

AUTHENTIC

SUMMER 2019 / 2020 ISSUE 9

MEN'S MAGAZINE

CHUCK MISSLER

Examines the Virgin Birth

Graham Burt:

We catch up with the man
behind Festival One

'Kanye' be Serious?

TOBY YOUNG LOOKS AT THE
CLAIMS OF KANYE WEST

WISE WORDS FROM

Charles Price

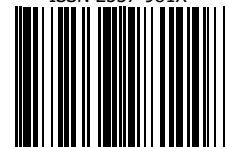
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John MacKay -
the Creation Guy

PLUS

- How Much are You Worth?
- Working Beyond the Ordinary
- Sharing the Gospel with Lew Meyer

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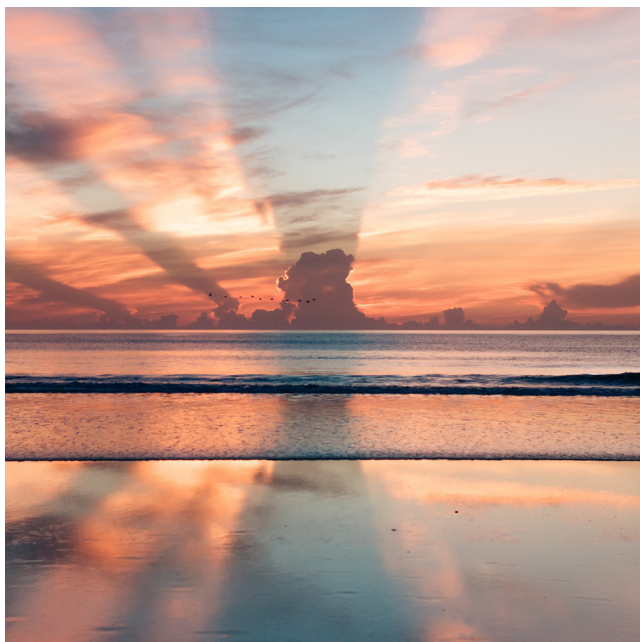
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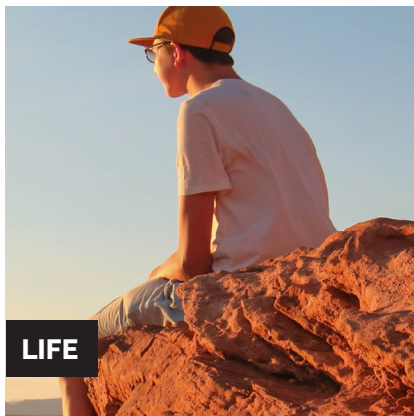
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WELCOME TO THE NINTH EDITION OF

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE

We're now in uncharted territory!

All my Christian life I've heard people talk about Church plants - and I don't mean the green things in the welcome area! Of course, there are incredible people planting Churches in some incredible places.

I personally know of people planting churches in Eastern Europe, Russia, China, South America and the Caribbean. It seems every healthy Church should be planting more!

Since July I've been helping out with a 're-potting' of a small, rural church near Cambridge. The Church building has been around for almost 150 years, but the regular attendance was down to single figures. My home church was approached to help out and subsequently, I was asked to be part of a team to go and 're-pot' rather than 'plant' - take an existing Church and see if we can nurture its growth.

My initial thought was "Nah. I like my comfy church life, my flat white on arrival, polished messages, great worship times and my chats with friends after the service", but the Lord had other ideas!

I was really challenged in my understanding of 'Church'. Well, of course, I know it isn't a place. It's us - the people. But it occurred to me that 'the people' means ALL people, not just the ones I enjoy being around.

So, my family and I have been attending this lovely little church for the last few months and something wonderful has happened. We've really fallen in love with the community. There's still only around 25-30 people in a church that couldn't fit many more than 50, but we've got to know people, their stories, their families - something that seems a little harder in a bigger,

more established church. It's made me wonder, are we prepared to get out of our comfort zones? Are we prepared to be bold in how we express our faith? Are we prepared to NOT do something we enjoy so that we can make room for what God has called us to?

I was ashamed to reflect on how selfish my initial thoughts had been. "Me, me, me!"

The 12 men that Jesus called 'apostles' were just young men yet they left everything they knew, all the comfortable stuff, friends, family, jobs, communities - they left it all - and followed Jesus. They didn't complain.

There's something about being totally abandoned to self that, although a little scary, seems incredibly appealing. My life, fully in the hands of the Creator of

the Universe. Hmmm, what would that look like?

This last year I've had the privilege of speaking at quite a few different churches and events and as I have travelled, I've noticed there's a real thirst for God's Word among believers in NZ - especially the men!

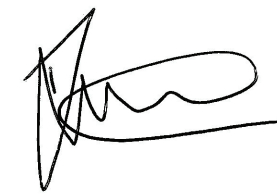
We've had some exciting talks with several other ministries about what Men's Ministry could look like in New Zealand and we're working together to prayerfully discern how we can genuinely support and encourage Kiwi men in their walk with the Lord. I'm really excited about how many other ministries are also excited about training and equipping the Church, that we might be lights in our community and share Jesus in word and deed.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul reminds us that, '...we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which

God prepared in advance for us to do.' Well, the English word 'workmanship' is actually translated from the Greek word 'poiama' which is where we get our word 'poem' from.

That means God has beautifully crafted each one of us - IN Christ Jesus - for a special purpose.

So we don't need to make plans. Let's just abide IN Him and trust Him with every part of our lives, especially the comfortable bits, and then we can discover all that He has for us - fullness in Christ.



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



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God is Our Righteousness

(Jehovah Tsidkenu)

By Nathan Johnson

So many Christians attempt to live out their Christianity in their own strength, resource, and ability ... yet sadly this always falls flat and comes up short. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that even our best effort still only produces filthy rags. So how is it possible to live out the Christian life – this impossible standard we are called to?

We are told numerous times in Scripture that God alone is righteous ...

- » ... Righteous and upright is He. (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- » There is none righteous, no, not one ... (Romans 3:10)
- » My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)
- » Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. (Revelation 19:11)

In our effort, in our strength, in our talent, in our ability, or our whatever, it is impossible to live the Christian life as it was intended. I love what Major Ian Thomas says about the Christian life, he wrote:

"The Christian life can be explained only in terms of Jesus Christ, and if your life as a Christian can still be explained in terms of you – your personality, your willpower, your gift, your talent, your money, your courage, your scholarship, your dedication, your sacrifice, or your anything – then although you may have the Christian life, you are not yet living it! ... It has got to become obvious to others that the kind of life you are living is ... beyond all human explanation! That it is beyond the consequences of man's capacity to imitate, and however little they may understand this, it is clearly the consequence only of God's capacity to reproduce Himself in you!" (from Saving Life of Christ and the Mystery of Godliness by Ian Thomas, page 162-163)

So how are we going to live the Christian life? How are we going to walk in purity, holiness, and righteousness? We need to be indwelt by the One who is the fullness of purity, holiness, and righteousness.

Isaiah 61:10 talks about the Messiah (Jesus) and declares, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

We are to be clothed by Jesus Christ (also see Ephesians 4:20-24). And when Jesus Christ indwells us by His Spirit (whom we call the Holy Spirit) then we experience His righteousness and

fullness of life within us (see 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 4:24; Philippians 1:11; 3:8-9).

We aren't merely to "look" righteous on the outside (actions, words, deeds) but more importantly be righteous in the inside (thoughts, motives, attitudes) – see Matthew 23:27-28.

I love how Jeremiah expresses this concept. In Jeremiah 23:5-6, Jeremiah talks about Jesus, calling Him the Branch of righteousness and giving Him the Name Jehovah Tsidkenu (God our Righteousness). The passage says:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Jesus' Name is "Righteousness."

But I love how Jeremiah continues this idea. The other passage in Scripture where the Name Jehovah Tsidkenu shows up is in Jeremiah 33:15-16. In this passage, this Righteous Branch is brought into Jerusalem, and the place where the Branch (Jesus) dwells, takes on the same Name – Jehovah Tsidkenu.

Wherever the One who is righteous dwells, that location becomes righteous.

How do we live a life of righteousness? By allowing the One who is righteous to indwell our lives via His Holy Spirit.

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and as He indwells our life, He makes us righteous. What an amazing reality!

Will you embrace the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jehovah Tsidkenu) afresh today and allow His life and righteousness to mark your life? May the only explanation for our lives, as Ian Thomas says, be Jesus and only Jesus.

Cheering you down the Narrow Way of the Cross! | 

■ By Nathan Johnson. © 2009–2019 deeperChristian. Website: deeperChristian.com. Used by permission.





Read it and Weep

BY DAVE FIRTH

I recently saw a statistic that claimed that less than 20% of Christians are reading their Bible every day. How can something so rich and vibrant be seen as so unimportant by so many Christians?

It takes around 104 hours to read the whole Bible (reading at a slow to medium pace). Apparently New Zealanders spend on average around 3 hours per day watching TV. Yet if we simply switched out two and a half hours a day for Bible reading (keeping 30 mins a day for TV) we'd read the whole Bible in just 5 weeks - 10 times per year!

But we prioritise TV shows, movies, social media updates and many other forms of 'entertainment'.


In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus responded to the enemy's temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The Psalmist writes, "Your Word is a lamp for my feet and

a light on my path." (Which means I can see where I am and I can see where I'm going). Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword..."

The Bible presents itself as our food, our light and our protection. In other words, it's essential for life! It presents Jesus Christ - our Redeemer. It points to Him, teaches about Him, emphasises Him and reveals Him as THE only, real, authentic life.

Let's get our eyes off the nonsense and fix them on Him - the author and perfecter of our faith. Make a stand. You know where your phone, wallet and keys are. They go everywhere with you. They're important.

So, where's your Bible?

Pray and ask the Lord to give you a passion and enthusiasm for His Word. | 

■ Dave Firth is a husband, father, Bible teacher and communicator. He loves the Lord and has a passion for His Word. For more info and free-to-use-Bible study tools visit www.davefirth.org



When all you can do is push

By Charles Price

On one of my frequent absences from home, when I lived in England, the grass on our lawn was in need of cutting. We had recently purchased a new lawn mower, which my wife, Hilary, had seen me use several times. Knowing I would not be back for several days and the fine weather was not likely to last until then, she decided to mow the grass. The mower was fairly solid, with rotary blades, roller and motor weighing down on the machine. She started the engine, which automatically began to turn the blades in its stationary position, and then began to push. It was really hard work! To get any movement took almost all her strength, but determined as she was, she applied all her might and with her body against the mower at a forty-five-degree angle she gave it everything she had until after two lengths of the lawn she was exhausted.

This was confusing. She had seen me walking up and down the lawn behind the mower, apparently effortlessly. Although she knew I was stronger than she was, she also knew the difference wasn't as great as this! In frustration and anger she grabbed hold of the handle to give the machine a good

shake and in so doing caught the clutch lever and engaged it. Suddenly the mower took off across the lawn under its own power, cutting the grass in its path with Hilary flying out behind it almost horizontal to the ground! What a marvellous difference.

How frustrating to find yourself manually operating something designed to run on its own power! And how wonderfully liberating to discover after a long hard, tiring struggle that there are resources at your disposal you knew nothing about. This has been the personal experience of many Christian people all through history. They have tried with the utmost sincerity and dedication to do for God what only God Himself could do for them. There was no fault in their zeal or failure in their enthusiasm. They just did not know or appropriate the indwelling presence of God Himself, as the only One who can provide what it takes to accomplish His will. When out of despair and exhaustion they find Christ to be alive, and alive in them, the discovery has been revolutionary.

There can never be any significant process in the Christian life until a

fundamental discovery has been made and appropriated, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2.20).

The Strength you have

There is a man in the Bible whose back was against the wall. He, along with the people around him was intimidated, oppressed and defeated by an enemy who refused to slacken its oppression much less to quit. His name was Gideon. The Lord came and spoke to him one day, and said, 'The Lord is with you mighty warrior' (Judges 6.12). Gideon was totally unimpressed. 'If the Lord is with us, why has everything gone wrong?' he asked, and began to recite the troubles and misfortunes of his nation, whose history was full of dramatic stories of God's intervention on their behalf, but whose present experience was one of misery and defeat. If this was more than some meaningless theological statement, more than dead sentiment in a dead creed, where was the evidence of God acting on their behalf? The answer God gave was a complete surprise.

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save





Israel out of Midian's hand." That was a revelation to Gideon, "the strength you have." Whatever strength God was speaking about was not something he had to receive, but something he already had. Gideon asked the obvious question, "How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family". In other

form. Although he already knew God, Gideon had not been counting upon the presence and ability of God; he had been counting only upon himself. But now he was to make a great discovery. The Authorised Version gives an alternative translation in its margin, of the expression "the Lord came upon Gideon" stating most beautifully, "The

when all the time the engine waits only to be engaged!

When I first became a Christian, I understood I had received from God what in retrospect I see as three things: A ticket, a certificate and a catalogue.

The ticket said, "Single to Heaven", I only needed a One-Way ticket!

Secondly, the certificate said, "This is to certify that Charles Price has had all his many sins forgiven. Signed, God". My fundamental understanding was that my sins were forgiven in order that I might one day go to heaven.

But what about now? How do I live in this world with all its temptations to sin?

This is where I saw the third ingredient as being a Biblical catalogue. I would read the catalogue to find out all the good things I could get from God. For example, I would discover I could be loving.

So, I would put in my order (called prayer) and ask God to give me love. I imagined Him coming with something

like a tube of toothpaste, squeezing it in myself and I would become loving – but it would wear off. Then I would ask Him for peace... and that would wear off, then I would ask for joy... and then for power. I imagined Him lighting a blue fuse and planting it within me to

Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1.3). Every blessing God has to give us is in His gift to us of Christ. Peter wrote: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through

Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)

He does not say 'examine your Bible' to see if your doctrines are in order but 'examine yourself'. Are there things




explode in spiritual power – but that too always wore out.

It was only after several years of a frustrating Christian life that I realised that when I became a Christian, God had only given me one thing – Himself. That God, by the Holy Spirit, had come to live the life of Jesus in me and that in Him alone was my strength and everything else I needed. I knew the language, but had not enjoyed the reality, that when I received Christ, I actually received Christ. My body became the home of his Holy Spirit to live His life in me. Paul wrote: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord

our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3). What is left out of that? We don't become zombies and passively lie back and everything happens. No, we live disciplined lives, but the discipline is not to get godliness into our lives, but to allow the life of God already within us to be expressed through us in blessing and enrichment to a weary world.

The indwelling presence of Jesus Christ within us is the ultimate test that we are genuinely in the faith. That isn't my idea! Paul challenges some readers to: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.

going on in your life which carry no explanation other than the fact, Jesus Christ is in you? The Amplified version of the bible translates the last part of the verse; "Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you - unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?"

It is His presence within us that is the nature of our spiritual life. Are you living in daily dependence on Him, daily obedience to Him, and with daily enjoyment of Him? | 

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





The Death of Discernment - The Church

By Ron Matsen

I believe there are clear historic parallels that give us insight into both the condition and the cause of many churches in decline today. We will examine three causes—all three have an example in the history of Israel.

Of all the end-time themes discussed in the Bible—such as global disasters (Matthew 24), the rise of the global super-state, the identity of the Antichrist, the mark of the beast, and the Magog invasion (Ezekiel 38-39)—“deception and apostasy in the church” is listed more times than any other end-time “sign of the times.”

Jesus warned in His Olivet Discourse saying, “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”¹ In both his letter to Timothy and the Thessalonians the apostle Paul warns them that “in latter times some will depart from the faith,”² and “that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first.”³ In both references Paul is writing about apostasy.

Are we now in the Age of Apostasy? While living in England for 20 years I observed a steady decline in general church attendance. According to the UK national census statistics church attendance in England as a percentage of the

population (both Protestant and Catholics are included in these figures) reveals a steady decline: 1970, 13.3%; 1980, 11.1%; 1990, 9.4%; 2000, 7.2%; and 2010, 5.3%.

What Is the Cause For this Decline?

I believe there are clear historic parallels⁴ that give us insight into both the condition and the cause of many churches in decline today. We will examine three causes—all three have an example in the history of Israel.

1. Broken Cisterns

Jeremiah complained about the apostasy of Judah by saying: Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; Be very desolate, says the Lord. For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. – Jeremiah 2:11-13

Today Darwinian physical science has given the world “Declaration over Exploration.” Sadly many churches are promoting “Theistic Evolution” as a needless compromise with the disastrous result of killing God the Creator. Freudian mental science has given the world an “Escape from Sin”

where everyone is a victim. Here, too, many in the Church promote these unbiblical ideas and thereby kill God the Judge. And 19th-20th century Biblical “Higher Criticism” gave the world spiritual doubt. The result? Absence of personal discernment as the Church promotes its own self criticism. All three of these secular practices are like the “broken cisterns” spoken of by Jeremiah.

2. Alliances of Weakness

Hosea helps us draw a historic parallel here. He observes that:

Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake unturned. Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it; Yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it. – Hosea 7:8,9

He was warning against the infiltration, integration, and influence of evil. The best example of this kind of compromise is King Solomon himself as the writer of 1 Kings reminds us, “... his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God.”⁵ The Worldwide Ecumenical Movement demonstrates this dangerous paradigm shift among some churches today, which results in pragmatic political positioning that dilutes and dims the Salt and Light effect⁶ of the true followers of Jesus Christ.

3. Sheep Without Shepherds

Again Hosea gives us the historic parallel. Concerning the backsliding of the northern nation of Israel He complains, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”⁷ Jeremiah tells us that this is caused by the wayward shepherds that have “...led them astray.”⁸ He warns, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!”⁹

False teachers in the end times are predicted by Jesus,¹⁰ Paul,¹¹ and Peter.¹² The Letter of Jude describes in detail the characteristics of these false teachers.¹³ These apostates will use lying signs and wonders as a strong deception¹⁴ to draw people into apostasy.

Paul warned that the allurements into apostasy will come because “...they will not endure sound doctrine.”¹⁵ To the Corinthian church he warned:

“I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!”
2 Corinthians 11:3,4

Who are the Apostates that come with another Jesus or offer a different spirit and present a different gospel?

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





Matthew 13:24-30 may well be a parable that gives us the insight we need to understand this disturbing end-times prophesy. After all, Jesus made it clear that Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven.¹⁶ When you review the “perilous times”¹⁷ Paul describes to his disciple Timothy he concludes that they are “...always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”¹⁸

So What Is the Solution?

The prophet Hosea comes to our rescue here as he tells Israel to “return to the LORD...” and “pursue the knowledge of the LORD.”¹⁹ What can we do?

Stay Connected – Resist the temptation to fall out of fellowship. Don’t allow the fear of confronting the tares among the wheat to frighten you away from fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Stay Sharp – Remain vigilant and always on your guard (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

Stay on Target – Remember that the value of staying true to the Word of God is that is not only keeps you safe but it also is of eternal value to those that hear you (1 Timothy 4:13-16). |  

1. Matthew 24:11,12
2. 2 Timothy 4:1,2
3. 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4
4. Romans 15:4
5. 1 Kings 11:1-4
6. Matthew 5:13
7. Hosea 4:6
8. Jeremiah 50:6
9. Jeremiah 23:1-2
10. Matthew 24:4,5
11. Acts 20:26-30
12. 2 Peter 2:1-3
13. Jude 3-4, 8, 12-13, 16-19
14. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12
15. 2 Timothy 4:3,4
16. Matthew 7:21-23
17. 2 Timothy 3:1
18. 2 Timothy 3:7
19. Hosea 6:1-3





The Paradoxical Life of Christ and the Christian

By Charlie McCall

The Bible is the Word of God. Every word is inspired by (breathed out from) Him. As such, it does not contain false statements because God is truth. He cannot err, and He cannot lie. So when statements in the Bible seem to contradict, we emphasize the word “seem,” and we put those statements in the category of “paradox.” We might not understand how to harmonize those statements but we know that if God said it then there is no contradiction. The contradiction is apparent, not actual.

The book of Ecclesiastes says that with much wisdom comes much grief and pain (1:18). That is a true statement. Think about how the more you know a person, the more you realize how much is wrong about that person. With perfect knowledge of people, society, government, families, and ministries comes an awareness of all that is good and all that is bad. Perfect knowledge causes us to know that there is no perfection outside of God. Perfect knowledge brings grief and pain. That “perfect” spouse isn’t actually perfect after all! The result of that knowledge is sorrow. If not addressed, that sorrow can lead to all sorts of problems: despair, divorce, even suicide.



Ecclesiastes also says that wisdom causes the stern face to beam (8:1). So, wisdom causes sorrow, and wisdom causes the face to beam (presumably with hope and joy). We’ve entered the land of paradox! How can those apparently contradictory statements both be true at the same time? I believe the answer is in the fact that for wisdom to be perfect wisdom it reckons not only on the realities of this fallen world but on the reality that there is a Redeemer and that this life is not all that there is.


Jesus is described as a man of sorrows (pains), acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3). He had to be. He has perfect, omniscient knowledge. He, as the Creator of this world, knew better than anyone how far the world falls short of what He created it to be. Every single person He encountered, every tree, landscape, sunset or animal that He saw was, because of sin, less than what He created it to be. And He knew that perfectly. Literally everything in His field of vision at every moment of every day was wrong. No wonder He was a man of sorrow and grief.

But He is also the Redeemer, and His plan stretches beyond the reality of this fallen world. People often speculate on whether or not Jesus ever laughed. There is no mention in the Bible that He did. This we do know, His face beamed! Why? Because wisdom does that to a person. And Jesus not only had wisdom, He is wisdom personified (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). So He was simultaneously sorrowful and beaming with hope and joy.

Are you by nature an optimist or a pessimist? Psychological categories don’t apply to Jesus. I’m inclined to think that they

will apply less and less to us as we become more and more like Him. If by nature you are a pessimist, God wants to make your stern face beam in the full knowledge of who He is, what He has accomplished for us in Christ (redemption), and what He will yet do – we will stand in glory with Him and be made like Him! If you are an optimist by nature, God wants to open your eyes to how bad things are apart from Him so that your optimism is not based in your nature or personality but in the person of Jesus Christ and the promise of His eternal Word and divine power.

How do we categorize Jesus? Many look at Him and see an enigma because they see contradiction or paradox on every hand (grace yet truth, love yet justice, kindness yet severity). If we don’t see the apparent contradictions about Jesus and embrace both sides of what is revealed about Him, we don’t know Him. He is merely a Jesus of our own imagination. It is more than a bit unsettling to accept all that He is, especially when we can’t fully understand how the apparent contradictions are, in fact, only “apparent.”

We must embrace all that He is or we are not only left with something other than Jesus, but we are left with a false view of reality that will either leave us with a sorrow that knows no limit or a joy that has no foundation. When we grow in the knowledge of Jesus through His Word, we will become like Him: a people of sorrow, acquainted with grief, whose stern faces beam! | 

■ 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



'ONE' Festival Worth a Visit!

BY DAVE FIRTH

Festival One isn't your typical Christian music festival. It began in the summer of 2015 after the Parachute festival was cancelled and is now in its 6th year. Every January thousands of people from all over New Zealand and overseas gather at Mystery Creek, pitch their tents and prepare to be astounded. This year the event is headlined by Lauren Daigle with Propaganda, Rapture Ruckus and Mary Bielski all performing.

We caught up with the man behind Festival One – 'G' (Graham Burt) to find out why he's so excited about the project...

COMMUNITY - ART MUSIC FESTIVAL ONE WHAKANGAHAU KOTAHI

Graham, you're involved in a lot of different things in your life so why did you decide to put the time and energy in to organising a music festival?

I didn't really! A group of us had been discussing the fact that Parachute was not going to continue to run a festival. One of my best mates said "How do you feel about Parachute Festival not being there anymore?" I replied "gutted". He said "If I found a way to fund it would you run it?" I said "yes". That's the whole conversation! That conversation was, of course, part of a greater context. We'd been talking about our concern for the lack of large events that brought Christians of all ages and denominations together, and how valuable we had each found that growing up. So that was at least part of it. And ... that conversation was, of course, part of a larger context. For me, it is the lack of confidence that so many people have in the Christian faith. Most of our church attendees, especially our youth, are struggling to find the common ground between what they learn from science, the everyday standards of morality they see around them, and what they think the Bible teaches. They are simply confused, and often not confident in the God that the Bible reveals. All of us working on Festival One see it as an opportunity to gently help restore confidence in the magnificent God of the Bible.

You've said that the event 'doesn't push the Christian faith down people's throats, but the Truth of the Gospel will always be there subtly in the background'. How do you keep the balance between being open and accepting without compromising on faith and values?

At Festival One the teachings and message of Jesus are both right on top and also woven into every single piece of activity.



We turn ourselves inside out interrogating everything we do to ensure that we are not just talking a Christian story, but living one as well. This can be hard at times - especially where there are areas of conflict or disagreement. Again, we try to handle these with grace, and at times have allowed ourselves to be misrepresented to endeavour to take a gracious path.

Last year you wrote, 'We are continually being told how important Festival One is for this generation and future generations'. In what ways do you think that Festival One is important for young Christians in New Zealand?

New Zealand has less than 35% of the population identifying as Christian, in other words a minority. It is really important that as Christians we get over the things that divide us, and concentrate on working together. Festival One is an amazing opportunity to meet and work alongside people from other sectors of the Christian tradition. This will always be vital. Just as important is the opportunity that it provides to come together as a group of thousands, having a great time together. That really mattered to me when I was young. I was part of a small church, and to get to go to huge events like these where there were thousands of other people that thought and believed the same as me gave me huge confidence. I felt way less weird!



I've heard you talk about the festival as a big family – have you kept the same team together from day one and how do you cope with being apart for most of the year?

For the most part the team remains the same - although every year we both lose and gain a few people. How do we keep it together? Every management meeting starts with a meal. I cook the main, and Jayne is the dessert master. We talk. We laugh and cry together. We pray together. Then we meet. Simply put, that is why the whole of Festival One stops at lunch and dinner time - to give everybody the chance to eat together. The simple practice of the daily rhythms of life, writ large! Easy!

Although most people would refer to Festival One as a music festival, you said that you want to show people what the Christian faith looks like, not just sing about it. How does Festival One do that?

Most of the feedback we get - and we get heaps - is about how the festival “feels”. People feed back about having incredible times with God and with their friends. About feeling

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at peace. About encountering God in unexpected ways. As a management team we talk endlessly about building a really solid backbone before the event begins - good design, good communications, good planning, good systems - and then once gates open and the thing takes off, trusting that backbone to work. It's no different to running a good dinner party. You plan where you will sit, where you will eat. What the table decor will be, what food and drink will be. What music to play and so on. You then prepare all that, so that when your guests arrive you can welcome them to an exquisitely prepared evening, and then relax along with them, and join in conversations. Same really.

Have there been times along this journey when you've thought, 'Stuff this – it's too hard!'

All the time. This is an incredibly hard thing to put together. There are so many moving parts. The risk is high from year to year. There are a huge number of uncontrollable variables. My hat is off to Mark and Chris De Jong who did this for 24 years! However, beyond all the risks and frustrations is the underlying



delight and privilege of being part of a team that gets to put on something as thrilling as this.

We're coming up to the 6th year of Festival One. How have you kept the standard and quality of the event so high?

Again, real simple. Surround yourself with a team of passionate and exceptionally talented people. But ... and here's the kicker, don't take on people just because they are talented. Take them on because of their hearts. Every single one of the management team and group heads is motivated first and foremost by a passion for Jesus Christ, and for seeing others get to know Him too. For all of us Festival One is not 'the thing'. It is the thing where we can let our passions for the Gospel and the talents that God has given us gain full expression. So ... it is always being made new!

Is there any one artist that has eluded you or that you've really found difficult to attract?

Of course. Can't say! Still working on it. Never give up!

My buddy Propaganda is coming this year. He's been wanting to visit NZ for years. You know he's only coming to see Hobbiton, right?

I heard he really wanted to only come to visit you! Can't wait to have this elegant crafter of the English language letting loose his passion for Jesus onstage.



You've also been involved with the Long Story Short project (an awesome set of videos explaining the Christian faith). Tell us where the idea came from and what did you hope to achieve through it?

This is the brainchild of Torrey Hilton and Geoff Smith, a passionate evangelist and a gifted theologian respectively. I got dragged in late in the piece and fell in love with both the people and the project. Torrey has just achieved amazing distribution worldwide via satellite and terrestrial

As a leader in business and ministry, what tips do you have for Christian men that are trying to find the balance between all their responsibilities?

There is no balance. You are either walking with God or you are not. You are either doing everything - absolutely everything that you do - for God's glory, or you are not. Work is then worship. Family is worship. Friends are worship. There is no separation. You might think this is simplistic, but it is rooted in the contrast between an ancient Jewish world view, and world



TV - hundreds of millions in the reach of these channels. The project taught me a huge life lesson. We filmed the story of the Bible, often on location where the original story took place. Something changed in me. My confidence in the story of the Bible grew immensely. Being where things happened, we didn't feel the need to justify, or even overly explain. Each place spoke its own story, in its own way. Our job was not to defend the story, but rather let the story speak for itself, and tell the bits that needed telling as elegantly as possible. That explains a lot about the way we organise Festival!



views subsequent to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who were the most powerful thought leaders around adding other pieces to the God, People, Place world view (sounds very familiar to residents of Aotearoa and what I believe is a gift to us as a nation).

So, what do you do to unwind?

Hang out with friends. Go off-road driving and camping with a bunch of mates. Cooking and entertaining. Reading. Holidays. Hanging with my family. Our son and his family are living with us currently which also gives us the gift of a 3 year old and a 7 week old. Absolutely wonderful.

Will we ever see you up on stage doing a bit of Karaoke?

No.

Thanks Graham, we will be praying for you and the team as you prepare for this year's event. |A

For more info about Festival One you can visit the website at: festival.one

■ Dave Firth is a husband, father, Bible teacher and communicator. He loves the Lord and has a passion for His Word. For more info and free-to-use-Bible study tools visit www.davefirth.org



'Kanye' Be Serious?

BY TOBY YOUNG

Kanye West - A name you wouldn't expect to read in a men's Christian Magazine. Yet, there it is; and here we are writing about him.

Why is his name popping up all over the place? And, more to the point, why here?

According to TIME magazine, Kanye West is one of the most influential people alive today. Kanye is an American record producer, rapper, director, fashion designer and songwriter. Within each of these fields, he has won multiple awards and honours. With 69 GRAMMY nominations and 21 wins he is one of the most successful artists in GRAMMY history and is also tied with Jay Z as the highest-decorated hip-hop artist. He has also been called the most influential artist of his generation.

This Kanye West, this super famous, super successful, superstar has reportedly come to Christ. He claims to have

been "radically saved". Naturally then, people are talking about him. Both those in and those outside of the Church are writing, blogging, and begging for you to listen to their take on the unfolding story.

Secular mainstream media has reacted mostly with curiosity. Whereas the Christian voices have responded, in large part, in one of two ways: by being overly excited and too quickly elevating Kanye to an authoritative position he shouldn't have in the Church at this time. Or, by being overly critical and standing over the man waiting for him to make a mistake so that they may yell "See, I told you he's not really saved! He was just faking it for more followers, etc..."



Those in the first camp need to be cautioned and reminded that the Bible instructs us to take time in selecting our leaders and to not rush the process (1 Timothy 5:21-24). The second group need to have pointed out to them that fruit take time to grow. A new convert, like a newborn babe, will not be mature overnight.

With that in mind, how should we, as Christian men, respond to this news then?

May I suggest that instead of responding in either of those two ways, we respond in a third, more Biblical and loving way? I suggest that, while still not being naïve, we err on the side of being overly gracious rather than being overly critical.

We've all been taught the age-old adage "don't judge a book by its cover". Now is a good time to follow that advice. When we consider Kanye, let's not make our decision of him simply based on his book's cover. Instead, let us listen to Christ, who said "you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20).



So what are Kanye's fruits and how are we to assess them?

From what has been reported Kanye has:

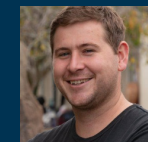
- » Been exposing himself to good, faithful, Biblical preaching from Placerita Bible Church.
- » Committed to studying the Scriptures on a weekly basis with Pastor Adam Tyson, who is known for being a faithful minister of the Word of God.
- » Had the same Pastor preach at his Sunday Service multiple times. During one message Pastor Adam Tyson is quoted as saying "This is the message that we bring to you: God is holy. We're all sinners. Christ came so that you could be born again and have a new life — only by His blood, only by his sacrifice — and through His resurrection you can say today "Here am I, Lord. Send me.""
- » Announced that he is no longer making secular music and that he only wants to focus on Gospel music from here on out.
- » Asked those working on his new album to abstain from premarital sex while collaborating on the project.
- » Released a new album titled "Jesus is King" which is faithful to the Christian message.
- » Come under heat for disapproving of his wife Kim Kardashian-West's choice of sensual clothing.

The fruit is looking promising; it's even looking good. Now, he's made mistakes along the way. But, since when was one of the requirements of being a Christian being perfect? One of the reasons any of us are Christians is because we know we're not! At least Kanye is pointing to the One who is perfect - the Lord Jesus Christ. And, for that, we should all take this news and rejoice that the Gospel is being proclaimed.

Sure, it may come to light in the future that this was all an elaborate ruse of Kanye's to gain followers leading up to the 2020 Presidential Election (which he's rumoured to be running for). Even so, the Apostle Paul left us an example if such things were to play out. We read of Paul's response to the Gospel being preached from wrong motives in Philippians 1:12-18. Verse 18 reads: "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice."

Let's respond then, like the Apostle Paul. Rejoice that a sinner is professing to be saved by the Saviour and in doing so is enabling the Gospel to be proclaimed all the more. |  

■ Toby Young serves as Youth Pastor at Riverbend Bible Church - www.riverbend.org.nz - and is married to Natasha and currently they have four children four-and-under.



Three lessons on faith and works

BY ALAN STANLEY

I have been interested in this subject for the last 20 years. It began when I was studying the Gospels at seminary. Jesus seemed to speak a different language, especially in the Synoptic Gospels, than what I was used to.

For instance, to a lawyer who believed one must love God and one's neighbour in order to inherit eternal life, Jesus replied, "Correct. Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:26). I'm not sure that would have been my answer. I could get my head around loving God but to love your neighbour made me uncomfortable. A rich young man asked the same question and Jesus told him to "Sell everything you have and give to the poor" (Luke 18:22). I definitely wouldn't have given that answer. These aren't isolated examples; there are many passages in the Gospels that enforce what Jesus tells these two men. And so I began my doctoral dissertation which sought to explain The Relationship Between Works and Salvation in the Synoptic Gospels.

So what have I learned since being engrossed in this area of study for the last 20 years?

Lesson #1: The relationship between faith and works can't be reduced to one scenario.

It's fairly common to think that the "works" Jesus wants nothing to do with are bad or sinful. However, the New Testament is replete with scenarios where people who claim to know Jesus do seemingly good things, like perform miracles, cast out demons, and prophesy. Hardly evil! And yet they will be excluded from Jesus' eternal presence (Matt. 7:21-23).

Paul addresses a similar scenario in Corinth. The Corinthians often get stereotyped as backslidden apostates wallowing in the mud of the world. But nothing could be further from the truth: they are zealous to hear good sermons—by the right

preacher of course (can we not relate to that today?), they have had great spiritual experiences, they are turning up for the Lord's supper, they are zealous for spiritual gifts, and keen to experience the Spirit.

Sure there are issues of immorality in the church, but that's the point—it's in the church! These are hardly prodigal-son-type-people. And yet Paul dares to warn them that it is possible for such people to miss out on the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The scenario in James is similar in some respects but quite different in others. These people, like the Corinthians, have not turned their backs on the word or church, but there is little indication they are even seeking an experience of the Spirit. They are, however, in love with the world. James, like Paul, warns that this must not continue (James 2:14-26).

The seven churches in Revelation 2–3 provide a good example of the variety of scenarios within Scripture on this subject, from people who have kept the world out (Rev. 2:1-7) to those who have let the world in (Rev. 3:14-22); from those who have a reputation for good works (Rev. 3:1-6) to those who tolerate heresy and idolatry (Rev. 2:18-29). In every single one of these cases, these people have not left the church.

There are of course other scenarios: people who decide to no longer follow Christ—Hebrews warns against this; people who once confessed Christ but have since run amuck theologically, even claiming to be without sin—1 John addresses such a situation; and there are those who "never stop sinning" turning their backs on righteousness (2 Pet. 2:13-22).

The point is that we must avoid simplistic scenarios when discussing this topic. To do so is to collapse what the Scripture says about the relationship between faith and works into one or two pithy maxims that in all likelihood do not do justice to the complexity of the scenarios life will invariably throw up.

Lesson #2: The emphasis in the relationship between faith and works must be on faith.

Over time I have found myself speaking less about works and more about faith. The reason for this is quite simple: "everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

Because of the context some commentators suggest that "everything" here is not in fact everything. But Paul often makes the point that obedience in general arises from faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 1 Thess. 1:3). "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6). Love is the product of faith and faith is the source of love (1 Tim. 1:5).

Now if, as Paul argues, every command in Scripture can be summed up in "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Rom. 13:10), then logically every kind of obedience must, and indeed can only arise from faith. If it does not, it is sin—which explains

"We must be able to speak to each person where they are at. But there is no one-size-fits-all-answer just as there is no one-size-fits-all-scenario."

why God hated Israel's offerings and prayers; good things in themselves, things that even the law commanded, but they did not arise from faith.

Why is faith so important?

Because "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). When we exercise faith our hearts are saying in effect that God is our hope, confidence, and assurance (Heb. 11:1), he is our satisfaction (John 6:35), and the One in whom we glory (Rom. 4:20). Paul says that it is with the heart that we exercise faith (Rom. 10:10). Jesus says that our hearts follow after our treasure (Matt. 6:21). If we put these three things together—heart, faith, treasure—to have faith in Jesus means no less than to treasure him.

To have faith is to trust him more than anything else that is competing for the allegiance of our heart. This explains why Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching" (John 14:23). "Mere duty will not generate obedience to Christ; only love for him can do that."

Many at this point will want to talk about "faith alone." I'm okay with that but I prefer not to use the phrase for the only time it occurs in Scripture it does so pejoratively (James 2:24). It would be more biblical, in my view, to speak of "faith in Christ alone." It matters where we put alone. When faith is in Christ alone our hearts are persuaded that Christ will satisfy more than those things that are saying "trust me"—money, success, career, reputation, possessions, education, approval, and so on. When we trust in Jesus alone 'works' will inevitably follow and he is glorified (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

Lesson #3: We must communicate the relationship between faith and works with pastoral sensitivity.

This subject tends to engender a variety of emotions. Some will worry about their salvation while others will be angry



that the subject of works is even being broached in the same sentence as salvation. Some won't care; they're saved and that's that. Others will anxiously wonder if they've done 'enough.' We must be able to speak to each person where they are at. But there is no one-size-fits-all-answer just as there is no one-size-fits-all-scenario. This is where pastoral sensitivity comes in. This is not a doctrine that we simply drop on people irrespective of their circumstances. We need to understand who we are talking to and not merely what we are saying to them.

Years ago I spoke at an event where I broached this subject. After the message, a lady came to me in tears because a year earlier unimaginable tragedy had struck her family that left her feeling abandoned. She was struggling! And she heard my one-size-fits-all-doctrine and was now wondering if God had abandoned her. Lesson learned Alan! This subject, like any other, requires pastoral sensitivity.

And here is a lesson that I have learned recently. Not only must we approach others with pastoral sensitivity, we must do the same with ourselves. I know that I am my harshest critic. However, there is no one who loves me as much as God does—without condition (1 John 4:8). If God is able to look at me—all of me—and love me—all of me—then I must, therefore, see myself as he sees me. But too often we are disappointed with ourselves and we tend to think that God must be disappointed with us too. All too subtly though, we have made our relationship with him about works. Once works become the driving force, we are in danger of thinking we can redeem ourselves.

John Coe, the director of Spiritual Formation at Biola University, articulates this well:

the attempt to deal with our spiritual failure, guilt and shame by means of spiritual efforts . . . is the attempt of the well-intentioned believer to use spiritual formation, spiritual disciplines, ministry, service, obedience—being good in general—as a way to relieve the burden of spiritual failure, lack of love and the guilt and shame that results.²

That is what it looks like to be driven by works rather than faith. But faith means trusting God when he says, I love you—as you are (John 3:16; 15:13; 1 John 3:16; 4:10). We all know it, but how often do we run to any number of 'works' to make up for the disappointment we feel with ourselves and we imagine God probably does too? That is not faith producing works.

Think about Peter. Peter had failed in the worst possible way. He had not merely missed an opportunity to talk about Jesus, he had actively confessed that he didn't know him. And yet at the empty tomb, the angel tells the women, "go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'" (Mark 16:7). Why single out Peter? He could have simply said, "go, tell his disciples." To answer that, put yourselves in Peter's shoes and just imagine the women rushing up to you, "He said, 'go tell his disciples and _____!'" |

1. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 505.
2. John Coe, "Resisting the Temptation of Moral Formation: Opening to Spiritual Formation in the Cross and the Spirit," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1 (Spring 2008), 55.

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SHARING THE GOSPEL: 10 Things You Need To Know About God

BY LEW MEYER

For most of us sharing the Gospel can be a challenge - so why not enlist a bit of help from a pro?

Lew Meyer has been telling people in New Zealand about Jesus for decades. Here he gives us ten things that help our Gospel conversations lead to Jesus!

1. God is there.

The more scientists discover about the chemistry of living things, the more staggeringly complicated they find them to be. Very complicated things are always the result of intelligence and design. There are no exceptions and there will never be any exceptions, unless the natural laws of science and mathematics change.

The immensely powerful activity of an intelligent person/being that exists independently of our space/time universe is the best explanation of the origin of the universe and of everything in it.

God is a non-material being (spirit). He is not male or female, but we use the pronoun 'he' because in the ancient world males were generally in authority. Also, Jesus told his followers to call God 'Father'.

God is totally pure, perfect and complete (holy) in character, and this governs His actions and reactions in this world. Right behaviour is behaviour that is in harmony with his plans for us. Wrong behaviour is behaviour that is in conflict with his plans. (1 Peter 1:16)

2. God is mysterious to us, and at times hard to understand.

The maker of anything is always greater than what is made. This means that God is far more intelligent and wise than us and therefore is somewhat mysterious. If we could fully understand the Creator, then we would be the creator's equal. (Isaiah 55:9)

We should not be surprised then, that we do not always understand God or the amount of freedom he allows. When those who seem to be innocent suffer and we are told God is good, it can confuse us. Why does God not intervene or restrict the freedom of evil people all the time? Why does he not remove bad consequences.

However, when we judge God, we are considering ourselves more good and wise than he. But we do not understand the past fully, and we certainly do not understand the future and how to work for the very best ultimate outcome.

Only when we have demonstrated our greater wisdom than God by designing and building a greater universe than this one, do we have the right to judge God.

3. God has created us with purposes to live for.

Human life is not just a result of random chemical reactions that have no purpose. Everything that is created has a purpose. There are no exceptions. Whether it is for practical use or to express emotion, or beauty, or to entertain, every created thing has a purpose. The purpose of anything is always tied up with a plan in the mind of the creator of it.

God reveals his purposes for us in the opening pages of the Bible. We are made with moral and spiritual qualities and creativity (Genesis 1:26) for the following...

To honour and love and obey our Creator and to display his greatness in the way we live our lives. This is summarized with the word 'worship'. We are to worship only the Creator. We are never to worship any created thing. (Exodus 20:3,4)

To be caretakers of this world. This includes loving one another and

living in harmony with nature and with each other. In a similar way to when a Governor General represents the authority of the Queen or King, God designed us to live here and to know him, communicate with him and represent him. Without a good relationship with God, no man or woman is really complete because their spiritual characteristics are disabled. We have failed in our purposes.

4. The primary characteristic of God is LOVE.

The Bible teaches that God is love. (1 John 4:16) This should not surprise us because he created us with the ability to love. It is not something he switches on and off. It is part of him. While there is only one God, there is difference within him. For God to be LOVE, there must be difference, because love cannot exist unless there is the lover

“God’s justice system allowed for a substitute to be punished. Jesus, God’s only Son, stood in for us all to accept the consequences of our behaviour. ”

and that which is loved. The Bible describes this difference within God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not three Gods. One God with difference within Him, and three main roles. The Father is the designer. The Son is the revealer and creator, showing what God is like, and the Holy Spirit is the empowerer. All work in complete harmony, unity and love.

5. God speaks to us in a way we can trust.

Our minds are so distorted that we cannot know the truth accurately about God unless he has revealed it to us. This he has done, firstly in what he has created. You can tell a lot about someone’s character and purposes by what they make, but only to a limited extent. Once written language was a common part of human culture (about 3000BC), the small library of writings we call the Bible was begun.

There is no set of religious writings that comes near the Bible for being historically true when we test it in archaeology. Its predictions have come true with a level of accuracy that only God could achieve. That shows the 40 writers had God’s supervising influence when they wrote it. It has amazing effects on those who read it and live by its guidance. It has transformed whole societies for good. No wonder it is the world’s best-seller every year. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20)

6. God had said that we have become his enemies.

The history of our relationship with God has been one of rebellion from Adam and Eve, the first two humans that the Bible describes and scientific DNA studies confirm. We are all their descendants and have somehow inherited this tendency. It is so powerful that every human has been affected.

perverted or violent extremes that shock us. We do not seek the solution. To make ourselves feel better, we tend to compare ourselves with others who are worse than us.

This distortion also shows itself in our spirituality. We are susceptible to addictions as we try to reverse this distortion in our own ways. We worship false gods. We replace faith in God with superstition and occult activity like astrology, witchcraft and spiritism. We trust in money and material things and ignore the importance of things that last forever.

If we choose to continue in this distorted way of living, there are consequences. Just as Jesus taught the truth about heaven (the new universe that is greater than our wildest imaginations), he also taught the truth about a future everlasting prison called hell. You cannot have justice without consequences. You cannot have serious crime without prison. You cannot live in rebellion to God’s clear instructions without going to hell when this life is ended. A real and very sad place, not just a state of mind.

The greatest crime is to reject the greatest command. Jesus taught us that the greatest command is to “Love the Lord with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.” (Matthew 22:35 – 39) To reject God or deny his existence because it doesn’t suit you to submit to his authority, is to choose hell.

7. God in his love, has made a rescue plan.

Since God is holy and perfect, as the judge of all people, he must act in response to our sinful rebellion. We all have a record of wrong-doing and, try as we might, we cannot live perfectly. We cannot even keep our own good intentions for good living, much less God’s. It is altogether appropriate that we should be terrified of God our judge if we are not in a right relationship with him. (Ephesians 4:18)

So how can a condemned rebel be lawfully accepted by a perfect judge? The answer is that “God loved us so

much, that he sent his Son”. (John 3:16) Jesus is the Son of God. He is the God-man who was conceived supernaturally in Mary. He lived his whole life in harmony with God’s plan. He did amazing feats to demonstrate that he was God’s son with God’s authority. He died outside the city of Jerusalem about 2000 years ago, by crucifixion on a cross at the hands of Roman soldiers.

God’s justice system allowed for a substitute to be punished. Jesus, God’s only Son, stood in for us all to accept the consequences of our behaviour. The Bible puts it this way, “Christ died for our sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:3)

8. God has the power to take away the fear of dying.

Many people question whether there is any meaningful existence after death. Jesus came back to life by God’s power on the third day after being genuinely dead. This demonstrated that he is truly God’s Son, and that there really is life after death. (Romans 1:1-4)

Hundreds saw Jesus alive after his death. This is one of the reasons the initial growth of Christianity was unstoppable. There were so many people alive who remembered seeing him alive in the days before his return to the place called heaven. It was promised that one day he will return to finally and completely establish his rule. If we are reconnected with God through trusting in Jesus, we are guaranteed an everlasting future in God’s new universe called heaven. Jesus has promised to take us there. (John 14:1)

When we have put our trust in him, we can be confident of a safe, secure and fulfilling future beyond death.

9. God commands us to turn to him and trust him.

The word Christ (English) or Christos (Greek) or Messiah (Hebrew) is not Jesus’ last name but his title. It refers to the fact that he is God’s unique Son and specially appointed ruler and leader

that we are to trust and obey. He is the greatest authority. On that basis, God requires everyone, everywhere to change their minds. (Acts 17:30.) To change from unbelief to belief and from rebels to loyal friends. True Christians (Christ’s Ones) are those who have chosen to submit to his authority and to trust Jesus and what he achieved for us in taking our due punishment. When we receive Jesus by submitting to him and trusting him, he receives and accepts us and our record of guilt is totally deleted. (John 1:12)

This is great news and it is FREE. We cannot contribute to it or pay for it or earn it. False religious groups will give lists of rules to be kept to earn God’s acceptance so they can control people or get their money. These are frauds. Jesus has done everything necessary for you to be freely forgiven and restored to a good relationship with him. We can live in friendship with Him forever. It applies no matter how bad we have been. There are forgiven and changed murderers, thieves and liars in heaven. There is no charge for entry into heaven. God’s offer of rescue must be received as a free gift or not at all. (Ephesians 2:8)

Jesus has promised that he will never reject anyone who sincerely comes to him.

10. God offers people a new beginning.

If you decide to receive Jesus into your life, God’s Spirit will begin to live in you and you will begin to change. Your priorities will change. You will have new desires to do good things, to help others, and to forgive others. You will have new power to live a good life. Some friends may reject you. In some cases, people of other beliefs may seek to harm you. But God will never leave you. He wants you to be baptized (immersed in water) as a sign of your new loyalty to his Son (a bit like putting on the team uniform before going on to the sports field). (Matthew 28: 18 – 20) A good church or a small Christian group

that meets regularly can help with that. Your birth family is still important but you will also have a new spiritual family of fellow-followers of Jesus. You will have a greater understanding of the Bible as you read it. You will have a longing for others to become friends of God too.

How does a person receive Jesus?

If you or someone you know can accept what is explained in this article and the Bible verses that explain it, and if you want to place your trust in Jesus, here is a suggested prayer of response to God’s offer. Read it first, and then, if it is what you want to say, pray it to God. If you are sincere and honest, he will accept you into his family, (his church) which is the group of all true Christians in the world.

Prayer of Response

God, my Creator. I am disconnected from you and have broken your standards for my life. I am glad you love me. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to take the punishment I deserve for my wrong-doing.

I am glad you raised Him back to life to be my living rescuer and friend. I choose to trust in Jesus today. I want to live by your plan from now on. Please delete my record of wrong-doing and accept me into your family as you promised. I need your help daily so please fill me with your Holy Spirit’s power so I can become more and more the good person you want me to be as I live in your purposes. Thank you for forgiving and accepting me forever. I prayed this in the authority of Jesus, your Son. Amen. |A

This article was written by Lew Meyer from OAC Ministries.

If you would like a free booklet to help you develop your friendship with God, or you need some help or advice, or you would like a good church in your area to attend where you will feel welcome and where you will learn and grow in spiritual strength, please email lew@oac.org.nz



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Working Beyond the Ordinary

BY PAUL CURTAS

During a recent phone conversation a person humbly told me that he had received a very good evaluation for his job performance. But at the same time he admitted that what he had done was not beyond the ordinary, and that most anyone, Christian or non-Christian, was capable of the same evaluation.

He then confessed that he realized that in God's eyes there is a different evaluation, which he didn't do so well at. Why? He went on to say that during the challenging times at work, when things were festering with negative attitudes, he would join right in with the pessimism and complaining, yet still do his job skillfully and well. He came to the understanding that doing a good job, while at the same time complaining and even slandering, was a contradiction to what he believed about God and his workplace (Philippians 2:13-14).

You see, if our faith could simply be explained in ordinary terms, like human evaluations or man-made achievements, then it offers little or nothing more to people than what they can do themselves. However, the exceptional quality of the Christian faith while on the job becomes evident in the tough times

when things are abnormal and out of our control. Certainly, we can thank God for the ordinary routines of life and work. But Christians are called to do more than just the ordinary routine of the job (John 6:28-29). Your co-workers and the people you serve should see in your attitude and actions that something bigger compels you than company or union incentive. They may not know who it is, but your life will testify of God when you are willing to act in faith and go beyond the ordinary. It could mean ... going the extra mile, beyond what is expected of you. Or maybe it will mean your choosing not to return to people in


the right response and actions that are beyond our own human abilities. We will not experience God's provisions in our workplace personally, until we are willing to come to Him in the midst of the turmoil of work and discover His resources. God desires to show Himself in the ordinary details of our work by the extraordinary way He works in and through us to influence the people and circumstances around us.

How about you? Does your faith in God in the workplace compel you to live and work beyond the ordinary? Certainly our performing the ordinary responsibilities

“Does your faith in God in the workplace compel you to live and work beyond the ordinary?”

the same ways they have treated you, but instead to bless them and pray for them.

We must not forget that the Christian life is an extraordinary work of God manifested through ordinary people in the details of life. In our workplace, faith in God means more than just going to work and doing a good job for the sake of human recognition. God is calling us there to display our trust in Him and to show through His peace and strength

of life, in regard to family, work, and church, brings glory to God. However, it is when difficulties enter these responsibilities that we discover our calling to show the extraordinary work of God in and through us. This makes our job more than just an achievement. Instead, it makes it a calling from our Creator and Lord. | 

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



God's “Hesed” Endures Forever

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

I've been deeply encouraged and convicted as of late with a single Hebrew word. Though this is a simple Hebrew word, its translation is quite complex. The translation into English can be rendered:

- » love
- » kindness
- » loving-kindness
- » steadfast love (or faithful love)
- » loyalty (or unswervingly loyal)
- » favor
- » mercy
- » beauty
- » righteous
- » devotion
- » faithfulness
- » favor
- » gracious covenant (or covenant loyalty)
- » grace
- » goodness
- » loving instruction
- » covenant friendship

Technically there are more, but those are the main variants.

This amazing and powerful Hebrew word (Hesed) occurs nearly 250 times throughout all the major divisions of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, and Writings), 127 of which are in the Psalms (with 26 of those in Psalm 136 alone).

Though Hesed is translated in a variety of ways throughout the Old Testament, the best definition I've found comes from a book by Michael Card, where he translated Hesed as "when the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything."

Our incredible, indescribable God is a God of Hesed.

Exodus 34:6-7 declares: "And the LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and

gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in Hesed and truth, keeping Hesed for thousands [of generations], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.'"

Our God abounds in Hesed – love, kindness, favor, loyalty, beauty, faithfulness, grace, and mercy.

This word shows up 26 times in Psalm 136 alone. Psalm 136 is a participatory psalm where a reader would remind the listeners of God's character and faithfulness in supplying all Israel needed throughout its history, and the congregation would all repeat back a single line: "For His Hesed endures forever!"

Some translations render the line: "For His mercy endures forever!" Others say "For His faithfulness endures forever!" and still others use "For His lovingkindness endures forever!" or "For His steadfast love endures forever!"

But the more I've been studying Hesed, the more I've been merely saying "For His Hesed endures forever!"

With a word that is so comprehensive that its nearly inexpressible, using the Hebrew word allows all the definitions to be present when I declare forth that God's Hesed indeed never ends, for He abounds in Hesed!

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

When is the last time that you pondered all God has done in your life? When did you last sit in awe of His abounding goodness, love, faithfulness, mercy, and "hesed."?

This is a month we typically set aside for thankfulness, gratitude, and remembering. May I encourage you


to take some time and make a list of your own history – all the ways God has provided, been there, protected, given, blessed ... and even the things that still don't make sense – the difficulties, hardships, trials, sickness, and challenges.

What if you put a declaration of God's character after each item? What if with every blessing, you too declared "For God's Hesed endures forever!"

What if in the midst of the difficulty, sickness, or challenge you were reminded that He hasn't abandoned you but declared: "This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the LORD's Hesed we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-23).

I can face any challenge because my God abounds in Hesed and His Hesed endures forever!

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His Hesed endures forever. (Psalm 136:1)

Bask in the reality that the God we love and serve, the One in whom indwells us with His Holy Spirit, is a God of Hesed – the One in whom we have a right to expect nothing from, yet gives us everything we need for life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:3). Know I am cheering you on down the Narrow Way of our precious Hesed God! | 



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Facing The Year Without Fear

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL




Perhaps this last year there were things we said we wish we hadn't, things we did we wish we hadn't, things we didn't do we wish we had. Too late now.

The journal of John Wesley records conspicuous New Year resolves and prayers. New Year's Day 1736, he was on board a ship bound for Georgia to conduct missionary work among the Moravians, and we have this entry: "Oh, may the new year bring a new heart and a new life to all those who seek the Lord God of their fathers". On 1st January 1790, after 50 years of amazing Christian service, Wesley wrote: "I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim; my right hand shakes much; my mouth is hot and dry every morning. I have a lingering fever almost every day; my motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God. I can preach and write still". Eighteen

months later the old warrior laid down his sword crying: "The best of all is God is with us".

Fear, and dismay are two enemies lurking in the shadows to rob us of our peace and purpose, trust and confidence for the New Year. Fear is the child of doubt, but faith is born of God. It's because of who God is, that He loves us intensely and has the sovereign ability to command such things for us, a year without dread, discouragement, or fear. Fear and Faith are never good friends. They don't get on well, so one of them must go. Fear ends in failure, but faith leads to freedom.

To look around isn't any help. There is enough in our modern world, enough wars, strife, and contentions at every level, international and local, to breed depression, hopelessness, fear, and dismay. To look back isn't any help. To do so sometimes only serves to remind us of our sins, failures, and weaknesses. To look within isn't helpful either. Excessive introspection can just be morbid and depressing. But Christians look up; "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." That's how we face the year without fear! | 



■ Stephen Whitwell has been a pastor for 33 years. He writes a monthly e-letter, Brief Word, which circulates worldwide. He has a passion for helping people discover who they are, and for writing and speaking about life! He can be contacted at www.goodwords.nz.

A Christmas Issue: Why a Virgin Birth?

BY CHUCK MISSLER

Every Christmas season our thoughts turn to the birth of Christ and to his mother, Mary. To some extent, we all take the nativity for granted. But why was Jesus born of a virgin? One answer, of course, is to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: "Behold the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

But that's more descriptive than causal: why was it necessary in the first place? There are, of course, many profound theological issues inherent in the virgin birth. One way to view this issue is to address one of the problems it solves.

The Problem

God announced very early that His plan for redemption involved the Messiah being brought forth from the tribe of Judah¹, and specifically from the line of David². The succession of subsequent kings proved to be, with only a few exceptions, a dismal chain. As the succeeding kings of Judah went from bad to worse, we eventually encounter Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin), upon whom God pronounces a "blood curse": "Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." (Jeremiah 22:30)

This curse created a rather grim and perplexing paradox: the Messiah had to come from the royal line, yet now there was a "blood curse" on that very line of descent! (I always visualize a celebration in the councils of Satan on that day. But then I imagine God turning to His angels, saying, "Watch this one!")

The Solution

The answer emerges in the differing genealogies of Jesus Christ recorded in the gospels. Matthew, as a Levi, focuses his gospel on the Messiahship of Jesus and presents Him as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Thus, Matthew traces the legal line from Abraham (as any Jew would) through David, then through



Solomon (the royal line) to Joseph, the legal father of Jesus³.

On the other hand, Luke, as a physician, focuses on the humanity of Jesus and presents Him as the Son of Man. Luke traces the blood line from Adam (the first Man) through to David-- and his genealogy from Abraham through David is identical to Matthew's. But then after David, Luke departs from the path taken by Matthew and traces the family tree through another son of David (the second surviving son of Bathsheba), Nathan, down through Heli, the father of Mary, the mother of Jesus⁴.

Zelophehad

One should also note the exception to the law which permitted inheritance through the daughter if no sons were available and she married within her tribe⁵.

The daughters of Zelophehad had petitioned Moses for a special exception, which was granted when they entered the land under Joshua.

I believe it was C.I. Scofield who first noted that the claims of Christ rely upon this peculiar exception granted to the family of Zelo-phehad in the Torah. Heli, Mary's father, apparently had no sons, and Mary married within the tribe of Judah. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, of the house and lineage of David and carrying legal title to the line, but without the blood curse of Jeconiah. [I believe that every detail in the Torah -- and the entire Bible -- has a direct link to

Jesus Christ. "The volume of the book is written of me." (Psalm 40:7) [For a more detailed discussion, watch for our new book, Cosmic Codes -- Hidden Messages from the Edge of Eternity, presently in publication.]

Earlier Glimpse

This was no afterthought or post facto remedy, of course. It was first announced in the Garden of Eden when God declared war on Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

The "Seed of the Woman" thus becomes one of the prophetic titles of the Messiah. This biological contradiction is the first hint -- in the early chapters of Genesis -- of the virgin birth.

John also presents a genealogy, of sorts, of the Pre-Existent One in the first three verses of his gospel⁶. The Prophet Micah also highlights this: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2) |A

1. Genesis 49:10.

2. Ruth 4:22; 2 Samuel 7:11-16.

3. Matthew 1:1-17.

4. Luke 3:23-38.

5. Numbers 26:33; 27:1-11; 36:2-12; Joshua 17:3-6; 1 Chronicles 7:15.

6. John 1:1-3.

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



The Uber-Manly Father List

BY ERIC LUDY

As a father, I want to do this fatherhood thing right. Like the everyday water turning to extraordinary wine at the wedding in Cana, I want Jesus to touch my ordinary fatherly average-ness and cause it to increase in tastiness as time passes.

I wrote down a list eight years ago that I pull out every now and again and meditate on. I simply call it The List. I realize that is a very boring title for something, but I've never had a reason to call it something different. Until now.

I changed it's name today to the Uber-Manly Father List. That's quite the name upgrade, is it not?

A few weeks ago I delivered an early morning message from the Ellerslie Chapel stage during our 'Daily Thunder' broadcast. It was pertaining to the Joshua Harris debacle and it was on the topic of fatherhood entitled, The Fight of the Father.

In that message I whipped out my List. And ever since, I have been asked over and over again by fathers if I could supply them with this list (thus, the need for this particular article and the exotic name upgrade). As a name, The List was simply not going to cut it. And since this list is quite epic and manly, I needed to make the name something a bit more hairy-chested.

Before I give you the Uber-Manly Father List, I should share some backstory on what this list is and how it originated. Eight years ago I had a thought, an imagining, a haunting question. If thirty years in the future, my six kids (all grown up, married, and with kids of their own) were to gather together in a living room and were to be asked the following question, what would they answer?

"Please be blunt honest, Ludy kids! Tell us what your father, Eric, was like. Just say it like it was!"

For any father such a thought leads to a gulping reflex. As it should. Because that is what this whole thing



called fatherhood is all about. It's not just about the now, it's about the generations that follow. We are setting a pattern, showing a picture, handing off an understanding.

So, what would my six kids say about me? I'm not totally sure. But, right now I'm still in the season where something can be done about their future answer. And that is what this Uber-Manly Father List is all about. It's what I am desirous to have my children say of me thirty years from now.

THE LIST

I really, REALLY want my children to say of me, in thirty years from now, that . . .

1. I was there, present, and available for them
2. I met danger with my own chest exposed
3. I was patient and long-suffering
4. I was a great listener and a good question-asker
5. I was a teacher, imparting everything I knew
6. I was a champion for Jesus, a living replica of His Grace
7. I was gentle and affectionate

8. I wrestled on the floor with them and wrestled in the public square for the Truth
9. I preached the Gospel, spoke the Gospel, taught the Gospel, and lived the Gospel in every moment
10. I was a protector from everything hostile to their spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health
11. I was a rescuer of the weak, an advocate for the vulnerable, a father of the fatherless
12. I was honourable, honest, faithful, and true
13. I was a noble gentleman unto my wife and loved her as a woman should be loved
14. I was always accessible, always approachable, and always wanting my children near
15. I was thoughtful, warmhearted, generous, and kind
16. I was strong when strength was required
17. I was soft when softness was needed
18. I was the last to sleep and the first to rise
19. I was consistently on my knees praying
20. I was a true man — a man as God intended me to be

Technically, that isn't the full list. There is more. But, I've always had a distinction in my list between the first part and the second part (and technically a third part). The second part builds off of desire #20. I want them to reflect back upon me as a true man. But what would that mean? Here's how I wrote that eight years ago.

I really REALLY want my children to say of me, in thirty years from now, that . . .

21. I refused to allow Jesus to have spittle upon His cheek
22. I refused to allow Truth to fall in the streets and judgment to turn away backward
23. I refused to deny the holocausts of my day
24. I refused to step down on the issue of protecting life in the womb
25. I refused to say no when the orphan child needed a home
26. I refused to allow the down-syndrome child be cast aside and buried inside a government program
27. I refused to ignore the young pregnant girl's situation
28. I refused to act as if the sex-trafficking industry were a myth
29. I refused to overlook the needs of the single mom's plight
30. I refused to do nothing when something needed to be done
31. I refused to turn a blind eye to the encroachment of the world upon my children's souls
32. I refused to yield to the plea to let my children just be "normal"
33. I refused to allow my boys to grow up without being trained as men

34. I refused to allow my girls to grow up without being trained as women


35. I refused to accept mediocrity while excellence could be had

I really REALLY want my children to say of me, in thirty years from now, that . . .

36. I trained them to GO into all the world and preach the Gospel

37. I "so loved the world" that I gave up my precious children to the harvest fields for the glory of Jesus Christ

Men, may we be a new generation of fathers — a generation that doesn't throw out the sacred things and change the boundary lines of Truth in pursuit of personal comfort, but one that rises up to establish them, even at the cost of our very lives.

Men, if you are shrinking before such a list and scurrying about in your soul looking for a rock of justification to hide under in order to excuse yourself from the high bar, I want to encourage you with the simple statement that none of us, in and of ourselves, are naturally equipped to live out such a rendition of fatherhood. This is not a "natural" thing. It's a supernatural thing. But, if you are a believer in Christ, then the Throne of Grace is opened unto you for this very purpose. And the Holy Spirit of God desires to move inside your life in order to empower you to do things that otherwise would be impossible. Everything you need in order to live with fatherly gusto has been made available. So, take a hold of it and use it to see your family transformed. | 



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The Ambassador's Mandate

By Ron Matsen

The apostle Paul encouraged the Ephesian church by telling them, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."¹ In a sense, when we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are like clay in the hands of the Master Potter.

He shapes us into vessels of honor² in order to be used for His glory. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he makes reference to our good works. What kind of works on our part could Paul be referring to if the work of our salvation is completed in Christ? Jesus also makes reference to our "good works" when He says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your

good works and glorify your Father in heaven."³ What good works could Jesus be referencing in His proclamation?

The last commandment of Jesus before His ascension was for His disciples to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."⁴ Paul challenged the Corinthian Christians by saying, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."⁵ What is the role of an ambassador? An ambassador knows whom he represents, he knows his commission, and he serves as a leader among leaders to represent the interests of his King. As ambassadors for Christ we have been given a clear commission to represent and communicate the messages from our ruling King, Jesus Christ, to others. How can we effectively accomplish this task?

The Bible tells us that for the message of salvation to be complete, man must first understand the existence and character of God. Therefore, the road

to the salvation of mankind begins with the exploration of the ultimate truth of the existence of God. The beginning of a person's reconciliation with God is their recognition of God.

Knowing the King

The English author C. S. Lewis wrote, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."⁶ The Christian faith is not a simple, private experience of personal interpretations or impressions. It is a serious, public exhibition of a worldview that is based on a belief system which has a foundation of truth that can be examined by an enquiring world.⁷ Christianity does not ask its followers to take a blind leap of faith into the intellectual abyss, but rather presents a perfectly rational response to the evidence surrounding us, within the world of science and through insightful discoveries from the Bible.

Knowing God should be the highest pursuit of every person. What could be more important than to discover God

that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”¹⁰
— Ephesians 3:14–19 NKJV

Serving the King


The Bible tells us that believing in the Gospel requires hearing the Gospel first. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians saying, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’”¹¹ Sadly, today, the percentage of the world that is hearing the Christian Gospel is getting smaller and smaller.

Preaching is one of the simplest forms of verbal communication. Where teaching can be defined as “explanation” thus sometimes requiring substantial preparation, preaching is simply “declaration.” Paul instructed the Corinthian Church, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”¹² For example, if you discovered that your local superstore was having a one-day sale on an item that previously was too expensive to consider, your natural response to the discovery of this good news would be to tell as many of your friends as possible, so they could enjoy the benefit with you. How much more important is the Gospel message before a world lost in darkness and without hope?

The apostle Paul then points out that every Christian has been given the

“ministry of reconciliation.” “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”¹³ Thus we can fulfill the command of the Great Commission by preaching the “word of reconciliation” to an unbelieving world.

The Message from the King

The message of salvation is clearly laid out in the Bible. The commission for Christ’s ambassadors is great.¹⁴ For salvation, man must first understand the existence and character of God,¹⁵ then the purpose and power of the Bible,¹⁶ the person of Jesus Christ,¹⁷ and the nature of man.¹⁸ This awareness prepares man for the message of the Gospel.¹⁹ Being confronted with a holy and just God should cause sinful man, who is deserving of God’s judgment, to naturally seek a way of salvation. In subsequent articles I will unpack the message of the ambassador of Christ, thus giving a clear understanding of the message delivered under “The Ambassador’s Mandate.” | 

1. Ephesians 2:8–10
2. 2 Timothy 2:20,21
3. Matthew 5:16
4. Mark 16:15
5. 2 Corinthians 5:20
6. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
7. 1 Peter 3:15
8. 1 John 4:8,16
9. John 3:16
10. Ephesians 3:14–19
11. Romans 10:14,15
12. 1 Corinthians 1:21
13. 2 Corinthians 5:18,19
14. *The Great Commission* by Ron Matsen
15. *Discovering God* by Ron Matsen
16. *Defending the Bible* by Ron Matsen
17. *Jesus: Who and Why?* by Chuck Missler
18. *Human Nature* by Ron Matsen
19. *The Gospel* by Ron Matsen

and thereby discover the purpose for our lives? How important is it to find out that He is not hidden; to follow the hallmarks of design to the throne room of the Designer; to catch a glimpse of His greatness; to discover that the overarching attribute of God is love;⁸ and to arrive at a place where we discover that we are the ultimate object of God’s eternal love?⁹

Paul’s prayer for the saints at Ephesus pretty much sums up the greatness of this quest.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

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THE CREATION GUY: John MacKay

BY DAVE FIRTH

I first met John Mackay almost 20 years ago at a little Methodist Church in the North of England. I’d heard he was ‘interesting’ and talked about Creation and Dinosaurs. Well, that was enough to get me there so I went to the evening meeting and sat and listened to this enthusiastic Aussie chew through facts and stats that had my head spinning, but, for me, it was the start of a fascinating journey into the scriptures, for which I am extremely thankful.

John was in NZ on a speaking tour earlier this year so we caught up for a chat.



Do you remember what you spoke about that night at Brookhouse Methodist Church?

Not quite, but I know it would have had three components: 1) The evidence God's Word is true and I think that night was on the same bit that convinced me to trust the data in Genesis...The Living fossils. 2) There is always a Bible teaching component on how relevant the issue is, and 3) a must have open Q&A which helps people sort out anything I missed.

So, how many churches do you think you've spoken at over the years?

Well if we say 40 years of researching around the globe plus teaching and preaching in Churches 2-3 times a week makes for a big number even when we take off Christmas and breaks.

How did you initially become interested in creation?

First motivation: even though I don't come from a Church family, the influence of one science teacher that spoke about how wonderful and true evolution was led to me thinking that if I was just an animal I could behave like one. Well, several years down from there it hadn't made anyone happy, least of all me!

Second motivation: as a keen science student I read way beyond my years so one day I was reading a University Biology text when the author (an atheist) threw in a chapter on why there is no God and how the Bible is just myths. Since I knew that you can't prove an absolute negative (no God) I soon realised that this high IQ guy was a philosophy dodo! But then it hit me that his argument 'the appendix does nothing so it's a left over from evolution' was also an absolute negative..dodo science...KAZAAAM...it hit me.

He poked fun at the Bible, so I picked one up and read it in secret for the next few years starting with Genesis. I discovered several things: Chapter 1 - the world was deliberately made. Chapter 1 and 2 - we are accountable to our Maker. Chapter 3 - we blew it and had a problem called sin...and boy, did I understand that, seeing as I was behaving like an animal and working so hard to not get caught. Fast forward 4000 years or so from Genesis 3 to John 3, and the

same Creator became our Saviour whom we could know! And it turned out to be true because I became a Christian by faith and found out for sure! Then I discovered so many other students were tethered to sin and dissatisfaction by the lie of evolution...and God took it from there.

At what point did you realise you would spend your days travelling around the world defending the biblical account of creation?

Just after I spoke to a missionary at a conference asking him to pray that God would raise up someone who could speak to students across the globe on this issue and he stared me hard in the eye and replied; WHY NOT YOU?

Wow, that's so cool. As a boy were you as excited about fossils and bones as you are today?

Always loved bashing rocks just to see what's inside them. And now thousands of fossils later (including loads of dinosaur bones, fossil dogs and thorns) I think the answer is 'yes'.

Tell us about how you came to put your faith and trust in Jesus?

Well, I've told you the first bit. The second bit is in John 14 where Jesus said, 'if you love me and obey my commandments I will make myself known to you, and I and my Father will dwell in you'. Now that's a 'provable' test if I ever heard one! So, I did and He did - and when people ask me how come I stayed strong as a Christian in such a tough ministry, where you get abused and accused...the reason is simple; Jesus within me is very real and absolutely worth it all, so I can see others saved from 'false science which leads them astray' as the word of God puts it.

What impact did your family have on your faith?

Three illustrations; my dad was an atheist who loved to argue... so my skill in debates probably owes a lot to that; secondly, when my mum found me reading the Bible and chewed me out for it, I was reading the passage in 1st Corinthians about how 'the flesh can't comprehend spiritual things' and God's Holy Spirit comforted me with power and peace; and thirdly, when Dad told me I would be cut out of the will, I really had to 'choose this day who I would serve' and I chose Jesus!

Why do you think people struggle with taking Genesis literally?

As King Solomon recorded 3000 years ago, 'there is nothing new under the sun.' Even the early Church fathers struggled with this issue and always for the same reason: the things influential world leaders said about history disagreed with what God's Word recorded. In AD 180, Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, wrote: 'Creation occurred 5529 BC plus or minus 200 years', not tens of thousands as Plato and others have written. So, there's a conflict between Greek thinking and Godly thinking

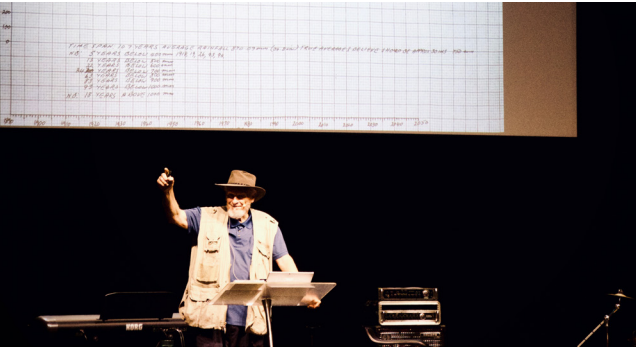
For everyone it's a 'choose this day whom you will serve' decision.

Just the same as recorded in Genesis, where a wannabe world leader said to Eve " Did God really say that?"

What do you say to those who believe the Bible is not to be taken as literal history and Genesis is simply idiom or allegory?

If they claim to be Christians you should ask them what the word 'good' means in Genesis.

Then ask what it meant when Jesus went around doing good and then ask if they are looking forward to Christ's return and a good new heavens and earth where there is no more curse? It won't take long to demolish their confidence in a God



who used evolution or millions of years based on death and struggle which are not good.

Of all the things you have dug out of the earth, what got you the most excited?

The fossils that smack evolution in the teeth! Thorns in the bottom layers of the Geological column. Seeing fossil marsupials with dinosaurs. And especially flood evidence such as trees buried with scallop shells embedded into them and horseshoe crabs, sea shells and vertical upright trees all in the one coal bed.

We featured your article about Neanderthals in issue 3. Why do you think people are so desperate to prove a 'missing link' that they mislead us with false evidence that, in many cases, gets proven false, but not widely reported?

Fake genus seem to be the most popular critters on the planet! And combined with the 'tough love' truth that 'the

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

heart of man is desperately wicked' which news editor wants to admit they made a mistake, when doing so destroys their whole life philosophy, that God's Word is wrong?

You've been travelling and speaking for many years now. Where's the strangest place you've been?

In the South American jungle, on a dig when a bunch of mean, machine-gun armed soldiers appeared!

Yikes! Whenever you teach you always seem excited about the evidence for Creation and how it reveals God and proves we can trust His Word – after all these years, what keeps you smiling?

Christ the Creator lives within me so He can do anything to help even the enemies of Truth, who are really skilled at hating the Truth. He's kind with 'weather prayers' also, giving our outdoor Jurassic Ark Creation Museum 112 m of rain the first week of December in the middle of widespread drought.

You've visited Aotearoa many times to preach and to dig! What's your favourite place in NZ and when are you next here?

I really 'dig' New Zealand (groan!) especially in the volcanic coal fields on the North Island. But I'll see you Kiwis in late April 2020 according to the current schedule.

Tell us about Creation Research and the work that you're involved in.

We run an outdoor Aussie Creation Museum, we run field trips and digs all over the world and organise debates - we get the great message of God's Truth out there from Genesis to John and beyond.

How can we keep in touch with your ministry?

You can get on our mailing list via our website: www.creationresearch.net

But also check us out on YouTube, follow us on Facebook or Instagram or write your questions to info@creationresearch.net

And if I can help your church or ministry by coming to speak, you can contact me at jbmackay@live.com.au.

Thanks John.
What a great guy. The man I once described as a cross between Steve Irwin and Santa Claus - which is definitely a compliment to them both! | 🎅



How much are you worth?

BY MAJOR W. IAN THOMAS

You cannot accomplish your own redemption, and you cannot accomplish your own sanctification! It is "according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (11 Peter 1:3): faith takes what God gives, and God gives what man needs! All that he needs!

All that God gives, which is all that you need, He gives to you in Christ, "That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:29 and 30).


The degree to which by a deliberate, voluntary attitude of faith you are reckoning yourself to be dead "with Christ" to all that you are "in Adam" and alive to God in all that you are "in Christ" is the degree to which the redemptive purpose of God has been wrought out in your life and this is the only valid estimate of your worth! Everything else is a dead loss! "Consequently, from now on we estimate and regard no one from a (purely) human point of view in terms of natural standards of value" (11 Corinthians 5:16, Amplified New Testament).

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

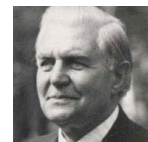
Pointing to an affluent looking gentleman coming into the church, I might say to you (if I were mischievous enough), "How much is he worth?" and maybe you would reply, "If he's worth a dollar, he's worth a million!" and I would say to you, "I did not ask how much money he had in the bank! I simply asked you how much he was worth!"

“All that God gives, which is all that you need, He gives to you in Christ”

A man could have all the money in all the banks in all the world, and be worth nothing so far as God is concerned, if he were still living "to and for himself"! The measure of a man's worth is the measure in which he no longer lives "to and for himself," but "to and for Jesus Christ." No more and no less!

How much are you worth? | 

(excerpt from 'The Mystery of Godliness' - Major W. Ian Thomas, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. ©1964)



Spiritual Maturity

By Alan Stanley

In 2011 the US based Barna Research group conducted a study on how Christians defined spiritual maturity.¹ The study found that “Most Christians...four out of five (81% in fact)...equate spiritual maturity with following the rules” – things like reading the Bible, prayer, going to church, being moral.

I can identify with this. For a good part of my Christian life I would have said the same, although I would not have said rule keeping, I would have said “holiness”. Holiness sounds more biblical. But it may come as a surprise – at least to eighty-one percent of us – that rule keeping, or even holiness, is not God's highest goal for us. Jesus is clear about this: God “seeks...

worshippers” (John 4:23). What this means is that God is not first and foremost after our obedience but our hearts.

The heart, writes Don Carson, “is the center of the personality, embracing mind, emotions, and will.”² The heart is like the control tower at an airport. The heart, whether we know it or not, like it or not, governs everything. One commentator writes, the heart is “that place from which we feel and think and determine our actions.”³ Thus, according to Jesus, “out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matt. 15:19).

So what makes the heart such a control tower? The answer is in Matthew 6:21: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” This verse highlights a very important principle.



The heart may govern how we think, feel, and act but it is treasure that governs the heart. Treasure moves the heart and it does so effortlessly. Don Carson articulates this point so well: “the most cherished treasure subtly but infallibly controls the whole person’s direction and values.”⁴

But according to Jesus, treasure comes in two forms: one earthly, temporary, visible, and evil, the other heavenly, eternal, hidden, and good (Matt. 6:19-20; 12:35). The Rich Young Ruler is an example of someone who is influenced by earthly treasure. Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give to the poor. But he can’t. Why? He has kept all the commandments (Matt. 19:18). But he can’t keep this one. Why not?

“No worldly treasure will die for anyone. But Jesus does just that.”


The reason is because for all his Jewish life he’s lived in relationship with God evidently oblivious to the fact that God was after his heart before his obedience. Without the heart, he had produced a life that looked pretty good by all appearances. But for all this time his heart had been where the heart will always be, with its treasure. Which, in this case, was wealth.

The Pharisees provide another example of misplaced treasure. Fastidious about holiness, Jesus chided them for honouring God “with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matt. 15:8). Like the rich young ruler, they had lived in relationship with God oblivious to the fact that God was after their hearts

before their obedience. Without the heart they were able to honour God with their lips but their worship was “in vain” (Matt. 15:9). Meanwhile, their hearts were where all hearts will be, with their treasure. Which in the Pharisees’ case was their “traditions” (Matt. 15:3-6).

Now contrast these two examples with a man who found some “treasure hidden in a field.” Notice how the man responds: “then, in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matt. 13:44). This man’s heart had found heavenly treasure and as a result he is able to do what the rich young ruler could not do, sell everything.

He experiences what the Pharisees never experienced, a heart ruled by heavenly treasure and, therefore, genuine worship.

Where is your heart? There is no question that it will be where all hearts are, with its treasure. But where is your treasure? Jesus is the only treasure that will change the heart and thus change lives. No worldly treasure can claim to be “gentle and humble” (Matt. 11:29). No worldly treasure will die for anyone. But Jesus does just that. He comforts those who mourn their sin, satisfies those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, draws near to those who repent, and dwells with those who are broken. He is what every heart is searching for. | 

1. <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/264-many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity?q=sermon+mount> 29/11/2011.

2. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 177.

3. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 205.

4. Carson, 177.

■ Dr Alan Stanley is the former director of postgraduate studies, lecturer in Bible and Theology at the Brisbane School of Theology and now lives in New Zealand.



The Key to Evangelism—Know Your Audience

BY RAY COMFORT



Evangelist Ray Comfort runs into two types of “fish.” Based on the apostle Paul’s example, he believes we should identify both types and respond accordingly.

Years ago, somebody sent me a video of well-known atheist magician Penn Jillette. In the video he described an intellectual quandary. He was marveling that some of his friends, who were savvy people, could believe the foolish stories in the book of Genesis. He particularly marveled that they embraced the silly story of Noah’s Ark and the Genesis Flood.

I watched a few other videos to understand what motivated atheists like Penn so I could better reach them with the gospel. It was evident that he really hated the thought of God. Rumour has it that he even crosses out “In God We Trust” from every dollar bill that passes his way.

In one video, Penn twisted a verse to say something it didn’t, and then showed his disdain for the whole Bible by kicking one and then throwing others over his shoulder. He had questions, but he wasn’t humbly seeking answers. So what do we do with people like this?

The Breaking Point

This popular despiser of Christianity was left marveling why intelligent people believe the foolish stories in Genesis. That's a clue. I give Penn credit. He asked, "Am I missing something?" He certainly is missing something, but it is doubtful he would listen if anyone declared it to him.

Such marveling "despisers" are addressed in Scripture. When Paul preached the gospel in the pagan city of Antioch, full of intellectual Greeks, he quoted the Old Testament prophets and warned, "Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you" (Acts 13:41, quoting Habakkuk 1:5, NKJV).

Notice that despisers will "by no means believe" what God has done, even if it is declared to them.

The proud are often offended when told they need to "believe." They think faith is intellectually beneath them. In their pride, they ignore that all healthy relationships, all businesses, and political dealings among nations rest on the foundation of faith. If there's no trust, there is no healthy relationship among people. If I don't believe you, I must believe you're a liar. That's not a good basis for any relationship, including a relationship with God.

The Real Need

The Bible says that God has chosen "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise." He deliberately puts statements and incidents in his Word that offend the proud mind.

Who in his right mind would ever be so childish as to believe that Noah built a literal Ark, and that all those animals came in two by two? Anyone with any intellectual dignity, with any pride of heart, would never stoop to believe such childish nonsense.

Such is the manifold wisdom of God. He has chosen "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise"...to leave them in a quandary (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Jesus warned that the door to eternal salvation is very low. To be saved, we must become as little children and simply believe the gospel, offensive though that may be to the human ego.

In Noah's day, those who didn't believe were shut out of the Ark. And today those who refuse to believe the gospel will be shut out of the Kingdom of God. They will be left marveling, and will perish in their sins. They will "marvel and perish."



The irony is that the book of Genesis is a glistening goldmine for intellectual scrutiny. If anyone with a humble heart studies the case in favor of the Noahic Flood, they will find powerful evidence for a literal worldwide catastrophe.

The problem is not with evidence but with the proud hearts that attack Genesis with an army of straw-man arguments. If one crumbles for lack of credibility, many more arise in its place. Atheists keep fighting, not because they are seeking the truth but because they want to justify their own love for sin. People love darkness more than light (John 3:19).

Fish for Humility

So when I fish for men, I'm looking for those who are humble, and I test the waters with three questions. First, "Do you think there's an afterlife?" Second, "Do you think you're a good person?" Third, "Are you afraid of dying?"

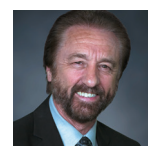
The way they answer these questions lets me know if they are humble or proud. A proud person will usually say that there's

no afterlife. He says that nobody knows, but it's obvious he thinks he knows. And he will rarely admit he's a bad person or fearful of death.

And then I cut my cloth to fit. Scripture tells us

that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. So I do the same. The proud hear a warning about the moral Law and God's wrath, and the humble hear about the mercy of the gospel.

In the process, the humble will listen to how Genesis uniquely addresses the big questions about our origins. And they will listen to its lessons about our ultimate purpose; the reality of evil; the cause of human suffering, disease, and death; and God's gracious promise of life through Jesus Christ alone. |A



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



Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Col. 2:6-7

A dear friend used to say, We all are the failures we were meant to be. In other words, our attempts at living the Christian life in own power were always meant to fail. God never intended for us to succeed by self-effort, self-motivation, and self-striving. We were never designed to live holy lives without trusting the Christ who died for us. In short, we cannot live the Christian life without Christ. Only by grace through faith is Christian growth achieved (Gal. 3:1-5).

When we attempt to live the Christian life in our power, we find it impossible. We grow frustrated. Our up again,

down again experience of momentary victory and devastating failure proves exhausting. The cycles of perpetual self-confidence/pride and shame/guilt leave us wondering if we are really saved. Then, we realize that our sense of desperation and defeat is what God is waiting for; he wants us to come to the end of ourselves.

God is waiting for us to admit our struggle, repent of our self-sufficiency, and pray for divine help (2 Cor. 12:8-10). It sounds a bit cliché, but God desires for us to stop trying and to start trusting. He wants us to give up striving and struggling to allow Christ to do the impossible: give us liberty and victory over our on-going struggles with sin (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The Lord's purpose and goal is to allow his Son, Jesus Christ, to live his life in and through us (1 John 4:9). The only person who ever successfully lived the Christian life was Christ himself.

Therefore, we need to allow Christ to live his life in and through us for victory over sin, power over temptations, and anointing for ministry (Gal. 2:20).

It is not difficult for man to live the Christian life, somebody once said, it is a sheer impossibility!

A sheer impossibility, that is, without CHRIST but for all that He says, you have all that He is, and that is all that it takes!

The Christian life can only be explained in terms of Jesus Christ, and if your life as a Christian can still be explained in terms of you your personality, your willpower, your gift, your talent, your money, your courage, your scholarship, your dedication, your sacrifice, or your anything then although you may have the Christian life, you are not yet living it! |A



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

A CHRISTMAS PROMISE: The Scepter of Judah

BY CHUCK MISSLER

One of the most familiar "Christmas Card" verses is found in Isaiah:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the Throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.
Isaiah 9:6-7

As we mentioned earlier, David's throne didn't exist in Jesus' day. Jeconiah was the last of David's line to sit on the throne. (Remember the blood curse on his line.¹ This curse was "side-stepped" by the virgin birth. Mary was of the line of David, but through Nathan, not Solomon.² The legal line descended through Solomon to Joseph, but not the blood curse.)

There is another remarkable prophecy, in Genesis, concerning the rulership of the tribe of Judah.

The Scepter of Judah

In Genesis 49, Jacob prophesied over each of the twelve tribes. Among these seemingly cryptic riddles, the best known one concerns the royal tribe of Judah:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Genesis 49:10

The term "scepter" refers to their tribal identity and the right to apply and enforce Mosaic Laws and adjudicate capital offenses: *jus gladii*. It is significant that even during their 70-year Babylonian captivity (606-537 B.C.) the tribes retained their tribal identity.³ They retained their own logistics, judges, etc.⁴

The term "Shiloh" was understood by the early rabbis and Talmudic authorities as referring to the Messiah.⁵

The Scepter Departs

In 6-7 A.D., King Herod's son and successor, Herod Archelaus, was dethroned and banished to Vienna, a city in Gaul. Archelaus was the second son of Herod the Great.⁶ The older son, Herod Antipater, was murdered by Herod the Great, along with other family members. (It was quipped at the time that it was safer to be a dog in that household than a member of the family!) Archelaus' mother was a Samaritan (1/4 or less of Jewish blood) and was never accepted. After the death of Herod (4 B.C.?), Archelaus had been placed over Judea as "Entharch" by Caesar Augustus. Broadly rejected, he was removed in 6-7 A.D.

He was replaced by a Roman procurator named Caponius. The legal power of the Sanhedrin was immediately restricted and

the adjudication of capital cases was lost. This was normal Roman policy.⁷ This transfer of power is mentioned in the Talmud⁸ and by Josephus:

After the death of the procurator Festus, when Albinus was about to succeed him, the high priest Ananias considered it a favorable opportunity to assemble the Sanhedrin. He therefore caused James, the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, and several others, to appear before this hastily assembled council, and pronounced upon them the sentence of death by stoning. All the wise men and strict observers of the law who were at Jerusalem expressed their disapprobation of this act...Some even went to Albinus himself, who had departed to Alexandria, to bring this breach of the law under his observation, and to inform him that Aranius had acted illegally in assembling the Sanhedrin without the Roman authority.⁹

This remarkable passage not only mentions Jesus and His brother James as historical figures, it also underscores that the authority of the Sanhedrin had already been passed to the Romans.

Panic Reaction

When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, they covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, and bemoaned, "Woe unto us for the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come!"¹⁰ They actually thought that the Torah, the Word of God, had failed! They should have known better.

The scepter had, indeed, been removed from Judah, but Shiloh had come. While the Jews wept in the streets of Jerusalem, a young son of a carpenter was growing up in Nazareth. He would present Himself as the Meshiach Nagid, Messiah the King, on the very day which had been predicted by the Angel Gabriel to Daniel five centuries earlier.¹¹ (In fact, every detail of His life had been foretold centuries earlier.)

The Babe of Bethlehem

There is another passage that will catch our attention this Christmas season. As we recall the prophecy in Micah that prescribes that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.
Micah 5:2

This verse not only identifies the significance of Bethlehem, it also points to His eventual ruler-ship, and it also mentions His pre-existence.

It is the remarkable Book of Ruth which connects the line of David with Bethlehem. As we recall this love story between Boaz (in the role of the kinsman-redeemer) and Ruth, who becomes his Gentile bride, it is interesting to consider the



possibility that their fields may have been the very ones in which the shepherds were visited by angels that famous evening.¹²

His Political Destiny

At this moment, Jesus is sitting on His Father's Throne. The question is, will He ever sit on David's throne? Will the promise that Gabriel announced to Mary also be fulfilled? Of course. And much of what He is about to do is also predicted with the same accuracy.

As we enter the new year, we each will struggle to remember to put 2020 when we write the date. The entire world measures its calendar from that singular, incomparable event.

The world will soon be in for a series of surprises! The world wishes it could go on without the reactionary Christians; God will soon give them what they want.

And it may come sooner than any of us realize. So as we reflect on the prospects of the coming year, let us all remember that, fundamentally, we are neither Republicans nor Democrats: we are monarchists! We look for our Coming King!

Merry Christmas! | 

1. Jeremiah 22:30; See also Footprints of the Messiah briefing package, Koinonia House, 1994.
2. Lk 3:31; 2 Sam 5:14; 1 Chr 14:4.
3. Josh MacDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 108-168.
4. Ezekiel 1:5,8.
5. Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Targum Yerusahmi, The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation; The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum, Samson H. Levy, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1974.
6. Josephus, Antiquities, 17:13.
7. This transfer of power was recorded by Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Bk 2, Ch. 8 Also, The Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin, folio 24.
8. The Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin, folio 24.
9. Josephus, Antiquities, 20:9.
10. Babylonian Talmud, Chapter 4, folio 37; also, Augustin Lemann, Jesus before the Sanhedrin, 1886, translated by Julius Magath, NL#0239683, Library of Congress #15-24973.
11. Daniel 9:24-27. See also Daniel's Seventy Weeks, Koinonia House, 1993.
12. Luke 2:8-20.

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



Forces at Work

BY PAUL CURTAS

We often use the word “workforce” to describe a number of employees working together to carry out a specific activity in a company. Together their cooperative efforts accomplish a bigger purpose than our individual responsibilities.

For instance, a flight leaving Auckland and going to Wellington requires a coordination of employees and equipment. This workforce is made up of people in flight operations, ground people, mechanics, airport/gate agents, baggage handlers, and finally cabin and flight deck crews; all of which work together to carry out this purpose.

Do you realize that there are also other forces constantly working around you in your workplace? I don't mean the company workforce, but spiritual forces that are trying to form your attitude and actions toward a purpose quite contrary to the Christian faith? It can happen when employees around you join together to show their disgust over the company, or a supervisor, or maybe toward an employee with a troubling


life. Their joint coordination is like an energizing force around you creating a spirit or general attitude that creates a response toward a person or the company. Some Christians think...if they just ignore such things, or distance themselves, it will eventually go away and not affect them. But this is furthest from the truth.

Jesus told us that we are to be His light in a dark world. However, our confrontation with the forces of darkness often reveals our own weakness and vulnerability. It is at this point that God is calling us to come to Him by faith at that moment, so we can experience the sufficiency of His power at work in us. God's strategy in teaching us to deal with the adverse forces around us is not by ignoring or joining them. Instead He alerts us to their danger and their persuasive pull, and He uses our encounters with them to draw us to trust Him and rely on His directions and strength. Learning to rely on Him in the midst of our difficulties and problems, allows us to experience the transforming work of His greater power at work in us; one that restrains us from returning wrong to those who wrong us, and compels us to do what is

right even when we've been wronged. Learning to rely on God's power and Word to direct us in life's circumstances, will produce attitudes and actions that conform us to His ways (1Thessalonians 2:13). Only then can our lives become a sharp contrast to the forces around us at work.

For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

So, what forces are you allowing to influence you at work? Are they the ones that drive people to complain, want more, and be less content and more self-centered? Or are you being compelled by the love and forgiveness of God, which has set you free from the bondage of the self-serving life and gives you a motivation that exceeds any company incentive? I trust that you are experiencing the compelling power of God working in your life.

You are from God...and have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 1 John 4:4 | 

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



THE CLARITY SERIES



David: Little Guy or Mighty Man of War?

BY TIM CHAFFEY

Was David just a “little guy” when he fought Goliath? Tim Chaffey examines what the Bible actually teaches about the stature of David.

In the VeggieTales retelling of David and Goliath, “Dave” sings a song about how little guys can do big things too. Undoubtedly, little guys can do big things, but this article is about David. Was he really a little guy when he fought Goliath as is commonly believed?

If we based our answer to this question on popular culture, Sunday school curricula, and children's songs, we would conclude that David was a little boy or small young man when he fought against a giant. Is this how the Bible describes David? Once again, please remember the purpose of this series on misconceptions is to provide a closer look at the text so that we are not guilty of misrepresenting the Word of God by repeating popular versions of the actual events.

First Glimpse of David

The Bible provides detailed biographical information about David. Although he is first mentioned in the book of Ruth as the son of Jesse, we find our first description of him in 1 Samuel 16 where he is anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. David was the youngest of eight brothers, and his appearance was “ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking” (1 Samuel 16:12).

Prior to seeing David, Samuel was impressed by the physical stature of David's brother Eliab and thought that he was the one God would choose. However, the Lord told Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

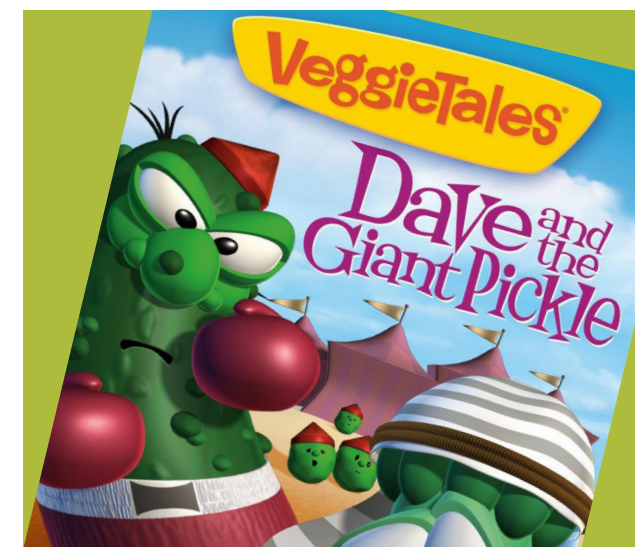
Perhaps this passage is where some people get the notion that David was small. He was the youngest, and his oldest and quite impressive brother was rejected. Since Samuel was told not to look at the outside, maybe David was small, but the text does not reveal this. In fact, there are several clues that David, although young, may have actually been a rather large man by the time he fought Goliath.

David the Armor Bearer

Sometime after David was anointed, King Saul was being troubled by a “distressing spirit” (1 Samuel 16:14). The king was advised to call for a skilled harpist to play for him, because the music might bring him relief. One of Saul's servants suggested David because he was “skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord is with him” (1 Samuel 16:18, emphasis added). David played for Saul and was successful in comforting the king. As a result, the king made David his armor bearer (1 Samuel 16:21).

HE WAS AN ARMOR BEARER FOR THE KING WHO HELPED HIS FATHER ON AN IRREGULAR BASIS.

Many people believe David was still serving as a shepherd for his father when he fought Goliath. This belief is likely based on 1 Samuel 17:17 where Jesse tells his son to take food to



his brothers who were camped out for battle. However, since David was already Saul's armor bearer, then he probably lived with (or near) Saul in Gibeath (1 Samuel 15:34). 1 Samuel 17:15 reveals that David occasionally returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep in Bethlehem. So David was not a full-time shepherd who was just on a special visit to Israel's army. He was an armor bearer for the king who helped his father on an irregular basis.

One may object to this timing by pointing out that after David killed Goliath, he was brought before the king, and Saul asked David, “Whose son are you, young man?” (1 Samuel 17:58). On the surface, this seems to show that Saul was not acquainted with David yet, but if that is true, it seems to contradict 1 Samuel 16:21 and 17:15, which tells us David and Saul knew each other well. Perhaps Saul had forgotten who David's father was. While these passages are only a chapter apart in Scripture, several months or years may have passed between David becoming the armor bearer and his battle with Goliath. There are two alternative reasons Saul may have asked this question. It seems Saul gave David a public ceremony (or at least an audience with the king) in which he could bring honor to his family. After all, David was now a celebrity, and it seems fitting that Saul would acknowledge his heroic actions before the people. The fact that David was brought before Saul by Abner, the military commander, and that David came carrying the head of Goliath supports this interpretation (1 Samuel 17:57).

Perhaps a better solution is that Saul had already promised he would give his daughter in marriage to the man who killed Goliath. Also, the father of the champion would be exempt from paying taxes in Israel (1 Samuel 17:25). David's lineage had to be known by the king so that he could follow through on these two promises.

David and Goliath

The following passage contains the description of the giant Goliath. Goliath was an incredibly large and strong man: And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines,



“The God who gave David the victory over Goliath is the same God who has given us His Word. In His Word, God has told us that He made the world in six normal-length days and destroyed the world with a Flood. He has revealed that His Son was born of a virgin, died on the Cross for our sins, rose from the dead, will one day return, and there will be a day of judgment.”

named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span [appx. 9'9"]. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze [roughly 125 pounds]. And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels [about 15 pounds]; and a shield-bearer went before him. (1 Samuel 17:4–7, bracketed information added)

It is difficult to imagine a person so large. Most people look small next to me since I am 6'9" (and have often been called a giant), but Goliath was a full three feet taller than me and much stronger! His coat of mail weighed 125 pounds, and just the tip of his spear was 15 pounds. Wearing this armor and wielding such a weapon in battle would require tremendous strength. Some have tried to reduce or downplay these staggering figures, but there are problems with these claims. For example, Hays and Billington presuppose that David was about 5'3" and the latter argues that Goliath was measured by David's shorter-than-standard cubit, thus reducing Goliath's height significantly. However, it is highly improbable that David was this height at this point in his life given the following details.

First, since David came from the same parents (or at least the same father) that produced his physically impressive brother Eliab, David may very well have grown to a similar size. Second, David was so offended by the Philistine's words against the living God that he volunteered to fight the giant. Saul's reaction to David's offer is telling. Notice that he did not claim that David was too small, although even the tallest people today would be dwarfed by Goliath. Instead, Saul said, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; *for you are a youth*, and he a man of war from his youth" (1 Samuel 17:33, emphasis added). Saul tried to dissuade David

by appealing to David's youth and Goliath's experience. The Hebrew word translated as "youth" (יָעַן, na'ar) can refer to any age from an infant (Moses in Exodus 2:6) to someone old enough to lead a military coup (Absalom in 2 Samuel 18:32). Third, David responded that he "used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it" (1 Samuel 17:34–35). Now we can understand why David was called a "mighty man of valor" in the previous chapter. He was young, but he was quite strong and brave.

While these facts above don't necessarily indicate his height, the following verses provide some clues. King Saul agreed to let David fight Goliath, so he offered David his own armor to use for the battle—likely the very same armor David had borne for Saul as his armor bearer. Remember, when Saul became king it was said about him that "From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23).

THIS IMPLIES THAT DAVID WAS ROUGHLY THE SAME SIZE AS SAUL AND THE ARMOR DID FIT, BUT HE REJECTED THE OFFER BECAUSE HE WAS NOT ACCUSTOMED TO WEARING THIS PARTICULAR ARMOR.

Although Saul acted foolishly on several occasions, he was not unintelligent. If he was one of the tallest men in the land, why would he offer a small young man his armor, knowing it would never fit and would only reduce his odds of winning the battle? If David was much smaller, Saul could have easily commanded a soldier closer to David's size to lend David his armor. But didn't David refuse the armor because it didn't fit? Not at all! Actually, David said, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them" (1 Samuel 17:39). This implies that David was

roughly the same size as Saul and the armor did fit, but he rejected the offer because he was not accustomed to wearing this particular armor.

Finally, after using a sling and a stone to defeat Goliath, David used Goliath's own sword to decapitate the fallen giant (1 Samuel 17:51). Although the Bible does not tell us exactly how big the sword was, David does state that it was unique (1 Samuel 21:9). The Bible also reveals that the rest of Goliath's weaponry and armor were quite massive, so there is good reason to believe the sword was large as well. David kept Goliath's armor and would eventually wield the sword himself (1 Samuel 17:54; 21:9). The fact that David was capable of using the giant's weapon provides another clue that he may have indeed been a mighty man.

Conclusion

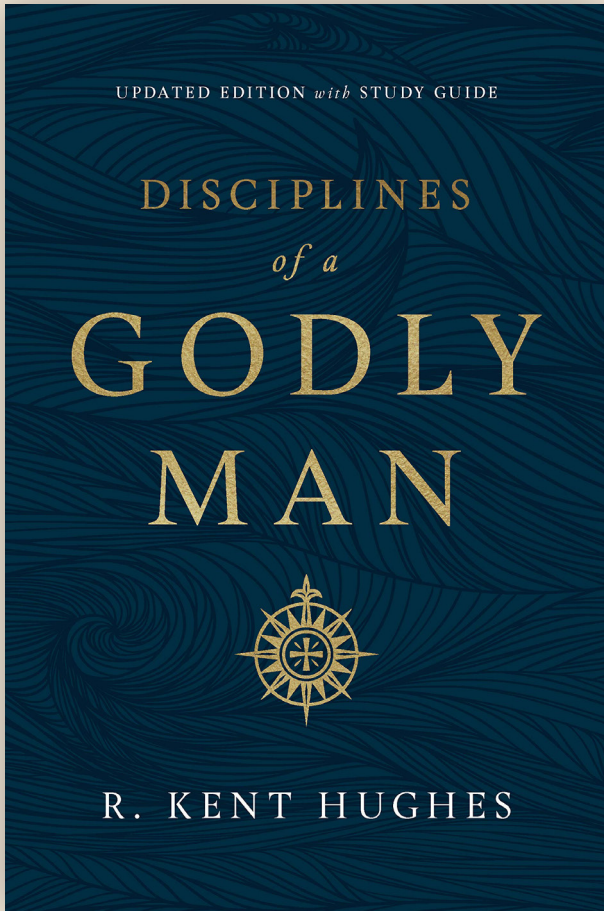
We see at least five pieces of evidence which can be used to support the notion that David was probably not a small man when he fought Goliath. First, his oldest brother was physically impressive, so David could well have grown to a similar size. Second, David was called "a mighty man of valor, a man of war" (1 Samuel 16:18) prior to fighting Goliath. Third, David had already killed a bear and lion by hand. Fourth, King Saul, a tall man, offered his armor to David for the battle. Finally, David was capable of wielding Goliath's sword. None of these arguments are watertight, but taken together, a much stronger case can be made for David being a large man than the commonly held view that he was small.

Of course, David's size is not as important as his trust in the Lord. From a human perspective, David faced tremendous odds, and no one thought he could defeat the giant. However, David's confidence never wavered because he trusted the Lord. After being taunted by Goliath, David fearlessly issued his own challenge in which he gave God all the glory: You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands. (1 Samuel 17:45–47) The God who gave David the victory over Goliath is the same God who has given us His Word. In His Word, God has told us that He made the world in six normal-length days and destroyed the world with a Flood (2 Peter 3:6). He has revealed that His Son was born of a virgin (Matthew 1:23–25), died on the Cross for our sins (Colossians 2:13–14), rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:4), will one day return (Acts 1:11), and there will be a day of judgment (2 Peter 3:7).

As David did in his battle with Goliath, we need to have complete confidence in God and His Word, giving Him the glory in everything we do. |A

■ Tim Chaffey is an apologist with a passion for training young people. He speaks regularly at AIG's Creation Museum, camps, schools, and churches, and has authored numerous books.





Disciplines of a Godly Man

R. KENT HUGHES // REVIEW BY JOSHUA ENS

One of the first questions any new believer asks, and any mature Christian continues to ponder is, what does it mean to follow Christ in the different areas of my life? The apostle Paul answers this question in his letter to the Colossian church writing, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). In his book, Disciplines of a Godly Man, R. Kent Hughes helps define what “whatever you do” means in the life of a Christian man.

Many good books exist on the topic of spiritual disciplines. There are, however, several reasons why this book stands out from the others. First, Hughes does not merely devote

individual chapters to activities commonly thought of as spiritual disciplines (such as Bible reading, prayer, fasting, meditation, and more). There is a time and a place for such a book, but Hughes approach is unique. In addition to mentioning the importance and utilisation of the disciplines listed above, Hughes spends most of his time applying God's word to all areas of life. The fact that the book contains chapters on topics ranging from the discipline of work to the discipline of witness sets it apart in the Christian Living genre.

Second, in the back of the book, Hughes provides the reader with ten resources to aid in the pursuit of godliness. Included in the resource section is the Bible reading plan

designed by nineteenth-century Scottish pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a topical Bible reading plan, and a selection of hymns and psalms for personal and family devotions. The section surveys thirty-four well-known evangelicals, providing the answers to questions about their reading habits and book recommendations. If you are undecided about the worthwhileness of buying this book, let the additional resources convince you; they alone are worth the price of admission.

Finally, this book achieves a helpful tone and tenor throughout the various topics, something often missing in this type of book. The word discipline often has a negative connotation, and when many Christians hear the word, they immediately think of legalistic behaviour. Hughes overcomes any apprehension the reader may have with the term by his emphasis on the necessity of the grace of God to perform the disciplines. He writes that the difference between discipline and legalism is motivation. “Legalism is self-centred; discipline is God-centred. The legalistic heart says, ‘I will do this thing to gain merit with God.’ The disciplined heart says, ‘I will do

this thing because I love God and want to please him” (15). At times, Hughes' words deeply wound the proud heart as he points out sin, but he is always careful to restore the reader's hope in the Gospel. He reminds the reader that “it is God's grace that energises us to live out the disciplines of a godly man. There is always more grace” (228).

One of this book's greatest strengths is that a wide range of people can enjoy it. Because he writes about perennial truths and challenges faced by Christian men, this is a book that young men and old, those who are mature in the faith, and brand-new believers will benefit from alike. A final suggestion for those considering reading this book, find a group of people to read it with you. Kent Hughes designed this book to be read and discussed with fellow believers for further application and reflection. If you are a pastor of a church, this would be a fantastic book for your men's bible study to read. Alternatively, if you are a father of sons, buy them each a copy as a gift and read it together over the next year. However you decide to read it, this book will convict you of sin, comfort you with the Gospel, and encourage holiness in your life.



Just Do Something

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Does God want me to pursue a degree or a trade? Or, maybe neither is the answer; is it God's will for me to start my own business? Will God be displeased if I marry Susie instead of Sally? Does God care about these decisions in the lives of his people? In his short book, Just Do Something, Kevin Deyoung answers some of the most asked questions about the will of God. Deyoung writes with great clarity and a pastoral heart to people who want to follow God but are paralysed with the fear of making the wrong decision. This is a great book to buy for a teenager preparing to leave home, a young adult child considering marriage or a career, or anyone else looking to understand what it means to make a God-honouring decision.



The Biggest Story

KEVIN DEYOUNG

One of the challenges of studying the Bible is the ability to understand where a specific passage fits in the grand narrative of Scripture. This challenge only increases among children. Even those who grow up in the church, children who can recite dozens of Bible verses and have significant knowledge of individual Bible stories struggle to explain the Bible as a unified story of redemption. The Biggest Story is a book which seeks to step into the void and meet this need. Kevin Deyoung, himself a father of eight children, explains how the garden of Eden, the cross, and the new heaven and new earth fit into this magnificent story. Along the way, families will experience beautiful artwork and illustrations which help explain key ideas and themes. For everyone with children in their lives, buy this book, place it on your coffee table, and enjoy reading it together.

All of these books are available from
Manna Christian Bookstore.

manna

■ Joshua Ens is a Canadian currently residing in New Zealand. As well as a book reviewer for Authentic he is a Youth Pastor at River City Bible Church and a full-time Secondary School Teacher.





Abominable

DREAMWORKS // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

Yi may look like any normal Chinese teen on the streets of Shanghai. But she's not. You see, Yi's a teen on a mission. As the other kids while away their summer break looking for fun, goofing off and taking selfies, Yi spends her days working like crazy to earn every yuan she can.

She's babysitting, walking dogs, dumping trash, taking any odd job possible. Although she's keeping her earnings secret from her mom and grandmother, Yi hopes to raise enough money to take a trip across China.

Yi's father often talked about taking her on such a trip. He had even collected little postcards of all the places he wanted them to visit together. It was something wonderful that they both dreamed of doing. But then he died.

And then this man whom Yi cherished most, was suddenly ... gone. It felt as if everything of worth in Yi's life had died, too. But the dream of the trip, well, it would live on. And Yi was determined to make it happen.


Then something remarkably unexpected happens: Yi finds a young Yeti on her apartment building roof. Oh, she doesn't know what it actually is right away. But she soon figures it out. I know, crazy, right? I mean, how does some supposedly

mythical creature end up on your roof in Shanghai? Turns out it escaped from a nearby lab owned by an eccentric billionaire named Burnish. And that adventurer and entrepreneur wants the big furry beastie back to prove that he did see such a creature years before while climbing Mt. Everest. It's the only way to clear his name.

So Burnish's helicopters hover over the city while the billionaire's minions—especially his right-hand woman Dr. Zara—keep careful watch on seemingly every street corner. And suddenly, Yi realizes that it's important that she put aside her own dreams to help this defenseless creature: She'll protect him and help get him back home ... to Mt. Everest.

Because even though he's huge, it's easy to see that this Yeti is just a kid. He's alone. He's lost. He's separated from his family, the ones he loves most. And as Yi knows so well, that's a rotten place for any kid to be.

For the full review, and details on the spiritual, sexual, violent content that may be in the film. Go to [Pluggedin.com](#)



Movie & Music Reviews
compiled from [Pluggedin.com](#)



Jesus is King

KANYE WEST // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

When a well-known artist embraces Jesus with passion and fervor, it can be hard to know how to respond. Is this for real? Is it a phase? Is it going to last? Is it a gimmick?

Kanye West has talked about Jesus since the beginning of his career. “Jesus Walks” put him on the rap map back in 2004, and nods to Jesus have permeated his work from time to time since.

But in the past, shout-outs to Jesus have often competed with lyrical excesses in other areas: harsh vulgarity, sexually explicit lyrics and Kanye’s famously outsized ego.

What seems wholly different on Jesus Is King is that those inconsistencies are almost completely absent. Almost. What Kanye has given us instead is an album that draws stylistically from rap and gospel, but one that focuses exclusively on Jesus and His identity as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

OBJECTIONABLE CONTENT

On “Selah,” we hear these odd lines that might be heard as rationalizing self-centered behavior: “When I scream at the chauffeur/I ain’t mean, I’m just focused.”

“On God” complains about paying taxes: “The IRS want they fifty plus our tithe/Man, that’s over half the pie.” The song also justifies high merchandise prices (which some have complained about) at Kanye’s events: “That’s why I charge the prices that I charge/ ... No, I cannot let my family starve.” “Water” prays, “Jesus, help us live/Jesus, give us wealth,” the latter request one that could be interpreted as promoting a prosperity gospel.

SUMMARY ADVISORY

Kanye West’s laser-like focus on Jesus here is breathtaking. But Kanye suspects that some Christians may still have doubts about his sincerity—an experience it seems that he’s already had, according to the song “Hands On”: “What have you been hearin’ from the Christians?/They’ll be the first one to judge me/Make it feel like nobody love me.”

None of us can know whether Kanye will sustain his current level of Christian conviction in the years to come. But his earnest spiritual fervor is undeniable on Jesus Is King. On this album (and in the accompanying short film of the same name), Kanye West takes the spotlight off of himself and shines it unabashedly on Jesus Christ, proclaiming Him King and Savior.

AUTHENTIC

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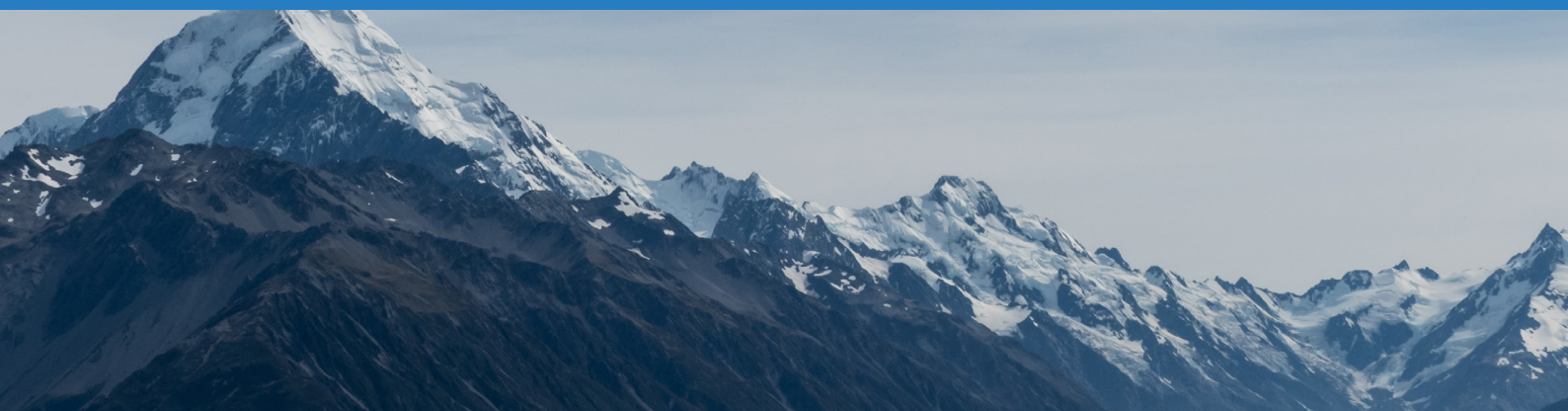
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