

AUTHENTIC

AUTUMN 2019 / ISSUE 6

MEN'S MAGAZINE

THE BUSINESS OF MINISTRY: A TRIBUTE TO:

Ian Elliott

Easterfest

What's going on in Taupo?

Eric Ludy's definition of

RADICAL

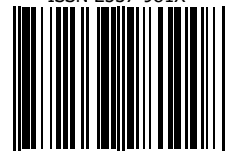
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AUTHENTIC

Do I really trust Him?

I really do love people!

God made us for relationships - no doubt!

Of course, our primary relationship is with Him. That makes sense. But the many people that God brings into our lives are all part of this fascinating concept called 'relational living'.

The apostle Paul spent a lot of time alone in a jail cell. In fact, towards the end of his life it seems that everyone had abandoned him. 'Not good', you might say, but during those times he wrote some amazing letters that form a big chunk of our New Testament!

Now, I know we don't 'need' anything other than Jesus. If we did then that would mean Jesus, himself, isn't sufficient. Paul powerfully demonstrates this by preaching the Gospel in Lystra where he is stoned to death (it seems) and his body is thrown out of the city. But he gets up, realises he's ok and heads right back into Lystra to go and preach some more!

In his letter to the Philippians he says it quite clearly, 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.' (Philippians 1:21)

Money, position, security, stability... these things are of no interest to Paul. He even puts life itself second in line behind death (physical) that he might 'gain' through his heavenly inheritance.

That said, Paul had many relationships that he valued greatly.

Of course, Peter and the other apostles, Barnabas, Timothy, Silas, Titus, Sosthenes, Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Luke, Epaphras, Onesiphorus, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, Artemas, Zenas, Aristarchus, to name just some (there's another 25 people he mentioned in Romans 16 alone!) of his friends and 'fellow workers' in the Gospel.

Friendship is a gift. We really shouldn't take it for granted.

These last couple of months have been extremely challenging for me personally. After ten years on staff at Capernwray Bible School I resigned from my job, moved off site into a new home and am now fully engaged with Authentic Christian Trust in my role as CEO of the trust, and editor of this magazine.

Change can be hard, but it's inevitable for all of us.

One of the hardest parts about leaving Capernwray was knowing I'm not going to see the staff everyday - those wonderful, crazy weirdos, some of whom have become my closest friends.

I'll miss those chats around the coffee machine and seeing their smiling faces wandering past my window.



Right now, one of my good friends is in hospital recovering from a terrible accident. There's a lot we don't know about when and how well he'll recover. We must trust our Lord that He will accomplish His purposes.

People are precious!

In October last year I met Ian Elliott (you can read about him later) and we just got on like a house on fire! What an amazing man. I was so excited to have a man like Ian in my life. As a friend but also a mentor and encourager. But just a few months later I was standing at the back of a large hall as several people shared what an amazing man he had been. God called him home.

But I'm learning that God's purposes and plans are exactly that - His purposes and His plans.

I love the well known verse in Isaiah 55:8 where the Lord declares, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"

He really doesn't think like we do. The passage goes on to remind us that God will accomplish His purposes.

So the only thing is this...

Do I really trust Him?

Through these last weeks I have also seen God's amazing provision.

Our loving, Father has continually provided for our ministry needs. He has also provided me with a new home and a new challenge. He has reminded me just how faithful He is.

He has provided me with amazing new colleagues (well they're not that new but now I'm full time it feels like they're new!)

At Authentic we have an amazing team. We really enjoy each other. We're excited about the work God has called us to and we see His hand at work in the midst of everything that we need to do.

Authentic Media is our marketing and communications agency which works with Christian ministries

around New Zealand. It helps fund the trust and it's projects - this magazine being a major one - and supports ministries with marketing ideas, design, branding, logos, websites, photography, video and all that good stuff!

In February we formally opened 'The Ark' (the old GLO bible college campus in Te Awamutu) as a new conference and ministry centre in the Waikato. Authentic Trust, Authentic Media and Authentic Magazine are all based there and we're involved in helping run conferences and events.

Calvary Chapel Bible Institute run their programmes there too. It's an amazing facility that literally hundreds of people contributed to reestablishing!

Lastly, we have made a decision about the future of the magazine...

Lord willing, we will do a ninth edition. So, as far as we know, in December 2019 we will publish the last Authentic Magazine...for now :)

Please keep praying with us and keep sending us your feedback.

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

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We'd love to hear your feedback, ideas and input. You can reach out to us via social media or our website at www.authenticmagazine.co.nz



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The Empty Tomb and the Resurrected Lord

By Dr Albert Mohler



The pattern of the Christian year is an exercise of the Church's discipline. The annual celebrations of Christmas and Resurrection Day force the Church to ponder again the truths of Christ's incarnation and resurrection.

Christians understand that every Lord's Day is Resurrection Day, but Resurrection (Easter) Sunday is the festival which draws all Christians face to face with the empty tomb and the truth of the resurrected Lord.

Resurrection Sunday is the central event in the church year—the climax of worship, expectation, and celebration. This celebration is also an acid test of the Church's faithfulness and conviction.

The secular world has done its

best to make a mess of Christmas, but it has largely ignored our celebration of the Resurrection. Where commercialism intrudes, it comes in the forms of eggs and chicks and rabbits—none of which claim any connection with the Resurrection. The fact is, the secular world will attempt to domesticate, commercialize, and tame the babe in the manger—but it will run at breakneck speed from the cross and the empty tomb.

That cross stands as condemnation on all human

attempts at self-righteousness, and the fallen world will do all within its power to hide the cross from sight. The empty tomb is the seal and confirmation of the cross, and the world will shield its eyes. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead separates Christianity from all mere religion—whatever its form. Christianity without the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is merely one religion among many. “And if Christ is not risen,” said the Apostle Paul, “then our preaching is empty and

“THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD SEPARATES CHRISTIANITY FROM ALL MERE RELIGION – WHATEVER ITS FORM.”

your faith is in vain” [1 Corinthians 15:14]. Furthermore, “You are still in your sins!” [v. 17b]. Paul could not have chosen stronger language. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” [v. 19].

Yet, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has been under persistent attacks since the Apostolic age. Why? Because it is the central

confirmation of Jesus' identity as the incarnate Son of God, and the ultimate sign of Christ's completed work of atonement, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. Those who oppose Christ, whether first century religious leaders or twentieth century secularists, recognize the Resurrection as the vindication of Christ against His enemies.

Those who would attack the Church and reject its gospel must direct their arrows at the most crucial truth claim of the New Testament and the disciples: That Jesus Christ, having suffered death on a cross, though sinless, having borne the sins of those He came to save, having been buried in a sealed and guarded grave, was raised by the power of God on the third day.

As Paul well understood, Christianity stands or falls with the empty grave. If Christ is not raised, we are to be pitied, for our faith is in vain. Those who would preach a resurrectionless Christianity have exchanged the truth of the gospel for a lie. But, asserted Paul, Christ is risen from the dead. Our faith is not in vain, but is in the risen Lord. He willingly faced death on a cross and defeated death from the grave. The Resurrection is the ultimate sign of God's vindication of His Son.

As John A. Broadus preached over a century ago: “It was the signed manual of the Deity, it was the seal of the Sovereign of the Universe affixed to His claim, it declared Him to be all that He had ever professed to be, and so it establishes the truth of all His teachings and the truth of the whole Christian society. The great fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the central fact of the evidence of Christianity.”

Believers have no reason to be defensive concerning the Resurrection. To the contrary, any denial of the Resurrection is a denial of the Savior. The biblical evidence is overwhelming.

As the disciples preached in the earliest Christian sermons, “This Jesus God has raised up, of whom we are all witnesses Therefore,



let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" [Acts 2:32,36].

The Resurrection was not a dawning awareness of Christ's continuing presence among the disciples, it was the literal, physical raising of Jesus' body from the dead. The Church is founded upon the resurrected Lord, who appeared among His disciples and was seen by hundreds of others.

The Church does not have mere *permission* to celebrate the Resurrection, it has a *mandate* to proclaim the truth that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrected Lord gave the Church a sacred commission to take the

"THE CHURCH IS FOUNDED UPON THE RESURRECTED LORD, WHO APPEARED AMONG HIS DISCIPLES AND WAS SEEN BY HUNDREDS OF OTHERS."

gospel throughout the world. As Paul made clear, the resurrection of Christ also comes as a comfort to the believer, for His defeat of death is a foretaste and promise of our own resurrection by His power. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" [1 Corinthians 15:53].

So, as the Church gathers to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we should look backward in thankfulness to that empty

tomb and forward to the fulfillment of Christ's promises in us. For Resurrection Day is not merely a celebration—it is truly preparation as well. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the promise of our resurrection from the dead, and of Christ's total victory over sin and death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the very center of the Christian gospel. The empty tomb is full of power. | **A**



■ Dr Albert Mohler is a pastor, author and president of the Southern Seminary & Boyce College in the USA. His mission is to address contemporary issues from a consistent and explicit Christian worldview.



THE BUSINESS OF MINISTRY:

A tribute to Ian Elliott

'A giant Totara has fallen'

I'd heard the name 'Ian Elliott' many times since I moved to New Zealand in July 2008. He seemed to be one of those men that everyone had heard of. But I didn't meet him until October last year. I was at an MMM event at their offices in Pirongia and Ian 'just happened' to be one of the speakers.

After the meeting I was mingling, coffee in hand, when Ian turned to me and said hello. He said he loved the magazine and then he said something that seemed out of context. "What are your running costs?"

I was a bit surprised for a couple of reasons. Firstly, being British, I'm used to small talk ("How are you?", "What do you do?", "Nice day isn't it?") but I was also a little surprised as just the day before we were trying to figure out how to pay all the bills. At Authentic we rely on the gifts and support of other trusts, ministries, churches and individuals - and it was a lean time! I told Ian a rough estimate (as I wasn't really prepared for the question) and he said he was going to Africa but wanted to see me when he got back. As you might expect, that was encouraging to hear.

We emailed back and forth over the next couple of weeks and when he got back from his trip he called to say he wanted to see me so we arrange a meeting for 6th December at his house in Tokoroa.

When I arrived at the farm, Ian was making a sandwich. He'd just got back from a meeting with a council subcommittee regarding some funding for the community - something of a common occurrence I later discovered.

We sat at the table and chatted for a couple of hours. He shared many stories - several about a young man he led to the Lord 40 years ago (that happens to be one of my best friends and an Authentic Christian Trust board member!) - and he told me all about how the farming trusts were established through godly men and women that wanted to see the Gospel spread across New Zealand and how they had decided to allocate funds to go into trusts to see that happen.

I was literally captivated by this man. I was encouraged that he liked the magazine and he saw that it met a need, and I was excited that he was keen to help see it continue, but I got really excited at the prospect of hanging

out with him more and gleaning from his wisdom and experience. This man was authentic!

He took me to his office, above the garage and handed me a large brown paper package. In it were four copies of the book 'In Trust' which details the origins and visions of what is now Trinity Lands and the Christian farming trusts that have supported so many ministries in New Zealand.

Before he left he gave me instructions to email specific financial details to him so when he returned from his trip to Europe he could meet with some trusts to share the vision of Authentic! What a guy! He was an advocate for me and the ministry in ways I could have never expected.

I set a reminder in my phone to contact Ian early in the new year but on the 9th January I got the sad news that Ian had died after a very brief battle with an aggressive cancer.

The following week I stood alongside around 1500 others at the memorial service of a man I'd only known for a few weeks, but who had encouraged me greatly.

Ian was born into a farming family

in Te Aroha and spent the first nine years of his life there. The family then moved to Nigeria where they were missionaries for the next four years. Ian came back to New Zealand early and stayed with his aunt and uncle on what was the original Lichfield Lands farm. It's fair to say he was extremely passionate about Christian ministry but he was an incredibly well respected businessman too.

Ian was involved in several Christian trusts including being the chairman of Trinity Lands, a Christian trust that manages significant assets including dairy farms, kiwifruit orchards and forestry blocks, and distributes funds to support ministries and communities across New Zealand. He was also the chair of Prison Fellowship International, chair of the South Waikato Investment Fund Trust (SWIFT), and managed 10 other farms.

But he was just as comfortable with a former US president as he was with a farmworker.

In his role as chairman of Prison Fellowship International, Ian was invited to attend American presidential prayer breakfasts with the likes of Bill Clinton, George Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump!

Although, according to his wife, Margaret, Ian's faith was "strong and clear" he respected and valued people who didn't have the same beliefs as him.

"We all remember him encouraging us at times when something wasn't going well. He said 'you have to learn it is a long game and there are times when things go well and times when they don't go so well but you can't worry about



"HE WAS AN INCREDIBLE BUSINESSMAN AND UNDERSTOOD THAT WHILE SUCCESS WAS IMPORTANT IT IS PEOPLE THAT MAKE IT HAPPEN."

the times when they are not going so well, you learn from them'," she said.

Trinity Lands CEO, Peter McBride, who was great friends with Ian and worked closely with him, said he was a natural leader.

"He was an incredible businessman and understood that while success was important it is people that make it happen," he said. "He committed most of his life to Christian work and was highly respected in the business community as well.


Ian Elliott had a real passion for people and always took a keen interest in the young people that came and worked for him, whether on the family farm in Tokoroa, or the farms operated by the trust. His daughter, Sarah said "He knew them all by name and what they had achieved and he stayed interested in them long after they stopped working for him. He

had an ability to see the good in everyone always.

"He could see the potential in everyone and what they could bring to a board table, farm or community. We were very blessed to have had him as our father."

Summary: People matter! Ian Elliott knew that and he lived it.

To many people, Ian was one of the 'men under the stage' - those faithful, humble believers that work behind the scenes to support and encourage others to be all that God has called them to be. It's no surprise that people feel poorer at the loss of such a man, but those that knew him would agree that they are all richer for having known him.

I remember saying this of Chuck Missler and it's true of Ian as well; yes, he was just a man, but a great man. One in whom Jesus was clearly present! | 



Fear or Grace: A game of two touches

By Jeremy Suisted

When I was twelve years old, Cambridge Middle School had a ruler called Johnny. In my whimsical imagination, Johnny stood about 6 feet tall at the age of 10, and weighed over 100 kgs. He was 13. His face was steel. It didn't change emotion.

Johnny didn't share his emotions. He didn't have conversations. He was a bundle of fat-and-muscle, with a hint of untapped rage hiding behind the stone-facade. He wasn't the cool kid. He was the kid you didn't want against you.

Years later, Johnny threw chairs at a teacher and got expelled. He was usually placid, but you sensed there was always the potential that something could explode.

And somehow, I'd chosen to play touch rugby at lunch time, a gangly white boy who was 90% arms and

legs – with Johnny and his posse.

I was never very good at sports, and was worse at touch. I could catch, run and pass – but I didn't understand the strategy and the decision making that made the game work. I still don't.

So I boldly camped out on the wing, attempted to guard my player and generally prayed that the action wouldn't come my way. (I don't know why I played at lunch time – this was voluntary.) But I remember Johnny – my team-mate – making an explosive break

through the defence that belied his weight. He ran, unmarked and with no-one to beat – making a beeline for the try-line.

The opposition had given up. I'd been tailing in support – and for some reason, decided to keep running alongside Johnny. We had 30 meters to go, and no defence. This try was for Johnny to take. 20 meters. 10 meters. 5.

As he approached the final steps and all he needed to do was ground the ball – Johnny slowed and turned. He looked at me.



He saw a skinny, bespectacled boy sprinting alongside him. A guy who didn't belong on the touch-field. Someone whose name he didn't know.

And in a moment of pure grace – and pity – he stopped, and passed the ball to me. He gave me the glory. He allowed me my moment – I could catch the ball, and score a try. This was not a regular occurrence for me.

I knocked the ball on. It bounced out of my hands. The try – whiffed. The opposition would get the ball.

I kept running. I kid you not. I didn't slow down – but kept running, as far away from the field as I could. I wanted to get away. And the cat-calls and mockery that came from behind me made me run faster.

An opportunity given to me. And I had failed. And they let me know it.

MOVING FORWARD

Hop in your DeLorean. Fast forward to 12 years later. I was 24 years old, and was with my Youth Community at Papamoa Beach. A bunch of 16-18 year olds were playing touch rugby on the sand.

These guys and girls were athletic. They could pass a ball further than I could see. Their game was like watching a fast-moving chess match – attacks, feints, covers and motion.

Slowly, a 13 year old kid from our Youth Community began to sidle to the sidelines. This boy had an anxiety disorder, and was

"I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT. MY BAD. HE HAD DELIVERED PERFECTION, AND YET HE GLADLY CLAIMED FAULT – SO THAT THIS 13 YEAR OLD MIGHT KEEP PLAYING."

incredibly quiet. He would come to our events, sit and watch, and go home at the end. When I tried to say "Hello" to him, he would walk away.

He looked like a shorter version of 12 year old me. Gangly and awkward.

The athletes turned to him. I watched, wanting to see what would happen next.

"Come and play with us, bro!" "Join in!"

He looked at his feet. He shrugged. But he made his way to the wing, standing on the very edge of the game.

"Let's go!"

The chess match continued, with one lonely pawn dragging his heels on the sideline. I could tell he was yearning to be part of the action, yet reluctant to make a mistake.

Suddenly, his team made a break. The ball carrier glanced up, and saw the 13 year old, unguarded on the edge. He fired a perfect pass, right in front of him.

The ball spiralled with Platonic perfection. The 13 year old watched it, arcing towards his run.

It slapped against his hands, and bounced in front. He'd knocked it on. His first touch – his moment where he'd risked it all – and he had failed.

I held my breath. Would he keep running? What would happen?

The athlete – a representative for Waikato, someone who had played rugby his entire life – yelled. "No worries bro! My bad."


I'll never forget that. My bad. He had delivered perfection, and yet he gladly claimed fault – so that this 13 year old might keep playing.

An hour later, he was still there. Running in confused circles, never quite in-sync with the rest – and yet he was smiling.

One game of touch was motivated by fear. One was motivated by grace.

Life can be running, motivated by fear – of failure, of others, of imaginary futures that never eventuate.

Or life can be running, called by grace – attempting, trying and stumbling towards the imaginary futures we are invited to participate in.

I default to fear. But I aspire to grace. 

■ 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



GOD IN WORK Resources

By Paul Curtas


In the Business World, resources are assets that we draw upon in order to function effectively. God has provided resources that are absolutely necessary for us to function effectively in the workplace.

First is the provision of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live life in a way that is impossible with our own natural resources.

Next is the Word of God that gives us truth to guide our minds and will and gives us a proper perspective in the way we look at ourselves and our world.

Then there is prayer, our point of access to God, 24/7, where we declare our dependence on Him by taking our requests to Him throughout the day.

Lastly, there is the resource of a connected body of people that allow us to find support and encouragement, as we identify with other Christians in our workplace. How are you utilizing God's resources in your workplace? Consider:

"My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19) | 



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BIBLEWORLD – A Hidden Treasure!

It was around 5 years ago when I first heard about Bibleworld. Somebody gave me a leaflet and said I'd probably find it interesting. Well it did look very interesting – artefacts, exhibitions, 3D models - but the leaflet just sat on my desk for a while, then found its way into a pile of papers before ending up in a box 'to sort'.

It wasn't until my wife went there with the kids on a homeschool trip, and they came back raving about the place that I figured it was time to pay a visit to Bibleworld - New Zealand's first and only museum of the Bible!

Simply put, this is an amazing place (and, no, they didn't pay me to say that!) – full of really interesting exhibits. It's not like a normal museum and it's more than just a discovery centre!

Ross and Sarah Nightingale are an incredible couple. They set up a trust in 2002 after Ross (a microbiologist by trade) received a very clear calling from the Lord to set up a Bible Museum in Rotorua. But rather than open the museum straight away, they spent the next 8 years traveling, studying and preparing to open what was to be 'Bibleworld'.

Having already both completed 4 years of a theological degree in

Melbourne in the late 90's, and then a Masters in Biblical Studies back in NZ, Sarah completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies and then in 2006 they travelled to Europe visiting Greece, Israel, Jordan, Turkey and Italy to learn about and see the archaeological sites and visit museums and ruins.

Then in 2009 they spent several months in the USA to volunteer at a biblical history museum in Georgia.



They also visited several other American Bible museums (including the Creation Museum in Kentucky) and met a number of archaeologists.

Later that year they began experimenting with model making, starting with a simple village house. This was followed by the 1:72 scale model of 'a city under siege', with around 180 small hand painted figures. Since then, they have refined their techniques and constructed many more models.

So, after a clear vision from the Lord in 2002, and 8 years of 'homework', in April 2010 they finally opened the doors of Bibleworld on Eruera Street in Rotorua.

Ross and Sarah are both really nice, normal people, so to a lot of Christians this project might seem a little extreme. I guess I'd have to be pretty sure about a vision from God if I was going to put this much time and energy into it. But that's the thing. They simply responded to God's call on their lives and took it VERY seriously. To be honest I was deeply challenged by their story. Starting Authentic was certainly a challenge for me but I didn't have to spend eight years studying, researching and flying all over the world – if I had it might have never happened (and you'd be reading the newspaper right now!)

When I asked Ross what the main aim and focus for Bibleworld was he replied, "Well it's twofold really; we want to get people excited to learn about the history of the Bible and to encourage people to open their bibles and engage with God's Word – real people doing real things."

What a great answer!



Dave & Ross looking at the Jerusalem model

How wonderful that there is a place that seeks to do this right here in Aotearoa!

As a lover of the Bible myself, I was encouraged that they weren't simply interested in attracting visitors to the centre. They wanted to encourage people to dig into God's Word and find the true

treasure that's in it – which, of course, is ultimately the person of Jesus!

Looking at the exhibits, there certainly is a lot to see but I was keen to know if the vision had been fully realised yet. Apparently not! And although they kept the specifics to themselves (very



5,000-year-old goblet

sensible in my opinion) they did say that they, "...still have lots more ideas for other things we want to develop because we really want to inspire people of all ages to continue learning about the Biblical world."

Today the museum has ten scale models, two interactive maps, a life-size diorama, over 70 genuine, ancient artefacts (including a 2,500-year-old piece of the wall of Babylon from the time of Daniel and a 5,000-year-old cup from a possible site of Sodom or Gomorrah), heaps of replicas and a range of hands on activities.

One of my favourites was the 1:1000 scale model of the city of Jerusalem (see picture). This thing is incredible – and one of only a few in the world with such detail. Being able to see the size and scale of the buildings and the distances the Lord Jesus and His disciples would have walked was amazing.

I assumed Ross must have had extensive art or model making classes, but I discovered he's just one of those annoying people that is just brilliant at something without any training!

When I asked him about this, he said he'd always been 'arty' and had painted a bit when he was young, but the model-making and carving was something he just figures is a God given gift! So, God literally gave him the skill AND the passion to create these models (and patience - it takes many hours to make each model).

The detail on some of the replicas that he has made is mind-blowing.

The full-size replica depicting the Assyrian King 'Tiglath Pileser III' looks like it was carved from a



Brick from Babylon

"BEING ABLE TO SEE THE SIZE AND SCALE OF THE BUILDINGS AND THE DISTANCES THE LORD JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES WOULD HAVE WALKED WAS AMAZING."

slab of stone thousands of years ago. But this 'slab' has been meticulously 'chiselled' to replicate the man the Bible refers to as 'Pul' (See 2 Kings 15:19).

What was really great was seeing the excitement on Ross and Sarah's faces when I asked them about the different responses they've had over the years. From Bible College lecturers getting convicted to read the Old Testament, to 3 year old kids realising that Bible stories were actually true, this couple are well and truly tuned in to the right frequency.

My challenge for you is this: When God calls, how will you respond?


Or what if He already has called you and you've ignored Him!

It's easy to dismiss it. It's easy to say, "It's not for me". But if you want to live a life transformed by the living, active, Lord Jesus, then submitting to Him - His will, His ways – is the first step.

I would definitely recommend you visit Bibleworld. It's amazing. Take the kids. Take your homegroup. Take your mates. You will find it enlightening and interesting.

But you'll also get a little taste of what God can do when we fully surrender every part of our lives to Him.

It's worth it. He's worth it. So worth it.

I'm sure Ross and Sarah would agree. 

Check them out on the interwebs: www.bibleworld.org.nz
- Free admission and ramp access (no stairs!)



Why Socrates was right; *recounting the case for self-awareness*

“Know thyself” said Socrates. Regardless of what he actually meant, the modern case for “knowing thyself” (self-awareness) is well established – at least for most of us. Of those spheres of life where self-awareness is embraced, one of the foremost would have to be the business world where it is used to improve teamwork and boost productivity via various self-awareness assessments. Here too however, opinions vary widely as to the usefulness of these tools. It is in working in this sphere and with one of these tools myself however, that I have become privy to a significant benefit of these assessments to the distinctly Christian act of co-operating with God in one’s own sanctification.

WHAT IS SELF-AWARENESS?

Self-Awareness can mean a number of things but what is in mind here is simply “knowing what one is feeling.” In the

ground-breaking book Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman argued that this knowing was the foundational skill in developing strong Emotional Intelligence. Furthermore, Goleman went on

to say that Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is far more influential in our success than our IQ and the skills we’ve used it to acquire. These days this point has been widely accepted and thus confirmed

AUTHENTIC | CURRENT ISSUES

the need to develop good EQ. The argument goes that those who know their feelings are in a position to do something about them, and conversely that those who don’t are not. Emotional Intelligence is therefore a key attribute in character formation which in turn, is a key component of sanctification (see NT Wright’s “After You Believe; Why Christian Character Matters”).

That our feelings rule so much of both our conscious decisions and automatic behaviour throws up an important question; do our feelings just happen or do they come from somewhere? In other words, do we need to be aware of more than just how we feel? In the psycho-analytical tool The Frame, something happens before feeling...

The order of events begins with ‘seeing’, then moves to ‘feeling’, to ‘doing’, to ‘getting’, and back to ‘seeing’. In other words how we see something affects how we feel about it. On a hike in the woods I see a massive hill climb that is hard and complain “why couldn’t we find an easier walk,” where you see an opportunity to get some great views and test yourself. We each then feel a certain way, act in accordance and get a different outcome. This then influences what we will see next time. But now we’re at another question; what influences the way we

“AS MUCH AS WE MIGHT TRY TO BEAT A CERTAIN TRAIT OUT OF OUR CHILDREN, OURSELVES OR EACH OTHER, IF IT IS A PERSONALITY ISSUE – HOW WE ARE MADE – THE TRAIT REMAINS... WE ARE WHO WE ARE.”

see? Here the answer is “almost everything;” our upbringing, our culture, our experiences earlier today and throughout our life, our personality, our beliefs, and so on. All of this coalesces together to produce certain tendencies to see things a certain way. Yes it’s that complicated, and this is why it’s difficult for the various self-awareness assessments to be ‘right-on’ with their results. But asking these tools to describe one’s self fully and completely is like asking healthy eating to keep us out of the doctor’s surgery whilst ignoring healthy exercise and healthy sleeping habits. The reality is, healthy eating affects all of our body (100%), as does exercising (100%) and our regime of rest (100%). Similarly, our personality affects 100% of behaviour, as does our character (100%), our upbringing (100%), our beliefs (100%), and so on. This is over and above the idea that our behaviour is the sum of a little bit of this and a little bit of that (eg. 30% personality, 20% character, 50% upbringing).

That we each have these tendencies to ‘see’ things a certain way goes a long way to explaining how and why two people can read the Bible and come away with two different understandings. Theologians have been forced to accept that we can never be unbiased interpreters of Scripture. Seemingly following Socrates, but placing self-awareness within a pursuit of God, John Calvin himself observes; “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

BACK TO ASSESSMENT TOOLS...

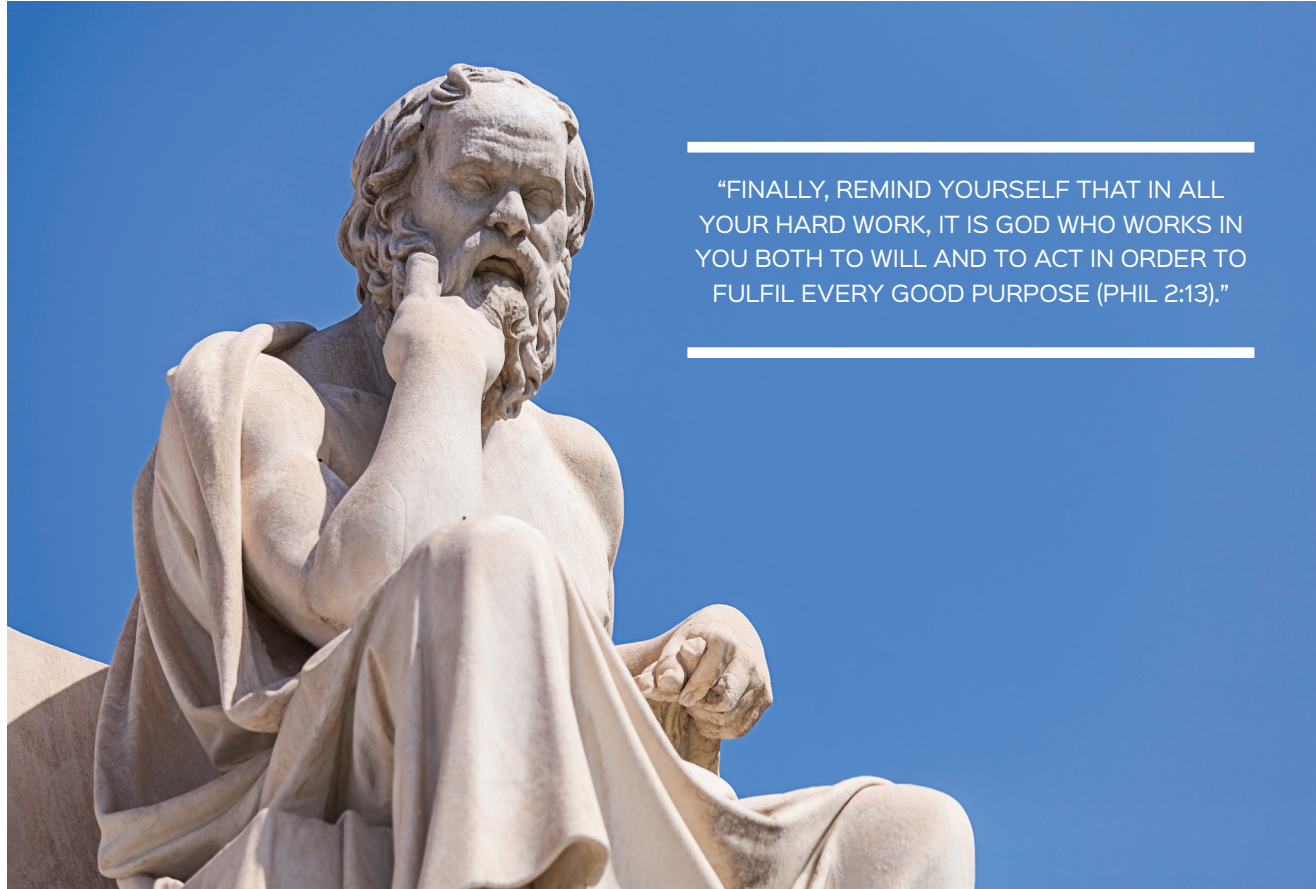
It is my experience that the

coaching conversation that follows the self-awareness assessment goes a long way to unpacking how people ‘see.’ Like our God, there is a part of us where we just are who we are (referring to God’s great self-disclosure to Moses, Exodus 3:14)... it just simply is our personality to be extroverted or introverted or a bit of both, to be a people person or a task person or again, a bit of both. As much as we might try to beat a certain trait out of our children, ourselves or each other, if it is a personality issue – how we are made – the trait remains... we are who we are. What is really needed is this aforementioned awareness, acceptance and a commitment to making these traits work for ourselves and those around us.

Moreover, it is in the conversation (rather than the online assessment) that one is able to investigate how our “other parts” interact; our beliefs, upbringing, etc. And then there’s the distinct language and thinking supplied that helps speed up the process of self-exploration. Admittedly assessment tools are seldom used for helping with sanctification and so these sorts of conversations are scattered at best. The potential is somewhat latent... but it is a potential that I have become privy to – one of the benefits of being a coach I guess.

SHOULD THE CHURCH USE SELF-AWARENESS ASSESSMENTS?

No, but I clearly, I believe it would be helpful. The provisos would be; getting a good process, a good coach, and being in the right place to engage in such work. There is another option however, a tried and true way to self-awareness, it is an ancient way, and it is the original way; live in community... be committed to a local church. I




"FINALLY, REMIND YOURSELF THAT IN ALL YOUR HARD WORK, IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU BOTH TO WILL AND TO ACT IN ORDER TO FULFIL EVERY GOOD PURPOSE (PHIL 2:13)."

don't mean to pick a fight – I'm not naïve about people's difficulties and troubles – and I will let the definition of "local church" be broad, but I do want to be clear that I believe self-awareness was in mind when God created mankind to live in community. Indeed, it's this awareness of how we're made that facilitates getting in behind the "image of God" we are made in – to live it fully for His glory. Yes living in community is tricky, and no, your local church may not be getting it right – like so much of what God made, sin has seriously undermined the benefits of living in community. But if you're willing to align yourself with God's original intentions for how to live, this living in community part does bear benefits for self-awareness.

Either way – by self-awareness assessment and process or living in community, or both (now we're talking...!), I want to [highly] commend the work of self-awareness; to understand what's behind why you feel a certain way – why you 'see' things a certain way.... And in so doing may your Emotional Intelligence be boosted, and likewise with the corresponding character strength you'll need to grow rightly. Finally, remind yourself that in all your hard work, it is God who works in you both to will and to act in order to fulfil every good purpose (Phil 2:13). And in time I trust that you too will see that after all, Socrates was right.

While personality testing could offer the church much to aid its teamwork and productivity that's not the

main point here. Rather it is that by understanding our own personality better (and of course, those around us), we're better set up to understand our tendencies to see things a certain way, how we then feel and act, and why we get the kind of results we do. This boosts our Emotional Intelligence that we use to cooperate with God in our character growth and sanctification.

As we mature in this way, we pray as David did "But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults" (Ps 19:12), we continue to study his word (Ps 19:7-11) and we seek to get on with living the Christian life, serving God and His church in our own unique ways – all of which are helped by this growing maturity. | 



■ Steve Parker is the director and coach of HEAF (Human Excellence And Flourishing). He is an accredited coach with Strength Network South Pacific and an outdoor instructor. Visit www.heaf.co.nz to find out more

Bible Study... *Chuck's Way!*

In May 2018 Chuck Missler went to be with the Lord. His passion for teaching God's Word was infectious and countless thousands of men and women from all over the world were blessed and encouraged by his teaching. In this article Chuck explains his own personal method for studying the Bible.

I have often been asked to provide some personal perspectives and general comments regarding the study and teaching of God's Word in a Home Bible Study setting. I have always been convinced that Home Bible Studies are where the "real action" is for committed Christians. There are no hard and fast rules regarding how to prepare for or conduct a Home Bible Study, but there are some principles which may prove helpful.

FOCUS

One of the key secrets to a successful Home Bible Study, in my experience, has been to focus on an expositional study, expounding upon the text. There is a simplicity and a fruitfulness to focusing on what God has said in His Word, addressing one specific book of the Bible at a time. This has proven to be one of the most effective means to laying an in-depth

foundation that will last a lifetime, and which will ultimately cover "the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27)

PREPARATION

My personal method is simplicity itself. After serious prayer, and having selected a target book for study, I then collect a few selected commentaries on that particular book. I prefer to buy my own, so I can mark them up and annotate

the margins. Commentaries are not expensive, and they will quickly take their place among your most treasured investments.

WHAT PACE?

Another issue is the tempo or pace of the study. I have found that for most books of the Bible, a chapter each week is usually about the right pace. This allows some real in-depth exploration without getting bogged down in too many details or tangents. There are, of course, portions of Scripture (especially in the epistles) that merit a more measured and penetrating pace, but you can lose your group's attention if you don't keep it moving.

After careful and repeated rereading of the chapter for the coming week, I simply glean the insights from each of several commentaries, underlining and annotating as I go. It's not difficult to stay a chapter or so ahead of your group. As the day of the study approaches, I prayerfully collect my notes from the annotations in each of my sources. It's not difficult or burdensome to gather enough to contribute a valid understanding of the chapter to be discussed. Along the way, some specific topics or issues will emerge, lending themselves to more specific investigation. This is where some easily available supplemental resources-such as a Bible encyclopedia or dictionary-can be handy.

WHERE TO START?

One of the most frequent questions I get is, "Which book should I start with?" There are many sound answers. Which book interests you the most? I startle many with the suggestion of starting with the Book of Revelation!

It is the only book in the Bible that declares a special blessing on the reader and hearer! No other book singles itself out in that respect. One of the reasons it is always such a special blessing is that a proper review will include supporting passages from virtually every other book of the Bible. (The 404 verses of Revelation include over 800 allusions from the Old Testament!) It puts God's entire plan of redemption into focus-from Genesis to Revelation.

Another sound suggestion is the Gospel of John. It has been said that it is shallow enough for a child to wade in, and deep enough for an elephant to bathe in! No matter how diverse your group-from the novice to the sophisticate-all will benefit from going through this book again. It deals with all of the basics. I've taught it many times

and each time results in new discoveries!

Other suggestions include the book of beginnings-the Book of Genesis, the prophetic Book of Ruth, or the Book of Acts. You can really start anywhere. Let the Holy Spirit lead you. He always knows best, if you're listening. And here's another incentive: there's no way to better learn a specific book than to teach it.


THE ROLE OF PRAYER

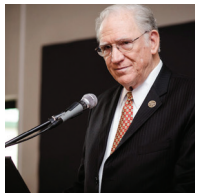
Prayer is, of course, your most formidable weapon. You need to be in prayer continually in preparing for the study; you must always open in prayer; and you need to have a prayer team committed to continuing to hold up the study in prayer. It is a warfare, after all.

"ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENT QUESTIONS I GET IS,
"WHICH BOOK SHOULD I START WITH?"



It should be understood that these brief comments are merely suggestions for teaching the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher and He will teach you in ways that can neither be manipulated nor regulated.

His diversity and style is very individual. My personal prayer is that Jesus would reveal and teach His Word to you in ways that you could never have imagined, and that you would take to heart the words of the apostle Paul: "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another..." (Colossians 3:16) | 



■ 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.



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The True Definition of Radical

By Eric Ludy



In the 80's the word "radical" was actually in fashion – or was that the 90's? Whenever it was, it's embarrassing to reminisce, because the word these days is anything but hip and in vogue. Today, "radical" is a synonym for "human being with screw loose." Images of wiry unkempt hair, wild maniacal eyes, and a horrible case of Turrets seem to subconsciously dance through the mind. Let's admit it – the word "radical" has lost its cool edge and now appears more on America's Most Wanted posters than on the lips of those that seek to be culturally kosher.

To be honest, I don't like the word at all. However, a true Christian seeking to live out the plain-spoken words of Christ, is going to be hard-pressed to avoid that unpleasant word from attaching itself to their every action. The word "radical" in relation with bravehearted Christianity is kind of like coos with babies, oohs with sunsets, and blues with jazz – it just kind of comes with the package.

Let me give you a for-instance. One day my wife Leslie and I got a letter from our dear friend, Jolene, in Montana. This girl is serious about her Christianity. She's sort of a spunky modern-day Gladys Aylward – bravehearted to the core, Christ-adoring, and a lover of the least. Girls like Jolene are considered "normal" in Leslie's and my worldview. But to this world, she's, you might say . . . cough . . . ahem . . . "radical."

Jolene was a twenty-seven-year old single girl at the time. Talented and full of energy to change this world. She's got all it takes to make money, find success, and live this life according to the modern prescription. But there's something that is sort of messing with her normalcy. You see, Jolene has Jesus. In fact, she has Jesus in a measure that has forever altered her and has made her rather strange to this world about.

So, as the story goes, this girl with so much potential, said to God, "Whatever you wish to do with my life, do it!" And that's when things started going a bit, how should I say? . . . *radical*.

Suddenly Jolene was awakened to the foster care system and all the many thousands of kids that are suffering. This young single girl asked God to allow her to help – to do something to make a difference. That's when Jolene was introduced to Justin, a thirteen-year-old boy, in desperate need of an advocate. So Jolene took this young boy in. Yes, you heard me correctly, Jolene, who is a twenty-seven year old *single* girl took this needy thirteen-year-old boy in as her foster son.

The story is something straight out of a classic Christian biography. So, this same Jolene sent Leslie and I a letter. It was like receiving a letter from Gladys Aylward herself.

Listen to what it said:

Life has been a little wild lately. Last week I got my official letter stating my teaching job has been terminated and this is simultaneous with the beginnings of Justin's adoption. An interesting combination I must say!

Okay, stop right there. Nothing that far out of the ordinary, right? Yes, the fact that she is even trying to adopt a thirteen year old from the foster care system is a bit over-the-top, but everything else is sort of everyday life for many of us. Well, let's keep reading.

God is in control of all things, and He will work out all the details. It's a learning process for sure.

At first I found myself using my adoption of Justin as an excuse for being upset over losing my job, but God quickly squashed that. He

asked me to take Justin in and He also is in control of my job status. My job is to simply trust and obey. Now, we are starting to get a bit more "radical" here. This is not the way a normal human responds to such adversity. She seems a bit too calm, don't you think?

Let's put the recipe together: One cup singleness, one cup needy thirteen-year-old boy, and one cup terminated job. Normally when you mix those three things together you get violent explosions and fireworks displays of dramatic panic attacks – but not in this little bravehearted girl.

Now, I'm going to skip over the part of her letter that details all the miraculous things happening in Justin's adoption process. It's great stuff but a little off topic for this article. And let's go straight to the part where she starts professing her feelings about the adoption:

"GOD IS IN CONTROL OF ALL THINGS, AND HE WILL WORK OUT ALL THE DETAILS. IT'S A LEARNING PROCESS FOR SURE."



I believe with every ounce of my being that lives will be radically altered through this adoption process.

Did you notice the word “radically” in her last sentence. Her word, not mine.

I am not called to the children only, but rather, to reach out to the lost and broken families. God has also clearly shown that I am to take in the lost and forgotten – the children in danger of “aging” out of the system and being dumped into the world all alone. Not if I have anything to say! I visit the

adoption websites daily and the only thing holding me back from having a houseful of dysfunctional kids to cherish are the state regulations. But God is bigger than those. I recently had God challenge my heart. I was determined that I would adopt 20 kids during my time on earth. God has recently challenged me with 50 – foster/ adopted children. I can't wait!!

Okay, does anyone see anything in that last little literary string that is strange and not of this world? This world would call such effusion of emotion and excitement “cuckoo” – they would call it “extreme” – and,

let's be honest, they just might tag it, (ahem) “radical.”

And let me say, if this is the definition of “radical,” then let that stigma also rest on me. And not just me, on you as well. And not just you, but every other Truth-loving Christian who desires to bring fame to their Risen King.

Whether we like the word “radical,” or not, the word is reserved for those of us that come to Jesus and say, in concert with that twenty-seven year old single girl named Jolene, “Lord; whatever you wish to do with my life, do it!” **LA**

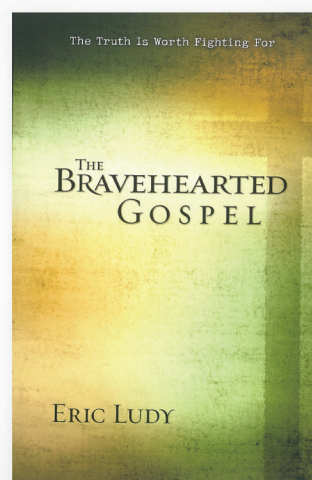
■ Eric Ludy - pastor, author and the president of Ellerslie Mission Society. www.Ericludy.com



DO YOU WANT TO BE ENCOURAGED BY ERIC LUDY?



His blog at Ericludy.com



His books at Braveheartedstore.com

LOVE, DOUBT and somewhere inbetween

By Jeremy Suisted



There's a small verse, tucked away at the end of Psalm 138 that has always captured my attention. The Psalmist sings,

*“The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.”*
What do you hear as you read this aloud?

I'm struck by the bold confidence that the writer begins with. He is certain that amidst the volatile nature of a changing world – God will fulfil His purpose for him. Whatever promises God has proclaimed, whatever hopes God has whispered to this person – they are confident that they will come to pass.

He then bursts into a spontaneous outbreak of worship, shouting out that the enduring, covenantal love of this God continues on forever.

This writer knows that kings will come and go. Empires will rise and fall. Wealth will transfer like the unpredictable Wall Street charts.

And yet the *hesed*, the never-quitting love of this God will be a constant. It is the first-principle. It is what all else can be grounded on. God has created out of love, and continues to be driven by love.

But then this final phrase. While the cymbal clash of praise is still resounding, there is this whisper that comes from the quiet place we've all known.

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

At first glance, this writing almost seems schizophrenic. Why is this writer fluctuating from confidence, to praise, to doubt – in the space of three lines? Surely this is not a model of faith?

And yet, in my most honest moments, I recognise that this is so often my journey of faith. I, too, can display acts of trust and faithfulness that surprise me. And then, often within this security of confidence, I can suddenly doubt all that seemed so true, whispering “If you're out there...” moments after exclaiming “Hallelujah!”

Rather than being an outlying case of a mentally strained individual, I see this verse as one of the most honest and universal calls of those who are following Jesus.

We believe, we praise, and we

“BECAUSE THAT’S WHAT HE ASKS US TO DO. I DON’T THINK GOD DELIGHTS IN OUR DOUBT AND UNBELIEF. I DON’T THINK HE WANTS US TO BE DOUBTING –”

doubt. Sometimes, paradoxically, all at the same time. It reminds me of the man, coming to Jesus with his epileptic son. Stop there, for a second.

Isn't it amazing that we can rush on through this story, without pausing to hold the weight of it? Have I ever thought of this man's life? The hope and joy at his son's birth. The fear and confusion at the sight of his son's first seizure. The anger at the injustice. The desire to take this burden off his child. The hope that he had been healed when it had been a long time between seizures. The despair when they came again.

This man – carrying this story, with this emotion churning away in his flesh and blood – comes to Jesus. He has heard stories of healing – he is hopeful. And yet – he has no doubt been disappointed before. Perhaps he has gone to other religious figures. Maybe he's taken the boy to the local religious gathering for prayer.

Jesus speaks to him, saying, “All things are possible for one who believes!”

And this hurting hopeful man cries out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

So much of life is lived in this place. I believe. Help my unbelief.

I can sing *The Creed*, and also be asking God to help me with my doubts. I can be speaking at a

youth event or church about faith, and be unsure that I'm doing what God wants me to do. I can pray for a friend, when I'm desperately awaiting a prayer to be answered – unsure if God will answer it.

And I love that God includes this prayer in the His prayer book. He tells us it's OK – no, he encourages us – to pray this prayer. To say – in one breath – “God you'll do what you're going to do, I believe it – please don't abandon me, please do it.”

Because that's what He asks us to do. I don't think God delights in our doubt and unbelief. I don't think he wants us to be doubting – He'd probably prefer it if we could omit that last line.

But He does delight when His children come to Him. Over and above our faith or doubt, He joys in our love. And it's love – bold and divine love – when we can sing, whisper or pray to the object of our desire – “I'm doubtful in you, please help me.”

Love surpasses cognition. It can transcend reason. And although we see only dimly – sometimes because the clouds of life have darkened our view – it is love when we can cling to the rock in whom we both love and doubt. And, so often, we discover that He is the rock who clings back. **IA**



■ 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

EASTERFEST

By Dave Firth

Something exciting is happening in Taupō!

I met Locky McNeill in a cafe on the lakefront in Taupō. He seems to have a vision beyond what a lot of people might see as the role of a pastor. He leads the Elim church in the town and he wants to see the Church in Taupō ‘do things together that we can't do apart’ - cool vision in my opinion!

After a very nice flat white, we chatted about what had happened in Taupo these last few years and what the future looks like. It was exciting. Here's a summary of our conversation:

So what exactly is Easterfest?

“Our heart is to bring together the best of the Taupo Church and provide a free, family-friendly Easter experience in one of the most beautiful places in New Zealand. Easterfest is a Christian Festival in the traditional sense (music and guest speakers), but we also want to create an even bigger,

more interactive experience for the community.

Easter is a very important time for us as believers and we want to share it as best we can with as many as we can. We want to share the real story of Easter with the people of New Zealand.”

How did the idea develop?

Some years ago a lady called Teri Walker approached the Taupo Ministers Group to see if we would support creating Easterfest in our place and context. Many of us had heard of a similar Australian festival by the same name and were keen to explore what this could mean.

As Churches we already had our own Easter programmes, in our own spaces and places.

Easterfest enabled us to do what we already did plus, because of the

scale of working together, we could do something even larger as well.

To our amazement things really took off. TVNZ came and did a story on Easterfest during our



Good Friday Service, which gave us some incredible national exposure.

That really set the scene and it has been an amazing journey ever since.

You're a pastor at Elim Church. Who else is involved?

Just about every Church here in Taupo is involved which is why it's achievable.

That's why I say *"we do things together that we could never do apart"*.

We all give of our time, resources and skills, especially when it comes to events like the Family Fun Day (which attracted over 7,500 people last year).

Some Churches have specific skills we utilise well. For example Advance Church are awesome at handling the production of events where we present the Gospel. Other Churches, like Elim, help bring people together and lead the combined Church Services.

So, what are the challenges of coordinating an event like this with several churches?

The two biggest are 'ego' and 'money'!

Ego - it is something that relationship helps deal to, but also it can be an unspoken threat.

Every Church needs to feel a sense of ownership in Easterfest but also recognise no single Church can own it.

We can each bring most of our culture and values to the event and also leave some behind for the greater good. Kind of like the 80/20 rule. I can bring 80% max of Elim and leave 20% behind. When you don't do that, clashes can happen



pretty much straight away...

Money - with the desire to host a festival that is free (or mostly free) the challenge is then "how do we fund it?"

So, generally we do it via donations, funding, sponsors and offerings. Every Church gives what they can.

We are always looking at funding models and potential income streams to achieve the goal of growing Easterfest whilst keeping it sustainable.

Do you ever think about giving up?

Unfortunately, yes - of course!

I face the regular tension of the privilege of leading my Elim Church whilst navigating this amazing opportunity to present Easter to a broader audience. It all takes energy and time.

Finding the balance in our leading responsibilities and personal life is a challenge we all have to face.

Would my life and ministry be easier if I wasn't leading both the Taupo Elim Church and Easterfest? Of course! - but I don't regret it or the opportunity God is giving us. I just have to learn to deal with it proactively.

Tell us about your personal faith journey.

I moved to Auckland to become a world famous rock and roll star many years ago.

In the middle of trying to make that happen, a Church began to pray for me because they wanted a new electric guitarist and I worked with someone from that Church. From that I gave my life to Christ one day in the shower and thought I should check out a Church. On Sunday night I went to what was South City Elim and began serving the Kingdom of God in whatever way possible and have done so ever since.

In 2009 my wife and I answered the call to come to Taupo and lead the Elim Church here.

It has been an amazing journey so far!

How has God wired you for what He has called you to?

I want to do big things.

I want to make a difference.

I want to do things sometimes that others would run away from or think seems too hard or even impossible.

Leading a Church and Easterfest, along with the others projects I work on here in Taupo, taps into that for me.

Faith, to me, should be adventurous, have an element of danger, and also sometimes can have a risk of failure. Living that out helps shape us and gives following Christ even more meaning and purpose.

Any encouragement for others looking to get churches working together?

Any great God given idea can work if you are prepared to invest in relationship.

Without relationship, the commitment to it and its growth, makes it hard to sustain.

Many years before our first Easterfest I led the Taupo Pastors on a journey to developing the basics of seeing relationship as a priority. That is why we can do Easterfest together - because of the relationship we have, we are committed to work stuff through.

How will this year's Easterfest be different?

After 3 years of doing, learning and growing, we definitely are wanting to continue to develop the festival. Teri Walker has moved on to other ministry opportunities and we've pulled together a new team to lead us onto the next stages of Easterfest development.



This year we are adding new components to broaden our reach and appeal. With a goal of Easterfest having something for absolutely everyone, we are adding a youth-focused event, there are clinics on sign language, extremely varied speaker presentations and loads of other stuff.

It's also important to plan far beyond this year's event, where in 2020 we are moving to a larger venue for our key performances and services. Plans are well underway to bring a major performance group to our shores from overseas and also incorporating a family-friendly street performers show over the entire weekend.

So, what's the ultimate goal of Easterfest?

For the event to grow and bless and develop all at the same time. But also with the goal that, behind the scenes, we as Churches, leaders and God's people, grow and bless and develop as well.

Jesus is coming back for His bride - not just one Church or one group. It seems to me that part of that process could be learning to work together more appropriately.

If I think of what Easterfest could be - what I dream for it - is that it grows to be a special event for believers

from across the nation.


We are not looking to copy other festivals, but learn from them. Easterfest can be something unique all because of its foundations, of *'churches doing something that they could never do apart.'*

This is all encouraging stuff! So, what do you need and how can people pray for Easterfest?

We need to get the word out even broader than we have done and invite others to partner with us. We want to let people know of our desire to invite them to consider making Taupo their destination of choice each Easter. To maybe see Easterfest as a type of pilgrimage (not in the weird way).

We would also like to find people and organisations - whoever God prompts to partner with us - to help build and develop this festival.

God gave us the vision for Easterfest.

And that vision is now the dream of a team, and that team needs to grow as the dream unfolds! 

Please pray for the Churches of Taupo over the Easter period.

You can find out more by visiting www.easterfest.nz

Grace *and* Life

By Charlie McCall

Grace is a big deal.

We are saved by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9). We are sustained by the grace of God (II Cor. 12:9). We stand in the grace of God (Rom. 5:2). It would be hard to overestimate the importance of the doctrine of grace. It is essential to the Gospel and all that we believe about salvation and the Christian life. But did you know that grace is not an end in itself? Romans 5:21 says that the purpose of grace is to lead us to eternal life. A person can know the grace of God without knowing eternal life.

Whenever sin is on the increase, grace abounds all the more (Rom. 5:20). God is gracious to everyone. He causes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. You don't need to be a Christian to know the grace of God. You don't need to be a good person to know God's grace. All

unbelievers, all who sin, experience God's grace, although they may not acknowledge it. The more they sin, the more His grace abounds. You don't need to be saved to know God's grace. However, God's grace is not the end goal. Eternal life is.

Paul asks in Romans 6:1, "Shall we continue in sin that grace might increase?" His answer: "May it never be!" Paul hates the question. He does not, though, reject the premise that he established in Romans 5:20 that with increased sin comes increased grace. What he rejects is the proposition that

we should sin more in order to see more grace. His response to that proposition is in two parts.

First, Paul argues that the purpose of being saved is so that we would be delivered from sin, not so that we would continue in it. Some people believe that a person can't be saved and continue in sin.

In Romans 6:12-14 Paul exhorts Christians to not let sin reign in their mortal bodies, to stop

presenting themselves to sin, and to stop living with sin as their master. Clearly, Paul is saying that people can be saved and yet have sin reigning in them and ruling over them. But that shouldn't be the case! We weren't saved simply to know the grace of God. We were saved so that we would be delivered from sin.

Second, we were saved to know life. Paul says that we were crucified with Christ, buried with Him, and raised to the newness of life (6:4). At the end of the chapter he says that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (6:23).

Here's what I believe Paul is saying: We haven't been saved to simply experience God's grace, we've been saved so that we can be set free from sin and so that we might experience His life, the newness of life.

God wants you to have life and experience life. He doesn't just want you to know His grace. You can live in sin and experience God's grace but you won't experience His life because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Keep in mind that Romans 6:23 is spoken to Christians, not unbelievers. It is the climax in Paul's answer to the question why a Christian shouldn't continue in sin.

Jump over to Romans 8:13 and Paul says to the Christian that the one who is living according to the flesh must die, but the one who is living according to the Spirit ("by the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body") will live.

So Paul again says that a Christian,

"GOD WANTS YOU TO HAVE LIFE AND EXPERIENCE LIFE. HE DOESN'T JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW HIS GRACE."


one who has eternal life, can live in such a way as to not experience the life that he received when he received Christ. That is because he is living from the flesh (his own resources, ability, humanity) rather than from the Spirit.

Present yourselves to Christ and you will experience His life. Continue in sin and you will experience death, while also experiencing God's grace.

People are great on preaching grace. That's a good thing. We are saved by grace, stand in grace, and are sustained by grace – but grace was meant to lead us to eternal life.

I personally want to know more than grace. I can know grace by simply continuing to sin. I want to know His life. I want others to know His life. We are offering people nothing if our grace-talk is not bringing people to eternal life in Christ – positionally (salvation) and experientially (sanctification).

Grace is a big deal. Life is an even bigger deal. Grace is meant to lead people to eternal life.

May we each know God's grace for leading people to life in Christ. | 

■ 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

Do you trust Jesus?

By Nathan Johnson



Do you trust Jesus?

Interesting question I know. And most of us would be quick to respond with a resounding “Yes!” But pause just a moment, do you actually trust Him?

In a moment of crisis, when worry and anxiety knocks at your door, when the pressure of life presses upon you – is your first turn Jesus? Do you throw yourself fully upon Him with confidence that He, and only He is the solution? Do you fully place your hope, faith, and trust in Him?

We know what the right answer is suppose to be, but how do we live in reality? Do we truly trust Jesus or do we place our confidence in something else?

We must remember that anytime we run toward anything besides Jesus, our trust and faith is misplaced. Sure, there might appear to be a moment of calm if we turn to our own wisdom, or finances, or our ability ... but it is fleeting. We might long to wallow in the misery or worry, thinking that perhaps the punishment of the moment might satiate reality.

But turning to anything besides Jesus only leads to disillusionment, despair, and discouragement. We need Jesus. And we must put our hope and trust in Him. Proverbs 3:5-6 commands us to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”

Psalm 37:7 says it slightly different with the emphasis on “rest.” The passage declares: “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.”

Isaiah likewise reminds us, “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation’” (Isaiah 12:2). And Jeremiah writes, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:7).

BUT HOW DO WE BEGIN TO TRUST JESUS?

Trust is built by consistently and faithfully living out one’s word.

If I told you that I’d meet you at 7am tomorrow morning for coffee, but I showed up at 7:20, you might not think anything about it. But if am always late, then when I say 7am, you’d know that likely won’t be true. Yet if I am always on time and have never been late, you

know you can trust my word.

If you lose trust with someone, how do you gain trust back? You must faithfully prove oneself over time. Trust takes time. So how do we begin to build a greater trust in Jesus? Look at His faithfulness and character.

He is the Faithful One. He is Faithful and True. He cannot lie for He is truth itself. He has always been faithful – turn to any page in your Bible and you will be overwhelmed by the faithfulness of our amazing God.

His timing is often not ours, but He has only ever been faithful.

Paul even reminds us that even “if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

The question is not “is Jesus trustworthy?” The better question is, “since He is trustworthy, do I trust Him?”

No matter what you may be going through, make your first turn Jesus Christ.

Do you trust Him? Really? | 



Men that Kiss their Wives

By Carlos Rodriguez

We come to love not by finding a perfect person, but by learning to see an imperfect person perfectly.

A few months ago my wife and I went on a 3-day-love-extravaganza trip to New York City. We saw zero landmarks. No Statue of Liberty, no Madison Square Garden, not even the top of the Empire State building. We chose to focus on each other. We ate the foods we wanted to eat together. Walked the streets we wanted to walk together. And remembered again why we sleep next to each other every day.

The last two years, Catherine and I have been on a journey of healing that has brought us closer (even when it had the potential to tear us apart). We have been through marriage counseling, painful conversations and lots of red wine.

And the discovery of, "I am at fault" and "I need to change" became the most liberating thing. The perfect invitation to surrender.

I took ownership of my stupidity. I started to embrace my weakness. And I began to prioritize my wife.

I write this because I am still growing and learning. And I invite us, men, to become more self-aware. To stop making excuses. And to try a few of these:

1. KISS HER ON THE WAY OUT:

If you want to be happy, healthy, successful, and live longer, give your spouse a kiss before you go to work each day.

"HAPPILY EVER AFTER IS NOT A FAIRY TALE. IT'S A DAILY CHOICE."

A study found that those who kiss their spouse each morning get sick less often. They also have fewer auto accidents. They earn 25 percent more monthly and they live about five years more than those who don't even give each other a kiss. The reason for this, says Dr. Sazbo, is that the kissers begin the day with a positive attitude. A kiss signifies a sort of seal of approval, offer Sazbo and his colleagues, and they believe, those who don't experience it, go out the door feeling not quite right about themselves.

2. DON'T WATCH PORN:

Stop making excuses. Find a couple of friends and be accountable. God loves you even when you struggle with porn, but He loves you (and your wife) too much to leave you struggling. Don't miss out from the best-sex-ever with your lady, because you're wasting your time having the worst sex ever with yourself.

3. SURPRISE AND DELIGHT:

Stop waiting for Valentine's day, her birthday or your anniversary. Everyone else does that. You are in a league of your own, brother. Go ahead and make today memorable. Find the gift she's been talking about for months and get it for her, or buy flowers on your way from work, or actually sit down and write a love letter. Yes, a love letter. It's not about what you want to do, it's about making the most special person in your life feel like the most special person in your life.

4. GIVE UP CONTROL:

Being a controlling *macho man* is so 1952. Stop watching Mad Men. Read *Wild at Heart* properly. True strength is permission, freedom and honor. My wife is at her best when I respect and value what she wants. She responds with gratitude when I stop trying to dominate her and I begin to validate her dreams and desires. I give her space to hang out with her friends, to go ride horses, to be Catherine without Carlos. Yes, some days I hate it! Selfish-me gets frustrated. However, it always comes back to me in good things



HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO FINDS A TRUE FRIEND, AND HAPPIER IS HE WHO FINDS THAT TRUE FRIEND IN HIS WIFE.

(time, space, fun, rice and beans etc). And more and more I am realising that this is exactly how God loves all of us. He has never taken away our free-will. Never will. Because true love is permission, it's freedom, it's honor. And He loves well.

5. LEARN HER:

These lists can be helpful. I write a few, and I read a lot. Nevertheless, every woman is different. No list is complete. Sometimes they can even be more damaging than helpful. So stop reading this junk and start asking the right questions. Talk to your queen about her wants, joys, frustrations and dreams. Do not take it personally if it contradicts you. Listen to understand her, don't listen to defend yourself.


And start moving in the direction of friendship. Find the things that connect you both and prioritize them above everything else. You will end your days next to her, not with your boss, pastor, leader or beer buddy... She's your true comrade, your partner in crime, your best friend.

It's both of you, against the world.

MY CHALLENGE TO YOU IS THIS:

Are you brave enough to say sorry? To embrace your role as her husband, hero, lover, servant? Are you willing to try things that are out of your comfort zone for the sake of her comfort?

This is real manhood. This is where it's at.

So why are you still reading? Open a bottle of wine, kiss her like you mean it, and start re-discovering your most valuable human relationship. | 



■ Carlos Rodríguez is a pastor, a provocative preacher and author.

THE ULTIMATE INJUSTICE

The Day We Were Freed

By Chuck Missler

Each Easter season we celebrate the series of injustices that led to the conviction of the innocent and the acquittal of the guilty.

There were six trials that fateful night: three Jewish trials - before Annas,¹ before Caiaphas,² and before the Sanhedrin;³ and three Roman trials - before Pilate,⁴ before Herod,⁵ and then again before Pilate.⁶

It is particularly disturbing to discover that virtually every legal detail was contrary to the prevailing laws which had been designed to protect the innocent.

LEGAL IRREGULARITIES

The binding of a prisoner before he was condemned was unlawful unless resistance was offered or expected. Jesus offered none.⁷ It was illegal for judges to participate in the arrest of the accused.⁸

No legal transactions, including a trial, could be conducted at night.⁹ The arrest was effected through

the agency of an informer and traitor.¹⁰ While an acquittal could be pronounced the same day, any other verdict required a majority of two and had to come on a subsequent day.¹¹

No prisoner could be convicted on his own evidence.¹² It was the duty of a judge to see that the interest of the accused was fully protected.¹³ Preliminary hearings before a magistrate were completely foreign to the Jewish legal system.¹⁴

It was illegal to carry weapons on a feast day.¹⁵ The use of violence

during the trial was apparently unopposed by the judges.¹⁶ It was illegal to conduct a session of the court on a feast day.¹⁷

The judges sought false witnesses against Jesus.¹⁸ In a Jewish court, the accused was to be assumed innocent until proven guilty by two or more witnesses.¹⁹ The Jews failed to find two witnesses agreeing against Jesus.²⁰

When the witnesses first disagreed, the prisoner should have been released.²¹ No witness was ever called for the defense.²²

The trial under Caiaphas took place in his home rather than the council chamber where it should have been held.²³ The Court lacked the civil authority to condemn a man to death.²⁴

The high priest rent his garment. He was never permitted to tear his official robe. (If he did not have on his priestly robe, he couldn't have put Christ under oath.)

A guilty verdict was rendered without evidence.²⁵ The balloting was illegal. It should have been by roll with the youngest voting first. Here it is simultaneous.²⁶ The sentence was finally passed in the palace of the high priest, but the law demanded it be pronounced in the Temple, in the hall of hewn stone.²⁷

WHY NO DEFENSE?

We often ponder the fact that no defense was made. This was, of course, according to the prophecies of the Old Testament: "He opened not His mouth."²⁸

Do you know why? *Because He was in our shoes:* and we are guilty.

It is significant that He was pronounced innocent by the personal representative of the ruler of the world.²⁹ Even Satan, having entered into Judas, declared His innocence.³⁰ To fully understand our own predicament, we need to examine more carefully Barabbas!

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BARABBAS

The substitution of Barabbas over Jesus before Pilate on that fateful day has profound implications for each of us. It is illuminating to examine the contrast between the two accused more closely:

- 1) Barabbas stood under the righteous condemnation of the law.
- 2) Barabbas knew the One who was to take his cross and take his place was innocent.
- 3) Barabbas knew that Jesus Christ was for him a true substitute.
- 4) Barabbas knew that he had done nothing to merit going free while another took his place.

WE OFTEN PONDER THE FACT THAT NO DEFENSE WAS MADE. THIS WAS, OF COURSE, ACCORDING THE PROPHECIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: "HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH."

5) Barabbas knew Christ's death was for him perfectly efficacious.

Barabbas and Jesus changed places! "The murderer's bonds, curse, disgrace, and mortal agony were transferred to the righteous Jesus; while the liberty, innocence, safety, and well-being of the immaculate Nazarene became the lot of the murderer.

"Barabbas is installed in all the rights and privileges of Jesus Christ; while the latter enters upon all the infamy and horror of the rebel's position.

"Both mutually inherit each other's situation and what they possess: The delinquent's guilt and cross become the lot of the Just One, and all the civil rights and immunities of the latter are the property of the delinquent."³¹

WE, YOU AND I, ARE ALSO NOW IN BARABBAS' SHOES!

What is our response? Is that redemption the most important priority in your life?

Your own personal "verdict" regarding that fateful day is the most important decision in your life.

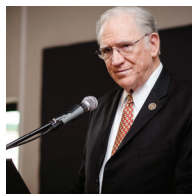
And it isn't as simple as a "once and for all" resolution: it should include a moment-by-moment reprioritization of everything in your life. And, it will determine your eternal destiny.

Commit some serious time to reflect on all this during this very special season of the year.

Baruch HaShem! | 

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■ 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.

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GOD IN WORK Jesus' Business Life

By Paul Curtas

When our Lord walked this earth, His association with work and a professional job was stunning, to say the least. The people who knew Him identified him as "the carpenter" (Mark 6:2-3), meaning He did more than do some carpentry work every so often. Rather, the use of the definite article "the Carpenter" clearly pointed to it as His occupation and even operating a business, where He offered a service and made a profit. But also, His claims to be God and yet working with His

hands as a carpenter challenged the culture's warped view of work.

The Greco Roman culture of His day thought any person who worked such a menial job with His hands was unimportant and lacking any influence within the culture. But Jesus was exemplary in His work as a carpenter. We are told that He grew not only in favour with God, but also in favour with humans (Luke 2:52), which included those with whom He associated in His professional life.

Though the world in His day looked upon His carpentry job as meaningless, His example drew the attention of people and His Heavenly Father, who said in Mark 1:11, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I have been pleased." Up to this point, all that He had done was work as carpenter.

Our work is more than a job or position... it is a calling where we demonstrate our faith in the Lord daily in the details of our work.

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Authentic Work: Living His life, His way!

By Dave Firth

So, what is authentic work?

Well, it's basically what the Christian life should look like in the workplace!

In Col 3:23 Paul says *'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.'*

Verse 22 says *'not only when their eye is on you to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord'*

Whatever you do! Whenever you do it!

So let's keep it simple. We're going to call this the 'GAS' principle.

THE GAS PRINCIPLE

God Owns Everything

Accept what you have

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness

1. God Owns Everything – (see Psalm 24:1, Colossians 1:16)

Not just your money, but also your time and talents – even your energy!

The whole subject of tithing (giving 10% of your earnings) can be confusing, especially if we misunderstand what it was for.

If you look at tithing in the Bible you'll see that 11 tribes tithed 10% of their property (animals and produce) to the Levites, who had no property or livestock. The Levites also then tithed 10% of what they received as a fellowship offering leaving all tribes with roughly similar amounts (if you do the maths).

So it was *the functional act* to support to priesthood.
- It's mentioned 30 times in the old testament and it was ALWAYS crops and livestock – never money.
- It was a tithe to a specific people group - the Levites. Always.
- And it was never practiced by the church after the resurrection!

Here's the thing, if God owns everything (which Psalm 24:1 says

he does) then tithing can become a guilt relieving way of spending God's 90%.

It's all God's stuff!

If you went overseas to be a missionary in Africa for 5 years and left me your house, car and bank accounts to look after, and you'd asked me to "be wise and discerning with my things", what would you expect to find when you returned?

Would I have stewarded YOUR things well or would I have spent all your money and wrecked your house and car? Hopefully the former - if I recognize that it's not mine.

And our time is even more important than money!

If you run out of money you can always get some more (in theory anyway).

But once time has gone – it's GONE!!! You never get it back.

And your gifts, abilities, ideas, energy – it all comes under that word 'EVERYTHING'

God really does own everything. Maybe we need to start living lives that reflect that?

2. Accept what you have – (1 Timothy 6:7-8)

Paul writes 13 letters and in almost all of them he starts with 'being thankful'.

Remember, Job praised and worshiped God, not just for getting him through a tough time, but for the tough time. He was thankful for the suffering!

Why? Because it pushed him into a deeper trust relationship with God!

But in our culture, we always seem to want more.

Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men in modern times. He died about 80 years ago but he was once asked, "How much is enough money?" His answer was, "Just a little bit more!"

It's sad that we get so easily distracted from what we have and literally 'crave' something more. Something better. Something new!

In 1 Timothy 6:7-8, Paul writes, 'For we brought nothing into this world...but if we have food and clothing we will be content with that.'

Well, folks, we have a lot more than just food and clothing!

According to Scripture I'm a son of the King!!!!

But sometimes, that little voice whispers that 'there must be more to life than Jesus'.

There isn't any life other than the Life of Jesus.

That's why so many 'celebrities' that buy everything they desire - houses, cars, planes - still end up depressed or suicidal, in rehab, their marriages breakdown. They're searching for life – but they will never find it unless they meet Jesus – who IS life!

3. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness... (Matthew 6:33)

How often do we face a problem that we try to solve in a thousand different ways and if we can't find a solution, then we pray?



There have been times where I have spent hours preparing a message or a sermon and found it so hard, complex and draining. But when I realise I'm doing it in my own strength, I stop, apologise to God and pray. He then usually gives me the clear message that I'd been trying to pull together myself for hours or even days!

Why do we separate our lives from our work? We really shouldn't. Our work is a major part of our lives. After all, God did give us 6 days to work and 1 day to rest!

I often hear people talk about the 'Work / Life balance'. I hate that. We should really stop saying it.

It should be 'Work / Rest balance' – God gave us work and rest as a gift.

Work is mentioned 3 times BEFORE the fall. It's not a necessary evil. It's a gift from God.

But rest is also a gift. That's something a lot of us need to remember! When we seek Him first, our life starts to look dramatically different!

For example, If a church wants to recruit a pastor from another church, what normally happens?

One of the elders arranges a secret meeting at a coffee shop nowhere near his church so they don't get seen, and they discuss the possibility of the pastor moving to the other church.



"WHY DO WE SEPARATE OUR LIVES FROM OUR WORK? WE REALLY SHOULDN'T. OUR WORK IS A MAJOR PART OF OUR LIVES."

This is the worldly way. That's how secular organisations operate. Aren't we called to be different?


Whereas, there was a Christian guy, Steve, who ran an IT company that wanted to recruit an employee from a rival company that was also run by a Christian, so he called the owner, Bob, and asked to meet him. He explained that he had a big project come in and he thought that one of Bob's employees - Tim - was a perfect fit and asked if it was ok to approach him.

Well, Bob was very thankful for the way the first guy had conducted himself and agreed to Tim being approached. Tim met with the

Steve and was offered the job and a higher salary. But Tim declined the job saying he'd rather earn less and work for Bob! You see, character really is more valuable than money – unfortunately not everyone sees that.

God has plenty of money – that's why we shouldn't ask people to give to things unless God tells them to. It's HIS MONEY.

The Christian life – the AUTHENTIC Christian life - is about **trusting God** in all areas of our lives at all times!

Only then will we find the freedom we are promised in Christ. 



■ 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

DOWN TO EARTH WISDOM FROM PROVERBS

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD

By Charles Price

In a radio conversation I heard someone suggest, "If there is a God, he is like a poker dealer, who deals you out a hand and then it's your job to make the best of them. Some have been dealt a good hand, some a poor hand. But up to you to play them the best way you can". Is that a fair comment? Some start life with huge advantages, others with just as huge disadvantages. We have been dealt different hands, and life seems random and unfair. We don't live on a level playing field. So how do we navigate our way?

Solomon, the author of Proverbs, was exceedingly privileged in his birth and upbringing in the royal family of King David. Yet he was smart enough to know all the external privileges were as nothing compared to the internal needs of his heart. When it came to direction and guidance, he would probably echo the words of Jeremiah, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man to direct his steps". So, if it is not in ourselves, where do we go for direction and guidance? We go to God.

There are two main themes in Proverbs about guidance.

1. GUIDANCE IS GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY NOT OURS.

Here is a key; "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). There is a condition and a promise. "In all ways acknowledge him..." (that's the condition) and "He will direct your paths", (that's the promise).

If you look carefully, we are never told to pray for guidance in scripture. We are to pray for wisdom, but are given the promise, "A man's steps are directed by the Lord" (Proverbs 20:24). If we 'acknowledge him', which is to relate everything to him and bring him into our deepest needs, hurts, joys and aspirations, he is going to involve himself and direct our paths, whether we are aware of it or not. His guidance is more than navigating our paths but being our rock of security in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

When God called Abraham to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees, he, *“obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going”*. (Hebrews 11:8). It was going to be a magical mystery tour with no known destination to Abraham! But, although he did not know where he was going, he knew who he was going with. That was his security.

To six of his twelve disciples, Jesus gave the invitation: *“Follow me”*. There is something missing from that invitation!! If someone walked up to me and simply said “Follow me”, the first thing I would say is ‘Where are you going?’ No one said that to Jesus because that was irrelevant. The issue was not about where they were going, but who they were going there with.

When our children were small, we would often travel as a family overseas on speaking assignments. It always intrigued me that when we arrived at an airport, boarded an airplane, travelled to some distant land, often all night, the children when very small were not the slightest bit perturbed by this unusual behaviour. We might have flown from England to Australia and stayed in the same seats for twenty-four hours. But they were totally relaxed because where we were going was irrelevant to them, only who they were going with. If mummy was one side and daddy the other, we could have gone to the moon for all they cared! We don't have to know where our lives are leading. Our security lies in our relationship with God not in the security of our circumstances, whether good or bad.

Let me suggest two things God does, and three things we do

He guides us through our inner desires (Subjectively)

When I was young someone told me I needed to ask God for a “Vision” for my life. I didn't know what a “vision” was, much less how you get one! But I came across a verse in the Psalms that became (and is) to me a key principle in guidance: Psalm 37:4, *“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart”*. There is a wrong way to read that and a right way. The wrong way is to read that if you delight in God, he will give you everything you want. The right way is to read it is that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, the desires of our heart will be God-given desires. In other words, his desires become our desires.

“IT'S PROBABLY TRUE TO SAY THAT NINETY PERCENT OF WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE WILL OF GOD IS IN THE SCRIPTURES!”

God is not playing games with us, teasing us by being deliberately difficult to follow, but we *“walk by faith and not by sight”* (2 Corinthians 5:7). We trust him and take risks in moving in what seems the right direction. We will never be one hundred percent sure until we are ninety, or eighty, or seventy percent, and courageously step out in faith to see what happens. It is only then the confirmation may come. Don't worry too much about making a mistake, for Isaiah 30:21 assures us: *“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”*” The ‘voice’ is not in front encouraging every step but comes from behind when God speaks if we veer off to the left or right. After all, he is more concerned to guide us than we are to be guided. Sometimes people have asked me

of a situation, ‘Is it God's will, or is it mine?’ I have learned to ask, *“Have you ever considered it might be both? It is your desire, but it is your desire because you delight in God and his desire has become your desire. So it originates in him and belongs to you”*. God's guidance is more a compass than a map which can be analysed in detail, but a compass which gives direction. As we follow it, we navigate all the particular issues along the way.

He guides us through Scripture: (Objectively)

It's probably true to say that ninety percent of what we need to know about the will of God is in the Scriptures! As David wrote, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path”* (Psalm 119:105). The particular will of God for us, lies within the general will of God for all his people. Scripture doesn't give us the particulars of what job we pursue, who we marry, where we live, but if we obey as best we know his general will, and make the decisions that seem most sensible, we will look back and see his guiding hand on us. Solomon wrote, *“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”* (Proverbs 19:21)

However, if God guides us through Scripture and inner desires, then we are also active participants in the process.

2. DECISIONS ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITY

How does God guide us? There is planning and decision making on our part. I suggest three things I have found helpful.

Look at circumstances (Use common sense)

Prov 21:5 *“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty”*.

To be diligent is to be careful and thoughtful. Look carefully at our circumstances. If I had a deep desire to be an opera singer and decide it is not in conflict with Scripture, how do I proceed? For me personally it would be very easy: Open my mouth and try to sing, and everyone will share a unanimous opinion – Don't!

Listen to Advice

Proverbs tells us: *“The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice”* (Prov 12.15); *“Listen to advice and accept instruction, in the end you will be wise”* (Prov 19.20); *“Make plans by seeking advice”* (Proverbs 20.18) and *“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed”* (Proverbs 15.22). The operative word is ADVICE. Some people like to make a decision for us, and some of us like it when they do! We have to make the important decisions ourselves, but the benefit of advice is that often other people see our situation more clearly than we do, they recognise our gifts (or lack of them) more readily than we do and can offer objective wisdom to us.

Be Practical.

Something I have found helpful has been to get a sheet of paper and make two columns. Above one write “For” and the other “Against”. Fill in both columns as honestly as we can, and my experience has been that however you start, in due course, one begins to grow longer and the other shorter. This is not foolproof but is a practical way to clarify the issues. There are five aspects there: Our



“PROVERBS TELLS US: “THE WAY OF A FOOL SEEMS RIGHT TO HIM, BUT A WISE MAN LISTENS TO ADVICE” (PROV 12.15)”

desires, scripture, circumstances, advice and being practical. Many years ago, I flew in the cockpit of an aircraft as it came to land in Harare in Zimbabwe. It was early evening, and as we approached the airport rows of lights set up the position and length of the runway. I asked the pilot how he

knew when to bring the plane down. He told me to look at the rows of lights ahead of us, and as we banked to line up with them, he said when all those lights are behind each other and you see only one light, then we are on track to land.

When the lights by which you seek guidance align, step out in faith. The confirmation usually comes in retrospect. And by the way, if you do go wrong, remember, *“... your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”* |

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Evening & Morning

(Genesis 1)

By Nathan Johnson

So the evening and the morning were the first day. Genesis 1:5

The statement “evening and morning” in the creation account is more than when the day started—it gives an incredible picture of the redemptive work Christ is doing in us.

Have you ever wondered why the Jewish day starts with evening?

If an Israelite touched a dead body and was unclean, they were unclean until evening. For the Israelite, the next day started not when you woke up or at our traditional midnight, but at evening. Sabbath begins not Saturday morning but Friday night.

During creation, as seen in Genesis 1, six times it says that there was evening and morning. But there

was no “evening and morning” on the seventh day. Why?

1. Light – God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1.5)
2. Dividing Waters (water/sky) – And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day (Genesis 1.8)

3. Land (with trees, grass, seeds, plants) – So the evening and the morning were the third day (Genesis 1.13)
4. Sun, Moon, & Stars – So the evening and the morning were the fourth day (Genesis 1.19)
5. Fish, water creatures, birds – So the evening and the morning were the fifth day (Genesis 1.23)

6. Living creatures, cattle, creeping things, man – Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Genesis 1.31)
7. Rest – Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2.1-3)

What is fascinating about the words “evening” and “morning” is that they convey more than mere times of the day.

EVENING

The word in Hebrew for “evening” is *erev* (or *ereb*). It does mean darkness, dusk, evening, and sunset, but it came out of the understanding of obscurity, mixture, chaos, increasing entropy.

When the day approaches evening, things increasingly get obscured, it becomes hard to see, darkness (chaos) encroaches, and there is seeming movement toward disorder (entropy). The word came to mean “evening” because of this.

MORNING

The morning is the opposite of evening. Sunlight pierces the darkness and things become

discernible. Entropy decreases, visibility is restored, and a seeming order ensues. This is why the Hebrew word *boker* (or *boqer*) came to mean “morning.”

EVENING AND MORNING: FROM CHAOS TO ORDER

Though Genesis is a literal account of creation, there is another layer of understanding and depth. On day one, God took creation and brought order to the chaos. On the second day, He continued His work and brought about more order. This continued through day six until creation was complete and therefore the “erev” (obscurity, chaos, entropy) of creation was brought into order.


Why didn’t day seven have an evening and morning? In a literal sense it did – it had a sunrise and a sunset. But there is more to the story than daylight ... *erev/boker* is not mentioned because creation was whole, in order, and “very good” (Genesis 1.31).

THE THREAD OF REDEMPTION

Do you see how this parallels our lives?

We are born into sin (which in Genesis 3 brought creation back into *erev*: chaos, entropy, and mixture). God’s redemptive work in our lives is paralleled in the creation account. He takes us from mixture, disorder, and chaos and brings about a transformation so great that “if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5.17). We are brought into *boker*.

And similar to creation, Jesus is constantly bringing us into greater order. We increasingly become more like Him – having His heart, mind, character, attitude, etc. God’s saving grace is not a one time deal but a daily redemptive work.

What areas of your life do you need to freshly give over to Jesus so that He can transform it, making you more like Himself in thought, word, and deed? Would you allow Jesus to take the *erev* areas of your life and bring forth *boker*? Will you go from evening to morning? 



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MOVIE

REVIEWS



CAPTAIN MARVEL

Vers knows who she is. How she got that way ... well, that's a bit of a puzzle.

Yes, she's secure in her identity as a Kree warrior. She knows that even among the Kree, she's pretty special: Not every Kree can shoot plasma bolts out of her fists, after all. And she may feel at home on the gleaming planet of Hala, where she and her mentor, Yon-Rogg, continue to hone her skills.

But is Hala her home? When she sleeps, she sometimes dreams of a different sort of life in a different sort of place—one that feels quite separate from Hala. Quite ... alien.

Captain Marvel is more than an origin story: It's a story of self-discovery, of Vers finding out who she is and what, exactly, the "best version" of herself looks like. And that, as far as it goes, is great. Unfortunately, the movie fails to realize its own potential. The best version of itself gets lost along the way.

This is not to say that *Captain Marvel* is a "bad" superhero movie. The MCU has been, over the course of its 20-plus movies, a competent, reliable entertainment factory. If you like superhero flicks, the worst you can say about any film in the MCU is that it was "pretty decent," and that's not a bad track record.



Unlike Carol Danvers and her many discouraging flashbacks, these films never fail outright. And this one has some thrilling, fun moments. The nods to its 1990s setting are pretty priceless, too, including a wink at Stan Lee's extensive cameo in the 1995 film *Mallrats*.

But *Captain Marvel* suffers from its hero being too big and the film being too little. It feels almost like a prelude to a larger story: an under-realized introduction to a character set to really flex her muscles in Marvel's upcoming *Avengers: Endgame*. But whatever relative shortcomings the film has aesthetically, it's pretty much of a piece, in terms of content, with what we've come to expect from Marvel's superhero flicks. It's a little less violent, but a little more profane. It gives us an inspiring protagonist—the first female superhero to get her own movie in the MCU—without giving her a chance to transcend the traditional superhero story.

Yes, this hero here is really, really "super." But when it comes to what makes her a hero? What powers her heart and will? This movie feints in positive directions without really unleashing the *character* of its heroic character. And it's that character—her soul and sacrifice—that makes a superhero story compelling. All her annotated powers are mere CGI decor.

Captain Marvel doesn't fail, but it does fall short. Perhaps its hero can find her real power, her narrative power, in the next movie.

THE LEGO MOVIE 2: THE SECOND PART

It's been five years since the first *LEGO Movie* told us that everything was awesome.

There was a very clear moral: *Don't glue LEGOs together, you Philistine!* As such, the underlying message was actually targeted at adults. Embrace your inner child and, in so doing, embrace your actual children as well. Let them play. Let them imagine. Let them explore their own creativity.

The moral of *The LEGO Movie 2: The Second Part*, aims a little younger. This film is, in some respects, about growing up.

Lucy hints at it from the very beginning, noting that the world is now "grittier" and "cooler." We know from the outset that it's five years after the original flick, and so we know that Finn (the little boy from the first movie) and his sister, Bianca (a toddler back then), are older, too. And as Finn has moved into adolescence, his LEGO creations have gotten more mature ... and darker. That tension between innocent childhood and jaded adolescence and adulthood is mirrored in the LEGO world, too, where Lucy encourages the ever-optimistic, always-innocent Emmet to get darker, broodier. But the movie suggests that while we all have to grow up, we don't have to grow darker or angrier.

We're also told that we really should try be nice to our younger siblings, too. It's not always easy: As an older brother myself, I know how annoying *my* younger sister could be sometimes. But we *can* cherish each other and even play together, and pictures that run during the credits—snapshots of siblings posing with their own mutual LEGO creations—reinforce that point.

In *The LEGO Movie 2*, not everything is awesome. But when we look at the movie itself, it comes pretty close.



AUTHENTIC | MOVIES



At its most idealistic, this franchise celebrates the innocence and creativity of childhood—even while inserting plenty of clever asides and cameo appearances to keep moms and dads in the audience engaged and entertained.

It's funny, too—and not just in a *ha-ha* sort of way (though it is that), but in how oddly layered the story is.

On its most superficial level, the interplay between the LEGO world and the "real" world doesn't make much narrative sense. But don't let that fool you: The meta-references and seemingly throwaway scenes that actually presage and echo throughout the movie reveal this to be a work of surprising ... *maturity*?

Yes, the film does have a handful of hiccups parents should be aware of, such as shirtless Batman and jargon related to other religions. But this is not a movie that seeks to build its credentials on envelope pushing. In fact, *LEGO's* movies push the *opposite* way, with their makers striving to prove that movies can be innocent and great and laugh-out-loud funny without all those double entendres and edgy allusions. You don't need to take a story and make it, in Lucy's words, *grittier* and *cooler* and *more mature* in order to make it relevant. Sometimes, the most important messages are the most innocent ones. Sometimes, the most poignant are the prettiest.

This movie acknowledges that sometimes even our own world can feel pretty broken. But the latest *LEGO* sequel tells us that we don't just have to break things apart: We can build things up, too.

And since we can, why not build something beautiful?

Movie Reviews compiled from PluggedIn.com

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AUTHENTIC

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