

AUTHENTIC

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MEN'S MAGAZINE

PHIL JOEL

Great 'News Boys'
Phil's on stage at home

A Family Adventure is Brewing

A COFFEE WITH AL BELCHER

ANDREW FRASER

We sit down with the CEO
of Rhema Media

CHUCK MISSLER

The Real Mt Sinai?

WISE WORDS FROM

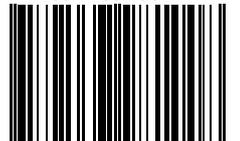
Charles Price

PLUS

- Trusting God
- Eternity in our Hearts
- Gone Fishing...



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WELCOME TO THE FOURTEENTH EDITION OF

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE

Introducing Jeremy...

As part of putting this latest issue of Authentic Magazine - issue 14 - together, I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with Narrows Park Christian Camp executive director Al Belcher. He's one of our three features this time around, thanks Al! You can read the piece on pages 42-47.

As we sat talking about life, family and following God, Al said something which - as I have since been reflecting on it - has stayed with me. In the course of our chat, he said, "...in anything I'm putting my hand to actually, I'm simply a steward. I don't own Narrows - it is God's place and He will have His way with it. "I am simply one part of creating an environment where people seek God. He does the work in their lives, He has already called them... and we can help create a space where they can come to know Him too."

In light of those comments, you may have a question or two. "Wait. Where's Dave?" "Why are we seeing Jeremy's

name in the editorial pages of this issue?" Well, here are the answers. Firstly, don't worry, Dave is still very much around and he's always a massive part of helping ensure each issue gets out into the hands of the people God would have us reach. But (and Dave admits this too :) he's a busy man! So, there is a change of sorts afoot around Authentic. In August last year, I came on board as assistant editor to Dave, to help him with some of the areas of decision making around content and editorial for the magazine. Aside from the biggest factor obviously being that I feel this is where God would have me for now, another major desire in coming on board was to be of help to Dave on the magazine front. Since then, you may have seen my name on various articles and features which have appeared in the past three issues.

Before I was here at Authentic, my background was as a journalist - mostly working for publications in the Fairfax Media stable. I have loved finding my

feet here at Authentic as we hear people's stories and are able to share Jesus through the written work we do.

As time has passed, and Dave and I have prayed and discussed things as we seek to follow what we sense is God's leading, that 'help', it seems, now looks a bit different. And an intentional changing of the guard of sorts is happening. Effective as of this issue, I will be stepping into the role of editor of Authentic Magazine and therefore assuming more of the responsibility to help bring each issue to life.

And that's why I'm saying hello here. Wow! I will admit it will be a challenge - but an exciting one! It's also a pretty practical reminder that sufficiency is in Christ, not in Jeremy! Ultimately, I am trusting and leaning on God and placing this in His hands. That's the best place to put it I think! As we know too, if God calls you to something, He is also the One who equips. And it's not about me. I'm so grateful to be surrounded by the



whole Authentic team! We are blessed to have great people who, while also possessing an awesomely broad range of skill sets, ultimately each have a heart for Jesus and want to use those skills for His Kingdom.

As I've been praying this week, I read an awesome example of stewardship which Jesus illustrated through a parable He told about the talents. It's found in Matthew 25:14-30. When a man went on a journey, he called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag - each according to his ability.

When the man left, Jesus told us what each of them did with that which had been entrusted to him. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work. So also the one with two bags. But, the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Ultimately, when the master returned from his long journey to settle his accounts, we are told that both the man who was entrusted with five bags of gold and the man who was entrusted with two had doubled what they were given.

In the passage is the phrase "...well done, good and faithful servant!" While the first two men are called such, the third man - who had received one bag of gold, buried it and done nothing

with it - is called lazy. His bag was given to the servant who had 10 bags.

Back to Al's comments - because the concept of stewardship is actually how I'm viewing what's ahead at Authentic. The magazine is not mine to do with what I please - nor has it ever been Dave's or any one else in our team's actually! It's God's - and in the time we have been given to take care of the work we do - we at Authentic are simply stewards of what we have been entrusted with by God. The work of Authentic - which has been running for just over three years now - is His and our desire is that ultimately He leads and guides. Like Al said, he views a major part of the work he does as being to create "an environment where people seek God..."

As we here at Authentic compile each issue, it too is our collective prayer as a team that the content which fills these pages does just that. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, and seek to be such 'faithful servants', or stewards, of the work God has entrusted us with - this magazine being an important aspect of that - may each page be filled with content which points you to Christ and be one of the ways in which your faith is strengthened, you see Him clearer and come to know Him more.

Until next time!

Jeremy

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

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Trusting God

BY CHARLIE MCCALL

Every life is another opportunity for God to display again - uniquely in every person - the truth that the truth is true.

We each have an opportunity to flesh out - to prove again in our own life experience - the truth of God's Word. The truth of Christ and His sufficiency, the truth that we can trust Him and have no regrets, the truth that the will of God is good, acceptable and perfect and the truth that you can hand your life over to Him and you're not going to be disappointed.

For all of us who are young in our Christian lives, we embrace those things by faith, but we don't necessarily know in our experience what's going to happen - for example, how are you going to raise your kids, how are you going to supply for your children?

But, the truth is that God is the supplier, when we trust God with how our kids are going to turn out, for example, what I have seen in my life is that it's better than I could ever imagine. God is truly no man's debtor. There are no regrets with putting your life in the hands of God and trusting Him - walking humbly in obedience to Him and letting Him prove Himself.

You don't have to promote yourself - it's just living before the Lord, humbly and faithfully trusting Him and He will prove Himself - we don't have to prove Him. Oswald Chambers once said, "God hasn't come to live in a man in order to prove to the

“There are no regrets with putting your life in the hands of God and trusting Him - walking humbly in obedience to Him and letting Him prove Himself.”

world what a great man He can make of that person. But, He comes to live in a man to prove to the world what a great God He is.”

And that's been a real help to me over the years.

It's not about me proving God, it's about God proving Himself. Through more than 30 years my wife and I, every year feel like we are spectators watching what God is doing. And I really think that's how it's supposed to be. You hand out God's word, you lead people to Jesus and watch what God does.

I don't know what more to say, other than trust Him - you won't be disappointed. | 

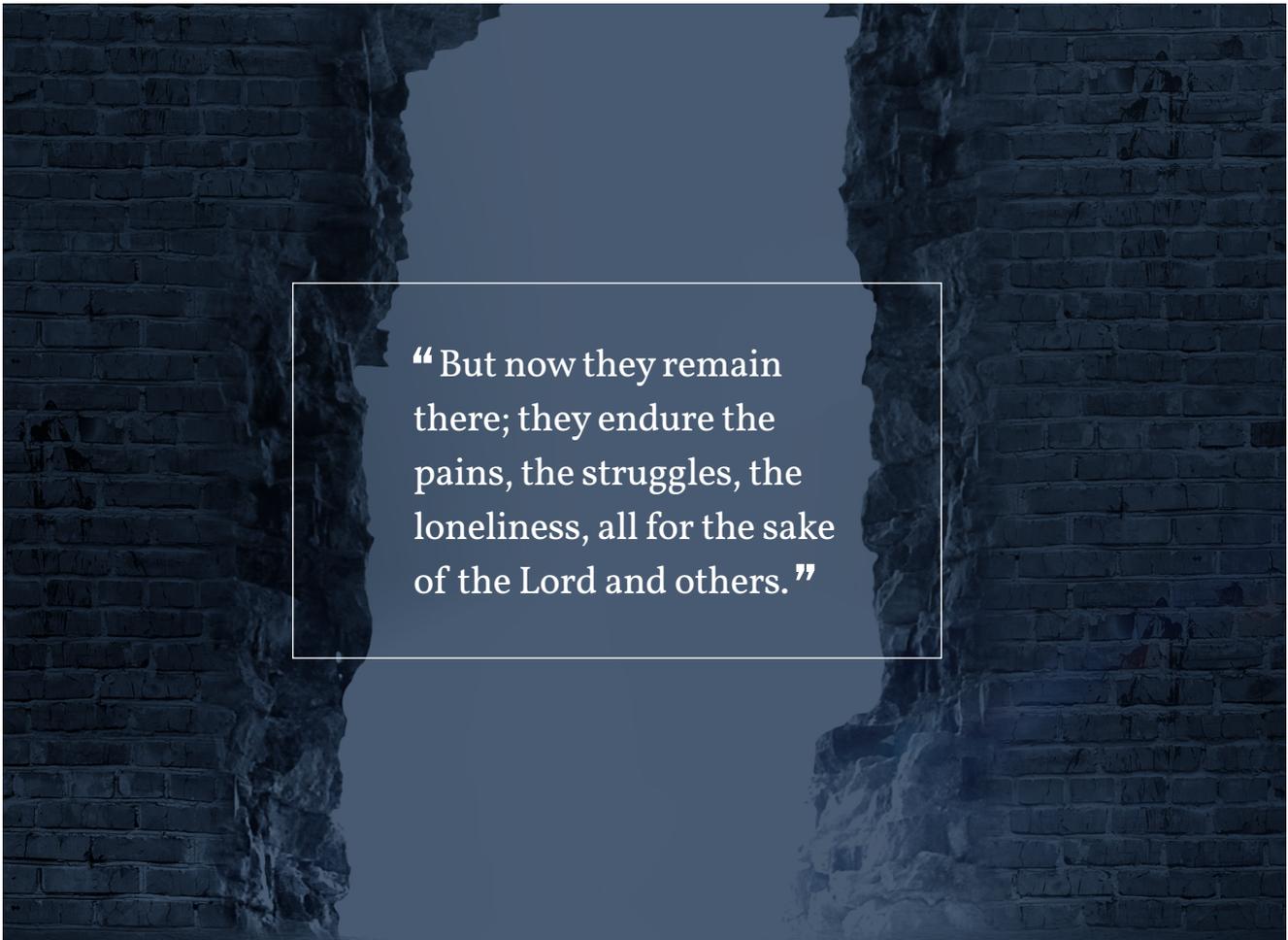
■ Charlie McCall is the director of His Hill – the Torchbearers Bible School in Comfort, Texas. To learn more about the ministry there visit www.hishill.org



THE MAN IN THE GAP

BY JAKE WILMOTH





“ But now they remain there; they endure the pains, the struggles, the loneliness, all for the sake of the Lord and others. ”

When I was growing up, I used to hear of these amazing evangelical outreaches where thousands of people would come to the Lord. It was like a sea of people going forward every night to proclaim the name of Jesus, “God was moving” people would say. Since then, however, things have changed - especially in the last year or so. At a time when social distancing is a concern, and even when we are restricted by how many people can meet together, I am wondering if there is a different way to see “God move.” So what better place to look than in the scriptures, and what better book to look in than Ezekiel. I know what you are thinking – Ezekiel, what a great name, but what a weird book – and you are right. Strong name, but a weird, awesome book.

Ezekiel was taken into Babylonian captivity at about 25 years old. He was a priest, and started proclaiming the word of the Lord when he was about 30 years old. The whole book of Ezekiel can be summed up in one phrase, “That you may know I am Lord.” Ezekiel did these weird and wonderful things as warning signs to the people of Israel. They had not been listening to God, so God was using Ezekiel to try and get their attention.

What I want to look at is what the Lord said in Chapter 22. This was before the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians. In Ezekiel 22: 23-29, God says that He has looked to the priests, the princes, the prophets and the people, and has found them all sinning. God had surveyed the nation, from its leadership all the way down to the people, and found that they did not “...know the difference between the unclean and the clean.” They had all sinned against God.

So what does God do? Does He send a mass revival? Does He call in the angels to destroy and restart? Does He bring in the big guns and have the people of Israel turn to Him because someone great gave their testimony? Not at all. God tells Ezekiel what He is looking for. In verse 30 God says He has been looking for one person to stand in the gap – one person to bridge the void so that people would turn from their sins.

I know what you’re thinking. I thought the same thing, one... one personjust one human being? Not 1000? Not 100? Not even ten? Not an angel.... nor an Arch angel? Really, just one person? Yes, just one person. Okay, let’s take a minute and think about what this means and what this would look like?

Before we look at the man who stands in the gap, let’s look at the gap for a second. The first thing we should notice is that one man can fill the void or defend that gap. It is not large,

and it is not hard. It is almost like the picture of the story of “The 300”, the Spartans who defended their land against the invading Persian armies at the Battle of Thermopylae. A large wall with a small hole or “gap” which could allow a whole army to slip through and destroy. This wall separates and protects.

Then we must ask, what is the gap? The gap is the difference between serving God and not serving God. It is the difference between sinning and not sinning. Notice what the man in the gap is to do. He is to build, repair or mend the wall. So, he is to stand where there is a hole, and to make sure that others don't slip through. He is to stand in the gap, and warn people about the possibility of sin on the other side. So if that is what the wall and gap are, what does the man do? What does he or she look like?

Firstly, the man in the gap is not just a man, but a human being. So ladies can stand in the gap as well. Second, they need to be “among the people.” That is to say that the man or woman in the gap is to have the respect of the people. Respect is very different from acceptance. Acceptance means everyone likes you, whereas respect means people may not like you, but they give you a certain amount of honour or esteem. Acceptance is usually based upon your actions, whereas respect is usually based on your character.

There is a fine balance that one needs to have when standing the gap and being among the people. If one is among the people and indulges in their sins, they will lose the respect of the people. If one is too far removed from the people and not truly among them, they will lose the ear of the people. Both have failed the Lord.

Thirdly, the man in the gap must build a wall or hedge. Meaning that they must make it so clear and apparent that they are against the sin. One must not simply identify a problem. One must act and build a wall against the problem. Many in the Church today identify sin or problems, but do very little to nothing about them. A man in the gap not only identifies the problem, but then he takes action against it. The action should never be condemnation, but restoration. A small side note, sometimes the action doesn't involve judgment, but grace.

Fourthly the man in the gap must be able to stand in the gap. The image this gives is someone strong in that they understand what they are doing. Someone does not just turn up one day and say “Oh look a gap, I will stand there.” The implications of this are that the one standing in the gap knows the troubles. They know what they are exposing themselves to. They understand the dangers involved. As someone stands in the gap, they are willing to do so, knowing the cost.

They know the cost because they have counted the cost before they actually took their stand.

Fifth, the man in the gap must stand on behalf of the land and the Lord. Notice that the man is standing for something other than himself. The land had not properly rested; the Israelites were supposed to work the land for six years, and then let it rest for one year. But they didn't do this, which is one of the reasons why they were going into captivity. But then, notice that the man in the gap was standing so that the Lord did “not destroy it” The question then is, what is “it?” “It” could be the land, or “it” could be the people. Personally, I think the Lord is a little vague here because the important thing is not what the Lord could destroy, but what the man in the gap does. He is the one that intercedes. He is the one who stands against the crowds and says that this is not the way, but he is also the one who says “Lord please forgive them”. It is a place of being caught in the middle, a place that is not desired. Notice the Lord has found no one. And notice the Lord simply desires one person and yet cannot find one.

Sixth, the man in the gap must stand in the gap. Now before you say I am repeating myself, let me tell you that I am, but for good reason. What I mean is they are to remain in the gap. Not only have they exposed themselves to danger in order to protect others.

“Then we must ask, what is the gap? The gap is the difference between serving God and not serving God.”

But now they remain there; they endure the pains, the struggles, the loneliness, all for the sake of the Lord and others. Many have cried “I will die for Christ”. Many have preached “Will you die for Christ?” But God is much more concerned with us living for Him. *“To Live is Christ and to die is gain,”* *Philippians 1:21, (NIV)*. So, here God wants someone who is willing and able to remain standing in the gap.

So the question for you today is – are you willing to stand in the gap? Are you willing to stand in the gap when others have walked right past? What gap is the Lord asking you to stand in today? Maybe there is a loved one living in sin. Is the Lord asking you to confront them? Maybe there is someone who has sinned against you. Is the Lord asking you to forgive them? What gap is the Lord calling you to stand in today?

Whatever the gap might be, know two things first and foremost, God is with you and will never forsake you (Deut. 31:8). Second, know that He will give you the strength to stand in that gap, even if others do not stand with you, (Romans 5:1-5).

One source you can use to discover more about the man in the gap is a book by Stuart Briscoe called *Ezekiel: All Things Weird and Wonderful*. | 

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



TUNING IN TO THE CALLING OF GOD

BY JEREMY SMITH



In Greek, the word Rhema means an 'utterance', or 'thing said'. And, back in the 1960s, when God first spoke into the vision of having Christian radio in New Zealand, few could have imagined just how far and wide that utterance would ultimately be broadcast.

It was in fact the initial stirring behind what is present day Rhema Media. Now, more than 40 years since the organisation was granted its first permanent broadcasting licence in 1978 - thus becoming the first Christian radio station broadcasting in the Commonwealth - Rhema has gone from one radio station broadcasting in Christchurch for 12 hours a day, to three nation-wide 24-hour-a-day radio networks and a 24-hour nation-wide television channel.

With more than 70 staff, it's radio networks Rhema, Life FM and Star - broadcasting on more than 100 radio frequencies - and television channel Shine TV collectively reach hundreds of thousands of Kiwis each week.

Daily devotionals Rhema Media publishes - Bob Gass' The Word For Today, and a youth version called the Word For You Today - are the third and fifth most read quarterly magazines in New Zealand, reaching about 175,000 and 72,000¹ people each week respectively.

In looking at the scale of those numbers with Authentic, Rhema Media CEO Andrew Fraser - who has been in the role for five years - is both humbled and grateful when he reflects on where God has already brought Rhema Media, and excited about where His leading will take them in the future.

"You can absolutely see God's hand in supporting us all the way through," Andrew, who first joined the organisation in 2002 as the General Manager of Operations, says. "When God births something, it survives despite the challenges."

Jeremy Smith sits down with Andrew to talk about how he came to faith in Jesus and some of the things that have helped him grow in his faith, what it's like stewarding a ministry like Rhema Media and what might be next on that journey, and even his love of space.

To begin with, I'd love to know some of the story of how you came to know Christ. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Sure. I was born and raised in a Christian family. I was always in church circles as I grew up and was involved in youth group and Youth for Christ (YFC). I was probably about 14 - which was the fourth form back then, and is now Year 10, - when I first made a personal commitment to Christ. I remember being at a Youth for Christ training camp and retreat and I got called on to give my testimony. When I was sharing, I was almost a little bit apologetic about my background - I suppose what I was doing was comparing myself to others, their testimonies and their stories. One of the organisers challenged me to not

be apologetic or embarrassed about where Jesus was taking me on my personal walk with Him. It took a while, but I slowly began to fully recognise and appreciate the beauty of the inheritance I have through my parents and my grandparents. That's not to say that I don't have issues and struggles, but I do have those blessings flowing down through my family line.

On that note, can you tell me about your family? In a busy role like you have at Rhema Media, they must be an amazing support structure...

They sure are. They are an amazing support network to me. My wife Anna and I have been married for 34 years this year. We have four grown children. From a church point of view, I'm blessed that I go to church, sit with the congregation and am simply refreshed. At this point in my life, that's important and I'm blessed to have that.

Okay, looking at your work sphere, you've been CEO for five years - and prior to that you worked on the operations side of Rhema for 14 years after joining the organisation in 2002. Can you remember your very first encounter with the ministry?

I was born and raised in Nelson and my hometown was the third region to receive a Rhema station, after Christchurch and Wellington. In the 1980s, I was just a young kid, but I really loved technology. So, I found out where the Rhema offices were, approached the manager, and said "...here I am, what do you want me to do?" He politely gave me a bunch of flyers and bumper stickers and said, "...here you go, can you drop these into some letterboxes?" That was my very first interaction.

How does your current role differ from your previous one on the operations side? Were you surprised by those differences and, from your perspective, what's it like stewarding a ministry such as Rhema Media?

That's actually a great question. I remember the interview process for the role of CEO and being asked if I was ready for what the step-up would mean. I initially didn't quite know what they meant, but in hindsight, - now having swapped across - it is actually very different.

Being in my current role is a great privilege and being surrounded by a great team does make it easier. Programming wise, we are on the go 24 hours a day, seven days a week - in that sense the work clock is always ticking, and I never really switch off from thinking about work. The busyness of it all also makes it very cool to be part of and there is a balance to be found. I lean on the Lord a lot.

I love the job and the sense that we all get out of bed every day to come to work for something as worthwhile as pointing people to Christ. What could be more worthwhile than that?

As a staff team, we will probably never know the full extent of the impact we are having on people's lives you know? It's 'tip of the iceberg' stuff. We also work with a bunch of fun, wonderful



“ And ultimately, in all the conversations we have and the decision-making processes we go through, we have to ask, Is this content pointing our audience towards a more meaningful, personal relationship with Jesus Christ? ”

people and we are so blessed to be able to be in a workplace where we can stop, pray, spend time in worship at staff meetings and even just be encouraged in our faith through the conversations we have as a team.

Given Rhema Media's beginnings in radio, is it fair to say radio will always be at the core of your reaching people for Jesus? And in that light, how do you know when it's the right time to add additional resources?

Yes, radio has always been at our core - but you know what? Fundamentally our core mission is not about radio itself - it's about sharing the Gospel message of Jesus with New Zealand through media. With that in mind, as we look to the future, radio is a great medium with which to get that message out to a large audience - it helps foster community and relationship with our listeners and helps them feel like they're part of something. Radio is absolutely a necessity to fulfil the core of our mission.

Ultimately, when we add platforms, it's about trusting God, while at the same time knowing what we're called to. For us at Rhema Media, that calling is to Christian media for New Zealand - that means making it increasingly possible for all New Zealanders to take the next step on their faith journey towards a meaningful, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

We're constantly looking at what is happening in the media landscape in terms of technology. We want the Gospel to go to the marketplace - to where the audience already is.

For example, according to NZ on Air, New Zealanders are still watching an average of two hours of traditional TV a day, as well as a similar amount of video on digital platforms - that's a massive ready-made audience! That is why Shine is on all available platforms, Freeview, Sky, on the web, social media, On-Demand and mobile apps.

Actually, thinking of it, one of my very first tasks when I arrived at Rhema Media was to get Shine TV on air. On the radio front, when the Government deregulated in 1991, that initially gave

us the opportunity to expand the Rhema network with more frequencies. Both Star and Life FM first came on air in 1997, and their inception came out of our audience telling us they wanted more content choices.

From a human perspective, it's the three-fold approach of knowing our calling, then asking, 'where is our audience?' and 'where are the opportunities?' and then pursuing the ones we believe God would have us go after. When it comes to taking the right opportunities, a fourth element - and the most important one actually - is prayer.

Looking at the content choices you have to make for Rhema, Star, Life FM and Shine TV, is it hard to make the 'tough calls' at times? To say 'yes to this' and 'no to that' if you will?

For sure that's a hard one - and that's a process we don't take lightly. We have 168 hours each week to fill on four broadcast networks. The balance is finding content that is interesting and draws people in, which ultimately also points them to Jesus and makes a difference in their lives.

As an example, on Shine TV, we feel called to increase the amount of culturally relevant local content from New Zealand that we air. So, we have deliberately gone out and sought to foster stronger relationships with local churches to help us produce and present content that is suitable on two fronts - broadcast quality and teaching quality. If we're looking at linear, or traditional television viewing, has that decision come at the expense of some of the overseas teaching material, which we still believe is great? Yes.

One of the advantages we have now, is that in cases where good programming is not making it to linear tv, we can put it up on our on-demand platforms so that people can still access it.

Are those decisions to bump or drop content tough? Absolutely. When we are assessing how important any piece of content is, be that programming, ads or anything that is under the Rhema Media stable, for me, one of the bottom

AUTHENTIC | FEATURE

lines is, "...would I be prepared to stand in court and defend this decision?" When we say court, we could either look at that as being defending it before man, or, ultimately, I think of also needing to be able to defend it before God.

I rely heavily on my senior leadership team who are extremely talented and passionate about Christian media and their key areas of responsibility, but where things reach my desk, I will help make those calls.

From an operational standpoint, we have guidelines about formatting decisions and the balance must be right. Programming choices must point to Christ first and foremost, while at the same time fostering that relationship with the audience, as we've talked about. And, of course, the Gospel has to be central. Every decision we make has to be made through a Biblical lens. And ultimately, in all the conversations we have and the decision-making processes we go through, we ask, "Is this content pointing our audience towards a more meaningful, personal relationship with Jesus Christ?"

You more than likely get viewer feedback - both positive and negative - based on those choices. What's that like?

We certainly are aware we are never going to please everyone. And yes, every day we get feedback on both sides. We do read it and we take it on board and reply. Everybody's opinion is valid from their perspective.

Actually, I heard a senior Pastor once use an analogy which has really helped me in my approach to dealing with some of the feedback we receive. He talked about a pyramid and at the top of that pyramid are our core beliefs as a Christian - things that are always true and will never change. God is three in one, Christ died for us and so on.

At the bottom of the pyramid is denominations - essentially preferences. There's no right or wrong with these preferences, it's just that that's where denominations come from. In the middle is personal convictions. When people have things that are their convictions, that's often when they write to tell us what they think. Of course, we never set out to offend anybody. We want to lift Christ up. At the same time though, I do believe that at times we have a responsibility to challenge people's interpretations which come from their paradigms and prompt them to ask, "why do I believe that?" I'd say in our walk with Jesus there are occasions when some of our paradigms need to be challenged.

Okay, so away from work then, when you get to have a day off, where are we likely to find you? Or do you find it hard to genuinely switch off and relax?

At times it can be hard to switch off, yes. Anna has a job which is just as big as mine and she's in ministry as well. For us, a day

off literally means that we just relax! It's about spending time together, going for walks, kayaking or visiting the beach.

If you weren't working at Rhema Media, what else do you think you might be doing?

You know what, one of my main hobbies is anything to do with space or spacecraft. I'm hesitant to go as far as saying I'm a space geek (my wife would probably say I am!) but I do have an app on my phone about every rocket launch and I've watched them all. I think, partly, that's where my love of technology comes from - I was part of the astronomical society when I was younger. If you asked me where else I would probably work if I wasn't here at Rhema Media, it would probably be at a place like Rocket Lab. Honestly, I could stare at the night sky forever. For me, seeing the night sky and how amazing it is - because it is just incredible - points me to Jesus in worship.

With all the roles you have in life as a Christian - a business leader, a husband, father, a friend - what are some things which have really helped you with your own walk with Jesus?

I suppose it's about lived experience in balancing all those factors you've mentioned. It's having good influences around you, keeping your eyes on God and continuing to believe there'll be a breakthrough. Actually, when Anna and I first moved to Auckland at the time I began my first role with Rhema Media, our four kids were all under 10. I'm an organised person and I like to know how things will work out.

There were some things about the move which just didn't make sense - be they financial aspects or whatever - and we just didn't know all the answers. In faith, there came a point when I just had to let go of trying to manage my life myself, hand it to God and walk with Him day by day. When we give the things we don't understand, or that we can't control to Him, that's where growth in our faith happens.

As we know God created creativity. I love the fact that on that note, Rhema Media is looking to be creative in the ways in which you seek to reach people. How though, do you look to get that balance right?

Absolutely. As I've said, I do have a bit of a passion for technology and I get really excited about it. I suppose it falls into that opportunity category that we've talked about - but you do of course have to have that balance. This is actually an area in which we have a lot of discussions and we're part of all sorts of industry forums as one way of helping us keep in touch with the latest technology.

The other thing I want to say though is of course that on top of all of that, as an organisation we have to make sure that we are caring for and stewarding the resources we've already

“You can absolutely see God's hand in supporting us all the way through. When God births something, it survives despite the challenges.”

been given - we can't go chasing fads technology wise and we have to decide what's worth investing time and resources into. Having said that, on the technology front, we have certainly been pioneers at Rhema on several occasions. In the mid-1990s we were the first radio network in New Zealand to use satellite for distributing our network - and others then followed. In about 2004, we were one of the first, if not the first, organisations to stream our radio and television platforms on the internet.

I suppose we have an advantage in the fact that we are not looking for a commercial return. We're simply looking to get the Gospel message of Jesus Christ out as far as we can get it.

Given some of the experiences you have had, and the things God has taught you, how would you encourage other Christian men?

I'd say this - and it applies not just in Christian ministry, but in a life following Jesus in general as well. I do think you have to learn to be comfortable with the 'grey'. And by that, I mean in the times of not necessarily knowing the 'how' of certain things and the ways in which they will turn out. We still have to trust God. I think His timing is often one of the things we struggle with - in the sense that when we make plans we also have our own timelines in mind. But sometimes, with God, it can take longer than we think it will. That doesn't necessarily mean it won't happen, it's just in His timing not in ours and we trust Him in the middle of that.

With Rhema Media in mind then, can you give me an example of a time when God provided and came through when a situation looked 'grey' or impossible?

When you ask that question, I cast my mind back to 2010 - that year we had to raise an extra \$6 million to relicence all our frequencies for another 20 years. That meant doubling our donation income that year. We approached the task on multiple fronts, working all the angles we knew we had if you like. We were obviously out there talking to people, and as we did so, we were fielding all these questions like, "...how are you going to raise the money?" and "...what if you don't?". My answer then was "...we will have the right amount of money at the right time."

We knew we needed the frequencies and God was calling us to have them, but we were acting in faith. I couldn't tell you back then exactly how or when we were going to reach the \$6 million mark. I can obviously tell you now, 10 years later, with the benefit of hindsight, that it worked out better than we thought. At the time, we just believed God. We were confident in what we knew He was calling us to do and He provided.

Last month was New Zealand Music Month and I watched a few of the live streams which featured Equippers Revolution, Blsd One, Te Rautini and others on Life FM on Friday evenings. How awesome having New Zealand content like that!

I'm pleased that several years ago now, we started focussing a lot of our programming decisions on providing Kiwi content for New Zealand, from New Zealand. In the digital age, with technology like streaming, we're seeing a lot of people - from those who are expats through to anyone who has any affinity for New Zealand - consuming the content. Our content needs to speak to the cultural context in which we find ourselves in our place of standing here in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

What scope do you see there being for Rhema Media to get alongside and work with other ministries in New Zealand? And for maybe doing more?

That's a great question, and it is a constant challenge. Ultimately, we're part of the body of Christ. We don't stand on our own and we take that responsibility very seriously. We do have a relatively unique situation here in New Zealand, in that we have the lion's share in terms of the reach of Christian media in New Zealand. But, we do believe we steward it on behalf of the Church. We have a responsibility to partner with other organisations and groups to help them get their voice out to the nation.

We've broken part of our mission statement down into a specific phrase which is "...content plus reach equals impact". We're looking to both make a positive impact on people's lives and a more specific impact in terms of pointing them towards Jesus Christ. We've got the reach, as I've said. And on the content side of things, we are both content creators and curators of good quality Kiwi Christian content.

We do gift airtime to organisations, but the truth is we have more organisations requesting spots than we can accommodate, in terms of being a fit with our audience. And those decisions about who we partner with and who we promote obviously weigh on our minds. In cases where we are unable to accommodate ministries at times, that's not to say we don't value and support the work they do. There's a lot that goes into that process - and we need to be really prayerful about how we approach individual situations.

Thanks so much for sitting down with us Andrew.

To find out more about the work of Rhema Media, visit: www.rhemamedia.co.nz |  

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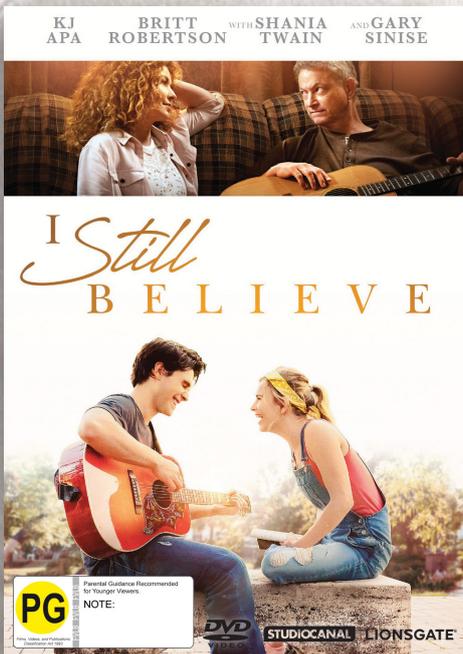
■ Jeremy Smith is editor and writer of Authentic Magazine. He is an experienced, Waikato based journalist who loves the Lord and enjoys using his talents to glorify God.



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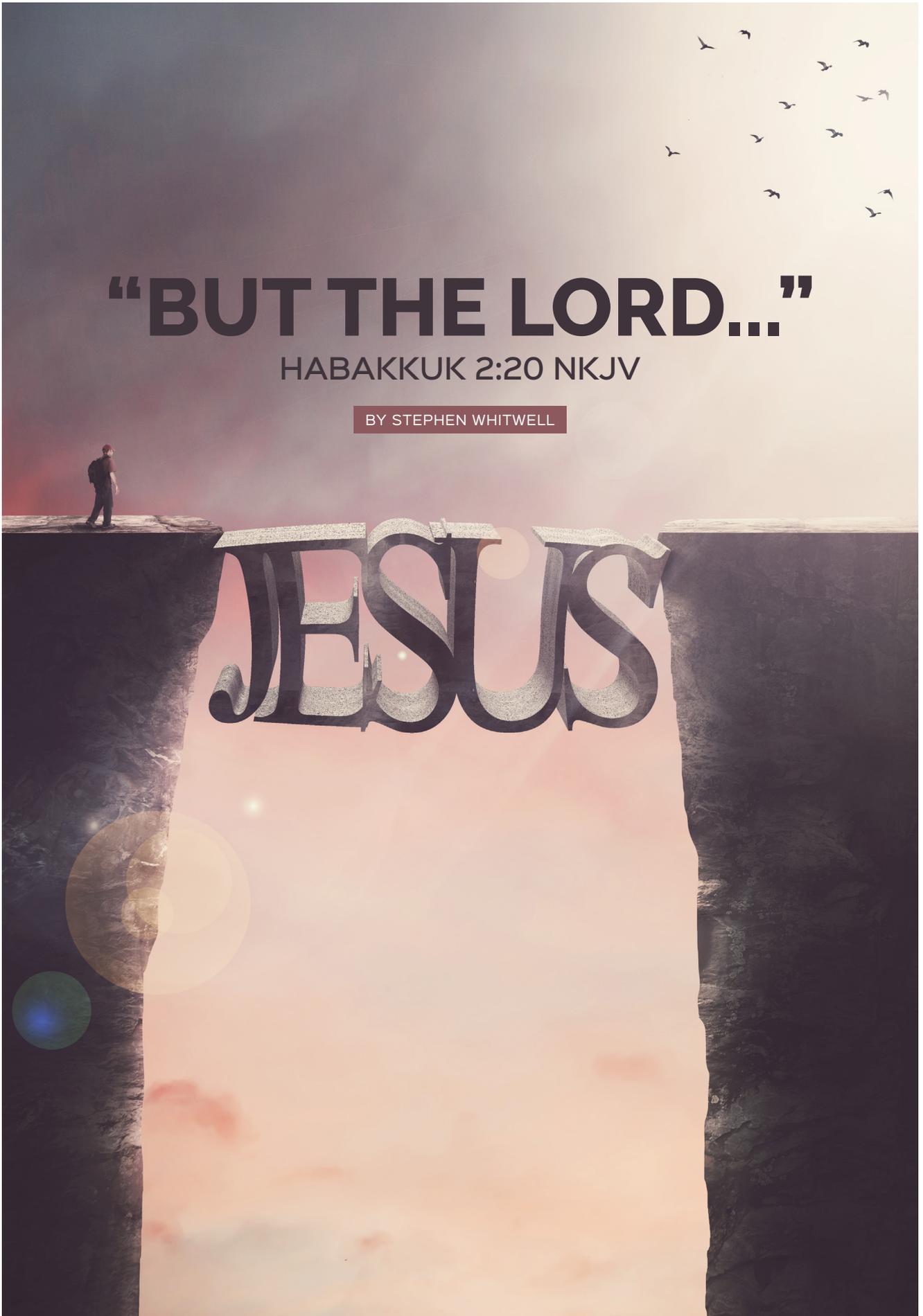
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“BUT THE LORD...”

HABAKKUK 2:20 NKJV

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL



Habakkuk was prophesying against the nation of Judah. They'd forgotten God. Things were dire. God's judgment and His woes were pronounced against the people. It was a huge burden for the prophet and he wonders how long this condition could continue. As I was reading Habakkuk, these words arrested my attention; "But the Lord..."

Things may have been bad for Habakkuk and the people of Judah..., but! They needn't be like that forever. A 'but', stems the downward flow, it shakes us in our thinking that things can be different. But the Lord. God is still God. There is always God. Prosperity, need, good times and bad times will come and go, nations will rise and fall but God always remains.

No matter what life does to us, there's always a "...but the Lord..."

1. We may be a sinner, but the Lord is able to forgive and forget.
2. We may be too ashamed by our sin, but the Lord can cleanse and heal our emotions.
3. We may be rejected by loved ones, but the Lord can show us He forgives and accepts us.
4. We may have a wayward family member, but the Lord can rescue and tame them.
5. We may be in strife, but the Lord promises He is with us.
6. We may be sick, but the Lord promises healing.
7. We may be in great need, but the Lord promises provision.
8. We may be lonely, but the Lord promises He will comfort us with His presence.
9. We may be facing a major decision, but the Lord promises to guide us.
10. We may be facing terrible opposition, but the Lord promises to defeat our enemies.
11. We may be mourning a loved one, but the Lord promises He will heal our heart.
12. We may be in a tight business situation, but the Lord promises to guide and provide.
13. We may be in a good place, but the Lord wants us even closer to Himself.
14. We may be wondering where we fit, but the Lord wants to lead us and show us His will.
15. We may not hear from God much, but the Lord has more for us to hear of and know Him.
16. We may not understand much of His Word, but the Lord has clear revelation for us.

I've had many '...but the Lord' interventions in my life. We've faced some pretty difficult decisions, but the Lord spoke and made the way clear.

For some decisions, the Word of the Lord was not forthcoming, but after the event, His Word of reassurance came. There's been times of brokenness, but the Lord brought His healing to my heart. We've faced enormous challenges, and in some it seemed God was distant, at other times He was close at

hand. But the Lord was always with us, proving His Word and comforting us with His presence.

My health journey over the last seven years or so has been a little chequered, but the Lord has been with me, and His healing, reassuring hand has been upon me.

Through many medical procedures God has been right there with me every time. His Word of comfort for my situation, and His confirmation of His call have been amazing.

The phrase "...but the Lord..." occurs 59 times in the NKJV Bible. Here's just a few.

- » *"They confronted me in the day of my calamity, But the LORD was my support..." - Psalm 18:18 (NKJV).*
- » *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all." - Psalm 34:19 (NKJV).*
- » *"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." - Acts 9:15 (NKJV).*
- » *"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil One." - 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (NKJV).*
- » *"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." - 2 Timothy 4:17 (NKJV).*

David knew that God made a difference. Ananias wondered if he'd survive praying for the persecutor of Christians. And Paul knew the presence and encouragement of God when he was faced with the challenge of telling his story. Many others also in the Scriptures have the same testimony.

But the Lord makes the difference. No situation is beyond a 'but the Lord'. There's always a "...but the Lord".

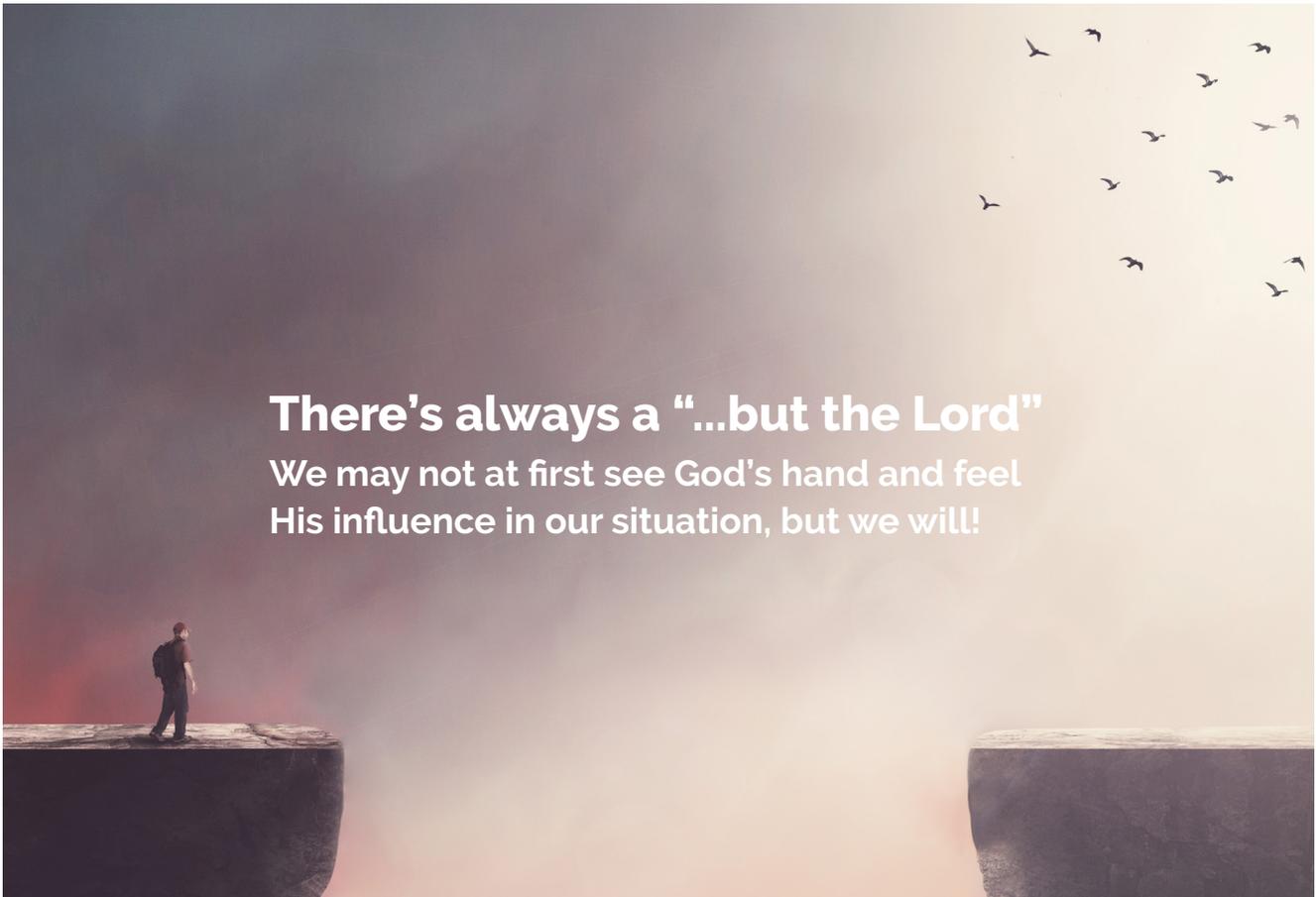
We may not at first see God's hand and feel His influence in our situation, but we will! But the Lord. There's a couple of common words in the Bible that have powerful, long-reaching implications.

The first one is the word 'therefore'. Which according to www.thesaurus.com means "accordingly, then, thus, consequently, in consequence, to-that-end".

A therefore – brings consequences, a continuation. We need to know what the therefore is there for. It's about one thing leading to another. A therefore is the link between two ideas, it transitions one idea to the next.

God had just created the woman and brought her to the man. Then God says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* - Genesis 2:24 (NKJV).

In other words the natural, the right thing, the expected follow-on from the creation of man and woman, is joining together as one. The second is the word But. Which means "... nevertheless, on-the-other-hand or however".



There's always a "...but the Lord"

We may not at first see God's hand and feel His influence in our situation, but we will!

A 'but' changes things, it arrests the progress of an idea, it turns it on its head. What was, need not be, what is can be different. A 'but' – breaks the link between two ideas. changes the direction of the idea.

- » *"How long O Lord..." - Psalm 13:1 NKJV.*
- » *"But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me." - Psalm 13:5-6 NKJV.*
- » Many of us I'm sure have been where David was when he wrote this Psalm. Wondering where God was in his situation, wondering how long it would be until He showed up and did something. The Psalm starts off with the heart-felt words, "How long O Lord?" (V1). I know I have been there many times.

The Prophet Habakkuk felt the same way, *"O Lord, how long shall I cry," - (Habakkuk 1:2 NKJV).*

Yet in David's mind, there was a 'but', (V5-6). We all need a 'but' in our world too. In God I believe there's always a 'but', and the best 'but' is the "...but the Lord." - for our past, present and future.

This knowledge, this truth that "...but the Lord..." is a reality changes our world. Never forget the '...but the Lord'. It changes everything.

- » But the Lord is stronger than any power against us.
- » But the Lord is bigger than the size of any of our situations.
- » But the Lord is more present than the presence of any trial.
- » But the Lord is more able than the abilities of our resources.

Habakkuk was encouraged by this thought, "...but the Lord." In spite of the circumstances he was in, he knew God was over all. He knew there was a "...but the Lord..." which changes perspective, and then changes reality.

May you too know the change to your perspective and reality by your own personal but the Lord!

But the Lord. End of story. | 

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





Have you heard of the phrase "blind faith"? I have many times. And, according to many, it is not a good thing...

Over my lifetime I have noticed that the meaning of things seems to change, even from one generation to another. What was considered a swear word to one generation is no longer considered coarse language by another.

Naming something 'wicked' when I was a kid meant something was bad. By the time I was in my twenties 'wicked' meant something was really cool. When I was a teenager if you were called a 'spunk' by a girl, that meant they thought you were attractive and was an indication they might be interested in you romantically. It apparently comes from use in naming fungus many years ago. And now no-one says it like I grew up with. It has gone back to having a less flattering meaning.

“My friends, faith is not based on what we see but on what we don't see right now. ‘Blind faith’ is actually the right type of faith if you want to see God move in our generation.”

Now let's go back to that phrase again..."...blind faith". Today I hear people saying "blind faith" is bad. It means you are trusting in someone or something you can't see and that is apparently silly and unwise. It means that you are kind of having wishful thinking about a matter. The mantra of many today is "...I will believe it when I can see it."

If you are like me in any way in the sense that you want to follow Christ, to live your life for Him, faith - and really 'blind faith' - is actually a huge key to it.

I can't see a physical Jesus to follow, but I do. My faith by definition is blind.

When I pray for someone to get healed even though they are sick, my faith is by definition blind once again. When I ask God (who I can not see also) for what myself and my family needs... my hope is once again placed on who I can not see.

My friends, faith is not based on what we see but on what we don't see right now. 'Blind faith' is actually the right type of faith if you want to see God move in our generation.

Of course, I am not talking about presumptive faith where God gives us our every want and desire. I am talking about Kingdom faith, where we take the little we know and add faith to it believing God is bigger than we can ever hope, dream or imagine. Where God's Word and His ways have influenced so much that our 'blind faith' causes us to act differently from the world around us.

Hebrews 11:1 in the NIV says clearly *"...faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see..."* Jesus even said to His disciples one day, *"...because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed". - John 20:29 (NIV).*

So, how about joining me in some good old fashioned 'blind faith'? Let's pray some big prayers and believe in God's power and goodness.

Let's not let the world redefine the Kingdom for us!

■ 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.





The Days of RAGE

BY RON MATSEN

As we watch the rising tide of violence sweeping over the world around us, we need to focus on the predictions given in the Bible that allow us to put all of these unsettling events into a prophetic perspective.

The Prediction of Peril

Near the end of His public ministry, Jesus Christ was approached by His disciples asking for His prophetic insight. Matthew 24:3 tells us, *“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”*

The Bible tells us that God never leaves His children without light when darkness is coming. In pronouncing the coming judgment upon Israel, the prophet Amos said, *“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7 (KJV).*

Jesus first responded to the questions from His disciples by saying, *“Take heed that no man deceive you.” Matthew 24:4b* He then continued, *“For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all [these things] must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and*

there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” Matthew 24:5-8 (KJV).

Jesus begins His summary response with a warning to not be deceived. Deception is a very powerful weapon in warfare. He then tells them of coming false Christs (Messiahs), conflicts and various disasters around the world but that these are just the “beginning of sorrows.”

Then, after giving a frightful overview of key events that will take place as signs of the end, Jesus gives a final prophetic similitude by stating “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Matthew 24:36-39 (KJV).

The key to understanding this insight from Jesus is to comprehend the general state of human conduct prior to God’s judgment on the earth.

Violence in the Days of Noah

Before the judgment of God by water, Genesis 6:5-7 tells us the condition of the world before the flood.

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.” Genesis 6:5-7 (KJV).

It sounds a lot like what we are seeing today. The Genesis record continues by telling us in verses 11-13 that,

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” Genesis 6:11-13 (KJV).

Violence after the Garden of Eden

Throughout the history of man, violence seems to be the default condition found among those who are not submissive to the word, will and way of the LORD. Genesis chapter 4 tells us the first violence recorded in the Bible was between two brothers. Cain, whose name means “possession” (which could be a type of those who are ruled by their flesh), rises up against his brother Abel, whose name means “breath” (which could be a type of those who are led by the Spirit). As the contention between the two of them grew, God himself intervenes.

“And the LORD said unto Cain, ‘Why art thou wrath? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.’” Genesis 4:5-7

Sadly, Cain rejected the counsel of God and rose up and killed his brother.

Violence in the Days of Sodom and Gomorrah

Like the days of Noah, Luke’s gospel tells us:

“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” Luke 17:28-30 (KJV).

Before the judgment of God by fire, Genesis 18 tells us: *“the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is*

great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.” Genesis 18:20,21 (KJV).

In chapter 19 we see the angels visiting the city in order to call upon Lot and his family. After retiring to Lot’s house we see:

“But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, [even] Lot, and came near to break the door.” Genesis 19:4-9 (KJV).

Clearly, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were being ruled by a mob of godless people who only wanted to see their wicked ways fulfilled. Once the righteous were removed from the city, God’s judgment fell.

“Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.” Genesis 19:24,25

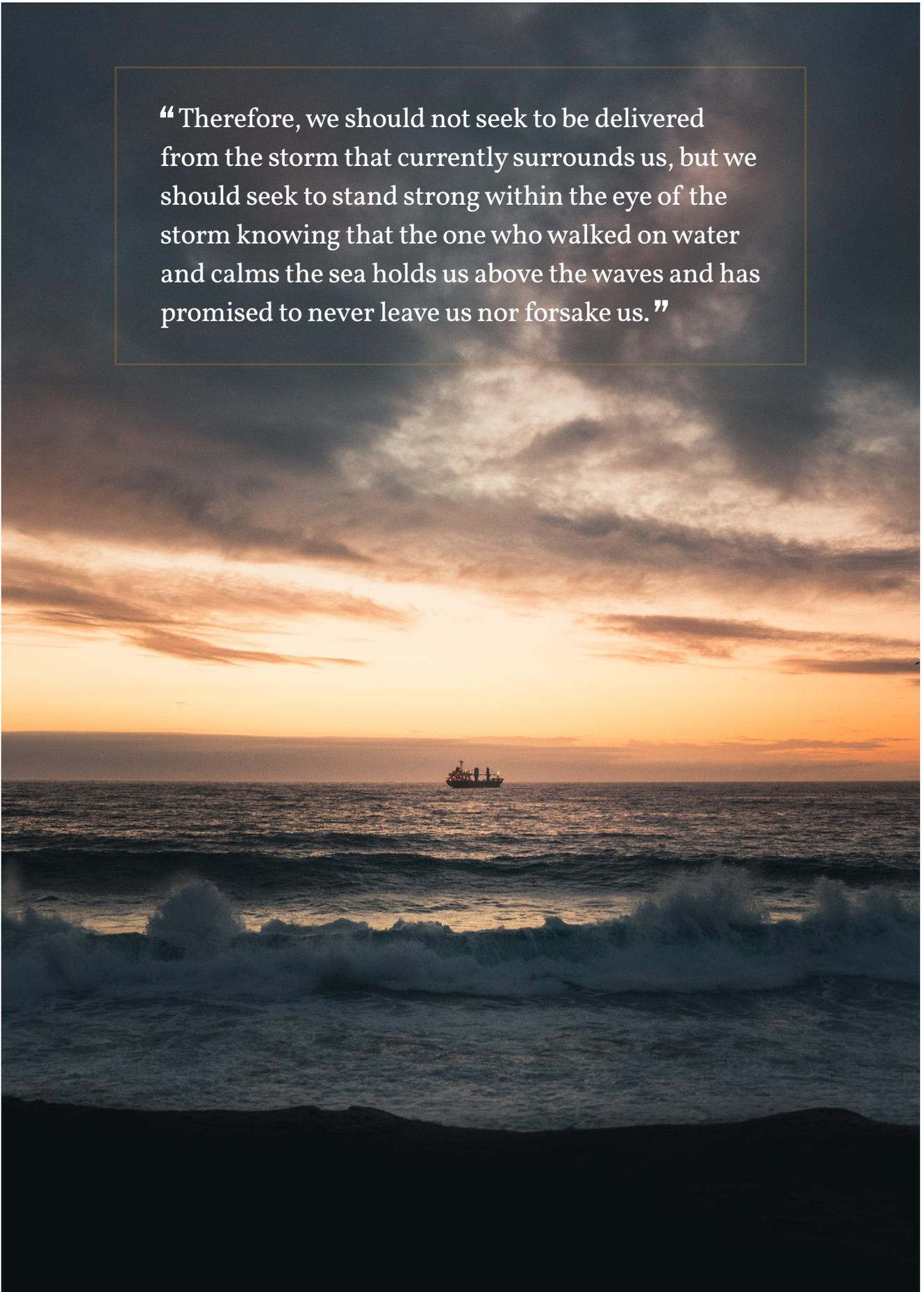
Violence in the Days of the Judges

After Joshua leads the Children of Israel into their promised land, he makes this solemn promise:

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that [were] on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:14,15 (KJV).

Having set the high standard of putting the word, will and way of the LORD first in “his house,” Joshua passes the baton to the subsequent generations that would follow. The Book of Judges records the sad ups and downs of the nation of Israel. After sixteen chapters of repeated regression and rescue, the historic record takes a turn into the dark days of widespread violence in this land of promise. The general state of human conduct during this period is characterized by this straightforward statement. *“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Judges 17:6 (KJV).*

“Therefore, we should not seek to be delivered from the storm that currently surrounds us, but we should seek to stand strong within the eye of the storm knowing that the one who walked on water and calms the sea holds us above the waves and has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.”



AUTHENTIC | CURRENT ISSUES

Chapters 17 and 18 records the misdeeds of a Levite whose name is Micah, which means “who is like God.” He steals money from his mother which ends up being made into an idol. Micah sets this idol up in a shrine. The Tribe of Dan comes along and steals the idol. Micah said:

“Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee? And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.” Judges 18:24,25 (KJV).

Again, we see that when the unrighteous rule, the governing motto is “might makes right.”

Finally, we are told in chapters 19-21 of the total moral degradation and depravity of the nation. A man who was seeking his runaway concubine came with her to Gibeah.

After finding accommodations, they are surrounded by a demanding mob. *“Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him (carnally).” Judges 19:22 (KJV).*

The subsequent horror and debauchery is incomprehensible. The widespread violence that resulted from this crime almost wiped-out the whole Tribe of Benjamin.

Violence in the End Times

Jesus warned that the conditions of the world in the end would be characterized by violence. Remember His introductory summary of Matthew 24. *“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”*¹ It is interesting to note that Jesus used two terms here to describe the combatants. The first term is “nation” which is from the Greek word *ethnos* which can mean “ethnic group against ethnic group.”

This is a fleshly struggle between people of different heritages and backgrounds.

The second term is “kingdom” which could be a reference to the spiritual conflict between the kingdom of Satan (earthly) and the Kingdom of God (heavenly). This is a war that will culminate with the second coming of Jesus Christ that will ultimately vanquish Satan and his followers.²

Our Refuge in these Days of Rage

Jesus prepared His disciples for this coming conflict by telling them, *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as*

doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against [their] parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all [men] for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, [that] speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:16-28 (KJV).

Therefore, we should not seek to be delivered from the storm that currently surrounds us, but we should seek to stand strong within the eye of the storm knowing that the one who walked on water and calms the sea holds us above the waves and has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.³ Let us remember the “real battle” that we are to fight. Not for our flag and our country but for His kingdom and His glory.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.” *2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (KJV).* | 

1. Matthew 24:7a

2. Revelation 19

3. Hebrews 13:5

For more, see www.khouse.org

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





Men's Groups

on the Road... or Track...

even Online

BY JEREMY SMITH

As Christians, we are not called to 'do' church, we are called to 'be' the church. Jeremy Smith talks to three examples of men's groups around New Zealand that have found unique and creative ways to meet in men's group settings. Shared passions bring them together as they aim to be salt and light in the spheres of influence God has placed them in...

Real Life Racing, Mahurangi (Warkworth)

Steve Pound, co-ordinator

"A \$1000 car doing nearly 200 kilometres an hour is pretty entertaining really."

When Steve Pound returned home to New Zealand after a season spent overseas on the mission field, he felt it was

important to look for ways to build new friendships with other Christians. Then came an idea he says God laid on his heart. With more than 15 years experience racing rally cars, maybe his passion for cars, motors and racing could help him do that?

Fast forward nearly four years to 2021 and the Real Life Racing group is well and truly on the road. Mostly made up of a bunch of guys from the Mahurangi, or Warkworth, area, the group meets every Tuesday.

Each week, up to 20 guys and their kids come along - both Christians and non-Christians and those who attend church and those who don't.

"We essentially build 'lemons' cars - cars we buy for no more than \$1000 and then build into race cars," Steve said. "We add safety features including a roll cage and race seat. You'd be amazed at the conversations that happen underneath a car.



“What God is doing is amazing. In our case, working on cars together is a really good way for guys to connect.” - Steve Pound

It's men connecting and growing in Christ in the light of a shared passion.”

Following each Tuesday build session, the guys talk about life and somebody gives a word and prays. Once or twice a year too, a bunch of the guys - their wives and families included - head to either Hampton Downs Motorsport Park, or Taupo's Bruce McLaren Motorsport Park. There - with some of the cars they have done up - they compete in 24-hour circuit racing events.

Five drivers split the task into two-hour driving stints. “I love those,” Steve said. “The first year we went it was so cute seeing dads with their race overalls, helmets and safety gear on and hearing their young kids proudly saying ‘my dad's a race car driver’”.

Steve said the work God is doing in the guy's lives makes continuing the group worthwhile.

The Real Life Racing model is one other guys are investigating establishing in other parts of New Zealand. Both Hamilton and Taranaki are on the radar so far.

“What God is doing is amazing. In our case, working on cars together is a really good way for guys to connect. That leads to other conversations and social connections and creates great friendships.

“I think lots of modern guys are pretty busy and they almost, to some extent, keep each other at arm's length a bit. This is one way we can change that.”

Guys contribute \$10 each week, with the rest of the finances coming in the form of people donating cars which are then done up and sold, or stripped down for parts.

For more information about Real Life Racing, visit the group's Facebook page - www.facebook.com/vineyardlemonsmotorracingteam - or email Steve at stv7777@gmail.com.

Dirt Church, Waikato

Marty Richards, co-ordinator

When Marty Richards heard a message about bringing your God-given dreams and ideas to life - not just putting them in the ‘too hard’ basket - one of his passions immediately came to mind.

“I'd been thinking of it for a while, and then earlier this year we got the wheels rolling.”

That idea was what is now known as Dirt Church - a group of guys who regularly get together to ride mountain bikes.

Marty enlisted the help of Capernwray Adventure Bible School's James Bruce - from whom guys could hire bikes to ride - and they were off.

Held mostly at Te Miro Mountain Bike Park, the ride nights have so far attracted up to 60 guys.

“In the warmer months we've been holding them every fortnight - but since daylight savings and winter - we've been riding monthly on Sundays.

Guys have been coming from all over the Waikato and further afield too - including Hamilton, Cambridge, Matamata and Tauranga - to ride with the group.

“We ride for an hour or two, we have a barbecue together, then we have a short talk and encouragement at the end.”

More than anything, Marty says, Dirt Church is proving to be a great way to be a positive influence - and introduce Jesus - in a natural and relatable way.

“On some nights, up to half the guys who come along don't yet have a relationship with Jesus. I'm being pretty open and authentic about the fact that we are a Christian men's mountain biking group - and also about the fact that we share the Gospel.

“People are becoming more and more open to the Lord and we're really praying for a lot of them. God will reach them - I just know it.”

Some uplifting and encouraging conversations happen naturally too, just in the process of getting together to ride. “We don't do awkward things like introducing ourselves - people just start talking to each other and get to know other guys that way.”

A big topic that Marty believes is of huge importance is that of men's mental health - and it has been brought up regularly. “It's my opinion that the Church could do more in that area. Men need to talk more about that amongst themselves too.

“People are becoming more and more open to the Lord and we’re really praying for a lot of them. God will reach them - I just know it.” - Marty Richards

The Church does really well with things like women's groups, Bible study groups and so on, but I do feel there's more that could be done to reach out to and connect with men.”

Marty said using a skillset or something you are passionate about as a tool to reach people for Jesus means you can be “excited and impactful” for His Kingdom.

Great friendships are being made too. “Since the start of Dirt Church, I've really connected with one of the guys in particular, and now we surf every Monday.”

Plans may also be afoot to expand Dirt Church into other areas of New Zealand in the future - and even the possibility of holding a national Dirt Church get together at Keswick Christian Camp in Rotorua is on the radar.

For now, this month's (June) get together is a ride in Rotorua and as the weather gets warmer and daylight saving rolls around, the rides will happen more often.

“Last year in summer we rode together every fortnight, but I think from later on this year we'll hold the rides every week - my wife said that was okay!”

You can find Dirt Church on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1378357975840585>

Or on Instagram @dirt_church_nz

Online E-Group, Nationwide

Rodney Read, group member

“Well, originally we didn't know how long it would last, we were just trying something and leaving it with God.” A format of gathering together which came to the fore for most last year in lockdown has actually been a tried and true way of meeting for far longer for this men's group.

For the past six years, a group of guys from all over New Zealand have been meeting online on Zoom early every Wednesday morning. Nine guys now make up the group - one of the earliest being Christchurch's Rodney Read.

The initial idea for the group first came about when Promise Keepers' national director Paul Monahan started mentoring

Rodney through Skype meetings. The concept grew from there - with all nine members also helping run men's ministries of some form in their respective churches.

Rodney - who by the way has subscribed to Authentic since issue two - is delighted to have such a forum in which to meet. “Yes, it's such good fellowship - I have to say, I really love the opportunity to stay connected in this way.

“At the start, we were just trying something new with a group of half a dozen guys. The really cool thing is that not only have we now grown in size overall, but all but one of the original six guys are still part of the group, even all these years later.”

Rodney said each of the guys are at different ages, stages and experiences in life when it comes to their faith. “And actually I love that - because that's really helped me in my own walk with Jesus. I have really grown. It's just so neat.”

Each week, the responsibility of facilitating the gathering is shared amongst the members and the beauty of technology is that if they ever wanted a guest speaker - even one from overseas - it could easily be accommodated.

In the early stages, by way of discussion topics, the group first began working through Promise Keepers material. “And actually a lot of what we talk about these days has to do with the things happening in group member's lives and what we face as men walking out our Christian journeys. I love that in this way we are in it together,” Rodney said.

Opportunities to meet other group members in person have also arisen over time. “I remember at one stage I was the only one who lived in the South Island,” Rodney said. “And so I'd met some of the guys from the group who lived in Auckland, but not in other areas of New Zealand. “When we first had the opportunity to meet in person it was in Wellington and it was such a worthwhile experience getting to meet everyone. “We had really good feedback from doing that and having the opportunity to actually put a face to everyone's name.”

With so much technology at our disposal in this day and age, Rodney is delighted to be able to use Zoom in the context of a group like this which is running for God's Kingdom.

If you want to find out more about the online e-group, you can do so by emailing paulm@promisekeepers.org.nz

Additionally, if you have a specific area of interest and you would like to find out if there are any like-minded men's ministry groups around the country, email jeremy@authentic.org.nz for more information. | 

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





FAMILY DINNERS: Do They Really Matter?

BY BOB MCCOSKRIE

I've always been aware that the family meal table holds something special - and not just the food.

As I grew up through my childhood and young adult years at home - and now as a married man with my own family - meals together have always been an important part of each day.

As my children got older, and as school and work and sports commitments have increased, it has become necessary that we work really hard as a family to ensure that we all sit down together at dinner time as often as possible.

And that can be a challenge. A couple of years ago, I decided to examine the research that's being done around the world specifically on this issue. I wanted to ask a simple question - should we do more to promote and encourage families having dinners together on a regular basis? Well, what does the research say?

Breakfasts and lunches are just as important by the way, and maybe even more convenient. It does appear though that dinner is the most likely of the meal times when families can all eat together - especially on weekdays. Even if it is an early or a late dinner. So, dinner time is where the research has tended to focus.

The resulting report was entitled 'It's Time for Dinner: The Effect of Regular Dinners on Family Life'. Amongst all the aspects of research - and there was a lot - the areas examined related to the effects of regular family dinners on well being, risk-taking, nutrition, obesity, helping prevent eating disorders, protection from cyber bullying and the effects of technology and deprivation.

What I found was compelling. On the whole, regular family dinners have both a positive and protective effect which benefits families - especially young people. The magic appears

“Family meals provide important opportunities for parents to communicate clear expectations around behaviour and family values. More frequent dinners also give opportunities for teenagers to express problems and concerns as they arise.”

not to be around the food - but the family engagement, the conversations, the strengthening of family bonds and, importantly, the role of helping children deal with the challenges of adolescence and peer pressure. Family meals provide important opportunities for parents to communicate clear expectations around behaviour and family values. More frequent dinners also give opportunities for teenagers to express problems and concerns as they arise.

The research also suggests a possible link between decreases in likelihood of suicidal thoughts, binge drinking, smoking and marijuana use, sexual activity, obesity and eating disorders. However, a word of caution from the research. Family dinners can also be negative experiences.

It may not be enough to suggest that families eat together regularly if they come prepared to criticise, to control, or to avoid conversation all together. I'm sure we've all experienced one or two of those types of dinners. But when they work, family dinners together help make great memories and strengthen the bond of those present. It seems a great idea that families should schedule as many dinners together during the week as possible. Even when competing with busy work and school schedules.

So here's a couple of tips based on the research findings.

- » Make shared family meals a priority (if necessary, book them in with the family in advance. Especially with older, busier children).
- » Prepare simple, cost-effective meals. Feeling the burden to produce 'My Kitchen Rules' meals simply puts pressure on those family members who are preparing the meal.
- » Involve children and teens in the meal planning and preparation.
- » Have healthy eating options.
- » Keep the meal time as positive as possible.
- » Turn off the TV and devices while at the table (i.e. don't have dinner with Hilary Barry or Mike McRoberts or Shortland Street. Have it with each other).

In our family, we always have a little bit of fun. We get everybody to put their phones in the middle of the table. The owner of the first phone to light up with a notification has to clear the table after dinner. That quickly encourages everyone

to put their phone in flight mode. Make dinner not about the food, but about the family and time together. The other thing that we do on a regular basis as a family at dinner is go around the table and get each person to share one good thing that happened during that day. And then, one not so good thing. It's a ritual that Ian and Mary Grant (from Parenting With Confidence) encourage and it's very powerful.

Everybody is given a voice and each family member receives the love, the congratulations, the comfort, the care, the celebration or the advice. Whatever is appropriate based on what is shared. And, it's a safe place to share.

In preparation for writing the report I mentioned above, Family First actually commissioned some independent research. It was research which was reported in the New Zealand Herald. It found that 88 percent of all New Zealanders said that family dinners were important. But 98 percent of families with children said it was important. That's good. However, when it came to actually doing it, it was a different story.

Just over half of the families - 56 percent - said they have dinner together at least five nights a week. Two thirds, or 67 percent, of families with children said they did. At least five nights per week is actually not too bad is it? But sadly, low income families were less likely to have family dinners as often as this. Perhaps because of issues like shift work.

Interestingly, a gender split was observed, with 80 percent of women saying that family dinners were very important - compared with 55 percent of men. Come on men - we need to get our families to the dinner table.

Just finally - and on a personal note - the day that this report was published was a time when my mum was in her final days and about to graduate to Heaven. So, it was a bittersweet moment. I know the emphasis my mum placed on family time and meals together. There was an expectation that you would have to have a good excuse not to be at the dinner table. And the large family gatherings with the extended family and children were her favourites.

A family meal accompanied by a serving of conversation and topped with care can make all the difference to family life. Family, it's time for dinner. | 

■ Bob McCoskrie is the director of the New Zealand social group Family First New Zealand. He has a master's degree in Commerce from the University of Auckland and is also a qualified teacher.





HOW CAN I OVERCOME FEAR?

BY ERIC LUDY

Are you being pushed around by fear? Did you know that you don't have to live that way? Victory over fear starts with a strong confidence in God's Word. When you start believing it, you'll see a breakthrough.

Fear is a nasty enemy. I think any man who struggles with lust would understand if I say fear is of a similar disposition. It's a different approach to the soul, but it has a similar control potential where it doesn't break easily. It is a long-time companion for many people. And yet the Gospel gives us an outlet of salvation, of deliverance, of escape and that all stems from the idea of faith.

Now I know this sounds like a pat answer at first, but we're going to go for it here. When a person — man or woman — believes in the Word of God, it does something in changing their perspective. For instance, if you waffle and waver on what the Word of God says, well, you're going to struggle. You're going to be insecure. You're going to be unstable. When winds and rains start beating against you, you're not going to be founded and grounded upon something so, therefore, you'll topple. That's what fear is. In a nutshell, it's an instability of confidence in the Word of God. It doesn't mean your feet aren't on it. It just means you're not grounded, you're not fixed to it. All told, 366 times in the Bible, it's going to tell you not to fear - for example, Isaiah 41:10, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:18, Joshua 1:9 and others.

That's a pretty good amount of time. You could try and pick any other topic and you're going to have a tough time finding that many repetitions of it. In other words, God is going out of His way to make something clear: there is no reason for you to fear.

Now our thought back is, "...well, God, I can think of a whole bunch of reasons." But if you know His Word, He's going to make it very clear. In Hebrews 13:5, for example, it says, *"...never will I leave you; never will I forsake you..." (NIV)*. Psalm 46:1 says, *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble..." (NIV)*.

If you believe that, did you know that it will change your entire relationship with this thing called fear? Fear only can overcome your life and get its talons into you when you don't believe the Word of God. But when you believe it, you can smile back and say, "...no, He's an ever present help — right now. He will never leave me nor forsake me. He is my refuge and my strength". You see, if you know the truth of God's Word, you hit fear in the teeth. But if you don't know it, if you're wobbly-kneed on it, if you don't truly believe it, you'll be shoved around. Victory over fear starts with a strong confidence in God's Word. When you start believing it, you'll see a breakthrough. Now, I would also encourage you to stand tall spiritually, to know your position in Christ, and push back in the authority of Christ's Name. In other words, don't let fear and anxiety, fretting and foreboding bully you around. You're a child of the most high God - live as one.

And so, simply put, the recipe for overcoming fear is Jesus. Jesus's Word, Jesus's accomplishments on that Cross. As it says in 2 Peter 1:3, *"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness."* (NIV)

With Jesus, you have everything you need to shoo fear out of the house. |  

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



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Eyes to See... Ears to Hear

BY JEREMY SMITH

When I was a teenager, I worked in a rurality-orientated retail store. A large part of my day-to-day working life was spent interacting with people. Being somewhat of a 'people person' though, I enjoyed getting to know our customer base. I felt it was important when they came into the shop that a friendly, familiar face greeted them.

Then one day, my dad had an idea. "I'm telling you," he smiled, "I could walk into the shop as a customer, pick something to purchase, then have you personally sell it to me at the counter. You wouldn't even know it was me you were serving!"

"Dad, come on," I said. "There's no way you would even get into the shop, let alone have me serve you, without me recognising you! It just would never happen, I know you too well!"

"You're on," was his simple reply. Needless to say, a week or so later, he did exactly what he was purportedly planning. And he'd certainly gone to great lengths to disguise himself in order to do so, might I add!

Now. Here's where he and I debate some of the aspects of this story to this day. He says I had no clue it was him - I say I admit I wasn't certain it was him, but also not 100 percent sure it wasn't him!

At one point during the sales transaction I even said, "oh, come on dad!" But the assistant manager replying, "Jeremy, just serve the customer," meant I backed off. Whatever the case may be, I have to hand it to him - he was in the shop, I served him and I didn't really know for sure it was him.

Here's why I share the story in this context - and I probably haven't even told my dad this. That story is a memory which subsequently comes to mind regularly as Jesus teaches me things about walking with Him. Usually it's the thought, "...huh, Dad was right in front of me, and I didn't really know it..."

Recently, as I read the parable of the sower in Mark 4:1-20, the story of my dad I've just shared came to mind again - and God laid something fresh on my heart. Let me explain.

Actually, as well as being in Mark, the parable is also recorded in both Matthew's gospel (chapter 13 verses one to 23) and in

Luke's gospel (chapter eight, verses four to 15). In Mark four, beginning in verse three, Scripture tells us Jesus shared how a farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But, when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root.

Verses seven and eight say, *"...other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."* - Mark 4:7-8 (NIV).

In Mark's account, the parable finishes in verse eight - and in verse 10 Jesus' disciples begin to ask questions about the story. So, from verses 14 Jesus explains.

"...the farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away."
- Mark 4:14-17 (NIV).

He goes on to say that still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop - some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.

In between the parable itself and the explanation we've just looked at, is verse nine which, as yet, you may have noticed I've not mentioned. But as I read it, something hit home. May it also encourage you.

As we know, the parable is about God's Word and the responses - and varying heart attitudes - of those who hear it. In verse nine there's a thought-provoking statement made by Jesus. *"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."* - Mark 4:9 (NIV). Wow. That made me reflect again and ask, "What's my response when He speaks? Am I alert and listening as one who has ears to hear and eyes to see?"

I need to be, if I am to be open and available to the ways in which God wants to use me.

With the story of my dad in mind, perhaps part of the reason I missed the fact that he was right in front of me - even though I was sure that could never happen - had to do with the fact I wasn't looking or watching for him.

In John, Jesus tells us that one of the hallmarks of His followers is that we will both hear and know His voice and then listen to it. *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me,"* John 10:27 (NIV).

In Matthew, we're told of another hallmark - that as Christians we are called to be both 'salt and light'. *"You are the salt of the earth..."* Matthew 5:13a and *"You are the light of the world..."* Matthew 5:14a.

Jesus clearly operated in this during His earthly ministry and is most certainly our example on this front - whatever He saw the Father doing, He did (John 5:19).

The verse in John 10 tells us that as we follow Him and walk out our daily lives, He will speak and we will hear His voice. Matthew 5 tells us what we're called to be when we hear it. It's my heart that I would be that light and salt - a Godly influence - wherever my walk with Jesus takes me - thus reflecting His heart for others.

We as Christians are each called to be accurate representations of Jesus and His heart and to bring His influence to situations and opportunities He leads us into as we journey with Him.

I don't always get this right, but every time I interact with people - be they those I know well - or those I've met briefly in passing before - my heart is that I ask 'how would Jesus interact in this conversation?' Then, listen to His voice and leading for the answer, and act accordingly.

As we firstly hear His voice, may we then be bold and step out to be used of Him in the ways He would have us be His hands and feet.

However that may look. I've heard it said that God is not looking so much for our ability, as He is our availability. And seeking God's truth - and allowing Him to grow us and shape us - takes a willingness to be challenged and changed.

So, don't be like me in the story of my dad - I missed something happening right in front of me because I wasn't looking for it.

May we always be sensitive to Jesus' leading and guiding - and have ears to hear His voice and eyes to see how He would have us be salt and light as we walk each day with Him. | 

“What’s my response when He speaks? Am I one who has ears to hear and eyes to see?”

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



ETERNITY

in our Hearts

BY CHARLES PRICE

Questions about the meaning and purpose of life used to belong in the realms of philosophy and theology. Philosophy speculates about who we are, why we are here and what our ultimate meaning is. If there is none, how do we create our own meaning?

Theology is based on revelation, given in the Scriptures, of a particular religion and deemed authoritative, needing no secondary evidence. Now, science is entering this territory. In fact, Stephen Hawking wrote that, “traditionally, (the big questions about where we fit) are for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. It has not kept up with modern development in science, particularly physics”. He says science is the best bet for finding answers to the meaning of our existence.

This movement probably began in the popular sphere with Hawking's own book, *A Brief History of Time*, which has sold over 25 million copies and counting. He raises fundamental questions about the beginning and what may have been happening before the beginning. What is the nature of time? Is it unending or closed? How vast is space? Is there

an end to it, and if so, what lies beyond? Into the mix comes the recurring ultimate question: What is the meaning and value of human existence?

Another of Hawking's best-selling books, *The Grand Design*, claims to offer, “... new answers to the ultimate questions of life”. But, having gone through the book, I have difficulty finding the promised answers, other than the prospect of a Unified Field Theory, which has been looked for from Einstein onwards to help us understand everything in one grand theoretical framework. A bit like Einstein's ‘ $e=mc^2$ ’, though on a much grander all-encompassing scale.

Brian Greene's *Until the End of Time*, subtitled, *Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe* is on the New York Times best-selling list.

His bleak first line is, “In the fullness of time all that lives will die.” He says “...every religion, every scientific investigation, every philosophy proceeds from the inevitability of death”. This is, he says, “...a uniquely human problem - for no other creature knows death. They become old with a consciousness wholly limited to the present moment, which must seem to them eternal.”

Another popular book is *The End of Everything (Astrophysically Speaking)* by Katie Mack. It takes us through five universe-ending possibilities, all leading to the ultimate extinction of everything we know.

This doesn't satisfy the writer, despite her putting on a brave face, for one of her last chapters is about, 'The Future of the Future'. The speculation is gloomy, but the writer is unable to escape her final question, "...as long as we are thinking creatures, we will never stop asking, ...what comes next?"

What Comes Next?

It is intriguing that most of us are not satisfied with answers that tell us there is no ultimate meaning to our existence, if that is, in fact, the actual state of play.

We keep re-asking the question hoping someone can one day solve this for us, or at least, give us some hope - because whereas doom and gloom scenarios may satisfy our minds as inevitable - they do not satisfy our hearts. C.S. Lewis first coined the phrase, 'chronological snobbery', which is the assumption that the thinking of earlier times is inherently inferior to that of the present.

New discoveries are, of course, being made all the time, but perhaps we need to ditch our 'chronological snobbery' and instead of looking ahead to the next great idea, look back to wisdom of earlier times. After all, some people have been making sense of life all along.

Back in the Old Testament, Solomon wrote the intriguing book of Ecclesiastes. In it, he looks at life from a purely human perspective, "under the sun", (a phrase he uses thirty times). It is about life as we see, feel, taste, touch, smell and think it - purely by what our senses tell us in the limited scope of our personal experience.

As such, it is a handbook on humanism. He states his very gloomy conclusion early on when he writes: "*Meaningless! Meaningless!*" says the teacher. "*Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.*" (Ecclesiastes 1.2). The word 'meaningless' reoccurs thirty-five times.

Not satisfied with that, he tells us he tried to find meaning to this life 'under the sun' through such things as pleasure, wine, building projects, possessions, wealth, music, women ("I acquired a harem"), work, knowledge and skill, (and that is only a partial list).

He claims, "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure". He was living the ultimate dream surely, but it turned very sour. "*Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.*" (Ecclesiastes 2.10-11).

When the excitement of his adventures and pleasures died down, he found it to be little more than, "...a chasing after the wind". So, he says, "I hated life... I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun... they were meaningless, a chasing after wind".

He questions whether a human has any advantage over an animal, for they come from the same dust, breathe the same breath, then return to the same dust. So, "...who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth". The option of settling down to, "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die", is a strong temptation, but that doesn't satisfy him either.

Eternity in Our Hearts

And here is his reason why: The Creator, he says, "...has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end," (Ecclesiastes 3.10-11). Something in the human constitution cannot be satisfied with only material explanations, material pleasures or material prosperity, for there is a dimension to human make-up he describes as "eternity in their hearts".

C.S. Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." He is agreeing with Solomon.

We cannot satisfy eternal appetites by material resources, for they are different things. The statement in the Bible, "Man cannot live by bread alone" is telling us that all the material resources available to us are not enough to satisfy the appetite of the human heart that we share with the rest of mankind. We are more defined by our heart than by our head.

The appetites of the heart are the search engine of the soul. They drive our explorations, but do not satisfy our needs when their horizon is limited to the material and physical. But the 'eternity' he speaks of is not a dimension 'out there', detached and far off, but 'in here' - an eternity in our hearts. This is an appetite expressed in the desire to connect with something that lasts forever.

“We cannot satisfy eternal appetites by material resources, for they are different things.”

Communion with God

Here Christianity finds its deepest significance. The central thrust of Christianity is communion with God. Miss that and we miss its entire message.

The ‘mechanics’ surrounding the Gospel (for example, the need for forgiveness, its ethics, the Church community, its global mission etc.) are not its substance. The substance of the Gospel is reconciliation with God for the purpose of communion, relationship, even intimacy with Him at the deepest level of the human soul.

As we contemplate the vastness of time and space on the one hand, and the brevity of our own earthly lives on the other, we are invited to find security in being known by God, loved by Him, indwelt by Him and reconciled to Him who has always been, is now, and will always be. An appetite for the eternal can only be met by the Eternal One! The human experiences of love, intimacy and trust are wonderful pointers to a deeper and more permanent love, intimacy and trust with God.

Most people are overwhelmed by the wonders we observe, from the vastness of space, to the miniscule nature of the atom (my body has about 8 octillion atoms – an 8 followed by 27 zeros).

But this needs to lead us somewhere to be satisfying. In the words of GK Chesterton when he became a Christian, “I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought it perhaps involved a magician”. We look at the ‘magic’ with amazement, but it is the “magician” our hearts yearn to know.

Throughout history, since time immemorial in the most primitive cultures and the most sophisticated cultures, countless people have found true meaning and significance in a relationship with God.

The natural world expresses His creative power, but wonder needs to become worship and worship relationship, and relationship experience. Whether Solomon is being hypothetical in his construction of a “meaningless” life, lived “under the sun”, a “chasing after the wind”, or whether he slipped into a dark period of living independently of God, I am not sure.

Whatever is true about that, he woke up towards the end of his book with his exclamation, “...remember your Creator in the days of your youth,” before, he says, the days of trouble come, before you lose all pleasure, before you get old and nervous and afraid of heights, and before “the silver cord is severed ... and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”.

By then you will have wasted the years you were given, he tells us, and find yourself empty-handed. He finishes his exploration of a meaningless life lived only under the sun with the wisdom for which he is famous.

Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter: *“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man,” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).*  

See page 80 for more information on a newly-launched further resource from Charles, his YouTube channel called Charles Price Ministry.

■ 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





Exchanged Life

BY MAJOR W IAN THOMAS

Christian living is not a method or technique; it is an entirely different, revolutionary principle of life. It is the principle of an exchanged life, "...not I, but Christ liveth in me," (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

This is all part of our Gospel - it is not the Gospel plus! We must not get our terminology wrong. To divorce the behavior of the Christian from the Gospel is entirely false and is not true to the Word of God, yet all too often such is the characteristic of Gospel preaching.

I would like to explore with you what is the true spiritual content of our Gospel not just Heaven one day, but Christ right now! Christ in you, on the grounds of redemption this is the Gospel! To preach anything less than this must inevitably produce "jellyfish" folk with no spiritual vertebrae, whose faith does not "behave!"

Do you remember what James says in his epistle?

"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead," (in chapter 2:26, KJV). The "spirit" there means breath, and a body without breath is dead. Stop breathing and folk will bury you! In other words, a living body breathes, and a living

faith breathes, and a living faith breathes with divine action. A living faith breathes with the activity of Jesus Christ. That is why the Lord Jesus, in John 6:29 (KJV), said, *"... this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."*

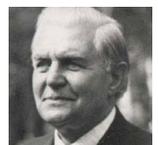
That is the work of God. It is your living faith in the adequacy of the One who is in you, which releases His divine action through you. It is the kind of activity that the Bible calls "good works," as opposed to "dead works."

"Good works" are those works that have their origin in Jesus Christ - whose activity is released through your body, presented to Him as a living sacrifice by a faith that expresses total dependence, as opposed to the Adamic independence (Romans 12:1 and 2).

It is only the life of the Lord Jesus - His activity, clothed with you and displayed through you - that ultimately will find the approval of God. | 

**Excerpt 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





A FAMILY ADVENTURE IS BREWING

BY JEREMY SMITH

From the outside looking in, 'busy' might be a word some would use to describe Al Belcher's life.

"You could say that - I don't see it as busy," Al says. "It's just stewardship of all the areas of responsibility God has entrusted me with. Pressure is a privilege, as they say."

Among those areas of responsibility is Al's role as executive director at Narrows Park Christian Camp – one he has held for the past nine years. He and his wife Dot followed the leading of God and moved there specifically to take up the role because they wanted to live a lifestyle that was conducive to raising a Godly family.

"We thought, '...what better place could we look to than one where I could essentially work from home and be involved day to day, while also raising and educating the kids from home.'" It's an approach Al says underpins the family decisions they make - one likely best summed up in this phrase - 'intentional parenting'.

"Dot and I have a combined vision before God and we do life together. We're a good balance of strengths and weaknesses, she's my better half and, all going to plan, I'm her's as well. Founded on the Word of God, our hope and intention is this - to raise our family to live out the Gospel well - and we've bought into that together."

The latest expression of that desire includes Al opening Waikato-based Sentinel Cafe in partnership with his eldest daughter Micah in mid-March. So, Jeremy Smith met him there to chat about finding faith in Jesus, raising a family and having a meaningful role in his kids' lives as they grow in God, Christian Camping and, of course, his love of good food!

To start off, can you tell me a little bit about your background? How did you come to know Christ?

I grew up in Canada and came to New Zealand when I was 17. It was a big adventure, I was a pretty wild child over there and moving countries left me a lot of freedom to test a few boundaries - which I thoroughly accepted. When I first arrived, I think I probably had a bit of a false sense of how great I was. Being that age and coming to New Zealand from Canada automatically made me interesting. It was easy to make friends, everybody wanted to know the guy from Canada. While I have been in New Zealand for most of my adult life - including my marriage and my kids - I have been shaped by growing up in Canada. I grew up in a first-generation Christian home. By the time my parents became Christians, my older sisters had been raised as non-Christians for part of their lives. Myself and my younger brother were raised in a newly Christian home, that brings all sorts of challenges. My parents were great - mum is a professor in Christian education, dad's a carpenter - and they provided a home that instilled a desire in me to know my Maker.

When did your faith become personal to you?

I probably first took ownership of my faith when I was about 19. Around the time my wife Dot and I were going to have our first child, Levi, I realised life was moving faster than I sometimes thought it was. Ultimately, I guess I realised the answers and solutions I was looking for were not found in me. I realised I had the God-shaped hole in my life. I had a choice. I could either deny that and carry on, or I could acknowledge the reality of Christ and learn what that meant. For me, the reality of Christ is where real life is found.

In that answer you mentioned your family. Can you tell us more about them?

Sure! Dot and I have six kids - Levi, Micah, Elias, Malachi, Anika and Amelie. We were pretty young when we started our family - I was 19, she was 22. We decided right from the outset that we needed to make raising our family our main thing. We've always tried to shape our lives around that priority - raising our kids well and having a family life that honours God.

Speaking of that desire, I love that that was actually a big part of the reason that you decided to move to Narrows Park Christian Camp to become executive director. Did you have previous experience in the Christian camping sphere before you took up the role?

Barely, besides growing up going to camps over the Canadian summer, I did work in camps for a little bit in Canada and here in New Zealand. I did one year at another camp before coming to Narrows. Before that, I was working in the business world and had my hand in a few other things. As you said, aside

from the major reason of following God's leading, the other big part of getting involved in Christian camping and coming to Narrows was that we wanted a lifestyle that was conducive to raising our family. Living and working at a Christian camp has helped Dot and I continue to be a daily part of shaping the community our kids are growing up in. Being part of a ministry brings with it a healthy accountability, and that's something we appreciate. It's a daily reminder of why we do what we do.

Did you have a vision for what God was calling you to when you took up the role and what has it been like undertaking the task?

An aspect of my role involves being a part of the Narrows Park trust board. The board is where the vision is shaped and held in place. When I first met the board as part of considering this role, they shared how they were looking for someone to grow the park to a sustainable level. There was of course already a vision in place, to be a 'leadership farm'. The goal when we arrived was to grow it. The aspiration was to create a place in which to grow Christian leaders. I saw my role then, and I still do, as essentially making sure Narrows Park is sustainable and that it continues for generations in the work it was set aside for. Over the years, I've been focussed a lot on keeping the

main thing the main thing. If we are going to develop Christian leaders then we need to have discipleship in everything we do. We need to be founded in the Word of God and train people to seek Him and outwork their faith so that they honour God with their lives.

There are two Biblical principles that I am shaped by - stewardship and ownership. If we recognise God as

the Creator - that He owns all things and we don't - then, according to Genesis, we have a reciprocal arrangement with Him as stewards of His creation. At Narrows, or anything I'm putting my hand to actually, I'm simply a steward. I don't own Narrows - it is God's place and He will have His way with it. I'm privileged to be there and steward aspects like resources, people and outwork the vision while I'm there - alongside others who have the same conviction of service. Generations of people have come before me who have a heart to see God's work done there. If I do my job right, there will be generations of people who will come after me as well. The big picture is that it is God's plan working itself out and I am one part of that - creating an environment where people seek God. He does the work in their lives, He has already called them to step onto that ground and we can help create a space where they can come to know Him too.

It must really impact you when people come back to you and tell you how their time at Narrows was formative in helping shape their walk with Jesus?

It sure does. As Christians, we are called to share the Gospel, to witness the Glory of God. I think my favourite part of being involved in Christian camping is the fact that we have an

“The big picture is that it is God’s plan working itself out and I am one part of that - creating an environment where people seek God.”



opportunity to do just that. To me, that's the meaningful outworking of my faith - that needs to be central to everything I do. I owe everything to God and I'm very aware of that.

I love the phrase you have already mentioned of 'intentional parenting'. Can you elaborate on how that approach informs the decisions - one of those being home schooling - that you make for your family?

Well, looking at home-schooling, I actually don't call it that. We're not trying to school our kids, we're raising our kids and educating them with a different worldview - intentionally. It's been the best decision of our parenting.

I have great relationships with all my kids. We're best of friends and we actually like our kids...imagine that! There's nothing clever that Dot and I have done. We don't have any list or '10 Steps to Successful Parenting' or 'Three Keys to Being a Wonderful Father'. There's no secret. It's simply that God's already put the principles in place that lead to things working like they were designed to. Proverbs 22:6, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* (NKJV).

We're working on that but there's plenty of years to go yet. We've found in educating our kids in the home that if you're not good at something, find someone who is and ask them to help train your kids. You don't have to be great at everything - in fact, Dot and I are terrible at lots of stuff. For example, we've got a great music teacher who has taught all our kids different musical instruments far better than we Could - it wouldn't be good for anybody if I tried to teach the girls their ballet! The end goal of course is to raise God-fearing kids and that's one of the ways in which we can do that. By using the community God has placed us in.

On the note of intentional parenting, yourself and your eldest daughter Micah have done something pretty cool. You've teamed up to open a new endeavour together - Sentinel Cafe in the Waikato. Can you tell a little bit about it?

Sure. Throughout the journey of raising our own kids, Dot and I have asked the question "...how do we not become redundant parents when our kids enter their adult phase?" Parenting doesn't stop just because they're not little kids anymore. And so over the last couple of years I've been asking, "...what meaningful role can I play to help our kids become confident adults and step into their next season of life?" We ask that in relation to all our kids. For example, with Levi, we encouraged him to give a number of different experiences a go - he tried farming and a few different jobs through some connections and some friends - then he landed in kiwifruit. And he is off to a great start in that industry.

It was the same thought process with Micah and Sentinel. In Micah's case, I knew she'd done hospitality and travelled around the world a little bit. She's naturally inclined to brighten up a room when she walks into it and she's great with people. Sentinel came about not because I wanted to run a cafe, but because I was looking for a way to not be a redundant parent and really trying to look for ways to help grow her in the next stage of her life.

We've been open since mid-March now and the adventure is well underway. I love the cafe environment because I love people and, through Sentinel, I enjoy hearing their stories of life that I wouldn't otherwise hear. But that's secondary to why I am doing it. This adventure is an extension of my commitment to raise up my family, the goal is still the same and the job isn't done.



What advice would you give other parents whose heart's desire is to also raise Godly children?

Interesting question. I have this conversation with a lot with people when they see me actually enjoying my kids. What I usually say is if you're going to bother having kids, you might as well raise them. That's where intentionality comes in. We often talk about things like the influence of friends, peer pressure, value systems, excuses etc. And I get it, it's the reality of living in the world. Together, Dot and I made the decision to be intentional about equipping our kids to think critically about decisions they make and the values that underpin those ways of doing things.

If you think the influence of their friends isn't positive, be intentional about helping your children find better friends. If they are learning attitudes or responses you don't appreciate, be the adult in the relationship and re-train them. Everything is a choice and the crux of the advice I would give is exactly that - if you're going to bother to have kids, be intentional about raising them. Often people view home education as escaping or retreating - God doesn't call us to do that. He says to be in the world, just not of it. I want to raise my family well and I'm intentionally advancing toward His Way - often that isn't what the world offers up.

I'm choosing to shape their environment. I guess in a personal sense, what convicted me is that when I stand before God, I'm not going to be able to give excuses and deflect to circumstances or someone who I gave my responsibility to. Instead, He's going to ask me "...what did you do with what I gave you?" I suppose it's a healthy fear of the Lord that informs the decisions we make together as parents, coupled with my desire to be faithful and do well before the Lord when it comes to how I used what He gave me. My overarching motivation is to be a good steward.

Do you think it is difficult to raise Godly children in today's day and age?

I don't think it's tricky - society isn't the garden of Eden - but to me that just means the problems are more obvious. In some ways, one could almost say raising children could be easier because of how confident the world is in its anti-God positions. Probably one of the biggest parts of this whole parenting journey is helping my kids and my family - and even myself - to remember that our value is found in God. People get it wrong all the time, it's best to look to the Creator and see what He says about who you are.

In any area of our lives, parenting included, the answers we seek aren't found in the world - they are of course in the Word. It's my view that if you want to raise Godly children, we as parents need to think wisely, think deeply, study the Word of God and then make decisions in line with that. What a privilege to have children, what a great adventure to raise them.

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

Actually, that desire to help equip parents is the motivation behind some of the regular events and gatherings that run at Narrows Park right?

Absolutely. A few examples from the work I do there include both father and son and mother and daughter weekends. They are specifically designed to help encourage other parents to engage in their parenting in different ways. And there's heaps of other practical ways you can do that too - we, as parents, just simply have to choose to be engaged and see the value in it. There's an old proverb I like - and it's how I view my parenting and my family life too. It says "I'm not rich enough to buy cheap stuff..." In other words, the right solution for the job often appears quick and easy, but it rarely ever is.

I can't fake it, there's too much at stake to be a 'pretend father' - a 'half husband' is way too expensive and costs you far too much in the end. They say good things take time, parenting is a lifetime.

Can I ask, when you all get to hang out as a family and have fun together, what does a collective 'perfect day' look like for the Belchers?

That happens every night. To be fair, I think that's one of the key things we do differently. We don't necessarily set aside family time, we live family time. That's why I work with my daughter at Sentinel, we're raising our kids but we're building our lives together. As well as being here at Sentinel with Micah and helping Levi with his passions, Elias is working with me at Narrows for a couple of days a week and he's interested in hunting, farming and engineering among other things. So, we're looking at ways to see those interests come to life.

One thing we've told all the kids is that they don't need to figure out exactly what they want to do, just start with what you like. There's no pressure, as they try a few things they might find a passion they really enjoy. But more than likely, they'll realise what they don't like and that's just as valuable.

Since we are here chatting in Sentinel Café, I have to ask - what do you reckon is the best thing on the menu?

Well, if it's not good, it's not on the menu!

Thanks so much Al. Let's pray for the Belchers and their family - and other families like them - who are prayerfully seeking to be all that God has called them to be as parents. |  

To find out more about Narrows Park, visit www.narrowspark.co.nz. The next event to be held there is Lead, scheduled for later this month and designed to equip those aged 13 and older to know who they are in Christ and then lead others as a disciple of Christ. To follow Al and Micah's journey at Sentinel Cafe, visit them on Instagram: @sentinelcafe.nz





Learning to Be Still

BY NATHAN JOHNSON

As an individual who is constantly busy and involved in countless projects and activities, Psalm 46 has been a reminder of focus in my life. And while these short eleven verses are full of golden nuggets, let me uncover just a couple.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling." - Psalm 46:1-3, (NKJV).

You see, it doesn't matter what is going on around us. The earth may be removed, the mountains themselves lifted off into the sea. Maybe the waters roar and are troubled or all the land is quaking with such swelling. Perhaps the economy is in crisis or the political system is sketchy. Jobs may be lost, money squandered, families torn apart, and the Church may be anemic. In the midst of whatever is going on in your or my life, verse one declares: *"God is our refuge and our strength."*

He, and He alone, is the place we come to for peace, safety, freedom, strength. But not only that; He is our very present help in trouble. Another way to understand this statement is that God is abundantly available. This is not to say that He gives us things in order for us "to do the job." Rather, He Himself, through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, produces and

sources our lives and handles everything we come up against. No wonder He is our refuge and strength!

But the statement that I continually come back to is found in verse 10: *"Be still and know that I am God."*

Such a simple declaration, but with profound depth. The Hebrew word for "be still" is the word raphah, which literally means, "to sink, relax, sink down, let drop, abandon, and be quiet". And it's an imperative, meaning it's a command. God is not calling us to inactivity or even to kick our feet up for an hour to rest and be still ... this is an attitude and lifestyle.

We are to continually, moment by moment, live in a posture where we sink, relax, sink deep down within, letting ourselves drop and be abandoned in Jesus Himself. This is the lifestyle of a Christian. A Christian does not "do" Christian activities or live a certain way; rather, a Christian is one filled with Jesus where the individual is relaxed, sunk deep within, abandoned in Jesus in order that Jesus may live and produce His life through the individual.

If you are attempting to live the Christian life on your own, it's not the Christian life. Jesus is calling, nay commanding, you to stop and allow Him to live His life (Christianity) through you. Will you raphah in Him? | 

■ 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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How to Make Your Marriage Blossom

BY RAY COMFORT

My wife Sue and I have been married for a total of ninety-four years. That's forty-seven years each. I think our marriage has been a dream for every one of those years, and so I'm going to share why. Here are seven simple principles that can make any marriage blossom.

1. Put God First

Love Him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). In doing so, you will give up your rights. His will is yours. His smile is more important than yours. Obey this, the greatest of all Commandments, and one fruit will be a wonderful marital relationship. Everything else grows out of this fertile soil.

2. Be Quick to Forgive

Say you are sorry if you have had an argument, even if you think you were in the right. You don't need to say that you were wrong; just say you are sorry that you had a disagreement, then share a hug. When you are getting along fine, talk about the importance of being humble of heart and doing this. It's essential to plan ahead, because human pride raises its stubborn head in an argument.

3. Listen to Each Other

Share everything. Laugh together. Communication is the key to any friendship.

4. Read the Bible Together Daily For Spiritual Nourishment

Treat this time as more important than your physical meals.

5. Pray Together

Confess your faults. Ask God for wisdom. Be thankful for each other.

6. Husbands, Love Your Wife as Much as Christ Loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25)

In other words, have the attitude that you would die for her. Love has nothing to do with an emotional feeling, and everything to do with your will. It's a choice. That means when she asks you to do something, you don't do it when you feel like it; you run to do it immediately. Give her flowers. Open the car door for her. For her, you would kill a lion. Treat her like a queen. The honeymoon need never be over.

7. Read 1 Corinthians 7 Together

Realise that each of you have important obligations that need to be fulfilled. Keep your grass green and you won't even look at your neighbour's.

Do these seven things that are based on the Scriptures, and you will have a wonderful marriage. You have God's Word on it. | 

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



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Faith & Hope

Peace with God Through Faith

BY CARL TINNIION

In issue 13, Carl Tinnion shared the first part of a series called Faith and Hope. This is the second and final part.

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." - Romans 5 :1-5 (ESV)

These two words; faith and hope, strike deeply for many of us in this season. There is much faith needed to get through each day at the moment. Just about everyone is searching for some kind of hope for the future.

In part one, I looked at the word faith in the scriptural context above. Faith, meaning to be fully persuaded, or fully convinced, that God's words to us are true. The truthfulness of God. In this scripture we are told we can rejoice, or celebrate in hope of the glory of God. This is the kind of glory that speaks of the magnificence of God where we can stand in awe at the beauty of His majesty.

Let us now look at the word hope, because I think hope is something we all are needing right now. Hope that tomorrow, blue sky will emerge from the dark clouds over humanity. The Greek word used for hope in this scripture is 'Elpis' - meaning "...to anticipate something good - usually with pleasure". A kind of joyful expectancy that releases great enjoyment, even in waiting for it to come.

I find this interesting as it takes the idea of hopefulness to a whole new level of meaning. This isn't a grey sort of hope, or a sad hopefulness that life might 'hopefully' get better. It is a pleasurable expectation of something good, coming soon!

The best way for me to compare this is a good food smell. Imagine coming into my kitchen and I am baking bread. That intoxicating smell coming from the oven affects anybody and everybody that enters my kitchen.

It is even better when I tell you I am cooking it for you alone! Suddenly, this smell becomes even more pleasurable than before because now you can anticipate eating it very soon.

You are more than hopeful. However, hope is not so easily come by if we look closely at this scripture. The precursors to hope are found in verse three. Suffering (difficult circumstances that we face) seems to come first and this eventually leads to endurance. A strengthening of our resolve not to give up, to climb to the top of the hill and to keep going.

Constant endurance moulds our character and causes us to go deep. Godly character is attractive, but it doesn't happen overnight, it is built carefully with gold. Character is the result of faithfulness, consistency, making right choices and not giving up. Most importantly, good character chooses life in every moment and in every person, no matter how challenging.

After all of this, hope is thus released within us. It is the natural consequence of everything experienced beforehand. Remember hope is the anticipation of good things that are most definitely coming because the One who has promised them to you is very good indeed.

In part one of this article, I shared that I have recently moved to a new continent and started pretty much every part of my life afresh. I love teaching but no one knows me in this place. I have a long history of leadership but that counts for nothing when you are new. We were homeless, rootless and pretty uncertain how the next few years will pan out.

But we know that God has led us here and we are convinced that He is faithful and good. Because of this assurance, there is deep peace in my soul... I am expectantly hopeful like never before!

“Hope, after all of this, is still a regular choice that we make in our hearts.”

I fully trust God and have got to a point in my life where I will keep trusting Him, even in the darkness when not much is making sense and I am experiencing pain or doubt.

Actually, even if I lose everything and nothing returns, I plan to remain hopeful because my identity has become more secure over time.

Hope, after all of this, is still a regular choice that we make in our hearts. The last few years for me have included suffering, the need for endurance and not giving up when the going got tough. I can say with certainty that my character has experienced all kinds of refinement in this process!

All of this has caused me to grow in hope that I have a good future ahead of me, because God has remained close throughout all of it. He didn't save me from my circumstances, but neither did He leave me. And throughout this time He has kept feeding, encouraging and showing me glimpses of tomorrow.

I have had to practice choosing hope many times over I can tell you! This is often about making a choice in my heart not to get lost in my own darkness or despair. All that I have in this life is my relationship with the Lord and the promise that He is still leading me on a good path. That should be enough. In fact it is always enough.

Because of this hope we are not put to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us freely.

Let me finish on this inspiring scripture from second Peter. This is for today, for exactly this moment, God's precious and great promises for your life. He desires us to become partakers in His divine nature, that we might grow in brotherly and sisterly affection, full of love for one another and for the world at large. May we all grow in hope as we see the Kingdom of Jesus unfold in the world today.

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

“For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so near-sighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

- 2 Peter 1:3-11 (ESV). | 

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



The Failure of the Anti-Smacking Law

BY BOB MCCOSKRIE

Family First has called New Zealand's anti-smacking law a "dog's breakfast" in a report it released last month. In this article, the organisation's national director - and lead author of the report - Bob McCoskrie discusses how, 13 years after the legislation was passed into law, the latest official data points to the fact it is failing.

The latest research on smacking in New Zealand has completely ignored the bigger picture of whether the ban has worked and whether it has reduced child abuse - the stated goal which was the sales pitch for the law in the first place.

An updated analysis of the anti-smacking law says not only has the ban failed to reduce the harm perpetrated against children, but it has increased the harm inflicted by children.

The report - *A Dog's Breakfast: New Zealand's Anti-Smacking Law 13 Years On* - examined the social indicators relating to child abuse affecting our children and families in the years leading up to the ban on smacking (2000–2007) and since the law was passed (2007–2019) using official Government data from Oranga Tamariki, New Zealand Police, Statistics New Zealand and the Ministry of Health.

Some of the key findings of this report include the fact that:

- » Notifications of abuse to Government agencies continue to increase at alarming rates.
- » Rates of physical abuse (including serious physical abuse) found by both the police and Oranga Tamariki (OT) have increased significantly since the law was passed.
- » There are significant warranted concerns around increasing levels of violence in schools, including bullying and physical violence targeting principals and teaching staff.
- » Successive Governments have failed to reduce physical abuse as promised, and any Government

targets appear to have been abandoned altogether.

- » Child homicides continue to fluctuate with no sign of any long-term, sustained improvement. New Zealand has one of the worst abuse rates in the OECD.
- » New Zealand has more children in care.
- » There are disturbing trends in the wellbeing of children, including the high rates of self-harm, suicide, and emotional and behavioural problems.
- » While politicians claim the new law does not criminalise "good parents" for lightly smacking their children, a legal analysis finds this is inconsistent with the actual legal impact of the new Section 59.

The fact that so many social indicators around the welfare of children continue to worsen - rather than improve or even abate - proves we simply are not tackling the real causes of child abuse.

It demonstrates that the law has been completely ineffective in terms of tackling the problem it was supposed to confront.

It is consistent with a lazy legislative approach of creating a law to deal with a small minority and apply it universally.

Criminalising good parents who simply want to raise law-abiding and responsible citizens is bad law-making. It is also no surprise that the parents in the longitudinal study are smacking less. Their children are that much older - and so too are the parents. It is a flawed conclusion.

SMACKING LAW HAS CAUSED DECLINE IN DISCIPLINE – POLL

A nationwide poll released last year found that half of New Zealanders believe that the 2007 anti-smacking law has caused a decline in discipline (with a further 16 percent unsure – 33 percent said it hadn't), and that they would continue to smack their child to correct their behaviour if they believed it was reasonable to do so. Almost 40 percent of mothers of young children say they have smacked despite the law change.

The Curia Market Research poll of 1000 respondents also found:

- » About 70 percent of respondents said they would not report a parent who they saw smacking their child on the backside or hand, while 20 percent would.
- » About 22 percent of parents with young children said their child had threatened to report them to the authorities if they were smacked.
- » Around 15 percent of parents with young children said they were aware of a family that had been negatively affected by the law.
- » About 17 percent of parents with young children said the law had made them less confident as a parent (21 percent of fathers).
- » Only 28 percent of respondents supported the current law (61 percent supported a change, with 11 percent undecided). Opposition to the anti-

smacking law was higher in low income areas, and significantly higher for National (79 percent) and NZ First (86 percent) supporters. Surprisingly, only half (51 percent) of Green voters supported the law.

“IT DEMONSTRATES THAT THE LAW HAS BEEN COMPLETELY INEFFECTIVE IN TERMS OF TACKLING THE PROBLEM IT WAS SUPPOSED TO CONFRONT.”

This polling is similar to Otago University's Child Poverty Monitor report released in 2019. In that report, 40.8 percent of parents from the New Zealand Health Survey agreed that, “There are certain circumstances when it is alright for parents to use physical punishment,” such as smacking.

As expected with a parenting technique that is now a criminal act, there was an overall fall in the percentage of children aged 0–14 years who received physical punishment such as smacking from 2006–2017, but with an increase between 2018 and 2019. Rates of physical punishment such as smacking were significantly higher for under-ten year olds when compared with older children. | 

A copy of the full report can be found at www.familyfirst.org.nz

■ Bob McCoskrie is the director of the New Zealand social group Family First New Zealand. He has a master's degree in Commerce from the University of Auckland and is also a qualified teacher.





WHAT DOES YOUR LIFE BOAST ABOUT?

BY PAUL CURTAS

The news and social media put a great amount of importance on personal achievement and status these days. A person's presence on social media has become a requisite to landing a good job. People are constantly looking for new ways through the media to boast of their abilities and be recognised for their achievements.

However, their posts are often very selective in what they present. People don't give a full or real picture of their life because they are so busy trying to sell themselves. Only displaying our successes can be misleading, like a mask we use to hide parts of our life we cannot fix or we cannot change.

God's way of recognising achievement is the opposite of the world's way. He takes us, regardless of how much or how little we've achieved, and brings us face to face with our weaknesses, failings and mortality. He does this, not to destroy us, but for the purpose of changing us for the better and ultimately freeing us.

Knowing our greatest need, God ultimately brings healing and hope to our lives by offering us forgiveness and new life - something only He can achieve in us.

We now become part of God's work (Philippians 1:6) which makes us His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10). Our boast is no longer about our human success, but with gratitude, we boast about who God is... by what He has accomplished in our life, and continues to accomplish through our weaknesses and in our debilitating situations.

Yes, it's encouraging to be awarded for our excellence in work, school, and sports... be thankful that God can use these for His purpose. But ultimately what catches people's attention is when we boast of God's work through our weaknesses in life. It is a total contradiction to the way the world thinks... but it is so real that it challenges them to consider their own failures and helplessness.

The world creates awards and ceremonies to boast about their achievement, but God redeems and restores broken people to boast about His grand achievement through us.

“God's way of recognising achievement is the opposite of the world's way.”

What does your life boast about? Consider: *“He (God) said... My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness. So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”*
2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT) |

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





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93% of Joginis are illiterate.

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Self vs Surrender

BY STEPHEN WHITWELL

“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” - Mark 8:34 (NKJV).

What better place to be in than the place of surrender to the Lord. This phrase has been rattling around in my mind these last few months and I have mentioned it in previous writings. “Self is always the problem - surrender is always the answer”.

So much of the issues we face are from this source; self. We want. We desire. We yearn. We crave.

There’s a battle going on between these things (which are actually not all bad) and the desire to please God and live in His will.

It’s a tough message, this one of surrender, but I can vouch that when we do surrender, life is far better. The text for this article is packed with truth.

Follow the Leader

Jesus never asks us to do anything He has not done, or go anywhere He has not gone - including death. That indeed is a characteristic of a leader who people will follow. But first comes the cross. No cross, no crown.

Deny Self

To deny self is not the same as self-denial. To deny self is to disown self. The Greek word for ‘deny’ and ‘deny himself’ also occurs in Peter’s denial of Jesus (Mark 14:72), where it denotes that he ‘disowns’ Jesus. To disown oneself means forsaking

one's selfish ambitions and worldly securities for the sake of Jesus and His call to obedience to God's will. Charles Spurgeon says, "The spirit of selfishness must be driven out".

Take up our Cross

Trouble and trial, difficulties and dire times are not a cross. The cross is death.

We must settle for a life into which the world's favour and esteem do not enter. Only criminals going to execution (people from whom the world's favour has been totally withdrawn) carried crosses in those days. This is how I am crucified to the world (Galatians 6:14).

There was a time when I was just married, and had a whole future ahead of me. A career beckoned in the motor trade, perhaps even my own business. Alongside that was a passion for motor racing. But also, a greater desire was in my heart, which was to obey God and be in His will. I just knew that I knew God had called me to let it all go, and obey Him and follow Him through life. I knew this would mean letting go of some pretty strong desires and passions. (Petrol-heads - motor racing fans and participants - are known for being fanatically committed to their sport).

But the desire to please God and follow His leading was strong too. God's call and leading into pastoral ministry was clear. And I am pleased to say, I am glad I obeyed. I took my family, we left our home town and all our close friends and relatives, and relocated a six hour drive away. We had no home, no job, we hadn't even checked to see if the church could afford to pay us a salary or not (and it didn't at first). But it was the will of God and I knew it.

Self was saying to me, "...what about that business idea?", "...what about all the money to be made in that career?", "... what about this and what about that?" But obeying God, surrendering to His will, brought a peace that truly passes all understanding.

Deep in the human makeup, is this capacity to rule. To be in charge. We read that Adam and Eve were created by God to rule, have authority, to control.

Then God said, *"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* - Genesis 1:26 (NKJV).

They were created to be like God in that they had the nature to be in charge. Their capacity, their ability, or default setting was one of ruling and having dominion. They had the command and commission to control. It was their prerogative

to exercise pre-eminence over their realm. It was inbuilt into their DNA. And guess what? We have been born with that same nature. That same DNA. That same capacity and potential. The problem arises when we are expected to then submit. Surrender. Let go. What!? Let go? Surrender control? Submit when we've been designed for ruling?

There's the problem. Without God, our self-nature wants only to control and be in charge and 'do it my way'. But when God draws us to Himself, when He saves us and redeems us, we come to the One who has been through death and now really is in charge! He is the Lord. He is God! It's hard to bring this self part of us to the Lord, and really surrender and submit and let it all go. Self is always the problem.

However, even in this struggle, God's grace is right there enabling us to do just that, to die to self and surrender all to Him. Surrender is always the answer.

Self is always the Problem – Surrender is always the Answer

The only way to win this battle is if we die. Thanks be to God! A death has occurred. Jesus died in our place, and when we are united with Him in His death, we are united with Him in His life. (See Romans 6:1-14).

The absolute best thing we can do is to surrender. Let go. Give up all to the Lord. Let Him take control.

In terms of leadership this is a great key. We could say it like this; "Submission is the apprenticeship of authority". (But that's another leadership development story).

The goal of the Christian life can be summed up by this verse; *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* - Galatians 2:20 (NKJV).

Such a life of surrender is pleasing to God, results in the greatest human fulfilment and will reap ultimate rewards in Heaven. Let go and let God. Surrender to the will of God. Give Him everything. God doesn't just want 10 percent of our money. He wants everything we are and everything we've got.

There's peace in that place of rest and submission. God's voice comes to that place. God's blessing, provision and leading is in that place.

It could be the hardest thing you'll ever do but the greatest thing you'll ever do.

Self is always the problem – Surrender is always the answer. | 

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





Phil Joel of the Newsboys was all smiles while on stage at Festival One.

HITTING THE RIGHT NOTES AT HOME

BY JEREMY SMITH

“I think as a teenager, you know, I was sort of rummaging around trying to find something that fit me. Music was something I gravitated toward - probably like most teenagers to be honest, but I felt like I especially loved it.”

“Then, someone gave me a guitar and I felt like, somehow, I'd come home. I loved it - thus began my musical journey.”

For Kiwi musician Phil Joel, that musical ride continues more than 25 years later - and now includes everything from the early 1990s days of being lead singer for New Zealand power pop band Drinkwater, to touring the world as part of Dove award-winning Christian rock band Newsboys, solo music and more recently founding United States-based worship band Zealand.

Phil, who now lives in Tennessee, was back home for Festival One 2021 at Mystery Creek - his first ever performance at the festival.

Ahead of his performance at the event - with a set in hand that reflected the gamut of his career so far - Phil, sat down with Jeremy Smith to reflect on the chance to be home, music, faith and the undeniable sense of God's leading over the years.

What was it like performing at Festival One for the first time?

It was an absolute treat, because at the moment this is the only place - the only country on the planet - where we can do these gatherings. So it's been very nice. When Graham (Burt), (Festival One executive director), asked me to come and play

I put a set together as a solo artist - which I haven't done for some time actually. That process sort of forced me to look back over my last 25 years in music and I realised, 'wow, I've been doing this for a while'. I had a moment of realisation and revelation that this has been kind of a long musical journey.

And actually being here at Festival, for me, feels like a culmination of all of these musical roads I've been on over the years. So, the set reflected that. For me, probably like everyone else, this is a time not only in corporate history, but a personal time and space in which we're all looking back over our stories and histories thinking 'where have we come from?' Because we're also trying to figure out where we're going. And for a lot of us, we don't exactly know where we're headed - there's a lot of unknowns and uncertainty, and it's okay.

As I was preparing to be here in New Zealand, it was an interesting time of reflection, wondering and praying about what the Lord has next.

You've been based in the United States for many years now. But as a Kiwi lad from Auckland, what's it like when you get opportunities like this to come home to Aotearoa again and play music?

Simply put, being at this festival at this time in history, getting to play these songs and to go into the back catalog of my music and also play current stuff is a life highlight. We finished our Festival One set by playing The Blessing Aotearoa with some of the singers from that recording. For me, that was kind of huge. Before the show, I doubted that I could even make it through that song without bawling my eyes out, although somehow I made it, without completely losing it. Of course, 2020 was obviously a brutal year for everybody and that song arrived at just the right time.



That's right, you were involved in The Blessing Aotearoa video. How do you feel when you hear testimonies of how that song has impacted people?

I think that song is right on time for both Aotearoa and the world. I think it's the fact that a lot of people are realising, 'we need to cry out to something bigger than ourselves, because in and of ourselves we are powerless'. That song resonates with both Christians and non-Christians alike and it is a great witness to the unity of the Church in New Zealand.

Loved seeing your son Eden playing the drums for part of your set at Festival One! Sharing the stage with your son must make you so proud...

That kid has more talent in his left foot than I have in my whole body! His feel on the drums is so natural. I've played with a lot of drummers and he's my favorite for sure. And the cool thing is, he plays for food!

On that note, can you tell me a little bit about your family? When you're not on stage, what do you guys like to do to spend quality time together?

We're a rather tight little unit - we really enjoy each other. In fact, when we spent two weeks in a hotel quarantining together we had a blast. Weirdly the time went by quickly. My daughter, Phyn, is a film student and so she's always filming things and making weird videos and short films. And my wife Heather is into that world too. She just directed my last music video and Phyn edited it. It's all a bit of a family affair these days.

How did you become a Christian and come to know Jesus?

I grew up in church and in a Christian home. I met Jesus when I was a little kid. My faith was very real for me as a child and it's always been a journey - one of highs and lows - plateaus and

peaks and valleys. And I'm still going, I'm still on that journey, still discovering more of who Jesus is and who He's made me to be. I've always found my faith to be an exciting thing that keeps re-shaping. I feel like a continual pursuit of Him should be an exciting thing and I find it sad when people miss out on the adventure of it because they're too busy trying to measure up to some sort of unattainable standard that God's never demanded that we reach.

Can you take a moment to step back with me in time to the Drinkwater days? As a kid I had some of that music on tape! (Remember those). And, many Kiwis, as well as fans around the world, remember those days fondly. It was kind of a cool start wasn't it?

It really was! Drinkwater was around from about 1991-1994. My friends and I started the band and before we had a name, we were just making a whole lot of noise in a West Auckland garage. Honestly, I think we started writing songs as a band because we weren't good enough to play or cover anyone else's music! I guess that was as good a reason to write music as any, and thanks to God, it worked out. I also think we were kind of right on time with the way we sounded and how we approached music. And it fit into what was happening in the 1990s. When I listen back now, I think it's pretty funny - kind of comical. The production is rather thin, the lyrics are really goofy, but it had something. And it's a moment in time - one I wanted to revisit a little bit at Festival One. As part of our set, we played three Drinkwater songs, it was a surreal highlight for me and the guys.

From Drinkwater, God opened a pretty huge door for you - your time with the Newsboys as bassist and a vocalist. Can you describe how that opportunity came about?

You could say right place, right time - but you have to acknowledge the divine element. It was God. I got a phone call one morning at 3am after the band's bass player had left. Previously to that phone call, Drinkwater had opened for a

Newsboys show in Auckland and we struck up a pretty good relationship right then and there. In that sense, it was kind of a natural thing. Actually you know, whenever I hit spots in life now where I'm thinking, 'I don't really know what's going to happen', I remember back to that moment and I'm reminded of the fact that God can make the phone ring at 3am and do whatever He wants. He can reposition, or position, things in any way, form or fashion He desires, you know? So, I think we just have to avail ourselves and just say, "...here I am God, I'm going to make some plans but I'm going to hold them really loosely and ask You to direct my path."

You've actually had two 'seasons' if you will with Newsboys - initially for more than a decade up until 2006. Then in 2018, it was announced that both yourself and co-founder Peter Furler would tour with the band for the Newsboys United Tour in 2018. Since then, you've actually continued touring together as Newsboys United. What's it like being back playing with the guys?

It's been super fun, and I think it's been really good too for concert-goers from yesteryear who are coming back and hearing some of these older songs as well as new stuff and sort of, in a way, having their faith re-ignited. It's been a really beautiful thing.

God has certainly gifted Newsboys with a big platform. I read the band has released 17 studio albums and six of those have been certified Gold. Career sales also top more than 10 million units. What are the pressures, positives and negatives that perhaps come with navigating such large scale 'fame'?

I've been doing this since I was 21 and I don't really know how to do anything else. It's been a really fun and exciting road. I've enjoyed things like getting Grammy nominations and fancy award shows, but I think the Lord keeps me a little bit happily ignorant to the trappings of some of what's gone on. Let's put it down to a God-given healthy dose of good old Kiwi 'bro-ishness'. And I mean, after all I'm still just a kid from west Auckland who likes to mess around with guitars.

This might be a tough question because everyone has their own individual favourite and the catalogue is lengthy, but what is a Newsboys track that really stands out as particularly special for you?

Well, one that I got to be part of writing and that I got to sing - a song that has kind of had serious longevity - is Entertaining Angels. I get people approaching me all the time saying, "...hey, still today that's one of my favorite songs." And that track is more than 20 years old. I think it'll be one of those songs that I'll be performing for the rest of my earthly days.

What's it like for you when someone tells you stories like that of how your music has helped them?

It's really, really encouraging. You know, I think people may sometimes assume that you're always conscious of how the music reaches people, but you're not. And when someone says, "hey, this song helped me through a really tough time", it's a wonderful gift to receive.

Musicians are just like anyone else, we need encouragement, you know, and it's an affirmation that maybe what we've been pouring ourselves into - to create art that speaks to the human heart and ultimately connects people with God - is working. It's really humbling.

So, let's talk about solo music. Congratulations on the January release of your latest solo project Better Than I Found It. You wrote the songs in 2019, then recorded and produced it in your home studio during quarantine. It's your first solo release in a few years, so it must be so exciting to put that out...

Absolutely. I'm super excited about this release, number one because I love the songs, and secondly, for the fact that I haven't released a solo project in a long time. As a solo artist, you can write and express things in a way that perhaps you can't as a representative of a band so it's nice to have those different outlets.

Your other musical endeavor is Zealand Worship - where tracks like Your Love Is Wild have really resonated with people. Tell me, how do you go about writing music that speaks to people?

Well, the Bible talks about the fact that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. I sort of approach songwriting initially as kind of a stream of consciousness therapy, prayer session you know? I kind of just let it all come out, then sort of sift through the sand until I find a gem - something poetic and artistic that I feel is God-inspired and that resonates with me. I take it from there and wrestle with it until it submits and allows itself to surrender to it's new life as a song.

Similarly on that note, in your own words, what's the magic of music?

God's given us a lot of really cool things to stir our hearts and to catch our eye. Nature is one of those things. You know, I think if you want to see God, go for a walk in the bush - get out into the forest. Be still for a while and you'll begin to hear His heartbeat and see His fingerprints.

Music is like that too, it's an amazing thing that can sneak into a human heart and create a bridge to the divine. The fact that our Creator created it is insane, It's so fun - and the very fact it's invisible but somehow tangible points to something bigger than ourselves. It is magic, huh?

“ You could say right place, right time - but you have to acknowledge the divine element. It was God. ”

I read that you have sworn off social media. You've said you're not anti-social media, but in a world where many in your position would maybe rely on those platforms to get the word out about what you're doing musically, can I ask, what was the rationale behind that decision?

I find myself at a lot of youth events in the United States and I see that while kids are becoming more connected than ever, they're also more desperately lonely than ever. Social media platforms promise that we'll be seen and understood and liked, but fail to fulfill any of these promises. My hope is that my choice to not be on social media platforms will encourage others to switch 'em off and live their lives, not worrying about what everyone else is doing or thinking or saying.

There are a bunch more reasons and I don't want to bore you with them. But I actually wrote a book called Redwoods & Whales - Becoming Who You Actually Are that talks a lot about this stuff.

What would be your encouragement to Christian men who are wanting to be Authentic in all aspects of their lives - their walk with Christ, in their family lives, in business and so on?

I think we need to cast off that pressure to live up to some sort of standard or attain a level of holiness that is just not realistic. And in saying that, I don't mean that we need to throw caution to the wind in regards to our behavior. But there's nothing

quite like the countenance of a man who understands who he is in Christ and his need for God - a man who understands the fact that he's fearfully and wonderfully made and that life is meant to be enjoyed in the Lord.

When we're walking with God and we make mistakes, the stuff that trips us up doesn't make God mad at us, it makes God mad for us because He realises we're being ripped off. So, I think sometimes we need to let the pressure valve off, breathe a little deeper and ask the Lord to fill us with His Spirit afresh. And He will. It's His kindness that turns us and changes us.

Finally, your musical career has given you the opportunity to see the world and meet some amazing people. I read that you even got the chance to tour with Katy Perry. In amongst the countless opportunities music has given you, who have you most enjoyed meeting and where is your favourite place in the world to perform?

The truth is New Zealand is, and will always be, my favorite place to be on stage. The old saying is true, "...there's no place like home".

Thanks so much for your time Phil. | 

To check out Phil's latest solo project Better Than I Found It and to follow more of his musical journey, see www.philjoel.com. For information on Festival One 2022, visit www.festival.one

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





The Main Reason to Delight Yourself in the Lord

BY NATHAN JOHNSON



The word 'delight' gives the idea of enjoyment, pleasure, to be satisfied and to experience a thrill.

Psalm 37:3-7 in the NIV declares... *"Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.."*

While Psalm 37 gives a promise if you delight yourself in God (He will give you the desires of your heart), it is important to recognize that we shouldn't delight ourselves in God because we get something from Him.

We should delight ourselves in Him because of Who He is.

Just because of Jesus.

Not to get anything from Him. Not to appease Him. Not for any other reason but that He is worthy.

David writes in Psalm 16:11, *"You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand."* (NIV). Only in His presence do we discover the fullness of joy – for true joy is found nowhere else. Jesus declared in Matthew 6:33 to *"...seek first the Kingdom of God"* and not worry about *"all these things,"* (NIV) (clothing, food, etc).

"Only in His presence do we discover the fullness of joy – for true joy is found nowhere else."

Yes, there is tremendous promise if we seek after, diligently give ourselves to, and love God with ALL our heart, mind, soul, and strength (see Mark 12:30) – for we are told that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (see Hebrews 11:6). God says in Jeremiah 29:13, *"You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."* (NIV).

The call is to all.

God responds to us when we seek Him (see Psalm 34:4), but we shouldn't seek or delight ourselves in Him because we get something from Him – we don't need Him PLUS anything. We just need Him.

Peter tells us that all things we need for life and godliness are found in Christ Jesus alone (see 2 Peter 1:3).

So, let us delight ourselves in Jesus afresh. Let's seek after Him with all that we are.

Not because we get something from Him ... but because of Who He is. | 

■ 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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www.authenticmedia.nz

The Real Mt Sinai?

BY CHUCK MISSLER

On one of his visits to us, my dear friend Bob Cornuke shared the story of one of his adventures. It actually paralleled several previous surreptitious visits to Saudi Arabia and clearly appears to corroborate some surprising discoveries. Bob and an acquaintance, Larry Williams, managed to spend some time in Saudi Arabia and made it a point to check out an astounding theory about the Exodus in the Bible.

Most people understand that Mount Sinai is **Jebel Musa**, in the Sinai Peninsula, where the **Monastery of St. Catherine's** is located. Look at any competent Bible atlas, and it will probably include a question mark since that location is traditional, but speculative. There are a number of tenuous conjectures associated with this location and numerous books have been written suggesting alternative candidates, among them **Jebel Helal** further north in the Sinai Peninsula, or **Jebel Serbal**, in the south. Another candidate is **Har Karkom**, known to the Bedouins as **Jebel Ideid**, also in the north.¹ None of these, all in the Sinai Peninsula, have any real archaeological evidence supporting them.

“The New Testament has always referred to Mount Sinai as being in Arabia.”

However Moses, when first exiled from Egypt, dwelt in Midian, at the base of Mt Sinai. Midian was in the northwest corner of Saudi Arabia. The New Testament has always referred to Mount Sinai as being in Arabia.²

The Crossing Point

With scuba gear, they discovered a remarkable land bridge crossing the Strait of Tiran and the southern extremity of the Gulf of Aqaba, between Saudi Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula. Presently about 50 feet underwater and several hundred yards in width, it drops several thousand feet on either side. The topography of the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula also fits the details of the Exodus narrative well.

Jabal al Lawz

Passing the bitter springs of Marah, they came to the mountain known as **Jabal al Lawz**. Moses kept sheep at Mt Sinai (Exodus 3:1 and thereafter); Bob and Larry found vegetation suitable for grazing. (The Israelites camped there 11 months.)

Jabal al Lawz rises about 8000 feet above the desert. It consists of two snub-nosed peaks, with a natural amphitheater between them; the stage on which the most momentous drama in history had been played out. However, as one approaches closer to the mountain, one encounters military guards and a chain link fence, 15 feet high, topped with barbed wire and a sign, in Arabic and English:

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA WARNING:
"IT IS UNLAWFUL TO TRESPASS."
VIOLATORS ARE SUBJECT TO PENALTIES
STIPULATED IN THE ANTIQUITIES REGULATIONS
PASSED BY ROYAL DECREE NO. M 26, U 23.6.1392**

Nevertheless, slipping past the guards at night and digging under the fence, Bob and Larry continued their adventure. Just south of the mountain, they found what they believe may have been the battlefield of Rephidim (Exodus 17:1, 8; 19:2; Numbers 33:14-15), a dozen football fields in size.

They also found a large altar made up of extremely large, stacked boulders. On one of them they found pictographs of cattle, not sheep native to Arabia. These pictographs resembled the Apis bulls of Egypt. Could this have been the altar for the Golden Calf? (Exodus 32.)

As one reaches the higher elevations of Jabal al Lawz, the ground turns black, dark like obsidian; the rocks look almost like coal. (Yet when they're broken, they were actually granite.) They were not volcanic; they appeared as if scorched from above (Exodus 19:18). They even found an unusually large crevice in which a man could hide (Exodus 33:22?) They also found an old stream bed; "...the brook that descended out of the mount" (Deuteronomy 9:21?)

At the base of the mount they also found two huge rocks - perhaps 60 feet long - wedged together, with a flat stone in the middle; possibly the altar of the Bible? (Exodus 20:24-26). Nearby, they also found the remains of the 12 pillars, all in a row, each one about 18 feet in diameter, spaced five feet apart (Exodus 24:4). Around the mountain, about 400 yards distant, they also found what appeared to be the boundary markers, the bounds set by Moses at the base of the mountain (Exodus 19:12, 21-23).

Needless to say, Bob and Larry are convinced that Jabal al Lawz is, indeed, the long-sought Mount Sinai of the Bible. | 

References:

- 1 Emmanuel Anati, *The Mountain of God*, Rizzoli, New York, 1986.
- 2 Galatians 4:25

■ 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.





WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLESSED?

BY ALAN STANLEY

You don't have to scroll down far on your Facebook or Twitter feed to see someone that is 'feeling blessed'. The word 'blessed' slips so easily off our lips. But what does it actually mean? What do we mean when we ask God to bless our children, our activities or our church? What would blessed children look like? Or a blessed church service?

Once in church, someone prayed from the front, "Lord, we are so blessed!" That happened when I lived in Australia - what did they mean? I suspect they were acknowledging in a very general way the absence of hardship in Australia. It's the same here in New Zealand. Perhaps they meant the prosperity that the two nations enjoy, probably the freedom we have to be a Christian without fear of reprisal. But, if that is what it means to be blessed, what does that mean for Christians in countries where the hardships are greater and the freedom is restricted? Are they not blessed?

Another friend of mine from Australia once visited an African country and one of the African Christians said to him: "It must be so hard to be a Christian in Australia." My friend asked him what he meant. The man responded, "You have so much it must be hard to depend on God." Humbling perspective, but there is no doubt that this is how Jesus views things.

At the end of the first century the resurrected Jesus told the church at Smyrna, "I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich!" (Revelation 2:9a, NIV), while He told the church at Laodicea, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked," (Revelation 3:17, NIV).

One church is poor and yet they are rich. The other is rich and yet they are poor. Quite obviously then, blessing has nothing to do with a high bank balance and the absence of hardships. Yet this is a contrast to the way many Christians think and speak about what it means to be blessed. Jesus tells us what it means to be blessed. "Blessed are you when people insult

you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in Heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you,” (Matthew 5:11-12, NIV).

Notice the reason that persecuted people are blessed is “... because great is your reward in Heaven.” Jesus doesn’t link blessing to circumstances that in the end will not last forever, He links it to the Kingdom of Heaven.

To be blessed means to be in the Kingdom. That is the only criteria. This is why Jesus compared the “Kingdom of Heaven” to a “...treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field,” (Matthew 13:44 NIV). The Kingdom is worth everything and one should do whatever they can – sell all they have if necessary – to make sure they are in it. Only then are they blessed.

What this means is that anything that brings us into contact with God’s Kingdom is to be viewed as a blessing. As it so happens, persecution will do that far more effectively than prosperity will. When, therefore, we pray that God would bless us, what we are ultimately asking for is that God would do whatever it takes to bring us more under His kingly rule – which sounds very much like “...Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven,” (Matthew 6:10, NIV).

Here is an example that I have often given in the past and was reminded of recently. Jesus had just fed the five thousand and it was time to leave. “Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd,” (Mark 6:45, NIV). Now, would there be any better place than where Jesus had “made” you to be? How many times have we asked the question, “Is this where Jesus wants me?” The disciples need not ask that question here. They know. They are exactly where Jesus wants them.

But Jesus does not go with them in the boat. He goes off to pray. Later on in the night “...the boat was in the middle of the lake, and He was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them,” (Mark 6:47-48a NIV). Now, don’t forget, the disciples are exactly where Jesus wants them.

He made them get in that boat. Furthermore, what happens next suggests that the strong winds and their struggle to make headway is also where Jesus wants them. Notice that as soon as Jesus saw their predicament He could have done something to alleviate it. After all, Jesus can simply “say the word” and heal people (Matthew 8:9-13). Could not Jesus bless them and get them out of this mess? Certainly, but the question is, would that be a blessing?

Look what happens next. “Shortly before dawn He went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them but



when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw Him and were terrified,” (Mark 6:48b-50, NIV).

Why doesn’t Jesus do something? The answer is, because He wants to bless them. “Immediately He spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid,’” (Mark 6:50 NIV). Commentators will often point out that the phrase “It is I” in Greek means “I Am” and, therefore, may very well be Jesus’ way of identifying Himself as the “I AM” who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). What greater thing could Jesus have done that night for these disciples than reveal His true identity to them? Would there be a greater blessing than that – to know that the “I AM” is with you? But what if Jesus had simply dispelled the winds and made it easy for them? What blessing would they receive then?

Here is the point. To be blessed is to see more of God. This has always been the case. God’s design “...to bless the Israelites” (Numbers 6:23) was to pray:

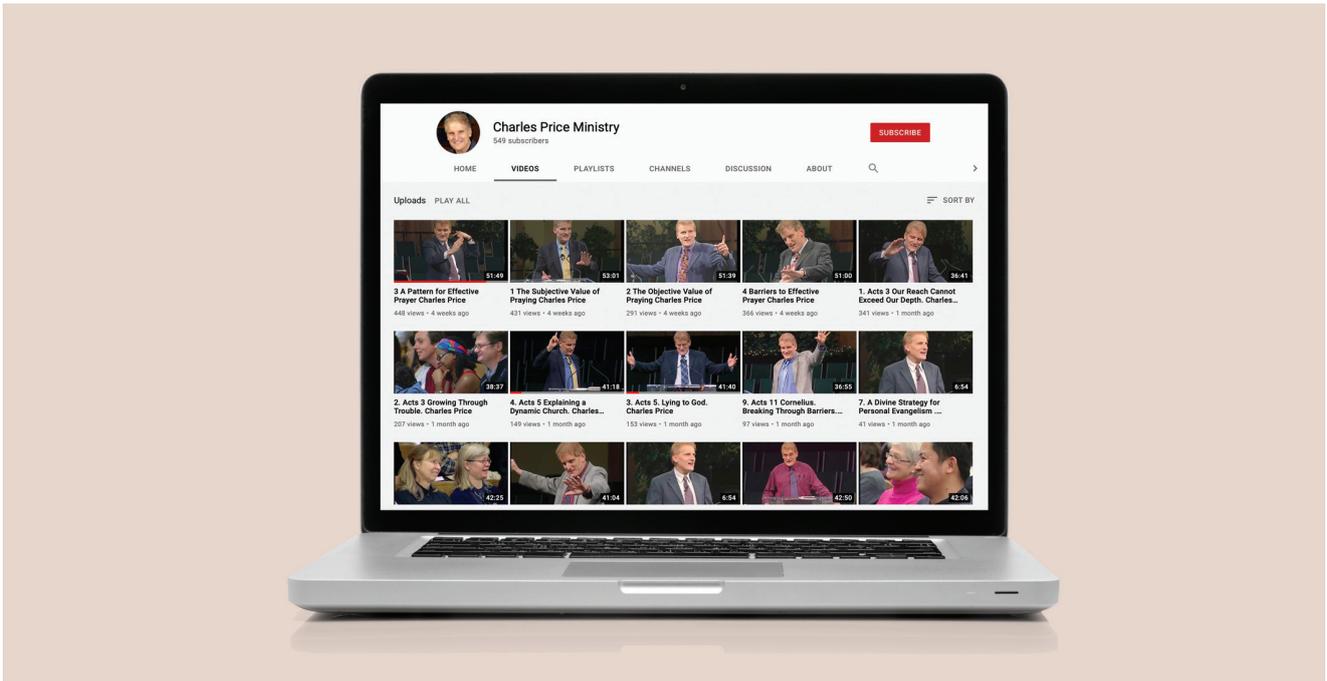
“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26, NIV).

Notice that the prayer in the first line – “...the LORD bless you” – is developed in the third line – “...the LORD make His face shine on you” – and then again in the last line – “...and give you peace.” In other words, to be blessed is to see God’s face.

God may dispel the winds in our lives and take away whatever it is that is causing us to strain at the oars, but will that bring us peace? Moses knew, and the disciples came to know it too, peace would only come through having God make His face to shine upon us. And that is precisely what He has done in the person of Jesus Christ at the cross. It is at the cross that we see the magnificence of God’s character and identity. But it is also, typically, at those cross-like moments in our own lives, where the wind is howling and we are straining at the oars, that we also are in a position to see more clearly the character and identity of God. And at that point, we are blessed. We are precisely where God wants us to be. | 

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





Youtube Scripture & Christ

CHARLES PRICE // REVIEW BY AUTHENTIC



Here at Authentic Magazine, as well as the content within the pages of this magazine, we love to be able to provide further resources for men which will be a blessing and a help in their walk with Jesus.

On that note, we are blessed to have Charles Price - the Minister at large at The People's Church in Toronto, Canada - as one of our regular contributors in the magazine.

Looking back, Charles has in fact written an article for every print issue of Authentic which has been published in our three-year journey so far.

He was even in a video interview as part of our only online issue - issue 10.

An itinerant speaker and Bible teacher, Charles has been visiting New Zealand for over 25 years.

During this time, he has also regularly been a featured Bible teacher on Christian TV and radio programmes. His heart is to teach from the Word and reveal the simplicity of Christ as life.

Earlier this year, Charles let us here at Authentic know that part way through 2020, he launched a new YouTube channel called Charles Price Ministry.

It is a further expression of his desire to preach Christ and the channel is now filled with hundreds of videos spanning more than two decades of his ministry.

We have screen grabbed a few images to give you an idea of some of his content, and you can find more messages and specific playlists related to a wide range of teaching topics by visiting www.youtube.com/c/CharlesPriceMinistry/videos.

May you be blessed as you do so. | 



I Still Believe

LIONSGATE // REVIEW BY PLUGGEDIN

Sometimes when we pray, we get an answer immediately and it's the answer we want. Other times, we have to wait for an answer - often to the point where we wonder if we'll ever get one. And sometimes, even then, God reveals that He has a different plan in store.

When Christian singer Jeremy Camp's (played by Kiwi actor KJ Apa) soon-to-be wife Melissa was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, everyone around her prayed for her to be healed – and that prayer was answered. Melissa was miraculously cured. They got married and were excited to share their story with the masses and bring glory to God.

But, God hadn't finished revealing His plan for them. On their honeymoon, Melissa's cancer returned. Sadly, there wasn't a miraculous cure this time around.

But Melissa continued to believe that God was going to use her. She told Jeremy that if only one person's life was changed by her story, "it [would] be worth it." *I Still Believe* tells Melissa and Jeremy's story. And it tells not only of their incredible love and the tragic loss they faced, but how the young couple maintained their faith in God through all of it.

The key message of this film (and the key message of Jeremy Camp's song "I Still Believe," from which it gets its title) is to continue trusting God even when we are broken and don't understand what His plan is for us.

Jeremy and Melissa's love for one another is palpable, and the first act of their story on the big screen is a faith-infused romance as they face various obstacles in their relationship – including some that seem as if they'll end that relationship before it even starts.

I Still Believe is an incredibly powerful story about faith, but it's also an incredibly sad story. It shows that even when we lay it all down at the feet of the Lord, we still might not get the answer we expect or hope for.

Melissa chooses joy in the face of cancer; and Jeremy, inspired by her faith, chooses to walk with her. Their journey is heart-wrenchingly difficult, and in the end, things still don't turn out how they hoped.

Jeremy asks a lot of hard questions about faith and obedience when Melissa dies, but he ultimately concludes that what's happened is God's will - even if he'll never fully understand. Like Melissa, he chooses joy in the face of hardship, allowing him to spread the message of God's faithfulness and truth. *I Still Believe* is a poignant portrait of faith and doubt, love and grief, heartbreak and hope. And it's a story with the power to prompt deeper conversations about all of those themes – once you're done weeping, that is.



This DVD is available from
Manna Christian Bookstore

TV SERIES

We continue our review of the season one episodes of *The Chosen*. In the issue, we take a look at episodes six and seven.



The Chosen

DALLAS JENKINS // REVIEW FROM PLUGGEDIN

Episode 6: “Indescribable Compassion”

Word is beginning to leak out that Jesus is not just an ordinary craftsman. As He and His disciples travel back to Capernaum, they find - and Jesus cures - a leper on the way. When they arrive back in the city, a crowd quickly gathers around the house where He’s preaching, forcing the friends of a paralytic man in need of a miracle to lower the man through the roof.

The Pharisee Nicodemus is among those who see the miracle, along with his less-accepting pupil, now a powerful Pharisee in his own right. Beforehand, Nicodemus tried to encourage his one-time student to keep his eyes and mind open for what God might be doing in the here and now, not just in the time when the Torah was being written. “I don’t want to live in some bleak past where God cannot do anything new,” Nicodemus says. “Do you?”

We hear a few parables from Jesus and see, of course, a couple of miracles. We witness the leper’s disfiguring wounds disappear. He forgives the paralytic of his sins and tells His audience that people need not use big words while in prayer:

“A lot of it is for show, anyway,” he says. Peter cares for a sick woman staying with his family, softly singing to her as he wipes her brow. (In an earlier episode, we learned the woman was coughing up blood.) Someone jokes with Jesus, telling the teacher that he heard about His trick with the wine at the wedding. “Can you do that to the well by my house?”



Episode 7: “Invitations”

Jesus meets with the Pharisee Nicodemus on a rooftop, where He makes some startling revelations. And Matthew, the tax collector, makes a startling decision.

The episode begins with a thousand-year flashback, with Moses crafting a bronze snake that the Israelites can look upon and be saved. Joshua takes issue with the act: “That is a pagan symbol,” he says. “Maybe you misunderstood [God].”

Moses responds that he’s learned, painfully, to do what God tells him to do without questioning Him. “It’s an act of faith!” he says. “Not reason. Faith.”

Jesus calls Nicodemus’ attention to that story: Just like that snake, “So the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”

We hear references to a case of demon possession that Nicodemus and Jesus both encountered (the latter more successfully than the former). We hear that Nicodemus wants to stay in Capernaum to continue his “research” at the expense of missing his newest grandson’s bris (circumcision) ceremony.

pluggedⁿ

Movie & Music Reviews
compiled from PluggedIn.com

AUTHENTIC

MEN'S MAGAZINE

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