

LIVING BULWARK

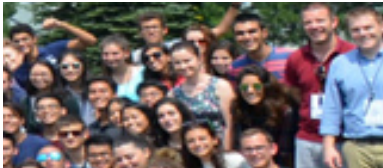
The online magazine of The Sword of the Spirit
sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission in today's world

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The Power of Faith ***“The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” – Romans 1:16***

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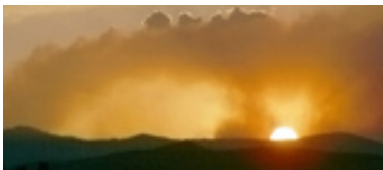
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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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Growing in Faith

*The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith
- Romans 1:16*

In this issue

Who doesn't want to grow in faith - especially the kind of faith that produces abundant life, well-being, happiness, and the promise of everlasting joy and union with God our heavenly Father who created us in his image and likeness and who sustains us every moment of our lives?

Jesus' followers on a number of occasions asked him, "Lord, increase our faith," and his response:

"If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:5), and "if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move - and nothing will be impossible to you" (Matthew 17:22).

The Holy Spirit makes our faith come alive

What did Jesus mean when he said to his disciples that our *faith can move trees and mountains* as well (see Matthew 17:20; Mark 11:23)? The term "mountain remover" was used for someone who could solve great problems and difficulties. Don't we often

encounter challenges and difficulties which seem beyond our power to handle? What appears impossible to human power is possible to those who *believe* in God's power. Faith in God is the key for removing obstacles and difficulties which keep us from doing his will.

Faith is not something uncertain or vague which requires a leap of the imagination or worse, some kind of blind allegiance. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Faith is a response of trust and belief in what is reliable, truthful, certain, and real. To have faith is to believe and trust in someone or something. We know that we cannot live or breathe without air even though we cannot visibly see it. Same with wind and with electricity. We believe in the power of electricity even though we can't visibly see it with the naked eye. We know we can tap into that power and use it to do things we could not do by our own human strength alone. Faith in God works in a similar way.

Faith is a gift freely given

Faith is a gift freely given by God to help us know God personally, to understand his word of truth, and to live in the power of his love and righteousness. God expects more from us than we can simply do by ourselves. That is why Jesus gives us the gift and power of the Holy Spirit who helps us to grow strong in faith, steadfast in hope, and constant in love.

When God reveals himself to us he gives us the "assurance" and "conviction" that his power and presence and glory is just as real, and even more real, than our experience of the natural physical world around us (Letter to the Hebrews 11:1-3). Things around us change, but God never changes. He is constant, ever true to his word, and always faithful to his promises (Psalm 145:13, Hebrews 10:23). That is why we can have the greatest assurance of his unconditional love for us and why we can hope with utter conviction that he will give us everything he has promised. Jesus is God's visible proof that his word is reliable and true - his love is unfailing and unconditional - and his power is immeasurably great and unlimited.

The Gospel is the power of God

As challenges, troubles, and even persecution increase around us, the Lord Jesus offers us more grace, more power, and more wisdom to meet these challenges. And the Lord increasingly opens new doors for evangelism and mission as well.

May this issue inspire each one of us to ask the Lord for an increase of faith and boldness to witness the power of the Gospel that can set people free from the tyranny of sin and division and from Satan's lies and deceptions. And let us never be "ashamed of the Gospel - it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Romans 1:16).

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor

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Jesus with disciples at Emmaus, by Rembrandt

Living a Life of Faith

“The key to seeing the glory of God, the key to experiencing the life of the Spirit, the key to having God work in us and through us powerfully is faith”

by Steve Clark

Beholding His Glory

“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 people 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 God to be glorified among men.

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)

The key to seeing the glory of God, the key to experiencing the life of the Spirit, the key to having God work in us and through us powerfully is faith. If we have faith, we will see things happen that are beyond human power. If we have faith, we will see God work in ways that we had not hoped for.

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 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.” (Colossians 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.

God Wants To Do It

Often, all too often, our attitude toward God is more like the attitude of a Stoic than of a Christian. A Stoic’s attitude is, “Whatever happens is the will of God. Therefore, I’ll just wait and see what God does to me, and whatever it turns out to be is the best thing possible.” Sometimes devout Christians say it this way: “What I want most is what God wants. Therefore, whatever God does is fine with me.”

It is true, we should want above all what God wants. If we love him, we should want to please him. But if we fall into a Stoic attitude of accepting the things that happen to us as God’s will, then we have missed two important Christian truths. We have missed, first of all, the truth that God has already told us what he wants. He has shown us what pleases him and what he wants to do. Therefore, by what he has said to us we can tell that many things that happen to us are not his will; sometimes they are even the result of what Satan has been trying to do. We can also tell that there are things that should be happening with us that are not happening.

We have also missed the important Christian truth that God wants us to ask things from him, even demand the things from him that we need or that he has promised us. He does not want passive, quietly resigned children. He wants eager children who want to know him, who want to experience his presence, who want to see his glory. Jesus himself said this to us through a story in the eleventh chapter of Luke,

“And Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Suppose one of you should go to a friend’s house at midnight and tell him, ‘Friend, let me borrow three loaves of bread. A friend of mine who is on a trip has just come to my house and I don’t have a thing to offer him!’ And suppose your friend should answer from inside, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, my children and I are in bed, and I can’t get up to give you anything.’ Well, what then? I tell you, even if he will not get

up to give you the bread because he is your friend, yet he will get up and give you everything you need because you are not ashamed to keep on asking. And so I say to you: Ask, and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.” (Luke 11:5–9)

God does not want us to be passively waiting for him to do his will, but he wants us to be asking, seeking, knocking. He wants to have us hungry to see his glory. It is only when we are anxious to know him and to see him change us and to see him do things in the world that we are ready to have faith.

Faith is based upon the knowledge that God wants to do things for us and through us; he has told us that he wants to do things for us, and for that reason we can have faith that he will. The scripture is filled with God’s promises, his stated intentions of what he wants to do for us and through us. For instance, in the fifth chapter of John’s first letter (1 John 5:3,4), it says “His commands are not too hard for us, for every child of God is able to defeat the world. This is how we win the victory over the world; with our faith”. A verse in the previous chapter (1 John 4:4) reads: “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” We have confidence that we can keep God’s commandments and overcome the world because God is living in us, and he is able. Another promise is found in John’s Gospel (John 14:12) where Jesus says to his disciples, “I tell you the truth: whoever believes in me will do the works I do — yes, he will do even greater ones, for I am going to the Father.” There is a simple fact at the basis of our faith — God wants to work in us and through us and he can do anything he wants.

Not only does God want to work in us and through us, but he wants to do more than we usually look for him to do. A few years ago a friend of mine and I were traveling on the West coast. We had gone out for a conference on evangelism, but one of our main interests was to visit some people we had heard about who seemed to know a great deal about faith and spiritual gifts. These people invited us to go to a Kathryn Kuhlman service. Kathryn Kuhlman calls herself an evangelist, but most people would describe her as a healer. Once a month she holds services in the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The Shrine Auditorium holds about 7,000 people, and when Kathryn Kuhlman comes, it is filled to capacity. People are turned away at the doors.

The meeting we went to began with praise and worship — 7,000 in a huge auditorium glorifying God. Just that itself impressed me. Then part way through the service, she called some people who had been there the month before onto the stage to share what had happened to them. One man had had arthritis so bad that, as he put it over and over again, “I couldn’t even weed my garden.” In the course of the meeting he had first come to, while he was sitting in a back room in which he could not even see the service, he had been totally healed. A second man had come to the service only because a friend had insisted on it. He did not believe in Christ and had no expectation that he would be healed of the terminal cancer from which he was suffering. Toward the end of the service, he felt something like a rush of water go through him, and afterwards, he felt much better. The following week he visited his doctor who certified that he had been healed and even brought the X-rays to the service to show everyone.

After the two testimonies the service turned to prayer again, and then, all of a sudden, Kathryn Kuhlman said something like: “Up there in that balcony somebody is being healed of arthritis,” and then, “Somebody down there can walk now and if he will throw away his crutches, he will find that it is so.” She pointed out a number of other people in the audience who were being healed. And I thought to myself, “that sounds good.” But then people started coming up to the stage, and they told about the different things that had happened to them. One was cured of arthritis (a number of people in fact had been cured of arthritis that night), someone came up with his crutches to report on his cure, a boy deaf in one ear could hear with it. Dozens of people came forward with impressive healings.

One of the cases I found most impressive was a woman who had had to wear braces over her whole body and had walked on crutches. I had just happened to see her and talk to her before the meeting. As the different people were coming forward, I saw a man carrying all the braces and gear the crippled woman had been wearing, while she herself was walking in front. She told the people of how she had had an automobile accident about five or six years before, and since then had had a number of operations, some of which had helped a little, but no doctor could cure her. And yet here she was in front of us bending and jumping and walking back and forth.

I found that service a great experience for improving my faith. It showed me that the Lord not only could do things like that; he actually did them in front of me. About a month later when we were back home, a minister from the East Coast, the father of one of our friends, came to visit us. He told us the story of how one time he had worked with Kathryn Kuhlman in her service, and afterwards, for the help he had given her, she gave him a copy of her book, I believe in Miracles. The inscription in it was: "There is more, so much more."

My reaction at that time was that if I could only have as much of God's working as I had seen at the Kuhlman service I would be satisfied. There is a tendency in me to rest with what I have, to feel that this is enough. Since I have already gotten more from the Christian life than I had expected, I am tempted to just sit back and enjoy it. But Kathryn Kuhlman was expressing an attitude of the Christian life that we all need to have: that God has more for us and that we should desire it and expect it from him. If we put an upper limit on what the Lord is going to do for us, or if we say that we have had enough, God has a harder time doing what he wants to do for us.



The life of faith begins when we have our eyes opened to a truth: the truth that the all-powerful Creator of everything is with us and wants to do things for us and through us. His power is available, and he is ready to do a great deal, in fact a great deal more than we are hoping for. We are in the position of Elisha's servant:

"When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning, an army with horses and chariots was surrounding the city. And the servant said, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' He said, 'Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' Then Elisha prayed, and said, 'O Lord, open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariot of

fire round about Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:15–17)

We are surrounded by the power of God, by armies of angels and saints, and once we see that, once we see that we not have to depend on our own personal resources to live the Christian life, we are on the way to living the life of faith.

Faith is simply the way to tap the spiritual power which is available to us. At this moment there are all kinds of power in the room we are in. There are magnetic waves, radio waves, even nuclear power. Two thousand years ago, the same power was on the earth, but people did not know how to tap it. Since then, we have learned how to make contact with that power so that we can have electric light or can hear music that is playing hundreds of miles away. But in the same room, there is even greater spiritual power than there is physical power. The power of God is with us right now. We need to learn how to tap that power; we need to learn how to have faith.

Now for some people it seems unfair that God should make faith the way to tap his power. They feel that it is as difficult to have faith as it was for people two thousand years ago to hear music that was being played four hundred miles away. They feel that God is just trying to make it hard for them, that he is trying to set up an insurmountable obstacle to their receiving his gifts. Faith seems as out of reach as miracles do. And yet the Lord is not asking for faith because he wants to make the Christian life hard for us. He is asking for faith, because his intention is to make the Christian life easy for us. Or perhaps a better way of saying it is, he is asking for faith because he wants to make it possible for us to do more and to see more happen than we ever thought was possible. Faith is what he is asking for because faith is simply the way we let him do things in us and through us. Faith is a way of yielding to God so that he can do things through us.

Perhaps a brief analogy will help illustrate how faith is a key to letting God work in our lives. Suppose we took someone who did not know how to swim, a person who had not yet experienced how it was possible to stay afloat and move through water; if we were to throw him into a lake, odds are that he would struggle so hard to stay up that he would not be able to stay up at all. He would be so afraid that “it wouldn’t work” (after all, everyone knows that bodies are heavier than water), that he would thrash around until he went under. But if we can give him faith first, if we can give him faith in the buoyant power of the water, he can easily stay afloat. His faith in the buoyant power of the water will let him relax so that he can allow the water to hold him up. Then he will be able to move around in the water and learn to swim.

We need the same kind of faith to live the life of the Spirit. The power of God is there to hold us up and to let us move in ways we did not think possible. When we struggle the hardest to stay up or to get results, we have the hardest time. What we do when we struggle that way is to act as though the only way we can make progress is by our own power. But when we learn how to trust the Spirit in us, when we learn how to relax and let God do with his power what he wants to do in us and through us, then things begin to happen.

Faith makes it possible for us to count on and cooperate with what God is doing. Let us say that we want to get into a locked closet. If someone were to come to us, hand us a key and say “that is the key to the closet,” it would be a simple matter for us to take the key and use it to open the door. Even if we encountered some difficulty in getting the key into the lock the first time we tried, we would not give up. We would approach the situation as if we had the key — and we would be able to unlock the door. We have been given the Holy Spirit as the key to living the Christian life. We need only to approach the Christian life as if we had the key. We need only have faith in the Holy Spirit living in us. If we do that, then we are able to see his work in us; we are able to count on it and cooperate with it.

We have to know and believe a simple fact before the life of faith is possible: that God wants to do things for us and through us. Once we know he wants to, we know that the power from God is available, then we will

be able to rely on it, expect it, and act on it.

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Faith Versus Sight

by Derek Prince

Faith!

Who can fully measure or express the potential represented by that short, simple word – FAITH? Perhaps the clearest way to bring faith's potential into focus is to examine two statements made by Jesus:

With God *all things are possible*. (Matthew 19:26)

All things are possible to him who believes. (Mark 9:23)

In each of these statements, we find the words "all things are possible." In the first passage, they are applied to God; in the second, they are applied to the one who believes. It is not too difficult, perhaps, to accept that all things are possible to God. Can we equally accept that all things are possible to the one who believes? This is what Jesus told us.

In practical terms, what does this mean? It means that, through faith, the things that are possible to God are made equally possible to the one who believes. Faith is the channel that makes God's possibilities available to us. Through faith, all that is possible to God becomes equally possible to us. No wonder that the Bible,

from beginning to end, consistently emphasizes the unique and supreme importance of faith.

Problems of Translation

Before we go further with our study, it will be helpful to clear up a linguistic misunderstanding that often causes difficulties in understanding faith. In English, we have two different words for faith: a noun, *faith*, and a verb, to *believe*. The connection between these two words is not always obvious. As a result, preachers sometimes try to make a distinction between “believing” and “having faith.” However, there is no basis for this distinction in the original Greek of the New Testament.

In Greek, the word for faith is *pistis*, and the word for believe is *pisteuo*. We see that the verb is formed directly from the noun. The stem of each word is made up of the same four letters – *pist*. As far as the Bible is concerned, believing is exercising faith. Conversely, exercising faith is believing.

When we look at the words that express the opposite of faith, we again find a difference between English and Greek. In English, the opposite of faith is unbelief. We have no such word as “unfaith.” But, in Greek, there is a direct connection between faith and its opposite. Faith is *pistis*; unbelief is *apistia*. (In Greek, the negative prefix “a” corresponds to the English prefix “un.”) The same four-letter stem *pist* occurs in both Greek words: faith, *pistis*; unbelief, *apistia*.

Also connected with this four-letter stem *pist*, we have the adjective *pistos*, which means faithful, believing. From this, the negative prefix “a” gives us the opposite adjective, *apistos*, which means unfaithful, unbelieving.

For the sake of clarity, we will set these five words side by side in two parallel columns:

	Greek	English
Noun	<i>pistis</i>	faith
Noun	<i>apistia</i>	unbelief
Adjective	<i>pistos</i>	faithful, believing
Adjective	<i>apistos</i>	unfaithful, unbelieving
Verb	<i>pisteuo</i>	believe

We see that all five Greek words are visibly linked by the stem *pist* that occurs in each of them. Altogether, these five words occur almost six hundred times in the original text of the New Testament. On this basis alone, it is clear that these words represent a theme that is central to the Bible’s total revelation.

Faith Defined

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews deals exclusively with the theme of faith. Its opening verse provides us with a definition of faith as the term is used in the Bible: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 kjv).

This verse tells us two main things about faith. First, “faith is the substance of things hoped for.” Faith is so real that it is actually called a substance. The Greek word used here for substance is *hupostasis*. It literally means “that which stands under” something else or “provides the basis for” something else.

The same word, *hupostasis*, occurs in Hebrews 1:3, where we are told that Jesus is “the exact representation

of His [the Father's] nature." The word here translated "nature" is *hupostasis*. The meaning is that God the Father is the eternal, invisible, underlying reality of which Jesus Christ the Son is the visible expression. Applying this meaning to Hebrews 11:1, we may say that faith is the underlying reality of things hoped for. Faith is real; faith is a substance.

Second, faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 kjv). The New American Standard Bible says, "the conviction of things not seen." Regardless of which translation we prefer, the vital point is that faith deals with things we cannot see. Faith relates to the invisible.

Two verses later, the writer again stressed faith's relationship to the invisible:

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.(Hebrews 11:3)

The writer here pointed out a contrast between the things that are seen and the things that are not seen, between the visible and the invisible. Our senses connect us to the visible world, to "what is seen." But faith takes us behind the visible to the invisible – to the underlying reality by which the whole universe was formed, that is, the reality of the Word of God.

Thus, faith relates to two eternal, invisible realities: to God Himself and to His Word. Biblical faith has only these two objects. In secular speech, of course, we speak of faith in many other contexts. We can talk about having faith in the economy, in a medicine, or in a political leader. But faith is not used that way in the Bible. In Scripture, faith is related solely and exclusively to two realities we cannot see with the natural eye: to God and to God's Word.

By Faith, Not by Sight

Paul brought out the opposition between faith and sight in 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." If we walk by sight, we do not need faith. If we walk by faith, we do not need sight. Each excludes the other.

This is contrary to our natural way of thinking. The world says, "Seeing is believing." But the Bible reverses the order: First we must believe, then we will see. This principle is so important that we will look at some passages of Scripture that illustrate it. In Psalm 27:13, David said, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Which came first, believing or seeing? Believing. What was true for David is true for all of us. If we cannot believe that we will see the goodness of the Lord, we will despair. The thing that keeps us from despairing is not what we see, but what we believe.

This agrees with the statement made about Moses in Hebrews 11:27: "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen." Nothing in Moses' visible circumstances at this time could have given him any hope or encouragement. But in spite of all that was against him, he endured because he was able to see the unseen. How did he do this? By faith. Faith enables us to see the unseen and thus enables us to endure when the visible world offers us no hope or encouragement.

Now we turn to the record of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in the eleventh chapter of John. We read,

Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"(John 11:39–40)

What Jesus asked here of Martha, He asks of all who desire to see the glory of God. We must believe that we will see. We do not see first, then believe. We believe first; then, as a result of believing, we see. Faith comes before sight.

Here, then, is the basic conflict between the old nature and the new nature. The old nature demands to see, since the old nature lives by the senses. God has to deliver us from that old nature and that old way of life and bring us to a new nature and a new way of life. Then we will say, “I am content not to see. I do not walk by sight, but by faith.”

In the book of 2 Corinthians, we are challenged once more by the contrast between the visible and the invisible:

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
(2 Corinthians 4:17–18)

Paul’s language in these verses contains a deliberate paradox. He spoke about looking at things that are not seen. How can we do this? There is only one way – by faith!

There is great significance in the word “while”: “while we look not at the things which are seen.” It stresses the same lesson that Moses learned in his test of endurance. He learned that, in the providence of God, affliction serves a useful purpose for believers. It forms and strengthens our character and prepares us for the eternal glory that lies ahead. But the lesson that the word “while” teaches us is this: Affliction serves us only while we keep our eyes on the invisible realm. If we lose sight of it and become preoccupied with the world of time and of the senses, we are no longer able to receive the benefits that affliction is intended to provide for us.

So we are caught between two worlds: the temporal and the eternal. The temporal is what we can see; we contact it with our senses. But the eternal is the world God wants us to be at home in. And we can be at home in that world by only one means: faith. Faith is the one thing that connects us to the unseen realities of God and His Word.

Summary

Faith lifts us above the realm of our own abilities and makes God’s possibilities available to us. Faith connects us to two unseen realities: God and His Word. As we maintain a relationship with God through faith, we are enabled to endure and to overcome the tests and the hardships that confront us in our daily lives. These, in turn, become opportunities for God to reveal His goodness and His glory.

There is an ongoing tension between faith and sight. Our old nature is at home in the world of the senses, and it demands to see. As Christians, we need to cultivate the new nature, which is able to trust God and His Word without demanding other evidence.

[This article is excerpted from *Faith to Live By*, written by (c) 1977 Derek Prince Ministries - International, first published in 1977 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 in Jesus Christ

by Charles Malik

Charles Malik was a distinguished Lebanese diplomat and one of the drafters of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. He served as president of the thirteenth session of the UN General Assembly in 1958. From 1966–1972, he served as vice president of the United Bible Societies, and from 1967–1971 he was president of the World Council on Christian Education.

The following article is a meditation on faith in Jesus Christ. It is excerpted from the book, *Christ and Crisis*, Chapter 5, by Charles Malik, written in 1962. It is lightly edited to include some helpful paragraph headings and some light updating of modern English usage.

“Lord, increase our faith”

Nothing is closer to our life than faith in Jesus Christ. If we have it, we know how crucially important it is in our lives; if we do not have it, we live estranged in a state of permanent torment. If we have it or if we do not have it, faith in Jesus Christ is the first and last meaning of our life. I do not care who or what you are; I put only one question to you: Do you believe in Jesus Christ? If you believe in him, then even though you are slandered and abused and misunderstood and miserable, even though you are dying, even though you are in hell, you will shed a few tears on your knees and, arising, you will gradually mount to heaven where the angels sing. And if you do not believe in him, then even though you are in heaven, even though you are the happiest and most secure person, I am afraid for you.

In the anguished cry of the father of the child with a dumb spirit, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24), we have the perfect expression of the dialectic of faith. For faith in Jesus Christ is not something we acquire once and for all and then carry for the rest of our lives in the manner in which we carry our bodies or the color of our eyes; faith in Jesus Christ is being constantly put to the test; it is daily under trial; we have perpetually to reacquire it again and again. Thus we cannot take pride in our faith as though it were thanks to us that we had it or continue to have it; we must always turn to him and say with the apostles: “Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). For without his faithfulness we will forthwith become faithless.

The trial of Christians being a minority

One trial of our faith is when we consider that after two thousand years the world is still so much unchristian and the Christians themselves are so faithless and so unworthy of the glorious name they bear. In their protected sentimental complacency people do not know what I am talking about. They must come out of their comfortable shells into the wide-open world to get the shock of their lives. The world with which we have to deal is largely unchristian and even anti-Christian.

Our faith in Jesus Christ is very childish indeed (would that it were childlike!) until we find ourselves in the position of David who tells us that after God had “looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God,” he found that “every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psalm 53:2, 3).

Our faith in Jesus Christ is very rudimentary indeed (would that it were primary!) until we find ourselves crying with David, “Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (Psalm 12:1); with Isaiah, “Lord, how long?” (Isaiah 6:11); and with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

We should first absorb the shock that the Lord is somehow tarrying, that the world will always be largely unchristian, that the faithful will always be a very small minority, and that none of us can be absolutely sure that he belongs to that minority, before our faith is truly confirmed in us. Our faith must predicate itself upon and accept these four facts before it becomes real faith, before it begins to merit any reward.

Faith lives on the radical trust of God's mercy

When we really take in the radical character of this situation, we can then only trust the mercy of God. Faith is to live on this radical trust of his mercy. The problem of the election and the remnant and the Church becomes then a burning issue in our life. For all their obscurity, pitfalls, and dangers, these matters must be fearlessly faced. Paul and Augustine and Calvin and Karl Barth were not talking nonsense when they had to wrestle with them, however we may agree or disagree with some of their conclusions; yet of the four, with Paul at least I cannot say that I am in a position or ever shall be in a position to “disagree.” Man is free, yes; but God is even more free; and it seems to be his pleasure to hold some men captives for him more than others. There is an unfathomable mystery here, very much like the “unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4) which that strange friend of Paul’s had heard in the third heaven.

To live in a modicum of peace in this world, a Christian, for all his zeal, for all his missionary drive, for all his burning desire in obedience to the Lord to convert all men and all nations, for all his kindness and gentleness and piety, must nevertheless accept the sad lot of belonging to a permanent minority. Did you hear?!—I said permanent minority! This should not disturb him because the possession of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit compensate for the loss of the whole world. His deepest joy and sorrow at the same time is that the others do not have the vaguest idea what they are living without. Faith must undergo and survive this bitter test. And when we affirm with Paul from the bottom of our heart, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10, 11),

we do so in humble but certain faith.

Loosing oneself in the cares and worries of the world

Unless we pass this fiery test and hold fast to our faith, we might fall into another temptation which could fritter away all our faith or whatever of it was left in us. We might become too much preoccupied with the world and its problems. Christians at times get themselves overworked about the state of the world. This is not a sign of faith but of the exact opposite. They should relax and trust Christ more. And so we set about, with the best of intentions, no doubt, and calling upon the power of Christ, to save the world from prejudice, ignorance, backwardness, corruption, injustice, war, sin: in short, from the grip of the devil. Christians in a position of responsibility, whether civil or ecclesiastical, must certainly try to do all this; they cannot face their Lord in his day having been unprofitable and delinquent in their tasks. But it is one thing to go about saving the world, or the humblest of situations in it, in our own human power, and it is an entirely different thing to trust that act of salvation to God, while meantime doing everything we can in obedience to his will.

It is one thing to be nervous and worried and concerned and unsure, and it is an entirely different thing to let Christ himself accomplish his work in us and through us—calmly, quietly, surely, and almost without giving his using us a thought ourselves. But it is eminently possible to lose oneself in the cares and worries of the world and therewith to lose Christ. The cry of “Martha, Martha” (Luke 10:41) keeps ringing in my ears when I behold people, including above all myself, busy day and night trying to save the world; especially as I am not sure that in our business we are adoring Christ enough; and our adoration of him is the most important thing possible.

Trust in God's justice and pray for his mercy

Moreover, there are cases where, no matter how much we may fret and fume, we can really do nothing ourselves, or what we can do is exceedingly limited in efficacy. Things as it were must take their own natural course, which might include the possibility of the manifestation of the judgment of God. We can then only ardently pray for his compassion. History is full of instances where God had to manifest his wrath despite every human effort and good will. This is Paul's verdict on paganism in Romans. We can only trust God's justice and pray for his mercy. And where that is obviously the case, we are only frittering away our energies and wasting our substance by worrying too much or smiting our breast too severely. There is a divine economy whereby we may conserve our resources for the most telling impact, upon the most promising soil, at the most opportune moment.

It is perfectly clear that we can save nobody and nothing if we are not first sure of ourselves. In these matters we can never bluff, we can never hide away our truth. To have the world maddeningly on our mind all the time is not the way to be sure of ourselves. It is rather the way to be distracted, to be unsure, to be impotently spread all over, for the world is completely uncontrollable and there is absolutely no end to what can and should be saved.

The dike of corruption cannot be plugged at every point, because the points are infinite. It is enough if an oasis of health here and another there can be secured. And so to be busy at this point and that point and that other point is often the way of escaping and fleeing from ourselves and therefore from Christ. It appears that the contemplative method of Mary is preferable. When I meet a soul hailing from a life of profound contemplation and prayer I immediately feel that the whole world is being there and then saved at his or her feet.

I think it is the Marys more than the Marthas who are going to save the world, although the Marthas are indispensable in the process. Only those who stay very close to Christ can help others who are far away.

Only those who prefer him to everything else, even to the call of the needy world, can be used by him for the

need of the world. Only those who are not lifted by pride to suppose that they must carry the whole burden of the world will be pitied by him, who does in fact carry the whole burden of the world, and [they will be] given a humble part of that burden to carry with him. Only those who go through one hell after another without losing sight of him—because even “if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Psalm 139:8)—will be granted the power, not in their time, but in his time, to help the world out of the several hells in which it finds itself.

The victory of Christ in our lives is the greatest thing, and in the end, the only thing for which we should be thankful. Our faith is never more keenly tested than when, thinking we are going to save the world, we really set about—whether seriously or half in jest—to save it. A sense of humor is of the essence of faith, and the deeper the mystery of faith, the more refined and lively the sense of humor. And we are quite without humor about ourselves when, forsaking the way of Mary, we readily follow in the footsteps of Martha.

Trials facing Christians in different parts of the world

And yet Christians live in the world and Christ never meant them to live out of it. “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). In the world, they must work out their own salvation and as much of the salvation of the world as possible. They cannot wash their hands of what is going on in the world. On the contrary, they must take the most active interest in it. Of none has this been more true than of American Christianity, with its wonderful missionary epic, ventured forth and accomplished purely in the name of Jesus Christ. What a crown of glory has this Christianity laid up for itself as a result of its prayers and exertions and vision and loving sacrifice and service all over the world!

Now the importance of the emergence of Asia and Africa from the Christian point of view is threefold. First, it is good and proper that these nations take their destinies in their own hands. A Christian can only rejoice at the sight of people realizing and exercising their dignity and independence. Second, new perfections of the spirit are called for to work out the proper creative fellowship between equals. The fellowship of equals is the end of all fellowship, and therefore it should be looked upon as the norm and rule. Once perfected it becomes far more stable and enriching. Third, Christians under the new conditions will have to demonstrate their faith in Jesus Christ in the teeth of five trials. (1) They have to stand firm as they face the resuscitated tribal and national deities. (2) They have to stand firm as they see old great religions rediscovering and reasserting themselves. (3) They have to work out new creative dialogues based on our common human nature and need. (4) Their own governments often find themselves embarrassed by them and by Christ. Now, the Church should never meddle in political affairs; she should never make the truth of the Gospel dependent upon the fortunes, which are more often misfortunes, of systems and regimes and persons. But in the impersonal formal order of international relations, Christians could find themselves a cause of embarrassment to their own governments. This is their trial and their cross, and they should bear it courageously, keeping in mind that governments and politics and cultures come and go, but Jesus Christ endureth forever.

Facing alien anti-Christian movements

And (5) alien anti-Christian movements also have to be faced. It could be said a hundred years from now, it might be said in heaven right now, that the Christians, whether by default or by folly or by sheer stupidity or because they were comfortable and relaxed, lost in the competition for the soul of Asia and Africa in the sixties of the twentieth century. For this is a most crucial decade. We can only say with Paul, God forbid! But let me tell you, there are situations in which the issue is very delicately poised. The Christian debacle in China is a sobering warning. I am not thinking of competition between political systems: that is an affair of governments, and that is a realm completely other than what I am here thinking of, a realm with its own honorable rules, rhythms, and laws.

I am thinking of the competition for the soul and mind of the people. I am thinking of whether Christians, not governments, can relax if the mind of the people is poisoned with respect to the name of Jesus Christ. Mighty forces are moving fast into whole spiritual vacua. Surely history will say a hundred years from now—in so far as there will be true history then—surely heaven is saying right now, what was the matter with the Christians, where were they? Nothing therefore is more necessary than to arouse responsible Christians from their lethargy and slumber into both the infinite dangers and the infinite possibilities of the moment.

We worship a person - not an idea

At the heart of the whole matter is faith in Jesus Christ. Do we believe in him as passionately as others believe in their own ideas and systems? If we do, then we ought to do better than they. For we worship a person, they worship an idea. We worship life and strength and love and victory; they worship negation and hatred. Christ can do without us; he can raise up children to Abraham from these stones; he may be secretly doing so already in the vast spaces of Asia and Africa. And so if we fail him, it cannot be that he failed; we will only have proven that we are unprofitable servants. Nothing puts our faith to the ultimate test more than the concrete challenge facing us all in Asia and Africa today...

The ecumenical movement and testing of faith and unity

The ecumenical movement provides another field for the testing of our faith. There is the National Council of the Churches of Christ in this country. There is the World Council of Churches. There is the pope's announcement in 1959 that he would call an Ecumenical Council to examine, among other things, the question of unity, and now 1962 has been set for the convening of this Council. The Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I has been working hard to see how the Orthodox Churches may be brought together and how the cause of general Christian unity may be furthered. Important discussions have been going on lately, in books, in magazines, and in private circles, on this theme. There is therefore an apparent urge among the Christians everywhere to see if they cannot come closer together.

Side by side with this there is an evident withdrawing of each communion into the sources of its own independent strength and belief, a tenacious if not a violent holding to what it knows and has received. A sincere urge towards unity, yes; but also a desperate clinging to your tradition lest you let go some truth that Christ has vouchsafed you. I myself can bear witness that I never was so conscious of the infinite wealth of what has been handed down to me in my own Orthodox tradition as I am now; and yet I pray day and night for the unity of those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Now this is a dialectical situation: in wishing and seeking unity we at the same time become exceedingly jealous of the trust which Christ has been pleased to commit to our keeping. I myself believe this is exactly as it should be. No unity based on sentiment or compromise or politics or human considerations is worthy of the Lord we know and worship. Besides, such a unity will never come about. We may seek and accept only the unity he wants. And therefore we cannot and we should not lightly yield on any matter that we honestly regard to be central to his will.

When such a dialectical situation arises, it is then that there is lots of hope. For the unity that is going to come about is not our making but his making. And God breaks through only in crisis; he speaks and acts only in tension. When all is smooth and well and there is no problem, why should he intervene? Herein comes our faith in Jesus Christ. It is a fact which will control all our further strivings that we were one up until 1054. We must therefore have faith that unity is his will and that he will consummate it in his own way and his own day precisely through the tension arising from each one of us holding firmly to what he knows and yet all of us yearning from the bottom of our hearts for the unity of the body of our Lord. And I sometimes have the feeling that some people do not want unity, do not really believe in it, but rather feel that disunity is a good thing. What is needed therefore is faith, faith in unity, and I am sure Christ then will intervene....

The greatest trial of our faith is ourselves

Of course the greatest trial of our faith is we ourselves. We are trying God all the time. And his long-suffering is simply incredible. They talk of proofs for the existence of God! We need no proof save the simple fact that nobody and nothing can stand us; therefore, since nevertheless we are, there must be an infinite Being who does. We exist; but we are impossible; therefore a Being must exist to bear our impossibility for us; that Being is God. The impossibility of man proves not only the possibility but the absolute necessity of God. And, what is more, our impossibility would have remained hidden from us (as theirs is indeed from all those who do not know him), did he not choose to die, and nowhere save on the Cross on a hill just outside Jerusalem, in order to reveal our impossibility to us, and, in freedom, to make us possible and bring us back to himself.

You know how it is that in crisis the best in us and the worst in us comes to the fore at the same time. Everything in us makes itself felt, the good and the bad. We are like an undeveloped film, and a crisis is like the sun bringing out every little shade and light in our character. It is when we see ourselves that we may lose our faith. It is not that we would then cry with David, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). Would that we did that! Would that we also added, "For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou has lifted me up, and cast me down" (Psalm 102:9, 10). It is that we might then cease to think of God altogether. This is our greatest temptation, not our sin, but that the devil, obsessing us with our sin, might succeed in making us forget God and his infinite compassion.

Shall we then lose our faith in Jesus Christ because the worst in us has made itself manifest together with the best? What pride! Shall we lose our faith in Jesus Christ because our total personal truth has become crystal clear? I can only say with Paul, God forbid! I can only say with him, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:25).

Only Christians can say "Jesus Christ is Lord"

Frustration because of imperfection and sin? O yes! But thank God, Jesus Christ is without sin and he is our Lord. Only the Christian can say this. All others are just as sinful as, or they may even be much less sinful than, the Christians, but they do not have somebody to look up to who is without sin. It is not sin or sanctity that differentiates a Christian from a non-Christian; it is the Lord Jesus Christ whose mercy the poor Christian trusts. And you and I have known his power, how in the twinkling of an eye he is able to change everything and make us into a new creature. And then, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

And so faith has been tested and through God's grace it has emerged triumphant over hell and the devil, when it can say with Paul, simply, quietly, and without guile: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).

[This article is excerpted from *Christ and Crisis*, Chapter 5, by Charles Malik, and was first published in English in 1962 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. A new English edition was published by Acton Institute in 2015, with a forward by Habib Malik, son of Charles Malik. Quotations in the author's text are from the King James Version (KJV). Public domain.]

Charles Malik was a Lebanese diplomat and one of the drafters of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1949, he was one of the signers of the UN's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. A decade later, he served as president of the thirteenth session of the UN General Assembly in 1958. He held

professorships at Dartmouth, Notre Dame, Harvard, and the American University in Washington, DC. He was awarded over fifty honorary degrees in his lifetime. From 1966–1972, he served as vice president of the United Bible Societies, and from 1967–1971 he was president of the World Council on Christian Education.

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The Power of Faith

by Cyril of Jerusalem, 315-386 AD

The power of faith is enormous. It is so great that it not only saves the believer: thanks to one person's faith others are saved also.

The paralytic at Capernaum did not have faith. But the men who brought him to Jesus and let him down through the roof had it. The soul of the sick man was ill as well as his body. That is made clear in the Gospel: "And when Jesus saw their faith he said..., 'Rise, take up your pallet and go home'". The Gospel does not speak of "his" faith but of "their" faith. The stretcher-bearers believed and the paralytic had the benefit of being healed because of it. (Mark 2:1-11)

Then there is the death of Lazarus. Four days had passed. His dead body was already decomposing. How could one who had been dead for so many days believe and himself ask for the Deliverer? He could not possibly do so, but his sisters provided the faith for him. When they met the Lord, one sister fell down at his feet. He asked, "Where have you laid him?" The other sister said: "Lord, by this time there will be a bad smell". Then the Lord said, "If you believe you will see the glory of God". As if to say, "As regards faith, you must take the place of the dead man". And the faith of the sisters succeeded in calling Lazarus back from the hereafter. (John 11:1-44).

So if these two women by believing in place of the other were able to secure his resurrection, how much more certainly will you

be able to secure it for yourself by your own faith in Jesus?

Perhaps your own faith is feeble. Nevertheless, the Lord who is love will stoop down to you, provided only you are penitent and can say sincerely from the depths of your soul: "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief". (Mark 9:23).

Excerpt from *Catecheses*, 5,8ff.

If You Believe, He Who Welcomed the Thief Will Welcome You Also

by Cyril of Jerusalem, 315-386 AD

Faith is the assent of the soul to a truth. If you want to know what advantage the soul gains from it, listen to what the Lord says:

'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.' [John 5:24]

How truly great is the goodness of God to the human race!

The righteous in ancient times, in order to find favour with God, had to struggle for many years. They achieved it after having served God for long and with heroic efforts; Jesus grants it to us in an instant.

It is true. If you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Jesus on the cross on Calvary welcomed the thief to Paradise. He will welcome you also.

Excerpt from *Catecheses*, 5, 8ff.

To increase faith is to strengthen it by the Holy Spirit

by Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD)

"They ask, 'Add faith to us.' They do not ask simply for faith, for perhaps you might imagine them to be without faith. They rather ask Christ for an addition to their faith and to be strengthened in faith.

Faith partly depends on us and partly is the gift of the divine grace. The beginning of faith depends on us and our maintaining confidence and faith in God with all our power. The confirmation and strength necessary for this comes from the divine grace. For that reason, since all things are possible with God, the Lord says that all things are possible for him who believes (Mark 9:23).

The power that comes to us through faith is of God. Knowing this, blessed Paul also says in the first epistle to the Corinthians, 'For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, and to another faith in the same Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:8). You see that he has placed faith also in the catalog of spiritual graces. The disciples requested that they might receive this from the Savior, contributing also what was of themselves. By the descent upon them of the Holy Spirit, he granted it to them after the fulfillment of the dispensation. Before the resurrection, their faith was so feeble that they were liable even to the charge of being 'little of faith'."

Excerpt from *COMMENTARY ON LUKE, HOMILIES 113-16*

Prove your Faith by Your Trust

by Ambrose of Milan (337-397 AD)

'Look at the birds of the air,' says Jesus. [Luke 12:24] What a splendid example for our faith to follow!

If God's providence bestows an unfailing supply of food on the birds of the air who neither sow nor reap, we ought to realize that the reason for people's supply running short is human greed.

The fruits of the earth were given to feed all without distinction and nobody can claim any particular rights. Instead, we have lost the sense of the communion of goods, rushing to turn these goods into private property.

The birds do not know famine because they do not claim anything specially for themselves and neither do they have any envy of others.

'Consider the lilies of the field: not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass which is alive today and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe one of you!' Listen to these stupendous and uplifting words.

With this parable of flowers and grass the Lord urges us to hope that God will also be merciful to us.

Nothing is more persuasive than a glance at unthinking creatures who have received such beautiful dress from providence. Surely we should be all the more ready to believe that human beings, if they entrust themselves completely to God and free themselves of all their worries, will not lack anything.

Excerpt from *On the Gospel of St Luke, 7, 124ff.*

[English translations by Paul Drake, quoted in *Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: A Patristic Breviary, Cistercian Publications*, 1993]



Arise and Build! The Dalej Conference 2016

by Pete Coyle

It is with great hope for the future that I reflect on the events at the Dalej Conference (pronounced, *dah-lay* – a Polish call to action, meaning roughly, “*Next! / Come on! / Let’s go!*”).

Organized by [Kairos](#) in the Europe and Middle East Region of the Sword of the Spirit, Dalej brought together young people from across Europe and the world. Some 480 people of 40 nationalities gathered in H₂O

conference centre in the Polish town of Kiczyce 23-28 July. The participants at Dalej, mainly the 17-25 year-olds associated with our Kairos outreaches, came to build community, worship the Lord, and spend quality time together. (Dalej was scheduled so that people attending could go on to the World Youth Day, also held in Poland this year).

Let us arise and build”

15 months ago, a small group [of people involved in Kairos Europe] gathered in the southern town of Bielsko-Biala in Poland... to think and pray as we travelled together towards what God was planning for the DALEJ! Conference. Two themes came consistently to mind as we worked together; the need for further perseverant missionary impetus in our work in the European and Middle Eastern region, as well as a strong sense of needing to recognise the spiritual state of the church in our lands, to mourn for what had been lost and to offer ourselves as part of God’s plan for rebuilding. In prayer and consultation we came upon the words from Nehemiah 2:18 – where the people respond to the cup-bearer’s exhortation, “Dalej! Budujmy”, “Let us arise and build”. DALEJ was born...

Tadhg Lynch, Belfast, Kairos Conference Director

Arise and Build!

A highlight of Dalej was the spiritual content, given in the mornings. It focused on the Book of Nehemiah which recounts how the governor Nehemiah and a remnant of God’s people rebuilt the city of Jerusalem from ruins and re-established in it a godly way of life. These sessions showed how we are called in our own time to answer the Lord’s call to “Arise and Rebuild” – in our lives, our churches, our outreaches and communities. This call was the main theme of the week and carried on into the whole atmosphere of the

conference.

The theme was taken up again during the Thursday evening prayer meeting when Dave Quintana (“Q”), beloved worker among young people for many years in this region, issued a clarion call:

“Filled with the spirit of Nehemiah, let us rise and build, let us persevere and run our race to the end. Let us rise and build – the joy of battle awaits you, and the mantle of authority now rests upon you.... with hearts afire, minds sharpened, hands equipped, mouths unleashed, wills resolved, feet at the ready:

Live in the grip of God.
Live by the grace of God.
Live for the glory of God.
Brothers and sisters...let us rise up, and build!”

Growing Together in Unity

The theme of unity was also a highlight of the conference. I found myself profoundly inspired by the unity we experienced among us and by God’s words to us about the importance of unity.

One sign of that growing unity was the university group from Haifa in the Holy Land. For two days of the conference we were joined by 30 members of the University Christian Outreach in Haifa. It was their first participation in a region-wide events. This connection and their witness to living radical Christian lives in the face of trials was inspiring. Many of us were struck by seeing brothers and sisters from Haifa and from Lebanon being united in the Lord and sharing their lives with one another.

Also, 15 young people from a student outreach in Vienna from a student their outreach were participants at the conference. There group has been more and more involved with Kairos over the past three years. We were also honoured by a visit by the Catholic Archbishop of Haifa, Georges Bacouni, and by the presence for a few days of Jeff Fountain who had led YWAM – Youth With a Mission – for twenty years. He spoke to us about God’s work in Europe, encouraging us to join in building for the Lord.

But our unity was more than just the breaking down of ecumenical, national and cultural barriers. On a more profound level, the unity that inspired me was seeing men and women come into unity as sons and daughters of God, worshipping, serving, building community. This was present to me in an almost tangible sense – that the young men and women gathered in Poland were empowered by the Lord to draw strength and grace from one another for both the conference itself but also for the trials to come afterwards.

The pain of the disunity among the wider church was brought to the forefront on Sunday, when we attended separate church services. Tadhg Lynch, our conference director, spoke passionately about the pain and opportunity afforded to us by our division and exhorted us to be open to and embrace the unity that God calls us to.

What impacted me most during Dalej was the sense of community... with brothers and sisters from all around the world chatting, laughing, living and praying together. I tasted a bit of what heaven would be like, with all nations and peoples praising God and living in harmony together. It really reminded me of the scripture that says "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1) The Spirit of God truly united us. Yes, there were cultural and linguistic barriers, but the love of God really bridged those differences. My biggest revelation at Dalej is that His blood has bought our unity. We are family because Jesus's blood run through our veins.

Holly Leung, Koinonia, London

Prayer Together – Letting God Change Us

We had five prayer meetings during the evenings, times where the Lord was very present and active in stirring our souls. Many were convicted and inspired by the Lord's presence at these times and it was powerful to witness people dedicating their lives to the Lord for the first time as well as those who rededicated themselves. The Lord also spoke powerfully through the prophetic gifts in a variety of ways and as people prayed with one another for specific needs. The three key prophetic senses were:

A word of mourning for the state of the "walls" That we should look at the lamentable state of the civilization around us and allow the Lord to stir in us a prayerful zeal for action.

A word of readiness for warfare God instructed us not to fear if we found ourselves unprepared for the spiritual battle, but that he would supply, equip and uphold us in the battle that is already around us.

A word of unity The Lord spoke to us powerfully about his pleasure at the unity among nations and the traditions as we gathered in him. There was also a peaceful and hopeful spirit about our ecumenical call and way of living it out which touched many from single-denomination communities.

The momentum gained from such a sequence of prayer meetings helped bring us together to focus on the Lord and interact with him.

With joy we rise and answer our King's call

"So we move forward, with our eyes fixed on Him who ransomed lowly man from sin... with joy we rise and we will answer our king's call, as we cry holy, worthy, mighty is our God."

These words of a song Martin Jordan wrote for Dalej prophetically captured the heart of what God did among us: Young men and women finding their master, taking their place, and strengthening their hearts, minds and hands to follow him – waiting and ready to go when God calls us to battle. Are you ready?

Christiane Lewerentz, Belfast, Kairos Supervisor

Lasting Relationships

Another notable factor in Dalej was the relationships that were built amongst us. Though we came from such diverse backgrounds, it was uplifting to see so many young men and women sharing true community with one another. Many friendships were made or renewed that will last for generations.

Looking to the future, it is my hope that Dalej and the unity and power God distributed among us there as his disciples will be a watershed moment for our work in Europe – a moment which has a transformative impact on the spiritual landscape of this continent and the world.

[This [article](#) was originally published in the [Sword of the Spirit](#) web site.]

Pete Coyle grew up in the Community of the Risen Christ in Glasgow. He is an affiliate with the Servants of the Word and currently lives in their household in London, UK. Pete also serves in Koinonia, a Christian university student outreach in London and also with Antioch Community in London.

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Beacons of Light – Kairos Youth Gather in Malaysia 2016

by Pauline Marie Belmonte

The Lord has been busy in Asia. A hundred young people, inspired by the work of God at last year's Asia Kairos Youth Camp in Manila, gathered in Penang, Malaysia, this July for this year's camp, entitled Kairos 2016: Beacons of Light. They sought to fan the Lord's flame into a great fire.

Penang, a state which once served as the convergence of Asian and European cultures, with its hills and quiet yet urban air, and home to Covenanted for Christ Community, provided the backdrop for this year's Kairos camp – a meeting amongst youth from Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. At the four-day event, the call went out for the youth to become beacons of Christ's light, ushering forth his glory.

Living together - building brotherly relationships

The Kairos camp was built upon Prep 7 – a group of thirty young people who came for 7 days prior to the main event to receive training to serve at the camp and also to grow personally in Christ. We lived in households – a men's household and a women's household. We did house chores, went out to the poor and needy, whilst living a life of prayer, scripture meditation and Christian relationships. The men's Prep 7 built brotherhood through service and responding to God's mission to the Sword of Spirit. At the place where the men's household was living, the brothers helped out with serving the homeless and also helped with preparations for the upcoming camp. Meanwhile, the women's household meditated on Christ's "I Am" statements in scripture, and their activities included outreaches to children and spending time with the sisters in the community.



For participant JM Tallas, a Filipino living in Singapore, it was an extraordinary time of building brotherly relationships with guys whom, despite his having just met, he felt he had lived with for years. Sam Rentap, a brother from Malaysia, found household a way of growing in confidence to praise and worship God, encouraged by the presence of his brothers in the household who were unabashedly doing so. For Janica Javier of the Philippines, the household experience stretched her abilities to love and serve God and others as she was constantly challenged to do more and more – to look beyond her own abilities and look to God’s grace for her.



The two households with over 30 young men and women made a significant impact on the participants. Decisions were made to live out a regular prayer life, be witnesses to the faith, and to be simply extraordinary disciples of Christ. The households were not only memorable for those who participated but memorable for hosting Covenanted for Christ Community, as the households were the first of their kind in Penang. And the households received generosity and hospitality from the community, who welcomed them at the Lord’s Day celebration and joined them in fellowship.

Kairos Camp - disciples in training

The venue for the main Kairos camp, after Prep 7, was at St Anne’s Church, in Penang. One hundred participants gathered there: some of them had travelled the previous night from Singapore and from all over the Philippines. Some even came from Sabah, a province of Malaysia near Borneo, and some participants

came from the U.S. The event served as an intersection of people from different cultures and backgrounds.

The days began with a times of prayer, worship and scripture meditation, followed by inspiring input from Raoul Roncal and Jake Yap who have been for many years closely involved in serving the youth of Asia. They are members of a brotherhood of celibate men, the Servants of the Word, and are also part of the region's largest Sword of the Spirit community in Asia, [Ligaya ng Panginoon](#), in Manila. Their presentations focused on training men and women in skills to defend the faith and to share Christ with others. There were sessions in the afternoon to help equip leaders.

And of course, the camp wouldn't be complete without letting out youthful energy in amazing races and competitions, and unleashing the creative juices in entertainment nights and music nights. Playing the entertaining games and concocting the imaginative performances were times for the participants to relax and to build relationships with one another.



Beacons of light to overcome spiritual darkness

Raoul spoke on being a beacon – that there is a need to gather the light, for a lighthouse without a light is essentially pointless. He pointed to the unsettling darkness in our world which we can see in secularism, relativism, and atheism. He exhorted us to overcome “spiritual blindness” that has been caused by this darkness.

Jake reminded us that light shines in the darkness, “Light springs up in the midst of despair.” This light springs from God who sent his Son to overcome this darkness and, as St. John writes in the first chapter of his Gospel, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” So, the question for those at the camp was this: “Have I chosen the light?” We were exhorted by Raoul that all have been called and been given a choice to be bearers of Christ's light into the world. While there is a joy in standing as beacons of light, there is also the challenge of feeling different, rejected and unworthy when one ventures to share and defend the light.

However, despite this seemingly immense cost, Jake explained that the cause of being a beacon of Christ's light far outweighs the cost. He shared the image of a lighthouse that in its role of lighting the way for ships it is not spared the onslaught of incoming ocean waves. Only because of its strong foundation can the lighthouse endure the storm. Jake invited us to be beacons of light against the darkness, and strongly founded on Christ.

The call to choose for Christ

“To be beacons of light for a cause far outweighing the cost.” This was the call, and it was in need of a response. The young people rose to this call in a powerful time of prayer and worship after the Saturday evening celebration of the opening of the Lord's Day. As the appointed time came to respond to the call,

people slowly began to kneel and raise their hands in awe of the mighty God who called them. Many young men and women had vivid personal encounters with God that night. This time proved be a highlight for many of the attendees.

As each person committed or recommitted himself or herself to Christ, we were encouraged to go around to pray for our brothers and sisters. The session hall filled with prayers, lifting up to God their new commitment, chosen ministries, and individual concerns. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit was at work. Josh Miranda of the US said that these prayers allowed him to open up to God's love and set aside inhibitions he had felt before. Denise Choon of Malaysia was struck by how God can use anyone to pray for her.

More confident faith

"Be a beacon of light and shine." That was the challenge posed by Avi Leong from the Philippines at the camp's closing gathering. The challenge was to shine – stand firm, listen to the Lord's command, initiate, never back down, and be excellent. And with this war cry, Kairos 2016 concluded with powerful and confident worship.

This Kairos Camp 2016 in Asia saw the Holy Spirit forming and building up the youth to a more confident faith. Monica Pontejos of the Philippines shared that by the example of the brothers and sisters who were brave in living out their faith, she was encouraged to a more radical expression of her own faith. Adelene, who is from Malaysia, was reaffirmed in her identity as God's daughter and her shared mission to shine Christ's light.

God has put a desire in each person to take a step forward in their commitment to him. One of the radical responses of the youth of the local host community is a commitment to start a youth outreach in Penang, to be called Christ's Youth in Action.

God is doing tremendous work with his youth in Asia. He never ceases to amaze. Kairos 2016: Beacons of Light is but one of those events that give testimony to this. And with every spirit-filled encounter between the Lord and his young people, he invites them to a deeper commitment to himself and to do greater things for him.

With God, something great and awesome is always brewing. How will the youth of Asia and the world respond next?

[This [article](#) was originally published in the [Sword of the Spirit](#) web site.]

Pauline Marie Belmonte recently graduated from university. She served as part of the core group who led the women's Prep 7. Photos: Pauline Belmonte, Kaina Sitoy, Michael Cheong, Ian Ling.

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The Gap Year That God Chose for Me

by Alina María García

"I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land (Ezekiel 22:30)."

It fills my heart with joy to have the honor of sharing what God has been doing in my life through the gap program. I'm 23 years old. I was born into community life and I'm convinced that God did it that way because he has a perfect plan for my life. My home community is Verbum Dei in Mexicali, Mexico.

In this adventure of discovering God's will for my life, the Lord invited me to experience a gap year. So, here I am Lord. I decided to give one year of my life to God, from January until December of 2016.

While at the Kairos conference in Costa Rica in 2015, the Lord kindled in me a desire to give him this time. It was during a talk by David Mijares – I don't remember the title of the talk, but I recall that he kept speaking about the importance of commitment, decision and sacrifice in a quest for discipleship. I remember perfectly what I felt in my heart: I knew it was my chance to respond to the Lord in a way that I never imagined I would. At the time I had one semester left before graduating from university, so I had little time to prepare financially and academically. But God opened up doors for me, and that was the confirmation that it was really his will that I should go.

I wasn't expecting to be sent to any particular community, I was open to anything that God wanted from me. I really love working with teenagers so I wanted to work with them, but at the start of the Gap year I found out I would mostly be serving with a university outreach, and only a little of my time with teenagers.

In Latin America, gappers spend their first month together in training and we also take a retreat in which we learn much about prayer and spirituality. After that I was asked to spend the first three months of my gap year at the gap regional center in Monterrey, Mexico. There I lived for two months at the Jerusalem House with two celibate women from Bethany Association and with fellow sisters of the gap program. After that we opened a new women's house, and I moved there for another month.

The new house, living with several other women proved to be a challenge for me. It was during this time that I discovered what a blessing it was to have grown up in my house with my mother and three other sisters, for now I could implement what I knew in this new environment.



After these months, in April 2016, I was invited to serve in Holy Family Community in Veracruz, Mexico. I knew from the start that this would happen, but I did not imagine how different it would be for me or what God was planning for me in this new stage of my gap year. It's normal to spend a few months in Monterrey, Mexico, where the gap center is, and then to move to another city. Certainly, when you live with others who experience the same as you and whom you can spend time with, you hardly ever feel lonely, but now in Veracruz I have been the only gapper, and I think that is the most difficult and challenging part about the change for me.

People go to work, the young go to school, and you seem to be the only who has "free time," so you find yourself in the company of God most of the time.

Definitely, a lot has changed in my life and my heart during these months – mainly in my desire for a prayer life. I don't see it as a duty anymore, instead it has become a necessity. It has taken on an essential value in my daily life. My prayer time is now my time with God, my opportunity to be in his presence, the chance to grow in nearness to him. And through prayer God has revealed things about myself that I didn't know were there, I have learned to face my own fears and my comforts. The Lord has invited me to fully trust in him. This adventure has been a great experience of love and trust, and as God is always here for me, times of solitude have become golden moments. During this time I have also had the wonderful opportunity to discern my vocation – whether to be single or married – and the Lord took this chance I gave him to show me many things and also to confirm my call to community life.

When you're a gapper humility becomes your ally. Without it, things are much more difficult in your daily life, especially in your service, because you have a different training experience than many of those with

whom you serve. You're still a servant like those who are not gappers, and you have leaders, and you must be submissive as Jesus was to his Father.

Something very beautiful about serving in other communities is that you meet many people and you can serve with them in the same way you work with someone in your home community, since we live by exactly the same ideals and values.

I still have a few months left of my Gap year, and I'm really not sure of what will happen when I get back to my city, my home, my family and my community. I have asked the Lord to give me a good job that gives me enough time to continue serving in my community. I would also like to study for a different career than electronics engineer, which is what my degree is in, a career that will be more useful in God's service. I don't know with whom or when I'll get married, but I want to do God's will during the next stage of my life and I'm sure the Gap year has been an investment in building his kingdom. I am seeking to do God's will.

[This [article](#) was originally published in the [Sword of the Spirit](#) web site.]

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Kairos Dalej 2016 - a video presentation (c) by Valerie Angeles and One Touch Production of Ligaya Community

Kairos Dalej Conference 2016 - Arise and Build!

a video presentation produced by Valerie Angeles

Organized by [Kairos](#) in the Europe and Middle East Region of the Sword of the Spirit, Dalej brought together young people from across Europe and the world. Some 480 people of 40 nationalities gathered in H20 conference centre in the Polish town of Kiczycze 23-28 July. The participants at Dalej, mainly the 17-25 year-olds associated with our [Kairos](#) outreaches, came to build community, worship the Lord, and spend quality time together. (Dalej was scheduled so that people attending could go on to the World Youth Day, also held in Poland this year).

> See related article, [Arise and Build! – Dalej Conference](#), A report on the Kairos International Gathering in Poland 2016, by Pete Coyle

video presentation (c) by Valerie Angeles and One Touch Production of Ligaya Community is available on [YouTube](#) at: <https://youtu.be/31FIB0zPAec>

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

October/November 2016 - Vol. 88

a video presentation on the ecumenical call and mission as the Sword of the Spirit - October 2016

The Beauty of Our Call to Ecumenism in Sword of the Spirit

a video spotlight narrated by John Keating
and introduction by Dave Hughes

The Sword of the Spirit is a growing network of more than 75 lay Christian communities around the world that have a common vision, way of life, and spiritual culture. Recent estimates put the numbers of those involved at around 9,000 people worldwide. We sometimes describe ourselves as a “**community of communities.**” Each community within the Sword of the Spirit is self-governing, but receives help in living out its life as a community from the sharing of resources with other communities around the world.

The Sword of the Spirit has a **strong common culture** that transcends our international differences. As a result, when members of different communities get together, even though they may be from different parts of the world, there is a very strong sense that we are part of the same international community of communities. One of the expressions of our common way of life is our [celebration of the opening of the Lord's Day](#) – the opening of Sunday – on Saturday evening with prayers and a festive meal. The hallmarks of these times are joy and thanksgiving.

The Sword of the Spirit is **ecumenical**. Some of our communities are ecumenical in their make-up, with members who belong to various churches – Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox. Other communities are all one denomination. But the call of all our communities is to foster the unity of all Christians. While recognizing our differences, we look to see how we can share in the riches of one another's Christian traditions and work together for Christ.

Our Ecumenical Call

We believe that God has called us together from many Christian traditions and churches to be a living testimony today to God's purpose for his people of “uniting all things in heaven and on earth” in his Son Jesus Christ (Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 1:10). We live as brothers and sisters united in a common commitment and a common way of life which allows us to support one another in living a zealous, disciplined life in Christ, and at the same time to respect those differences among us which reflect our various church backgrounds and Christian commitments.

We believe that we can discern in this time in history a great working of the Holy Spirit to draw together the Christian people in a mutual recognition of their common “sonship” in Christ, a recognition which can form a solid foundation from which to deal with the many important questions which still divide the Christian people.

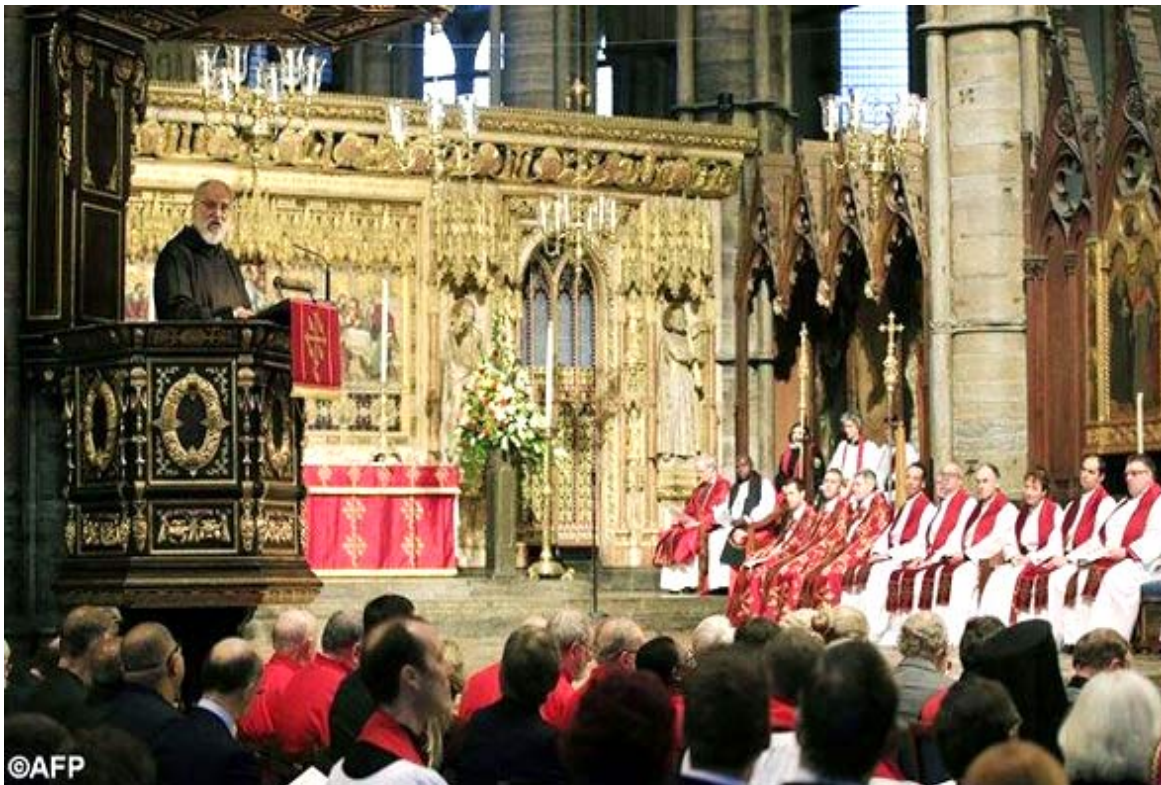
We believe that the Lord desires to overcome the divisions among the Christian people (Gospel of John 17:22-23). We therefore join ourselves to one another as brothers and sisters both as a response to the way God has worked among us and in the belief that it furthers the Lord's work of unity and contributes to the life of the various churches and the Christian people as a whole. We do

so humbly, recognizing that our efforts are only a small part of what God is doing in the world today.

John Keating is Vice President of the Sword of the Spirit and an Elder in the Servants of the Word, an ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord in Sword of the Spirit.

Dave Hughes is Chairman of the Ecumenical Commission of the Sword of the Spirit. He is also the Senior Coordinator of Word of Life Community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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“Rebuild My House” (Haggai 1:1-8)

by Father Raniero Cantalamessa

Father Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, delivered a sermon to the General Synod of the Church of England on November 24, 2015 in Westminster Abbey during a service to mark the inauguration of the 10th five-year-term of the Church of England's General Synod.

The Word of God remains forever alive

Few prophetic oracles in the Old Testament can be dated so precisely as that of Haggai, which we have just heard in the first reading. We can place it between August and December in the year 520 BC. The exiles, after the deportation to Babylon, have come back to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. They set to work, but soon grow discouraged, each preferring to work on his own house instead. Into this situation comes the prophet Haggai, sent by God with the message we have heard [reading from Haggai 1:1-8].

The Word of God, once it is proclaimed, remains forever alive; it transcends situations and centuries, each time casting new light. The situation deplored by the prophet is renewed in history each time we are so absorbed in the problems and interests of our own parish, diocese, community – and even of our particular Christian denomination - that we lose sight of the one house of God, which is the Church.

The prophecy of Haggai begins with a reproof, but ends, as we heard, with an exhortation and a grandiose promise: “Go up into the hills, fetch timber and rebuild the House, and I shall take pleasure in it and manifest my glory there” - says the Lord” (Haggai 1:8).

Fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation

One circumstance makes this point particularly relevant. The Christian world is preparing to celebrate the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation. It is vital for the whole Church that this opportunity is not wasted by people remaining prisoners of the past, trying to establish each other's rights and wrongs. Rather, let us take a qualitative leap forward, like what happens when the sluice gates of a river or a canal enable ships to continue to navigate at a higher water level.

The situation has dramatically changed since then. We need to start again with the person of Jesus, humbly helping our contemporaries to experience a personal encounter with Him. "All things were created through him and for him"; Christ is the light of the world, the one who gives meaning and hope to every human life – and the majority of people around us live and die as if He had never existed! How can we be unconcerned, and each remain "in the comfort of our own panelled houses"? We should never allow a moral issue like that of sexuality divide us more than love for Jesus Christ unites us.

"We preach Christ crucified"

We need to go back to the time of the Apostles: they faced a pre-Christian world, and we are facing a largely post-Christian world. When Paul wants to summarise the essence of the Christian message in one sentence, he does not say, "I proclaim this or that doctrine to you." He says, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), and "We preach . . . Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4:5). This is the real "articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae", the article by which the Church stands or falls.

This does not mean ignoring the great theological and spiritual enrichment that came from the Reformation or desiring to go back to the time before it. It means instead allowing all of Christianity to benefit from its achievements, once they are freed from certain distortions due to the heated atmosphere of the time and of later controversies.

Justification by faith versus self-justification!

Justification by faith, for example, ought to be preached by the whole Church—and with more vigour than ever. Not in opposition to good works – the issue is already settled - but rather in opposition to the claim of people today that they can save themselves thanks to their science, technology or their man-made spirituality, without the need for a redeemer coming from outside humanity. Self-justification! I am convinced that if they were alive today this is the way Martin Luther and Thomas Cranmer would preach justification through faith!

Unity is not a simple matter. One has to start with the big Churches, those that are well structured, putting together that which unites them, which is vastly more important than what divides them; not imposing uniformity but aiming at what pope Francis calls "reconciled diversities". Nothing is more important than to fulfill Christ's heart desire for unity expressed in today's gospel. In many parts of the world people are killed and churches burned not because they are Catholic, or Anglican, or Pentecostals, but because they are Christians. In their eyes we are already one! Let us be one also in our eyes and in the eyes of God.

The Anglican Church has a special role in all of this. It has often defined itself as a "via media" (a Middle Way) between Roman Catholicism and Reformed Christianity. From being a "via media" in a static sense, it must now become more and more a via media in a dynamic sense, exercising an active function as a bridge between the Churches. The presence among you of a priest of the Catholic Church, in circumstances of such special significance, is a sign that something of the kind is already happening.

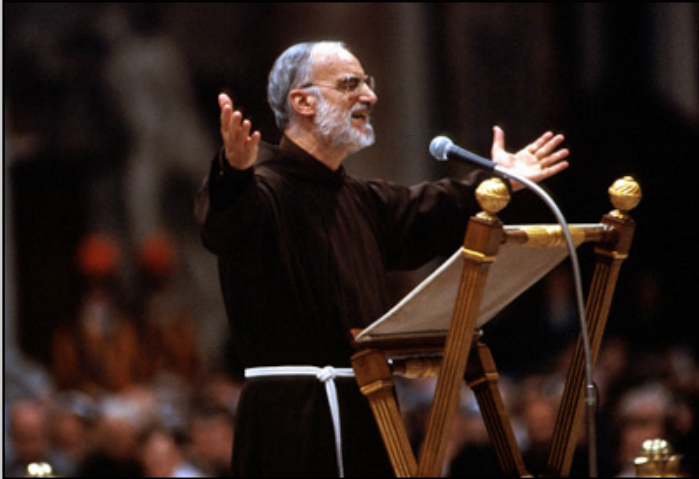
Take courage now – the Lord is with you

Let us conclude by returning to the text of Haggai. After the people of Israel, in obedience to the prophet's invitation, had returned with renewed fervour to the task of rebuilding the temple, God sent His prophet again, this time with a message full of hope and consolation:

"But take courage now, Zerubbabel – it is the Lord who speaks, courage, Joshua, son of

Jehozadak, high priest; courage, all you people of the country – it is the Lord who speaks. To work! I am with you, the Lord of hosts declares; and my Spirit is present among you. Do not be afraid!” (Haggai 2, 4-5).

Zerubbabel was the political leader at the time, and Joshua the religious leader. I believe that the Lord wanted me to be among you today, above all to tell you that He is addressing this same message to you, at the inauguration of your Synod and also in view of the meeting planned for next January between the leaders of the entire Anglican communion: “Take courage, Your Majesty, Sovereign of this nation, courage, Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury, courage Sentamu, Archbishop of York, courage, you bishops, clergy and laity of the Church of England! To work, because I am with you. Says the Lord!”



Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M. Cap. (born July 22, 1934) is an Italian Catholic priest in the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. He has devoted his ministry to preaching and writing. He is a Scripture scholar, theologian, and noted author of numerous books. Since 1980 he has served as the Preacher to the Papal Household under Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. He is a noted ecumenist and frequent worldwide speaker, and a member of the Catholic Delegation for the Dialogue with the Pentecostal Churches.

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Common Witness from the official Lutheran – Catholic worldwide ecumenical dialogue

From Conflict to Communion:

Lutheran – Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017

This coming year presents a unique opportunity for Christians to participate in an Ecumenical Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. A number of Churches are planning to hold ecumenical services for common prayer for renewal and reconciliation and a common witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ who is the center of their common faith, and a commitment to continue the journey to unity.

In 2017, Lutherans and Catholics will jointly look back on the events of the Reformation 500 years ago. At the same time, they will also reflect on 50 years of official ecumenical dialogue on the worldwide level. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has prepared a joint report, entitled: *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. [link to full text below] - editor

A selection of excerpts from three sections of their report are provided here as an introduction to the results of their official ecumenical dialogue and joint agreement:

- [Forward: Centrality of the Gospel and need for ongoing repentance and reform](#)
- [Justification: A Summary of Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue and Joint Agreement](#)
- [Common Prayers for the Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation](#)

Forward: Centrality of the Gospel

Martin Luther's struggle with God drove and defined his whole life. The question, *How can I find a gracious God?* plagued him constantly. He found the gracious God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. »True theology and the knowledge of God are in the crucified Christ« (*Heidelberg Disputation*).

In 2017, Catholic and Lutheran Christians will most fittingly look back on events that occurred 500 years earlier by putting the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center. The gospel should be celebrated and communicated to the people of our time so that the world may believe that God gives Himself to human beings and calls us into communion with Himself and His church. Herein lies the basis for our joy in our common faith.

To this joy also belongs a discerning, self-critical look at ourselves, not only in our history, but also today. We Christians have certainly not always been faithful to the gospel; all too often we have conformed ourselves to the thought and behavioral patterns of the surrounding world. Repeatedly, we have stood in the way of the good news of the mercy of God.

Repentance and reform led by the Spirit

Both as individuals and as a community of believers, we all constantly require repentance and reform – encouraged and led by the Holy Spirit. »When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ›Repent,‹ He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.« Thus reads the opening statement of Luther's 95 Theses from 1517, which triggered the Reformation movement.

Although this thesis is anything but self-evident today, we Lutheran and Catholic Christians want to take it seriously by directing our critical glance first at ourselves and not at each other. We take as our guiding rule the doctrine of justification, which expresses the message of the gospel and therefore »constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ« (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*).

The true unity of the church can only exist as unity in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The fact that the struggle for this truth in the sixteenth century led to the loss of unity in Western Christendom belongs to the dark pages of church history. In 2017, we must confess openly that we have been guilty before Christ of damaging the unity of the church. This commemorative year presents us with two challenges: the purification and healing of memories, and the restoration of Christian unity in accordance with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:4–6).

The following texts describes a way » from conflict to communion« – a way whose goal we have not yet reached. Nevertheless, the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has taken seriously the words of Pope John XXIII,

»The things that unite us are greater than those that divide us.«

We invite all Christians to study the report of our Commission both open-mindedly and critically, and to come with us along the way to a deeper communion of all Christians.

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Introduction

1. In 2017, Lutheran and Catholic Christians will commemorate together the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. Lutherans and Catholics today enjoy a growth in mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect. They have come to acknowledge that more unites than divides them: above all, common faith in the Triune God and the revelation in Jesus Christ, as well as recognition of the basic truths of the doctrine of justification.

2. Already the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980 offered both Lutherans and Catholics the opportunity to develop a common understanding of the foundational truths of the faith by pointing to Jesus Christ as the living center of our Christian faith.¹ On the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth in 1983, the international dialogue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans jointly affirmed a number of Luther's essential concerns. The Commission's report designated him »Witness to Jesus Christ« and declared, »Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, cannot disregard the person and the message of this man.«²

3. The upcoming year of 2017 challenges Catholics and Lutherans to discuss in dialogue the issues and consequences of the Wittenberg Reformation, which centered on the person and thought of Martin Luther, and to develop perspectives for the remembrance and appropriation of the Reformation today. Luther's reforming agenda poses a spiritual and theological challenge for both contemporary Catholics and Lutherans.

Notes:

1 Roman Catholic / Lutheran Joint Commission, »All Under One Christ: Statement on the Augsburg Confession 1980,« in Harding Meyer and Lucas Visser (eds), *Growth in Agreement I: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1972–1982* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 241–47.

2 Roman Catholic / Lutheran Joint Commission, »Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ« I.1, in Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch (eds), *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 438.

Justification - A Summary of Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue and Joint Agreement

Luther's understanding of justification

102. Luther gained one of his basic Reformation insights from reflecting on the sacrament of penance, especially in relation to Matthew 16:19. In his late medieval education, he was trained to understand that God would forgive a person who was contrite for his or her sin by performing an act of loving God above all things, to which God would respond according to God's covenant (*pactum*) by granting anew God's grace

and forgiveness (*facienti quod in se est deus non denegat gratiam*),³⁶ so that the priest could only declare that God had already forgiven the penitent's sin. Luther concluded that Matthew 16 said just the opposite, namely that the priest declared the penitent righteous, and by this act on behalf of God, the sinner actually became righteous.

Word of God as promise

103. Luther understood the words of God as words that create what they say and as having the character of promise (*promissio*). Such a word of promise is said in a particular place and time, by a particular person, and is directed to a particular person. A divine promise is directed toward a person's faith. Faith in turn grasps what is promised as promised to the believer personally. Luther insisted that such faith is the only appropriate response to a word of divine promise. A human being is called to look away from him or herself and to look only at the word of God's promise and trust fully in it. Since faith grounds us in Christ's promise, it grants the believer full assurance of salvation. Not to trust in this word would make God a liar or one on whose word one could not ultimately rely. Thus, in Luther's view, unbelief is the greatest sin against God.

104. In addition to structuring the dynamic between God and the penitent within the sacrament of penance, the relationship of promise and trust also shapes the relationship between God and human beings in the proclamation of the Word. God wishes to deal with human beings by giving them words of promise – sacraments are also such

words of promise – that show God's saving will towards them. Human beings, on the other hand, should deal with God only by trusting in his promises. Faith is totally dependent on God's promises; it cannot create the object in which human beings put their trust.

105. Nevertheless, trusting God's promise is not a matter of human decision; rather, the Holy Spirit reveals this promise as trustworthy and thus creates faith in a person. Divine promise and human belief in that promise belong together. Both aspects need to be stressed, the »objectivity« of the promise and the »subjectivity« of faith. According to Luther, God not only reveals divine realities as information with which the intellect must agree; God's revelation also always has a soteriological purpose directed towards the faith and salvation of believers who receive the promises that God gives »for you« as words of God »for me« or »for us« (*pro me, pro nobis*).

106. God's own initiative establishes a saving relation to the human being; thus salvation happens by grace. The gift of grace can only be received, and since this gift is mediated by a divine promise, it cannot be received except by faith, and not by works. Salvation takes place by grace alone. Nevertheless, Luther constantly emphasized that the justified person would do good works in the Spirit.

By Christ alone

107. God's love for human beings is centered, rooted, and embodied in Jesus Christ. Thus, »by grace alone« is always to be explained by »by Christ alone.« Luther describes the relationship of human persons with Christ by using the image of a spiritual marriage. The soul is the bride; Christ is the bridegroom; faith is the wedding ring. According to the laws of marriage, the properties of the bridegroom (righteousness) become the properties of the bride, and the properties of the bride (sin) become the properties of the bridegroom. This »joyful exchange« is the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

108. The image shows that something external, namely Christ's righteousness, becomes something internal. It becomes the property of the soul, but only in union with Christ through trust in his promises, not in separation from him. Luther insists that our righteousness is totally external because it is Christ's righteousness, but it has to become totally internal by faith in Christ. Only if both sides are equally emphasized is the reality of salvation properly understood. Luther states, »It is precisely in faith that Christ is present.«³⁷ Christ is »for us« (*pro nobis*) and in us (*in nobis*), and we are in Christ (*in Christo*).

Significance of the law

109. Luther also perceived human reality, with respect to the law in its theological or spiritual meaning, from the perspective of what God requires from us. Jesus expresses God's will by saying, »You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind« (Matthew 22:37). That means that God's commandments are fulfilled only by total dedication to God. This includes not only the will and the corresponding outward actions, but also all aspects of the human soul and heart such as emotions, longing, and human striving, that is, those aspects and movements of the soul either not under the control of the will or only indirectly and partially under the control of the will through the virtues.

110. In the legal and moral spheres, there exists an old rule, intuitively evident, that nobody can be obliged to do more than he or she is able to do (*ultra posse nemo obligatur*). Thus, in the Middle Ages, many theologians were convinced that this commandment to love God must be limited to the will. According to this understanding, the commandment to love God does not require that all motions of the soul should be directed and dedicated to God. Rather, it would be enough that the will loves (i. e., wills) God above all (*diligere deum super omnia*).

111. Luther argued, however, that there is a difference between a legal and a moral understanding of the law, on the one hand, and a theological understanding of it, on the other. God has not adapted God's commandments to the conditions of the fallen human being. Instead, theologically understood, the commandment to love God shows the situation and the misery of human beings. As Luther wrote in the »Disputation against Scholastic Theology,« »Spiritually that person [only] does not kill, does not do evil, does not become enraged when he neither becomes angry nor lusts.«³⁸ In this respect, divine law is not primarily fulfilled by external actions or acts or the will but by the wholehearted dedication of the whole person to the will of God.

Participation in Christ's righteousness

112. Luther's position, that God requires wholehearted dedication in fulfilling God's law, explains why Luther emphasized so strongly that we totally depend on Christ's righteousness. Christ is the only person who totally fulfilled God's will, and all other human beings can only become righteous in a strict, i. e., theological sense, if we

participate in Christ's righteousness. Thus, our righteousness is external insofar as it is Christ's righteousness, but it must become our righteousness, that is, internal, by faith in Christ's promise. Only by participation in Christ's wholehearted dedication to God can we become wholly righteous.

113. Since the gospel promises us, »Here is Christ and his Spirit,« participation in Christ's righteousness is never realized without being under the power of the Holy Spirit who renews us. Thus, becoming righteous and being renewed are intimately and inseparably connected. Luther did not criticize fellow theologians such as Gabriel Biel for too strong an emphasis on the transforming power of grace; on the contrary, he objected that they did not emphasize it strongly enough as being fundamental to any real change in the believer.

Law and gospel

114. According to Luther, this renewal will never come to fulfillment as long as we live. Therefore, another model of explaining human salvation, taken from the Apostle Paul, became important for Luther. In Romans 4:3, Paul refers to Abraham in Genesis 15:6 (»Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness«) and concludes, »To one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness« (Romans 4:5).

115. This text from Romans incorporates the forensic imagery of someone in a courtroom being declared righteous. If God declares someone righteous, this changes his or her situation and creates a new reality. God's judgment does not remain »outside« the human being. Luther often uses this Pauline model in order to emphasize that the whole person is accepted by God and saved, even though the process of the inner renewal of the justified into a person wholly dedicated to God will not come to an end in this earthly life.

116. As believers who are in the process of being renewed by the Holy Spirit, we still do not completely fulfill the divine commandment to love God wholeheartedly and do not meet God's demand. Thus the law will accuse us and identify us as sinners. With respect to the law, theologically understood, we believe that we are still sinners. But, with respect to the gospel that promises us »Here is Christ's righteousness,« we are righteous and justified since we believe in the gospel's promise. This is Luther's understanding of the Christian believer who is at the same time justified and yet a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*).

117. This is no contradiction since we must distinguish two relations of the believer to the Word of God: the relation to the Word of God as the law of God insofar as it judges the sinner, and the relation to the Word of God as the gospel of God insofar as Christ redeems. With respect to the first relation we are sinners; with respect to the second relation we are righteous and justified. This latter is the predominant relationship. That means that Christ involves us in a process of continuous renewal as we trust in his promise that we are eternally saved.

118. This is why Luther emphasized the freedom of a Christian so strongly: the freedom of being accepted by God by grace alone and by faith alone in Christ's promises, the freedom from the accusation of the law by the forgiveness of sins, and the freedom to serve one's neighbor spontaneously without seeking merits in doing so. The justified person is, of course, obligated to fulfill God's commandments, and will do so under the motivation of the Holy Spirit. As Luther declared in the Small Catechism: »We are to fear and love God, so that we . . .,« after which follow his explanations of the Ten Commandments.³⁹

Catholic concerns regarding justification

119. Even in the sixteenth century, there was a significant convergence between Lutheran and Catholic positions concerning the need for God's mercy and humans' inability to attain salvation by their own efforts. The Council of Trent clearly taught that the sinner cannot be justified either by the law or by human effort, anathematizing anyone who said that »man can be justified before God by his own works which are done either by his own natural powers, or through the teaching of the Law, and without divine grace through Christ Jesus.«⁴⁰

120. Catholics, however, had found some of Luther's positions troubling. Some of Luther's language caused Catholics to worry whether he denied personal responsibility for one's actions. This explains why the Council of Trent emphasized the human person's responsibility and capacity to cooperate with God's grace. Catholics stressed that the justified should be involved in the unfolding of grace in their lives. Thus, for the justified, human efforts contribute to a more intense growth in grace and communion with God.

121. Furthermore, according to the Catholic reading, Luther's doctrine of »forensic imputation« seemed to deny the creative power of God's grace to overcome sin and transform the justified. Catholics wished to emphasize not only the forgiveness of sins but also the sanctification of the sinner. Thus, in sanctification the Christian receives that »justice of God« whereby God makes us just.

Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue on justification

122. Luther and the other reformers understood the doctrine of the justification of sinners as the »first and chief article,«⁴¹ the »guide and judge over all parts of Christian doctrine.«⁴² That is why a division on this point was so grave and the work to overcome this division became a matter of highest priority for Catholic–Lutheran relations. In the second half of the twentieth century, this controversy was the subject of extensive investigations by individual theologians and a number of national and international dialogues.

123. The results of these investigations and dialogues are summarized in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* and were, in 1999, officially received by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. The following account is based on this Declaration, which offers a differentiating consensus comprised of common statements along with different emphases of each side, with the claim that these differences do not invalidate the commonalities. It is thus a consensus that does not eliminate differences, but rather explicitly includes them.

By grace alone

124. Together Catholics and Lutherans confess: »By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works« (*JDDJ 15*). The phrase »by grace alone« is further explained in this way: »the message of justification ... tells us that as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way« (*JDDJ 17*).⁴³

125. It is within this framework that the limits and the dignity of human freedom can be identified. The phrase »by grace alone,« in regard to a human being's movement toward salvation, is interpreted in this way: »We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation« (*JDDJ 19*).

126. When Lutherans insist that a person can only receive justification, they mean, however, thereby »to exclude any possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God's Word« (*JDDJ 21*).

127. When Catholics speak of preparation for grace in terms of »cooperation,« they mean thereby a »personal consent« of the human being that is »itself an effect of grace, not an action arising from innate human abilities« (*JDDJ 20*). Thus, they do not invalidate the common expression that sinners are »incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace« (*JDDJ 19*).

128. Since faith is understood not only as affirmative knowledge, but also as the trust of the heart that bases itself on the Word of God, it can further be said jointly: »Justification takes place ›by grace alone‹ (*JD nos 15 and 16*), by faith alone; the person is justified ›apart from works‹ (Romans 3:28, cf. *JD no. 25*)« (*JDDJ, Annex 2C*).⁴⁴

129. What was often torn apart and attributed to one or the other confession but not to both is now understood in an organic coherence: »When persons come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love. These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated« (*JDDJ 22*).

Faith and good works

130. It is important that Lutherans and Catholics have a common view of how the coherence of faith and works is seen: believers »place their trust in God's gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him. Such a faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without works (*JDDJ 25*).« Therefore, Lutherans also confess

the creative power of God's grace which »affects all dimensions of the person and leads to a life in hope and love« (JDDJ 26). »Justification by faith alone« and »renewal« must be distinguished but not separated.

131. At the same time, »whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it« (JDDJ 25). That is why the creative effect Catholics attribute to justifying grace is not meant to be a quality without relation to God, or a »human possession to which one could appeal over against God« (JDDJ 27). Rather, this view takes into account that within the new relationship with God the righteous are transformed and made children of God who live in new communion with Christ: »This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God's graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of the gracious God, who remains true to himself, so that one can rely upon him« (JDDJ 27).

132. To the question of good works, Catholics and Lutherans state together: »We also confess that God's commandments retain their validity for the justified« (JDDJ 31). Jesus himself, as well as the apostolic Scriptures, »admonish[es] Christians to bring forth the works of love« which »follow justification and are its fruits« (JDDJ 37). So that the binding claim of the commandments might not be misunderstood, it is said: »When Catholics emphasize that the righteous are bound to observe God's commandments, they do not thereby deny that through Jesus Christ God has mercifully promised to his children the grace of eternal life« (JDDJ 33).

133. Both Lutherans and Catholics can recognize the value of good works in view of a deepening of the communion with Christ (cf. JDDJ 38f.), even if Lutherans emphasize that righteousness, as acceptance by God and sharing in the righteousness of Christ, is always complete. The controversial concept of merit is explained thus: »When Catholics affirm the »meritorious« character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace« (JDDJ 38).

134. To the much discussed question of the cooperation of human beings, a quotation from the Lutheran Confessions is taken in the Appendix to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* as a common position in the most remarkable way: »The working of God's grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive (cf. Philippians 2:12 ff.). »As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit . . .«⁴⁵

Simul iustus et peccator

135. In the debate over the differences in saying that a Christian is »simultaneously justified and a sinner,« it was shown that each side does not understand exactly the same thing by the words »sin,« »concupiscence,« and »righteousness.« It is necessary to concentrate not only on the formulation but also on the content in order to arrive at a consensus. With Romans 6:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, Catholics and Lutherans say that, in Christians, sin must not and should not reign. They further declare with 1 John 1:8–10 that Christians are not without sin. They speak of the »contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam« also in the justified, which makes a »lifelong struggle« against it necessary (JDDJ 28).

136. This tendency does not correspond to »God's original design for humanity,« and it is »objectively in contradiction to God« (JDDJ 30), as Catholics say. Because, for them, sin has the character of an act, Catholics do not speak here of sin, while Lutherans see in this God-contradicting tendency a refusal to give oneself wholly to God and therefore call it sin. But both emphasize that this God-contradicting tendency does not divide the justified from God.

137. Under the presuppositions of his own theological system and after studying Luther's writings, Cardinal Cajetan concluded, that Luther's understanding of the assurance of faith implied establishing a new church. Catholic–Lutheran dialogue has identified the different thought forms of Cajetan and Luther that led to their mutual misunderstanding. Today, it can be said: »Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ's promise, to look away from one's own experience, and to trust in Christ's forgiving word alone (cf. Matthew 16:19; 18:18)« (JDDJ 36).

138. Lutherans and Catholics have each condemned the other confession's teachings. Therefore, the differentiating consensus as represented in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* contains a double aspect. On the one hand, the Declaration

claims that the mutual rejections of Catholic and Lutheran teaching as depicted there do not apply to the other confession. On the other, the Declaration positively affirms a consensus in the basic truths of the doctrine of justification: »The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics« (*JDDJ 40*).

139. »In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their differences open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths« (*JDDJ 40*). »Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration« (*JDDJ 41*). This is a highly remarkable response to the conflicts over this doctrine that lasted for nearly half a millennium.

Notes:

36 »God will not deny his grace to the one who is doing what is in him.«

37 WA 40/II; 229, 15.

38 Luther, »Disputation against Scholastic Theology (1517),« tr. Harold J. Grimm, LW 31:13; WA 1, 227, 17–18.

39 Luther, »The Small Catechism,« in BC, 351–54.

40 Council of Trent, Sixth Session, 13 January 1547, can. 1.

41 Luther, »Smalcald Articles,« in BC, 301.

42 WA 39/I; 205, 2–3.

43 *JDDJ*, op. cit. (note 4).

44 *Ibid.*, 45.

45 *JDDJ*, Annex 2C, quoting »The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration,« II. 64f., in BC, 556.

Common Prayers for the Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation

In the document *From Conflict to Communion*, we read, “The church is the body of Christ. As there is only one Christ, so also he has only one body. Through baptism, human beings are made members of this body.” (#219) “Since Catholics and Lutherans are bound to one another in the body of Christ as members of it, then it is true of them what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26: ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.’ What affects one member of the body also affects all the others. For this reason, when Lutheran Christians remember the events that led to the particular formation of their churches, they do not wish to do so without their Catholic fellow Christians. In remembering with each other the beginning of the Reformation, they are taking their baptism seriously.” (#221)

Thanksgiving, repentance, and common witness and commitment

In its basic liturgical structure this theme of thanksgiving, repentance and common witness and commitment, as developed in *From Conflict to Communion*. Lutheran—Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran—Roman Catholic Commission on Unity.

These characteristics of common prayer mirror the reality of Christian life: shaped by God’s Word, the people are sent out in common witness and service. In this particular and unique ecumenical commemoration, thanksgiving and lament, joy and repentance, mark the singing and the praying as we commemorate the gifts of the Reformation and ask forgiveness for the division that we have perpetuated. Thanksgiving and lament, however, do not stand alone: they lead us to common witness and commitment to each other and for the world.

John 15:1-5

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

³ You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Reflection on John 15

◇ Christ calls Himself “the true vine” but a vine cannot be without branches: Christ does not want to be without the church, as the church is nothing without Christ: without Christ, we can do nothing.

◇ There is only one true vine. All the branches are branches of one vine, and thus they are called to unity. As we come closer to Christ, we also come closer to each other. John’s Gospel focuses on communion with Christ, who is the face of the Father’s mercy.

◇ The branches are not for themselves but in order to bear fruit. The fruit is twofold: witness and service. Believers in Christ and the church as a whole are witnesses to the gift given to them. They are witnesses for the life with Christ and the salvation through Christ. The world that constantly forgets God desperately needs this witness. In communion with Christ we are called to serve others as Christ does to us. In the present context, one important fruit of the branches is their longing for unity, seeking unity, being committed to continue the journey to unity. The imagery of the vine and branches is one of growth. On the ecumenical journey, we commit ourselves to growth, with all that growth entails.

◇ The branches are in constant need to be cleansed: *ecclesia semper reformanda* (church always needs reforming). The emphasis laid in John 15 on the fruits and the cleansing of the branches creates the challenge to us of self-critically examining ourselves. This also allows for coming back to the element of repentance in the service but it should be more oriented to the future: the call ever anew to conversion to Christ and to the neighbors as overcoming peoples’ own self-centeredness (and also the churches’ self-centeredness) through the power of the Holy Spirit. Here the imperatives can be of some help in describing this call to conversion and to unity.

◇ At the heart of this text is the statement that without Christ, we can do nothing. Christ is the center. Our journey of faith, our journey together, our commitment to common witness and service, all have their source in Jesus Christ.

◇ This communion or relationship is not only individual but communal. It is reflected in a common commitment and witness, in a common purpose and service in and for and with the world.

◇ “Oneness” in purpose and service witnesses to God who is love. “That they may be one so that the world believes...” (John 17:21).

◇ Abiding: Remaining in Christ implies remaining in fellowship with one another. It is in abiding or remaining in fellowship, committed to communion and reconciliation, that good fruits are produced. A good tree is recognized by its good fruits. A good tree is one that is not divided in itself.

Theo Dieter
Dirk Lange
Wolfgang Thönissen

Prayers of Repentance for the Common Commemoration of the Reformation

Let us pray:

Jesus Christ, Lord of the church, send your Holy Spirit! Illumine our hearts and heal our memories. O Holy Spirit: help us to rejoice in the gifts that have come to the Church through the Reformation, prepare us to repent for the dividing walls that we, and our forebears, have built, and equip us for common witness and service in the world. Amen.

“Lutherans are thankful in their hearts for what Luther and the other reformers made accessible to them: the understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and faith in him; the insight into the mystery of the Triune God who gives Himself to us human beings out of grace and who can be received only in full trust in the divine promise; the freedom and certainty that the gospel creates; in the love that comes from and is awakened by faith, and in the hope in life and death that faith brings with it; and in the living contact with the Holy Scripture, the catechisms, and hymns that draw faith into life” (#225), in the priesthood of all baptized believers and their calling for the common mission of the Church. “Lutherans... realize that what they are thanking God for is not a gift that they can claim only for themselves. They want to share this gift with all other Christians.” (#226)

“Catholics and Lutherans have so much of the faith in common that they can... be thankful together.” (#226). Encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, Catholics “gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise.” (Unitatis Redintegratio, Chapter 1). In this spirit, Catholics and Lutherans embrace each other as sisters and brothers in the Lord. Together they rejoice in the truly Christian gifts that they both have received and rediscovered in various ways through the renewal and impulses of the Reformation. These gifts are reason for thanksgiving. “The ecumenical journey enables Lutherans and Catholics to appreciate together Martin Luther’s insight into and spiritual experience of the gospel of the righteousness of God, which is also God’s mercy.” (#244)

Prayers of Repentance

“As the commemoration in 2017 brings joy and gratitude to expression, so must it also allow room for both Lutherans and Catholics to experience the pain over failures and trespasses, guilt and sin in the persons and events that are being remembered.” (#228) “In the sixteenth century, Catholics and Lutherans frequently not only misunderstood but also exaggerated and caricatured their opponents in order to make them look ridiculous. They repeatedly violated the eighth commandment, which prohibits bearing false witness against one’s neighbor.” (#233)

Lutherans and Catholics often focused on what separated them from each other rather than looking for what united them. They accepted that the Gospel was mixed with the political and economic interests of those in power. Their failures resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Families were torn apart, people imprisoned and tortured, wars fought and religion and faith misused. Human beings suffered and the credibility of the Gospel was undermined with consequences that still impact us today. We deeply regret the evil things that Catholics and Lutherans have mutually done to each other.

We bring before you, Lord, the burdens of the guilt of the past when our forebears did not follow your will that all be one in the truth of the Gospel.

We confess our own ways of thinking and acting that perpetuate the divisions of the past. As communities and as individuals, we build many walls around us: mental, spiritual, physical, political walls that result in discrimination and violence. Forgive us, Lord.

Christ is the way, the truth and the life. He is our peace, who breaks down the walls that divide, who gives us, through the Holy Spirit, ever-new beginnings. In Christ, we receive forgiveness and reconciliation and we are strengthened for a faithful and common witness in our time. Amen.

Full text of the report, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, can be downloaded from the following links:

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html

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An Ecumenical Prayer for Renewal and Reconciliation

“God was reconciling the world (*kosmos*) to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 *Corinthians* 5:19). As a result of God's action, the person who has been reconciled in Christ is called in turn to proclaim this reconciliation in word and deed: “The love of Christ compels us” (2 *Corinthians* 5:14).

The fact that God in Christ has reconciled the world to himself is a reason to celebrate. But this must also include our confession of sin before we hear the Word proclaimed and draw from the deep wellspring of God's forgiveness. Only then are we able to testify to the world that reconciliation is possible.

1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, that began with the Peace Prayer Movement in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in which people placed candles in windows and doorways and prayed for freedom. Horst Sindermann, a member of the GDR Leadership until 1989, noted “We had planned everything. We were prepared for everything, just not for candles and prayers.” This is why the division of Christians and the reconciliation we seek are represented by the symbolic construction and dismantling of a wall. This can become a symbol of hope for any situation in which a division seems insurmountable. Thus the construction of a symbolic wall at the confession of sin, the visible presence of this wall during the proclamation of the Word, and finally the dismantling of this wall to form a cross as a sign of hope, give us courage to name these terrible divisions and to overcome them with the help of God.

- L** In the course of history, there have been many renewal movements in the Church, which is always in need of deeper conversion to her head, Jesus Christ. Sometimes these movements have led to unintended divisions. This fact contradicts what Jesus asks the Father in John 17:23: “that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Let us confess our sins and pray for forgiveness and healing for the wounds which have resulted from our divisions. As we name these sins we will see how they become a wall which divides us.

Silence

- L** Let us pray: God and Father in heaven, we come to you in Jesus' name. We experience renewal through your Holy Spirit, and yet we still construct walls that divide us, walls which hinder community and unity. We bring before you now the stones with which we erect our walls and pray for your forgiveness and healing.

C **Amen**

(As each sin is named the corresponding stone is brought forward to build the wall. Following a moment of silence, the stone bearer [R] makes the plea for forgiveness as the congregation responds “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”)

- L** One stone in our wall is “lack of love”.
(The stone with the key term “lack of love” is placed.)

R1 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for whenever we have failed to love. We humbly pray:

C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

- L** One stone in our wall is “hate and contempt”.
(The stone with the key term “hate and contempt” is placed.)

R2 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our hate and contempt for one another. We humbly pray:

C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

- L** One stone in our wall is “false accusation.”
(The stone with the key term “false accusation” is placed.)

R3 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for denouncing and falsely accusing one another. We humbly pray:

C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

- L** One stone in our wall is “discrimination.”
(The stone with the key term “discrimination” is placed.)

R4 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for all forms of prejudice and discrimination against one another. We humbly pray:

C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Sung response: “Lord, forgive us”. (Local committees choose their own sung responses)

- L** One stone in our wall is “persecution”.
(The stone with the key term “persecution” is placed.)
- R5** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for persecuting and torturing one another. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L** One stone in our wall is “broken communion.”
(The stone with the key term “broken communion” is placed.)
- R6** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for perpetuating broken communion among our churches. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L** One stone in our wall is “intolerance”.
(The stone with the key term “intolerance” is placed.)
- R7** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for banishing our brothers and sisters from our common homeland in the past and for acts of religious intolerance today. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L** One stone in our wall is “religious wars”.
(The stone with the key term “religious wars” is placed.)
- R8** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for all wars that we have waged against one another in your name. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Sung response: “Lord, forgive us”.

- L** One stone in our wall is “division.”
(The stone with the key term “division” is placed.)
- R9** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for living our Christian lives divided from one another and astray from our common calling for the healing of all creation. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L** One stone in our wall is “abuse of power.”
(The stone with the key term “abuse of power” is placed.)
- R10** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our abuse of power. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**
- L** One stone in our wall is “isolation.”
(The stone with the key term “isolation” is placed.)
- R11** Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for the times when we have isolated ourselves from our Christian sisters and brothers and from the communities in which we live. We humbly pray:
- C** **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

L One stone in our wall is “pride”.
(*The stone with the key term “pride” is placed.*)

R12 Gracious God, the love of Christ compels us to ask forgiveness for our pride. We humbly pray:

C **Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Let us pray: Lord, our God, look upon this wall that we have built, which separates us from you and
L from one another. Forgive us our sins. Heal us. Help us to overcome all walls of division and make us one in you.

C. Amen.

Excerpt from the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017:

Document source can be downloaded at:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/xi-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity/2017/2017>

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/weeks-prayer-doc/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20160531_week-prayer-2017_en.html

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Re-Formation – Increasing Conformity to the Image of Christ

"the divine agenda for the rest of my life on earth is my sanctification"

by J.I. Packer

Diseases and Delusions

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

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

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

First Truth

We are all invalids in God's hospital. In moral and spiritual terms we are all sick and damaged, diseased and deformed, scarred and sore, lame and lopsided, to a far, far greater extent than we realize. Under God's care we are getting better, but we are not yet well. The modern Christian likes to dwell on present blessings rather than future prospects. Modern Christians egg each other on to testify that where once we were blind, deaf, and indeed dead so far as God was concerned, now through Christ we have been brought to life, radically transformed, and blessed with spiritual health. Thank God, there is real truth in that. But spiritual health means being holy and whole. To the extent that we fall short of being holy and whole, we are not fully healthy either.

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

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

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

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

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

Second Truth

We are all prone to damaging delusions. On my first night in the hospital, the place was not where I thought it was, and the person by my bed was not whom I thought it was: I was in a state of delusion. The next day I felt well and

could not think of myself as ill, but that was delusion too. In the same way believers are often deluded about Christian faith and living.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God's Prescription for Us

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

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

of loyal discipleship that He calls you to tread. That is the way to profit from the Bible. Only when your reading of the written Word feeds into your relationship with the living Word (Jesus) does the Bible operate as the channel of light and life that God means it to be....

Why did we need salvation?

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Life

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

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

All aspects of their new status become real by virtue of Christ's suffering for them on the cross (see Romans 3:21-26, 5:1, 8:15-19; Galatians 4:4-7; John 15:3; 1 John 1:3-7). This is momentous. To be justified means that, by God's own judicial decision, I stand before Him now and forever "just as if I had never sinned." To be adopted means that now I may call my Creator-Judge "Father," in the intimacy of His beloved family, and know myself to be an heir of His glory – "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). To be cleansed means that nothing in my past imposes any restraint on my fellowship with God in the present.

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

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

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

God's Future Plan of Salvation

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

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

So the divine agenda for the rest of my life on earth is my sanctification. As has already been hinted, I have been

raised from spiritual death and born again in Christ so that I might be changed into His moral likeness. “You were taught,” Paul tells me (for I, like all other Bible-readers, stand with the Ephesian Christians at this point), “with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self . . . to be made new . . . and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24; see also Colossians 3:9-10). The detailed moral directives in each of Paul’s letters show me that he means this in the most literal and down-to-earth sense.

Conformed to the Image of Christ

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

[excerpt from *Rediscovering Holiness*, Chapter 2, (c) 1992 by J.I. Packer, first published by Vine Books, an imprint of Servant Publications in 1992. An updated version was published by [Regal Books](#) in 2009.]

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Daughter, Take Courage

a morning meditation by Mary Rose Jordan

Scripture - Matthew 9:20-22

"Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." Jesus turned and saw her. "Daughter, take courage" he said...

Meditation

The story of this woman is told in 3 of the 4 gospels and in each account, she is not named. She is known only by her issue- that she has been bleeding for 12 years. We see this often in Scripture- stories are told of people known only by their issue- blind man, leper, adulterer, deaf, dumb, possessed. Perhaps you sometimes feel this way- that you are walking through life and are known only by your issue. Something you've done, something that's been done to you. Something that haunts you, separates you.

We learn a bit more about this particular woman in Mark and Luke's version of the story- that she had spent all she had on treatment, but still was unwell. This woman had been suffering for a long time, was labeled by her issue, and was spent. She had nothing left. By all accounts, this woman was exhausted and desperate. Sometimes miraculous things happen when we reach this point in our life, when, out of absolute exhaustion and desperation we lift our heads and gaze at our Creator and cry for help.

How does Jesus respond to her? He says, "Daughter, take courage!" Jesus says to her- give me your fear and I will give you my courage. Take courage. Leave fear behind. But not only that- *he gives her a name.*

Daughter.

This name gives her value. It gives her dignity. It gives her worth. Matthew, Luke and Mark all referred to this woman as "suffering, spent, scared". We all have these words- words we use to describe ourselves our words we think describe how others view us: scared, anxious, depressed, bitter, sad, broken, single, angry, barren, scarred, not enough, not whole, not beautiful, inadequate, overwhelmed, not good enough, dumb, fearful, weird, different, too much, too little. But in those moments when we are completely spent, exhausted and desperate and just lift our arm to reach for the edge of Jesus' cloak, we will hear a different name, a different voice. We will hear Jesus, and he will call us "daughter". All of the words we feel DESCRIBE us fall away, and we are left with a word that DEFINES us. This woman was not her issue- you are not your issue. You are a person with a soul and identity- a daughter of God. Take heart, take courage.

Prayer

"Father, today I give over to you all of the ways I feel I am not enough (name them!). I bring to you all of my issues- big and small- and place them on your alter. Today, Father, I am reaching to touch the edge of your cloak. Help me to hear your words to this woman in my own heart, help me to know deep in my heart that I am your daughter. I believe in you, I believe you are my Father and that you created me and know me. Help me today to live as a joy-filled, healed, and renewed daughter."



Your Faith Has Made You Well

a morning meditation by Mary Rose Jordan

Scripture: Matthew 9:20-22

Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his (Jesus') cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has made you well". And at that moment, the woman was healed.

Meditation

I know- this may look familiar to you! This is the same scripture passage I used for the last meditation. Sometimes different things stand out to us when we read Scripture. The Lord uses Scripture to speak in different ways to us and we hear and read things differently depending on what is happening in our life.

These verses contained 2 phrases which stood out to me and Joanna Lewis (the awesome graphic artist who helped design the images for these meditations!) when we were putting together this series. The first, "Daughter, take courage" we looked at last week. Today, we are focusing on "your faith has made you well". I want to take a quick look at this courageous woman's thoughts and actions and what must have been moving in her heart that day...

She had probably heard that Jesus was visiting where she lived. She had likely heard of his reputation as a healer, as a restorer. She had been sick for so long. She had been waiting for a healing miracle for so long. I can imagine something stirring in her heart- a heart that perhaps had been hardened, damaged, left feeling hopeless from years of unsuccessful treatments and medicine. But something does stir- she knows if she can just get close to him she will be healed. She has complete confidence this will happen. So she shows up (sometimes the hardest thing to do!). She is jostled in the crowd of people wanting to see Jesus. She is weak and feeble from being ill for so long. But the stirring in her heart does not go away and she reaches through the people, thinking 'if I can just touch the hem of his clothes'.

I cannot tell you many times during prayer I have found myself desperately thinking of this woman and crying out, 'Jesus, if I could but touch the hem of your garment'. It can be hard to keep faith that the Lord will provide, will heal, will restore. It can be easy to lose hope, to give up or to let your heart be hardened to the Lord because you feel he hasn't provided. It can be easy for our trust in the Lord to begin to wain when, over time, we feel our prayers go unanswered or that we have had to wait too long. In times of hopelessness, distrust, abandonment, sickness, or loneliness, let us not forget this woman.

What have you been trusting, waiting, searching for from the Lord? Whatever it is- do not give up! Weeks, months or maybe even years have passed, but just like this woman, keep on praying! Keep seeking! Keep asking! Keep reaching for Jesus! God is faithful and HE WILL PROVIDE.

Let us never forget the words he said to his daughter that day:

your faith has made you well.

Sisters- let's rise up this morning, take courage, and go through our day remembering that the Lord is near to all who call out to Him. Prayer

Heavenly Father, may I have faith like this woman. Help me to be completely confident in your provision and will. Help me to be completely peaceful in knowing your care and love for me is very, very strong. I love you Lord, strengthen my faith today. Let me be a light to those around me.

[illustrations by Joanna Lewis]



Mary Rose Jordan was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She received her Bachelor's of Education degree from the University of Michigan with concentrations in English and history. Throughout her time at U of M she was involved in [University Christian Outreach](#), a group that was instrumental in helping her become a more ardent and mature disciple of Christ. After graduation she quickly entered the non-profit sector where she was involved in community development for a number of organizations in the metro Detroit area. Mary Rose lives in Glasgow, Scotland with her husband, Andy.

The Lovely Commission is about a work that is near and dear to Mary Rose's heart. She's had the

opportunity to work with many youth and youth programs and is very convicted that young girls today face issues and challenges never seen before. She also believes that we, as women, need to come together in defense of each other and look to truly embrace and love the way our Lord created us.

This article by Mary Rose first appeared in [The Lovely Commission](#), a new publishing venture and brand of [Kairos North America](#). It is run by Molly Kilpatrick and Mary Rose Jordan and a team of contributors from various Christian communities in North America and beyond. Together they are working to build a culture of radical love, femininity, modesty of heart, mind, and body amongst young women.

Their aim is to inspire and equip young women to embrace and promote a culture of Godly femininity in which we live out our rich identity as daughters of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Roger Foley (Lamb of God) and Brian Lalonde (Servants of the Word) on Goldney Ridge, Mount Rolleston, New Zealand

'It is not the Mountains we conquer, but ourselves...'

a reflection by Roger Foley

Many of us are familiar with this rather famous quote from Sir Edmund Hillary, the New Zealand climber who summited Everest in 1953. The mountain, originally named Peak XV when surveyed around 1865, was then later renamed to honour George Everest the then Surveyor General of India. The mountain of course had and still has both Nepalese and Tibetan names pre-dating the interest of others 'conquering it' [to defeat, to beat, to annihilate and more]. The Nepalese name is 'Sagarmatha' [Goddess of the Sky] and the Tibetan is 'Chomolungma' [Mother Goddess of the Universe].

My modest endeavours into the Southern Alps, the Shark's Tooth on Taranaki, and into the explosion crater on Ngauruhoe have never been incursions with a mind to conquer. Rather in my journeys, which have ranged from alpine climbing to crawling through narrow caving systems, to bungee jumping, have all included facing and 'conquering' my limitations and fears. Ed Hillary was right.

However the biggest challenges in life are not 'way out there', they are 'close in here.' The most important challenge for me is the challenge to commit my life each day, after day, after day, after day, without reservation or question, into the hands of an 'unseen' God. Now that can be pretty scary. Much scarier than a boot slipping on a ridge, or getting your helmet stuck in a cave crawl!

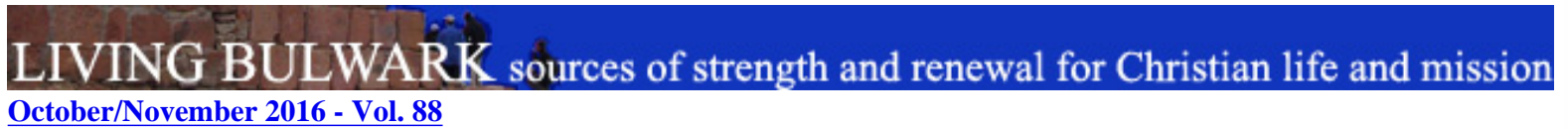
This morning in my study reading I came across 'What happens after you die depends on what happens before you die...' Mmm, indeed, food for thought.

> See other [articles by Roger Foley](#) in Living Bulwark



Roger Foley is the senior coordinator of the [Lamb of God](#), a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. He and his wife Veronica live in Christchurch, New Zealand.

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a video presentation on the Sword of the Spirit International Coordinators Meeting - May 2016

Highlights from the Sword of the Spirit International Coordinators Meeting - May 2016

a video spotlight produced by Sword of the Spirit

Introduction

Over the last 12 years the Lord has spoken strongly to the [Sword of the Spirit](#) about an open door for mission and a special season of grace, especially for the young people in Sword of the Spirit. Given the increasing difficulties and challenges which Christians face around the world – religious persecution, drift from Christian morality, and breakdown of marriage and family life – there has been a growing sense of urgency among Sword of the Spirit leaders to work more closely together internationally to strengthen the work of building Christian communities and preparing community members to be fully engaged in mission.

God spoke to me strongly in three areas: The first area is the unity God wants for his people and how much I should strive for building and maintaining unity at all levels in my personal life, and in my work and service. The second area that God showed me where I can grow more is in doing spiritual warfare. Lastly, God revealed me how blessed and fortunate that I am in the midst, and at the cutting edge, of a work of ecumenism which the Lord is doing among his people at this time and age. Indeed, I now appreciate more the time I live in where I can

In keeping with that sense, the coordinators from all of the [communities in the Sword of the Spirit](#) have gathered every four years since 2004 to seek the Lord together. This past May 27-30, 2016, some 400 coordinators and main [Kairos](#) leaders met for four days in Lansing, Michigan. They came from the 75 communities located in Asia, the South Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and Central and South America.



Our Plans, God's Plans

by Sam Williamson

Last week's ideal plan didn't translate itself into reality. Instead, life happened. While on an errand, I met a man and we talked for two hours; a friend called to say her father is dying and I went to visit him; and our water main sprung a leak, drenching the basement.

I'm traveling west for a retreat, so last week was filled with dozens of tasks to get ready. I use a planning app that helps me prioritize action items for each day. And then (hopefully) I complete all the items. But last week I failed utterly.

At the end of that *"life-is-full-of-surprises"* week, a well-known Christian blogger sent an email describing how "elite" entrepreneurs and executives accomplish their goals by eliminating the competing distractions. I thought, *"Distraction-free life-management? Sign me up!"*

And then I paused: *How does it leave room for God?*

When Our Plans Go Awry

When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, he never expected the plagues, Passover, and parted Red Sea. When Elijah heard the voice of God on Mt. Sinai, he expected to hear it like Moses did, in the fire, wind, and earthquake. Instead he got a still, small voice.

Because God loves to surprise us. You can't put him in a box. He won't fit in your iPhone.

Gideon planned to attack the enemy with an army of 32,000, and God whittled it down to 300; Paul expected to evangelize Asia, and God directed him to Macedonia; and I planned to prepare for a retreat, and God interrupted me with a stranger.

By all means, make a plan; but expect God to disrupt it.

How Can We Know God's Will for Each Day?

Consider this famous proverb: "Trust in the Lord, not your own ideas; acknowledge him in all your plans, and he will direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6 par). Meditating on this proverb produced my paraphrase above and the following simple pattern for getting God's guidance:

After prayer, counsel, and wisdom: *make a plan.*

Then: *give that plan to God.*

Finally: *let God direct your path.*

Giving our agenda to God means that he will frequently guide us down paths our original maps never envisioned. We trust in God to direct us, not in our own ideas; we especially don't want to trust our own plans.

Plans are just nice starting points to get us moving.

God's most common guidance is done naturally: sometimes with disruptions, sometimes through circumstances, and often through surprises. The non-formulaic nature of his guidance means we will take risks, learn through trial and error, and that we remain alert to God's gentle nudges.

Which is perfectly fine. It means we remain in a conversational relationship with God.

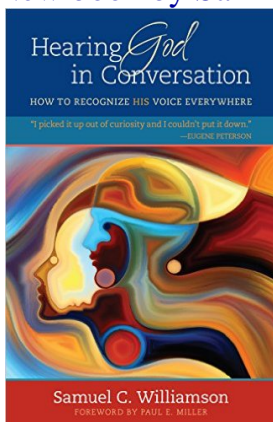
Which was his plan all along.

Sam

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Sam has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.

New book by Sam Williamson



[Hearing God in Conversation: How to Recognize His Voice Everywhere](#) published by Kregel Publications, 2016, available from [Amazon](#)

> See [book review](#) by Don Schwager

October/November 2016 - Vol. 88

An Excellent New Book by Sam Williamson

Hearing God in Conversation

How to recognize his voice everywhere

Reviewed by Don Schwager

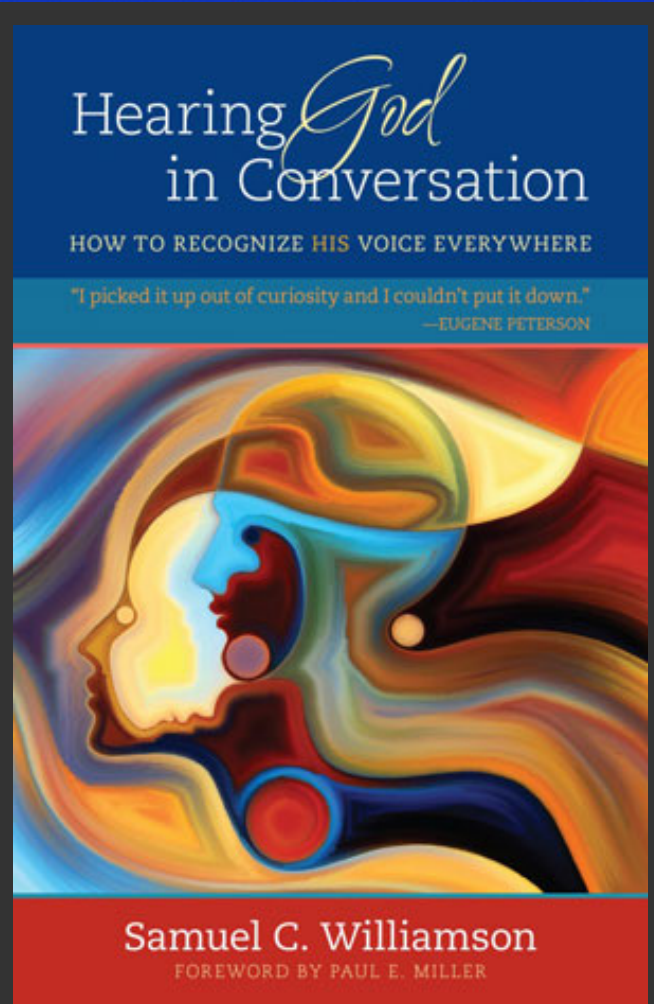
This book is a rare gem full of spiritual wisdom, practical insight, and personal examples of how God converses with us in our daily lives. I was captivated from the first to the last page.

Sam Williamson is a great natural story teller, a sound biblical narrator and armchair theologian, and a wise counsellor with spiritual depth and insight. He is also an excellent writer – easy to read and joyful to follow. Reading his book is more like carrying on an enlightening conversation with an experienced and faith-filled friend while sitting in an easy chair enjoying one another's company. You can't savor enough and you want to come back for more and more.

The book drives home a key Scriptural truth - God speaks to us at all times. Our challenge is learning how to recognize his voice and tune in to the conversation he desires to have with us.

This book covers a wide range of topics related to hearing God. Several chapters are devoted to the Scriptures - how to meet God personally in the Scriptures, how to recognize the voice of God, how to interact with Scripture to understand the truth in God's Word, how our conversational relationship with God is born in meditation, the role of the Holy Spirit in witnessing with our spirit, and how to hear God for others.

God wants a two-way relationship with us – not only when we pray and read his Word in the Scriptures, but in every area of our lives as well. The book gives numerous examples on how God speaks to us in the ordinary circumstances of daily life, in our conversations with others, in our detours and disruptions, how he shouts to us in his silence, how he teaches us through our emotional curiosities, and questions us



Hearing God in Conversation: How to Recognize His Voice Everywhere, by Samuel C. Williamson, published by Kregel Publications, 2016, available from Amazon

Praise for the book

"In this book, Sam Williamson shares his deep spiritual wisdom with a kind of disarming humility that will help readers hear God's extraordinary voice as an ordinary life experience."

Jean Barbara,
President of the Sword of the Spirit

"I've just finished reading Sam Williamson's compelling book on hearing God. Sam treats this crucial subject with wisdom, humor, and deep conviction. His highly readable personal stories and spiritual insights will surely inspire many to pursue with greater confidence the life-changing experience of daily conversation with God. *Hearing God in Conversation* is a helpful and well-balanced spiritual guide which I would not hesitate to recommend to

to draw us into a conversational connection with himself.

The book is balanced in dealing with potential pitfalls and aberrations. It treats the need for discernment, how to distinguish God's voice from other voices, how filters and biases can shape and block our ability to hear God's voice, and the role of community in helping us discern and confirm God's word for us.

For many years I have been reading with delight Sam Williamson's essays in his online journal, [Beliefs of the Heart](#). And I'm delighted to see this book in print. I think it will go a long way to help, inspire, and encourage many Christians to grow in their personal walk with the Lord. Read it, savor it, and give it to your friends. And let it awaken in you a deeper desire to better know, hear, and understand the Lord as he converses with us and draws us into a deeper heart-to-heart relationship with himself.

[Hearing God in Conversation: How to Recognize His Voice Everywhere](#), by Samuel C. Williamson, published by Kregel Publications, 2016, available from [Amazon](#)

men and women from all the Christian traditions who hunger to walk more closely with God.”

John Keating,
Servants of the Word elder

It is a tragedy that so many Christians believe that God does not speak to them. This book is one of the best I've seen at equipping ordinary people to listen to God in everyday life. I especially loved the description of how to “brainstorm with God” – what a wonderful way to demystify the process of seeking guidance. Most importantly, the author puts the emphasis where it should be: on a biblically grounded, conversational relationship with God in which we let God take the lead. If you've ever secretly longed for your friendship with God to be much more interactive than it is and you are finally ready to do something about it, read this book.

Thomas E. Bergler,
Professor of Ministry and Missions

Don Schwager is editor for Living Bulwark

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CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



Wearing Spiritual Blinders

by Tom Caballes

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?"

- Job 31:1 ESV

When I was young, I was fascinated by horse-drawn carriages and why do horses wear blinders [or blinkers]. Later, I discovered that wild horses have eyes on the sides of their heads for safety against predators. Horses wearing blinders are inclined to be more focused on the direction of a straight and narrow path and is much easier for the person controlling the horse to direct it where to go. We are like that horse – because we are sinners, our tendency is to wander off from God. We ‘leak’ spiritually. Our ‘wild’ side makes us spiritually adventurous. The ‘virgin’ in Job 31:1 can be pleasure, power, possession, etc. – anything that can grab our hearts away from God. It is great to have foresight in life, but regarding sin and discipleship, we want to be narrow-eyed as much as possible. How I wish I always have spiritual blinders that keep me on a straight and narrow road to God – do you?

So How Do You Develop Having Spiritual Blinders in Your Life?

1. Do you have a personal mission statement for your life? Have you clearly identified what you want to accomplish in your life? Do it now if you have not done it yet. Having ultimate goals in life gives you a sense of direction on what will you do in the immediate, short term and long term goals in your life.
2. Know what your personal weaknesses are. What will you look for if you are free to wander off spiritually? What bad habits, sin, and temptation attract you most? You need to be single-minded for God and walk the narrow road ahead of you, rather than wander off spiritually.
3. God knows you intimately. In spite of your sinfulness, God wants to draw you to Him. He is forever faithful, and His mercy is always available for those seek Him. Ask forgiveness from God whenever you fall. God does not keep a tab on the number of times you failed, but He counts the number of times you rise and walk with Him again. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. [Hebrews 4:16 ESV]*
4. Sometimes we need help when we are confused or when we wander off to the wrong direction. That is why it is important to ask help and guidance from those who can help us grow in the Lord. We should not make major decisions in life without talking with a person we trust to look after us well.
5. Lastly, desire to follow God wholeheartedly. Offer every day to God and claim it for his glory. Have you thrown away your peripheral vision for worldly pleasures, riches and fame, and sinful things? Is your heart set on God and God alone? Are your eyes fixed on heaven?

Other Scripture passages:

1. *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 ESV]*
2. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... [Hebrews 12:1 ESV]*
3. *For all that is in the world -- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life -- is not from the Father but is from the world. [1 John 2:16 ESV]*
4. *... Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. [James 4:7-8 ESV]*
5. Other Scripture references: **1 Timothy 6:10-12; and 2 Timothy 2:22.**

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. Are you walking a straight path to God, or do you tend to wander off? Can God easily direct you?
2. What are your personal weaknesses, and how do you control them?



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

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

CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



Living in the Crucible of Humility

by Tom Caballes

Christ Jesus...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- Philippians 2:6-8

According to C.S. Lewis, a British novelist, academic, and lay Christian apologist, “the essential vice and the utmost evil is pride. All other vices are mere fleabites in comparison. It was through pride the devil became the devil. Pride is the complete anti-God state of mind.” On the other hand, humility is perfectly personified in Jesus. He was in the form of God, and He gave all that up – for you and me. The Being who existed before the world began became a servant and suffered one of the most humiliating ways to die. Imagine you transforming to become a disgusting cockroach to save all the other filthy cockroaches in the world! If Jesus lived in the crucible of humility, what else does He expect from us as His followers?

So How Do You Live in the Crucible of Humility?

1. Realise that everything comes from God – all our riches, brains, talents – everything. There is no real reason to be proud of anything because there isn’t anything we can give credit out of our own doing

alone.

2. Let God lift you up – not yourself or other people. Vain-glory or feeling superior to others is a personal attempt to validate yourself – for nothing. So what if you are prettier, richer, or more famous than others? At the end of the day, God’s approval is the only one that counts. So seek God’s approval, not of people’s.
3. Stop comparing yourself with others. Comparing is a useless exercise because everything comes from God. God has blessed each and every one of us in different ways. Count your blessings and be thankful.
4. Be happy for others’ success and victories – do not be envious and develop self-pity. Acknowledge that God is the one who blesses people with all sorts of blessings. “What about me?” you may ask - In due time, God will reward you – either in this life or in the one to come!
5. It is okay to experience being humbled at times – losing games, not being chosen or promoted, not being acknowledged or something similar. These situations will test our hearts whether we are after people’s approval or God’s approval. It is also good to keep our pride in check at times.
6. Grow in obedience to God’s will. Life will not always be easy or convenient – but you need to know His will for you and follow it. Jesus obeyed the Father that led to suffering and death – so should we.
7. Know how much God loves you. At the end of the day, when you realise how much God loves you, all self-love and pride will shrink in due time. Let your appreciation for God and what He has done grow daily in your heart. After all, pride is the supreme love of self; if you love God to the brim in response to His love, there is no place for the love of self. So be consumed by the love of God – and also loving God in return

Other Scripture passages:

1. *The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honour and life. [Proverbs 22:4 ESV]*
2. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. [Matthew 11:29-30 ESV]*
3. *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...[1 Peter 5:6 ESV]*
4. Other References: **Proverbs 11:2; James 4:10**

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. How often do you struggle with pride? How do you keep your pride in its place?
2. How have you grown in humility since you said your yes to God?



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

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



Have You Been Tested Lately?

by Jerry Munk

The Apostle Simon Peter is an example of someone who went through many difficult times of testing. We can read about one of Peter's tests in the Gospel of Luke – it takes place just before the crucifixion.

The Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren." [Peter] said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death." Then [Jesus] said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know me."

– Luke 22:31-34

Peter was warned of the trial he was about to face, yet he still stumbled and denied Jesus. If we can learn from Peter's experience, perhaps we will be better prepared when our time of testing arrives.

Learning from tests

... that he may sift you like wheat.

I read the story of a man who had attended medical school in Edinburgh around 1800. At that time, medical school was much different than it is today. It was more of a self-directed course of study. On the first day of class many professors would give an examination. The exam was something of a sifting in that it helped the students separate the material they already knew from the material they did not yet know. Without the exam, the students may have focused too little on the material they had not yet mastered.

In the same way, it is important for us to identify the strengths and weaknesses in our spiritual life. We are in many ways self-directed in our spiritual education. Certainly the Holy Spirit guides us, and we receive help from our brothers and sisters, but whether we learn and what we learn is pretty much up to us. It is, therefore, helpful to know what we do well and what we do poorly, where we are strong and where we are weak. A time of testing helps reveal to us the areas in our spiritual lives that need some work.

Giving the right answer

I have prayed...that your faith should not fail.

Jesus prayed that Peter would give the correct “answer” as he went through his testing. The answer that Jesus was looking for was faith (and hope and love, as well as courage and the other virtues). Unfortunately, there was something lacking in Peter’s faith. In the Gospel of Matthew, Peter correctly identified Jesus as the Son of God – an astounding confession of faith at the time. Yet just moments later, Peter doubted God’s plan and God’s power by trying to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die (Matthew 16:13-23). Peter had the faith to see that Jesus was God (believing faith), but he lacked the faith to trust fully in God’s plan (trusting faith). This lack of faith appears again, when in the courtyard he denies even knowing the Lord Jesus.

Peter was tested many times and repeatedly got the answers wrong. He lacked faith and hope when he rebuked the Lord and tried to hinder the Father’s plan. He lacked love and courage when he denied the Lord, as Jesus was being sentenced to crucifixion. Failing these tests painfully revealed to Peter his faults and weakness. In the same way, when we are tested, the Lord reveals to us areas in our lives that need some work.

We will be tested many times in our lives. The Lord is looking for us to respond with “correct answers” as we experience these trials. Here is a hint: the correct answers are faith, and hope, and love – and prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. The Lord looks for virtue and strength of character. He also looks for the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Often, people seek miraculous deliverance as the answer to their tests. From time to time deliverance may part of it, but normally the right answer is virtue.

Giving the wrong answers

I don't know him.

So very often we respond with the wrong answer in times of testing. Some common wrong responses are: anxiety, despair, resentment, fear, and recklessness. If you look at your life and see anxiety, despair, resentment, and fear – you are in a time of testing, (perhaps without realizing it) and you are getting the answers wrong.

When we fail a test – give the wrong answer – it really is important to recognize that failure and repent. If we keep giving the wrong answer over and over we will never become the person that God wants us to be. We will wallow in fear, anxiety, resentment, and despair instead of growing in the virtue and fruit that pleases our Lord and makes us useful in building his kingdom.

There is life after tests

When you return ... strengthen your brethren.

Our life is not mainly about tests. Peter’s ministry and all he accomplished for the Lord is not defined by the tests he failed; it is defined by what he did after the tests. We can see how Peter obeyed the “strengthen your brethren” part of Jesus’ prayer – he did spread the gospel and strengthened the early church. In John 21:17 Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter’s answer is always “Yes,” and the Lord commands him to “feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.” Jesus is reviewing with Peter his test *and* his failure. He is also pointing out that Peter has a job to do, that he should not wallow in self-pity, but strengthen his brothers.

There is fruitful ministry following our tests – even if we do not score 100%. Tests today prepare us to serve the Lord tomorrow. It is important to respond rightly during a test; it is also important to respond rightly after the test. It is especially important to respond rightly after a failed test: like Peter we need to return to the Lord Jesus in love, repentance, and obedience.

In the time of Christ a newly-forged sword would be heated until it glowed like the evening sky. It was then thrust into cold water. This “testing” made the sword stronger and better able to hold a sharp edge. (It was because of this technology that the Roman army won so many wars. Their swords could literally cut their opponents’ swords in two.) In the same way we are made stronger and more useful to our Lord as we experience the fire of testing.

Seeing the test in progress

I am ready to go...to prison and death.

Peter’s test at this time was not to go to prison and death: that test would come in the future. The test at hand was answering the statement of a servant girl in the courtyard, “This man was with him.” Jesus warned Peter that he would be tested, that the test would come before dawn, and it would involve denying the Lord Jesus. We can look at it now and say that Peter should have been prepared, but the test seemed to catch him unaware.

Often times we fail to recognize tests as they happen, even when we are warned of them in advance. Jesus warned Peter he was going to be tested just as he has warned us we will be tested. Will we recognize the test when the time comes? Often tests are subtle, like a servant girl asking, “Aren’t you one of his followers?” If we are expecting something dramatic, we may miss the subtle test, just as Peter did.

When tests are small, more like quizzes, the smallness, the ordinariness, blinds us to the fact that a test is taking place. What kind of spiritual “quizzes” might be going on right now?

- A relationship problem with your spouse
- A relationship problem with your children
- Trouble with finances and work
- An area of persistent sin
- Failure in your personal Christian disciplines.

How can we learn from our tests and be strengthened in our walk with the Lord if we don’t even realize that we are being tested? Learning to recognize small tests like these can help us recognize larger tests when they come our way.

Note: Those who we are close to will also go through times of testing, and their tests can spill into our laps. For example, the Lord Jesus was going through a huge test as he was preparing to die for us. Peter’s test in the courtyard was the result of Jesus’ test. When we see that a brother or sister is being tested, perhaps a test will come our way as a result. Will we respond to our brethren in faith, hope, and love – and prudence, justice, temperance, and courage.

Preparing for a test

Pray that you may not enter into temptation.

In Luke 24:40, Jesus instructs Peter to pray that he does not enter into temptation. The Greek word translated

temptation here is *pirasmos*, meaning a trial or proof. God allows temptation – He allows tests – but never beyond what we can endure. “God...will not allow you to be tempted (to be tried or proven) beyond what you are capable, but...will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).”

We should prepare for tests through prayer. When the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he included the phrase, “lead us not into temptation”: literally “lead us not into hard testing” (Matthew 6:13). The Lord has been telling us as a community that a test is coming. He is doing this for a reason. I think the reason is so we can prepare. We should pray for his strength and for his grace; we should pray that we will recognize the test when it comes and answer it with faith, and hope, and love.

I thought it was supposed to be easy

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

How does this passage from Matthew 11:30 fit into difficult times of testing? Trials almost never seem easy nor do their burdens seem light. Looking at the Greek can be helpful in coming to an understanding of what this scripture passage is communicating.

The word *easy* is translated from the Greek word *chrestos*, which means useful, good, or manageable. Testing is useful for us, although not always easy in the English sense of the word; but it is good for us and the Lord never gives a test that is unmanageable. Tests are useful because they prepare us for the future work God has for us. Difficult is not always bad, nor is *easy* always good. The Lord’s yoke, the harness that makes our work purposeful, is good, and useful, and manageable.

The word *light* in the text is translated from the Greek word *elowno*, which means “driven by the wind.” I see this as implying the power of the Holy Spirit, as wind in scripture is often associated with the Holy Spirit. Along with the yoke and burden, the Holy Spirit fills us with his power. He enables us to bear the burdens that come in his service by supplying his own power – the power of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Conclusion

For what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (Hebrews 12:7)

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has told us that testing will come.

- We should be praying.
- We should be on the alert.
- We should keep the correct answers close at hand.
- We should remember that tests are useful.
- We should rely on his power and his grace.
- In all of this let us seek to strengthen our brethren – that is, one another.

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Seeking For Jerusalem

poem by Pete Coyle

1.

Look - that is no country for old men
That is no Kingdom for cold souls
No wearied Sanballat halting again
Men beaten by life's toil and tolls.
Men meandering meaninglessly then
Slide gently night-wards with the proles.
That kingdom is for those who will endure
Suffering, bleeding, their souls still pure
Not resting until those walls rest secure.

2.

The aged would claw back times hand
Whilst the fresh scions drive it onward
Both at work mending the Promised Land.
But that kingdom shall not regress downward
It will not if we obey our King's command
To restore Jerusalem- we shall be empowered.
Arise, Arise, men in your unholy liaison
Rise now assured amidst the murky dawn,
God's chosen are now arrived from Babylon!

3.

Arise, you people of that New Jerusalem.
This kingdom is a great venture, newly begun

And we are not building a new Byzantium
This task should, can, must and will be done.
I speak not of what was or is but is to come
Of kingdom, wall, of battle which must be won.
Amidst these ragged ruins winds begin to howl,
We persevere in our building without a scowl.
And we sort 'tween the fair stones and the foul.

4.

We are not a dying generation that moan
Amid gathering darkness. Others lie caught
The desert dulling the soul to a sordid groan.
But we know the quiet voice which verily begot
This solid sphere. Jerusalem's walls of stone
Needs must our strain, our only thought
We are besieged but resolute in the fight.
From burning darkness turning to tender light
For we will to build Jerusalem with all our might.

Pete Coyle grew up in the [Community of the Risen Christ](#) in Glasgow, Scotland and obtained a Masters in English Literature and History from the University of Glasgow. In September 2013 he moved to London, UK to become an affiliate with the [Servants of the Word](#), where he currently works and serves in a variety of capacities. He has been writing poetry and prose for the last five years.

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