

AUTHENTIC

WINTER 2019 / ISSUE 7

MEN'S MAGAZINE

Read the story behind NZ's
Sports Chaplaincy

WISDOM SERIES BY
Charles Price

We chat to the Honorable

Alfred Ngaro

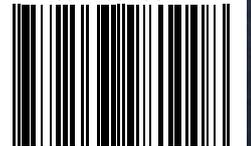
about family, faith and politics

THE
3 MOST SERIOUS
PROBLEMS FACING
MEN TODAY

PLUS

- Authentic Marriage
- Strength in 'Numbers' - Chuck Missler
- Learning to Cast Your Burden

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WINTER 2019

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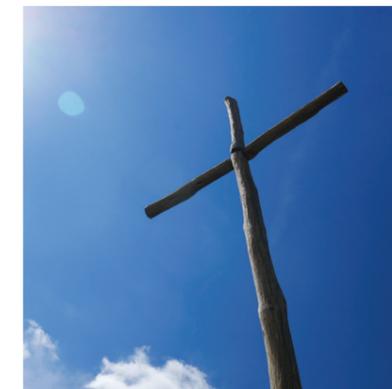


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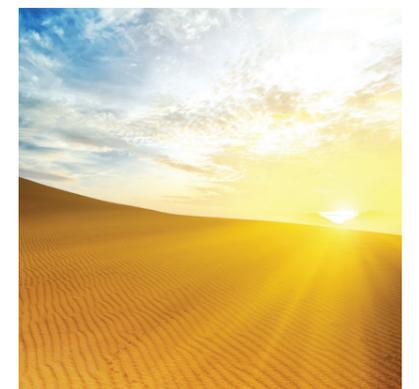


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AUTHENTIC

And it really is Magnificent!

Politics!

We use this word a lot for all sorts of things.

For example, to be 'politically correct' usually means to be careful not to say anything that might offend or upset a group of people in society.

Yet the original word comes from the Greek word Πολιτικά, or Politiká, which literally means 'affairs of the cities' - and is also the same root of the words police and policy.

So politicians really should be concerned with the 'affairs of the cities'.

Well, this issue we have featured our first politician - Alfred Ngaro. He's been in the news a lot lately so we decided to interview him about his work and his faith - two things that a lot of men like to keep separate.

I recently returned from Japan, where I spent a week at the Torchbearers Bible School there teaching the book of Genesis. I've had the privilege of teaching this subject in different places for many years but it never gets old. I love reviewing my notes and getting deep into the text with the students.

We can read the same passage of scripture over and over, listen to sermons on the same passage from different speakers and get new truths each time.



Torchbearers Bible School students in Yamanakako, Japan

Yet when I watch a movie, I have no interest in watching it again and again.

It shouldn't really be a surprise though, should it? 'For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...' (Hebrews 4:12)

And it's pretty exciting too!

Being the seventh issue, we've featured one of the late Chuck Missler's articles on 'heptadic structures'. Now I should preface this with the fact that I have been extremely wary over the years of what many people call 'Bible Codes'. You can make your own mind up but, as always, Chuck's presentation should get you digging through scripture - which was always his ultimate goal in any message he spoke or article he wrote.

And after almost two years of writing a regular feature for us, we finally got to interview Charles Price when he visited New Zealand recently - and for those of you that

missed him, he'll be back at the Keswick Convention in December (see page 68 for details).

Over the last 2 years of watching the Authentic ministry develop I've been challenged and encouraged by some of the same things. Learning to step out in faith regardless of the circumstances has become a familiar lesson with each passing trial or challenge. We choose to trust the Lord or lean on our own understanding. It's true to say that sometimes I'd much prefer all the wrinkles to get ironed out and all the problems to go away, but after each struggle I'm left in awe at our God and His ways - which are SO different to our ways (thank you Isaiah 55) - and how He goes about masterfully weaving things together in an unimaginable way. He is teaching me a great deal, including many things that I thought I'd already learned!

Something I've always struggled with is discerning the difference between opportunities and distractions.

We are heading towards the end of the initial 2 year plan and along the way we've parked some ideas that just seemed too big to tackle - but then I remember thinking the same thing about launching a Christian Men's Magazine!

But now we are starting to think and pray about the future and how some of these ideas could be part of Authentic.

If you've been keeping up to date on my ramblings in these 'editorial' segments, you'll know we have been praying about whether to continue the printed magazine next year. The initial vision was 2 years and we are rapidly heading towards the end of that so the big question is "What next?"

Well, we are passionately committed to sharing the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the men (and women) of New Zealand and training and equipping the Church to make disciples - and we don't think the Lord is letting us retire just yet so here's a couple of things that are in the works:

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP
Launching in August, we're going to be offering Christ-centred, Bible

■ Dave Firth is the Editor of Authentic Magazine, a Bible teacher, speaker, husband, father and follower of Jesus Christ.

teaching into the business and leadership community. This will be in the form of conferences, training programmes and even some website resources supporting ministry leaders as well as Christian business leaders.

Some of the conference will be at our ministry base, The Ark, in Te Awamutu.

AUTHENTIC TV
No, we haven't lost our minds (yet!) We're going to start producing a series of teaching videos with different 'Authentic' speakers and authors (if all goes to plan, it will include several that we feature in the magazine). We'll see what happens!

Obviously, all of these projects require many things; a clear vision, the right people, enough time, sufficient resources and lots of prayer. We see this mission as a shared mission with all of you so let's start with the main one and let's get praying.

(if you'd like to join our official 'prayer team' please email prayer@authentic.org.nz and we'll send you updates with our prayer items)

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PUBLISHER

Authentic Christian Trust
info@authentictrust.org.nz
www.authentictrust.org.nz

EDITOR

Dave Firth
editor@authenticmagazine.co.nz

DESIGN

Authentic Media
info@authenticmedia.nz

PRINT

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www.mainprint.co.nz

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The Story of Sports Chaplaincy in New Zealand

By Phil Pawley

Standing in the middle of Old Trafford stadium with close on 80,000 cheering rugby league fans looking on is a moment I will never forget. The noise was unbelievable, even though the game had not yet started.

We were out in the middle going through team warm-up exercises. My job was time-keeper for strength and fitness coach Apollo Perelini, as he led our team through each exercise. It was easy to see why elite players get addicted to the adrenaline rush

that comes from playing in front of such a crowd.

As soon as warm-up finished, I helped gather up the practice balls and other kit and followed the team back into the changing rooms, my ears ringing and my

heart full of admiration for the boys who would soon do battle once more with their Grand Final nemesis team, Leeds.

My timekeeping role included teeing up Coach Daniel Anderson for his final words of

encouragement, and then it was all about getting the lads out of the sheds on time to suit SKY TV's precise schedule.

The tension mounted to a peak as the moment arrived. The team circled and clasped hands and went through their final routine.

I threw open the door open and shouted "Time to go lads!" They walked the gauntlet of encouragement from our backroom staff slapping them on the back and wishing them all the best as they made their way out into the tunnel, joining Leeds and the referees. Led by the Coach and Chairman of each Club, and followed by the backroom staff, the two teams made their way down the famous Manchester United tunnel and out into the late summer sun.

I usually refrain from asking for divine intervention in a mere sporting contest, but this was different. It was the Coach's last game in charge, and in my mind, winning was a fitting send-off for one of St Helens all-time greats. So as we emerged into the daylight, I confess I offered a small prayer that, this time, we might win. It was September 2008, and SAINTS had finished League Leaders 4 years running, but it would be small comfort if we lost the Grand Final to Leeds for the second year in a row!

Despite the roar I distinctly 'heard', if that's the right word, the whisper of God, "do you want to win, or do you want my will for these people?" My heart sank. The rest is history. As inaugural chaplain to SAINTS—St Helens RLFC, I was privileged to spend 10 years from 1999 to 2009 investing in the lives of a group of people who, for the most part, had little other contact with the

THE ROLE OF A SPORTS CHAPLAIN IS TO CARE FOR THE EMOTIONAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE CLUB OR TEAM THEY WORK WITH.

Christian message. As I earned the respect of the team, coaching and club staff, I was accepted as pastor, spiritual advisor, friend and confidant.

The role, as with most sports chaplains, was unpaid and usually involved from 4–8 hours per week during the season. I was fortunate that my employer, the Diocese of Liverpool (Church of England), was happy for me as their Diocesan Missioner, to spend half a day a week engaged in hands-on mission.

The role of a sports chaplain is to care for the emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of those involved in the club or team they work with. This can vary from mentoring individuals through to hospital and home visitation, from helping manage a critical incident to relationship care and support. It involves being an advisor to the club and athlete, supporting them through trials and triumphs, good times and bad.

Sports chaplaincy is based on trust relationships which often take several years to build, so it is not a short term fix by any means. Chaplains need to be present, be seen, be knowable.

They 'loiter with intent', sensitive to opportunities to serve and support, and in so doing, they 'earn their stripes'. Slowly, through one to one care, the club and team learn that their chaplain can be trusted and is the person to speak with when facing difficulties in life.

I had been chaplain for two years

when the stadium manager accidentally torched his upper body in a BBQ mishap and died six weeks later. I visited him and his family in hospital, spoke at his funeral and supported his wife and children for months after the accident. The day Bill died, I spent most of the morning firstly at his bedside praying with and comforting his widow and kids, and then at the club relaying the sad news and being available to staff and players to support them with prayer and a listening ear as they tried to make sense of this tragedy.

In 2009, my wife Diane and I returned to our roots in Aotearoa New Zealand for me to take up a post as senior pastor for Morrinsville Baptist. For the next eight and a half years it was 'nose to the grindstone' as I learnt to pastor a medium sized church, including leading it through a \$2.6 million building project. We developed the infrastructure of the church to allow for growth, revamped and multiplied small groups, introduced the church to a bicultural journey, and in the latter part of my time, was appointed as Mission Consultant for the Waikato Baptist Association for one day a week. I did not have time to pursue sports chaplaincy personally, but kept in touch with what was happening in England and with the fledgling movement here at home.

In 2017 I took a much needed sabbatical and decided on a (mostly) solo walk from Waitangi to Waikanae, retracing the journey of Tārore's copy of Luke's



Gospel. This copy of Luke was passed from Henry Williams to Waharoa's Chief Ngakuku, and to his daughter Tārore. She was murdered on October 1836 at Wairere Falls by Uita of Te Arawa, Rotorua. He took her copy of Luke and came to faith in Christ as a direct result of its message. The Gospel ended up in the hands of Tamihana Te Rauparaha of Kapiti who took it as far as Stewart Island preaching Christ as he went. It is a remarkable story of spiritual awakening and tribal reconciliation.

My hikoi opened my eyes to our history and reinvigorated my desire to share the love of God and the good news of Jesus with ordinary Kiwis who I bumped into along the way. In doing so, I rediscovered courage to share my faith. It also stirred in me the missionary imperative to GO, and to be the vulnerable one entering into the world of the non-churched person, rather than waiting for them to walk through the church doors.

Late in 2017, Diane and I recognised my time at Morrinsville was ending, and that a new challenge awaited. A challenge that required me to get out of my comfort zone and make the good news of Jesus accessible to

Māori and Pakeha by going where people naturally gather. Sport is by far the largest such gathering point in our land, and offers amazing opportunities to building relationships of trust strong enough for spiritual conversations to happen. All we need to do is go and get involved.

We moved to Te Mata on the Thames Coast in February 2018 and I took up my new role as National Director of Sports Chaplaincy New Zealand at the end of the month. Our small team of regional leaders and staff are dispersed across the nation from Invercargill to Auckland. We identify, train, appoint and guide voluntary sports chaplains to work with local clubs and school teams, regional and elite teams, high performance athletes and major events across the land. We are dedicated to providing quality pastoral care to sporting people irrespective of their religion, race, gender, or any other identifying factor. We pastor people WHERE they are and HOW they are with unconditional love.

Our chaplains are all volunteers who dedicate 4-8 hours a week (in season) to their team or club. Our staff and regional leaders also

raise half their own salary and costs through personal support and sponsorship. So SCNZ is a faith ministry, reliant on the good will and support of a large network of like-minded people.

Sports chaplaincy is still in its infancy in New Zealand, but growing. Birthed in 2009 as ENGAGE to provide chaplaincy for the Rugby World Cup, SCNZ was formed as a charity in 2009. Recent news items confirm that most if not all sport would benefit greatly from better care for the wellbeing of athletes. Sports chaplains would have provided much needed confidential support to athletes facing bullying and abuse. The need is great but the workers are few.

Our 2023 goal is to have 200 sports chaplains across the land and to grow this to 800 by 2027. We are growing chaplaincy by regularly hosting chaplaincy training around the country. Our regional leaders help trainees find a suitable placement and give them ongoing support and guidance.

Not everyone is called to front line service, but we are all called to pray, some are called to give, others are called to go. At 10.02 daily, many of us pray Luke 10:2 "Ask the Lord of the harvest to thrust out workers (chaplains) into the harvest...". Others receive regular prayer TXTs from the regional leader in their neck of the woods. Still others are part of our financial support team. I long for the church of Jesus to demonstrate the love of God in a tangible manner out there in our community. If you want to join me, do get in touch. |A

Phil Pawley is the CEO of Sports Chaplaincy New Zealand. For more info visit www.sportschaplaincy.co.nz



The GENEALOGY of The Antichrist

Pedigree of the Coming World Leader?

By Chuck Missler

Waiting in the wings of the forthcoming global turmoil is the Man with a Plan - the one whom the world will welcome to resolve its many problems. The Bible gives us many provocative clues to his identity¹, and from many prophetic glimpses his genealogical line may prove to be traceable.

Daniel Chapters 7, 8 and 11 describe the career of Alexander the Great and his successors so vividly they constitute some of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible. We also find that Alexander's four generals--Lysimachus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Seleucus--divide the empire after his death just as the passages indicated.²

As Israel is sandwiched by the subsequent tensions between Ptolemy (Egypt) to the south and Seleucus (Syria) to the north, it is also amazing to note the precision with which Daniel records their respective successors in Chapter 11.³

ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES

The Seleucid ruler that figures so prominently in Biblical studies is, of course, Antiochus IV, who also adopted the label Epiphanes or Coming One. Committed to crushing Judaism, he outlawed the keeping of the Torah, persecuted the Jews, and confirmed his place in history by having a sow sacrificed on the sacred altar in the Temple in Jerusalem and placing an idol to Zeus inside the Holy of Holies itself. This desecration is known specifically as The Abomination of Desolation.

The consequent outrage led to the famed Maccabean revolt which successfully threw off the yoke of the Greek rulers and ushered in the Hasmonean period of Israel's history. On the third anniversary of the Temple's desecration, on the 25th of Kislev, 165 b.c., the Temple was rededicated. This rededication is celebrated to this very day as Hanukkah.⁴

This historical event took on additional prophetic significance two centuries later when four disciples received a private briefing by Jesus Himself on the Second

Coming, in which Jesus alluded to a future reoccurrence of a similar desecration as the key to all end-time prophecy.⁵ This repetition of the Abomination of Desolation is the central milestone in the middle of the climactic seven-year period comprising the Seventieth Week of Daniel Chapter 9.⁶

However, as so often occurs in Biblical prophecy, many times the immediate, local application of a passage clearly transcends the context to yield a glimpse of a larger, more climactic application.⁷ While the passage in Daniel 11--up to verse 35--has clearly been historically fulfilled, verses 36-45 seem to strangely overlap both the career of Antiochus Epiphanes of the past and also the final world ruler, portrayed as the Willful King.⁸

After the horrible reign of Antiochus IV, the Seleucid line continued under the same title, with Antiochus V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, and XIII. The Seleucid dynasty came to an end in 63 b.c. when Pompey declared that Syria would become a Roman province. However, the descendants of the Seleucids continued in importance and became intertwined with the Herodians and the royal houses of Rome.⁹

THE PRINCE THAT SHALL COME

The Coming World Leader--commonly known as the Antichrist--has 33 titles in the Old Testament and 13 in the New Testament. One of these, The Prince That Shall Come, comes from Daniel 9:26-27 in which the people of the Prince that shall come would destroy the city and the sanctuary. The fulfillment occurred in history when the Roman legions under Titus Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D.¹⁰

This reflexive reference to the Romans in Daniel 9:26 is one of several reasons why most Bible scholars view the future Prince that shall come as a Roman, or European.

A CONTINUOUS GENEALOGY?

A genealogical link between the original Antiochus Epiphanes and Titus Vespasian would not be surprising, and yet it is very provocative. But there may be more.

In the fifth century the royal line of the Franks intermarried with the Merovingian dynasty, which ultimately links with the family trees of the Habsburgs, the House of Lorraine, Plantard, Luxembourg, Pontzat, Montesquieu, Sinclair, Stuarts, and most of the royal families of Europe. Among contemporary luminaries are Otto von Habsburg of Austria and his son, Karl, and King Juan Carlos I of Spain and his son, Felipe. [It is from this type of background that some consider King Juan Carlos of Spain or his son Felipe as possible candidates. The lineage of the son includes 2 German emperors, 8 kings of Denmark, 5 kings of Sweden, 7 Czars of Russia, 1 king and 1 queen of Norway, 1 queen of England and 5 kings of Greece.]

THE MAGDALENE BLASPHEMY

There are a number of occultic groups that hold to the outrageous suggestion that the Merovingian line is directly linked to offspring from Jesus and Mary Magdalene.¹¹ While obviously a blasphemous lie, it is interesting that there are people who take this seriously. Could this Satanic delusion have an end-time purpose?

A CANDIDATE ON THE



HORIZON?

History is littered with speculations as to the identity of this final Coming World Leader. While there still remains a 378-year void in the span between Vespasian (69 a.d.) and the reign of Merovee (beginning in 447 a.d.), there may be dusty documents lying in some library that might validate the implied linkage. Let's watch and see.

The more one studies the numerous references to this Man of Destiny in the Scriptures, and the more one examines the many details of the scenario that surrounds his career, the more it appears that the world is plunging into the period in which he will become the man of the hour. Many of the most knowledgeable commentators believe he may be alive today.

He will be the master of deceit

(even more than the politicians who presently dominate the District of Corruption!). Jesus warned us that if it were possible, he would deceive the very elect.¹² Our protection must be spiritual, not just intellectual.

However, we don't believe that the Coming World Leader will be revealed until after the Rapture of the Church.¹³

It certainly is an exciting time to find out what the Bible really says about the times in which we live! Scripture tells us not to be ignorant of Satan's devices,¹⁴ so for more see our Briefing Package, The Coming World Leader.

But let us remember to focus our attention on our Blessed Hope, our reigning King, and not on the imposter who is destined for destruction. **IA**

References (Without Recommendation):

1. His physical description is given in Zechariah 11:17. For more background, see our Audio Book, *The Coming World Leader*, on page 27.
2. Daniel 7:6; 8:8, 22; 11:4; et al.
3. See our *Expositional Commentary* on Daniel for details.
4. The Holy Spirit includes an allusion to Hanukkah in the New Testament: John 10:22.
5. Matthew 24-25; Mark 13-14; Luke 21-22.
6. The Seventy Weeks of Daniel are the principal foundation in understanding all end time prophecy. This passage also includes the most amazing prophecy in the entire Bible. See our Briefing Package *Daniel's 70 Weeks* on page 14 for more information.
7. The references to the origin and career of Satan in Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:12-19 are well-known examples. The allusions to Antiochus Epiphanes are another.
8. The Willful King has been identified by Ibn-Ezra with Constantine the Great; Rashi and Calvin understood him to represent the Roman Empire; Jerome, Theodoret, Luther, J.N. Darby and most Pre-Tribulation scholars see him as the Antichrist.
9. In The Histories of Tacitus, we find the son of Antiochus IV, King of Commagene which is located on the West Bank of the Upper Euphrates). This Prince Epiphanes in the first battle of Cremona is carrying an official title in honor of the man who had desecrated the Temple 238 years before. Vespasian, Herod Agrippa II, and Queen Bernice are portrayed as close confidants. Numenius, of the Seleucid dynasty, was a member of the Roman senate. (Josephus, *Antiquities*, xiii, 5.8.)
10. Some confuse the destruction of the Temple with Jesus prediction that it would receive the idol in the Holy of Holies (the Abomination of Desolation). During the ferocious siege of 70 a.d., the Temple caught fire and was subsequently dismantled to retrieve the gold. There was no opportunity to establish the desecration fitting the Biblical specifications.
11. The Prieur de Sion is among the elusive secret societies that traces its interests from the Knights Templar and is believed to have global government ambitions.
12. Matthew 24:24.
13. 2 Thessalonians 2. See our *From Here to Eternity* Briefing Package on page 14 for a more complete discussion.
14. 2 Corinthians 2:11.

■ Chuck Missler was an author, Bible teacher, engineer, and former businessman. He was also the founder of the Koinonia Institute. Chuck Missler sadly passed away in May 2018.





THE SAVING LIFE OF CHRIST

By Major W Ian Thomas

... **“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” As the “good, acceptable, and perfect will of God” was implemented by the Son through dependence on the Father, so that “good, acceptable, and perfect will of God” may be implemented by you through dependence on the Son.**

This divine vocation into which you have been redeemed, as “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that you should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10) can only be fulfilled in the energy and power of the One who indwells you now by His Spirit, as He walked once only in the energy and power of the Father who indwelt Him through the Spirit. Of Himself He said, “I can of mine own

self do nothing” (John 5:19), and of you He says, in John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing.”

How much can you do without Him? Nothing! So what is everything you do without Him? Nothing!

It is amazing how busy you can be doing nothing! . . . “The flesh”—everything that you do apart from Him—“profiteth nothing” (John

6:63), and there is always the awful possibility, if you do not discover this principle, that you may spend a lifetime in the service of Jesus Christ doing nothing!

. . . The life which you possess as a born-again Christian is of Him, and it is to Him, and every moment that you are here on earth it must be through Him—of Him, through Him, to Him, all things! “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies

of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1).

The Lord Jesus Christ claims the use of your body, your whole being, your complete personality, so that as you give yourself to Him through the eternal Spirit, He may give Himself to you through the eternal Spirit, that all your activity as a human being on earth may be His activity in and through you; that every step you take, every word you speak, everything you do, everything you are, may be an expression of the Son of God, in you as man.

If it is of Him and through Him and to Him, where do you come in? You do not! That is just where you go out! That is what Paul meant when

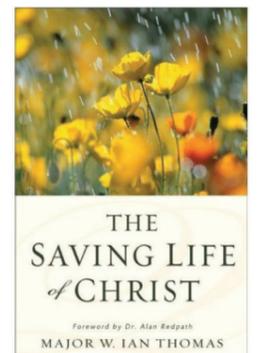
he said, “For me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). The only Person whom God credits with the right to live in you is Jesus Christ; so reckon yourself to be dead to all that you are apart from what He is, and alive unto God only in all that you are because of what He is (Romans 6:11).

When the world looked at Jesus Christ, they saw God! They heard Him speak and they saw Him act. And Jesus said, “As my Father has sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). The world again will hear God speak and see God act!

Is it for you to BE - it is for Him to DO! Restfully available to the Saving Life of Christ, enjoying “the richest measure of the divine Presence, a body wholly filled and

flooded with God Himself,” instantly obedient to the heavenly impulse—this is your vocation, and this is your victory! | 

(The Saving Life of Christ, pp. 150-52).



Major W Ian Thomas is the founder of Torchbearers International (Capernwray Bible Schools), the author of several books on the exchanged life and was a prolific speaker and itinerant Bible teacher. He went to be with the Lord in 2007. For more information about Torchbearers visit www.torchbearers.org



Authentic Marriage

By Dave Firth

Jesus was the perfect example of the Christian Life – because He is the Christian life!

Of course, he never had a wife while he was living a human life on earth. But there's a good reason for that!

Jesus was already betrothed to His bride - The Church, which is often referred to as the 'bride of Christ' – so Jesus already has a wife – us!

Marriage in the bible is all about commitment (or a covenant) but, of course, it parallels our joining with Christ as part of His body.

So, here's a couple of verses from Genesis 2 to get us started:

Genesis 2:18 states:
The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

The Hebrew word for 'helper' is ezer kenegdo – which means to help or aid / support or match.

Basically, someone to worship with and experience relationship with.

This is the first example of man and woman in union (which means 'oneness') or commitment - the first covenant between human beings before God.

And in Genesis 2:24 God says:
That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

So, He made Adam & Eve – male and female – because God's design ALWAYS has purpose and function. As with many things, we have a choice. We can follow God's ways or we can do it our own way. I am noticing that more often than

AUTHENTIC | MEN & FAMILY

not, society goes its own way and rejects God's instructions for 'good' living. How we view, money, power, ambition, success, relationships can often be in stark opposition to what we find in Scripture. Everyone seems to have their own thoughts and feelings about what is right.

But God's design has purpose and function! Plus, importantly, He made the rules.

For example, if you are playing soccer with a bunch of friends and you decide to pick the ball up and run with it or bounce it – that's fine. But you have ceased playing soccer and are now playing something different. You may have the freedom to do it, but you can't call it soccer anymore.

You see, if you don't make the rule, then generally you shouldn't be the one to change it.

God designed marriage. He made the rules. And although He may have given us free will to follow His rules or reject them, we can't play different rules and call it marriage.

As far as God is concerned there is a simple recipe for marriage: One man, one woman and God. Three ingredients, if you like.

Solomon was a very wise man. Yet at one point he had around 1,000 women to keep happy (wives and concubines).

In the book of Ecclesiastes, where, you might say he is reviewing his life and some of the decisions he made, he states that '...a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.' (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Now although he is talking about relationships and strength in numbers, there is something that rings true for us in this simple

illustration. Any dad that has tried to braid their daughter's hair without practice will have discovered that the braid needs three parts for it to stay together. Otherwise, it simply unravels!

There's clear logic in the statement that 'God's design works!'

But, yes, of course, the roles of man and woman are different – and that's ok.

Remember, the term used of Eve, the first ever wife, was 'ezer kenegdo' which literally means 'one that fits together' (or it's not too much of a stretch to say 'completes' the man).

God's design is perfect. When He created man and woman He was very happy with what he'd done. In fact, that day wasn't just 'good', it was 'very good!'

The problem is that often men (& women) take verses out of context!

Some men like to read Ephesians 5:22-24,

'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.'

But they ignore the next bit... (v25-28)

'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same

way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.' So, as husbands we are to love our wives...just as (in the same way that) CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH? Oh dear. That is a high bar He's just set for us!

But then we have a slightly confusing passage in Luke 14 where Jesus talks about the cost of being a disciple and literally says that if you don't hate your father and mother, your wife and your children, your brothers and sisters and your own life, you cannot be my disciple Luke (14:26)

When I first read this, it was a real struggle for me as I'm sure it was for most people. It just doesn't sound right!

Some have suggested that the English word 'hate' can mean 'love less' in the original Greek language, but I don't think that's what's going on here.

Remember in Mark 12:30 Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6 when He says, "Love the Lord with ALL your heart, soul, mind and strength..."

I looked up 'all' in the dictionary and guess what I found?

'All' means 'ALL' – everything! It's very simple.

If I give ALL my money to one of my children, how much money do I have left to give to my other kids? Nothing!

So, if I love the Lord with ALL my heart, soul, mind and strength, how much love to I have left for my wife?

You guessed it...nothing!

Well, I realise that sounds a bit



IF I SAID 'LET'S GET INTIMATE' TO MY BUDDY HE'D PROBABLY LOOK AT ME A BIT STRANGE AND BACK AWAY SLOWLY!

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If I said 'Let's get intimate' to my buddy he'd probably look at me a bit strange and back away slowly!

It comes from the Hebrew word 'sord', meaning 'closeness' or 'confidence', and is used only twice in scripture, both times in the book of Job.

In Job 19:19
'All my intimate friends detest me'

Here, the word 'friends' is 'math' which means 'male' or 'men' He's saying this about his close, male friends – his buddies or his mates!

And then in Job 29:4
'Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house,'

Here it means the deep, personal connection he had with God

Marriage is ALL about intimacy – closeness and confidence. But I believe there's 5 attributes to being intimate in marriage (and they're not all exclusive to marriage!)

1. Spiritual Intimacy

This doesn't just mean believing the same things, but rather being 'one in spirit'.

Now, it is possible to be spiritually intimate with other people: friends, our kids, our parents etc.

David and Jonathan became 'one in spirit' (1 Sam 18:1) and there was a deep love – intimacy!

Paul encourages the Philippian church to be 'one in spirit' – to have a deep intimacy of faith with one another.

If you are married, are you pursuing intimacy with Christ?

strange at first but there is a very well-known story in the gospels that sheds a bit of light on this.

In John's account of 'the feeding of the five thousand', we read in chapter 6, verse 8, that it's Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, that spots the boy with five small barley loaves and two fish. But Andrew is a fisherman. At least six of the other disciples were also fisherman and Jesus also knew a thing or two about fishing!

So, when Andrew looks at the kid's lunchbox, and then at the five thousand men (and their families) that were starving hungry, something amazing happened.

He didn't think to himself, "I'll break this food up into teeny-weeny pieces and give a crumb to everyone!" – that would have been stupid – instead he comes to the conclusion that what he has in his hands is 'something', but it is

totally insufficient for the task. And then the moment of brilliance.

He turns and looks at Jesus and reasons that if he gives everything he has in his hands to Jesus, He will make it enough – and that's exactly what he does, and of course, you know what happens next!

In Andrew's hands the food was insufficient. So he gave Jesus all of it and Jesus made it enough.

We are to simply love the Lord with ALL we have - and HE will make it enough.

INTIMACY

'Intimacy' is a word that has been tainted or changed over the years, a bit like 'wicked', 'sick' or 'gay'. It just doesn't mean what it used to. When we hear the word, we immediately think of something that probably isn't the original meaning.

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Or does one of you push and the other resists?

2. Relational Intimacy

Do you know each other? Do you get on with each other? Is there friendship? Do you spend time together? Do you buy each other things that you know the other person would like? (food, drink). Remember those 'partner' games where you have to answer questions about the other person? Do you do well at those, or do you fail miserably? (It can be pretty heated if you get all the answers wrong!)

3. Emotional Intimacy

Do you laugh together? Cry together? Are you able to be open and honest about your feelings

and hurts? Do you actually care about the other person's feelings or do you just want to get your point across or share your hurts, struggles or frustrations?

4. Physical Intimacy

Do you hug each other regularly? Several studies have shown that hugs are healthy!

They may even reduce the chances of you getting sick!

And then there's kissing. When you get home do you kiss your wife? Do you hold hands when you're out walking? Back massages and foot rubs?

A lot of people confuse 'physical' with 'sexual' but, as you'll see,

these are not necessarily the same at all!

5. Sexual Intimacy

This one is designed ONLY for marriage (husband and wife).

So, it's true to say that you can experience intimacy on some levels with others, but here we're dealing with the ingredients for an Authentic Marriage!

Hopefully I don't need to explain what sexual intimacy is (and even if I do, I'm not going to!), but I would strongly suggest that husbands and their wives should both read Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 7, along with the many other passages about husbands, wives and marriage.



But a good question to ask yourself is this; Is my sexual intimacy selfish? Is it on my own terms? Or is it a healthy part of God's design for marriage?

So, if all 5 of these 'intimacies' are important ingredients in a marriage then if one or more of those things is missing, the recipe is wrong and what comes out of the oven will look very different from what you had hoped for!

In so many areas of our lives we have to choose, "Lord do I want to do it your way or am I going to do it my way?"

Like, if you buy a brand new type of car and in the manual the manufacturers say you should put a certain type of fuel in it - high performance!

They also say the tyre pressure in the front tires should be 29psi and in the rear tyres 32psi. Then they say it needs a certain type of oil in it filled to only ¾ full. They say the most economical speed is 85kph and that it needs servicing every 6 months.

If you do all those things, you'd expect it to run well. The manufacturer knows what they're talking about! But what if you don't follow the instructions?

Maybe you get it serviced every 12 months. You drive it at 120kph. You get a slightly different, cheaper type of oil and fill it up to a

different level. You put 26psi in the front and rear tyres. And maybe you try a different type of fuel (maybe diesel because it's cheaper). How will your car run? Probably not too good!

What makes us think we know more than the manufacturer?

Well there's two groups of people that get this wrong;
- Those that have read the manual and think they know better
- Those that haven't read the manual.

The parallels between our relationships on earth and our relationship with God are fascinating.

How can we love someone if we don't know anything about them?

When Jesus says to Satan that 'Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' - He is likening reading scripture to our basic obvious needs.

ANY IDEA HOW LONG IT TAKES TO READ THE WHOLE BIBLE?

It takes around 104 hours (reading slowly). Only 75 hours if you listen to it on an audiobook.

Well, a recent survey suggested that the average Kiwi watches TV for 3 hours a day! So if you switched off your TV for 2'5 hours per day (which still allows time for the news) and replaced it with Bible reading, you'd read the whole Bible in 5 weeks (that's 10 times a year)

If we're honest, we know that if something's important we always have time for it. Who's ever been too busy to collect a winning lottery ticket?

We have to stop reading self-help books, or even Christian books about marriage, and start reading God's Word and allowing Him to influence our life as He teaches us about himself - remember the Christian Life isn't something you learn - it's something He Lives!

CONCLUSION:
The best gift you can give your wife (or anyone else for that matter) is a totally surrendered life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember John 6:8 - Andrew gave ALL the fish and bread to Jesus and HE made it enough. Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, Soul, Mind and Strength - and HE will make it enough for those you need to love!

IA



Humility and Accountability

in All the Seasons of Life

By Charlie McCall

Paul went from being an arrogant, self-assured zealot to a humble servant of God. Most amazing to me is his testimony in the letter to the Galatians where he says that he subjected the gospel that he had been preaching to the Jerusalem elders for fear that he was perhaps "running in vain" (Gal. 2:2); in other words, in fear that he was wrong. That's miraculous.

Paul had heard the voice of Jesus from heaven, was healed of blindness, had the resurrected Christ appear to him, spent over a decade in ministry where he saw countless people saved, others healed, and the dead raised. He had every reason to believe that God was validating through signs and miracles that he was on the

right track and was preaching and teaching the right stuff. But there was a group of people (Jewish Christians) who kept telling him that he was wrong to not insist that the Gentile converts be circumcised. In Paul's mind, that was an addition to the gospel. Which means that it was another gospel (Gal. 1:6), a departure from

Christ (1:6; 5:4), a falling from grace (5:4), and utter foolishness (3:1). In other words, he felt very strongly about his position! Scripture and years of experience backed him up. Yet . . .

Here's the miracle . . . he recognized that he could be wrong! Scripture can be wrongly



■ Dave Firth is a husband, father, bible teacher and communicator. He loves the Lord and has a passion for His Word. For more info visit www.davefirth.org

interpreted. Experience can have other than God as the cause and can also be wrongly interpreted. So Paul did what very few people in his position, with his experience, age, knowledge and authority have done. He humbled himself! He recognized that he was part of the Body of Christ, that Christ is the head of it, and that Christ has raised up leaders for His Body through whom He exercises authority, gives direction, correction, and affirmation. Paul did not have the attitude that the only authority in his life was God. God is indeed our authority, and He places us under the authority of others. A Christian who claims to be under the authority of Christ and has no other authority in his life that he is answerable to is deceived. He is not under authority, he is in rebellion.

If Paul, not inferior to the most eminent of the apostles (2 Cor. 11:5), would willingly submit all he believed and all his ministry experience, set aside all the miracles as proof that he was on the right track and submit himself to a group of godly Christian men who as Jews would have been inclined toward the position of Paul's enemies, so much more should we submit all we teach and every experience we've had to those in the Body of Christ who know Jesus and His Word and will honestly examine the Scriptures to see if what we believe and teach squares with what God has said.

I have in my life a board of this ministry, an elder board at my church, my wife, my adult children and my staff to whom I am accountable – in theory. But what about in my heart and practice?



Am I truly accountable, teachable? Am I willing to lay on the table for others to examine what I believe and teach? Am I willing to listen and to be corrected?

What about you? Are you prepared to submit your convictions and experiences to the examination of others? Do you have people in your life that you will yield to in obedience to Christ? It is God's design for us to have this. It is meant to be the manifestation of the indwelling Christ who is Himself humble of heart and totally under the authority of His Father.

This miracle of humility, submission to authority and being teachable comes about by putting on Christ. It is a miracle that He wants to display in us no matter how old, wise and experienced we might be.

We are afraid that if we submit our interpretation of Scripture to others for examination we could be proven wrong. We fear that the deeply personal experiences

that support our convictions could be dismissed as not being from God. Our whole house of belief could come crashing down. What would we have left? The truth! We would be deeply humbled, to be sure. And we would once again be walking in truth. On the other hand, like Paul, we could have our experiences and understanding of Scripture confirmed. Thus, this kind of humility and accountability doesn't have a downside. We either get set back on the track of truth, or we receive the backing and support in what we believe of godly, mature Christians. Either way, Christ is exalted through His humility being on display in us.

I'm entering the last season of my walk with Christ. My kids are married and having kids of their own. I'm now in my sixties (how did that happen)! Pray that I, too, will walk humbly with God and remain accountable to His Body. |A



■ Charlie McCall is the director of His Hill – the Torchbearers Bible School in Comfort, Texas. To learn more about the ministry there visit www.hishill.org

Cast Your Burden Upon the Lord For He Cares For You

By Nathan Johnson

Imagine you're on the edge of a massive desert. Sand spreads out before you, mile after endless mile. The heat from the sun blazing and causing droplets of sweat to form on your brow as you stand looking off into the distance.

As you glance at the burden near your feet, questions arise as to how you will ever be able to carry the 1000 pounds across the 100 miles you must traverse. An impossible feat if there ever was one.

What may sound like a far-fetched story is really the reality of each of our lives.

Over the last two weeks, I've had several conversations where I've used the concept from Psalm 37:5a which tells us to "Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him ..."

The idea of "commit" is to "roll the burden" upon the Lord.

Just as it's impossible for a single person to carry 1000 pounds across 100 miles of desert, so too it's impossible for you to live out the calling upon your life as a Christian ... in your own strength and ability.

Many Christians today are exhausted, stressed, or crushed down by the burdens and demands of life—yet, are we not the same believers who are more than conquerors and called to "rejoice always"? (see Philippians 4:4 and Romans 8:37).

Yet the burdens only weigh us down when we try to carry them.

1 Peter 5:7 reminds us to "cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you."

What if you didn't have to carry all the weight?
The pressures?
The stress?
The burdens?
What if we do "commit our way unto the Lord" and roll the burden upon Him?

If I had to carry 1000 pounds across 100 miles of desert, I wouldn't load my back and attempt

it in my strength – I know I'll fail. Rather, I would take a pack animal like a donkey or camel, roll the burden upon their backs and let them carry the weight – for they were designed to carry it.

Interestingly, as I lead the camel across the desert, I am bringing 1000 pounds across the 100 miles ... but not by bearing the weight myself.

This is exactly the picture in Psalm 37:5.

God is not a camel or donkey (He truly is indescribably superior), yet He does want to carry the load for us.

Rather than live under the stress, burden, and pressure – will you roll the burden upon the Lord? Remember, He cares for you.

Know I am cheering you on unto that end! |A



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GOD IN WORK Authority at the Workplace

By Paul Curtas

Under what power or authority do you enter the workplace? There are basically two. One is the power or authority your company, owner, or boss gives you to perform the particular job they hire you to do. With that job comes the authority to make certain decisions; and, depending on your position, you may be given authority to give other people the power to make decisions there. Also, there are company goals and policies that define the authority by which you have the power to act and conduct yourself while at work.

Secondly, as a Christian, you enter

the workplace with the power God has provided for you. This should complement and enhance your work and is characterized by how you conduct yourself while on the job. There is no company policy that gives you the power to act in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, truthfulness, gentleness, and with self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Your company policy, nor any law for that matter, can produce and regulate this. It is not natural to our human make up... rather it is a God thing. His salvation provides the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, which in turn produces this fruit

through our lives. We don't simply act this out at church ... this power is to affect us in all of life, including our workplace. What do you see the power of God producing through your life? (by Paul Curtas)

Consider: "For God, Who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). 



■ Paul Curtas is the director of FCAP (Fellowship of Christian Airline Personnel) - www.fcap.org Through his many years of experience with people in their workplace and his core beliefs as a Christian, he communicates how the Christian faith gives work its greatest purpose in the most practical ways.

GREAT QUOTES!

Over the years, decades and centuries there have been many incredible men and women (or 'Greats') that have shared wonderful insights from their walk with the Lord. Each issue we will share a few of these 'quotes' that have rocked our world and encouraged thousands. Enjoy!

"The deceitfulness of the heart of man appears in no one thing so much as this of spiritual pride and self-righteousness. The subtlety of Satan appears in its height, in his managing persons with respect to this sin. And perhaps one reason may be that here he has most experience; he knows the way of its coming in; he is acquainted with the secret springs of it: it was his own sin. Experience gives vast advantage in leading souls, either in good or evil."

– Jonathan Edwards
'The Religious Affections'

"It seems to me that there are but few who really live with a passion for God—especially a passion just to be with Him. Today there is such a noise coming up before the throne of the Most High—the clamour of so-called praise, singing, and joyful shouting. But I wonder if the same people who love to sing and shout, loudly exclaiming the praises of God, really have such an intense glory in their secret life with the Lord. When the meeting's over and there's no one there to listen except the only One who matters, do you still have that same passionate joy in your spirit, just to be alone with the Living God?"

– Keith Green

"if Jesus ever commanded us to do something that he was unable to equip us to accomplish, he would be a liar and if we make our own inability a stumbling block or an excuse not to be obedient, it means that we are telling God that there is something which he has not yet taken into account."

– Oswald Chambers

"I have now concentrated all my prayers into one, and that one prayer is this, that I may die to self, and live wholly to Him."

– Charles Spurgeon

DOWN TO EARTH WISDOM FROM PROVERBS

THE DEEP WATERS OF A MAN'S HEART

By Charles Price

Any book with the word 'heart' in its title is usually about cardiology or romance! We have a remarkable muscular pump buried in our chest that sends our entire blood through our circulatory system every 45 seconds, with the average heart beating 100,000 times per day, pumping around 2,000 gallons of blood. It is a tough muscle, capable of beating non-stop for over a hundred years! Other factors can get in the way and make it give up earlier!

The heart flutters and contorts in romance too! Dr. Reginald Ho, a cardiac electrophysiologist at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, tells us that, "When you catch sight of your beloved your heart starts racing, because of an adrenaline rush. Here's how it works: "The brain sends signals to the adrenal gland, which secretes hormones such

as adrenaline, epinephrine and norepinephrine. They flow through the blood and cause the heart to beat faster and stronger", Ho said. So, there you are!! When a boy says to a girl 'I love you with all my heart' he really is loving her with his heart.

The Bible speaks of the heart some 570 times, but it is talking of something altogether different

from a pump or the nerve center of romance! It shows how it is the place where our mind, emotion, will and personality all merge together to create the steering wheel of our lives. It is the center of who we are and the disposition from which we function. It gives feeling and atmosphere to our lives, so much so, Solomon tells us: "*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life*" (Proverbs 4.3).

A wellspring is, by definition, the origin and cause of something, for example, "*the wellspring of hope*", or "*the wellspring of sadness*". The condition of our heart is the "wellspring of life". Everything that is true about us can ultimately be traced back to the heart. It is true there are bruising and buffetings in life against which we build defenses which express themselves in behaviors we would far rather be without. Our history, however, is not ours to change, but it would seem our heart is.

The state of our heart has great medicinal properties: "*A heart at peace gives life to the body...*" (Prov 14:30), "*A cheerful heart is good medicine*" ...(Prov 17:22). You can have a *heart at peace* (Prov 14.30); a *joyful heart* (Prov 14.10); and a *happy heart* (Prov 15.13).

But it has its poisonous properties too! "*Before his downfall a man's heart is proud...*" (Prov 18:12) You can have a *perverse heart* (Prov 11.20); a *anxious heart* (Prov 12.35) (Prov 11.20); a *bitter heart*; (Prov 14.10) a *proud heart* (Prov 16.5, 18.12); a *hard heart* (Prov 28.14) and we can suffer from *heart ache* (Prov 15.13).

No wonder, as one translation puts it, we are to, "*Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*" (Prov 4.23 KJV).

Trying to guard our behavior alone, is shutting the door after the horse has bolted. Our actions have a root and source. To deal with behavior only in the area of actions, is to touch only the symptom and not the cause. Without going back to our hearts we will not deal with recurrent behavioral struggles. For that we need heart surgery.

There is a loneliness in our hearts, for no other person can penetrate



TRYING TO GUARD OUR BEHAVIOR ALONE, IS SHUTTING THE DOOR AFTER THE HORSE HAS BOLTED. OUR ACTIONS HAVE A ROOT AND SOURCE.

its true feelings, motives and depths, and very few of us invite them to even try. Solomon tells us, "*Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy*" (Prov 14:10). It has extremes of bitterness and joy which only we feel and cannot share fully with anyone else. The closest we may get is when someone else draws us out: "*The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out*" (Prov 20:5).

Our hearts are confusing and conflicting places. William Faulkner, an American writer in the first part of the twentieth century, wrote, "*The only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself*". Conflict is a major theme of life. Films and novels are built around them, history is propelled by them. They reflect the personal struggle of our own heart in conflict with itself.

CS Lewis wrote, "The heart is a kingdom divided against itself". We find satisfaction in stories when the good finally outweighs the bad, and the victory belongs to the virtuous. Why? Because this resonates with the deepest longing in the battle within our own hearts.

1. THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT OUR HEARTS

When David was appointed king of Israel, his primary qualification was not his military skill, leadership skill, or intellectual skill, but his heart. God said of him: "*I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.*" (Acts 13:22). That was when David was still a teenage boy, but if ever there was a conflicted heart, it was the heart of David. We only know that because Scripture doesn't hide the truth about its heroes, for in David lies the conflict of a heart



FAR FROM DISQUALIFYING US, A BROKEN HEART HUMBLER AND QUALIFIES US FOR AN HONEST AND REAL CONNECTION WITH GOD.

that is after God's heart, yet at the same time knows: *"The heart is deceitful above all things ... Who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). Who can understand it indeed! It flip flops from one way to another for a multitude of reasons.

It was David who, after committing adultery, cried out, *'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me'*, (Psalm 51:10). To create a pure heart suggests a moment of crisis, and to renew it suggests a continuing process. Most of us need both. To be brought face to face with the reality of our own hearts rather than living in denial, is a sobering and painful thing. In the bitterness of his failure, David learned that *'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise'*. (Psalm

51:17). Facing the realities of our own heart leads to contrition, and to the God who responds to the *'broken and contrite heart'*, in restoration. Far from disqualifying us, a broken heart humbles and qualifies us for an honest and real connection with God. David was the man already described as *'a man after Gods own heart'* but that heart has to be maintained by the renewal of a steadfast spirit. Failure can lead us from God or lead us to God. And like the prodigal son, when we turn back to God, we learn the Father is waiting to welcome us home.

2. THINGS TO DO ABOUT OUR HEARTS

'I the Lord search the heart...' (Jeremiah 17:10). The challenge is to let him do so! Back in 1936 the Irish evangelist Edwin Orr came

to New Zealand. He preached at the annual Easter Ngaruawahia Convention and something of a revival took place which spread across the North Island. A report at the time stated, "Hundreds publicly confessing sin, scores of conversions resulting, with sanely intense meetings of tireless crowds continuing till approaching midnight".

The great theme of Orr's preaching was Psalm 139.23, *'Search me, O God, and know my heart...'*. As he was about to leave, a group of Maori girls came and sang one of their songs of farewell, 'Now is the Hour'. Orr loved the tune, pulled out a piece of paper and wrote down words to that tune, which for many years has been one of my favorite hymns:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart today,
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray;
See if there be some wicked way in me;*

Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.

These words are an invitation for the Holy Spirit to perform heart surgery. If the heart is the "wellspring" of life, the source of the spring determines its quality. I grew up in rural England and our house was supplied with fresh water fed from a spring. If the spring became contaminated, as in floods bringing soil into the spring, or a frog getting sucked into the pipe (which happened), then the water was correspondingly bad.

The Bible does not speak of a 'perfect' heart, but it does of a 'pure heart', as in the beatitude, *'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God'* (Matt 5:7).

Pure is not perfect in outcome but intent. The New Testament word means, 'pure' as in the sense of grain being separated from its chaff and remaining 'pure grain', or wine not being diluted and therefore 'pure wine'. The grain may not be Grade A, and the wine taste like vinegar, but it is 'pure' in the sense of it being uncontaminated with other things. A 'pure heart' therefore is a single mindedness, which is about intent, being honest, genuine and sincere. No wonder then the cry continues to be, *'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me'*.

Solomon writes about the daily process: *'My son, ... keep my commands in your heart...'* (Prov

3:1), *'Write wisdom on the tablet of your heart'* (Prov 7:3), *'...apply your heart to what I teach...'* (Prov 22:17). This is not about the accumulation of knowledge but about the effect of Gods word to be a *hammer* that molds us and *fire* that energizes us (see Jer 23.29).

Ultimately, *'as a man thinks in his heart, so is he'* (Prov 23:7), therefore *'guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life'*. Trace your tears and your joys to their source and you will have found your way into the deep waters of your heart, the place you do not need to be afraid of you do not have to guard continuously with a "PRIVATE: NO ENTRY" sign. | 



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

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STRENGTH in Numbers?

By Chuck Missler



The numerical structure of the Bible has been studied closely, being the subject of numerous volumes in the past.¹ But none are more provocative than the works of Dr. Ivan Panin.²

Ivan Panin was born in Russia on December 12, 1855. Having participated in plots against the Czar at an early age, he was exiled and, after spending some years studying in Germany, he came to the United States and entered Harvard University. After graduation in 1882, he converted from agnosticism to Christianity.

In 1890 he discovered some of the phenomenal mathematical designs

underlying both the Greek text of the New Testament and the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

He was to devote over 50 years of his life painstakingly exploring the numerical structure of the Scriptures, generating over 43,000 detailed, hand-penned pages of analysis (and exhausting his health in the process). He went on to be with the Lord in his 87th year, on October 30, 1942.

THE HEPTADIC STRUCTURE

The recurrence of the number seven — or an exact multiple of seven — is found throughout the Bible and is widely recognized. The Sabbath on the seventh day; the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine in Egypt; the seven priests and seven trumpets marching around Jericho; the Sabbath Year of the land are well-known examples.

Also, Solomon's building the Temple for seven years, Naaman's washing in the river seven times, and the seven churches, seven lamp stands, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven stars, and so on in the Book of Revelation, all show the consistent use of the number seven.

But there turns out to be much more below the surface. Ivan Panin noted the amazing numerical properties of the Biblical texts — both the Greek of the New Testament and the Hebrew of the Old Testament. These are not only intriguing to discover, they also demonstrate an intricacy of design which testifies to a supernatural origin!

VOCABULARY

One of the simplest — and most provocative — aspects of the Biblical text is the vocabulary used. The number of vocabulary words in a passage is normally different from the total number of words in a passage. Some words are repeated. It is easy, for example, to use a vocabulary of 500 words to write an essay of 4,000 words.

AN EXAMPLE

The first 17 verses of the Gospel of Matthew are a logical unit, or section, which deals with a single principal subject: the genealogy of Christ. It contains 72 Greek vocabulary words in these initial 17 verses. (The verse divisions are man's allocations for convenience, added in the 13th century.)

The number of words which are nouns is exactly 56, or 7×8 .

The Greek word "the" occurs most frequently in the passage: exactly 56 times, or 7×8 . Also, the number of different forms in which the

ONE OF THE SIMPLEST — AND MOST PROVOCATIVE — ASPECTS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT IS THE VOCABULARY USED.

article "the" occurs is exactly 7.

There are two main sections in the passage: verse 1–11, and 12–17. In the first main section, the number of Greek vocabulary words used is 49, or 7×7 .

Why not 48, or 50?

Of these 49 words, the number of those beginning with a vowel is 28, or 7×4 . The number of words beginning with a consonant is 21, or 7×3 .

The total number of letters in these 49 words is 266, or 7×38 — exactly! The number of vowels among these 266 letters is 140, or 7×20 . The number of consonants is 126, or 7×18 — exactly.

Of the 49 words, the number of words which occur more than once is 35, or 7×5 . The number of words occurring only once is 14, or 7×2 . The number of words which occur in only one form is exactly 42, or 7×6 . The number of words appearing in more than one form is also 7.

The number of the 49 Greek vocabulary words which are nouns is 42, or 7×6 . The number of words which are not nouns is 7. Of the nouns, 35 are proper names, or exactly 7×5 . These 35 names are used 63 times, or 7×9 . The number of male names is exactly 28, or 7×4 . These male names occur 56 times or 7×8 . The number which are not male names is 7.

Three women are mentioned — Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. The number of Greek letters in these

three names is 14, 7×2 .

The number of compound nouns is 7. The number of Greek letters in these 7 nouns is 49, or 7×7 .

Only one city is named in this passage, Babylon, which in Greek contains exactly 7 letters.

And on it goes!

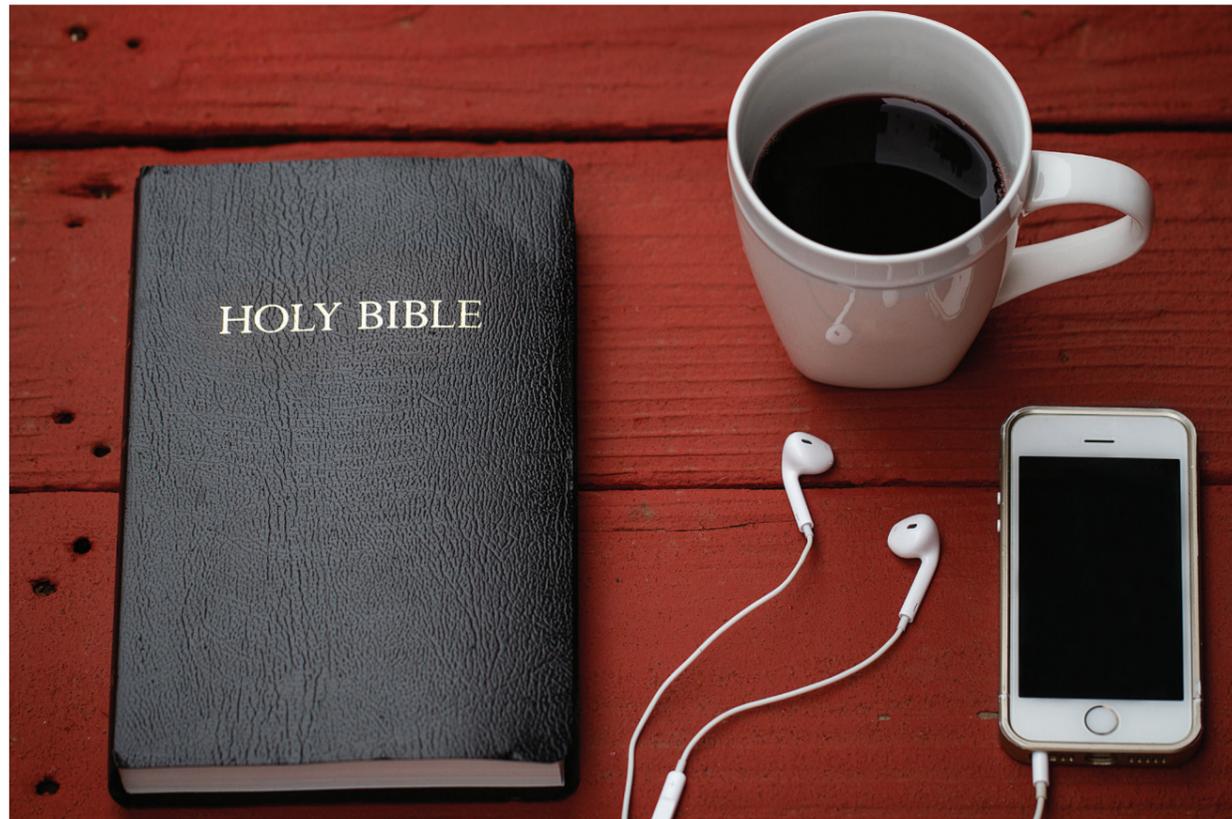
GEMATRIA

There are even more features in the numerical structure of the words themselves. As you may know, both Hebrew and Greek uses the letters of the alphabet for numerical values. Therefore, any specific word — in either Hebrew or Greek — has a numerical value of its own by adding up the values of the letters in that particular word. The study of the numerical values of words is called gematria.

The 72 vocabulary words add up to a gematrical value of 42,364, or $7 \times 6,052$ exactly. If one Greek letter was changed, this would not happen.

The 72 words appear in 90 forms — some appear in more than one form. The numeric value of the 90 forms is 54,075, or $7 \times 7,725$ exactly.

We will defer other examples of gamatrical properties of the Biblical text for subsequent articles, but it becomes immediately obvious that hidden below the surface are aspects of design that cannot be accidental or just coincidence. Remember, the rabbis say that "coincidence" is not a kosher word!



OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are words in the passage just described that occur nowhere else in the New Testament. They occur 42 times (7 x 6) and have 126 letters (7 x 18). How was this organized?

Even if Matthew contrived this characteristic into his Gospel, how could he have known that these specific words — whose sole characteristic is that they are found nowhere else in the New Testament — were not going to be used by the other writers? Unless we assume the absurd hypothesis that he had an agreement with them, he must have had the rest of the New Testament before him when he wrote his book. The

Gospel of Matthew, then, must have been written last.

It so happens, however, that the Gospel of Mark exhibits the same phenomenon. It can be demonstrated that it would have had to be written “last.” The same phenomenon is found in Luke. And in John, James, Peter, Jude and Paul. Each would have had to write after the other in order to contrive the vocabulary frequencies! You can demonstrate that each of the New Testament books had to have been “written last.”

There is no human explanation for this incredible and precise structure. It has all been supernaturally designed. We simply gasp, sit back, and behold

the skillful handiwork of the God who keeps His promises.

And we are indebted to the painstaking examinations and lifetime commitment of Dr. Ivan Panin for uncovering these amazing insights.

Isn't God — and His remarkable Word — fun? **IA**

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2. Ivan Panin (various works), “Bible Numerics,” P.O. Box 206, Waubashene, Ontario, L0K 2C0.



■ Chuck Missler was an author, Bible teacher, engineer, and former businessman. He was also the founder of the Koinonia Institute. Chuck Missler sadly passed away in May 2018.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR CALLING

By Ron Matsen

With all that is going on in the world today it is difficult for Christians to know where they should be focused and how best to utilize their time and talents

The apostle Peter began his second general epistle by issuing a challenge. “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”^[1]

WHAT IS PETER TELLING US TO DO?

- We know that we are CALLED:
1. to become a Believer in Jesus Christ.^[2]
 2. to become a Disciple of Jesus Christ.^[3]
 3. to become a Witness for Jesus Christ,^[4] and

4. to become a functioning member of the Body of Jesus Christ.^[5]

We know that the Body of Christ is structured to equip us for our function. We understand from the apostle Paul's teaching that Christ, “gave some to be apostles, some

prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”^[6]

The real question here for most Christians is “How do we understand our place in the Body of Christ?” In other words, “What is my calling?”

Try these 12 guidelines for service:

1. Be Faithful toward God. Faithfulness sits at the core of

any meaningful work relationship. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”^[7] Paul instructed Timothy, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”^[8]

2. Rely on the Protection of Divine Direction. Know that God directs the steps of His children. Remember, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand.”^[9]

3. Dedicate Your Heart to Pleasing God’s Heart. Ask God to reveal His heart to your heart. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.” Make sure your heart is fully committed. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

4. Open Your Eyes to the Opportunities around You. There is no shortage of ministry opportunities, only ministers willing to undertake those opportunities. Jesus told His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”^[10]

5. Don’t be Afraid to Venture into the Areas of Your Weaknesses. God is looking for Availability, not Capability. “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”^[11]

6. Follow Your Heart. This is an area of our character that can often get us into trouble. But the compass of your heart is True when it is directed by God. “Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.”^[12]

7. Seek Ministry Partners. There is much strength in the Pattern of Pairs. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”^[13] Again

we read, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.”^[14]

8. Look for Divine Confirmation. Think of Gamaliel’s test concerning the ministry of the disciples. “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”^[15]

9. Stand Firm in Your Calling. Stand firm, even when others may doubt or try to destroy your service to God. You will not be the first person to endure the questioning of others. “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”^[16]

10. Try to be Transparent. Be a Reflector not a Collector. In other words, can you serve unnoticed?

After all, if you are serving the Lord then His approval should be your only concern. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”^[17]

11. Avoid the Pursuit of Power. Follow the example of John, the cousin of Jesus. “John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”^[18]

12. Consider the confessions of Paul. At the height of his ministry he says, “I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle.”^[19] Yet, at the end of his ministry he declares, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”^[20]

13. Give until it’s Gone. The nation of Israel was issued an interesting challenge by God. “Bring all the tithes into the

storehouse, that there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,” Says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”^[21] Said another way, you cannot out-give God.

Ultimately, I believe Paul sums up the right attitude regarding our service before God. “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”^[22] 

1. 2 Peter 1:10, 11
2. 1 Corinthians 1:9
3. Luke 9:23
4. Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8
5. 1 Corinthians 12:4–14
6. Ephesians 4:11–16
7. 2 Chronicles 16:9
8. 2 Timothy 2:2
9. Psalm 37:23, 24
10. Matthew 9:37, 38
11. 1 Corinthians 1:26–31
12. Psalm 37:4, 5
13. Proverbs 27:17
14. Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10
15. Acts 5:38, 39
16. 1 Timothy 4:12–16
17. Matthew 5:14–16
18. John 3:27–30
19. 1 Corinthians 15:9
20. 1 Timothy 1:15
21. Malachi 3:10
22. 2 Timothy 4:6–8



■ Ron is the President of Koinonia House and Koinonia Institute. He has taught verse-by-verse through the Bible many times, over the last 30 years on the subjects of evangelism, leadership, and end-times topics. Although Ron and his wife are native Californians, they lived in England for 20 years and in 2011 immigrated to New Zealand where they partnered with Chuck Missler based at The River Lodge in Reporoa.

The Bible is Never OUT OF DATE!

By Nathan Johnson

At one point in His ministry, Jesus was dealing with the Sadducees (the liberals of His day). While the Sadducees believed the authority of the first five books of Moses (The Pentateuch), they did not accept the authority of the rest of Scripture.

This liberal group came to Jesus to challenge the teaching of the resurrection from the dead (which they didn't believe). In response to their question, Jesus said,

"But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:31-32).

What an odd response to a question about the resurrection from the dead.

Here Jesus quotes a passage from Exodus 3:6 (a passage the Sadducees saw as authoritative and true)—spoken by God to Moses nearly fourteen hundred years prior to Jesus.

But don't miss a key point: Jesus

took Scripture written 1400 years earlier and made it present tense. He said, "have you not read what was spoken TO YOU by God ..."

For Jesus, the Scriptures weren't a dry and dusty book to be used in the Synagogue once a week. The Word of God was present tense. Yes, it was written centuries earlier, but it is, as the writer of Hebrews described "living and active" (see Hebrews 4:12).

We find ourselves in a similar situation—as Christians, the Word of God was written nearly 2000 years ago. But we, like Jesus, must see ALL of Scripture as authoritative and in the present tense.

It is as if God just spoke and the ink is still drying upon the page.

Hear me correctly: we are not

creating new Scriptures—the canon of God's Word is closed—but the Bible (the canon of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation) itself is indeed alive. It is living and active. It is not some book describing things a few millennia ago, it is for this present day.

How do you see the Bible?

Is it a book you merely take to church or a nice decoration for your coffee table? Or is it, as Jesus saw it: alive, present tense, and necessary for today?

What a tremendous reality to remember that the Bible is never out of date! God is speaking to us today through His Word. The question is, will we listen?

Cheering you deeper into the Living and Written Word! | **A**



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ALFRED NGARO: - a man with a plan!

By Dave Firth

Politics is something a lot of us struggle to fully get our heads around. All the different nuances between the parties can be confusing. And then there's the infighting and mudslinging, sometimes between people in the same party, that can make it, at times, intolerable.

Alfred Ngaro is no stranger to controversy and has often been criticized for speaking openly and honestly about issues that the mainstream media like to have a fixed narrative on. He has also been criticized for talking publicly about his faith in Jesus. We caught

up with the Honourable Alfred Ngaro to see how politics can fit with faith and family.

So, what's it like being a politician in New Zealand?

It's an honour to be chosen to represent the people of New

Zealand. I never had an aspiration or expectation to become an MP. It feels like being chosen to become a member of the All Blacks, in that you represent the country as you struggle with some of the challenges that we face day to day, while having to make tough

decisions that will get you, and the team, across the line - for a better New Zealand.

You were trained as a sparky. Do you still get asked to do the electrical work for your friends and family?

My brother-in-law, who is a builder, said to me that a carpenter was the most honourable of all trades, because Jesus was a carpenter. I replied that a sparky is the most honourable trade because Jesus' Father was a sparky - in the beginning, when it was dark, He turned on the light.

Do I still get asked to do electrical work? Yes sometimes, but I also volunteer in the local community to help those in need like at our Neighbour's Day.

Apparently it was your grandmother that insisted you go and get your theological degree. Tell us a bit about your family history and how you came to know Jesus.

We were raised with the values of faith, family and the future. We attended the Pacific Island Presbyterian Church (PIPC) and prayers, reading the Word and attending church were an important part of my upbringing. I was 18 when I gave my life to Jesus through hearing an evangelist and became an active member of my local church. My grandmother was the daughter of a Polish Jew and she encouraged me to walk in the footsteps of my forefathers who were missionaries, ministers and spiritual leaders, so 8 years later I went to Bible college to complete a theological degree. My wife and I were then in ministry for the next 20 years pastoring while developing Christian social services.



BE TRUE TO THE CALLING THAT GOD HAS FOR YOUR LIFE. OUR POTENTIAL TO DO GREAT THINGS FOR GOD BEGINS WITH THE SIMPLE THINGS IN FRONT OF US SUCH AS FAMILY.

I read that you are the first Cook Islander to be elected to Parliament. Is that an important piece of the puzzle for you and how valuable has it been to your current role?

I am the first generation born in NZ of parents who migrated from the Cook Islands. So it is not only a proud moment for my family but also for the Cook Island community. It goes to the heart of our democratic country when we can have representation of our diversity as a nation and it has become a source of encouragement for others to say, "If he can do it, so can we!"



You have had several roles and responsibilities but you are also a father, husband and grandfather. What encouragement can you give to men in New Zealand looking to live authentic Christian lives?

Be true to the calling that God has for your life. Our potential to do great things for God begins with the simple things in front of us such as family. His desire is to transform us from the inside out, despite our past. God wants to reveal His glory through a life worth living.

Go hard for God and don't go home!

I THINK NEW ZEALAND NEEDS TO GO BACK TO FIRST PRINCIPLES, WE WERE A NATION FOUNDED ON CHRISTIAN VALUES; THE VALUES OF RESPECT, LOVE, JUSTICE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, COMPASSION, AND SACRIFICE.



How does your faith shape your role?

I often express my faith through three principles; love, acceptance, and forgiveness. These are the things I try and reflect on when making both political and day-to-day decisions in my life. I model my leadership on the example of Jesus where he would serve even the lowly and undeserving. But when needed he would speak with authority to confront people with the truth.

As with other politicians, notably Donald Trump, there can be deep hatred towards someone who stands up for what they believe in rather than towing a party line. What sort of criticism have you faced and how have you handled it?

When I am criticised for something I believe in, the first thing I'll do is listen carefully to the critical comments made. Then I would respond with the truth as I see it. I focus on the issue rather than the person (although I have noticed that the really nasty comments always start with being personal).

For example when a journalist asked me how I would vote on the 'Gay Marriage bill'. I replied, "Its not the 'Gay Marriage' bill. It was the Redefinition of Marriage bill." I said that I would be voting against it.

He then added, "Aren't you being homophobic?" I said, "No, because I was not voting against people that want a same sex relationship (which was recognised under the civil union bill), I was voting against the redefining of marriage, that has been historic and traditional for a very long time." I was recently asked if I would change my vote and opinion on this bill. My reply was, "No."

What's the hardest part about being a Member of Parliament?

The hardest part about being an MP is being away from my family. At least half of the year is spent away from home.

What do you think the biggest challenges are for New Zealand as a country?

I think New Zealand needs to go back to first principles, we were a nation founded on Christian values; the values of respect, love, justice, righteousness, compassion, and sacrifice.

Some of our greatest social challenges can be addressed by focusing on one particular area; the family.

How do we help families to have healthy and loving relationships? We must address family violence, child abuse and neglect, poverty and educational achievement and housing - a contributor to the housing crisis is the breakup of family relationships.

We keep thinking about an economy that is purely about growing wealth when this can also be measured by prosperity. The Bible is a contract between God and humans. If humans have faith in God, He will deliver security and prosperity. This emphasises the importance of personal empowerment, proposing that it

is God's will for his people to be blessed.

In a survey last year ('Faith and Belief') the report stated that 33% of New Zealanders are Christian yet only 16% attend church (only 9% are actively involved). What are your thoughts on the state of the church in NZ?

I don't want to criticise the church - there's enough of that happening already - but I do want to challenge the church. We have lost our role in being the conscience of the nation around issues that we know to be immoral and wrong. We have also lost our mission in bringing people to faith and helping to equip them with the tools to live a Christian life in the marketplace.

But our greatest challenge is to be unified. We have become our greatest enemy when we focus on that which divides us rather than that which unites us and because of this we do not realise our true potential to reveal the Glory of our God.

But we know the end of the book and it declares that God wins in the end and that His kingdom will come.

I am so encouraged by the movement on the ground of God's people who have been yearning for this country to return to the love of God and to see revival in the land.

You are a man that many Kiwi blokes look up to and respect. Who do you look up to and why?

William Wilberforce went from pastor/preacher to being a politician and, like me, he was

simply seeking to follow the will of God. He had an apostolic calling to remove an injustice at the heart of our society and around the world, which ultimately brought about the abolition of slavery.

In a world that seems to be less welcoming of Christian beliefs, what motivates you to continue in politics?

My belief in a God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent is what motivates me. The footprint of faith is deep and wide in this land which proves the truth that God has shaped the foundations of our country. There have been many people of faith who have sacrificed in the service of bringing the Gospel to this land.

Politics can seem a little daunting to a lot of Kiwi blokes. What can we do to practically support you and others that share your vision, and how can we get involved?

Pray for myself and other Christian MPs, for Parliament, and for New Zealand.

Participate in debates that involve relevant issues that we, as Christians, should have a concern about, eg. euthanasia, abortion and legalising marijuana.

It is important to have Christians living their faith actively in the marketplace of our society. Always remember that this is a long game.

Do you get to watch much rugby and who do you follow? (Go Chiefs!)

I still play for the Parliamentary rugby team, and we have four



games a year on average where we play teams around the country. This helps us engage with the community and helps raise funds for local charities.

I still watch Rugby whenever I can. Obviously, as an Auckland, I support the Blues, but as I spend a third of my year in Wellington, I've been able to claim a Hurricanes victory - whenever it happens!

Please pray for Alfred and other Christian MPs as they seek to honour the Lord Jesus in their areas of influence. Remember, we might not all agree on the same issues and policies but we should all agree that having Christians active in our nation's governance is extremely important and they definitely need our prayers and support. | 

For more info or to contact Alfred go to www.alfredngaro.national.org.nz



■ Dave Firth is the Editor of Authentic Magazine and the CEO of Authentic Christian Trust. He is a husband, father, bible teacher and passionate communicator. He loves the Lord and has a passion for His Word. For more info visit www.davefirth.org

A Life of Prayer

By Nathan Johnson

I've recently read a book by AW Tozer about the "Praying Plumber from Lisburn" (Thomas Haire).

While I've heard about Thomas Haire's prayer life, I've been captivated afresh by his utter devotion to communion and intimacy with God. Here's a snippet of how Tozer describes the prayer life of this Irish plumber:

"The two characteristics that mark Tom Haire as unusual are his utter devotion to prayer and his amazing spiritual penetration. Three months after his conversion, when he was sixteen years old, he formed the habit of praying four hours each day. This practice he followed faithfully for many years. Later he added one all-night prayer session each week. In 1930 these weekly all-night prayer times were increased to two, and in 1948 he settled down to the habit of praying three nights of every week. He gets along on very little sleep. In addition to the three nights each week that he stays awake to pray he is frequently awakened in the night seasons by a passage of Scripture or a burden of prayer that will not let him rest. 'And almost always,' he says, 'the Lord wakens me early in the morning to pray.'"

Now before you compare your prayer life to Thomas Haire, remember that the Lord deals with individuals ... well, individually.

Yes, we are *all* called to prayer. And each of us should have a greater desire for deeper intimacy and communion with our precious Savior

- but that doesn't mean we must emulate Thomas Haire tomorrow.

I hear about Haire's prayer life and I'm impressed and convicted. And simply, I want the kind of relationship he had with Jesus. So while I desire it, will I allow Jesus to build me into such a man of prayer? And I need to remember that such transformation will likely take some time.

If my lifestyle has been unhealthy and I suddenly want to get in shape, the best thing to do is not buy a gym membership and spend five hours the first day in the gym ... the likelihood is that I'd never go back. It would be better to start small and take a season working up to the long gym workouts and an overall healthier lifestyle.

Yes, there may be a radical shift (even tomorrow), but as I read Christian history, the prayer life of Tom Haire looks different than John Hyde or George Müller or Rees Howells.

So let's not make excuses about why our prayer lives may be flabby (and let us thus press into prayer)



... but let us also not immediately try to mimic the prayer lives of men like Haire, Ravenhill, Hyde, and others. Rather, let us press into Jesus Christ, with a passionate desire to know Him more through spending time with Him in prayer—and allow Him to increase the time and richness spent with Him.

Who knows, maybe your prayer life will look similar to Thomas Haire ... or perhaps it will look completely different. Either way, I do know God longs to spend time with us in prayer and through His Word—not 15 minutes in the morning to check off our devotional time, but He longs to have constant intimacy, communion, and relationship with us all throughout the day. May I encourage you to go spend time with Jesus today? You don't have to start with three hours, but perhaps start with setting aside 30 minutes and use the time to wait upon the Lord (see Psalm 46:10 and Isaiah 40:31). Cheering you deeper into intimacy and communion with our Lord and King! | 



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WHEN LIFE ISN'T SIMPLE

By Jeremy Suisted

When God was handing out the attributes, he forgot to give me a healthy dose of balance and water-confidence. I flail without finesse, and I swim like a brick.

So when my uncle and a boat load of family asked if I wanted to learn how to wake-surf, you can imagine my hesitation. However, the weather was beautiful, the water was warm – and I jumped into Lake Taupo ready to start my new career.

To the uninitiated, successful wake-surfing looks like this:

You're being towed close to the boat, at a low-speed. The board has no bindings – so it's easier to do tricks and a beginner-friendly activity.

It also means that it's nigh-on-impossible to keep the board by you when you're floating in the water.

For my first attempt, I twisted my body into what felt like a correct position. I gave an awkward nod to my uncle. He gave the boat power, and I promptly was dragged over the board, and dunked underwater.

I emerged – thanks to my life-jacket – to some simple advice from my cousin Esther. "Lean back, and let the boat pull you up."

I tried, and fell again. This time, my other cousins joined in.

"Put your feet wider."

"Soft legs, strong arms."

"Keep your eyes up."

I kept falling.

Then, others on the boat who hadn't done it before started offering their advice too.

"Put your back leg a little closer to the rear."

"Don't stand up so quickly."

"Lean to the left/right more."

I had expert advice from every corner. I kept on falling. My mind was full of confusing advice, leading me to keep shifting focus from one part of my body to the other.

Eventually, frustrated, I asked for everyone apart from Esther to shut-up. Then Esther repeated the simple advice – "Lean back, and let the boat pull you up. You can worry about the rest later."

I lent back, and just focused on the boat.

And I got up. I soared like a majestic eagle. And then splashed back down to earth.

I was ecstatic! I tried again – leaning back, focusing on the boat – and I got up. I rode for longer, then made a mistake and splashed. Then, the other advice was helpful.

See, whenever any wake-surfer goes for a ride – they have to get-up. They have to start by leaning-back and letting the boat pull them up. But, after they've learnt the basics – they don't have to think about it. It's intuitive to them. They simply get up – and then focus on the complicated stuff.

FROM WATER TO REALITY

When I think of my life, I often stumble when things get complicated. I get conflicting advice about what to do with finances. I wonder whether my current vocation is the right one – or is there a better way of doing

this? I lie awake at night lost in my head, worried about a business opportunity, my future, or the future of others.

In these times, my thoughts are often complicated and competing. It is in this time when disagreements, stress and confusion arise.

And it's often in these moments that I forget the simple truths.

Now, to suggest that a life focused on simple truth will be devoid of confusion is too simplistic and not true. Yet, having core truths to fall back on provide a useful framework for making sense of life – and for continuing on during the hard times.

In one of the early churches in Galatia – a church that had only existed for a few short years – they had already begun to complicate things. There was conflict and in-fighting, confusing discussions about theological fine points, disagreements about wealth, identity, roles and purpose. They were providing each other with expert advice – yet had forgotten the simplistic. They had neglected what was important.

When the Apostle Paul wrote them a letter – it is interesting that in many of these matters, he doesn't wade into the debate. Nor does he provide an expert diagnostic. Instead, he reminds them of the simple truth in the beginning – that under the Christian belief, it is all about Jesus, grace and new life. He urges them to lean on Jesus.

This sounds like Sunday School-level stuff. But Paul recognised – we need the simple stuff. We don't learn it and move on – but when

we encounter chaos and confusion – we need simple truths to lean on.

The Welsh minister Martin Lloyd Jones captured this, when he preached,

"The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why art thou cast down' – what business have you to be disquieted?"

You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope thou in God' – instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do."

He urges us to turn to the simple truths and preach them to ourselves – reminding ourselves of them throughout the day.

For the Christian, the good news of Jesus is not a basic truth to be learnt and then filed away. It is a foundational truth that can undergird our lives.

By all means, we can explore the complexities of faith, the intricacies of life – and we are encouraged to think deeply and critically about such things.

But let's not forget the simple truths. Let them be the ones that guide us, and help us make sense of the confusing journey of life. **!A**



■ Jeremy has a fascination with exploring the intersection between faith and life, and loves sharing his thoughts and observations with others who are interested in looking deeper and closer. www.jeremysuisted.com

An interview with **Charles Price** - the People's Pastor

I first was introduced to Charles Price on a cold Monday night in October 1999, when my wife and I attended some night school classes at Capernwray Hall in Lancashire, England. We'd been stirred to read our bibles more and were looking for some good bible teaching - something meaty!

Charles was teaching the first hour and the Word of God literally came alive for me.

I remember him telling a story about how he was walking down a street that had a glass shop next to a hardware store and next to that was a jewelers, when a gas line that ran underneath the shops exploded launching the contents of all three shops into the air. The result was that a perfectly formed watch landed on his wrist and began to tick!

Of course, he was talking about the absurdity of everything in this world coming about by chance alone - and it got my attention!

He was followed by Billy Strachan and at the end of the two hour session I couldn't believe how excited and alert I was - compared to sitting in our local methodist church on a Sunday morning listening to a 20 minute message that seemed to go on for a thousand years!

Since then I've 'bumped into' Charles four times in four different countries:

At a conference in a large church in Wisconsin (USA), in the Air Canada lounge at Vancouver

airport, back at Capernwray Hall in England for a staff conference, and most recently when he visited New Zealand in May for a two week speaking tour of both the North and South Islands.

So, I couldn't miss the opportunity of interviewing him about his life of teaching, travel and discovering Truth!

What's your connection with NZ and how far does it go back?

I first came to NZ in 1981, as a young man almost on our honeymoon (four months into marriage) and conducted six week long series of meetings in Auckland, Queenstown, Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and then back in a different part of Auckland. Over the years, I have been back thirteen times now, and love the beauty of the country and the warmth of the people!

Tell us about how and when you came to know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?

I was twelve years old when I came to assurance of salvation, after a youth event in my home town of Hereford in England. It was a Saturday night, and I knew something had happened next day, when I went to the church my parents had taken me to from

infancy and for the first time the service was interesting and made sense! I realised I had an appetite I had not had before. This was my evidence I had received a new life.

What part did Capernwray play in growing your relationship with Jesus?

Major Ian Thomas, who founded Capernwray, came to Hereford less than a year after I became a Christian. I was mesmerized by his ministry, and that summer a group of us went to a teen week at Capernwray Hall. Later, in my school holidays I would go and work there, and it became like a second home to me, where I learned so many truths, and gained so much experience that set me up for the rest of my life. In due course I attended the year long Bible School.

The significance of the 'Christ in You' message has been a big part of your teaching ministry. Can you briefly explain the significance of this truth? (And you cant just say "read my book")

What makes a person a Christian, is that the Spirit of Jesus Christ lives in them, and he is the source of their ability to live. Often however we view Jesus as the teacher, the model, the example we try our best to imitate him, or

see him merely as the patron of our Christianity. But he is its Life. God has only one thing to give us – it is Himself, so that by the Holy Spirit, he might reproduce the character of Jesus in us. Disciples ceased to be ‘followers of Jesus’ after Pentecost, and instead became indwelt by Him, and the relationship is now one of union with Christ, that we are in Christ, and he is in us.

When did you know God was calling you to be a preacher?

At the age of 16 I sensed God was calling me to preach and began to do so. With three friends of the same age, we got permission to preach on the streets of our town, and one day were invited to go and speak in a little rural church which had no pastor and hardly any attendees. That opened a door and by the time I was 18 we were preaching most weekends in many of these small village churches.

You spent 15 years on staff at the People’s Church in Toronto. How different was it for you to be a pastor of such a large church having worked at Capernwray Hall with a much smaller group of staff, students and guests?

I had no desire to be a pastor, but God made it very evident it was the right thing to do, so with some fear and trepidation we arrived in Toronto in 2001, to a weary congregation, in an amazing cosmopolitan city. We saw people come to Christ and saw our numbers more than double to over four thousand each week and the average age drop by around 25 years (so I am told, I haven’t tried to measure it myself)! A key was working with a great team.

I know you saw the Lord work in some incredible ways during your time there. What are some of the



I HAD NO DESIRE TO BE A PASTOR, BUT GOD MADE IT VERY EVIDENT IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO...

most memorable moments that you experienced?

I learned a saying from Major Thomas, ‘A river cuts its own course’. You want to see natural developments like a flowing river, rather than a canal which needs maintaining. One significant area of spontaneous growth was in our media outreach across the world. We had a TV programme shown in Canada, but eventually it was seen in over 70 countries in several languages, Spanish across South and Central America, Arabic across the whole Middle East and North Africa, and with subtitles in India, Korea, Taiwan, and in Eastern Europe. We similarly started a daily 30 minute radio programme broadcast in Canada, USA, UK and New Zealand. We raised a significant amount of money for global missions, amounting to around 40 million dollars in total during those years, both from the congregation and our TV audience to whom we annually presented

a large project we wanted to help fund.

So, what have you been doing since you stood down as senior pastor of the People’s Church?

The church wanted to keep a relationship with me, so they call me ‘Pastor at Large’, which sounds a bit like something that has escaped from the zoo! There are no formal obligations in this. If I am invited somewhere and feel it is appropriate and a valuable use of time, I go. In our first year after stepping down, my wife Hilary and I were on all six continents, but its not about geography, it’s about people! My greatest joy is in knowing people are meeting more deeply with the Lord Jesus Christ and experiencing him more fully.

Of all the countries have visited, which would be your favourite and why?

I love different countries for different reasons. For a sense of



belonging I love visiting Africa, for at the age of 18 I went to work for two and a half years on a large farm in Zimbabwe and was bitten by the Africa bug! Only people who have lived in Africa understand that! For intrigue, I love China with all its mysteries. For beauty, I have to say that New Zealand is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. But England still feels “home” even though we live in Canada.

You were here in NZ in May this year for a 2 week speaking tour. How did that go and what were the highlights?

I was in Cambridge, Christchurch, Timaru and Dunedin. It’s hard to identify highlights, for all were different with their own highlights. In Dunedin an annual “Resurrection service”, to affirm belief in the literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead, in response to the challenge of that truth some years ago, was attended by more than 1500 people in the Town Hall and was a wonderful demonstration of unity, as well as of hunger and receptivity to the truths I tried to share of the Risen Christ being our Life.

You’re coming back out to NZ in December for the Keswick convention in Rotorua. Can you tell us a little about Keswick and your history with the ministry?

In the town of Keswick in the English Lake District some 144 years ago, Christians were called together for the purpose of the ‘deepening of spiritual life’. Its focus was not on any subject, but on an object – the object of holiness of life, lived by repentance and faith in dependence on the Spirit of God. It sparked a movement across the world, and there are still today many ‘Keswick Conventions’ in different parts of the world, and I have preached at a number. In Rotorua it is a holiday, a camp, a celebration built around the central purpose of meeting with God.

Preaching and teaching as much as you do might seem quite daunting to many people, especially with all the travel it entails. How do you keep fresh and focused on each assignment?

In every situation I have learned to say of Christ, ‘I can’t, but He can’ and then to trust him. I am fortunate in being able to travel well without too many negative side effects, and though I may say

something I have said a hundred times before, it needs to come fresh to my own heart. Gods truth always has to come “to us” before it can ever go “through us”. That is the challenge and privilege in ministry.

What do you do for rest and relaxation?

Go home!

What encouragement can you give to NZ men seeking to live authentic lives?

Authenticity is related to honesty. Many of us live behind masks created by expectations of ourselves or others. Life is not driven by a series of ‘musts’, ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ but by an open honest relationship with God that gives us the freedom to live open, honest and unashamed relationships with others. We do not learn the Christian life as theory, but as experience, and that comes as we bring God into every situation of our lives.

You’ve been writing for Authentic magazine from the beginning. What do you think of the magazine?

I love its intent, its quality, and the fact so many are now reading it. |A

Sharing Our Faith: The Great Opportunity

By Ron Matsen

Everyone who has called on the name of Jesus Christ for their own salvation now has an irrevocable calling upon their new life, which compels them to take the Gospel to the world around them.

The last commandment of Jesus before His ascension was for His disciples to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”¹ How seriously should we personally take this command today? Is this command somehow only limited to those who feel they have the gift of evangelism? What needs to be said, understood, and believed for a person to be born again?

For salvation, Man must first understand the existence and character of God, then the purpose and power of the Bible, the person of Jesus Christ, and the nature of Man. This awareness prepares Man for the message of the Gospel.

Being confronted with a holy and just God should cause sinful Man, who is deserving of God’s judgment, to naturally seek a way of salvation.

The Bible tells us that believing in the Gospel requires hearing the Gospel. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians saying,

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the

gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”² Sadly, the percentage of the world that is hearing the Christian Gospel today is getting less and less. Preaching is one of the simplest forms of verbal communication. Where teaching can be defined as “explanation,” thus sometimes requiring substantial preparation, preaching is simply “declaration.” Paul instructed the Corinthian Church, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”³ For example, if you discovered that your local

superstore was having a one-day sale on an item that previously was too expensive to consider, your natural response to the discovery of this good news would be to tell as many of your friends as possible, so they could enjoy the benefit with you. How much more important is the Gospel message before a world lost in darkness and without hope?

The Apostle Paul then points out that every Christian has been given the “ministry of reconciliation.”

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.⁴

Thus we can fulfil the command of the Great Commission by preaching the “word of

reconciliation” to an unbelieving world.

All Christians need to recognize the fact that they are no longer to become entangled in the affairs of this present world, because they have been given citizenship in a heavenly kingdom. As “ambassadors for Christ,”⁵ we have been given a clear commission to represent and communicate the messages from our ruling King, Jesus Christ, to others. How can we effectively accomplish this task?

THE DISCOVERY OF GOD

The English author C. S. Lewis wrote, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”⁶ The Christian faith is NOT a simple, private experience of personal interpretations or impressions. It is a serious, public exhibition of a worldview that is based on a belief system that has a foundation of truth that can be examined by an enquiring world.

Christianity does not ask its followers to take a blind leap of faith into the intellectual abyss, but rather presents a perfectly rational response to the evidence surrounding us, within the world of science and through insightful discoveries from the Bible. The Bible tells us that for salvation, Man must first understand the existence and character of God. Therefore, the road to the salvation of mankind begins with the exploration of the ultimate truth of the existence of God. The beginning of a person’s reconciliation with God is their recognition of God.

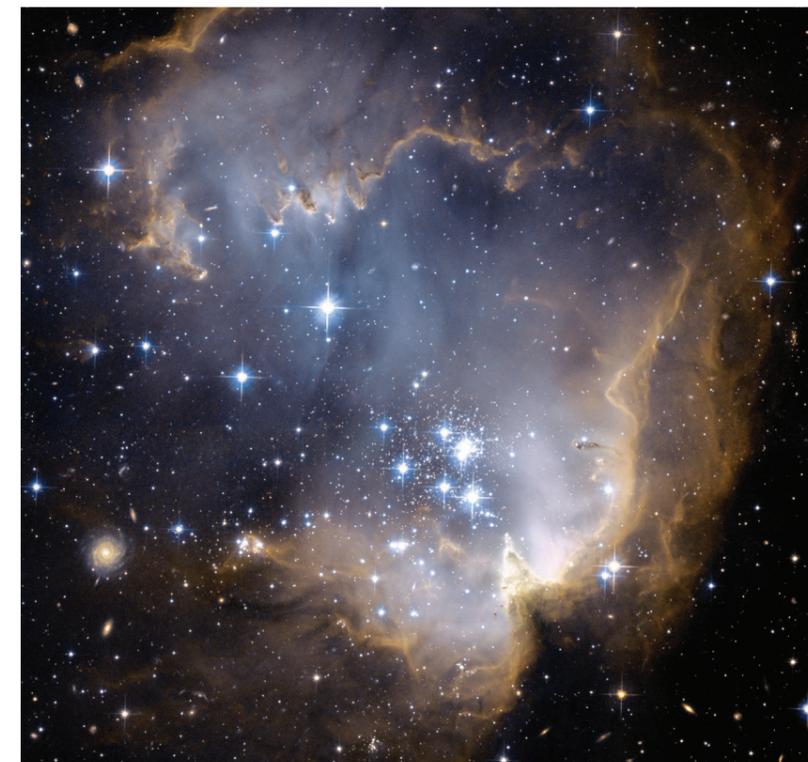
The argument for and against the existence of God has raged for ages, with both sides declaring victory but rarely to the converting of their counterpart. To prove the existence of God, an understanding is needed that comes from an “aggregate of thoughts” knit together with “summary logic.” I call it the “algorithm of complex theology.”

Simply stated, it is the idea that many different observations, when consolidated, can yield a unified conclusion.

There are five classic philosophical arguments for proving the existence of God:

1. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Ontological Argument is based on the widespread intuitive knowledge of the existence of God within every culture. It focuses on our internal witness. It argues that once we mentally grasp the concept of God, we can see that God’s non-existence is impossible. In other words, if you believe in the necessity of God, then you must believe in the existence of God.



Questions raised by this approach include, “Why does mankind universally concern itself with the existence of God if he does not exist?” “Why do I believe in a supernatural or spiritual realm?” “Why do people who say they don’t believe in God still ask for prayer?”

2. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Cosmological Argument seeks to prove the existence of God from the fact that the universe exists. The basis of this argument is built upon the observation that the universe is finite—it had a beginning—and that it came into being through something or someone. This is also referred to as the “First Cause Argument.” It focuses on the principle of the “first mover.” That is, for every action there must be a reaction or for every reaction there must be a preceding action.

3. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Teleological Argument seeks to prove the existence of God from the fact that the universe is ordered. This is also referred to as the “Argument from Design.” It is based on the principle that if we see design, there must be a designer (God), because we see “design” that infers “purpose.” The study of design in both the cosmos and in life systems reveals the wonders of both the Macro Universe and the Micro Universe. For more on the Teleological Argument for the existence of God, you should check out the “Beyond Series”⁷ by Dr. Chuck Missler.

4. THE MORAL ARGUMENT

The Moral Argument seeks to prove the existence of God from the inherent nature of morality within mankind. It asks many tough questions regarding the basis of Universal Morality. If morality consists of an ultimately authoritative set of commands, where can these commands have come from but a commander that has ultimate authority? The apostle Paul warned the Roman Church that all mankind stand guilty before God because “what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.”⁸

5. THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE ARGUMENT

The Religious Experience Argument seeks to prove the existence of God by human experience with the supernatural realm. The focus of this approach is the idea that one can only perceive that which exists, and so God must exist because there are those that have experienced him. While religious experiences themselves can only constitute direct evidence of God’s existence for those fortunate enough to have them, the fact that there are many people who testify to having had such experiences constitutes indirect evidence of God’s existence, even to those who have not had such experiences themselves.

Although you cannot completely, empirically prove or disprove the existence of God using logic alone, we can certainly use the information available to us to

guide those that are blind to the glorious light of the Gospel into the direction of truth, so they might seek the truth for themselves. Oftentimes, the best use of Christian apologetics is to unseat the confidence of the unbeliever in their faulty world view, to the point that they seek a better answer for the questions facing them concerning the purpose of their own life. In the end Jesus said,

*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught by God.” Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.*⁹

Nevertheless, everyone who has called on the name of Jesus Christ for their own salvation now has an irrevocable calling upon their new life, which compels them to take the Gospel to the world around them. Remember, it is a spiritual battle. With great opportunity comes great opposition, so don’t be surprised when the effort to share the Gospel becomes difficult.

After all, it’s a matter of life and death to those waiting to hear your message of reconciliation. |A

NOTES

1. Mark 16:15 (NKJV)
2. Romans 10:14,15 (NKJV)
3. 1 Corinthians 1:21 (NKJV)
4. 2 Corinthians 5:18,19 (NKJV)
5. 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NKJV)
6. C. S. Lewis “Mere Christianity”
7. Beyond Time and Space, Beyond Coincidence, Beyond Perception, and Beyond Newton by Dr. Chuck Missler, Koinonia House.
8. Romans 1:19 (NKJV)
9. John 6:44,45 (NKJV)



■ Ron is the President of Koinonia House and Koinonia Institute. He has taught verse-by-verse through the Bible many times, over the last 30 years on the subjects of evangelism, leadership, and end-times topics. Although Ron and his wife are native Californians, they lived in England for 20 years and in 2011 immigrated to New Zealand where they partnered with Chuck Missler based at The River Lodge in Reporoa.

MOVIE REVIEWS



THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

John Bunyan’s classic story of spiritual pilgrimage, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, is often said to be the second-most read book in the world. Since its original publication in 1678, it has been translated into more than 200 languages, as well as being adapted into scores of plays, TV shows and theatrical versions.

The latest lands in select theaters via Fathom Events on April 18 and 20.

This version, like Bunyan’s original work, follows the allegorical tale of Christian Pilgrim, a man who encounters a mysterious Book that promises more to life than the hopeless toil and drudgery he trudges through in the dank City of Destruction.

Inspired by the courage of another character, Faithful Pathfinder, Christian soon sets out on a quest for the fabled Celestial City. He encounters trials and temptation aplenty along the way, circumstances that repeatedly dangle enticing opportunities to turn away from his pilgrimage to his own promised land.

Christian must also resist the snares of antagonists known as the Supervisor and the Master, who at times take on demonic, dragon-like forms as they attempt to deflect Christian from his goal. “We can dissuade him with fear, with doubt, with pride—there are many persuasions,” the Supervisor tells his minions.



As he makes his way, Christian has to decide whether he will capitulate to despair or trust the King of the Celestial City to help him arrive. Some unlikely and unlooked for allies turn up along the way as well.

Ultimately, he realizes that success in his journey requires relinquishing the many burdens he has doggedly carried with him. In that moment, he exclaims, “My heart has been cleansed! My King did for me what I—and no one else—could do. He has rid me of my burden, and He has given me new life!”

This version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is infused with dramatic peril and, at times, conflict with darkly demonic forces. Those elements almost give the story a Lord of the Rings-esque vibe. Because of that, very young and/or sensitive viewers may find these momentarily intense scenes to be frightening. But that’s really the only issue here that parents need to be aware of. And for families that want to explore this story’s rich allegorical lessons about faith and perseverance, this animated version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* once again opens the door to discuss a timeless spiritual classic.



TOLKIEN

J.R.R. Tolkien doesn't exactly come across as an epic, self-sacrificial Frodo in this biopic. His heroism is a bit more understated here. His core virtue in the film—much like Frodo's, really—is his tenacity. And his love for languages—even the ones he makes up—requires sacrifice, too. Initially a classics major at Oxford University, he has to prove to the school's intimidating philology (language) professor that he's worthy of switching majors and finding a seat in the professor's already over-stuffed department.

In some respects, the people around Tolkien are the real heroes here. His mother helps build a love of story in Tolkien. His prep-school comrades, all of whom come from wealthier, more secure backgrounds, take him in and make him their kindred brother. And his 'friend' Edith helps Tolkien (who's already experimenting with made-up languages by this time) see the *real* power of words.

The real J.R.R. Tolkien was a man of deep faith, but his Catholic convictions are underplayed in this biopic. Still, we see religious references now and then. When Mabel tells her children that difficult times are ahead, she adds, "We are lucky to have the [Catholic] Church support us." We see that support mostly in the guise of Father Francis (whom the real Tolkien considered almost a genuine father). Always wearing his clerical collar, Francis watches out for the Tolkien boys as best



he can (though he takes a dim view of Tolkien's relationship with Edith).

I wonder what the real J.R.R. Tolkien would've thought of this movie. While director Dome Karukoski expressed hope in an interview that, one day, he can sit on a cloud with the author and talk about it, Tolkien was notoriously adverse to people using lenses outside a given story to view said story. He never liked it when his friend C.S. Lewis used obvious allegory in his own fantasy series (The Chronicles of Narnia), and he was discomfited by efforts to interpret his own books as analogous to, say, the horrors of World War II or fascism or industrialism. He thought the story should always stand on its own.

"I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence," he wrote in a forward to *The Fellowship of the Ring*. "I much prefer history—true or feigned—with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author."

Still, as a Tolkien fan, it's interesting to see where Tolkien might've drawn inspiration for his stories: The bucolic green hills of Sarehole Mill become the Shire, his school friends as the first manifestation of a do-or-die Fellowship, the horrors of the Somme echoing the bleached, barren lands of Mordor.

Tolkien is a fine, watchable biopic that, content-wise, strays from the straight-and-narrow at times but not too badly. But watching the movie, I longed a bit for what it could've been. It could've delved into Tolkien's faith more adroitly and earnestly. It could've spent more time with Tolkien's relationships beyond Edith, especially with Father Francis. In its speculation about how Tolkien's Middle-earth might've sprung from his own personal history, Tolkien neglects, I think, the most compelling parts of that history. In examining Tolkien's seminal stories, this movie neglected Tolkien's own. And maybe that was Tolkien's point.



UNPLANNED

"My story isn't an easy one to hear. I think I probably ought to warn you of that up front."

Those words introduce us to Abby Johnson in *Unplanned*, which tells the true story of how this former Planned Parenthood clinic director changed her mind about abortion. Indeed, her story isn't easy to watch. But it forces viewers to confront the reality of abortion from an unexpected viewpoint.

Abby's story begins during her college years at Texas A&M. She grew up as a "small-town super achiever," she says. But when she got to college, she quickly became a "party girl" ... and got pregnant. "I'll take you to a clinic to take care of it," her boyfriend, Mark, tells her.

"I can't tell my parents about this," she believes. "They can't know I'm having sex. They can't know I'm pregnant." And so Abby gets her first credit card, so that she can secretly pay \$500 for her abortion. An ill-advised marriage to Mark follows, as does a divorce after he cheats on her. But even as the divorce proceedings go forward, Abby learns she's pregnant again, and she chooses a second abortion, this time via the abortion drug RU-486.

All this before Abby's junior year of college.

At a job fair that year, Abby meets a young woman promoting Planned Parenthood. "It's hard to believe that there's still some people out there that wanna tell us what we can and can't do with our body," the young recruiter says, inviting Abby to volunteer. Soon, she agrees to start volunteering. "I left campus that day as a proud champion of women in crisis."

That choice will redirect the trajectory of her life, as volunteering leads to a job and, eventually, to being named director of her local clinic in Bryan, Texas.

But Abby is surrounded by people who grieve for her career choice: her parents; her loving and patient second husband, Doug; and a group of faithful pro-life advocates who turn up every Saturday to pray and to convince the women who arrive to reconsider their choice.

But Abby still believes she's helping women ... right up to the moment that she's asked to help with an abortion procedure, something she's never done in eight years. The tragedy she witnesses on the ultrasound screen accomplishes in one moment what years of conversations with her family had failed to do.





In that moment, everything changes for Abby, propelling her life in a new direction, and putting her on a collision course with her former employer, the biggest abortion provider in America.

This film has earned an R-rating for several scenes that, while not as graphic as they could have been, are still very difficult to watch.

Early on, we witness an abortion procedure Abby helps with. She's asked to hold the ultrasound monitor while a doctor performs the abortion. Before the hose-like implement he inserts reaches a woman's uterus (activity that's implied but not shown), we see what looks like a normal ultrasound of a fetus moving around. Once the probe reaches the uterus, however, the doctor crudely says, "Beam me up, Scotty!" and turns on the vacuum-like machine performing the abortion. Abby, and we, watch as the baby tries to escape, "swimming" away as its limbs are sucked off one by one. With each, we see red, goopy matter flowing through the hose into a container. It's an emotionally brutal scene, and it's among the most difficult scenes I've ever witnessed on film.

Every now and then, a movie comes along that's not just merely "good." Or merely "must see" water-cooler fare. I'm talking about films that are genuinely important because they force us to see something clearly that perhaps we've never really seen before. Oftentimes, these can be gritty, graphic, difficult-to-sit-through films.

I'd put *Schindler's List* in that category. And *Saving Private Ryan*. And Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Not surprisingly, perhaps, all of those movies are rated R. They pull no punches in their detailed depiction of difficult, violent realities.

I'd put *Unplanned* in the same category as these films in terms of the emotional wallop it packs. Like them, *Unplanned* forces us to look at an awful reality that we might be tempted to minimize. The film's depiction of a fetus being sucked, limb by limb, from its mother's womb cannot be unseen.

But unlike so much of our culture's fascination and infatuation with gore and violence, that scene depicts something that really happens. Since 1973, an estimated 56 million abortions have been performed in the United States. Sixty million souls knit together in God's image. Sixty million souls that never drew a breath. It's a moral travesty that's incomprehensible in its scope.

Unplanned is an important film because it makes us consider the moral weight of this otherwise mind-numbing statistic. Through the eyes of one woman who once believed she was doing good, we see the horror of abortion for what it truly is.

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AUTHENTIC

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