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LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission in today's world

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Fear of the Lord

by Bruce Yocum
 Belfast, Northern Ireland

Ignoring God and shunning his judgments is the great sin of our age

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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Fear of the Lord

***Ignoring God and shunning his judgments
is the great sin of our age***

By Bruce Yocum

The spiritual condition of the Western world

The abortion debate is one of those issues that pulls back, for those still capable of seeing, the veil that is cast over the spiritual condition of the Western world. For centuries, the beliefs and values of Christianity served, at least to some degree, to guide Western society in its morals and to restrain men and women from committing atrocities common to the state of fallen human beings.

In this past century as Christianity has been cast aside by many, we have seen the most destructive and brutal wars ever fought; the horrors of totalitarianism (Auschwitz and the gulag as only the most obvious of the results); the rise of racism (as, for example, scientifically practiced by Nazism); the rejection of Christian sexual ethics and the subsequent epidemic of venereal diseases (ironically, in the only era of history that has had the medical knowledge to prevent or cure venereal disease); mass abortion; and public advocacy of euthanasia and suicide.

These developments are not surprising to Christians who have been instructed in God's law and are familiar with the simple teachings of the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans:

For though they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools....Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves....And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness... (Romans 1:21-22, 24, 28-29).

The key here lies in the words “they did not honor him as God” and “they did not see fit to acknowledge God.” Those who cast off the restraints of acknowledging and honoring God and then, left with the “freedom” of their own choice about what is right and what is wrong – those people are choosing destruction. Man, when left without God, is given up, not to his own dignified version of morality, but to the immense indignity of slavery to sin.

Issues critical for understanding God's action in this age

There are two issues to examine here. These issues are critical for our understanding of this spiritual age, and God’s action in this age. These themes are the *fear of the Lord* and *judgment*. They are necessary for a proper understanding of God, of the work of Jesus as Savior, and of the Christian life.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). Wisdom in Scripture is not abstract and academic knowledge; it is practical knowledge of how to live successfully. This verse tells us that the beginning, the foundation, of understanding how to live is the fear of the Lord. The verse continues: “Those who are trained by it understand.” Fear of the Lord helps us to see the realities of human life more clearly.

Fear of the Lord is often criticized as an outmoded spirituality left over from the Old Testament. However, Jesus himself teaches it: “I will tell you whom to fear; fear him who can throw both body and soul into hell; yes I tell you, fear him!” (Luke 12:5). Fear of the Lord is nothing more than an understanding of who God is, and a response to him based on who he is. His power, lordship, and authority demand from us a response of obedience to his commands. Disregarding the commandments of God shows the opposite of fear of the Lord; it shows contempt.

Those who promote abortion and protect those who commit it have no fear of the Lord. They have cast off the restraint on their behavior that fear of the Lord is meant to impose.

This is where the issue of judgment comes in. Many men and women today no longer believe God judges, and therefore they consider themselves free to do as they will: “He thinks in his heart, ‘God has forgotten, he has hidden his face; he will not see what I do’” (Psalm 10:11). In other words, they believe there is no one besides themselves to determine what is right and wrong, what they should and should not do. They are the judges.

One of the fundamental theological issues today is the reality of original sin; the practical importance of this issue is revealed in such matters as abortion. If man indeed is fallen, if sin has worked its way into man so that he cannot be free of it without a redeemer, then, when man becomes the judge, the judgments that he gives will be corrupt. A deep, deep corruption is revealed in the militant advocacy of abortion, and in the revolutionary view of the place and purpose of human sexuality that marches hand in hand with it.

Unless men and women are brought back to God

What future can lie in store for a society whose choices and judgments are made “free” of the fear of God? What further steps will we take on the path of corruption? Abortion is not just a present evil darkening our lives; it is the dark shadow of a future yet more sordid – unless men and women are brought back to God.

As Christians, we should make use of whatever means we can in our pluralistic society – political lobbying, voting, the media – to combat abortion and to support pro-life efforts. But our opposition to abortion must be accompanied by the proclamation of the gospel if we are to see light in the midst of this darkness. Men and women must be

brought to knowledge of the God who made them, and to an acknowledgment that God's judgments are right and true.

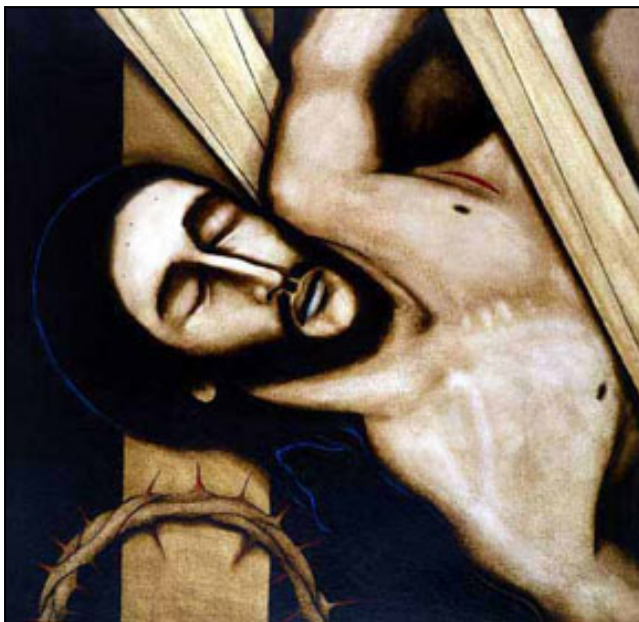
[Bruce Yocum is President of Christ the King Association and a member of the International Executive Council of The Sword of the Spirit. This article was originally published in *New Covenant Magazine*, July Issue, 1991.]

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Jesus Down from the Cross - painting by [Michael O'Brien](#)

Dying to Defeat Death

The death of Jesus was a victory over death itself

By Steve Clark

At Easter, Christians proclaim that Christ has defeated death. Most commonly if we speak about people defeating death, we mean that they came close to dying but did not, probably because they fought to stay alive. Christ, however, died. He defeated death in a more definitive way than by staying alive when his life was threatened. He defeated death by dying and coming back to life by his own power.

Christ did not just defeat death for himself, but he defeated death for other human beings as well. His death and resurrection make it possible for others to survive their own deaths and as a result of dying come into a life that is better than the one they had before.

Freedom from a captor like Satan is freedom from an external oppressor. Freedom from death is freedom from an internal weakness. Death may originate from an outside cause like a blow or gunshot or fire. But death does not occur until the human organism loses the power to sustain life.

Defeating death by dying

Life takes constant effort, as human beings discover when their lives are threatened by disease or injury and they find themselves in a “fight for their life.” Overcoming death, then, involves the strength to sustain life. Defeating death by dying and coming back to life involves a special strength, a more than normally human strength. This strength Christ had.

In the description Paul gives us of Christ's redeeming work in Philippians 2, he tells us that Christ began his attack on death by lowering or humbling himself. "Though he was in the form of God, Christ Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." This description refers to what we now would call Christ's incarnation. The first step, then, to defeat death was for Christ to enter into the human condition so that he could change it.

Paul describes Christ's incarnation as a self-emptying or self-lowering, because he wishes to describe how Christ's death – a further step of self-lowering-led to his exaltation. The fact that the Philippians passage goes on to describe Christ's resurrection and ascension as an exaltation indicates that the incarnation by itself does not fully constitute his self-lowering, since Christ will still have a human nature, a glorified human nature, after his resurrection and ascension.

Christ's self-lowering was not simply his taking on the condition of humanity, but his taking on a human condition in which he was deprived of something that would be present once he was raised from the dead and glorified. His self-lowering, in other words, was his willingness to take upon himself humanity in its fallenness. Exactly what he took on of our fallen human nature, when, as Paul says he came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), is a complicated question. He clearly became subject to human weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4), suffering, and death. But at the same time, he was able to remain without sin and in full union with God. How ever these two facts go together, Christ willingly entered into and personally took on something of the fallen, low state of humanity. Before his resurrection, there was something missing in him that could have been there without making him something other than human.

What happened at Christ's resurrection

To understand fully what was missing, we need, to consider what happened at his exaltation or resurrection. After his resurrection, Christ was "glorified." As we have seen, the scriptural word "glory" means greatness or power, even more than it does exterior radiance or splendor. Moreover, it can be used to indicate a greatness or power that things have in their own makeup, not just something conferred on them externally. "Glorification" then, can refer to an inner strengthening or empowerment.

When Christ was glorified, he did not cease to be human or become human to a lesser degree. Rather, his human nature was given a new power or capacity. He was capable of acting in ways he could not before. He could appear in rooms without opening doors. He could ascend to heaven by his own power. Even more importantly for our purposes, he was free from the power of death. "Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Romans 6:9). When he was glorified, his human nature became transformed or metamorphosed so that he had a greater or more glorious type of human life, one with fewer limitations. Most especially, his human nature had a greater power over its own life, so it lacked the limitation of intrinsic mortality.

Before his glorification, however, Christ did not lack all glory. He had a glory with his Father before the world was made (John 17:5,24), and therefore a glory that was uncreated. That divine glory is in him now (2 Corinthians 3:18; 46), and it was in him on earth even before his resurrection. Because of the presence of that glory, when we see him we see God in him (2 Corinthians 46; John 149). Even though he took on the weakness of unfallen human nature, Christ had a power inside of himself capable of taking away that weakness. It was hidden or veiled to a certain extent, but it was there. Christ's death and resurrection, then, was a transition from a state of humiliation which involved a divine glory present in a "weak human nature" to a state of exaltation, which involved a human nature transformed by that glory.

When the Scripture describes that transition, it most commonly says that God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:24,32). The change is described as coming from an action from outside of Jesus which rescues him from death. Yet Paul also describes that change as Jesus himself rising (1 Thessalonians 4:14). In the Gospel of John, Jesus asserts that "I have power to lay [my life] down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). As the Son of God, Jesus could not only count on God's power to raise him up. He could also count on that power as something in him,

something he could employ even though dead.

These two types of statements are two ways of seeing the same truth. God did raise his Son but did so by acting through the divinity which was “in” Christ, which he and his Son shared. In a similar way, when God raises us from the dead, our resurrection will be due to his Spirit in us which will communicate life to us “from the inside” (Romans 8:11).

How death can be lifegiving

Jesus in the Gospel of John used an image to describe his death which sums up the truth we have been considering. He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). A seed can be very hard and look much like a little stone, lifeless. But once it falls into the ground, a process of change happens that could be described as a death. The seed dies to its old mode of existence. That death, however, is not the end. Something inside of the seed, something that was there all along, is released and begins to live in a new way. It transforms the seed into something greater, a plant capable not only of growing but of giving rise to other plants like itself. Death can be lifegiving – depending on what is inside when the dying begins.

Inside Christ was divine glory. Once he died, the shell of his “weak” human nature began to crumble. Rather than leading to the complete dissolution of his existence, that crumbling led to freedom for what was inside to “come out” The kernel of the seed – the glorious life inside – began to act not only in his human spirit and soul but also in his body. The bonds of death could not hold him (Acts 2:24). His “indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16) manifested itself. Or as Melito of Sardis, an early second century writer, put it in his Paschal Discourse: “By his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man's destroyer, death, a fatal blow.”

The death of Jesus, then, was a victory over death itself. The very act of dying was itself the way death was overcome. “He destroyed death by death” (Byzantine liturgy). Jesus underwent a human death and proved stronger because of the indestructible glory within.



Steve Clark is President of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). This article is excerpted from his book [Redeemer: Understanding the Meaning of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ](#), copyright © 1992 by Stephen B. Clark, published by Servant Books. It can be purchased online at [Tabor House Books](#)

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Models of Life

Our individual lives, marriages, and family life need to be brought under the Lordship of Christ

By Bob Tedesco

This article is addressed to Christian parents and pastoral leaders to help them understand the challenge of living Christ-centered marriage and family life in the midst of a secular culture – a culture which often works against the Christian ideal.

Missing the Mark

The Greek word *hamartia*, which is frequently used in Scripture and is translated “sin,” is a derivative of the word *hamartano* which means “to miss the mark.” In our efforts to live the Christian life we can get caught in certain cultural traps that cause us to lose focus and “miss the mark.”

The throne diagram, used in the Life in the Spirit Seminars, illustrates the centrality of Christ in the life of the Christian. The diagram is a cross placed on the throne of a person’s heart. The throne is surrounded by the types of things which can occupy one’s life, such as education, family, career, pleasure, any number of which could easily usurp the place of Christ on the throne. This diagram is a way of examining and situating our life’s priorities.

From many years of pastoral work with individuals, couples, and families in Christian community, I have learned by close observation that it is possible for two Christ-centered people to enter into marriage that itself is not Christ-

centered at its core. The same is true for families. It is possible for Christ-centered parents to lead a family lifestyle or culture that does not have Christ at the center. The reasons for this are many and varied. People might not know how to have a Christ-centered marriage or family. It may be a shortcoming in the Christian community, or local church, or the individual's personal lack of understanding. Even with the availability of good pastoral and teaching resources, it is possible not to have a Christ-centered marriage or family. In the tide of increasing secular cultural influences, our priorities can easily become blurred.

A Parenting Study

A recent sociological study of parenting among Christians in the United States, conducted by the Barna Group, was released in 2005. Here is a summary of some of their key points:

1. Christian parents are more likely to put an emphasis on seeing that their children get a good education than on seeing them enter adulthood as followers of Christ
2. Christians in the U.S. don't parent much differently than the population at large
3. Believers do not (significantly) train their children to think or act differently enough for faith to make a difference: gambling, excessive drinking, cohabitation, adultery, divorce, and other unbiblical behaviors are (statistically) just as likely.

Cultural Influences

Christian parents often find themselves dealing with certain surface expressions only to realize they have missed the effects of deeper cultural trends and concerns. Modesty is one example. If parents wait until their daughter begins to exhibit morality problems without addressing from a young age the child's need for training in modesty in speech, entertainment, and music, they will be attempting to deal with only one aspect of a wider spectrum that has largely been ignored, missing the fact that *something has been put in place before the problem* manifested itself.

Most of us have, in fact, been formed by our secular culture to give "conditioned responses." Sometimes we don't recognize the underlying value sets, including pressure from society and relatives, and the internal orientations that condition us for a certain response. We can be really culturally driven, culturally responsive. We can be deceived, claiming to be and actually desiring to be Christ-centered, but find ourselves on a path that goes far from the heart of God.

There are many things that get put in place in us by the culture around us, for example, fear-based living. There is the fear of rejection, fear of disease, fear of kidnapping or terrorism, to name a few. Another is the need for approval which is connected to the fear of rejection. We want approval from friends and relatives, preferring not to be seen as abnormal. But if we live a Christ-centered Christian life we just won't look normal.

Some of us are driven by a competitive spirit: a drive to win. Or we can be influenced by the entitlement mentality, believing we "deserve" certain things as individuals and families. On a personal level we can be oriented by greed, orderliness, perfectionism, pleasure, fear, guilt, accomplishment, security, success, education, and so on.

How we think about and view our spouse is another way we're influenced by the culture. Some culturally accepted models are to see your spouse as your best friend, confessor, fellow adventurer, partner, lover. Some of these are more or less true, but if any one view gets exaggerated it distorts the marriage relationship.

Families, too, are under a cultural influence. One common model is to see the family as an island unto itself, a nuclear family, turned in on itself behind a protective wall, establishing its own ways and traditions. But each individual family is painfully lacking in the resources necessary to have a good family life.

There are all sorts of "centers" to today's families. You can have the missionary family, the social action family, the business-oriented family. Families can be sports-based, focused on academic excellence, achievement oriented, career-based, child centric. When individuals or families become committed to these kinds of "centers," other things

will naturally be pushed aside, further and further toward the fringes, away from the center. It may be one or the other spouse. It may be that the church or Christian community takes on less importance. When those things get far enough away from the center, not much effort is required to cut them off.

There are plenty of effects from all of these cultural orientations for individuals, for marriages, and for families. One obvious one is the increasing divorce rate. Today's approach to family life is creating a lot of ambivalence towards marriage among single men. It's creating self-centered adults. Not knowing how to get their families on track, many married men fall into workaholism, finding some approval and a measure of success from their work that they are unable to derive from their families. We have many rudderless people drifting without direction.

The "Culture of Self"

Many of us are familiar with the comparison, "the culture of death and the culture of life." I suggest that the culture of death and the culture of life are really subordinate to and subsets of the "culture of self." We need to see that we're living in a culture of self whose orientation embraces the culture of death. The kingdom of God, the culture of Christ, embraces life.

There are other subsets, or "isms". Relativism, narcissism, and hedonism in certain ways, all describe this "culture of self" because they all put "me" at the center of the universe. We can work on fighting all the "isms" but if we don't deal with the stuff inside of us that puts us first, the "culture of self," all of our fighting is a waste of time. Our real war is in dealing with "me" at the center rather than Christ. "I", "me", and "mine" are not the approach of the Kingdom of God. Christ and his kingdom have got to be at the center. If I keep pulling myself into the center, it pushes him out!

Christ-centered Living

A personal conversion to Christ, spiritual growth and formation, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and ongoing decisions are needed for Christ-centered living, not just for individuals but for groupings as well. Marriages need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Our marriages and families need to be converted to Christ. And once we make that decision, we need to find out how to do that. It requires education and knowledge in order to avoid the secular cultural drift. I am suggesting that not only individuals, but marriages, family and communities should have an "examination of conscience"; taking a hard look at our behavior, our practices, our priorities, our decision-making as a group, as a marriage, as a family, and as a community.

The congregation that started the WWJD (What would Jesus do?) movement has been a bit misrepresented. The actual approach was more like "We will do what Jesus would do". WWDWJWD. That's the approach we need to take. "I will do" and "we will do" what Jesus would do. The Lord wants Christ-centered individuals, Christ-centered families, Christ-centered communities. And that's going to require taking some steps.

What Can We Do?

1. Read Scripture a lot, even if you think you have it memorized. It challenges the world's input constantly. Get the children to read and memorize it. Get them to be able to answer questions from a Scriptural perspective. In Scripture we should look for antidotes to the world, the flesh and the devil, but especially the flesh. The world and Satan have less influence over a person whose flesh is broken. Reading of Scripture is a genuine defense against the flesh.
2. Insist on "everything that is lovely and good" (Philippians 4:8). Think on these things.
3. Do a heart check. If your heart is polluted or poisoned, you will have trouble seeing and hearing things that the Lord wants you to see or hear. If your heart is not postured correctly, you won't be able to respond. If your marriage or family needs to be consecrated or dedicated to the Lord, get a pastor or a pastoral leader to lead a prayer for the family. Communities could even have retreats dedicated to such re-centering.
4. Always suspect the "self" when you are making decisions or desiring something. It's worth suspecting, asking ourselves, "Is this really from the Lord and his will for me or is it fueled by something down inside of

me that is apart from what God wills?”

5. Pray for protection - from ourselves being blind or selfish, for our spouses from themselves, for our children, for our community, that as a people we would not be selfish in our orientation.
6. Rekindle fear of the Lord. If you distort or exclude any aspect of God’s nature, you get a distorted view of who God is. An over-emphasis on God’s mercy while under-emphasizing his justice will lead to an unbalanced perspective. Sin has consequences. We need to learn that and to teach it to our children.

Summary

“If you live what I have taught you, you are my disciple and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31). Let’s not forget the beginning of the sentence. Jesus is saying, “Live in my Word, live what I have taught you, then the truth will set you free.” It is a promise of freedom and it’s worth celebrating. If we live according to the Lord’s plan, and raise our children according to his plan, we will see the fruit of the Christian life and the power of the Holy Spirit revealed!



Bob Tedesco is President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the [People of God](#) community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 35 years.

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Mary Magdalene

A Portrait of Love Stronger than Death

By Jeanne Kun

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death.
(Song of Solomon 8:6)*

In the Old Testament, God's love for his people was reflected in the covenant he made with them. The prophets often described this covenant as a betrothal or compared it to the relationship between a husband and his bride. In the New Testament, God's covenant was fulfilled in Jesus, who is the fullness of the Father's love: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Mary Magdalene's love for Jesus knew no limits. She had experienced his love and its power when he drove seven demons away from her, and she responded with a grateful, loving heart. So great was her devotion to Jesus that she accompanied him as he went about his ministry and braved the horror of Golgotha to stand faithfully by him as he was crucified. Even when her beloved Lord was laid in the tomb, Mary's love did not die. Indeed, her ardor grew more intense when his body was not to be found, and she sought it with longing.

Mary's love was stronger than death, enduring beyond the grave. Her seeking and her love were rewarded with the appearance of her risen Lord – and, ultimately, with the joy of beholding him and loving him forever in heaven.

Through Jesus Christ, God lavishes his love on each of us – and Mary Magdalene offers us an example of how to love him in return. When St. Bernard of Clairvaux was once asked why and how much God should be loved, he replied, "My answer is that God himself is the reason why he should be loved. As for how he is to be loved, there is to be no limit to that love." May our love for Jesus be as limitless and as immeasurable as Mary's!

Read and prayerfully reflect on these additional Scripture passages that describe God's love and the love of those

who ardently long for him:

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,
my soul thirsts for thee;
my flesh faints for thee,
as in a dry and weary land
where no water is.
So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary,
beholding thy power and glory.
Because thy steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise thee.
So I will bless thee as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.
(Psalm 63:1-4)

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my soul shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as a young man marries a virgin,
so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.
(Isaiah 61:10; 62:5)

And I will betroth you to me for ever;
I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice,
in steadfast love, and in mercy.
I will betroth you to me in faithfulness;
and you shall know the LORD.
(Hosea 2:19,20)

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?
He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all,
will he not also give us all things with him?
Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?
It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?
Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead,
who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.
For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,
nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:31-35,37-39)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us,
that God sent his only Son into the world,
so that we might live through him.
In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us
and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.
Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
No man has ever seen God; if we love one another,
God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.
(1 John 4:9-12)



Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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Scripture Study and Reflection on the Life of Moses - Part III



Crossing of the Red Sea by Francois Tissot

God Chooses Israel as He Chose Moses

By **Mark F. Whitters, Ph.D.**

This is the third in a series of Scripture meditations on the life of Moses as presented in the Book of Exodus. The struggles of Moses as savior of the children of Israel prefigure Jesus Christ, savior of the world.

Dr. Whitters is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#), an ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He leads the Servants of the Word household in Detroit, Michigan, USA, which serves urban youth and seeks to foster racial dialogue in the inner-city. He is a lecturer in ancient history and religion at Eastern Michigan University and a regional coordinator for a scholarly guild called the Society of Biblical Literature.

Background: [see [Part II: Moses and the Burning Bush](#)]

The encounter between God and Moses in the early part of the Book of Exodus serves as a model for how God will relate to Israel. Moses stands in place of Israel, and the lessons he learned parallel what the people will learn. If Moses must be persuaded to enter into a covenant with God through a time in the wilderness of Midian, so must Israel. In Part III of *Lessons from the life of Moses*, we will see how the experience of Moses wandering in the Midian wilderness served as a precedent for the experience of Israel wandering in the Sinai wilderness. For both Moses and Israel, the wilderness represents a “liminal” entrance into a world where God is able to deal with them directly and exclusively. “Liminal” is derived from the Latin word for threshold or boundary. We might compare the wilderness to an alternate reality, something like a retreat for a spiritual seeker or a honeymoon for lovers. The divine choice now shifts to include Israel, and Israel must respond to this special relationship with God.



The Decalogue - [print by Jeanne Kun](#)

Moses and the People at Sinai: Exodus 19:1-6

1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 And when they set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Literary Dimension of Sinai

The Exodus story returns to its central focus: Sinai (or Horeb). This place will dominate the Pentateuch now until Numbers 10:10. We are now at the midpoint stage of the pilgrimage of Israel in the wilderness – the last stage being the entrance into Canaan. For the discerning reader, this midpoint stage would be the propitious one. The Sinai revelation (chapters 19-24) is also the textual center of Exodus. The reader would be well advised not to overlook these literary signals.

Sinai does not ever again dominate the biblical landscape of Israelite history, except for one instance: Elijah goes back to Mount Horeb for renewal (1 Kings 20). Apart from the poetic allusions to the wilderness and the Sinai pact, the biblical writers generally wanted to keep the focus on the land Israel had inherited. The Pentateuch however stresses that the actual foundation and identity of Israel occurred outside of its national boundaries, as it were, and outside their own efforts. God accomplished the work unilaterally; Israel did not generate itself as a nation, devising its own laws or political processes. Thus, the operative word again is "liminal" zone where man and God meet.

The same thing happened to Moses, who was unilaterally selected and safeguarded by God in his infancy and non-Hebrew upbringing. Even more relevant was his sojourn in the Midian wilderness and his marriage there. Once Moses was isolated from his familiar surroundings, God revealed himself directly in the burning bush. So also once Israel is isolated from its adopted refuge in Egypt, God offers the covenant.

Interpretive Dimension of Sinai

The rabbis conceived of the Sinai revelation as a wedding image. The Lord called his bride out of Egypt, won the permission of her guardian Pharaoh to take her to himself, wooed her in the wilderness, quarreled with his lover and reconciled himself to her, and now tells her about the home he has planned for her (Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 360). Similarly, Moses was involved with a mystical marriage in the wilderness of Midian, and his wife's name Zipporah means "bird."

If we take this angle on divine election we see that Sinai tells the story of the "romance" with Israel from the Lord's (the "bridegroom's") point of view. The text suggests that the relationship is easy from his point of view: he took her into his grasp like an eagle with its fledgling (v. 4). He is completely in charge; though she may not be completely trust him. The wooer knows where he wants to take the relationship and all the cards are in his hands as far as strength and wealth and experience are concerned. The eagle is a virile and high-flying bird. It epitomizes self-

control, transcendence, and freedom – and yet the image of the eagle also connotes risk, danger, and courage.

The marriage image also might flow from the idea that Israel is God's "treasured possession (*segulla*) among all the peoples" (v. 5). This is the first time the term occurs in the Scriptures, and it occurs often thereafter. Even in the New Testament it occurs twice. Titus 3:14 says, "[Jesus Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." It also appears in 1 Peter 2:9-10 with two other terms that seem to be rather parallel: "holy race and royal priesthood." It is the "treasured possession" idea that is not obvious in its meaning.

What does it mean to be a "peculiar people" or a "treasured possession"? How are God's people singled out and designated as God's favorites? It seems unfair that God would have such preferences, but perhaps a marriage metaphor is intended. The word in its Akkadian context suggests "possession," as in a king being the possession of a goddess. So perhaps it is something that has been purchased at a great price. Perhaps a great redemption price or dowry has been required of the Lord to obtain it. This would fit the marriage image from above. Another Near Eastern parallel comes from a Ugaritic treaty: "Now [you belong?] to the Sun, your Lord; you are [his serva]nt, his property."

What about the relationship between God and his "possession" Israel, from Israel's point of view? We can only imagine Israel's experience of the relationship based on other chapters of Exodus, but clearly Israel is learning to trust on a day-by-day basis. Will the manna come through today like yesterday? Should the Israelite not take twice or three times as much today just in case it does not come tomorrow? Now Israel is trying to survive on daily faith that the manna will miraculously appear instead of a constant and altogether ordinary diet of lentils and onions.

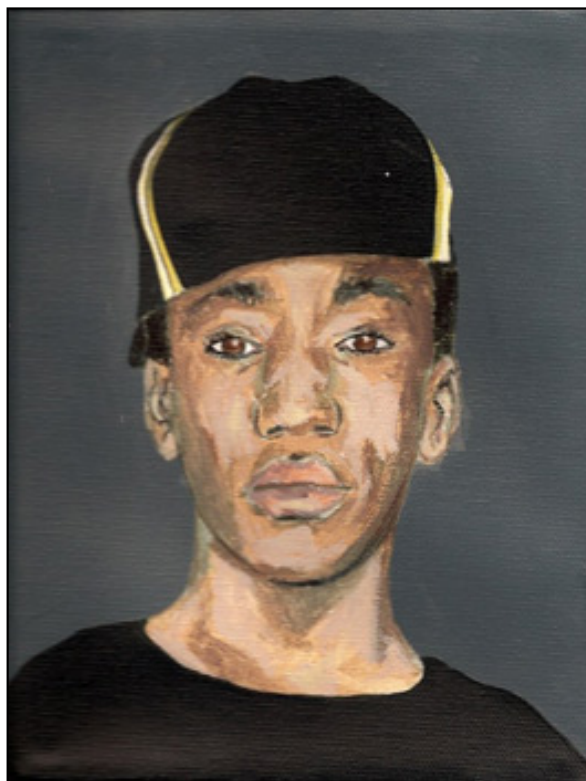
The other image is that of the eagle with its fledgling. Imagine what it would be like to be the fledgling, learning to fly either by being dropped from the eagle wings into a free fall or by holding for dear life to the back of a high-flying bird! The fledgling is unskilled, lame, and dependent. Thus, one might now see Israel's point of view. The beloved is wholly dependent on the lover in this espousal covenant, that is, Israel is in quite a vulnerable place as it follows God in the wilderness. A covenant with such a sovereign and transcendent God is a risky business.

It was much easier for Moses who won Zipporah as his bride. Even then it was Zipporah who saved him from death, putting Moses in her debt as a "bridegroom of blood" (4:25-26). Now the shoe is on the other foot, with Moses and Israel dependent on God for their lives. One might understand why Moses was so reluctant at first to serve as God's representative to Pharaoh and why Israel remained stiff-necked.

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portrait of a Detroit youth by [Yvette Rock](#)

Henry's Question

By Sarah Hughes

Searching questions from inner city teens

The question suddenly crashed through the conversation. "Why are you a Christian, Sarah?" fired Henry, a 14 year old kid from the inner city of Detroit. The others turned to look at me. There was silence as they waited for my reply.

I had graduated from high school only a year before and was living in Detroit for the summer to do mission work with Youthworks-Detroit, an outreach of the Word of Life Community. In moving to the inner city, I had felt painfully young and unqualified for urban outreach, although excited to be doing what I could for the people of Detroit, as they struggled with very real issues of poverty, violence, and racial tension. Through a program called Street Team, we had hired a group of inner city high school kids to provide them with needed job experience. The program also aimed at sharing the gospel with them, something the teens needed much more desperately than the scant hourly wage they made working for us around the city. I had been given the awesome opportunity to be a witness to these teens as I worked side by side with them every day that summer. But when Henry's question came, I floundered.

That summer afternoon in Detroit stands clear and sharp in my memory. It was just another normal day of work, washing windows in a school, until the weight of the question dropped through our idle chatter. Henry was probably the shortest kid on our crew. Fourteen years old, impish and cheeky, he was always goofing off or wandering away

absently when he was supposed to be working. It was hard to ever take him seriously, much less get him to listen. Always an entertainer, he would make up stories about his past for us, pretending he came from somewhere other than Detroit. The question was all the more surprising because it came from Henry. Did this goof-off kid really care? But why would he have asked if there wasn't something in him that was interested?

What's the answer the world desperately needs to hear?

Yet to my shame, when the question came, I wasn't ready with an answer. "Why are you a Christian, Sarah?" My mind jumbled frantically for words. "Well, um," I began, not sure where to start. "My parents were Christians, and I was raised as a Christian, and..." I trailed off. Before I could collect my thoughts enough to continue, the conversation was off again, running in a different direction. I'd had that one split second opening to share. In hesitating, I had failed. Failed miserably, and I knew it.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Once upon a time, I memorized that verse from 1 Peter 3, but the message didn't quite hit home. I thought I knew why I was a Christian, but was I really ready, ever prepared and on my guard, to tell anyone who asked me? Apparently not, and as a Christian, that's unacceptable—the world around us desperately needs to hear our answers.

If Christ has truly impacted my life as I claim he has, I should have had a great answer for Henry's question, but in the moment no words had come. The question has haunted me ever since, an amazing opportunity that I let slip through my fingers because I wasn't ready. Henry didn't need superficial, circumstantial answers about Christianity. What did it matter to him that I was raised in a Christian family? That meant nothing in his situation. Instead, Henry needed to be pointed to the living God, available to all regardless of their circumstances and upbringings. Surrounded by violence and pain and poverty in Detroit, he needed to hear the truth of the overflowing hope and life Jesus brings. He needed to be shown Christ who is the reason why.

Speaking Christ's life-giving message of hope

That moment when Henry asked the question taught me a lesson. I realized that I needed to grapple with the real reason for my Christianity and consider if I am actually ready to put it into words for anyone who asks. I should be always ready to shout to the world the life-giving truth that has been so generously given to me. Why am I a Christian? I am a Christian because in Christ I find life and am set free. I know that only through Jesus' saving work am I saved from the bondage of failure and inadequacy that is my own sin. Not only do I find an answer to my inherent inability, but in God alone I find the abundant goodness and beauty that my soul needs and desires. As I walk with Christ, I find fullness of life for today and precious hope for tomorrow because I know my God reigns and will make all things new in his perfect timing. These are the truths of why I am a Christian that I want to convey to the world.

Looking back at that summer, I wish I could re-live the moment when Henry asked the question, so that I could tell him the real reason why instead of giving a half-baked superficial explanation. While I can't change the past, by the grace of God I can pray for Henry and live each new day seeing it as an opportunity to show my hope to those around me and to be ready to tell them the reason why. In Jesus, my failure is wiped out, and I am given grace to stand and try again. I pray that I live every moment in a way that shouts to the world the why of my life. And when the question is asked of me again, I hope to be ready to give my answer.



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A group of university students enjoying a light moment during a UCO dormtroopers event.

Dormtroopers

On the front lines of evangelism in a campus dormitory

By Ben Gilbert

How can I best serve the Lord and spread the message of Christ and his gospel? I began to ponder this question last year, in the middle of my freshmen year at the University of Michigan. It's been the driving force in many of the decisions I've made as a university student.

I got involved with [University Christian Outreach](#) (UCO) during my first semester at the University of Michigan. Almost immediately I was drawn to the strong calling of discipleship in the group – the call to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord and his will for our lives. Throughout my first semester, I asked the Lord to show me exactly how I could give myself more fully to him as a university student. His answer caught me by surprise, because he spoke into an area of my life I did not expect him to work in. He asked for my living situation so he could use it for his purposes.

In the early winter of 2007, a fellow student asked if I would be interested in living in the dorms so we could do campus evangelism together. I was intrigued, especially since this was an idea that had never crossed my mind. I had assumed I would move out of the dorms after my freshman year, as most students do, and find another apartment with other Christians somewhere off campus. However, I did decide to lift this decision up to Christ. Where did he want me to live? His answer came quickly and resoundingly. He reminded me of how many students are in need his love and truth – and how much work there is to be done on this campus, and of how full of opportunity the dorms are. They are a wonderful place for outreach since they are filled with so many students living so close to one

another.



Ben (far right) and his fellow roommate “dormtroopers” Dave and Brad spruce up their room for Christmas

So this year I am living in the dorms with two of my fellow “dormtroopers” as we now call ourselves. We have a triple suite together. It is our hope that through our daily prayer and dorm activities we can share the gospel with those around us through our words and example. So far the year has been amazingly fruitful and life-giving for us. To support one another we agreed to participate in certain events. We have morning prayer for men three days a week, and on Friday mornings we have coed morning prayer in our suite. My roommates and I also have lunch together once a week to discuss how our week is going, both spiritually and physically, and what we could use support in. Finally the dormtroopers also have dinner together once a week to spend time with one another and to encourage one another in Christ.

Through the spiritual events – inviting students to join us for morning prayers, dinner with prayer together afterwards, and celebrating the Lord’s Day’s with an opening ceremony and meal on Saturday evenings – we are able to share our faith in Christ with so many others while also seeking to deepen our own relationships with one another and with the Lord. We also put on fun events that have included movie nights, men’s nights, a bowling night, and just hanging out playing different card and board games with people from the hall. I have been able to form some great friendships while sharing my faith in Christ with many of the guys that live on our hall and in our dorm.



[Sarah Hughes](#), a “dormtrooper” from a women’s residence hall,

prepares a Saturday evening dinner event for resident students

My roommates and I have been able to bring some of our dorm friends along to the UCO events and some have started coming to our regular UCO weekly prayer meetings. While others may not be interested at this time in coming to our UCO events or in pursuing more spiritual-oriented activities, we have nonetheless formed good friendships and opportunities to offer them personal support and encouragement to pursue faith in Christ. The experience of being in the dorms, on the “front lines” of evangelism, has been a life changing experience for me and my fellow “dormtroopers”. I continue to thank the Lord for calling me to this service for his kingdom.

I keep going back to that question: How is it that I can best serve the Lord and spread the message of Christ and his gospel? I believe the Lord has answered the question at least for now by calling me to live my faith openly and witness Christ to others in the dorms. I was surprised at the call, it was an answer I did not expect, but in agreeing to follow the Lord I have been abundantly blessed and I truly believe his work is being accomplished. I encourage everyone who wants to serve the Lord to not be afraid to ask this question and then to follow where the Lord leads. How can you serve the Lord and spread the message of Christ and his gospel? Ask him. You might be surprised by the answer.



Ben Gilbert is completing his second undergraduate year at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, majoring in cell and molecular biology along with philosophy. In addition to his full-time studies, Ben is actively involved in student evangelism and music ministry with [University Christian Outreach](#).

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On Being a Bulwark: A Philosophical Perspective

By Joshua Birk

A “living bulwark”

I was once told that as a member of the Sword of the Spirit I am a part of a “living bulwark”. When I first heard this curious phrase I was completely lost. What was a bulwark, I thought to myself, and what did it mean for it to be alive? Furthermore, how exactly was I a part of this thing? A few hours later, and with the help of a dictionary, I had it all figured out. Or so I thought.

My investigation informed me that a bulwark is a defensive wall, a protection against external danger. If I was a part of this wall, then I was helping to protect something or someone inside the wall from some sort of danger. In constituting part of the wall, along with others in the Sword of the Spirit, I helped give it the property of being alive or “living”. This is not to say that Christians outside of the community do not serve the same role. It merely means that the Sword of the Spirit feels that God has called us in particular to be a “living bulwark”. Hence the name of this publication.

Although I had been told that being a “living bulwark” was central to our purpose as a people, I basically ignored that idea. I think that was due in part to what I perceived to be a certain vagueness surrounding it. Who or what were we protecting? What was the danger? Were we alone in being a bulwark or was the wall bigger than I might think?

I gave little thought to the subject for some time until I stumbled across a book with a provocative idea that not only helped clear away the ambiguity surrounding that odd phrase, it also changed my views about Christian community. The book, [After Virtue](#), is written by a philosopher named Alasdair MacIntyre.

The state of contemporary moral discourse

MacIntyre starts the book by drawing a picture of a society once enlightened by science. After a fierce reaction

against it, the vast majority of knowledge regarding scientific principles and theory is severely damaged. Only fragments of the formerly scientifically advanced society remain. Eventually, the hostility ebbs away and the society revives its interest in the sciences. However, the surviving fragments which they possess lack a context for interpretation as the basic language and theory of science has been severely damaged. Attempts to relearn and interpret their scant knowledge result in incoherence and subjectivity. Such is the state of contemporary moral discourse, MacIntyre writes:

The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described. What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.

Emotivism – a killer virus

MacIntyre's image of modern morality is indeed a dark one. It is common in orthodox Christian circles today to attribute many of societies' moral failings to relativism. But what MacIntyre speaks of is not relativism. If incommensurable moral debate is the symptom, MacIntyre points to philosophical emotivism as the virus. And a deadly virus it is.

Emotivism is a philosophy which regards morally declarative utterances as merely statements of one's feelings. For an emotivist, the phrase "Killing children is wrong", would be an expression of my emotions about killing children. As such, it could not be evaluated in terms of truth or falsehood for feelings cannot be true or false. Furthermore, that statement would not just serve the purpose of expressing my own emotions. In saying it, I would be seeking to draw out similar feelings in others, trying to win them over to my felt morality.

Our moral dialogue is rife with objective moral language, but, as MacIntyre points out at length, the Enlightenment era took out the legs from underneath objective dialogue. Emotivism has subverted Aristotelian virtue centered ethics and has therefore "undermined the possibility of securing a rational justification" in our debates.

Can intellectual and moral life be sustained in the new dark ages?

Dan Keating, a professor of philosophy at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan and a member of the Servants of the Word, writes, "It is important to recognize here the full repercussions of MacIntyre's thesis. He is not merely arguing for one ethical theory over another, modified Aristotelianism over emotivism. He digs far deeper than this, overturning the soil, roots and all, of the entire foundation for contemporary moral theory and practice. His claim is that the rejection of a teleological view of human life as embodied in Aristotelianism and as characterized by the virtues has led modern society onto a path of an increasing moral blindness that cannot be cured from within, but requires the very elements which it previously rejected to rescue it from ongoing incommensurability. MacIntyre's own belief is that the change he is calling for will not likely take place soon on any broad scale. He concludes After Virtue by recommending 'the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.'"

If MacIntyre is mainly correct in his assessment, and I think he is, the gravity of our undertaking should not be underestimated. Our forming Christian community is a dangerous thing. The walls protecting a common Christian culture and more broadly a basic belief in, and practice of, virtue centered ethics have been and are being severely damaged or completely destroyed. If we are to be a living bulwark, part of this new wall, we will be the first to be attacked.

A few years ago, during the University Christian Outreach Winter Conference held in the United States, I had a vision that I shared with the group. It was of a city surrounded by an army. The story of Joshua and the Battle of Jericho initially came to mind. But the picture I saw was not the bright and strong image of God showing his power to the Israelites as at Jericho. It was a sick and bleak inversion of that story. Those inside the city were on God's side and those on the outside were barbarians. I felt the Lord calling us to resist the enemy on the outside instead of

hiding in fear. Then, I thought that might mean leaving the safe confines of the city walls to engage the enemy. Now, I realize that might just mean becoming a part of the wall, taking my place as a part of a living bulwark.

If you have questions or would like to dialogue with the author, you can contact Joshua Birk by email at his address: birkjoshua@gmail.com

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Manna in the Wilderness

By Ruth Gryniewicz

The Lord's path of obedience

A year ago I felt the Lord invited me down a particular path of obedience. He asked me to train to be a teacher. I had never wanted to be a teacher and the idea was extremely distasteful to me. But against this personal disinclination rang the Lord's call, distinct and unavoidable. So I tried to reason with him. "Lord, you know that I will do your will, but are you sure about this particular direction? It will take a huge investment of my time and money, I'll need to stop serving in my community, and, besides, you know that I don't really want to teach." The Lord refused my objections. I felt I heard the Lord responding, "Ruth, at this particular moment I'm not calling you to teach, I'm calling you to be trained to teach. Obey my will in the moment and surrender the future to me." There I had my answer. The Lord was calling me and my response had to be full obedience.

In order to confirm my discernment, perhaps hoping that I would be proved to have heard the Lord incorrectly, I sought the advice of others, and at every turn I encountered confirmation. This clearly appeared to be the Lord's will. And so I set out to earn a Masters in Education, training as a teacher. But I frequently found myself back on my knees pleading "Why, Lord?" Then one day the Lord taught me a deeper meaning of surrender. He revealed that I did not need to know why – he was asking obedience of me, not understanding. This obedience is a daily battle and requires me to continually reject the doubts, rebuke the tempter, and renew my surrender.

As I near the end of this year of teacher training I still do not know what the outcome of my future career will be. I may decide to teach or I may decide to do something else. But I am realizing that the Lord has used this time to train me in more than just teaching. I have experienced the importance of surrender, at every moment, and in every situation.

This has not been an easy year and in many ways I feel as though I have been wandering in the wilderness – like the people of Israel did after their deliverance from Egypt. I am frequently desperate to give up – “Lord, hasn’t my will been broken enough? Where is this obedience leading me, anyway?” I have experienced my own weakness in a tangible, substantial way. I have had to daily live the truth that without Christ, I can do nothing.

Meeting the Lord in the wilderness

Through this experience, I have met my Lord in a new way in the wilderness. He has invited me to abandon myself fully to his care. And he has provided. Like the Israelites received manna for food in the desert, so I have received sufficient grace for each day.

Like the manna which could not be stockpiled for future use, I have learned that I cannot stockpile God’s grace for the future. I must not forget that I need Christ’s grace all the time. Through binding my will in obedience I have discovered a deeper freedom and purpose for my life. Christ is bringing me to the place where I can say, “in your will, Lord, is my peace.”

His will, once so distasteful, is becoming my delight. And as Christ calls me out of my own inclinations, I find there is more room to give and receive love. I now realize that this path of obedience, which I thought was leading into a trackless waste, has actually brought me more fully into the presence of the Lord.



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photo by [Wojtek Solecki](#)

Grass

by Daniel Propson

A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of
the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers
fall, but the Word of our God stands forever."
- Isaiah 40:6-8

Our friends the trees have shed their colored coats.
From the first we were the forest's mockery.
They fell like insults on our weary spines,
Arrayed our carpets in their gaudy finery.

In time too late, we changed our color too and, parched,
We begged the snow to saturate and shield us from
The winds that like a scourger blow the Winter's stay

Away. O biting gusts of death and coming Spring,

Have mercy on us rotting things. If you must onward go,
Then pass these weaklings over on your deadly, awful way—
If you must shout your loudest, yield us but a whisper now,
While the strong and mighty evergreens you easily flay.

The breath of God has left its mark.
Our blades have fallen under prints of snow;
We are light no more, obscured
Beneath the weight of His white message.

He called it freedom.
It is pain.

More than we can bear He bore.
Now, whiter than snow, we wait
For coming Spring.

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