

January 2008 - Vol. 15



[What is the Greatest Title of All?](#)

Jesus said, "Whoever Would Be Great Among You.."

What prompted Jesus to wash his disciples feet at the last supper?

And what lesson can we learn from his example?

a scriptural reflection by Don Schwager, London, UK

God's Word Alive

- [A Disciple's Yoke](#), by Bruce Yocum, Belfast, Northern Ireland
- [Handling Failure and Rejection with Faith and Peservance](#), by Mark Whitters, USA

Way of Life

- [What Makes Youth Happy?](#) by Mike Shaughnessy, Lansing, Michigan, USA
- [Sounds of Silence?](#) finding sanctuary in a busy world, by Brian Shell, Lebanon

Outreach & Mission

- [On a Mission to Minnesota](#): how one email led to a life-changing transformation by Barbara Stock from Munich, Germany

Book Review

- [A Grace-less Community](#):
a book review of *Too Late the Pharlarope*, by Jon Wilson, USA

Art, Verse, & Music

- [The Art of Seeing](#): enhancing your spiritual vision – enriching your Christian faith, by Jeanne Kun, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

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[January 2008 - Vol. 15](#)



Jesus Washing Peter's Feet, by Ford Maddox Brown (1865)

The Greatest Title of All

Whoever would be great among you (Matthew 20:26)

by Don Schwager

What is the most coveted title in the Bible?

What prompted Jesus to wash his disciples' feet at the last supper?

What character trait most identifies Jesus as the Messiah?

Titles and honors

We like to rank people – to know who are our superiors and inferiors, and who is first, best, or the greatest. We are forever making distinctions and comparisons. Entitlement for the House of Lords in Great Britain is different than the House of Commons. One's peers cannot be lords and commoners at the same time! We don't address children as Sir or Madam. If you have more than one doctoral degree you may be called "Doctor Doctor" in some countries. Most lords and dignitaries are addressed as "your eminence" or "your excellency" while a select few are called "your most excellent eminence".

Some are born with titles – others must earn them. And some must defend their titles against all takers. Muhammed Ali, the title winning world prize fighter, simply called himself “The Greatest”!

Who wouldn't cherish a title and recognition and the opportunity to be a “somebody” rather than a “nobody”. The appetite for glory and greatness is inbred in all of us.

A title chosen by God

God addressed Abraham as his “friend” and “servant” (Genesis 26:24) and he honored Moses before the people as “my servant Moses ..who is entrusted with all my house” (Numbers 12:7). God addressed King David (Psalm 89:3) and all the prophets of Israel as “my servants” (Jeremiah 35:15).

Jesus – God's Chosen Servant

When Jesus was born, no earthly title was conferred on him. He was simply known as the “son of Joseph, the carpenter” (Luke 4:22). But his name, which means “God saves”, revealed the hidden plan of God for this child who was conceived, not of man, but of the Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus understood that his mission as the Messiah would involve his taking on the role of a “suffering servant” as described in the Book of Isaiah:

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.” (Isaiah 42:1-4)

Isaiah prophesied that this Servant would be God's instrument, a "sharp sword" for speaking God's word and executing God's decrees (Isaiah 49:2). This Servant would be a teacher of God's truth, but also a perfect disciple and learner (Isaiah 50:4). Lastly, he would be a suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12), a "sinless one" who would be "numbered with the transgressors." He would be one who would yield himself, uncomplainingly, to unjust punishment. His work for a time would seem to have failed but he would meet adverse circumstances with enduring faith and courage. He would be deeply despised and abhorred by the nations, then disfigured, condemned and put to death. His death, however, would be a sin offering. By his atoning death many would be made righteous. He would not experience corruption since God would vindicate him gloriously by raising him up. His fruitful life beyond the grave would prove him to be the righteous one. It was the will of the Lord that he should first suffer and die and then prosper and reign victoriously (Isaiah 53:10-12).

King by right – Servant by choice

In love and obedience Jesus submitted to his Father's plan of salvation. He chose to follow the course set by his Father even though he could have accomplished the mission another way. He knew that it was his Father's will that he should suffer and die on the cross. It was love for fallen humankind that motivated Jesus to take the position of a servant rather than a king. He was king by right but servant by choice. He would bring the kingdom of God to the earth, not by military might or political stratagem, but rather by surrendering his life to an “atoning death”. He knew that the cross and resurrection was the way of triumph for overcoming his enemies and for establishing his everlasting kingdom.

Jesus, who knew well that he was Lord of all, set himself as an example to his disciples – as an example of a servant.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served

but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28)

Paul the Apostle, in his letter to the Philippians, Chapter 2, explains how Jesus’ self-abasement, his willingness to become a servant, resulted in his exaltation as Lord of heaven and earth:

“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

The character of servanthood

Jesus embraced the way of servanthood because it freed him to love selflessly and courageously for the sake of others. Everything he did – his life and ministry, his teaching and miracles, his concern for the well-being of others – was motivated by one thing only – selfless love for others – with its attributes, such as loving-kindness, goodness, gentleness, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and steadfast faithfulness.

In Jesus’ darkest hour, when the enemy was about to scatter his disciples and betray him to a criminal’s death on the cross, John tells us that Jesus “loved his own to the end” (John 13:1). In Luke’s account of the last supper, the disciples are arguing at the table with one another for “who is the greatest among them” (Luke 22:24). It is precisely at this moment that Jesus rises from the table and begins to do something which is shocking and unthinkable to his disciples – he stoops to wash their smelly, dirty feet with a towel and basin of water.

“If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).

Freedom to serve in love

True servanthood is neither oppressive nor demeaning, because it’s motivating force is love rather than fear.

Paul states that servanthood is more than simply a willingness to serve and help others. Its chief characteristic is to put others first in our care and concern for them (Philippians 2:3) and to love them as we would love ourselves. It’s key not only for overcoming self-centeredness, selfishness, pride, conceit, and arrogance. It’s the way to true freedom, joy, and happiness. Jesus is our model. He shows us the way of perfect love and freedom through humble self-sacrificing service of others.

The Lord Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has won great freedom for us – freedom from slavery to sin, selfishness, fear, and everything else that would keep us from loving others for their sake. We are free to love as Christ loves because “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit” (Romans 5:5). Paul reminds us that God has given us this freedom, not just for our own benefit, but for the opportunity to lay down our lives in loving service of our neighbour as well.

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another” (Galatians 5:1,13).

Servants of Jesus Christ

Is it any wonder that the greatest title which the first disciples chose for themselves was “servant of Jesus Christ”?

“And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the maid servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'” (Luke 1:38)

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:1)

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:1)

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1)

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ” (Jude 1)

“Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1)

“The revelation of Jesus Christ ..to his servant John” (Revelations 1:1)

"Where I am, there shall my servant be also." (John 12:26)

Are you ready to serve as Jesus served and to lay down your life for others? Ask the Lord Jesus to give you a servant's heart.

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[January 2008 - Vol. 15](#)



A Disciple's Yoke

We need not fear a clear statement of the requirements of the gospel.

by Bruce Yocum

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”
(Matthew 11:28-29).

What a freeing and delightful passage! Jesus tells us that to follow him is restful, easy, and not burdensome. When I was growing up, I understood this passage to mean that Jesus was offering us a life without restrictions, a life without demands or the commandments of the past. Jesus is a God of love and graciousness and gentleness; we are relieved that we no longer have to fear him as the people of Israel feared God under the old covenant.

That is the “gospel” I heard as a teenager. What tremendous news, I thought, that to follow Jesus frees me from the need for discipline and obedience.

Since then, I have come to agree with a close friend, named Helmut Niklaus, who passed away recently. He saw things a bit differently. For several decades he had been a leader of YMCA-Munich, a major outreach to youth. During those years he had met thousands upon thousands of young people, many of whom have grown up in Christian homes. But surveying the condition of modern Western youth as he met them day by day, Helmut said, “One of the greatest problems today among Christian youth is a lack of proper fear of the Lord.”

What does it actually mean to fear the Lord? Too often we equate it with living under a tyrannical God, with obeying his laws and rules out of fear of punishment.

In reality, this understanding is distorted. In Helmut's view — and in mine — young people today suffer enormously from being left in a state of false freedom that knows no laws or restrictions, no obedience or discipline. That is not the “rest for the heavy laden” that Jesus speaks about in Matthew, chapter 11.

Jesus is speaking of entering into his way of life and becoming his disciple. The yoke is the yoke of his word and his teaching. It is “easy” and “light” not because there is no obedience or discipline, but because it is the teaching and the way of life designed by God for human beings. People have a choice either to follow in God's way or to become slaves to their own passions and desires and to the prince of this world.

The way of Jesus, the yoke of his teaching, the discipline of obedience to God — these bring life and rest and refreshment. My friend Helmut had seen the sorrow, the pain, and the suffering of those who have been “set free” from obedience to God's law. We have all seen the fruit of promiscuity, of rebellion, of the pursuit of pleasure in the lives of those around us, both the young and the old.

This tragedy is sometimes assisted by those who ought to be teaching the way of God. John Paul II once said, “We can say that Europe today... with the collaboration of many students of theology, and above all of moral theology, defends itself very effectively against the necessity of conversion. Formerly the task of theology . . . was how to follow, how to proceed side by side with the process of conversion. Now it seeks to free the human person in the name of the dignity of that person from the necessity of conversion.”

But there can be no “freedom from the necessity of conversion.” Jesus, in calling us to make him our Lord, also calls us as well to live our lives entirely according to his word. This is the call to conversion.

Many of us today, whether teachers, parents, pastors, or youth workers, are afraid to teach the need for a full conversion of the lives of those who belong to the Lord. In failing to firmly and clearly preach the necessity of that conversion, we keep those who hear us from humbly submitting to the yoke of Jesus' teaching and finding in it life and refreshment.

Read the passage again. The yoke of discipleship is easy; the burden of Jesus' teaching is light. We have nothing to fear from the gospel, and neither do those who listen to us.

[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, February 1989.]

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

Handling Failure and Rejection with Faith and Perseverance

What Lessons Can We Learn from the Life of Moses?

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

This is the first in a series of Scripture meditations on the life of Moses as reflected 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. In 2005 he was selected as one of five "Regional Scholars" by the Society.



Moses at the Well at Midian,
painting by James Tissot

Background: The text and two stories

The opening of Exodus picks up where Genesis left off, in Egypt. The first paragraph reminds us of Jacob's sons. Literally, the Hebrew for "born to Jacob" (1:5) is "coming out of Jacob's thigh." Remember Jacob's thigh? This is what was impaired by the divine messenger, and he limps for the rest of his life because of it. The thigh ("loins") stands for the reproductive capacity of a man, and so symbolizes as well the begetting of sons. In Jacob's case, his sons correspond to Jacob's limp, because they are a source of heartache for him. This is the whole latter half of Genesis, summed up in a couple words.

So the children of Jacob, called "children of Israel" in Exodus, are living in Goshen, a province of Egypt. By the time of Moses their condition is tantamount to slavery. Note that the actual condition of slavery in Egypt is not mentioned. The sheer anonymity of Israel and the main actors of chap. 1 reinforce the strangeness of Egypt more than its oppressiveness against slaves. The suffering therefore is inward and personal, not economic and physical. The Book of Exodus therefore speaks to anyone who is burdened, not just the poor and disenfranchised.

Into the midst of this condition is born another son of the children of Israel/Jacob. This son, however, is given exemption from the oppression that the rest of the children of Israel must bear. As a child, he is granted a miraculous

rescue from sure death on the water and raised in house of the oppressor ruler, Pharaoh. Oddly, at no point so far in the Book of Exodus is there a direct reference to God. There is only a vague hint, in the miracles that surround Moses, that a divine plan will unfold.

Moses apparently never forgot his ethnic roots in spite of his position and privilege. He twice intervenes to execute justice for his people, once by killing an Egyptian, but his efforts backfire when he realizes that Pharaoh probably has learned of his crime and his prop-Hebrew sympathies. So he abandons his status and home in Egypt and flees to another land.

Here is where we pick up the involvement of God in the life and mission of Moses. In the subsequent chapters Exodus 2-4, there are two stories woven into one. First is the story of Moses going to Midian in order to escape the rejection of his people and the punishment of Pharaoh. He resembles his ancestor Jacob who was rejected by his brother Esau and fled into Paddan-aram, where he found a home, family, and new life. Moses flees to Midian, obtains wife and family, and lives as a shepherd for priest Reuel. This first story is filled with symbolism, and largely spans Exodus 2:11-22.

The second story – next month's meditation – is longer (not ending until Exodus 4) and more divinely tinged. Here we see a middle-aged Moses, perhaps settled in and unwilling to get much involved in God's plan for his life. Here we find that the father-in-law is Jethro (another name for Reuel) in the first story), an employer and ruler, who has almost no role in the story. This second story focuses on God rousing Moses through the burning bush, a story that continues in later chapters. The theme echoes in the lives of other heroes who set out on pilgrimage, perhaps to the underworld or to a far-away land, to discover their destiny or some secret about life.

The first story: Exodus 2:11-22



Moses slays an Egyptian

11 One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well. 16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 The shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. 18 When they came to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come so soon today?" 19 They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 He said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." 21 And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah. 22 She bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

Exod 2:11-14: Moses leaves the security of his privileged upbringing and he wanders out among his people. He sees the oppression that the Egyptians inflict on them, and he decides to intervene to help the underprivileged. When he intervenes again on the next day, his own people rebuke him. They reject him for his “do-gooder” mentality, and he correctly fears that his own people will turn him in to Pharaoh.

It is worth noticing the uncooperative attitude of the children of Israel. In the pages ahead, the Book of Exodus gives many examples in which the children of Israel prefer the onions of Egypt to their own freedom, and so they rebel against the leadership of Moses. The Egyptians have successfully implanted the slave mentality in the Israelite consciousness. The Egyptians have stripped them of dignified work and the memory of their glorious father Joseph (1:8), so they are clearly unruly now, undisciplined and unaware of their own dignity.

The uncooperative attitude first is directed against Moses. For Moses the people’s rejection of his leadership is his first taste of failure, a failure that will be the by-line of many of his leadership projects. The idealism of Moses meets the realities of a people who are unwilling to avail themselves of the divine plan. Moses is set back by this obstinacy, but he will encounter it throughout his tenure as leader.

2:15-22: In Midian he meets seven daughters at a well, and again his big heart stirs him again to help them by protecting them and drawing water for them. The father of the daughters, Reuel, invites Moses to his home for “bread” and in time offers his daughter Zipporah as wife. Then Moses and Zipporah have a son, whom Moses names Gershom (meaning, “a stranger there”). In other words Moses finds contentment in the midst of his failure through the birth of a son. He finds a new way of life and some consolation for losing his first home and status.

God unfolds his plan

What can we make of this episode in Midian? We see ever more clearly that God is unfolding his plan in prodigious ways. The text shows us this divine dimension in several ways. First, Moses meets seven daughters, and the number should remind us of God’s presence. Second, he meets them at a well, like Jacob who met his wife at a well – another hero whose travels abroad were ordered mysteriously by God. Wells are often portals or liminal zones in the Bible: at a well, Isaac’s wife is met; Jesus meets the woman of many husbands; and wells often are symbols of God’s revelation and outpouring. Third, he is invited by Reuel – a deliberate change of name for this man also called Hobab and Jethro (see 3:1) – who is a priest. Reuel means “friend.” Thus, we have another hint of God who is befriending Moses with this man who appears in other Bible stories as an advisor and helper. Finally, he marries Zipporah, a name meaning “bird,” and they have son whom he symbolically names Gershom. In effect Moses applies his experience as stranger in a foreign land the name of his son.

We can now see the evidence of God’s hand upon Moses clearly, though the divine name is not yet mentioned by the editor or Moses. The seven daughters indicate the fullness of God meeting him at the well, where he will have something like a baptismal ritual of initiation. Reuel reminds us that God is befriending Moses and offering help and hospitality. The invitation of bread could remind the reader of Eucharist or festal union with God himself. His wife is Zipporah, a name harkening the reader to the presence of the Holy Spirit as dove or bird. Where would be the symbol of the Son? That will come in the next story – next month’s meditation – about the burning bush, where a transcendent and almighty God takes on incarnational form.

Nonetheless, through this pilgrimage the call and mission of Moses are starting to dawn on the reader, and (I conjecture) upon Moses himself. He names his son Gershom, implying he knows his status and is not content with living out a quiet life among the Midianites. He is a stranger in a strange land, and he knows that his home is elsewhere. Whoever has directed his life up to this point will continue to keep his hand upon him, so that he will one day return to his native land.

Naming is an important dimension of biblical typology and symbolism. No less, the naming of sons in the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) is a way for the Patriarchs to express personal feelings about their pilgrimages (see Joseph’s naming of his sons in Gen 41:50-52).

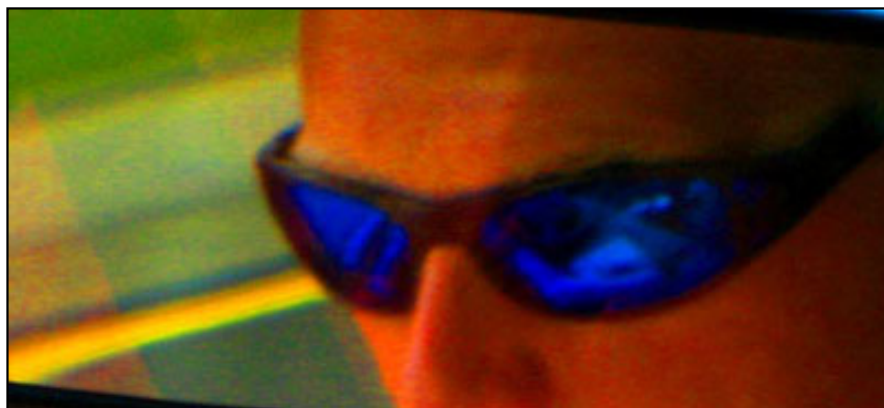
Questions for reflection:

1. How has God called me? From birth? In a midlife crisis? Can I see distinct signs of his call on me?
2. How have I responded to tests in my life? Do I fight or cooperate with God's presence or his dealings with me?
3. Have I ever been on what I would consider a pilgrimage? When did I reach my destination or refuge? What did I learn from that pilgrimage? How can I foster a sense of pilgrimage in my life?
4. Where is my ultimate destination? How do I regard my true home in the midst of success or failure?

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[Doug with mirrored glasses](#) by Jamie Treadwell

What Makes Youth Happy?

by Mike Shaughnessy

The following article was originally published in the North American [Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter](#). If you would like to subscribe to this monthly newsletter, please visit their website at: <http://www.kairos-na.org/youthculturenewsletter.htm>

It's your constitutionally guaranteed right in America to pursue happiness.

MTV sponsored a poll in August of 2007 to determine whether American youth are happy and if so, why? Knowing what makes youth happy also improves their marketing.

Their results mirrored those of the National Survey on Youth and Religion from 2005.

Seventy-two percent of Americans aged 13-24 say they are happy or mostly happy. What makes them happy? Sex, drugs and rock-n-roll? No. Family and friends are number one and two. God (religion) comes third, but an important third.

Sixty-five percent of young people say their religion/faith is important in making them happy. In this group four out of five claim to be happy. What about the thirty-five percent who say religion/faith is not important? In this group only three out of five claim to be happy.

So, God helps on the happiness scale.



[Ruth sun-drenched](#) by Jamie Treadwell

Is this a problem? No, God intends for us to be happy with him forever, but it can be guaranteed that we will not be happy if my happiness is my goal. Happiness is the by-product of a selfless life of loving God and neighbor.

This is where youth culture is deceptive. It trains youth to believe that the pursuit of my personal happiness is the goal of life. It then promotes self-centered methods of obtaining happiness, most of which cost money and draw young people away from loving others and toward themselves! Parents can unwittingly reinforce the problem by trying to provide happiness directly to their children instead of training them in the selflessness that actually leads to happiness.



[Tommie in blue](#) by Jamie Treadwell

TO THE POINT: helping youth not to be self-centered is one of the most important things we can do to ensure their happiness. Unselfish service should characterize our families and youth groups.

[Mike Shaughnessy is an elder in [The Servants of the Word](#) and the Director of [Kairos in North America](#). Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.]

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photo by [Wojtek Solecki](#)

Sounds of Silence?

In a crowded, noisy, busy world, is it possible to find some space – some room for silence, reflection, and sanctuary with God?

by Brian Shell

I'm on a packed bus in central Beirut. Noise everywhere and stifling, stuffy air closes in on me. Stop-and-go traffic and blaring music deafen me and numb my brains. I'm inhaling stale smoke and toxic pollution. A normal day driving from a busy university to a busy home. Nothing stops, and on and on it goes.

I bet you experience something similar – wherever you are.

Crowded life, crowded mind, crowded soul.

I feel like I'm over-booked, over-spent, and running on empty. I know and believe that God is present in my busy life – but how do I stop to meet the Lord and to refill my empty soul? How can I make the Lord present and real in my life, especially in stressful times like exams, term papers, and study projects.

Nobody denies that more and more people have a problem with being too busy. Solutions vary from health spas to packaged vacations to yoga. Yet I think that the tiredness that most people feel is at a fundamental level linked to something other than the body. I think our modern world has a fatigued soul; and spas, massages and yoga can't bring refreshment there.

I have learned that I do not need to be controlled by the busy-ness and distractions around me. I can choose to find space in my day to make room for God. For me this works best in the morning, when the house is still quiet. No music, no radio, no TV, no distraction for one hour. Fortunately my house has a room set aside just for prayer, quiet reflection, and meditation. That time spent in prayer and in reflective reading of scripture not only refreshes my soul – it allows me to listen to the Lord's voice as he speaks to me through his Word. This is what orients the rest of the day for me.

As I sit on this bus, traveling across the sprawling city, I am not rattled by the noise, the crowds of people, the army checkpoints, or even the political tensions of a torn and divided country. Even though I am leaving a long day of studies and classes for an evening of meetings and more study, and my life seems packed, I have peace. I have found sacred space in my life, which I have had to carve out through deliberate choice. In my attempts to make prayer and reflection on scripture a daily discipline, I find that God truly is my sanctuary and refuge.

The Lord invites each of us to spend time with him alone, to meditate on his words, to be quiet before him. This quiet can be scary in some ways. In fact, most often when I try to spend time in quiet reflection I find my mind racing despite my best efforts: “I can’t forget to send this email. Then I have to cook dinner. Wasn’t that a cool scene in that movie yesterday? Oh no, my Biochem exam is tomorrow.” and the list goes on...

I know that “finding sanctuary” is not easy. I still have to work at keeping my time for prayer free of other things that demand my attention. The competition for my time and attention – the pressures of the world that push and pull and demand and grab me are still there. Everything is urgent, is now, is a priority, is pressing. Yet so very little of it has lasting importance. The Lord, on the other hand, simply asks, invites, and welcomes, respecting my freedom to choose for him. What he offers in exchange is of eternal significance, everlasting worth, and brings peace in the present circumstances of my life.

The Lord does not force, he only knocks on the door. It is my choice, and your choice as well, to take time out of the day’s busy-ness to be alone with him. In the end I know that I am not doing God a favor by spending time with him. God shows his favor to me, by giving me life – his abundant life, and rest for my weary heart, mind, and body, and lasting peace for my soul as well.

My hope and my prayer is that you, too, will find sanctuary and refuge in the Lord as you make time and space to listen to him in your daily life.

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup
overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the
LORD for ever.*

- Psalm 23

[Brian Shell is an affiliate member of the [Servants of the Word](#). He is currently a university student in Beirut and actively involved in [University Christian Outreach](#).]

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[January 2008 - Vol. 15](#)



Barbara (on the left) enjoys the beauty of Minnesota's fall colors with her missionary companions

On a Mission to Minnesota

by Barbara Stock

A transforming trans-Atlantic exchange

Sometimes a two-line email can change a person's life.

In May 2007 Mike Shaugnessy, the director of [Kairos in North America](#) [an international federated outreach to high school, university and post university aged people] dropped me a quick line saying he had just been in St. Paul, Minnesota, and their [University Christian Outreach](#) chapter was looking for a women's senior mission leader starting the beginning of August. Would I be interested? Well... no. I had just moved to a new apartment to start a woman's household in a neighborhood cluster of the [Bread of Life Community](#) [located in Olching, Germany]. I had also changed jobs a few months before that. Besides, if I were to seriously consider relocating somewhere, my first preference would be some place in Europe, not the US. In addition to that, my brother was getting married and my sister was going to return from across the Atlantic after living there for two years – why would I want to go abroad at this time?

Nonetheless, I promised Mike that I would think and pray about this mission opportunity and let him know if I were to get any sense of direction from the Lord about it.

It was pretty clear to me already that the Lord wanted me to serve him within the Sword of the Spirit in some capacity, living out our trans-generational, international and ecumenical call and mission. I'd realized over the years that if I wanted to take this call seriously, I had to change some things in my life. And I had. But somehow it didn't seem I was quite there yet...

Getting out of the boat

One question that burned in the back of my head was, "Barbara, when are you going to start doing what you really think you're supposed to do?"

For some reason I felt I definitely needed to finish the 3rd chapter of a book I was reading at that time by John Ortberg, entitled, *If You Want to Walk on Water You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*. Near the end of chapter 3 Ortberg writes: "It is wrong, it is sin, to accept or remain in a position that you know is a mismatch for you. Perhaps that's a form of sin you've never even considered – the sin of staying in the wrong job. But God did not place you on this earth to waste away your years in labor that does not employ his design or purpose for your life, no matter how much you may be getting paid for it." And, "To what extent does your current work express your true giftedness and passion?"

Well – my passion is probably best summed up in the Kairos mission statement: "To equip and motivate people to hear and respond to the call of God on their lives and in particular to equip them to live and contribute to the building of Christian community in the context of the Sword of the Spirit." I had felt for a while that particular call from the Lord, that passion, and my job with a consulting firm in Munich didn't exactly allow me to wholeheartedly invest in that. It was a career that I liked but that was really secondary to the Lord's call to me.

So I decided to call Gordy DeMarais, the Executive Director of Saint Paul's Outreach (SPO) in Minnesota, to find out more about SPO and the kind of work the position entailed. One of the first things he said is, "SPO is part of Kairos, that's our regional youth programme in North America. You know what Kairos means?" You betcha...

Little by little the Lord made it clear that going to Minnesota might be his plan for me, at least for the next year. Finally I decided to get out of the boat and move to the States.



Barbara (second from the left) with St. Paul's Outreach staff and Gappers

Relying 100% on the Lord

I must say I didn't expect it would be even half the blessing it's been to me. Probably for the first time in my life I feel I'm able to do 100% what I think I'm supposed to do right now. And that involves relying 100% on the Lord and His provision which is a blessing and a challenge at the same time, at least for me. And I truly believe God does provide. What a humbling experience for a German perfectionist...

SPO's mission is "To Engage Young Adults in a Life of Christian Discipleship". Together with Natalie Kebe, I'm responsible for the women's side of things – our female staff, student missionaries and gappers (if you're interested in finding out more about our GAP program, have a look at our website <http://www.spoweb.org/> or send me an email at Barbara@spoweb.org).

We also have four women's households this year and I'm leading one of them with six women, and facilitating the formation programme in conjunction with the Community of Christ the Redeemer (a member community of the Sword of the Spirit in St. Paul, Minnesota, numbering some 500 people). My mission chapter is the University of Minnesota.

Asking the Lord what he wants

I think we easily tend to assume that once we've moved on with some areas in our lives (such as studies, careers, state in life, kids, etc.) we're just meant to follow the path set before us... and sometimes we are. But we shouldn't forget to ask the Lord what *he* wants for us and what that means for our current situation. Maybe he's asking us to change something, to step out in faith, get out of the comfortable boat we've settled into. It might just be a habit we need to break so we can hear the Lord more clearly.

When the Lord asks you to change something – take a leap! It's so worth it.

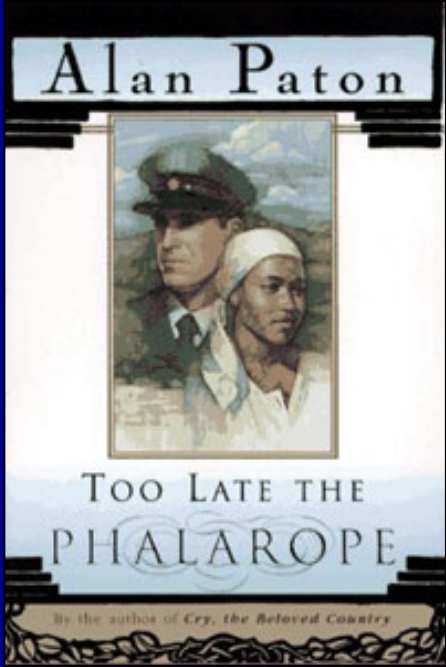
I've never heard someone regret to give God everything. However, I've met a lot of people who have regrets that they had held something back.

[Barbara grew up in the [Bread of Life Community](#) in Munich, Germany. She previously did a GAP year of service with [Koinonia](#) in London. She studied economics and business education and training at Ludwigs Maximilians University in Munich and worked in recruiting for two consulting firms.]

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[January 2008 - Vol. 15](#)



BOOK REVIEW

Too Late the Phalarope
 By Alan Paton
 Publisher: Scribner
 Date: 1996 (paperback edition); original copyright: 1953
 Number of pages: 288

Note: This book deals with adult themes, including sexuality and spiritual doubt. The writing is not explicit, but parents should familiarize themselves with the book before recommending it to younger readers.

original book cover 1953

A Grace-less Community

by Jon Wilson

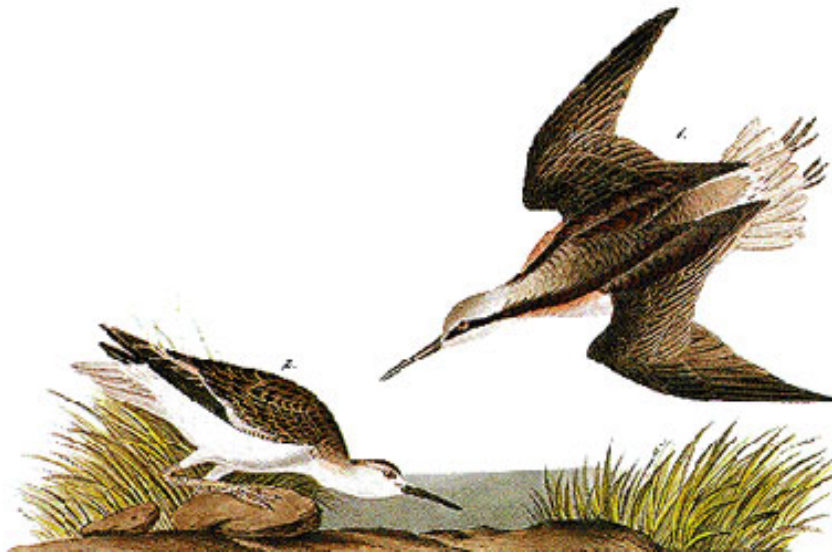
In our age of individualism and fragmentation, community has become something of a buzz-word. People yearn for connection, relationships, and authenticity, and they have a sense that community is the thing that is missing from their lives. For some, however, community is a lived reality. I have known community all my life, from the tight-knit Dutch Reformed community of my youth to the intentional Christian community of which I am now a part. With this experience comes the understanding that community has its own attendant pitfalls and dangers, whether pressure to conform, the need to keep up appearances, or the temptation to hide problems and weaknesses.

These hazards are narrated with pitiless clarity in Alan Paton's novel, *Too Late the Phalarope*. Paton, a South African author and political activist, wrote in the middle decades of the 20th century, addressing the racial and social injustices of the South African culture of his day. The novel tells the story of Pieter van Vlaanderen, a military hero, rugby star, and police lieutenant who becomes sexually involved with a poor black woman of his town. His crime is discovered, he goes to jail, and his family is torn apart. While the cover art and editorial blurb of the current edition of the book seem to want to bill the story as one of forbidden love and courageous taboo-breaking, these "themes that sell" have no place in this book. Rather, Paton weaves a complex tale of a man, and indeed, a family searching for spiritual peace in the midst of a flawed Christian culture which has the potential to free, but in the end brings brokenness and bondage.

Pieter van Vlaanderen was an unusual child, alternating between the hardy athlete and the sensitive aesthete. His harsh father saw in him a girl who picked flowers; his chastening would bring on a fit of boyish temper as Pieter

would respond with some feat of physical prowess. While he grew to become venerated as a rugby star, he also became a man haunted by something unnamed, unseen except by those closest to him. Pieter's Aunt Sophie, the story's narrator, brings the insight of hindsight to the telling of the tale, and we are shown the deep ambivalence of Pieter's relationship to his father. They both love, almost idolize, one another, but their encounters too often end in anger and misunderstanding. The father is unable to express love and acceptance of the boy, and this inability is passed on to and internalized by the son.

Aunt Sophie also explains the inadequacies of Pieter's marriage and sexual relationship with his wife, Nellie. They love one another, but Nellie is also afraid of Pieter, afraid that there is something unknown about him that can harm her. Aunt Sophie's theory is that a more true and whole giving of herself to her husband would have prevented the ultimate harm which he did inflict on her. When Pieter comes under the spell of the "mad sickness," his name for the lust he struggles with, he is finally left without the defense that would have been his as a happily married man.



Phalarope by Alexander Wilson

But in the end, Pieter is lost through lack of grace, the grace he should have known as a member of his community. This is the true heartbreak of the novel, the missed opportunities for grace. The many times that Pieter does not speak of his troubles to sympathetic friends. The love and warmth of his marriage that turns cold and bitter all too quickly, all too often. The powerful sermon about the mercy of God, about our need for grace, a sermon finally left unheeded. And most poignant of all, the father and son together sighting the phalarope, the bird they had spoken of, argued about; a moment of connection, of grace, that came too late to save the son from himself.

Paton's novel has a strong sense of place. His lyricism fills the reader with longing for a land of such beauty as South Africa. His affectionate portrayal of the Dutch Reformed community brought me with a smile back to my own upbringing. Yet in writing about a land fractured by injustice, he avoids the temptation to produce a political tract. Rather, he tells of a human, even a spiritual tragedy. His narrative puts flesh on abstract, theological concepts like original sin, human frailty, forgiveness, and grace. He reminds us that community is not enough. For community to be life-giving, it has to be community awash in love, vulnerability, and humility; it has to be awash in grace.

[Jon Wilson is a coordinator of [Word of Life](#), a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. He and his wife, Melody and their four children live in Ypsilanti, Michigan, USA.]

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The Art of Seeing

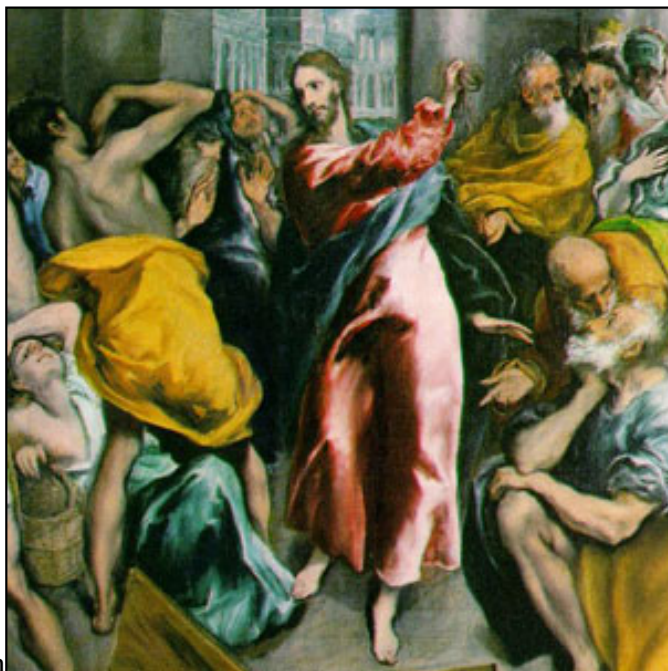


Madonna and Child by Bernardino Luini - 1480-1532

*enhancing your spiritual vision – enriching your
Christian faith*

by Jeanne Kun

When the Word became flesh, the “invisible was made visible.” Thus, Christian art and sacred images traditionally have been a means of making the truths of our faith visual. In earlier times when few people could read, frescoes, stained-glass windows, and paintings “told” the stories of the Gospels and the Old Testament, making them alive and understandable before the viewer’s eye. Now, in a age when we are so constantly bombarded by images, we often ignore or have desensitized ourselves to the visual overload surrounding us – and have lost our ability to see what is before our eyes. “Seeing” is itself an art to be learned anew.



Christ Cleansing the Temple by El Greco - 1541-1614

“[A picture] has to be contemplated with the mind and heart. It has to be savored, played with, patiently and acutely analyzed, if it is to yield the food of its meaning. ..The contemplation of great pictures gives us a grateful sense of being well fed. We want to say some sort of grace.”

– John Drury, author of *Painting the Word* and *The Burning Bush*



"Noli Me Tangere" (Do Not Touch Me) by Titian, 1511-12

“Artists in every age have offered the principal facts of the mystery of salvation to the contemplation and wonder of believers by presenting them in the splendour of color and in the perfection of beauty. A sacred image can express much more than what can be said in words, and be an extremely effective and dynamic way of communicating the Gospel message.”

– Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Benedict XVI)
Introduction to the *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The Art of Seeing

is a presentation of full-color slides of Christian paintings, sacred images, and other works of art by renowned artists and great masters from the earliest of days of Christianity to the present, with accompanying inspirational and informative commentary by Jeanne Kun.

The Art of Seeing can be scheduled as a single presentation or as a series of two or more presentations, in a format ideal for parish evenings of inspiration, mornings of prayer, or days of reflection and recollection. Gospel scenes and works of art chosen to particularly correspond to the themes of Advent and Lent can enhance and enrich the celebration of these liturgical seasons in your parish or church.

Jeanne Kun holds a B.A. (magna cum laude) in History of Art (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA). She has presented lectures and seminars in parishes and schools, using art and sacred images to illustrate the life of Christ as well as Advent, Lenten, and Marian themes. She has also developed and led directed retreats (in the United States, Germany, Northern Ireland, Austria, and Israel), explaining paintings of Gospel events to invite retreat participants into reflection and prayer.

Jeanne also has more than twenty-five years' experience in the field of Catholic publishing as a graphic artist, editor, and writer. Currently a staff writer and editor for The Word Among Us Press, she is the author of the bestselling Bible study, *My Soul Magnifies the Lord: A Scriptural Journey with Mary*. Among the many other books she has written are *My Lord and My God! A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus*; *God's Promises Fulfilled: A Scriptural Journey with Jesus the Messiah*; *Treasures Uncovered: The Parables of Jesus*; *Mighty in Power: The Miracles of Jesus*; *Exodus: God to the Rescue*; *In the Land I Have Shown You*; *Love Songs: Wisdom from Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* and *Even Unto Death: Wisdom from Modern Martyrs*. Her poetry and inspirational articles on prayer, Scripture study, and practical Christian living have appeared in *God's Word Today*, *Together in Christ*, *The Lamp*, *Faith and Renewal*, *WORD for the Christian Woman*, and other Catholic magazines and journals.

Jeanne lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she is a member of Christ the King Catholic parish and Word of Life Community.

For information about scheduling **The Art of Seeing** in your parish for an evening of inspiration or day of prayer and recollection, please contact Jeanne Kun at: jeanne.kun@sbcglobal.net

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