



Faith to Live By

I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me Gal 2:20

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Faith to Live By

*“The life I now live... I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me”
- Galatians 2:20*

Seeing the glory of God

Steve Clark, in the introduction to his book, *Growing in Faith*, illustrates the goal of faith in our personal lives.

“Didn’t I tell you that if you would have faith, you would see God’s glory?” These were Jesus’ words to Martha just before raising Lazarus from the dead. And Martha did see the glory of God when Lazarus walked out from the tomb.

God is glorified when he works in a powerful way that men can see and appreciate. When Jesus healed people, cast out demons from them, and even raised them from the dead, men saw God’s glory before their eyes in a way that they could not easily miss. And the glory of God is what we are looking for when we want the life of the Spirit. We want a life which is lived by the power of God, a life in which God is at work in a way that can be experienced and seen. We want to see the glory of God in our own lives, and we want to be glorified among other people.

The key to seeing the glory of God is illustrated in the story of Lazarus. Jesus had heard that Lazarus was sick, close to death. He deliberately waited until Lazarus died, and then came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Once there, he went to the tomb:

“Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrances. ‘Take the stone away!’ Jesus ordered. Martha, the dead man’s sister, answered, ‘There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!’ Jesus said to her ‘Didn’t I tell you that if you would have faith [believed], you would see God’s glory?’ They took the stone away, Jesus looked up and said: ‘I thank you Father, that you listen to me. I know that you always listen to me, but I say this because of the people here, so they will believe that you sent me.’ After he had said this he called out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out with his hands and feet wrapped in grave cloths, and a cloth around his face. ‘Untie him,’ Jesus told them, ‘and let him go.’” (John 11:38–44)

Sometimes we think that faith is only needed for beginning the Christian life, for getting into a relationship with the Lord. Faith is for the beginning of our Christian life, but it is also meant to be a part of our lives as Christians all the way through. Saint Paul says:

As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2:6,7)

Whenever we want to see God do something, whenever we want to experience his presence or see him improve a situation, we need faith. If we want to live the life of the Spirit, we have to live the life of faith. Faith makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to live in us and work through us.

In this issue

This issue focuses on growing in faith in our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and our growth in faith and unity together as brothers and sisters in Christian community.

Steve Clark's first article examines “[What is Faith?](#)” He distinguishes three kinds of faith – believing faith, trusting faith, and expecting faith. His second article, [Growing in Faith](#), examines practical steps for maturing in faith.

Carlos Mantica, founder of the City of God community in Managua, Nicaragua reflects on his experience of [discovering and growing in faith](#) through a vital personal encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus.

Derek Prince presents a biblical perspective on [faith as a fruit of the Holy Spirit](#) that enables us to grow in our trust in Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks about the [gift of faith to youth](#) in Germany on the occasion of their confirmation and profession of faith as young adults.

Jim Berlucchi, a seasoned evangelist and Christian leader, offers sound wisdom for [person-to-person evangelism](#) – helping individuals encounter a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor



What is Faith?

by Steve Clark

Many times the reason people feel they are unable to have faith is that they misunderstand what faith is. Often people think of faith as a blind leap. According to this view faith consists in deciding to believe that something will happen even though there is no good reason to do so. Faith is seen simply as a blind act of the will, a leap with no assurance that there is a landing place. There are times in life when it is worth taking a blind leap (sometimes we have no alternative), but Christian faith, the faith which the Lord Jesus spoke about, is not the same thing as taking a blind leap.

In the letter to the Hebrews, faith is described in the following way:

“To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Although we do not see the things we are having faith for (if we saw it we would have knowledge of it, not faith for it), yet faith gives us a sureness, a certainty. We can have faith because we know something that allows us to expect that God will do certain things. Christian faith is a faith in the unseen, but it is not blind. A Christian does not have faith when he is in darkness, but when he has seen a light, and that light is God’s revelation to us.

Sometimes a Christian has caught only a glimpse of that light. Sometimes he can see only dimly (and therefore makes mistakes). But still he sees a light. Faith is a response to the fact that God is there, and that he has shown us what we can expect from him. Once we know the truth, once we see (or begin to see) by the

light of revelation, we can have faith. Faith is expecting God to do what he has shown us he will do — expecting it, counting on it, and doing those things which allow him to do what he has shown us he wants to do.

Counting on God's promises

There are many ways that God reveals to us what he wants to do. God reveals what he wants to do through a promise that we know always holds. Then our faith can be sure no matter what the situation. Once we know that God has said he always wants something to happen, then we can simply count on it and expect it to happen. We can find promises like this in scripture. One such promise is the promise Christ made in the eleventh chapter of Luke when he said that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who would ask him for it:

“Everyone who asks will receive, and he who seeks will find, and the door will be opened to him who knocks. Would any one of you fathers give his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or would you give him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? As stingy as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, the Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask of him!” (Luke 11:10–13)

After I was prayed with to be baptized in the Spirit at Duquesne, I had difficulty for a while in opening up to the life of the Spirit. One of the big questions for me then was, would “it” happen to me or not? It happened to so—and-so and it happened to so—and-so, but would it happen to me? Would I ever get baptized in the Spirit? I was not clear on what “it” was, and since I had not experienced anything very distinctive when I was prayed with, I was not sure anything had happened. Therefore, I was not sure whether I could experience any of the things the Spirit was supposed to do for people — tongues, guidance, or anything else. I felt a great uncertainty, and therefore my whole Christian life began to lose confidence.

At some point, I began to understand things differently. I could see that according to the scripture, the Holy Spirit is for everyone. If you are a Christian, you can have the gift of the Holy Spirit if you ask for it. That is what the Lord promised in Luke 11. In fact, he said that the Father was generous in giving the Holy Spirit. He was eager for people to have the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. Christ seemed to say that the promise held true regardless of the situation. Therefore, since I had asked, I could count on having receiving it.

My new understanding made things very different. Once I began to proceed on the basis that Christ’s promise was reliable, all of a sudden things began to happen. I soon yielded to tongues, began to experience the Spirit guiding me, and began to experience some of his power in prayer. Or rather, to be more accurate, I did not so much yield to tongues as come to discover that the Holy Spirit had been prompting me to speak in tongues all along, and that I had not really had faith in it. I did not so much begin to experience the Holy Spirit guiding me; rather, I began to recognize the guidance he had already been giving me. It was not so much that God did something new for me; rather, I began to have faith in the promise God had made. I began to experience things happening to me that the scriptures said were supposed to happen.

There are promises the Lord has made that we can count on. Whenever the Lord says that something will happen if something else is done (“you will be given the Holy Spirit if you ask for it”), then we know we can count on that happening if we meet the conditions, even if it remains unseen for a while. Whenever the Lord give a command (“rejoice always”), or describes the Christian life (“love is patient and kind”), then we know we can have the power to live that way as we grow as Christians. We know that regardless of the situation, we should expect all the things that are part of the Christian life.

There are, however, many things that the Lord would like to do (and that we need faith for) that are not covered by universal promises. Therefore, we cannot appeal to scripture to know for certain that we can see them happen. Maybe we want healing. Maybe we need some money. Maybe we would like things to work out so that somebody can hear about the Lord. We know the Lord heals people, that he provides for his people's needs and that he wants people to hear about him. But we cannot always be sure that in this particular situation he will heal, provide money, or arrange circumstances. There are many such things that come our way, but when we look through the scriptures we cannot exactly find a promise that will guarantee that we can expect these things to happen.

The Lord has another way of revealing to us what he is ready to do. As we grow in the life of the Spirit, the Lord begins to speak to us and lead us. Sometimes his direction comes to us as an inner word. Sometimes it is just an inner sense, a witness to our own spirit. We come to know in a spiritual way that all we have to do is ask for something and it will happen or all we will have to do is act in a certain way so that the Lord can work through us and a certain result will happen. We get directly from God a spiritual assurance.

A short while back, I was speaking to a student who was not a Christian. He had come back from summer vacation with some serious difficulties. During the summer he had faced the apparent meaninglessness of his own life and he was anxious about what he saw. He had come to me because we had known one another before and he was wondering if God was the answer. While I was talking with him I began to get a sense, a quiet sense that the Lord wanted to help him to see the Lord had the power to do things for him. The thought came to my mind, and I sensed that I could pray for him and he would experience a healing; that he would experience his anxiety go away and would experience himself being freed from some of the things that were bothering him.

So I put faith in what God was showing me. I talked to him for a while and then I said, "I can pray for you. God has given me the power to pray for you, and when I do, you will experience a change. There will be a new peace afterwards." He was willing to try anything, so we prayed together, and as I prayed the Lord led me in the prayer. I felt that I should pray for the healing of some specific things that had happened to him in the past. As I was praying for one specific situation, I had a mental image of Christ touching a red sore spot and then of black matter flowing out. Just as soon as that happened, he started to cry and he began to talk about the situation I prayed for. It was a purging experience for him and when it was over, he said that he had not realized how much that situation had bothered him. By the time we were done, there had been a healing. God had done the very thing that I had promised he would do.

We cannot always expect God to work this way. After all, many times when we want to ask God for a healing, healing is not the thing which is needed. But when I was in that situation, I had a sense that God was willing to do it for him. In other words, God revealed to me something that he would do. My part was to have faith in that revelation — to believe that it was actually from God, to rely on it, and then to do what I had to do; to make a promise to him on God's behalf and then to pray for him so that the promise would come true. And it did.

There is yet a third way we can have faith through God's revelation. Sometimes we do not have a universal promise that we can count on, nor do we have some sort of direct leading or word from the Lord about this particular situation, and yet it is still right to have faith in the situation. We may not have as much assurance as we would like, but we can still step out and have confidence in the Lord. We do so simply because God has revealed to us that he loves us and that he likes to do good things for his children.

A few months ago a friend came to visit and stayed overnight. When we got up for morning prayers and breakfast, I noticed that he was limping. One foot seemed to have some kind of pain in it, and he could not walk on it very well. After breakfast, we all prayed together, and while we were praying the thought came to

mind — the obvious Christian thought — perhaps we should pray for his foot to be healed. The Lord heals people, and Christians have the power to pray for such healings. There was a certain reluctance for me to pray for it, but I decided that if I believed in Christ, I really ought to. So I suggested to him that we pray for his foot to be healed, and he agreed. I laid hands on him and we prayed for the healing. Then we went back to morning prayers, and after we had finished praying, I asked him, “How’s your foot?” He said with a surprised look on his face, “The pain is gone. It’s healed.” And then I said with an even more surprised look on my face, “It is healed?”

Now it is fairly obvious that his foot was not healed because we were filled with a great feeling of faith. Nor had I felt any special indication from the Lord that he wanted to heal the foot. Moreover I do not believe that there is any promise in scripture that the Lord will always and everywhere heal everything. But on the other hand, I know that the Lord has promised that he will heal, and I know that he life to give those who believe in him what they ask for. I was able to put enough faith in the Lord to pray for the healing, and it happened.

We can also have faith even when we do not receive an inner revelation from God or have a specific promise from scripture about a situation. We can do this because we know what God is like. We know that he has power and that he wants to work through us. We can make that the basis of our “leap.” In other words, God wants us to develop an overall attitude of faith in him. He wants us to expect him to do more and more — even when we cannot find a specific promise that covers it or when we have no specific leading for it. As we have more and more faith in him, we will see more and more happening.

Faith, then, is not a blind leap, but it is a response to revelation. It is a response to what we know of God and what he wants to do. But it is a very particular kind of response.

Faith is the response we make to a rock. A rock can be relied upon. A man can lean upon a rock, or build upon a rock. He cannot trust sand, but he can trust rock. Because it is firm, he can count upon it and expect things from it.

In the Psalms, the Lord is called our rock. He is our rock, because we can rely upon him. When he says something, we can count upon it. If he indicates to us something will happen, we can expect it. If he tells us to do something, we should act upon it. We know, because he is trustworthy, that we have a firm footing when we walk in faith in him.

Three kinds of faith - believing, trusting, and expecting faith

There are three kinds of faith — believing faith, trusting faith, and expecting faith — and we do not begin to see the glory of God until we have expecting faith. Believing faith could also be called doctrinal faith. Many people have this kind of faith because they accept the Christian truths. They have faith that Christ is the Son of God or that there is a heaven and a hell. Trusting faith is faith in God’s goodness. When people have trusting faith, they believe that everything will turn out well. God will take care of them because he loves them. Believing faith and trusting faith are both important, but they are not enough to see God’s glory. The difference between just having believing faith or trusting faith and having expectant faith can be seen in the story of the woman suffering from severe bleeding that is told in Mark’s Gospel:

“Then Jesus started off. So many people were going along with him that they were crowding him from every side. There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years, even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better, she got worse all the time. She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him. ‘If I touch just his clothes,’ she said to herself, ‘I shall get well.’ She touched his cloak and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that

she was cured of her trouble. At once Jesus felt that power had gone out of him. So he turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ His disciples answered, ‘You see that people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?’ But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. The woman realized what had happened to her; so she came, trembling with fear, and fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. Jesus said to her, ‘My daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed from your trouble.’” (Mark 5:24–34)

As Jesus was walking through the crowds, the woman suffering from severe bleeding came up to him. She reached out to touch him, and when she did, she was healed. It was her faith that allowed her to be healed. But it was not just believing faith that she had. When she reached out to touch him she did not say, “This man is the Son of God,” or, “this man is the Messiah, and I want to touch him.” She might not have even known who he was. All she knew was that he had healed people. Nor was it just trusting faith that she had. When she reached out to him, she did not say, “This is a good man, a man I can trust. He will see that whatever happens to me is the best possible thing.” Rather, she had expectant faith. She said, “If I touch just his clothes, I shall get well.” She did not just believe in who Jesus was, nor did she just trust him, but she expected that if she touched him in expectant faith, and that, Jesus said, is what healed her.

Expecting faith

The kind of faith which makes it possible for us to see the glory of God is expectant faith. God wants us to reach out for many things, because we have a confident expectation that he will do things for us if we only turn to him. When we put that kind of faith in him, things happen.

Expectant faith often means that we have to do something before we see God act. A good example of the active element in our faith is Peter’s walking on the water. Peter saw Christ walking across the lake, coming closer to them. When Peter saw him, he asked Christ to let him walk on the water. So Christ told him to come, and he did. He stepped out of the boat and began to walk.

In order for Peter to walk on water, he actually had to walk. It may sound stupid to say it that way, but Peter’s part was to walk, and his part was indispensable. There would be no walking on water unless Peter actually did some walking. It was the power of Christ which made it possible for the water to hold Peter up, but the power of Christ could not do everything. His power could be there, but if Peter had never stepped out of the boat and walked, there would have been no story to tell.

In order to walk on the water, Peter needed some expectant faith. He may not have needed a lot, but he at least needed enough to take the necessary step. Moreover, he not only had to expect something to happen. He also had to do something to make it possible. His expectant faith had to lead to action. He had to act upon what he knew Christ had said.

A response to God's revelation

What is faith, then? Faith is a response to God’s revelation. Once God begins to show us something about what we can expect from him, we need to respond to that by believing it, counting on it, acting upon it. As we begin to put expectant faith in what God is showing us we begin to see things happen.

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Growing in Faith

by Steve Clark

Many years ago, if people had told me that I would pray with someone to receive the gift of tongues, and he would receive it, I would have thought that they were not quite in touch with reality. Not only did my faith in the area not reach very far. It was almost nonexistent. And yet now, I expect it all the time. In fact, if I were to prepare someone and then pray with him and he did not receive the gift of tongues, I would wonder why not.

The Lord has made many changes in me. He has built up my faith far beyond what it used to be. I expect him to do more and more. In many areas of my life, my faith in God is unquestioning. When I notice lacks in myself in the area of the fruit of the Spirit and pray for the Lord to make a change, I expect to see progress. On the other hand, there are other areas where my faith is lower. If I pray for someone and he is healed, I am not surprised, the way I would have been ten years ago; but on the other hand, my faith in that area is not as great as it is when I pray with someone for the gift of tongues. Moreover, I must confess, I would be surprised if I prayed with someone who was dead and he got up. But then again I would not be surprised to see the Lord building my faith in that area so that I might expect to see it happen some day.

Faith grows. We do not have to be upset when we notice that we do not yet have faith to move mountains. Often when people have been baptized in the Spirit, they begin to feel nervous and guilty about the way they exercise faith. They read the promises Christ made to those who have faith, and they think they should be able to do all those things at once. Sometimes they even become fearful of trying anything, because they think it might not happen and they fear that might prove fatal to what little faith they think they have. Or they do try praying for something and it does not happen, and then they start feeling guilty about how little faith

they have.

The readiness to grow in faith

What the Lord expect from us is not mature, fully formed faith all at once (of most of us anyway), but the readiness to grow in faith. Even more, he wants us to have an expectancy to grow in faith. He does not want us to be anxious about the shortcomings in our faith but he wants us to look to him and expect him to build faith in us. In other words, he wants us to know that faith comes from him and that it grows. As we expect him to build our faith, we will begin to see changes.

Often God builds our faith through experiences. Our faith is fed when we see God act. After I saw the Kathryn Kuhlman service I described above, my faith was different. In fact it has never been quite the same since. Because I saw what God could do, I found it easier to believe in what he would do. As I see him doing more things around me in a daily way, I find faith easier and easier. Almost without thinking about it, I have come to expect God to do many things as a matter of course that ten years ago I would have been very excited about. Just today, some friends shared with me some sudden changes in their lives that had come through prayer. I was happy that the changes had happened, but I did not think twice about the way they had happened. I have come to expect that God will work in that way.

God also builds our faith through people who have faith. If we live with Christians who have faith, we will find faith growing in us. If we live with Christians who are fearful and who have little faith, or if we live with little personal contact with other committed Christians, we will find ourselves struggling to keep our faith alive.

Recently the Lord began to speak to our community about having more faith. He told us that we did not count on his promises enough, that we often reacted to situations as if he were not there or would not help us, that we often acted like a group of orphans. That word from the Lord changed us, and our whole community began to pray for healings of all sorts, began to ask him to supply things they needed but could not find or afford, began to ask him to fix machines that were not working, to find things that were missing. Not only did the community begin to pray more for big things, but they also prayed for little things. They tried to meet each situation more consistently in faith.

As those around me began to change, I began to notice something happening to me. I found myself having more faith and expecting the Lord to do more all the time. The change did not come because I took some special steps. It was more because the faith of others “rubbed off.” It felt like I was catching faith from others. And I believe the Lord wants it to be that way. He wants us to have our faith built up by other members of his Body.

The Lord often builds faith in us by directly imparting it to us spiritually. When we are baptized in the Spirit the Lord imparts faith. Many times he imparts faith as we pray. We experience the Lord’s presence in a strong way or we hear him speak to us in a clear way, and afterwards we find that we have more faith. The more we come to know the Lord and the more we experience his reality, the more faith we find that we have.

Although faith grows in us because of what God does to us, we do have a part in the growth of our faith. We can cooperate with him as he works to increase our faith. If we learn some simple lessons, we will find ourselves growing steadily in faith.

Listen to God's Word

In order for us to grow in faith, we have to hear God speak to us. The words he speaks to us build faith in us. He speaks a message to us that frees us to have faith. Paul explains it this way,

“The Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.’ This includes everyone, for God is the Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. As the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can they call on him, if they have not believed? And how can they believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear, if the message is not preached? And how can the message be preached, if the messengers are not sent out? ...So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ.” (Romans 10:11-17)

It is hearing the basic Christian truths presented to us that allows us to have the kind of faith we need.

God's word comes to us in many ways. The most important way is through the scriptures, and therefore if we want to grow in faith, we should read the scriptures regularly. But it also comes through prophecy, through words that other Christians speak to us that are prompted by the Spirit and through words that God speaks to us directly as we learn how to listen for his voice. God's word is alive, and that means that he wants to speak to us constantly. Moreover, usually it turns out that the things he wants to say to us are the same simple things: faith-building truths.

The truths that build faith the most quickly are usually the most basic truths. For instance, one of the most faith-building truths is that God loves us. He created us because he loves us and he wants us in existence because he loves us. He became man and died on a cross for us because he loves us. His care and concern for us is constant, because he loves us. No matter what situation we are in, we can know that we can count on his love. As we grow in consciousness of the truth that he is a loving Father, we can pray and act in faith more easily. We know in every situation that we can count on him to be for us.

A second faith-building truth is that the Lord is with us. He does not leave us, but he is there with us. That means that whatever situation we are facing, whatever concern we are wondering about, the Lord is there with us. We do not have to act in any situation as if we were alone. We can always expect the Lord to be there and to make his help available. Much of our lack of faith comes simply from our forgetfulness of the Lord.

A third faith-building truth is that Christ is in us through the power of his Spirit. Not only is he with us in every situation, he is in us. That means that we can count on him to act through us, to give us the strength that we need, to supply us with wisdom, to even give us faith. Paul says to us, “Surely you know that Christ Jesus is in you” (2 Corinthians 13:5). To simply be aware of these truths being spoken to us helps us to grow in faith.

There are many faith-building truths. As we listen to the word of the Lord, we will hear those truths being spoken to us. In fact, we can count on the Lord to repeat them to us and draw them to our attention as they grow dim in our minds. The more we live in the light of God's word, the more we will grow in faith.

Pray For Faith

The following suggestion is a simple, obvious one: we should pray for faith. That is a prayer that God always answers. We should persevere in that prayer until we see it happen within us, knowing that the Lord wants us to have faith and that he will give it to us. As it says in 1 John:

“This is why we have courage in God’s presence; we are sure that he will hear us if we ask him for anything that is according to his will. He hears whenever we ask him; since we know this is true, we know also that he gives us what we ask from him.” (1 John 5:14–15)

We should, therefore, not pray for faith in a begging way, or in a way that acknowledges that we have no faith. We should pray for it by turning to Christ and remembering how much he wants us to have faith, and how he has given it to so many others in the past when they have turned to him for it.

Be Willing To Try Acting in Faith

When I was first prayed with for the gift of tongues, I was afraid to do anything at all that might be “me”. I would not so much as move my lips, because I was afraid that I would be getting myself into praying in tongues. People worked to get me free from the fear, and after I was willing to try speaking in tongues, a change began to occur. Once one of the attempts I made to speak in tongues was different from the others. There was a different ability to yield to the Spirit, a new spark of faith. If I had not been willing to try, I do not know what it would have taken for me to begin speaking in tongues.

The same lesson applies in more ordinary areas of our lives. We often do not relate to people in a good way, because we do not have the ability to do so, or at least we do not see that ability in ourselves. But once the Holy Spirit has been given to us, we have the source of the fruit of the Spirit inside of us. We have a new power to relate to others well. One of the people I knew well in our community tended to be shy and had a difficulty being able to talk with people. He was afraid that they would not be interested in what he had to say, or, even worse, that he would not be able to think of anything to say. After a few months of his new life as a Christian, the Lord began to let him know that he had given him a new ability to relate to people and that as he tried using it he would see that it was there. He did try, and he could see something new happening. Today he is able to talk freely with a wide variety of people and to serve and care for them in a responsible way.

God wants us to be unafraid. He expects us to learn to have faith, and he will give us faith. If we want to grow in faith for healing, we should pray with people to be healed, and pray for ourselves to be healed. If we do not have the faith to expect God to do things in a given area, we can at least trust him enough to expect him to increase our faith. We may even have to have the persistence of the man who went to his friend at night and demanded loaves of bread; we should be prepared to be that way, and not shrink back. We should not hold back until we feel perfect faith.

Do not Try to “Work Up” Feelings of Faith, But Look to the Lord

Faith is a gift, not a feeling that we have to work up inside. I went through a period of “trying to have faith.” I had notice that at times of genuine faith, I often felt an assurance that God would act. And so when I tried to “have faith,” I tried to produce that feeling of assurance inside of me. I would not pray for someone, or speak, or do anything until I had worked up a feeling of assurance. Well, it rarely seemed to work. It almost seemed, in fact, that the harder I tried to “have faith,” the less it worked. Then I learned

an important truth. I began to see that what I was doing was concentrating on myself. I was having faith in my feeling of assurance, rather than in Christ. I was beginning to think that if I felt a certain way, things would happen. But I also rediscovered another truth in the process — that trying to concentrate on having a certain feeling is often one of the worst ways of actually getting that feeling. The more I tried to produce a feeling of faith inside me, the harder it was for me to actually experience it.

We grow in faith, not by looking to ourselves, but by looking to Christ. What we need to focus on is not our own feelings (Christ often works despite them), but on him — on his power, on his promises, on what he has done in the past. What we need to fill our minds with and our hearts with when we try to act in faith or pray in faith is the Lord himself. As we turn to him, he will increase our faith.

Pray With Confidence

How we pray for things makes a big difference in our growth in faith. Often we have a tendency to beg God for things. Over and over we will ask him to give us what we want. The very approach of begging betrays a lack of faith. Whom do we beg but the person we do not believe will give us what we are asking for? God wants us to approach him confidently, as sons and daughters who are sure of their Father. When we ask, we should ask with confidence, thanking him for what he will do, confessing his power and Lordship, praising him. Our prayer should be an act of faith, not an indication of our lack of faith.

I once observed two acquaintances of mine who learned the same lesson, but in a different area. They were in love with one another, and the man had promised the woman that he would love her until he died. When she first heard him say it, she was happy. But she kept asking him over and over if he really would love her until he died. Finally one day they had a fight over the question, and he wanted to know if she had so little trust in him that she would never believe him when he said yes. She felt so insecure about herself that she could not believe him. He felt exasperated and hurt, because her constant asking made him feel that she did not think he could be trusted.

We do the same thing with God at times. We ask him as he were not to be trusted, or as if he did not really love us. Sometimes we call his promises into question. It is true that what that shows is only that we are insecure. But we are treating him in a way that a human being would find insulting. We are praying to him as if we cannot expect him to help us, or sometimes as if he does not want to help us. That gets us into the kind of relationship with him in which it is harder for him to do things for us.

Our prayer is most effective when it is according to the truth. When we acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord and has all power in heaven and earth, when we call to mind his love for us and how much he wants to do for us, then we are beginning to pray in the Spirit of truth. The more our prayer is in the Spirit of truth, the more effective it is.

Resist Spirits of Fear and Doubt

There are many things in us which work against faith: fears, doubts, hesitations, confusions, anxieties. There is a great deal about the way we are which is an obstacle to growth in faith. But Peter tells us that we also have to be aware that we have to deal with evil spirits who work upon the natural things in us and stir them up, making it more difficult to have faith. Peter says:

“Throw all your worries on God, for cares for you. Be alert, be on watch! For your enemy, the Devil,

roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him.” (1 Pet. 5:7–9)

Paul tells us,

“Put on the armor that God gives you, so that you will stand up against the Devil’s evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings, but against the evil spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.” (Ephesians 6:11–12)

And James gives the simple advice to us,

“Oppose the Devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7)

One way in which evil spirits work upon us is through lies. They begin to put thoughts into our minds, thoughts which hinder our ability to follow the Lord. They tell us, “it will never work” or “you do not have enough faith” or “God will never listen to someone like you” or “it didn’t work the last time” or any number of different thoughts. When we listen to those thoughts and believe them, our faith begins to drain away. Instead we have to resist them. We have to say to ourselves, “I know what the truth is, and those thoughts are not the truth.” If we give in to all the thoughts of doubt and fear that go through our heads, we will not be able to grow in faith.

A big obstacle to our ability to resist the work of evil spirits is our tendency to live by our feelings. Many of us tend to approach situations with the idea, “if I feel that way, that’s the way it must be.” We think that if we feel we cannot do something, we cannot, or if we feel fearful, we have to act in a fearful way. But we do not have to follow our feelings. If we do follow our feelings evil spirits will have a field day with us, because they can more easily work on our emotions than any other aspect of us. The Holy Spirit give us the ability to follow the Lord no matter how we feel. We have to claim that power and begin to act on it. We have to recall the truth and act in faith even when we are opposed by feelings of fear and doubt.

Go To Where Our Faith Can Be Fed

If our faith is fed by seeing God act and by being in contact with committed Christians who have faith, we should go to situations in which we can see God act and where we can make contact with men and women of faith. If we want to grow in faith, it only makes sense to go where our faith will be helped. For most of us that means looking around for the nearest group of Christians who are beginning to experience growth in faith and joining with them. It is difficult to grow in faith by ourselves.

Of course, we cannot always see God act when we want to (we could if we had the faith, the problem is often getting to the point of faith), nor can we always find a group of Christians who can help our faith. Or sometimes we are part of a group of Christians struggling to grow in faith, but the whole group needs help to grow in faith. Then years ago, I would not have known how to get myself in a situation in which I could grow in faith the way I am able to now. In such a case, books can be a great help. For me, it was the reading of *The Cross and the Switchblade* that revolutionized my faith. By reading a book on how God acted, my faith was fed, fed to the point where I could make a resolve to do whatever I had to do to grow into the kind of faith that I saw in the book.

Books, in fact, can often feed faith, and if we want to grow in faith, reading certain books can help us. The Cross and the Switchblade is one such book, as is Realities. I Believe in Miracles is another, as are The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi and The Miracles of Lourdes. There are many books written about how God has acted in history that can make us see that what we read about in the scriptures is not just something that happened in a Never–Never Land, nor in a special period of past history, but that has happened in every age since Christ and is happening today to people like us. Amen!

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Steve Clark is past president of the [Sword of the Spirit](#) and founder of [The Servants of the Word](#).

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*A new dimension of faith as a living encounter
with the person of Jesus Christ*

by Carlos Mantica

How come they never told me...

*That God is a personal being
who dreamed about me from all eternity,
who loves me,
and, because he loves me,
wants my happiness,
and is omnipotent.*

*That Christians do not follow a doctrine,
but a person—Jesus of Nazareth, the Alpha and the Omega.
I died, and behold I am alive for evermore,
and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:18)*

*That God did not come into the world in order to save the righteous—
He came into the world in order to save people just like you and me.*

*That the Holy Spirit is not something that is given to us,
but Someone who gives himself to us and who works in us
inasmuch as we yield to him.*

*That a Christian is
a human being
chosen by Christ
in order to be like Christ,
to love like Christ and,*

*having been empowered by Christ
and incorporated into Christ,
to complete Christ's mission in the world.*

*That being a Christian is only difficult when one is not a Christian.
That what Christ requires from me is
to believe in him and to trust him—
to believe that he can,
that he wants to,
and that he will act if I will, and
I allow him to take control of my life
and to give me a new way of being, of acting and of loving
through his Spirit.*

That Christ hates sin

*but loves the sinner
before he sins,
when he is sinning,
and after sinning.*

*That nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.
(Romans 8:31-39)*

*That I am not a sinner because I sin,
but I sin because I am a sinner. (Romans 7:17)*

*That I cannot save myself
no matter how sincere my intentions,
or how strong my will.
If I were able to save myself, Christ would have died in vain.*

That I will never die.

*That he who will judge me on the last day
is the same who died for me on a cross.*

*That we shall one day be like him (1 John 3:2)
and that such was his intent from the beginning (Genesis 1:26).*

*That what no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived
is what God has prepared for those who love him.
(1 Corinthians 2:9)*

*That the whole creation waits with eager longing
for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:15)*

See related articles by Carlos Mantica:

- > [From Evidence to Faith](#)
- > [What is the Kingdom of God?](#)

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Peter and John healing a lame man, by William Hatherell 1855-1928

From Evidence to Faith

by Carlos Mantica

The following article is adapted from a series of talks prepared for the City of God community in Managua, Nicaragua, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. The talks were given by Carlos Mantica, the senior leader of the community. - ed.

Many people are still stunned when they hear a lay person preaching. That is why it's worth remembering that, from the very beginning, it was the Lord's desire that fishermen, tax collectors, and people just like you and me would be the ones to carry the Good News of the Kingdom to all nations. Nowadays, the Lord is again calling mechanics and refrigeration technicians, accountants and doctors, engineers and people from all walks of life, to be his witnesses and to proclaim to the whole world that our God lives and is present among us.

The One who has power to heal and transform

I would like to begin this short presentation with a passage that seems to me very appropriate for today. It is taken from chapter 3 in the Acts of the Apostles, and says:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour [i. e. around 3 p.m.].
And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called

Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this made strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."

I invite you all to visualize this scene. The Lord has healed a man lame from birth, who was known to everybody, and a big crowd gathers around Peter and John in order to find out who these magicians or these saints are, who have healed him with extraordinary powers. Peter is amused by the matter, and says: "Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"

Jesus of Nazareth - King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Something similar happens when people come to our community gatherings and say, "I want that white-haired man standing over there, or the fat one who is leading the gathering, or that other one with the big nose, to be the one to pray for me, because I've heard that they heal people." So we have to answer just like Peter did: "Brothers and sisters, none of us here has any healing power of any kind.

All of us together would not be able to heal anyone of a cold. We are ashamed to admit that we are not very holy or very pious either. Among us there is only one who is holy, who heals and saves, and his name is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in whose name we take the risk of facing ridicule so that his glory can be manifested among men."

In fact, the most important message of Peter in this passage I just read is his proclamation, "The one whom you delivered up and denied, God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."

We, too, are witnesses of Jesus Christ

We too proclaim that Christ is alive, that Christ reigns, and that he has been given all power in heaven and earth. I intend to share briefly with you why we say that we are witnesses to the truth of all this.

Can we prove God's existence?

I went to a school run by the Jesuits, in Granada, Nicaragua, back when students actually studied at school. And, among other things, one day we studied St. Thomas Aquinas and his proofs of the existence of God. Our philosophy teacher would then say, quoting St. Thomas:

The Uncaused Cause

"First Proof: The Uncaused Cause. Just look around and you will see that there is no effect without a cause. This seed was caused by this fruit, and this fruit by this tree, and this tree by another seed, which in turn was caused by another seed, till we go back to the very first seed that somebody had to create because it could not create itself. And you came from your father and mother, and they from your grandparents, and they from your great-grandparents, till we go back to the first man who could not have created himself but had to be created by somebody else; and it makes no sense to say that he was made by a Martian or by a first cell, because somebody had to create that cell or that little Martian, and the one who created them and

was not created by anybody is the one we call God.”

“Boy, was St. Thomas clever!”, we all said, but we remained the same we had been up to that moment.

The Order of the World

Oh, but listen to the Second Proof”, the teacher would then say; “The Order of the World:

“Look at something as ordinary as the leaf of a tree. Billions and billions of leaves in the whole world, carrying out every day chemical operations so complex as changing carbon dioxide into oxygen, through the action of light. Man, despite all his intelligence, has not been able to produce one single leaf or one single lab that can do what any leaf does.

“Or take a look at the human eye: billions of perfectly well-ordered cells, working together to make it possible for us to see, and if just one of them is not playing its role, the whole operation fails. Or look at the earth—a mere grain of sand in the cosmos. There are millions of galaxies, each of them millions of times bigger than the earth, and some of them so far away that their light, traveling 365,000 kilometers per second, has not reached the earth yet, and there are stars whose light we see today, but which actually ceased to exist thousands of years ago, and what we see is only the light that came out from them before they disappeared, and each of them occupies the right place without straying from its course.

“Or look at the microcosm—in the fertilized egg of a woman the chromosomes are present that will determine if the child will have the small nose of his great-great-grandmother, the intelligence of his grandfather and the bad temper of his father. All of this requires a superior intelligence that has shaped everything in the universe, and saying that everything fell into order just by chance is as absurd as if I went up to the steeple of the Cathedral with a lot of boxes of printing types, threw all the characters into the air, and when they fell down they spelled the complete works of Shakespeare on the stair steps of the church.”

There was no denying it. This argument by St. Thomas persuaded us through and through. “No way, José! There’s got to be a God!”, we said.

All cultures believe in God

And then came the Third Proof: All cultures of all ages have believed in God. All of them? Surely, every single one of them! The Chinese, and the Hindus, and the Vikings? Yes, sir! And the Eskimos and the Redskins? Of course! And the Indians of Mexico and of Nicaragua? Sure, so sure that if you want to know their names you can buy the book I wrote on Nicaraguan speech and there you can find them!

“Oh boy,” we said. That really gives you a matter for reflection! There must be some reason why all cultures of all ages have believed in God. “Well,” some atheists came around and said, “what happens is that those ignorant people of other ages looked at the sun, the moon, the stars, the seasons, and the mechanisms of fertility, and when they could not give an account of them they turned them into gods and goddesses—the Sun God, the Moon Goddess, the goddess of fertility, and so on.

But the atheists were not convincing. I only had to read the first chapter of the Bible, not to mention the encounter of Moses and the other prophets with God, to realize that Jews and Christians not only did not believe that the sun and the moon were gods, but they clearly asserted that all of them had been created by a being that was superior to all of them, and who was the explanation for the cause of all things, for the order in creation, and for the fact that all cultures had come to the conclusion that such a God had to exist.

So I came out of school believing in God, but believing in the same way that some people believe that such and such toothpaste will prevent cavities but they do not even brush their teeth. I believed that God was someone who had to exist, but who played no role in my life. Maybe he was a force, an energy, something immensely big that was supposed to inspire awe and respect, and about whom many strange things were said whose truth I would never be able to ascertain until I was dead, but which, just in case they were true, were a good reason for me to behave reasonably well, least I were to come to his presence one of these days.

God is a personal Being

Many years had to pass before I discovered that God is a personal being, who has dreamed of me in eternity before the beginning of time and creation, who loves me and because he loves me wants what is good for me, and who is omnipotent. And that

“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld his glory” (John 1:14),

“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11).

What am I trying to explain here? I am trying to say that we sometimes meet people who think that we believe in God or in Jesus Christ because someone spoke to us when we were young, maybe a teacher, priest or minister, or some other Christian tried to persuade us with arguments about the existence of God. Or that, throughout the centuries and in the midst of the most hostile environments and ideologies, people continue to believe in God because somebody told them he existed. Or that thousands and thousands of men and women left everything behind —possessions, fame, riches and love, in order to follow him and serve him among the most miserable and dispossessed in the whole earth, among those who are rejected by society itself as human rubbish, so that, throughout history and to this day, hundreds of thousands of people have been willing to die, even in the most atrocious fashions, rather than deny their God and Lord.

I think that line of argument is rather stupid. Because more absurd than believing in God is to believe that there are people who are able to die for something they have merely been told about, or because of a catechism or some religious instruction that was thrust into their heads when they were young.

It was not until August 13, 1965, that I discovered that we Christians do not follow a doctrine, but a person. That Muslims, Buddhists and all other “-ists” follow the ideas of a dead figure - a corpse, whereas we Christians follow a person - who died for our sins and rose again and who is alive today and who will continue to be with us always, to the close of this present age and for all eternity

—“Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom you delivered up and denied, but whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”

We have encountered the Risen Lord

We are witnesses to this because for many of us we, too, remember the day when we first experienced a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. Our encounter with the person of Jesus is the only reason we truly believe that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

There are many ways in which people encounter the person of Christ. Many have had a personal encounter with him when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, or when they sensed him stirring within their hearts and moving their lips to speak out inspired words of praise in an unknown language through the gift of tongues, or when they were inspired to raise their hands as an expression of joy and worship. Some have encountered the Lord speaking to them personally through a prophetic word spoken out in a charismatic prayer meeting or gathering. Still others might have met him when they experienced a peace that he alone can give, and a joy that no human trouble can take away.

Finally, others became aware that Christ is alive, that Christ loves them and that Christ reigns, on the day they came out of curiosity or out of some personal need, to a charismatic prayer meeting or community gathering, due to a cancer that had decreed their imminent death, or because of a child of theirs who was unable to walk, and then they were able to have firsthand experience of the reality of Christ who heals and of Christ who saves.

Brothers and sisters, I have said all these things for the sake of those who do not believe, or for those who believe because

somebody else told them or because they were taught when they were young children, we want them to be able to say what those men told the Samaritan woman in John 4:42:

“It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Encountering Him in tangible experiential ways

That is what our public Christian community gatherings are for — so that many may meet him - Jesus the risen Lord who gives total inner security, and perfect peace and joy. Others come and experience in a tangible experiential way the presence of the living God, and others experience the healing of their diseases by the work of the same one who, two thousand years ago, healed so many sick people.

He is the same yesterday and today and forever, and he is among us because he promised so, and his name is Faithful and True. And he is the same one who says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

I encourage all of you, in the intimacy of your hearts, to invite Jesus Christ to come into your life. Thus, in the future, our praise will be as thundering as the praise of all those who know him. Let me end with the words of John in the introduction to his first letter:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us (1 John 1:1-3). Amen!

See related articles by Carlos Mantica:

- > [How Come They Never Told Me](#)
- > [What is the Kingdom of God?](#)

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The Fruit of a Faith-filled Life

by Derek Prince

Faith as a fruit

One way to bring the difference between faith as a fruit of the Spirit versus faith as a gift into focus is to picture a Christmas tree and an apple tree. A Christmas tree bears gifts; an apple tree bears fruit. A gift is both attached to a Christmas tree and removed from it by a single, brief act. There is no direct connection between the tree and the gift: one may be a garment, the other a fir tree. The gift tells us nothing about the nature of the tree from which it is taken.

On the other hand, there is a direct connection between an apple and the tree that bears it. The nature of the tree determines the nature of the fruit – both its kind and its quality. An apple tree can never bear an orange. A healthy tree will never bear unhealthy fruit (see Matthew 7:17–20). The fruit on the apple tree is not produced by a single act, but is the result of a steady, continuing process of growth and development. To produce the best fruit, the tree must be carefully cultivated. This requires time, skill and labor.

Let us apply this simple analogy to the spiritual realm. A spiritual gift is both imparted and received by a single, brief transaction. It tells us nothing about the nature of the person who exercises it. On the other hand, spiritual fruit expresses the nature of the life from which it proceeds; it comes only as the result of a process of growth. To attain the best fruit, a life must be carefully cultivated– with time, skill and labor.

Faith expresses character

We may express the difference in another way by saying that gifts express *ability*, fruit expresses *character*. Which is more important? In the long run, undoubtedly, character is more important than ability.

The exercise of gifts is temporary. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, there will come a time when gifts will no longer be needed. But character is permanent. The character we develop in this life will determine what we will be throughout eternity. One day we will leave our gifts behind; our character will remain forever.

However, we do not need to choose one at the expense of another. Gifts do not exclude fruit; fruit does not exclude gifts. Rather, they are intended to complement each other. Gifts should provide practical expressions for character, just as they did perfectly in the person of Jesus Himself. His loving, gracious character was expressed by the fullest possible exercise of spiritual gifts. Only through the gifts could He meet the needs of the people to whom He had come to minister, fully expressing to them the nature of His heavenly Father whom He had come to represent (see John 14:9–11).

We should seek to follow Christ's pattern. The more we develop the attributes that characterized Jesus – love, concern, and compassion – the more we will need the same gifts He exercised in order to give practical expression to these attributes. The more fully we are equipped with these gifts, the greater will be our ability to glorify God our Father, just as Jesus did.

Fruit, then, expresses character. When all nine forms of spiritual fruit are present and fully developed, they represent the totality of Christian character, each form of fruit satisfying a specific need and each complementing the rest. Within this totality, the fruit of faith may be viewed from two aspects that correspond to two different but related uses of the Greek word *pistis*. The first is trust; the second is trustworthiness.

Faith as trust

The first aspect of faith as a fruit is trust. The Jerusalem Bible translates *pistis* as “trustfulness.” Many times over, Jesus emphasized that one of the requirements for all who would enter the Kingdom of God is to become as little children (see Matthew 18:1-4; 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). There is probably no quality more distinctively characteristic of childhood than trustfulness. And yet, paradoxically, it is a quality that is seen at its perfection in the most mature men of God – men such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. We may conclude, therefore, that the degree to which we cultivate trustfulness is a good measure of our spiritual maturity.

More fully, the fruit of faith – in this aspect – may be defined as a quiet, steady, unwavering trust in the goodness, wisdom and faithfulness of God. No matter what trials or seeming disasters may be encountered, the person who has cultivated this form of fruit remains calm and restful in the midst of it all. He has an unshakable confidence that God is still in complete control of every situation and that, in and through all circumstances, God is working out His own purpose of blessing for each one of His children.

The outward expression of this kind of trust is stability. This is beautifully pictured by David in Psalm 125:1: “*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*”

All earth's mountains may tremble and shake and even be totally removed – except for one. Zion can never be moved. God has chosen it for His own dwelling place, and it alone will abide forever.

So it is with the believer who has learned to trust. Others all around him may give way to panic and confusion, but he remains calm and secure. “*His foundation is in the holy mountains*” (Psalm 87:1).

Commitment leads to trust

We must know for sure that our soul is safe in the Lord's hands. The key to this kind of trust is commitment. We first make a definite, personal commitment of our life to Jesus Christ. Then in the hour of Testing – perhaps at the very threshold of eternity – we do not need to make any further commitment. We need only rest in the commitment we already made – one that included both life and death, time and eternity.

In Psalm 37:5 David says, “*Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.*” More literally the verse says, “and He is doing it.” Two things are here required of us. The first is an act, “commit.” The second is an attitude, “trust.” The act of commitment leads to the attitude of trust. So long as we continue in an attitude of trust, David assures us, God “is doing it.”

Committing a matter to the Lord is like taking cash to the bank and depositing it in our account. Once we have received the teller’s receipt for our deposit, we need no longer be concerned about the safety of our money. It is now the bank’s responsibility. It is ironic that people who have no difficulty in trusting a bank to take care of their money find it much harder to trust God concerning some vital personal matter.

The example of the bank deposit illustrates an important factor in making a successful commitment. When we walk out of the bank, we carry an official receipt, indicating the date, the place, and the amount of our deposit. There are no uncertainties. We need to be equally specific concerning those things committed to God. We need to know, without a shadow of doubt, both what we have committed and when and where the commitment was made. We also need the Holy Spirit’s official “receipt” acknowledging that God has accepted our commitment.

Trust must be cultivated

Trust is like all forms of fruit: it needs to be cultivated and it passes through various stages of development before it reaches full maturity. The words of David in Psalm 62 well illustrate the development of trust:

“He [God] only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken” (verse 2, NAS). But after making exactly the same declaration of trust in God, he says, *“I shall not be shaken”* (verse 6, NAS). Between verses 2 and 6, David progressed from not being “greatly shaken” to not being shaken at all.

We need to be as honest about ourselves as David was. Before our trust has come to maturity, the best we can say is, “I shall not be greatly shaken!” At this stage, troubles and opposition will shake us, but they will not overthrow us. However, if we continue to cultivate our trust, we will come to the stage where we can say, “I shall not be shaken” – period! Nothing will be able even to shake us – much less overthrow us.

Trust of this kind is in the realm of the spirit rather than the emotions. We may turn once more to the personal testimony of David for an illustration. He says to the Lord, *“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee”* (Psalm 56:3 NAS). Here David recognizes two conflicting influences at work in himself simultaneously: trust and fear. Fear is superficial, in the emotions; trust is deeper down, in the spirit.

Mature trust is like a deep, strong river, making its irresistible way to the sea. At times, the winds of fear or doubt may blow contrary to the river’s course and whip up foaming waves on its surface. But these winds and waves cannot change or hinder the deep, continuing flow of the waters below the surface, as they follow the path marked out for them by the river’s bed to their predetermined end in the sea.

Trust in its full maturity is beautifully exemplified by the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12:

“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

By all worldly standards, at this stage Paul was a failure. Some of his most influential friends and supporters had turned against him. Of all his close coworkers, only Luke remained with him. Demas had actually abandoned him and turned back to the world. Paul was infirm and aged, a manacled prisoner in a Roman jail, awaiting unjust trial and execution at the hands of a cruel, depraved despot. Yet his words ring with serene, unshakable confidence. Beyond the horizon of time he looks forward to an unclouded day – “that day” when the righteous Judge will award

him “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).

For Paul, as for David, trust was the outcome of an act of commitment. It is expressed in his own words: “He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him.” “Trusting” was the result of “entrusting.” Years previously Paul had made an irrevocable commitment of himself to Christ. Subsequent trials and sufferings gradually brought forth an ever-deepening trust that had now come to its full fruition in a Roman dungeon, its radiance all the brighter by contrast with its gloomy setting.

Faith as trustworthiness

We turn now to the second aspect of faith as a fruit: trustworthiness. Linguistically, trustworthiness is in fact the original meaning of *pistis*. In Arndt and Gingrich’s standard lexicon of New Testament Greek, the first specific definition given of *pistis* is: “faithfulness, reliability.” If we go back to the Old Testament, the same applies to the Hebrew word for faith, *emunah*. Its primary meaning is “faithfulness”; its secondary meaning is “faith.” The verb from which it is derived gives us the word *Amen* – “So be it” or “Let it be confirmed.”

Both meanings alike converge in the person and nature of God Himself. If we view faith as trust, its only ultimate basis is God’s trustworthiness. If we view faith as trustworthiness, it is only through our trust that the Holy Spirit is able to impart to us God’s trustworthiness. God Himself is both the beginning and the end of faith. His trustworthiness is the only basis for our trust: our trust in Him reproduces in us His trustworthiness.

The nature of God's covenant love

Probably no attribute of God is more persistently emphasized throughout the Scriptures than His trustworthiness. In the Old Testament there is one special Hebrew word reserved for this attribute: *chesed*, which is variously translated “goodness,” “kindness,” “loving-kindness,” or “mercy.” However, none of these translations fully expresses its meaning.

There are two distinctive features of God’s *chesed*. First, it is the expression of God’s free, unmerited grace. It goes beyond anything that man can ever deserve or demand as a right. Second, it is always based on a covenant that God voluntarily enters into. We may combine these two features by saying that *chesed* is God’s trustworthiness in fulfilling His covenant commitments, which go beyond anything that we can deserve or demand.

We thus find a close connection between three important Hebrew concepts: *emunah*, faith or faithfulness; *chesed*, God’s trustworthiness; *berith*, a covenant. This is the recurrent theme in this psalm:

And My faithfulness [emunah] and My loving-kindness [chesed] will be with him...My loving-kindness [chesed] I will keep for him forever, and My covenant [berith] shall be confirmed [amen] to him... But I will not break off My loving-kindness [chesed] from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness [emunah]. My covenant [berith] I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. - Psalm 89:24, 28, 33–34

The last verse brings out a special relationship between God’s trustworthiness and the words of His mouth.

There are two things God will never do: break His covenant or go back on what He has said. God’s trustworthiness, imparted by the Holy Spirit, will reproduce the same characteristics in us. It will make us persons of unflinching integrity and honesty.

We have already seen that God’s *chesed*, expressed in His covenant commitments, is based on His grace, going beyond anything that we, its recipients, can ever deserve or demand. This too will be reflected in our covenant relationships with fellow believers. We will not limit ourselves to the mere requirements of justice or some legal form of contract. We will be ready to make the full commitment God made in establishing His covenant with us – to

lay down our lives for one another. “*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 John 3:16). It is by the laying down of our lives that we enter into full covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Scripture paints a fearful picture of the breakdown of moral and ethical standards that will mark the close of this present age (see 2 Timothy 3:1-4). As the world thus plunges deeper into darkness, God’s people must – by contrast – be more determined than ever to walk in the light of fellowship. We must show ourselves both willing and qualified to enter into and maintain those covenant relationships upon which fellowship depends. For this purpose we will need to cultivate to full maturity the fruit of trustworthiness.

Summary

Spiritual fruit differs from spiritual gifts in two main ways. First, a spiritual gift can be imparted and received by a single, brief transaction; fruit must be cultivated by a continuing process, requiring time, skill and labor. Second, gifts are not directly related to the character of those who exercise them, while fruit is an expression of character. Ideally, fruit and gifts should balance one another in a combination that glorifies God and serves humanity.

As a form of fruit, faith may be understood in two distinct ways: as trust and as trustworthiness. Trust is manifested in stability, which increases as trust matures. It requires an initial act of commitment. We base our trust on God’s trustworthiness. God demonstrates His trustworthiness toward us by fulfilling His covenant commitments, which are beyond anything we can deserve or demand. In turn, it makes us the kind of people who are willing and able to enter into and maintain covenant commitments, both with God and with one another.

[This article is excerpted from *Faith to Live By*, written by (c) 1977 Derek Prince, first published by Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and republished in 1997 by Whitaker House, New Kensington, Pennsylvania, USA.]

Derek Prince (1915–2003) was born in India of British parents. Educated as a scholar of Greek and Latin at Eton College and Cambridge University, England, he held a Fellowship in Ancient and Modern Philosophy at King’s College. He also studied Hebrew and Aramaic, at Cambridge University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. While serving with the British army in World War II, he began to study the Bible and experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Out of this encounter he formed two conclusions: first, that Jesus Christ is alive; second, that the Bible is a true, relevant, up-to-date book. These conclusions altered the whole course of his life, which he then devoted to studying and teaching the Bible.

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Faith is the Daily Bread that God Gives Us

*a sermon for young adults on the occasion of their public profession of faith
at a confirmation service in Germany in 1938*

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dear confirmation pupils! This is a very sober word. But it is good that from the very beginning we get used to not bragging about our faith. Faith is not like that. Precisely because all depends today on our *really* keeping the faith, all desire for great words fades away. Whether we believe or not will be evident every day; protests do not change a thing.

You know from the Passion story that Peter says to Jesus: “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you,” and Jesus answers: “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And the story ends: “And Peter went out and wept bitterly.” He had denied his Lord. Great assertions, even if they were said truthfully and were meant seriously, are always closest to denial. May God protect you and all of us from this.

This confirmation day is an important day for you and for us all. It is not an insignificant thing that you profess your Christian faith today before the all-knowing God and before the ears of the Christian church-community.

For the rest of your life, you shall think back on this day with joy. But for that very reason I admonish you today to full Christian soberness. You shall not and may not say or do anything on this day that you will remember later with bitterness and remorse, having said and promised more in an hour of inner emotion than a human being can and may ever say. Your faith is still weak and untried and very much in the beginning.

I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief

Therefore, when later on you speak the confession of your faith, do not rely on yourselves and on your good intentions and on the strength of your faith, but rely only on the one whom you confess, on God the Father, on Jesus Christ, and on the Holy Spirit. And pray in your hearts: I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief. Who among us adults would not and should not pray the same with you?

Confirmation is a serious day. But truly, you know that it is still easy enough to confess one's faith in the church, in the fellowship of Christians, your parents, siblings, and godparents, in the undisturbed celebration of a worship service.

Let us be thankful that God grants us this hour of common confessing in the church. But all of this will only become utterly serious, utterly real after confirmation, when daily life returns, our daily life will all its decisions. Then it will become evident whether even this day was serious.

Faith is the daily bread that God gives us

You do not have your faith once and for all. The faith that you will confess today with all your hearts needs to be regained tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, indeed, every day anew. We receive from God only as much faith as we need for the present day. Faith is the *daily* bread that God gives us.

You know the story about manna. This is what the children of Israel received daily in the desert. But when they wanted to store it for the next day, it was rotten. This is how it is with all the gifts of God. This is how it is with faith as well. Either we receive it daily anew or it rots. One day is just long enough to preserve the faith. Every morning it is a new struggle to fight through all unbelief, faintheartedness, lack of clarity and confusion, anxiety and uncertainty, in order to arrive at faith and to wrest it from God. Every morning in your life the same prayer will be necessary. I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief.

"I believe." Today, when the Christian congregation acknowledges you as autonomous members of the church, it expects that you begin to understand that your faith must be your very own individual decision. The "we believe" must now grow more and more into an "I believe."

We must serve God alone

Faith *is* a decision. We cannot avoid that. "You cannot serve two masters"; from now on either you serve God alone or you do not serve God at all. Now you only have *one* Lord, who is the Lord of the world, who is the Savior of the world, who is the one who creates the world anew.

To serve him is your highest honor. But to this Yes to God belongs an equally clear No. Your Yes to God demands your No to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor, to all godlessness and mocking of the Holy.

Our Yes to God demands a brave No as well

Your Yes to God demands a brave No to everything that will ever hinder you from serving God alone, whether it be your profession, your property, your house, your honor before the world. Faith means decision.

But *your* very own decision! No person can relieve you of it. It must arise from loneliness, from the solitude of the heart with God. It will be born out of the hot struggles against the enemy in your own bosom.

You are still surrounded by a church-community, by homes that carry you, by parents who pray for you, by

people who help you wherever they can. Thanks be to God for this! But God will lead you more and more into loneliness. He wants to prepare you for the great hours and decisions of your life when no human being can stand by your side and when only one thing is true: I believe, yes, I myself, I cannot do otherwise; dear Lord, help my unbelief.

Dive into Scripture and prayer

Dear confirmation pupils, the church therefore expects of you that you will come of age in your dealings with the word of God and in prayer. Your faith today is a beginning, not a conclusion. First, you must dive into Scripture and into prayer, you alone, and you must learn to fight with the weapon of the word of God wherever it is needed.

Christian fellowship is one of the greatest gifts that God gives us. But God *can* also take this gift away from us as it pleases God, as he has done already to many of our brethren today. Then we will stand and fall with our very own faith.

Someday, however, each and every one of us will be placed in this solitude even if he has evaded it throughout life, namely, in the hour of death and the Last Judgment. Then God will not ask you, have your parents believed, but: have *you* believed? May God grant that in the loneliest hour of our life we can still pray: I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief. Then we shall be blessed.

Learn to say DEAR Lord

“I believe, *dear Lord*...” In life, it is not always easy to say, “Dear Lord.” But faith must learn this. Who would not wish sometimes to say: I believe, harsh Lord, severe Lord, terrible Lord. I submit to you. I will be silent and obey. But to learn to say “dear Lord” is a new and difficult struggle. And yet we will have found God, the father of Jesus Christ, only when we have learned to speak that way.

Your faith will be led into difficult temptations. Jesus Christ was tempted as well, more than all of us. At first, temptations will come to you not to obey God’s commandments any longer. They will assault you with great force.

Satan, Lucifer, the bearer of light will come to you, handsome and alluring, innocent and with the appearance of light. He will obscure God’s law and call it into doubt. He will want to rob you of the joy you will have in God’s path.

And once the evil one has caused us to waiver, he will tear our entire faith out of our hearts, will trample it underfoot and cast it away. Those will be difficult hours in your life, when you tend to become weary of God’s word, when all is in revolt, when no prayer passes your lips anymore, when the heart refuses to listen any longer.

The Father tests and strengthens us

As certain as your faith is alive, all of this must happen. It must happen so that your faith is tested and strengthened, so that you will be able to cope with increasing tasks and struggles God works on us through these temptations. He never plays a game with you, you can be confident of that, but the father wants to make fast the heart of his children.

That is the reason why all of this will come over you. And even if the temptation is very confusion, if our resistance threatens utter collapse, indeed, even if defeat has already arrived, then we may and should cry out with the final remnant of our faith: I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief. Dear Lord, it is after all the Father

who tests us and strengthens us in such a way.

Dear Lord, it is after all Jesus Christ who has suffered all temptations like us, yet without sin, to be an example and a help for us. Dear Lord, it is after all the Holy Spirit who wants to sanctify us in this struggle.

Faith tested through sorrow

Your faith will be tested through sorrow. You do not yet know much about this. But God sends sorrow to his children when they need it the most, when they become too overly sure on this earth. Then a great pain, a difficult renunciation, a great loss, sickness, death, enters our life. Our unbelief rears up. Why does God demand this of me? Why has God allowed this to happen? Why, yes, why? That is the great question of unbelief that wants to suffocate our faith. No one can avoid this calamity. Everything is so enigmatic, so dark.

In this hour of being forsaken by God, we may and shall say: I believe, *dear* Lord, help my unbelief. Yes, dear Lord, also in the dark, also when in doubt, also in the state of being forsaken by God. Dear Lord, you still are my dear father who makes all things serve my benefit. Dear Lord Jesus Christ, you yourself have cried out: My God, why have you forsaken me? You wanted to be where I am. Now you are with me. Now I know that you don't leave me even in the hour of my need. I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief.

Fight the good fight of faith as a soldier of Christ

Your faith will bring you not only temptation and suffering but, above all, struggle. Today's confirmation pupils are like young soldiers who march into war, into the war of Jesus Christ against all the gods of this world.

This war demands engagement of the entire life. Should our Lord God not be worthy of this engagement? The struggle is already being fought, and you shall now join in. Idolatry and fear of human beings confront us everywhere. But do not think that great words here can accomplish anything.

The hardest enemy is within us - stand firm

It is a struggle with fear and trembling, for the hardest enemy stands not opposite us but within ourselves. You shall know that precisely those who stood and still stand in the middle of this struggle have most deeply experienced this: I believe, dear Lord (yes, dear Lord!), help my *unbelief*.

And if we, despite all temptation, do not flee but stand and fight, then this is not due to our strong faith and courage in battle, our valor, but rather it is the sole fact that we cannot flee anymore because God holds on to us so that we can no longer disengage from him. God leads the struggle within us and against us and through us.

God has created a sanctuary of peace for us

"Help my unbelief." God answers our prayers. Amid temptation, suffering, and struggle, he has created a sanctuary of peace. This is his Holy Eucharist. Here there is forgiveness of sins; here is the conquest of death; here are victory and peace. It is not we who have won it. God himself has done it through Jesus Christ. Righteousness is his; life is his; peace is his.

We exist in unrest, but rest is with God. We exist in strife, but victory is with God. You are called to the Lord's Supper. Come and receive in faith forgiveness, life, and peace. Ultimately, only this remains for you in the world: God's word and sacrament. Amen.

Sermon preached on April 9, 1938. Text quoted from Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Theological Education Underground: 1937-1940 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works). Ed. Victoria J. Barnett. Trans. Victoria J. Barnett, Claudia D. Bergmann, Peter Frick, and Scott A. Moore. Vol. 15. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. Print. 476-480.

Brief bio

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and a founding member of the Confessing Church. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews and the evils of the Nazi ideology. In spring of 1935 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was called by the Confessing Church in Germany to take charge of an "illegal," underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). He served as pastor, administrator, and teacher there until the seminary was closed down by Hitler's Gestapo in September, 1937.

In the seminary at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer taught the importance of shared life together as disciples of Christ. He was convinced that the renewal of the church would depend upon recovering the biblical understanding of the communal practices of Christian obedience and shared life. This is where true formation of discipleship could best flourish and mature. Bonhoeffer's teaching led to the formation of a community house for the seminarians to help them enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community.

In 1937 Bonhoeffer completed two books, *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*. They were first published in German in 1939. Both books encompass Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of what it means to live as a Christian community in the body of Christ.

He was arrested by the Nazi Gestapo in April 1943. On April 8, 1945 he was hanged by the Gestapo as a traitor in the Flossenbürg concentration camp. As he left his cell on his way to execution he said to his companion, "This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life."

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Person to Person: A practical approach to effective evangelism



Speaking About Jesus Christ

by Jim Berlucchi

Communicating spiritual truths in our natural settings, can be a great challenge. Sometimes our attempts result in embarrassment.

I remember a job I held years ago. I was eager to use every opportunity to tell others about my relationship with the Lord. In the absence of natural opportunity, I sometimes engineered ill-fated conversations about spiritual subjects.

One of these took place one day with a co-worker named John. Poor John desperately needed to hear the gospel, though he didn't know it. He was recently divorced, involved in another relationship, and anxiety ridden about his career. If only someone spiritual like me could open the gates of heaven for John!

The right moment never seemed to come as my eagerness to talk to John brewed nearly to a boiling point. Finally, one day, I attempted a spiritual ambush. In the midst of a pleasant conversation, I made my move:

John (with some anxiety): "I've got to find a new job. I'm really at a dead end here in this place. I need more money."

Jim (in a crouch position): "Well John, life is really just a mist. Before you know it we'll all be gone, jobs and all." (I refrained from citing Psalm 90 as a reference.)

John (ending the conversation with indignation): "Well, that sure is a religious statement if I ever heard one!"

Somehow, the spiritual relevance of my comment escaped John and practically ended any chance I had to reach him with the message of salvation.

My comment to John backfired for at least two reasons. First, I was impatiently manipulating the conversation. Second, my pious comment smacked of an impersonal religiosity that didn't speak to his expressed concern.

When speaking about Christ, spiritual truths, our prayer group, community, or church, we need wisdom as well as zeal. Wisdom should be our guide in communicating effectively about the Lord's life to outsiders. "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you ought to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:5-6).

This passage cites wisdom and discretion as key ingredients in effective communication. Discretion demands our alertness not only to the person but to the situation. Though my comment to John was true enough, it was not sensitively geared to the overall conversation. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). "To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23).

Speak Simply

An ex-marine once told me of a frequently used abbreviation in the corps – KISS.

"That's interesting," I countered, "What does KISS mean?" "Keep It Simple Stupid," he replied. For our purposes, let me substitute: "Keep It Simple Saint."

Everyone appreciates simplicity of communication. We need not be complex or theological as we talk about the Lord. We don't need to overpower our hearers in a torrent of words.

Speak Personally and Sincerely

The apostle Paul was a great preacher to both Jew and Gentile. Yet he was remarkably and consistently personal in transmitting the gospel. He uses many situations to give his personal testimony in the record of the Acts of the Apostles. Even in the midst of his eloquent defense before King Agrippa in Caesarea, he presents his personal story. Agrippa responds by saying, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!"

Likewise, it is usually best to speak personally about our own relationship with the Lord and his people. The hot air of theological debate can be quickly deflated with personal reference to the Lord. Tell people how God has worked concretely in your life – answering prayers, giving guidance, changing your marriage, easing your problems, strengthening your character, providing for your financial needs.

Avoid False Piety

We should diligently avoid jargon that sounds strange to unchurched ears: "Praise God, I was really blessed and edified!" "If it weren't for the fellowship and the blood, I'd be a backslider." "Let me tell you about life in the body." "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." These and similar sounding phrases can alienate men and women.

If our speech is to be seasoned with salt, we should realize that much Christian jargon is not only perplexing but often offensive to outsiders. Within decent bounds (that is, righteous and appropriate), our speech should fit into the given environment.

Christians can also use jargon which is not necessarily religious sounding but which is unique to their church or fellowship, and thus meaningless to outsiders. Although I am a “coordinator” in the “Word of God,” an interdenominational Christian community, I describe myself to others as one of the directors of a Christian organization. We should be careful to avoid jargon, especially when talking to outsiders. This advice proceeds from the scriptural recommendations to “be all things to all men.”

Don't Be Moralistic and Pushy

One of the surest ways to alienate non-Christians is to confront them about their morals. They will respond defensively, and you will simply be reinforcing the widely held misconception that Christianity is primarily a moral code. While morality is of critical importance, moralizing is most often harmful, particularly to those who have never heard the good news.

I know a young man who was involved in serious wrong at the time of his conversion. In ignorance, he continued in this wrongdoing until another Christian gently educated him in the matter. He immediately changed his behavior, motivated by his desire to live completely for God. It is normally only this motivation plus the operation of God's power that can produce such moral change. Without these two bases, moralizing will most normally provoke resistance and defensiveness.

Likewise, pushiness usually provokes mistrust and reluctance. Take the case of Carl. A successful student and star athlete, he was nonetheless disenchanted with his life and was looking for a spiritual solution to his problems. As he came into contact with some Christians on campus, he was keenly interested but cautious about expressing commitment. Encouraged by Carl's interest, but failing to note his uncertainty, a Christian worker doggedly pressed Carl for a commitment, only to lose him completely. Had that Christian exercised patient faith and greater sensitivity, Carl might well have taken the needed step.

As servants of the Lord, we must always be attentive to the initiative of the Master. No one can come to the Father except by the Son. No one can come to the Son unless the Father calls him. Placing our trust in the action of God in others can often be a great challenge for a fervent, well intentioned Christian ambassador. Without faith however, our work will be to no avail. As we exercise patient faith for others, we will see results.

This is not to say that we shouldn't urge or gently push at the right moment. Nor should we be tepid and indecisive in calling others on to the Christian life. The important point is to be sensitive both to the person and the work of the Holy Spirit in the other person. A Spirit filled push at the right moment can be just what's needed.

Guard Your Tongue

Complaining and criticalness come naturally to human beings. Our society encourages us to evaluate and criticize everyone and everything. Politicians, ministers, foreigners, neighbors, relatives, spouses, bureaucrats in Washington, barbers, socialists, capitalists – everyone is a target for criticism and slander.

In this atmosphere of negativity the command of Jesus rings out unmistakably: “Judge not, that you might not be judged” (Mt 7:1). The Christian who faithfully obeys this command refuses to follow the crowd. Christians should not judge and criticize others, except in cases where they have responsibility over people or situations. Even then, their judgment should be objective and merciful.

The inclination to find fault with others can seem overpowering. It's easy to see how others fall short. But what are we conveying when we openly criticize others? If nothing else, a criticizing Christian demonstrates that he or she is no different than anyone else, no light on a hilltop, no lamp on a stand.

One cannot overestimate the positive impact of speech that is uncontaminated by slander and meanness. I know a number

of individuals who were initially drawn to Christ through witnessing the positive attitude and speech of Christians. This was a trait that impressed me before I fully encountered the Lord. I would even attempt to draw Christians into a negative conversation and then marvel at their resistance. I found their behavior mystifying and irritating at the same time. What strange view of reality could support such positive attitudes and speech? If the Christians around me had spoken like the rest of my contemporaries, I probably wouldn't have been very curious about Christianity.

Never underestimate the power of the tongue – for great good, or great evil. Christians should “speak evil of no one” (Titus 3:2a).

Finally, for the sake of both righteousness and witness, we should avoid criticism of other Christians or Christian groups. Would not an outsider conclude “See how those Christians hate one another!” The current scandal of division among Christians should greatly motivate us to speak well, or not at all, of our brethren.

Be Gentle and Courteous

Three striking phrases follow on the heels of Paul's recommendation “to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men” (Ti 3:2). This might strike us as ill-suited advice from someone who seemed to thrive on debate, as the apostle Paul. His strong verbal defense of the gospel always occurred in contexts where debate was socially acceptable. Moreover, Paul repeatedly demonstrated courtesy and meekness in his dealings with both Jew and Gentile. His immediate apology for a harsh and ill-informed rebuke to Ananias the high priest, is a striking example of Paul's allegiance to his own teaching (Acts 23:1-5).

Paul's interest in gentleness and courtesy is due to his interest in evangelism. In 2 Timothy 2:24-25 he states, “And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone . . . forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth.”

Peter shows a similar concern to instruct his listeners in discreet speech: “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with both gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

Both Peter and Paul highlight the value of courtesy, gentleness, and reverence in speech. Interestingly, they correlate these qualities with evangelism. Sidestepping futile arguments and avoiding a quarrelsome tone is stressed in a number of passages regarding speaking with outsiders. Non-Christians will frequently try to provoke and draw a Christian into similarly obnoxious behavior. It is essential for us to overcome such a temptation if we are to communicate the truth about Christ. The manner in which we speak is normally as closely scrutinized as our words themselves. We can still speak softly, knowing that we are, indeed, carrying a big stick.

The above six recommendations cite both how we should and should not speak about the Christian life to those who are not Christians. They recognize certain tendencies of the tongue and errors into which we can readily fall. It is perilously easy to commit any or all of the six errors mentioned. With ease, we may find ourselves:

1. presenting the gospel in a complicated or confusing manner
2. speaking impersonally, theologically
3. using religious jargon
4. pushing when we shouldn't
5. criticizing others

6. running roughshod over people, being defensive and insensitive.

If you can relate to any of these tendencies, don't be disheartened! Though we are filled with the Spirit of God, we are still hampered by our imperfect human tendencies. As we master the tongue, we will not only be more pleasing to God but to outsiders as well.

[This article is adapted from the book, *Person to Person: How to be effective in evangelism*, © 1984 by Jim Berlucchi, and published by Servants Books, Ann Arbor.]

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Person to Person: A practical approach to effective evangelism



Earning the Right to Be Heard

by Jim Berlucchi

Excellency in character and conduct should be the trademark of every disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself, fully man and fully God, was perfect in all that he said and did. He was God's example to us of peerless character – a man of courage, faithfulness, integrity, obedience, and loyalty. He conducted himself so that all who heard him listened. The crowds “were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 8:28b-29). Jesus earned “the right to be heard.”

We, too, must earn the right to be heard. If our lives fall short under the scrutiny of a watchful observer, that same observer will be more apt to dismiss any spiritual message we might impart. On the other hand, if we demonstrate excellence of conduct and speech in our daily relationships, people will listen more seriously to what we have to say about the Christian life. Our message will be credible. Credible is defined as “worth of belief; trustworthy; reliable; entitled to confidence.” This kind of credibility accounted for the evangelistic success of Christ's infant church: “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:46-47)

The leader of that early church, Peter, later instructed the Christians regarding the effective witness. “Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).

Similarly, the apostle Paul says to the church at Thessalonica: “We exhort you brethren . . . to aspire to live quietly,

to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; *so that you may command the respect of outsiders*, and be dependent on nobody” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Both Peter and Paul, great giants of the faith, emphasize the importance of the witness of a Christian life to outsiders. Every group that is interested in promoting a message or vision for life perceives how important their members’ conduct is. Many of us have heard of the Boy Scout law, the list of qualities that should characterize a scout. A scout is: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent.

Peter supplies us with God’s list of qualities in 2 Peter 1:5-8:

For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord wants us to be the kind of people who command the respect of others. We should be known as responsible and self-controlled people. Our word should be reliable. We should be able to be counted on. If we are not, our verbal witness will count for little.

Two cases in point illustrate the necessity of good conduct, one negatively and one positively.

A Christian college student by the name of Joe plays varsity baseball. He is especially known for his Christian commitment and aggressive evangelism. He talks to other players about following the Lord and uses every opportunity to give his testimony. As a matter of fact, his speech is always peppered with “Praise the Lord” and “Alleluia” in practices and games. Beside this, he is an excellent ballplayer who starts in every game.

One might think, given this description, that Joe is sowing some spiritual seed that will bear fruit. Unfortunately, this isn’t the case. Joe is known, not only for his fervor and talent, but also for his unreliability. He is usually late for practice and sometimes late for games. He can’t be counted on in the normal rigors of preparation and is sloppy with his schoolwork. As far as discipline and responsibility go, Joe is manifestly deficient, and this shortcoming costs him severely whenever he tries to witness for Christ. Because of his obvious unreliability Joe might, in fact, be doing the gospel more harm than good. Though zealous and well-intentioned, Joe has failed to earn the respect of his peers and coaches.

Just as poor conduct undermines verbal witness, excellent conduct promotes evangelistic success. Larry is a local businessman who has helped many of his associates draw closer to the Lord. As aggressive in his verbal witnessing as Joe, Larry concentrates even more on his behavior in the office and in general. He is not only competent in his professional duties, but reliable, respectful, and cooperative as well. Because he is so respected, others give weight to his Christian convictions and are positively influenced. Larry recently showed me a letter of recommendation his boss wrote for him:

I have had the pleasure of professional association with Mr. Jenkins for the past five years. In all my dealings with him, I have found him to be both fair and uncompromising in principle. His work is always of the highest caliber. Reliability is his trademark.

Both clients and co-workers respect him, and as his supervisor, I too, hold him in high regard. I

unreservedly recommend him in his area of expertise. In my frank opinion, he is a fine Christian gentleman.

It is worth noting that Larry's boss is not a Christian. However, his respect for Christianity has grown through his association and regard for Larry. He even mentions Larry's Christianity favorably in his letter of recommendation.

The respect and credibility we command through our actions and reputation can help us to assess how verbally aggressive we should be with the gospel. Larry's verbal witness was effective because his life visibly reinforced his convictions. Joe's verbal witness backfired because of his shortcomings. Joe should have taken steps to grow in responsibility. At the same time, he should have been more discreet in his preaching.

Though strength of character is important, I am not asserting that we must be perfect before we proclaim Christ. However, the better we are as persons, the more powerful our proclamation. In certain relationships, where we are particularly prone to error, we might wisely decide to subdue our verbal witness. We should not strain our effectiveness beyond its limits. Conversely, in situations where we have established a good reputation, we can and should be telling others about our relationship with the Lord. Whenever possible, we should take maximum advantage of our good reputation.

We should regularly and prayerfully appraise the quality of our conduct. Who are the people we often relate to? Are we respected among them? Do our neighbors know us as reliable and courteous? Are we patient and thoughtful with our roommate? Do we need to apologize for any wrongdoing we have committed in our family? How can we improve our behavior on the job?

This kind of assessment will not only help us improve our witness, but will give us wisdom in assessing how actively we should speak of Christ in various relationships (Colossians 4:5).

For those who work outside the home, the quality of our work will play a major influence in our ability to evangelize others at the workplace. Scripture offers wisdom for those under forced employment (slaves) that can be helpful for the Christian employee today. I am certainly not suggesting that we should conduct ourselves like Christian slaves on the job, but there is a rough analogy here. In Colossians 3:22-24 we read:

Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyesight, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not man, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.

These instructions are both clear and applicable.

Obey in everything. Many employees set their own standards for obeying their supervisors. The Christian should be committed from the heart, even when no one will see, to obey his boss in everything related to his work, unless it is sinful.

Not as man-pleasers, but God-pleasers. The Christian should not be primarily motivated by the attention he will get from his employer. His motive should be to please God.

In singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. The motive of the Christian worker is pure and generated by the fear of the Lord – not the fear of the annual performance review or the opinion of others.

Whatever your task, serve heartily. A recent report in a national news magazine cited widespread corruption in the world of work. Tax evasion, theft, sloth, graft, and wasting time were described as rampant features in small and large corporations. Consider how brightly a hard-working Christian shines in this atmosphere of increasing greed and laziness.

Having favor both with God and man is instrumental in spreading the gospel. The key to godly character of course, is God himself. Not only can we accomplish nothing without him – we can *be* nothing without him. It is his power within us that enables us to be more than conquerors – victors over our own personal deficiencies and winners of men as well.

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A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus

by Jeanne Kun

“May I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, now and forever.”

This famous prayer of St. Richard Chicester expresses the ardent desire of every disciple of Christ. Each day, we want to grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord and in our commitment to follow him. *My Lord and My God! A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus* was written with that goal in mind. We can better follow Jesus when we get to know the men and women who were his first followers. By reflecting on Jesus’ encounters with his disciples, we will come to a deeper understanding of our Lord. And, as our knowledge of Jesus increases, so will our love for him and our desire to give our lives each day entirely to him.

My Lord and My God! A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus is designed to help readers learn to carefully examine the gospels. As we become more attentive and alert to every word and detail written by the evangelists, Jesus and his followers come into sharper focus before our eyes. And as we meditate upon the disciples featured in the ten reflections in this book—among them Simon Peter, Zacchaeus, Bartimaeus, Mary of Bethany, Joseph of Arimathea, and Thomas—we’ll discover just how diverse the face of discipleship is. In fact, we’ll also find our own faces reflected there.

Meeting Jesus and His Followers

Much about Jesus' character is revealed to us in the ways he responded to the people and events in his life. There are so many clues: his words as well as his silences; what he did as well as what he refrained from doing; the actions he praised as well as those he criticized. He taught, healed, affirmed, challenged, and convicted the people he met, calling everyone to a deep transformation of life. These men and women, whether they were rich or poor, learned or simple, esteemed or lowly, Jew or Gentile, related to Jesus in ways that can help us to examine ourselves and our own interactions with our Lord.

As you reflect on each gospel scene, try to get inside the characters yourself. Put yourself in the shoes (or sandals!) of those who encountered Jesus and imagine yourself in the scene. Accompany the woman with the hemorrhage as she pressed through the crowd to reach Jesus and bring him your own needs. Join Mary of Bethany at Jesus' feet and listen to his words to you. Play the role of Judas in your own imagination and realize how close each of us is to succumbing to temptation and betrayal. Go with Mary Magdalene to the garden tomb in her grief and rejoice with her as you, too, encounter the risen Lord there. Like Thomas, stretch out your hand to touch Jesus and, with deepened faith, exclaim "My Lord and my God!" Or ask yourself where you fit in a particular scene, and which person you identify with right now in your life. As St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, advised:

Make it a habit to mingle frequently with the characters who appear in the New Testament. . . . My advice is that, in your prayer, you actually take part in the different scenes of the Gospel, as one more among the people present. . . .

It is not a matter of just thinking about Jesus, of recalling some scenes of his life. We must be completely involved and play a part in his life. We must follow him as closely as Mary his Mother did, as closely as the first twelve, the holy women, the crowds that pressed about him. If we do this without holding back, Christ's words will enter deep into our soul and will really change us.

The men and women who came to Jesus with faith, hope, and love, with needs, weaknesses, and sins, provide a mirror for us. We can see ourselves in their devotion and courage as well as in their anxieties and cares. Look into this mirror and allow God's Spirit to transform you.

"My Lord and my God!" Since Thomas first exclaimed these words twenty centuries ago, millions of men and women have come to meet the risen Lord and repeat this profound profession of faith in him. I pray that *My Lord and My God! A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus* will help each of us make this proclamation our own.

> See also [Zacchaeus' Encounter with Jesus](#), by Jeanne Kun

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



Zacchaeus being called down from the tree - by [William Hole](#)

Zacchaeus and his Unexpected Encounter with Jesus

by Jeanne Kun

The scene: ***Luke 19:1-10***

[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

Reflecting on the Word

When he awoke that morning, Zacchaeus could not have expected that he would entertain such an unusual guest in his home and relinquish half of his wealth – happily, at that – before the day was over! His encounter with Jesus was a surprising and life-changing one, and for years afterward, Zacchaeus – and all of Jericho with him – must have often recalled that memorable time when Jesus came to town.

Jesus, accompanied by his followers, was in Jericho on his way from Galilee to the Passover festival (and his death) in Jerusalem. Messianic fever ran high among the excited crowds who greeted him as he traveled to the holy city, attracted by his preaching and miracles. Could this be the Messiah, they wondered, come to deliver them from their Roman oppressors?

A prosperous commercial and agricultural town in Jesus' day, Jericho is located near the end of the Jordan Valley, not far from the Dead Sea. From Jericho, the road begins its steep climb to Jerusalem. As Jesus entered the town, Zacchaeus, one of the district tax collectors, was eager to catch a glimpse of him. However, since he wasn't a tall man, he couldn't see over the heads of the crowd. So, quick-thinking and resourceful – qualities that had likely served him well in his lucrative profession – Zacchaeus ran ahead along Jesus' route and climbed a tree so he could get a good view of the teacher with a reputation for such amazing deeds.

Zacchaeus didn't worry that day about how undignified he looked nor did he care about what anyone else thought of him. Clearly his sole concern was to see Jesus, but we wonder what, in particular, motivated that desire. Was it idle curiosity to get a look at a miracle worker? Or was Zacchaeus moved by a longing for something worth far more than anything his money could buy?

Called a chief tax collector by Luke, Zacchaeus may have been Rome's "Internal Revenue Service supervisor" for the whole district, with other tax agents under him (Luke 19:2). Rights to collect public revenues within the provinces of the Roman Empire were auctioned off in Rome to financial companies. Frequently the bidder who won a contract then sold rights to collect taxes in various regions to smaller speculators, who often abused their positions by charging exorbitantly high rates. Consequently, tax collectors were unpopular. The Jews of Jericho would have especially despised Zacchaeus (Luke 19:7) because his job brought him into contact with "unclean" Gentiles and probably also required that he work on the sabbath. Moreover, he not only collected the taxes demanded by the Roman occupiers but defrauded his fellow townsmen to pad his own pocket (19:8).

Zacchaeus had shrewdly accumulated his wealth and enjoyed the material comforts it brought him. Was he, nonetheless, dissatisfied with his life? If he didn't care how foolish he appeared by climbing a tree to see Jesus, perhaps he was actually hoping for a personal encounter with this preacher whose words were known to cut to the heart.

"I must stay at your house today!"

Jesus' timing is perfect: He knows just the right hour to reach a heart that is longing for him. So he took the initiative, calling out: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). When Jesus found this strange little man sitting up in a tree, he was like a shepherd searching for his wayward sheep. Just a short time before, Jesus had told this parable to the Pharisees who objected to his association with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2):

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which

was lost.” (Luke 15:3-6)

In seeking out Zacchaeus, Jesus was also fulfilling God’s own description of himself as Israel’s “shepherd”:

Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. . . . I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:11-12,16)

Jesus called out to Zacchaeus by name, just as a shepherd “calls his own sheep by name” (John 10:3). Had he heard the crowds shouting at the little man, mocking him as he sat so oddly perched in the sycamore? Or did Jesus know Zacchaeus and his name by divine insight, just as he had “known” Natharuel sitting under the fig tree (1:47-48)? And Zacchaeus, like the sheep, recognized the voice of the shepherd (10:4).

It was Jesus who sought out Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus had climbed the tree and risked his reputation to see Jesus but, paradoxically, it was Jesus who sought out Zacchaeus. Jesus’ desire to be a guest in the tax collector’s home – “I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5) – reminds us of his invitation to all: “I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Jesus didn’t confront Zacchaeus about his sins or ask him for an account of his shady business practices. Instead, he honoured Zacchaeus with request to be his guest. Touched by Jesus’ graciousness, the little tax collector acted quickly and decisively: He “made haste and came down” – no holding back on his part or wasting time! – “and received him joyfully” (Luke 19:6). Recognizing some special quality about this itinerant rabbi, Zacchaeus immediately brought him home. And with that spontaneous, eager response to Jesus, his life was radically transformed.

When the crowds grumbled that Jesus was entering the house of a sinner, was Zacchaeus embarrassed for the Lord’s sake? Perhaps he was ashamed and convicted that he was unworthy to receive this thoroughly good man who offered him his friendship. In any case, Zacchaeus was deeply moved by the Lord’s presence in his home and reformed his ways.

Zacchaeus not only publicly admitted his wrongdoing to his unexpected guest but also made his repentance concrete: He spontaneously announced that he would share half of his possessions with the poor and generously repay all those whom he had defrauded (Luke 19:8). In making fourfold restitution, Zacchaeus went far beyond the requirements of the Mosaic law regarding compensation for stolen goods (Leviticus 6:1-5; Numbers 5:5-7).

Affirming Zacchaeus’ repentance, Jesus declared: “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). Was there a surprised Mrs. Zacchaeus on the scene, and some startled children and house servants, too? Surely all the members of the household would have shared in the grace and blessings of Zacchaeus’ transformation, just as Cornelius’ entire household received salvation at his conversion (Acts 10:2; 11:14).

As Jesus carried out his mission “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), tax collectors and sinners were certainly among those whom he welcomed into his kingdom (Matthew 9:10-13; 21:31-32).

Pondering the Word

1. What might you surmise about Zacchaeus' personal character before his encounter with Jesus, considering his job as a tax collector? How do you think he might have related to his fellow Jews? To his Roman employers?
2. What is the significance of Jesus addressing Zacchaeus by name before the tax collector had actually been introduced to him? Reflect on Isaiah 43:1 and Psalm 139:13-16 as you consider your answer to this question. What other gospel scenes can you think of in which Jesus called someone by name? How did they respond?
3. What similarities do you see between Zacchaeus, the tax collector-turned-apostle Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32), and the publican in Jesus' parable in Luke 18:9-14? How were they different from one another?
4. The story of Zacchaeus' conversion comes soon after Luke's account in the previous chapter of the rich young man who was unwilling to give up his wealth to follow Jesus (Luke 18:18-23; see also Matthew 19:16-22). What do the contrasting ways in which the two responded to Jesus suggest to you about discipleship? About material possessions? About repentance?
5. Why did Jesus call Zacchaeus a "son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9)? Read Genesis 15:5-6, Isaiah 51:2, John 8:39-40, and Romans 4:1-3, 12 to help you answer this question.
6. Why do you think many Scripture scholars have called Luke's narrative about Zacchaeus a concise summary of the Christian gospel or a "mini-gospel"?

Living the Word

1. What obstacles stand in the way of your seeing Jesus clearly? What can you do to remove these obstacles and gain a better view and understanding of him?
2. Do you occasionally hesitate to respond to Jesus because you feel self-conscious or worried about what others might think of you? Or because you are afraid that your response might cost you a great price? How can you overcome these fears?
3. Do you think of everything that you have – your talents, your money, your time – as belonging to God? How generous are you with the resources and gifts God has given you? In what ways do you share them with others?
4. Zacchaeus expressed his repentance concretely. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what specific actions you should take to respond fully to Jesus' offer of salvation. Write a brief prayer asking Jesus for his help to do this.
5. Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and ate with sinners (19:7). How do you treat or react to people who are on the margins of society?
6. How has your relationship with Jesus affected your "household"— your family, friends, coworkers, and

neighbors? Does Zacchaeus' conversion give you hope for any one dear to you who is distant from the Lord? Hope that your own life can be transformed by a deeper personal encounter with the Lord?

> See also [Zacchaeus' Tall Tale](#), a poem by Jeanne Kun

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Covenant Christian Community

by Bob Tedesco

In the Sword of the Spirit we say that we are in covenant together, at the local level, and at the international level. Our covenants are unique at the local level, but they all contain a paragraph that describes our relationship to the international community of communities. The issue could be easily raised as to whether or not a written covenant is necessary, or whether or not it can be described as a part of the nature of life in the Body of Christ. We believe that the Lord has called us into covenant with him and with this people. We have had numerous prophecies that have initiated and sustained that understanding. Here are some excerpts:

“I am making a covenant with you...this covenant is part of my plan to renew my church...”

“Yes, I have called you together in a covenant that is of great significance for the life of my people throughout the world, and I want you to bind yourselves to me and show forth your loyalty to me. I want you to come to me under this covenant, submit yourselves to my service, lay down your lives for the mission that I have given you.”

Exodus 19:5 says, “Now therefore, obey my voice and keep my covenant and be my possession.” It could be said here that the prophecies are for us, for those to whom they were spoken. It could also be said that the scripture given is for the Old Testament folks, or more narrowly, for those that the prophet addressed. We would not say that all Christians or Christian groups should sit down and write a covenant, but we do think we have something to contribute in this area. Furthermore, since the Bible is broken into the Old and New Testaments (covenants), it may be the case that the Lord does have

certain expectations on his New Testament people based on his covenant with us, sealed by the blood of his son.

We have been led in our local communities to attempt to identify and summarize that greater covenant and to commit ourselves together in covenant relationships.

The Roman Catholic Bishop James A. Griffin talked about commitment this way:

“Words like commitment, compassion and empathy have no place in the world of objects,” said Bishop Griffin.

Individual relationships in our society are characterized by looser connections. We’re no longer joiners living out commitments in fraternal or social groups. We’ve become more individualistic. Individual fulfillment is more important. ...If this is where we find ourselves, is there any antidote for the loose connections? The solution is found in commitment.

“We learn this in the family, which is the root of all relationships. Within every family there is a commitment to all the members of the family and a shared commitment to a common value system,” he added.

“Without commitment, there can be no lasting relationships”, said Bishop Griffin, and “barriers are insurmountable. Disagreements are destructive. Shortcomings are terminal. Commitment allows individuals’ lack to be filled up with gifts of others.”¹

More Covenant Background

Pertinent Questions

What are the needs in society today? How is the Lord addressing those needs? What is there about our call that is unique, or important or prophetic? Society today is increasingly unstable, increasingly disconnected. We see a profound example of this at the family level where many marriages have failed and many families have unraveled at the altars of individualistic hedonism and narcissism.

The Lord wants a people where unity is a blessing, and to be scattered is seen as a curse. It is not good when members of a family run in every direction, each pursuing his own path to self-fulfillment. If we consider the marriage covenant and the divorce rate, we can identify and target one of the major threats to the stability and strength of the family, to society, and to the church. If making and keeping covenants strengthens and supports marriages, we would have ample reason for seeing value in our life together. It is the case that covenant communities have divorce rates far below that of most churches. That result is important and prophetic. The Lord is addressing a need.

Types of Covenants

There are many types of covenants: solemn, implied, simple, legal, simple-legal, limited duration, etc.

An example of an implied contract is when a paper boy delivers a paper for weeks and is paid weekly. There is then an *implied* covenant that if he delivers the paper next week, he will get one week's pay. It is also implied that his price will be the same.

I'd like to describe marriage as an *expansive* covenant: The vows may have been simple and limited, but there is a much broader understanding of what a man and woman are entering into as husband, as wife, as father, and as mother. There are legal, spiritual, and societal expectations that go beyond, "I will be a friend to you." So too with us; when we agree to follow the Lord together, to be faithful to him and to each other, it is broader than the few elements that we identify in our local covenants. But, we would certainly like to focus on and get those elements to work. We would get a long way into the Christian life if we took our covenants seriously.

The Covenant Nature of God

Trinity

We see first in the Trinity a clearly defined relationship of a certain order, of fierce loyalty, of covenant love. Jesus knew his role and his relationship to the Father and to the Holy Spirit; the Father spoke of his Son, and the Spirit gives testimony to Jesus in the hearts of millions daily. Is there a written covenant among the Father, Son and Spirit? I don't know. But their relationship is clear, and clearly defined.

God and Man

All through the Bible we see the Lord entering into agreements with man, promising certain things in return for certain obedience. These agreements and promises have theological names based on persons and places (Davidic, Edenic, Sinaitic, Abrahamic, etc.), but each one shows certain aspects of the covenant nature of God: 1) his faithfulness (he will do his part); 2) his justice (he requires our part); 3) his tenacity (he is determined to get mankind on the right track and into his family); 4) his desire to "deal" with man. There is also a progressive nature to these covenants as mankind is shepherded more closely onto the path that leads back to God. We see the culmination of God's covenant nature with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He will go to great lengths to keep his side of the deal: *the sacrifice of his son*.

There is an algebraic rule which states that if "A=B" and "B=C", then "A=B=C." In a certain way we are acting in a similar fashion. That is, if the Trinity has a clearly defined relationship and God defines his relationship with man, then it is good for brothers and sisters to have clearly defined relationships. We attempt to mimic our Father, to relate the way he relates, and to take on the covenant nature of God.

Covenant in Scripture

Berith

The word “covenant” is used as a translation for the Hebrew word “berith” in the Old Testament. That word literally means “fetter” or “bind,” but it also means “to eat with.” For the Hebrews, it was a serious thing to have a meal with someone. In the New Testament, the Lord’s Supper is the covenant meal of the Christian. It is where and how we celebrate our “deal” with the Lord...the deal that gets us into heaven and delivers us from the fires of hell. The words translated “covenant” show up about ninety times in the Old Testament and twenty-eight times in the New Testament. It is clearly a major theme, an important way of describing the character and intentions of God.

Three Types

There are three types of covenants common in Scripture:

1. A two-sided agreement between equals (David and Jonathan; see example next section)
2. A one-sided disposition imposed by a superior party, and
3. God’s self-imposed obligation (our redemption by the work of Christ is in this category).

Serious Intentions Require Serious Tools

Difficult Assignments

Close brotherhood and Christian mission are often complex endeavors. We saw in the New Testament that John Mark did not complete his mission as Paul expected and was subsequently excluded from the next mission (Acts 15:38). Marriage is a complex journey which is begun (and not until) with marriage vows. We have “confessing” churches, and “rules” for religious orders. These defined relationships have taken an approach that puts them at odds with our shifting-sands culture. Our shifting-sands culture affects both marriage and mission.

At Stake

At stake are survival, continuity, endurance, longevity and trans-generational strength. Our word should be important; our covenants are a blueprint for the present as well as a seed for future generations. They are a mix of God and man, and express our best efforts to describe our intended response to him and to each other.

Summary

Covenants are serious.

Covenants are serious tools for serious intentions (community, discipleship, mission, all require covenant).

Covenants are serious because our WORD should be serious.

Covenant-breaking unravels relationships: the family, society and the Church.

Covenant reflects the very nature of God.

Covenant reflects the relationship of the Trinity.

Restoring covenant is one of the key works of God being introduced to us and then shown through us (a gift from the Lord to meet a need).

It is not the idea or the invention of some prophets of a movement.

It is ancient, widely expressed in scripture, and in Church life, in civil law, and in marriage.

The inability to commit, the inability to honor and to keep your word is a modern fatal flaw...a need that is being addressed by God.

Covenant is trans-generational but must be fully embraced in nature and fully embraced with character to benefit from its blessing.

A Scriptural Example

In a quick study of Ruth, we see it begins with the widow Naomi instructing her Moabite daughters-in-law to return to their own land now that her two sons have died. Ruth says, “Wherever you go I shall go, wherever you live I shall live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God too” (Ruth 1:16 paraphrased).

This example of covenant love works out well for Ruth who marries Boaz. They have a son, Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

So covenant love and faithfulness is in the line of David. The very next book in the Old Testament is 1 Samuel. In 1 Samuel, we see the story of Samuel, the story of Saul and the story of David (1 Samuel 16).

Covenant Lived Out

The knitting of the souls of Jonathan and David; Jonathan and David make a covenant (1 Samuel 18:1-5) “When he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his own house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his girdle. And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul’s servants.”

The outbreak of jealousy in the heart of Saul (1 Samuel 18:6-9) “As they were coming home, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with songs of joy, and with instruments of music. And the women sang to one another as they made merry, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him; he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed thousands; and what more can he have but the kingdom?” And Saul eyed David from that day on.”

The attempted murder of David by the now insane Saul (1 Samuel 18:10-12) “And on the morrow an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; and Saul cast the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David evaded him twice.”

Things continue to deteriorate between Saul and David, yet the covenant stands (1 Samuel 20:3-4; 8a) “But David replied, ‘Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes; and he thinks, ‘Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.’ But truly, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.’ Then said Jonathan to David, “Whatever you say, I will do for you...(David replied,) “Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a sacred covenant with you.”

The covenant extends to family (1 Samuel 20:14-17) “‘If I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever. When the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth, let not the name of Jonathan be cut off from the house of David. And may the Lord take vengeance on David’s enemies.’ And Jonathan then made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.”

The covenant is reiterated (1 Samuel 20:23) “And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the Lord is between you and me forever.”

The covenant is reiterated as trans-generational (1 Samuel 20:41-42) “And as soon as the lad had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times; and they kissed one another and wept with one another, until David recovered himself. Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, “The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.”

Recommitment night (1 Samuel 23:15-18) “And David was afraid because Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose, and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, “Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; Saul my father also knows this.” And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord.”

Saul and David remain at odds (2 Samuel 3:1) “There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became

weaker and weaker.”

Saul and Jonathan die (1 Samuel 31:2, 4c) *“And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan and Abinadab and Mal’chishu’a, the sons of Saul...Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it.”*

The introduction of Jonathan’s son (2 Samuel 4:4) *“Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet, Mephib’osheth.”*

The covenant extends to Jonathan’s family (2 Samuel 9: 1-13) *And David said, “Is there still any one left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” Ziba replied, ‘There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.’” The king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “He is in the house of Machir the son of Am’miel, at Lo’debar. Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Am’miel, at Lo’debar. And Mephib’osheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. And David said, “Mephib’osheth!” And he answered, “Behold, your servant.” And David said to him, “Fear not for I will show kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father; and you shall eat at my table always.” And he did obeisance, and said, “What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?”*

Then the king called Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said to him, “All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master’s son. And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, and shall bring in the produce, that your master’s son may have bread to eat; but Mephib’osheth your master’s son shall always eat at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, “According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.” So Mephib’osheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons. And Mephib’osheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who dwelt in Ziba’s house became Mephib’osheth’s servants. So Mephib’osheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he ate always at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

Note: In ancient times a covenant in blood was not uncommon. Each man would make a small cut at the base of his thumb and the two would bring their two hands together and mix the blood as a sign of being joined together. Some think that this covenant of David and Jonathan was a “blood covenant.”

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Lamb of God branch in Wellington, New Zealand

The Cutting Edge of Our Call as a Christian Community Is Simply to Be...

a reflection on the Lamb of God national community in New Zealand

by Roger Foley

I travel and move around a lot in my service. As a result I often work with pastors and people across various streams of the overall church. This is a huge privilege for me. Yes I am a Catholic and well committed to my church, but from the beginning of my journey in Christ I have been blessed with an exposure to, and appreciation of, the richness of the work of God across many streams and denominations. God is at work in a greatness and glory far wider than most of us would see if we are focused only on a narrow appreciation. A narrow appreciation can also develop within us a judgemental approach which for me conflicts immediately with the words of Jesus in Chapter 17 in the Gospel of John.

And we have a clear warning from Paul in Ephesians 6:12: *'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'* So why do we invest ourselves in 'struggling with mere flesh and blood' - because the battle is elsewhere?

A great gift to the National Community is our Nelson Branch where you will find a sustained long term focus in praying into protection for us in this spiritual realm.

Call to shared life in ecumenical Christian community

In the [Lamb of God](#) we have a particular call within this rich mosaic of the work of God. It is not an easy

call. But it is an important call because it is a call of God and its end purpose and intent is known to God. We are called to live in an Ecumenical Christian Community. Not just on Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays. Not just from 9.00 to 5.00pm. Not just when we feel like it. Not just for three or four years. But we are called to substantially live our Christianity within this particular Christian Community named the Lamb of God.

Our national community has its place within the worldwide 'Community of Communities' called the 'Sword of the Spirit', which is established in twenty-eight countries [and growing] with seventy-five members communities and dozens more in relationship or formation. Is that a work of God, or not? It is an amazing work of God, and you and I are a part of this work.



What do you do as a Christian community?

As I travel and relate in a variety of circumstances the most frequent question I am asked is 'but what do you do as a community?' I have always maintained that 'simply being' is our main call.

Living as a Christian people today and displaying love, support, forgiveness, and sharing our lives and praying together, is sufficient in itself to 'justify' our existence.

But because of and out of our life together, we do more. We have outreaches, run seminars, visit prisons, reach out to those in need, and a lot more. And here in Christchurch we live in a cluster, which does impact and display values to neighbors. It used to be a nicely laid out part of the city until it was pounded in the earthquakes.

So on the first of September we will have been living our lives together in very changed and challenging circumstances for 1,276 days [and counting] since the devastation hit the eastern suburbs. But by God's grace no one has left the community and walked away despite the significant increase in stress and strain and increased daily hardships. If we were not blessed in grace to 'live as a people' in love and forgiveness and sharing - we would no longer exist. But the Lord is with us. And that grace at work is evidenced to others and it is opening doors because it is there, it is 'simply being' who we are in our response in this call to live for God.

See related article on Lamb of God > [Land of Awesome Beauty - Land That Can Take Your Life](#)

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Giving Our All to God

by Tom Caballes

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

- Mark 12:30

A friend of mine shared that she does not want to be too close to God because of the consequences she saw in the lives of some of those who gave their lives fully to God – hardships, suffering, sorrow, etc. I remembered that this is why Teresa of Avila jokingly thought that God has only few friends is because of the way He treats them. Some give to God only their ‘loose change’ both financially and in other ways - not their ‘first fruits’ nor their best.

Many people have different excuses why they do not give their all to God – compromises with the world, pleasures that they cannot live without, or grudges that they cannot forgive. Some do not share God to others because of fear of being laughed at. How about you – what is your excuse for not giving your all to God? Remember: God does not like lukewarm people. According to Revelations 3:15-16, He spits them out. It’s either you go all out for God – or do not go at all.

How do I give my all to God?

1. It all starts from within. Have you decided to follow God, with all of your life, for the rest of your life? Who is in your life’s driver seat? Have you decided come hell or high waters you will stick with God?
2. Decide to know and follow God’s will for your life, not your own will – in all areas of your life.
3. Develop habits that helps you grow as a disciple of God. Daily prayer, Scripture study, service, and righteous speech patterns are some of the good habits that draw us closer to God.

4. Grow in God's character. Imitate his love, patience, and service to others. Think first what would Jesus have done if He was in your situation? Strive to grow in holiness, which is being set apart for God.
5. Seek to become great in God's eyes by serving others. We live in a Kingdom that is upside down – the more people we care for and serve, the greater we are in God's eyes. Be generous to God, His people and with others who are in need with our time, talent and resources.
6. Be willing to get out of our comfort zone and share to others about our life in God. Be willing to suffer persecution as we identify ourselves with God. Rejoice instead when this happens! See Matthew 5:11.
7. Spend time with people who have the same mind as yours. If you hang around with people who are lukewarm and superficial, do you think they will help you be all out for God?
8. Aim and seek to become a martyr, the ultimate act of giving our all to God. Yet at this time and age, there are probably few opportunities to be a real martyr. How about being a daily martyr, dying to own flesh every day, to daily relationship difficulties, and to other daily difficulties? This type of martyrdom might even be harder. Why? It requires dying every day, not just once!

Other Scripture passages:

1. *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?* [Psalms 42:1-2]
2. *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.* [Psalms 63:1]
3. *How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.* [Psalms 84:1-2]
4. Other references: Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21; Philippians 3:7-11; Colossians 3:1-3.

For reflecton or sharing:

1. What areas in your life are you not releasing to God and keeping to yourself? Why?
2. In what way can you practice daily martyrdom at home, in school, or at work?



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Growing in Love as Brothers and Sister in Christ

“Be imitators of God, beloved children. Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice.”

– Ephesians 5:1-2

by Don Schwager

We learn to love through imitation of God

What does the Apostle Paul mean when he says, “imitate God” and “walk in love as Christ loved us” (Ephesians 5:1,2)? When God made a covenant with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, he revealed the nature of his covenant love to Moses when he declared,

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and faithfulness, keeping merciful love for thousands” (Exodus 34:6-7).

God's plan from the beginning of creation was to have a people created in his image and likeness who would be united with him in a bond of love and unity.

Paul the Apostle tells us that *God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world... and He destined us in love to be his sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ. according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:4,5).

Through Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross we have been reconciled with the Father in heaven and have received adoption as children of God. The Lord Jesus has won freedom for us over sin and has sealed us with his Holy Spirit. We are now free to walk in love as he has loved us (Galatians 5:1,13). As God's beloved children, his sons and daughters, we are called to imitate God in his character – in his steadfast love, kindness, mercy, faithfulness, and forgiving-heart.

Loving others as God loves us, choosing to do what is (morally) good and to reject what is evil, turning away from falsehood, deceit, and lies and living according to the truth as God reveals it to us – this is what it means to imitate God and to be like him in his image.

The nature of Christian love

Christian love – the love which Christ has taught us – is costly and sacrificial. Paul says that Jesus “gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2). His whole life and ministry was an offering of love to the Father in humble service and love for his “brethren” – the brothers and sisters he called to be his disciples. That is why Paul describes Jesus’ love as a “fragrant offering and pleasing sacrifice” (Ephesians 5:2).

The Lord Jesus puts us first in his love and care. Although he was King and Lord by right, he willingly became a lowly and humble servant for our sake. He proved God’s love for us by washing his disciples’ feet and by freely laying down his own life out of merciful love for us.



We love one another as Jesus has loved us

Christian love – the love of Christ – supercedes and surpasses the Old Covenant commandment to “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment – “that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Jesus sets the new standard of love – a love that is willing to sacrifice everything – including one’s own life – for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus is our model who shows us how we are to love as he has loved us. His love for us is wholly (entirely) directed towards our good – our welfare. This is the true meaning of love – a love that is outwardly focused and wholly directed towards the good of the other person.

God’s Love is a supernatural gift that transforms our ability to love others

How is such love possible? What appears to be impossible on the human level now becomes possible through what the Lord Jesus does in and through us by the gift and working of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that “God’s

love has been poured into our hearts through the gift of the Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

God’s love is a supernatural gift freely given to us. Like any spiritual gift given by God, this gift of love must be exercised if it is to grow and mature in us. This gift of supernatural love doesn’t replace our human love – it transforms our human ability to love others freely and whole-heartedly for their good.

“Through love be servants of one another”

The Holy Spirit purifies our hearts – our thoughts, intentions, attitudes, and inclinations – so we can freely choose to love others as Jesus himself has loved us. Paul the Apostle tells us that “Christ has set us free” from slavery to sin and selfishness (Galatians 5:1) – so “Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another” (Galatians 5:13).

The gift of Christian love

True Christian love is not a sentiment, feeling, or good intention alone - it is the deliberate and free decision of the heart that motivates and impels us to do what is good, right, merciful, and kind – even when we do not “feel like doing so” or when we face obstacles and difficulties that stand in the way of showing love, mercy, kindness, and goodness.

Love is a supernatural virtue that strengthens us in relating well to others

The love which God pours into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit is a supernatural virtue (a Christian character trait) which strengthens us in loving God as the supreme good whom we love above all else. This supernatural virtue of love also enables us to love other people – especially our brothers and sisters in Christ as well as all the people we relate with, including our enemies – with heart-felt kindness and charity (doing good for their benefit without any expectation of payment or return in kind), with goodness, patience, and mercy (forgiving them from the heart and not holding on to any ill-feelings or resentments).

We can choose to do a kind deed from time to time, especially after someone has been kind and good to us. But the virtues go further because they strengthen us in habitually doing good for others regardless of how they may treat us.

Why we need to grow in virtue

Virtues are good habits of heart (based on a personal choice and a decision) that incline us to do what is good, especially in the face of challenges, difficulties, and obstacles that try to hinder us from choosing and doing what is right and good. The more it becomes a habit the easier it is to do in a regular and ongoing way.

Vices are the opposite of virtues. Vices are disordered and bad habits of the heart that incline us to do what is wrong, hurtful, or harmful for others as well as for ourselves. Bad and sinful habits are not easy to break – they can be mastered and overcome with God’s supernatural grace and help and through the support and encouragement of others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ who also seek to grow in holiness and righteousness.

Christian love is rooted in truth and moral goodness

The virtue of Christian love is rooted in truth and moral goodness (righteousness). Love without truth inclines to mere flattery and false praise. Truth without love inclines to harshness and legalism. Christian love is wholly oriented to seeking the good of the other person. It is servant-hearted love because it takes its eyes off oneself in order to focus on how one can serve the best interests and welfare of others. Christian love is linked with humility and meekness because it doesn’t insist on one’s personal rights, privileges, and preferences.

Christian love is always oriented to serving others for their sake, their welfare, and benefit.

The reward of Christian love

The reward of Christian love is God himself – who loves us generously, selflessly, and whole-heartedly for our sake. That is why Jesus went to the cross with joy rather than sorrow – his joy was rooted in pleasing the Father and in laying down his life out of merciful love for us.

God loved us first and our love for God is a response to his exceeding kindness and mercy towards us. Our love for others proceeds and flows from the love of God – the love that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Romans 5:5). We imitate God when we show love, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness for others.

Some signs of the lack of love

What are some of the tell-tale signs of lack of love in Christian community?

- Holding on to hurts and bad feelings - such as bitterness, resentment, grudges
- Critical and judgemental thoughts and speech
- Neglecting or refusing to ask for forgiveness or to receive forgiveness
- Neglecting or breaking a commitment or promise made to our brothers and sisters (especially our commitment to meet together in share groups and community meetings – we need to apologize when we can't make a commitment for a good reason or ask forgiveness if we fail to keep a promise or commitment out of forgetfulness, etc.)

Overcoming personal blind-spots to loving others

We all have blind-spots in our personal lives and we need others to help us recognize and overcome them. That is one key reason we need each other in Christian community. Our brothers and sisters in Christ can often see our blind-spots better than we can by ourselves and they can help us avoid hurting others because of our blind-spots. That is why we need to be humble and willing to let our brothers and sisters show us where we may be failing to express love, patience, kindness, and meekness in our relationships.

We need to patiently listen and receive the input and correction our brothers and sisters bring to us. How else can we grow in love, righteousness, and holiness and overcome our blind-spots unless we allow our brothers and sisters to help us see them and overcome them.

“Put away bitterness and anger – be tender-hearted”

Paul the Apostle tells us to “put away bitterness, wrath, anger, and slander” so that we can freely choose to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Scripture repeatedly calls us to forgive one another. Jesus asked his disciples, “How many times should one forgive his brother? Seven times, no, I say seventy times seven.” The constant exhortation to forgive each other suggests that we fail one another and let one another down every day – and maybe several times a day. But that must not stop us from promptly forgiving each other from the heart.

If we offend our brothers or sisters, we need to go privately and directly to ask their forgiveness. The longer we put off forgiving one another, the easier it is for resentment and bad feelings to settle in our hearts and minds. Forgiveness breaks the chain of bitterness, anger, resentment, and hurtful speech that hurts, wounds, and separates us from one another in loving-kindness and mercy. Forgiveness opens the flood-gate of mercy and healing love.

[In every stage of life – we must learn to grow in greater love](#)

However old, experienced, or advanced we are in age, we must never think we have attained perfect love and maturity. In this life we never stop growing in love, wisdom, holiness, and Christian maturity. Every stage of life – from infancy, childhood, young adult, middle age, senior age, and advanced old age –has its own unique opportunities and challenges for overcoming weaknesses and sinful tendencies, such as selfishness, pride, fear, and lack of brotherly love.

Unfortunately many people regress and fall back into selfish and immature ways of behaving and living due to isolation, neglect, sin, and worldliness. That is why a community of faith, hope, and love is essential if every member of Christ's body is to grow and reach maturity in every stage of life - from childhood to advanced old age.

[We grow and mature together in a community of faith and love](#)

The Lord's plan for our personal growth in faith, hope, and love and in full Christian maturity is the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:13-16) – the community of brothers and sisters who are committed to helping one another grow as disciples of Jesus Christ – from birth to adulthood and from adulthood to advanced old age and to everlasting glory with the crucified and risen Jesus Christ who reigns for ever.

Let us be grateful for the opportunities that God offers us for growing together in Christian community as a body of disciples who love each other as the Lord Jesus has taught us.

[Don Schwager is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#), and author of the [Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations](#), and the book, *Training In Excellence: How Godly Character Forms Strong Men and Women and Strengthens the Building of Communities for Generations to Come*.]

See related articles:

- [Christian Brotherhood: A Reality Created by God](#), by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- ["You Are Our Brothers"](#), by Augustine of Hippo
- [Love of the Brethren](#), by Steve Clark
- [The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood](#), by Joseph Ratzinger/Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI

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The God of the Locks

by Michael Shaughnessy

Most Christians can point to a moment or an event that was life changing for them. Something happened that enabled them to live their faith at a higher level than they did previously. Many can point to several high-impact experiences, whether it was a retreat where they gave their life to the Lord, a Life in the Spirit Seminar when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, or a prayer meeting when they suddenly knew they needed to do a GAP year as a missionary.

The dynamic of high-impact events is similar to a ship going through a lock. The lock raises the ship to a new level – a level the ship would not be able to reach otherwise.

Good youth work capitalizes on this dynamic. It recognizes that change often happens quickly for teens, whether the change is physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Providing high-impact events is an important part of any effective strategy for moving youth ahead in their faith. It is why we build in opportunities, or locks, for this to happen.

Adventure trips help young teens by giving them the chance to experience the grandeur of God reflected in his creation.

The Youth Equipped to Stand Retreat (Y.E.S.) presents a clear call to respond to the Gospel message. Many church youth believe in God, pray, obey their parents (usually), and are “good kids,” but they

have not really taken the step of inviting Jesus to be Lord of their life. It is this step, going through this lock, that is necessary for them to become an adult disciple and live their faith at a new level.

Mission trips have a “lock effect” by helping youth choose to live in love and service to others, and not to live just for themselves.

A GAP year brings a new maturity of faith, personal discipline, and clarity about following the Lord. It's a year of one's life that affects the rest of one's life. One of the most important things youth workers and parents can do for teens is to encourage them to attend these high-impact events and give the God of the locks the chance to raise them to the next level. More information on each of these programs is available at www.kairos-na.org.

Transplant Shock

The transition from high school into college is one fraught with challenge for Christian youth. All freshmen are likely to experience the equivalent of “transplant shock” to their faith. For those who move away from home and into a dorm the shock can be severe.

It doesn't need to be so. Transplant shock can be handled. It is caused by the loss of the aids necessary to support faith.

At home youth knew where the church was and the service times, but most of them will show up on campus with no information about church. They attended a youth program they liked in an environment they knew, but their parish youth program won't exist on campus. They had a Christian peer group at home, but will be thrown into a multiple new peer groups they don't know, and whose values may differ wildly from their own, with no strategy to defend their faith. They will almost certainly be hit by loneliness, high pressure to conform, and an assault on their beliefs by those who educate them. Add that they have lost the onsite moral support of parents and youth workers, and faith transplant shock is almost inevitable.

Kairos has recently initiated going into Christian schools and speaking to graduating seniors about transplant shock and what they can do to about it. If we expect them to be missionaries we must prepare them for the role.

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

Photo credit: Regents Canal Lock in Camden, London by [Cathryn](#)

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Gabe Colston from YouthWorks-Detroit (center) visits the North Coast of Ireland with friends from Youth Initiatives

Youth-Works Detroit and Youth Initiatives Belfast

From Detroit to Belfast – a summer of personal growth and service

For many of the past 16 summers, Youth Initiatives (YI) has been sending young people from Belfast to come and serve in the city of Detroit as part of our Detroit Summer Outreach internship program. These youth have encountered the living Christ in powerful and life-changing ways while serving in the city, and they have made a powerful impact in the lives of Detroit youth. One of the first, Tony Silcock, is a Program Director with YI, and many others have returned to serve and lead and become planted in our outreaches in Northern Ireland.

This past summer, an amazing first has occurred – YouthWorks-Detroit has sent our first young person to Belfast to serve in their Summer Schemes program. Gabe Colston came to us as an intellectual 8th grade student just beginning to find his way as a young man. Four years later, after serving as a member of our StreetTeam Leadership Program and our youth group, Gabe has grown tremendously, graduated high school, and is preparing to enter college at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in the fall.

However, he has also grown tremendously in his relationship with Jesus, and he has heard a call and invitation to service. When the opportunity to give his summer to service arose, he jumped at the chance to follow Jesus

in the adventure awaiting him with YI.

He dove in, spending his time in Belfast living household life with the Servants of the Word, in a common life of prayer and service, and reaching out to youth who often have never embraced much positive in their lives or been encouraged that their lives could amount to anything. We are grateful that Gabe is choosing a life of service and sacrificial love, and excited to see where the Lord will lead him next. Please continue to pray for Gabe and all our Detroit youth as God continues his work of renewal and revival in the city of Detroit one life at a time.

My amazing Experience with Detroit Summer Outreach

by Chelsea Duff

“The time I spent serving with Detroit Summer Outreach this past summer with was the best of my entire life. I cannot in words do justice to this summer, this city, and the Lord’s work here. I have never experienced anything as amazing as Detroit Summer Outreach. The blessings I have experienced this summer I cannot count. Detroit, the people in Detroit, YouthWorks-Detroit, and everybody I met will always have a very special place in my heart. I have so much love and admiration for the city of Detroit. Maybe someday I will figure out how to express how amazing this summer was. ”

[Chelsea Duff is a member of University Christian Outreach at the University of Maryland, USA.]

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New Testament Affirmation of Singleness

by Dr. Barry Danylak

In our modern multicultural climate, orthodox Christians who affirm a high value for biblically-based “family values”, such as sexual chastity, heterosexual marriage, life beginning at conception, and the discouragement of divorce, often find allies in those from other faith traditions including Judaism, Islam and Mormonism.

But the New Testament’s surprising additional affirmation of singleness as something “good” (1 Cor 7:1), on the other hand, generally breaks with these other traditions and raises the possibility that the distinction itself points to something fundamentally different in Christian theology.

What is it that makes Christianity different, and why is it that Christianity positively affirms a positive role and purpose for singles within the community of faith, while these other traditions also rooted in the creation account in Genesis do not? The answer is not a simple one, but intersects how we understand the person and work of Christ, the nature of Christian discipleship and the household of faith.

Genesis is the foundational beginning of how we are to understand marriage, singleness and offspring, but it is not the end of the story. As theologically astute Christians we are compelled to follow these themes as they develop through the full canon of the Word of God culminating in the person work of Jesus Christ and the nature of the new community that he inaugurates.

The theological question of singleness is worth exploring not simply because we may find ourselves

or someone dear to us in the single state, but because in exploring it we gain greater understanding of the larger macro-theological themes of Scripture. The payoff is not primarily therapeutic, but transformative in what it has to teach us about the nature of God and the grandeur of his plan for humanity. The upshot is that this is a topic worth exploring because the journey has much to teach us beyond the topic itself.

For though we begin with a theological question about singleness, we soon find ourselves standing before the grand and comprehensive plan of God purposed in Christ for all creation. From there we return, blessed and enriched in our understanding not only of singleness, but also of marriage, offspring, family and everything else in God's created order.

The topic is also important because it does touch so many of us, either at present, or in the past, or possibly in the future. We all begin our life as single and we all will exit it single.

The majority of us find ourselves unmarried as we approach death's door. Even those in long and very blessed marriages recognize that circumstances can suddenly tear us from our spouses with no advanced warning. So it is perhaps the stark reality of life in this age that compels us to take fresh comfort in this distinctive New Testament teaching. And it is reason enough that we should seek to understand the deeper theological truths to which it points.

The Corporate Joy of Singleness

I am persuaded that there is a type of corporate joy in celibate Christian singleness that is seldom appreciated or talked about. In Luke 20:34-36 Jesus tells us that those who attain to the new age of the resurrection will neither marry nor be given in marriage because they cannot die anymore. Rather, they shall be "like the angels". With death and marriage (in the traditional sense) passé in the age to come, we can also infer the disappearance of few other things such as old age, childhood (assuming we are all resurrected as adults), spousal and parental relationships, and most likely sexual union.

Former familial relationships (spouses, parents, children, etc.) may be recognizable, but they will not function as they formerly did. On the other hand the reality of being brothers and sisters in our new family in Christ may well be the best sense of what does continue in our eternal state.

Part of the excitement and joy of being single in Christ here and now is that it can serve as an anticipatory glimpse of our eternal community. This is because Christian singleness is not meant to be a singleness lived in isolation, but lived within a larger family of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christian singles have greater availability for sharing in and strengthening the lives of one another in a range of different ways. Singleness brings more flexibility to spontaneously make time to encourage someone else's spiritual journey over a meal or coffee. It can serve to spur each another in existing or new opportunities for service within the kingdom of God.

There can be a genuine buzz of excitement in the anticipation of wondering how and where God

might choose to move us next in his global operations. There is continual opportunity to create time to drink deeply of the well of life experiences of others around us, and there are many opportunities to meet and share in the lives of an enormous range of persons of both sexes within the global family of Christ.

Though in some degree these things are also experienced in our fellowship as the broader corporate church, Christian singles that cultivate community together often find an intensification of this unique joy insofar as they are less distracted with traditional familial responsibilities of the present age. This is the joy of singleness that rightly serves as a prophetic token of the age to come. It is something to be savored and shared.

For more resources on the topic of "[redeeming singleness](http://redeemingsingleness.com/)" visit Dr. Barry Danylak's blog at: <http://redeemingsingleness.com/>

Dr. Barry Danylak is author of the 2010 book [*Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the single life*](#). He completed his Ph.D. with the University of Cambridge with the title of his thesis: "Secular Singleness and Paul's Response in 1 Corinthians 7". Barry is a never-married single man currently serving as the community leader for single adults at Centre Street Church in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Barry resides in High River, Alberta, Canada.

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

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A recent meeting of the International Brotherhood Council - August 2014

Servants of the Word - New Growth and Update

The Servants of the Word is an ecumenical, international brotherhood of men living single for the Lord within a larger community of communities, the Sword of the Spirit. The brotherhood began in August of 1971. Today there are fifty lifelong members, along with many other younger men who are affiliates or in a formation process in the Servants of the Word. The brothers live a common way of life in ten households around the world and actively serve in the mission of the Sword of the Spirit, an international network of Christian communities.

Three brothers from three different countries recently made a life-long commitment to the Servants of the Word this past August, 2014. [See insert below.]

Three Brothers from three different countries made life-long commitments to Servants of the Word last August 2014



Noel Delgadillo (left) from Miami, USA, Dale Arconado (center) from Manila, Philippines, and Joe Fahd (right) from Beirut, Lebanon each made a life-long commitment to the Servants of the Word this past August, 2014

“In response to the exceeding greatness of the gift of God, we dedicate ourselves to loving him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and consecrate our lives to his service.”

The Brotherhood Council which met this past August 2014 re-elected Ken Noecker [photo below] to a second four year term as Presiding Elder of the Servants of the Word.



And lastly, Andy Pettman [below] highlights some of the key aspects of the call and life together of the brothers in the Servants of the Word.

Our Call and Life Together as Servants of the Word

by Andy Pettman

In the New Testament, a young man seeks out Jesus to learn from him the path to eternal life. Jesus' reply was a personal invitation – “Go, sell what you have and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). That invitation has been taken up by Christians through the centuries; the Servants of the Word began with a similar call.

In the early 1970s, a group of young men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, came together in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA with a common vision for a life of total consecration to God, lived in community and in simplicity, for the sake of more fruitful and effective service to the Christian people. What follows is a brief description of the most important aspects of our call and life together as a brotherhood of men living single for the Lord.

Single for the Lord

There are many ways of following the Lord, and most Christians are called to the blessing of marriage, family life, and fruitful careers. But by choosing to stay single, we in the Servants of the Word are free to devote our time, energy, and resources to more direct and concerted service of the Lord and his people (1 Corinthians 7:25-33). Jesus himself is our best model of a man whose perfect freedom and single-minded dedication to his Father enabled him to accomplish his mission on earth (Matthew 19:10-12).



Brothers pray with Noel at the life-long commitment ceremony - August 2014

Servanthood

Our name, The Servants of the Word, expresses our fundamental identity: we are servants of Jesus Christ, servants of his Gospel which we wish to proclaim to others, and servants of the local communities of which we are a part and of the larger Sword of the Spirit, an international and ecumenical association of Christian communities. As servants, we believe that our lives are “not our own” (1 Corinthians 6:19), and we wish to place all our time and every aspect of our lives at the disposal of the Lord and of his people.

Discipleship

We firmly believe that God has called each brother to make a personal decision to be his disciple. Like the man who stumbled upon hidden, buried treasure, and like the merchant who chanced upon a pearl of exceeding value, we have renounced all else in order to follow the Lord and have the “one thing necessary” (Luke 10:42). To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to belong to him. We are his men, going with him wherever he goes, trying to do his work, and living as he would. Our desire is to imitate him as well as we can, as we await the coming of his kingdom.

A life of prayer

The Servants of the Word aspire to be men of prayer. The worship of God punctuates our waking hours, from morning praise together, to communal evening and night prayers. Following a longstanding Christian tradition, we chant the psalms, and together intercede for various needs. Appreciative of the Lord’s gift of charismatic prayer and worship “in the Spirit,” we also spontaneously “sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” with thankfulness in our hearts (Colossians 3:16).

In addition to corporate worship, each brother also spends time individually in prayer and meditation. The reading and study of Scripture is a high priority, as well as growing in understanding of our Christian faith through other teaching resources.

Several times a year, the brothers go on weekend retreats together. These are special times for more extended prayer and meditation, and for building up our brotherly relationships.



Servants of the Word members enjoy a celebrative meal in honor of the brothers who recently made their commitments to the Servants of the Word - August 2014

A shared life

Our relationships of brotherhood and friendship are an integral element of Servant of the Word life. We wish, not just to be co-workers or fellow servants of one another, but brothers, friends in Christ. To this end, we regularly meet in smaller groups to talk about our lives and to be accountable to one another. We normally share the morning and evening meal together, and we make time for other common activities, recreation, and fellowship to strengthen and build up one another.

Sharing a common life also means respecting the order and structures which make a corporate existence possible. Some brothers have pastoral responsibility for governing our life and caring for brothers. Some are entrusted with handling legal and financial matters on behalf of the brotherhood. And some are concerned that the daily, ordinary life of our various households goes well.

> See related article by Andy Pettman on [Household Life in Servants of the Word](#)

Andy Pettman is a life-long member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and leader of the [Servants of the Word household in London](#), UK. Andy also serves as senior coordinator of [Antioch Community](#) in London, UK. He is a member of the Sword of the Spirit teaching team and regularly speaks at conferences, seminars, and retreats.

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A report on Bethany Association



Mags Tierney with young women from Christ the Redeemer Community

Helping Women Discerning the Call to Live Single for the Lord

Mags Tierney, a covenant member of Charis Community in Belfast, Northern Ireland and a member of [Bethany Association](#) - an international, ecumenical association of women living single for the Lord, was delighted to be asked by the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit to spend some of her time and energies helping young community women discern the call to live single for the Lord. So far she has visited communities in New Jersey, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, Lansing, Detroit, and Minnesota.

At these events, Mags told her own story of God's call and shared about signs of the action of God across the Sword of the Spirit network of communities. She also launched the latest Discernment Guide for Pastoral Leaders. The booklet is designed for use by a pastoral leader over a 6 or 12 month period of discernment and includes reflection and discussion questions, Bible meditations for the time of discernment and a reading list of helpful books and articles for reflection.

See related articles by Mags Tierney:

- [I Say, "Lord, Send Me" ...but Am I Available to be Sent?](#)
- [A Response to God's Call:](#) Report on women living single for the Lord in covenant communities

A report on the Brotherhood of Hope



Knowing Christ Our Joy

by Brother Sam Gunn

With a warm smile, a gifted intellect and a very promising future, Brother Parker Jordan had it made in life. Instead, on July 5th, he made a gift of his life to Jesus Christ by professing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience in life-long private vows in the [Brotherhood of Hope](#), a religious brotherhood of Catholic lay brothers founded by Fr. Philip Merdinger. In a packed Sacred Heart church in New Brunswick, New Jersey surrounded by brothers, family and friends he said his threefold 'yes' in vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Brother Parker could have pursued the American dream of self-sufficiency. Instead he is pursuing Jesus, his All-Sufficiency.

There was a word that came up again and again - at a pre-vows encouragement party attended by some of the college students Br. Parker serves at Rutgers University, at a private family reception the night before, or in conversations with the many guests. The word was "joy." Brother Parker is a man of radiant joy. Without hesitation or doubt he offered his life and the joy of his offering was felt by all who witnessed this stirring event. "Joy," Fr. Philip Merdinger preached at the vows, "is something the Lord himself does in us from within." Urging the congregation to allow the Holy Spirit to work this joy in their own hearts, we offer you the same invitation: Say 'yes' to the joy of the Lord. It is a joy so powerful it leads a man who could have it all to give it all to Christ without fear. God First, God Alone!

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Scenes from Lebanon - A New Art Series by David Kurani



Ain Mreisse Cove, watercolor, 76x57 cms, by David Kurani

When Saint Paul the Apostle sailed up the Mediterranean coast on his last journey he made several stops on the way. There are numerous little bays that fishermen use to shelter their boats and repair their nets, one or two even have small churches marking sites where locals claim the saint landed on his way. The cove pictured here is the last remaining one in the capital city of Beirut and it happens to be near my work. Who knows, maybe the Apostle Paul also landed here.

The house is an older style of architecture far more interesting than the modern sea view apartment buildings around it which pale by comparison (quite literally and deliberately in this painting)

The youth on the kayak (called a 'hasaki' meaning fish bone) might be paddling out to check some lobster traps, or practicing for a race, or just having some sport. These hasakis combine the advantages of both canoes and surfboards and are great for outings on the clement Mediterranean coastal waters. I used to jump off them to dive for sea urchins with their tasty orange flesh inside the prickly spines! I think there may be a lesson there: finding virtue beneath a rough exterior.



Cedars of Lebanon, watercolor, 27x35 cms, by David Kurani

The cedar is the 'king of trees' and this grove is the oldest in Lebanon with some trees over 2000 years old. They were high enough to be practically inaccessible to the Phoenicians who traded in cedar and fir through the ports of Byblos (Gibileth or modern day Jubail), Sidon, and Tyre.

They also used cedars to build their boats. Why? They were plentiful and the wood was immensely strong. It has a triangular crystalline structure that supports weight. It is not uncommon to see branches carrying a great mass of snow extending out horizontally from the trunk and hardly bending down from the weight. The wood is also aromatic-repelling insects and water pests.

Its beautiful grain, also, must have recommended it to Solomon who wanted it for his temple. So much so that he concluded a very generous treaty with neighboring King Hiram of Tyre to obtain vast quantities of cedar wood and juniper from the Lebanese slopes as it says in 1 Kings, 5 and 6. Also mentioned are the skilled Lebanese workmen (the 'Giblites'- citizens of Gebal as mentioned above, the Greek Byblos just to the north of Beirut and still called 'Jubail').

So in total - what a grand creation is the cedar! (*Yet the voice of God can shatter it*- Psalm 29) Can it be that I can possibly grow into the human equivalent? Psalm 92 verse 12 seems to indicate so... with God's help.



Cedars in the Snow, watercolor, 24x32 cms, by David Kurani



Pine Copse,

watercolor, 62x46 cms, by David Kurani

If the cedar is 'the king of trees' here in Lebanon, then the pine is the common man, so plentiful is it here. Called variously the umbrella pine, the stone pine, the pinion pine, (and there may be still other labels) its nuts enhance many local dishes and sweets, its cones and branches fuel the village ovens, carpenters use its wood and fieldworkers and travelers its shade. Truly a giving tree - one to be grateful for. I also happen to find it beautiful and have painted many a study of it/them in various lights and climes.

Last month I went back to the mountain house my family used to occupy during the summer months and saw this pine copse which was important to us then. The underbrush which now is thick as in this illustration, was cleared away and I and my family spent many a happy hour chatting, playing games, picnicing, and even calling out and listening to the echo from the facing hillside. So many good times! And in the bad times just to go and sit there was truly a medicine to recover a personal peace. I see how much God loved me and delighted to give me good things way before I knew him.



Jacaranda Trees, watercolor 27x35 cms, by David Kurani

Jacaranda trees grow differently in different places. I was told that in the Brazilian rainforests they grow tall and so thickly that they form a canopy solid enough for small animals to walk on some 40 feet above the ground. But here in Lebanon they branch out like lace and cover themselves (and the ground around) with myriad purple blossoms. Glorious! Their colors are so showy I am reminded of the story of the little boy who said "Isn't God great! Just think - he could have done it all in black and white!"

These here are in the garden of the house of the president of the university I teach in. While painting them I had the thought: Who said plants don't move? I mean besides upwards and outwards. To the artist's eye these trees with their sinuous swaying and striking colors remind me of maidens dancing at a wedding; a lot of movement there! (cf. the five wise virgins admitted into the party).

Another thought: My parents were married in this very garden way back in 1933. The ceremony was officiated by a Greek Orthodox priest for my father's side of things, and a Protestant minister for my mother's. I certainly am grateful to God for this early 'ecumenical convergence' in that one of the results was me!

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

Also see [previous art works](#) by [David Kurani](#)

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Zacchaeus being called down from the tree - by [William Hole](#)

Zacchaeus' Tall Tale

poem by Jeanne Kun

Until Zacchaeus was visited so long ago
by saving grace in Jericho,
he'd known no joy nor satisfaction
in all that he'd possessed or wrongly gained.
Instead, he'd yearned for something he could not attain:
The sight of you, O Lord, eluded him,
for he was small of stature (and of heart).

But throwing off his dignity and pride,
he climbed the sycamore and
grew taller than he'd ever been before.
And from this new height,
he won his first glimpse of you.

Passing by that blessed tree,
you probed its leafy shelter with keen eyes;
and catching sight of the chief of tax collectors
perched (as if awaiting fate — or was it grace he hoped to meet there?)
so precariously in his post,
you stripped bare his soul
and looked into his longing.
Then suddenly sure with knowledge of his need,
you offered yourself to him as guest:

Zacchaeus, make haste and come down;
for I must stay at your house today.

Honored by such favor and request,
gladly did Zacchaeus descend
to be host and welcome you into his home and heart.
And as that humbled heart swelled great with generosity
in gratitude that you'd so gifted him with grace,
more gladly still did he give half his goods away
and repay fourfold his failings.
Yet far greater was the recompense that he received:
Since salvation came that happy day to him and all his house,
the little man's no longer stunted by his greed and ill-gotten gains.
Growing to full stature in you, O Lord,
Zacchaeus now stands straight and tall.

[Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. Copyright © 2004 by Jeanne Kun. Used with permission. See related article: [Zacchaeus and his Unexpected Dinner Guest](#).]

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