, pronounce with our mouth, write with a pen, than the words, “Thanks be to God”? There is no phrase that may be said so readily, that can be heard with greater joy, felt with more emotion or produced with greater effect.

– St. Augustine, Letter 72
We should not accept in silence the benefactions of God, but return thanks for them.

– St. Basil the Great

Grow!

1. In ancient times, leprosy was considered incurable, yet Jesus miraculously healed ten people afflicted by the disease. What sin or difficulty in your life do you consider to be “incurable,” hopeless, impossible to overcome or change? How free do you

with expectant faith. If they already believed that he could make them whole again, they may have left Jesus filled with rising hopes and confidence. Or, still marked by the ravages of their disease, they may have departed with disappointment, wondering how the priests would respond to them. In any case, it was only after they went on their way, obeying Jesus' directive, that they were cured (Luke 17:14).

As soon as one of the ten – a Samaritan (Luke 17:16) – became aware of his healing, he raced back to Jesus, loudly praising God (17:15). No waiting for a more convenient moment for him! He simply couldn't let the master go without thanking him right away. And when the Samaritan found Jesus, he threw himself at his feet (17:16) – the proper place to humbly acknowledge how undeserving he was of God's mercy and to give thanks. Surely such an expression of gratitude brought Jesus great pleasure.

Jesus' healing of the Samaritan recalls the prophet Elisha's encounter in Samaria with Namaan, a foreigner who also suffered from leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14). Initially Namaan balked at Elisha's command to wash in the Jordan River, but when he eventually obeyed the prophet, "his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean" (5:14). He returned from the river to thank Elisha for his cure and honored the God of Israel (5:15). Namaan's cleansing through water is a type of baptism. The story also points toward the adoption of foreigners into God's covenant and the universality of salvation (Isaiah 56:3-8). Similarly, the gospel account of the leprous Samaritan's faith is a prelude to the influx of many Samaritans in to the church through the preaching of the apostles, after Jesus resurrection (Acts 8:5-8, 14-17, 25).

Jesus' final words to the Samaritan – "your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19) – echo his message to the woman he cured of a hemorrhage (8:48). Like her, the grateful man was given far more than physical wellbeing. Through his faith and obedience, he had received wholeness of body and spirit, peace, and friendship with God in Christ.

feel to cry out to the Lord in your need?
What hinders you or limits your faith and expectation?

2. The ten people who came to Jesus to be cured acted on his command to show themselves to the priests without any proof or assurance of what the results would be. Think of an occasion when you stepped out in faith, obeying Jesus' word. What happened? What effect did this have on you?

3. The Samaritan thanked Jesus by praising him in a loud voice and falling at his feet (Luke 17:15-16). How could your actions, as well as your words, give thanks to God?

4. How does a sense of gratitude to God change us and our outlook on a situation? What happens when we fail to acknowledge God's generosity?

5. Think of someone you know who is ill, lonely, suffering from a mental or physical limitation, or in some way "marginalized" or cut off from society? What is one thing you could do this week to make them feel less isolated and more connected to the body of Christ?

Reflect!

1. Examine your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any attitudes – for example, discontentment, taking God's benefits for granted, holding on to your own agenda, complacency – that blind you to God's blessings and block you from experiencing and expressing gratitude. What could you do to overcome such hindrances and change your outlook? To make giving thanks to God a more conscious & active part of your life?

2. Reflect on the following Scripture passages that portray expressions of gratitude to God for his goodness & gifts:

In the Spotlight Hansen's Disease

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease that mainly affects the eyes, skin, peripheral nerves, and mucous membranes of the upper respiratory tract. It was known in ancient Egypt, Israel, India, China, Greece, and Rome. In the Middle Ages, leprosy also spread rapidly across Europe. To protect the populace from contagion, strict laws were enacted that banned those afflicted with the disease from all social contact. There was little palliative treatment for the disease and no hope for a cure. As a consequence, in addition to their physical afflictions, leprosy sufferers also bore the stigma of being "outcasts," rejected and excluded from society. By the fifteenth century leprosy had declined in Europe, but the disease is still common in India, Brazil, Myanmar (Burma), Indonesia, Nepal, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In 1873 a Norwegian doctor, Gerhard Hansen, first identified the bacillus of leprosy, *Mycobacterium leprae*. Today leprosy is curable with Multidrug Therapy (MDT), a powerful combination of clofazimine, rifampicin, and dapsone. Once treatment begins, the disease's advance in the body is halted and the patient is no longer contagious. At the beginning of 2005, approximately 300,000 leprosy patients were under active treatment worldwide.

Ten million leprosy patients have been cured during the past fifteen years. Nonetheless, Hansen's disease, as leprosy is now called, still remains a serious illness. Currently, an estimated two to four million people around the world have been so visibly and irreversibly disabled by leprosy that they require ongoing care.

Excerpted from [Mighty in Power: The Miracles of Jesus](#), by Jeanne Kun ([The Word Among Us Press](#), © 2006). Used with permission. This book can be ordered [online](#).

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

[David] appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, to praise invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. . . . Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and the priests Benaiah and Jahaziel were to blow trumpets regularly, before the ark of the covenant of God. Then on that day David first appointed the singing of praises to the Lord by Asaph and his kindred.

– 1 Chronicles 16:4, 5b-7

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre. For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

– Psalm 92:1-4

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits – who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

– Psalm 103:1-5

[B]e filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

– Ephesians 5:18-20

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Act!

Count your blessings! Write your own personal "litany of thanks."

Make a list of what you are grateful for and keep adding to it. Recount this list occasionally as you pray, thanking God for each of the particular benefits he has bestowed on you. You may find it helpful to use Psalm 103 as a model for your litany of thanks.

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Servant of Love for the Lepers of Molokai

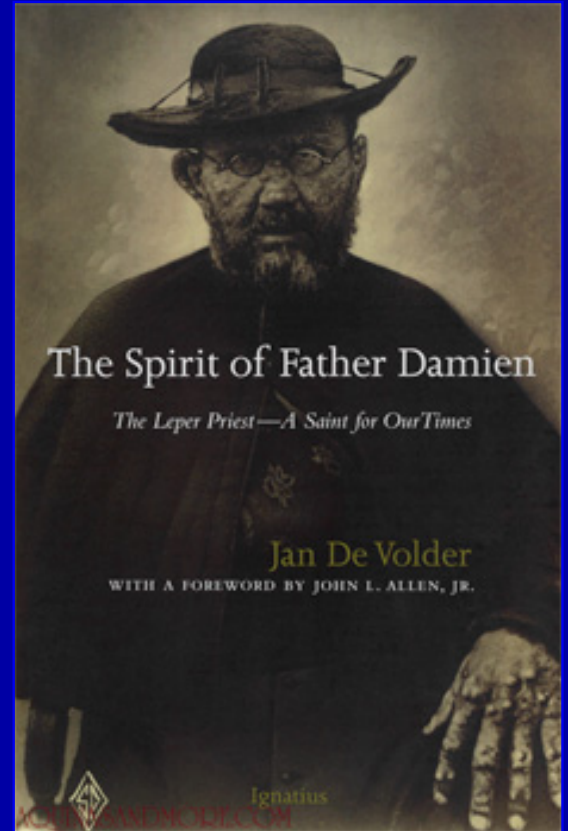
The heroic testimony of Damien de Veuster

edited by Don Schwager

To touch a leper

Damien de Veuster was very practical with his hands. Give him some tools and he would build a chair or a table in no time. If something broke, he would figure out how to fix it. In his youth Damien learned many handiwork skills from the local blacksmith. Damien's father wanted him to take over the running of the family business – a farm which was six miles from the university town of Leuven, Belgium. Damien's heart yearned for something new, exciting, and great. Growing up in a fervent Catholic family, his mother regularly read to her children the stories of great martyrs, missionaries, and saints. Damien's favorite missionary saint was Francis Xavier, who preached the gospel throughout India and Japan, and died before reaching China. Damien wanted God to use him to do something great like these heroes from the past.

When Damien's older brother, Pamphile, joined a new missionary order, Damien decided that he would follow him to the missions as well. Damien didn't learn easily so he had to study extra hard to qualify for the rigors of missionary studies, which included mastering new languages. His dream came true when he volunteered to go to Hawaii – a new mission field both for Catholic and Protestant missionary societies in the 19th century. The journey from Europe took 5 months by boat.



The Spirit of Father Damien
The Leper Priest - A Saint for our Times
 by Jan De Volder
 Ignatius Press 2010 San Francisco

Damien had entered a house of death. From the moment he arrived at the leprosy settlement, his faith and his intellect intuitively knew that this was the challenge for which his huge missionary's heart was longing. Amid these biblical outcasts, who were not only utterly rejected but also radically disfigured, he understood that his presence could make a difference. These poor unfortunates were like sheep in need of a shepherd, children yearning for a father's love. "They are repugnant to look at, but they also have a soul redeemed at the price of the precious blood of our Divine Savior", he wrote to his superior. "He too in his divine love consoled lepers. If I cannot heal them, as he could, at least I can offer them comfort." That was Damien's choice: to look at the lepers with the loving eyes of Jesus.



view of Kalawao on the island of Molokai

While Damien was not naturally bright or eloquent in preaching unlike many of his missionary companions, he, nonetheless, excelled in reaching out to the people of Hawaii to bring them the good news of Jesus Christ. This was a daunting task because Hawaii was an isolated collection of several volcanic islands in the middle of the Pacific ocean. Most of the people had never heard the gospel before. Travel across the islands was not easy because the terrain was often rugged with steep cliffs, mountains, ravines, and sharp volcanic rock, and the tropical climate was very humid.

In letters to his family Damien described some of the challenges he faced in his missionary work:

“We cannot travel here either by train or by trap [horse-drawn carriage] and not always by foot. How do you think we manage these long journeys? With good mules and excellent horses. I have just bought a superb horse for 100 francs and a mule for 75. There are times when I have to move around by canoe” (written in May 1865).

“I had to visit a group of Christians, but how was I to get there? The village was perhaps the most inaccessible in the whole archipelago. One side was blocked by the sea, and the other by rock cliffs of extraordinary height. The track is manageable until one arrives at a beautiful valley; but then there are at least 12 miles of ravines and rocks to cross. The Protestant minister needs two hours to climb the first rock cliff! I personally can do it in forty-five minutes, though I do admit it leaves me out of breath...Moreover there are at least another ten

That love manifested itself in concrete action, for how could you transmit divine love and salvation if you did not keep before your eyes the concrete needs of those entrusted to you? Did the Apostle James not write: “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Damien took care of all the material needs of his people: the food and water supplies, clothing, and housing, for which his carpentry skills came in extremely handy. And, although assisting the dying and burying the dead were his daily tasks, he was also profoundly concerned with the suffering bodies of the sick. For instance, he actively sought out the latest medicines and therapies, which, while not offering a cure, did provide some mitigation of the suffering.

Damien not only cared for the sick; he also gave them back their human dignity and self-respect by pointing out their own responsibility. Despair and self-neglect often occur in patients with terminal diseases—all the more so in exiled leprosy patients. Those suffering with illness also need the medicine of human contact and friendship. Together with his sick companions, Damien entered the battle against meaninglessness, emptiness, and despair. He made sure that they did not waste their lives by surrendering to idleness, drunkenness, and an unrestrained lifestyle. If necessary, he could become very angry. But he also offered them alternatives: he taught them to take better care of themselves and of others. He reconciled them, not only with one another, but with God. Through his pastoral work, his sermons, the liturgies at which he presided, and the sacraments he administered, he taught his flock that each one of them was valuable in the eyes of God. He also

ravines so wedged in that each one is like climbing a mountain. The path is impracticable and it is not possible to travel it with an animal” (March 1865).

Damian outdid many of his missionary companions in physical endurance and hard work. He traveled almost constantly, and covered more territory than most of them, visiting thousands of people scattered across the rugged terrain. He worked with unrelenting dedication among the people, teaching, preaching, building churches, and serving them in many practical as well as spiritual ways.

Damien often confided to his older brother Pamphile, who was also a missionary priest serving in Europe as a school teacher:

“As I have had to work all week and cook on Sunday, you will excuse me if my hands are not as clean as yours, which do nothing, I suppose, but turn the pages of books. Sometimes the plates are not well washed either. But what matter. Hunger and habit make us eat just the same. For dessert, we smoke a pipe. That finished, quickly back on the horse to another church! I often say two masses, and so I have to delay eating for two or three hours. The more tired I am on Sunday afternoon, the more happy I am, above all when a lost sheep comes back to the flock of the Lord. On Sunday afternoons I hear confessions or give theology lessons in kanaka [a local dialect]” (letter dated October 23, 1865).

“I’m going to tell you now what I do during the week. After mass I often give a little talk. Then it is breakfast, always with poi [baked, fermented taro root]; after that (at least for the last seven months) I take off my cassock and grab the saw. Only with a lot of sweat have I been able to build some chapels that are decent both inside and outside...Still more sweat and then comes a terrible hurricane that knocks down...two chapels! ...This year I will be able to dedicate more time to visiting the sick and to studies, providing that Divine Providence does not send me other worries” (letter dated October 23, 1865).

“Unfortunately, what is the missionary life if not a tapestry of pain and misery? One passes all the time in unrewarding tasks like Martha and very little time at the feet of the Lord like Mary Magdalene. Happy the missionary who only has to concern himself with his ministry! We, on the other hand, have to concern ourselves with the material aspects of our mission

taught them that their lives did not come to an end with death, which gave meaning to their lives and deaths.

[excerpt from *The Spirit of Father Damien* by Jan De Volder, (c) Ignatius Press 2010]



Commemorative stamp - Fr. Damien's birthplace in Tremeloo, Belgium



View of the leper settlement at Molokai



Fr. Damien in front of a church he built at Molokai

stations, something which can cause us a lot of worry” (letter dated October 24, 1865).

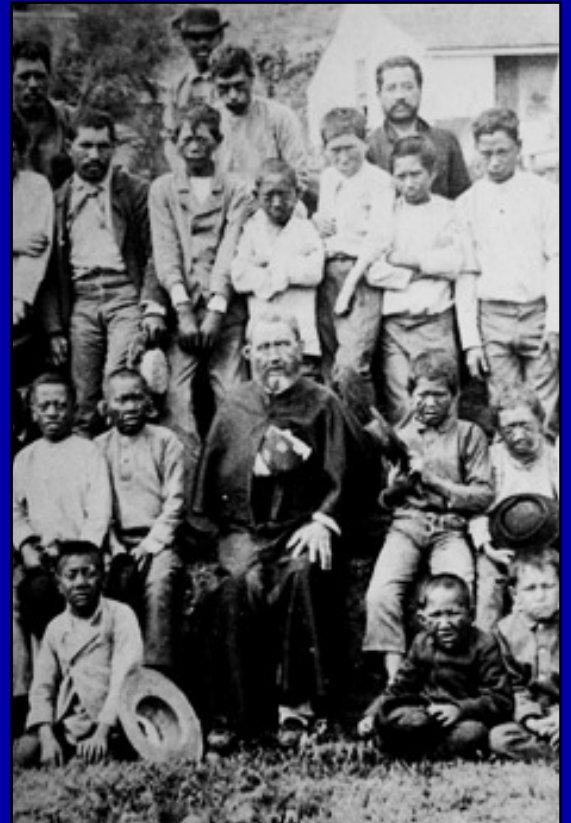
One particular situation in Hawaii broke Damien’s heart. People by the hundreds were dying of leprosy. As their limbs wasted away they were often shunned and left untreated by their families and society at large. The only solution the government could find to stop the spread of the leprosy epidemic was to forcibly remove everyone who contracted the disease and then confine them to a remote peninsula where they could not escape. They were not only cut off from any contact with their families and friends, but were left defenseless in a situation where lawlessness reigned and unrestrained abuses became rampant. Many sought escape from their misery and hopelessness through getting high on opium, alcohol, and endless orgies. Many children, as well as women, were sexually abused and treated like slaves. Those too weak to care for themselves, and the dying, were left alone to fend for themselves.

In August of 1873 Damien confided to his brother how he would respond to the plight of lepers confined to Molokai:

“In the spring of last year our new Government, taking into consideration public health, wanted to rigorously purge all the islands of this terrible disease. By order of the Health Board, all the lepers that they were able to round up were sent to the leprosy settlement of Molokai, which was like a state prison. Some of my beloved lepers from Kohala also went. I attribute an unequivocal presentiment – that I would soon be united to them – to none other than the voice of God.”



Fr. Damien with the girls choir - 1870



Fr. Damien with his orphan boys in Kalawao



Fr. Damien arrives at Molokai - painting by Herb Kawainui Kane

To isolate or to touch?

Damien was 33 years old when he volunteered in 1873 to move to the leper colony of Kalawao on the island of Molokai. He knew that this would be his life mission. There was no turning back for him. He expected the worst, but the dreadful condition of the 700 lepers at the Kalawao settlement shocked him. Damien recorded the conditions he saw in some memoirs he wrote to the Hawaiian Board of Health:

“Many...make their small shelters, covering them with sugar cane and ki leaves, or at best with pili grass...Under such primitive roofs these wretches, banished from society, live together, without any distinction being made regarding age or gender, and without anyone being classified according to whether their illness is advance or in its early stages, and all of them, more or less, unknown to each other. They pass all their time playing cards, drinking some kind of rice beer and giving themselves over to various excesses...In this place there is no law!”

“At that time, the development of the illness was horrible and the number of deaths quite considerable. The miserable condition of the lepers was so terrible that the colony well deserved the name given to it: ‘a living cemetery’” (letter dated November 25, 1873).

Damien’s superiors had given him strict advice: “Do not touch them. Do not allow them to touch you. Do not eat with them.” At



In this photo provided by Hawaii State Archive, Father Damien is seen in this portrait taken two months before his death in 1889 at the leprosy settlement in Kalaupapa, Hawaii



Father Damien de Veuster is pictured in bed shortly before he died in 1889 at the Kalawao settlement on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. The Belgian- born missionary priest contracted Hansen's disease, or leprosy, during his 16-year service to an isolated community of people who had the disease.

the time it was seen as the right hygienic thing to do, but Father Damien knew that would be impossible. How could he not bless the dying, embrace the sick, bandage the wounded, and console the grieving? After all, that is what Jesus did. Jesus was physically present to those in need. He came to their homes, sat and ate with them, listened to their needs and concerns, and prayed with them as well. He blessed, touched, embraced, healed, and consoled those who were troubled in mind, body, and soul. Even lepers approached Jesus with confident trust that he would receive them and show them mercy.

When Damien arrived at Kalawao on the island of Molokai there were around 700 people suffering from leprosy in the settlement – Catholics, Protestants, and non-believers. Damien considered all of them as his “children.”

“As for me, I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all for Christ. Because of this, when I preach I normally say, ‘We lepers’...When I go into a hut, I always begin by offering to hear their confession. Those who refuse this spiritual help are not deprived of corporal assistance, which is given to all without distinction. Consequently, everyone, with the exception of a few obstinate heretics, look on me as a father” (letter dated November 25, 1873).

Damien made it a habit to personally visit every leper and to inquire of their needs. He not only made them his friends, he ate with them from the same pot. He even shared his own pipe with them. He nursed the sick, cleansed and bandaged their wounds, and prayed with them as well. He incessantly wrote letters demanding that the best medicines and supplies be sent right away for the care of his lepers.

“During the week I visit my numerous sick and busy myself with orphans, who are all lepers. At times it can be quite unpleasant to be always surrounded by these unfortunate children, but I find consolation in it. They learn their catechism well, and are present daily at morning mass and the evening rosary. As I am now a bit of a doctor like my patron saint, Damien, I try, with God’s help, to alleviate their terrible suffering and in this way lead them in the way of salvation” (letter dated November 25, 1885).



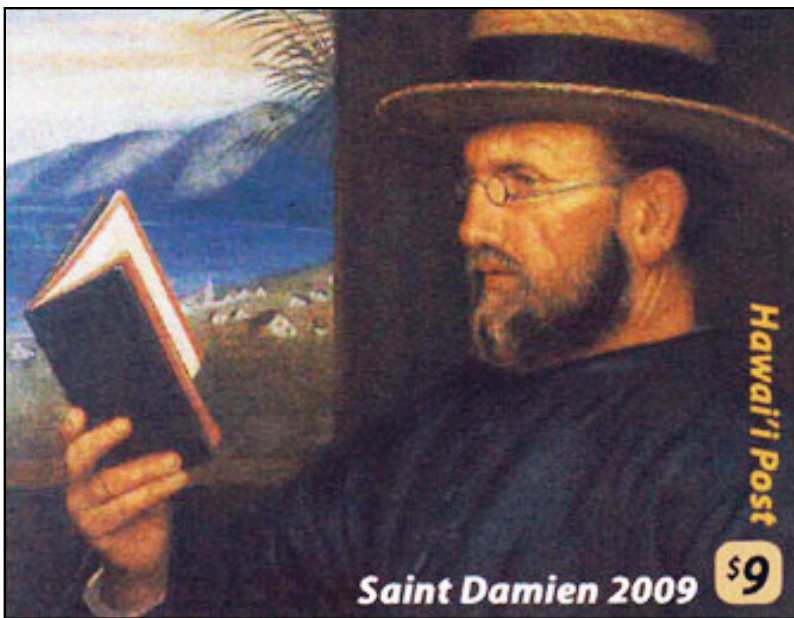
Lepers gather at the gravesite of Father Damien



boys with leprosy - Hawaiian State Archives
1900



Leprosy, caused by the bacillus mycobacterium leprae, brings about a gradual withering away of body parts. There are presently some two million cases of the disease worldwide, primarily in the underdeveloped nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.



Commemorative stamp - Fr. Damien reading the Bible
watercolor by the English painter Edward Clifford, 1887

In December of 1887 Damien wrote to his Anglican friend, the English painter Edward Clifford:

“When you come I imagine there will be 1500 in our settlement. Each boat brings dozens of them. I presently have some 60 boys with leprosy, and all live in the garden of our church. The Health Committee is going to build a large number of little houses and I myself am at the point of finishing a large dormitory. I would be very grateful if you would bring me a magic lantern [a picture box with illuminated images from the Gospels, which Damien used to give catechism lessons to the boys]” (letter dated December 8, 1887).

Damien’s letters and pleas for material assistance for the lepers began to circulate in newspapers throughout Europe and the United States, and eventually worldwide. He became a celebrity, but he didn’t allow it to go to his head.

“May the Lord protect me from being carried away by vanity because of certain good which he deigns to permit through my ministry. I am much talked about in the newspapers and in the churches, I wish that all the glory be given to the author and accomplisher of all good. I would desire to remain unknown in Kalawao settlement, where I am happy and content among many sick children” (letter dated December 8, 1874).

As donations began to pour in to the leper colony, Damien



Painting of Father Damien bandaging the
wounds of the lepers

maintained a strict account to his superiors for the use of money which was sent his way. Damien kept a personal promise of simplicity and poverty. In his spiritual retreat in 1881, Damien recorded three resolutions he made:

“In order to draw closer to the poverty of Jesus Christ, I will ask only for that which is strictly necessary and useful, nothing which is superfluous or enjoyable. I will not complain if at anytime you deny my request. I will think twice before buying things more or less needed. I will keep an exact account and I will never use deceit in order to get what I want from my superiors. I will simply ask, I will not demand.”

Through his patient care and perseverance, Damien turned a disordered, lawless colony of abandoned souls into a living Christian community of love where people learned to care for one another. Numerous letters testify to this remarkable transformation:

“For some time I have been giving theology courses to the more educated of my Kanakas. Their zeal has been a great help for the religious formation of the newly converted. As I have to attend four churches, they do the teaching when I can’t be there. Often more people come when the priest is not there” (letter dated July 14, 1872).

“We have created in Kalawao two associations: one for men and the other for women. Their main objective is to visit and help the sick. I have great hope in their zeal and that they will do a great good for the parish. May God keep my many sick children on the right road” (letter dated April 24, 1887).

Damien’s courage, joy, and trust in God’s care did not diminish in the last years of his life, even after he had contracted leprosy. At the beginning of 1889 Damien wrote to his friend, Hugh Chapman, an Anglican priest from London, to thank him for a donation of 1000 pounds:

“I cannot tell you how happy I was with the visit of our mutual friend, Edward Clifford, who came to be among the poor exiled lepers. During his stay he put every effort into bringing into our community of lepers a little joy with his magic lantern [a picture box with illuminated images from the Gospels, which Damien used to give catechism lessons to the boys], his music box, and above all, his so sweet

voice. You can see for yourself in the portraits the destruction the illness has caused to my whole body. There is, at least, a small light of hope which could restore me, if not a miracle; but I do not want to tempt the Lord, as I am persuaded that the will of the Lord is that I die in the same way and of the same sickness as my afflicted sheep.”

In his last letter to his brother Pamphile, he confided:

“Dear brother, I continue happy and content and even though I am very sick, I only want to fulfill the will of the Good God....I am still able, though not without some difficulty, to stand every day at the altar where I never forget any of you: Please, in return, pray and get prayers for me as I am gently drawn towards my grave. May God strengthen me and give me the grace of perseverance and a good death” (letter dated February 12, 1889).

On March 28, 1889 Damien became bedridden. Even though he knew that his death was imminent, he did not stop taking thought for his lepers. Shortly before his death he dictated a brief letter to Doctor Swift, the settlement’s resident physician: “Jobo Puonua has been spitting blood from yesterday morning. Please spare a moment to go and see him – at the second house after that of Jack Lewis – and oblige your friend, J. Damien. In the same house you will find the dying woman I have spoken to you about last night.”

On Monday, April 15, the first day of Holy Week, Damien knew his hour had come. He said, “The Lord is calling me to celebrate Easter with him.” He died in the arms of his two missionary companions, Father Conrardy and Brother Sinnett. Sinnett wrote, “I have never seen a happier death. He constantly was one with God through his prayer and suffering.”

Father Joseph Damien de Veuster was beatified by Pope John Paul II on June 4, 1995, and the state of Hawaii has honored him with a statue which stands in Statuary Hall in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol building. On October 11, 2009 he was declared a canonized saint by Pope Benedict XVI.

Quotes from the unpublished letters of Fr. Damien, translated by Derek Lavery, Fergal Maguire, Ulan Naughton, and Mary McCloskey - Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

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

Servants of Jesus Christ Series



A Servant's Heart – Loving and Serving Others for their Sake

By Don Schwager

The nature of Christ's love for others

The Lord Jesus stated quite emphatically that he came “not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The mission he was sent to do required that he lay down his life for others rather than lord it over them (Matthew 20:25-28). Scripture proclaims that love is stronger than death (Song of Solomon 8:6; 1 John 8:14) and the only sure way for overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:14, 17-21). Jesus’ obedience to the Father and his atoning death on the cross won great victory over Satan, sin, death.

Jesus not only demonstrated his great love for us, he made it a new commandment as well – “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Jesus’ love was first and foremost very direct and personal. He never treated people impersonally or at a distance. Jesus often made it a point to stop what he was doing and to ask people what he could do for them. When a blind man, named Bartimaeus, shouted for Jesus’ attention, Jesus immediately stopped what he was doing and asked Bartimaeus “What do you want me to do for you?” Then Jesus immediately granted his request and restored his sight (Mark 10:46-52). When Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter, Jesus immediately went to the ruler’s home and asked to see the child on her sick bed. “Taking her by the hand, he said to her, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise!’” (Mark 5:41). When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, the tax collector, watching him from a distance in a tree, Jesus stopped what he was doing and began to speak with Zacchaeus alone. “Make haste and come down. I must stay at your house today!” (Luke 19:5-6. Jesus’ gracious invitation was not only an act of special favor

and friendship, but a remarkable reversal of the scorn and distance usually shown to tax collectors at the time.

When the apostles tried to keep children away from Jesus, Jesus rebuked them and said, “Do not hinder the children from coming to me... then he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them” (Mark 10:13-16). When Jesus went to Peter’s home, he discovered that Peter’s mother-in-law had a fever. So Jesus “came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her” (Mark 1:31).

Jesus’ compassion was more than a verbal expression of heartfelt sympathy. With his tender physical touch he personally identified with the misfortunes of others and then went on to alleviate their suffering as well. When he met a man who could not speak or hear, he put his fingers into the man’s ears and he touched the man’s tongue with his own spittle – both to physically identify with his ailments and to bring his healing touch (Mark 7:32-35). When lepers approached Jesus he did not keep his distance to avoid contamination. Jesus physically touched them, embracing them with his personal care, and he made them whole and well, both physically and spiritually (Mark 1:40-42).

Jesus identified so closely with people’s concerns and burdens, that these became his as well. He wept with those who lost loved ones and he mourned over the city of Jerusalem because many of its inhabitants were unprepared to receive him as their savior. Jesus shared in the joys of people as well – he even changed water into wine for a newly-wed couple when their wedding reception supply ran dry (John 2:1-10). The gospels state over and over again that when Jesus saw the crowds who came to see him “he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14 and 15:32; Mark 6:34).

Jesus loved with a servant’s heart – a heart that was always oriented to the needs and interests of others and always ready to do good for them.

A holy self-disinterestedness

When we read the gospel accounts of Jesus’ wonderful deeds and miracles, we might be tempted to say, “Jesus could do that because he had divine power – he was God’s anointed Son. I’m a mere mortal human being, after all!”

How can we possibly attain such love – love that is pure, unselfish, wholly directed to the good of others? Paul the Apostle tells us that we already possess it in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5).

We already have a divine power at work within us – through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ. He re-creates us and gives us a new heart, a heart like the heart of Jesus himself. We can now love others as Jesus has loved them because God’s Spirit dwells in us and gives us the strength to lay down our lives in humble service of others.

The choice is ours to make each and every day – either to yield to what my flesh wants or to yield to the Holy Spirit who gives me the strength to love as Jesus loves.

Put on Jesus Christ

Paul in his letter to the Philippians tells us to put on the mind and heart of the Lord Jesus who became a servant for our sake:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

What might hinder us from loving and serving others for their own sake, rather than for some benefit it might bring to ourselves? We are born with an innate and intense desire to please ourselves and to get others to do our bidding. Selfishness comes quite naturally. It's part of our fallen sinful nature. Unless this fallen nature is put to death, the new nature which Christ has won for us cannot take root and grow in us. Death to self – especially the self that wants “my will done” in place of God’s will – is the necessary first step for allowing God’s love and truth to take deep root in our hearts.

Jesus called his disciples to “deny themselves” – that is to let go of running their lives apart from him (Luke 9:23; Mark 8:34). The Lord Jesus must now reign as the true Master of our lives. If we trust in him and submit to his word, then we can truly know and experience the freedom he has won for us. Jesus promised those who believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). We are most free when we surrender our lives to the Lord Jesus and allow him to transform our hearts and minds with his love and truth.

Letting go of self-serving interests and selfish ambition

There are many obstacles to growth in servanthood. [See chart below.] For many of us, fear is a key road block: Fear of being taken-advantage of, fear of being asked to do unpleasant tasks, or to serve disagreeable and irksome people. Pride also gets in the way. “I deserve to be first.” “I deserve better treatment.” “I’ve earned the right to insist on what I want or what I prefer.”

For others, selfish ambition is the driving force that blinds them from serving others with attentive care. Selfish ambition can make us view and treat people as obstacles, interruptions, and problems that stand in the way of getting what we want. Self-centered people are concerned chiefly with themselves and with advancing their own interests to the exclusion of others. They seek to manipulate and use others to get what they want.

Preoccupation with self is perhaps the biggest obstacle of all. Our materialist culture caters to putting self first. “You deserve the best! Afterall, you’re first.” We can easily become absorbed in our creaturely comforts and not notice how we might be neglecting others or missing the opportunity to give a helping hand.

We’re wired to seek our own pleasure and comfort and to care for ourselves first. And even when we do consciously agree to serve others, we might qualify it with an ulterior motive or reward. “What’s in it for me?” “How will it benefit me or advance my interests?” “I will do a favor for you, but I also expect that you will return the favor as well.” “I will help you out this one time, but don’t expect me to help you when it interferes with my preferences and priorities.” “I will do what is necessary or what is required, but don’t expect me to do more.”

It takes effort, discipline, and a healthy dose of self-renunciation to place ourselves last rather than first. Humility, the willingness to change, and the courage to ask God to widen our hearts with generous love, are key steps for growth in Christlike servanthood.

Through love be servants of one another

Paul in his letter to the Galatians reminds us that Christ has set us free to live in his way of love and servanthood.

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 5:13).

With this gift of freedom comes the choice – to serve and advance myself first or to put the interests of others first and to serve them with love. The gift of a servant’s heart – loving and serving others selflessly – involves more than simply giving some of my time and resources to help and care for others. Being a servant of Christ involves taking on the heart of Jesus – a heart that loves to give generously and serve with everything I have. After all, everything I possess – my life, gifts, talents, and material goods – come from God. I can use them simply to please myself or share them in serving and caring for others.

The Scriptures are full of examples of men and women who loved and served with generous hearts, and who willingly put the interests of others ahead of themselves.

One notable example comes from the Old Testament in the Second Book of Samuel, Chapter 23. King Saul, out of envy, was pursuing David as he fled into the wilderness. Saul was determined to put him to death. At one point when Saul’s men were closing in on David, David, along with a band of his loyal companions, hid in a cave at Adulm. In his weariness and thirst, David spoke of his longing for a taste of the cool refreshing waters from the well at Bethlehem. Before David could realize the impact of his words on his men, three of his companions chose to break through the enemy’s line of defense so they could fetch for David some cool refreshing water. They risked their lives to serve David in this small act of kindness. David wept when they returned with water from the well at Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23:13-17).

Another example, this one from the New Testament, shows how Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, looked upon herself as a “maidservant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38,48). When the angel Gabriel greeted her and told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah, she did not hesitate to give her unqualified “yes.” When she heard the news that her cousin Elizabeth was expecting a child, she went in haste to give personal support and practical help (Luke 1:39). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months – no short time of personal, probably often menial service (Luke 1:56).

To serve is to reign with Christ

Perhaps the person who most prefigured Christ in his servant-like qualities is the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph. Joseph was the son of Jacob who was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. He served in the land of Egypt, first in the house of Potiphar, then in prison, and finally in the house of Pharaoh who appointed him as chief steward over the land of Egypt. Joseph was a suffering servant who did not resent those who treated him badly, but he willingly served them and blessed them in everything he did for them. The Book of Genesis records the remarkable blessings which Joseph brought to the whole land of Egypt. Look especially at the verses in bold:

Serving Potiphar: Genesis 39:1-6

Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Pot'i-phar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ish'maelites who had brought him down there. **The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man;** and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian, and **his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands.** So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had **the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had, in house and field.** So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and having him he had no concern for anything but the food which he ate.

Serving in prison: Genesis 39:20-23

And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But **the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.** And **the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison;** and whatever was done there, he was the doer of it; the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Serving the ruler of Egypt: Genesis 41:38-41

And Pharaoh said to his servants, "**Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?**" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are; you shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "**Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.**"

We do not hear of Joseph wallowing in self-pity, nor evading unpleasant duties. In fact he gave more than what was required or expected of him. He won the admiration and trust of his task masters because he put their interests above himself. He blessed others in the way he served them and cared for their needs, concerns, and interests.

Who does that remind you of? The Lord Jesus Christ who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

An early church father once said, "To serve Christ is to reign with him" (see Revelations 5:10). When we submit our lives to the Lord and Master of the universe and allow him to work in and through us, we, too become a blessing to many others. Our joy and privilege is to be servants of Jesus Christ – not just when we offer our prayers or when we perform some act of service. Our privilege is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in each and every circumstance of our daily lives.

Let us do as Paul exhorted his fellow Christians at Colossae:

Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23).

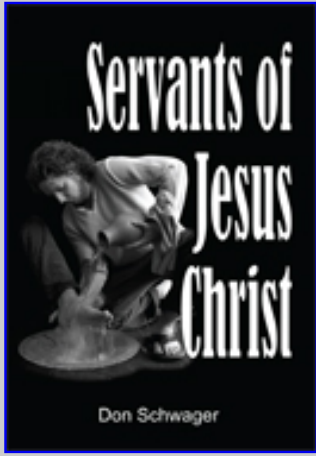
Distinguishing True Servanthood from Its Two Extremes: Self-serving Interests and Selfish Ambition

Self-Serving	Serves Others Selflessly	Selfish Ambition
Serves out of self-interest; preoccupied with self-concerns, avoids unpleasant tasks.	Serves the interests of others, other-focused, attentive to their concerns, puts the welfare and good of others first.	Wants to be served and be first; acts like a dictator – overbearing, controlling, outspoken/opinionated.

<p>The self-oriented individual expresses interest and motivation for things of their own liking, and express disinterest or dislike for things they don't care about.</p> <p>"What's in it for me?" "How will it benefit me or help me advance?"</p>	<p>Other-focused, motivated to serve, build up, and strengthen others; takes on the concerns and interests of others as if they were his/her own.</p> <p>Not preoccupied with oneself – a healthy disinterest in self that frees a person to focus attention and service on the needs of others.</p>	<p>Self-centered and selfish, concerned chiefly or only with yourself and your advantage, to the exclusion of others.</p> <p>Disinterested in others. Views and treats other people as obstacles, interruptions, problems, and as inferiors. Lacks interest in and concern for the welfare of others.</p>
<p>Self-minded individuals are preoccupied with their own interests, opinions, and personal concerns.</p> <p>They don't recognize, listen, or pay attention to what others think and are concerned about.</p>	<p>Listens first; seeks to understand others before being understood.</p> <p>Cooperative, and good team builder.</p>	<p>Arrogant, know-it-all attitude, "I'm always right, they are wrong." "I can do it better by myself."</p> <p>Distrust of others; can't listen to others; prefers imposing his/her own views rather than building consensus and motivating team spirit and cooperation.</p>
<p>Self-interested people try to shuffle unpleasant tasks and problems to others so they can focus on their own preferences and interests.</p>	<p>Enjoys serving others anonymously – doesn't look for credit, reward, or payback.</p>	<p>Coerces others to do his/her bidding and to advance their own interests.</p>
<p>Reactive rather than proactive – driven by feelings/moods, and by the changing circumstances and problems which interrupt the status quo – cripples objective thinking, problem-solving, response, and decision-making.</p> <p>Timid/fearful of other people's reactions, opinions, and demands.</p>	<p>Proactive and responsible (response-able) rather than reactive (being driven by feelings, circumstances, or the social environment).</p> <p>Proactive people make love a verb (reactive people make love a feeling). Love is something you do – the giving of self, making sacrifices, serving others freely.</p>	<p>Motivates others through fear, intimidation, and punishment.</p>

For previous articles in the series, Servants of Jesus Christ, see:

- Part 1: [You Gotta Serve Somebody](#): Who Is the Freest of All?
- Part 2: [What Is the Greatest Title of All?](#) *Whoever would be great among you ..scriptural reflection*
- Part 3: [Attaining True Greatness - Humility versus Pride](#)



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

His book, *Servants of Jesus Christ: What can the New Testament teach us about the transforming power of Christ's love and the way servanthood?* is available from [Tabor House Books](#).

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Disinterestedness

by Romano Guardini

Perhaps this title surprises the reader, for who is likely, at present, to consider disinterestedness a virtue; that is, an example of moral value?

There is a proverb which comes from ancient China and which states that the fewer interests a man has, the more powerful he is; that the greatest power is complete disinterestedness. But that idea is foreign to us. The image of man which has become the standard since the middle of the past century is quite different. It presents the active man who moves with decision in dealing with the world and accomplishes his purposes. This man has many interests and considers himself perfect when everything that he does is subordinated to the goals that he sets up for himself.

That such a man accomplishes much would not be denied even by the teachers of that ancient philosophy. But they would probably say that most of it is superficial and bypasses that which is really important.

How, then, does the man live who is ruled by his interests?

In his associations with others, such a man does not turn toward another person with simplicity and sincerity, but he always has ulterior motives. He wishes to make an impression, to be envied, to gain an advantage, or to get ahead. He praises in order to be praised. He renders a service in order to be able to exact one in return. Therefore he does not really see the other as a person; instead, he sees wealth or social position, and then there is always rivalry.

With such a man we are not at ease. We must be cautious. We perceive his intentions and draw back. The free association in which true human relations are realized does not develop. Of course, our life with its many needs also has its rights. Many human relations are built upon dependence and aims. Consequently, it is not only right but absolutely necessary that we should seek to obtain what we need and should be conscious of doing this. But there are many other relations which rest upon a candid and sincere meeting of persons. If interests and ulterior motives determine our attitude in such cases, then everything becomes false and insincere.

Wherever the essential relations of “I” and “thou” are to be realized, interests must give way. We must see the other as he is, deal simply with him, and live with him. We must adapt ourselves to the situation and its demands, whether it be a conversation, collaboration, joyfulness, or the enduring of misfortune, danger, or sorrow.

Only in this way are true human values made possible, such as a real friendship, true love, sincere comradeship in working, and honest assistance in time of need. But if interests become dominant here, then everything atrophies.

A man who keeps interests in their proper place acquires power over others, but it is a peculiar kind of power. Here we approach the ancient aphorism of which we spoke in the beginning. The more we seek to gain our own ends, the more the other person closes up and is put on the defensive. But the more clearly he perceives that we do not wish to drive him, but simply to be with him and live with him—that we do not want to gain something from him, but merely to serve the matter at hand—then the more quickly he discards his defenses and opens himself to the influence of our personality.

The power of personality becomes stronger in proportion to the absence of interests. It is something quite different from that energy by which a man subordinates another to his will, and which is really a very external thing in spite of its dynamic quality. The power of personality stems from the genuineness of life, the truth of thought, the pure will to work, and the sincerity of one’s disposition.

Something similar holds true of a man’s relation to his work. When a man who is dominated by his interests works, then his work lacks precisely that which gives it value; that is, a sincere service to the thing itself. For him the first and chief consideration is how he can get ahead and further his career. He knows very little of the freedom of work and the joy of creation.

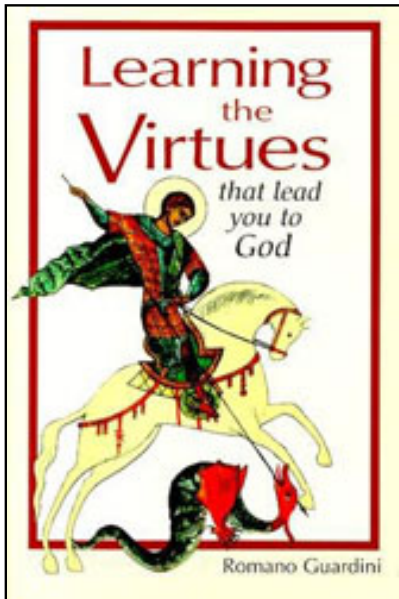
If he is a student, he works only with an eye to his vocation, and very frequently not even to that which really deserves the name of vocation, which is a man’s feeling that he is “called” to a certain task within the context of human society. Rather, he works with an eye to that which offers the most opportunities for financial gain and for prestige. He really works only for the examination; he learns what is required and what the professor in each case demands. We must not exaggerate; these things, too, have their rights. But if they are the sole motives, then the essential thing is lost. That kind of student never has the experience of living in the milieu of knowledge, of feeling its freedom and its greatness. He is never touched by wisdom and understanding; his interests isolate him.

What we have said of students also holds true of other forms of preparation for later life.

Naturally, we repeat, these other things have their rights. A man must know what he wants; otherwise his actions disintegrate. He must have a goal and must orient his life to that goal. But the goal should lie mainly in the object to which he devotes himself. He will pay attention to remuneration and advancement, since his work gives him the means of which he and his family have need and gives him wealth and the esteem of others. But the real and essential consideration must always be what the work itself demands, that it be done well and in its entirety.

The man who has this attitude will not let his actions be determined by considerations extrinsic to the task. In this sense, he is disinterested. He serves, in the fine sense of the word. He does the work which is important and timely; he is devoted to it and does it as it should be done. He lives in it and with it, without self-interest or side glances.

[This article is excerpted from *Learning the Virtues: That Lead You to God*, by Romano Guardini, 1998 edition by [Sophia Institute Press](http://www.sophia institute.com/) (<http://www.sophia institute.com/>), Manchester, New Hampshire, USA. Used with permission.]



Romano Guardini (1885-1968) was an influential Catholic philosopher, author, and priest in Germany. He was chaplain for a Catholic youth movement and chair of the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Berlin until the Nazis forced him to resign in 1939. He openly opposed the Nazi ideology. His books, lectures, and homilies influenced many Christian thinkers, especially in Central Europe, including Josef Pieper and Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI).

Guardini's book, *Learning the Virtues That Lead You to God* was originally published in 1963 by Werkbund-Verlag, Würzburg, Germany, under the title *Tugenden: Meditationen über Gestalten Sittlichen Lebens*. In 1967, Henry Regnery Company published an English translation by Stella Lange under the title *The Virtues: On Forms of Moral Life*. This 1998 edition by Sophia Institute Press uses the 1967 Regnery translation, with slight revisions throughout the text. Copyright © 1987 Publishing Partnership of Matthias-Grünwald, Mainz/Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn; fourth edition, 1992. All of the rights of the Author are vested in the Catholic Academy in Bavaria.

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“Your Master Is Here and Is Calling for You”

Bethany Association – International Women’s Single for the Lord Conference
October 19-23, 2011– Quito, Ecuador

by Christiane Lewerentz and Jeanne Kun

“Your Master is here and is calling for you.” In response to this call **seventeen women in the Sword of the Spirit have joyfully given their lives to the Lord** in a commitment to live single for him and have formed the [Bethany Association](#). With that scriptural call from John 11:28 as our theme, our fourth international conference took place on October 19-23 in the outskirts of Quito, Ecuador.



All but one of the lifelong sisters were able to attend the conference, where we experienced the reality of being truly international – American, European, Mexican, Filipina, and Ecuadorian sisters shared actively in the conference leadership and played significant roles in the various conference sessions. It was clear that we had made **some huge leaps since our first meeting in 2005**. We also experienced a strong desire and commitment to let God use us

as Bethany Association for the Sword of the Spirit.

In addition to the lifelong sisters, conference participants included six women discerning the call and several married senior woman leaders whom we invited as guests. So the conference was a lovely mix of joyful reunions, new encounters, and the deepening of relationships with one another. **The association has also become truly transgenerational:** there is a forty-year age span from the “mature, pioneering” sisters to the youngest participant. As one nineteen-year-old in discernment noted, “I wasn't sure how I was going to experience this conference and wondered if I would be bored, but I wasn't bored at all – I feel like I have had the opportunity to meet some of the ‘coolest women I know’.”

As hosts for our conference, the community Jesús es el Señor (Jesus is Lord) gave us an exceptionally warm welcome and had thoughtfully prepared for our visit. Our time together opened with a guided tour through modern Quito and the historic colonial city center with old Spanish-style buildings such as the Jesuit university established in the seventeenth century and on towards a fantastic view of the Andes mountain range east of Quito. The tour was followed by a welcome dinner at an elegant restaurant at the foot of the huge statue of Our Lady of Quito looking over the sparkling lights of the city at night.



Jeanne Kun (left) speaks during a Bethany Council discussion session

The four-day conference was held at Maria Auxiliadora Retreat House of the Salesian Sisters, situated a little above the city. It has **beautiful gardens with exotic flowers**, fruit trees, and a stunning view of one of the snow-topped volcano peaks around Quito. It was a lovely site for walks, rest, and times of personal prayer in the mild weather we were blessed with. Every day started with common worship, a meditation, and a time of personal prayer.

In the worship time on Thursday that started the conference, God invited us to shift our perspective from inviting him into our midst, to seeing the Lord as our host and ourselves as guests in this place where he wanted us to receive from him. Mags Tierney's morning meditation recalled the different aspects of the association's name **“Bethany” – a place to belong, a place of being quiet at Jesus' feet, of new life and freedom, and of “wasting” our lives for our Lord.** In an opening session, Jeanne Kun, president of the association, introduced the conference theme, gave a brief history of Bethany Association, and welcomed our guests. In her report, the treasurer Sherry Snyder encouraged Bethany members to initiate the establishment of regional and local funds.

"Since this was the first conference I could attend, it was important for me to meet the sisters from all over the Sword of the Spirit who I had only heard about since 2005. Even though I joined the Association in 2009 when it was established – it was during this conference that I gained God's vision for what God is doing in and through the Bethany Association"

– Menchie Rojas, Manila, Philippines

The first of three teaching sessions was on Thursday afternoon looking at the Bethany Association Charter's *Statement of Ideal and Rationale*. This session served to draw out the heart of the calling to live single for the Lord within the association, and **introduced the review of life as a helpful practice (for annual self-reflection)** to examine how well we live out our call and where we experience challenges in putting it into practice.

This was followed by a split session: Questions & Answers for those in discernment, and personal sharings amongst the life-long committed women. This was a good time for those of us at the beginning of the journey to get out burning questions, and for those further along the way to update our sisters and encourage one another.



sisters enjoying an informal time together over lunch

On Friday, Marianita Sarzosa opened the morning with a rousing meditation on our conference theme, "The Master Is Here and Is Calling for You." Then Sherry's teaching session challenged us to look at our lives in the light of simplicity and to consider **the freedom that comes with clearing our hearts, minds, and daily lives from unnecessary clutter**. Jeanne later talked about *pattern of life* – prayer times, the importance of accountability to a pastoral leader, the joy of reviewing your life regularly – to get us thinking about how we structure our lives in ways that will help us live out our ideal in everyday life. In discussion groups we shared about the different ways in which each woman seeks to live simplicity in her particular life circumstances, career, and culture.

Our meal times turned into great opportunities to share testimonies and life stories or to simply enjoy the fun and the entertaining "misunderstandings" that came with gathering together women from eight different nationalities across three continents.

“To finally be in a place to receive and discuss teaching on the pillars of our commitment in Bethany was a bit like a dream. It was a sign for me of God’s favor and blessing. And a sign that God wants women living this way of life in our communities. United we are a stronger witness to that grace amidst our diversity.”
– Mags Tierney, Belfast, Northern Ireland

The Lord spoke to us clearly – through Scripture and prophetic words – of his love for the women of Bethany and his vision for the association to be a place of warmth, welcome, and refuge. Here are a few of the prophetic words and Scripture passages we received:

Now you will see new things break forth among you – not by your own efforts but by the power of my Spirit. You are now a small stream of water but you will become a deep and flowing river that will bring life and strength and refreshment to the Sword of the Spirit (Ezekiel 47, 1-9).

The Lord calls us as consecrated women to be a “place of love, rest, and comfort” for one another, for the Sword of the Spirit, and for all whom the Lord allows us to encounter.

I have fruitfulness for you, my Bethany Association... and your fruitfulness comes from me. Under the soil, life is sprouting (Hosea 14:8).

Jesus wants to give us new wine (as at Cana).



Sue Cummins (left) and Beth Melchor (right)

On Saturday, Sue Cummins spoke about our inner journey of becoming like God, living in union with him – **receiving his love and loving others with the same love** that is infinite and present beyond our understanding even in suffering and dark places. In the afternoon, we were invited to attend the local community gathering – which refreshed all of us with enthusiastic, Spirit-filled worship, words of knowledge, prophecies, and prayer ministry. One of the local community coordinators and his family joined us for our Lord’s Day Celebration. The evening ended with a spectacular Ecuadorian entertainment including dances from Guayaquil and Cayambe, Ecuador, performed by

community members. The dazzling indoor fireworks eventually sent everyone into fits of coughing and laughter, but made the evening ever more unforgettable.

The conference officially concluded on Sunday with a daytrip to the marketplace in Otavalo and to lunch and a boat tour at Cuicocha, a volcano with a lake in its crater. Some women stayed a few more days to explore the equator – “Mitad del Mundo” (“middle of the earth”) – and the beautiful nature reserve in Mindo.



sisters enjoy a boat tour at a scenic volcano with a lake in its crater

Each of us returned home strengthened to continue the journey of loving God with singlehearted devotion and zeal – and encouraged by the assurance that we are walking side by side with sisters from around the world into the good works that God has prepared for Bethany Association to do. Through Mae Legaspi’s word, sung in the Spirit, **God exhorted the life-long women to “stand firm” and not to “let our hands fall limp.”**

We ask our brothers and sisters in the Sword of the Spirit to remember the women of Bethany in **your prayers that we remain faithful now and to the end**, for the sake of the Kingdom. And we particularly ask your prayers for the young women in discernment who seek to give all to follow Christ.



Christiane Lewerentz, originally from Germany, is currently living in Belfast, Northern Ireland with Mags Tierney for a time of discernment with Bethany Association.



Jeanne Kun is President of Bethany Association and a senior woman leader in Word of Life Community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.



Description of Bethany Association

We are women who have heard God call us personally to live a life set apart for him and his kingdom. We live out our response to God's call through a commitment to intentional singleness – living "single for the Lord" – alongside married couples, families, and single people, as active members of The Sword of the Spirit, an international, ecumenical, charismatic "community of communities."

To learn more about Bethany Association visit their website at: <http://bethany.swordofthespirit.net/>

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The Spark of Divine Love within You

by Basil the Great (330-379 AD)

Love of God is not something that can be taught. We did not learn from someone else how to rejoice in light or want to live, or to love our parents or guardians. It is the same – perhaps even more so – with our love for God: it does not come by another's teaching. As soon as the living creature (that is, man) comes to be, a power of reason is implanted in us like a seed, containing with it the ability and the need to love. When the school of God's law admits this power of reason, it cultivates it diligently, skillfully nurtures it, and with God's help brings it to perfection.

For this reason, as by God's gift, I find you with the zeal necessary to attain this end, and you on your part help me with your prayers. I will try to fan into flame the spark of divine love that is hidden within you, as far as I am able through the power of the Holy Spirit.

First, let me say that we have already received from God the ability to fulfill all his commands. We have then no reason to resent them, as if something beyond our capacity were being asked of us. We have no reason either to be angry, as if we had to pay back more than we had received. When we use this ability in a right and fitting way, we lead a life of virtue and holiness. But if we misuse it, we fall into sin.

This is the definition of sin: the misuse of powers given us by God for doing good, a use contrary to God's commandments. On the other hand, the virtue that God asks of us is the use of the same powers based on a good conscience in accordance with God's command.

Since this is so, we can say the same about love. Since we received a command to love God, we possess from the first moment of our existence an innate power and ability to love. The proof of this is not to be sought outside ourselves, but each one can learn this from himself and in himself. It is natural for us to want things

that are good and pleasing to the eye, even though at first different things seem beautiful and good to different people. In the same way, we love what is related to us or near to us, though we have not been taught to do so, and we spontaneously feel well disposed to our benefactors.

What, I ask, is more wonderful than the beauty of God? What thought is more pleasing and satisfying than God's majesty? What desire is as urgent and overpowering as the desire implanted by God in a soul that is completely purified of sin and cries out in its love: *I am wounded by love*? The radiance of the divine beauty is altogether beyond the power of words to describe.

[Article excerpted from the *Longer Rules of Basil the Great*]

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 18, 2012

Readings from Scripture for Day 1

[Zechariah 9:9-10](#) A king righteous and victorious—and humble

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. 10 I will cut off the chariot from E'phraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

[Psalms 131](#) My heart is not proud

1 O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. 2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul. 3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and for evermore.

[Romans 12:3-8](#) We have different gifts with which to serve

3 For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

[Mark 10:42-45](#) The Son of Man came to serve

42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 1: [Changed by the Servant Christ](#)

Daily Prayers for Christian Unity • 2012

- Introduction to the [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)
- Day 1 [Changed by the Servant Christ](#)
- Day 2 [Changed through patient waiting for the Lord](#)
- Day 3 [Changed by the Suffering Servant](#)
- Day 4 [Changed by the Lord's victory over evil](#)
- Day 5 [Changed by the peace of the Risen Lord](#)
- Day 6 [Changed by God's Steadfast Love](#)
- Day 7 [Changed by the Good Shepherd](#)
- Day 8 [United in the Reign of Christ](#)

[The scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1966, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ.]

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 19, 2012**Readings from Scripture for Day 2****1 Samuel 1:1-20** Hannah's trust and patient waiting

1 There was a certain man of Ramatha'im-zo'phim of the hill country of E'phraim, whose name was Elka'nah the son of Jero'ham, son of Eli'hu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an E'phraimite. 2 He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Penin'nah. And Penin'nah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phin'ehas, were priests of the LORD. 4 On the day when Elka'nah sacrificed, he would give portions to Penin'nah his wife and to all her sons and daughters; 5 and, although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb. 6 And her rival used to provoke her sorely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. 7 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. 8 And Elka'nah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" 9 After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. 10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. 11 And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head." 12 As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard; therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. 14 And Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunken? Put away your wine from you." 15 But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman sorely troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. 16 Do not regard your maidservant as a base woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." 17 Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him." 18 And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her countenance was no longer sad. 19 They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elka'nah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her; 20 and in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

Psalms 40 Patient waiting for the Lord

1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. 2 He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. 4 Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods! 5 Thou hast multiplied, O LORD my God, thy wondrous deeds and thy thoughts toward us; none can compare with thee! Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be numbered. 6 Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire; but thou hast given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering thou hast not required. 7 Then I said, "Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; 8 I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy

law is within my heart." 9 I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; lo, I have not restrained my lips, as thou knowest, O LORD. 10 I have not hid thy saving help within my heart, I have spoken of thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness from the great congregation. 11 Do not thou, O LORD, withhold thy mercy from me, let thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness ever preserve me! 12 For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me. 13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! 14 Let them be put to shame and confusion altogether who seek to snatch away my life; let them be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt! 15 Let them be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!" 16 But may all who seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; may those who love thy salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!" 17 As for me, I am poor and needy; but the Lord takes thought for me. Thou art my help and my deliverer; do not tarry, O my God!

[Hebrews 11:32-34](#) Through faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets -- 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

[Matthew 3:13-17](#) Let it be so now, for it is proper to fulfill all righteousness

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; 17 and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 2: [Changed through patient waiting for the Lord](#)

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 20, 2012

Readings from Scripture for Day 3

[Isaiah 53:3-11](#) The man of sorrows accustomed to suffering

3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand; 11 he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities.

[Psalms 22:12-24](#) He did not despise the affliction of the of the afflicted

12 Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; 13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; 15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death. 16 Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet -- 17 I can count all my bones -- they stare and gloat over me; 18 they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots. 19 But thou, O LORD, be not far off! O thou my help, hasten to my aid! 20 Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion, my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild oxen! 22 I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee: 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel! 24 For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

[1 Peter 2:21-25](#) Christ suffered for us

21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his

wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

[Luke 24:25-27](#) Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things?

25 And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 21, 2012

Readings from Scripture for Day 4

[Exodus 23:1-9](#) Do not follow the majority in wrongdoing

1 "You shall not utter a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man, to be a malicious witness. 2 You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; nor shall you bear witness in a suit, turning aside after a multitude, so as to pervert justice; 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his suit. 4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him. 5 If you see the ass of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall help him to lift it up. 6 "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his suit. 7 Keep far from a false charge, and do not slay the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked. 8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. 9 "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

[Psalms 1](#) Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord

1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.
4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

[Romans 12:17-21](#) Overcome evil with good

17 Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[Matthew 4:1-11](#) Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear

you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, `You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, `You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 4: [Changed by the Lord's victory over evil](#)

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 22, 2012

Readings from Scripture for Day 5

[Malachi 4:5-6](#) He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and hearts of children to their parents

5 "Behold, I will send you Eli'jah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

[Psalms 133](#) How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

1 Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!

3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life for evermore.

[Ephesians 2:14-20](#) To reconcile both groups to God in one body, putting to death hostility

14 For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility,

15 by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near;

18 for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

[John 20:19-23](#) Jesus stood among them and said: Peace be with you!

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 5: [Changed by the peace of the Risen Lord](#)

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 23, 2012

Readings from Scripture for Day 6

[Habakkuk 3:17-19](#) God, the Lord is my strength

17 Though the fig tree do 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, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19 GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like hinds' feet, he makes me tread upon my high places.

[Psalms 136:1-4,23-26](#) His steadfast love endures forever

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever.
 2 O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures for ever.
 3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 4 to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 24 and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures for ever;
 25 he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures for ever.
 26 O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

[1 John 5:1-6](#) This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith

1 Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood.

[John 15:9-17](#) No one has greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that

you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 This I command you, to love one another.

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 6: [Changed by God's Steadfast Love](#)

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 24, 2012**Readings from Scripture for Day 7****1 Samuel 2:1-10** Not by might does one prevail

1 Hannah also prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation. 2 "There is none holy like the LORD, there is none besides thee; there is no rock like our God. 3 Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. 4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. 5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. 6 The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and on them he has set the world. 9 "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones; but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might shall a man prevail. 10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."

Psalms 23 You are there with Your rod and Your staff

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;
 2 he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;
 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.
 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Ephesians 6:10-20 Be strong in the Lord

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; 16 besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is

the word of God. 18 Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

[John 21:15-19](#) Feed my sheep

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." 19 (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, "Follow me."

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 7: [Changed by the Good Shepherd](#)

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity • January 25, 2012

Readings from Scripture for Day 8

[1 Chronicles 29:10-13](#) It is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all

10 Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed art thou, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. 11 Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12 Both riches and honor come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. 13 And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name.

[Psalms 21:1-7](#) You set a crown of fine gold on his head

1 In thy strength the king rejoices, O LORD; and in thy help how greatly he exults!
2 Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withheld the request of his lips. [Selah]
3 For thou dost meet him with goodly blessings; thou dost set a crown of fine gold upon his head.
4 He asked life of thee; thou gavest it to him, length of days for ever and ever.
5 His glory is great through thy help; splendor and majesty thou dost bestow upon him.
6 Yea, thou dost make him most blessed for ever; thou dost make him glad with the joy of thy presence.
7 For the king trusts in the LORD; and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.

[Revelation 3:19b-22](#) To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne

19b So be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 21 He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

[John 12:23-26](#) Whoever serves me, the Father will honor

23 And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him.

> Return to Prayer and Reflection for Day 8: [United in the Reign of Christ](#)

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