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MEN'S MAGAZINE

Track Star Talks Tokyo 2020

**Barrie Hanson Asks** 

'IS CHARITY LOST'?

#### **DAVE GOW**

Shares The Word of Life

#### **Eric Ludy**

on Living an Immovable Life

#### **PLUS**

- Ministering to Jesus
- Defending the Faith
- The Family Altar





From Gangs to God

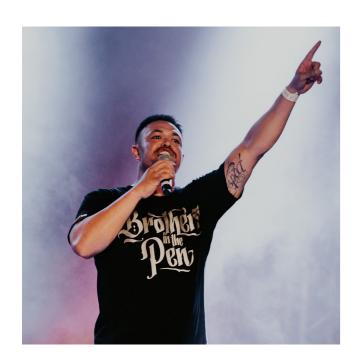
**Charles Price** Discusses the Danger of Drifting



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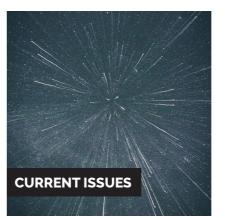


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Cover Photo: Para-athlete William Stedman pictured back home in Christchurch after winning two medals within 24 hours of each other at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games in August - a silver medal in the men's long jump T36 and a bronze medal in the men's 400m T36 race. Photo: Victor Alexeyev Other Images: Unless otherwise stated, all images published in this issue which appear outside of the three main feature articles are sourced from either Unsplash or Depositphotos.

#### WELCOME TO THE SIXTEENTH EDITION OF

## AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE



Can you believe you're reading the last issue of Authentic for 2021? Reflecting for a moment on how and where God has led us as a team over the last 12 months, we're so grateful.

I want to say thank you. Ultimately to the Lord for His continuing faithfulness on this journey, but also to those who support us - by praying for the ministry of Authentic, contacting us to offer encouragement and ideas, and to those we've worked with at our media agency, Authentic Media, this year.

When I was younger people would say, "...the more years you live, the faster they go..." I wasn't convinced, but I might be now! Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity..." (NIV).

The King James uses the phrase "redeeming the time..." As we approach a new year, may we be good stewards of the time we've been given.

On that note, for those of us able to visit, the ever-so-subtle carols at The Warehouse have been gently reminding us since about October that Christmas is, in fact, fast approaching!

Silliness aside - we're bombarded by messaging around this time of year telling us Christmas is all about gifts and giving, aren't we? Truthfully, it is, but in a sense so much more than the purely commercial nature we're oftentimes confronted with.

Amongst all the other great things the Christmas season affords us - time with family, rest and relaxation - Jesus is, and will always be, the reason for the season. True love exemplified is this - God loved, so He gave. In the Father's perfect timing, He sent His Son, our Saviour, Jesus. "...when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." - Galatians 4:4-5 (KJV).

The Lord is our example in all. Why do we love others? Not because we 'feel like it', but because of His perfect example, "We love because He first loved us..." - 1 John 4:19 (NIV).

A piece written for us in this issue discusses love in action - out of a lifestyle of genuinely loving people comes the fruit. As we love, we're motivated to display that love through

actions. As 1 John 3:18 says, "...let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (NIV). Titus 3:5 says, "His love is evident in that "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy." (NIV).

I heard a story about a pastor who, as he preached, paused briefly - placing a \$20 note on the stage. "This belongs to the first person to walk up here and take it," he said, before continuing. Skepticism - and conversations - arose in the room. "You go and get it!" "No vou!" And "It can't actually just be free can it?" "There's some kind of catch, isn't there?" Finally, and rather sheepishly, a young lady made her way to the stage - almost snatching it off the ground before bolting back to her seat. She was still convinced there was a catch, even as she had the cash in her hand. There wasn't a catch, and she kept the money.

The point of the exercise was to illustrate what Titus just told us - we cannot work towards or earn our salvation - it is a free gift. Often we think there must be 'catches' or things we have to 'get right' before we even consider coming to Jesus. But Jesus' own words "...it is finished" and His

simple invitation "...come to me..." tell us there's nothing we can add to Salvation through our own effort - is a gift freely received, "...if you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead..." (Romans 10:9).

On the cusp of 2022, my simple encouragement is this. Though I like the cash analogy, and while Salvation is a free gift given to us through Jesus' finished work on the Cross, we should always remember that His sacrifice in coming to earth to die on the Cross for our sins in fact cost Him - and the Father - everything.

The lengths He went to - the sheer magnitude of what Jesus accomplished in coming to earth as a baby, living a perfect life, dying on our behalf as a sinless sacrifice and being raised to eternal life - should subsequently influence how, on His behalf, we now live our earthly lives with intentionality.

"...being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!" - Phillippians 2:8 (NIV).

In this issue we chat with Christchurch-based Para-athlete William Stedman, who competes in sprints, middle distance running and long jump events for New Zealand. He has recently returned home after winning a silver medal in the long jump and a bronze medal in the men's 400m T36 at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics.

We also speak with Georgie Ngaau, or BLSD One, who shares how God is using his music to share his testimony in a powerful way.

Word of Life New Zealand field coordinator Dave Gow also discusses the heart behind the ministry with us.

Thanks to all who contributed to this issue. Actually, reflecting on 2021 in its entirety, thanks also to everyone who regularly contributes to the issues we produce - be that through chatting to us for features, suggesting content ideas, writing columns or reviews or advertising with us.

Your efforts in sharing the encouragement the Lord places on your heart blesses us here at Authentic - and, as is always our hope as a team, we pray that what you read in these pages throughout the year has blessed you and ultimately pointed you to Jesus.

From the Authentic team, we pray you have a restful and relaxing time over the summer break. May Jesus be at the centre of - in and through - everything we do. Until next time!

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Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.

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AUTHENTIC | BIBLE

AUTHENTIC | BIBLE



Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. - 1 Corinthians 13:1 (KJV). Here, God's word points out that charity must be an action - otherwise saying and not doing is just noise. Look what it says in James. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." - James 1:22 (KJV).

The intention is good, but without action it is meaningless. Notice that if you truly love God you must ultimately do something. Charity is kindness in action. Charity is humility in action. Charity puts others first and self second - as did our Lord throughout His entire life.

Charity is in fact more than love. The word 'love' does not actually do charity justice. Charity means 'well behaved'. The Bible says we are to present ourselves faultless - which means

"There must be faith in

Iesus Christ. And that faith

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accompanied by actions."

we are not to be easily provoked. Also, we are not to think badly of people without cause. We are to avoid sin and not to engage or enjoy anything that God has expressly forbidden. Charity loves the truth and hates lies - and, unlike love, it requires an adult approach. 1 Corinthians 13:11 tells us, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (KJV).

True charity demonstrates

maturity. I am amazed how easily people can be swayed by popular opinion, rather than the truth. Again, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity". - 1 Corinthians 13:13 (KJV). Charity is the greatest – why? Greater than faith? Greater than hope? Yes, Scripture tells us charity is greater than faith.

Many people have faith. But faith in what? Faith in their own strength. Faith in their own possessions and wealth. Faith in their own intellect. But, faith has to be more than human, more than natural - it must be supernatural.

God actually declares in His Word that without faith it is impossible to please Him. In the great passage in Hebrews 11:5-6 faith is clearly outlined. What kind of faith then? – the kind that demonstrates a love of God and His son - and our Saviour. No man cometh to the Father, save by the Son. Jesus answered: "I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." - John 14:6 (NIV)

There must be faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith must be expressed. It is not enough to say that you have faith in Christ - because it, like charity, must be accompanied by actions.

How then do we demonstrate that we are a follower of Jesus Christ? Have we repented of our sins? Have we rejected unholy and unrighteous things? Are we true followers of Christ and have we changed direction in our living? Are we living for Him?

Our Love of Christ, in action, will demonstrate repentance. Love of Christ will demonstrate a desire for righteousness. Love in Christ will demonstrate a love for His Word. This is charity – this is the force of love. Charity is greater than hope. We hope for many things. I often ask people if they know they are going to Heaven after they die. Many reply, "I hope so".

That is in fact an answer which only demonstrates hope, not faith. God has declared to us in His word that we can have a sure hope in the person of Jesus Christ. He that hath the Son hath life. But we must 'love' Jesus and that means action. Simply

expressed, love in action demonstrates our love for Christ.

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." - 1 John 5:11-13 (KJV).

We have eternal life if we have Jesus Christ as our Saviour. It is a sure hope.

We need to be positively "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ". - Titus 2:13 (KJV). If we put our love for Christ into action, our faith is sure - but our love for Christ must be visible in our life. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." - 1 Corinthians 13:13 (KJV). No wonder the Bible says the greatest of these is charity. Charity is love in action - and just look what God's love has done for us.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." - John 3:16 (KJV).

How great is our God that He has provided, in His love for us, salvation and the security of a place in Heaven for all who believe. Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God commended His love toward us, (His charity) in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (KJV). How great is God's charity towards us! Because charity is His love in action.

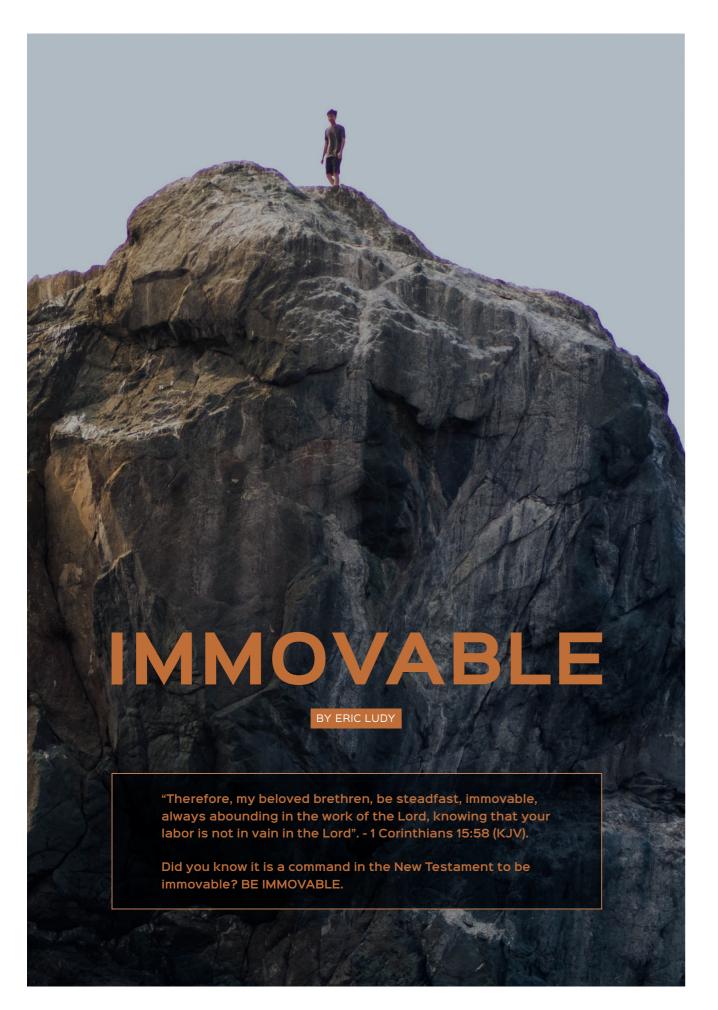
So, the challenge is this - how do we demonstrate charity in our lives?  $|{\bf M}\>$ 

■ Barrie Hanson lives in Bluff, Southland. He has been a Christian for over 40 years and in that time he has been a preacher, Pastor and a church helper in both Auckland and Hamilton.



AUTHENTIC | LIFE

AUTHENTIC | LIFE



Everything in this world will be moved, but there is one thing that will last, and that is truth. We must be built upon a true, solid foundation. What we are building on is not just text, theory, good ideas or human philosophies. We are building upon the efficacy, the power and the authority of Jesus. He is a person. We are standing on Him. Anything fixed to Jesus will last with Him.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." - Matthew 7:24-25 (NIV)

God is likened to a rock. His word is likened to a rock. Simply put, a rock doesn't change from generation to generation. A rock does not spend its time sitting there thinking, "Oh, I just really want to be climbed upon. If I don't

have 'the look' in this generation, then they might not like me."

Rocks don't care about that. And, you know what, God isn't attempting to win a popularity contest. He just is who He is - He's not going to change to match our likes or our dislikes.

Let's get it straight - God does not alter - God does not shapeshift. God's truth is a reflection of who He is - and in it is no shadow of turning - just like Him. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." - Hebrews 13:8

(NIV). Christians, Jesus has given us everything we need in order to behave how we ought to behave. So, as a result, we can be as He is - though we are not as He is, by our nature, and the way we are outside of Him, we can be as He is when we turn unto Him and He fills us with His grace.

He enables us to live lives that would otherwise be impossible. God stabilises our life. He takes us from going up, down and all over the place and rivets us to His bedrock. And He begins to build us the way His nature is revealed in Scripture.

No more are we like a wave of the sea, tossed to and fro. Get to know Jesus and He will stabilise your life - building you as a rock. "... The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord." - Psalm 112:6-7 (NKJV).

Do you know how often we get evil tidings? They can come through television, newspapers, emails, or through whispers and conversations around you. When they come, they can actually renovate our perspective. It's amazing - you could be

in a great mood, feeling wonderful about life and an evil tiding can come and completely destroy your life.

What's funny is that your life is the exact same as it was, but an evil tiding came in and warped your view. Suddenly you're under the weight of something that is controlling you.

I just want to tell you that you've been bullied around by evil tidings for far too long. Do you know what you do when an evil tiding comes? - you leap for joy. God is not going anywhere and if we live with integrity we have nothing to fear - no matter how loud they shout.

"... behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." - 1 Peter 2:6 (KJV). This means to be put to shame, to be disgraced, to have hope met with failure. This is what we're afraid of. And this is

what the enemy tries to tell us is our fate if we build upon Jesus.

What is the bait of the enemy? The question, "...what if He doesn't come through for you? What if that's wishful thinking? What if God isn't all that?" There are all sorts of things the enemy throws at us.

But, take "...he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded..." to the bank. We will not be moved - no matter what is happening in this world, we will not be shaken by it. Will we be tested? Yes! But that doesn't mean we move

from the Rock upon which we stand. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." - Psalm 46:1-2 (KJV).

That is immovable. You must know your Saviour. You must know what to build upon, and if you build upon the Rock, you will not fall - you will not be moved. That is your confidence, it is faith in Him.

"We believe the Word of God - it says it, it's right, it's fixed, immovable and we will not budge." When the earth and the sky are peeling away, you are fixed on the Eternal One, Jesus Christ. And when the wind and rain beat against you, your house will not fall. "Be still, and know that I am God." - Psalm 46:10 (KJV). Be fixed, be resolute, be immovable.

The God of Jacob is your refuge - every moment is an opportunity for leaping and rejoicing. No matter what is happening around us, God still sits enthroned.

And our God wins.

■ Eric Ludy is the president of Ellerslie Mission Society and the bestselling author of eighteen books on Christian thought and living. Eric Ludy functions as the director of Ellerslie Discipleship Training in Windsor, Colorado and serves as the teaching pastor at Ellerslie's campus church. For more from Eric visit www.ericludy.com

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the efficacy, the power,

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8

AUTHENTIC | CURRENT ISSUES

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## Jesus Our Saviour

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21 (NKJV).

In not many sleeps from now it'll be Christmas. Carols will be sung, trees will be set up, Nativity scenes will be built.

Christmas is a wonderful time. The carols we sing and all the activity around the Christmas season points to the birth of Jesus as a little baby. No other birth is as significant as His was. No other birth divided history as He has.

In the secular presentation of Christmas, we certainly don't hear the reason for the season. But it is this - God loves us,

and sent His Son to be our Saviour. Christmas is God's rescue mission! Jesus didn't come to earth to be a baby. He came to grow up, live a perfect life, die on the Cross and be resurrected again. "... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10. (NKJV).

Jesus, our Saviour, came to save us - and many places in Scripture reflect that. The following are just some examples.

"Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

- John 4:42 (NKJV).

"Christmas is God's rescue mission! Jesus didn't come to earth to be a baby. He came to grow up, live a perfect life, die on the cross and be resurrected again."

"Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." - Acts 5:31 (NKJV).

"From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Saviour - Jesus..." - Acts 13:23 (NKJV).

"....but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." - 2 Timothy 1:10 (NKJV). "To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour." - Titus 1:4 (NKJV).

"...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." - 2 Peter 3:18 (NKJV).

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world." - 1 John 4:14 (NKJV).

"But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." - Matthew 1:20-21 (NKJV).

Just about every Bible version of Matthew 1:21 has these words, "...He will save His people from their sins..." It couldn't be any clearer than that.

In patriarchal times, either a mother (Genesis 4:25) or a father (Genesis 4:26, 5:3) could name a child. Mary was told Jesus' name (Luke 1:31); but Joseph was told both the name and the reason for it.

Jesus' job description was clearly revealed in His name. Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua, which means 'Saviour'. When we read the name Joshua in the Old Testament, it means the same. The two 'Joshuas' in the Old Testament are used in the New Testament as types of Christ - one being Joshua, successor to Moses and the one who led the people into the promised land, (Hebrews 3-4), and Joshua the high priest, a contemporary of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2).

Also note - Jesus is the One who leads us into the promised land (ultimately Heaven), and the One who ministers before the Father as our high priest (forgiveness and salvation). Jesus is our Saviour! He came to save us and deliver us from the consequences of our sin.

Sin has always been the problem. It is what brings a separation between us and God. It corrupts, contaminates and defiles - it devalues, derails and destroys our life. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord". - Romans 6:23 (NKJV). Thank God that in Christ we are saved!

Christmas is also an invitation. It is God inviting us to accept His love and to be with Him. To be united with Him in a relationship unbroken and unstained by sin, and obtained by Jesus Christ our Saviour.

To finish, I leave you with this poem by Sylvia Fraser. It is called A Gift of Love and I pray it may be an encouragement.

A tiny babe,

in a manger gently laid,
a Christmas gift from God above,
a demonstration of His love.
God gave His Son that you might come,
into fellowship with Him,
that you might walk and talk with God,
without consciousness of sin.
And through this gift of His dear Son,
each person has the right,
to come to God through Jesus,
and receive eternal life.

Let's sing the Christmas Carols. Let's be bold and put up Nativity scenes everywhere, in prominent, visible places. Let's spread the word, to everyone, that Christmas time is about God loving us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us. Christmas celebrates His coming. It's worth it. It's worth a good celebration. It's worth a few Nativity scenes, a few chats with our neighbours about the reason for the season. It's worth it because God the Father saw to it that we could be saved! Accepting His invitation brings freedom, peace and purpose.

May you know and experience the love of God our Father.

Then it really is a Merry Christmas!

■ Stephen Whitwell is a husband, father of two and a grandfather of eight. He loves God, the Bible, his family, life, fine food, writing, living in the Bay of Plenty and helping people discover who they really are in Christ. A retired pastor, he writes and publishes Brief Word – a free e-letter and blog - and also serves as a trustee for Authentic Christian Trust. He can be contacted at: www.goodwords.nz



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## An Inexhaustible Supply of Deity

BY MAJOR W. IAN THOMAS

Jesus Christ Himself is the final exegesis of all truth. He is all that we need to know about God, and He is all that we need to know about man.

The Lord Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, that as a Man, all the illimitable resources of deity had been vested in His person.

That is the first thing I would like you to notice, for although He was in the beginning with God, and was God, and is God - and although, as the Creative Word all things were made by Him, when He came to this earth, in the very fullest sense of the term, He became man. But He became man as God intended man

to be, and behaved as God intended man to behave - walking day by day in that relationship to the Father which God had always intended should exist between man and Himself.

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant..." Philippians 2:6-7 (NIV).

In all Jesus' activities, in all His reactions, in every step He took, in every word He said and in every decision He made, He did so as man even though He was God. He knew that in His perfection as man,

God intended to vest in man - all things! In other words, man in perfection has an unlimited call upon the inexhaustible supplies of deity.

To put it another way, all the available to the man who is available to all the inexhaustible supplies of God; and Jesus Christ was that Man! He was Man in perfection - totally, unrelentingly, unquestioningly available and that is why there was available to Him all that to which He was available - all things!

From: The Saving Life of Christ. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. ©1961.

W. Ian Thomas was an evangelist, Christian evangelical writer, theological teacher and founder of the Torchbearers Bible schools You can learn more about the ministry of Torchbearers, at www.torchbearers.org





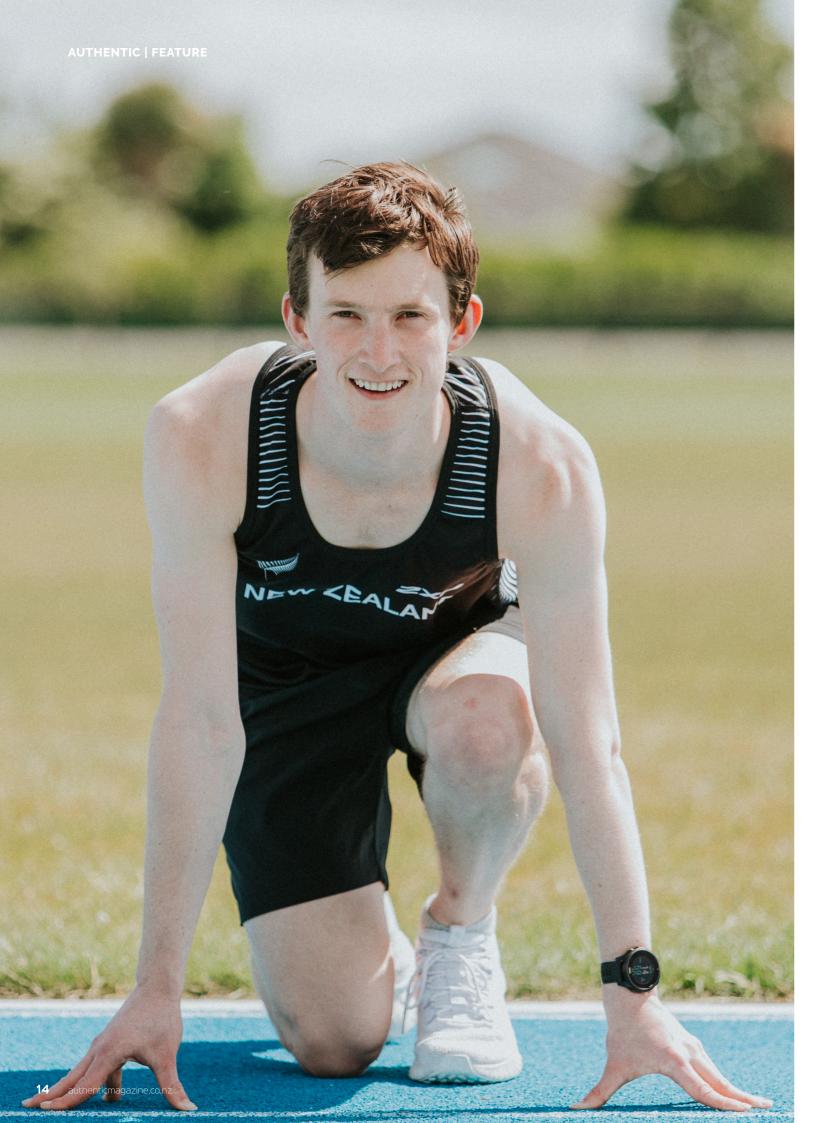
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## William Stedman REMAINS STEADFAST

BY JEREMY SMITH

Christchurch Para-athlete William Stedman is home after winning two medals at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics. The medals though are a result of his wider desire to use his giftings for God, he says - and more than any accolades, he wants his story to be a message which points people to Jesus. He catches up with Jeremy Smith to chat about faith, family, his studies, sport and living with Cerebral Palsy.

"Honestly, as I take a moment to reflect on my journey so far and as I think about what God might have for me in the future - I'm definitely pretty excited. I'm happy to share my story to be an encouragement to others."

The fact William Stedman is excited about what's ahead is saying something - because it's fair to say the current chapter of the Christchurch-based Paralympian's story is already, well, pretty exciting.

In late August, 21-year-old William won two medals within 24 hours of each other at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics - a silver medal in the men's long jump T36, with a final distance of 5.64m, and a bronze medal the following day with a time of 54.75 seconds in the men's 400m T36 race.

Fresh off returning to New Zealand, William chatted with Authentic - and while delighted with meeting his pre-games two-medal goal, he added that over and above any accolades he acquires, ultimately it's the big picture that matters.

"My faith gives me perspective on my athletics career, so my sense of identity isn't dependent on my performance."

William's total Paralympic medal count is now four - he adds his Tokyo medals to the two he won when he made his Paralympic debut for New Zealand in Rio 2016. Then just 16, William won bronze medals in the men's 400m T36 and 800m T36 races. He also competed in the long jump there, finishing fifth.

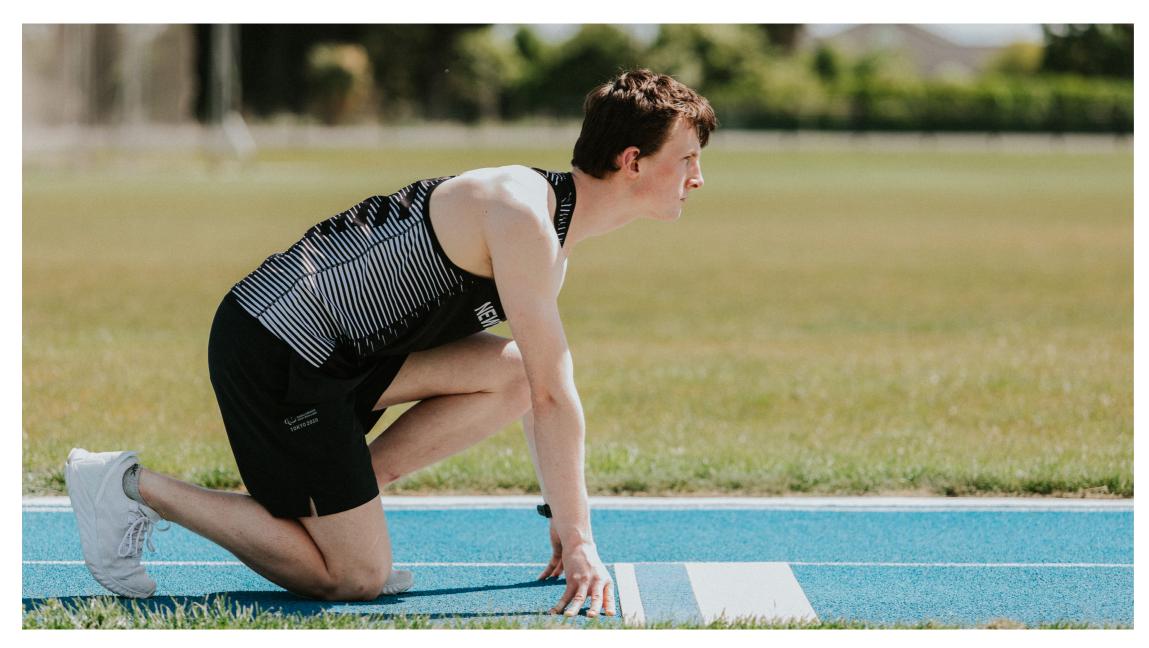
Medals in Tokyo, though a goal, were anything but a given however. He had a few injuries in the lead up to the event, before being diagnosed with a small stress fracture in his lower back just a week before departing for Japan.

"Yeah, it could have easily gone not quite so well," William said, adding that he was a "little concerned" upon hearing that news. "Some adjustments to our training programme and responsibly managing it with things like physiotherapy really helped - and it started to actually feel not too bad. I am really happy with how everything turned out."

When I ask how he sensed God first opening doors for him into the Paralympic realm - given that sport is now a large part of William's testimony that the Lord is using - William says he always loved sport growing up - including cricket and football - and his first encounter with the Paralympic games in fact came when he got to watch the 2012 event in London from the stands with his family.

"Before then, being at the games in terms of competing had never really crossed my mind - but when I saw the athletes

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competing in London I definitely thought to myself, "Wow, this is cool! I could do that!"

Upon returning to New Zealand after those games, William joined Christchurch's Port Hills Athletic Club - initially running cross country, before, at 15, deciding the track - and track events - were calling.

In 2014, he teamed up with his coach George Edwards, who still coaches William today. In fact, George was among the group of supporters - which included family and friends - who nervously watched how William was going in Tokyo from back home in New Zealand. Doing so actually meant those watching from home didn't get to see William's final long jump effort live.

When you chat with William, you begin to realise something about him. As much as we talk about Tokyo, William loves sharing his faith. And as we talk, he's honest, real and vulnerable - he's made an intentional decision to be that way whenever he shares his story - no matter who he's talking to.

Whether it's amongst friends, or on the world stage in front of TV cameras, William wants to reflect Jesus. In that light, it's fair to say God has truly blessed William's sporting journey too.

In 2015, William was named Para-athlete of the Year by Sport Canterbury - before being named Junior Sportsperson of the Year by ParaFed Canterbury the following year. Then, in 2017, he was named Junior Athlete of the Year at the Canterbury Athletics Awards, and also shared the middle distance Athlete of the Year accolade. Just last year, he was named Para-athlete of the Year at the Canterbury Athletics Awards.

Pausing at this point in our chat, William wants to highlight the aspect of his journey that is Cerebral Palsy.

"Cerebral Palsy is something I've had since I was born, and even though it's made some things harder, I've been really blessed in that I've never felt limited by it. And God has used my Cerebral Palsy to open up opportunities that I wouldn't have had if I had not been born with it."

Cerebral palsy is caused when parts of the brain that control movement, balance and posture are damaged - and though it affects people in different ways, it can affect body movement, muscle control, muscle coordination, muscle tone, reflexes, posture and balance. And that's part of the encouragement William wants to offer readers who may be facing their own challenges. "If we give everything to God - even those challenges - He can and will take and use them."

Rather candidly, William adds, "...as I grow in my faith and look at my own life, there's absolutely no doubt in my mind that God has already been using my journey with Cerebral Palsy in ways that I couldn't have imagined.

"I honestly think it's a perfect example of God taking an aspect of my life that could have limited me, and using it for good. My encouragement to readers would be to not let our struggles, or the things that could potentially hold us back, keep us from allowing God to use us." As we chat, William mentions Romans 8:28. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." (NIV).

"It's been so cool seeing how God has used something like my Cerebral Palsy, which could be seen as a hindrance, into something that I consider a blessing."

His upbringing and early childhood is likely a major factor in the openness and honesty with which William shares his story today. He and his two younger siblings - his brother Luke, 19, and sister Isabelle, 17, were raised in a Christian home by their parents Phil and Cath. Phil pastors Christchurch's Riccarton Community Church (RCC). "I am so grateful to have had Christian parents," William says. "It has given me a good foundation for different aspects of my life.

"Although I had grown up in a Christian household my entire life, it wasn't until a couple years ago that I think I fully understood, in a truly personal sense, what Christianity was about, the magnitude of what Jesus did for us on the Cross and how that should impact how we live. It has changed my life in a huge way."

In terms of his journey with cerebral palsy too, William says his parents also instilled an "amazing" outlook in him. He was always encouraged by his whole family to do a range of physical stretches, which helped with mobility and flexibility. "I even remember, as a kid, having a star chart for doing them too," William smiles.

"More important than just the stretches though, is the fact I was never raised to focus on deficit - or to dwell on or consider the ways in which Cerebral Palsy would stop me from doing anything.

"I mean, of course I was aware I was living with it, but my parents' encouragement was to be like someone who just found a few things a bit harder. One of the most important things I learnt from living with Cerebral Palsy was that, with practice, I could learn to do a lot of things that I couldn't do initially. This has set me up well for a lot of things in later life. My parents also encouraged me to develop a personal relationship with Jesus since I was little."

As God teaches him more, William says he regularly thinks about a piece of Scripture in Ephesians - which both reminds him of what Jesus has done for us - and our subsequent part to play in being used by Him.

"I love Ephesians 2:1-10, "...as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And

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God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the Heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (NIV).

"What does it mean to you to live the authentic Christian life then?," I ask. "And what's the importance of surrounding yourself with Godly friends and influences who point you to Jesus and help you do that?"

"Authenticity is something that I have not necessarily been good at in the past," William says in an honest response. "It can be very easy to put up a facade for other people. But authenticity is so important, and is something that I do aim to live out in my life.

"I'm definitely not perfect, but I want to be an example of

that authenticity. I try to be honest with the people around me - I think shame or guilt can sometimes be a big issue for people - myself included - and being honest and open helps with that.

More than that though, knowing that I'm secure in Jesus, and that He can use even my weaknesses, means that I have the freedom to be open. I don't need a facade, because every failing He has forgiven says more about His love than about my ability."

And William has no doubt that

having Christian friends around him has also been key to helping him grow in his faith. "In my faith journey, I've certainly found having those friends to be so important. I attend the church my dad leads - Riccarton Community Church - and I'm blessed that I've met a lot of amazing friends through that avenue who do point me to Jesus. They've absolutely been instrumental in helping me continue to grow.

"I also have some great Christian friends through my studies at the University of Canterbury. I'm completing a four-year electrical engineering degree part time there, and I'm involved with Student Life - a ministry which runs on campus.

"My encouragement to readers on that front is to look for - and pray about - God bringing Christian friends into your life - they are such a blessing and help keep you accountable, open and honest."

On the sporting front, it's only really now, as William settles back into life in New Zealand, that he's had some time to reflect on his achievements in Tokyo. And he's pretty happy.

"I actually thought the last long jump wasn't very good," he says of his first event. "I'm not sure why - but when I saw the distance of 5.64m flash up on the screen I just couldn't believe it - I was pretty shocked to be honest, it was a pretty cool feeling. I think the long jump is probably my favourite event," he says of the track disciplines he competes in.

"It's quite technical but I certainly enjoy it - if it's going to plan," William says with a smile. "There are very small margins of error and actually, the 400m and the long jump are probably pretty similar in terms of ability."

Part of reflecting on Tokyo, William says, involves saying thanks to the large team of people - coaching staff, supporters, family and friends for all their help. "I'm so blessed to be surrounded by amazing people in so many spheres of life, and I thank God for that. When it comes to athletics endeavours, I value the friendship that my coach George and I have so much.

"Yes, he is my coach, but I just think we also get on so well - and that's really important. In my mind, one of the most awesome qualities about him is that he's always learning in terms of coaching and then passing those learnings on to me.

"...knowing that I'm secure in Jesus, and that He can use even my weaknesses, means that I have the freedom to be open. I don't need a facade, because every failing He has forgiven says more about His love than about my ability."

"He's been an absolutely massive part of my athletics journey - he's kind of the mastermind behind the training programme to be honest and it's amazing that as I look back, I can see how our time training together has helped me improve when it comes to my abilities too. In a way, as we put in the work together, when I achieve my sporting goals George achieves his."

"Do you still get nervous when you compete at such a level?" I ask.

"Absolutely," William laughs. "I don't think I've ever not been nervous. But as well as George, I've got a big team behind me who help me stay focussed on the simple things like visualising jumps and concentrating on the task at hand. This is also where I find that the perspective that my faith brings really helpful. Prayer is a big thing... there's definitely a lot of prayer going on, all the time!"

As I ask William what he feels God might have for him next, he alludes to some "really exciting" things ahead. First though, he's looking forward to "putting his feet up" for a short time over the summer holidays and taking a break from an, at times, gruelling training schedule.

"Well, off the track, I'm just so looking forward to spending some time with my friends. Actually, my idea of a perfect day to rest and relax would be one where I spend it doing things like getting out into nature. I love the outdoors skiing, mountains and tramps. I also like playing the piano and the guitar."

Most exciting of all though is the fact he and fiancée Annika Duke are getting married next month - they're currently putting



the finishing touches on their summer wedding ceremony. "Annika and I met when we went to Middleton Grange School, a Christian School here in Christchurch, and we've been dating for about four years – since our final year of school," William says. I can tell how excited he is, as he shares a snapshot of their story. "She's wonderful. I am so grateful to have her in my life."

Athletics wise though - Lord willing - the next sporting step looks like the next Paralympics - to be held in Paris in 2024. He adds he can see scope for improvement and "doing even better" than his results in Tokyo. He's likely to be back in Tokyo next year too, at a World Championship event.

"Honestly, Paris is only about three years away now - but on the other hand three years is a long time in sport. In the spirit of going where God could lead me over the next few years, I'm holding onto this pretty lightly.

"But my best long jump distance in Tokyo - 5.64m - and my race time 54.75 seconds were both below my personal bests for the events. My long jump personal best is actually 9cm further than what I managed in Tokyo, and to give you an idea,

if I had jumped my personal best in the long jump I would have only been 3cm short of the Gold medal-winning distance in Tokyo. So, who knows where I'll be in 2024!"

"I gave it absolutely everything in Tokyo. Especially so in the 400m race after winning the bronze in the long jump - following that race I can definitely say I had nothing left in the tank."

As our chat nears its end, William offers one last thought.

"Above all, my approach has been remembering that sport isn't everything – my faith in Jesus is undoubtedly what has kept me grounded throughout the ups and downs of sport and life in general over the last few years.

"It is ultimately the motivation for everything that I do.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says "...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God...". I want to be the best athlete, friend, musician, or engineer that I can be - because I know I'm ultimately doing it all for God's glory."

Awesome William! Thanks so much for chatting to me!

■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.



AUTHENTIC | MEN & FAMILY

AUTHENTIC | MEN & FAMILY



Father and son Alan and Jackson Stanley share the second and final part of a feature series they've written describing a journey they've been walking together in recent years. Part one appeared in issue 15 and we begin this part with Jackson's words in italics.

As I continued down this path I felt like I was on top of the world. I was living the dream - going to parties every weekend, skipping school and smoking as much weed as I could afford. I often felt guilty for letting my parents down. However, that was quickly drowned out by a few cones with my mates. The only opinions which mattered to me were that of my friends. If I had their respect, I was happy. However, there was another side to this lifestyle. While I was genuinely having fun, everything else around me began to deteriorate. I couldn't see it at the time, but my relationships, my education and my mental health were all on a downward spiral. I felt that I had no responsibilities to any group of people outside of my friends, and I could care less about school. But I was completely oblivious to the consequences of my actions. All I cared about was getting the next high. And the more I smoked, the more I wanted that next high. Eventually, I couldn't go a day without getting high and I was only happy if I wasn't sober.

As Jackson's dad, somewhere in the back of my mind, I wondered how I would handle a situation like this. Well, I didn't have to wonder anymore. What surprised me was that once I had let Jackson go - as the father in the prodigal son parable let his son go - I felt a freedom that I'd never experienced before. A freedom to love my son unconditionally. A freedom to love him as my son irrespective of whether he was walking with the Lord or not. And a freedom to love him irrespective of the kind of lifestyle he was living. I should point out that this love was not contingent on whether Jackson got his act together. And, remarkably, I came to a point where I was not secretly in my heart wishing he'd get his act together. What I'm trying to say is that I simply enjoyed him for who he was - my son - rather than for what he was doing or how he was living. I'm sure I didn't feel this way all the time but I do know that, as time went on, I remember feeling a deep love for my boy regardless of his choices.

There were plenty of times when I was able to hug him, tell him that I love him, talk with him and even pray with him. There were plenty of times when I was able to share deeply with him. Perhaps the greatest thing I learned was to listen to him - to really listen. I had not lost my son at all. In fact, I had gained an appreciation of what it meant to love him without imposing my own expectations and beliefs on him. It was nothing short of liberating.

This does not mean that there weren't difficult decisions my wife and I had to face, nor does it mean that we simply threw all our values and beliefs out the window. But one thing that helped was coming to appreciate that our relationship with our son was more important than enforcing our rules. For example, more than once it seemed we were faced with the decision of letting him go to a party - for the third or fourth weekend in a row - or allowing him to drink, but stay home. There was part of me that wanted to say, "The decision is easy. No to both." But the question we were then faced with was, "Would we really prefer our son stay home, sober and under our surveillance?" To what end? What would that achieve in the long run? Situations like this were never easy, but we looked at them with a new perspective - a perspective that led us to choose what we thought was best for the relationship. It often felt like we were choosing the lesser of two evils. I never knew whether we were doing the right thing half the time, but this was new territory; it was uncertain, but I wanted love to prevail. I was convinced that our goal was to have a relationship rather than enforcing rules. It would have been easy to do the latter. The former was messy, sometimes complicated, and yet massively rewarding.

The moment things really changed for me as a father, was, funnily enough, in a car again (recall my opening story in part 1). It was after midnight, and I had just picked Jackson up from a party. He was high, lethargic and seemingly happy; far from his depressed self that had become so characteristic of him since lockdown in 2020. As I drove him home, I thought of the boy that we had known and raised. The baby who I stayed up all night with once because he couldn't sleep (and then having to preach blurry-eyed the next day). The toddler who would chew his food until he fell asleep. The first grader who stunned his teacher with his ability to learn to read faster than anyone she'd ever known.

The boy who fell off his skateboard and badly injured himself because I convinced him that he could make it down the hill. The teenager who I would read to and play a silly, but very fun, game with before saying good night. It was like his life flashed through my mind within a matter of seconds. And I thought about him now. And all I could see was pain. Lots of pain. Beneath the lethargic happiness brought on by drugs and alcohol, I saw a broken boy - my boy! My boy in pain. My heart swelled with compassion and filled with a love that hurt. I ached with a love like I'd never ached before for him.

And then it hit me: this is the way that our Heavenly Father looks at His children. This is the way God looks at me. We often imagine that God is fixated with our sin, disappointed when we fail in some way or quick to judge. However, the reality is far different. It must be different. He sees the cause, root and pain behind our sin. He sees our futile searches for happiness

and the brokenness that undergirds our searches. How else do we explain Jesus being a friend to sinners and tax-collectors? Telling a woman caught in adultery, "I do not condemn you"? How else do we explain the father's compassion, not even waiting for a confession or apology, toward his prodigal son? This kind of love is scandalous. But it's God's love.

I recall a few moments in my life, only a few, where I have had something revealed to me that has so gripped and impacted me that it has forever changed me. This was one of those rare moments. I was seeing my son as my Heavenly Father sees me. This, of course, is not to take away from the love and compassion I felt for Jackson in that moment. But that God would see me in the same way . . . well, I couldn't have asked for a greater gift.

This is how I began to see my son. But how did Jackson see me? ... It was hard at first. I was angry at my parents. They didn't know how to react to the things I was doing and they didn't want to hear my side of the story. This only pushed me further away from them. The problem was I was never going to stop the things I was doing if I was forced to. It had to be my decision, otherwise I would keep coming back to it. So, when I told my

parents this, and they listened to me, it was as though a weight had been lifted from me. Although I didn't think much about it at the time, later I would often think about how my parents helped through that time in my life - helping me with my schoolwork when I couldn't be bothered helping myself, picking me up in the middle of the night when I was stranded, making me food when I was too high to get off the couch and just sitting on

my bed with me. Despite what I was doing they made it clear that they loved me and were there for me. My dad would even tell me that he would always love me even if I continued to do drugs. I knew that whatever direction my life took my parents meant what they said.

This story does have a happy ending as it turns out. However, I would like to make it clear that it's not the happy ending that is important to me personally. In fact, the editor of Authentic suggested to me that we entitle these two articles something along the lines of "Jackson's redemption" - yes, Jackson gets redeemed! Keep reading. However, this is not why I am sharing this story. For, as wonderful as this next part of the story is, that's Jackson's happy ending. My happy ending had already happened. And it was simply this: I no longer needed my son to live up to my expectations, values, or Christian beliefs for me to be proud of him and be his biggest fan. I knew that I loved him for the boy he was, not for the boy I wanted him to be.

But there's more to it than my love for my son. God had shown me how He - as a Father - sees me, His child. How often is our experience of God's love influenced by how well we are doing in our Christian walk? How much do we believe God loves us when we sin, when we've blown it, when we're spiritually dry or when we've turned away from Him? But unconditional love exists, irrespective of how well we are doing. Think about it for a moment. "How could anyone," asks David Benner, "...ever expect to feel safe enough to relax in the presence of a God who is preoccupied with their shortcomings and failures?" He just can't help loving you. And He loves you deeply, recklessly and extravagantly - just as you are." Why? Because "...the Father's love reflects the Father's character, not the children's behavior." I'd experienced this myself in the way I saw my son and was now experiencing what it felt like for God to see me in the same way.

But, back to Jackson's happy ending... In the October 2020 school holidays, I went with my mum and younger brother to visit my older brother Luke at YWAM in Nelson. I don't know why I went. I knew I wouldn't be able to smoke for a week. It didn't take long for the withdrawals to set in. My depression spiked, I was constantly angry and I couldn't sleep. However, on the day we were to leave I decided to sit in on YWAM's worship service. I slipped in the back where no one could see me. I began to pray, "God, if you are real, send someone to pray for me." I looked up and saw a man walking towards me. He sat next to me and said,

"I felt God telling me to pray for you." He then asked me if there was anything I would like to surrender to God. I told him I wanted to be set free from my addiction to marijuana. As he prayed the tears began to stream down my face.

Two weeks later, I sat in the back of my friend's car with my head in my hands. I was in pain, every day. I hadn't smoked for two

weeks, but I wasn't happy. In fact, I felt worse. I cried out to God, asking him repeatedly, "Why can't I be happy?" I then asked Him, "Is it You that I'm missing? Will You make me happy?" Later that night, I decided to read my Bible. However, I couldn't understand it. I put it right up close to my face, but it still made no sense. I felt dejected and hopeless. The next day at school my brother from YWAM texted me to tell me that last night one of the girls studying with him had a vision of me in my room with my face close to the Bible. There's no way she could have known that. I knew it was God. My pain went and I was overcome with a joy I had never experienced. There and then I asked God into my life. It is now just over a year later, and my life couldn't be more different. I've been sober from marijuana for over a year. In May I was baptized, and I am just about to complete my first semester of a Bachelor of Theology at Laidlaw College. My journey of faith has not come without struggles, but despite my countless mistakes God is always waiting for me with open arms and His gift of grace.

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reflects the Father's

children's behavior."

character, not the

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Alan Stanley is a Waikato-based preacher, writer and lecturer at Pathways College of Bible and Mission. He has started a new initiative - PreachIt! - aimed at training, equipping and mentoring preachers. See, www.preachit.nz



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AUTHENTIC | LIFE

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## "...it is the Lord, Christ you are serving... thinking about that should drastically change not only what we do but how we do it."

Recently while driving I was listening to the radio, Life FM actually. A speaker mentioned these verses from a different perspective.

A note worth mentioning as we begin is that I trust we have already settled our eternal destiny. So, we can be sure we are the group Jesus referred to as 'sheep'. Having escaped and been rescued from the fate of the 'goats', we are those people born again, forgiven, redeemed, justified and being transformed on our way to Heaven.

In that light, have you given much thought to the act, the lifestyle and the place of 'ministering to Jesus'?

We hear a lot about 'ministering', but it is usually in the context of 'ministering' to others. However, the passage we've just read teaches us that serving and ministering to the hungry, the thirsty, the lonely, those lacking clothes, the sick and those in prison is actually ministering to Jesus. What a thought!

So, when we say give food to a homeless person, when we visit prisoners - and nurses - when we serve the sick, we are actually 'ministering to Jesus'!

Incredible. Even in tasks that at times can seem mundane, and in serving fellow human beings with the right heart and spirit, we are - in reality - 'ministering to Jesus'.

Remember the Apostle Paul's words; "With goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men." Ephesians 6:7 (NKJV). "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." - Colossians 3:23 (NKJV).

If we look at the surrounding verses in this passage in Colossians, they say the following in the NIV.

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with

sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Carrying this thought that we ultimately serve Christ around 24 hours a day, seven days a week should change us a lot. When we 'minister' - or do what we do in our day to day lives - when we help, serve, give, administer and simply carry out the tasks we have before us, let's not forget a few important things.

God sees what we do. No generous 'unseen-by-human-eye' gesture goes unnoticed by the Father. He sees all we do, even when no one else does. He sees and knows about the 'ministering' we do to those difficult people.

God values those interactions with humanity differently than we do. Too often we want to do things for others to be seen, and particularly seen by the right people! This is otherwise known as self-promotion. Yet the smallest random act of kindness to the lowest in society is highly valued by the Lord.

And remember, the key to all of this is that we are actually serving Jesus! Unbelievable! When we think about 'ministering to Jesus', we would probably default to thinking about things like prayer and corporate worship. While that is true, there's more to it than that. We are actually serving Jesus.

I'd ask us to remember Paul's words again, "... as working for the Lord...", and "...it is the Lord, Christ you are serving..."

Thinking about that could drastically change not only what we do but how we do it, because the 'why' is different. When our motive and reason for 'ministering' is because we know we're actually 'ministering to Jesus' as we interact and serve another soul, then I think we're well on the way to making a divine impact on planet earth.

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Ministering to Jesus

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL

As we begin, let's reflect on the following scripture, the text for this piece.

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

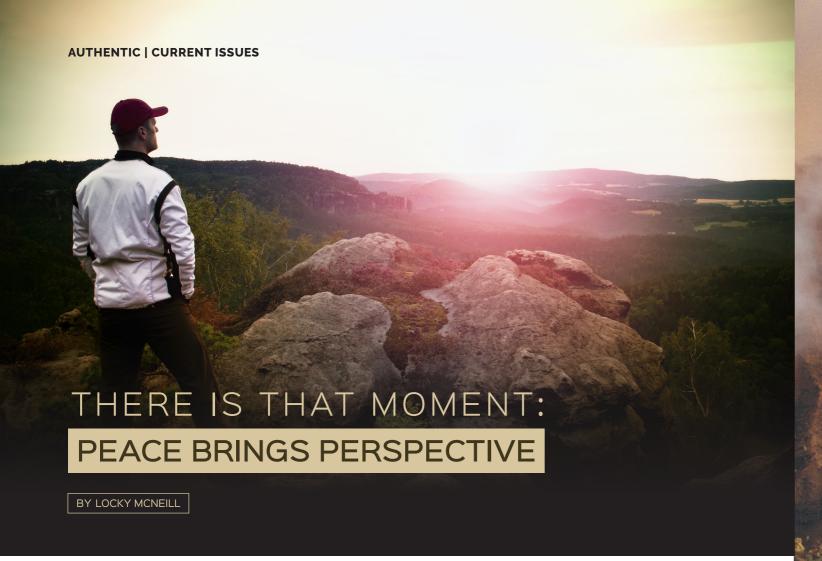
Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me

food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." - Matthew 25:31-40 (NKJV).

■ Stephen Whitwell is a husband, father of two and a grandfather of eight. He loves God, the Bible, his family, life, fine food, writing, living in the Bay of Plenty and helping people discover who they really are in Christ A retired pastor, he writes and publishes Brief Word – a free e-letter and blog - and also serves as a trustee for Authentic Christian Trust. He can be contacted at: www.goodwords.nz.





I can remember the days on which my children were born. The location, the weather, the sounds, the people involved, the drama...

Then there is that moment - the moment when everything changes. Straight after the birth, everything stops - a strange calm settles. Maybe not strange in the sense of weird, as such, but certainly something surreal in nature.

I don't think that Mary ever forgot the day Jesus came into the world. We are told in Scripture, "...but Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." - Luke 2:19 (NIV).

The day had certainly been supernatural and strange stressful and stupendous. And as she sat with Joseph in that stable holding the Son of God in her young arms, I think she had a moment. Maybe even a series of moments.

As we've just read, Scripture tells us that she pondered - and that she treasured it all in her heart. A peace would have come over her that was palpable and divine as she did so.

It is my prayer that this Christmas may not just be a season, but a moment for you. In the passage in Luke 24 which tells us of the women rising very early in the morning to go to Jesus' tomb, there is a simple phrase in verse eight which says, "... then they remembered His words..." (NIV).

As you take time to reflect on Jesus entering the world and setting you up for Salvation, may God's peace flood your whole being.

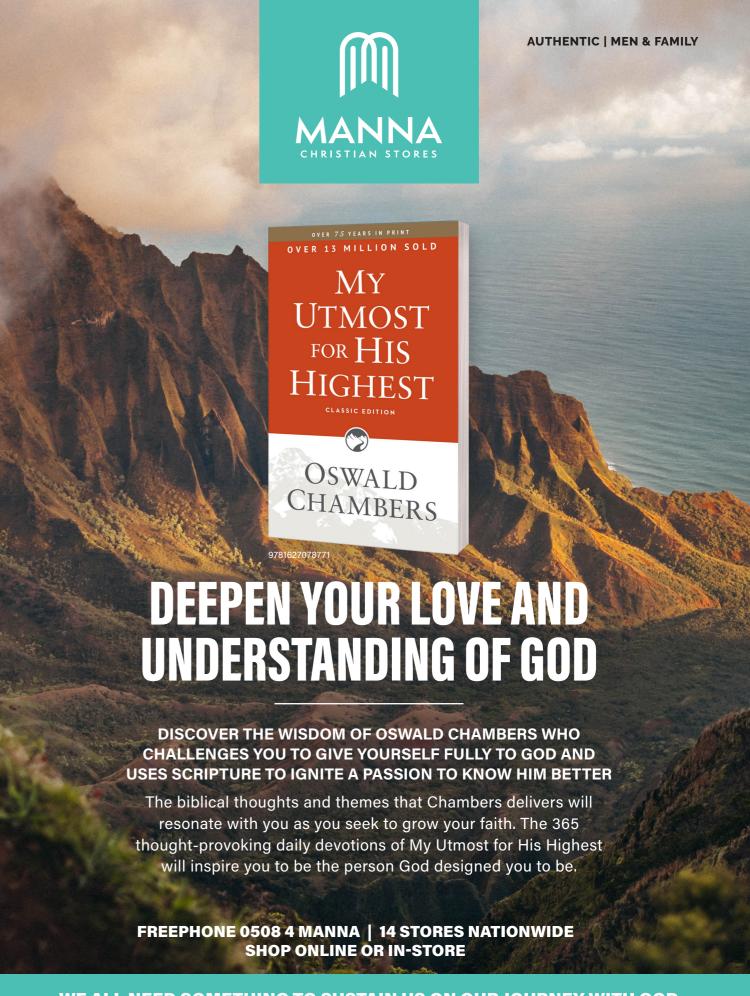
There should be - for both you and I - a moment in which our time of reflection brings a supernatural peace to our souls.

Because Jesus Himself told us peace was what He was leaving for us. And as Paul says in Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." (NIV).

As you read this piece, please know that in reflecting on the year that has been I have been praying that this would happen for you! And to all our readers, I pray this Christmas is a special one for you.

Locky McNeill is a faith-based entrepreneur living in Taupo, New Zealand. He is a father to two young sons and a husband to one talented wife who can bake up a storm of goodness. He splits his time between being a digital Pastor, event director, MC, performer, writer and host of the Real, Raw & Relevant with Locky McNeill online show.





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## THE SIGN OF JESUS' COMING

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

This Christmas season as, I hope, we all have opportunities for rich, wonderful times with our families, may we also bask in and reflect on the reality of all that Jesus is.

My prayer for you is that this Christmas it wouldn't be so much about getting things, as much as it is about giving, showcasing and displaying the life and the love of the One whom we are celebrating.

In this piece, I'd like to talk about the sign of Christ's coming and when the angels declared it to the shepherds. It's a passage which has been a rich meditation to me, and therefore I really hope it'll be an encouragement and benefit to you.

In Luke chapter 2, we read of the grand thought of Jesus being born in a little manger. You'll likely know the story well - Joseph and Mary are called to leave a place called Nazareth and head to Bethlem - between 130 and 160 kilometres away - to register in the census.

Mary is nine months pregnant. Now, I don't know about you, but if I was with someone who was nine months pregnant, going on a journey which was up to 160km long wouldn't make a lot of sense.

But of course, after they arrive there, Mary gives birth and places Jesus in a manger. It's interesting to note that there's some speculation as to whether the manger was actually the bottom of someone's house, whether it was a rock outcropping, or whether it was a stable.

Regardless, Mary gives birth to Jesus. Looking at Luke chapter 2, the part I'd like to highlight for us is the verses in which some shepherds are given a most incredible sign. "...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the

fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Suddenly a great company of the Heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest Heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into Heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." - Luke 2:7-20 (NIV)."

What an incredible passage. Picture this. Here is this group of shepherds out in a field in the middle of Bethlehem - the place of shepherds. Typically, in fact, Bethlehem was the place of the priestly shepherds. In that day typically too, shepherds were the youngest members of the family and you would essentially say to them, "...give your life to looking after the sheep and fighting off the wolves..."

I find it really interesting that in the middle of the night, here are these angels who show up to shepherds. In this culture, the shepherds were the lowest in the economy. Shepherding was not a high ranking job. It was a lowly one. Not only that, but the angels go to not just the lowest in that culture, but to those who are also likely teenagers to bring them the Good News "...with great joy..." I love that idea.

So, what is the Good News? The Good News is that there is a baby born in the city of David, in Bethlehem, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Reading that, you realise that for thousands of years the Jews were anxiously awaiting Salvation. They're awaiting their Messiah.

There's been 400 years of silence

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since the end of the Old Testament. And now, for the first time. a declaration is being made.

And it's this. "Hey, there's Good News coming, and although things have been silent for 400 years and there's been no prophetic voice - now good things are happening. This Messiah you've been waiting for, who has been prophesied thousands of years before - even to Adam and Eve in the garden - the One who is going to stomp upon the head of the serpent, the one who is actually going to restore Israel, the One who is going to bring Salvation - whose name itself is 'God is our Salvation' is here."

As we unpack this passage, it's worth making note of the fact that when the angels say "He's here..." it's interesting they didn't trumpet it down at the temple. They trumpet it to the lowly people, who were likely teenagers out in the field.

The angels tell the shepherds there will be a sign - and that sign is, "...you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger..." At Christmas time each year, we've all seen depictions of Jesus as a baby in a manger. But when we look at this there in profundity, or depth, to this - it literally is a sign.

If we take a look at what is happening in the culture of the day, it becomes beautiful. Why is it a sign? Because the angels are talking to priestly shepherds and the message of Jesus being in a manger meant something to them in

their context. But, what? Well, priestly shepherds were often from Bethlehem - which is about five miles from Jerusalem, where sacrifices would take place. So, what the priestly shepherds would do is they would raise their flocks with the thought of sacrificing them down at the temple in mind.

As they acted as caretakers for the animals, when they had to take a little year-old lamb over to the temple to be sacrificed, literally what they would do is take the little lamb to the temple - wrapped in swaddling clothes so it couldn't move. Why? Because as they were travelling the five miles we talked about, if the little lamb became injured in some way, then it was no longer the perfect sacrifice. The lamb was swaddled so it couldn't hurt itself.

Wow. In that context, think of the profundity of that. Here is an angel saying, "the Messiah is here... and the sign is He's wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger".

In the shepherd's minds, what would they have been thinking? Jesus, the Messiah who was coming, is a little lamb for

sacrifice? That is so beautiful to me. When we get into the book of Hebrews, here is Jesus who is THE lamb. In the book of Revelation, John tells us, "... Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb..." - Revelation 14:1 (NIV).

There is language used in Scripture to indicate that Jesus is the Lamb, "...the perfect sacrifice...". That was so countercultural to their understanding of the Messiah. The Messiah was going to be a conqueror who was going to come in, remove Rome from the throne and restore things. The angel essentially tells the shepherds it is the opposite - the Messiah is coming as a sacrifice. Isn't it neat, then, that the shepherds who apparently left their sheep - ran to see the sign?

They see Mary and Joseph and they see Jesus lying in a manager. And "...when they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds

> said to them..." - Luke 2:17-18 (NIV). "This is interesting..." they would have been thinking, "...this is not what we were expecting..." But yet, when they returned, they were glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Do you realise that Jesus, the One who came, who humbled Himself and became a little baby, is our perfect Lamb of sacrifice?

> Isn't it amazing that in this Christmas season as we are celebrating His birth, in some aspects we are also celebrating His work - the fact that Christ came so

He could bring about Salvation for His people. He is the perfect sacrifice - a little lamb wrapped up who will be brought to the temple some time later and sacrificed. I would love for us to be walking into this Christmas season not dazzled by the consumerism, the lights and the music - as grand as that is.

to respond like those shepherds did. They ran to see Him and when they saw the reality of the sign they could not help but tell everybody around them. And everyone they told was left in wonder. And, even if those they told didn't respond, at least the shepherds were glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

I want that to be my heart this Christmas season - as we are celebrating the birth of Jesus - that we are captured by the reality of who He is and what He has done. In light of all that, we should respond by glorifying and praising God.

Let's walk into this season with Jesus as our focus. I want us

If we approach this Christmas season with that attitude, it would change everything for us, wouldn't it?

■ Nathan Johnson is program director and an instructor at Ellerslie Mission Society in Windsor, Colorado. Learn and see more at deeperchristian.com. Used by permission.

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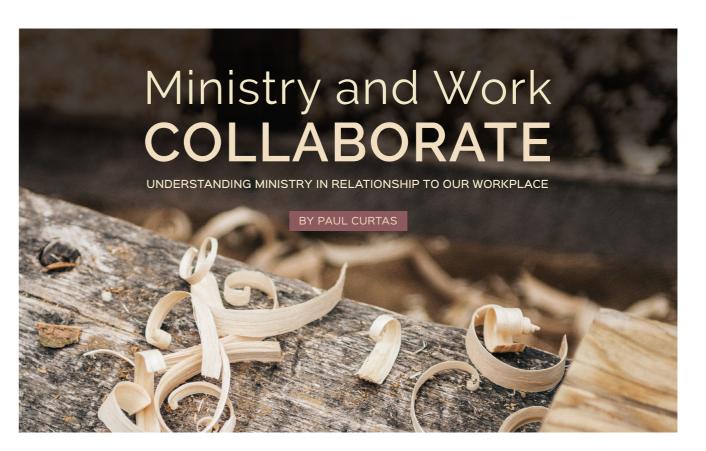
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"Whatever we do... we do all for the glory of God! Ministry in the workplace is bringing our relationship with God into the details of work and workplace."

Building upon the Biblical model of ministry, that of service, we begin to recognise that in our jobs we regard ourselves as servants of Christ. Doing our work heartily unto Christ is providing a service, or ministry, unto the Lord - not merely to men. Don't miss this!

God is saying that as you perform your company's job description this way, you participate with Christ in ministry at your workplace. As a Christian, if you see your work as anything less than this, you will miss the opportunity of workplace ministry!

As previously mentioned in other articles I've written, a complete understanding of ministry in relation to work does not divide work and ministry into separate compartments; they

do and should overlap. I have also mentioned before that Jesus' every day work as a carpenter while He was here on this earth was exemplary of that. We are whole people! Our faith and obedience to God is to be evident in our total life experience, not just designated parts which we've labeled as "private" and "sacred".

Whatever we do...we do all for the glory of God! Ministry in the workplace is bringing our relationship with God into the details of work and workplace. As an employee you have been equipped and trained to perform your job for your company. However, as a Christian, you have an added dimension you cannot afford to overlook. Your faith in the Lord should be integrated into the details of the job you have been trained to do. If

not, then your job could become nothing more than a routine and your faith alienated from your work. God designed our faith in Him to influence our work, giving the routine of our work a deeper purpose and meaning. It brings value to the little things we say and do and a deep realisation that something much bigger is being accomplished in it all. Does your job description have this added dimension to it?

Many churches keep records of their members' attendance on Sundays, but God carries out His ministry in our workplaces by His attendance through us there. The essence of workplace ministry is about God declaring His glory through us in our companies, as we perform our jobs and serve the people God has placed around us.

■ Paul M. Curtas is the General Director of FCAP. He is also the author of the book "When God Shows Up at Work", which is now available in German and Spanish, as well as English. Visit his website for more details - www.godinwork.com



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## Defenders of the Faith

BY LEW MEYER

In any warfare, there are advance troops sent to engage the enemy. Then there are the other support soldiers. In the same way, we need to ensure the Gospel is reaching the mission targets - our communities, our children and our unsaved family members. It is fine to take new ground in battle, but the ground gained also needs to be defended. This is less spectacular soldiery, but not less important.

Likewise, in the battle of life, leaders of churches and leaders in Christian homes need to oversee the defense of their loved ones. We need to be defenders of the 'high ground of truth', won over the centuries by those who knew and loved the Word of God and fought valiantly against heresy.

The enemy has many teams in action to target our churches and families. He wants to confuse and then capture them. Readers may have noticed an upsurge in calls from Jehovah's Witnesses during lockdown. No longer able to go door to door, they do their work on the phone. Others may have been confused by the Seventh Day Adventist television channels. So, what do they believe? And is it theologically okay?

#### Immigration and world religions

Immigration has brought a mission field to us in the form of adherents of the major world religions - including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The challenge is on for us to understand these beliefs and to show people the love of Christ by opening our homes and hearts, sharing food and - ultimately - the Gospel.

#### The Cults and Semi-Cults

What we call pseudo-Christian cults are distortions of the Gospel. These can be hybrids of two or more belief systems. Mormonism is a mixture of Christianity, Blue Lodge Freemasonry and Occultism. The Unification Church is a mixture of Korean-style Christianity and Eastern Mysticism.

Cults have been around since near the beginning of the Christian Church. Paul consistently battled the Jewish/Christian hybrid and its legalism, and wrote Galatians for that reason. His battle language was not polite. He also battled the Greek philosophy/Christian hybrid with its mysticism, spiritual elitism and re-definition of Jesus - and wrote Colossians. The battle with Greek philosophy is not over, with the resurgence of fatalism in theology.

#### Servant leadership is redefined. The structure is hierarchical.

Jesus clearly forbade this model of leadership in Matthew 20:25-28. "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (NIV)

He could foresee the titles (also forbidden in Matthew 23:8-12), politics, pride, power-plays, back-stabbing, corruption and distortions that this would bring. The enemy took full advantage, to divide and conquer. Around 300 AD, one dominant arm of Christianity adopted the leadership structure of the Roman Empire. Sadly, the reformers didn't reform fully. Today, many churches continue the same blatant disregard for Jesus' teaching. The moment I put the words 'Senior Pastor' on my door, I establish a hierarchy, and human nature is such that I may have an associate pastor snapping at my heels.

Hierarchies also play into the hands of narcissistic leadership that has a distorted psychological need to be in control. More recently, many churches have imported the 'American business model' culture into the church. The top pastor is effectively the CEO. This also can distort the intended leadership team dynamics of Ephesians 4, putting too much emphasis on Pastors and teachers and not enough on prophets (aka preachers) and evangelists.

Have you had any missions in your church lately? Mercifully, there are many who have genuine servant hearts within these systems. A danger signal in regard to structure is when the top gun decides he or she hears from God for the whole church. Everybody should attend their group. The Church has strayed from what God intended in theology and practice and they are here to correct it. This is seen in all cults. Some excuse their disobedient structure by explaining that it reflects the structure of their culture. My answer? Change the culture, not the words of Jesus.

2. Jesus redefined. His being and nature are distorted. The second assault on the Christian high ground is the wave of attacks on the person of Jesus Christ. Every full cult distorts Him. Jehovah's Witnesses consider Him a created angelic

being. Mormons believe Jesus to be one of many gods and a spirit-brother to lucifer. He was married and had children. We had a church council and a Nicene creed to sort out who Jesus is, but the enemy knows a good strategy when he sees one and will not let go of this one easily. Jesus is the heart of our faith, so it should not surprise us that He is the bullseye on the devil's target. Often the bodily resurrection of Jesus also comes under attack. This is not surprising either, as this is a key piece of evidence that Jesus is God. Tragically, many Christians are so theologically illiterate that they are easy prey for these generally polite household visitors.

#### 3. Salvation redefined. Some kind of good works is required in addition to Faith.

Are we saved by God's unmerited kindness by the attitude of trust, or by a mixture of trust and our good activities? The third major tactic is the consistent assault on the central doctrine of salvation by grace. The key verses every believer should know by heart are Ephesians 2:8–10. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". (NIV)

Please note, we are saved to do good things, not by doing good things. To believe these verses is to trust in Christ, and to disbelieve them is to trust, at least partially, in one-self. God will not accept any contribution from you or me apart from trust in who Jesus is and what He has achieved on the Cross for us.

Officially, the leaders of the Mormon, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventist and the Roman Catholic Churches do not believe these verses. For them all, salvation is a process that includes human effort. Similarly, cults cannot allow their people to feel they are saved by grace alone through faith alone, because they can lose their control. They can no longer say, "...unless you do what we say, you will go to hell".

Please note too that I believe there are genuine believers in the SDA church, as there are in the Roman Catholic Church, but I am reporting on the official teachings of these groups. Ellen G White, the original prophetess of the Seventh Day Adventists, clearly taught Salvation dependent on works and that the atoning work of Christ is not complete. Only a true disciple of Jesus can say with holy joy, "I'm saved! I have eternal life! I'm safe forever!" A cultist can't. They have to face their impending death with a fear that they may not have done enough.

#### The greatest three weapons we have against false teachers are:

1. Love. This surprises them and can disarm them, especially the Jehovah's Witnesses. They believe the Christian

Church is Babylon the Great of Revelation. They are not expecting the love of Jesus in us. We are to speak the truth in love, but it must be the truth - it requires 'tough love.' I feel deeply for them, they are the deceived ones. The deceivers are the leaders and false prophets who started the groups.

- Prayer. People need their eyes opened, and Satan's influence removed.
- 3. The Word of God. They have distorted it but it can still speak to them.

#### Warrior leadership and the church?

It is time to stand up and fight. Get to know the Bible and you'll be able to discern the errors. Challenge non-Biblical, nonservant leadership styles in your church.

Study the doctrines of the faith and the great creeds. (Nicene. Apostles.). Leaders need to be deliberate in following Moses' father-in-law's advice in Exodus 18:20 to behave like a leader. "Teach them His decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave." (NIV)

Insist on good doctrinal teaching. Sniff out false doctrine if it arises in teaching and challenge it. You may make enemies inside and outside the church. There are many people pleasers who are pluralists at heart. They want to accept everyone without challenging their beliefs. They want bottoms on seats.

#### Warrior fatherhood and the family?

Scripture gives the responsibility for the spiritual development of children to fathers. Many women do an excellent job of this because they have to, but that is not God's best plan. While we may have others in assistance, it is our responsibility to see that it is carried out with excellence. Our children need to be in a right relationship with God, growing in their faith and in their understanding of the Word of God.

The example of their father should teach them what their Father in heaven is like. In Deuteronomy 11:18-21 God says thorough Moses, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the Heavens are above the earth." (NIV)

May God grant us the courage to realise that we as men need to be warriors for truth in the Church and in the home.

■ Lew Meyer is an evangelist, Bible teacher, apologist and elder of a small fellowship. He is a writer who has recently produced a series of small books on cults and religions designed to educate believers and act as a tool they can give to people of other religions. Lew lives in West Auckland with his wife, Angela.





In writing this piece, two scriptures come to mind. Ecclesiastes 1:9, "... There is nothing new under the sun..." (NIV) and 1 Corinthians 8:1. "Now about food sacrificed to idols..." (NIV). The scripture in Ecclesiastes came to mind because of the current pandemic. Many of us have no doubt been shocked, or caught off guard a bit, yet for various understandable reasons. Phrases such as "unprecedented", "never before" and "unheard of" have been used to describe the state of the world.

Yet, the Word of God tells us "...there is nothing new under the sun". I know you're probably thinking, "...but Jake, there has never been a pandemic like this before". And you're probably right. There has never been a pandemic of Covid-19 before. But have there been far-reaching, world-altering, life-shaking events before? Have there ever been events where people are divided? Or, a question which causes me greater concern, "... have there been events in history where believers are divided?"

According to Solomon and the Word of God, the answer is ves – because as stated. "...there is nothing new under the sun..." This is where the second scripture - 1 Corinthians 8:1comes to mind. And, It raises a question - "...what does eating things sacrificed to idols have to do with COVID-19?" Actually, in reality, everything. In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul's concern lay

with something deeper than eating things sacrificed to idols; that was in fact just the symptom. Love versus knowledge was the root of the issue in the church at Corinth. The Corinthian believers thought their knowledge of things sacrificed to idols gave them rights, liberties or freedoms to do what they wanted because they 'knew' there was no power in those idols.

Paul says that's fine, because we believe in the One God! But what about those who do not have that knowledge? Or those whose view differs from yours? Paul's real question in these verses is "...how do your actions affect someone else?" He says other people, both Christian and non-Christian, might not have the 'knowledge' we have. Therefore, they are 'weaker', and we need to keep them in mind. If they are weaker, meaning they stumble by eating things sacrificed to idols, then we should not eat meat sacrificed to idols.

Paul goes to the extreme here and says he will become a vegetarian if that would help his fellow brethren. "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall." -1 Corinthians 8:13 (NIV).

Now, many of us are probably thinking, "...I can't always read people's minds. I am who I am." And I get that. We can't always be walking on eggshells wherever we go. With all of this, I believe there is a balance that we can have in mind as we handle controversial topics and issues in life. In looking at how our actions can affect someone else, I believe there are two extremes - both of which are potentially dangerous.

Those are the conformist approach and the anarchist approach - and there has to be a balance between the two. The first extreme is the conformist, one who goes along with whatever those in authority say. They might even live in a subtle, yet constant, state of fear - fear of upsetting those around them, or fear of overturning the apple cart. We know that's not what Jesus taught. He said He has come to divide (Luke 12:51). But then the question becomes, "...to divide whom and at what cost?" I believe Jesus is referring to dividing believers from unbelievers. This is a message of the cost of following Jesus - not one of causing division within the Church.

The other extreme is the anarchist. The danger of the anarchist is that they reject any governmental authority; they

live in a subtle - and sometimes not so subtle - constant state of agitation, always questioning everything and never accepting anything the Government or authority says. We also know this is not what Jesus taught. Jesus paid taxes to Caesar. He also told Peter they were exempt from the Temple tax and yet he still paid the Temple tax.

"...have you maybe stopped and questioned how someone else who is perhaps seeking the Lord would perceive your behaviour? Remember, as believers we ultimately display Jesus."

Do we really understand what Paul means when he says "...to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some..." - 1 Corinthians 9:22 (NIV).

I grew up in the United States, and I appreciate many of the blessings of being born there - many of the freedoms provided for me because I was born there come at little or no cost to me. But, it causes me great concern when I hear Christians talking about not wanting to adhere, and even civil disobedience. I say it causes me concern, because I don't think that's what Paul had in mind. Again. I believe he had in mind knowledge versus love. And so I ask, is our knowledge of the truth outweighing our love for unbelievers, or even fellow Christians?

Or, let's take the other side of the argument. It also causes me concern when we take a knee to everything the Government says. As an American, I think to some degree it was bred into me to question everything a politician says. That can be good, but it can also be bad. That said, there is nothing wrong with

> pushing back or questioning what comes out of the Beehive, so long as it is done "decently and in order" and within the confines of the law.

Now that every group reading this is mad at me, or about ready to throw this down, let me say one last thing before you disregard everything I have said - unity in love!

"When they had come to

Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes." - Matthew 17:24-25 (NIV).

My point in saying this is there has to be a balance between the two extremes I've mentioned. There should be a healthy tension between conformity and anarchy. Those of us prone to conforming need those prone to anarchy to help us question the right things. Those of us prone to anarchy need those prone to conformity to learn when not to question those in authority. God created each of us and therefore, being part of His body, we need each other in order for there to be that healthy balance.

Now most Christians reading this will be thinking "yep, preach it!" "I know what you're talking about!" We might even have a friend or two in mind whom we think needs to change their attitude or behaviour. Or, we have someone from church in mind, thinking they are such a conformist or anarchist! But, I wonder, do we really understand what Paul is talking about?

As believers in Jesus Christ, I think we have enough stuff beating us up and pushing against us from the outside. Let's be honest too; the enemy does a pretty good job at beating us up, and we don't need to give him any more amo do we? So let's stop fighting over stuff that is not salvational, or things that are not relevant to getting to Heaven. Yes there is truth in them, but have you maybe stopped and questioned how someone else who is perhaps seeking the Lord would perceive your behaviour? Remember, as believers we ultimately display Jesus.

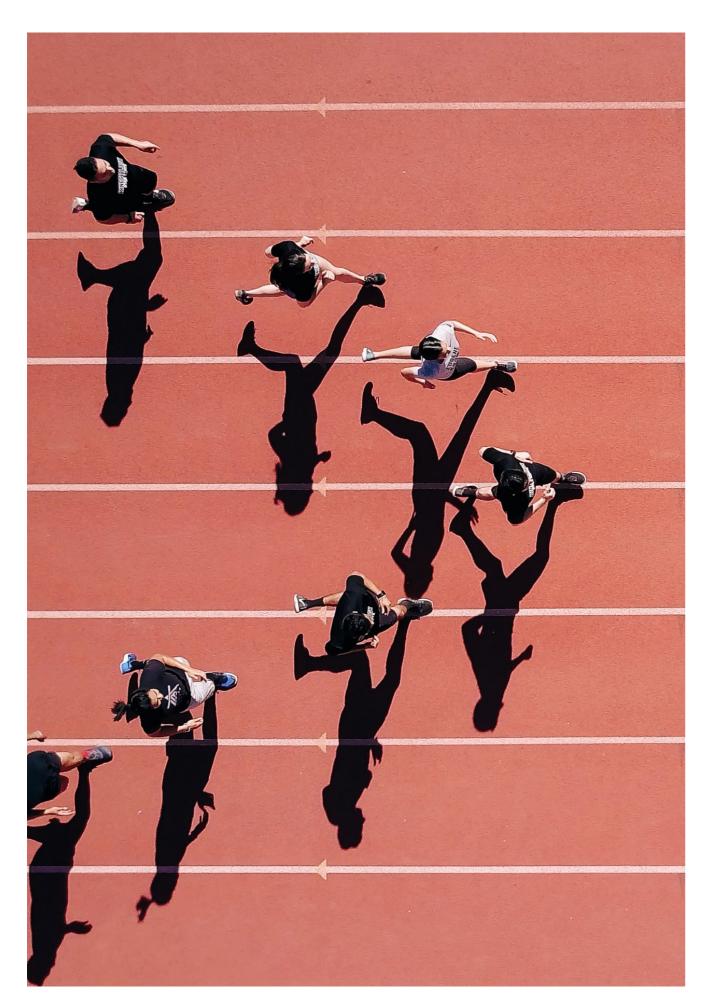
So have you stopped and asked, "...what does 'the other side of the fence' think of my words? Or more importantly, "...how will they receive both what I am saying and the way in which I am saying it?"

I am fully aware that we can't control what others think of us, but the passage we've just looked at in 1 Corinthians shows us we can have an influence upon it - and I believe that's what is ultimately at the heart of Paul's message.

■ Jake Wilmoth was a teacher at Calvary Chapel Bible Institute for 11 years. He has always had a heart for the church. He and his wife Tecla love helping people in the Waikato community - either through food or building projects.



AUTHENTIC | BIBLE



# THE ALL CONSUMING PURSUIT

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

As sweat dripped down his brow, his eyes narrowed in deep concentration. The next two minutes would determine everything - failure, or fame. The long days of training and years of obsessive dedication have culminated into this moment at the starting line.

Olympic athletes have grueling lives. Nearly every waking moment is spent on their sport. Everything revolves around being the best at what they do. Their heart, mind and strength are focused on one thing.

Just as an Olympic athlete doesn't casually pursue their sport, neither should we, as Christians, casually pursue our God.

Our call is to seek God with all of our heart (Jeremiah 29:13), to seek first His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33) - for He rewards those who diligently seek after Him (Hebrews 11:6). "Just as an Olympic athlete doesn't casually pursue their sport, neither should we as Christians casually pursue our God."

the life of an Israelite from the time of Moses, even through today. In Jesus' day, every Jew would quote the Shema at the beginning of the day and often at its end. This passage was quoted every week at the start of the service in the synagogue. It was foundational to the life of Israel and, as such, many scholars suggest Jesus would have quoted it daily.

Since many Rabbis saw the Shema as the heart of the entire Law (in fact, some modern scholars suggest that the entire

book of Deuteronomy is a commentary or explanation of the Shema), it is no wonder Jesus used this as His response when asked what the greatest commandment was: "Jesus answered, "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love

your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." - Mark 12:29-31 (NIV).

#### THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

One day, the religious leaders of Israel came to Jesus trying to trap Him. During the discussion, a scribe asked the question which of God's commandments was most important. Interestingly, Jesus responded with the one passage the Jews knew well, the Shema.

The Shema, literally meaning "hear" or "listen," is the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (NIV). This passage was the basic confession of faith in Judaism and central in

#### LOVING GOD WITH EVERYTHING

In early Hebrew, "heart" (which included the mind) and "soul" overlapped, so rather than being two distinct aspects of a person, they conveyed the idea of the "internal life, dispositions, emotions, and intellect". One scholar said we might better understand it today as the whole of our mind and emotions, both conscious and unconscious. "Strength" indicates strength or power, but also energy and ability. Taking the passage as a whole, the emphasis is upon loving God with totality, undivided loyalty and wholehearted

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exclusive devotion. I find it fascinating that Jesus, like He often did when He explained the Old Testament, gave a fuller understanding of the passage. The original in Deuteronomy says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Yet, when Jesus quoted the passage, He added in "mind." Though covered in the original with "heart," for a Greek-influenced world that placed so much emphasis on the mind, it appears Jesus didn't want His audience to have any excuses; their love and devotion unto God was to be total and all-consuming.

If we quickly look at each aspect of loving God with 'all,' we find there is nothing excluded: Heart: Heart, interior, center; the focus of a person's thoughts (mind), volition, emotions, and knowledge of right from wrong (conscience) - understood as the heart. Soul: The immaterial part of a person which is the actuating, or causing of an individual life. The site of all the psychological facilities - such as the heart, mind, and conscience. Mind: Understanding, intelligence, mind, disposition, thought; that which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings - especially the seat of the faculty of reason. Strength: capability, strength, power, might; the possession of qualities required to do something or get something done.

As the Bible Knowledge Commentary puts it: "To love the Lord means to choose Him for an intimate relationship and to obey His commands. This command, to love Him, is given often in Deuteronomy (6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20) Loving Him was to be wholehearted (with all your heart) and was to pervade every aspect of an Israelite's being and life (soul and strength)."2

Loving Jesus isn't to be a theory we mull around in our minds; rather, it is demonstrated in how we live. Does your life truly show that you love Him with all? Is your pursuit of God 'all-consuming'? Consider taking this concept deeper in the three-day study below.

"Loving Jesus isn't to be a theory we mull around in our minds; rather, it is demonstrated in how we live. Does your life truly show that you love Him with all? Is your pursuit of God 'allconsuming'?"

#### DAY ONE

Read the following passages and make a list of what it means to love Jesus with wholehearted and exclusive devotion: Deuteronomy 10:12-13; 2 Chronicles 6:14; Psalm 84:1-2, 10; 119:2; Jeremiah 29:13-14; Matthew 6:33; John 14:15-27; 15:1-13; 1 Corinthians 13; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 11:6; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:15-17; 3:10, 16-18; 4:7-21.

#### **DAY TWO**

I've often said that there are three things that reveal what is most important to us: how we spend our time, how we spend our money and what we talk about. I recently came across an AW Tozer quote where he gave a list of seven things that reveal what is important in our lives:

- 1. What we want most
- 2. What we think about most
- 3. How we use our money
- 4. What we do with our leisure time
- 5. The company we enjoy
- 6. Who and what we admire
- 7. What we laugh at

Examine your life. Where do you place the focus and emphasis? Is it Jesus or something else? What are some practical things you can do starting today to begin building your life around Jesus?

#### **DAY THREE**

Loving and pursuing God with 'all' cannot be disconnected from loving others. Though Jesus gives it as the 'second' most important commandment, the emphasis of the passage is that both loving God and loving others is intimately connected. The book of 1 John is very practical in loving God and loving others. Take some time and read through all five chapters of 1 John, which should take around 15 minutes, as well as the following verses - John 13:35; 15:12-17; 17:20-21; Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4:32. Then allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any people or relationships that need reconciliation, restoration, forgiveness or love. How can you practically demonstrate love to the people in your life - including, and perhaps most especially, the people you dislike, those who frustrate you or those who are different to you?

1 John D. Barry et al., Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press,

2 Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 274.









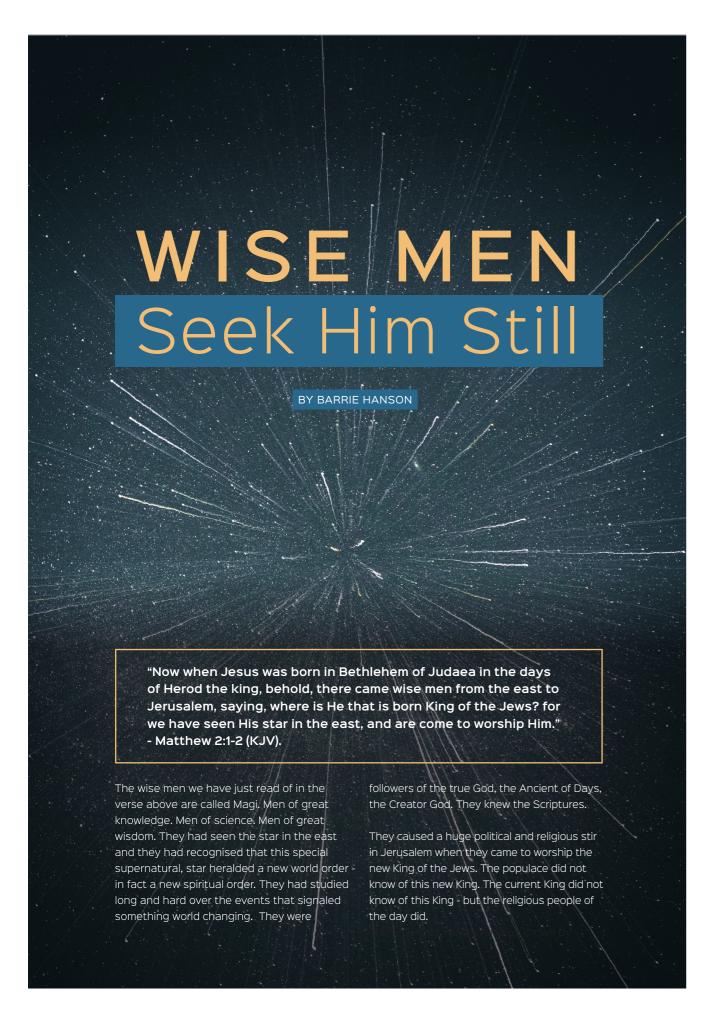
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the religious people, but forgotten by everyone else. Isn't it interesting that the wise men came first to the palace? - the logical place to see the new King - but it was a big surprise to Herod, the current King. Note that the star had stopped leading them at this point in the narrative.

Take a look at this passage. "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also." -Matthew 2:5-8 (KJV).

We can see from the text in Matthew that Christ has been born in Bethlehem up to two years previously. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, in the north. Therefore, after Jesus was circumcised in the temple on the eighth day after His birth, naturally Mary and Joseph returned home. The wise men had started their journey and their seeking of the Messiah up to two years before this meeting. How far they had come!

But Bethlehem was not to be their final destination. When the wise men left for Bethlehem, the star appeared. Why would it need to appear if they knew where they were going? Bethlehem was a tiny hamlet very close to Jerusalem. Finding a child there would have been easy. However, the star directed them north to Nazareth.

"When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." - Matthew 2:9-10 (KJV).

The word "lo" here needs to be interpreted. The idea is that this was a dramatic and sudden appearance. They saw the star and were so excited – they knew they were back on track! Notice now that the Bible talks about a child - not a baby. Jesus is now at least two years old.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." - Matthew 2:11 (KJV).

There is no mention of a stable. Sorry, but the Christmas cards have got it wrong. This is happening at least two years after His birth in Bethlehem. They came into Mary and Joseph's house. Nazareth was another 100km on their journey, but they were determined to find the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords who was promised to come. A Saviour for all

The Bible says they fell down and worshipped Him. A child, but also a King. A toddler, but also a Saviour. The prophecy of a Messiah to come was signaled throughout the Old Testament. These wise men knew that Salvation must be of

> the Lord and He will never reject those who come seeking forgiveness.

> "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous

and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." - Malachi 3:16-18 (KJV). (The Book of Remembrance - Old Testament Saints).

In their worship, the wise men prostrated themselves before their King and their Saviour. Nothing has changed. Salvation is ours if we are broken before Christ.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto Salvation." - Romans 10:9-10 (KJV).

What sacrifices these wise men made in search of their Saviour. Think of the cost in time and money to make this journey! Then, when they arrived in Jerusalem, they caused quite a stir - so it must have been no small party.

They had no help there; in fact we know that later Herod killed all the young children in Bethlehem. But, nothing was going to get in the way of their desire to see and worship their King. What a challenge that is for us.

"In their worship, the

themselves before their

King and their Saviour.

Nothing has changed.

Salvation is ours if we are

broken before Christ."

wise men prostrated

■ Barrie Hanson lives in Bluff, Southland. He has been a Christian for over 40 years and in that time he has been a preacher, Pastor and a church helper in both Auckland and Hamilton.



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#### **AUTHENTIC | LIFE**



Recently, I sent out a text centered on Psalm 37:5 - "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this." (NIV). I just couldn't get past that verse for a few days!

I still haven't really been able to even completely finish digesting the entirety of Psalm 37 - there are so many amazing truths in it. The Psalm is filled with verses that you can just meditate on, allowing God to speak to your core being, uplifting and encouraging you. It's such a blessing.

As I continued on through the Psalm, one phrase that I came across multiple times in this single Psalm is "...do not fret". If something is repeated multiple times in a few short verses, then I'd suggest the writer is trying to convey something important to us.

Some ways to interpret 'do not fret' could be the following: "...do not worry..." or maybe, "...do not be constantly or visibly anxious..." Looking at the passage, the instruction to 'not fret' seems to be in response to evil and wickedness.

"Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity." - Psalm 37:1 (NKJV).

"Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass." - Psalm 37:7 (NKJV).

"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret - it only causes harm." - Psalm 37:8 (NKJV).

So then, in a world in which there certainly is a fair share of evil and wickedness - and worry - how do we choose to respond? Is your response to worry or to be anxious?

In my life, I know I can find myself in this position more than I'd like. So, at the the end of this short encouragement, can I remind us that the best starting point is to renew and refresh your mind with God's Word.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

- Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV).

As you set your mind on Him, 'do not fret' and may you be blessed as you seek the Lord afresh.

■ Ryan Kilfoil lives on a small lifestyle block in Tauranga with his wife, children and extended family. He has a deep passion for God's Word and loves sharing life and faith with people.





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He'd be lying too, he says, if he told me there wasn't at least one occasion when - in the early days after having made that statement - its stark reality broke his heart. "I remember meeting my mum and a case manager to tell them I'd left the gangs. All I could see in that moment were my brothers, those I'd walked with who were - and are - still on that path. Tears rolled down my face. Truthfully, those I'd left behind were my family. I loved them.

"But I was absolutely serious about committing my life to Christ. I can't approach anything half-heartedly. When I was living the street life, I was 100 percent in - live or die. When I made up my mind to leave the gangs and follow Jesus I decided, again 100 percent, that a life in the gangs was no longer for me.

"Although some people didn't fully understand my decision to come to Christ, the 'real ones' - those who've loved me for who I am - always respected and supported it. Many of them still reach out and talk to me. And I use my testimony now to point them to Christ. I don't want them to be fake around me, or think that just because I've come to God they can't talk to me. I want them to be real with me. I use those conversations to glorify the Father."

James 4:8 comes to mind. "...draw near to God and He will draw near to you..." (NKJV). Because, as soon as Georgie took a step towards God, it's as though the Lord ran to him.

"The Lord wasn't mucking around," Georgie smiles. "I began to close doors I felt He was leading me to close and straight away things began shifting in my life."

Only a short time after leaving the gangs, Georgie found himself in the prison chapel, up the front proclaiming that God was at work. With the powerful symbolism of laying down his old life and picking up his new life in Christ at play, it was the first time he ever shared his testimony.

Fast forward nearly seven years, and I sit chatting with Georgie and his wife of almost four years - Arnia - on Zoom. They say they never could have imagined then how God would use their testimony to reach others with the Gospel as they've since surrendered to Him.

It's both a collective and an individual decision to continually place their lives in His hands - allowing God to use their story, and a gifting God's clearly given Georgie, to point others to the Lord.

That gifting is music. With the intentionally-chosen stage name 'BLSD One' - standing for Blessed, Loved, Saved and Delivered - and the 'One' pertaining to being one in Christ - Georgie writes tracks which are raw and real - every word intended to "hit its mark" and display Jesus.

"Most of my stuff simply reflects the journey the Lord has brought us on," he says of his approach to writing songs.

"I talk about my real life experiences. In a way, the process of writing my songs is made up of intimate moments with Him as I simply thank God for what He has done.



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"I've loved music since I was a young kid. It used to be kind of a lifestyle thing - something the boys and I would hang out and do. We used to love to rap, freestyle and sing. When I was in prison, I wrote heaps of music and came out with lots of tracks that weren't Christ-centered. As the Lord began to change the way I thought, I started seeing my music as a tool He's given me that I can use to speak a language to those walking where I once was. And, in a way I know they relate to."

Where Georgie was once unwaveringly passionate about the streets, he's now even more passionate about testifying of God's grace and how the Lord has saved and changed him.

"I want my music to display hope so those who hear it know that Christ delivered me - and He can deliver them too. When I listen back to some of my tracks, I can't deny it was the Holy Spirit who led me as I wrote them. My prayer is, "...Lord, I'm willing to be used by You..." - and I'm always amazed by the ways He does that."

It becomes clear as we chat that Georgie and Arnia are a team - and the Lord is at work in both of their lives through their respective, powerful, stories. Absolutely we are," Georgie says. "I couldn't do this journey without her - I wouldn't want to either." It's a joint calling of God. So, before we go further, I ask how they met and how they both came to know Christ. "I suppose in a way, we were bound to meet," Arnia smiles. She and Georgie have known each other since they were teenagers, growing up in Whangarei in the same circle of friends - the "troubled crowd".

It was in around 2016 that the Lord drew Georgie and Arnia together as a couple. Georgie was released from prison in 2017 and, after they were married in 2018, they began the ministry of BLSD One together.

Georgie and Arnia have no doubt the Lord brought them together purposefully - their ultimate desire is that, above everything, every aspect of their lives would be Christ-focussed. I ask what they most love about each other.

"That's clear to me," Georgie replies. "Arnia always puts others first - she'd lay down her life for her family. I love her - and I love that she loves the Lord. I love that she's open and willing to grow in the areas we're weak in and I love that we work together on improving our marriage, the way that we manage and balance life and as we look to grow in every area we can - because that





not only betters our relationship with one another, but also encourages us both to seek Jesus."

Arnia smiles.

"Honestly, Georgie is my biggest supporter, in everything I do. He's got my back and is always encouraging me to move forward - even when I can't see how that's possible. He's always walking alongside me. I remember the first time I shared my testimony, I was a mess and in tears. But then, and every time since, he's been right there supporting me. That support gives me the confidence to speak about what the Lord had done for me. Georgie absolutely helps me grow in the areas where I'm lacking and he leads us so well.

"That, and he most definitely brings the humour to the table," she smiles.

As we talk, a Māori proverb - ka mua ka muri - or, "looking back in order to move forward", comes to mind. It expresses a great truth around simple imagery - a person walking backwards into the future. So it is with Georgie and Arnia's story - as they walk in the BLSD One chapter the Lord has for them now, they do so acutely aware of, and grateful for, where He has already led them.

To understand more of how they each reached the point of surrendering their lives to Christ is to hear more of their story growing up. So, we take a look back.

As far as Georgie can remember, his mum's always been walking with the Lord. His dad though was - and still is - an active gang member. "Growing up, Dad was in and out of prison, so I was raised - more often than not - by mum. Dad did support the fact mum had a faith though, and he encouraged me to go to church and listen to and honour her," he says. "At intermediate age, I transferred from a public primary school to a Christian school and, as a little kid, I grew up in church and youth group.

"As well as music, I loved sports and was involved in lots of athletics-related stuff. I was a Northland 110-metre hurdle champion for three years. Honestly though, a combination of my surroundings and some of the poor decisions I made back then ultimately determined the path I went down at that age. Although a Godly influence was there from mum, I started

looking towards the life my dad was living and being drawn to the other influence that was around me - the gang lifestyle."

As a teenager, walking in that direction felt like a "natural transition", he says.

"It wasn't something I even had to work towards really. I felt that in some ways my mind was already conditioned and almost trained in that life. I can say now that, as I got more and more committed to that lifestyle, I felt like all the potential I had at the time was drifting away. I was directing my positive energy towards negative things and changing my core beliefs."

A series of "bad choices" became a lifestyle he adopted in the gangs. Not only was violence normal, it became what he turned to to solve problems.

But God. Georgie, now in his 30s, lived the gang lifestyle all the way through until 2015, when a dramatic encounter with the Lord changed his trajectory. Arnia also came to the Lord not long after. Both agree that a major positive influence towards their respective decisions was the combination of continued prayer - and a faithful outward example - of Georgie's mother over many years.

"From my point of view," Arnia begins, "his mum is one person who's been there through everything, always pointing us to the Lord. She had an open door policy when we were younger - I always felt welcome any time. You could just turn up and she would love on you. Even since before Georgie and I were together, she's been like a second mum - always there no matter what. I know there were times when I even turned up to her house drunk, yet, without judgement, she would just say to me, '...come on, let's pray - I want to tell you about Jesus.' I knew little bits about God, but she was always the one planting those seeds."

"I agree. She's an absolutely amazing, Godly woman," Georgie adds. I ask him about the moment He surrendered to Christ.

"That's a big question," he says. "I guess a lot of dark people entered our lives. Even though I was raised in an environment where violence and that type of stuff was normal, this was a whole other level of things which were revealed to me. We weren't intentionally seeking it either, it just came to us.

"That darkness led to many moments - not just one - which caused me to look towards Christ. If there was one particular instance though, and I'll be honest, it was when Arnia was stabbed. That absolutely made me go back to what I'd known as a child. I was in prison, vulnerable and helpless and I couldn't do anything to help her. I had nowhere to go except to what, back then, was my last resort. Prayer.

"I knew to return to the foundation mum laid - and the example she set - when I was growing up. There I am, an active gang member, down on my knees in prison, simply beginning to pray and call out to Jesus. And the Lord answered my prayer and began to reveal to me that He was real. So, as I said, straight away I was out of the gangs."

We mention Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (KJV).

"No matter what, wherever you find yourself, Jesus is there waiting when you call out to Him," Arnia adds.

As they've since walked with God, Georgie and Arnia say they're incredibly grateful to have been "mentored well" by Godly people in their lives - including several key people like their Pastor, James Anson, who leads their church community - Auckland's FaithPointe Church West Harbour. Many of the talented musicians, producers and people Georgie surrounds himself with in the music sphere are also Goldy influences.

"Lots of the boys have awesome stories of where they've come from and what the Lord has done in their lives," Georgie says. "When it comes to the people the Lord places around you, they're a huge blessing - they help sharpen your faith and your desire to move towards God."



AUTHENTIC | FEATURE AUTHENTIC | FEATURE



"May my story be a living

testimony that there's hope

for people who have walked

who have the same mindset

and beliefs as I once did, or

to those looking for Jesus."

in the same shoes as me,

"Yes, we are so blessed to have a lot of people around us like that," Arnia says.

On that note, I ask, "...how important is it to have Godly influences who point you to Christ? And what would you say to encourage those who either desire to walk the authentic Christian life, or who are seeking Jesus?"

"I would say one of the biggest things the Lord's been teaching me is that He always prompts me to lead by example," Georgie ponders. "By that I mean, in my relationship with Him it has never been about just talking the talk. Those the Lord places around me want to see that I walk the walk.

"We all know the saying, "...actions speak louder than words..."  $\,$ 

When I think about the life I used to walk, as I began to profess something new, there were some who didn't believe it straight away - they wanted to see me walking out what I was professing. I get that.

"In prison, when I first came to the Lord, it almost didn't matter what I said or did, because those around me wanted to see if I was for real.

It's almost like they were testing me to see if I would react naturally, out of my old ways, or out of the new mind of Christ in me.

"In my experience, given where I was walking, you can almost expect people to be unsure at times. That shouldn't be a surprise if it's part of your experience too - they only knew the 'old' you. Arnia and I are walking a journey over time to display Him and the new creation we are 'in Christ', as 2 Corinthians 5:17 puts it."

Georgie mentions Romans 12:2. "All the glory goes to Him. I know it's Christ who transforms us through the renewing of our minds as we submit to Him." Georgie wants people to know, wherever they're at, there's hope - and it's found in Jesus.

"Thinking back, I'm stunned when I reflect on the fact that even through all the violence, the crime and everything else I'd done,

God still had a plan for me. Jesus was always standing there knocking. May my story be a living testimony that there's hope for people who have walked in the same shoes as me, who have the same mindset and beliefs as I once did, or to those looking for Jesus. As we seek Him, it's God who has given me His strength to not only change, but also the strength to pursue and walk in that change.

"Come to God as you are, just to start somewhere. No matter what we've done in life, when we come to the Father, we are made worthy though His Son, Jesus. He loves you. I always say my first steps might be baby steps, but in my world they were giant. It might be the same for you now, but step towards the Father - that little step might be all you have to offer - but it's all He needs.

"It's the Lord who has renewed my mind. Honestly, given where I came from, I've felt at times that the process of the Lord renewing me has been slow and steady. But it's been the most rewarding walk.

For anyone else in my old shoes, I'd encourage them to be open to surrounding themselves with positive people - surrounding yourself with familiar mindsets makes it hard to think differently and change."

Musically, the major door the Lord opened for Georgie with BLSD One came during last year's New Zealand Music Month, when he won a listener-voted competition Life Fm ran to find an artist who'd never had their music professionally recorded.

Arnia says with a smile that the Lord works in mysterious ways. By that she means it was her who initially heard about the competition and told Georgie she was entering him. Georgie though, initially at least, was a bit unsure.

With hindsight, he's grateful for Arnia's encouragement and can see how the Lord's been working through that avenue. "When I won, I felt as though God was making a statement over my life and clearing a pathway for me to use my gifts in music for His glory. The journey astounds me," he says.



"I entered him the day before the competition closed and we got a call the next day," Arnia laughs. She submitted Georgie's track Brothers in the Pen. The song is essentially a prayer for and a letter to those Georgie knows who are still in prison.

"I get people I knew in my old lifestyle asking me how I've changed. They know me, and they know what I was like. So many of them absolutely want to change, but they don't know how to. They've tried to change in their own strength but can't.

"Brothers in The Pen came out of hearing their desperate need and hope for God. I wrote it as a way to reach out and pray for my brothers who want to change to tell them that the answer is Jesus. Many of those who reach out have been in prison for many years, some will never be released."

To reach them, Georgie and Arnia have since also produced a certain number of *Brothers in The Pen* CDs - the idea being to get the song and its message into the hands of those in prisons through official channels.

"When they hear *Brothers in the Pen*, they'll hear the Gospel message, and the hope we have in Christ. The things God is doing amaze me - it's a blessing and a privilege to be a vessel He can use," Georgie says. When he won, *Brothers in The Pen* was put on rotation on Life Fm, and he also got the chance to record an EP - aptly named *New Creation*. That subsequent radio play has also seen many more people reach out.

"I loved the process of recording *New Creation*," Georgie says - adding that he was intentional about allowing God to guide the process. "The Lord placed awesome people around me and together we followed His leading as to how the EP took shape. I honestly feel like the Lord gave me a revelation of what He wanted to say through it and I see now that the finished product

painted the perfect picture of the message the Lord wanted me to share, not what I thought was best." New Creation is filled with powerful tracks like Come on And Ride - which expresses Georgie's desire to no longer glorify the streets, but God - and I Am Not Ashamed, in which Georgie boldly professes Jesus. And then there's his latest song Gotta Have That Peace, released last month. A collaboration with band mate Daniel Leaupepe, Georgie says it's another example of the Lord's perfect timing.

"Maybe it relates even more now, given the times we're living in, but in life we all go through storms. Not only when things are hard either, but sometimes even when we feel life is going well, we struggle.

"I want people to know the Lord offers us His peace which passes understanding - and His strength and joy to walk in. As I reflect on some of the lyrics, I'm simply saying thank you to God that, in every season, He's faithful."

Now looking to 2022, Georgie and Arnia are excited. There's new music coming and they're working on some new designs for their BLSD One clothing line. In a big faith step too, they're establishing a trust for their BLSD One ministry called Rhythm of Life. First up on the 2022 calendar though is performing at Festival One next month. They debuted there this year and Georgie is excited to not only make a return, but also to take the stage at the festival's brand new recently-announced venue, Hartford Karapiro.

He'll be joining forces with his 'brothers' in his band too - Daniel, AJ, Manutaii and Manuele Leaupepe - who are the lead guitarist, bass guitarist, vocalist and the drummer respectively. The rap element will be present in Tony Faifai, and keyboardist Regan Reti will possibly join them too.

"Some of the guys are new band members - which will bring a whole new dynamic. All I'll say for now is you're in for an interesting treat," Georgie smiles.

The words of Proverbs 16:9 almost sum up Georgie and Arnia's story perfectly. Even as they make plans, it's ultimately God who is directing their steps. And, so far, both agree it's been a 'BLSD' journey.

#### Thanks so much for sharing your powerful story Georgie and Arnia! $|\Lambda$

Stream BLSD One's latest single Gotta Have That Peace on Spotify, or other streaming platforms, by searching 'BLSD One'. Catch BLSD One at Festival One 2022 next month - visit www.festival.one - or to keep up with their journey, see www.facebook.com/Blsdonefamz

■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.



AUTHENTIC | MEN & FAMILY

AUTHENTIC | MEN & FAMILY



In Old Testament times, people built altars to God to commemorate something He had done. Altars served as a memorial to teach succeeding generations about God and His character. Gathering for a family 'altar', or a devotional time, is a good way to teach your children about God and His ways.

As you establish your family altar, you will need to build it out of the immovable rocks of resolution. The reason you have to be resolute is that it will be a battle. You will find that there are many excuses for not having devotions. Circumstances will constantly crop up. You may be pressed for time, feel tired, or simply want to catch up on the news of the world. Your kids will occasionally groan when you announce that it's time for devotions. Perhaps you think you don't have the ability to teach the Bible. As you face distractions of various kinds, keep in mind one very powerful reason for daily devotions: the eternal salvation of your children.

Here are some practical points to consider when establishing a family altar, or a framework around your devotional practices.

#### 1. Open in Prayer

Begin devotions by thanking God for your family and then prayerfully asking Him, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful

things in your law." - Psalm 119:18 (NIV). The Bible uses the phrase "the Law" to refer, at different times, to the entire Word of God, the Law of Moses, and the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are the very backbone of Holy Scripture. We must seek the help of God's Holy Spirit if we are to comprehend the incredible things God has in His Law. The apostle Paul said, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law." - Romans 7:22 (NIV).

Why should we delight in God's Law, even though we are not saved by our obedience to it? It is because the Law reveals God's holiness, His righteousness, His justice and His truth. It is the very instrument that the Holy Spirit uses to convert the soul. "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." - Psalm 19:7 (NIV). It is the means by which the way to the sinner's heart is prepared to receive the grace of God. If we want our children to be truly converted, we must first know the wondrous things from His Law, and that comes only by prayer and revelation of the Holy Spirit.

#### 2. Read the Bible Out Loud

The Bible says, "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." - 2 Timothy 2:24 (NIV). So, if you're worried about a lack of teaching ability, don't say, "I can't teach"; say, "Success comes in cans."

Simply start by reading five verses from one of the Gospels. Then have each family member read five verses; this will not only help them become more confident in reading out loud, but will help them remain attentive. Pause now and then to ask what they think a particular verse means. Be ready for - and don't be discouraged by - a regular "I dunno." Tell your children what you think the verse means, and continue with the reading, making use of any Bible cross-references.

If you have young children, start with a 'picture' Bible. I did this many years ago when I found a Bible full of beautiful pictures of Adam and Eve. Noah's ark. David and Goliath and so on.

#### 3. Forget Your Inhibitions

This is not a time to worry about your dignity. Role-play with your kids when they are small. Be Goliath, and give each of them a turn at being David. Have them throw a pillow or other object at you, then fall down when you get hit. Act out Daniel in the lion's den. Be a lion and roar. Play out Bible stories with your children whenever you can. It will help them retain the principles behind the story.

If I remember correctly, when kids hear something, they retain 10 percent of what's heard. If they hear and see something,

they retain about 40 percent. But if they actually experience something - as in see, hear, and participate in it they retain approximately 80 percent. Honestly, I can't remember the exact statistics, because I only heard them.

Use the time when they are young and impressionable to impress upon

them eternal Biblical truths. I was deeply into role-playing until one memorable day: as I was rolling around on the floor doing something incredibly funny, I looked up and saw that none of my children were even cracking a smile. They were looking down at me as though I was some kind of nut. It was then that I realised they were no longer impressed. The 'impressionable years' had gone.

#### 4. Keep It Short...and Sweet

So that the devotional time doesn't seem like a drag, don't make it too long. Keep it around 10 to 15, perhaps 20 minutes. In fact, if you stop devotions when the kids are having a good time, this will make them look forward to the next time.

From the Scripture passage you read, select a memory verse and have your kids repeat it together six times. Perhaps you could have them write memory verses in a special book, and review them regularly. Repeat the same verse each night during the week. If they remember it at the end of the week, give them some sort of reward. My wife Sue and I often gave our kids a small amount of candy. The reward is important. We all need incentives in life, and candy is a good one. I learned that children speak a special language called 'candy', and if I wanted to communicate with them I could do so by speaking their language. For years I ran successful kids' clubs, teaching the Bible to

hundreds of children. If the kids learned a Bible verse, I would toss out candy as a reward. If they sat quietly and listened, I would toss out candy. If they even showed up, I would toss out candy. The kids loved it and they kept coming back.

So, be liberal when it comes to sweets. If you are worried about rotting your kids' teeth, have them brush after they have consumed their reward. If you are concerned about them becoming obese, make sure they eat only the candy you give them. And the reward doesn't have to be a big candy bar. A few jelly beans can be just as rewarding to a child. This is for the most important of issues - their eternal salvation.

#### 5. Use Anecdotes and Humor

If you want to keep the attention of your children, thoroughly flavor the reading with anecdotes. It is said of the Messiah, "I will open my mouth with a parable." - Psalm 78:2 (NIV). Jesus often used parables - stories that carried a deeper meaning. We must do the same. Make them short, and preferably humorous.

Many people thank me for using humor when I teach, but occasionally someone will criticise this approach, asking me to justify it from a Biblical perspective. One man wrote to say that "this is foolish jesting," which God aligns with "fornication,

uncleanness, covetousness, and filthiness." He stated that Jesus didn't tell jokes, so we shouldn't either. Many years ago I did wonder if it was legitimate to use humor, and was delighted to find a quote by 'The Prince of Preachers,' Charles Spurgeon (my favorite preacher). He said that the use of humor in a sermon is like a flash of lightning on a

dark night. It makes people sit up and wait for the next flash.

After I spoke at a church meeting, an excited woman approached me to say that her husband hadn't been to church for seven years. She added, "When you started, he said, "Here we go again". But then you made him laugh, and he stayed for the whole sermon... and put his hand up at the end, indicating he made a commitment to Christ."

Using humor in your family devotions keeps the attention of your children so you can convey timeless truths.

#### 6. The Phone Bird

"This is for the most

important of issues -

their eternal salvation."

New Zealand doesn't have crows or mockingbirds. Because of this, for our first year or so of living in the United States, we were fascinated by the different bird calls we heard in California. One day while working in the yard, I stopped to listen to the variety of songs. One in particular gripped my ears. I stood there captivated by the sound, thinking, "I bet Californians call it a 'phone bird.' It sounds exactly like a phone ringing."

Suddenly it dawned on me - it was the phone ringing. I missed the caller. Notice that it was only when my understanding was right that the result was action. The night of my conversion, when my understanding was right, it resulted in action. My

realisation that I had sinned against a holy God led me to repent and place my faith in Jesus. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." - Romans 10:17 (NIV). As my own children heard the Word of God - and as they understood God's holiness, His justice, His truth, His righteousness, His love, and His faithfulness - they acted upon the Word by exercising saving faith, and came to know the salvation of God.

Now, commit yourself to having a family altar with your children. Do it as "...a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship." - Romans 12:1 (NIV). Remember to close the family devotions in prayer, asking God to help you and your family to remember - and act upon - the lessons you have learned.

Adapted from Ray's book How to Bring Your Children to Christ.

■ Ray Comfort, the founder and CEO of Living Waters Publications, is an internationally recognized evangelist and author. Ray is the host of the award-winning Way of the Master television program and radio program. He is also a best-selling author of over 80 books.







"God's grace can cover

our past. What will we

each make of our future?"

With a new year approaching, here's a question: What will you choose to let into it?

It's often observed that we all have plenty of time for the things we consider most important. So what will you make a priority?

Without allowing any feelings of guilt, how important to you is knowing God and making Him known? Are your efforts to connect with people, to be a witness, as important as you'd like them to be?

Not all seasons of life are the same. Consider your teenage years, and then your early 20s, 'young professional' years, then maybe marriage and children, the kids leaving home and then you're a grandparent. Every new season of life has opportunities - just like every new year

Consider what might happen in the course of the coming year. You might move house. This means you'll have to say goodbye to your current neighbours - and hello to new ones. Your opportunity to be a witness to

the old neighbours will be over, while your opportunity to be a witness to your new neighbours begins. If your move involves a change of schools or workplace, the same applies.

What if God purposed that we go through these kinds of changes? What if your witness through those relationships was more important than the house or job?

I was once told that the average person moves house half a dozen times, and will have between three and ten different jobs in their lifetime. Some people move and have many more jobs than this. What if your primary assignment from God's perspective was actually the people - rather than your growing

wealth, or career advancement? What if the changes we all experience in our lives turn out not to have been random – but instead purposed by God, because our witness to the people at each new place is our real assignment?

Imagine if, distracted by our social lives or insecurities at high school, we choose not to give thought to our witness. We don't meet with our Christian peers to pray for our school, peers and opportunities. We don't speak up. We presume we'll have a lifetime of opportunities ahead – so there is no urgency. We think, "I'll see them again."

Have you seen them again? Cast your mind back across the previous seasons – or decades. Did you see that neighbour again? Did you ever reconnect with those school friends - and

> with enough time to get to the point of having a real conversation about life and faith?

> If you are anything like me, this doesn't happen often. How many people are you now waiting to 'see again'? I know that I have many!

So, the truth is, we only ever get to live today, today! When we miss an opportunity, while it is comforting to say 'another opportunity will come', it's not actually true! Financial opportunities are the same. No opportunity comes twice! While similar opportunities do sometimes come, when an opportunity is gone, it is gone.

So, what if God's purpose at your school is that you are a witness to someone. What if God's purpose in that flat you live in with friends at age 23 is your witness to them - because you're not actually going to connect with them again in 10 and 40 years time? What if God's purpose in having you move house at age 30 was because of the new neighbours you had - AUTHENTIC | CURRENT ISSUES

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because God wanted you to connect Him with them?
What if all these connections – including those of the other
500,000 or more Christian's in our nation - were intended by
God to work together to create an effect?

It is said the average person interacts with at least seven different Christians on their journey toward personal faith. This means our conversations and relationships count!

Peter, the disciple of Jesus, wrote, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance," (2 Peter 3:9). He was talking about why the return of Jesus was being delayed.

He reiterated his point half a dozen verses later saying, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means Salvation..." (2 Peter 3:15). So, why does the world continue to rotate on its axis, despite all the suffering? It is so that more people will come to know Christ! God wants more people in Heaven!

Larry Norman was a famous Christian songwriter in the 'rock' era of the 1960s and 70s. He wrote a song called, 'I Wish We'd All Been Ready', in it he imagined what it might feel like to live at the time when Christ returns. From the perspective of eternity, what really matters? The answer is people, and helping people know their Creator!

Count your years. Maybe you have an estimated 50 to go, or 30, or 15. Whether it is the 10 years we live next to a set of neighbours, or the length of life itself, in all cases the opportunity is limited – and that makes what we do with the opportunities we have important!

2022 is a new year. Here are two questions to conclude.

Firstly, what could you do to position yourself to service and represent God well in this coming year? And what is your next step to become a better witness for Him?

We all will have failed at some level to be the witness we could have been in the past. That's certainly true for me! But how could we improve – to do something that might make a difference to someone's life?

Secondly, how could you begin to restructure your life so as to have more time and focus available for the things that are most important heading into the coming decade, or decades? We don't change overnight. We all get stuck in various 'habits' and patterns of living in different seasons of our lives. Maybe work dominates, or hobbies, or bad habits.

Could a change in careers help? Or not? Do you need to watch less TV, or to take up exercise – and who could you spend time with while you do that? Do you maybe need to train yourself in some area, so you will have more opportunities to talk with and help or encourage others? Opportunities do not come twice. We all get just one life. God's grace can cover our past. What will we each make of our future?

With 2022 now in view, let's each ask God for wisdom, and then courageously make the decisions we need to. God is with us, and there are people who we are each positioned to be a voice of hope to this next year.

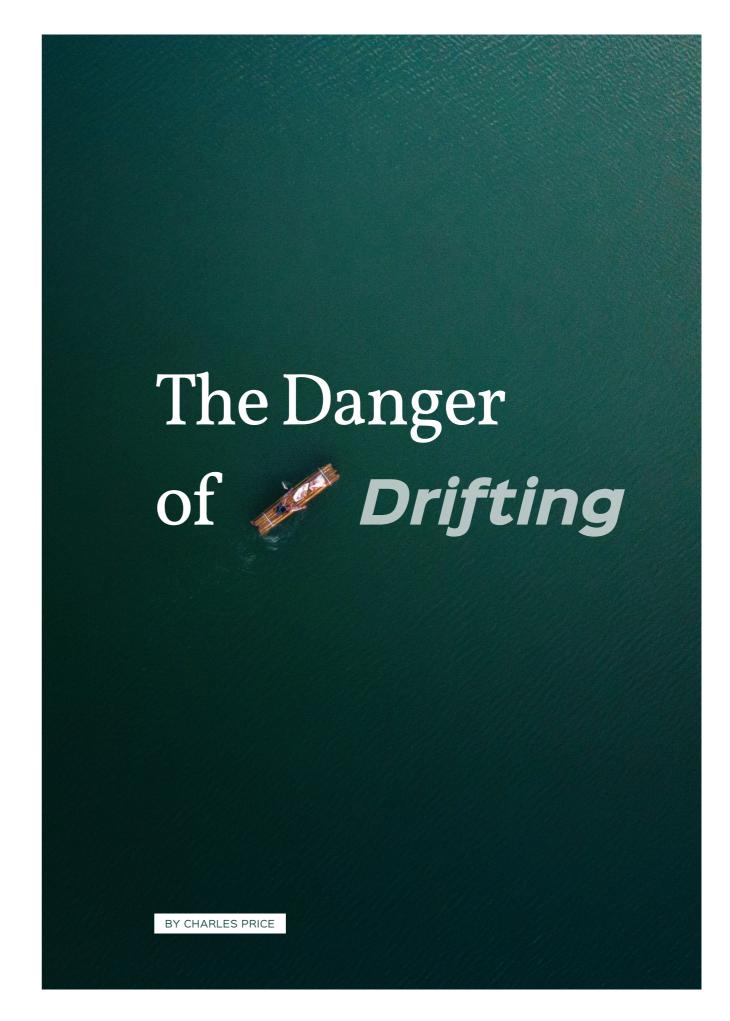
This is a limited opportunity.

Let's find ways to be that voice!



■ Dave Mann is a gifted leader, communicator and author with a passion to see the Christian faith both well represented and positively appreciated by New Zealand society. He completed theological studies at Laidlaw College, worked in community ministry in South Taranaki and was then a Pastor in Singapore. He returned (with family) to New Zealand in 2010 and is now the director of Shining Lights Trust, an organisation which oversees the national Hope Project media efforts.





AUTHENTIC | BIBLE

When we hear Samson's name, we think of strength - and of his reputation as the Bible's strongest man. There are stories of him getting hold of an attacking lion and ripping it apart. Once he was bound with ropes and snapped them like cotton. He tied 300 foxes together, attaching a torch to their tails. They ran through the Philistines' corn fields, causing great destruction. Catching foxes is not easy! I grew up in a country area where we had foxes. I don't know of anyone who ever caught one by natural means.

With a donkey's jawbone, he struck down 1000 men in battle. Once when he came to the Philistine city of Gaza, the gates were closed. So, he pulled them off their hinges - picking up the gate posts and carrying them up the hill. However, his strength was not natural. It was derived from a particular relationship he had with God as a Nazirite. A key, as a symbol of that consecration, was that Samson never cut his hair. Before I mention my key verse regarding Samson, I want to mention a verse in the New Testament - Galatians 5:16-17. "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want." (NIV).

Those who know Jesus Christ know about that internal 'war' within our own soul. The 'self' and the 'spirit' are in a relentless, never-ending battle. With that Scripture in mind, look at or key verse - Judges 16:20. "...she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'il go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him." (NIV).

Wow. He didn't know the Lord had left him, and that he was on his own

- powerless, bankrupt and, with all the resources he'd taken for granted, gone. Samson was a judge in Israel - judges in this period were the civic and military leaders of the nation. Before Israel was a monarchy it was a theocracy. This means God ruled. How? He'd put His Spirit on individual men or women, anoint them and work through them. The people would recognise they were anointed and follow them as a leader.

If you like, Samson was born with a spiritual silver spoon in his mouth, with his parents knowing this baby boy had been set apart by God to rule the nation. As an outward sign of his inward consecration to God, no razor would be used on his head and he was to not drink any strong drink or touch any dead body.

He was to be dependent upon the Spirit of God. Judges 13 gives us Samson's job description, given before his birth. "... he will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines." - Judges 13:5b (NIV). The Philistines had the upper

hand over Israel at this stage - in fact, Judges 14:4b tells us "... they (the Philistines) were ruling over Israel." (NIV). Yet, with the Philistines dominating, Samson was set apart - with all the resources made available by the Spirit of God to deliver Israel from them. Something he never did.

He should have done, for "...the woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him..." - Judges 13:24-25 (NIV). I love the picture of God 'stirring' Samson as a young man, with the awareness He had a task for him. In Judges 14:6, Samson was attacked by a lion and we're told, "...The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him..." (NIV). The same phrase is in Judges 14:19 and 15:14 - two occasions when Samson was attacked by the Philistines.

During his 20 years as a judge, there were a steady stream of occasions when the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson - he was empowered to do things not possible with normal physical strength and resources. That's one of the 'streams' in Samson's story – a stream of God-empowered living and actions. Another stream is a phrase Paul mentioned in the above passage from Galatians - "...live by the Spirit..."

"Ultimately, the source of our strength is the indwelling presence of Christ Himself. If anything replaces Him we are found, in our most vulnerable moments, to be powerless."

Samson knew something about that - and as you continually do, you will not gratify the sinful nature's desires. But, we do see Samson gratifying his selfish nature. Judges chapters 13-16 tell us one of his problems was women and sex. He once went down to Philistine territory to scout out the enemy to see how he could defeat them. Lo and behold, when he got there, he found one of them very attractive. On his return home, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." His

father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me."

- Judges 14:2-3 (NIV).

Judges' writer says in parentheses here, "...actually, there was a divine hand in this - Samson could infiltrate the Philistines by marrying one of them..." But it all went wrong. The wedding was a fiasco - his wife ended up married to Samson's best man. He went back down to Philistine territory and met another Philistine girl who he fell in love with – Delilah - and he married her. Rather than living in the Spirit, Samson is now living in the realm of his sinful, fleshly nature - and he needn't and shouldn't have been.

Philistine leaders came to Delilah saying, "...you've married! Get him to reveal the secret of his strength.... we'll pay you to find out." So, Delilah got the Philistines to hide in she and Samson's house, asking him multiple times about the secret to his

strength. On his instructions, she tied him up with fresh string, new ropes and took seven braids of his head and plated them together on a loom.

Each time, she told him the Philistines were upon him, and he rose up strong and overcame them. She persisted to know his secret, and - finally relenting - he told her everything.

"No razor has ever been used on my head," he said,
"because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from
my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength
would leave me, and I would become as weak as any
other man." - Judges 16:17 (NIV).

As he slept this time, she cut off his hair. Now, as Samson went to defend himself as he'd done before, he found his strength was gone and was completely weak. "He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him." - Judges 16:20 (NIV).

Powerless, the Philistines gouged out his eyes, bound him with shackles and set him to hard labour grinding grain like an ox. Samson never intended to end up in that position - or to fail so completely like that. If you'd asked him early in his life if he was going to finish defeated and humiliated, he would say, 'Of course not'. That was not his expectation and never his intention.

But, little by little, as we see in elements of his story, Samson moved away from what God had ordained for him in his consecration as a Nazarite. He played fast and loose and gave away the symbol of his strength. Few of us intend to lose contact with God either - but it happens. What do you think is the secret of your strength? What lies at the very heart of your relationship with God? Is it that you know you're loved by God? As Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit..." (INIV). Or is the secret of your strength your dependence on Jesus Christ? Is it your abiding relationship with the Holy Spirit? Is it feeding on His Word? Is it fellowship, serving or ministering?

Whatever you see as the 'secret' of why you are in a relationship with God, that 'secret' of our strength will, at times, be undermined - little by little. For some, a source of our strength has been the fellowship of the Church, meeting with other believers and growing in discipleship. Ultimately, the source of our strength is the indwelling presence of Christ Himself. If anything replaces Him we

are found, in our most vulnerable moments, to be powerless. We need to go back again to find our strength in Him. Samson battled, in particular, with his sexual appetite and ill-discipline, his strong leadership skills which tempted him to self-sufficiency and with the pride that comes from that. He gave in to temptations until, excusing them and justifying them, he did not know the Lord had left him. That is until he found himself barren and bankrupt – disqualified for his task.

The Bible tells us the truth about its heroes – and Samson is one of the saddest. But there is a message of hope for each of us too. "...the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved." - Judges 16:22 (NIV). He's now in prison, blinded and humiliated, but his hair - the symbol of his strength - begins to grow again.

One day, he's taken to the temple of Dagon to entertain the crowd with shows of strength. As he is stood between two pillars, Samson says in Judges 16:28, "...Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more." (NIV). And God did. Samson pushed against the pillars and the temple collapsed. Samson himself is killed in the process, but so were many others, for scripture tells us he killed more in his death than he did in his life.

Samson remarkably appears again in Scripture in the Hebrews 11 list of men and women of the Old Testament who lived by faith, and who had seen God work. Samson appears there, but with a wasted life behind him. Someone I knew years ago used to say, "...you can have a saved soul, but a wasted life...". So it was with Samson. At the beginning, he was set apart by God, at the end he was calling out to God – but in the middle, he lived a sorrowful, wasted life.

I don't know where you are at in your relationship with God. If you sense you are distant, I don't know specifically where or how you need to get back on track. But, I know in reading this passage, and letting it speak deeply into my own heart, that it's possible to become distant from God.

It's possible to start well and to drift away, to become preoccupied with our own agendas and selfish interests, rather than with the mind and will of God - and then to suddenly realise we are powerless. How did a man like Samson not know that the Lord had left him? What is pulling me apart in my own life? The message of Samson is that, once again, will we call out to God to strengthen us – as in Samson's case – even just one more time? God is never hesitant to respond to the cry of a human heart. In terms of our salvation, He never leaves us, but, in terms of His power and presence, we can become distant. His Spirit can be quenched and grieved. But failure is never final. We can come home to God again. And I trust that you will.

■ Charles Price serves as 'Minister at Large' with The Peoples Church, Toronto, Canada. He is also an itinerate speaker and preacher and author of several books. For more information please visit: www.livingtruth.ca



# SHARING The Word of Life



"How is a young person in Tirau most likely going to be reached for the Lord? By somebody they know in Tirau being bold and sharing Jesus with them. How will somebody in Te Awamutu be reached? Through a friend sharing the Gospel.

"The Lord gives us all spheres of influence in our lives - a major way we are going to effect culture change for Jesus. I absolutely love the fact the Gospel message is for us as Christians as well. Every time I hear it, I'm absolutely impacted - it inspires and excites me. I reflect on the fact that, "...wow, this is the truth of what Christ has done for me, I need to tell people about it! I'm also reminded of the urgency with which other people need to know the Lord."

That's the heart with which Word of Life New Zealand field coordinator Dave Gow and his team approach each day - with a God-given vision to see every young person in Aotearoa impacted by the Gospel through their friends.

Utilising various tools, or events, each year which typically reach thousands of young people - including ORIGIN, CONVERGE and gatherings simply called Youth Nights - Word of Life initiatives are designed to partner with local churches to evangelise and disciple youth - then equip those young people to share Jesus with their friends and those around them.

"In 2 Timothy, 4:5, Paul tells us to "...do the work of an evangelist..." Dave, (30), says. "We're all called to that work, to reach people for Christ. Why? Simply because we represent Jesus."

Dave sat down with Jeremy Smith to discuss the ministry of Word of Life - based in Hamilton - and a desire to cultivate Gospel-advancing youth ministries up and down New Zealand.

"The key is relationship
- reaching individuals
with the Gospel, then
empowering them to share
it with others themselves."

#### It's great to meet you Dave! First off, tell me how you came to know Jesus? Did you grow up in a Christian home?

Sure, yes. I grew up on a farm in Gore, in Southland in a family which loves the Lord. My mum was a Sunday School teacher. That meant I learnt lots about who Jesus was. I don't ever remember not believing that what I was learning was true and that Jesus was who He said He was. However, that knowledge alone didn't initially make a whole lot of impact on how I was living life at that stage. When I left school I started work on a sheep and beef station. That was when I really felt my faith being tested. I started asking, "...what does it mean to practically live out a genuine, authentic faith then?"

Through that season, I was part of a youth group, but I felt that in a lot of ways it was simply a place you went to have fun, without there necessarily being a sense of intentionality behind it. A couple of my friends in that group though, did tell me they were going on a mission trip to Samoa and asked if I was keen to go. It was during the middle of winter and because I was working on the farm I thought, "...yeah, I'll happily get out of this!" While I initially probably signed up for all the wrong reasons, God absolutely transformed my life while I was there.

I had no idea about the organisation I was going with - it turned out to be a Word of Life Youth Reachout trip. As is often the way with the Lord, as much as I thought we were going on a missions trip to serve those in Samoa, it's so true that God was absolutely going to use that experience to minister to me.

#### Was that when your walk with Jesus became personal do you think?

Absolutely - my faith became my faith. Looking back, I'd been almost viewing my faith as an entry ticket into Heaven. In Samoa, I discovered the powerful reality that Jesus rose again for me - He is alive now and I can have a relationship with Him now. My eternal life doesn't start once I'm in Heaven, it starts now. Realising the reality that God's Word is for me today and speaks into my life was utterly transformational. I began having daily quiet times with God, relationally with Him, and He ministered to me through that.

When I got home from Samoa after three weeks, I sat down with my parents and said, "I'm sorry, but I won't be taking over the family farm. I feel called to ministry". I had no idea how they'd react, but they were incredibly supportive. Six months later - in 2010 - I moved up to Hamilton to do an internship with Word of Life, alongside some study at Pathways College.

#### That's so cool! Before we chat about Word of Life, I'd love to know a little bit about your family...

My wife Ainsley and I married in 2014 - in 2015 we attended Word of Life Bible Institute in New York. We have three boys - Elijah, (4), Isaiah, (3), and Ezekiel (1). You know what that means! At one stage, we had three boys under three! Madness! But such good madness. Ainsley was our Word of Life accounts administrator for two years and she's now a full time mum.

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#### What does quality family time look like for you guys then?

We love projects! For me, it's refreshing working on our property. Although, maybe our problem is that we love projects, but we don't necessarily love the maintenance involved with those projects! Ainsley really enjoys gardening - I think we've got something like 100 house plants! Other than that, we like to go camping, and - when I can - I really enjoy hunting.

We've got a little bit of land and about 40 ewes - so I still get my dose of farming-related activities. We love it and we're blessed. I recently had a really proud dad moment when I asked Elijah, "... what do you want to do when you grow up?" He excitedly replied, "hunting!" I asked Isaiah the same thing. He said, "chase sheep!".

#### For those reading this who may not know, how did the ministry of Word of Life begin?

It began in the United States with Jack Wyrtzen's vision that it's the responsibility of every generation to reach their generation for Christ. Essentially, Jack and four or five of his friends were challenged in the area of sharing the Gospel with others.

They'd been meeting together at a Bible study, so they decided to do a five-week Gospel presentation in their community. Each person prepared a message and ran one of those weeks.

As each one went by, more and more people flocked to hear the Gospel. They began to run a wide range of evangelistic initiatives. One day, a youth leader challenged Jack about training and equipping others. Word of Life Fellowship began in 1940 and, in the subsequent 75 years, has added camps, conference centres, Bible institutes, and church youth ministries in over 70 countries.

Word of Life New Zealand began in 1984, starting with Bible clubs before expanding to run a camp property Bible college in Nelson. Internationally there are regions and Word of Life New Zealand is part of the Indo-Pacific region - the largest area in terms of population, scope and many other factors.

So many voices compete for a young person's attention in the culture we live in today. I know this is part of the heart behind Word of Life too, so how can we be effective in cutting through that 'noise', sharing the Gospel with others and pointing people to abundant life in Christ?

That's such a great question. There's a couple of elements to answering that. Word of Life is a parachurch ministry - we are non-denominational and we work alongside churches to foster the calling of evangelism. I think it's worth saying that if we aren't sensitive to the Lord's leading and guiding regarding how we reach people, we could potentially add to that noise.

Our vision is to see every young person in New Zealand impacted by the Gospel through a friend. Truthfully, for that Godgiven vision to be fulfilled simply 'shouting' our vision and adding to the 'noise' is never going to work.

The key is relationship - reaching individuals with the Gospel, then empowering them to share it with others themselves. Who are the ones who will actually reach young people today with the message of Jesus? Young people. We are simply here to equip youth leaders and empower youth.

Take schools for example. What will cut through the 'noise' we've talked about in that environment is the realisation for a young person that "...this is one of my best friends who is sharing with me about the truth of Jesus - someone who knows me and loves me". Of course, it's also really important that we share our faith with others and evangelise in other ways - but if we're actually going to see each young person in New Zealand impacted, one of the major ways that will happen is relationally.

That's an interesting point. Trust, building relationships and rapport are also all tools we should use in whatever sphere God has placed us in, as we look to reach those around us and bring Jesus into their situation, right?

Absolutely. Another key thing for all of us is to understand the role we play in being Jesus' hands and feet in the world we live in. In Scripture, I love Paul's example in Acts 17 when he's in Athens. Before he shares the Gospel, he's clearly doing reconnaissance, "...for as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of

worship..." - Acts 17:23 (NIV). In doing so, he's asking, "...what culture and context do I find myself in here?"

He discovers they're very spiritual people - they have altars to various 'gods', and even one to the 'unknown god'. Essentially, he comes into the culture, understands where he finds himself and preaches the Gospel in a beautiful way, pointing them to Jesus.

In that I see a wonderful technique I've been taught over the years through Dare2Share - 'Ask, Admire, Admit'. Ask questions to understand where others are coming from and what they believe about God. Admire what you can about what they believe.

And then admit that the reason you're a Christian is that you're in need of a Saviour. It's as though Paul says, "I can see you have faith. I admire that. You're searching for something - here is who you are looking for. His name is Jesus".

For young people today, an important question is, "...how do we equip them to speak into this space?" There's lots of aspects of the culture we live in that we don't have to agree with or accept, but our heart and our approach is key to our effectiveness in sharing the Gospel.

If we come from a position of attack, or disagreement, that's not going to help you share the Gospel with your friend, or anyone really - it'll build walls, not bridges.

Great point! Sometimes as Christians we get discouraged as we look to share our faith though. What would you say

to people to encourage them to firstly lay aside the things holding them back and, secondly, to boldly share the Gospel with others?

I think there are several factors. According to Dare2Share research, factors like the fear of man, and not knowing what to say when we get a chance to share, often contribute to a possible sense of reluctance. What I'd say is that a degree of fear is always going to be there - in a lot of ways, that's actually a good thing. It causes us to rely on God. When we understand that we don't approach sharing the Gospel fearlessly, nor do we approach sharing the Gospel in our own strength, we begin to rely on God and realise that each time we step out the Lord will equip us.

For those of us who perhaps wonder how to effectively share the Gospel when we get a chance, a fantastic resource I'd suggest is Dare2Share's GOSPEL acrostic - God Our Sins Paying Everyone Life. It's a clear way for us to know and understand our faith and what we actually need to communicate to others. (Great point Dave! Check out page 83).

On that note, in a Word of Life sense, there's a few different tools you utilise as you look to share the Gospel and equip others to do so. Tell me about them...

"I discovered the powerful

reality that Jesus rose again

for me - He is alive now and

I can have a relationship

with Him now. "

Sure. We facilitate several initiatives for youth leaders and high schoolaged young people called ORIGIN, CONVERGE and Youth Night. Within the overarching vision we've talked about, each of those play an important role. The purpose of ORIGIN is exposure. If we're wanting to effect culture change across the nation, then exposure is important in the sense that it gives us potential opportunities

to come alongside and support more youth ministries. In a typical calendar year, we do four ORIGIN events - two in the North Island - in Hamilton and Auckland - and two in the South Island, in Christchurch and Dunedin.

We call it "an exciting free-for-all night of fun". There's over 50 different activities people can take part in. We have a cafe, a gaming truck, wrestling type activities, mystery-related activities and quizzes. Activity wise, the goal is to win as much 'dosh' as possible - money which they spend at an auction to try to win some prizes. While we do make it a lot of fun, the overarching mission is that we want it to be a space into which young people can invite others along to hear the Gospel. The Summit is the part of the evening when everyone comes together and we share the message of the Gospel using lots of different platforms - drama, spoken word and media.

By the point in the evening when someone gets up to share a message, the audience is presented with the question, "...you have heard the Gospel... what's your response?" Ultimately, our desire is to challenge every young person in the room that they are making a choice whether they realise it or not - to either trust God, or to not trust Him.

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CONVERGE is about partnering with youth groups in an area and bringing them together for a joint night. Activity-wise, we fit whatever we can into a church's space and say, "...we're here to serve you". At its heart is a relational tool - whether we have journeyed with a youth group for a long time, or whether they've just heard about us - whether they are a large group, or a smaller one, we want to serve them and build relationship and stir up conversations to assist them in equipping their young people and increasing expectations about reaching their community

Often going hand in hand with CONVERGE and Youth Nights is what we call advanced training - sitting down with their leaders a few weeks out from those nights and helping to equip them in the lead up, and for after the fact. The gold is in the culture change which happens in the youth ministry after those

You've mentioned your involvement with Word of Life dates back to 2010. What's it like to reflect on your ministry journey in your current role as Word of Life New Zealand's field coordinator?

Well, in my time with Word of Life I've done a little bit of everything under the sun. I started out in events back when we were running sports tournaments. Then I moved into a role centered around facilitating discipleship - a passion of mine. Then, I started to take on more leadership.

Over the course of 2019, we established a management team as then field coordinator Tom McIvor prepared to take a six-month sabbatical. It was also because staff numbers had grown a lot too. When I first got involved in 2010, there were three staff and two interns. We're now a team of 20.

The role of field coordinator is certainly a mix of being exciting, challenging and daunting. To be honest, it was one that I initially never really sought, or wanted. When I looked at the way Tom led I thought, "I can't be that person." But, when Tom went on sabbatical, we began asking questions about how we would

effectively lead the team while he was away. In and through that time - while I've always had a heart for our team - God began to speak to me and work in my life, and in the lives of those in our team. He stirred in us a deeper heart for how we can serve those around us. I became even more passionate about the work we do and excited to serve the team in this way. When Tom was ultimately appointed to a role with Word of Life International, I was officially appointed to the field coordinator role here in New Zealand in spring 2020.

I've always seen myself as working best in an almost secondin-charge supportive type of role really. But, the Lord equips us for what He calls us to - and I trust that God has me in this role for this time. While in one sense there is, at times, a lot more involved in leading a ministry than I'd imagined, it's also an amazing God-given honour to serve our team in my role. I may not be the 'up the front' guy, but I am 100 percent behind our team, empowering, supporting and encouraging - spurring us on to be all that God has called us to be.

You've spoken of how impactful your time in Samoa was for you. Is that experience still something which you reflect back on as formative in how you look to now impact other young people for Christ?

Exactly. When I initially felt called to ministry - although I didn't really know the extent of what it would look like - Word of Life seemed like a no brainer, simply because of how God used that time in Samoa to impact me. I thought, "Well, I want to be able to learn from that and serve others." As I said, one of my clear passions is discipleship and discipleship training - the Lord has been leading me on a journey of discovering how the Gospel is absolutely key in that process.

Everything we do as a team is around advancing the Gospel discipleship happens through that. Whatever form that takes - events, leadership training or other tools - we're continually asking, "...how are we equipping the local church to reach, evangelise and disciple people in a way which means the young people at that church get excited about reaching their friends?"



In that light, it must really impact you when you hear from youth communities - and young people themselves - about how the work of Word For Life has pointed them to Jesus?

For sure. Often the most powerful stories are the ones we may not always hear about.

For example, at this year's Hamilton ORIGIN we had nearly 500 youth leaders and students. And it's the flow on stories from different youth communities that really move me. One story I heard was of young people being challenged by their leaders to invite friends. Then, on the final day before ORIGIN, those young people had the courage to invite some friends.

Their friends came along and the following week their friends were at youth group. Now, all of a sudden, because of the courage of these young people who invited friends, those friends are now on a journey in a youth community where they get to hear the Gospel, week in and week out. That is culture change, beginning in the youth ministry. Our events like ORIGIN are cool - and they incredibly achieve an aspiration to an extent - but ultimately it's also achieving that deeper purpose.

Covid has undoubtedly had an effect on your ability to facilitate things like ORIGIN and CONVERGE - As you look to 2022 and beyond, are you excited about where God might be leading the team?

Yes! Things have certainly looked a little different - but in a way we're grateful that we've had an opportunity to look ahead and plan. The reality is, things are going to look quite different going forward too. In part because of Covid, but also as we look to follow the Lord's leading in the environment we find ourselves in, we will not hold ORIGIN in 2022. We absolutely see its value in us

achieving our vision, but the situation over the last two years has meant that while organising them takes a lot of time, we're often then not guaranteed to be able to run them effectively.

Our heart is to serve and minister to churches - with ORIGIN not running, we'll be able to devote a full 12 months of the year to that aspect of our work.

We'll likely look to establish a new type of event, the focus of which will be us coming alongside youth groups and equipping them to run their own evangelistic events for their community - through which they can also equip their young people to be the ones to serve. It's very early, initial stages on that front - but that's the kind of thing we're very excited about when we look ahead with a desire to empower youth communities to take ownership and effect change in their spheres of influence.

#### Awesome! Lastly, any final encouragement for our

Know the Gospel and the impact it can have on your life. Remember the Dare2Share Gospel acrostic I mentioned? God Our Sins Paying Everyone Life? Well, I used to be a 'G-O-S-P-E' type person and stop there. Then I discovered 'L', life. Life in Christ starts now and stretches into eternity. I would love for readers to remind themselves of the importance of the Gospel message in their lives so that not only does their own thankfulness to the Lord for what He's done for them increase, but they'd then be inspired to ask, "...if I believe this to be true, I need to do something about it."

Thanks so much for sharing your story with us Dave. For more information about Word of Life. visit www.wol.org.nz, or head to their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/wordoflifenz

■ Jeremy Smith is editor of, and one of the writers for, Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato-based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.



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concussions are reasonably rare. I've never heard of a rugby player having had multiple concussions - let alone ten!

I would suggest the reason football players have concussions is that they wear protective helmets. Rugby players have the instinct to protect their heads when they tackle or fall. As they hit the ground, they instinctively hold their heads up. Football players, on the other hand, use their helmeted heads as battering rams. When they hit the ground, their head recoils and the helmet gives their head an even greater impact. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that what they're trusting to protect their heads is the very thing that is causing the damage.

I say that to say that when we are self righteous, we are deceived into thinking that we are inherently good - or that our good works are pleasing in the sight of God. But, if we are reliant on good works alone - even if they are seen as 'good' in society - those good works will ultimately end up having a bad result. Why? Because when we are self-righteous we don't see our need of a Saviour. Hence my football analogy - the very thing we think is helping us is doing us eternal damage.

This is why, as parents, it's so important to instill Moral Law in our children's young minds before they learn to become self-righteous.

This shows them the standard of goodness God requires. Its power, under the Holy Spirit, will help your

children steer clear of the deception of self righteousness and bring them to the righteousness that is found in Christ alone.

To help our children see God's perspective on goodness, we must first agree with His testimony that we are all morally bankrupt. In and of ourselves, there is no one good - not one. We must help our children get rid of the idea that their own righteousness will save them - and indeed we must also get rid of the idea that ours will save us, if we have it! When it comes to our children, how do we do that? By showing them God's righteousness.

In the New King James translation (NKJV) - Proverbs 20:6 says, "...most men will proclaim each his own goodness..." We can get an idea of our children's understanding of salvation by asking if they think they are good people. As humans, if we have no knowledge of sin, when we are asked this question we will almost certainly say we are. Without God's Law - the Ten Commandments - we actually have no understanding that in God's eyes 'good' is moral perfection in thought, word and deed. If we examine the Ten Commandments and open up their spiritual nature, we'll see that in and of ourselves none of us can be good as far as God is concerned. This is actually an approach Charles Spurgeon referred to as our most powerful weapon,

because in utilising it, we bypass human intellect and speak directly to the conscience. In Romans 8:7, Scripture tells us the human mind is at war with God.

"The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." (NIV).

Therefore, to witness effectively - both to our children and to those of any age - we have to find ground upon which there is agreement with the Law. This is so we can reason with the lost about sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come. In the words of John 16:8, "When He comes, He will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment." (NIV).

In speaking to our children, that place of common ground is the conscience.

"...the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness..." - Romans 2:15 (NIV). Ephesians 4:18 tells us human understanding is 'darkened' - but

the conscience is the area where God has given light. The word 'conscience' actually means "with knowledge". The conscience is the headline, written boldly to warn of sin, while the Scriptures give us the fine print. None of us can say we don't know it's wrong to lie, steal or murder - that knowledge is written in large print on our heart. However,

Scripture shows us the true nature of sin, and that God requires truth even in the inward parts.

"Yet You desired faithfulness even in the womb; You taught me wisdom in that secret place." - Psalm 51:6 (NIV).

The fine print reveals to us that lust is adultery of the heart, hatred is murder of the heart, fibs are bearing false witness and so on.

So, as we go through the Ten Commandments and reason with our children about sin, righteousness and judgment, we can simply say to them, "...you know it's wrong to steal and lie...". Our child's conscience will affirm within them the truth of the Law.

Scripture tells us God desires that all come to repentance. So, may I urge us as parents to use the tools the Lord has provided for that purpose. The conscience, our God-given ally in the hearts of our children, will work with us as we go through the Moral Law and will reveal to them their need of a Saviour.

Adapted from Ray's book How To Bring Your Children to Christ... And Keep Them There. Originally from Christchurch, Ray and his family now live in Los Angeles, California.

■ Ray Comfort, the founder and CEO of Living Waters Publications, is an internationally recognized evangelist and author. Ray is the host of the award-winning Way of the Master television program and radio program. He is also a best-selling author of over 80 books.

"Ephesians 4:18 tells us human

understanding is 'darkened' -

but the conscience is the area

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A number of years ago, my wife and I ran a conference for families. Throughout the week, we ran a series of short devotional theatre pieces based on the woman at the well - the story found in the Bible in John 4:1-45. The process of unpacking this story and putting it into short theatre scripts really impacted me - because it is a story which in fact says so much about God and how He treats us as

"When we meet Jesus in all His

fullness, whatever the context,

we begin to love the things He

loves and, in reality, we become

more like Him in the process."

The story centres around a Samaritan woman. Samaritans at that time were despised greatly by the Jews, and Jesus asks this woman for a drink by a deep well.

"When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" - John 4:7 (NIV).

The nuance of this passage is that Jesus shouldn't really have been in Samaria at all. The norm for Rabbis at the time would have been to avoid the region altogether. A Rabbi would walk around the region when travelling north, adding more days to the journey just to avoid dirtying their shoes.

Jesus shouldn't have been near this woman, let alone asking her for a drink.

"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" - John 4:9 (NIV).

Samaritans were viewed as half-Jews who had ethnically mixed with their neighbours, possibly from Mesopotamia.

We are told in Scripture that this particular Samaritan woman had also had five 'husbands' - so to top it all off she was a 'sinner' and most likely despised by her own people as well.

Read Jesus' words to her

"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband." - John 4:17-18 (NIV).

There are two parts to this story. The first is that a woman, terribly rejected by wider society and even by her own people, has her identity transformed by spending time with Jesus.

She is given the chance to change the direction of her life and to become new again, drinking from a 'new' well. She is given God-shaped hope and forgiveness, no longer to be trapped in the pattern of her old life or mistakes. The experience of being known by the Creator of the universe gives intrinsic value to us as human beings - and this sounds like good news to me!

The second part of the story, and for me perhaps the most important part, is that this 'new woman' then goes back to her town and tells everyone what Jesus had done for her and who He was. Said another way, she passes on the Good News.

"He told me everything I ever did." - John 4:39 (NIV).

The end result is that many Samaritans accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The woman's encounter with Jesus had a missional outcome - and therefore a wider Kingdom hope for the nations

When we meet Jesus in all His fullness, whatever the context, we begin to love the things He loves and, in reality, we become more like Him in the process. To become like Jesus is to join in with His

> mission on the earth in giving all humans hope and intrinsic value,

The first thing the woman at the well does after experiencing the love, acceptance and forgiveness of Jesus is to join in with His global mission in telling others! Eastern Orthodox Church history in fact remembers her as one of the first

apostles - St Photini. She went on to preach the Gospel of the Good News in many places, including Rome - eventually being martyred down a well.

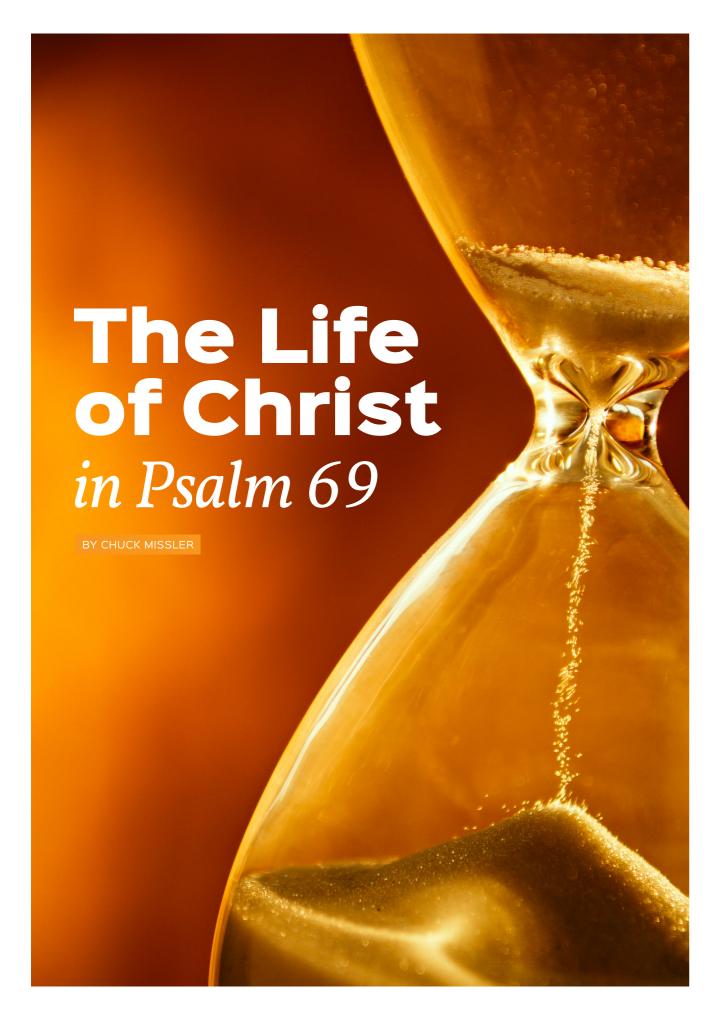
Jesus states in this story in verse 14: "...whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (NIV).

For me, the symbolism of this water is extremely powerful; a wellspring of water bursting forth does not trickle, nor is it gentle. Jesus promises to give us this kind of life-giving water always. And as we are truly filled with this new water, it overflows - refreshing and renewing everyone around us. When human beings experience a really good thing, they inevitably want to share that experience and knowledge with everyone around them, even unto death!

Actually such good news cannot help but burst forth like a wellspring of life. Do you want to experience such a well of life? I

■ Carl is English, recently emigrated to NZ with his Kiwi wife and kids. Carl has worked with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) for 26 years in youth work, church planting, art ministry and as a travelling speaker. With a Masters in Applied Theology, he is setting up afresh in NZ, still working with YWAM in education projects throughout the Pacific, as well as a Story Teller, Chef and Lecturer on the side! He has recently launched a YouTube channel called 'Heavenly Nosh' combining theology, cooking and art!





In this piece, we are going to focus on a Psalm that has an important nuance - Psalm 69.¹ Next to Psalm 22, it is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Psalm 22 deals with the death of Christ, Psalm 69 deals with the life of Christ.

Psalm 69 is quoted in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and in Acts and Romans. There are also many references to it other than in direct quotes. In Psalm 69, there is an allusion to the early years of Jesus Christ. This Psalm gives us a glimpse into 'the silent years' - as they are often called - of Christ's childhood and His young manhood. It's a period of time of which the Gospels tell us practically nothing.

Luke does record in his Gospel an incident in the life of our Lord when He was 12 years old and in the Temple (Luke 2:41-49). Other than that, we know very little about His childhood. Psalm 69 though fills in some details. We gain insight into some of His days in Nazareth and His dark hours on the Cross in this Psalm.

This Psalm is classified as an imprecatory psalm - or a psalm which invokes judgment, calamity or curses upon one's enemies - because of the imprecatory prayer in Psalm 69:22-28.

It is from that section that most of the New Testament quotes are taken. His cry for justice is a psalm of early humiliation and rejection.

We begin in the north of Israel, in Nazareth. We hear the heart sob of a small boy, a teenager, and a young man.

"Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for My sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for My sake, O God of Israel. Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered My face. I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother's children. - Psalm 69:6-8 (KJV).

There are two reasons He was bearing this: Firstly, they hated Him because of who He was - in the same way the sinner hates the righteous person today. And secondly, because He came to take a lowly, humble place on earth, He bore reproach, and shame covered His face.

Verse eight is a strange verse isn't it? "I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother's children," - not His father's children because Joseph was not His blood father; His siblings were half-brothers and half-sisters. They may have taunted Him and it could have been an unhappy home for Jesus. This verse also teaches the virgin birth of Christ. A very strange phrase for the psalmist to use is "...and an alien unto My mother's children". Whenever one sees an apparently unnecessary detail, there is actually a need to look

at it more closely. That is what the rabbis will call a remez, a hint of something deeper. It's like a sign that says, "...dig here." It is possible that Mary's other boys - James, Judas and Joses said something like, "...mother, we heard someone say that Jesus is not really our brother. They said that nobody knows who His real father is"<sup>2</sup>

His apparent illegitimacy may have been a common buzz about Him and His mother. Mary had other children; we know that from the Gospels.

In Mark 6, Four brothers are named here - James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. So, there were at least four half brothers. James and Jude later become believers, and they each wrote a book of the New Testament.

We know He had four brothers and at least two sisters; it was apparently a family of seven children, maybe more. Jesus was apparently viewed as having taken up Joseph's trade as a "carpenter." (Hebrew: charash; Greek: tekton).<sup>3</sup>

"We really have no idea what Jesus went through for those 30 years prior to His ministry. What we do know is that He was faithful in all things so that we might become a legitimate son or daughter of God."

The Psalmist continues: "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten Me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me." - Psalm 69:9 (KJV).

That verse is quoted in the New Testament when He cleared the Temple.

"And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep

and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables.

And said unto them that sold doves, take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise. And His disciples remembered that it was written, 'the zeal of Thine house has eaten Me up.'" - John 2:14-17 (KJV).

The disciples link that to Psalm 69. They were well aware of Psalm 69. The Greek word for zeal signifies 'to stretch out the neck,' a metaphor from the racers who strain every limb to reach forward to lay hold of the prize.

And, as we continue in Psalm 69, we see verse 10. "When I wept, and chastened My soul with fasting, that was to My reproach." - Psalm 69:10.

When He would fast or weep, His brothers would ridicule Him for it. They would probably assume that He was just putting on an act. When He (Jesus) was pious they made fun of Him. "I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them." - Psalm 69:11 (KJV).

Word circulated that He was illegitimate. In John 8: 41b-48,

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when He is tangling with the Pharisees, and they say, "... we were not born of fornication...." They threw His apparent illegitimacy in His face. In verse 44, before that chapter finishes, Jesus tells the Pharisees about their parentage in no uncertain terms.

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do." - John 8:44 (KJV).

"They that sit in the gate speak against Me; and I was the song of the drunkards." - Psalm 69:12 (KJV).

Those who 'sit in the gate' are the high officials of the town, the judges. The best people in Nazareth also spoke against Him. The drunks of the town are making up little unkind songs in the tavern about Him and His mother. We all know how unforgiving small towns are. His life in Nazareth could not have been nice. ]Why did He endure all of this? He was reared in a town where He was called illegitimate – why? We really have

no idea what He went through for those 30 years prior to His ministry. What we do know is that He was faithful in all things so that we might become a legitimate son or daughter of God. The Son of God bore insult, injury and indignation for each of us - reaching its apex at the Crucifixion. He paid the ultimate penalty for our sins and ensured our adoption as children of God for eternity.

1. Author's note: This is a nuance in Psalm 69 that I have missed in the past.
2. Author's note: It must have been interesting when they later discover who He really is!

3. Hebrew: charash; Greek: texton: This word, which is a general word for graver or craftsman, is translated "carpenter" in 2 Kings 22:6; 2 Chronicles 24:12; Ezra 3:7; Isaiah 41:7. The same word is rendered "craftsman" in the American Standard Revision Version of Jeremiah 24:2 and 29:2 and "smith" in the American Standard Revised Version of Zechariah 1:20. In 2 Samuel 5:11; 2 Kings 12:11; 1 Chronicles 14:1; and Isaiah 44:13, Hebrew "charash" occurs with Hebrew ets (wood) and is more exactly translated "carpenter" or "worker in wood." The Greek Tekton, the corresponding Greek word for Artificer, is translated "carpenter" in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3.

■ Chuck Missler was an author, Bible teacher, engineer, and former businessman. He was also the founder of the Koinonia Institute. Chuck went to be with the Lord in May 2018.





AUTHENTIC | MEN & FAMILY

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Hamilton Christian School principal Shaun Brooker has a huge heart when it comes to a holistic approach to, and view of, Christian education. In this piece - purposefully written in the style of a letter from a parent - he expresses what he views that calling as looking like - not only just at school, but in all spheres of life.

Shaun, who is also chair of the New Zealand Association for Christian Schools, is passionate about Christian education, learning through utilising technology and leadership - and his desire is that all parents are aware of the influence they have in pointing their children to Jesus.

To You, the Teacher,

Thank you for your commitment to educating my child and raising them up in Christ - not just equipping them for their future career, but also helping them to set their eyes on things above. I pray that you will equip them well. If you are a science teacher, teach them science in the best way you can... with Christ's help. Recognising that they are not just my child, but they are a child of the Most High King. (2 Corinthians 6:18).

If you are a junior school teacher, teach them the foundations of literacy and numeracy well, helping them create a curiosity for God's creation (Romans 1:20). And do it the best that you can, with Christ's help. Recognising that they are not just my child, but a child of the Most High King.

But don't just equip them with head knowledge. Help them appreciate the promises that are set out in the Scriptures for them. Help them to understand that the Creator of the universe desires a relationship with them. Help them know that even when things are not going as they would hope in life, Jesus is still King (Psalm 33:11).

When they leave your school, and then maybe move out of home, be certain they know their value, their identity and their purpose and that - ultimately - if they trust God and place their calling in His hands, they can do immeasurably more than they could ever have dreamed or imagined. (Philippians 4:13).

But, please don't preach at them. Don't start science with an undirected dissertation of the Scriptures. Rather, help them discover God's incredible creation and remind them that, as Creator, God cares so much more for them than He does for the birds of the air and the flowers in the field. (Matthew 6:30).

As a Christian in education, either an educator or a parent, help them to value and love prayer. Don't teach them that prayer is a religious activity that happens at certain times of the day with set prayers. Do more than just praying at the beginning of the day, lunchtime and at the end of the day. Demonstrate to them that there's more than just students praying, 'thank you for today, I pray that nobody gets hurt, amen'.

Rather, teach them to love prayer and see it as an ongoing conversation with their Creator and the lover of their soul... not just the regurgitation or repetitiveness. Please model meaningful and authentic prayer to them, a conversation of respect between them and the Sustainer of life.

And, help them to love the Scriptures. Don't relegate Scripture memorisation to a thoughtless homework task - the memorising patterns of words from the Bible that will be assessed on Friday and replaced with another pattern of words on Monday. Don't reduce it to something that is punishable by writing sentences out over and over and over if they have the pattern wrong on Friday. Rather, make Scripture a fundamental part of the classroom. Let it be revisited and unpacked with such frequency that it would be almost impossible for them not to hold His Word in their heart. Please, do not punish them when they get it wrong, rather reflect on how you could explore different approaches in the class - or what you teach at home - to ensure such a strong foundation that it is harder for them to fail than it is to succeed.

And please, present the Scriptures to them in such a way that they know that His Word is relevant to their life now, as well as to their future. (Malachi 3:6). Through your passion for His Word, help them develop an insatiable curiosity for Scripture. Help them to love worship.

Don't make them numb to worship by putting them in a room where all the students gather together and powerful words about their Creator and what He has done for them go into their eyes and out of their mouth without touching their heart on the way through. Rather, take time and have them consider the rich truths that the artist has brought to life through song. Promote the 'stickiness' of those words so that they penetrate their mind and saturate their heart.

Please don't be offended - but know that just because you are a Christian teacher or parent, it does not mean that my child will experience Christian education in your classroom, or Christ-centered learning at home. Rather, the quality of the Christian education that they experience in your classroom, or the Christ-centered learning they receive at home if you home school, will be proportional to the intentionality that you put into both the subtle and overt experiences they have of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures and how you as the teacher, or parent, model what it is to live a life completely sold out for Him.

So, thank you. Thank you for the way that you will join us in modelling how to be a Christian in this broken world. Thank you for not just telling my child, but for showing them the fruit of the Spirit in action - through who you are, they will understand what it means to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with their Maker (Micah 6:8).

Praying God's richest blessings for you, Parents of 'You Know Who'.

■ Shaun Brooker is the principal of Hamilton Christian School and the chairman of the New Zealand Association for Christian Schools. He has taught and led in Christian and state schools in England, the Cayman Islands, and New Zealand.





### Blue Miracle

NETFLIX // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

Blue Miracle tells a heartwarming true story about what it means to be a father.

Casa Hogar is an orphanage in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Run by "Papa" Omar and his wife, Becca, the group home helps get homeless youth off the streets.

Unfortunately, in 2014, Omar finds himself - and the orphanage - more than \$100,000 in debt. The bank is ready to repossess the property, and the boys living there are once again looking at a bleak future sleeping under bridges and dodging hoodlums with guns.

However, there's one hope for the boys - the Bisbee Black and Blue. Known as the Super Bowl of fishing competitions, the Bisbee Black and Blue awards cash prizes in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. And, after the town was devastated by Hurricane Odile, the \$5000 entrance fee was waived for local fishermen. Omar doesn't know anything about fishing, and neither do any of his boys. But Captain Wade does.

Living in his rundown boat on the docks, Wade is the only man who has ever won the Bisbee two years in a row. But he's technically not a 'local fisherman'. He needs some homegrown teammates to qualify for free entry. And it turns out Casa Hogar might be just the ticket.

He doesn't care about saving Casa Hogar, he's more interested in riches and glory. And Omar is hesitant to expose his boys,

who he's trying to instill good moral values in, to someone who clearly doesn't care about them.

But since neither man has any other options, they'll have to learn to work together if they want any chance at realising their dreams.

A note for parents, positive elements of the film include the fact that Omar attempts to set a good example for the boys living at Casa Hogar, teaching them the importance of doing the right thing even when it's difficult. He also teaches the boys to pray, informing them that God is always listening. However, he also explains that sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers in the way we think He will. And that's certainly what happens in *Blue Miracle*.

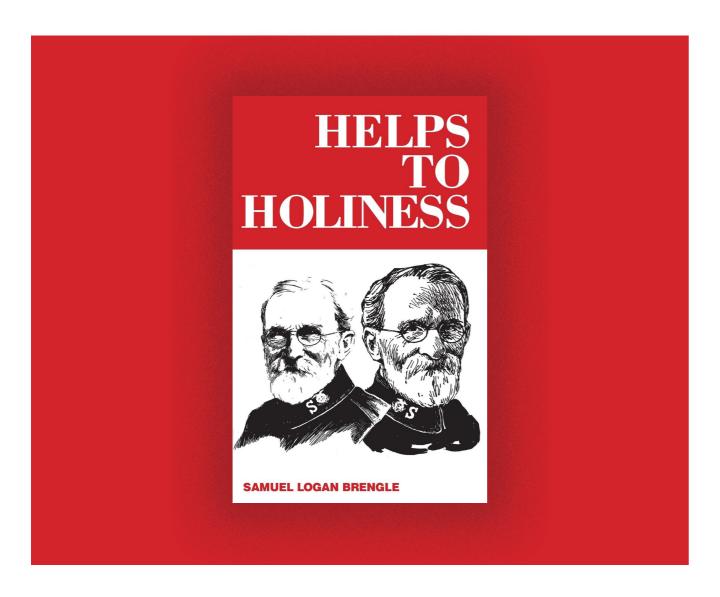
There are times when we hear some heartbreaking tales about why the boys at Casa Hogar are orphans. And Omar and Becca sometimes have to be painfully realistic about the fact that these boys are all alone.

There are a few mild profanities to watch out for, and we see some flashes of violence. But otherwise, *Blue Miracle* tells a heartwarming true story about what it means to be a father and demonstrates that integrity and good character are the most valuable assets a person can possess.

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Review compiled from PluggedIn.com

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## Helps to Holiness

SAMUEL BRENGLE // REVIEW BY NATHAN JOHNSON

If you've been following deeperChristian for some time, it shouldn't surprise you that I love Samuel Logan Brengle's books. He's a man from recent Christian history I turn to over and over, and with whom I feel a deep friendship.

He and a few others like Oswald Chambers, Ian Thomas, Andrew Murray, AW Tozer, Leonard Ravenhill and EM Bounds have had an incredible influence on my life.

Samuel was a man of profound faith who preached a bold Gospel, yet lived a life of tremendous humility. God used him - both his life and words - to deepen the faith of thousands. Early in Salvation Army history - soon after William Booth started it - Samuel extensively travelled as an evangelist for them.

His biography made my list of must read Christian biographies - a powerful story of a man who gave up great fame and prestige

to allow God to form deep humility in him, that he might be used in greater measure for God's Kingdom and glory.

I appreciate Samuel's love, passion, and focus on Jesus. In his biography, one of my favorite stories is how - as an itinerant preacher - Samuel was once ministering in an impoverished and destitute area of Boston. As he was walking down a street, a drunkard who hated him recognised his face. Finding a brick nearby, he threw it at Samuel's head.

"Oh the endless depths of our Jesus! May we aggressively go after Him. May He be the fullness of our life, holiness, and Godliness."

Greatly hurt, Samuel was taken to hospital, where he spent several months recovering. In his hospital bed, to pass time, Samuel Brengle wrote articles for the War Cry, a Salvation Army publication championing the need for revival and holiness in our lives. These articles were compiled and turned into his book *Helps to Holiness*.

Finally, people often ask me about my favorite classic Christian books and biographies which have deeply impacted my life. So, I asked myself a question - "...if I got lost on an island, what three biographies would I choose to keep me company?" It's a tough question. So, I tweaked the question and decided on six - though that was equally difficult.

With that in mind, I will leave you with a selection of some of the classic Christian biographies that I would recommend, which have inspired my faith in Jesus Christ, in the hope that they will bless you too.

Of course, given my review of *Helps to Holiness* here, we have to start with the story of Samuel Brengle.

#### My Six Must Read Biographies:

#### Samuel Logan Brengle, Portrait of a Prophet

By Clarence Hall

I have often prayed that God would shape me into a man that is a composite of several people - in fact several of those people are the ones whose biographies are mentioned here. But one man from recent Christian history that I sense God most moving me toward is this one, Samuel Brengle. As mentioned above, Samuel - as a Salvation Army preacher - was a man focused on one thing: the glory and holiness of God being preeminent in the lives of individuals. His was not an easy life, but it was a full one.

#### Rees Howells: Intercessor

By Norman Grubb

Rees Howells lived the life I want most. Growing up on the British Isle, he had an overwhelming experience with Jesus where he gave up everything in order to be spilled and spent for the glory and for the Kingdom of God. He was a man of prayer - effectual and fervent prayer - that literally changed the course of history at several points.

#### CT Studd: Cricketeer and Pioneer

By Norman Grubb

CT Studd lived no ordinary life. Everything about this man was extraordinary - but extraordinary because of the God who indwelt and lived his life. It was Studd who changed world

missions and passionately pleaded for individuals to give up everything and trust in the life and provision of Jesus. CT Studd was a missionary throughout China, India and was the first missionary to enter into "dark interior Africa." His life story is gritty, bold and daring; it is in-your-face with passion, conviction and encouragement.

#### Samuel Morris: Missionary to America (Heroes of the Faith) By Terry W. Whalin

I have never read of an individual so captured by the indwelling presence of Christ. Having a supernatural encounter with Jesus in the bush of Africa - he was the son of a tribal king - Samuel found his way to the United States, where he desired to learn more about the Holy Spirit.

Upon arrival, the life of everyone he encountered was turned upside down by his simple but fervent desire for God. He died a few years later, but the testimony of his life still rings true. Reading his life always wells up deep emotion within my chest. Just a note, books on Samuel Morris can at times be hard to find - there are a few good ones like 'Heroes of Faith', but some of the great oldies are no longer in print.

#### Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God

By David McCasland

Oswald Chambers, the author of the famous My Utmost For His Highest, is one of my favorite authors to read. His life is even more profound. A humble servant, a prolific writer, a deep expositor and preacher and a remarkable teacher are but a few of the words which describe this man of God. Told through narrative and journal entries, this book gives you a view of the man who wrote the world's best-selling devotional book and brought countless thousands to the saving work of Christ.

#### A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael By Elisabeth Elliot

Amy Carmichael, as a young Irish woman, set off to be a missionary - spending the majority of her life in India. Her life was one of complete abandon as she rescued girls from temple prostitution, cared for orphans and wrote passionately about the Christian life. Reading about Amy Carmichael gives me an urgency of soul, a deeper love and passion for Jesus and a piercing conviction for how I spend my time.

To kick off your summer reading list, at least two of these titles - A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael and Rees Howells: Intercessor are available at Manna Christian Stores. Oswald Chambers' well-known devotional My Utmost For His Highest, also mentioned in the above list, is in stock too.

■ Nathan Johnson is program director and an instructor at Ellerslie Mission Society in Windsor, Colorado. Learn and see more at deeperchristian.com. Used by permission.



## So, What's the GOSPEL Message?

Enjoying reading Authentic Magazine? It's our prayer the content filling these pages encourages Christian men, helping them grow in their faith, knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ - while being a light to those living without Jesus. If, having read this issue, you have questions about taking the next step towards Jesus - this Dare 2 Share resource might help.

A GOSPEL acrostic, it's also a clear and precise way to share Jesus with others.

God

#### created us to be with Him. (Genesis 1-2)

God created the universe (Genesis 1:1) - including the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Created to be in complete fellowship with Him and each other, God wanted them to care for the earth and the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). He said they shouldn't eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but His plan was disrupted when they evilly did so.

OUR

#### sins separate us from God. (Genesis 3)

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree (Genesis 3:6), they sinned. Becoming aware of their error, there were both immediate and future consequences. Immediately banished from the garden, they'd physically die in the future. Their offspring - everyone including you and I - was born sinful, selfish and subsequently deprived of God's fellowship (Romans 5:12-14).

SINS

#### cannot be removed by good deeds. (Genesis 4 - Malachi 4)

Humanity attempts to remove sin through good deeds, but the 10 Commandments God gave the Israelites (Exodus 20:1-17) showed they couldn't live up to His perfect standards (Galatians 3:23-24). A sacrificial system involving goats without blemishes (Leviticus 4:27-31) foreshadowed the Lamb of God, Jesus, who'd take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

AYING

#### the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again. (Matthew - Luke)

Jesus came to earth, fulfilling the law (Matthew 5:17). He was the ultimate sacrifice (Luke 24:46) - living the perfect life we couldn't live, dying in our place for our sin. His payment was infinite and complete. He rose from the dead after three days (Mark 16:6), being seen by over 500 witnesses (I Corinthians 15:6) on at least 12 occasions in 40 days (Acts 1:3).

EVERYONE

#### who trusts in Him alone has eternal life. (John)

Eternal life is a free gift of God through faith, not by our good deeds (Ephesians 2:8-9). It's not trying, but trusting. Jesus paid the price - all we must do is receive the gift of forgiveness through faith. When we believe Jesus died for our sins and trust in Him alone, we receive eternal life and we pass from death to life (John 5:24, Romans 10:9).

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#### with Jesus starts now and lasts forever. (Acts - Revelation)

Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, we'll be with Him forever in Heaven. When we trust in Him, we enter into a personal, permanent relationship with God. Eternal life doesn't start after you die, but when you believe (John 10:10). A real relationship with Jesus is through prayer, worship and the strength God gives us through His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).



Our purpose is to proclaim the Authentic Christian Life - the real, genuine life - where Christ is alive in us!

Authentic Magazine is a quarterly printed magazine, designed to encourage kiwi Christian men in their faith. It is a project of Authentic Christian Trust, a registered charity in NZ.

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You can get in touch with us by emailing info@authenticmagazine.co.nz

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