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Living a Holy Life

Strive to be holy – without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14)

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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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The Beatitudes Are Inseparable from the Cross of Christ

by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1875-1979) was an American theologian and bishop, first in New York City and then in Rochester, New York. He became well-known for his preaching, especially on television and radio. He hosted the night-time radio program *The Catholic Hour* for twenty year (1930–1950) before moving to television and presenting a weekly program called, *Life Is Worth Living*. The show ran from 1951 until 1957, drawing as many as 30 million people on a weekly basis. He wrote 73 books and numerous articles and columns. Mother Theresa of Calcutta always kept a copy of Sheen's book, *Life of Christ*, with her wherever she travelled for daily reflection and meditation.

Mount of Beatitudes – Mount of Calvary

Two mounts are related as the first and second acts in a two-act drama: the Mount of the Beatitudes and the Mount of Calvary. He who climbed the first to preach the Beatitudes must necessarily climb the second to practice what he preached. The unthinking often say the Sermon on the Mount constitutes the “essence of Christianity.” But let any man put these Beatitudes into practice in his own life, and he too will draw down upon himself the wrath of the world. The Sermon on the Mount cannot be separated from his crucifixion, any more than day can be separated from night. The day our Lord taught the Beatitudes, He signed his own death warrant. The sound of nails and hammers digging through human flesh were the echoes thrown back from the mountainside where he told men how to be happy or blessed. Everybody wants to be happy; but his ways were the very opposite of the ways of the world.

One way to make enemies and antagonize people is to challenge the spirit of the world. The world has a spirit, as each age has a spirit. There are certain unanalyzed assumptions which govern the conduct of the world. Anyone who challenges these worldly maxims, such as, “you only live once,” “get as much out of life as you can,” “who will ever know about it?” “what is sex for if not for pleasure?” is bound to make himself unpopular.

Flimsy catch-words

In the Beatitudes, Our divine Lord takes those eight flimsy catch-words of the world – “Security,” “Revenge,” “Laughter,” “Popularity,” “Getting Even,” “Sex,” “Armed Might,” and “Comfort” – and turns them upside down. To those who say, “You cannot be happy unless you are rich,” he says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” To those who say, “Don’t let him get away with it,” he says, “Blessed are the patient.” To those who say, “Laugh and the world laughs with you,” he says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” To those who say: “If nature gave you sex instincts you ought to give them free expression, otherwise you will become frustrated,” he says, “Blessed are the clean of heart.” To those who say, “Seek to be popular and well known,” he says, “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and speak all manner of evil against you falsely because of me.” To those who say, “In time of peace prepare for war,” he says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

The cheap clichés around which movies are written and novels composed, he scorns. he proposes to burn what they worship; to conquer errant sex instincts instead of allowing them to make slaves of man; to tame economic conquests instead of making happiness consist in an abundance of things external to the soul. All false beatitudes which make happiness depend on self-expression, license, having a good time, or “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die,” he scorns because they bring mental disorders, unhappiness, false hopes, fears, and anxieties.

The model for all ages

Those who would escape the impact of the Beatitudes say that our divine Savior was a creature of his time, but not of ours, and that, therefore, his words do not apply to us. He was not a creature of his time nor of any time; but we are! Mohammed belonged to his time; hence he said a man could have concubines in addition to four wives at one time. Mohammed belongs even to our time, because moderns say that a man can have many wives, if he drives them in tandem style, one after another. But our Lord did not belong to his day, any more than he belonged to ours. To marry one age is to be a widow in the next. Because he suited no age, he was the model for all ages. He never used a phrase that depended on the social order in which he lived; his Gospel was no easier then than it is now. As he put it:

For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. - Matthew 5:18

Half measures not enough

The key to the Sermon on the Mount is the way he used two expressions: one was, “You have heard” the other was the short, emphatic word, “But.” When he said, “You have heard,” he reached back to what human ears had heard for centuries and still hear from ethical reformers – all those rules and codes and precepts which are half measures between instinct and reason, between local customs and the highest ideals. When he said, “You have heard,” he included the Mosaic Law, Buddha with his eightfold way, Confucius with his rules for being a gentleman, Aristotle with his natural happiness, the broadness of the Hindus, and all the humanitarian groups of our day, who would translate some of the old codes into their own language and call them a new way of life. Of all these compromises, he said, “You have heard.”

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” Moses had said it; pagan tribes suggested it; primitive peoples respected it. Then came the terrible and awful **but**: “But I tell you...” “But I tell you that he who casts his eye on a woman so as to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his own heart.” Our Lord went into the soul, and laid hold of thought, and branded even the desire for sin as a sin. If it was wrong to do a

certain thing, it was wrong to think about that thing. He would say, "Away with your hygiene which tries to keep hands clean after they have stolen, and bodies free from disease after they have ravished another." He went into the depths of the heart, and branded even the intention to sin a sin. He did not wait for the evil tree to bear evil fruits. He would prevent the very sowing of the evil seed. Wait not until your hidden sins come out as psychoses and neuroses and compulsions. Get rid of them at their sources. Repent! Purge! Evil that can be put into statistics, or that can be locked in jails, is too late to remedy.

Christ affirmed that when a man married a woman, he married both her body and her soul; he married the whole person. If he got tired of the body, he might not thrust her body away for another, since he was still responsible for her soul. So he thundered, "You have heard." In that expression he summarized the jargon of every decaying civilization. "You have heard, 'Get a divorce; God does not expect you to live without happiness'" then came the **but**.

But I tell you that the man who puts away his wife Makes an adulteress of her, And whoever marries her after she has been put away, Commits adultery. - Matthew 5:32

What matters if the body is lost? The soul is still there, and that is worth more than the thrill a body can give, more even than the universe itself. He would keep men and women pure, not from contagion, but from desire of another; to imagine a betrayal is in itself a betrayal. So he declared:

What God has joined, Let not man put asunder. - Mark 10:9

No man! No judge! No nation!

Cut sin off

Next, Christ laid hold of all those social theories which would say that sin was due to environment: to Grade B milk, to insufficient dance halls, to not enough spending money. Of them all he said, "You have heard." Then came the **but**: "But I tell you." He affirmed that sins, selfishness, greed, adultery, crime, theft, bribery, political corruption – all these come from man himself. The offenses result from our own will, and not from our glands; we cannot excuse our lust because our grandfather had an Oedipus complex, or because we inherited an Electra complex from our grandmother. Sin, he said, is conveyed to the soul through our body, and the body is moved by the will. In war against all false self-expressions, he thundered out his recommendations of self-operation: "Cut it off," and "cut it out."

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. - Matthew 5:29, 30

Men will cut off their legs and arms to save the body from gangrene or poisoning. But here our Lord transferred circumcision of the flesh to circumcision of the heart, and advocated letting out the lifeblood of beloved lusts and hewing passions to tatters, rather than be separated from the love of God which is in him, Christ Jesus.

Next he talked of revenge, hatred, violence, expressed in those sayings of everybody, "Get even," "Sue him," "Don't be a fool." He knew them all, and of all of them he said:

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' Then comes the awful **but**: "But I say to

you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."- Matthew 5:38-41

Innocent suffer for the guilty

Why turn the other cheek? Because hate multiplies like a seed. If one preaches hate and violence to ten men in a row, and tells the first man to strike the second, and the second to strike the third, the hatred will envelop all ten. The only way to stop this hate is for one man (say the fifth in line), to turn his other cheek. Then the hatred ends. It is never passed on. Absorb violence for the sake of the Savior, who will absorb sin and die for it. The Christian law is that the innocent shall suffer for the guilty.

Thus he would have us do away with adversaries, because when no resistance is offered, the adversary is conquered by a superior moral power; such love prevents the infection of the wound of hate. To endure for a year the bore who afflicts you for a week; to write a letter of kindness to the man who calls you dirty names; to offer gifts to the man who would steal from you; never to answer back with hatred the man who lies and says you are disloyal to your country or tells the worse lie, that you are against freedom – these are the hard things which Christ came to teach, and they no more suited his time than they do ours. They suit only the heroes, the great men, the saints, the holy men and women who will be the salt of the earth, the leaven in the mass, the elite among the mob, the kind who will transform the world. If certain people are not lovable, one puts love into them and they will become lovable. Why is anyone lovable – if it be not that God put his love into each of us?

Price paid for the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is so much at variance with all that our world holds dear that the world will crucify anyone who tries to live up to its values. Because Christ preached them, he had to die. Calvary was the price he paid for the Sermon on the Mount. Only mediocrity survives. Those who call black black, and white white, are sentenced for intolerance. Only the grays live.

Let him who says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," come into the world that believes in the primacy of the economic; let him stand in the market place where some men live for collective profit, or where others say men live for individual profit, and see what happens. He will be so poor that during life he will have nowhere to lay his head; a day will come when he will die without anything of economic worth. In his last hour he will be so impoverished that they will strip him of his garments and even give him a stranger's grave for his burial, as he had a stranger's stable for his birth.

Let him come into the world which proclaims the gospel of the strong. Let him advocate hating our enemies, and condemn Christian virtues as the "soft" virtues, and say to that world, "Blessed are the patient," and he will one day feel the scourges of the strong barbarians laid across his back; he will be struck on the cheek by a mocking fist during one of his trials; he will see men take a sickle and cut the grass from a hill on Calvary, and then use a hammer to pinion him to a Cross to test the patience of one who endures the worst that evil has to offer, that having exhausted itself it might eventually turn to Love.

Let him come into our world which ridicules the idea of sin as morbidity, considers reparation for past guilt as a guilt complex and preach to that world, "Blessed are they who mourn" for their sins; and he will be blindfolded and mocked as a fool. They will take his body and scourge it, until his bones can be numbered; they will crown his head with thorns, until he begins to weep not salt tears but crimson beads of blood, as they laugh at the weakness of him who will not come down from the Cross. Let him come into the world which denies Absolute Truth, which says that right and wrong are only questions of point of view, that we must be broadminded about virtue and vice, and let him say to them, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after holiness," that is, after the Absolute, after the Truth which

“I am” and they will in their broadmindedness give the mob the choice of him or Barabbas; they will crucify him with thieves, and try to make the world believe that God is no different from a batch of robbers who are his bedfellows in death.

Let him come into a world which says that “my neighbor is hell,” that all which is opposite me is nothing, that the ego alone matters, that my will is supreme law, that what I decide is good, that I must forget others and think only of myself, and say to them, “Blessed are the merciful.” He will find that he will receive no mercy; they will open five streams of blood out of his body; they will pour vinegar and gall into his thirsting mouth; and, even after his death, be so merciless as to plunge a spear into his sacred heart.

Let him come into a world which tries to interpret man in terms of sex; which regards purity as coldness, chastity as frustrated sex, self-containment as abnormality, and the union of husband and wife until death as boredom; which says that a marriage endures only so long as the glands endure, that one may unbind what God binds and unseal what God seals. Say to them, “Blessed are the pure” and he will find himself hanging naked on a cross, made a spectacle to men and angels in a last wild crazy affirmation that purity is abnormal, that the virgins are neurotics, and that carnality is right.

Let him come into a world which believes that one must resort to every manner of chicanery and duplicity in order to conquer the world, carrying doves of peace with stomachs full of bombs, and say to them, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” or “Blessed are they who eradicate sin that there may be peace” and he will find himself surrounded by men engaged in the silliest of all wars – a war against the Son of God; making violence with steel and wood, pinions and gall and then setting a watch over his grave that he who lost the battle might not win the day.

Let him come into a world that believes that our whole life should be geared to flattering and influencing people for the sake of utility and popularity, and say to them: “Blessed are you when men hate, persecute, and revile you” and he will find himself without a friend in the world, an outcast on a hill, with mobs shouting his death, and his flesh hanging from him like purple rags.

Beatitudes are hard facts and realities

The Beatitudes cannot be taken alone: they are not ideals; they are hard facts and realities inseparable from the Cross of Calvary. What he taught was self-crucifixion: to love those who hate us; to pluck out eyes and cut off arms in order to prevent sinning; to be clean on the inside when the passions clamor for satisfaction on the outside; to forgive those who would put us to death; to overcome evil with good; to bless those who curse us; to stop mouthing freedom until we have justice, truth and love of God in our hearts as the condition of freedom; to live in the world and still keep oneself unpolluted from it; to deny ourselves sometimes legitimate pleasures in order the better to crucify our egotism – all this is to sentence the old man in us to death.

Those who heard him preach the Beatitudes were invited to stretch themselves out on a cross, to find happiness on a higher level by death to a lower order, to despise all the world holds sacred, and to venerate as sacred all the world regards as an ideal. Heaven is happiness; but it is too much for man to have two heavens, an ersatz one below, and a real one above. Hence the four “woes” he immediately added to the Beatitudes.

"But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." - Luke 6:24–26

How to be happy

Crucifixion cannot be far away when a teacher says “woe” to the rich, the satiated, the gay and the popular. Truth is

not in the Sermon on the Mount alone; it is in the one who lived out the Sermon on the Mount on Golgotha. The four woes would have been ethical condemnations, if he had not died full of the opposite of the four woes: poor, abandoned, sorrowful, and despised. On the Mount of the Beatitudes, he bade men hurl themselves on the cross of self-denial; on the Mount of Calvary, he embraced that very cross. Though the shadow of the Cross would not fall across the place of the skull until three years later, it was already in his heart the day he preached on “How to be Happy.”

[Excerpt from [Life of Christ](#), Chapter 11, (c) by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen 1958, published by [Ignatius Press](#), San Francisco, with forward by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR. Used with permission.]

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Quest for Holiness

by W.E. Sangster

William Edwin Sangster, a great Methodist preacher and writer, lived between 1900-1960. During World War II, he served as senior minister at Westminster Central Hall in London, the "cathedral" of Methodism. The basement became an air-raid shelter as soon as the German assault began. As space in the below-ground shelter was scarce, he and his family lived at great risk for five years on the hazardous ground floor. By war's end 450,000 people had found refuge in the church basement. In 1949 Sangster was elected president of the Methodist Conference of Great Britain.

Worthy of admiration

It cannot seriously be questioned that it is a matter of major importance that the admiration of people be directed towards those who are worthy of the admiration. We grow like the people we admire. If the longing for holiness is to be quickened in people they must see, not only its perfection in the Savior, but approximations to it in the saints. Indeed, there are ways in which it could be perilous to see it only in the Savior and never in the saints.

To quicken the quest for holiness in people – which is the end of all religious nurture – four steps are necessary.

First, to convince people that it is God's intention that man should be holy; that nothing less can satisfy his ambitions for his earthly children and that, keeping this fact in mind, a devout man may often murmur to himself, "He wills that I should holy be." Secondly, to nourish in the people faith in the possibility of holiness. The difficult

question of ultimate and ineffable perfection can be left aside if only because it involves questions of completeness as well as of purity, and stretches the mind into the vast aeons of eternity. But if the promises of the New Testament are kept in mind, and there are no mental reservations about the power of the Holy Spirit, the life of constant victory over sin by the might of God can be held before the people as a possibility in this life. We can say of all the powers of hell,

They cannot keep a blessing back
By heaven designed for me.

The motive of perfect love

Thirdly, to hold perfection before the people in all its fulness in Jesus. In him every virtue is balanced with its complementary virtue! The vices of good men are often shadows cast by their virtues. Because they are so morally strong, they lack tenderness. Because they are so generous, a proper prudence is wanting. But in Jesus the balance and harmony are all there. This is perfection – the uttermost that can appear in a sinful world.

They were actions of the perfect if we recognize that our Lord was acting all the time under the motive of perfect love. To startle and recall the recalcitrant in the case of the Pharisees; to defend the Gentiles from the desecration of their Court of the Temple, and to impose discipline on the shabby traders, in the case of that illicit commerce. Love in conflict with sin must hurt to save. His life reveals an utter perfection – i.e. a life moved always by a perfect motive even though it was moving in an imperfect world.

And it is just because he is himself in that world that the plain man finds Jesus' example completely beyond him, and the need for the witness of the saint appears. Gazing on perfection in Jesus, sinful man is both abashed and abased. He hears the hammer strokes through the prayer of his Savior as they nail the suffering Son of God to the wood: "Father! ...Forgive them!...They know not what they do!"...and he knows he is looking on the holy and feels profane. Indeed, he feels the oneness of the human race and that his own fist swings the hammer which transfixes the hand that moved only to bless.

A voice awakens in his soul. "I could never be like that. It is blasphemy to think it. This is God and I am a sinner. I was conceived in sin, and the seed was tainted before I was conceived. I was shaped in iniquity, born into a wicked world, and I have drawn in sin with every breath. The whole mental and moral atmosphere of humanity is heavy with decay. And to this foul earth I belong, and within this body of death I am imprisoned, and I am ashamed even to lift my gaze to the One who is of 'purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'"

By a strange contortion of the human mind the very perfection of our Lord's example is used to excuse men from following it. His Person is extolled to explain the majesty of his pattern - and then pleaded to excuse human sin. God incarnate could live like that but not sinful man. Need sinful man try? Need sinful man admit the obligation?

Sinful man is glad not to admit the obligation and praises the perfection of his Lord the more heartily now that he has excused himself to himself – and accepted the excuse!

Holiness is derived

So we come to the fourth step and see disclosed the great ministry of the saints. Their holiness is all derived. It is begotten in them of God – begotten in that very human nature which man in self-despair had recognized as hopeless and corrupt.

Look at the saints! Listen to the first martyr and his magnificent echo of Calvary: "Lord, lay not this sin to their

charge!" Pass in review the noble men and women of all ages who have "marked the footsteps that He trod" and come to sanctity.

God did this with tainted seed, shapen in iniquity, and begotten into a polluted world. Can anything be put beyond the power of the Holy Spirit? All the saints came of one diseased stock and some of them had brought forth fruit consonant with the stock from which they came. They had been open sinners, sensual, bestial and proud in it. They made a pagentry of their evil living. Like their precursors in the faith at Corinth, some of them had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners...but now they were washed and sanctified!

God did it! Now let the heart of man "deceitful above all things" and "desperately sick" deny the challenge of the saint's example. If God could do this with men and women – and such men and women – might he not do something with me? Even me?

If those who had given hostages to evil, and trebled the carnality of nature by unholy indulgence, could be arrested, converted, washed and sanctified, is anyone beyond the reach of Christ's redeeming and purifying power?

Augustine said:

To Carthage I came where a cauldron of unholy loves bubbled up all around me. I loved not as yet, yet I loved to love; and, with a hidden want, I abhorred myself that I wanted not. I searched about for something to love, in love with loving, and hating security, and a way not beset with snares...For this reason my soul was far from well, and, full of ulcers, it miserably cast itself forth, craving to be excited by contact with objects of sense...To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I succeeded in enjoying the person I loved. I befouled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I dimmed its luster with the hell of lustfulness; and yet, foul and dishonorable as I was, I craved though and excess of vanity, to be thought elegant and urbane. I fell precipitately then...

And this was the man whom God made into a saint so mighty that he over-tops the ages, ranks as second figure in the great Evangelical Succession, and spreads the brightness of his sanctity through all the centuries since.

No branch of the church could exist without saints. Indeed, their presence is one proof that it is a true branch of the vine. Only God can make a saint. God, therefore, is in any branch of the church in which they grow. It would be a telling part of the answer of any Christians to those who would unchurch them, simply to say: "Look at our saints." How the saint is defined, and whether or not precision in definition is possible, is a subject which must engage us later. Our present concern is only to stress the church's need of saints. Not only is their presence in the church proof of God's presence also, but a chief means in the education of those who come after.

The unmistakable homesickness of the soul

There is that in the soul of man which must respond to the highest in virtue. It may not respond at once. Human nature can easily be over-faced by examples too remote and austere. Moreover, human nature can easily deny God because the whole race has long been in rebellion against him. Yet there is that in human nature which calls out to the supreme examples of virtue: owns, as it were, the intention of God who made it, and feels the unmistakable homesickness of the soul.

And it is part of the service of the saints to awaken that homesickness of the soul in men and women. It does not

exhaust their service to our poor race. Taken in its wholeness, their service is many-faceted. They often bring a revival of religion. It was of revival that Lacordaire was thinking when he said: “O God, give us some saints.” All France went to Ars in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to see the most lowly-born and ill-instructed priest in the country because he was a saint. The church is revived by the power of the Holy Spirit through the saints.

The saints are the most convincing answer to atheism and agnosticism. They do not usually answer them philosophically. In some mystic way they make it impossible for others to live near them and disbelieve. In the mixed character of Voltaire – nobility and cynicism strangely blended – there was much mockery of religion. But a contented atheist he could not be. Asked by a skeptical friend one day if he had ever met anyone like Jesus Christ, he lapsed into silence and then answered with awe-ful seriousness: “I once met Fletcher of Madeley.”

Nothing but an increase of saints will make the church powerful in the world. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. As he comes to sanctify, so he comes in power. The world could not long ignore a holy church. The church is not despised because it is holy: it is despised because it is not holy enough. There is not enough difference between the people inside the church and those outside to be impressive. A church in which saints were as common as now they are rare would convict the world, if only by contrast. Sanctity cannot be ignored. Even a little bit is potent. So far from the gates of hell prevailing against it, it hammers on their triple steel.

The saints are the chief hope of reunion. They link loving hands while mere ecclesiastics eye each other with suspicion and moil for a formula. Deep calleth unto deep. All the saints belong to one communion. That truth is obscured now by church divisions but only in the Church Militant. When the saints meet at the throne in the Church Triumphant they meet with the ardor of love.

The Lord reflected in his servants

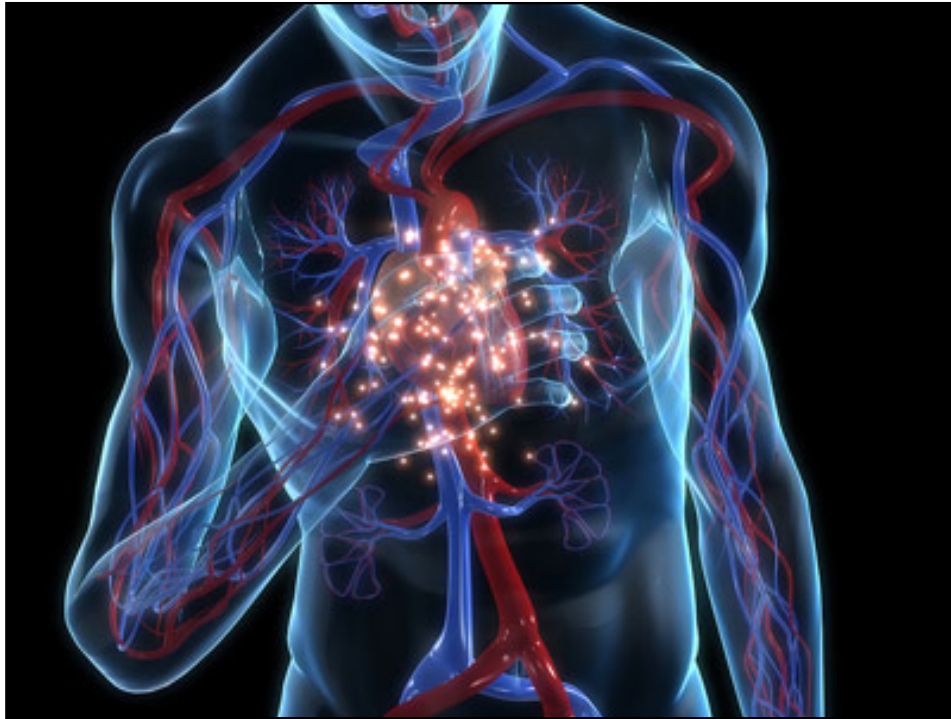
Holding up the saints before the people helps them in a dozen different ways. They see the Lord reflected in his servants. They see what God can do with human nature. The saints are not obstructions to Jesus but interpretations of him. Quoting Newman’s assertion, “and if Antichrist is like Christ, Christ, I suppose, is like Antichrist,” G.K. Chesterton says of St Francis of Assisi, “If St Francis was like Christ, Christ was to that extent like St Francis.” The overwhelming majesty of our Lord’s example is mediated through his servants and the impulse to deny the obligation to live by that pattern on the grounds of his Deity is thwarted.

“This you can be!” Unaware of it themselves, that is what the saints are saying all the time.

It would never occur to them to say it aloud. It is doubtful if they ever think it. One of the most gracious dispensations of God concerning his saints is their lovely unawareness of sanctity. The nearer they move to him, the more conscious are they of sin. If it were impossible at times not to note their own growth in grace, it were impossible also to forget that it was all by his power. If they could be persuaded to admit their progress and talk of it at all, the language of their heart would be this: “If God could do this in me, he could do it in anyone.”

More than that it would be unreasonable to ask of them.

[Excerpted from *The Pure in Heart, A Study on Christian Sanctity*, by W.E. Sangster (1900-1960), The Epworth Press, London, Great Britain, 1954.]



Why Holiness Is Necessary

by J.I. Packer

Diseases and Delusions

I opened my eyes to find myself lying on my back in a strange bed. Because my head was raised, I could see into the semidarkness beyond the bed. My first thought was that I was in New York's Grand Central railroad station at night. (I had recently seen a photo of the huge Grand Central hall at night, and thought I was recognizing that location.) Then I saw, sitting on the left-hand side of the bed, my mother. She was wearing the big flowered overalls and dusting-cap in which she used to clean the house. She did not speak, but smiled and gave me a cold drink through the spout of what looked like a small white teapot. Afterward they told me that I went straight back to sleep.

In fact, as I learned when I woke next, I was nowhere near Grand Central station. I was in the hospital in my English hometown, having had surgery for a depressed fracture of the skull, which was thought to have damaged my brain. What I saw was partly a delusion, for the ward did not really look like the Grand Central station of the photo either by day or by night. The person keeping vigil by my bed had been a nurse in uniform, wearing a frilly headdress, blue frock, and white apron. I saw what I saw (if I shut my eyes I can see it now), but I was not seeing what was there. My shocked and battered brain was playing tricks on me. Reality was different from what I thought it was.

All of that happened in 1933, when I was seven years old. Why do I now hark back to it? Because it illustrates two truths that I find I have to stress over and over again when talking to Christians today.

First Truth

We are all invalids in God's hospital. In moral and spiritual terms we are all sick and damaged, diseased and deformed, scarred and sore, lame and lopsided, to a far, far greater extent than we realize. Under God's care we are

getting better, but we are not yet well. The modern Christian likes to dwell on present blessings rather than future prospects. Modern Christians egg each other on to testify that where once we were blind, deaf, and indeed dead so far as God was concerned, now through Christ we have been brought to life, radically transformed, and blessed with spiritual health. Thank God, there is real truth in that. But spiritual health means being holy and whole. To the extent that we fall short of being holy and whole, we are not fully healthy either.

We need to realize that the spiritual health we testify to is only partial and relative, a matter of being less sick and less incapacitated now than we were before. Measured by the absolute standard of spiritual health that we see in Jesus Christ, we are all of us no more, just as we are no less, than invalids in the process of being cured. The old saying that the Church is God's hospital remains true. Our spiritual life is at best a fragile convalescence, easily disrupted. When there are tensions, strains, perversities, and disappointments in the Christian fellowship, it helps to remember that no Christian, and no church, ever has the clean bill of spiritual health that would match the total physical well-being for which today's fitness seekers labor. To long for total spiritual well-being is right and natural, but to believe that one is anywhere near it is to be utterly self-deceived.

It is not always easy to grasp that one is ill. I remember how in the hospital in 1933 I was, so to speak, kept in cotton wool for several days by doctor's orders, since nobody knew how much harm might have come to my brain. I also remember how hard it was to think of myself as a sick boy, since at no stage did I feel any ill effects at all. For slipping out of bed to wander round, and for standing on the bed to see how springy it was, I was tongue-lashed, I recall, by the nurse who upbraided me with Welsh eloquence for, in effect, putting my life at risk. After this I remained dutifully bedbound, according to instructions – but still without any conviction inside me that it needed to be that way. (Seven-year-olds can be as opinionated as any adult, and I certainly was.)

In the same way, Christians today can imagine themselves to be strong, healthy, and holy when, in fact, they are actually weak, sick, and sinful in ways that are noticeable not just to their heavenly Father, but also to their fellow believers. Pride and complacency, however, blind us to this reality. We decline to be told when we are slipping; thinking we stand, we set ourselves up to fall, and predictably, alas, we do fall.

In good hospitals, patients receive regular curative treatment as well as constant care, and the treatment determines in a direct way the form that the care will take. In God's hospital the course of treatment that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the permanent medical staff (if I dare so speak), are giving to each of us with a view to our final restoration to the fullness of the divine image, is called *sanctification*. It is a process that includes on the one hand medication and diet (in the form of biblical instruction and admonition coming in various ways to the heart), and on the other hand tests and exercises (in the form of internal and external pressures, providentially ordered, to which we have to make active response). The process goes on as long as we are in this world, which is something that God decides in each case.

Like patients in any ordinary hospital, we are impatient for recovery. The question that forms the title of Lane Adams' wonderful little book on God's sanctifying therapy, *How Come It's Taking Me So Long to Get Better?* is often our heart-cry to God.¹ The truth is that God knows what He is doing, but sometimes, for reasons connected with the maturity and ministry that He has in view for us, He makes haste slowly. That is something we have to learn humbly to accept. We are in a hurry; He is not.

Second Truth

We are all prone to damaging delusions. On my first night in the hospital, the place was not where I thought it was, and the person by my bed was not whom I thought it was: I was in a state of delusion. The next day I felt well and could not think of myself as ill, but that was delusion too. In the same way believers are often deluded about Christian faith and living.

There are the delusions of direct theological error about God's nature and character and ways and purposes. In liberal and modernist and process theology, to look no further, these abound.

There are the delusions of doubt and unbelief. Something horrible happens, and at once we conclude that God must have forgotten us or turned against us, or perhaps gone out of existence.

There are the delusions of self-confidence. We think we have finally licked some particular sin or weakness by which we were previously dragged down. We relax, and a sense of well-being, security, and triumph creeps over us. Then comes the double whammy of fresh external pressure and a renewed inner urge, and down we go again.

There are also the delusions that disrupt relationships. We misunderstand each other's motives and purposes. We blame others for causing the tensions and generating the hostility, and are blind to our own part in provoking the difficulties.

There are delusions too, resulting from failure to distinguish things that differ – for example, equating the biblical gospel with Jesus-centered legalism, Jesus-centered lawlessness, Jesus-centered socialism, or Jesus-centered racism; equating secular psychological counseling with biblical pastoral direction; or equating inner passivity as a formula for holiness with the biblical call to disciplined moral effort in the power of the Holy Spirit.² All such delusions spell disaster.

And then there are delusions about the Christian life – that it will ordinarily be easy, successful, healthy and wealthy, excitingly punctuated by miracles; that such acts as fornication and tax evasion will not matter as long as nobody finds out; that God always wants you to do what you feel like doing; and so on, and so on. Satan, the father of lies and a past master at deluding, labors constantly to mislead and muddle God's people, so that humble self-suspicion, and the commonsensical hardheadedness that used to be called prudence, and the habit of testing by Scripture things hitherto taken for granted, become virtues of very great importance.

Throughout this book, I shall be appealing to Scripture constantly. It is the only safe way, for we are all as vulnerable to delusions about holiness as we are about anything else.

God's Prescription for Us

The sort of physician I appreciate (and you, too, I expect) takes the patient into his or her confidence and explains his or her diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. Then he or she tells you what the prescribed medication is meant to do. You are put fully in the picture, and so you know where you are.

Not all physicians behave this way, but the best do – and so does the Great Physician of our souls, our Lord Jesus Christ. His therapeutic style, if I may express it this way, is communicative from first to last. The Bible, heard and read, preached and taught, interpreted and applied, is both the channel and the content of His communication. It is as if Jesus hands us the canonical Scriptures directly, telling us that they are the authoritative and all-sufficient source from which we must learn both what we are to do in order to be His followers and also what He has done, is doing, and will do to save us from the fatal sickness of sin. Think of your Bible, then, as Jesus Christ's gift to you; think of it as a letter to you from your Lord. Think of your name, written in the front of it, as if Jesus Himself had written it there. Think of Jesus each time you read your Bible. Think of Him asking you, page by page and chapter by chapter, what you have just learned about the need, nature, method, and effect of the grace that He brings, and about the path of loyal discipleship that He calls you to tread. That is the way to profit from the Bible. Only when your reading of the written Word feeds into your relationship with the living Word (Jesus) does the Bible operate as the channel of light and life that God means it to be....

Why did we need salvation?

Why, because we were sinners! And, as such, lost! This has been said already, but the assertion needs now to be amplified.

We were sinners: sinners in practice, because we were sinners by nature. Sin is a universal, trans-cultural reality; an infection from which no human being anywhere, at any time, is exempt. What is it? Formally, it is what answer fourteen of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says it is: “Any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.”

But it is also an energy, an obsession, an allergic reaction to God’s law, an irrational anti-God syndrome in our spiritual system that drives us to exalt ourselves and steels our hearts against devotion and obedience to our Maker. Pride, ingratitude and self-gratification are its basic expressions, leading sometimes to antisocial behavior and always, even in the nicest and most honorable people, to a lack of love for God at the motivational level. The religious practice of unregenerate mankind, whatever its form, may be and often is conscientious and laborious. It always proves, however, on analysis to be self-seeking and God-exploiting, rather than self-denying and God-glorifying, in its purpose.

Both Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek have a wide range of words for “sin,” picturing its nonconformity to God in a variety of different ways:

- as rebellion against our rightful owner and ruler;
- as transgression of the bounds He set;
- as missing the mark He told us to aim at;
- as breaking the law He enacted;
- as defiling (dirtying, polluting) ourselves in His sight, so making ourselves unfit for His company;
- as embracing folly by shutting our ears to His wisdom; and
- as incurring guilt before His judgment seat.

The Bible, functioning as a mirror for self-knowledge, shows us ourselves as playing God, by making ourselves, our wishes and advancement, the center of everything; as fighting God, by refusing to submit to Him and defying His revealed will; and as hating God in our hearts for the claims He makes on our lives. “The mind of sinful man is death . . . the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Romans 8:6-8)....

New Life

The New Testament goes on to explain to us the newness of our life in Christ as a real and radical alteration of our personal being. It tells us that believers have been united to Christ, and are now “in” Him, having died (finished with their old life) and been raised (started off in a new life) with their Lord (Romans 6:3-11; Ephesians 2:4-10; Colossians 2:11-14). In Christ they enjoy a new status. They are:

- justified (pardoned and accepted);
- adopted (made God’s children and heirs); and
- cleansed (fitted for fellowship with their holy Creator).

All aspects of their new status become real by virtue of Christ’s suffering for them on the cross (see Romans 3:21-26, 5:1, 8:15-19; Galatians 4:4-7; John 15:3; 1 John 1:3-7). This is momentous. To be justified means that, by God’s

own judicial decision, I stand before Him now and forever “just as if I had never sinned.” To be adopted means that now I may call my Creator-Judge “Father,” in the intimacy of His beloved family, and know myself to be an heir of His glory – “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). To be cleansed means that nothing in my past imposes any restraint on my fellowship with God in the present.

Nor is that all. In Christ believers are also involved in a process of character change. The Holy Spirit (through whose agency faith was engendered in them) and Christ (through whom the new life was won for them, and became consciously real to them) now indwell them to transform them “into his [Christ’s] likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christ and His Spirit empower them to put sinful habits to death and bring forth in them the new behavior patterns that constitute the Spirit’s “fruit” (see Romans 8:9-13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-26). This, too, is momentous.

We who believe have to wake up to the fact that the ministry to us of the Father and the Son through the Spirit has turned us into different people from what we were by nature. Our present task is, as it is sometimes put, to be what we are – to live out what God has wrought in, expressing in action the new life (new vision, motivation, devotion, and sense of direction) that has now become ours. Or, as Paul puts it, “Live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). The thought is the same.

The hearts of saved persons will always affirm that their conversion, or new birth, or renewal (different people use different words at this point) was the work of God from first to last. All the searching and struggling that went into it will be felt to have been no less divinely orchestrated than were its final stages of conviction, commitment, and assurance. Ever since the fifth century, Western Christians have used Augustine’s term for God’s initiative of life-giving love within the soul, giving thanks for His *prevenient grace*: grace that moves in as a renovating force to make the spiritually blind see, the spiritually deaf hear, and the spiritually dumb speak. (“Prevenient” means “coming before” – coming to one, before one is spiritually alive, in order to impart life.)....

God's Future Plan of Salvation

The lesson to be learned here is that our thinking about the future part of God’s saving plan must start where Binney starts: namely, with recognition that the triune God is *light*. This means that He is holy – pure and perfect, loving all good and hating all evil. Also, it means that He constantly searches out all that is in us, so that “everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). (The exposing of what would otherwise lie hidden in darkness is one of the thoughts that the biblical image of *light* regularly conveys: see John 3:19-21; Ephesians 5:11-14.) So no unholiness in us will go unnoticed.

The triune God who is *light* is also *love* – holy love (see 1 John 1:5; 4:8,16). What does this mean? It means that only what is actually holy and worthy can give God actual satisfaction. As the love that binds spouses in a good marriage is an evaluative love that appreciates the excellence of the loved one, so the love that binds Father, Son, and Spirit is an evaluative love whereby each delights in the holiness of the other two, and in the holiness of the holy angels. That love will not have full joy of us who are Christ’s until we are holy too. Nor can we fully love God, and fully enjoy Him as we love Him, while we know ourselves to be still in the grip of moral weaknesses and perversities. To know oneself, here and now, to be, in Luther’s phrase, *simul justus et peccator* – a justified sinner, right with God though sinning still – is a wonderful privilege. But the hope set before us is yet more wonderful, namely to be in the presence of God, seeing Him and fellowshiping with Him, as one who is a sinner no longer. What God plans for us in the present is to lead us toward this goal.

So the divine agenda for the rest of my life on earth is my sanctification. As has already been hinted, I have been raised from spiritual death and born again in Christ so that I might be changed into His moral likeness. “You were taught,” Paul tells me (for I, like all other Bible-readers, stand with the Ephesian Christians at this point), “with

regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self . . . to be made new . . . and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24; see also Colossians 3:9-10). The detailed moral directives in each of Paul’s letters show me that he means this in the most literal and down-to-earth sense.

Increasing conformity to the image of Christ – to His righteousness and holiness, His love and humility, His self-denial and single-mindedness, His wisdom and prudence, His boldness and self-control, His faithfulness and strength under pressure – is the sum and substance of the “good works” for which Christians have been created (that is, re-created) in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). It is also the “good” for which in all things God works in the lives of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). The God in whose hands I am, willy-nilly, and whom I have in fact gladly and penitently put in charge of my life, is in the holiness business. Part of the answer to the question that life’s roller-coaster ride repeatedly raises, why has this happened to me? is always: it is moral training and discipline, planned by my heavenly Father to help me forward along the path of Christlike virtue (see Hebrews 12:5-11).

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Is Christianity Hard or Easy?

by C.S. Lewis

How much of myself must I give?

The ordinary idea which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as a starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else – call it “morality” or “decent behaviour,” or “the good of society” – has claims on this self: claims which interfere with its own desires. What we mean by “being good” is giving in to these claims. Some of the things the ordinary self wanted to do turn out to be what we call “wrong:” well, we must give them up. Other things, which the self did not want to do, turn out to be what we call “right:” well, we shall have to do them. But we are hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life and do what it likes. In fact, we are very like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there will be enough left over for him to live on. Because we are still taking our natural self as the starting point.

Giving up or becoming unhappy

As long as we are thinking that way, one or other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, “live for others” but always in a discontented, grumbling way – always wondering

why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you have become that, you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish.

Harder and easier

The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours."

Both harder and easier than what we are all trying to do. You have noticed, I expect, that Christ Himself sometimes describes the Christian way as very hard, sometimes as very easy. He says, "Take up your Cross"—in other words, it is like going to be beaten to death in a concentration camp. Next minute he says, "My yoke is easy and my burden light." He means both. And one can just see why both are true.

The almost impossible thing

...The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self – all your wishes and precautions – to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call "ourselves," to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be "good." We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way – centred on money or pleasure or ambition – and hoping, in spite of this to behave honestly and chastely and humbly.

And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. As he said, a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.

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Taking On God's Character

– A case for Christian character

by John Keating

Every four years athletes from nearly every nation on the globe compete in the Olympic Games. They are chosen for their excellence in skill and discipline. Those who bring home gold medals are treated as national heroes. As Christians we are called to not only run the good race of our faith, but to strive for excellence as men and women who bring honor and glory to God. We are called to be a holy nation – a people who reflect God’s own character as he has revealed it in Jesus Christ, and who bear it proudly as citizens of his kingdom.

We Christians tend to neglect the importance that God places on our character. We can become more concerned with living a “good life” or “getting by.” We often fall into the trap of looking at the world around us and deciding that I’m not as bad as she is or I never do that sort of thing, and think that in comparison with the world we’re doing pretty well. Living the Christian life is a far more glorious call than we often imagine. For God’s intention is to restore us fully to his image and likeness, to make us “perfect.” And this has implications. It means that we must be concerned with more than believing the right things and obeying certain commands. We must also be the right thing – from the inside out. As a result, although we all have quite different personalities and talents, certain qualities of character should typify all Christians because the character they reflect is God’s.

Though these often go unnoticed, the New Testament lays out some specific instructions about Christian character. It frequently presents a number of qualities to which we should aspire. Among them are such godly virtues as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, reliability, meekness, self-control, compassion, zeal, forbearance, and perseverance.

It is not at all easy to grow into God's character and to become increasingly like the Lord Jesus Christ, acting and responding as he would. But that is the goal that lies before us if we will pursue it. The temptation is always to resist, stopping short of all that God intends to do in us. His process of reforming us is often uncomfortable and at times quite painful, and the easy road of settling for less is so attractive. Our justification might go something like this: "Well, there are some pretty sizable discrepancies between Jesus' character and mine, but my faults and character defects aren't that major, and besides, nobody's perfect. Sure, I can get pretty grouchy and irritable at times, and that streak of selfishness doesn't show any signs of going away. Yes, I probably need to learn to control my tongue better, because it gets me into trouble at times. But, that's the way I am, and I've learned to accept myself and be content."

But should we be so easily contented? If we will cooperate with God's grace at work in us, more of our faults and defects can actually change. He has a great and splendid plan for us and is not likely to settle for less, provided that we don't. The holiness of our character is a high priority for him. If we will allow it, he will never cease working to bring us to perfection. C. S. Lewis has aptly described God's work of building our character:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of: throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making court yards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but he is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it himself. [C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1943), p. 174]

Growing fully into the character of God, into his image and likeness, is a lifelong project. In fact, it will never be completed on this side of the grave. But God's upward call will lead us daily into a richer and better life, into becoming more like his Son Jesus, true children of our Father in heaven.

Brokenness: The necessary step for change

Ever since the Fall, we humans have been a stiff-necked, headstrong, rebellious, self-centered lot. And many of us have been shaped by the same forces that Paul describes to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus. We were "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air," and "following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind" (Eph 2:2-3). To fully put on the Christian character of Christ, such as meekness and zeal, requires from us substantial internal change, because these servant-like, godly qualities wage war on the stiff-necked self-will and rebelliousness of our fallen nature. True character cannot be acquired simply by accepting the abstract theory. There must be a change within us, a death to ourselves. Some Christians have used the word "brokenness" to describe this necessary change. Rightly understood, I believe this idea can be of great use to us as we learn the character of Christ.

What is brokenness?

At least two very different images could come to mind when this term is used. One of them is somewhat inaccurate and unappealing. The other can be a valuable aid to us. One misleading image of brokenness interprets it as a condition that involves being crushed or smashed. According to this we are something like the porcelain figurine my family had on one of our basement shelves. One night when we were kids, a violent

thunderstorm knocked out the electricity supply to our house. A few of us were playing together in the basement when everything went pitch black. After a few moments of consternation and confusion, I said “Okay, everybody get in single file and hold on to the one ahead of you, and we’ll all feel our way upstairs.” I led the way, groping ahead of me in the dark. Unfortunately, the first thing I made contact with was that porcelain figurine. I drew my hand back quickly, but too late. It crashed to the floor and broke in several pieces. Even though we later tried to glue it together, it was never the same. Something like this may happen to people who have come through the harrowing experience of brainwashing and torture. They can come out “broken individuals” who are never quite the same again. Their spirit is crushed; they have no heart left to fight, or sometimes even to live.

This image has also been used of one who suffers a crushing personal defeat or humiliation. For example, in 1938 Adolf Hitler took over Czechoslovakia. Hitler accomplished this feat without a fight by summoning Czechoslovakia's president, Dr. Hacha, to Berlin. There, the Czech president, an old man in ill health, was kept up most of the night, mercilessly browbeaten by Hitler and his aides, and threatened with the destruction of his people. Finally, in despair, he consented to sign a statement that authorized the entry of Hitler's troops into Czechoslovakia. Hacha left Berlin defeated and utterly humiliated, a “broken” man.

Now, this is not the kind of “brokenness” God wants to do in changing us. He does not wish to crush us, to leave us in a weak, decrepit, or miserable condition. How could we be strong, forceful, and confident in serving him we were like that? We would be defeated rather than victorious.



The second and more accurate image of brokenness is really quite different. I can best depict it by describing a movie I saw many years ago. It was the story of a young American Indian boy and a great, white, wild stallion. This horse was well known to the Indians of the territory, but no one had succeeded in catching, much less riding, this magnificent animal. The young Indian went out into the wilderness, and with great patience, love, and firmness succeeded in catching and then training the proud, wild beast to the point that it obeyed him, carried him bareback, and stayed loyally with him to the death.

This is a good analogy for the kind of brokenness that applies to us. The Lord is certainly not much like the Indian boy, but we are a quite a bit like that wild horse, whom the Lord must corral and then “break” with love, patience, and firm discipline. This notion of “breaking” a horse is frequently used by cowboys, not in reference to crushing a horse's spirit, but in regard to taming his wildness and curbing his will so that all his strength and

ability can be harnessed and made useful.

Herein lies a key to character traits, such as meekness and zeal. Our strength must be tamed and channelled by God if we are to be his profitable servants. While he loves us even in our wild, untamed condition, we will only be of limited use to him until he has “broken” and trained us. Once broken, we go from being headstrong, wilful, selfish, and unpredictable to being responsive, obedient, and trustworthy servants of God. There is no diminishing of strength entailed in being broken. If anything, our strength increases as we submit ourselves to God's training, because our strength is properly channelled and harnessed.



Breaking self-will

A fundamental internal change – this is what brokenness is all about. Part of this change involves letting go of our stubborn wilfulness and our determination to get our own way. This letting go should characterize our thinking about major decisions we must make (eg. What should I do with my life? Should I take that new job? Should we move to another city?). We must be free to do God's will, which sometimes coincides with our own will but sometimes does not. This change should also characterize our approach to the small issues of our daily life, where our tendency is to push for getting our own way, even when it matters very little. We would do well – when there is nothing more at stake than our own preferences – to insist less often on what we want, and to let others have their preferences more frequently. This is especially true in marriage, where both husband and wife must each undergo a certain breaking of their preferences and self-will.

For some of us, a problem with self-will is not immediately obvious, since it only surfaces on certain occasions. It tends to rear its head precisely at those times when we are crossed, when things don't go the way we want them to, or when others find fault with us. For instance, one woman I know (we'll call her Sandra) is a very nice, kind person. She's generous and agreeable. But when Sandra wants something, she wants it. And she doesn't graciously take no for an answer, even from those who have authority to decide. At the first resistance to her will she prods and cajoles, but if the no remains no, her eyes begin to flash, her voice gets sharp, and she can become pushy and even nasty. Or take my friend Bob. He's a very talented and likable fellow, who makes a good first impression. Bob, however, is a firm believer, in the infallibility of his own opinion, and in the vast superiority of his way of doing something over all comers. A while back, Bob, who teaches catechism in his Catholic parish, was corrected by the director of his program for taking a different approach to the material than the one they had agreed upon. Bob got irritated and defensive, tried several justifications of his methods, and showed great

unwillingness to make the minor changes that his director required.

Sandra and Bob still have a lot to learn about Christian meekness. Some of the necessary internal breaking of self-will still needs to take place. Having their self-will broken, though, won't mean that they will become weak-willed or will lose all their capacity for having strong opinions or preferences. In fact, it is a great virtue to have a strong will, provided that it is exercised toward the proper ends. As Christians, we are to strongly exercise our wills toward the accomplishment of *God's* will. At the same time, we must learn to lay down our own will: our attachment to our own way, our preferences, and our desires.

Breaking wildness

The white stallion in the movie manifested his wildness by reacting violently whenever he was confronted with difficult circumstances. For example, if a man tried to approach him, he would react in fear, turn tail, and race off like the wind. When another stallion attempted to challenge his domain, he snorted and neighed with anger, pawed the ground, and charged in full fury with hoofs flying and teeth bared.

As with the horse, there can also be a streak of wildness in us that needs breaking – a tendency to violent, emotional reactions when facing difficult situations: for instance, a tendency to freeze, or else to bolt and run in fear, or a tendency to lash out in anger. Being broken of our wildness means learning to overcome the unruly emotional reactions within us in such a way that we are free to make the response which is proper to a servant of the Most High King.

Being broken, even in the sense used in this article, is always a trying and painful experience. But there is no way around it for those of us who would take on the character of the Lord. Our strength must be brought under God's control, and our self-will and wildness must be broken in order to bring about the full internal, change that frees us to be true servants of God.

[This article is adapted from the book [Strength Under Control: Meekness and Zeal](#), by John Keating, first edition by Servant Publications in 1981, second edition by [Kairos Publications](#) 2011.]



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See previous
articles
by John Keating

- > [Going Against the Tide: Lessons in Faith and Courage from the Book of Daniel, Part 1](#)
- > [God's Servants in the Fiery Furnace – Lessons from the Book of Daniel, Part 2](#)
- > [Joshua Takes the Lead: "Be Strong and of Good Courage," Part 3](#)



.The Unimaginable Hope of the Tests of God

by Sam Williamson

When we think about God testing us, most of us shudder. Yet I believe that they can be a key to hope and joy. Let me explain.

I began flying lessons in 1997. These lessons taught me to take off and land, to navigate using aviation charts, and to communicate with air traffic control.

I particularly liked learning to land.

On my second actual flight, about a mile above the ground, my instructor Jayne pulled the throttle to idle and announced that my engine had just died. She asked what I was going to do. Throttling her was not an option because I hadn't yet learned to land. But I was strongly tempted.

Soon a pattern emerged. She'd kill the engine, I'd want to kill her, and we'd practice standard engine-restart procedures, and I'd look for a place to land. Then we would circle down to the landing site until Jayne said we would have made it (or not). Then she'd re-throttle the engine, we'd climb, and we'd review what I had done.

Jayne drilled the engine-out procedures into me so thoroughly that I could have done them in my sleep, though I never tried.

Two types of tests

Jayne taught me to fly through a series of tests. The nature of these tests – repetition and reflection – taught me to fly. Educators call these *formative tests*. They are educational methods that train us in the midst of the test, such as my flying instructor's engine-out surprises.

Each time Jayne killed my engine it was a test, but the test itself trained me to handle emergencies safely and confidently. Formative tests teach us *today* how to avoid failure and disqualification *tomorrow*.

However, when most of us think of tests conducted by educators, we picture *summative tests*. These measure how much we have already learned, such as midterms, finals, and college entrance exams (the ACT or SAT).

While formative tests are designed to *qualify* us for the future, one could say that summative tests are designed to *disqualify* us, as in "My SAT score was low so I failed to get into Harvard."

So what?

Why is this distinction so important? Because understanding the difference between summative and formative tests is the key to joy or despair. It is the difference between midday sun and midnight darkness. Frankly, it is the gospel.

Most people consider Christianity to be one large summative test, sort of a huge College entrance exam: a big moral test which we repeatedly fail. But it isn't.

Why do we fear God testing us? Why do we freak out when we read passages like this, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you **to test you**" (1 Peter 4:12)? We fear God's tests for these reasons:

- We fear the failure of tests
- We fear the pain of tests
- We fear the purpose of tests.

The Failure. If God's tests are summative (assessing and disqualifying), then yes, we should fear them. But if God is using tests to form us, then we can be at peace – even in the middle of a crisis. When we misunderstand the nature of testing, we think God is disqualifying us, when he is actually working to qualify us. Through tests he makes us more capable; he dismantles the false self and builds in us our truest calling. He broadens our shoulders and he strengthens our steps. He's teaching us to fly.

The Pain. When we are barely holding our lives together, the mere thought of the burden of a test – adding one more thing – causes pain. We fear our engine-out-plane will hit the ground. But God himself is our flight instructor, sitting in the plane next to us. He is not on the ground giving radio instructions. His exercises develop our strength. He is preparing us for something great.

We often willingly experience self-inflicted pain to attain our own goals – the pain of exercise to gain health, the pain of dating to find a spouse, the pain of child-rearing to have a family – so why do we fear the pain of God's tests? Isn't he always pursuing greater goals than we seek? Isn't he more careful with our hearts than we are? He is always after something richer than we imagine.

The Purpose. We think we know what we need, and we fear God will get it wrong. God's tests often go in directions we don't wish. We want to be a doctor, and God wants to give us peace. We want financial security and God wants to give us joy. God formed our hearts and deepest desires. He created our calling before we were born. He knows what we need, and through his tests he reveals and shapes our hearts and our calling. And he is teaching us to land.

When we believe God's tests are formative, we experience hope, the pressure is off. We know that God has prepared us for this moment, and we are at peace knowing God is using this moment to prepare us for the next. It's okay. Even if we "fail" this time around, God uses today's experience to prepare us for tomorrow.

Only one test is truly summative. That test is what we choose to believe. Do we choose to believe his tests are summative or formative? If we believe his tests are summative – and failure is disqualification – then everything rests on our shoulders.

When we believe in our hearts that he has done everything for us – he has already qualified us – then every test is an engine-out exercise.

He's teaching us to fly.

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Spiritual Servants

by Jon Wilson

As Christians, we are conscious of the call to be servants. Many of us make ourselves available for Christian service, whether in our community, church, or another grouping. We take seriously the call to put others before ourselves, and to allow the Lord to use us in our everyday lives. At the same time, we encounter some real challenges. We are busy, and we often feel as though we are struggling to keep our heads above water. Some of us feel burned out, some of us are a little cynical. Some of us just have never been asked to do anything. Others of us don't enjoy our service; we would like to find something more fulfilling, but don't know how. It can be easy to feel stuck, not knowing how to move forward in the area of service. I would like to suggest a few different perspectives that might help in this area.

One fruitful way to consider our service is to think about it spiritually. We need to make sure that our service is spiritual, not just physical or natural. What do I mean by spiritual? I simply mean trying to see things as God sees them, to get his perspective on things. If you think about it, this is the opposite of what we often think about when we hear the word "spiritual." Our "spiritual" thinking can be ethereal, floating on clouds, separated from real life. But if a spiritual perspective is an attempt to gain the Lord's perspective, spiritual vision is more real, more grounded in reality, than our everyday natural vision.

"When I run, I feel his pleasure"

I like to try to think spiritually about things like gardening, hiking, or running. These very physical activities, but how does God see them? Why did he create us to do these things? Are there spiritual lessons we learn from them? I think of Eric Liddell in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, a missionary and athlete, who said: "I believe that God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure." God is involved in our everyday, mundane lives, and he orders our steps even when we are walking the halls at school, the office, or home.

We can focus the same lens on our service. Our service is often very human, concrete, physical, but we need to keep God intimately involved in what we are doing. If we lose a spiritual perspective, our service will lose its meaning. As we serve our Master, we need to keep our eyes fixed on him.

Motivation

As we work to be spiritual servants, we also need to ensure that we are rightly motivated for service. First and foremost, we should be motivated by the love of God in Christ. Our Christian life always needs to begin with God's love. We do not initiate our relationship with the Lord. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It is in light of this reality that we offer our service as an expression of joy and gratitude to him.

We should also be motivated by love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our service benefits our brothers and sisters. It is an expression of love and care for one another. Furthermore, serving one another and serving with one another also strengthens our relationships and can bring great joy. I experienced this recently, when I was given responsibility to organize a large and complex event in our community. I don't naturally like organizing events, but to my surprise I actually ended up enjoying this task. As I thought about it afterwards, I realized it was because I was working with other people to get it to happen. It was the joy of our relationships that made the service a blessing for me.

We are also motivated in our service by our desire to follow in Christ's footsteps. We long to be joined to Christ, who is the true servant. Philippians 2:1-11 speaks about having the same mindset as the Lord Jesus, "who, being in very nature God, did not grasp equality with God, but emptied himself, taking on the very nature of a servant." There is no higher call than the call to imitate Jesus Christ.

Fulfillment versus usefulness

How might a spiritual perspective help us in addressing some of the challenges many of us face in the area of service? Let's look at a few specific issues. When we talk about finding fulfillment in our service, we will likely find some different points of view. Should we be looking simply to serve where we are needed, or should we strive to find service that is in accord with our gifts and that is fulfilling for us? I think we need to find a balance here; it is both/and. There are always things that need to be done. I don't teach my kids to set the table because they are gifted at it; it is just something that needs to get done. (And menial service can be fun when we have a good attitude and serve with brothers and sisters!) But, particularly with major services, we should be attentive to what we think God may have gifted us for, and be attentive to what we enjoy. This requires initiative, courage, a willingness to fail, and an open communication with the people in leadership. If we ignore our gifts and passions when we come to our service, we will find ourselves building pretty grim communities.

It is worth pointing out that when we are doing something we enjoy and are gifted at, the fear of failure can be greater, since it matters to us how our service turns out. This is part of our service to one another: we carry this fear and try things anyway, use the gifts God has given us. And when we are being served, we often have to be attentive to this: critical comments, unsolicited advice and input are often unnecessary and unhelpful. Let's be grateful and honoring of those who are serving in our midst.

What about the area of busyness? Yes, most of us are busy; yes, our lives are full. But rather than dwell on this, it is perhaps more important to take on a spiritual perspective and ask ourselves, are we busy doing the right things? Is our time filled with what the Lord wants us to be doing? It might be useful to contrast busyness with fullness of life. Christ came that we may have life to the full, not just that we may be busy. Do we experience the many activities in our lives as contributing to the kind of fullness that comes from Christ? If not, we may need to reevaluate some of our commitments.

Our goal should be an intentional, examined life and schedule. We should strive as much as possible to make conscious choices to do the things we are doing. We should evaluate our various commitments, seeking input from brothers and sisters that know us well. And when we are confident that we are doing our best with our time, we can be at peace, and own our busyness. These are things we are choosing for and that we believe in.

I recently found myself starting to dread another day and week of my busy schedule. Finally, I stepped back and thought, "Why am I dreading these things?" I realized that part of my problem was that I was thinking too much about all that was coming up on my schedule, thinking too far ahead. I began making a conscious effort not to think ahead more than was necessary, but to enjoy each thing as it came. I find I am more able to find the Lord in each service if I am not constantly looking ahead to the next thing.

A place to serve

Let's look at one final challenge many of us face in our service – that of finding a place to serve. It can be difficult to find the right kind of service, in terms of time commitment, gifts required, and the needs of our community. This is a shared responsibility, between the community leaders and each member. While our leaders must strive to help all members engage productively in service, each of us must also take responsibility for our own service. This calls for patience, experimentation, and a willingness to step out and try new things. It is helpful to remember that we need to take the Lord's work seriously, but not take ourselves too seriously.

If you are struggling to find a place to serve, it can be very helpful to talk about this with a pastoral worker or your men's or women's group. The people who know us best may have some good insight into what we might be able to take on as our service. It is also worth saying that some service does not yet exist. We may need to invent it! Let's be open to direction from the Lord as we try to creatively engage in service for him.

In conclusion, we should consider the wisdom found in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others; while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Here we see that the call to serve is a gift from God. God calls us to serve, God equips us to serve, God gives us the resources to serve, and God blesses us through our service. Our service blesses everyone around us as well. Let us embrace this gift of grace, and experience the joy God has for us in our service. Let us be spiritual servants, boldly confronting the things that hold us back from service and taking risks in order to advance the kingdom of God.

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Kairos Gappers who served in [YouthWorks-Detroit](#) last summer

Why the Gap?

[Spanish version: [Por qué la Brecha](#)]

by Miguel Vargas

The [bulwark](#) of the Sword of the Spirit has been built by many men and women who were willing to leave everything behind and follow the Lord. I have heard many inspiring stories from the beginnings of the covenant community movement back in the 1970s and '80s. Many young single and married people decided to move from one city to another in order to live in a Christian community. They left their jobs and studies and the prospect of career advancement, as well as friends and relatives, in order to serve the Lord in charismatic covenant community. We admire the sacrifices these early pioneers made to build Christian communities around the world and we benefit from the fruit of their labor. It is easy today to think that we don't need to make this kind of sacrifice anymore. But the Lord continues to call young people today to make radical decisions to live as his disciples and to serve what he's building in the [Sword of the Spirit](#). We hear the Lord calling many to serve generously, offering six months, one year, two years, or even their whole lives to serve the mission he has given to our community of communities – preaching the good news and living our life together that draws others to Christ.

In recent months I have had conversations with young people from many places around the world who are considering joining the [Kairos Gap Program](#) of the Sword of the Spirit. There is a common element in these conversations: nearly everybody wants to do it, but they wonder if it might be too risky for them. It's natural and understandable that we want to take control of our future and not miss the opportunity to move forward. After all, gappers choose to put their career development on hold for a year or more in order to serve the Lord in mission. In that time period they will miss job opportunities, perhaps professional training, and settling their state in life – whether to remain single or get married, or live single for the Lord. Gappers often move to other countries far away from the people they love most. They will probably miss important moments in the lives of their friends, and they

will have to say no to many things they would like to do. It is natural to wonder if it's worth the sacrifice involved.

For those considering the call to serve in the Kairos Gap program, it is very helpful to speak with people who previously did a Gap year in order to hear what they gained from the experience of leaving behind other good things for the sake of serving the Lord. Wise Christians who know us well – parents, youth workers, pastoral leaders, and community coordinators – can offer us helpful counsel in sorting out the questions and concerns involved in making a good decision.

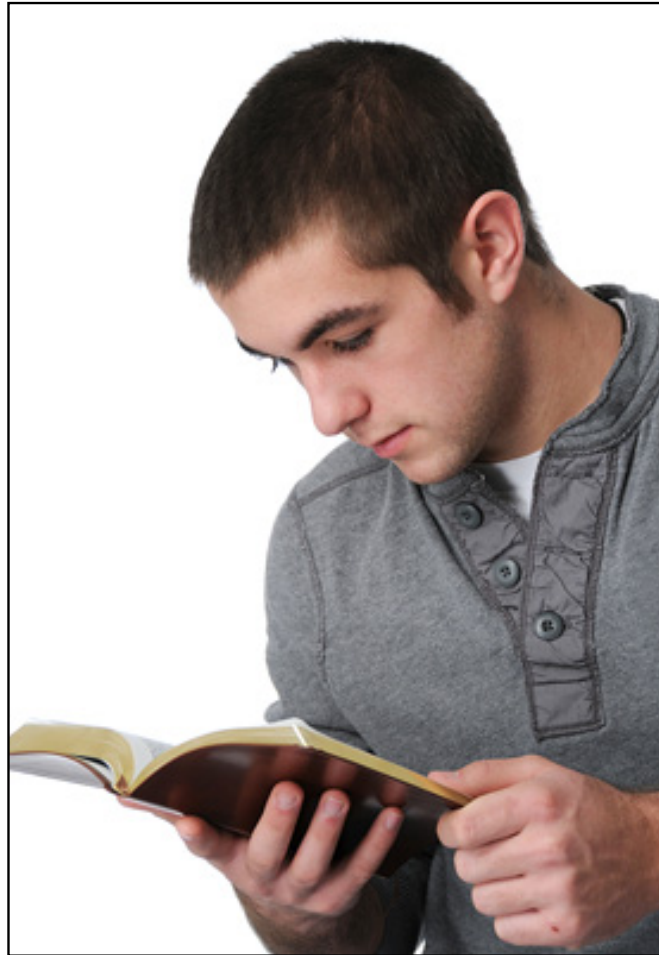
The most important person we need to consult, of course, is the Lord Jesus himself. Do we trust him to lead us in making the right choice? If we choose to serve him in a Gap year, will he provide for us all that we need – physical, spiritual, and emotional strength? We know that he had power to open the Red Sea for Moses and the people of Israel and to lead them safely through the wilderness for forty years. Jesus not only had power to perform many miracles, such as feeding 5000 people, he also had power to rise from the dead after three days in the tomb. We believe that his power is still at work today – bringing people to new life in Christ and raising up Christian communities around the world. If the Lord has done all this for the sake of his people in the past, will he not be able to give each of us a job, a place to live, a stable life and future, after we have given him one year of service? Scripture gives us the assurance of God's care for us: "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have served his people and continue to serve them" (Hebrews 6:10).

Is it God's will that you should do a Kairos Gap year? Or your son or daughter, or the young person you care for in your youth group? I don't see how the Lord could be upset with any young person who chooses to offer him their whole heart, life, gifts and talents, abandoning themselves completely into his providential care. This kind of offering pleases the Lord and brings him glory.

I can share from my own personal experience, since I have now lived and served in different communities for more than three years outside of my own country, Costa Rica. It's definitely worth doing. I have lived hundreds of miles away from home, missed important moments in my loved ones' lives – both joyful and difficult moments. I have had to make significant adjustments and cultural changes to adapt to the customs of the people I have served in other places. I have also had to serve for long periods of time not knowing if I was making any useful contribution to the people I was trying to serve. But in all that time the Lord has not let me down. He has been there for me, giving me support in every circumstance of my life – in my morning prayer times, in the daily routine of community life, in serving, and in caring for others. Is this kind of life and service really worth doing? I firmly believe it is. I have no fear that wherever the Lord might send me, whether to return to my home country or go to another country, he will be there with me to establish me in the job and service he wants for me.

The sacrifice the Lord asked some forty years ago of our parents and those who went before us in the Sword of the Spirit is not a thing of the past. The Lord continues to call us to serve him as disciples on mission. He continues to ask the same from us – to offer our lives to him, and to freely choose to serve wherever he leads us. I believe that he wants us to be even more radical in giving him generous service. We do not need to let fear or insecurity hold us back from responding with trust to the Lord's call. Our God is a faithful God who never forsakes those who wholeheartedly offer him their lives. I believe that our communities and the world around us need – today more than ever – the free and generous offering of young and courageous people who are willing to proclaim their faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of the world.

[Miguel Vargas is a [Kairos Mission](#) leader currently participating in the [Servants of the Word](#) international formation program in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA and the [Word of Life Community](#) in Ann Arbor.]



Fighting for Costly Grace

by Dieterich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace.

Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, ipso facto a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. ... Well, then let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. ... That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the Gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of His Son: 'ye were bought at a price,' and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but deliver him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'

On two separate occasions Peter received the call, "Follow me." It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1.17; John 21.22). A whole life lies between these two calls. The first occasion was by the lake of Gennesareth, when Peter left his nets and his craft and followed Jesus at his word. The second occasion is when the Risen Lord finds him back again at his old trade. Once again it is by the lake of Gennesareth, and once again the call is: "Follow me." Between the two calls lay a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ. Half-way between them comes Peter's confession, when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God....

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now prevailing upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme fellowship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs.

[excerpt from *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dieterich Bonhoeffer. First published in German in 1937. First English edition published in 1953 by SCM Press Ltd, London.]



Drawn by the Love of Christ

by Catherine of Siena (1347-1380 AD)

Note: This excerpt is from Chapter 26 of the *Dialogue* in which Catherine describes God's explanation to her of Jesus' role as bridge between the divine and the human. She uses the language of metaphor – such as the use of a bridge and a wall of stones – to portray the work of the Lord Jesus and how he draws us to himself. Literal minded readers might find the imagery obscure. It helps to read her works with the heart as well as the mind.

Then God the eternal One responded to her soul:

I want to describe the Bridge for you. It stretches from heaven to earth by reason of my having joined myself with your humanity which I formed in the earth's clay. This bridge has three stairs. Two of them were built by my Son on the wood of the most holy cross, and the third even as he tasted the bitterness of the gall and vinegar they gave him to drink. You will recognize in these three stairs three spiritual stages. . . .

But though the bridge has been raised up so high, it still is joined to the earth. Do you know when it was raised up? When my Son was lifted up on the wood of the most holy cross he did not cut off his divinity from the lowly earth of your humanity. So though he was raised so high, he was not raised off the earth. In fact, his divinity is kneaded in the clay of your humanity like one bread. Nor could anyone walk on that bridge until my Son was raised up. This is why he said, "If I am lifted up high I will draw everything to myself" (John 12:32).

Drawn by love

When my goodness saw that you could be drawn in no other way, I sent him to be lifted onto the wood of the cross. I made of that cross an anvil where this child of humankind could be hammered into an instrument to release humankind from death and restore it to the life of grace. In this way he drew everything to himself; for he proved his inspeakable love, and the human heart is always drawn by love. He could not have shown you greater love than by giving his life for you (John 15:13). You can hardly resist being drawn by love, then, unless you foolishly refuse to be drawn.

I said that, having been raised up, he would draw everything to himself. This is true in two ways: First, the human heart is drawn by love as I said, and with all its powers: memory, understanding, and will. If these three powers are harmoniously united in my name, everything else you do, in fact or intention, will be drawn to union with me in peace through the movement of love, because all will be lifted up in the pursuit of crucified love. So my Truth indeed spoke truly when he said, "If I am lifted up high, I will draw everything to myself." For everything you do will be drawn to him when he draws your heart and its powers.

What he said is true also in the sense that everything was created for your use to serve your needs. But you who have the gift of reason were made not for yourselves but for me, to serve me with all your heart and all your love. So when you are drawn to me, everything is drawn with you because everything was made for you. It was necessary, then, that this bridge be raised high. And it had to have stairs so that you would be able to mount it more easily.

The stones of true virtue

This bridge has walls of stone that travellers will not be hindered when it rains. Do you know what stones these are? They are the stones of true solid virtue. These stones were not, however, built into walls before my Son's passion. So no one could get to the final destination even though they walked along the pathway of virtue. For heaven had not yet been unlocked with the key of my Son's blood, and the rain of justice kept anyone crossing over.

But after these stones were hewn on the body of the Word, my gentle Son (I have told you that he is the bridge), he built them into walls, tempering the mortar with his own blood. That is, his blood was mixed into the mortar of his divinity with the strong heat of burning love.

By my power the stones of virtue were built into walls on no less a foundation than himself, for all virtue draws life from him, nor is there any virtue that has not been tested by him. So no one can have any life-giving virtue but from him, that is, by following his example and his teaching. He perfected the virtues and planted them as living stones built into walls with his blood. So now all the faithful can walk without hindrance and with no cringing fear of the rain of divine justice because they are sheltered by the mercy that came down from heaven through the incarnation of this Son of mine.

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Christ on the Cross, by El Greco (1585-95)

Contemplating Christ's Passion

by Jeanne Kun

For our sake

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered, died, and was buried.
On the third day he rose again,
in fulfillment of the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
– Nicene Creed

Every time we pray the Nicene Creed, we profess our faith in Jesus Christ and his saving deeds for us. These few sentences summarize the whole truth of our redemption. But the words have become so familiar that they trip off our tongues, almost without thought. We have memorized them and easily say them by heart, so to speak. But how deeply do we really understand their meaning? How can we truly grasp by *heart* the profound truths they contain?

In this guide, we will read and study Scripture texts that help us fathom Jesus' tremendous love as revealed through his passion, death, and resurrection. By studying the Scriptures about the meaning and power of the cross and prayerfully contemplating our crucified Lord we will come to know the depths of his mercy and compassion toward us, sinners undeserving of such sacrificial love.

The Paradox of the Cross

"When mankind was estranged from him by disobedience, God our Savior made a plan for raising us from our fall and restoring us to friendship with himself," wrote St. Basil the Great in the fourth century. "According to this plan Christ came in the flesh, he showed us the gospel way of life, he suffered, died on the cross, was buried, and rose from the dead. He did this so that we could be saved by imitation of him, and recover our original status as sons of God by adoption."

In words echoing the Creed, Basil clearly and effectively reviews the history of humankind's redemption, the story of our need for salvation, and how God brought that about through his Son Jesus. Central to our salvation is Christ's death on the cross: Through his sacrifice, the Son of God conquered sin and Satan, overcame death's stranglehold on the human race, and restored us to union with our Creator. Jesus' cross is a greatest of paradoxes: Through his death we have received life. The cross may seem an instrument of torture in the eyes of unbelievers, but to those who do believe, it is the instrument of our salvation. "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

St. Paul was the first to put into writing a "theology of the cross." In his letter to the church at Corinth, he explained, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). What good news it is that God reconciled the world to himself through Christ and does not count our sins and failings against us! But we are forgiven, not because God overlooked our trespasses, but because Christ took them upon himself. Reconciliation with God was won for us at the price of Jesus' death on the cross. His passion and crucifixion are a stark reminder that our salvation, forgiveness of our sin, is costly.

Not only did the cross bring us eternal life, it also brings us a more abundant life here and now. Jesus "bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). His death on the cross won us victory over our sins – every one of them. Though his cross, Jesus has set us free from all that separates us from our Lord and prevents us from following him: our disobedience, our pride, our anger, and our self-centeredness. In Christ, we die to this "old self," and in Christ we rise to the new..

Embraced by Christ's love

In the first session of this guide, we will look at the evangelist John's eyewitness account of the historical event of Jesus' death. This text brings home to us the physical horror of the crucifixion, one of the most dreadful and excruciatingly painful forms of execution ever devised. Here we come face to face with Jesus' passion – that is, his burning love and passionate ardor for humankind and his fervent desire to save us – that led him to his passion on the cross. When we look to Golgotha, we see what love is. As Father Richard John Neuhaus once wrote, "The perfect self-surrender of the cross is, from eternity to eternity, at the heart of what it means to say that God is love." It is as if Jesus' arms are outstretched on the cross to take us into his loving embrace.

In the second session we will meet the Risen Lord and examine how his death was not simply a tragedy but also a triumph. Through dying on the cross and rising victoriously, Christ entered into his glory. Overcoming the curse of death that was upon us all, he opened the way for us to share glorious, eternal life with him and the Father.

The first two sessions include many references to texts from the ancient Hebrew Scriptures – the Christian Old Testament. As we study them, we will see that it was “in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) that Jesus passed through all that he did for our sake. And as we come to recognize how Old Testament prophecies and “prefigurements” and “types” are fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament, we will grow in our understanding and appreciation of God and the marvelous plan of salvation his Son has carried out for us.

Contemplating Christ's passion

Thomas Aquinas once noted that “the Passion of Christ is enough to serve as a guide and model throughout our lives.” But it is especially in the season of Lent that our thoughts and our hearts are turned to Christ’s passion and crucifixion. Lent is a time for us to remember with gratitude Jesus’ sacrifice – the price of our atonement paid for by his own blood. It is also a time for us to reflect on our need for this reconciliation, a time to ask where we have sinned or turned a deaf ear to God’s call to us, and to repent.

Allow Paul’s cry, “Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20), which we hear during the Ash Wednesday liturgy, to strike deeply at your heart. He persistently appeals to us not to reject God’s offer of salvation, “not to accept the grace of God in vain” (6:1). “Now” – today, each and every day – is “the acceptable time” for us to return to the Lord, “now is the day of salvation” (6:2) for us. During the forty days of Lent, open your heart to the mystery of the cross and its meaning for you personally. Then, at the Easter Vigil, the night-watch of the resurrection, enter into the joy of Christ’s victory as the church sings its great proclamation, the *Exsultet*:

This is the night when Christians everywhere,
washed clean of sin
and freed from all defilement,
are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.

This is the night when Jesus Christ
broke the chains of death
and rose triumphant from the grave. . . .

Most blessed of all nights, chosen by God
to see Christ rising from the dead!

Of this night Scripture says:
“The night will be clear as day:
it will become my light, my joy.”

The power of this holy night
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;
it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride.

Night truly blessed, when heaven is wedded to earth
and man is reconciled with God!

Let us take hold of the life-giving power of the cross so that we can share in the victory that Jesus won for us. Our hope is that on the last day, we will be united with him in his resurrection, healed and transformed in body, mind, and spirit and wholly conformed to his image. "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

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- > Related articles: [Jesus' Crucifixion: "It Is Finished,"](#) by Jeanne Kun
 - > [Freedom from Sin and Death: "A New Creation,"](#) by Jeanne Kun

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Jesus' Crucifixion: "It is finished"

by Jeanne Kun

On the Cross the name of the Father is supremely "hallowed," and his Kingdom irrevocably comes; in the "consummatum est" his will is definitively done.

— Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Priests*, Holy Thursday 1999

The evangelist John was an eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion, and so we have a record of Jesus' last words: "It is finished" (John 19:30). On a literal level, these words signify the end of Jesus' life as he gave up his spirit to the Father. But they also express satisfaction – even triumph. In colloquial speech today, Jesus might have said, "Mission accomplished!"

God sent his Son into the world to heal the separation between God and humanity caused by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Christ's crucifixion was not a failure of his mission or a meaningless waste of a good man's life cut off too soon, but God's chosen means for our redemption: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16). And so by his death, Jesus' mission was completed. As Scripture scholar Jean-Pierre Prévost notes:

The Greek verb *tetelestai* means "brought to its

John 19:17-37

17 Carrying the cross by himself, [Jesus] went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."

25 And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to

accomplishment.” Like he has done so many times, John uses here double entendre. The word “finished” refers to the physical and temporal end limit of Jesus’ life. But it also tells, at the same time, about the total accomplishment of the mission entrusted to him by the Father.

After this declaration of his achievement, Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). This “giving up” or “delivering over” – in Greek, *paradidomi* – is the same word used by St. Paul when he says that God “did not withhold his own Son, but *gave him up* for us all” (Romans 8:32, emphasis added). Paul uses a similar phrase when referring to Christ: Jesus “gave himself up” (Ephesians 5:2, 25; see also Galatians 2:20), indicating that Jesus purposely delivered himself up to death for our sake.

When Jesus breathed his last, he both handed his spirit back to the Father and handed on the Holy Spirit to the Church. The water that flowed from Jesus’ pierced side symbolizes the Spirit made available to humanity because Jesus had now been glorified in the “lifting up” on the cross (John 19:34; 7:39; 12:32). His blood is a symbol of the redeeming work of the cross. Moreover in this water and blood, the early Fathers of the Church saw allusions to the life-giving Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

Also symbolic are Jesus’ words to John, the “beloved disciple,” who stood with Mary near enough to the cross to hear his dying master speak: “Woman, here is your son. . . . Here is your mother” (John 19:25-27). With these words Jesus created a new family: Mary received from Jesus a son in the beloved disciple – who represents each of us – and thus became the spiritual mother of all the faithful.

It is noteworthy that in Jesus’ crucifixion we see the fulfillment of an important Jewish ritual, the annual Day of Atonement. On that day each year, the high priest entered into the inner tabernacle with an offering to atone for Israel’s sins. On Golgotha Jesus was both the victim and the great high priest. The atoning sacrifice was no longer the blood of an animal but Jesus’ own blood. No longer was it necessary for the high priest to enter into the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Temple, which was a symbol of the heavenly tabernacle. Now Jesus offered himself directly to his Father in heaven. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews points to Jesus’ dual role as victim and priest:

[I]t was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from

fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” 29A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

31 Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. 32Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) 36These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” 37And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

Understand!

1. How well do you think Jesus’ final words from the cross as recorded by John (19:30) summarize the purpose of his life – and death? Read Romans 3:23-25 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 to help you understand what Jesus “accomplished” on the cross, and then describe it in your own words.

2. Several times St. John refers to Scripture being “fulfilled” in the events on Golgotha: the casting of lots for Jesus’ garments (John 19:23-25 and Exodus 28:32; Psalm 22:18); the fact that none of Jesus’ bones were broken (John 19:36, and Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20); observing the piercing of Jesus’ side (John 19:37 and Zechariah 12:10).

sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. (Hebrews 7:26-27)

The twentieth-century Catholic apologist Frank Sheed explained the meaning and effect of Jesus' sacrificial death this way:

What [Jesus] had become man to do was now done: expiation had been made, sufficient and overflowing for the first sin which had made the breach between God and the human race, and for all the sins by which the breach had been widened. This was atonement. Disguised by our pronunciation, the meaning of the word is at-one-ment. God and the human race had been at-two: now, and forever, they would be at one. Individual men might still separate themselves from God, but no one could separate the race of man. (*To Know Christ Jesus*)

Reflect!

1. Read Genesis 22:1-19. As the commentary in The Navarre Bible states,

The sacrifice of Isaac has features which make it a figure of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. Thus, there is the father giving up his son; the son who surrenders himself to his father's will; and the tools of sacrifice such as the wood, the knife and the altar. The account reaches its climax by showing that through Abraham's obedience and Isaac's non-resistance, God's blessing will reach all the nations of the earth (cf. v. 18). So, it is not surprising that Jewish tradition should attribute a certain redemptive value to Isaac's submissiveness, and that the Fathers should see this episode as prefiguring the passion of Christ, the only Son of the Father.

What does this mysterious and painful story add to your understanding of God, the Father "who did not withhold [*spare*, RSV] his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32)?

2. Reflect on the following passages to enhance your

Why is it significant that these Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled? Why was it so important to John to preserve these details in his gospel?

3. What significance do you see in Jesus' words from the cross to Mary and John? What do these words, spoken even while he was suffering, reveal about Jesus' character? About his relationship with his mother and his disciple?

4. John wrote, "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (John 19:35). Why did John stress so strongly that he was an eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus' passion and death (see also 15:27 and 21:24)?

5. Explain in your own words Jesus' dual role as victim and priest and how his death is an "atonement." (You can look up the definition of "atonement" in a dictionary to enhance your understanding.)

In the Spotlight *Cry of Joy, Song of Triumph*



"It is accomplished." John 19:30

It was not an utterance of thanksgiving that his suffering was over and finished, though the humiliation of the Son of Man was now at an end. It was rather that his life from the time of his birth to the time of his death had faithfully

understanding of the cross as an expression of the depth of Christ's love for you and as a fulfillment of the Father's plan for your salvation:

[H]e had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:2-6)

[Jesus said:] "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." (John 10:17-18)

[T]hough he was in the form of God,
[Christ Jesus] did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24-25)

achieved what the Heavenly Father sent him to do.

Three times God used that same word in history: first, in Genesis, to describe the achievement or completion of creation; second, in the Apocalypse, when all creation would be done away with and a new heaven and earth would be made. Between these two extremes of the beginning and the accomplished end, there was the link of the sixth utterance from the Cross. Our Divine Lord in the state of His greatest humiliation, seeing all prophecies fulfilled, all foreshadowings realized, and all things done which were for the Redemption of man, uttered a cry of joy: "It is achieved."

The life of the Spirit could now begin the work of sanctification, for the work of Redemption was completed. In creation, on the seventh day, after the heavens and the earth were finished, God rested from all the work that he had done; now the Savior on the Cross having taught as Teacher, governed as King, and sanctified as Priest, could enter into His rest. There would be no second Savior; no new way of salvation; no other name under heaven by which men might be saved. Man had been bought and paid for. A new David arose to slay the Goliath of evil, not with five stones but with five wounds – hideous scars on hands, feet, and side; and the battle was fought not with armor glistening under a noonday sun, but with flesh torn away so the bones could be numbered. The Artist had put the last touch on his masterpiece, and with the joy of the strong he uttered the song of triumph that his work was completed.

– Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*

Grow!

In the Spotlight

The Place of the Skull

Golgotha is the Greek transcription given by Matthew (27:33), Mark (15:22), and John (19:17) of the Aramaic word presumed to be *Gûlgaltâ* and explained by them to mean “skull.” Luke simply calls the place in Greek *Kranion* (cranium), without giving the Aramaic form. The familiar English name “Calvary” comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of the Scripture by St. Jerome, which gives the Latin for skull, *calvaria*.

The site used by the Romans for the public crucifixion of criminals is thought to have been an abandoned limestone quarry outside the western wall of Jerusalem, where a mound of unquarried rock jutted up twenty to thirty feet from the quarry floor. The place’s name may have been derived from the physical contour of the rock, which possibly resembled a skull. Or, as some scholars propose, the site may have been called Golgotha because it was strewn with the skulls of those who had been executed there (this would have been contrary to Jewish burial traditions, but not Roman ones) or in reference to a nearby cemetery (an idea consistent with the numerous tombs that have been found in the area by modern archaeologists). Later legends – influenced by the place-name and by Christian typology that recognizes Jesus as the “new Adam” (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45) – imaginatively consider the place of Christ’s crucifixion to also be the burial place of Adam’s skull.

Gospel accounts indicate that the site of Jesus’ crucifixion was outside the walls of Jerusalem. Most likely it was near a road where it would have been easily seen by those entering and leaving the city through the gate of Ephraim, because public execution was intended to be not only a punishment of criminals but a warning to others to avoid the same fate by avoiding their crimes. In A.D. 326 the Roman emperor Constantine had a large basilica built over this site, and today what remains of the rock of Golgotha is venerated under an altar in the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Modern archaeological excavations have established that this site was indeed outside the so-called second north wall of Jerusalem and the gate of Ephraim in the first century.

1. What is your response to the physical and emotional sufferings of Jesus? Which of the events surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion or which of his words spoken from the cross makes the deepest impression on you? Why?

2. In your own words, paraphrase Jesus’ final declaration, “It is finished.” Describe a mission or task entrusted to you by God that you feel you have faithfully carried out or accomplished. What enabled you to do this?

3. In what ways has Jesus’ accomplishment of his mission on the cross made a difference to you personally in restoring or healing your relationship with God? In what ways does this mission still need completion in your life?

4. In willingly giving himself over to death, Jesus paid an incredible price for our salvation. What does this reveal about his love for you? What could you do to concretely express your love for Jesus? To show your gratitude to him?

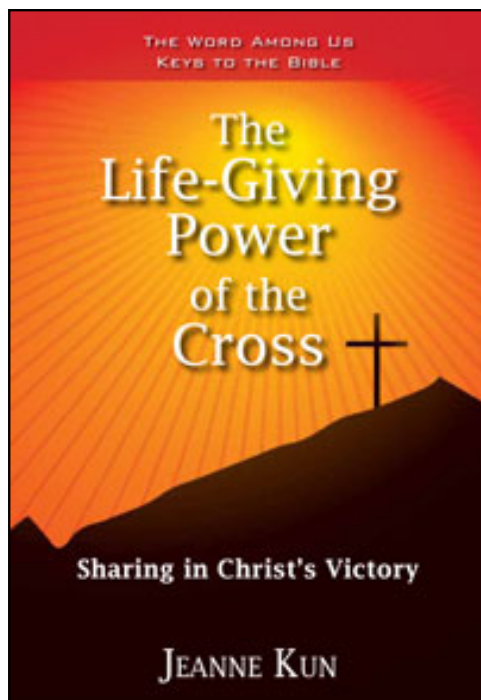
5. After Jesus’ death, the beloved disciple “took [Mary] into his own home” (John 19:27). How have you made a place for Mary in your life and in your home? In what way(s) do you honor Mary as your spiritual mother? As the “Mother of the Church”?

In the Spotlight

In the words of the saints



Where have your love, your mercy,



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your compassion shone out more luminously than in your wounds, sweet gentle Lord of mercy? More mercy than this no one has than that he lay down his life for those who are doomed to death.

— Bernard of Clairvaux

Yes, my sweet Savior, I see you all covered with wounds. I look into your beautiful face but, O my God, it no longer wears its beautiful appearance. It is disfigured and blackened with blood and bruises, and shameful spittings: He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him (Isaiah 53:2). But the more I see you so disfigured, O my Lord, the more beautiful and lovely you appear to me. And what are these disfigurements but signs of the tenderness of that love you have for me?

— Alphonsus Liguori

Look at the Cross and you will see Jesus' head bent to kiss you, his arms extended to embrace you, his heart opened to receive you, to enclose you within his love.

— Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Act!

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, known in her Carmelite monastery as Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face, once wrote to her sister Céline about the crucified Lord: "Jesus is on fire with love for us . . . look at his adorable face! . . . Look at his eyes lifeless and lowered! Look at his wounds. . . . Look at Jesus in his face. . . . There you will see how he loves us" (Letter 87).

Kneel before a cross or crucifix or sit quietly before an image of the suffering Christ and follow Thérèse's exhortation to look at Jesus' face and at his wounds. Meditate on Jesus' great love for you and then express to him your love and your gratitude that he died for your sake and

for the sake of all humankind.

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Truth and Grace in Jesus Christ

by Patrick Henry Reardon

I was less than half my present age when I first surveyed the famous image of Apollo at Olympia. Housed there, in modern times, in the archaeological museum this sculpture originally adorned the west pediment (triangular upper section of the wall) of the Temple of Zeus. It is among the most instructive art works I have ever contemplated.

I picture to myself the worshippers at Olympia walking around to the west side of the temple, at eventide, to gaze at this heroic image of the sun god, as he stood in solemn majesty to face the setting sun. Here they beheld Apollo's white figure slowly turn to rose and honey in the glow of the twilight – "thy western halls of gold," as Keats put it.





Clustered around the feet of Apollo, in this image, and a fraction of his size, the Lapiths of Thessaly do battle with the offensive Centaurs, while the sun god himself, standing in the triangle and towering above the scene of turbulence beneath, extends a commanding right arm to impose on chaos the eternal claims of rational order.

This scene, sculpted about 460 B.C., was perhaps inspired by the recent victories – Marathon in 490, Salamis in 480, Plataea in 479 – of the "rational" Greeks of the West over the forces of anarchy brought by the Persians from the East. This very theme, after all, was prominent in Greek politics and literature through the next century.

When I described the rational order as something "imposed" in this scene, the participle was chosen deliberately. It is an obvious feature of sculpture that form is enforced; statues are not permitted to grow and expand as they might wish. In all things, but in nothing more than sculpture, rationality requires rationing.

For the Greeks, truth was fixed and determined. It was beyond man's ability to control. Man could discover truth, but he could not make it. It was objective, not subject to human manipulation. Truth could accomplish many things, but it could not change. To know the truth is to know why it must be the truth. Freedom was the last concept the Greeks would ever have associated with truth, and history was the last place they would expect to find it.

Consequently, classical Greek philosophy believed that truth represents an imposition, inasmuch as the truth is one and necessary. It is eternal, unchanging, and utterly monist. Its proper standard is symbolized in trigonometry. Euclid and Pythagoras got it right; there is no wiggle room in a triangle.

Thus, classical philosophy held that whatever was known to be true was true because it had to be true. Lucidity was conveyed by necessity, so that the contours of truth were as stable as the stone shaped by the frame of Apollo. This conviction was arguably Greece's chief contribution to the philosophia perennis.



I left Olympia and continued my trip. A few days later I found myself in a boat tossed about on the Sea of Galilee. The locals told me the waves and wind were normal for the season, but the experience brought to mind an earlier scene on those same waters. That prior episode involved fishermen caught in a sudden storm. As they struggled to maintain control and keep the craft from foundering, they called for help from a friend asleep – who knows how? – on the stern sheets of the boat: "Master save us; we are perishing."



The sleeper woke up and calmly addressed the wind and waves, "All right, gentlemen, if you please, that will be quite enough." And immediately, we are informed, the wind died down and the waves came to a rest.

The similarity between the two scenes – Apollo with the centaurs and Jesus with the storm – serves chiefly to highlight a contrast. It is this: the truth conveyed in the case of Jesus is not "necessary." It is historical and backed up by no explanatory or metaphysical necessity. The truth in Christ is an absolutely free gift; it is revealed in the experience of grace and election. Its perception relies on no prior theory, logical presupposition, or antecedent principle. The truth revealed in Christ is pure grace; it is truth freely given and freely received.

We know this truth, not because we recognize that it must be true, but because we perceive it to be true. It is intrinsically tautological; there is no necessity that warrants or explains it. The truth revealed in Christ is perceived by faith, in which there is no place for a monist metaphysics or prior justification. From Alpha to Omega, it is all grace.

The stability of this revealed truth depends, not on unchanging, eternal laws, but on the personal fidelity of the one revealed. Indeed, the order imposed on the wind and waves is but an extension of the gracious act that created the wind and waves.

Jesus does not represent the commanding claims of a rational and eternal order; he is, rather, the embodied image of the Father, freely choosing and inviting us to be his children. The oneness of this revealed God is not an inference drawn from syllogistic necessity, but the immediate revelation of the voice which proclaims, "The Father and I are one" and "He who sees me sees the Father."

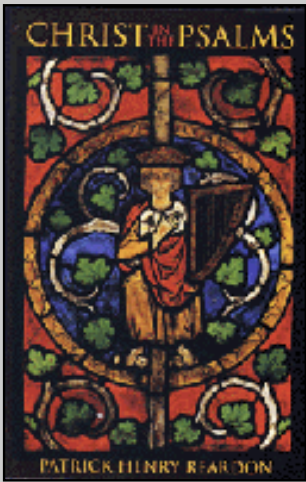
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He has authored many books including: *Christ in the Psalms*, *Christ in His Saints*, *The Trial of Job: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Book of Job*, *Chronicles of History and Worship: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Books of Chronicles*, and *Creation and the Patriarchal Histories: Orthodox Reflections on the Book of Genesis* (all from [Conciliar Press](#)).



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Let us be wholly absorbed by grace

by Macarius-Symeon (Pseudo-Macarius) (300-391 AD)

Inside us evil is at work suggesting unworthy inclinations. However, it is not in us in the same way as, to take an example, water mixes with wine. Evil is in us without being mixed with good.

We are a field in which wheat and weeds are growing separately. We are a house in which there is a thief, but also the owner. We are a spring which rises from the middle of the mud, but pours out pure water.

All the same, it is enough to stir up the mud and the spring is fouled. It is the same with the soul. If the evil is spread, it forms a unity with the soul and makes it dirty. With our consent, evil is united with the soul; they become accomplices.

Yet there comes a moment when the soul can free itself and remain separate again: in repentance, contrition, prayer, recourse to God. The soul could not benefit from these habits if it were always sunk in evil.

It is like marriage. A woman is united with a man and they become one flesh. But when one of them dies, the other is left alone.

But union with the Holy Spirit is complete. So let us become a single spirit with him. Let us be wholly absorbed by grace.

[Marcarius-Symeon, often called Pseudo-Marcarius in the West, is the author of numerous ascetical writings dating to the second half of the 4th century. These were handed down under the name Macarius of Egypt (an Egyptian monk who was renowned for his sanctity and miracles), and also under the name Symeon of Mesopotamia.]

> See related article [Purification of Spirit](#) by Leo the Great

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Purification of Spirit through Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

by Leo the Great (died 461 AD)

Dear friends, at every moment the earth is full of the mercy of God, and nature itself is a lesson for all the faithful in the worship of God. The heavens, the sea and all that is in them bear witness to the omnipotence of their Creator, and the marvelous beauty of the elements as they obey him demands from the intelligent creation a fitting expression of its gratitude.

But with the return of that season marked out in a special way by the mystery of our redemption, and of the days that lead up to the paschal feast, we are summoned more urgently to prepare ourselves by a purification of spirit.

The special note of the paschal feast is this: the whole Church rejoices in the forgiveness of sins. It rejoices in the forgiveness not only of those who are then reborn in holy baptism but also of those who are already numbered among God's adopted children.

Initially, men are made new by the rebirth of baptism. Yet there is still required a daily renewal to repair the shortcomings of our mortal nature, and whatever degree of progress has been made there is no one who should not be more advanced. All must therefore strive to ensure that on the day of redemption no one may be found in the sins of his former life.

Dear friends, what the Christian should be doing at all times should be done now with greater care and

devotion, so that the Lenten fast enjoined by the apostles may be fulfilled, not simply by abstinence from food but above all by the renunciation of sin.

There is no more profitable practice as a companion to holy and spiritual fasting than that of almsgiving. This embraces under the single name of mercy many excellent works of devotion, so that the good intentions of the faithful may be of equal value, even where their means are not. The love that we owe both God and man is always free from any obstacle that would prevent us from having a good intention. The angels sang: *Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth*. The person who shows love and compassion to those in any kind of affliction is blessed, not only with the virtue of good will, but also with the gift of peace.

The works of mercy are innumerable. Their very variety brings this advantage to those who are true Christians, that in the matter of almsgiving not only the rich and affluent but also those of average means and the poor are able to play their part. Those who are unequal in their capacity to give can be equal in the love within their hearts.

[excerpt from *Sermon for Lent*, by Gregory]

> See related article [Conquering the Enemy by Conquering Ourselves](#), by Leo the Great

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We conquer the enemy by conquering ourselves

*True peace and freedom can only be ours when the flesh is
ruled by the spirit and the spirit is guided by the will of God*

by Leo the Great (400-461 AD)

In the days of Saul and David, it was when the Israelites fell into sin that the Lord allowed the Philistines to oppress them. In order to regain the ascendancy over their enemies, the people were ordered to fast. The Israelites understood very well that they deserved all they had to endure at the hands of the Philistines because they had neglected God's commands and given themselves over to evil practices. It was no use for them to try to win their freedom by taking up arms; they first had to get rid of their sins. And so they began to discipline themselves and to conquer the desires of the flesh in order to be able to conquer their opponents. When they fasted their oppressors gave way before them, whereas when they indulged all their appetites the enemy held them in subjection.

It is the same with us today. We have our own struggles and conflicts, and we can win by using the same tactics. The Israelites were attacked by human beings; we are attacked by spiritual enemies. We can conquer by bringing our lives into line with God's will for us; then our enemies will give way before us. It is not their power but our lack of self-discipline that makes them a threat to us, and we shall weaken them by overcoming ourselves.

We must ask God's help in this warfare, because our only means of conquering the enemy is to conquer ourselves. How often we come into conflict with our own lower nature, with those unspiritual, unregenerate attitudes that scripture calls the flesh! What the flesh wants is opposed to what the spirit wants, and what the

spirit wants is opposed to what the flesh wants. If the desires of the flesh are the stronger, then our spiritual faculties will be dragged down to the level of our lower nature and will be enslaved where they ought to be masters. But if we are determined to serve the Lord and find our joy in his gifts, if we trample underfoot our instinctive tendency to gratify ourselves and refuse to allow sin to rule in our mortal bodies, then our spirit will be in control and no strategy of the Evil One will be able to overthrow us. True peace and freedom can only be ours when the flesh is ruled by the spirit and the spirit is guided by the will of God.

[excerpt from *Sermon for Lent*, by Gregory]

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Bsharreh covered with snow, Lebanon, watercolor, 32x24 cms, by David Kurani

Landscapes in Lebanon

new art work series - Part 4
by David Kurani

Bsharreh, the subject of the first picture, is a town where generations of Christians maintained their faith even in high, remote mountains. It is at the farthest inland end of Qadisha, "valley of the saints". The nearby cedars may be seen as symbols of this strong faith.

Tyre was a once-mighty and (in)famous Phoenician port in Old Testament times, but also where Jesus healed the Canaanite woman. It has a small Christian population to this day, many of whom are traditional fishermen.



Tyre harbor scene, Lebanon, watercolor, 62x46 cms, by David Kurani

From the artist: I love painting landscapes and nature - just going outside and looking at it is medicine for my soul. I feel palpably better after gazing at it. To try and capture some of its beauty and upbuilding effects can be both a challenge and a relaxation at the same time. And I feel happy contentment if I am able to capture some of it and bring it inside to those who cannot go outside so much, or to the particularities of that interesting place/time/light.

Of course God is behind it all. The scenery is his handwriting, the weather his mood, the appreciation of them his inspiration and the creative process his impulse built on his precedent. I am reminded of a thought offered by Bernard of Clairvaux which goes, in effect: "The beauty around us is meant to remind us of, and point us towards, the perfection of beauty in its author and creator, our God." I thank God every time I finish a picture; I feel each one is a gift from him.



Lebanon's natural bridge in Faqra, watercolor, 51x35 cms, by David Kurani

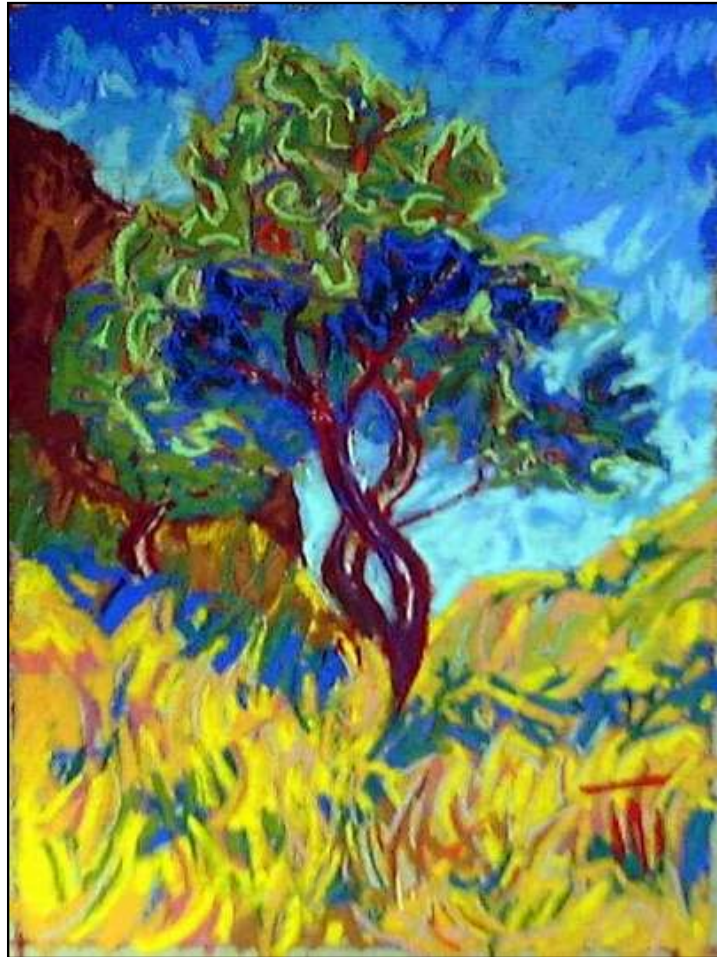
David is a noted Lebanese landscape artist. He teaches classes in art and theater at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. David has exhibited widely in art galleries and private collections throughout Lebanon, Europe, and the USA. He recently completed a 6-month sabbatical dedicated to painting the Lebanese landscape. He and his wife Gisele and their three sons are active members of the People of God in Lebanon, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit.

Also see [Springtime in Lebanon > Part 1](#), > [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) art work by David Kurani

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Landfall - a prose poem in 3 parts

Part 1 - Genesis

God looked down on the earth. There were many things there that he had made. There were men and women; tillers of earth, carriers of water and hewers of stone. There were birds in the air and creatures that swam in the sea. There were powerful volcanoes, ocean waves and small breezes that rustled the bushes and played about the tops of the trees. There were cities of great wealth and power, towns which heard his voice and followed his law and there were villages, hamlets and great modern capitals which did not. Everywhere God looked upon what he had made. But he did not see the man.

God knew the man. The man was his. And God searched upon the earth for the man that he knew – but did not find him. God looked in the forest, but the man was not there. He looked in the city, searching through apartments and houses. In the bus depot and in the library, in the cinema and in the shopping centre he looked - but the man was not there. God combed every field and pasture of the country, he lifted the streams and felt beneath their beds. He sifted the sand by the sea shore - but the man was not to be found there. God ran his fingers upon the ridges of the mountains and through the grains of sand in the desert – but he did not find the

man. So he created him.

God closed his fist about the nothing. He stretched and pulled it into shape. God carved the shape upon his hand and fashioned the man. He made him to stand upright and shaped his feet and limbs. He put his likeness upon his face and his mark upon his forehead. He breathed his life into the man, and he was.

The man lived on the earth. He knew his Father. The man lived in the city, in the house of his parents. He was small. His mother would hold his hands in hers and help him to stand. She held the index fingers of her hands to the man. He curled his small fists around them. The man began to walk upright upon the earth. His mother would help him to walk to the garden and back to the house. She would laugh as he swayed on his small feet and her laugh sounded like the water to the man. The man knew his mother.

The man played with his sister. They had a swing set and a small slide in their garden. The man would play all day in the garden and wait for his father to come home. His father would catch the man in his arms and throw him in the air. The man would laugh. He knew his father and his mother and his sister. When the weather was fine, they would eat dinner in the garden beneath the pear tree.

The man walked with God. When he was small, he did not see God every day but he knew him and he could hear him. The man began to talk. The man talked to his father and his Father answered. Sometimes the man did not know what to say to his Father so he said nothing. Then, he sat with God in the world. The man began to know the world. The world had a back garden and a house and a front garden. The front garden had a drive running through it. On the drive was a red car and behind the car was an orange gate. The man could see through the gate and the car could go through it but the man could not.

The man began to grow. He had short spiky hair and skinny legs and pointy knees. His teeth were a little crooked because he fell and bit the world and his teeth were a part of the world now. The world was a house and the back garden. The world was a front garden, and the drive in the front garden and the gate and the footpath up to the shops and the footpath down to Mary Meacle's house. The world was the car and school and church before school and grandma's house and sweets and the park and the library on Fridays and walking home from school with his mother and bananas.

The man liked the world most of the time. When the bananas were brown and it rained and he fell and scraped his knee he did not like the world, but this did not happen all the time. He told his father about the world and God understood. God loved to see the man he knew in the world he had created.



Part 2 - Fall

The man walked with God. He walked with God in the park and on the bus and in the city. The man walked with God on the shore of the lake that had two rivers and one island. The man walked with God in the shop and on his bike when he was cycling and in the gym where he went to try and lift weights and not fall over. The man walked with God and he talked to him. The man talked to him less than before, because the man knew other people to talk to now. He talked to his Father and he talked to his father and he talked to his mother and to his sister and to his teachers and to the driver on the bus. The man talked to the people on his soccer team and the man in the shop. And the man talked to God.

The man grew. The man liked to run but it was hard. Running made his legs feel pain. The pain was good because it made his legs stronger and he could run more the next day. But the man did not like to run always. The man grew. Sometimes the man could not hear God anymore. When the man could not hear God he ran on the beach. The beach was far away. When he ran on the beach, the man had to run longer. His legs felt more pain. But the run to the beach was long. When he ran on the beach the man forgot the pain in his legs. The man talked to God on the beach. God always answered the man on the beach. And the man grew.

One day the man walked to the front gate. There was no red car now, the red car was dead. The car was dark green and low and sleek. It was a saloon. The car belonged to the man's father. When he was grown but not up the man learned to drive the car. The car was a Honda. It came from Japan. The car had two seats in the front and a kind of leather bench in the back. The man could feel the engine beneath him as he drove.

The man's father showed him how to work the gears and press the break and do a hill-start. He showed him how to steer the car and change lanes and overtake and not drive on the motorway. The man's mother showed him too but when the man pressed the break the man's mother pressed the man and said "watch that car" and

her voice sounded like the sea when it was angry. The man and his mother did not drive in the car together very often.

The man drove in the car with his father because he was not allowed to drive in it alone. The man wanted to drive the car alone but he was not allowed. He was not allowed because he was grown but not up and because his Father said so. The man did not like to not drive the car on his own. He wanted to drive the car on his own now. The man did not want to drive the car when the time came.

The man thought about the car. He could see it every day he walked past the car on his way to the city. The car was dark green and low and sleek. The man talked about the car to his friends on the bus.

The man walked with God on the bus and in the city and he talked to his Father about the car, but God did not answer. The man took the bus to the gym. The man walked to the football field and he went to the cinema and he talked to his friends on the bus about the car. The man walked with his father to the beach and with his mother to the shop and with his sister to the park and he thought about the car, but he did not talk about it. He said yes and no and maybe to his father and his mother and his sister.

The man talked to God about the car but God did not answer. The man went for a run. The car was dark green. The man's house was on a hill. The car was low. He ran down the hill and up another one. The man ran along the top of the hill to the slope to the beach. The car was sleek. The man ran down the slope to the beach. The car was dark. It was a long way to the beach, but the man wanted to run on the beach with God and talk about the car. The car was dark green. God always answered him on the beach. The car was low. The man ran on the beach and his feet sank in the soft sand and he asked God about the car but God did not answer because the sand was sleek. The man ran closer to the water where the water had been and his feet did not sink so much in the sand and he asked God about the car but God did not answer because he was dark green. The man ran by the edge of the water where the sand was hard like the road and packed firm like the world and where he could feel the water on his legs but not the wet and he asked God about the car but God did not answer because he was low. The man ran in the surf at the edge of the water and his feet were wet and the sand was very soft and slippery and dark green and God did not answer and his shoes were wet and they slipped off the break and hit the accelerator instead and the car lurched forward across the intersection and bit the other car and turned it around a bit and a woman fell out and bit the ground and stayed there. And the man sat in the car alone and he cried to God and God did not answer but his mother's voice did and it sounded like the waves of the sea when the wind is up and roaring around the beachhead and tossing the surf against the rocks with terrible power again and again and again and it said "watch that car! Watch that car! WATCH THAT CAR!"

> Next Month - Part 3

[Prose poem by an Irish dreamer who majored in English literature. Art work by an American business major who paints [Irish landscapes](#) when he is not dreaming.]

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