

AUTHENTIC

SPRING 2020 ISSUE 11

MEN'S MAGAZINE



We chat with the man
behind the music

Rapture Ruckus

10 Things

YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT
THE DANGER OF MEDIA

An interview with

SHAUN BROOKER

Christian School Principal

BUILDING BRIDGES

Former National Party leader,
Simon Bridges chats with us

WISDOM SERIES BY

Charles Price

PLUS

- Called to be Holy
- No Soul is too far Gone
- What was God doing before creation?

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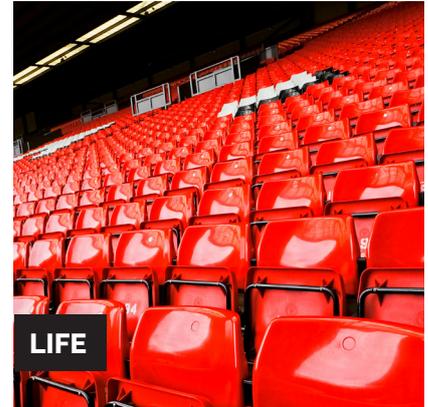
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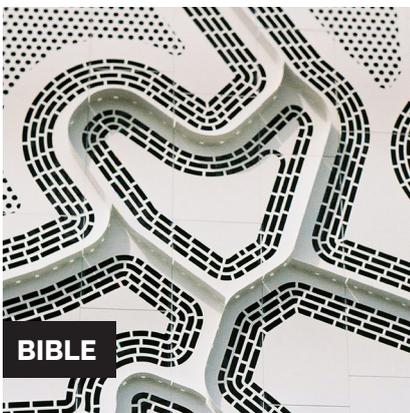
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WELCOME TO THE ELEVENTH EDITION OF

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE

We're back (but not with a vengeance)

Well what a journey we've been on since our last magazine!

We had to postpone our 10th edition but then, at the last minute, we decided to 'pivot' and trialled our first ever online edition. There are some great articles to read, exclusive video interviews and great teaching from some of our regular contributors including Charles Price, Eric Ludy, Nathan Johnson and Lew Meyer.

So issue 10 is available online (just visit the website) if you want to enjoy that content, but we know that not everybody likes to read stuff on a screen so we have brought a few of our favourite articles from issue 10 and included them here, in issue 11 as well. Woo hoo!

Like many of you, we've had to navigate some challenges over the last few months with a lot of unknowns. Watching the news reports back in March, nobody really knew how things would play out. Of course, we only know what we know and the future only becomes certain once we get there and it becomes the past! (Ooh, that sounds deep but I think you know what I mean)

However it does seem to be true that New Zealand has been, up to now, one of the preferred places in the world to be during the last 6 months so we should certainly be thankful to the Lord for His mercy.

One thing I have reflected on this year has been how easy it is to doubt God when people around us start to panic. One of Solomon's well known Proverbs includes the reminder to 'Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart...'

All literally means all - look it up in the dictionary if you don't believe me! Not some, not the first, not the best. All means ALL.

And just in case we're wondering what that exactly means, he adds, with beautiful clarity, '...and lean not on your own understanding.' Here Solomon is stating that our own 'wisdom' or 'understanding' is not something to be relied upon. Our Heavenly Father, the Creator of the Universe, knows and understands all that is going on and simply calls us to trust Him in the midst of our doubts, fears, concerns, stresses, challenges - however we label it.

As most of you probably know by now, Authentic Magazine is produced by Authentic Christian Trust, a registered charity that seeks to share the good news of Jesus with the people of New Zealand. Authentic Magazine was our first, and very much our flagship project.

I am so grateful for the incredible staff team we have. Some are full time, some are part time and some pop in and help out when they can. But one notable change is the arrival of our new editorial genius - Jeremy Smith!

Jeremy is actually a real, live journalist with loads of skills and experience! How cool is that?

We're thrilled he's joined the team and we're already lumping on the pressure now to get him to help move Authentic forward to reach more men across New Zealand.

You can see some of his handy work in this issue with a few of the interviews he's done (Simon Bridges, Rapture Ruckus and Shaun Brooker) but he's also helping in the sourcing, writing and editing of our content.



So, as Jeremy will be a bit more visual in the magazine than some of the other staff, I thought it might be fun to ask him some quick fire questions so you guys know who you're dealing with. (this should be fun)

When and where were you born?

"Auckland, 1987"

Cooler job in media? (obviously, before joining Authentic)

"Oh, definitely photographing Prince William & Kate when they came to Cambridge in 2014."

So why did you join Authentic?

"I really wanted to use my skills to serve the Lord. I love this magazine bro!"

Good answer! Right now on to some very important (not really) questions...Tea or Coffee?

"Oh definitely coffee." (good boy!)

Ah, so do you prefer Robert Harris or Starbucks?

"Ooh, I actually like Starbucks. They have some cool drinks!"

And fast food - McDonalds or Burger King?

"Burger King, but only because I have happy memories of eating at a BK in Melbourne when I was really hungry!"

Is that your favourite food then?

"Nah, I'd say pizza is my favourite."

If you could holiday anywhere in the world where would you go?

"Anywhere with a beach. I love the beach. Fiji or Hawaii. Somewhere like that?"

Being a creative chap, can you play any instruments?

Nah, not really. I had piano lessons when I was younger but didn't really follow it up."

You quitter! (just kidding)

OK, here's a big one...Soccer or Rugby?

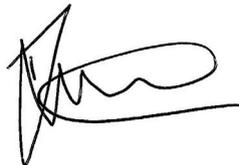
"Oh no, don't make me choose. Err, probably rugby but I'll get in trouble whatever I say."

Interesting fact?

"Well, my dad designed the giraffe logo for the 'Longest Drink in Town'. The one on the paper cup. How's that?."

Pretty good. Well done Jeremy. You can stay! :)

Well, it's great to be able to welcome you to this new, long awaited edition of Authentic Magazine. All of us at 'Team Authentic' hope that you enjoy it and we trust that it encourages and blesses you.



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

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Are You Abounding in Thanksgiving?

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

Did you hop out of bed this morning abounding in thanksgiving? I confess my abounding this morning was more of a lethargic shuffle.

Isn't it fascinating how many times in Scripture we are told to "rejoice always" or have the fruit of joy, or to "abound in thanksgiving"?

I've been pressed lately that joy, thanksgiving, rejoicing isn't an add-on to the Christian life, but rather the undercurrent of it.

Regardless of circumstance, situation, trial, tribulation, or difficulty – joy and thanksgiving are to mark our lives and be the language of our lips (see Ephesians 5:4).

This week I freshly read a short article by Andrew Murray on the intersection of faith and thanksgiving. This is the statement that stood out to me: "Faith and thanksgiving belong to one another and keep one another. The more I believe, the more I shall thank; the more I thank, the more I shall believe."

That's an incredible statement! In one sense, Murray is telling us that we can measure our faith by how much thanksgiving is stirring in and out of our lives. If we have little joy and thankfulness, it means we have little faith. So how is your faith today?

Are you abounding in thanksgiving (even if you didn't pop out of bed that way)? Is the tenor of your life one of "rejoicing always"?

If not, perhaps it's time for us to turn our gaze afresh upon the One who has made "known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

May I encourage you today to "walk in Him, [be] established in your faith, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:17). Cheering you unto that end!

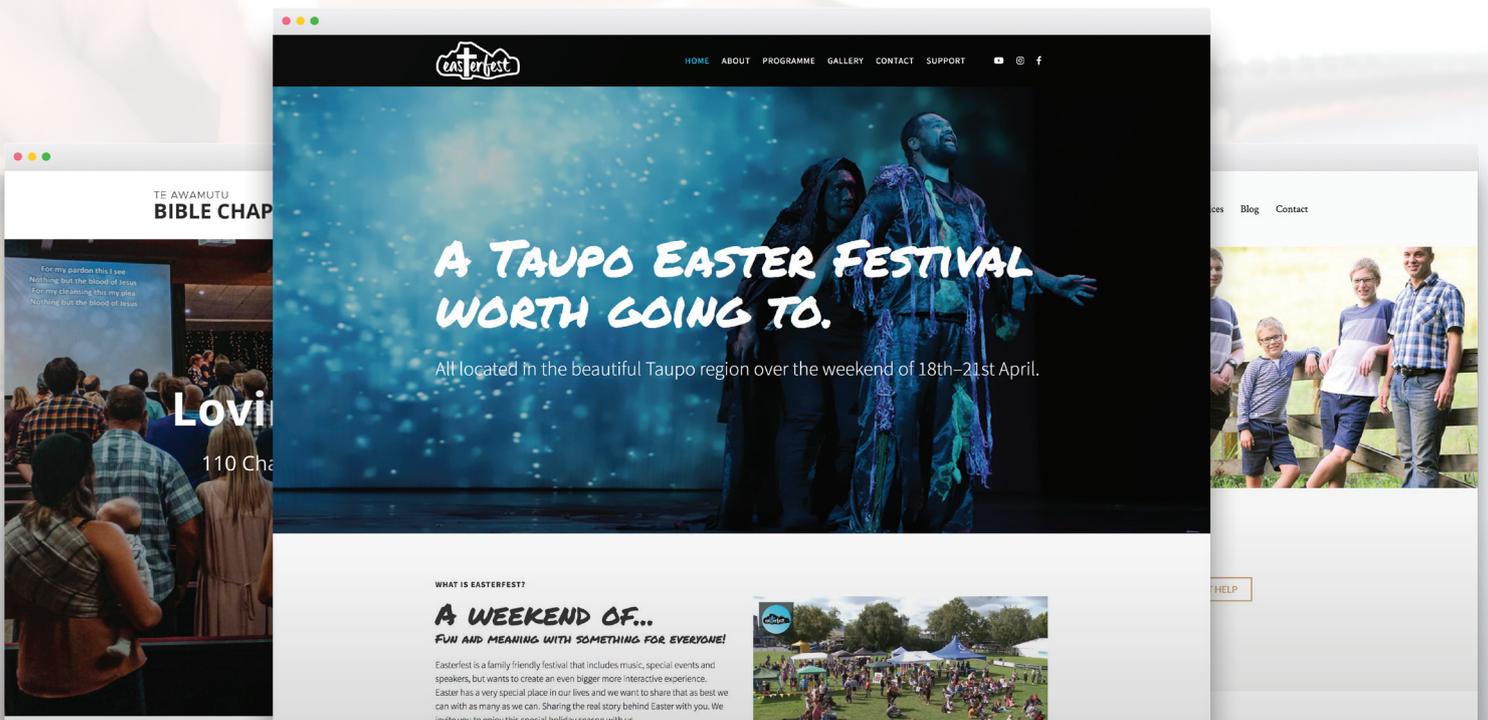
■ Nathan Johnson is program director and an instructor at Ellerslie Mission Society in Windsor, Colorado. Learn and see more at deeperChristian.com. Used by permission.



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Fullness in Everything

BY MAJOR W. IAN THOMAS

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

In other words, you can do no more without Him than He could do without the Father. But how much could the Father do through the Son? Everything! for He was available to all that the Father made available to Him. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands . . ." (John 13:3.) "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" (Colossians 1:19).

How much then can Jesus Christ do through you and through me? Everything! He is limited only by the measure of our availability to all that He makes available to us, for "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:9,10). What then is the faith that releases divine action? How may you be saved by His life, as you have already claimed to be redeemed

by His death? This is the critical question of Christian experience, and the answer is simple "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

Faith in all its sheer simplicity! Faith that takes God precisely at His Word! Faith that simply says, "Thank You."

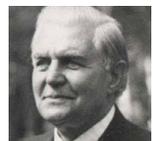
If you are to know the fulness of life in Christ, you are to appropriate the efficacy of what He is as you have already appropriated the efficacy of what He has done. Relate everything, moment by moment as it arises to the adequacy of what He is in you, and assume that His adequacy will be operative; and on this basis in I Thessalonians 5:16 you are exhorted to "rejoice evermore!" You are to be incorrigibly cheerful, for you have solid grounds upon which to rejoice!

Can any situation possible arise, in any circumstances, for which He is not adequate: Any pressure, promise, problem, responsibility or temptation for which the Lord Jesus Himself is not adequate? If He be truly God, there cannot be a single one!

This being so, applying His adequacy by faith to every situation as it arises, will leave you with no alternative but to obey the injunction of I Thessalonians 5:18 "In everything give thanks!" In how many things? In everything without exception, "this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." |

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

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



So, what do you do? Reflections on Business, Vocation and Identity

BY MURRAY SHEARD

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (Col 3:23)

I once had a student summer job testing electronic sensors. I had to load up a sensor and take a reading. I waited five minutes and took another reading. Then, another 10 minute wait before a final reading. I'd unscrew the sensor, grab the next one from the pile and repeat. As you can imagine, I was rather bored - and that was only the room temperature test. On some days, I'd do this in a cell heated to 40 degrees. Other days, cooled to freezing point. It was not my favourite summer.

I'm not sure if it was primarily this experience or later when I ended up teaching business ethics at Auckland University, but somewhere I developed an interest in how our work and the way we do it is part of God's story of breaking into the world to redeem all things, as Jesus sets out so well in Luke 4:18-19. How can we find the purpose in it? How can we influence our workplaces so we re-make work into an enterprise that plays its part for good in God's world?

Work and Identity

Work is central to our lives. We spend so much of our time at work so it must be important how we do it. And in turn, what doing that work does to us! At a party, talking to a stranger, what is the first question you are asked? "What do you do?" What is telling about this is that we know exactly what they

mean by 'do'. They are not asking about your hobbies. Nor are they looking for an answer like 'I eat', 'I sleep', or 'I pee'. They are asking about work. What I 'do', is my work.

Work is a key aspect of our identity. It wasn't always this way. The ancient Greeks thought work was too demeaning to be part of what defines us. To them, what defined a man was his deeds. But then, they had slaves!

For most of us, we do not have a choice not to work, so our work and our deeds are caught up together. If you think about it, our world is continually created and recreated by human work - and we ourselves are shaped, even recreated in that process. Work is seen by many of us as our calling card to the rest of the world.

Our identity is fundamentally in Christ, but if there is one thing that can get in the way - perhaps especially for men - it is work. A lot of us have had times where we are too tied up in our work and our own desire for the admiration and success we try to find there. Work can become an idol. And if work goes wrong - as it did for me once when I lost a business - we can lose ourselves and forget that our real value comes from being a child of God.

But these two elements - our identity in Christ and the way that work moulds our sense of meaning and identity - don't have to be in competition. God's calling for us to live with Christ inside us, to live as redeemed people, includes re-making our work relationships. Given the significant amount of time we



spend there, if our salt and light is not evident at work, where is it evident? When we seek to model a redeemed world – ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ - surely creating workplaces where human beings flourish, must be part of that? We shouldn’t be bled dry by our work.

Finding Purpose

Yet work can shrivel us and for many people, that is their experience - at least in some jobs they have had like my summer job all those years ago. When the industrial revolution swept through Europe, many observers were worried. The critique was not mostly about material inequality or poverty and disease through overcrowded manufacturing cities. It was what modernised work did to alienate and distort human souls.

We are not just workers. Our value to God is in the gift of our lives that we give back to God. Our value to God is not just our production – and that should not be our only value to each other either. Sometimes, listening to election debates and political advertising, I’m struck by the emphasis they place on the importance of producing good, productive workers, as if that is all there is to being human.

An observer from outer space might conclude that we had lost the Cold War. No - work is more than that. It is part of our pilgrimage of belonging and identity as fully human, made in God’s image and born creatively to produce. I’m especially struck by how this is true of men, partially because they have traditionally been the dominant bread-winners.

I’m sure I’m not alone when I say that I want work that makes my heart sing. We want workplaces where we feel gratitude for the skills we have, know they are well used, and where we can ‘pay it forward’. We want workplaces that inspire us to listen to the forgotten reaches of our hearts.

We want workplaces that answer our desire for creativity and purpose. You shouldn’t have to sell your soul to make a living.

These are the deepest yearnings for our work. And hence, they bear the weight of something beyond ourselves - something imprinted on our nature from the beginning. This ‘beyond’ is God’s Holy Spirit continually calling us to be transformed more to the stirrings of God’s own life within us. I have always been drawn to organisations that attempt

inspiring solutions to contemporary problems – working toward a just, sustainable, spiritually fulfilling human presence on this planet.

It’s that desire that led me to my current work at cbm, which operates at the intersection of international development and disability, making sure that people with disabilities are included in development projects, rather than being neglected, stigmatised and left behind.

But wherever we work, our work arrangements – whether they uplift or instead grind us down - must be part of the story of what a world touched by God’s hand looks like. Like any institution, we couldn’t justify our work arrangements morally if they distorted our nature or produced a stunted human. The nature of work must be part of the story of justice and redemption.

Business with Soul

So what does this mean for business and workplaces? Businesses need to engage people at an increasingly deep level if they are to give them fulfilling work and retain their services. Companies need the vitality of all hands in order to stay afloat in the sea of change increasingly engulfing them. Organisations might be visible to us as brands and products, but fundamentally, they cannot survive as outer forms but must breathe with the life of those who make them up.

Any organisation taking its place in an increasingly fluid global market is asking staff for more adaptability, vitality, imagination and enthusiastic willingness to go the extra mile. But if organisations are asking us for this commitment, they are asking for our hearts and minds.

They are asking for our hidden loves and personal investment. We have to feel affection for something if we are to apply our creativity and enthusiasm to it. We are attracted to work that makes us feel good. We want it, we seek it and when we have found it, we stick around.

Positive emotions prompt creativity, cooperation and openness to change. We shy away from a workplace if we feel threatened, bored, unappreciated, lonely or fearful. If what we do and how we do it is not vividly ‘proved upon our pulses’ (as the poet Keats put it), we lose the reason for doing it.

Hence, if the goal of a company is simply profit - without thought for the good of those that work within it and for the wider good of the community - then it will engage only those people motivated by financial gain. But if organisations and workplaces have more expansive goals and qualities across a range of values, and a sense of creative engagement is found within their walls, they may get something more soulful and creative from their staff. There is no formula to act as a lever inside a person to release this. These qualities—creativity, belonging, engagement, ethics, and even love—are what

human beings have always wanted for their work. We look for work and culture that allows us to bring more of ourselves to the job.

Reimagining our workplace

At cbm, our senior leadership team ask ourselves how we can look after our staff, acknowledge their contribution, enhance individual agency, and inspire a vision. We seek to draw on the ideas of all our staff and facilitate a high-trust environment. During Covid-19 lockdown, it was obvious that, even though we were all at home and the usual ways of working and structure of accountability had to change quickly, the passion for our work, the commitment to tasks and the care for each other continued.

This I believe, contributed to how well we navigated this unfamiliar territory. Commitment, passion, imagination, creativity: none of these can be coerced, manipulated, legislated, or dragged out by a catchy company slogan, or by outlining a three-year plan. Instead, they have their own logic, deep within the soul God has placed within us.

This is a challenge for leaders and managers, but it is also a challenge for us all.

- » Can we continue to find the 'God-moments' in our workplace, where our own actions can make a difference – for one or for many?
- » Can we ask how the ways we work together - this process, this decision, that relationship – can better model God's love?
- » Can we include others more in the decisions we are making, enhancing their sense of agency?

In short, can we work as if the Kingdom is here? The 'contract' between an organisation and the people within it should work for both parties because both benefit from production and achievement, but also from creativity, fun, belonging, and a sense of higher purpose. Aren't these our deepest longings for our work? They call for conversion of our fallen institutions, principalities and powers to Christ's likeness. Kingdom values, personal calling, and the organisation's good can come together. They don't have to be enemies.. | A

■ Dr Murray Sheard received his PhD in Ethics and Philosophy from The University of Auckland. He has worked in international development for over 15 years and is the Chief Executive Officer of cbm New Zealand, an international Christian development organisation committed to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the poorest countries of the world.



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AUTHENTIC
MEN'S MAGAZINE



The Greatest Fear of All...

By Paul Curtas

**"In the fear of the LORD there
is strong confidence."
Proverbs 14:26**

**"The fear of the Lord is the
beginning of wisdom."
Proverbs 9:10**

The news focusing on the latest statistics about the Corona-virus and where it may be heading next has captured the attention of millions around the world. We hear how many are being infected by it, and sadly, how people have died from it.

All this is having a paralyzing effect on many. This is not only impacting the lives of people personally, but also it has affected areas of commerce where business is being cancelled. Industries worldwide has taken a hard hit, meetings and production has reduced and employees are not working as much, which means reduced pay. We are watching the make-shift securities, that seem to support, protect and comfort our lives, slowly erode away.

Life's afflictions show us our vulnerability and how sudden life can change. Before we realize it, they produce a growing fear within that begins to paralyze us. We become anxious and scared of the slightest threatening news. It can stall us from making the necessary daily decisions of life, or we start making premature decisions primarily based on fear. Life then becomes edgy, hemmed in by our fears.

Fear is a big part of our emotional make-up. It has its bad and good sides. For example, if I see a tree starting to fall toward me... out of fear, I would run away from it, so it couldn't harm me. This is a healthy fear. But if I continue to dwell on this event and play it over and over in my mind, it can make me a fearful person staying away from trees, thinking they could hurt me. Though such fears are not realistic and probably will never happen, being preoccupied with fears will only

breed more fear and overcome us. So how should we view and respond to real threats... like the coronavirus? First, do not become overly obsessed by all the news reports. These reports can be overstated and listening to them constantly breeds fear. Instead, act responsibly and use precaution by following common sense health guidelines of hygiene.

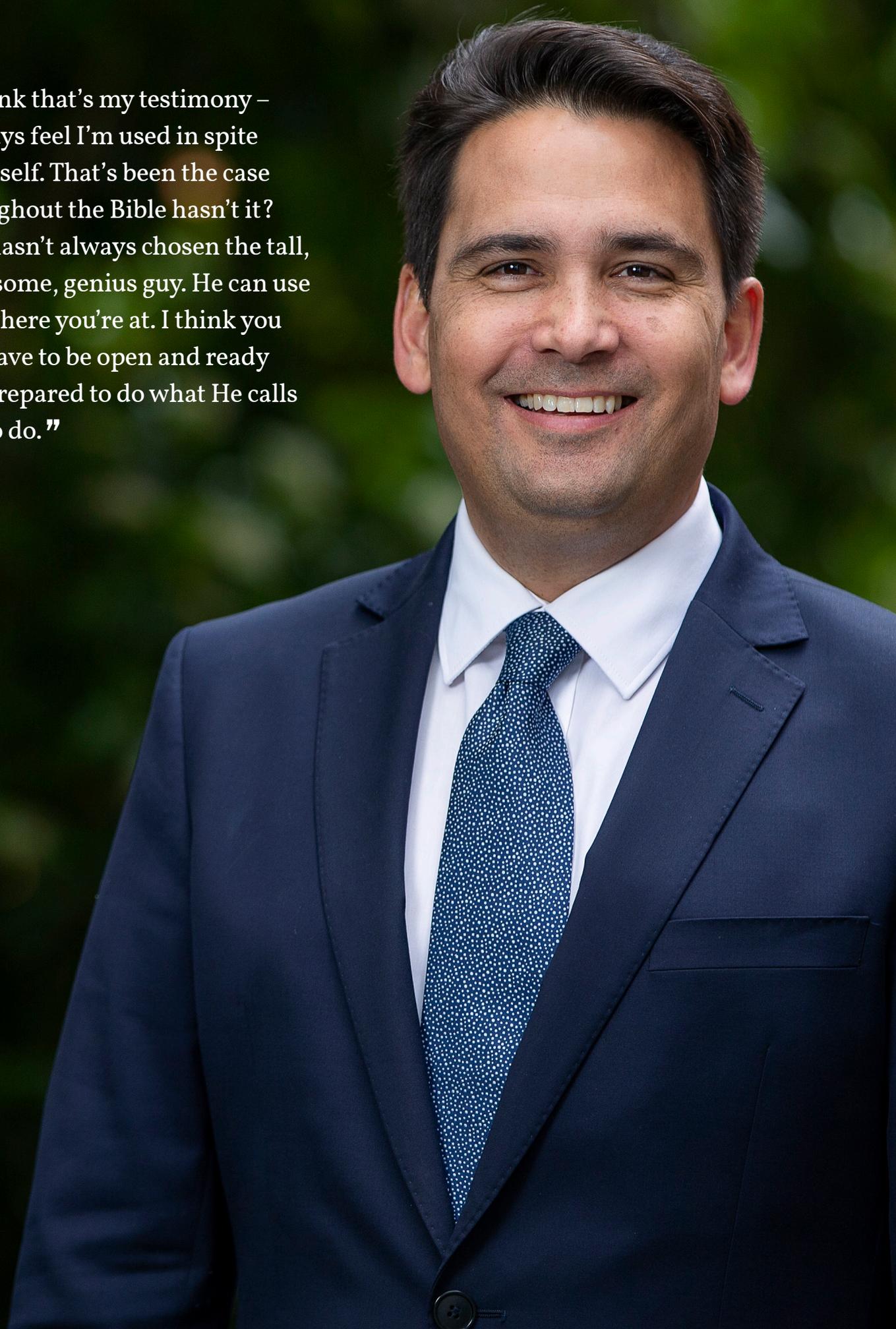
We should not think that trusting God means I can become naïve to danger and evil and simply ignore it. No, actually the opposite, in God's Word we are told when danger is approaching to turn away or hide, or you could be hurt by it (Proverbs 22:3). But God knows when our minds become focused on fearing things, it will change our motivation. We will do things out of fear, and eventually it shapes our character and we become driven by fear. So God invites us to enter into the greatest fear, that of fearing Him. The Bible speaks repeatedly of the importance of "fearing the Lord." When we "fear" God, we respect and trust His ways and provisions. It does not make us more fearful, because we understand His great power and His love for us (1 John 4:16-19). Actually, fearing God is what dispels all of the other fears that enslave us.

Has fear in some way gripped your life? God has not promised us that life will be easy and untouched by trials and adversities. Jesus told us that in this world we will have tribulations, but to take courage. He promises to give us His peace and power to sustain us in the midst of afflictions so that we can overcome them (John 16:33). David in Psalm 23:4 spoke about the Lord leading us through the valley of the shadows of death... and because of this, David said... I will fear no evil. May God help us to learn more how to "fear Him" as we make our journey through this life. | 

■ 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



“I think that’s my testimony – I always feel I’m used in spite of myself. That’s been the case throughout the Bible hasn’t it? God hasn’t always chosen the tall, handsome, genius guy. He can use you where you’re at. I think you just have to be open and ready and prepared to do what He calls you to do.”



BUILDING BRIDGES

BY JEREMY SMITH

Sipping a coffee, he is reflective.

“Navigating politics as a Christian can be difficult at times,” he states honestly. “But, ultimately I know who is in control – God. And, as His Word says, as long as we keep Him before us we know all things work together for the good of those who love Him. “I certainly know God is not through with me yet – and, in Him, all the experiences we go through have a purpose.”

While typically “not one to look back too much”, it’s a candid assessment offered by National’s MP for Tauranga, Simon Bridges. In May, he was challenged for, and subsequently lost, his role as leader of the opposition – a position he held for a little over two years.

Now though, as Simon focuses on what’s ahead, he sat down with Authentic Magazine to talk faith, the silver lining of getting to spend more time with his most important priority, his family, and being a Christian in politics.

Start us off with a bit about your family. Wasn’t your dad a pastor?

I grew up in Auckland with a strong Christian upbringing in a great household. I am the youngest of six children. My dad’s Māori and my mum’s Pākehā. Yes, Dad was a Baptist preacher, very much in the charismatic, movement during the late ‘70s and ‘80s. He was a rough diamond – as I am. Mum was a primary school teacher, as well as a pastor’s wife. They served God faithfully .

So, when did you come to know Jesus for yourself?

There’s that old saying that perhaps many people have heard, “Just because you’re in a garage doesn’t make you a car.” And that’s true. So, for me, my conversion and probably my first real experience was at a Barry Smith meeting when I was 12 or 13.

Other strong experiences were at youth group and a gathering called Summer Harvest, which used to be held on Bill Subritzky’s farm north of Auckland.

And I’ve been a Christian since – throughout my 20s and during university. Though, there were definitely times when I probably wasn’t strongly living out a Christian life.

Tell us about your family...

My wife Natalie and I have three children – two sons, Emlyn, eight and Harry, six, and daughter, Jemima, two.



I heard that Natalie is English. How did you two first meet?

It was during our university years, most of which were in Auckland, I did spend a year studying in Oxford. There, Natalie and I were in the same college - St Catherine's College.

We bumped into each other in the cubby hole area pretty early on. She later told me she then went back to her flat and telephoned her mother to tell her she had just met the most handsome Japanese man. Of course, I'm not Japanese - I'm Maori - so that made me smile. Not long after that we started going out and at the end of our year at Oxford we got married in a 1000-year-old chapel.

Before she knew it, Natalie was on her way back to New Zealand - which she'd never really heard of other than knowing of the All Blacks and the Haka - which she'd watched before with her Welsh dad. I don't even think he'd ever even been to the Southern Hemisphere. It was a big leap of faith by her. That was in 2005, and 15 years on, here we are.

So, where does politics fit into all of this?

My family wasn't political and no one else had been a member of a political party. But, being a church-going household, we did talk about social issues and always watched the news. I was a news junkie. From a relatively young age, probably round 11-12, I was buying political books and reading them.

Looking back so far, as I see it, there have been two or three landmarks in my life in terms of my faith journey. Politics is one of them. At university, I studied law and eventually became a crown prosecutor. I was in a good law firm and on my way up. And because that career was going well, I can remember when I stood for parliament my parents thought I was nuts.



There were risks to it - leaving my job, all of those things. But as a Christian, you'd say making that leap was a God thing. I wanted to have more of a public service aspect to what I was doing and I got very involved in the National party early on - I've been the Member of Parliament for Tauranga since the 2008 election.

What are the biggest challenges with being a Christian in politics and how do you navigate that?

From time to time I get asked the question "Should Christians be in politics?" And my answer is, of course, "yes". In truth, in the early days in terms of the outworking of a Christian faith, I didn't really think along the lines of "should I be acting like this or that," or "what would Jesus do?", as people often say. I think more and more people are beginning to realise it's important that there are Christians in political life.

“From where I sit, I simply think it’s important there are Christians across the spectrum contributing, being salt and light.”

But the longer I live the more I think we shouldn't type-cast Jesus either. He wasn't a shrinking violet, whether he was upending tables, or getting stuck into Pharisees. But he could also be incredibly gentle and kind - He was someone of true character and life. I also think the Jesus I know isn't on the far left or the far right. If you go through the Bible, many of the characters were in some ways politicians if you really think about it. David was a king! Let me tell you something, that's a politician. Joseph was number two - technically the Prime Minister - in Egypt, which wasn't even a God-fearing country. And then there's Daniel. And those are just the obvious ones.

Honestly, I think one of the tricky things for me has always been how to integrate it all and if I'm being candid, I don't want to set myself up as the gold standard. Because it is a very public life and I, as we all do, fall short of the glory of God. I know I'm flawed.

From where I sit, I simply think it's important there are Christians across the spectrum contributing, being salt and light.

I read that when you were elected as leader of the opposition in 2018 you became the first person with Māori ancestry to serve as leader of a major party in New Zealand. What does that mean to you?

My grandmother on my dad's side was Naku Joseph. She was of Ngati Maniapoto descent and grew up at Oparure Marae near Te Kuiti, but died before I was born. She was very clear with my dad, now in his late 80s, that he shouldn't have much



to do with the Maori world and so - consequently - we grew up without any real sense of this and being distant to it. As I've gotten older that has made me sad, and I've since been back to our Marae a number of times and consider myself Maori. I believe Maori, as our indigenous people, have a deep significance, both spiritually and politically, in our nation.

As well as being opposition leader, you have held lots of other roles – transport minister, economic development minister and leader of the house - during your time in politics. What would you say you're most proud of?

There are several achievements I am proud of. One example very early on was passing a law against animal cruelty. Then, as transport minister I was really proud of being part of major roading projects like the Waikato Expressway. But there are many others.

What has been the hardest part of politics and do you have any regrets?

You know, I don't really. There's a saying from my upbringing – "do your best and let God take care of the rest." I've always thought that if you do what is right for the right reasons you can leave the rest with God. That's genuinely how I feel, so I've never really been one to look back massively. Some of that is my Christian faith where we are told to throw off things that might drag us down and finish our race strong.

Obviously being in the public eye as you are often means people – even some Christians – form a perception of you based on your actions. Much of that seems to be centred around your approach to – or how you would vote on – certain issues. What's your response?

The reality is that a lot of the time when I was making decisions, I knew they may not have been looked upon well. But I felt they were right. Keeping God before me goes for

everything, whether that be the situation with Jami-Lee Ross or chairing the Epidemic Response Committee and holding the Government to account regarding its approach to Covid-19.

Can you talk us through what it was like navigating the leadership challenge from your perspective?

Firstly, I can say I thought I would win – but obviously that didn't happen. Answering honestly, I genuinely was calm throughout the whole process and even afterwards.

Looking specifically at losing that role, I have no doubt my faith was crucial in helping me through. It was always about navigating that process with good grace, integrity and forgiveness. It's very easy to get caught up in bitterness and who did what to who and so on, but we know that as Christians that's not our job and it doesn't help us. So, I never wanted to get into that.

I've heard you say that after losing the leadership of the opposition there were some "real silver linings" as you called them – what are they?

After a good 12 years of "really going at it" politically, the biggest one is more time with my family. They are the most important thing to me and I aim to be a good, family-orientated, Godly role model for them. Then, I'm also enjoying more time being here in Tauranga. We love this place.

Talking of scrutiny, how do you find the work rest balance, particularly considering you have a young family?

Politics is not for the faint hearted – whether its social media or death threats, these things happen in public life. I have no doubt Natalie wouldn't be up for it if it wasn't for our shared faith and the knowledge that this is a calling.

AUTHENTIC | FEATURE

So then, why did you ultimately decide to continue in politics and stand in Tauranga at this year's election next month?

I think for the sake of Natalie and the kids I did have a serious think about what was best, staying or getting out. Obviously for me as a Christian that involves prayer and reading the Bible. I really feel that this is God's calling on my life and I've still got a really significant contribution to make.

If you weren't in politics what would you be doing?

If I hadn't stood for parliament and got in in 2008 as a 32-year-old I'd probably be a middle-aged lawyer right now – but life was breathed on my career and I've certainly been privileged.

Who's the most interesting – or perhaps unusual - person you've met?

In terms of the most famous people, I've met President Obama, Tony Blair, Australian Prime ministers and a fair few royals. There is one that particularly strikes me – not just because this is for Authentic Magazine - but sometimes it's the less obvious ones. I had a very insightful meeting with cardinal Luis Tagle, a Filipino cardinal of the Catholic Church. They talk about him as potentially being the first Asian pope. I went with National Party deputy leader Gerry Brownlee, National MP for Rodney, Mark Mitchell and Paulo Garcia to meet him and it was a real privilege. On that same trip we also met boxer Manny Pacquiao.

What's the best part about being in politics?

There's plenty of real blessings – from the very superficial things like meeting the royals as we've mentioned – through to being involved in decisions that shape the fabric of our nation.

Describe for us what the perfect day with your family, away from politics, looks like?

I certainly know what my boys would say – fishing. But I have to be honest, that doesn't happen much. From my perspective, it would probably be in nature. I'm looking forward to tramping around Mt Ruapehu and Tongariro and staying in huts with the boys – it will be their first big tramping endeavour. Hopefully we'll be able to do that a bit later in the year.

And music? You also play the drums?

Yes, definitely. Music is a big one for me – it opens up another dimension. I'm often in my happy place in my man cave at the back of our house. I've got an electronic drum kit set up – I swore I'd never get one and it would only ever be a real kit.

But, you know, middle age creeps in and you have to do these things.

You subscribe to Authentic Magazine – can you tell us why you think it is an important resource in today's world?

Men are in a world where there's a lot of sinicism about manliness and male characteristics and virtues. As Christian men we need building up as a well – and Authentic fulfills a really important gap. I am proud to subscribe, long may that continue.

What would you say to encourage Christian men in New Zealand?

My encouragement would be that God uses flawed and broken vessels – and often the more flawed and the more broken the more He'll use you.

In my experience – while I'm relatively high up in New Zealand politics - I certainly have more flaws than I care to mention. But I know that I'm serving irrespective of those. I think that's my testimony – I always feel I'm used in spite of myself. That's been the case throughout the Bible hasn't it? God hasn't always chosen the tall, handsome, genius guy. He can use you where you're at. I think you just have to be open and ready and prepared to do what He calls you to do.

What can we as Christian men do practically to be a support?

Simply put, be prayerful and discerning about things.

Thank you Simon for your openness and honesty.

Please pray for Simon and other politicians that put Jesus first in their lives. May the Lord use them mightily to advance HIS Kingdom. |  



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



The Christian Mindset

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

Where we place our mind and what we give our thoughts to will determine our focus and how we live.



Our culture is celebrating and promoting fear, pride, and lawlessness. What the Bible calls evil, culture declares as good. What God says is good, the culture tosses it away with hateful rejection.

While this has always been true (read the Biblical prophets), the widespread obsession and increase of immorality, fear, pride, anger, and lawlessness within American culture (and even within the Church) over the past few months has been an infection far more contagious, dangerous, and deadly than Covid19.

Many Christians who aren't wrapped up in the cultural craziness of the day are yet living in fear, anxiety, and

trepidation – and in so doing, disregarding the Biblical mandate to live without fear, be strong and courageous, and to not worry. But how can a Christian live without fear or worry? How are we able to be strong and courageous no matter the circumstances circling around us?

While there are far more complicated responses, I've concluded that it simply comes down to one word: mindset. Where we place our mind and what we give our thoughts to will determine our focus and thus how we live.

For example, if a fearful situation presents itself, rather than dwelling upon the situation and fear – what if I set my mind on Jesus Christ and realized that in Him I am more than a



conqueror, in Him there is no fear because perfect love casts out fear, in Him there is no place for worry or anxiety because He is the One in control, and thus I can trust Him.

Isaiah 26:3 tells us, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

When we live in fear, anxiety, worry, and trepidation it is a declaration of our lack of focus upon and trust in God.

When we focus and trust Jesus, it is not that the circumstance goes away and we find ourselves skipping through meadows with skittles falling from the sky. Rather, in Christ there is a restful hope and trust in His provision, sovereignty, guidance, and protection – that He truly does have all things under His control and He is using all things (the good, the bad, and the ugly) for our good (see Ephesians 1:20-22 and Romans 8:28).

I’ve recently been pondering Paul’s statement to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).

Paul wasn’t writing Philippians from a comfy couch eating choice foods without a worry in the world, he was writing from a prison cell (see Philippians 1:13, 4:22).

Years earlier, while in prison after being beaten with rods, Paul and Silas rejoiced by “praying and singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25). When Paul says to “rejoice in the Lord always” he actually means it. But how? The key is not focusing upon the circumstances but rather focusing upon the One above

your circumstances. God didn’t cause them to be beaten and thrown in prison, yet He allowed it to happen and promised to use even the pain and torture for their good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Paul and Silas were not singing about their beaten backs was or how depressing the jail cell was, they were singing about how great their God is. The pain was still there, they were still locked in a cell, but their mind was set on Christ.

We live in a time where lawlessness reigns, anger abounds, fear flourishes, and worry wins the day. But we can live in perfect peace when we keep our minds steadfast upon Jesus and trust in Him (again see Isaiah 26:3).

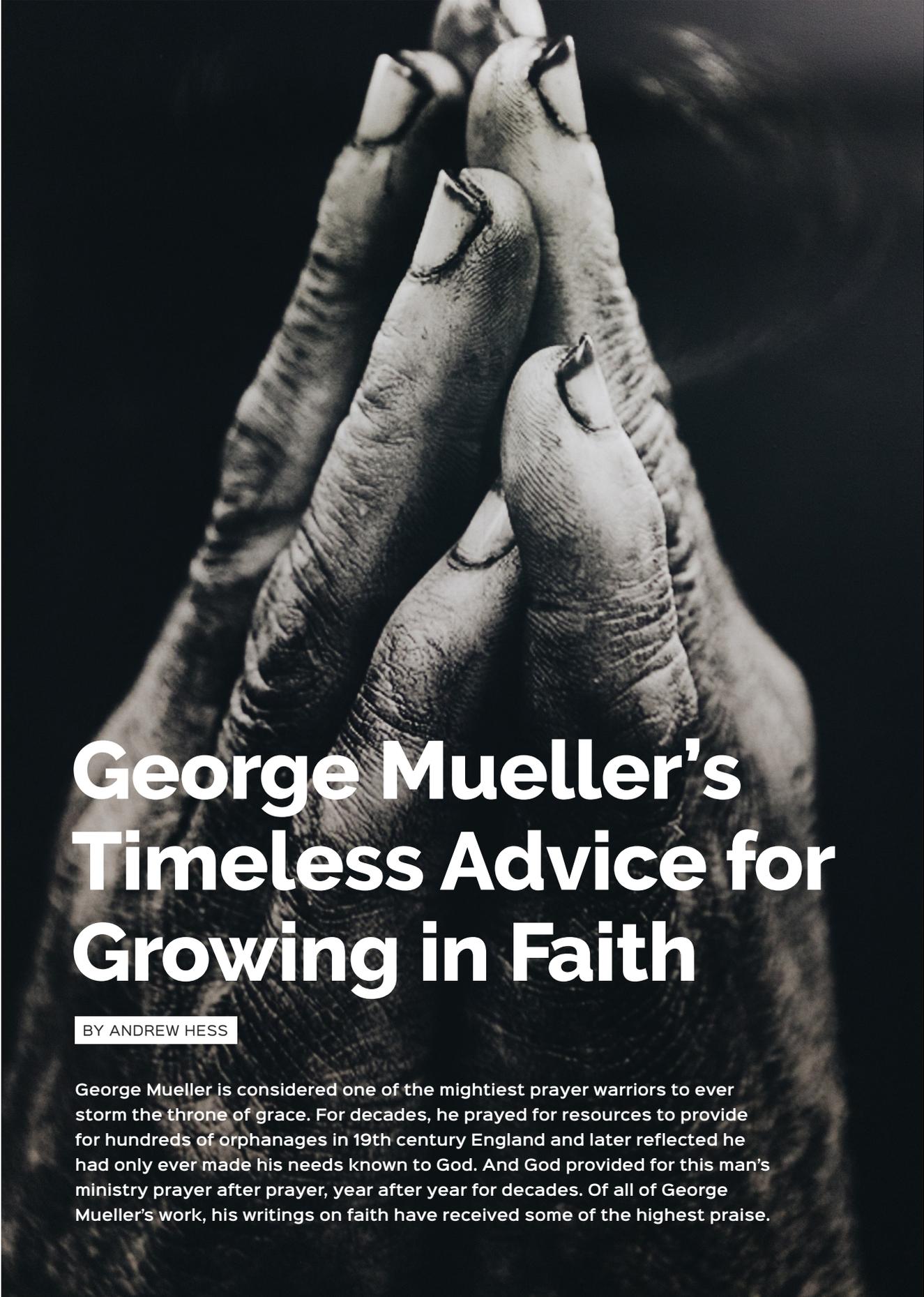
So dear Christian, remember, you are a BELIEVER, you are to believe (ie: trust) in the strength, provision, protection, guidance, and love of our God. So be bold, be strong and courageous, live without fear, do not fret and worry about tomorrow but seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (see Matthew 6:25-34).

Remember to keep your mind steadfast upon Jesus – for it is only then when we will experience perfect peace which will in turn guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. So let us rejoice always and be anxious for nothing, for our Lord is at hand (see Philippians 4:4-7). And as Paul reminds us ...

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8). Know I’m praying for you and cheering you on as we set our minds on Jesus. | A

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





George Mueller's Timeless Advice for Growing in Faith

BY ANDREW HESS

George Mueller is considered one of the mightiest prayer warriors to ever storm the throne of grace. For decades, he prayed for resources to provide for hundreds of orphanages in 19th century England and later reflected he had only ever made his needs known to God. And God provided for this man's ministry prayer after prayer, year after year for decades. Of all of George Mueller's work, his writings on faith have received some of the highest praise.

George Mueller on Growing in Faith

Here is a wonderful excerpt from George Mueller's writings on strengthening faith:

Let not Satan deceive you in making you think that you could not have the same faith but that it is only for persons who are situated as I am. When I lose such a thing as a key, I ask the Lord to direct me to it, and I look for an answer to my prayer; when a person with whom I have made an appointment does not come, according to the fixed time, and I begin to be inconvenienced by it, I ask the Lord to be pleased to hasten him to me and I look for an answer; when I do not understand a passage of the word of God, I lift up my heart to the Lord, that He would be pleased, by His Holy Spirit to instruct me, and I expect to be taught, though I do not fix the time when, and the manner how it should be; when I am going to minister in the Word, I seek help from the Lord, and while I, in the consciousness of natural inability as well as utter unworthiness begin this His service, I am not cast down, but of good cheer, because I look for His assistance, and believe that He, for His dear Son's sake will help me. And thus in other of my temporal and spiritual concerns I pray to the Lord, and expect an answer to my requests; and may not you do the same, dear believing reader?

Oh! I beseech you, do not think me an extraordinary believer, having privileges above other of God's dear children, which they cannot have; nor look on my way of acting as something that would not do for other believers. Make but trial! Do but stand still in the hour of trial, and you will see the help of God, if you trust in Him. But there is so often a forsaking the ways of the Lord in the hour of trial, and thus the food of faith, the means whereby our faith may be increased, is lost. This leads me to the following important point.

You ask, "How may I, a true believer, have my faith strengthened?"

The answer is this: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17). As the increase of faith is a good gift, it must come from God, and therefore He ought to be asked for this blessing.

The following means, however, ought to be used:

1. The careful reading of the word of God, combined with meditation on it. Through reading of the word of God, and especially through meditation on the word of God, the

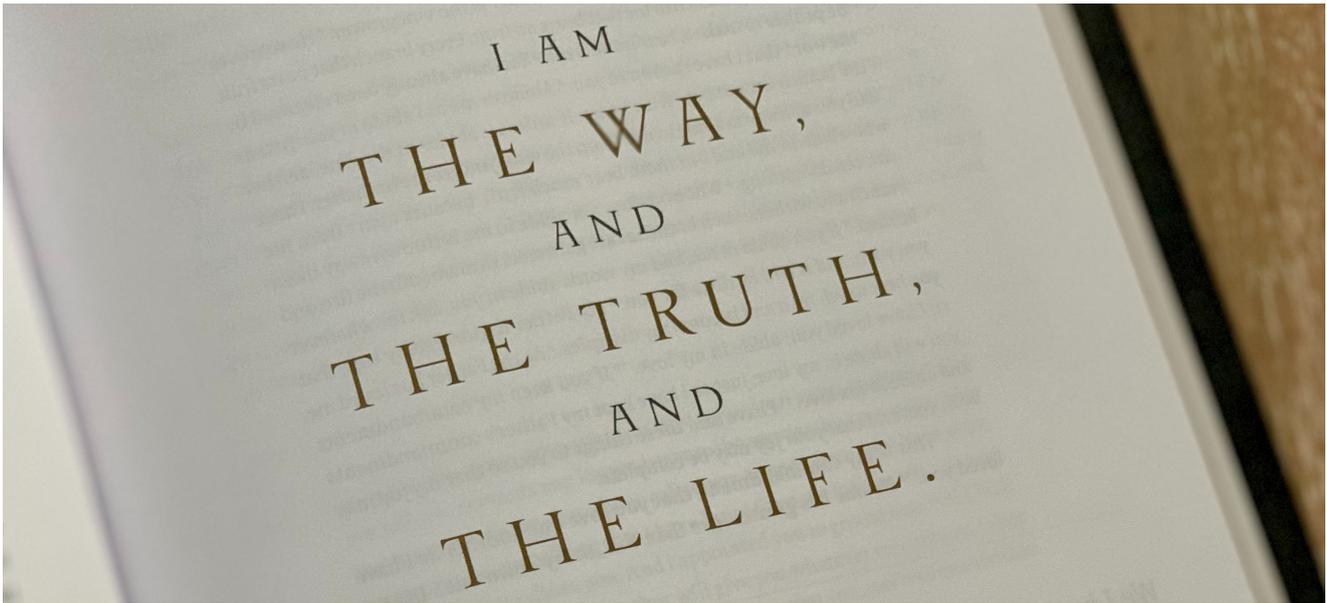
believer becomes more and more acquainted with the nature and character of God, and thus sees more and more, besides His holiness and justice, what a kind, loving, gracious, merciful, mighty, wise, and faithful Being He is, and, therefore, in poverty, affliction of body, bereavement in his family, difficulty in his service, want of a situation or employment, he will repose upon the ability of God to help him, because he has not only learned from His word that He is of almighty power and infinite wisdom, but he has also seen instance upon instance in the Holy Scriptures in which His almighty power and infinite wisdom have been actually exercised in helping and delivering His people; and he will repose upon the willingness of God to help him, because he has not only learned from the Scriptures what a kind, good, merciful, gracious, and faithful being God is, but because he has also seen in the word of God how, in a great variety of instances He has proved Himself to be so. And the consideration of this, if God has become known to us through prayer and meditation on His own word, will lead us, in general at least, with a measure of confidence to rely upon Him: and thus the reading of the word of God, together with meditation on it, will be one especial means to strengthen our faith.

“Either we trust in God, and in that case we neither trust in ourselves, nor in our fellow-men, nor in circumstances, nor in anything besides; or we DO trust in one or more of these, and in that case do NOT trust in God.”

2. As with reference to the growth of every grace of the Spirit, it is of the utmost importance that we seek to maintain an upright heart and a good conscience, and, therefore, do not knowingly and habitually indulge in those things which are contrary to the mind of God, so it is also particularly the case with reference to the growth in faith. How can I possibly continue to act faith upon God, concerning anything, if I am habitually grieving Him, and seek to detract from the glory and honour of Him in whom I profess to trust, upon whom I profess to depend?

All my confidence towards God, all my leaning upon Him in the hour of trial will be gone, if I have a guilty conscience, and do not seek to put away this guilty conscience, but still continue to do the things which are contrary to the mind of God.

And if, in any particular instance, I cannot trust in God, because of the guilty conscience, then my faith is weakened by that instance of distrust; for faith with every fresh trial of it either increases by trusting God, and thus getting help, or it decreases by not trusting Him; and then there is less and less power of looking simply and directly to Him, and a habit of self-dependence is begotten or encouraged. One or the other of these will always be the case in each particular instance. Either we trust in God, and in that case we neither trust in ourselves, nor in our fellow-men, nor in circumstances, nor in anything besides; or we DO trust in one or more of these, and in that case do NOT trust in God.



3. If we, indeed, desire our faith to be strengthened, we should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried, and, therefore, through the trial, be strengthened. In our natural state we dislike dealing with God alone. Through our natural alienation from God we shrink from Him, and from eternal realities. This cleaves to us more or less, even after our regeneration. Hence it is, that more or less, even as believers, we have the same shrinking from standing with God alone, from depending upon Him alone, from looking to Him alone: and yet this is the very position in which we ought to be, if we wish our faith to be strengthened.

The more I am in a position to be tried in faith with reference to my body, my family, my service for the Lord, my business, etc., the more shall I have opportunity of seeing God's help and deliverance; and every fresh instance, in which He helps and delivers me, will tend towards the increase of my faith. On this account, therefore, the believer should not shrink from situations, positions, circumstances, in which his faith may be tried; but should cheerfully embrace them as opportunities where he may see the hand of God stretched out on his behalf, to help and deliver him, and whereby he may thus have his faith strengthened.

4. The last important point for the strengthening of our faith is, that we let God work for us, when the hour of the trial of our faith comes, and do not work a deliverance of our own. Wherever God has given faith, it is given, among other reasons, for the very purpose of being tried. Yea, however weak our faith may be, God will try it; only with this restriction, that as in every way, He leads on gently, gradually, patiently, so also with reference to the trial of our

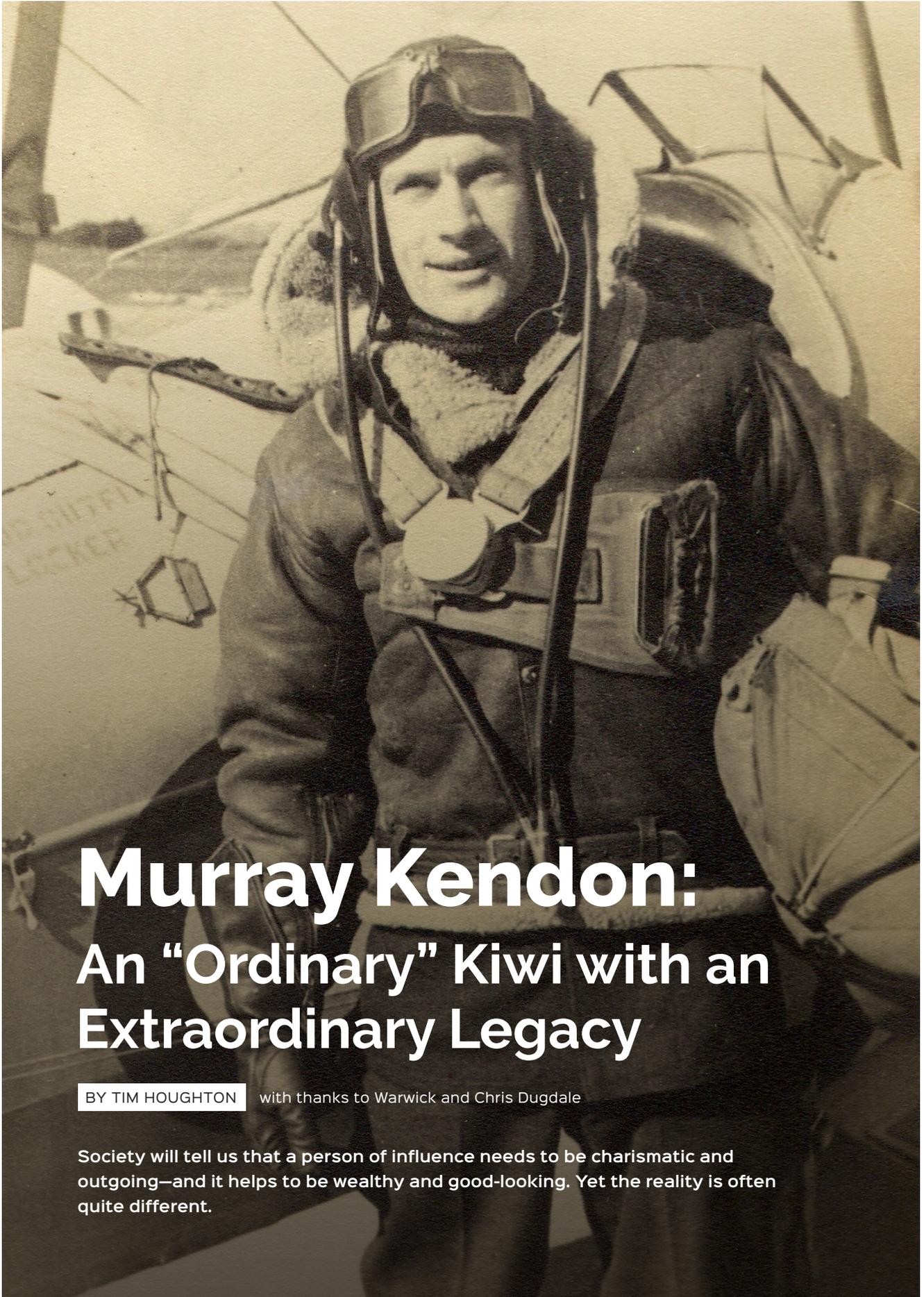
faith. At first our faith will be tried very little in comparison with what it may be afterwards; for God never lays more upon us than He is willing to enable us to bear. Now when the trial of faith comes, we are naturally inclined to distrust God, and to trust rather in ourselves, or in our friends, or in circumstances.

We will rather work a deliverance of our own somehow or other, than simply look to God and wait for His help. But if we do not patiently wait for God's help, if we work a deliverance of our own, then at the next trial of our faith it will be thus again, we shall be again inclined to deliver ourselves; and thus with every fresh instance of that kind, our faith will decrease; whilst on the contrary, were we to stand still, in order to see the salvation of God, to see His hand stretched out on our behalf, trusting in Him alone, then our faith would be increased, and with every fresh case in which the hand of God is stretched out on our behalf in the hour of the trial of our faith, our faith would be increased yet more.

Would the believer, therefore, have his faith strengthened, he must especially, give time to God, who tries his faith in order to prove to His child, in the end, how willing He is to help and deliver him, the moment it is good for him. | 

■ Andrew Hess is the director of content at the White Horse Inn and editor of corechristianity.com. He formerly served as the editor of churchleaders.com. His writing has been featured on The Gospel Coalition and Focus on the Family.





Murray Kendon: An “Ordinary” Kiwi with an Extraordinary Legacy

BY TIM HOUGHTON with thanks to Warwick and Chris Dugdale

Society will tell us that a person of influence needs to be charismatic and outgoing—and it helps to be wealthy and good-looking. Yet the reality is often quite different.

God is looking for those with a faithful commitment to obeying what He has said—and the tenacity and determination needed to turn a dream into a reality. Simply put, God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. One such man was Murray Kendon.

In many ways a “typical Kiwi”, quietly spoken and unassuming, his life continues to impact thousands of people each year in some of the most remote places on the planet. Murray’s legacy is Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), an organisation that flies 130 light aircraft in 30 developing nations. These aircraft, specially designed to take off and land on rough, short runways, deliver urgently needed food, emergency supplies and resources to isolated communities. Each year they transport about 1,400 Christian and humanitarian agencies, provide medical evacuations and assist in disaster relief work. They enable doctors, medical and church teams, teachers and missionaries to get to the remote places where God has called them, to areas that would be hard or impossible to reach any other way.

This year MAF celebrates 75 years of “Flying for Life”. But how did it all begin? What was the spark that started MAF?

The Story Begins

Born in Auckland in 1917, Murray Kendon became a Christian when he was sixteen.

“After I was converted, many things changed”, he recalled. “I had a growing passion to share the truth of life in Christ with others. A group of us began using singing and simple testimonies to witness on the streets and beaches, hospitals and parks.” Soon after, Murray experienced a growing sense of urgency, “To find a way to get the message of true life in Jesus Christ to those living far from a city or town. I prayed with another new Christian over the next nine months, seeking God’s guidance and confirmation. Together we left our work and homes in early 1937, at the age of twenty-one, to sing and preach in small townships and scattered settlements. We started during the winter in the “King Country”, an area dotted with remote timber mills and bush camps.

We made friends by working without pay alongside the bushmen, taking a hand at crosscutting felled logs and



↳ The Miles Gemini at Newcastle airport in 1947, prior to departing for Africa.



↳ Second from left: Murray Kendon in MAF's Miles Gemini aircraft during the UK tour.

enjoying an enormous evening meal with them in the camp cookhouse. Afterwards we would sing and speak to them about the Gospel before walking back on the rickety rails through the dark to sleep in our old car. It was very uncomfortable. The front seats could not be folded down so we had to sleep sitting in the back with our feet hanging over the front seats. We would often wake in the morning to find icicles hanging inside the car”.

When war loomed heavy on the horizon Murray, in his unassuming way, decided on the Air Force because, “I was not keen on joining the Navy or the Army”. When asked if, as a committed Christian, he was a conscientious objector his answer was, “No”. But as a man who cared deeply about people, Murray said, “I was not keen to shoot others down”.

Murray spent eight months in Canada, before being transferred to Britain. Even while training hard to fly, Murray used weekends and leave time to preach. At one such meeting in England, Murray met his future wife Minnie, who was hungry to learn the Bible. It wasn’t long before she caught Murray’s enthusiasm for sharing about Jesus. During one ten-day period they held 57 meetings in dance halls, churches and private homes. They were married for 69 years.

Murray’s active service was with 179 Squadron, flying as a Wellington co-pilot. The Wellingtons were armed with depth charges, machine guns, 22 million-candle power searchlights and powerful radar. Murray’s crew of six was comprised of Britons, Australians and Kiwis. Their brief was to comb the Atlantic to find and destroy enemy submarines, which were sinking Allied ships.

A Dream One Night

One night, as Murray flew across the Bay of Biscay, he watched the flak from France over which thundered a British thousand-bomber raid, and it stirred something in his heart. He later wrote down his thoughts:

“How come thousands of planes can be found to kill and destroy, and only a handful to spread God’s amazing offer of free forgiveness and eternal life in glory?” And so the vision for MAF was born.

The Dream Takes Shape

In 1944, just before the end of the war, Murray was joined by Trevor Strong, a Kiwi pilot who had been shot down, spent months as a POW, escaped and was then recaptured. Trevor had also experienced a call to using aircraft for missions, so with great enthusiasm he applied himself to the task of making Murray's dream a reality.

In the beginning the focus was on establishing prayer. "Soon we had hundreds of mostly young people faithfully praying for MAF", Murray recalled.

With the dream still in its fledgling stage, Murray poured out his heart to Dr. Thomas Cochrane, the influential president of the Movement for World Evangelism in London. The answer was swift and direct: "God has laid this on your heart, Murray—perhaps He wants you to do something about it. You pray about it, write an article, and I will publish it." Thus, on 5th July 1945, the first recorded thoughts about a MAF-type operation were published in an English Christian newspaper, "A Christian Weekly".

This article was embraced by a number of Christian pilots from different countries who recognised the opportunity to use their aviation skills to serve and build, rather than to destroy. In 1946 Murray flew to America to connect with the Christian Airmen's Missionary Fellowship, begun by female pilot Betty Greene two years earlier. They found their name and vision almost identical, decided to work together and later took on the common name of Missionary Aviation Fellowship.

Murray helped purchase MAF's first aircraft, a Miles Gemini. They flew this plane on a six-week tour of over 30 cities in England, Scotland and Ireland, during which twenty thousand people heard about MAF.

In 1948 MAF made an intensive six-month survey flight to Africa to assess the viability of using aircraft in missions. The first and longest journey, which lasted a month, took the pioneer pilots in a great 3,000 mile loop, from Nairobi in East Africa, across the huge expanse of what is today called the Democratic Republic of Congo to Leopoldville (modern day Kinshasa) in the extreme west, then back by a more northerly route.

MAF Starts in New Zealand

In 1946, Trevor Strong returned to New Zealand, setting up the MAF committee here. By 1959, MAF New Zealand was officially incorporated as a society, with the goal of establishing prayer groups, promoting the work and raising funds. It was clear that God's blessing rested on the rapidly expanding work, and in



↳ MAF in Sudan in 1950 on its survey tour of Africa, with some Mabaan people looking on.

1961 the first New Zealand staff, Doug and Glenis Hunt, were sent to PNG.

The Next Generations

Today many are taking the baton passed on by Murray. Bridget Ingham completed a PhD in physics in 2005 and over the following ten years developed a highly successful career as a research scientist. Then, in early 2016, God got her attention and reminded Bridget of her dream to be a pilot. Today Bridget, along with fellow Kiwi Andrew Macdonald, are the two MAF pilots currently flying in Timor-Leste in Southeast Asia.

Murray went to be with his Lord on 27 May 2014. Today Minnie lives in Wellington. Looking back, she laughs at how she secretly had some doubts about the success of the whole "MAF enterprise", but felt it was her duty to support Murray as he worked so hard to see his dream established! | 

To find out more about MAF, go to maf.org.nz.



↳ Murray & Minnie Kendon

WITH THANKS TO MAF



■ Tim Houghton has been Communications Manager at MAF New Zealand for over five years. He loves using creative media to promote MAF, an organisation that for 75 years has enabled missions to take place in isolated communities around the world. Find out more about MAF at www.maf.org.nz



BECOME AN AIRCRAFT ENGINEER FOR MAF

Benji Hunt from New Zealand
Aircraft Engineer, PNG

Are you a school-leaver or wanting to change your career? Do you want to serve God in a worldwide ministry? Start training in 2021 through one of our New Zealand training partners. Join our individually tailored pathway towards a career with MAF.

Be part of something bigger! Contact us today!

With a fleet of around 130 aircraft in over 30 countries, MAF flies in some of the most challenging parts of the world to bring hope to people in places of deepest human need.

Find out more: maf.org.nz/engineers or email: info@maf.org.nz



MISSION AVIATION FELLOWSHIP

maf.org.nz



ACT JUSTLY, LOVE MERCY AND WALK HUMBLLY: Shaun Brooker

BY JEREMY SMITH

Equipping and transforming. Those are two words central in the minds of Hamilton Christian School principal Shaun Brooker and his staff as they begin each day in Christian education. A principal with a reputation for having fun, Shaun sits down for a chat about how God led him into education, his desire to always point students towards Christ and his love of rugby.



So, this isn't your first job in education is it Shaun?

No, it's not. I began my educational leadership journey in the Cayman Islands, where I was the head of an elementary department at an international school. We were there for three years. I've also been principal at a Christian school in Timaru and before I came to Hamilton, I was head of the junior campus at Auckland's Elim Christian College.

You have a reputation as a fun-loving principal. I've heard that you travel to and from school on an electric skateboard?

In the summer months, yes. I enjoy the freedom. We live close to school so it's nice to have something that gives you an opportunity to unpack each day on the way home. It allows me to separate the two zones of being Dad and husband at home and principal at school.

Ok, tell us about your journey with Jesus...

I was raised in a Christian home - I'm so grateful for that. When I think of my testimony, I think of the parable of the talents. I still have lots of areas to learn and grow in, but in my weaknesses He is strong.

When I was at school, I was top of accounting and maths, but I failed miserably in English, especially when it came to things like speeches and writing. It's really interesting to me that as I've handed those areas that I perceive as my weaker aspects over to God, He takes them and uses them.

I love the institution of school, but, ultimately, it doesn't define you. I keep coming back to the fact my journey is in His strength, not mine. God took me in a completely different direction to where the careers adviser thought I should have gone. These days I get asked to speak at conferences here and abroad and I have lots of opportunities to write. I do find it funny that no one has wanted me for my accounting skills though!

Speaking of fun, you and your staff team bring a lot of that enjoyment to your approach to Christian education don't you?

I think we sometimes take life too seriously. I love John 10:10 where Jesus says "I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly."

The Pharisees had a kind of "if this, then that" kind of approach to life. It was so much about the law that it took their focus off Christ.

I believe that as a school we can't accurately role model to students what a focus on Christ looks like if we are completely law bound and not in at least some senses relational and fun-loving. We need to love life and enjoy being here. Laughing together is just such a good medicine for the stresses that happen too. It builds relationships because people are drawn to it. A life following Christ is not a life of oppression. We want our students to know that as staff we're here to walk alongside them to help them become more Christ-like and to understand that Christianity is a relationship in which we grow out of our desire to become more like Him.

In our digging around we found out that you're an Apple distinguished educator. What's that?

Apple has world-wide representatives who are recognised as using technology effectively to add value to the learning environment. When others look to utilise technology within their context in a similar way, those representatives can help them do so meaningfully. I'd say the use of technology as an educational tool is one of several areas I'm really passionate about - the others of course being education and, specifically, Christian education.

What would be your advice to parents who want to ensure their children use technology in an effective and safe way as part of their education?

Get to know your children's device. Both Apple and Google have built some incredible tools into devices these days - and these enable parents to have control of the technology. Parents with particularly young children should maintain ownership of the device and not give their children their own iPad for school. It keeps that element of it being 'mum and dad's device that I'm allowed to use'. It's a topic I've actually written a book about. It's also about everything being in moderation and balance.

Here's a big one - how would you summarise the value of Christian education, particularly in today's society?

It's huge. If you break Christian education down, it's the ability to both educate and equip a child for the future and transform them for Kingdom good. Christian education is so much more than education with a side dish of Jesus. It's a complete approach, understanding the world around us and the way God designed it through Christ's eyes.

John Hull wrote a paper essentially titled "Aiming For Christian Education, Settling For Christians Educating". Along those lines, as a staff team here at school, we're constantly challenging ourselves and asking, "is the only point of difference for us as a Christian school that we get together and pray and have devotions? But then does the rest of our

AUTHENTIC | FEATURE

programme look just like the school down the road?" Because it absolutely shouldn't just be that - we should in fact be markedly different in many ways.

What about Christian families with children in the public school sector?

I can only speak to my experience. I'm working in Christian education - and my own children are in Christian education - because I see the opportunity that exists for children to transform their world around them from a Christian viewpoint.

There are many reasons why Christian parents have their children in secular school. It can be because they want a different sporting opportunity, perhaps a perception of stronger academic outcomes at a secular school, or sometimes it's simply that people struggle to afford it. In some cases, there genuinely is a lack of Christian education providers in their neighbourhood.

I think we should simply count our blessings in that it's amazing that we even have the opportunity to send our children to Christian schools around New Zealand which will focus not only on academics in isolation, but authentic, holistic and transformational education.

What about homeschooling? Don't you have some involved in sports teams at your School?

In a similar sense to above, there are a lot of reasons why parents would choose Christian homeschooling as the best option for their individual situation. From our perspective, one of the things we see as a gap in that system is the sporting opportunities. Ultimately, we don't exist to build a kingdom, we're here to build THE Kingdom. So, for those Christian homeschooling families who don't have the opportunity to send their children to a sports team, we are happy to help. It's been a win-win over the years. They've strengthened our teams and it's meant the school has had teams where we might not have otherwise had them.

“I think we should simply count our blessings in that it's amazing that we even have the opportunity to send our children to Christian schools around New Zealand.”

Speaking of sport, we know you're a bit of a rugby fan. Are you still playing?

I've been in 1st XV sides from an early age and I've continued to play right up until earlier this year when I was injured after being destroyed in a tackle.

My whole world is Christian - a Christian school, a Christian family, Christian trusts, and a Christian church. I love that, but as well as the camaraderie, I also think rugby has been a great way for me to be salt and light.

St. Francis of Assisi said, "preach the gospel at all times - and if you must, use words." I love that sentiment - making a difference for Christ wherever we are.

I also love my own kids being able to see me model things that I want them to do themselves, like being active and playing hard. Because I play No 8 though, I'm always getting in trouble with opposing teams.



We love your blog - www.christianeducation.org.nz - how did that come about?

I completed my masters about a decade ago. In that process I quite enjoyed being able to articulate myself through writing. Since then I've challenged myself to continue doing it and it's been a vehicle for me to better express my thinking.

My blog brings a Christian view to a wide range of topics and it's not that everyone even agrees with everything, but it causes them to think. It's my ultimate hope that whatever I share strengthens people's faith. As I mentioned, I failed English, so I do find it hilarious that these days publications - both here in New Zealand and overseas - often contact me wanting to use my material.

Can you tell us about your role with the New Zealand Association For Christian Schools?

I am the association's current chairman - it's a huge honour. I genuinely believe Christian education can bring hope to the next generation. These days there seems to be a whole generation of people who have removed themselves from church. And this new wave of people are saying "I don't want to go to church, but I want my children to grow up with the values I learnt at church". That's perhaps one of the reasons why they'd like to send their children to a Christian school.

Our biggest waitlist is actually non-Christian families wanting to come to our school. I have to say though that while school

growth is encouraging, having a waiting list is disheartening. I don't think a Christian school should ever take the place of the church. Jesus - and in fact Paul as well - are very clear around the purpose of meeting together.

But I think it's a fantastic thing that we have Christian education - hopefully what that does is rejuvenate the church. Wouldn't it be fantastic if after we positively impact children's thinking they leave looking for church? And we do see a good number of children from those families become Christians through the process of being at school here.

So, you see your role at Hamilton Christian School as more of a calling than a career?

I have deeply reflected on the fact that God doesn't necessarily call us to a place, He first calls us first to a purpose. I believe He made it abundantly clear - through opening a series of doors - that coming to HCS was the right thing because I would grow. The motivation coming here was simply one of me wanting to be obedient to where I felt He was leading our family.

And you get to speak at conferences too. Do you enjoy that?

Yes - and it amazes me that God chooses to use me in that way, both here and overseas. I am blessed to be able to take opportunities that God presents to grow me. I love the saying "the quality of your yes is determined by the quantity of your no". Keeping that in mind really helps when it comes to balancing all the opportunities I get approached with. I also seriously can't underestimate the value of my amazing wife. We have four kids - aged 13, 11, nine and seven, and she is happy to stay at home with them whenever I go away to speak. Having someone like her in my life who believes in me and challenges me to always keep moving forward in Christ is a huge blessing.

How would you encourage parents - perhaps fathers in particular - in terms of supporting their children in their Christian education?

At school we do a lot of work looking at resilience. We have about 450 students on our roll. A couple of hundred of them are teenagers and we continually seek out what we can do to help them be strong in their character going forward.

From resilience research, we've developed what we call our "VIPS".

These mean that we aim to help every child understand that they - and everyone around them - have **value**, we are all created in His image.

Secondly, they have an **identity** - God created them unique, with their own set of skills and giftings.



Then, we reinforce that we all have a **purpose**.

Strength is our last one - that they can do immeasurably more for His kingdom through His strength than they can through their own strength.

When we think about the VIPs framework, I would offer encouragement to parents around how important it is that you remind your children that they have a unique identity and to be excited about who God has created them to be. The VIPs are really, really important to us at the school but they're also great to bring into the home to reinforce that message in that context. And further to our earlier point, if there are parents out there who have children in public schools that's where I'd be saying have those conversations with your children, because in that public school setting they're likely being told other things as well around identity and purpose.

If I had my four children in a secular school at the moment, the VIPs messages would be the types of messages I would really be wanting to reinforce with them.

It would be naive to think that simply because you are a Christian school you don't - at times - face some similar issues to those faced by any other school. But, how does having Christ as the foundation make a difference



It would be naive to think that simply because you are a Christian school you don't - at times - face some similar issues to those faced by any other school. But, how does having Christ as the foundation make a difference to your approach when those things surface?

There needs to be a range of approaches. One thing I'm always aware of in our context is when we get it wrong, we can get it wrong with eternal consequences. I'm forever considering Jesus' approach to things and leaning on the Holy Spirit.

Can I just say, a Christian school is not populated by angels. We have human beings on a journey of becoming more Christ-like. And we're all at different points in that journey. Teachers aren't always going to get it right, nor are the students. But what we do as teachers and as a leadership team when students do get it wrong should be about pointing them to the cross not away from it. We talk a lot about the complexity of discipleship, which is in fact much harder than discipline. So, our interactions should always ensure that at the end of the process students are walking closer to Christ.

What impact has Covid-19 had on the learning processes at school and what lessons will you take away from the experience?

It's been a really interesting journey. The biggest thing was obviously shifting all our learning processes home. I'm hugely proud of how everyone - students and staff adapted so quickly.

From an education standpoint, while the lockdown brought some struggles with it has in some other ways also been the most incredible learning opportunity. We knew what we wanted to deliver, and we are used to delivering a curriculum with a Christian message. But to completely have to change our ways of doing it was challenging. We've since sat down as a staff team and discussed what we might do differently in the future. Much of that is around flexibility of timetables and learning

- particularly with our senior students because, as they get older, they can begin to have more autonomy around that.

For our secondary school students, over that time we condensed our whole day's timetable into a morning, freeing them up for other things in the afternoon. From the feedback we've received, not only did students really enjoy that, but they also flourished.

Any other nuggets you can share with us?

If you asked me what one of the key thoughts around Christian education is, the word 'intentional' comes to mind. When I reflect on Authentic being a men's magazine, I ask what does being intentional mean especially as a dad, a grandfather, a businessman, or whatever spheres of influence we find ourselves in as men. As a dad myself, I am personally reflecting on how I'm intentional with what I want my own children to become in Christ.

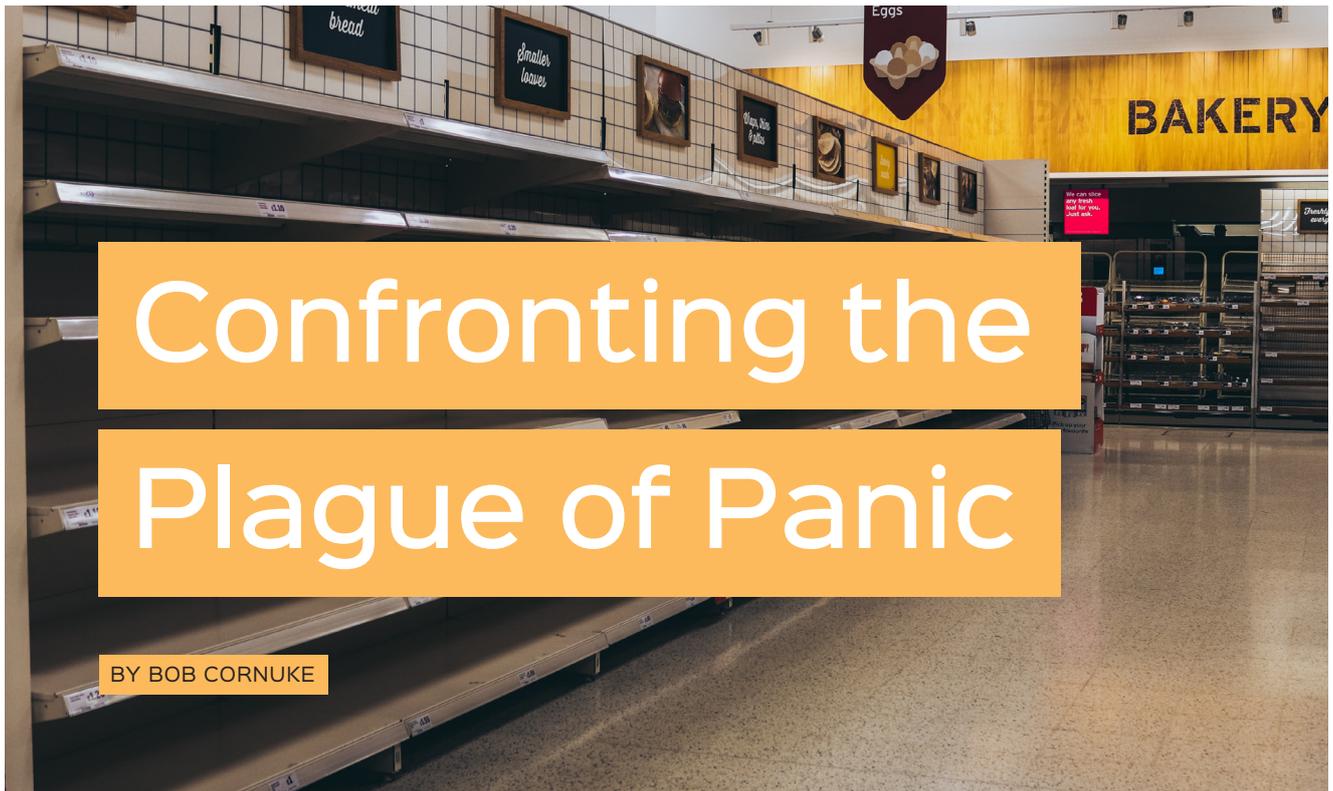
What are those things we need to remove and improve to enable our intentionality as fathers and grandfathers to flourish? - because ultimately we're aiming to build confident young Christian men and women who are not ashamed of who God has created them to be.

Let's pray for Shaun and his team and others in positions of leadership within Christian education in New Zealand. | 🙏



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





Confronting the Plague of Panic

BY BOB CORNUKE

We are passing through a portal of concern the likes-of-which we have not experienced since World War II. An invisible virus has seemingly shut down the world in many ways.

This was unexpected and like other unexpected disasters it strikes fear in the hearts of many. Our forefathers however have endured much worse and not only survived it all but thrived. To thrive in fear there are basic principles of reasoned vigilance that need to be executed along with spiritual awareness.

Pandemic caused Panic in the Past

To gain a perspective on today's pandemic I would like to examine another pandemic in history. In October of 1347, twelve wooden ships glided slowly into Messina. These Genoese galleys held cargo believed to be from the Crimea, but they also carried a silent disease that would be known as the "Black Death." The sailors were all dying a hideous kind of death: their ashen-grey bodies were covered in dark sores and their tongues had turned black. The ship was ordered out to sea again immediately, but the virulent disease quickly spread regardless, much like a match being dropped onto a stack of dry straw. In the end, one out of three people in Europe would be dead. In some cities towns and hamlets, all would die.

The plague was the result of flea-infested rats. When the rat dies, the fleas would seek another host vermin, inserting its stinger into the host's skin repeatedly, at which time, virulent bacilli were injected into the open wound. The results

varied from dark sores encompassing the body, to swollen, painful, lymph glands throughout the body — gangrenous inflammation of the lungs and throat, unbearable pain, vomiting, spitting blood and horrifically-foul smelling breath. On rare occasions, a person might survive, but most of the afflicted died within three days. One could wake in the morning feeling perfectly fine, but, by nightfall they would be placed in a burial shroud.

The plague jumped from town to town so fast that many could not escape its deadly advance. Even if they could physically run from the encroaching terror, there was no place for them to go. Physicians could do nothing; priests were equally powerless, and terrified at the prospect of giving last rites lest they, too, become infected. All life as it had been known previously had abruptly ceased. It was like the end of the world, and, for many, that is exactly what it would be.

Narrow lanes and streets all over Europe echoed with groaning moans by day and into the long evenings. Gravediggers could be heard crying out, "Bring out your dead!" Robbers, for once, feared entering darkened houses, mothers deserted their own children, jails were abandoned, ships washed to shore with all on board having succumbed, and the common burial pits were filled to overflowing. In some locals in England, corpses were stacked five deep, with just a thin layer of dirt for a covering. The hideous smell of death oozed from the ground.

When the plague receded in its wrath, people turned from being fearful to being angry, and searched for what or whom was to blame. Jews were initially blamed for wanting to kill

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When the plague receded in its wrath, people turned from being fearful to being angry, and searched for what or whom was to blame. Jews were initially blamed for wanting to kill Christians. Many believed they had put poisons in the water supplies. The Jewish practice of eating certain foods, cleansing procedures and refraining from drinking from unsanitary wells and rivers made them the prime targets of suspicion, because these measures caused some Jewish neighborhoods to have much lower death rates from the plague. Jews, in some sectors, had unknowingly controlled death rates by owning cats who hunted the rats.

Christians, on the other hand, did not own many cats because of their association with witchcraft. As a result, there were far more rats in non-Jewish neighborhoods than in Jewish ones. Many reasoned the Jews caused the plague somehow and set out to lynch them. In Strasbourg alone it is estimated that eight hundred Jews were rounded up, taken to a cemetery and burned at the stake. In Speyer, Germany, massacred Jews were floated down the Rhine River in empty wooden barrels. Fanatical killings like this occurred in Poland, Austria, Spain, and France. The killings seemed to wane when some astute clergy noticed that just as high of a percentage of Jews had died from the Plague as had those of other religions.

Pandemic caused Panic in the Present

Just as then, today we are seeing those who are fearful beyond reason and their angry fingers of condemnation are being waved about. These angry ones need to find fault in someone. There must be a villain for them to excoriate. So we are seeing the blame game being aimed at everyone from politicians, to scientists, to doctors to clergy.

"How can this possibly happen today ?" people are saying. After all, just 100 years ago, life expectancy was sixty percent shorter than life spans today. Infections caused by a simple cut that could kill back then are cured today with antibiotics and other drugs. Garbage trucks remove our standing rubbish when just century ago, filth piled in the streets. Clean water today is just the twist of a knob away, and food is freshly preserved with refrigeration. Just think of it, our pioneers had to take a rifle along with them into the woods just to relieve themselves because of hostile natives or animal predators—it is a

“Fear is an involuntary reaction that is meant for the moment of imminent peril. Worry, on the other hand, is voluntary and becomes a counterfeit kind of fear.”

wonder they could even go!

The Paralysis of Panic

If you are in a building and reading this article, the very walls around you — the wiring, the paint, the foundation, the roof, the insulation — all have been specially designed to offer a safer environment. None-the-less we sit in those buildings today and worry much more than our forefathers ever did. Even with all the vast advancements in medicine and health care practices, we are worrying more today than ever.

One of the reasons we worry more today is because of the mass media. Thousands of bits of information stream into our minds at a relentless pace. The media has an arsenal of print, web, cable, and radio outlets that pummel us with breaking news that often manipulates situations into far more perilous events than they really are. This tactic is designed to make us compelled to read, watch and listen. The news outlets may get their better ratings, but our brains are victims of their fear mongering. The Covid-19 virus is real, but when we are bombarded daily with images of mass burials and hospital reports of death-counts, the mind often goes from reasonable vigilance to a paralyzing all-consuming worry.

A Perspective on Panic

Fear is much different than worry in that fear is a good thing instilled in our instincts by our Creator to help us survive perilous situations. True fear is a full blown call to action by our senses when imminent danger presents itself. It is a rapid-fire call to arms by our internal defense system to save us from potential impending death. To illustrate this, try to envision yourself in this scenario; You are asleep in bed at night when suddenly you are woken by footsteps outside your bedroom window. There is the snap of a dry twig and you sit up straight in bed. The glint of a flash light beam reflects off your widow triggering your fear mechanism to jump into action in a split second. Your bodily systems shift into another gear. In the dark womb of your bedroom your heart immediately starts to pump more blood to the brain. A dose of adrenaline enters your body getting you prepared for the sudden strength needed in a potential confrontation.

In an instant your muscles heat up lactic acid for muscle speed needed to combat the intruder that is lurking in the shadows waiting for the opportunity to break into your home. The body at this time also introduces into our system a hormone called cortisol that makes the blood thicken in anticipation that skin will soon be bleeding from the trauma of the impending physical combat. The expression of fear which appears on your face will also help with the eminent risk as your eyes widen allowing for better peripheral vision. Your nostrils flare



wide to suck in needed air to feed our involuntary systems which are now at full speed.

Then you hear it. There is a soft meow outside your window and you recognize the voice of your neighbor saying “here kitty.” Your heart immediately begins to slow down and your muscles relax. The moment of fear has passed, the possibility of danger has gone and the tick of the clock next to your bed and the sound of your panting breath are the only sounds you hear.

Contained within your skull, rests the most incredible creation in all nature, the brain. A simple blob of grey matter that has far more complexity than any rocket ever sent to the moon. That brain has a design mechanism that, on its own, will send a signal in a millisecond that gives us a radical physical boost that awakens razor sharp senses in that moment of need. That jolt of fear triggering help was never meant to be anything more than a temporary aide in the moment danger. It was not meant to be a long term fix, but nevertheless, some do lengthen that jolt which fear provides, creating an addiction called man-made worry.

The Problem with Prolonged Panic

When fear is manufactured, when its source is NOT real and genuine, that false fear creates a whole other batch of problems. Fear is an involuntary reaction that is meant for the moment of imminent peril. Worry, on the other hand, is voluntary and becomes a counterfeit kind of fear. When left unchecked, it will begin to rule our responses and direct the most important decisions we make. It interferes with our faith as we direct our hearts from God and wallow in the mire of continual worry.

Since worry allows us to do something with our fearful thoughts, it often becomes the crutch we limp through life upon. Maybe you have spent long nights worrying about your daughter being out too late with friends. You look at your watch minute after minute just to have something to do. You

■ Bob Cornuke is a Biblical investigator, international explorer and author of nine books. He has participated in more than 60 expeditions around the world searching for lost locations described in the Bible. Bob has appeared on National Geographic Channel, CBS, NBC's Dateline, Good Morning America, CNN, MSNBC, Fox, ABC, History Channel and Ripley's Believe It or Not. Bob was the President of the Bible Archaeology Search and Exploration (BASE) Institute.



George FLOYD

A Kiwi perspective
on George Floyd
and racism

BY CRUISE HAMILTON

I am a Kiwi who spends time in Minnesota every year. I am a Vikings fan. I have friends and family in and around the Twin Cities area. I hope to give a fresh pair of eyes primarily to other New Zealanders. Sorry Kiwis, we have a biased media and we are often too gullible.

I am also a Christian, which means I love truth, and I want to hear the whole story if possible before I make a judgment. I watched the recording of George Floyd as soon as it was going viral.

I was shocked, saddened, and horrified that it appeared Mr. Floyd was dying right before my eyes. I was also very mindful that I saw none of the previous context, I didn't know why he was being arrested at the time.

The rest of the story came out later, I saw another angle, three police were restraining Mr. Floyd on the ground, not just Derek Chauvin.

I have also learned that Mr. Floyd had methamphetamine in his system at the time of his arrest. I also learned that he had multiple prior arrests, one being that he pointed a gun at a pregnant woman's stomach while his accomplices robbed her house.

Was George Floyd completely innocent? Probably not. Should he have died? Not at all.

I really hope the investigation is done well and justice is done. If he was killed by those police officers because of the way they handled the arrest, I hope they receive the full weight of the law. If his death wasn't due to the supposed suffocation I hope that people can accept that.

Racism. Why do people go straight to "white man" "black man" why is a man quantified by the color of his skin?

Quite possibly some police officers caused the death of an American citizen. All I see from the media, reporting, and commentary is that one was white and one was black. If a "black man" was in the place of Derek Chauvin would it have been the same issue? No.

If the skin colors were reversed, would the response be the same? No. Because I am a Christian I believe there is only one race, the race of Adam, the race of mankind. Different ethnicities but only one race. Your color of skin only really determines how

much sunscreen one needs in my world. With that said if you are still reading I would like to exhibit a Q&A session.

Was George Floyd killed because he was black?
We simply don't know. We will have to wait for a confession from those officers who arrested him.

Are the majority of Americans racist?
No, I don't believe so. I can't think of one of my friends or family that hates or has disdain for people who have a different skin color. I assume most of them judge people on the content of their character.

Are all police racist in the USA? No. I have a friend in the police force over there who is certainly not racist. There may be some, but by far the majority of police do not hate black people.

Is this Trump's fault? His political opponents and liberal media sure like to blame him. But no.

Is looting and pillaging a good way to communicate your message? No. The crimes of stealing, arson, and violence show the heart and desires of those committing them. If you upset me I won't steal my neighbor's car and burn his house down.

Are American police brutal and do they use unnecessary force?
Yes, sometimes they do.
Unfortunately, they are humans like you and I. It is a hard job where they themselves are disrespected, threatened and live in a state of mind knowing they could be murdered themselves by people who "actually" hate them (FTP, PIGS).

“It is very sad when those who vow to protect and serve pulverize and serve.”

It is very sad when those who vow to protect and serve pulverize and serve. It is unacceptable, as is the hate they are shown for the protection and service good cops do.

Is this whole thing about racism? Unlikely. It is an election year. The media manipulates people very easily. Some people like to watch the world burn. People love drama. The media loves to feed the masses what they want.

I really don't think there is as much racism as you're told to believe. I have not met a white supremacist yet in my 12 years of visiting Minnesota and Wisconsin. I don't think I have met a black supremacist either. But I know conservative republicans and leftist democrats. I think that's where the true division is, not skin color. Philosophy and politics dear friends. |A

■ Cruise Hamilton is a Christian, husband, father, and sheep farmer from the Eastern Taranaki hill country. He takes great pleasure in spending time with his wife and three young children. He enjoys studying theology and philosophy, and in his spare time will seek out a hearty conversation about either topic.





Their intentions

VERSES God's plan

BY LOCKY MCNEILL

One of the biggest frustrations for fellow believers expressed to me over the years is that they sometimes have been truly hurt by the words and actions of others of faith. We rightly have high expectations of each other. And those expectations are very easily bruised along life's journey.

To be honest it happens to us all at some point. Has happened to us personally again very recently. But can I attempt to encourage you with a few simple words today?

Joseph was hurt by the words and deeds of his very own family. They hated him for being a "dreamer" and conspired to initially kill him before settling on selling him to slave traders. Not a cool moment it would seem for the "family of faith".

Listen to the most powerful words he ever spoke. They express the power of hope. They opened the door for the dream to be fulfilled.

*"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."
Genesis 50:20 NIV*

He had every right to be offended. Every right to want to exact his revenge. And yet his outlook on the worst moments of his life is starkly different to our human inclination.

If your hope is in Christ today may you derive comfort from these words. God is so for you and not against you that no matter the worst anyone offers up against your life. God is working to a far bigger playbook. His Will prevails. The worse your enemies rage, the bigger your victory!

Don't hope for harm to befall you, but if it does or has recently, please know God knows. He will use it for His glory. Just hold on to the hope you have even if your hope is being sorely tested. This painful moment will bring about salvation not just for yourself but many others.

Please be encouraged today! | 

■ Locky McNeill is a faith-based Jesus entrepreneur living in Taupo, New Zealand. He is a father of two young men and husband to one talented wife, who can bake up a storm of goodness. He splits his time between being a digital pastor and festival director for both Easterfest New Zealand and Christmas in the Park Taupo.



MISSION, THEN MARRIAGE

BY MICHAEL FOSTER

Finding and pursuing a godly mission tends to make finding and pursuing a godly woman easier and more successful. When you make finding a wife your mission, you are less likely to find a wife, or a mission.

I don't have any silver bullets for young Christian men on the search for a godly wife. It's rough out there. But I will tell you that it's unwise to pursue a wife before you have some clarity on your mission.

What are you about? Where are you going? How will you use your gifts?

Proverbs 24:27 says, "Prepare your work outside and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterwards, then, build your house." You need to do some work on your "field" before you take a wife to build your house.

Stated concisely: chase excellence, not women.

God has given you gifts. How can you use them to give him glory and expand his kingdom? What vocation is a good use of your gifts? Lawyer? Entrepreneur? Coder? Bricklayer? What skills and disciplines do you need to develop in order to excel in that vocation?

Pursue them with singleness of mind. Adam had a mission. He needed a helper. God brought Eve to him. The creation pattern reveals a great deal about God's design. It's natural for a woman to want a man on mission. She wants a man who is going somewhere.

The upshot for you is that it's much easier to "find" a godly wife when you have "prepared your field." A man on mission is simply more attractive. Consider: If a man tells another man that he is dating a new girl, one of the first questions will be, "What does she look like?" If a woman tells another woman that she is dating a new guy, one of the first questions will be, "What does he do?" Looks do matter for ladies—but the mission matters big-time.

This is why nice guys finish last, while jerks get the girl. The former thinks he should make the woman his mission. He puts her on a pedestal—which means he demotes his mission in favor of her. The jerk doesn't. He's attractive, not because he abuses her, but because he has an independent drive that supersedes her. He has a mission, and she's either with it or not. He ain't changing.

Subconsciously, no woman wants the burden and stress of being a man's center. At a deep level, she knows it would make them both miserable. And because she knows herself, she cannot help despising a man who would settle for such a mediocre vision. She wants to help him work toward something greater than both of them; not watch passively as he works for something no bigger than herself.

The takeaway isn't to be a jerk. Men should be kind and humble—but absolutely driven. Nothing can get in the way of the mission.

This not only attracts potential spouses, but works as a filtering system: "Marrying me means joining my mission. If you won't join, then this won't work."

Before I started officially dating Emily, I told her: "I like you. I want to get to know you. But you need to know I feel a call to the ministry. I'll be hated, probably poor and away from home a lot. If that's a problem, this won't work." That was 20 years ago. I stayed on mission. I got the girl. To reiterate, figuring out your mission isn't a "silver bullet" for the finding-a-wife problem. But it's a place to start.

■ Michael is a serial-entrepreneur who has been in bi-vocational ministry the better part of his adult life. God has blessed him with a beautiful wife and seven children. He is currently in Cincinnati, taking a break from pastoral ministry.



What Was God Doing Before Creation?

By Ken Ham

One reason people give for rejecting a young universe is that they think it somehow limits God. After all, what was He doing all that time before creation? This question reflects a basic misunderstanding of God and time.

Because of my stand on a young universe, a man approached me and said, “But it makes no sense to believe in a young universe. After all, what was God doing all that time before He created?”

I answered, “What time do you mean?”

The person answered, “Well, it doesn’t make sense to say that God has always existed, and yet He didn’t create the universe until just six thousand years ago.” Apparently, he was worried that God once had a lot of time on His hands with nothing to do.

I then went on to explain that because God has always existed, then it is meaningless to ask, “What was God doing all that time before He created?” No matter how far you were to go back in time, you would still have an infinite amount of time before He created! So even if the universe were billions or trillions or quadrillions of years old, you could still ask the same question.

Time Was Created with the Universe

I then answered, “But you are missing the fact that there was no time before God created.” Time is actually a created entity. The first verse of the Bible reads: “In the beginning God

created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, emphasis added). A study of this verse reveals that God created time, space, and matter on the first day of Creation Week. No one of these can have a meaningful existence without the others. God created the space-mass-time universe. Space and matter must exist in time, and time requires space and matter. Time is only meaningful if physical entities exist and events transpire during time.

“In the beginning . . .” is when time began! There was no time before time was created!

God Is Separate from Both Time and the Universe

When I’m teaching children, I like to explain it this way. There was no “before” God created. There was not even “nothing”! There was God existing in eternity.

This is something humans, as finite created beings, can never really understand. That’s why the Bible makes it clear there is always a “faith” aspect to our understanding of God. Now, biblical faith is not against reason, but such things go beyond our understanding.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

In Psalm 90:2 we read: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

So what was “before” creation? God existing from everlasting to everlasting—God existing in eternity. Do you remember what God said to Moses when he asked God who he should say sent him to lead his people out of Egypt’s oppression?

“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

God is the great “I AM.” He exists in eternity. He was not created.

In Revelation 1:8 we read, “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

Isaiah 43:10 records these words from God: “‘You are My witnesses,’ says the Lord, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.’”

In other words, it’s a mistake to talk about what God was doing “before creation” because the concept of time (before, during, and after) did not come to be until Day One of Creation Week. God exists—He is—He is the eternal self-existent One. He is outside of time.

God Wanted Us to Know His Plan for History, from Beginning to End

The Bible makes it clear that God’s existence is completely separate from the history of this universe, which began in Genesis 1:1. In other words, there is no such thing as “prehistoric.” History began when it was first recorded—the first verse of Genesis.

Now when we understand this and then also understand that the whole of creation, including Genesis 1:1, was accomplished in six days, we can begin to calculate how long ago God created the world.

Exodus 20:11 makes it clear that the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1) and everything else (all that is listed in Genesis 1) were created in six days: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Based on the way the word day is used in Genesis 1, creation had to be six ordinary (approximately 24-hour) days. Many technical and popular articles show that the context requires this meaning.¹

Then the Bible lists very specific genealogies of the Messiah’s line in Genesis 5 and Genesis 11. We are told that Adam was 130 years old when he begat Seth. When Seth was 105 years old, he begat Enosh—and so these lists continue. When one adds up all the dates and other time references throughout Scripture, then it is clear that “In the beginning . . .” was about six thousand years ago.²

Now some Christian leaders have claimed that the Bible doesn’t give an absolute date for creation, so we can’t know how old the creation really is. But of course the Bible doesn’t give a date for creation. You see, if the Bible recorded that creation was six thousand years ago, then because the Bible was completed about 2,000 years ago, the creation would be 8,000 years old! And the Bible doesn’t use terms like BC or AD because they are man-made conventions based around the birth of Jesus.

However, the Bible does give us something much better than a date—a very specific history that allows us not only to determine the age of the universe but also to know all the essential details about God’s plan of redemption from the beginning of time, including the line of the promised Messiah. One final point: Nowhere in the Bible do we find any suggestion of millions or billions of years. Belief in millions of years is really part of secular man’s religion, which attempts to explain life without God, instead of believing the true account of origins in Genesis that begins “In the beginning . . .”

Our ability to trust God’s promise of salvation relies upon our ability to trust everything He says about history, from beginning to end. If we can’t trust His claims about the past, how can we trust His promises about the future?

Thankfully, we serve a God we can trust in every detail. Though He is beyond space and time, He humbled Himself to become a man and die on the Cross for our sins. He also has given us a record of this history in His Word so that we can know it’s really true. 

1. For example, see “Biblical Age for the Earth,” chapter 2 of *Old-Earth Creationism on Trial*, free online at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/oct/prosecution-biblical-age>.

2. See Bodie Hodge, “How Old Is the Earth?” <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2007/05/30/how-old-is-earth>.

■ Ken Ham is the founder and president of Answers in Genesis and pioneered the world famous Creation Museum and Ark Encounter attractions in Kentucky, USA. For more information from Answers in Genesis visit www.answersingenesis.org



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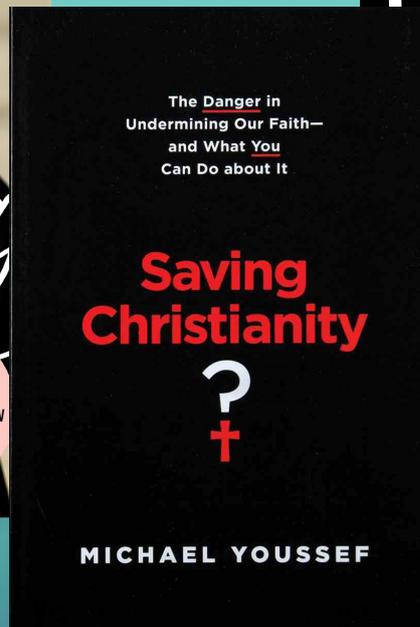
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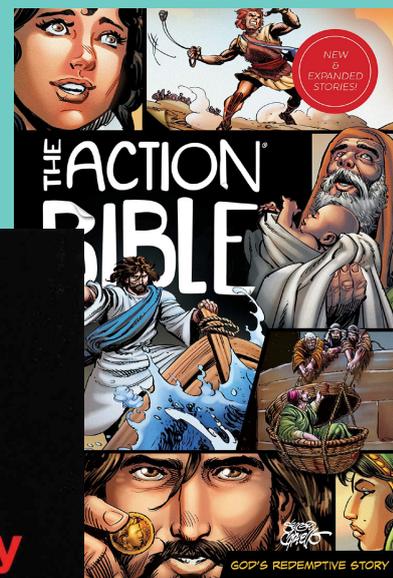
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Together We Can

Go Further

BY PAUL MONAHAN

Sandhill Cranes, ducks and geese are birds that have one major thing in common - they tend to migrate over long distances. They also understand that to do this they can't do it alone. In fact they don't usually travel in numbers less than three and that is for a special reason which I will explain soon.

These birds can fly amazing distances. You may remember when Disney produced three movies about "The Mighty Ducks" that started with a Peewee ice hockey team. My son was a fervent fan and I don't know how many times I sat through the films when he was a child. In the movie the team were famous for a move called the "Flying V". I only comment on this because geese fly in a V formation which is an incredibly powerful technique, giving the flock a range 71% further than a bird flying alone. So if a goose starts to fall out of formation it starts to feel the drag increasing so re-joins as quickly as possible.

Sometimes however a goose is hurt, sick or shot, two other birds will drop out of formation and stay with it until it is well enough to fly again or dies. Then they will carry on with another formation. It is interesting that the geese practice shared leadership. The leadership rotates as the lead bird tires and drops back in the formation and a new lead bird comes to the front of the V. In this case the lead bird must be able to cope with the air turbulence that is not as

prevalent further back. The birds within the formation gain lift from the bird in front, meaning it takes less effort to fly. In motor racing terms it is called drafting.

These birds probably know a thing or two as they spend their time honking in support and encouragement of the leading bird who is taking the brunt of the wind. The honking lifts the spirits of all in the flock as they travel these enormous distances.

So what can we learn as men from this?

It is better to travel and do life together in groups, it is faster, better and safer. If a member of the group is sick or hurt you need to look out for them. So keep your eyes open and don't be afraid to ask for help for yourself. Don't leave the hard stuff to a single family member or group member, share it round.

You must keep expressing your "honking" to the others in your group even when you don't feel like it! Groups that are encouraging, function better and are more productive. Individual empowerment is a by-product of good "honking". I would hope as Christians we could be the best "honkers" in the world. Start by choosing some people you can encourage and make it a habit. I know I try to be positive and encouraging. I think it helps me as much as it does those I encourage! | 

■ Paul Monahan is the national director of Promise Keepers, having also held a number of different roles in church leadership over more than two decades. He has studied at Lifeway Bible College and been a Christian school principal for 14 years.



What about God and Covid-19?

BY CHARLES PRICE



As a Brit living in Canada, I need to congratulate New Zealand on its marvellous handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, which the world has looked at with some admiration.

Being mainly islands with a relatively low population must have helped of course, but you acted decisively when a new threat appeared after a hundred days of no new infection. I realise things may change between me writing this and you reading it. Anyway, so far, congratulations.

A question asked over recent months is: Do Christians have any way to make particular sense of this pandemic that evades the secular mind? Is there, behind the scenes, a big picture we can make some sense of? Or is it random!? Some have tried hard to give answers to this, and I don't want to add to their wisdom or folly, other than to say it's worth thinking about.

The problem with looking for a supernatural explanation is that we can put in our two cents worth of insight and opinion without any objective criteria for measuring them. This is particularly dangerous when people offer 'prophetic explanations' purporting to come directly from God. Most of these, by the nature of their contradictory standpoint, seem to be more opinion than revelation. Apparently, according to a recent survey in the United States by the Center for Public Affairs Research, two thirds of Americans believe Covid-19 is a message from God. However, they do not know, or agree on, what the message is. That sounds like poor communication to me! The same survey reported that, 'most Christian believers in our poll are confident that God will protect them from infection during this pandemic'. Putting those two things together, people believe Covid-19 is a message from God, but it's not for me! It's for other people and I will be protected from its consequences. Not too convincing so far!

Here are a few attempted explanations:

Explanation No 1: The Sovereignty of God.

In the early days of the pandemic, I frequently heard people say, despite all the fear and calamity, 'God is in control'. What does that mean? It might seem sacrilegious to question that statement, but I do because the Bible does. 1 John 5:19-20 says, 'We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one'. We know the security of being children of God, but we also know the insecurity of living in a world where the evil one has an awful lot of influence. In fact, a world that is 'under the control of the evil one'. The devil is, in the words of Jesus, 'The prince of this world'. That is a lofty title to have given him. This is a much more realistic way to explain the atrocities and evils of our world than that they originate in the heart and mind of God for reasons mysterious to us but known best only to Him. Let's be real, we live in a fallen, broken, hostile world in which, to all appearances, the devil has the upper hand. I think John intended us to understand that, and the world makes better sense when we do too!

Explanation No 2: God is Judging us.

My understanding is that God judged the world in Jesus Christ, once and for all. There is judgement in the sense of evaluation still to come, (as at the judgement seat of Christ), but judgement, as an expression of the wrath of God, was meted out and completely satisfied in the death of Jesus Christ. That is the heart of the Gospel. All our sin, past, present and future was atoned once and for all, in the judgement of God poured out on Jesus Christ as our substitute. Therefore, there cannot be a little bit more judgement offered here and a little bit more there, some for this particular sin, some for that particular one, some for this generation and some for that generation. There is no more price to pay for sin. 'For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God' (1 Peter 3.18). We live in a post-judged world, not in a world being continually judged.

Now, having said that, Romans 1 teaches us that the wrath of God is still expressed in our world, not by God zapping us, but by God 'giving us over to the sinful desires of our hearts', which he specifies as, foolish thinking, moral degradation, and depraved activity, all of which derives from a wilful 'exchanging the truth of God for a lie' (see Romans 1). But that is not judgement for sin, that is letting us go to the natural end of our own choices. If anything, it is self-inflicted judgement by allowing ourselves to go down destructive roads. However, true as that is in the moral realm, it has nothing to do with physical events like Covid-19 (or earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis or floods). In the Old Testament, before Christ, God did send physical judgements on Egypt, on other nations and on Israel, but all his judgement of us was completed in His judgement of Christ, as our substitute, in our place.

Explanation No 3: God is chastising us.

Chastising is a rebuke or a reprimand. A child is chastised to bring them back on track when they misbehave. I think this may be getting warmer, but it only makes sense if we know what we are being chastised for. To chastise a child and ask them to work out what it is for, leaves the child in a confused ambiguous state. If they were like me, they could think of a number of things that would be good grounds for chastisement. But do we have to work that out from a global pandemic? For global wrongs? Which wrongs? Some are taking pot shots at trendy sins and failings and suggesting they may be a cause. I received an email recently with a very specific identity of the reason the world is being chastised. But if this person has understood it correctly, most of the world clearly hasn't. Oh, and by the way, the thing identified was something that this particular person had never been involved in. How convenient to get an explanation for other people but not for themselves!

Explanation No 4: God is disciplining us.

Now I think we are getting much closer, and I will tell you why. In the book of Hebrews, the writer gives them what he calls a 'word of encouragement'! Here it is: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Be encouraged, he says, by the fact God disciplines you. Well, we might respond, how does He discipline us? And the writer says: 'Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. (Heb 12.5-7). Here is the key, 'Endure hardship as discipline'. The word hardship is both ambiguous and all embracing! What kind of hardship? Anything! Everything! Every hardship is an opportunity for growth, for discipline is with a view to change us. Whether it's personal, national or global, whether it is physical, material or spiritual. Every hardship has within it the

capacity to drive us from God or drive us to God. This doesn't mean God orchestrates hardships to discipline us. We know fine well that Covid-19 was caused by human folly, possibly by eating the meat of bats not designed for human consumption. The word 'hardship' does not determine its origin, but implies the value of hardship from any cause, for any reason, in any area of life, to discipline us (change us) by driving us towards God. It may have a human, natural or evil cause, but it can become an instrument for our good. We probably learn more about God when we are in trouble than when we are in comfort. Tears are a better teacher than laughter. Hardship strips us of our dependence on things that don't last, with the potential to turn us to dependence on what does last.

Let's go back to the verse about the whole world being in the hands of the evil one. We must read the whole passage: 'We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true - even in His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 5:19-20)

There are two things we need to know there.

1) 'We know ... that the whole world is in the hands of the evil one'. So be totally realistic about that and don't be too surprised by the colossal evils that come into our world and are perpetrated by the world.

But, 2) 'We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we might know Him who is true'. So, be equally realistic about the fact we have a place of security and understanding. Not a place of explanation but of understanding. Understanding of what? More than that we 'know Him' who is true, but that 'we are in Him who is true - even in his Son Jesus Christ'. To be in Christ is to be united with Christ, more fully and experientially, 'He in us, and we in Him'. This is where the discipline of hardship has the power to take us, and that is where we find security.

This does not explain Covid-19 but it indicates what to do with the inconvenient fall out and distresses that come from it, not to mention the economic collapse, the grief and mourning so many around the world are dealing with.

In every sphere, our inconveniences, our difficulties, our losses, our hardships can become our friends. They may appear as enemies at first, but they themselves become the source of the discipline which deepens us and leads us into a deeper security in Christ. If we, 'endure hardship as discipline', we may have found in the pandemic some jewels to be enjoyed for much longer than the disease. | 

■ 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



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CAUSING A RUCKUS

BY JEREMY SMITH

The “tipping point” was one particularly bad Saturday night. High on drugs as he sat in a car being driven around Wellington, a then teenage Brad Dring encountered the presence of God in a way that has forever shaped his life. The next day - a Sunday - he asked his mum to take him to church so he could commit his life to God. Jesus has been at the centre ever since. Fast-forward more than 20 years to Festival One 2020 and shortly before the curtain closed on the band’s last-ever show, the man now known to many as the energetic front man for Christian hip hop and rock group Rapture Ruckus thanked Jesus for helping that 16-year-old find his confidence, calling and purpose in a way he never thought possible. Now, as he looks to God for what’s next, he sat down with Authentic Magazine to talk faith, family, and how he sees his love of music as a ministry to impact many lives for Jesus.

So, how long has music been a part of your life?

I would have been 18 and just out of high school in Wellington and I went to study music. I had actually applied to do a surfboard shaping course and I didn’t get accepted to that so I decided to go and do a music course instead. Before Rapture Ruckus, I was a drummer, so I was majoring in drumming at the music course and I had been in a few covers bands.

How was it that you first came to know about Christ?

I had grown up with my mum going to church, but I definitely hadn’t been involved in that world for a few years. I had distanced myself pretty far from it.

It was actually while I was at music school that I met people like Doug and Mike Aitofi and some of the other guys I’ve since done music with over the years. They were all new Christians

at the time and as I started talking to them and getting to know them, they shared their faith with me. For the first time I felt that it started to stir things up that I remembered feeling before as I was growing up - whether it had been through mum, through church, or through praying.

You have shared from stage before about a key moment when God encountered you in a powerful way. Was that the point at which you decided to make your faith personal?

It’s undoubtedly an experience that has shaped me. When God starts speaking, you start to sense His presence. At the time I accepted Jesus I felt like I was just teetering on a fence of sorts and thinking “maybe this is a thing”.

I guess the tipping point was just a really bad night, which is the most normal night in the world for your typical stoner kid. Driving around high in the middle of the night with a drunk person driving a car way too fast. Amongst being in this place of turmoil, I remember just feeling God’s presence wash into the car. All of a sudden everything was super clear. That was a Saturday night and the next day - Sunday - I asked mum if I could go to church with her. It all just started to feel real and I think when I experienced God’s presence for the first time, that was when I decided walking with Jesus was what I wanted to do.

I initially had a bit of a weird idea about what ‘making my faith personal’ meant. I thought that meant that I had to go home and throw out all my records and my bongos and all my naughty things that I had everywhere. And I did just that.

Where does this whole Rapture Ruckus journey fit into this part of your story?

The very week before I had the encounter with God on the Saturday night, we had just started recording class at music school and we were learning about the recording studio. So, after that weekend when I went to church, I reconnected with the guys at music school and I started a recording project.



They had a digital 16-track recorder at the school and Doug and I recorded the very first Rapture Ruckus album on that little recording machine. We burned some CDs and started dishing them out. Next thing, we started getting invited to perform our songs live and at the end of that year we ended up performing at the Parachute Music Festival.

In your own words, how would you describe your music and how you go about writing it?

The thing I always come back to is that 90 percent of the time I'm writing for a 16-year-old version of myself. The guy that needed God then and still needs Him. Me being that kid then, and other kids like that - that's the person I always think of as the one who I'm writing to. A 16-year-old me. I'm just trying to encourage that kid who comes to our shows and is in the audience and be helpful. Early on in the Rapture Ruckus days in New Zealand and Australia we started doing a lot of travelling through high schools and we'd see a lot those of kids who needed that help. That's probably when we discovered the art of keeping the messaging of our songs really simple - simple music, simple choruses. And that's intentional so that the message of what God's done for me, and what He wants to do for those who hear our songs, is not lost.

You mention Australia and New Zealand, but this musical journey has taken you world-wide hasn't it? You also felt the call of God to the United States?

Yes. I started travelling to the United States in around 2005 or so with the Parachute Band. I was doing their front of house

sound and we were doing maybe five tours a year, there and to other countries.

In between that, I used to hop planes out to Nashville and stay with Detour 180 - a New Zealand band that was out there at the time. The Lads were also out there and some other friends so I just used to jump on shows or little tours with people. I just wanted to do it - make the music and perform it as much as I could and the United States just felt like this enormous place where I could do just that, if the right door opened. We just needed a few key things to fall into place - and in 2009 we recorded a live DVD called Rapture Ruckus -Live At World's End at Parachute Music Festival which was seen by Tooth & Nail Records and led to us signing a record deal with them later that year. In 2010, we moved to the United States.

It might be hard to pick a favourite, but if you had to, five albums and five EPs later, which of the songs you have written and/or performed (maybe even one we never quite saw make it to the stage) holds a special place in your heart and why?

I think Hold On will always have a special place in my heart. For the countless emails, messages and letters we've received over the years and for how this song has offered some form of help and comfort to people going through a tough time or situation. This song was also the first song of ours that we ever heard on the radio in the United States. We were driving across California, skipping through stations and there it was.

In amongst all that, how have you found the balance of keeping Christ at the centre, while at the same time garnering a level of 'fame'?

If by 'fame' you mean someone saying "hey" at the supermarket and mentioning they listen to my music, then yeah I'm all about it lol. I love meeting new people. Putting Christ at the centre of my music was what always felt natural and authentic because music has always felt like a gift from above. Keeping Christ at the centre of my day to day life has maybe been more of a struggle. As life gets busy and you're constantly traveling and on the go. There is a great passage in the Bible where Gods says He'll never leave us nor forsake us. If I'm ever feeling a bit lost or distant from God, I just remember that He's always there, His grace is unending and no matter where I am I can find peace in His presence.

We've talked about the balance of fame and keeping God at centre. Similarly, how have you found balancing your busy performance schedule with Rapture Ruckus with your most important job - being a husband to your wife Mel and sons Roman (7) and Lincoln (5)?

Good question. I think it was important that within our marriage and band it was very clear that our family well-being would always come before music and traveling. Between 2010 and 2017 we were averaging around 150-200 days a year out on the road touring, so that meant that our families travelled with

us on the bus. As it turns out our wives are all way smarter than us and we would have been lost without them lol. My first born son Roman spent the first two years of his life on a tour bus and crawling around venues, learning to walk out the back of festival stages. God's grace has always been abundant when it comes to balancing family and the music. We've always had an incredible crew of people around us to help carry the load and create a real family environment even though we were so far from home most of the time. I had always been adamant that the day the balance wasn't balancing anymore I'd know it's time to do something different. And that's kind of where we got to. I just knew it was time to move into a new season and be more present with my family. Call that what you want, but I call it God's grace and calling.

For you what is the magic of music?

Music is the most powerful tool known to man for influencing emotions. Somewhere in that balance of emotions is the soul and in amongst that is the Holy Spirit. When those things all mix, something happens. I can't explain it but I feel it. There's the musician part of me that understands the science of music, but there is most definitely a spiritual element to it as well because of the way music moves us in unexplainable ways.

Can you think of times when people have told you that your music impacted them and pointed them to God?

Absolutely, but you know what, I don't think it started out like that. I think I just started writing it for me and somewhere along the line people started sharing stories with me about those songs.

That's when all that changed - I realised people were listening and I started thinking about writing for other people. I've got literally hundreds of those stories - emails and messages - stored and I keep them all. They make all the hard work and sacrifice worth it.

It's clear to see over your time in Rapture Ruckus that your band mates and colleagues have been more like a 'musical family'. What's the secret to maintaining such a close bond over more than two decades? Jesus and music maybe?

To this day I still don't understand how I ended up surrounded by such an amazing and talented bunch of people. Literally the smartest, kindest and most generous people you'll ever meet. They're all absolute 'A-batters' in their own right and they gave up doing anything they could dream of to come galivant around the place with me making music, driving 10 hours a day and performing in the hottest, sweatiest dust bowls you can imagine.

Because we really do feel like a family, it falls back into that category of music and family balance. And family always comes first.

So you're moving back to New Zealand from the United States now - can you tell us where you might base yourself back here in Aotearoa?

We loved the past 10 years being based in the United States but I always knew that one day we would return home to New Zealand. I really want my boys to know where they come from and experience the New Zealand I know and love - surfing, fishing and so on. For now, we'll be staying out in Raglan. I've got 10 years of surfing to catch up on.

That's right. As well as music, another of your passions is surfing - both making (shaping) boards and riding them. Is it fair to say that passion might be something you turn your attention to post Rapture Ruckus?

Haha surfing is always welcome to steal my attention. I love the ocean and surfing is something I've always done. It's a constant in my life and no matter how long it's been since I've managed to get to the coast, whenever I do manage to get into





some waves it's like a reset switch. It makes me feel grounded, content and brings the force back into balance.

What do you most love about the process of shaping surf boards and then being out in the ocean riding them?

Building surfboards was something that kept me connected to my passion of surfing while living in middle America hundreds of miles from the coast. I love the process of hand shaping, there's no computers or technology involved. It's foam, wood, pencils, rulers and hand tools. Then, at the finish you end up with a brand new surfboard - and that's something I was never able to afford lol.

So, other than surfing, what's next?

All I'll say for now is watch this space. I know that in my heart this season has come to an end and it's important for me to finish it clean before I can fully focus on what comes next. I'm definitely an all-in or nothing kind of guy. I will say I'm excited to do what I can to help the next generation of aspiring musicians and creatives here in New Zealand. I'd love to work more with young people on a one on one basis. You know? I think I've got a lot I can offer on that front. Funnily enough, I always feel kind of nervous when I'm talking to a big crowd of people and sometimes I think to myself "I'd love to just help that kid right there with what they're going through".

As you look to God for the next chapter might hold, would you like to say any 'thank you's'?

There's always room for some thank yous, though if I start making a list I'm afraid I will miss someone important. What I will say is Rapture Ruckus would never have happened without the support, time and hard work of a small group of very generous and very talented people who are passionate about making a difference in people's lives. I am forever thankful for the prayers and support of my home church - Wellington Elim - for the launch pad provided by Parachute Music and my amazing manager Jono Scarlet who took my dreams and made them happen.

To everyone who's played even the smallest role in helping make Rapture Ruckus what it is, I will be forever grateful. You taught this scatterbrain, insecure soul that the greatest treasure in life is the people we meet and the relationships we form.

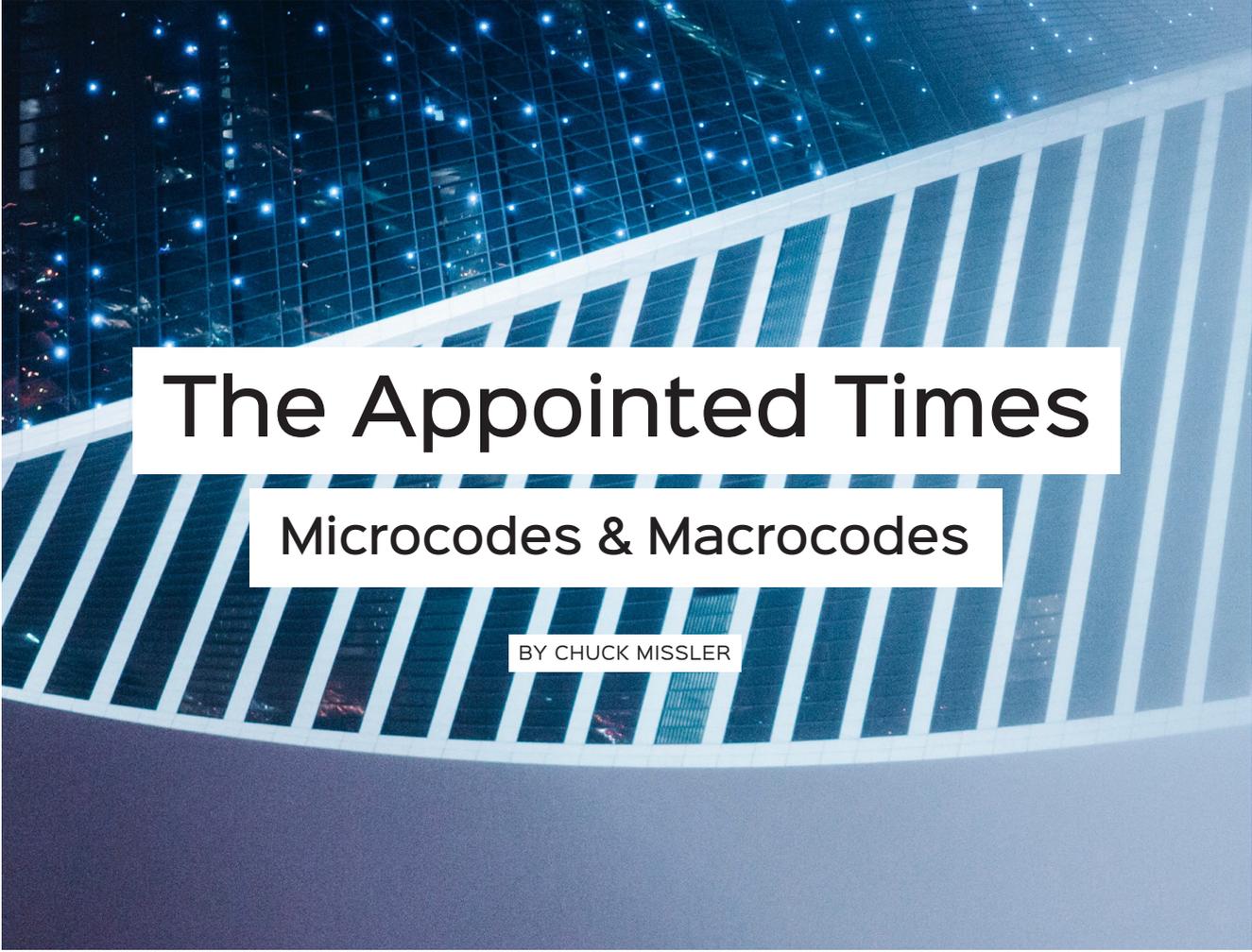
Any final thoughts?

Be kind, love well. Next time you're in Raglan hit me up and we'll grab a wave.

***To keep up to date with wherever God leads Brad post Rapture Ruckus, follow the band's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/raptureruckus. | **

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





The Appointed Times

Microcodes & Macrocodes

BY CHUCK MISSLER

There has been a great deal of interest in "Bible Codes." The main flurry of controversy has been about the equidistant letter sequences that seem to be hidden within the Biblical text. An example of this occurs in Genesis 1:14:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

The word HaMoyadim, here translated "seasons," means "the appointed times." When searched for as an equidistant letter sequence, the word appears only once in the Book of Genesis, at the interval of 70, clustering exactly where the word is spelled explicitly in the text,

and where the calendar is established. There are only 70 specially appointed times for holy days called HaMoyadim, in a year, as defined by Leviticus 23. 52 sabbaths, seven days of Pesach (encompassing Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Feast of First Fruits), one day for Hag Ha Shavuot (Feast of Pentecost), one day for Yom Teruah (Feast of Trumpets, which is coincident with Rosh Hoshana), one day for Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), 7 days for Sukkot (Feast of Booths), and one day of Shmini Atzeret (Eighth Day of Assembly).¹ $52 + 7 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 7 + 1 = 70$, the very interval where HaMoyadim, "the appointed times," is encrypted in the text. Coincidence?

The longer the word, the smaller its chances to be found in the text at any given interval. Statistically, the word HaMoyadim would be expected to occur

only five times in the 78,064 letters of Genesis. In fact, it appears in this hidden form only once in Genesis; and on that one occasion its equidistant letter interval is exactly 70, and centered within the span of that hidden appearance is precisely its only open appearance in the text.²

The odds against this have been estimated at more than 70,000,000 to one.³

Macrocodes

In addition to microcodes and the equidistant letter sequences, there are also macrocodes embracing the entire structure; they transcend the frame of reference of the individual document itself. They are similar to the "macros" that anticipate the formatting in our word processor programs. Thus,

macrocodes can be anticipatory: they look forward in time. These Biblical macrocodes, originating from outside our time domain, demonstrate their unique origin by presenting the structure of future events in advance, which is one of the properties of the Biblical record that establishes its uniqueness.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the use of the Jewish calendar ordained in the Bible.

The Seven Feasts of Israel

The Torah, the five books of Moses, details seven feasts during the Hebrew calendar:⁴ The first three feasts are celebrated in the spring, in the month of Nisan: Passover (Pesach), Feast of Unleavened Bread (Hag haMatzah), and the Feast of First Fruits. (Connotatively, these are all included in the celebration of Passover.)

Fifty days later there is the Feast of Weeks, Shavuot, also known as Pentecost ("50"). It was celebrated the day following the "counting of the omer" (49 days + 1), 50 days after the Feast of First Fruits.

There are three remaining feasts in the fall, in the month of Tishri: the Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah); the Day of Atonement, (Yom Kippur); and the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth).

While each of these feasts has an historical commemorative role, they also each have a prophetic role. When God set their feast times, the very terms He used are suggestive: mowed which means "to keep an appointment," and mikraw which means "rehearsal."⁵

Paul emphasized this⁶ and also highlighted their predictive role as "a shadow of things to come."⁷ Jesus also pointed to his personal role in their fulfillment:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law (Torah), or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. Matthew 5:17

This is another of these instances in which "The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed."

Shavuot, The Feast of Weeks

The first three feasts occur in the first month; they were also prophetic of Christ's first advent. The final three feasts occur in the seventh month and appear to be prophetic of Christ's Second Coming. Between these two groups of feasts is Hag Ha Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, also called, Hag Ha Kazir, the Feast of Harvest ("the First Harvest").

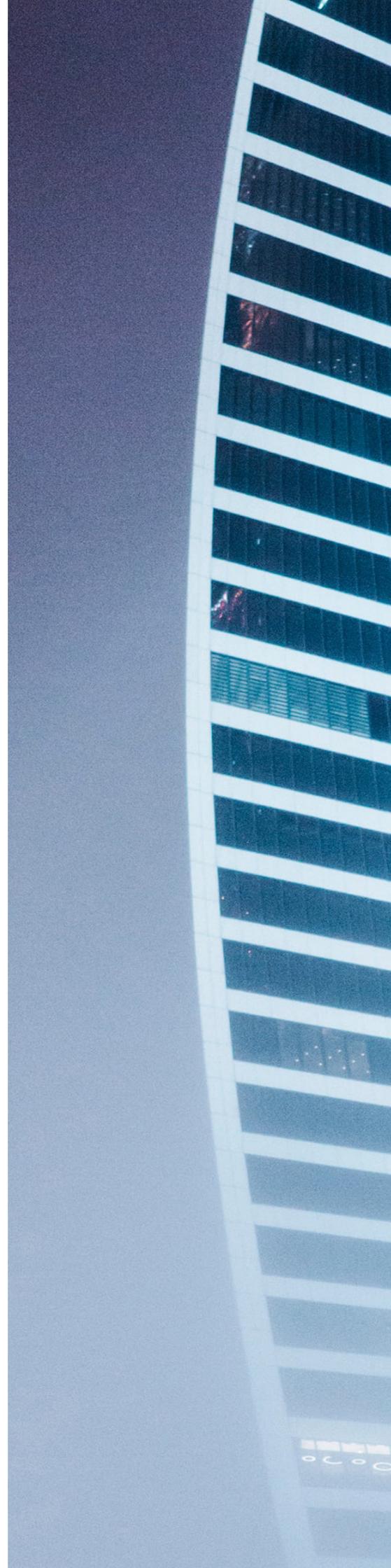
This feast was to be observed on a strange formula: In other words, they were to begin counting on the day of the Feast of First Fruits ("the morrow after the Sabbath": always a Sunday!), seven weeks (49 days) and thus celebrate this unusual feast also on a Sunday.⁸

Counting these 49 days is also called "Counting the Omer." (This "50 day" formula also gives this celebration its alternate label, "the Feast of Pentecost.") It is interesting to notice the frequent intervals of 49 (72) in the Torah codes.

The Feast of Pentecost was also one of only three which were obligatory for all males.⁹ Historically, this feast is viewed as commemorating the birth of the nation and the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai.¹⁰ The observance of this feast is unique in that it includes two loaves of leavened bread, the only use of leavened bread in the Levitical specifications. This would seem to hint of a Gentile application, in contrast to the unleavened bread emphasized in the Passover. Two lambs were to be offered. (Jew + Gentile?)

Prophetic Applications

There is a widespread recognition that the Feast of Weeks (or Feast of Pentecost) is prophetic of the mystery of the Church. And, indeed, the Church was "born" on the Feast of Pentecost.¹¹



It is significant that each event which seems to be "macrocoded" by the calendar was actually fulfilled on the very day that the feast is observed: The Crucifixion on Passover; the Feast of First Fruits on the following Sunday; etc.

Therefore, the birth of the Church on the very day of the Feast of Pentecost in Acts 2 is extremely provocative. Yet it may prove to be myopic to assume that this feast has been completely fulfilled in the birth of the Church alone.

Rapture Possibility?

The sudden "gathering out" of the church (harpazo in the Greek;¹² called the "rapture" from the Latin) may also be hidden behind this feast. The first three feasts, in the first month, appear predictive of the first "coming" of Jesus Christ. The last three feasts, in the seventh month, are viewed as predictive of the Second Coming.

(There are many who look to the Feast of Trumpets or the Feast of Tabernacles as predictive of the "rapture" of the Church. Yet, these views seem to fail to discriminate between the "rapture" of the Church and the Second Coming.)

There would also seem to be an intrinsic contradiction in attempting to apply the Jewish feasts to the Church. As we have noted in the Seventy Week prophecy¹³ and elsewhere, there is a clear distinction between Israel and the Church, a distinction that unfortunately has been blurred in views that fail to recognize the unconditional nature of the relevant commitments to Israel. Paul, in his definitive statement of Christian doctrine which we call the Epistle to the Romans, spends three chapters emphasizing that God is not through with Israel.¹⁴

In his Epistle to the Ephesians he also reveals that the mystery of the Church

was hidden from the Old Testament.¹⁵ (This also is indicated in the parables of the Matthew 13.¹⁶) It appears that the church period occurs in a gap, or interval, in the Jewish timeline of the Old Testament. A provocative possibility is that the Feast of Weeks may prove predictive of both the birth and removal of the church in God's program.

Enoch as a Macrocode?

Enoch is one of the most interesting characters in the Bible. The first prophecy uttered by a prophet was a prophecy of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and it was proclaimed before the Flood of Noah!¹⁷ Enoch is also distinctive in that he did not suffer death; he was "raptured."¹⁸

There were three groups of people facing the flood: those that perished in the flood; those that were preserved through the flood; and those removed before the flood: namely, Enoch.

There are some who view Enoch as a foreshadowing of the church being removed prior to the global ordeal known as the Great Tribulation.

It is interesting that there is a Jewish tradition that Enoch was born on the day that was later ordained as the Feast of Weeks. What makes this even more interesting is the associated tradition that he was "raptured" on his birthday.

Is it possible that this is a foreshadowing of the harpazo of the church?¹⁹

There would seem to be a logical consistency if the same feast that "stopped" the Jewish clock will be the same event that "restarts" it. We will just watch and see. Let's remember that He instructed us to "occupy until He comes."²⁰ Even so, Come, Lord Jesus! | 

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1. Prof. Daniel Michelson, "Codes in the Torah," *B'Or HaTorah*, No.16, 1987, published by the Association of Religious Professionals from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in Israel, p.31.
2. The open appearance has no "the."
3. Jeffrey Satinover, *Cracking the Bible Code*, William Morrow & Co, New York, 1997, p.125.
4. Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 16.
5. Leviticus 23:4.
6. Romans 15:4; Galatians 3:24, 25.
7. Colossians 2:16, 17.
8. Leviticus 23:15-22.
9. Deuteronomy 16:16.
10. Exodus 19:11. This is reckoned by the rabbis as follows: *The Passover in Egypt was on the 14th of Nisan; the crossing of the Red Sea, 3 days later on the 17th. They are viewed as arriving at Mount Sinai on the 3rd day of the 3rd month, ostensibly on the 3rd of Sivan, 46 days later. Moses is told to prepare for the "3rd day."*
11. John 14:25, 26; Acts 1:8; 2:1-47.
12. 1 Thess 4:17. Harpazo, "take by force, take away, carry off; catch up (into heaven)."
13. Daniel 9:24- 27.
14. Romans 9, 10, 11.
15. Ephesians 3:1-10.
16. Matthew 13:17, 34, 35. If they were "kept secret from the foundation of the world," they are not explicit in the Old Testament.
17. Jude 14, 15.
18. Genesis 5:24; Hebrew 11:5.
19. It may be argued that Enoch was only one person, but so is the Church: it is signified as the "Body of Christ." Romans 7:4; 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 4:12; 5:23; Colossians 2:16, 17; and, perhaps, Revelation 12: 5.
20. Luke 19:13.

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



DESTROYING AND ANNOYING

Why Would God create mosquitoes, viruses, and bacteria?

BY XANDRA CARROLL

“Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.”
(Job 12:7-10)

As a Christian biologist I'm often asked: “Why would God make creatures that only destroy and annoy?” I myself have

struggled with this question, especially just after being nipped by a particularly mouthy horsefly. I once asked this question to a Christian medical doctor and her response was simply, “I guess God gave Satan his own paintbrush.” Her response grieved me even more than my question had. Surely the Prince of Darkness was not co-Creator of our world, but the Prince of Peace! Yet the death and suffering we observe due to a myriad of seemingly evil micro-critters bids us seek an answer. This article will explore the trifecta of organisms most well-

known for their destruction and annoyance of the human race; namely, mosquitos, viruses, and bacteria.

MOSQUITOS

Mosquitos are positively ubiquitous. They live 8,000 feet high in the Himalayan mountains, and deep below sea level in the California desert. As recently as 1870, the idea that a mosquito could kill was considered preposterous. Today we understand that a million people die each year from malaria alone. Dengue fever (which I have personally enjoyed, along with malaria), Zika virus, Chikunguya, and others have resulted in countless lives lost. If God chose to make mosquitos, why on earth? Our answer lies in the mosquito's natural history.

Females perch daintily on the surface of the water and lay eggs in two long rows. The eggs bow upwards at the ends, giving it the appearance of a tiny canoe made of pearls. When the eggs hatch, mosquito larvae serve to clean the water of their aqueous habitat because they eat detritus (waste material). Larvae also feed on fallen bug carcasses, thus cleaning the surface of the water. While larvae benefit aqueous ecosystems, most of our qualms with mosquitos have to do with this stage: the successful production of offspring. Interestingly, most mosquitos will never bother you. There are more than 3,000 species of mosquitos, but only 200 bite humans. It's important to realize that, as a rule of thumb, only the females bite, and only when they are reproducing. It is estimated that only one in a million mosquitos at a given time will bite. Females need protein to make eggs, and without a blood meal they will be unable to reproduce. Male mosquitos are usually purely nectarivorous. Females also stick to nectar when they are not trying to produce eggs. This drinking of nectar is very important ecologically, as mosquitos are major plant pollinators. In fact, some plants are only pollinated by mosquitos! Also, mosquitos are basically little buzzing candies. Birds, frogs and fish enjoy eating those sugar-packed insects. Mosquitos have benefited science in many ways, the most major being the design of their proboscis. This has inspired scientists to design less-painful hypodermic needles. Work is also being done on insertion guides for placing electrodes into the brain, and a study of mosquito saliva to determine its special properties.

VIRUSES

Everywhere we find life, we find viruses, and in staggering abundance. 1 mL of ocean water contains about 100 million virus particles. Estimates indicate there are 1031 viruses on Earth. If we could weigh all the viruses on Earth, they would equal the weight of 75 million blue whales. At the offset, this sounds like a major concern. Indeed, viruses like influenza, herpes and measles kill 10 people every hour globally. Yet virologist AJ Roberts writes: "The vast majority of viruses on planet Earth are not associated with disease or suffering. In fact, they are critical for sustaining balance in Earth's ecological webs."

But just how do viruses provide this delicate balance of Earth's ecology? At every level, it would seem. Bacteriophage, for instance, help keep our bodies' microbiomes in balance so that we don't become overrun by bacteria.

Also, the next time you enjoy a gentle rainstorm, thank a virus. We would not have the same precipitation cycle without them!

Aerosoled viruses hang out in the upper atmosphere and help create nucleation (clustering) to initiate precipitation. Viruses are also essential for our ocean ecology. Viruses split open 40-50 percent of the bacteria in Earth's oceans on a daily basis, releasing gobs of organic molecules into the food chain for other organisms to survive on.

The vast majority of virus activity has a symbiotic effect. These viruses help plants, insects, and many other organisms to survive under otherwise impossible environmental conditions. Certain viruses even protect plants from the infection of detrimental viruses.

“We have much to learn about mosquitos, viruses, and bacteria. The hand of God crafted each of these creatures with a lovely purpose. We can solidly say of this trifecta, as God said, “It is good”.”

Viruses have enabled us to make leaps and bounds in science. At least 15 Nobel Prizes have been awarded for research based on virus-dependent work. Viruses were used to discover the triplet base codon nature of the genetic code, RNA splicing, and tumor suppressor genes. The virus used in the polio vaccine helped lessen global cases from over 350,000/yr in 1988 to less than 500/yr in 2013. Today viruses are used to fight cancers, genetic illnesses, and chronic infectious diseases.

As AJ Roberts said: "Although a few viruses are remarkably bad, we dare not put all viruses in that category. In fact, life as we know it would not be possible...without the vast array of viruses that fill the planet."

BACTERIA

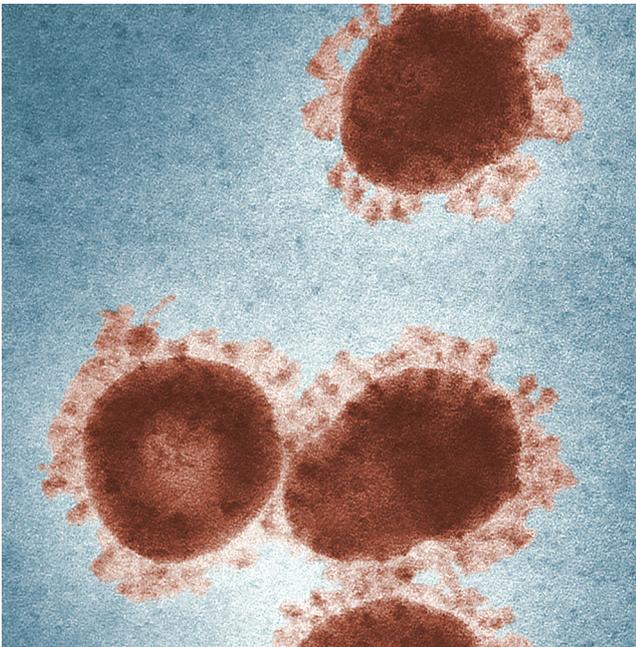
Similar to the viruses and mozzies, we are often only aware of the detrimental ramifications of bacteria. 'Bad' bacteria are extremely bad, especially when they are resistant to antibiotics. According to the CDC, at least 2 million people in the U.S. are infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria every year, leading to the death of at least 23,000 people.

Yet, on the whole, bacteria are key organisms in biogeochemical and metabolic processes. They play an essential role in the earth's biodiversity, both on terra firma and in aqueous environs.

We have found extensive populations in the Arctic and the Antarctic, and everywhere in between. Bacteria appear wherever other organisms are, and they are sometimes found where there is no other evidence of life. Bacteria are essential for human existence. In fact, there are 10 times more microbial cells than human cells inside a human being. So in a sense, you are more bacteria than you are human! But don't think about that too much or it might make your stomach hurt. And speaking of your stomach, the highest numbers of microbial species in a human are found in your gut. Helpful strains of *E.coli* and *Streptococcus* aid in digestion, stave off harmful pathogens, and help develop the immune system. The disruption of gut bacteria has been linked to many disease conditions. We are dependent on the services of commensal bacteria for not just digestion, but for many aspects of our health.

CONCLUSION

We have much to learn about mosquitos, viruses, and bacteria. The hand of God crafted each of these creatures with a lovely purpose. We can solidly say of this triffecta, as God said, "It is good". Yet we can also see the destruction they cause and say, "It is fallen". This sinful, broken world is not as it should be. But if we look close enough, we still see God's fingerprints on the gently buzzing mosquito, the wandering virus, and the fastidious little bacterium. | 



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HEART OF A SUPPORTER

We're Gonna Win the League!

BY DAVE FIRTH

Faithful supporters are what sports teams rely on. Cheering them on through the good times and bad times.

As an Englishman that has followed Liverpool FC (soccer team for those that don't know) all my life, I can tell you it's been tough, at times, to be a supporter of the 'Mighty Reds'.

I didn't really pick my team in the traditional way. My dad put a football match on the TV when I was about 6 and it just happened to be Liverpool v Everton. I decided I wanted the red team to win and they did. That was it - I was a Liverpool fan!

Well, seeing as this was the early eighties it wasn't a bad club to pick. In the next 10 years, Liverpool won the league six times, the FA Cup twice, the League cup four times and the European Cup twice!

True supporters are incredibly loyal and most Liverpool fans' loyalty has been tested since those glory days with a few flashes of success but no league title in 30 years! They've come close. They've won League Cups, FA Cups and more European Cups (now called Champions League) but the domestic league title has eluded them - until now. After 30 years of nail biting disappointments, Liverpool finally won the Premier League!

The reason I'm waffling on about Liverpool is I want to thank all our loyal supporters that have bought into the vision we have for Authentic. It has often been a lot of fun

but there have been some significant challenges along the way. We've had financial struggles, tough editorial decisions to make, production issues, changes in personnel to navigate and several 'curve balls' along the way.

Of course, we shouldn't be surprised that we experience difficulty. After all, we believe this is God's work - he's the boss! But it's when we have found things challenging that we have been so deeply encouraged by our supporters. Many of you have written to us to encourage us and it's often come at a really critical time.

As editor of this magazine, I've had to consider several times whether we continue producing Authentic Magazine or finish the project. Because sometimes it just seems too hard.

We haven't always felt comfortable sharing exactly how things are going with Authentic. We've often had struggles and needs and these are things that, arguably, we should share more publicly if we genuinely want to be 'authentic'.

God has, and will, continue to provide for Authentic as long as it's His chosen vessel for His purposes. Like most decent soccer teams we love our supporters. And like the mighty Liverpool FC, without our supporters we're just a bunch of people rushing around for nothing.

Please join with us to pray and seek the Lord in this 'new season' as we aim to serve Him - the King of Kings - faithfully as we share His life with the people of this great land. | 

■ 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



Called to be Holy

BY ALAN STANLEY

When my eldest two boys were three and four, they were given life sized dolls of Bert and Ernie—from the television program Sesame Street—for Christmas. Pretty cool presents, I thought. But upon opening their presents, what captivated them was not Bert and Ernie but two small bags of balloons that they had each received along with Bert and Ernie. Hmm. What to get excited about, Bert and Ernie, or balloons? I would have thought Bert and Ernie. But not to their three and four-year-old minds. Balloons were definitely the main attraction.

That is often how it is in life. I am currently without a job. What invariably excites me these days is a potential job opportunity, a “position,” an area in which I can make a contribution—you get the idea. In fact, at the time of writing this I was scheduled to leave in a week’s time for a month long teaching trip overseas in two countries. That’s a month of feeling like I have something to offer, a month of feeling useful, a month of feeling like I have a place in the world. But of course, Coronavirus has put a stop to that. So now what?

We men—and it may well be the same for everyone—live to contribute, to make a difference; we want to feel valued and we want to be active. But what excites us is not always what excites God. Now don’t get me wrong, God is interested in our work, our activities, and so on. But they are not always what he is passionate about. To him they can be like bags of balloons while the real gift is standing right in front of us to be enjoyed. How so, you ask? Let me start with a personal story.

Recently I was talking to my wife about the Christian concept of “calling.” A call, to put it loosely, is when God places something on your heart so strongly that it becomes your

mission or goal. I was telling my wife about what I thought my “calling” was in this season of unemployment. It was to do . . . how to put this, hmmm, well, what I felt God had called me to do. Sounds straightforward. Except an hour later I was reading in 1 Corinthians 1 as part of my daily Bible reading plan. Here are the first two verses of that chapter:

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:1–2)

The words “called to be his holy people” stood out to me like a neon light. And it was not so much the content of the words, but the fact that God, in my mind anyway, was addressing my earlier discussion with my wife on calling. It was though his word to me was “Alan, this is your calling, to be holy; and what a better time for you to learn that—no job, no income, no overseas travel, etc., etc., etc. Perfect!”

Have you ever had the experience where you feel like God has a direct word for you at a particular time? It’s a tremendous confidence boost. To think that God would speak to your situation, to you! personally. God does things like that. I knew of course that I was called to be holy, every Christian knows that (see Romans 8:29). But that this would be highlighted for me within an hour or two of me discussing my calling with my wife, this had to be more than a coincidence. God was taking my attention off the metaphorical bag of balloons and focusing it on the metaphorical Bert and Ernie.

The thing is that being called to be holy is for all of us. God just reminded me in a way that I couldn’t merely think, “Oh, I know

that already, now what about a job for me Lord?" I do not mean to suggest that I relax my search for a job, only that God was highlighting where my focus was to be—and indeed where his focus was. It's hard though, I admit. Being called to be holy is not always number one on my priority list. But it should be, and here's why. We'll begin in Genesis 1 where we are told God's plan for our lives:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
(Genesis 1:26)

Image is about how we want to be known, how we want to be identified. We may want to be identified as slim, sporty, tough, sensitive, funny, well-mannered, hard-working, intelligent, easy-going, flexible, tolerant, wealthy, educated, moral, religious, and so on. Genesis 1 tells us that God created us so that we might be identified with him! God created us so that when people look at us, they might see something of his glory, something of his character, something that points people to understand more of who God is. It's a simple plan!

In fact, we can see that this is his plan by following, very briefly, the storyline of the Bible. Following God's creation sin enters the world and interrupts God's plan. But notice the effects: with sin came a preoccupation with self. First, Eve is motivated by what she perceives to be good for her. Second, Eve and her husband are struck with self-consciousness, and fear drives them into hiding. Third, neither are willing to bear responsibility for their actions and so they blame someone else (Genesis 3:10–13). If you are a parent, you may have noticed the sequence of these events in your kids. But it's not just children. Selfishness has entered the world and now characterizes humanity. But notice how it all ends up. By the end of the first major section in Genesis, self-absorption characterizes the "whole world" (Genesis 11:1):

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:1–4)

The motivation for humanity's building project is their image: "that we may make a name for ourselves." So . . . the first section of the Bible begins with God's overwhelming passion for his image and ends with humanity's overwhelming passion

for their image. The first section of the Bible begins with God's creation pointing to him and ends with humanity's creation pointing to them. The first section of the Bible begins with God's motivation to make a name for himself and ends with humanity's motivation to make a name for themselves.

God created human beings so that we might be identified with him. Now every human creates so that we might be identified with our accomplishments. Those accomplishments might be the accumulation of wealth, a successful business, a healthy body, a great marriage, godly children, a big house, a stellar reputation, intelligence, and so on. It's the way we are wired; it's in our DNA (from Genesis 3) we might say. And it was there that day when I was thinking about my calling—until God called me back to his original intention, an intention that has been his since the very beginning.

Look at how the next major section in Genesis starts. God promises to make Abram's "name great" (Genesis 12:2). This promise shows us just how important the theme of image/name/identity is. In the previous chapter "the whole world" sought to "make a name" for themselves and now God responds, "I will make your name great." The same promise next occurs when God promises David, "I will make for you a great name" (2 Samuel 7:9). The link between Abraham and David points ahead to "Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1) who will baptize people into his "name" (Matthew 28:19), indicating that salvation in Jesus and identity are bound up together. Hence, from Genesis 12 it is clear that if our "name is ever to become great it will not be because of any self-initiated effort. The great name will be a gift, not an achievement."¹

Here is the point. All of the above reveals God's heart, that is, his consuming passion, his longing or overwhelming ambition; or we might say his highest goal or purpose. God's heart is his image. We can tell this from thinking about the non-human aspect of creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God;

"God created human beings so that we might be identified with Him. Now every human creates so that we might be identified with our accomplishments."

the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). Creation is intended to reflect God in some way. Thus, "what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:19–20). Couple these passages with God's intent to create human beings in his image and likeness, and we get a very clear picture of God's heart for us. He has designed every square inch of his creation—non-human and human—so that wherever we look we might get a glimpse of God. Thus, God's all-consuming passion is to reveal himself, and that the revelation of himself

may spread through his image bearers, so that eventually “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9; see also Habakkuk 2:14); “may the whole earth be filled with his glory” (Psalm 72:19).

A few years ago, I was a passenger in a car in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. Suddenly the man driving proudly asked me to look up at a giant billboard with a pretty young girl jumping in the air. It was his daughter. God created us so that we, his children, might be his billboard for all to see. This is what his promise to Abram was all about; Abram and his descendants were to be “a display people, a showcase to the world;”² one writer has said, God’s “poster child.”³

So once again we are brought back to God’s heart, God’s passion! It is for a people who image him. In fact, God is so serious about this that he became a billboard himself. “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18). Thus, Jesus could say, “The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me” (John 12:45), and “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). “The Son is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). Since no other individual, or nation, in history had been able to image God perfectly, God did it himself; and he went to extreme lengths to do it.

John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus ultimately revealed the Father on the cross (see e.g., John 7:39; 12:16; 13:31; 17:1). The cross is the pinnacle of what God has been seeking to do from the very beginning, to glorify his name (John 12:28). In going to the cross Jesus revealed the true image of God. “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do,” he said (John 17:4). How does the cross glorify God? In short, “by conveying divine love.”⁴ At the cross “We are seeing, in particular, what God’s own love looks like.”⁵ We all know John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” However, it is better to translate the verse “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son” (Holman Christian Standard Bible). In other words, God’s love for the world is most evident in Jesus’ death on the cross. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12). The point is that God has gone to extreme lengths to reveal who he is to the world; to show the world that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16).

Now let’s return to the call to be holy! In being called to be holy, we are simply being called to image God: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Notice how Paul goes on to explain what it looks like “to put on the new self, which is being renewed . . . in the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:10). He tells his readers to, “as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” He concludes with “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12–14). Jesus said it like this, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Being like God is crucial to understanding God’s call on our lives. Jesus told his disciples to “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34–35). He did not say “By your accomplishments everyone will know that you are my disciples.” Neither did he say, “By your church attendance everyone will know that you are my disciples.” And he did not say, “By your theology everyone will know that you are my disciples.” Love! By love everyone will be able to tell that we belong to Jesus. Love is the defining characteristic of brothers and sisters in God’s family (Matthew 22:36–37; Romans 13:8–10; Colossians 3:14; James 2:8)—this kind of love:

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16–18)

The apostle Paul puts it like this: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1–2, NIV84).

So, you see, imaging God has always been God’s intention: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Whether we think about the creation of the world, God’s promise to Abraham, or God’s call on our lives right now, his calling for us has not changed.

But here’s my problem, and I suspect I might not be alone. My greatest desire, my heart, my passion—above all passions—is not always to be holy/to be conformed to the image of Jesus. My passion is to contribute, to make a difference, to feel useful, to feel like I have a place in this world where accomplishing is the name of the game. I came across the following news article

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

a number of years ago that well illustrates what many men probably struggle with:

ANDREW Griffiths worked seven days a week, starting each day at 6am and not finishing until 9pm. He put on 50 kilos and his marriage of 10 years broke apart. His job ruled his life. "I'd always been a workaholic," Mr Griffiths, owner of the Oceanic Marketing Group said. "I based a lot of my self-worth on my success or failure in business. That translated to me working harder and harder to prove to the world I was successful. Everything else in my life became secondary." All of his relationships suffered, not just with his wife. And due to lack of exercise and poor diet, Mr Griffiths' weight gain saw him tip the scales at 150 kilos.⁶

There it is: "I based a lot of my self-worth on my success or failure in business." It might not be business of course that we find our self-worth in, it could be our qualifications, our ability to preach great sermons, our wisdom, our possessions, our abilities, our reputation, or a thousand other things that we might want to be identified for. But God's call always calls us back to something greater, not greater according to our egos, but greater according to the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22).

To be focused on imaging Jesus means to be focused on people, and how best we might serve them. This after all was Jesus' focus (Mark 10:45). Here is how I am trying to work this out in my own life. It is always tempting to look into the future. But God is more interested that we focus on who we should be today (Matthew 6:33–34). The future is not unimportant of course, but so often our future obsessed thoughts concern our metaphorical bags of balloons.

So, I ask myself, "What is in front of me right now?" It might be my wife, one of my kids, someone I am talking to after church, a friend I am meeting at a café, a sermon I am preparing, dishes to wash, a meeting to attend, at the dinner table with family or friends, an article to write. In each one of these situations God is calling me to image Jesus. We struggle, I know, because our minds are often running ahead to our real passion—the business, work, the appointment we have later on, our spare time, a holiday. We are so prone to getting caught up with our own perceptions of greatness (Matthew 18:1–4). But whatever is right in front of us now is where God's heart is, and specifically how we might image him. If it is a conversation, to listen well; to give the person our undivided attention, to be Christ to that person. If it is a task or activity, to be conscious of who the task is for and thus perform it with an attitude that basically says, "I am helping someone by doing this." Currently as I write I need to be thinking, "How can I best serve those who read this?" rather than, "How can I write in a way which impresses those who read this?" For those who preach, "How can I write this sermon in a way that best serves those who hear?" rather than, "How can I write this sermon in a way which impresses

those who hear?" For those who are a mechanic: "How can I fix this car with an attitude of "I am fixing this car to help make someone's life better"? To image Jesus in every situation is to love them, to show them mercy, to act justly toward them (Matthew 23:23). It is to be concerned for them as a whole person, their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Whenever I lose my focus and get caught up with those bags of balloons, there is a beautiful song that serves to remind me of my calling. It's counter cultural and runs against the grain of how many think even in the Christian world. It's called Dream Small:

*It's a momma singing songs about the Lord
It's a daddy spending family time
That the world said he cannot afford
These simple moments change the world
It's a pastor at a tiny little Church
Forty years of loving on the broken and the hurt
These simple moments change the world*

*It's visiting the widow down the street
Or dancing on a Friday with your friend with special needs
These simple moments change the world
Of course, there's nothing wrong with bigger dreams
Just don't miss the minutes on your way, your bigger things, no
'Cause these simple moments change the world*

*Out of these small things and watch them grow bigger
The God who does all things makes oceans from river*

*Dream small
Don't bother like you've gotta do it all
Just let Jesus use you where you are
One day at a time
Live well
Loving God and others as yourself
Find little ways where only you can help
With His great love
A tiny rock can make a giant fall
Dream small!"* 

1. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 372.
2. Durham, *Exodus*, 263 cited in Bartholomew, *Drama of Scripture*, 44.
3. Goldingay, *Reading Jesus's Bible*, 164.
4. Koester, *The Word of Life*, 122.
5. N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone Part 1 Chapters 1–10* (vol. 5; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 33.
6. Myles Wearing, "Beating Workaholism," (Oct 23, 2009): <https://www.news.com.au/news/beating-workaholism/news-story/af20ba94cafd20fa072543004c22f871>.
7. Josh Wilson, "Dream Small." Listen to it here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOBaLrtEyc>

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Your Christian media ministry, bringing you a unique perspective on election and referenda issues



On October 17th, New Zealanders will go to the polling booths to vote in the general election, and for the End of Life Choice and Cannabis Legalisation & Control referenda.

Rhema, Life FM, Star and Shine will present election issues and policies to people from a faith perspective.

Andrew Urquhart interviews party leaders and Gary Hoogvliet will chat to Christian leaders and influencers on election issues.

Andrew Urquhart and Eloise Packham also host The Panel with leading thinkers and experts, and on Perspective, Tash McGill navigates the opinions and perspectives of Kiwis from all sides of the political spectrum.

Our Nation Our Voice

Election 2020

Party Leader Interviews with Andrew Urquhart

Tuesdays & Thursdays from Sept 22nd
11:00am on Rhema, Life FM & Star
8:00pm on Shine TV

Christian Leader Interviews with Gary Hoogvliet

Sundays & Tuesdays 8:30pm on Shine TV
Mondays 11:00am on Rhema, Life FM & Star

The Panel with Andrew Urquhart and Eloise Packham

Begins 9th September
Wednesday 11:00am on Rhema & Life FM
Thursdays 7:30pm on Shine TV

Perspective with Tash McGill

Begins 21st September
Mondays 8:00am & Wednesdays 7:30am
on Rhema & Life FM

Join a Day of Prayer

for the election & referenda

on Rhema, Life FM,
Star & Shine TV

Friday 16th October

Watch on Shine Freeview Channel 25

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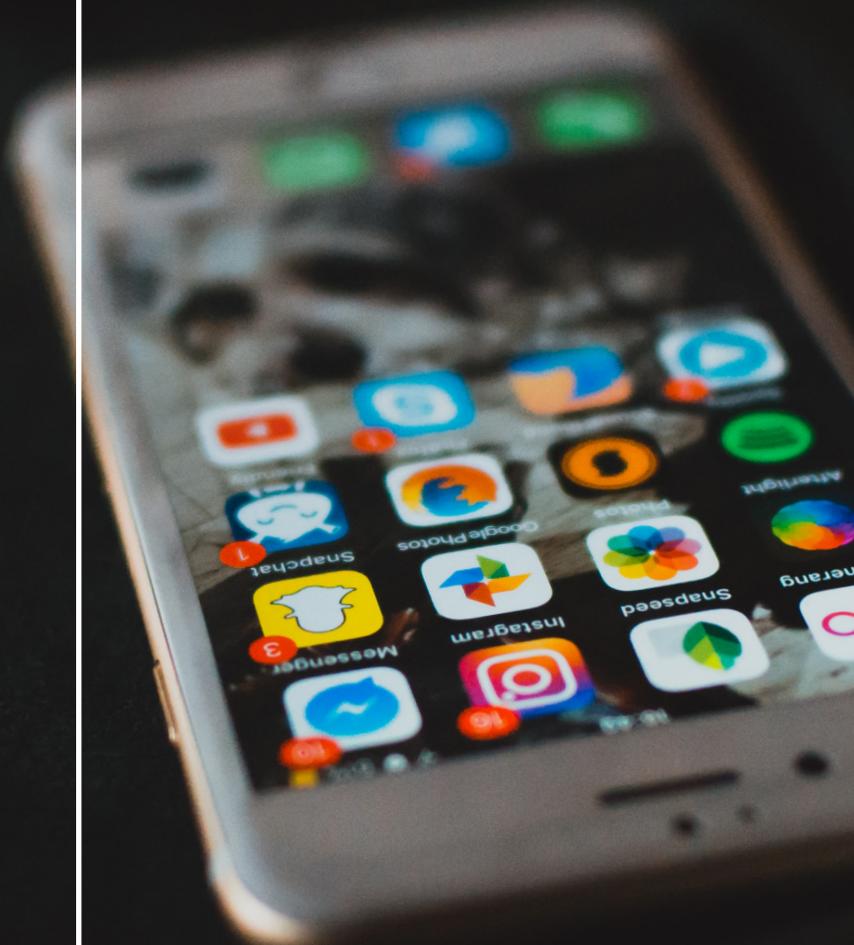


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10

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE DANGER OF MEDIA

By Tony Reinke



1. Media feed us an endless stream of spectacles that captures human attention and holds fast a collective gaze.

A spectacle is a moment of time, of varying length, in which collective gaze is fixed on some specific image, event, or moment. A spectacle is something that captures human attention, an instant when our eyes and brains focus and fixate on something projected at us.

In an outrage society like ours, spectacles are often controversies—the latest scandal in sports, entertainment, or politics. A spark bellows, grows into a viral flame on social media, and ignites the visual feeds of millions. That's a spectacle.

As the speed of media grows faster and faster, the most miniscule public slip of the tongue or passive-aggressive celebrity comment or hypocritical political image can become

a spectacle. And often the most viral social media spectacles are spicy tales later exposed as groundless rumors and fake news.¹

Whether it's true, false, or fiction, a spectacle is the visible thing that holds together a collective gaze.

2. Media wants something from you.

The real world around us dissolves away, not because our spectacles are false or fake, but because we hold sovereign sway over a menu of endless spectacle options. We control it all. We remote-control it all. And inside the buffet of digital options, we lose sight of the edges that give shape to our embodied existence. We grow blind to what we cannot control.

We no longer seek out new spectacles; new spectacles seek us out, delivered to us with hardly more required than a thumb twitch, or less. Auto-playing video clips animate, expire, and then scroll on to the next one in line. Autostarting next

episodes extend our Netflix bingeing. We are asked to do nothing. Simply veg.

Few of us have reckoned with the consequences of this televisual culture on our attention, our volition, our empathy, and our self-identity.

3. Media stirs our insatiable appetite for glory.

Why do we seek spectacles? Because we're human—hardwired with an unquenchable appetite to see glory. Our hearts seek splendor as our eyes scan for greatness. We cannot help it.

"The world aches to be awed. That ache was made for God. The world seeks it mainly through movies"²—and in entertainment and politics and true crime and celebrity gossip and warfare and live sports. Unfortunately, we are all very easily conned into wasting our time on what adds no value to our lives. Aldous Huxley called it "man's almost infinite appetite for distraction."³ Worthless or worthwhile, our eyes are insatiable things.

4. Advertising can lead you into dangerous habits.

Advertising spectacles build powerful habits within us and make us endlessly restless buyers who crave the power to change our lives and our surroundings with another trip to the mall.

The blob of the autonomous self is promised a new identity in a shiny new exoskeleton—a new consumable good to complete us and give us form in the world, to shape the identity we want to project to others. So we become self-consumed consumers—autonomous buyers whose lives are given new shape and form by the next thing we add to our Amazon shopping cart.

He must awaken his transforming power deep inside us and open our eyes to behold the splendor of Christ.

5. Media wants to shape our identity.

Image is our identity, and our identity is unavoidably molded by our media. To use the evocative language of Jacques Ellul, speaking about movies, we choose to give ourselves vicariously to the onscreen lives that we could never personally experience. We escape into lives that are not ours and become adapted to the experiences of others. We live inside our projected simulations—inside the promises and the possibilities of our most beloved celebrities.

In the age of the spectacle, we leave the hard edges of our embodied existence—our shells—in order to find our own shape and definition as we live inside a media-driven life of

abstraction. And because we can live entirely inside the world of our images (consumed and projected), we lose our identity and our place in the community. We lose a sense of what it means to be inside the body God assigned and shaped for us.

6. Our attention span is being exploited by digital media.

Smartphones make it possible for the attention economy to target our little attention gaps as we transition between tasks and duties. Our attention may be slightly elastic enough to fill up every empty gap of silence in our days, but in the end it's still a zero-sum game. We have limited amounts of time to focus in a given day, and now every second of our attention can be targeted and commoditized.

Our attention is willingly shattered into a million pieces, guided by our impulsive urges, captured into our digital profiles, and exploited by the spectacle merchants.

7. Our prayer lives are endangered.

Yes, there are apps and alerts to remind us to pray. May we use them. But in the digital age, nine-second intervals of attention calculate into four hundred discrete spectacle modules per Snapchat hour, a spiritual chaos meant not to serve the soul but to serve the attention merchants. Our attention is finite, but our call to persistent prayer is clear. It's time to be honest. The worst of our compulsive social media habits are filling our days and corroding our prayer lives.

8. Media can blind to the glory of Christ and decrease your zeal for the Lord.

Feeding on sinful media will annul your holy affections. Yes. But pampering yourself with a glut of morally neutral media also pillages your affectional zeal. Each of us must learn to preserve higher pleasures by revolting against lesser indulgences.⁴ Our shows and movies and games lure us to give ourselves away to the screen, a video addiction David Foster Wallace called "a distorted religious impulse," a giving of the self that must be reserved for God alone, an idolatrous giving away of the soul to a media that will never love us back.⁵

We humans don't merely have habits—we are habits, said Jonathan Edwards.⁶ Therefore most of life is not first deliberated at the conscious level and then acted out. That's true. Rather, the only hope for the sanctification of our habits and loves is the Spirit. He must awaken his transforming power deep inside us and open our eyes to behold the splendor of Christ.

In a world of shiny attractions that grab our attention and demand our affections, *Competing Spectacles* helps us to thrive spiritually by asking critical questions about where we place our focus.

9. Your problem is internal, not external.

When God “put eternity into man’s heart,” he made the heart a capacious, hungry, and restless thing (Eccles. 3:11). Sinful longings drive the lust in all our faculties, not least in our vision—for “the eye is not satisfied with seeing” (Eccles. 1:8). Just as hell and the grave engulf and never fill up, so too, “never satisfied are the eyes of man” (Prov. 27:20).

The lusting eyes of mankind feed and feed and feed and never get full. Worldly eyes rove, animated by an eternal craving, seeking some new spectacle to bring peace and rest and joy. Satisfaction never arrives, it just keeps fading away.⁷ The root danger is not the sparkling world but the sin within us. Unbridled eyes roam restless over the earth, hungry for some new thrill. And until hell and the grave are swollen, man’s eyes will keep looking to the world’s spectacles for what they can never find.

10. You will become what you behold.

Pastor David Platt’s warning is necessary: “You don’t become like Christ by beholding TV all week. And you don’t become like Christ by beholding the Internet all week. You don’t become like Christ when you fill your life with things of this world. You become like Christ when you behold the glory of Christ, and you expose your life, moment by moment, to his glory,” all through God’s revelation in Scripture.⁸

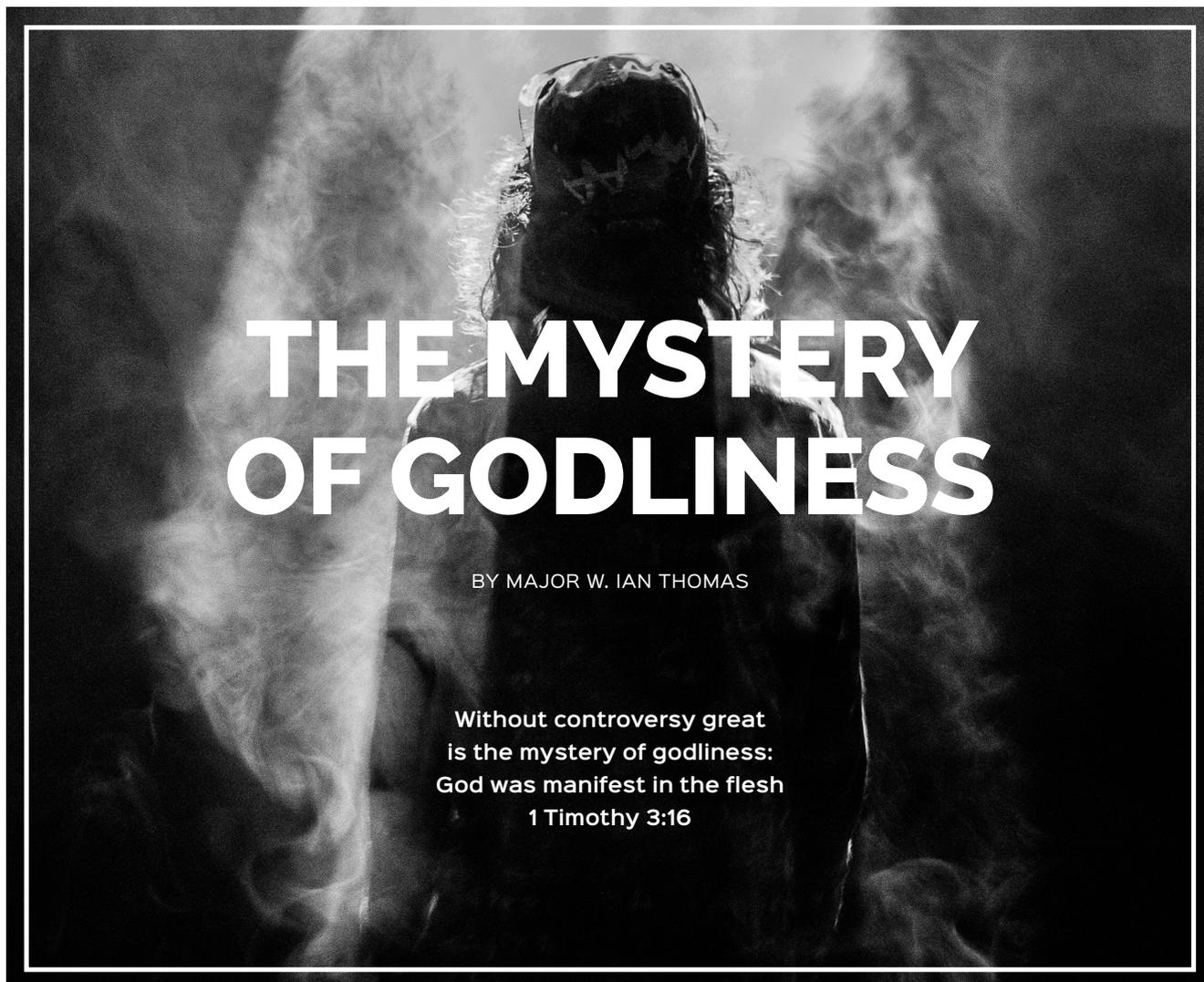
In setting our minds on the Spectacle of Christ, we are called to a personal discipline that is entirely foreign to this world, even foreign to our own natural inclinations. We learn a new divine speech—a foreign language of unseen glory—as Scripture feeds our new appetites for the Savior. Our new appetite directs us toward Christ. No other factor more distinguishes the Christian’s appetite from the world’s appetite for manufactured spectacles.

Content adapted from *Competing Spectacles* by Tony Reinke. This article first appeared on Crossway.org; used with permission. | 

1. Robinson Meyer, “The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News,” theatlantic.com, March 8, 2018.
2. John Piper, twitter.com, April 12, 2017
3. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 35
4. 1 John 2:15–17.
5. See John Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).
6. “Created beings, in other words, do not have habits but are habits and laws. Edwards wrote that a soul’s ‘essence consists in powers and habits.’” Sang Hyun Lee’s summary in Kenneth P. Minkema Harry 7. S. Stout Adriaan C. Neele, *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 271.
7. David Lipsky and David Foster Wallace, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 82.
8. David Platt, “Unveiling His Glory,” sermon, March 16, 2008, radical.net.

■ Tony Reinke is a journalist and senior writer for desiringGod.org. He is the author of *Lit: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*; *Newton on the Christian Life*; and *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*.





THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

BY MAJOR W. IAN THOMAS

**Without controversy great
is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifest in the flesh
1 Timothy 3:16**

Godliness is a mystery! Fail to grasp this fact and you will never understand the nature of godliness.

God did not create you to have just an ape-like capacity to imitate God. There would be no mystery in that, nor would this lift you morally much above the status of a monkey or a parrot! The capacity to imitate is vested in the one who imitates, and does not derive from, nor necessarily share the motives of the person being imitated, who remains passive and impersonal to the act of imitation.

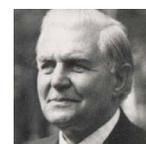
In direct contrast to this, godliness or Godlikeness is the direct and exclusive consequence of God's activity in man. Not the consequence of your capacity to imitate God, but the consequence of God's capacity to reproduce Himself in you! This is the nature of the mystery!

Remove the mystery or try to explain it away, and the result must inevitably be disastrous, for you will no longer be anchored to anything absolute; you will be at liberty to choose your own God the object of your own imitation; and your "godliness" will be the measure of your conformity to the object of your choice.

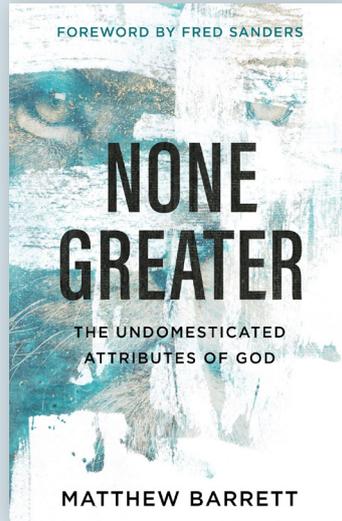
The moment you come to realize that only God can make a man godly, you are left with no option but to find God, and to know God, and to let God be God in and through you, whoever He may be and this will leave you with no margin for picking and choosing for there is only one God, and He is absolute, and He made you expressly for Himself!

From: The Mystery of Godliness. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. ©1964.

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



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None Greater

MATTHEW BARRETT // REVIEW BY JOSHUA ENS

There is rarely anything new or exciting in an orthodox book about the attributes of God. Because God is eternal and unchanging, and continues to preserve his Word, books written over 1500 years ago teach us valuable things about God's nature and acts. The church, therefore, does not need to prize innovation when understanding God's self-revelation. Similarly, when God's people ignore past generations of thinkers and writers they rob themselves of a blessing connected to God's faithfulness through the years. Matthew Barrett avoids both pitfalls of innovation and ignorance in his book *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God*.

Barrett's particular approach focuses on (1) an area of neglect in Christianity, (2) a desire to show the unity of God's attributes, and (3) a specific audience. First, it is the author's concern that many modern churches have gotten the starting point wrong when it comes to our doctrine of God.

"As I reflected on my own journey, it was obvious that God had always been introduced into conversations in a very experiential way: love is a common human experience, so God must be a God of love...Thinking about God was always from the bottom up—that is from my experience to who God is." (8)

'Bottom-up' thinking, domesticates God, altering uncomfortable truths which seem beyond us, until we have created a god in our own image. The author argues that instead, we must begin with God, as he reveals himself in his Word in a 'top-down' approach.

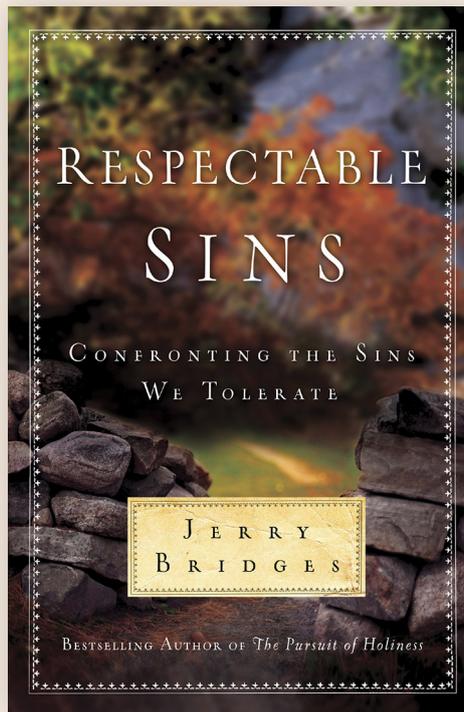
Second, Barrett has a central thread which runs the course of the book unifying each chapter and bringing the reader back

to one foundational truth: "God is someone than whom none greater can be conceived" (10). This assertion finds its origin in the great theologian Anselm (1033-1109). A robust guiding principle prevents this book from devolving into a series of disconnected essays about God's attributes. Were this the case, it would give the reader the impression that God can be divided into parts, rather than embracing his perfect, undivided being.

Third, Barrett writes for churchgoers, people who desire to know God more truly. The author saw the need for a work in between scholarly theological tomes and devotional-style books. Along the way, Barrett introduces the reader to some centuries-old authors he has grown to call friends. Further, Barrett makes these writers accessible for the general public in a way that their original works are not. There is enough of an introduction that some may wish to investigate the source, while others will be content with the summary provided. Barrett also provides a helpful and thorough glossary for the unfamiliar vocabulary often encountered when studying the attributes of God.

Everyone who desires to know god more truly must read *None Greater*. However, mere knowledge is not the goal. "Rather, this knowledge of God is meant to lead us into worship" (14). One cannot help but pause in praise throughout the chapters as you behold more clearly the majesty, beauty, and glory of our Triune God. Seeing God in this way is but a small taste of the ultimate hope of every believer when we shall be in God's presence, entirely free from sin, and will worship him for all eternity. | 

BOOK



Respectable Sins

JERRY BRIDGES // REVIEW BY JOSHUA ENS

The sins of society often inundate Christians. There is a good reason for this saturation; in addition to one's life and relationships, media of all kinds both promote and report actions and lifestyles that run contrary to the Christian ethic and worldview. Yet, too high a focus on cultural sins from a militant stance creates a vacuum where the "respectable" sins of Christians are allowed to flourish. A posture focused entirely in an outward direction tends to lead to self-righteousness, pride, and judgmentalism.

It is at this point that Bridges' book enters the fray. He writes to conservative evangelicals, including himself in the group, who "may have become so preoccupied with some of the major sins of society around us that we have lost sight of the need to deal with our own more 'refined' or subtle sins." (9) The brief chapters and the author's economy of words leaves the reader pondering each sentence carefully, without feeling bogged down in the content. Similarly, it is helpful to read this book a chapter at a time, pausing to confess and pray about the content. This time for reflection allows the Spirit of God to work, instead of overloading our minds and hearts with chapter after chapter.

“It is not an exaggeration to say that this book has been one of the most influential books of my life.”

Bridges focuses on fourteen sins tolerated by many Christians. These chapters range from 'Sins of the Tongue', to 'Worldliness', to 'Unthankfulness', and 'Ungodliness'. It would be tempting for the reader to scan through the chapter titles and select a part of the book that is relevant to a particular sin struggle and read the section in isolation from the rest of the book. This approach, however, does a great disservice to the

author's design for his readers. First, he must understand the significance of even the subtlest of sins.

"It does not matter whether our sin is scandalous or respectable, all our sin is sinful, only sinful, and

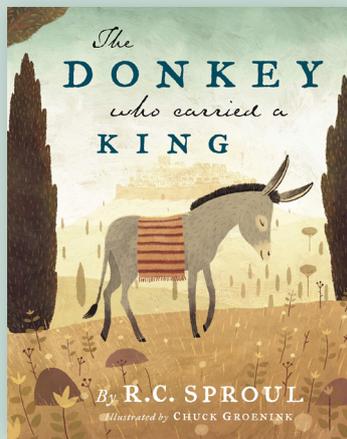
altogether sinful. Whether it is larger or small in our eyes, it is heinous in the sight of God. God forgives our sin because of the shed blood of Christ, but he does not tolerate it. Instead, every sin that we commit, even the subtle sin that we don't even think about, was laid upon Christ as He bore the curse of God in our place." (29-30)

From this place of honest reckoning with one's sinfulness, Bridges applies the soothing balm of the Gospel in the fourth chapter. It is my recommendation that the reader

should consider regularly returning to this chapter should discouragement set in later in the book. The author reminds us that not only does Christ forgive sinners of all their sins, but the Gospel frees us to face our sins. Instead of minimizing our sin, the Christian can fight against sin with "the assurance that my sin is forgiven before I can even acknowledge it, let alone begin to deal with it" (34). The two chapters that follow explain the work of the Holy Spirit in delivering us daily from sin and practical ways to fight against sin. These first six chapters, therefore, stand as a unit which highlights God's holiness, our sinfulness, the power of the Gospel, and practical ways to engage in the spiritual battle. Each of these aspects will be much needed as the reader learns and understands more of the subtle sins that have affected and infiltrated our lives.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this book has been one of the most influential books of my life. I believe that this book needs to be read by anyone who can afford it. In fact, if you cannot afford it now, you need to cut out coffee until you can; its truths and application are that precious. My one qualification with this book is that this book should be read within a community of believers. That community can be as small as one close friend over coffee, or as large as a men's Bible study. It was in this latter context that I first read the book, and it was refreshing to my soul to have the support of others alongside me as we journeyed through very familiar, and often ignored, sins. This book may not make you feel good at the turn of every page, but it is written with your good and God's glory in mind. | 

CHILDREN'S BOOK



The Donkey Who Carried a King

R. C. SPROUL // REVIEW BY JOSHUA ENS

In any kind of teaching, the most challenging task is to take profound truths and make them understandable without sacrificing or compromising the concept. For over fifty years, Sproul refused to let theology remain an 'ivory tower exercise' and introduced masses to the great doctrines of the Bible. Sadly, far fewer people know about his marvellous children's books. In these books, Sproul's grandfatherly tone and masterful story-telling combine with his clear thinking and writing to create a book which is attractive, suspense-filled, and biblically faithful. I whole-heartedly recommend any of the author's picture books for children, but my favourite is *The Donkey Who Carried a King*. This is an imaginative journey

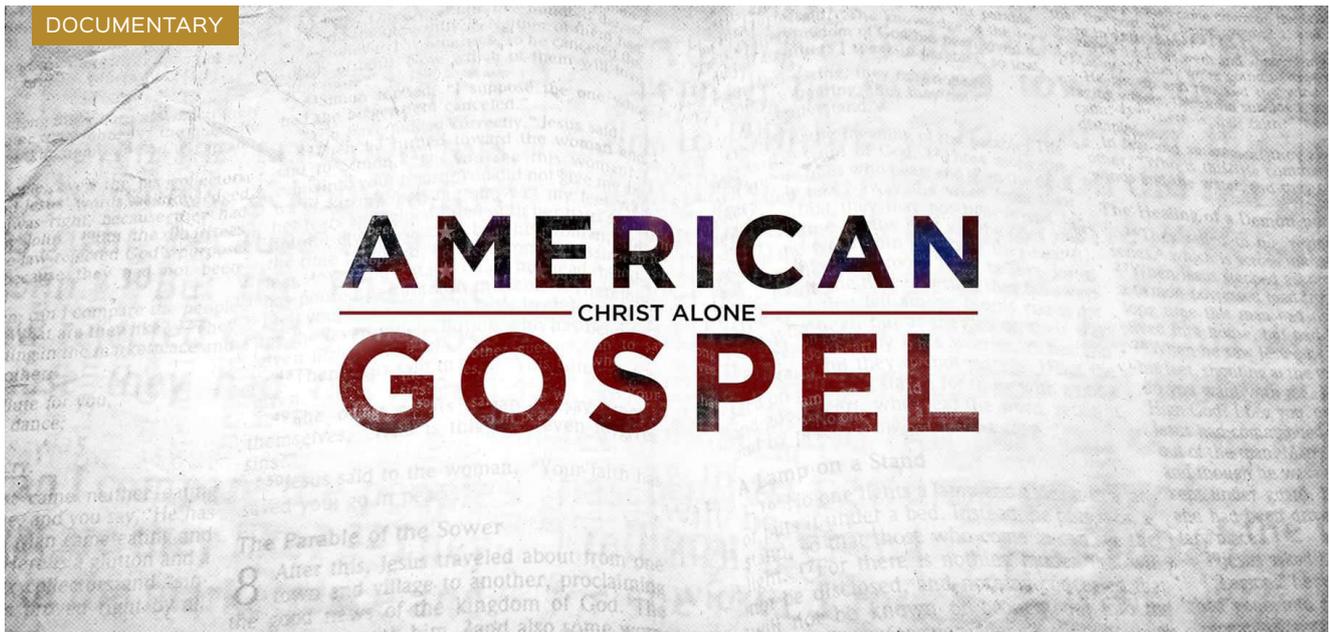
into the perspective of the donkey who carried Jesus at the Triumphal Entry. The events of the story cover the final week of Jesus' life on earth, culminating with his death on the cross. Sproul's writing and the beautifully styled illustrations will make for a wonderful family reading experience. After buying this book, be ready to look for more books by this author for yourself and your children. | 



These books are available at Manna Christian Bookstore manna.co.nz

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American Gospel: Christ Alone

TRANSITION STUDIOS // REVIEW FROM TMS

I vividly remember the first time I heard someone use “abominate” as a verb. It was John Piper and he was talking about the prosperity gospel.

In the U.S. there has arisen a particularly virulent form of false teaching—a gospel which promises cash and comfort to Christ’s followers, and in so doing bilks the poor, the needy, and the ill. It’s a gospel which elevates man and deposes God. The film *American Gospel: Christ Alone* by Transition Studios tackles this teaching, along with several other false gospels, in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner.

In *American Gospel: Christ Alone*, we are treated to the melding of excellence in craft with excellence in content. I want to share five features of *American Gospel* which set it apart and make it a must-watch for believers who love the precious truths of the gospel.

An Admirable Craftsmanship

This film would be laudable even if we set aside the content and just looked at it purely as a specimen of documentary filmmaking. The story is composed of interviews, archival footage, and animated graphics. And if viewers aren’t paying attention, they may not even notice that this film has no narrator stringing that content together. This is an impressive feat. But Kimber pulls it off to great effect. The craftsmanship of this documentary speaks to Kimber’s talent as a filmmaker and story-teller. I can’t tell you what joy that brings to me. The lack of quality Christian media has long been a gaping hole in the efforts of the true church.

A Striking Depth

I was impressed by the theological depth of *American Gospel*. Even as it took aim at the worst of the worst in the health and wealth movement, Roman Catholicism, and other sub-gospels, it didn’t take the low road of mere mockery.

A film like this could have surrendered itself to easy potshots at heretical crackpots. It’s a sad feature of so many believers, who are otherwise sound theologically, that they often simply mock false teaching. Though it’s easy to laugh off the clownish Osteens of the world with their Cheshire grin, awe-shucks platitudes, and brazen money-grabs, the truth is millions are deceived by these people.

No, *American Gospel* takes the high road and thoughtfully, carefully tears down every philosophy that raises itself up against the knowledge of God. This film isn’t a takedown of false gospels, it’s a dissection. There is a theological depth to this film that speaks to the theological acumen of its creator and his interviewees.

It’s a great cast of people who make up the interviews, too, by the way. The film features voices like Ray Comfort, Mark Dever, Costi Hinn, Paul Washer, Michael Horton, and our own Steven J. Lawson and John MacArthur. Additionally, there are interviews with many people who were saved out false movements to a living hope by the true gospel.

The interviewees don’t waterski over theology, they take a deep dive. You’ll find more open Bibles than mere opinions

here. There are discussions of subjects like the theology of trichotomy—the teaching that man is made up of body, soul, and spirit. And they show how this belief actually stands behind the “little god” theology of the worst corners of the self-exalting health & wealth movement.

In the film, Sean Demars, states it plainly, “Bad theology hurts people.” And that’s really what this film is about. It exposes the false gospels of the American church with particular attention given to the massively influential movement often called the prosperity gospel—a false gospel homegrown in the United States of America which is now being exported all over the world.

A Damning Indictment

At the Strange Fire conference in 2013, hosted right here on the campus of Grace Community Church and The Master’s Seminary, Conrad Mbewe begged the American church to stop exporting the false gospel of the prosperity movement to Africa. In the film, Justin Peters echoes this sentiment when he sadly notes that most of the so-called “Christian world” is characterized by the false gospel Americans spread. It’s a damning indictment.

Missionaries from these false movements are going to the world and replicating a message of false hope, twisting God’s Word to turn men away from eternal hope. Paul Washer says it well, “It is a pain to know that people do not know Jesus. It is a greater pain to know that often times Jesus and Christianity is being distorted.”

As I watched, I found myself convicted for the times when I have simply laughed at internet memes as though no serious person could possibly fall for the message of these frauds. The truth is, the people who are being caught up in these false teachings are the most vulnerable among us. It is the suffering and the down-trodden, desperate for hope, who are most often caught in the net of a message which promises healing and financial safety.

An Unexpected Balm

Another feature that struck me about American Gospel was the interviews with precious suffering saints. I was frequently brought to tears by people struggling under illness who sought hope in the prosperity gospel, but after coming up empty-handed, finally found true and lasting peace in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They no longer sought for God to change their circumstances but accepted that God was using their circumstances to change them.

I think suffering Christians will discover an unexpected balm in this film as they are reminded of the true hope provided in

“I was frequently brought to tears by people struggling under illness who sought hope in the prosperity gospel, but after coming up empty-handed, finally found true and lasting peace in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Christ Jesus, a hope which transcends suffering, sanctifies us, and increases our dependence on the Master. True and lasting joy cannot be found in the short-sighted hope of mere physical comfort. It is found in the fount of all blessing Himself, and in the trust that He is a faithful and loving God who does not cause suffering to His creatures without a loving purpose.

A Clear Gospel Message

But what stood out most to me in this documentary was the juxtaposition of truth and falsehood. Like a sparkling diamond against a black velvet backdrop, the gospel shimmers in all its glory when set against the vapid, self-serving, abominable putrescence of the false gospels presented in this film.

May the Lord use this film to open the eyes of many to the insidious wickedness of false gospels, and more importantly, to the truth of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, for His glory and for their eternal joy. And may it be a reminder to believers of the wonderful gift we have in the gospel. May it cause us to praise God with renewed thankfulness for opening our eyes to the truth. |  

This article was originally published on The Master’s Seminary Blog, for more information about TMS go to www.blog.tms.edu

What others have said about American Gospel: Christ Alone

“The great strength of the film is that it’s not only a negative examination of the Word of Faith movement, but also a very positive and helpful examination of biblical truth. Those who watch it will not only be convinced that the prosperity gospel is evil, but they will also know exactly why it is so evil.”

TIM CHALLIES ★★★★★

“This is the best clarifying juxtaposition of truth and prosperity preaching I know of. I pray millions of people around the world will watch this for the glory of Christ and his Good News.”

JOHN PIPER ★★★★★

■ Reagan Rose is the Director of Digital Platforms at Grace to You. He is also the author of Redeeming Productivity, a blog about how Christians should approach getting things done. Reagan earned his Master of Divinity from TMS in 2017.



TV SERIES

The CHOSEN



The Chosen

DALLAS JENKINS // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

The world could use more Jesus. But can it use more of Him on television?

Depictions of Jesus' life, death and resurrection have been a mainstay on both big and small screens since we've had screens to watch. His story's been told and told and told some more, and a cynic might doubt whether another such retelling can possibly bring anything new to the party.

VidAngel has two words for that cynic: Wanna bet? The Chosen is the product of two up-to-the-minute trends: Streaming networks and crowdfunding.

VidAngel, the entertainment content-filtering service that's endured a litany of lawsuits to shut its business down, is now trying to become a very family-friendly version of Netflix—filled with its own stable of original programming. But to create The Chosen, VidAngel's first scripted show (it also has televised a series of stand-up acts called Dry Bar Comedy), the fledgling streaming network has turned to its would-be fans for funding.

But rather than offer the usual perks of crowdfunded entertainment—everything from keychains to dinner with the cast—VidAngel offered them a share of the show itself. Officials from VidAngel say they won't take a dime until the investors make their money back plus 20%. Now, more than \$10 million in investments later (the largest amount ever raised by a would-be crowdfunded TV program), VidAngel has its show.

Because (presumably) the show is dependent on fans and investors financially supporting the thing, The Chosen's distribution model is a bit different, too. After releasing the episodes in 2019, it opened up the entire first season to viewing the following year, during the coronavirus epidemic,

via its app. And while the shows are technically, at this point, “free,” that's not completely true. Director Dallas Jenkins reminds viewers that each stream of an episode actually costs money, and so they're relying on donations from viewers to pay the whole thing forward. All while raising cash for subsequent seasons, as well.

But if the show's inception and distribution have been a little bit divergent, the show itself offers some new wrinkles, as well.

SCRIPTS AND SCRIPTURE

VidAngel hopes The Chosen will be a “multi-season series about the life of Christ,” which might strike some as a challenge: Movies that follow a given Gospel word-for-word run long, but there's not enough in the text to stretch the story out for a Game of Thrones-like run.

So the show's producers have shifted away from strict fidelity to the text and into a more imaginative, extrapolated, extra-biblical narrative. It's fiction, in other words—fiction that was inspired by and embraces Scripture, but fiction that nonetheless feels free to remove and (mostly) add elements as the story—not theology—demands.

The show's makers, led by The Resurrection of Gavin Stone director Dallas Jenkins, clearly wanted this story to be a cut above your typical Christian passion play. They seem to be gunning for The Chosen almost to be a biblical Breaking Bad. I mean that in the best of ways, incidentally. For viewers who approach Christian entertainment with a jaundiced eye, The Chosen gives us something different: a gritty, grimy, problematic Palestine filled with the unwashed and impure, giving the production a flavor of authenticity.

The episodes thus far hone tightly in on its ancillary characters—infusing them with dimension the Gospels just didn't have time to give. Their lives don't begin with the coming of Jesus: Fishers Peter and Andrew struggle with the Sabbath and fight to keep their boat out of hock. Pharisee Nicodemus tries to shove away his own spiritual doubts to more effectively lead his people. Prim tax-collector Matthew dabs his wrists with perfume to hide the stench of the streets. Jenkins and Co. have made the brave and, I think, smart move to dole out Jesus over time—to let these very real subplots begin to emerge before these characters' realities are completely upended.

The result? A show that's more show than sermon, one that feels strangely taut and engrossing—even for those of us who know its ultimate end.

But naturally, *The Chosen* comes with caveats. Again, the world given to us here isn't the sanctified version we see in stained glass or many a movie about Jesus. While the content isn't gratuitous, exactly, people step in dung, long to get drunk and engage in fistfights. Characters get hurt and sometimes die. The streets of Palestine can practically reek of sin. It all feels germane: Jesus came to save such a world as this, after all. But it can be a bit graphic.

The ambitions of *The Chosen* require a great deal of poetic license, shall we say—again, a work of fiction in service of this age-old tale.



But for TV fans spoiled by today's rich, complex television landscape but tired of its salaciousness; for viewers who love Jesus (or who just want to know more about Him) but are turned off by what they might see as shallow, saccharine piety; *The Chosen* might just scratch an itch they never even knew they had.

**EPISODE 1:
"I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME"**

Peter and Andrew unsuccessfully try to earn some tax money to save their fishing boat. Eventually their livelihoods are saved, at least temporarily, when Peter strikes a deal with a powerful Roman legionnaire. But Andrew believes the deal—which involves Peter ratting out fellow Jews for fishing on the Sabbath—to be immoral. Meanwhile, a woman named Lilith struggles with demons that the Pharisee leader Nicodemus can't cast out. It leads Nicodemus to a crisis of faith, and it pushes Lilith to the verge of suicide.

In flashback, we see Lilith as a child in Magdala reciting Scripture with her father, who later dies. She stores that Scripture in an old doll, but later tears the paper up in despair. It's insinuated that she's a prostitute: She wakes one day to find her hands covered in blood and a man—his neck also bloody—screaming in the streets. When Nicodemus comes to cast the demons out, Lilit hisses, "We are not afraid of you. You have no power here, teacher." Later, a despondent Nicodemus says, "Only God Himself could've drawn them out." (And God, in the form of Jesus, eventually does just that—calling the woman by her given name of Mary.)

We see women of apparent ill-repute hang about Capernaum's seedy quarter. In flashback, we see a Roman centurion fill Lilit's sight, a suggestion that the woman may have been raped. She visits a tavern and gambling center, asking the barkeep (whom someone refers to as a eunuch) for alcohol. Nicodemus complains of the sinfulness of the city's fishermen: "Foul-mouthed, given to gambling and secret dens and even fishing on Shabbat," he says. "Surely the Messiah will not come until this wickedness is purged from our midst."

Peter indeed goes out fishing on the Sabbath to feed his family: He gets into a brawl with his brother-in-law (a common occurrence, it's suggested). Both deal out plenty of damage, and Matthew walks away with a bloody nose. He says that he has "hands of wine" because of the damage they do to one's liver. ("It sounded more clever in my head," he later admits.)

Matthew serves as a "publicanus" (tax collector) for the Romans, though his driver refers to him instead as a "public anus," thinking it funny. Matthew steps in a pile of dung and retches after doing so. We hear references to hell.

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AUTHENTIC

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