Jesus – the Pioneer and Perfecter of Our Faith
“Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race set before us” – Heb. 12:1,2

• Intro to This Issue: “Jesus – the Pioneer and Perfecter of Our Faith”
• The Redeemer Who Died, by Steve Clark
• Through Repentance to Faith, and The Fruit of a Faith-filled Life, by Derek Prince
• Why Does God Allow Temptations? and Love Thinks No Evil, from Early Fathers

• There Is More: Signs and Wonders for the Sake of the Kingdom, by Lynne May
• A Theology and Short History on the Healing Ministry, by Damian Stayne
• Living by Faith in the Promises of God, Commentary on Hebrews - Chapter 11
• Living Ordinary Lives Extraordinarily, Tom Caballes, and Being Molded by God

• A Letter from Galilee, by Archbishop Georges Bacouni
• An Unearthly Delight & Spiritual Warfare: The Real Battlefield, by Sam Williamson
• Companions to Eternity, Jeanne Kun & Sisterhood/Friendship, Carmen Dahlberg
• Brotherhood of Hope: Reconnecting Roots, & Passion for Unity, Br. Joe Donovan

• Christian Perseverance and Strength to Finish Well, Reflection on Hebrews 12
• The Witness of Early Christian Martyrs, Monks, & Holy Families in Cappadocia
• “All of us have a race to run towards our appointed end,” by Basil the Great
• The Spiritual Meaning of Fasting, by Carlos Alonso Vargas & Readings for Lent

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.
Jesus – the Pioneer and Perfecter of Our Faith

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,
and let us run with perseverance the race set before us."
– Letter to the Hebrews 12:1,2

Intro to this issue

This issue overlaps with the forty days of Lent, the annual retreat of the Christian people in honor of the forty days of Jesus' retreat in the wilderness. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to fast, prayer, and feed on the Word of God during this anointed period of preparation and testing for his public ministry in the land of Galilee and in the towns and villages of Judea. He learned obedience through suffering, perseverance, and trust in doing the Father's will, no matter the cost or sacrifice he would need to make. He found joy and strength in seeking to please his Father rather than choosing his own path to happiness.

"For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."
– Hebrews 12:2

The theme for this issue come from the Letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 12:1-2: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race set before us."

As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews explains, the Lord Jesus offered up his life as a pleasing sacrifice to God the Father on our behalf as both our High Priest and Victim who shed his blood for our salvation. Just as Jesus made himself a pleasing sacrifice of praise and worship to the Father, so, we too are called to offer our lives as a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord our God. We have been made clean by the blood of the Lamb who sacrificed his life on the cross to
CLEANSE US OF SIN AND TO PURIFY OUR HEARTS, MIND, AND BODIES FOR HIS GLORY.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews concludes in Chapter 13 with an exhortation to offer our lives to the Lord each and every day. The call to holiness - to be holy as God is holy - extends to every area of our lives, to every deed we perform, every relationship we encounter with our fellow human beings, and especially with those who belong to the household of faith - our brothers and sisters in Christ. The author encourages his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God and to not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

– Hebrews 13:15-16

Our fallen nature and the world around us incline us to please self above all others, to put self first rather than last as Jesus taught. The sacrifice we continually offer to God each and every day is the sacrifice our heart, mind, will, and life to God. We sacrifice our preferences so that we may love God purely and love others generously. The marks of good Christian living include "fraternal" love for each member of the body of Christ, being hospitable by opening our homes and sharing our goods with others, even with strangers who may be "angels unaware," just as Abraham and Sarah offered hospitality to the three angels God sent to their tent in the wilderness (Genesis 18:1-8).

The call to holy living includes honoring and upholding what God honors, such as life-long fidelity of husbands and wives to each other, sharing our goods with those in need, and caring for the neglected, especially those who are ill-treated. Our reward is the joy of knowing that our sacrifices are pleasing to God because we love, honor, and serve him as we love, honor, and serve one another in holiness, love, and truth.

St. Basil the Great wrote: "All of us have a race to run towards our appointed end. So we are all on the way... The easy undisciplined way of life leads to pleasure to be enjoyed now, not later; the way of salvation is hard in the present, but promises a beautiful future."

May this issue inspire all of us to run the good race of the faith with perseverance, joy, and confidence in the grace and work of the Lord Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor
The Redeemer Who Died

by Steve Clark

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them
- 2 Corinthians 5:19

The main section of the Book of Revelation begins with a vision. John sees an open door in heaven and is summoned by a heavenly voice to come and see “what must take place after this” (Revelation 4:1). No sooner had the voice spoken than he found himself in heaven. God was seated on his throne, presiding over his court. God, in other words, appeared to John as the ruler of the universe, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords. He was in the process of determining what would happen to human history.

In God’s right hand John sees a scroll, which contains the divine decrees for the future. Once the scroll would be opened, God’s purpose would be achieved, evil would be destroyed, and the great and blessed consummation would arrive. John’s vision, however, comes at a dramatic and somewhat distressing moment. The time is at hand for the concluding act to begin, but something is missing. The angel calls out the great summons: “Who is worthy to open the scroll and open its seals? Let him stand forth and be the blessed
instrument of the consummation.” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth comes forward as worthy to open the scroll.

John begins to weep. He fears that human history will not achieve the purpose for which God created it, that the present evils will continue. Then one of the rulers in heaven speaks to John. “Weep not,” he says. Someone has just conquered, the one who was prophesied as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:9–10) and as the Root or Branch of David (Isaiah 11:1,10) – the messianic King of Israel. Because he has conquered, he can open the scroll. As it turns out, John is present when the one who is worthy arrives in heaven – he who died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and was ready to receive “dominion and glory and kingdom” (Daniel 7:14) from the eternal Lord of the universe, the Lord God Almighty.

The one who stands forth is an extraordinary personage, a lion who is a lamb. This is symbolic language that shows the paradox of a man of great and regal power, a king and high priest, standing before the throne of God – yet appearing at the same time as a sacrificial victim. Moreover, although he is a human figure, John can see in him divine power and divine omniscience as expressed in the symbols of the seven horns and seven eyes.

Only one was found worthy, our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the one who could open the scroll. He is the one who can bring human history to its decreed consummation, who can establish the kingdom of God, and who can bring to earth the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, filled with God’s glory and blessing (Revelation 21–22).

**Why was Christ worthy?**

Christ was worthy because of what he did, shedding his blood and paying the price of redemption. But he was also worthy because of who he was. He was not just an ordinary man. Christ was worthy because he was special.

I was once employed in a shipping room. Various attempts had been made to improve efficiency – to no avail. One day the president of the company unexpectedly appeared. From then on the shipping room was different.

Another time I was in New York City seeing a friend off on an ocean liner to Europe. My friend’s uncle had driven us. The area around the dock was crowded, with no parking spaces anywhere nearby, except within a cordoned-off area. My friend’s uncle happened to be a priest, and an Irish policeman noticed our efforts to find a place, caught sight of my friend’s uncle (and his collar), lifted the chain, and waved us to an empty space while nodding respectfully to the priest.

I recently read an article describing a well-known television talk show. The article explained how the person being interviewed was asserting the evils of abortion. Normally, no one would have been allowed onto that particular program to make such remarks. The guest on the show, however, was Mother Teresa. Her charitable work in Calcutta gave her an access and moral authority that opened up even that show to her.

“It all depends on who you are.” The saying is true in many ways, some good, some bad, but the principle involved is an important one for our redemption. Not just anyone could be the Redeemer. It would have done no good for the Jewish High Priest or the Roman Emperor to notice that the human race needed redemption and to ask for volunteers. No one else in the land of Israel or in the Roman Empire – indeed no one else in all of human history – could have done what Jesus did. Only the one who held a special position could be the Redeemer.
John’s vision in Revelation 5 shows us who the Redeemer was and had to be. He was the prophesied king, the one who was from the royal dynasty of Israel but who was to rule all the nations of the earth as their rightful Lord. He was also the priest who was himself a sacrifice, able to make the offering that could purchase human beings for God. He was human, but had divine power and omniscience and could be worshiped as the Son of God (Revelation 5:13). Only such a person could be the Redeemer.

The New Adam: A Representative

The question before us is: Who must someone be in order to die for the sins of others and have that death make any difference? Christ’s position as the new Adam gives us a first answer. He held a special position in the human race and that position allowed his death to have an effect that no one else’s could have. He acted as the representative of the human race – in a unique way.

A representative is someone who can act on behalf of others. Sometimes, a representative only represents an individual. A widow might give her son or daughter “the power of attorney” to act on her behalf and take care of her interests. A businessman might have an agent in another country to dispose of his assets in that country.

Agents also represent groups of people. In English-speaking countries, it is common to say that people who are affected by some governmental action should be represented in the deliberations that decide on that action. “No taxation without representation,” to use the historic phrase. They therefore are represented by someone in Parliament or Congress. Such representatives have some freedom of action, but they should genuinely represent the interests of those on whose behalf they are sent.

Representatives also function to symbolically represent groups of people. In the twentieth century, it became common to find the body of an unknown soldier who had died in war and to bury him with great honor in the “tomb of the unknown soldier.” He was chosen to be the symbolic representative of all such soldiers, chosen precisely because the only thing known about him was that he was a soldier who had given his life in war.

There is, however, a significantly different kind of representation: corporate or authoritative representation. The head of some corporate body, and only he, can represent it when it acts. If two warring nations decide to make peace, the presidents or their designated delegates sign the treaty. Average citizens off the streets, even citizens in high standing, would not be authorized to sign. They would not hold a position allowing them to represent the nation as a corporate entity.

Likewise, if one nation wanted to warn another nation that war was imminent unless something changed, the message would not be delivered to just any citizen of the other nation. Once again, the president would seek to communicate that message to the head of the other nation, or at least an appropriate official, in the expectation that the head of state would lead that nation in its response. Only an authorized leader can represent the nation as a corporate entity.

In a similar way, if a nation loses a war and has to pay reparations, the head of the nation – either personally or through a delegate – is responsible to see that it happens. He might not be the one who began the war. He might not even have taken part in the war in any active way. He might even have become the head after the defeat because he was opposed to the war from beginning to end. But if he is the head of the nation, he is responsible for the body he is the head of. He is therefore responsible for the fulfillment of the treaty obligations by that nation. Someone, in other words, can be morally or legally responsible as a representative for something he is not morally or legally responsible for as an individual. Christ was such a representative – of the human race, or at least the redeemed human race. But Christ’s representative role was unique and unrepeatable in human history. Perhaps the easiest way to understand it is to understand what it means to say
he is the new Adam.

**Christ and Adam**

The phrase “new Adam” comes from Paul, at least in the sense that he is the earliest one we know of who used it and that his writings are the source of later writings that use the phrase. The idea almost certainly does not stem from Paul. But the clearest and most explicit presentation of the idea in scripture is found in Paul.

Paul makes several references to Christ’s relationship to Adam. The most extended presentation is found in Romans 5, where Adam is described as “a type of the one who was to come” (v. 14), a type of Christ. Paul says of the two of them in Romans 5:17–19:

> If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace…reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ…Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience, many will be made righteous.

The same connection is made in First Corinthians 15:21–22:

> As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

In the same chapter, Christ is called “the last Adam” (v. 45), in contrast to the first Adam.

To see Adam as a type or foreshadowing of Christ indicates an important correspondence between the two in God’s plan for human history. In certain respects, the position that Adam held and Christ now holds are the same. Adam prefigured or foreshadowed Christ as the head of the human race, the source of its life.

By calling Christ “the last” Adam, Paul probably means that Christ is the Adam for the ending period of human history, when he brings into existence a new human race as the fulfillment of God’s plan. A more common title among Christians is “new Adam,” indicating that Christ brings that newness of spiritual life that is the mark of the new covenant (Rom 7:6). Either way, Christ is a new beginning, the personal source of a new humanity that fulfills the purpose for which God originally created the human race.

Adam is a type of Christ, but in a somewhat different way than someone like David is. Christ fulfills David’s role of king of Israel by ruling in a “fuller”, that is, a spiritually more effective, way. Although Christ fulfills the same role as Adam, in certain respects he reversed what Adam did. Both Adam and Christ were appointed to establish the human race. Adam was appointed to begin it, Christ to renew it. Adam, however, brought condemnation; Christ brought acquittal or justification. Adam brought death through his fall. Christ brought true and unending life through his rising.

Nonetheless Christ did not totally reverse what Adam did. He became a son of Adam and took on the humanity Adam began. He reversed the fall of Adam not by annihilating human nature or transforming it into something completely different, but by restoring human nature and bringing it to a new level of life.

**A Corporate Effect**

The position of the first Adam reveals some important truths about that of the new Adam. The texts comparing
the two indicate that the chief reason to see Christ as the new Adam lies in the way Christ passes on the results of his actions and his own life to his spiritual descendants. Just as by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam performed an action that changed the human race, so by giving himself on the cross, Christ performed an action that also changed the race. Just as Adam’s action affected the way all his descendants lived because as their father he passed on his life to them, so Christ’s action affected all his spiritual descendants, because he too passed on his life.

Behind the effect of Adam’s and Christ’s actions is what could be called the family principle, which explains why the action of ancestors can have moral effects on their descendants. The modern mentality makes it more difficult for us to recognize the family principle than it seems to have been for earlier people, including the recipients of Paul’s letters. Our individualistic orientation often leads us to overlook corporate effects, especially corporate moral effects.

In Adam we see the family principle magnified. As the first father, he simply was the human race at one point. What happened to Adam happened to the whole race. Subsequently, the same was true of Adam and Eve together. As we have seen, none of the various views of “original sin” among orthodox Christians completely eliminates the corporate aspect of the result of the first sin. Since the fall, the human race as a whole has been in a state of “separation” from God (Isaiah 59:2). Corporately, it has failed to comply with the commandments of its sovereign. As a result, it has suffered the bad consequences of its condition, including the loss of that full life that God intended for it. According to the beginning of Genesis, this condition is the result of the family principle and of the actions of the first two parents of the whole human race.

The family principle is similarly magnified in Christ and allows him to merit (deserve, earn, pay for) redemption for us. As the head of the new human race, Christ functions like Adam. He shares his relationship to God, his Father, with his spiritual descendants. He also passes on his life to that new human race and determines much of what the life of its members is like.

Christ is, however, the new Adam. “New” indicates that there are some important respects in which Christ’s effect on Christians is unlike Adam’s effect on the human race as a whole. It is not only unlike Adam’s in the fact that the effects of his actions reverse that of Adam’s. It is also unlike Adam’s in the fact that the operation of the family principle or principle of corporate solidarity is itself strengthened in Christ, not lessened.

This increase in the effect due to the family principle is indicated by the section of First Corinthians 15 that talks about Christ as the new Adam. Paul is explaining how a corruptible human nature can be raised from the dead after decaying in the tomb:

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life–giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:45–50).

In this passage, Paul tells us that the new Adam is a heavenly man, not just an earthly man. He is, in other words, a human being, but a special one. He also tells us that this heavenly human being is not just a living being like other human beings, but a life–giving spirit. In both ways Paul is possibly referring to what we would describe as Christ’s incarnate nature. More probably he is talking about the transfigured, glorified
humanity that resulted from the resurrection. Either way, the human Jesus of Nazareth has a heavenly aspect, a “spiritualized” humanity. That humanity is the source of a new human life, one that changes us so that we look more like God and can live eternally.

The heavenly human being, who is Christ, imparts the new life to us directly. We receive spiritual life from the “life-giving spirit”. We are given the heavenly image from the “man of heaven”. We are not, in other words, connected to Christ the way we are connected to Adam. We are only connected to Adam through generations of intermediaries. We are connected to Christ directly. We become Christians through a personal union with him. We can even be said to be one spirit with Christ and corporately one flesh with him (1 Corinthians 6:16–17). We are his body, members of him (1 Corinthians 12:27).

To describe Christ as the new Adam indicates the importance of what Christ is doing. He is not just improving the human race. He is not just creating a grouping of human beings that will do better than others. He is creating the grouping that can fulfill the purpose for which God created the human race in the first place, because they know his will and have been delivered from the bondage of sin. They are the new human race not in the sense that there are no other human beings, but in the sense that they are part of the human race as it is becoming what God made it to be.

**The Representative of the Race**

Christ’s position as the new head of the human race provides an important perspective in understanding why his death could count for us. He acted on our behalf in his death, as well as in his resurrection and ascension. He was representing the human race which would come into existence as a result of what he was doing, the race which would be his body, and which was already being drawn together through the calling and formation of his disciples. In considering his death and resurrection, we sometimes miss the fact that Christ acted as a corporate representative and not just as a righteous or godly individual.

Christ can represent the human race because of who he is. As the new Adam, he is the head of the human race. He is the one whom God appointed to be the ruler of the human race, and even now he functions as the King or Lord of those who accept him for who he is. Consequently, Christ has the authority to relate to God the Father on behalf of the human race. In turn, he also represents God to the human race insofar as God relates to the human race through the head of that race. Finally, he leads the corporate response to God of those who accept him.

Christ died “for us,” therefore, not only in the sense that his death was for our benefit, but also in the sense that he died “on our behalf” as our representative. As Paul put it, “One has died for all, therefore all have died,” (2 Corinthians 5:14) because that one could act on behalf of all as the head of those who were united to him. The effects of his death can therefore become our own once we become members of his body and “live for him” (2 Corinthians 5:15).


Steve Clark is past president of the Sword of the Spirit and founder of The Servants of the Word.

Praise for Steve Clark's most recent book,

**The Old Testament in the Light of the New**
“Steve Clark’s The Old Testament in the Light of the New is a welcome and well-done contribution to the Church’s ancient tradition of understanding what in the Old Testament anticipated and prefigured what is only fully realized in the New. This work helps us more clearly understand everything written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets and the Psalms, precisely in the light of Christ.”

– DONALD CARDINAL WUERL Archbishop of Washington, D.C.

“There are few subjects more important for Christians today than how to understand the Old Testament, for it is widely recognized that it is impossible to understand the New Testament without proper knowledge of the Old. This book is an enlightened and accessible guide to Jesus’ Bible, and therefore a crucial source for understanding Jesus himself.”

– GERALD R. MCDERMOTT Chair in Anglican Divinity, Beeson Divinity School

“Throughout the liturgical year, we are challenged to understand and present how the Old and New Testament readings fit together, not merely in the minds of those who compiled the Lectionary, but rather, in ‘the mystery hidden from ages’ but now revealed in Christ: God’s plan of salvation. Stephen Clark helps us to see in Scripture how this plan unfolded and how we are part of it.”

– MOST REVEREND WILLIAM E. LORI Archbishop of Baltimore

“A Lutheran reading Clark’s book will come away from this Thanksgiving Table not just stuffed with biblical knowledge and satisfied that his every Lutheran itch has been scratched (e.g., law-gospel distinction, Christocentric-incarnational anti-agnostic content, the tensions arising from the theology of the Cross dialectic, and all this in a full course meal of biblical theology) but rather, better equipped and energized to follow Jesus into the world, making authentic disciples of all nations.”

– TED JUNGKUNTZ Professor of Theology (retired), Valparaiso University

“One of the chief challenges of a contemporary reader of the Bible is to discern through vast medley of books and authors one single story. Stephen Clark offers a framework that will equip the attentive reader to discover the threads of the plot that drives the narrative of our salvation.”

– MOST REVEREND MICHAEL BYRNES Coadjutor Archbishop of Agana in U.S. Territory of Guam

“Without the Scriptures which Jesus opened to his disciples, the message which he conveyed and embodied would be incomprehensible. Clark leads his readers on a journey like that which was taken by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; we can all benefit by walking that road with him.”

– MARK S. KINZER President Emeritus of Messianic Jewish Theological Institute

“Stephen Clark admirably demonstrates the integral unity found between the Old and New Testaments, a unity found within the person and work of Jesus. Theologians, students and seminarians, pastors, and the laity will all benefit from Clark’s book not only by obtaining a proper understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, but also by deepening their faith in Jesus who inhabits both and is the truth that gives life to both.”

– THOMAS G. WEINANDY, Capuchin College, Washington DC Dominican House of Studies and the Gregorian University

“Stephen Clark has done careful, scholarly work for many years. His new book is no exception. Many Christians are perplexed about how to understand the relevance of the Old Testament to the Christian life. While the first half of the
Living Bulwark

book is accessible to the general reader, the second part is included for those interested in its scholarly underpinnings. Stephen Clark has made a useful and ecumenically sensitive contribution to understanding this important issue.”

– RALPH MARTIN, S.T.D. Sacred Heart Major Seminary Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization President, Renewal Ministries


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Return to Table of Contents or Archives • (c) copyright 2018 The Sword of the Spirit
Faith follows Repentance
The whole message of the Bible is in this order: repent and believe. There are lots of people who might say they are struggling for faith. The truth is not that they are struggling for faith, but that they may have never met the condition of repentance. Repentance is the first of the six foundation doctrines. If that foundation stone is not in place, the building will always be wobbly.

Over the years, I have counseled hundreds of people, hundreds of Christians who have come to me with their personal problems. After a lot of experience, I came to the conclusion that at least fifty percent of the problems of professing Christians are due to the fact that they have never truly repented.

They have never really changed their mind. They have never really made the decision to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus in their lives. They are still making decisions based on this point of view: “If I do this, what will it do for me?” If someone has truly repented, that is not the way they think. Instead they think, “If I do this, will it glorify Jesus?”

So we have multitudes of people – especially young people, but not limited to young people – who are double-minded. The Bible says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. (See James 1:8.) He does not have a solid foundation. He cannot produce a stable building.

Right now, quietly reflect on what you have just read and ask yourself: “Have I ever really, truly repented? Or am I still double-minded? Is it my aim to please Jesus on Monday, but please myself on Tuesday?” If that
is the way you are thinking and living, in actual fact, you have the worst of both worlds. If that is your mindset, you would probably be better off just living in the world, living for yourself – because you are a double-minded person, a split personality.

But if that is, in fact, the way you are thinking and living, take steps now to truly repent and live instead to glorify Jesus.

**The Nature of Repentance**

There is one parable that Jesus told which is the most vivid and perfect illustration of true repentance. It is the parable of the Prodigal Son. (Somebody once said it should be called “The Caring Father.”) The story is found in Luke 15. The second son of a wealthy family decided to get all his inheritance from his father on the spot so he could go off to a distant country and live it up. He did all sorts of sinful things. But then, when he had spent his whole inheritance, a famine came and the only job he could get was feeding pigs. (We must remember that he was Jewish, so for him to feed pigs was just about as low as he could go – without any slight to present-day pig farmers. It just so happens that for the Jewish people, the pig is one step below a rat in their society.)

So here is the wandering son, in rags, feeding the pigs, hungry, wishing he could fill his stomach with the husks that the pigs are eating. Then this is what happens.

> “But when he came to himself, he said …”

*Luke 15:17*

That is the point each of us must come to. It is what I call “the moment of truth.” You have to see yourself as you really are. You have to see yourself as God sees you.

> “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and went to his father.”

*verses 17–20*

**True Repentance**

Do you see the two elements? He made a decision and then he turned around. That is repentance: making a decision and carrying out your decision.

Repentance means going back to the father whom you have offended, to the God who loves you, and saying, “I’ve made a mess of my life. I can’t run my own life. I need You. Will You take me back?”

It’s wonderful to see how completely he repented and how eager his father was to receive him. He planned to say to his father, “Make me as one of your hired servants.” But when he started back from where he had strayed, his father was watching for him. That is how God is. When we begin to turn, He is watching for us and waiting for us. I think this is so beautiful.

The father saw him from a long way off and ran to meet him. The father kissed him, and he never let his son say those last words, “Make me as one of your hired servants.” Instead he said:

> “‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.’” *verses 22–23*
This is the result of true repentance. And it is worth repenting to be welcomed like that by God. Just think about that picture for a moment. The prodigal son came to himself. He said, “I’ve made a mess of my life. I’ve wasted everything my father gave me. But I’m going to make a decision. I’m going to turn around, I’m going to go back to my father and say I’m sorry.” He turned and went. Think about that. That is true repentance, repentance in action.

**False Repentance**

We need to understand that there can also be a false repentance, which we call remorse. Judas experienced that kind of false repentance, as described in Matthew’s gospel:

Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!” Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. Matthew 27:3–5

Judas had remorse, but he never changed. In fact, I believe he had passed the point where he could change. To me, this is a solemn thought. In this life, people can pass the point where it is possible for them to change.

The most significant moment in any human life is the moment when God begins to deal with you about repenting. If you shrug your shoulders and say, “I’m not interested. Maybe later,” there is no guarantee that God will ever give you the opportunity again. The most critical moment in any human life is the moment when God says, “Repent. I’m willing to take you back. I love you. I want you.”

**What Makes Gods Angry?**

Considering what I have seen in people’s lives and in the Bible, I have come to the conclusion that one action that makes God really angry is despising His grace. He freely offers us His grace, but if we despise it He turns in anger.

One person who despised the grace of God was Esau, and his action is described in Hebrews 12. Let’s look at that passage, because there is a lot of Esau in people like you and me. We want to be careful that the Esau in us does not make our decisions.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully [diligently] lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane [godless] person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. Hebrews 12:14–16

We have no record whatever that Esau ever committed fornication. But in God’s eyes, his attitude was just as bad as fornication. What was his attitude? For one little bowl of soup he despised his birthright. He had the birthright as the elder son – all the inheritance could have gone to him. But just because he was physically hungry and could smell that delicious soup that Jacob had prepared, he gave it up.

This is very vivid to me, because I lived among the Arabs for some time. They make the exact same lentil soup that Jacob made. It has the most delicious smell that permeates the whole house. I can just picture Esau, coming back from his hunting – tired and hungry – and he smells this delicious soup. And Jacob, bargainer that he was, says, “Listen, you sell me your birthright and I’ll give you the pottage, the soup.”
I suppose Esau thought, *What good will my birthright do me now? I’m hungry. I’ll just take what was offered to me.*

The Bible says Esau despised his birthright and he made God extremely angry. Later on, through the prophet Malachi, God said, “Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated” (Malachi 1:2–3). That is a very solemn thought: If you deliberately despise the grace of God and the inheritance He offers you in Jesus Christ and turn away to pursue some cheap, temporary pleasure of this world, you make God very angry.

**Avoiding the Point of No Return**

Going on with the message about Esau from Hebrews:

> For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected [by God], for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.
> Hebrews 12:17

The Greek makes it clear that he was not seeking the place of repentance, but he was seeking the blessing. He was rejected because he found no place – no way – to repent. I believe that in this life, a person can pass the place of repentance and never be able to get back. I want to urge you to consider this, for it is a very solemn thought.

Far too little is said today in congregations and many denominations about the need for repentance. But without true repentance there can never be true faith. You will always have a wobbly, up and down experience – in one day and out the next – because you have not laid the first foundation stone – repentance. Repentance involves a decision of the will to turn away from self-pleasing and doing your own thing to turn back to God. Face up to God and say, “Here I am. Tell me what to do and I’ll do it.”

Some of you reading this have never truly repented. I want to suggest to you it may well be the source of many of your problems. You feel good one day, have a wonderful meeting in the church, and you think everything is wonderful. The next morning something bad happens and down you go. The problem is that you have never really laid the first foundation stone. All you have is a wobbly edifice that one day will collapse.

**Repentance, Then Faith**

I want to emphasize that repentance must come before faith. There can be no true faith without repentance. This is emphasized all through the New Testament.

In Matthew chapter 3 we read about the ministry of John the Baptist who was sent to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus the Messiah. In one word, his message was: “Repent.” John the Baptist taught that repentance was essential before the Messiah could come. Repentance prepared the way for the coming of Messiah. Until God’s people, Israel, had been through the experience of repentance, they could not be ready to meet their Messiah.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.’ ”
> Matthew 3:1–3

How did John the Baptist prepare the way of the Lord? By calling God’s people back to repentance. Repentance is the only way we can prepare for the Lord to come into our hearts and lives.
Jesus Continues the Message
Later, when John had finished his course and in fulfillment of His own prophetic word, Jesus Himself came to continue the ministry of the gospel. It says in the gospel of Mark:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.”
Mark 1:14–15

Repent and believe. You cannot truly believe unless you have first repented. The first word of command that ever came from the lips of Jesus was not believe but repent.

I remember being in a meeting in Southeast Asia where a certain preacher had preached a message on healing. He had spoken very eloquently about God’s will and His plan to heal. He had quoted many of the promises about healing. But he had not said one word about repentance before he called the people forward. Most of those who responded to the invitation came from a background of idolatry and they had no idea what they had to do to receive what God was offering. I know, because Ruth and I were both involved in counseling those who came forward. It was such a lesson to me. With all his good intentions and his sweet language, the preacher had totally confused those people, because he gave them the impression that they could come to God without repenting. He never used the word repent once in his message.

I say this not to criticize a preacher, but because I learned a lesson. I believe there are many people in many “gospel” churches who are confused because they are only being told what God will do for them without being told what God requires from them. The first thing He requires is for us to repent – change our mind, turn around, make an 180-degree turn. We must face God and say, “Tell me what to do, and I will do it.” That is repentance.

If we look on to the end of Jesus’ ministry, His message never changed. After His resurrection, Jesus gave instructions to His disciples. (Remember, this was just before Jesus left this world.)

Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ [Messiah] to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
Luke 24:46–47

Notice the order of the message: repentance first and then remission (or forgiveness) of sins. There is no forgiveness without repentance – and that is the message that was to begin in Jerusalem and be preached to all nations. Repentance, then forgiveness, through His name.

[This article is excerpted from Through Repentance to Faith, from unpublished materials in the Derek Prince archives, (c) 2009 Derek Prince Ministries International, Charlotte, NC]
which he then devoted to studying and teaching the Bible.
The Fruit of a Faith-filled Life

by Derek Prince

Faith as a fruit

One way to bring the difference between faith as a fruit of the Spirit versus faith as a gift into focus is to picture a Christmas tree and an apple tree. A Christmas tree bears gifts; an apple tree bears fruit. A gift is both attached to a Christmas tree and removed from it by a single, brief act. There is no direct connection between the tree and the gift: one may be a garment, the other a fir tree. The gift tells us nothing about the nature of the tree from which it is taken.

On the other hand, there is a direct connection between an apple and the tree that bears it. The nature of the tree determines the nature of the fruit – both its kind and its quality. An apple tree can never bear an orange. A healthy tree will never bear unhealthy fruit (see Matthew 7:17–20). The fruit on the apple tree is not produced by a single act, but is the result of a steady, continuing process of growth and development. To produce the best fruit, the tree must be carefully cultivated. This requires time, skill and labor.

Let us apply this simple analogy to the spiritual realm. A spiritual gift is both imparted and received by a single, brief transaction. It tells us nothing about the nature of the person who exercises it. On the other hand, spiritual fruit expresses the nature of the life from which it proceeds; it comes only as the result of a process of growth. To attain the best fruit, a life must be carefully cultivated – with time, skill and labor.

Faith expresses character

We may express the difference in another way by saying that gifts express ability, fruit expresses character. Which is more important? In the long run, undoubtedly, character is more important than ability.
The exercise of gifts is temporary. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, there will come a time when gifts will no longer be needed. But character is permanent. The character we develop in this life will determine what we will be throughout eternity. One day we will leave our gifts behind; our character will remain forever.

However, we do not need to choose one at the expense of another. Gifts do not exclude fruit; fruit does not exclude gifts. Rather, they are intended to complement each other. Gifts should provide practical expressions for character, just as they did perfectly in the person of Jesus Himself. His loving, gracious character was expressed by the fullest possible exercise of spiritual gifts. Only through the gifts could He meet the needs of the people to whom He had come to minister, fully expressing to them the nature of His heavenly Father whom He had come to represent (see John 14:9–11).

We should seek to follow Christ’s pattern. The more we develop the attributes that characterized Jesus—love, concern, and compassion—the more we will need the same gifts He exercised in order to give practical expression to these attributes. The more fully we are equipped with these gifts, the greater will be our ability to glorify God our Father, just as Jesus did.

Fruit, then, expresses character. When all nine forms of spiritual fruit are present and fully developed, they represent the totality of Christian character, each form of fruit satisfying a specific need and each complementing the rest. Within this totality, the fruit of faith may be viewed from two aspects that correspond to two different but related uses of the Greek word *pistis*. The first is trust; the second is trustworthiness.

**Faith as trust**

The first aspect of faith as a fruit is trust. The Jerusalem Bible translates *pistis* as “trustfulness.” Many times over, Jesus emphasized that one of the requirements for all who would enter the Kingdom of God is to become as little children (see Matthew 18:1-4; 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). There is probably no quality more distinctively characteristic of childhood than trustfulness. And yet, paradoxically, it is a quality that is seen at its perfection in the most mature men of God—men such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. We may conclude, therefore, that the degree to which we cultivate trustfulness is a good measure of our spiritual maturity.

More fully, the fruit of faith—in this aspect—may be defined as a quiet, steady, unwavering trust in the goodness, wisdom and faithfulness of God. No matter what trials or seeming disasters may be encountered, the person who has cultivated this form of fruit remains calm and restful in the midst of it all. He has an unshakable confidence that God is still in complete control of every situation and that, in and through all circumstances, God is working out His own purpose of blessing for each one of His children.

The outward expression of this kind of trust is stability. This is beautifully pictured by David in Psalm 125:1: “*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*”

All earth’s mountains may tremble and shake and even be totally removed—except for one. Zion can never be moved. God has chosen it for His own dwelling place, and it alone will abide forever.

So it is with the believer who has learned to trust. Others all around him may give way to panic and confusion, but he remains calm and secure. “*His foundation is in the holy mountains*” (Psalm 87:1).

**Commitment leads to trust**

We must know for sure that our soul is safe in the Lord’s hands. The key to this kind of trust is commitment. We first make a definite, personal commitment of our life to Jesus Christ. Then in the hour of Testing—perhaps at the very threshold of eternity—we do not need to make any further commitment. We need only rest in the commitment we already made—one that included both life and death, time and eternity.
In Psalm 37:5 David says, “Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” More literally the verse says, “and He is doing it.” Two things are here required of us. The first is an act, “commit.” The second is an attitude, “trust.” The act of commitment leads to the attitude of trust. So long as we continue in an attitude of trust, David assures us, God “is doing it.”

Committing a matter to the Lord is like taking cash to the bank and depositing it in our account. Once we have received the teller’s receipt for our deposit, we need no longer be concerned about the safety of our money. It is now the bank’s responsibility. It is ironic that people who have no difficulty in trusting a bank to take care of their money find it much harder to trust God concerning some vital personal matter.

The example of the bank deposit illustrates an important factor in making a successful commitment. When we walk out of the bank, we carry an official receipt, indicating the date, the place, and the amount of our deposit. There are no uncertainties. We need to be equally specific concerning those things committed to God. We need to know, without a shadow of doubt, both what we have committed and when and where the commitment was made. We also need the Holy Spirit’s official “receipt” acknowledging that God has accepted our commitment.

Trust must be cultivated

Trust is like all forms of fruit: it needs to be cultivated and it passes through various stages of development before it reaches full maturity. The words of David in Psalm 62 well illustrate the development of trust:

“He [God] only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken” (verse 2, NAS). But after making exactly the same declaration of trust in God, he says, “I shall not be shaken” (verse 6, NAS). Between verses 2 and 6, David progressed from not being “greatly shaken” to not being shaken at all.

We need to be as honest about ourselves as David was. Before our trust has come to maturity, the best we can say is, “I shall not be greatly shaken!” At this stage, troubles and opposition will shake us, but they will not overthrow us. However, if we continue to cultivate our trust, we will come to the stage where we can say, “I shall not be shaken” – period! Nothing will be able even to shake us – much less overthrow us.

Trust of this kind is in the realm of the spirit rather than the emotions. We may turn once more to the personal testimony of David for an illustration. He says to the Lord, “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee” (Psalm 56:3 NAS). Here David recognizes two conflicting influences at work in himself simultaneously: trust and fear. Fear is superficial, in the emotions; trust is deeper down, in the spirit.

Mature trust is like a deep, strong river, making its irresistible way to the sea. At times, the winds of fear or doubt may blow contrary to the river’s course and whip up foaming waves on its surface. But these winds and waves cannot change or hinder the deep, continuing flow of the waters below the surface, as they follow the path marked out for them by the river’s bed to their predetermined end in the sea.

Trust in its full maturity is beautifully exemplified by the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12:

“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

By all worldly standards, at this stage Paul was a failure. Some of his most influential friends and supporters had turned against him. Of all his close coworkers, only Luke remained with him. Demas had actually abandoned him and turned back to the world. Paul was infirm and aged, a manacled prisoner in a Roman jail, awaiting unjust trial and execution at the hands of a cruel, depraved despot. Yet his words ring with serene, unshakable confidence. Beyond the horizon of time he looks forward to an unclouded day – “that day” when the righteous Judge will award
him “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).

For Paul, as for David, trust was the outcome of an act of commitment. It is expressed in his own words: “He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him.” “Trusting” was the result of “entrusting.” Years previously Paul had made an irrevocable commitment of himself to Christ. Subsequent trials and sufferings gradually brought forth an ever-deepening trust that had now come to its full fruition in a Roman dungeon, its radiance all the brighter by contrast with its gloomy setting.

**Faith as trustworthiness**

We turn now to the second aspect of faith as a fruit: trustworthiness. Linguistically, trustworthiness is in fact the original meaning of pistis. In Arndt and Gingrich’s standard lexicon of New Testament Greek, the first specific definition given of pistis is: “faithfulness, reliability.” If we go back to the Old Testament, the same applies to the Hebrew word for faith, emunah. Its primary meaning is “faithfulness”; its secondary meaning is “faith.” The verb from which it is derived gives us the word Amen – “So be it” or “Let it be confirmed.”

Both meanings alike converge in the person and nature of God Himself. If we view faith as trust, its only ultimate basis is God’s trustworthiness. If we view faith as trustworthiness, it is only through our trust that the Holy Spirit is able to impart to us God’s trustworthiness. God Himself is both the beginning and the end of faith. His trustworthiness is the only basis for our trust: our trust in Him reproduces in us His trustworthiness.

**The nature of God’s covenant love**

Probably no attribute of God is more persistently emphasized throughout the Scriptures than His trustworthiness. In the Old Testament there is one special Hebrew word reserved for this attribute: chesed, which is variously translated “goodness,” “kindness,” “loving-kindness,” or “mercy.” However, none of these translations fully expresses its meaning.

There are two distinctive features of God’s chesed. First, it is the expression of God’s free, unmerited grace. It goes beyond anything that man can ever deserve or demand as a right. Second, it is always based on a covenant that God voluntarily enters into. We may combine these two features by saying that chesed is God’s trustworthiness in fulfilling His covenant commitments, which go beyond anything that we can deserve or demand.

We thus find a close connection between three important Hebrew concepts: emunah, faith or faithfulness; chesed, God’s trustworthiness; berith, a covenant. This is the recurrent theme in this psalm:

> And My faithfulness [emunah] and My loving-kindness [chesed] will be with him...My loving-kindness [chesed] I will keep for him forever, and My covenant [berith] shall be confirmed [amen] to him.... But I will not break off My loving-kindness [chesed] from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness [emunah]. My covenant [berith] I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. - Psalm 89:24, 28, 33–34

The last verse brings out a special relationship between God’s trustworthiness and the words of His mouth.

There are two things God will never do: break His covenant or go back on what He has said. God’s trustworthiness, imparted by the Holy Spirit, will reproduce the same characteristics in us. It will make us persons of unfailing integrity and honesty.

We have already seen that God’s chesed, expressed in His covenant commitments, is based on His grace, going beyond anything that we, its recipients, can ever deserve or demand. This too will be reflected in our covenant relationships with fellow believers. We will not limit ourselves to the mere requirements of justice or some legal form of contract. We will be ready to make the full commitment God made in establishing His covenant with us – to
lay down our lives for one another. “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). It is by the laying down of our lives that we enter into full covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Scripture paints a fearful picture of the breakdown of moral and ethical standards that will mark the close of this present age (see 2 Timothy 3:1-4). As the world thus plunges deeper into darkness, God’s people must – by contrast – be more determined than ever to walk in the light of fellowship. We must show ourselves both willing and qualified to enter into and maintain those covenant relationships upon which fellowship depends. For this purpose we will need to cultivate to full maturity the fruit of trustworthiness.

**Summary**

Spiritual fruit differs from spiritual gifts in two main ways. First, a spiritual gift can be imparted and received by a single, brief transaction; fruit must be cultivated by a continuing process, requiring time, skill and labor. Second, gifts are not directly related to the character of those who exercise them, while fruit is an expression of character. Ideally, fruit and gifts should balance one another in a combination that glorifies God and serves humanity.

As a form of fruit, faith may be understood in two distinct ways: as trust and as trustworthiness. Trust is manifested in stability, which increases as trust matures. It requires an initial act of commitment. We base our trust on God’s trustworthiness. God demonstrates His trustworthiness toward us by fulfilling His covenant commitments, which are beyond anything we can deserve or demand. In turn, it makes us the kind of people who are willing and able to enter into and maintain covenant commitments, both with God and with one another.

[This article is excerpted from *Faith to Live By*, written by (c) 1977 Derek Prince, first published by Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and republished in 1997 by Whitaker House, New Kensington, Pennsylvania, USA.]

**Derek Prince** (1915–2003) was born in India of British parents. Educated as a scholar of Greek and Latin at Eton College and Cambridge University, England, he held a Fellowship in Ancient and Modern Philosophy at King’s College. He also studied Hebrew and Aramaic, at Cambridge University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. While serving with the British army in World War II, he began to study the Bible and experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Out of this encounter he formed two conclusions: first, that Jesus Christ is alive; second, that the Bible is a true, relevant, up-to-date book. These conclusions altered the whole course of his life, which he then devoted to studying and teaching the Bible.
Why Does God Allow Temptation?

by Maximus the Confessor (580-662 AD)

One can distinguish five reasons why God allows devils to attack us:

First, so that from attack and counter-attack we may become practised in discerning good from evil.

Second, so that our virtue may be maintained in the heat of the struggle and so be confirmed in an impregnable position.

Third, so that as we advance in virtue we may avoid presumption and learn humility.

Fourth, to inspire in us an unreserved hatred for evil through the experience we thus have of it.

Fifth, and above all, that we may attain inner freedom and remain convinced both of our own weakness and of the strength of him who has come to our aid.

- Centuries on Charity, 2, 67 (SC9,p114.)

Right Use not Misuse
It is important to understand the right use of external objects and pictures of them in our imagination.

The reasonable use of them produces for its fruit the virtues of chastity, charity, and right knowledge.

The unreasonable use results in debauchery, hatred, and ignorance.

It is through the measure in which we misuse the powers of the soul, namely its desire, emotion, reason, that the vices install themselves: ignorance and folly in the reasoning faculty, hatred and debauchery in the desires and emotions. The right use, on the contrary, produces right knowledge and prudence, charity, and chastity.

Nothing that God has created is in itself bad. Food is not bad, gluttony is. The procreation of children is not bad, lechery [driven by lust] is. Wealth is not bad, avarice is. Glory is not bad, vainglory is.

So you see nothing is bad in itself, only the misuse of it, which is the soul's negligence in cultivating its true nature.

- Centuries on Charity, 3, 1 (SC9,p123.)

Maximus the Confessor (580-662 AD), also known as Maximus the Theologian and Maximus of Constantinople, was a Christian monk, theologian, and scholar. He was born in the region of Constantinople and was well educated. In his early life, Maximus was a civil servant, and an aide to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. He gave up this life in the political sphere to enter into the monastic life. Around 614, he became a monk (later abbot) at the monastery of Chrysopolis. During the Persian invasion of the Empire (614), he fled to Africa. He was exiled twice, tortured in 662 and died shortly after. His title of Confessor means that he suffered for the Christian faith, but was not directly martyred.

[Translation by Paul Drake. For more readings see Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: A Patristic Breviary, by Thomas Spidlik, Cistercian Publications, 1994.]
Love Thinks No Evil

wisdom from John Climacus

The following short excerpts are from *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by John Climacus, abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt during the 7th century. John Climacus is revered in many Eastern churches as a great teacher of spiritual wisdom. Orthodox monasteries throughout the centuries have read his Ladder of Divine Ascent during Lent.

**Light, fire and flame**

Love in its nature makes a human being like God, as far as is possible for a human being. The soul is intoxicated by the effects of it. Its characteristics are a fountain of faith, an abyss of patience, an ocean of humility.

Love is the complete repudiation of any unkind thought about one’s neighbor, since, "Love thinks no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Love, unchangeable tranquility, and our adoption as children of God are different from each other only in name. As light, fire and flame are present in the selfsame operation, so are these three manifestations of the Spirit.

When someone is completely permeated with the love of God, the brightness of his soul is reflected by his whole personality as if in a mirror.
Therefore the one who loves God also loves his brother or sister. Indeed, the second love is the proof of the first.

**Poison in your heart: the memory of insults**
The memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive, hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyzes prayer, puts love at a distance, and is a nail driven into the soul.

If anyone has appeased his anger, he has already suppressed the memory of insults, while as long as the mother is alive the son persists. In order to appease the anger, love is necessary.

Remembrance of Jesus’ passion will heal your soul of resentment, by making it ashamed of itself when it remembers the patience of the Lord.

Some people have wearied themselves and suffered for a long time in order to extract forgiveness. By far the best course, however, is to forget the offences, since the Lord says: "Forgive at once and you will be forgiven in generous measure" cf. Luke 6:37-38.

Forgetting offences is a sign of sincere repentance. If you keep the memory of them, you may believe you have repented but you are like someone running in his sleep.

Let no one consider it a minor defect, this darkness that often clouds the eyes even of spiritual people.

**Repentance, baptismal renewal, daughter of hope**
Nothing equals or excels God's mercies. Therefore, he who despairs is committing suicide. A sign of true repentance is the acknowledgment that we deserve all the afflictions, visible and invisible, that come upon us, and ever greater ones.

Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility.

Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair.

Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions.

**Hypocrisy and lies, mother and daughter**
Fire is produced from stone and steel; lying comes from loquacity and gossip. And the lie destroys love.

No one who has any sense would say that telling lies is not an important sin. The Holy Spirit has severely condemned it. "You destroy those that speak lies," says David to God (Psalm 5: 7).

The mother of lying is hypocrisy, mother and also, often, its substance as well. Hypocrisy in fact works out the lie beforehand and then puts it into practice.

Those who possess the fear of God are the furthest from telling lies, because they have an honest judge, their own conscience.
As with all the passions, we ought to recognize various types of lying according to the damage done. One person tells lies from fear of punishment; another when no danger is threatening; another because of conceit; another for enjoyment; another to raise a laugh; and yet another to do harm to his neighbor.

A child does not know what a lie is, so his soul is free of malice. Someone who is elated with wine speaks the truth on all subjects, even without meaning to. In the same way, anyone who is inebriated with the spirit of penitence will never be able to tell lies.

**Do not give up, but stand courageously**

Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter.

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honor your patience.

He who really keeps account of his actions considers as lost every day in which he does not mourn, whatever good he may have done in it.

I consider those fallen mourners more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning over themselves; because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection.

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**Life of John Climacus**

John Climacus, also known as John of Sinai or John of the Ladder, was born around 579, possibly in Syria. He read widely in his early years. At the age of 16 John decided to join the monastic community at the foot of Mount Sinai in Egypt at the spot believed to be where Moses spoke to God face to face.
At the age of 35 John lived as a hermit at a place called Tholas which was about five miles from the main monastery. Many people sought him out as a teacher and spiritual guide. John received so many guests that some monks complained that he had become a chatterbox. John remained silent for a year until his accusers asked that he go back to receiving guests as had been his practice.

It was also customary at the time for small clusters of monks to gather together in a close-knit semi-eremitical way of life. John accepted a disciple, named Moses, to live with him. He also traveled to visit sick hermits and monasteries near Alexandria and solitaries in the Egyptian desert. He was recognized for his great love for God and for people, and he was also known for his miracles, and his healing of the sick.

During this period, political unrest and persecution broke out in the region. Forty-four monks were martyred at the monastery of Sabas during the Persian invasion of Jerusalem in 614. Some monks had fled, forced to wander from place to place as the Persians advanced. Syria fell to Islam in 636, Palestine fell in 638, and Egypt fell by 642. Many monks in these regions fled to the west as the Arab empire took form.

The monastery at Sinai survived these invasions. Around 649, after John had spent some 40 years of solitude in the desert, John was persuaded by the monastic community at Sinai to serve as their abbot. John's widespread fame and admiration as a holy man of God was evident when six hundred pilgrims arrived at the monastery on the occasion of his installation as abbot.
The abbot of a nearby monastery at Raithou asked John to write a book of spiritual wisdom for the monks in the desert communities. John called the book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, from which his name “John of the Ladder” or “John Climacus” (*climacus* is the Greek word for *ladder*) is derived.

John knew that he was living at the end of an age, in a time of great turmoil and uncertainty. He wrote not only for the monks in the desert but also for Christians elsewhere, to strengthen them in the faith as well.

John wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* primarily as an invitation to the journey toward holiness and union with God in the monastic life. It records what John had learned from his forty-year journey in the wilderness, both as a solitary hermit and as a brother in monastic community. John wrote as a pastor to help his fellow monks grow in faith through “a personal encounter with Christ at each step of the ladder.”

John died between 654 and 679. Soon afterward, *The Ladder* was translated from the Greek into Syriac. By the tenth century, it had also been translated into Arabic and Georgian. It appeared in Latin by the eleventh century.
There Is More:
Signs and Wonders for the Sake of the Kingdom
by Lynne May

Desperation + Expectation = Invitation for God to work.

It’s a formula I learned from Fr. Mathias Thelen, a Roman Catholic priest in the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, USA. I didn’t know the Holy Spirit was going to have me learn it by living it, but that’s exactly what happened and how I discovered that signs and wonders are a part of the revival that is beginning to happen here in the United States.

Desperation

About a year and a half ago, I was desperate for an end to the excruciating and chronic back pain I had been living with. It had been minor, dull for years. It spiked about a year and a half ago. Sleepless nights. I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t exercise. I could barely work. I was emotionally and physically at the end of myself. People around me prayed with me, but for some reason, God was not allowing for breakthrough. Doctors said they were doing what they could. I prayed for a miracle.

Expectation

I went to my primary care physician for back pain medicine. She saw the tears streaming down my face. A devout Catholic, she said, “You know, there’s a priest, Fr. Mathias Thelen, who used to be at my parish. He held wonderful healing services. Very powerful stuff happened. You should call him.” Well, I was desperate.
As I drove away, I looked up Fr. Mathias Thelen’s office line number off of Google and found it through the seminary’s website where he taught at the time. He picked up on the first ring, saying, “Who is this?” I said, “It’s Lynne.” We were old friends, acquaintances more so, from years earlier. He said, “What do you want? It must be the Holy Spirit, because I’m never in my office!” I said I wanted prayer ministry. So we set a time.

When we met for prayer ministry, we prayed through a set of inner healing things before even getting to the physical healing that we thought were perhaps even more urgent to cover than the physical pain. When we did get to the physical pain, I have to admit, he prayed with me, and the pain didn’t leave. Maybe it lessened slightly, but nothing much happened. Then the session ended.

But this wasn’t the end of the story of my healing journey. Around this time or a bit earlier, I had also begun to see an additional back doctor I had heard about from a friend, and his treatment began to work, rigorous as it was. I found in this doctor’s care my miracle of back pain healing was being fulfilled. And I had received much inner healing from Fr. Mathias, which, I believe, is what God wanted to address in that session that I think my back pain lessened as a result. But the real thing that struck me was Fr. Mathias’ faith. I remember thinking, “What faith he has for healing! The confidence!”

God Works

And that witness of faith haunted me. The following week, I heard that at the local Catholic high school, a documentary called Fearless was going to be shown to anyone interested. Guess who it starred: yes, Fr. Mathias. He was everywhere! So I went, curious. I left, weeping. I saw Catholics in pews who didn’t know one another laying hands on one another for healing and being healed. I saw people getting out of wheelchairs when they were prayed with and the Gospel was proclaimed. I saw recipients of healing give lively testimonies. I saw people get words knowledge about whom they should pray for out on the street that day, find the people, and the people blessed as they received prayer. It was my introduction to two things I’d never really thought of: signs and wonders and power evangelism.

Who were these Catholics walking in this power, and where did the teaching for this come from? How have I never heard of this? I had to know more. This organization that put together this film, Encounter Ministries was based in Columbus, Ohio. Their name comes from the fact that they believe that every person is just one encounter away from meeting Jesus Christ. Fr. Mathias is senior leader for Encounter, though he is in Michigan. Encounter Ministries is Catholic and exists to bring the supernatural charisms into Catholic parishes. The Holy Spirit continued to increase my desire to learn more and that spring, I found myself driving to Columbus to take a few summer classes with this group.

Demonstrate the Gospel

The mantra of the classes: Although we understand that signs, wonders, and miracles are not the whole Gospel, we are convinced that the Gospel is not whole without them. We spoke about John 14:12, where it says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do.” When I look at my life, I have to admit: I’m challenged by this. Am I doing the works that Jesus did – and greater? No, I am not. But I am learning both how to do and hunger for more of the works of Christ. Jesus often, even regularly, proved his claim that he is the Messiah through a demonstration – through a healing, a deliverance, a multiplication. His preaching was accompanied by signs and wonders. He used signs to point people to himself. If that is how our Lord ministered and demonstrated the power of his kingdom, shouldn't his disciples today seek his wisdom and learn from him and follow suit?

“Lord, help me,” is a prayer I’ve prayed many times as I’ve begun down this path. And I haven’t prayed it nearly as often as I should. I’ve been reading books and authors on healing and deliverance, signs and
wonders – including Damien Stayne, Mary Healy, and videos from Bill Johnson, Randy Clark, and Todd White, plus solid teaching and help from Encounter Ministries, who run their own school of supernatural ministry. As I’ve begun to get my toes wet, God keeps trying to throw me in the deep end.

A Tire Shop Encounter

“So are you taking a class on healing prayer?” I wake up and sit up in my chair at the tire shop: an older, African American man is asking the question. I’m falling asleep after another long night of driving to/from Columbus. “Yes,” I say, “I just started.” He hobbles over, sits down, and says, “Well, God healed my soul 20 years ago. I’m still waiting for him to heal my leg. He promised he would.” And he just sits there. Oh boy: I know what’s coming. This is a Holy Spirit setup. A chance to apply what I’ve learned!

I get up and begin talking to the man. He confessed to me that he was a former heroin addict, who gave his life to Jesus but still had the symptoms of illness that resulted because of the addiction, including a leg that was emaciated and a dropped foot.

I asked if I could lay hands on his leg for healing. He agreed. I knelt down and began to pray, “In the name of Jesus, I command you, pain, get out, right now. Leg, be restored. Be healed, in the name of Jesus. Bones, ligaments, muscles, be healed, be made well, in the name of Jesus.”

We pray a couple more times, and I keep checking in to see if there’s some progress. There is a bit, maybe. Suddenly the man pauses me, looks into my eyes, and asks, “Do you really think that God would heal the effects of a sin that I committed, heroin addiction?”

I looked at him, and my heart melted. “Yes!” I cried. I preached to him the parable of the prodigal son. I said the Father had welcomed him back. There is a robe upon his back. Sandals on his feet. A ring on his finger. Yes, not only would he; he wants to, I said.

The man said, “Okay, then I guess we have to take off the brace and find out!” So the man took off the brace, and I held my breath as he walked about the tire shop (among all the people doing what you would normally do in a tire shop). I would later learn that often, the healing takes place as the person tries to do what they could not do before. Testing it out is key. And that it can take time after receiving prayer; it doesn’t always happen instantly.

The man did not experience total healing, but pain relief and some strength entered back into his leg that day. He could walk around the shop, and he hadn’t taken off his brace to walk for years. Better yet, he knew his sins were forgiven! Hallelujah. It reads like something from the Bible. The man knew his sins were forgiven and began to walk. We exchanged contact information. As I went to hug him goodbye, the Holy Spirit whispered, “And offer to pay his bill!” So I blurted out, “And I want to pay your bill!” He laughed, “But you don’t even know how much it is!” I said, “Okay, fair, tell me, and then I will chip in an amount.” The man was poor. I was glad for the chance to help.

As I sat there, back in my chair, not sleepy anymore, it hit me: “Wow, okay, I am now officially that ‘wacko.’ I am that healing-praying nut in a public place. And this stuff is for real. You want me in this, Lord. You set me up. And look how it blessed that man. And how it blessed me! Praise you, Lord!”

There Is More

There is so much more I could share. I’ve seen and heard of many miraculous healings. Sometimes, I pray over myself, or my housemates pray over me, or we pray over each other, and we receive physical healing.
We have a household culture of prayer ministry, I would say. It is normative for us to see one another healed on a regular, nearly daily basis. Or to have a sense or a prophetic word for another household member. All because of a few simple teachings we have received and that, coupled with childlike faith. I pray with my Uber drivers, my waiters in restaurants, friends, people over the phone. It’s a beautiful way to live.

In this darkening, suffering, and post-Christian world, God is raising up signs and wonders and more of his power, so that his disciples can demonstrate his power effectively as they preach the Gospel. This is the in-breaking of the kingdom! Bringing heaven to earth is what the world desperately needs. It is what Jesus came to give. He commissioned us to do what we saw him do – and more. One of my favorite things is to pray with non-believers, to ask them if they would be open to hearing from a higher power. In my next article, I want to share more about that.

**Revealing the Heart of Jesus – with Compassion and Humility**

In conclusion, let me say a word about motives and remaining grounded in all this. First, motives: What should be our motive for seeking signs and wonders, more power? To prove to others that Jesus is real? Yes, of course. But deeper than that even: wanting to reveal the heart of Jesus to another out of a genuine sense of compassion for them. Jesus looked with compassion upon those he ministered to. Our motive of compassion will keep us focused on love first, not gifting or power, per Paul’s caution in 1 Corinthians 13.

And second, remaining grounded, humble. Humility goes hand-in-hand with authority. We have to know who we are to walk with this greater measure of power, that we sons and daughters of the Father. Jesus ministered out of his identity, and this identity also gave him the confidence to minister boldly. So signs and wonders aren’t about proving an atheist wrong, or trying to win conversions. They’re not about getting cool prophetic words or glory stories to share. They are about giving Jesus Christ all the glory, and it’s wonderful that he allows his beloved children to be a part of it, even a critical part of it, to touch a hurting world.

I thank God, and probably not often enough, for the year I was not healed, my year of desperation. He emptied me, and that reminded me of my identity: I am his daughter. When I couldn’t do anything for anyone, give anything, he was still there. But! I am so grateful that God broke into this desperate time, which had created a hunger, an expectation, and then, before I almost could blink, swept me up into this new thing he is about, one which even I feel as if I am just beginning to learn of.

I have no idea what our Lord has in mind, but I pray I can be open to whatever that is.

[Lynne May is a member of the Work of Christ Community in Lansing, Michigan, USA]

*top illustration of man walking away from crutches left on the road, by HarveyMade at Lightstock.com*
A Theological Reflection and Short History on the Healing Ministry

by Damian Stayne

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.

-Mathew 9:35

A young nurse was working in the hospital when a man who was intoxicated came in and attacked her. He broke her spine and severely damaged her spinal column. As a result, she underwent a total of forty medical interventions, during which several metal plates and bolts were inserted into her spine, but none of the treatments helped. The damage to her spine was so severe that for six years, she could not even get out of bed. Standing was completely impossible. Although she was on very high doses of morphine, the doctors were unable to properly manage the pain. She could not even sit herself up in her bed. Her speech had been affected, and she did not have complete use of her arms. Because of the damage to the spinal column, she could not cope with light, so she had to always be in the dark or wear sunglasses. For six long years, she lay bedridden in pain in a dark room.

In desperation her mother brought her in her wheelchair to a healing service. I preached, and then we heard a joint testimony of healing from a woman and her physician husband. At one of our previous services in France a year before, this woman had been healed of an incurable degenerative condition that had kept her bound to a wheelchair.
As I led the time for healing, I asked the Christians in the auditorium to place their hands on the sick near them and pray. As God prompted me, I commanded conditions to be healed in Jesus' name. I concluded, "Be freed from your crutches, be freed from your sticks, be freed from your paralysis, be freed from your wheelchairs, in Jesus' holy name." Then I told the people, "Now in Jesus' name, do what you couldn't do before." All over the room, hundreds demonstrated their healings.

Suddenly we heard a big cheer from the center of the crowd. I jumped off the stage and approached the area where the excitement was. There was the young woman standing next to the wheelchair, hugging her mother. I asked what had happened, and they explained that she had just stood up with no pain. All the strength had returned to her legs. I could see that she was completely stunned.

I walked her to the stage. With her empty wheelchair next to her, she gave a brief explanation of her incredible healing. She walked up and down the platform freely and then jogged back and forth, shaking her head in wonder and wiping tears from her eyes. The people were cheering and shouting the praises of God. A year later, she was still completely healed.

It was reported to me afterward that some male members of the security staff for the facility in which we were meeting were moved to tears. Through witnessing such a beautiful act of God, they were convicted of the lordship of Jesus and then and there asked for his mercy and invited him into their hearts as their Lord and Savior. Glory to God!

The Vatican document *Instruction on Prayers for Healing* states, "People are called to joy. Nevertheless each day they experience many forms of suffering and pain.' Therefore, the Lord, in his promises of redemption, announces the joy of the heart that comes from liberation from sufferings (d. Isaiah 30:29; 35:10; Baruch 4:29). Indeed, he is the one 'who delivers from every evil' (Wisdom 16:8)."1

The prophet Isaiah announced a future time in which sickness and infirmity will be overthrown and there will be a great outpouring of healing grace:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a hart,  
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.  
(Isaiah 35:5-6; see also 65:19-20)

This is a prophecy of the messianic era. Jesus' ministry was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and the Church is the continuance of the ministry of Jesus in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. One aspect of that ministry is the ministry of healing, which is inseparably linked to the proclamation of the Christian gospel.

**Jesus' Ministry of Healing**

The amount of time that Jesus gave to healing the sick was considerable. He clearly understood this ministry as having a central role in his mission. It was a demonstration of the in-breaking of the kingdom, not only the confirmation of his message. At times this ministry is described as an expression of his compassion; at other times, as an attack against the influence of the evil one; and at still others, as a sign of the glory of God. Looking at the Gospels, it is inconceivable to imagine Jesus without healing miracles, because they were so prevalent. This is from the Vatican's *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*:
In the public activity of Jesus, his encounters with the sick are not isolated, but continual. He healed many through miracles, so that miraculous healings characterized his activity: "Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness" (Matthew 9:35; d. 4:23). These healings are signs of his messianic mission (d. Luke 7:20-23). They manifest the victory of the kingdom of God over every kind of evil, and become the symbol of the restoration to health of the whole human person, body and soul.2

Jesus' ministry is summed up by Peter: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; ... he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

When Jesus commissioned the Twelve, he "gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity" (Matthew 10:1). He said to them, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (10:8; see Luke 9:1). This makes it clear that the Church potentially has within its power the grace to heal every disease and sickness, even to the raising of the dead (d. Matthew 10:8). This commission was not restricted to the apostles. The seventy-two were also commissioned, when they were sent out to "heal the sick" (Luke 10:9).

In the conclusion to the Gospel of Mark, as well as in the Letter to the Galatians, the expectation that healings are to be normal in the ministry of ordinary believers and the local church is clear. It is highly significant that there is no commissioning of Jesus' disciples to proclaim the gospel that is not accompanied by the command to heal the sick. In the four Gospels, more than one-third, or 38.5 percent, of the narrative text refers to the healing of the sick in one form or another.

The New Testament Church:
A Model of Proclamation with Healing Power

The conclusion of Mark's Gospel, speaking of the disciples, declares, "And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (16:20).

The first preaching of the gospel described in the Acts of the Apostles was accompanied by numerous miraculous healings, which demonstrated and confirmed the power of the gospel proclamation. The Vatican's Instruction on Prayers for Healing notes, "This had been the promise of the Risen Jesus, and the first Christian communities witnessed its realization in their midst: 'These signs will accompany those who believe: ... they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover' (Mark 16:17-18)."3

Such an emphasis on healing and miracles as natural accompaniments of the proclamation of the word of God is clearly expressed in the prayer of the early Church. In a moment of persecution, when caution might have seemed the prudent response, the community of disciples prayed, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30).

Following Pentecost, multitudes were healed through Peter and the apostles. But only after this second outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when power for healing was specifically requested, is Peter recorded as being used to heal them all (Acts 5:16).
The healing gifts are widely distributed among believers in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of the New Testament. The Vatican document on prayers for healing states, "The wondrous healings are not limited to the activity of the Apostles and certain of the central figures in the first preaching of the Gospel." The preaching of Philip in Samaria was also accompanied by miraculous healings: "multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed" (Acts 8:5-7).

St. Paul describes his own proclamation of the gospel as being characterized by signs and wonders worked by the power of the Holy Spirit. He writes, "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:18-19; see also 1 Thessalonians 1:5 and 1 Corinthians 2:4-5). It is clear from the accounts of Paul's ministry that miraculous healings were among these signs and wonders to which he referred. Such wonders were also occurring among the faithful in the local church: "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (Galatians 3:5).

Of course, the Church has been committed to healing through the medical profession and the establishment of hospitals through the ages. This developed alongside the activity of charisms of healing, as we see in the lives of St. Cosmas and St. Damian (c. AD 287), both medical doctors who also exercised gifts of healing.

As with prophecy, the expectation of healing miracles continued in a dramatic way in the early centuries of the Church. In the second century, St. Irenaeus (AD 130-202) wrote, "By praying to the Lord who made all things, only by calling upon the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, [does the Church] even now cure thoroughly and effectively all who everywhere believe in Christ." Likewise, Origen (c. 185-c. 254) testifies about healings in his age: "We too have seen many set free from severe complaints, and loss of mind, and madness and numberless other such evils, which neither men nor devils had cured." And Hilary of Poitiers, a Church Father and Doctor of the Church (c. 315-c. 367), writes, "We become steadfast in hope and receive abundant gifts in healing."7

Later, in the fifth century, St. Augustine of Hippo says "with regard to the goods of life, health, and physical integrity, ... 'We need to pray that these are retained, when we have them, and that they are increased, when we do not have them.'"8

Many of the testimonies of these Fathers are vigorously upheld by Blessed John Henry Newman in his great Essays on Miracles.9

Dr. Ramsay MacMullen, professor of history and classics at Yale University, in his book Christianizing the Roman Empire AD 100—400, asserts that healing and deliverance from demons—and not only social advancement, as some secular critics have claimed—were major factors in turning the pagans of the empire to Christianity. The reason was that these miracles clearly demonstrated that the Christian God was greater than all the gods of Rome.10

The number of reports of healing miracles in the ministries of saints down through the ages would be impossible to count. One example of a saint with healing gifts was St. Patrick (385-461): “For the blind and the lame, the deaf and the dumb, the palsied, the lunatic, the leprous, the epileptic, all who labored under any disease, did he in the Name of the Holy Trinity restore unto the power of their limbs and unto entire health;
and in these good deeds was he daily practiced."11

After the fourth century, there seems to have been a decline in expectant faith for healing as a ministry exercised by ordinary Christians. However, there continued to be amazing stories of miracles in the revivals led by many saints, including St. Augustine of Canterbury, St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, St. Bernard, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Collette, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis of Paola, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Paul of the Cross, and others. From apostolic times, healings have been present in the Church in what French theologian René Laurentin calls “a constant tradition,”12 and it would be hard to find a period when they were entirely absent from the Church.

Yet the records we have tend to be, for the most part, demonstrations of healing in the ministries of the saints, holy men and women, and at shrines, or through relics. The point I want to make here is not that healing miracles were not a part of Catholic culture and belief; they certainly were. However, the expectation of them as regular components in the life of Christian communities, through the prayers and actions of ordinary good Christians, in the first four centuries had faded.

“During the first eight centuries of the Church’s history, the anointing of the sick was regarded as a rite of healing for all kinds of illness,” writes Fr. Laurentin. After the ninth century, spiritual healing became more emphasized, although physical healing was accepted as a real possibility. “Only by a distortion that began in the nineteenth century did it become the ‘sacrament of the dying.’” 13

Healing in the Orthodox and Coptic traditions

Healings continued in the Orthodox Church in a similar way. Some Orthodox saints were remarkable in their healing gifts. Especially well known are St. Seraphim of Sarov, who was a contemporary of the Curé of Ars, and St. John of Kronstadt, who died in the early twentieth century. St. John's life is sometimes referred to as “a sea of miracles.”

Here is just one story from St. Seraphim:

The sick nephew of Princess Shahaeva was carried into St. Seraphim's cell. The saint told him to lie facing away from him, but the man in time turned to look at the saint and saw him levitating in the air in prayer. The young man was healed but admonished to never tell what he had seen until after the saint's death.14

In 1903 St. John of Kronstadt appeared in his gold vestments to a man who was dying of typhoid, and as he blessed him, he held the man's hand. This was no ordinary vision. St. John was mysteriously physically present in that room, although he was known to be present simultaneously in another place many miles away. He assured the man that he would recover and then stepped away and disappeared into a white haze. The man quickly recovered. When he told his father about the priest who visited him, his father explained that he had sent a telegram to Fr. John in Kronstadt asking him for his prayers.15

The Coptic saint Pope Kyrillos VI (1902-1971) was the instrument of thousands of healings, recorded in eighteen volumes. In one healing, he gave a cup of water that he blessed to a woman who had been diagnosed with an undeveloped uterus, which made having children quite impossible. Eight months later, she was experiencing pain and enlargement of her abdomen, and she consulted a new doctor who did not know of her medical history. To her astonishment, he told her she was eight months pregnant. The woman's husband showed the doctor her previous medical reports, and the doctor was amazed that the woman had been able to get pregnant and carry the baby to nearly full term. “Can it be that we are still in an era where clergy pray on water and miracles are performed? God created a new womb for her,” he said. This same physician attended
Healing in the Pentecostal and charismatic tradition

Maria Woodworth-Etter's healing services and revivals attracted people from all over the United States in the early twentieth century. Dying people would be brought in cots and find themselves instantly raised up. The blind, deaf, and lame were regularly healed, and often in large numbers. Even the dead were raised. One of the miracles that took place in her ministry that was witnessed by a medical surgeon, John H. Bowen, was the total healing of a child with several chronic conditions.

There was a boy seven years old, who had never walked; he was born insane, blind, deaf and dumb; he was always pounding his head and beating himself like the maniac among the tombs. They tried everything, including the best medical help, but the doctors could not locate the cause, and they said he would never have any sense…

[But after the prayer he] can hear and see perfectly. God has given him a bright, intelligent mind; he laughs and plays and walks around in front of the pulpit every day in view of all the congregation; before he was healed, he had spasms, as many as twenty a day, but now he is well and happy.

Hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of healings were experienced through ministries such as these in the first part of the twentieth century. These were followed by the healing revival of the 1940s and 50s, which swept across North America. Meetings took place in tents that could hold up to eighteen thousand people. In the sixties and seventies, Kathryn Kuhlman became renowned for her extraordinary healing ministry. Such large numbers of healing miracles took place in her ministry that she was sometimes referred to by Catholics as a "Walking Lourdes." Kuhlman was very happy to have met with Blessed Pope Paul VI, who gave her his blessing and assured her of his prayers.

As we have stated, the “canonizing" of the enduring place of charismatic gifts among the people of God in the texts of the Second Vatican Council opened the way for a renewal of charisms of healing being exercised among "ordinary" Catholics. The Sacrament of the Sick was restored to its original intention as a sacrament of healing, and the language of healing can now be found in many of the liturgical texts of the Church. In 2000 the Vatican also published a document encouraging the charism of healing in the Catholic Church.

Healing Ministry Today

In today's culture, it is common to hear the term healers used of both Christian and non-Christian practitioners of healing. However, such a title is inappropriate when referring to Christians exercising healing gifts. Like other spiritual gifts, healing is not something we receive one day and possess for the rest of our lives, as though we carry it in our pockets and bring it out whenever a need presents itself. Every time we seek God’s intervention for healing, we depend on his free gift.

While this total dependence on the Lord's action never changes, there are those who, if faithful, can be used in this way very regularly and often with increasing power as their faith grows. In such cases, we refer to “a ministry of healing.” Professor Francis Sullivan explains:

Paul never speaks of a “gift of healing,” nor does he speak of any individuals as “healers.” Paul mentions healing three times in 1 Corinthians 12 (vv. 9, 28, 30), and each time he uses the phrase charisma iamaton, which means “charisms of healings." The consistent use of this
phrase suggests that Paul saw each healing as a charism, or gift of grace. But his statement, “To another [are given] charisms of healings,”... suggest[s] that when Paul talks about those who “have charisms of healings,” he has in mind not the people who are healed, but people who are in some way involved in the healing of others. Paul's way of speaking of this implies that he does not see this as a habitual “gift of healing”; on the other hand, it does suggest that certain individuals are used with some frequency as channels or instruments of the healings that take place. If this is the case, then it would seem legitimate to speak of such people as having a ministry of gifts of healing for other people.18

An exercise of the kingly anointing

When we were baptized, we were made sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly anointing. Often the emphasis on the kingly anointing has been one of conforming the world to the values and purposes of Christ through social action—by influencing work, politics, education, commerce, and the environment, so that God's values reign there. This is quite true, and its importance can hardly be overestimated. It is something in which all of us are called to play a part in one way or another. But this is not the whole story.

In Genesis, Adam had dominion over creation. Before the fall, all creation could be mastered by man: “Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” (1:28). The New Jerome Biblical Commentary tells us of the word subdue, “The nuance of the verb is ‘to master,’ ‘to bring forcefully under control.’"19 Dominion in Greek is kratos, and according to one definition, it means “force,” “strength,” or “might,” and “more especially manifested power.” It is derived from the root word kra, which means “to perfect, to complete.”20

Thus, to exercise dominion is to have mastery over and bring to full order and completion God's creation. This exercise of dominion is a kingly authority that Adam and Eve exercised over creation before the fall. According to The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, "In the ancient Near East, the king was often called the image of the deity and was vested with God's authority; royal language is here [Genesis 1:28] used for the human."21 Adam named creatures as Jesus named people. In other words, he creatively defined them. This is not naming as one might name a pet; rather, Adam's words carry the very power of God as God's son in a sinless state. “The giving of names [by Adam] is in itself a creative act.” 22

In the Liturgy of the Hours, we read in one of the intercessions in Lent: “May we gain through the second Adam what was lost by the first.”23 Supernatural ministry such as physical healing demonstrates the kingship of Christ in a particular way. Jesus says to his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore ...” (Matthew 28:18-19) There is nothing that is not under his authority. The kingly authority of the risen Jesus is not only over the spiritual realm but also over the physical realm, and it is possible to exercise this kingly authority even now, imperfect as we are.

When I am standing before a crowd, many of whom are physically sick, I stand with the authority of Christ exercising my kingly anointing in him. As I speak to the various conditions—“Ears, hear; eyes, see; legs, be strong; cancers, be gone,” and so forth do not simply speak with hope. I speak with faith and authority, knowing that if I am acting in the Holy Spirit, people's bodies will resonate to the creative word of Christ on my lips—not to my voice but to the words of Jesus from me.

Now of course, unbelief can present an obstacle, as we see even in Jesus’ own ministry in his hometown: “And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). But I believe that God has woven into his created material world a programming that recognizes the voice of its Creator. The Sea of Galilee had no ears, but it “heard” the voice of its Lord in Jesus' command to be still (see Mark 4:39). The fig tree had no ears but “heard” the voice of its creator in Christ and withered (Matthew 21:19).
When we speak in authority, in faith, in a faith environment, our words have tremendous creative power through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, unless I have specific revelation about a particular sickness to be healed, I cannot be absolutely certain I will see healing in all the areas I’ve mentioned, but I have a general faith expectation that is not wishful thinking. At every service we run, we normally see deafness, levels of blindness, and lameness healed, and sometimes in large numbers. It's common to see incurable and terminal conditions, as well as many smaller conditions, instantly healed.

When we command healing, we do so as people exercising the King's authority over what he has made. This is why cancerous tumors, even large ones, often shrink and even vanish. When the Scripture says, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19), this is because the children of God hold the material world's healing in their hands. As coheirs with Christ, we are the kings and queens over God's creation; we are called to exercise his dominion in love, turning back the effects of the fall and establishing the kingdom.

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Damian Stayne is the founder of Cor et Lumen Christi (The Heart and Light of Christ), a Catholic community located in Wigton, United Kingdom, which which seeks to integrate a deep life of prayer and worship and a ministry of the word with healing, signs and wonders. The community is formally recognized by the Vatican. Damian has ministered in 25 countries, equipping believers of every background for supernatural ministry and seeing thousands healed at his services. God has graciously used Damian to bring many into the ongoing experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, prophetic revelation and deliverance. He believes that the Lord desires the new season in the miraculous that the church is now entering to be characterized by humility, purity, intimacy, unity and the manifestation of God’s glory. Damian is married to Cathy and they have two adult children John and Miryam.

For contact Info and book orders see below.

**Notes:**
2. *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*, 1.
3. Ibid.
8. St. Augustine, Epistle 130, VI, 13, as quoted in *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*, 4.
10. See Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire AD 100–400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1984), chap. 4.
13. Ibid.
15. “A Sea of Miracles” (Orthodox Photos.com, 2003), orthodoxphotos.com/ readings/portrait/miracles.shtml
20. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 334. The word *kratos* “also signifies dominion, and is so rendered frequently in doxologies, 1 Peter 4:11; 5:11; Jude 25; Revelation 1:6; 5:13 (RV); in 1 Timothy 6:16, and Hebrews 2:14 it is translated 'power.'
23. Divine Office, Lent weeks 1 and 3, Thursday morning intercession.

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INVITATIONS
If you would like to invite Damian or his team to lead one of their training schools in spiritual gifts and a public Miracle Healing Service or their Healing, Signs and Wonders conference please contact Damian at coretulumenchristi@gmail.com

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FILMS
Short films of Healings at our events to build faith can be found at [http://www.coretulumenchristi.org/videos.php](http://www.coretulumenchristi.org/videos.php) or at Damian's Facebook page.

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*top illustration: Jesus heals the lame man, illustration by James Tissot*
The Meaning of Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old received divine approval. 3 By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

The author to the Hebrews uses two expressions to define what faith is. He uses the word "assurance" and the word "conviction". Faith is not something vague, uncertain, undefeasible, or something which requires a leap of the imagination or worse, some kind of blind allegiance. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Faith is a response of trust and belief in what is reliable, truthful, certain, and real. To have faith is to believe and trust in someone or something. We believe in the power of electricity even though we can't visibly see it with the naked eye. We know we can tap into that power and use it to do things we could not do by our own human power. Faith in God works in a similar way.
When God reveals himself to us he gives us the "assurance" and "conviction" that his power and presence and glory is just as real, and even more real, than our experience of the natural physical world around us. Things around us change, but God never changes. He is constant, ever true to his word, and always faithful to his promises. That is why we can have the greatest assurance of his unconditional love for us and why we can hope with utter conviction that he will give us everything he has promised. Jesus is God's visible proof that his word is reliable and true; his love is unfailing and unconditional; and his power is immeasurably great and unlimited.

Faith and hope are closely linked together. Hope is not mere wishful thinking; "I hope it doesn't rain today." Hope is based on the certainty that God will do exactly what he said he would do and he will fulfill every promise he has made. Human hope is imperfect because we have limitations and we often fail to do what we said we would do. Supernatural hope, which the author to the Hebrews writes about, is a "hope beyond human hope" because it points to God who is utterly reliable and true to his word and who is all-powerful to fulfill all that he has promised.

Hope enables us to persevere when our faith is put to the test. We will experience trials, setbacks, difficulties, and failures in this life. But God will triumph through it all and accomplish his purpose for us. That is why God gives us the gift of hope which "the Holy Spirit pours into our heart" to strengthen our faith and endurance to persevere to the end without wavering (Romans 5:3-5). Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith and hope in the certainty of God's revelation.

"Lord Jesus, your word is utterly true and reliable. Give me understanding that I may grow in the certainty of the hope you have placed in my heart and serve you faithfully all the days of my life."

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction to The Letter to the Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews was written for a second generation of Christians sometime between the persecution of Nero in 64 AD and the persecution of Domitian about 85 AD. It was likely written around 80 AD. There is a reference to some of the community's leaders who were martyred in past times (Heb. 13:7). The present community had not yet suffered persecution and martyrdom since the author states: "you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4). The Letter points, however, to the risk of persecution about to come.

We do not know who the author is. Origen, the first great biblical scholar, who lived between 185-254, remarked: "who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews only God knows for certain."

What Christian community does the Letter address? We do not really know for sure. We do know, however, that it was written to a well-established church (Heb. 5:12) which had suffered persecution some time in the past (Heb. 10:32-34). It was written to a church not founded by the Apostles (Heb. 2:3). It was possibly written to Hebrew Christians in Italy. The most direct hint is from Heb. 13:24: "Those who come from Italy send you greetings." Another translation says: "Greetings to you from our Italian friends" (REV).

The Letter was likely intended for a scholarly group of Christians who were well versed in the
knowledge of the Old Testament. It may have been directed to a group of Christians who were preparing to become teachers (Heb. 5:12). The author of this letter writes as a teacher who has been separated from this group and is concerned about their drifting away from the faith. The author calls his letter "a word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22).

What can we learn from this Letter? "We have confidence to draw near to the throne of God." We, too, live in an age of spiritual conflict and struggle, when many Christians drift from their faith. Our faith must be strengthened in the knowledge of what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us. The Lord Jesus has removed the barriers and opened the door to the living presence of God. We now have access to God. This is the idea that dominates the Letter to the Hebrews. As you read this Letter and meditate on its truth, allow the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and insight into the great mystery of our faith.

The Faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah

Hebrews 12:4-7

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

Every age and culture has its heroes - men and women who were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of something greater and more noble. The author to the Hebrews gives us a list of noble men and women of old who were noted for their great faith and trust in God. Cain and Abel were the oldest sons of the first parents, Adam and Eve.

Genesis tells us that Abel's sacrifice was very pleasing to God (Genesis 4:4). From the very beginning of creation God put in the heart of every man and woman the longing to be united with God. The offering of a sacrifice as a gift to God, whether it be a prized possession such as an unblemished animal or the first-fruits of the harvest, was meant to express gratitude and reverence for the Creator and Author of life.

Abel's gift pleased God because it was given in "faith" -- in total trust and reverence for his Maker. Abel gave his gift with the certainty that God would accept it as a pleasing offering of thanksgiving and worship. Faith is the condition of being acceptable to God. To approach God is only possible for those who believe that he exists and has good things in store for them. To please God is to believe in what is unseen and to hope for the good things to come.

Abel lived in and for the future. That is why he is called "just" or "righteous". He trusted in the promises of
Living Bulwark

God and made his life an offering of praise to God. We do not know why Cain's sacrifice did not please God. Perhaps he gave his gift grudgingly or insincerely with little thought that it would move God in the least. True faith in God moves us to give God our best -- the best of our time, talents, gifts, and resources. Do you make your life an offering to God as Abel did with faith and confidence in his providential care and love?

The scriptures tell us very little about Enoch. Genesis gives us one sentence: "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). What does it mean to "walk with God"? Psalm 1 tells us that those blessed by the Lord "walk not in the counsel of the wicked .. but delight in the law of the Lord." Enoch loved God and followed his ways. He was a man of great faith because he lived a life of repentance, turning away from evil practices and renouncing sinful desires, and earnestly sought to understand how he could please God in the way he lived. God rewarded him for his godly faith by "taking him to himself". Through the gift of faith, God enables us to walk with him each day, and he gives us the help and grace we need to turn away from sin and to choose the way of love and righteousness.

Noah is a man of great faith because he believed in God's message. With reverence and obedience he took God at his word and built an ark to preserve his household in safety. He and his family were saved from destruction and judgment because he believed and obeyed the word of God. God's judgments are just and good. If we trust him, as Noah did, and heed his warnings, then, we too will know and experience the joy, freedom, and safety the Lord desires for those who take him at his word. Ask the Lord to strengthen your faith in his word and to increase your longing to be united with him forever.

"Lord Jesus, your word is utterly true and reliable. Give me understanding that I may grow in the certainty of the hope you have placed in my heart and serve you faithfully all the days of my life."

The Faith of Abraham

Hebrews 11:8-19

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son,18 of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." 19 He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.
Abraham is the greatest model of faith in the Old Testament. Paul the Apostle calls him the "father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). What made him great? Exceptional gifts, leadership skills, wisdom or experience? God chose Abraham to be the father of a mighty nation because he was faithful -- every ready to believe what God spoke to him and ever ready to obey his commands without hesitation.

Abraham was evidently a good listener. He was attuned to God's voice and hungry for God's word. He trusted even when God told him to do something he didn't fully understand.

Genesis 12 tells us the story of Abraham's journey of faith to an unknown land of promise. What must have gone through the minds of Abraham's relatives and friends? "There goes that dreamer again, in search of adventure and fortune." Abraham was willing to forsake everything he had and cherished for the sake of the God who called him. God was evidently pleased with Abraham and called him his "friend" (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:23).

How did Abraham grow in faith? "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations" (Rom. 4:18). Abraham's wife Sarah was too advanced in age to conceive. No wonder she laughed when three angelic visitors told Abraham he would have a son by the following year (Gen. 18:12-14). Abraham hoped where there was no human hope because his trust was not in human capability but in divine power. The supreme test of Abraham's faith was the sacrifice of his son Isaac to God. Abraham not only obeyed. He trusted that God could bring his back to life again! Now that's trusting, believing, expectant faith!

True faith takes God at his word. Abraham fulfilled the definition of faith given by the author to the Hebrews: "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). God strengthened Abraham in faith much the same way a metallurgist strengthens iron and forges steel. He hammered away at Abraham's character until there was nothing left but pure metal, refined, molded, and shaped into a perfect instrument for his purposes.

Abraham had to learn the way of faith in the same we learn it. Faith grows by consistency, taking daily steps of obedience and trust in God's word. If we want to grow in faith and allow the Lord to use us as his instrument, then we must cooperate with God as Abraham did. He will test us, not to make us fail, but build into us the character and strength of will that does not waver in the face of doubt, trial, and affliction.

The Apostle Paul describes how Abraham grew in faith: "No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:20-21). Do you trust that God will be faithful to you and accomplish everything he has promised you?

"Lord Jesus, in love and obedience to your Father you gave your life for my sake. Strengthen my faith in your promises and give me courage to always say yes to your will for my life."

The Faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph
Hebrews 11:20-22

20 By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. 21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial.

Why does the Author to the Hebrews link Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph together? They persevered to the end of their days and their faith did not waver even in the face of death. They did not live to see the fulfillment of God's promises to make of them a great nation and to bring them into the Promised Land.

Isaac died a nomad (Genesis 27). Jacob died as an exile in Egypt (Genesis 47:29, 48:15-16). And Joseph died as a great figure and a stranger in a foreign land as well (Genesis 50:22-26). They, nonetheless, hastened the day of this fulfillment through their faith and hope in God's word. Their faith enabled them to see beyond the present circumstances to the future which God promised. As links in a great chain of men and women of faith they hastened the fulfillment of God's promises.

We, too, are called to be links in a great chain of hope and faith that passes from one generation to the next. Is your hope in this present life only? Ask God to give you the faith to see beyond the grave to the victory which awaits those who persevere to the end.

"Lord Jesus, your promises never fail because you are ever faithful to your word Give us eyes of faith to see beyond the grave to the victory which awaits those who persevere in hope."

The Faith of Moses

Hebrews 11:23-29

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them. 29 By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

The Author to the Hebrews lists five great acts of faith in the life of Moses. First is the faith of Moses' parents who hid their child, in spite of peril to their own lives by defying Pharaoh's orders to have every male Israelite child put to death. When they could no longer hide him they released him to the Nile River in a basket trusting God to preserve this child for his own purposes. The fact that Pharaoh's own daughter took him and raised him as her own child pointed to his future destiny as one spared to lead his own people to their freedom.
The second great act of faith was Moses' loyalty to his own people. While Moses grew up in Pharoah's own house in great luxury as a royal son, he never lost his identity as a true son of Israel. He worshiped the true God of Israel and he willingly suffered abuse for identifying with his own people. He exchanged the glory of Pharoah's house for the plight of his oppressed people, just as Jesus exchanged the glory of his Father's house for the sake of humankind enslaved to sin and death.

Moses' third act of faith, after he withdrew from Egypt to Midian because of an intervention on behalf of people, was to patiently wait on God in exile before returning to Egypt to free his people (Exodus 2:14-22). Moses could have recklessly thrown his life away by defying Pharoah on his own strength rather than waiting for God to show him when and how he was to bring about his people's freedom from slavery.

When Moses returned to Egypt at the Lord's bidding, he confronted Pharoah with mighty signs from God in the form of ten plagues. On the eve of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, God instructed Moses to prepare the Passover feast as a celebration of his great saving deeds. Moses faithfully followed through on all the Lord's instructions. Such was his faith that he even commanded the people to celebrate the Passover annually. He knew beyond a doubt that God would free his people and see them safely to the Promised Land. His faith was full of hope because he looked beyond the present circumstances to the future which God promised. Jesus' victory over sin and death on the cross is our true Passover which we celebrate in the Lord's Supper or Eucharist.

The fifth act of faith was the crossing over the Red Sea on foot while the Egyptian armies pursued them with a fleet of 600 swift chariots (Exodus 14). Moses was willing to do what seemed humanly impossible when God commanded him to lead his people through the sea. Faith enables us to see beyond our human capacity to the power and grace of God at work in us. When God commands he gives the grace and strength to carry through successfully. Like Moses, we will have to face many barriers and obstacles on our journey of faith. But God will see us through if we keep our eyes on him and trust in his help and power. Are you ready to suffer for your faith as Moses did and trust God to see you through any difficulty or trial?

"Lord Jesus, your victory on the cross frees us from slavery to sin and the fear of death. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you as we journey in faith to our home with the Father in heaven."

The Faith of other heroes in Israel's history

Hebrews 11:30-40

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies. 32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets -- 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated -- 38 of whom the world was not worthy -- wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had...
foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The author to the Hebrews concludes his description on great acts of faith with a list of Old Testament heroes and heroines noted for their faith and trust in God. They accomplished great deeds because they looked not to their own strength but to the strength that comes from God alone. Jericho was known as a well-fortified city that could not be penetrated by outside forces. The Israelites made a public declaration of their faith by marching around the outside walls while singing and chanting praises to God for seven days (Joshua 6:1-20). The inhabitants of Jericho must have thought them foolish and weak since they made no attempt to attack the walls directly. The Israelites were able to occupy the city when God acted on their behalf by destroying the walls that stood in the way.

The fall of Jericho remains a powerful example for us that nothing can stand in the way of God when he decides to act for his people. When you meet insurmountable obstacles and difficulties in your life, do you praise God for his faithfulness and power to bring you victory over the forces of evil and destruction?

Why is Rahab the harlot noted as a great heroine of the faith? After all, she was not an Israelite but an inhabitant of Jericho before its great fall. No one in Jericho would have believed that the Israelites could overtake their great city. Rahab not only believed in the God of Israel but she staked her whole future on this belief that God could do the impossible when she gave hospitality to the Israelite spies. She had the faith and courage to take God's side even when it looked doomed for failure.

She welcomed the spies with these words: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt . . . for the LORD your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." (Joshua 2:9-11)

Rahab protected the spies and enabled them to escape unharmed. For her faith and hospitality she and her family were spared when the city was overtaken. She is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5) and the Letter of James praises her for her faith and good works (James 2:25).

The list of heroes that follows have a characteristic feature to them. They all won decisive victories for God against insurmountable odds.

Gideon with 300 men overtook a numerous force of Ammonites who had terrorized the Israelites for a long time (Judges 6-7). Barak and his band, under the inspiration of the prophetess Deborah, overtook the superior force of Canaanites (Judges 4-5). Samson alone defeated the Philistines against overwhelming odds because he found strength and victory in God (Judges 13-16). Jephthah, called back from exile, overtook the Ammonites against great odds as well (Judges 11-12).

David the shepherd defeated the Philistines by slaying Goliath with a single stone. As King he won many decisive battles and united the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13-20). The prophet Samuel time and again bore faithful witness to God among a people who were rebellious and discontented. Many prophets in turn rallied the people to put their hope and trust in God alone rather than in the strength of their armies or human resources.

The author to the Hebrews ends his praise of great heroes by telling us what these men and women of faith did in the name of God. His audience would have been very familiar with the biblical stories surrounding the
themes he mentions. Daniel stopped the mouths of lions (Daniel 6:23). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego escaped unharmed from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:19-28).

The prophets Elijah and Elisha escaped destruction by the sword (1Kings.19:1ff, 2 Kings.6:31ff). Judith saved her people from destruction when she single-handedly cut the head of Holofernes and threw his army into panic.

All these examples serve as a reminder of what God had accomplished in the past through men and women of faith. They remind us that God is still at work today, ready to fight for us against the spiritual forces that would destroy both body and soul in hell. When we acknowledge our own weakness and sinfulness, then we are on the right path to true humility and greatness in the kingdom of God.

Heroes of the faith were men and women just like us. They struggled with temptation and testing, with doubt and hopeless causes. They found strength and hope to overcome all odds in one source alone -- in God who never abandons those who trust in him. What made them great was not their natural gifts, talents, wits or resources. It was their whole-hearted trust in God and in the power of his kingdom. They believed against great odds in the God who is faithful to all his promises.

They never wavered in hope even when there was no cause for human hope, because their hope was in God. They all died before seeing the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus Christ. We are the heirs of Jesus Christ who died and rose for our sake. May their example inspire us to greater faith and confidence in Jesus our Redeemer. And may we do great deeds for God as we look not to our own strength but to the strength which comes from God alone.

"Lord Jesus, you show us the way to victory through your humble obedience to the will of your Father in heaven. May we never doubt your strength and saving help as we seek to do your will."

> See complete commentary and reflection on all 13 chapters of The Letter to the Hebrews

Don Schwager is a member of the Servants of the Word and author of the Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations website.
Living Ordinary Lives Extraordinarily

by Tom Caballes

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

- 2 Corinthians 3:8 ESV

We live our lives in a one-direction sequence - one day, one week, one month, and one year at a time. From the past comes the present, and later the future. We do not have a fast-forward button in our lives, and neither can we rewind and undo the mistakes of the past. Our days are like falling dominoes in a sequence of dominoes of a lifetime. As we walk through our daily lives, God is calling us not just to live and then die – He is calling us to a relationship with Him so we can live now and live forever with Him. That daily falling dominoes of life have value, purpose, and meaning. He is probably not calling us to be great Saints – but we are all being called to be saints in our own little way, in our own little world, and in our own borrowed time. That is all we can do to please God. Are you ready to accept the challenge of living an ordinary life lived extraordinarily? It is not going to be easy, but the rewards are tremendous. Are you willing to pay the price?
So How Do You Live an Ordinary Life in an Extraordinary Way?

1. “What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.” [Teresa of Calcutta]. God is not probably calling you to start a new movement or be a great preacher, but God wants you to start where you can make a difference – right in your own home. Think of your parents, spouse, children or neighbours. How can you be more loving to each of them? You cannot just change people directly; change starts with you.

2. Aim to make small differences daily. Continents and islands drift apart a few centimetres a year, but over millions of years, they make a huge difference – they can be thousands of kilometres apart. It is the same way with you – if you want to transform your home, school or your office, start with making small differences daily. Over a period of time, those actions will transform your environment and will become a blessing to everyone.

3. Think of and do little acts of love – being thoughtful, kind, forgiving, generous, forbearing, understanding, and caring. It also means not judging people and being patient with them. Do as Jesus would in your situation.

4. Do not worry if you fail at times – if you failed to act lovingly today, decide to change and decide to act lovingly tomorrow. While you are still alive, you will never be perfect; so don’t expect perfection from anyone, including yourself. Like you, people also fail – so be forgiving and understanding even if they do not respond to your acts of love. The measure you set for yourself should be the measure you have for other people too.

5. Try to make a small difference daily in your life and make it a habit. Thoughts lead to acts; acts lead to habits; habits lead to character, and character leads to destiny. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, rephrased]

6. There is a price to pay so you can be more loving each day. For love to be real, it must cost, it must hurt, it must empty us of self. [Teresa of Calcutta]. It will cost your selfishness and your pride – it will be difficult, and it will hurt at times until being loving becomes a lifetime habit. The unredeemed self in us will resist stubbornly, but are you willing to let it die a slow death? Sometimes it looks like it is easier to be a martyr than a saint!

7. Living an ordinary life extraordinarily will lead to something magnificent – eternal life. There you will appreciate the life you lived – with a difference, not only for you but also for everyone else around you.

Other Scripture passages:

1. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [Galatians 5:22-24 ESV]

2. Other references: Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 4:31-32; Ephesians 5:2; and Colossians 3:12-14.

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. What one act of love can you think of and do to the one closest to you daily and consistently?
2. Are you willing to pay the cost of living an ordinary life extraordinarily?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
When God Wants to Mold Men and Women for His Noble Purposes

by an anonymous writer

If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work

- 2 Timothy 2:21
When God wants to drill [train to perfection] a man
And thrill a man
And skill a man
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part

When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him
And with mighty blows converts him
Into shapes and forms of clay
Which only God can understand

How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes
How He uses whom He chooses
And with mighty power infuses him
With every act induces him
To try His splendor out—
God knows what He’s about.

Top illustration for book cover by Tim Ladwig for Fight the Good Fight of Faith by TUMI.org
See also interview with Tim Ladwig.
A Letter From Galilee

by Archbishop Georges Bacouni

Archbishop George Bacouni has been serving in Israel as archbishop in the Greek Catholic Melkite Archeparchy of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All of Galilee for more than three years. He has also been actively engaged in the life and mission of the People of God community in Lebanon since the early 1980s. The following letter was first published by CNEWA in the December 2017 issue of One Magazine.

I send this letter from Mount Carmel in Haifa in Galilee, close to the holy sites of the Prophet Elijah. When I was 12 years old, I expressed my desire to become a priest to my father. He replied by shouting: “No, get out of my face!” I thought it was the end of my vocation.

Two years later, my father passed away and suddenly I found myself in charge of my family, being the eldest boy. As a poor Christian, my dreams were limited to studying, working and, later, getting married.

But the Lord had other plans for me. In 1990, the last year of the civil war in Lebanon – where I was born and grew up – the Lord called me again to priesthood. The archbishop of Beirut accepted me as a seminarian even though I was 28 years old, a late vocation. I resigned from the bank where I had been working for more than ten years and started my theological and philosophical studies.
I was ordained in July 1995. Ten years later, in 2005, I was elected and ordained bishop to serve the Melkite Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Tyre in the south of Lebanon. And now I have been serving in Israel as archbishop in the Melkite Archeparchy of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All of Galilee for more than three years.

What a blessing, to be in this particular part of the world – where Jesus was born, grew up, proclaimed the Good News, was crucified and rose from the dead.

The Lord entrusted me with the flock of his homeland and to follow in the footsteps of the apostles. When I was taught how to meditate on a Gospel passage, I was asked sometimes to imagine the places where Jesus lived: Capernaum, Tiberias Lake, Nazareth, Jerusalem.

Now I know all these places, and they remind me of the historical facts. But Jesus is not only part of the history, he is still alive and in the midst of his church.

When you enter Peter’s house in Capernaum, where Jesus healed the paralytic; when you see the place where he fed five thousand people; when you are in a boat in the middle of the lake where he walked on the water; and many other holy sites, I assure you that you feel you are sharing the experience of the apostles and the crowds. You feel privileged being Christian. Visiting these sites – let alone living there – is a spiritual retreat.

Many of my predecessors used to say, “I am the archbishop of Jesus.” I don’t dare say that, but it’s true in a way that the bishop in Galilee is responsible for Jesus’ hometown.

What a blessing! But in the same time, it’s a huge responsibility and difficult mission for many reasons. First, Arab Christians from all denominations make up no more than 1.7 percent of the population in Israel. Almost half are in my eparchy. And yet, Catholics, Orthodox, evangelical Protestants and many religious orders from all over the Christian world maintain a foothold in the Holy Land – particularly in Jerusalem.

To not be of the majority is a challenge in and of itself, but to be divided makes our mission more difficult and weakens our testimony.
Second, what we as a church experience here is common with Christians all over the world: We have a crisis in our families, as youth participation declines – in part because Sunday in most places is not a day off – and gaps widen between generations, as a unified concept of values erodes.

I always share with the people of my eparchy that the pilgrims who come from abroad are not only here to visit the holy places, but to meet the local Christians and find in them genuine witnesses of the faith.

The third challenge is the plight of Christians living in the Middle East. While we are free to practice our faith in Israel – and we live in peace with other communities of faith in our society – the situation of our brothers and sisters in neighboring Syria, Iraq and Egypt has been harmful to the church in the whole region.

I keep saying that, since I became bishop, the blessings have increased and the cross has become heavier. But in all things the Holy Spirit is filling me with grace and encouragement to keep on in my mission.

I made a plan to visit, with the parish priests, all the families of our eparchy in their homes over a period of five years. So far, almost half of them have been visited. I have seen that many remain firm in their faith, even if they don’t attend church. They love their church; they are proud of their Christianity. Every year, during Advent, their generosity surprises me during the fund-raisers for the suffering Christians in Syria or Iraq.

A few months ago, representatives of the leaders of the European Catholic Episcopal Conferences met in Jerusalem. I told them that the last part of my liturgical vestments worn during my ordination was the
omophorion, a woolen shoulder garment. It is a symbol of the lost sheep. I told them that my call and my main task are to look after the lost sheep and be a good shepherd. This means that the bishop is not a businessman, nor a politician, nor a general manager.

All kinds of pastoral work give me great joy, and being close to the faithful, sharing with them their joyful or painful times, achieve the goal of my consecration. They want to know whom their bishop is, and that it’s easy to reach him.

In our tradition, we have married men who can be ordained priests. The seminarian has to decide before being ordained deacon. When I decided to stay single, my main reason was to have enough time to dedicate myself to the mission. Instead of having my own family, I have a wider one. All the faithful with whom Jesus entrusted me are my family, with all the joy and pain that I experience. I don’t pretend that I have succeeded, but at least this is my vision.

I have lived, worked and served in many countries in the Middle East. Many Christians have left, but many others remain. We are the salt and the light of the region. In Galilee, Jesus taught: “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

This is happening nowadays mainly in Syria, Iraq and Egypt. It’s difficult for a Christian to stay there, but we need to stay. We are Arabs, this is also our land and if God put us in this part of the world, it is because he has a purpose: To be witnesses, to proclaim the Good News and to be peacemakers. It’s important to say to humanity that we can live together regardless of our various religions.
Part of the discipleship is persecution. The Lord told us: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

At the same time, and also in Galilee, Jesus promised that surely he would always be with us, to the very end of the ages. He is always with us and there is no need to be surprised; the cross and persecution are part of our daily life.

Near our cathedral in Nazareth, we have a chapel we call the Church of the Synagogue. There, Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord.” (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Let’s keep doing this in the parishes, monasteries, schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, social centers, prisons, with the refugees and all the needy. In this way, we will prepare for Christmas in Galilee, in the Holy Land, in the Middle East and in all our countries.

top photo by Corinna Kern: Archbishop Bacouni writing at his desk in Galilee
Sometimes I hear God best in surprises. Seemingly unrelated circumstances suddenly unite, and their merger stirs something in my heart. Like a succession of waves on a beach, one last surge dissolves my sandcastles.

This last month I talked with:

- A despairing man whose ministry seems stagnant, and all his work seem fruitless;
- Another man who keeps a tally in the front of his Bible of all the souls he helped save;
- A group of friends who mused on our all-absorbing attraction to superhero movies;

Each discussion hinted at some deep longing for significance, expressed in meaningful ministry, “souls I helped save,” or that desire to be superhero (ish) ourselves. Wanting a life that matters doesn’t contradict Scripture. We are made in God’s image, and he is the God of all glory.

And yet. Last week I read about the baptism of Jesus. A voice from heaven cries, “You are my beloved Son; I delight in you.” My first response (and probably my second and third) was: “That’s exactly what I want, to hear the Father say to me, ‘Well done. I am pleased with you.’”

Then a thought flashed through my mind: Is it possible to have as much joy when the Father affirms Jesus as I
would have if He so affirmed me? Can I simply take joy in the joy of Jesus?

I’ve Been Looking in the Rear View Mirror

It’s a brand-new idea to me: of delighting so much in Jesus that his happiness overwhelms me, whatever happens in my own life. Familiar verses take on new meaning:

- Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4). No longer to delight in God in order to get my “real” desire (a new house or better job), but that the desire of my heart is to see the Father overjoyed in Jesus.
- Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him (Ps. 41:1). To enjoy the blessedness bestowed on Jesus that he considered the poor ...
- The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Ps. 145:18). To rejoice in God’s nearness to Jesus who alone cried out to him with true purity.

My nature unconsciously looks to God to accomplish my own schemes: my ideas for happiness or a good name, or my plans for ministry or a retreat house. In John 15, Jesus says the branch that bears fruit abides in the vine. I find myself saying, “If I just do that, like abide a bit more, then I’ll get what I really want.

Which means my heart really abides in the fruit and not the vine.

God is inviting me to abide in him a new way: simply to delight when he is honored, whether I see results I want or not. Joy in him is undermining my sandcastles.

All It Took Was a Trip to Lowes

On an errand to Lowe’s hardware store, a phrase from an old John Newton poem snuck into my thoughts on fixing a furnace humidifier. I googled the phrase in the parking lot. In it, God speaks to Newton, and through Newton, God spoke to me:

These inward trials I employ,
From self, and pride, to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may find thy all in Me.”

I keep thinking I need a home for retreats or to hear words of affirmation. Both fine things. I think, instead, God is breaking my “schemes of earthly joy,” all those fleeting castles of sand, because he is building a lasting home of unearthly joy.

There is a delight we can have simply in knowing him, in finding our “all” in him alone.

Sam

P. S. God often speaks to us in the moments we think he is silent. To nurture that conversational relationship with your Father, I suggest you read Hearing God in Conversation.

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Two friends and I host a weekly podcast on various spiritual topics. Last month we planned to discuss (I kid you not), *How to Recognize Spiritual Assault*. Schedule conflicts and illness forced us to cancel our two previous podcasts. We didn’t want to call off a third.

That was the situation four hours before the podcast. This is the story that followed:

- Late in the afternoon, my wife and I had a tense discussion. I missed much of my podcast planning time, leaving me irritated, distracted, and unprepared.

- Our dinner reservation was changed from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm, leaving me little time for conversation with friends, and even less time for food.

- The closest parking spot was several dozen blocks from the restaurant, and I arrived five minutes late.

- As I left the restaurant, a torrential downpour greeted me, and I splashed and waded the six blocks back to my car.

- Three different traffic jams—three!—delayed me further. I arrived home with two minutes to spare, soaking wet, and freezing. And further irritated, distracted and unprepared.
I began the call in a frenzied, intense, and distracted state of mind. Do you recognize the frontlines of the spiritual assault?

**It's Not What We Normally Think**

When I later reviewed that story with a friend, he exclaimed, “Whenever I speak on spiritual warfare, the same stuff happens to me: my wife and I get into a fight, my car breaks down, the sound system shorts out, and I’m an emotional wreck. We’ve got to pray against Satan’s evil orchestration of events.”

But the inconvenient incidents weren’t my problem; they were just its triggers. What left me bleeding on the battlefield was the bullets of twisted belief.

The book of Job may be the best spiritual warfare manual ever written. In it, only seven verses describe Satan’s evil orchestration of events: marauders, natural disasters, enemies, weather, and illness (Job 1:14-19 and 2:7). That’s it, seven verses out of forty-two chapters.

The rest of the book of Job reveals the distorted thinking of Job, his wife, and his friends. The book of Job concludes with God revealing himself, and it is God’s self-disclosure—clear thinking of true reality—that brings the healing Job needed.

**It’s the Lies That We Buy That Kill Us**

Scripture emphasizes Satan’s messages not his physical power. He’s called: a liar, the father of lies, a deceiver, an accuser, and a blinder of our minds. Scripture doesn’t call Satan the demon of thunderstorms, the terrorizer of technology, or the evil spirit of illness.

He may cause some of these, but he always lies about them with false interpretations.

Satan’s objective is to convince us of untruths about God (and then others and even ourselves). Satan’s plan with Job was to get him to “curse God to his face” (Job 1:11). It is our false beliefs that make us act in fear, rage, timidity, domination, misunderstanding, and oppression.

**I Could Have Handled That Call Differently**

The changed reservations, poor parking, and bad weather triggered inner responses of unneeded intensity, distraction, and forcefulness. I thought: “Why does this always happen to me? At the very worst times? Now I’ve got to make this call work, even though I’m unprepared.”

What if, instead, I believed that God works out all things for the good? Even poor podcast prep.

I would have made the call with peace not frenzy (*Success doesn’t depend upon me*), and curiosity not distraction (*What is God up to?*). Everybody would have had more fun. Including me.

Instead of cowering in thunderstorms, we can sing in the rain as we wonder, “What great marvel is God up to now?”

Sam

P. S. Plato urges us: “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.” If you are breathing, you are under a spiritual assault. The question we face is not, “Are we under attack?” but, “What is the heart of the attack?”
And the only cure for spiritual warfare is found in hearing Him. To nurture that conversational relationship with your Father, I suggest you read *Hearing God in Conversation*.

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Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.


Top illustration (c) by Kevin Carden
Companions to Eternity

Friendship and Sisterhood in Inter-Generational Community

by Jeanne Kun

I’m a single woman. More than forty years ago after much prayer and reflection, I felt that the Lord called me to make a commitment not to marry in order to dedicate my life single-heartedly to him. Some people don’t understand this peculiar call, especially if it’s not something they have had real examples of in their circles, but it’s not that strange, really.

God calls all of us to pour out our lives for others, and although the way we live this out may look different, it is essentially the same call: to give all of our lives to Christ for the rest of our lives. By intentionally remaining single I’m able to freely use my time and energies in a unique way to serve the Lord and the people he puts in my life. Each day I experience the Lord himself as my chief treasure and my “chosen portion” (Psalm 16:5). My singleness is not only a personal blessing but it gives witness to others of God’s personal love for each of his people. It speaks of the real possibility it is for each of us to love him deeply in return—that he is not a cold, distant, impersonal “force” but love itself.

My choice of life makes a statement; it says something to others about what I value and gives me perspective on eternity. Living single for the Lord only makes sense in the context of the promise of eternal life. It’s a sign of the life to come, and a foreshadowing of the final reality of the church as the bride of Christ.
God calls all of us to pour out our lives for others, and although the way we live this out may look different, it is essentially the same call: to give all of our lives to Christ for the rest of our lives.

Although I’m not married and have no children, I rarely feel “lonely” because I’m blessed to belong to a transgenerational Christian community whose members are adolescents, teens, university students, single men and single women, married couples ranging from young newlyweds to those soon to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversaries. They are my spiritual and very real family. God has given me a valuable source of strength and support for my life’s journey in the deep friendships that I have with both men and women of all ages. “We are companions to eternity,” as the medieval German mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg once wrote.

Fostering friendships is a high priority in my life, and over the years I’ve come to realize that friendships don’t always “just happen naturally”: not as a single woman, and I imagine not as a wife or a mom or a grandmother either. Relationship-building takes conscious effort and decision; sometimes it’s just plain hard work. I’ve learned not just to wait for others to take initiative – I’m proactive and take initiative myself to reach out and foster friendships.

I recall joining a sharing group with women in our community who were very different from me not only in age but in their personalities, social and educational backgrounds, and life experiences. But I came to love and value each of these women as I asked the Lord to show me how to reach out to them and open my own life to them. By God’s grace, each of us overcame any reservations and hesitancies we first felt, and we grew to be true friends in Christ.

Rather than focusing on our differences – “She’s married and I’m single” or “She just doesn’t have the same interests as I do” – as barriers or limitations, each of us came to realize that these differences added a great richness to our lives. We also learned to be reasonable and realistic in our expectations about what we could be for one another rather than being unrealistic and demanding.

Relationship building takes conscious effort and decision... Rather than focusing on our differences - “She’s married and I’m single, or “She just doesn’t have the same interests as I do” - as barriers or limitations, each of us came to realize that these differences added a great richness to our lives.

We grew to trust one another so that we could be really honest in sharing not only our joys and victories but also our difficulties and weaknesses. We also looked for concrete ways to care for one another in our needs, rather than being self-oriented or self-concerned.

In reflecting on Luke’s Gospel account (1:39-45, 56) of the “Visitation,” the encounter between Mary and her elderly cousin Elizabeth, I’ve come to see many riches and truths. Taking a look at Mary and Elizabeth’s meeting has helped me better appreciate the women who touch my life and has strengthened my relationships with them.
Living Bulwark

After giving her fiat, “let it be to me according to your word,” to God’s message brought to her through the angel Gabriel, Mary hurriedly set out to visit Elizabeth (Luke 1:38-39). She was eager to confide her fears and confusion as well as her joy and wonder at the angel’s strange message to her older kinswoman.

In most cultures, including the Jewish one, a young woman would be the one to greet her elder with respect. However, on this occasion, it was Elizabeth who honored Mary. First, in calling Mary “blessed” (Luke 1:42), the older woman recognized that the younger had been chosen by God – Mary wasn’t great by any achievement of her own but rather by God’s choice.

Elizabeth honored Mary because she was to bear a special child, lauding her young cousin because of her faith: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (1:45).

Then, filled with the Spirit, Elizabeth became the first to honor the Lord in his human nature when she called the fruit of Mary’s womb “blessed” (Luke 1:41-42). Perhaps it was also Elizabeth’s awareness of God’s recent graciousness to her and Zechariah – she was now pregnant after so many years of infertility – that increased her sensitivity to God’s action in others. She recognized how privileged she was to encounter God so personally: “Why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (1:43).

Mary and Elizabeth had faith in the promises God had made to them. They buoyed one another up and encouraged one another to look forward to the fulfillment of those promises.

Their relationship with each other was characterized by joy and gratitude to God. God was at the center of it. There was no jealousy or competition between these women; they were truly glad for what God was doing in each of them, different and unique; each was responding to her own call from God, not to someone else’s call!

They were truly glad for what God was doing in each of them, different and unique; each was responding to her own call from God, not to someone else’s call.

Mary spent her pregnancy serving her older cousin who probably needed help. Most likely, Mary did simple things for her in the home, while Elizabeth, on her part, offered Mary security, comfort, understanding, acceptance – a space where she was protected and at rest interiorly while she meditated over what God was doing in her.

These insights and truths I’ve gleaned from reflecting on the Visitation are ones that I continue to bring into my encounters with those whom the Lord brings into my life – older or younger than I am, single like me or married. For I treasure making and having many, many dear friends who’ll be my companions to eternity!

Jeanne lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she has been a member of The Word of Life Community, the local branch of the international Sword of the Spirit, for more than forty-eight years. She is also a founding member of Bethany Association, a global network of Christian women who, like her, have chosen to remain single for the Lord. On staff with The Word Among Us Press for the past nineteen years, she is the author of more than a dozen books, among them "My Soul Magnifies the Lord: A Scriptural Journey with Mary"; "Treasures Uncovered: The Parables of Jesus"; "The
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Lois Project is a Missional Motherhood Collective that aims to empower moms and mentors in their Christian faith. We seek to share real stories and insights from women around the world as a means of connection and encouragement and to cultivate a sincere faith that influences future generations.

The Lois Project is a group of Christian women from various cities, countries, and church backgrounds who feel a common call to be disciples on mission in all seasons of life. Most of us find ourselves in a season of care-giving as mothers, grandmothers, mentors, or teachers.

Many of our writers are part of an international, ecumenical Christian community called The Sword of the Spirit. Although we come from Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant traditions we seek to foster unity among these groups and work together.

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Friendship and Sisterhood in Inter-generational Community

by Carmen Dahlberg (Detroit, USA)

One of my favorite parts of motherhood is doing it in the context of inter-generational community. At a wedding several weeks ago, I expressed my anxiety over my daughter's percentile to another guest. Now a grandmother, she responded, "When I was raising my children, we didn't worry about things like percentiles. Some people had big babies, and some people had teeny babies." They all turned out fine.

Her simple statement was more refreshing to me than she likely realized. Raising a child in the information age, the era of instant access to a deluge of opinions, can be nothing short of overwhelming. It's helpful to hear about motherhood in ages past, when child rearing came down to common sense and community. Women like this wedding guest remind me that, as huge and all-encompassing as this stage feels in my life, mothers have been raising children since the time of Eve herself. My role is important, but I'm not pioneering anything new.

And as I settle into this new stage of life, I'm increasingly thankful for the women in my life who are in different seasons. Second-time mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters: ultimately, we're all just passing...
through on our way to the kingdom. The ladies in my life help me to be not only the best mother but the best wife and the best woman I can be. I am more than my motherhood, and my relationships with women, veterans and celibate alike, call out and affirm parts of me that can sometimes remain buried under that identity. Through their friendship and sisterhood, they are making this season of family life richer.

See also > Companions to Eternity, by Jeanne Kun

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The Brotherhood of Hope: Reconnecting with Our Roots

Our roots

The Brotherhood of Hope is a community of Catholic brothers radically consecrated to Jesus by vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience in a common fraternal life. We strive to advance the Gospel primarily by reaching out to inactive or uncommitted Catholic students at secular universities. We foster deep conversion to Jesus Christ, build evangelistic communities, and train leaders to empower others with Christ’s liberating hope.

Our roots are deeply tied to the Charismatic Renewal. We were founded in 1980 by Fr. Philip Merdinger, a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Newark NJ, USA and former coordinator in the People of Hope, a community in the Sword of the Spirit. It was after visiting the Servants of the Word in Ann Arbor, Michigan USA, in 1978 that Fr. Philip – moved by the example of young men living “single of the Lord” – was inspired to found our brotherhood community. We are deeply grateful to the Servants of the Word for their founding inspiration, the support we have received, and the common patrimony we share.

While in discernment to become a Catholic community of brothers, our brotherhood had to move its home from New Jersey to Boston, and leave the Sword of the Spirit. This period was a challenging one for both the brothers and the community we left. But all throughout this time we brothers remained faithful to our founding inspiration and continued to live out a charismatic spirituality and to bring others to a deeper life in the Spirit.
Reconnecting
Beginning in 2008, the Brotherhood of Hope began a communal discernment to re-enter the Sword of the Spirit. For the past decade, we brothers have had the great joy of reconnecting with our roots, rekindling our relationship with the Servants of the Word, visiting other communities and becoming a regular part of local covenant community life. In January 2017, the Brotherhood of Hope petitioned to become a formed, underway community in the Sword of the Spirit (known as Underway B Community). In April 2017, we underwent a visitation by various leaders from the Sword of the Spirit and were approved as an Underway B Community!

Reconnecting with the Sword of the Spirit has been deeply refreshing for our community! Renewing our ties with the Servants of the Word has once again become a great gift of fraternal camaraderie to us. Restoring ties with the family life of covenant community has been encouraging and lifegiving.

We brothers and Saint Paul’s Outreach, a Catholic campus outreach of the Sword of the Spirit, have developed a common alliance in our outreaches, and we work together in many ways to proclaim the Gospel on college campuses.

Currently the Brotherhood is helping to build a covenant community in Tallahassee FL, USA. It is a very fruitful endeavor which has been steadily growing over the past few years.

We brothers are extremely grateful to the Lord for his faithfulness in leading us back to our spiritual family in the Sword of the Spirit!

[This article is adapted from the October 2017 issue of The Sword of the Spirit North American Regional Newsletter, used with permission.]
From the Very Beginning Our Brotherhood Has Been Passionate for Unity
by Br. Joe Donovan

One Saturday morning, we brothers were celebrating the end of another blessed semester at Rutgers University with breakfast at a favorite diner near New Brunswick. Not long after we sat down a group of about fifteen African-American men began to arrive.

They greeted each other with warm, manly affection and took up the tables in the center of the diner. When their meals arrived they stood up, held hands, and prayed a blessing. It was a very compelling witness of Christian brotherhood and unity.

Toward the end of their meal I approached them and introduced myself. Instantly I was welcomed into that same bond of unity with the same brotherly embrace they showed to one another.

They even invited all of us to attend their men’s fellowship at First Baptist Lincoln Gardens. When some of us showed up the following Monday, there too we were welcomed unconditionally as brothers in Christ. It was a startling example of what Jesus intended when he prayed on the night before he died: “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (Jn 17:20-21).

Later, St. Paul would exhort the Ephesian Christians to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3), yet through the succeeding centuries the Church has found itself struggling to “keep the unity of the Spirit.” This year we recall the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the challenge to the Church led by Martin Luther to reform some of its corrupt practices which he felt gave a counter-witness to the grace of faith offered by Jesus. On this anniversary we thought it fitting to highlight how our community has responded to the division.

From our foundation, we Brothers have made repairing unity among our Christian brothers and sisters a
central part of our evangelistic mission. Our Ideal states: “As Catholics we know we belong to an even larger body of Christian brothers and sisters and are committed to the spread of the Kingdom.” Jesus makes Christian unity a condition by which the world can come to faith—“that the world may believe that you sent me”—therefore we believe that fostering Christian unity is an indispensable part of proclaiming the Gospel.

These ecumenical endeavors have taken many forms. In the “Bible-belt” of Tallahassee, Br. Jude Lasota spearheaded efforts to meet regularly with several local Protestant pastors. This effort gained their respect to the point of being welcomed into the pastor’s fellowship. He was even invited to preach at some of their churches!

Amongst the Orthodox, whom Catholics share so much in common, we Brothers have built many friendships with both celibate and married clergy, and have found moments when we can invite each other to minister to our respective congregations.

This work for unity, however, is most clearly demonstrated in our campus missions. We try to use every opportunity to work together with our Christian sisters and brothers to proclaim Christ and to witness together, in unity, to his love and power. From service projects to prayer events and monthly gatherings of Christian chaplains, we take Jesus’ desire seriously.

For example, eight years ago the Catholic Student Association at Northeastern University began teaming with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and the Baptist Student Union to host a Christian response to the school’s annual Sex Week. This was a moment when we could together proclaim a clear message about God’s design for human sexuality to the students. At Rutgers University, Christian chaplains meet together monthly to witness about God’s work in our outreaches and to pray for each other. On many of the campuses the student groups join together for moments of prayer: whether it be times of intercession, the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, or praise and worship nights. But aside from these programs, one enduring fruit is the friendships which have emerged from our collaborations, both amongst the chaplains and amongst the students we serve.

Our prayer is that all Christians make time and find ways to respond to this dying wish of the Lord Jesus. Maybe it will happen with a chance encounter at a diner, but however it happens, may it bear the fruit of unity for which Jesus prayed.

[This article is from the Spring 2017 Brotherhood of Hope Newsletter.]
Christian Perseverance and the Strength to Finish Well

By Don Schwager

What is perseverance?
A key Greek word for “perseverance” (*kartereo*) which was used by the ancient Greeks, as well as by the New Testament writers, literally meant “to be strong,” “to be courageous,” “to persist at,” “to hold fast to something,” “to occupy oneself diligently with something,” “to endure steadfastly,” “to suffer.” In connection with persons it meant “to stay by,” “remain with,” and “to be loyal to someone.” The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews used the analogy of a race to describe how perseverance is essential for staying the course and finishing well: “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Another key Greek word for perseverance (*hupomene*) described the inner quality of patiently enduring and courageously bearing up under trials and suffering. It was described as “manly constancy or strength under trial.” For the Greeks this virtue depicted strong, courageous, and brave resistance to some hostile power, and the endurance of pain and affliction with a steadfast spirit that would not be bowed down with grief or despair. The Letter to the Hebrews encourages Christians to follow the example of Jesus who patiently and courageously endured the cross for our sake: “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted” (Hebrews 12:3).

C.S. Lewis describes how perseverance in the virtues builds strong character in people:

There is a difference between doing some particular just or temperate action and being a just or temperate man. Someone who is not a good tennis player may now and then make a good shot. What you mean by a good player is a man whose eye and muscles and nerves have been so trained by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied on. He has a certain tone or quality which is there even when he is not playing, just as a mathematician’s mind has a certain habit and outlook which is there even when he is not doing mathematics. In the same way a man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character. Now it is that quality rather than the
Perseverance as a character trait
The virtue of perseverance is the patient determination to stay the course and to finish strong in the pursuit of what is good. It holds fast and persists in pursuing the good in the face of difficulty, discouragement, setbacks, or suffering. It does not vacillate, waver, hesitate, or falter in pursuing what is good. And it resists quitting in the face of difficulty.

Perseverance is the mean between giving into “softness” – seeking the path of least resistance, ease, and comfort on the one hand, and the stubborn, unyielding insistence of holding fast to one’s personal opinions, preferences, or self-serving goals.

Patience and courage
Perseverance is also connected to patience and courage. Patience enables us to bear affliction without anxiety or discouragement. Patience is courage borne out over time (James 1:2-4; Luke 21:19).

Courage also requires that we be ready to die for the sake of what is right. We must be willing to die rather than sin. The martyrs, by laying down their lives for the Lord Jesus Christ and the spread of the gospel make the supreme act of courage.

Examples from the Bible
In the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament we read the story of two remarkable women, named Ruth and Naomi. They steadfastly stood by each other in a time of suffering for the people of Israel. Ruth was determined to remain loyal to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and persisted in following Naomi back to her home town of Bethlehem where she could serve Naomi and her people.

The Lord Jesus told his follows that he would honor as his true and loyal disciples those “who continue (remain steadfast) in his word” (John 8:31).

In the parable of the widow and the unrighteous judge, Jesus told his disciples to “persevere in prayer and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). He also explained that those who persist (persevere) in “seeking, asking, and knocking” will receive the answer to their petitions (Luke 11:5-13).

Paul the Apostle also taught that perseverance was a necessary condition for prayer: “be constant (persistent) in prayer” (Romans 12:12), “continue steadfastly in prayer” (Colossians 4:2), and “keep alert with perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

Running the race with perseverance
In the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 12, the author exhorts his fellow Christians to persevere in running the race set before them.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).
What is the race – the particular course or goal – which the Lord Jesus has set for you, and for all of his followers as well? The image of a race used in Hebrews 12 could refer to a foot race in a stadium or to a long distance run (a marathon) which was often used in battles and for sending messages between distant towns or provinces. A long distance run required great endurance, stamina, discipline, and mental concentration. The author of Hebrews sums it up with the word “perseverance.”

Why is perseverance needed? Runners can get tired, distracted, wearied with sore muscles, or hurt with cuts and bruises. And then there were often obstacles along the path – rocks, ravines, steep hills, flooded streams or rivers to cross, maybe bad weather conditions, or maybe even enemies waiting to ambush them. In the life of a disciple there are many obstacles and challenges that must be faced and overcome if we are to stay on course and finish well. What might be some of the obstacles and challenges which you have experienced?

We do not run the race alone. There is a cloud of witnesses to encourage us to stay the course and not quit, or lose sight of the goal. These witnesses include those who have run the race before our time – our forbearers in the faith who persevered in their faith and calling to the very end of their lives. Our fellow Christians who know us – our brothers and sisters in Christ – also witness the race we are on. They, too, encourage and help us keep our eyes on the goal – the finish line of the race. How can you better draw strength and encouragement from your brothers and sisters in the Lord?

And best of all, the Lord Jesus is the “pioneer and perfecter” of our race. He has gone ahead of us and marked the way for us. We can be sure we are on the right path if we keep our eyes on him. Do you trust the Lord Jesus to show you the way forward? Ask him to free you of any obstacles that might keep you from fully trusting in him.

Hebrews says that Jesus was made perfect through suffering. Through his suffering on the cross he completed the work the Father sent him to do, to redeem us from our sins and win for us eternal life. Jesus is the goal, the one we go to meet and he is the companion who accompanies us on our journey. We struggle with sin and like a runner we must shed whatever would impede us in the race. We must part with old habits, self-indulgences, and associations which keep us from following Christ and his way of holiness. But we do not struggle alone. The Lord Jesus is with us and he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. Discipline comes from the same root as disciple. If we want to be true disciples of Christ that we must allow the Lord Jesus to train and form us into the kind of men and women he intends us to be. We can resent discipline, approach it with self-pity or in rebellious complaint, or we can accept it as coming from a loving Father.

**Joy and perseverance**

We face many tests in life – but the most important test is the daily choice and decision to put our faith and trust in God – to rely on his power and strength, rather than relying on our own human resources. As disciples of the Lord Jesus we can expect trials, challenges, and difficulties. The world, the flesh, and the devil are at war against the kingdom of God and against those who serve it’s king, the Lord Jesus Christ. God allows testing – not to fail us – but to make us strong, mature, and complete. That is why perseverance is necessary for passing the test. Perseverance keeps us going strong, not giving up, not quitting, not giving into despair, discouragement, or sadness when difficulties or setbacks try to weigh us down.

Like the long-distance runners, those who persevere in their faith win the “crown of life” when they complete the finish line. James also tells us that they receive a very precious gift right from the start of the race – the gift of joy – a spiritual fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you
may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:2-4, NIV translation).

This joy is a spiritual source of strength and consolation – as we struggle, work hard, and patiently endure trials and wait for God’s kingdom to become fully manifest. The Lord himself gives us a joy that no sadness can diminish, no trial can defeat. It is a joy that is also contagious – that draws others who want to share in it and to discover its true source.

What is the source of this supreme joy and happiness? When Jesus began preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, he taught his disciples the beatitudes (Luke 6, Matthew 5). The word beatitude literally means happiness or blessedness. Jesus' way of happiness, however, demands a transformation from within – a conversion of heart and mind which can only come about through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How can one possibly find joy and happiness in facing trials and in suffering for the Lord Jesus? If we want to be filled with the joy and happiness of heaven, then we must empty ourselves of all that would shut God out of our hearts. God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will more than compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world. Thomas Aquinas said: "No person can live without joy. That is why someone deprived of spiritual joy goes after carnal pleasures." Do you know the joy of persevering to the finish line in God’s love and strength?

> See related articles in Living Bulwark by the author

Don Schwager is a member of the Servants of the Word and author of the Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations website.

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by Don Schwager

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Location of the Cave Church of the Three Crosses in Cappadocia, Turkey

The Witness of the Early Christian Martyrs, Monks, and Holy Families of Cappadocia

by Don Schwager

A land of radical disciples and missionary monks

One of the first group of people from other nations to receive the Gospel and outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the early church were the Cappadocians in Asia Minor (today located in central Turkey). Luke in his account of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, list the residents of Cappadocia among the nations gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast (Acts 2:9). They witnessed the tongues of fire which appeared over the heads of the apostles and other disciples who had gathered in the upper room in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And to their utter amazement when they heard Peter and the other apostles speak to the crowds, each heard them in their own native language.
We know that the Gospel quickly spread to Cappadocia and throughout the region of Asia Minor. Peter's First Letter specifically addressed the Christian communities in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia - all Roman provinces in Asia Minor.

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

– 1 Peter 1:1-2

When Peter wrote his letter, some time before his execution in Rome between 64 - 67 AD, the majority of Christians in Cappadocia and Asia Minor were Gentile converts. Peter addresses them as “elect exiles” living in “dispersion.” These were titles originally given to the Jews who were a nation chosen by God but now were dispersed among the Gentile nations after the Babylonian exiles. Peter wrote his letter during a time of persecution which affected the Christians living in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor. Peter wrote to affirm them in the faith and to encourage them to persevere with hope in the midst of severe trials and persecution.

**Rapid growth of Christianity in the first 4 centuries**

By the time Constantine legalized the practice of Christianity in 313, the Roman Empire was already heavily Christianized. By the year 300 perhaps 10 percent of the people were Christians, and by the middle of the century, Christians may well have been a majority of the citizens, 33 million Christians in an empire of 60 million people. So Constantine did not so much ensure Christianity’s success as acknowledge it. His edict of toleration was overdue recognition that the Christian church had already won the empire. They were already in the majority.

These were not 33 million “nominal” Christians – not 33 million “cafeteria Catholics” and “chaplain to the culture” Protestants. They could not be. They did not have the luxury of being lukewarm. In the decade before Constantine’s edict, the Church had suffered its most ruthless and systematic persecution ever under the emperor Diocletian and his successors. The practice of the faith was, in many places, punished by torture and death. In many places, to live as a
Christian meant, at the least, to accept social stigma and humiliation. What is more, the Christian way itself was characterized by demanding disciplines in the life of prayer and in the moral life.

To be a Christian was not easy in the year 300. It cost something. Whether or not you were martyred, you had to pay with your life. Christians were laying their lives on the line every time they attended the liturgy, and they continued to do so through the course of every day. Yet the rate of conversion throughout the empire – beginning with the first Christians, long before Constantine – was most remarkable.


[When Dr. Stark published his finding he was not a Christian and had no vested interest in making Christianity look good.]

What Stark found in his study of the first Christian centuries was an astonishing growth rate of 40 percent per decade. Again, Constantine gets no credit for this growth. Most of it happened in the years before he was born. In fact, even though conversions were coerced at various times after the year 380, the Church never again witnessed the kind of growth that took place when conversions were costly.

- by Mike Aquilina, Salt of the Empire, see full article in Living Bulwark, August 2009

Witness of heroic martyrs among the Christians of Cappadocia

A number of holy martyrs were honored as Christian heroes throughout Cappadocia, including St. George the Wonder Worker – a Roman officer under Diocletian in 303, Orestes the Physician in 304, the Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste in 320, the martyr Barbara of Nicomedia, and the martyr Catherine of Alexandria in 305. They were tortured and put to death for their bold witness of faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ. A number of the early rock cut cave churches and shrines in Cappadocia were dedicated to their honor.
The Martyr George of Cappadocia

The martyr George, whom Eastern Christians call the Victory-Bearer and Wonder Worker, was a native of Cappadocia, a Roman province in Asia Minor. He was raised in a deeply committed Christian family. His father was martyred for Christ when George was still a child. His mother was originally a Greek native from Lydda in the Roman province of Syria Palaestina. After his father’s death, George and his mother settled back in the Syrian province where she owned land.

When George came of age, he joined the Roman army. He was brave and valiant in battle, and he came to the notice of the emperor Diocletian (284-305) and joined the imperial guard with the rank of comites, or military commander.

As Christians increased in number and influence, Diocletian, who was pagan and anti-Christian, began to intensify his persecution against the Christians. Following the advice of the Senate at Nicomedia, Diocletian gave all his governors full freedom in their court proceedings against Christians, and he promised them his full support.

When George heard the decision of the emperor he decided to take a public stand against the emperor’s edict. George distributed all his wealth to the poor, freed his servants, and then appeared in the Senate. The brave soldier spoke out openly against the emperor’s designs. He confessed himself a Christian, and appealed to all to acknowledge Christ: “I am a servant of Christ, my God, and trusting in Him, I have come among you voluntarily, to bear witness concerning the Truth.”

“What is Truth?” one of the dignitaries asked, echoing the question of Pontius Pilate. The saint replied,
“Christ Himself, Whom you persecuted, is Truth.”

Stunned by the bold speech of the valiant warrior, the emperor, who had loved and promoted George, attempted to persuade him not to throw away his youth and glory and honors, but rather to offer sacrifice to the gods as was the Roman custom. The confessor replied, “Nothing in this inconstant life can weaken my resolve to serve God.”

Then by order of the enraged emperor the armed guards led him off to prison and began to torment him there. The next day at the interrogation, powerless but firm of spirit, George again answered the emperor, “You will grow tired of tormenting me sooner than I will tire of being tormented by you.” George was severely tortured for days and then sentenced to death for refusing to recant his faith.

At the place of execution he prayed that the Lord would forgive the torturers who acted in ignorance, and that God would lead them to the knowledge of Truth. Calmly and bravely, George bent his neck beneath the sword, receiving the crown of martyrdom on April 23, 303. The martyr George was widely honored among the Christians in Cappadocia and beyond for the bold witness of faith and perseverance in suffering for Jesus Christ. He is called St. George the Wonder Worker for many miracles that were attributed to him.

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Martyrdom of the Forty Christian Soldiers of Sebaste in 320 AD

Gregory of Nyssa (330-395 AD) in his homily on the commemoration of the Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste, describes the martyrs as forty battle-tested and highly-decorated Roman soldiers, who were part of the Twelfth Legion “Fulminata” (Legio XII Fulminata) meaning “Armed with Lightning” stationed in Cappadocia. They were also very committed Christians who openly confessed their faith. During the persecution by the emperor Lucinius in 320 AD, they were interrogated and refused to recant their faith.

According to Basil the Great (329-379 AD), they were condemned by the pagan prefect to be exposed naked upon a frozen pond near Sebaste, (in southern Anatolia) on a bitterly cold night, so that they might recant their Christian faith or freeze to death. Among the suffering soldiers, one weakened, and left his companions, seeking the warm bath house or banya near the lake which had been prepared for any who might waver in
their faith. This one deserter, according to the Synaxarion, dropped dead as soon as he crossed the threshold to the bath house. One of the guards, who was appointed to keep watch over the martyrs, saw a supernatural light descending over them. Immediately he proclaimed himself a Christian, threw off his garments, and placed himself beside the thirty-nine soldiers of Christ. Thus the number “forty” remained complete.

At dawn, the stiffened bodies of the confessors, some of which still showed signs of life, were crushed with hammers, burned and then the charred bones were cast into a river so that Christians would not gather them up. Three days later the martyrs appeared in a dream to Peter, Bishop of Sebaste, and commanded him to recover and bury their remains. The bishop, together with several clergy, gathered up the relics of the glorious martyrs by night and buried them with honor. Later, their relics were recovered and distributed throughout many cities. In this way the commemoration of the Forty Martyrs became widespread, and numerous churches and shrines were erected in their honor.

Many Christians today commemorate their martyrdom on March 9th and March 10th.

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**Martyrdom of Orestes the Physician in 304 AD**

The Martyr Orestes the Physician of Cappadocia lived at the end of the third century in the city of Tyana in Cappadocia in the time of the emperor Diocletian (284-305). He was a capable soldier, and from childhood a very committed Christian.

By order of the emperor, the military officer Maximinus was sent to Tyana to deal with Christianity, which then had spread widely throughout Cappadocia. Orestes was among the first brought to trial to Maximinus. He bravely and openly confessed his faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. The prosecutor offered the saint riches, honors and renown to renounce God, but Saint Orestes was unyielding.

At the order of Maximinus, they took Orestes to a pagan temple and again demanded that he worship idols. When he refused, forty soldiers took turns one after the other, beating the Orestes with lashes and rods, and then they tormented him with fire. Orestes cried out to the Lord, “Establish with me a sign for good, let those who hate me see it and be put to shame” (Psalm 85/86:17). The Lord heard his servant. The earth began to tremble, and the idols fell down and were smashed. Everyone rushed out of the temple, and when Saint Orestes came out, the very temple tumbled down.

Infuriated, Maximinus ordered the holy martyr to be locked up in prison for seven days giving him neither food nor drink, and on the eighth day to continue with the torture. They hammered twenty nails into the martyr’s legs, and then tied him to a wild horse. Dragged over the stones, the holy martyr departed to the Lord in the year 304. His relics were thrown into the sea.

In 1685, when Saint Demetrius, later the Bishop of Rostov, was preparing the Life of Saint Orestes to be printed by the Kiev Caves Lavra, he became tired and fell asleep. The holy martyr Orestes appeared to him in a dream. He showed him the deep wound in his left side, his wounded and severed arms, and his legs which had been cut off. The holy martyr looked at Saint Demetrius and said, “You see, I suffered more torments for Christ than you have described.” The humble monk wondered whether this was Saint Orestes, one of the Five Martyrs of Sebaste. The martyr said, “I am not that Orestes, but he whose Life you have just finished writing.”

[Source: https://oca.org/saints/lives]
How many Christians were martyred in the first 4 centuries AD?

The eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon, author of the Fall of the Roman Empire, reduced the number of casualties during the Great Christian Persecution to a maximum of 2,000 and suggested a total of 4,000 for the entire imperial period. Historians now say that you cannot determine an exact number, the numbers being considered range from 10,000 to 100,000 martyrs.

“Judging from the calculation of Ludwig Hertling [an Austrian Jesuit who specialized in ancient history and theology at the Gregorian University in Rome], one could estimate that during the second half of the first century (Nero, Domitian) the martyrs would be about five thousand; during the second century (Hadrian, Trajan, Antonio, Marco Aurelio) about ten thousand; for the whole third century (Septimius Severus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian) about twenty thousand; and the late third and early fourth century (Diocletian, Galerius, Maximinus Daja) some fifty thousand. This calculation would give us a number of approximately one hundred thousand martyrs during the persecution of the Roman Empire.”


A distinguished family of holy women, monks, and bishops

Macrina of Caesarea: philosopher, monastic foundress, miracle worker

One distinguished holy woman from Cappadocia was Macrina (330-379 AD), a philosopher, miracle worker, and founder of a monastic community of women. Macrina was the eldest of 10 children in a well-off Christian family in Cappadocia. Along with Macrina, this family produced an extraordinary number of saints:
the girl’s maternal grandmother (Macrina the elder), for whom she was named; her parents, Basil and Emmelia; and three of her brothers, all bishops – Peter of Sabaste, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesareae, and a fourth brother, Naucratius who became a renowned Christian jurist, and a sister (or sister-in-law), Blessed Theosebia the Deaconess.

Gregory of Nyssa wrote a 35-page narrative of his sister’s life around 380-383. In an introduction to The Life of Saint Macrina, scholar Kevin Corrigan calls Macrina the “spiritual guide” in her distinguished family and says that her “influence upon the major currents of her own time is evident on almost every page of the [Life], an influence that goes to the very heart of Christianity.”

According to the Life, the holy woman rejected “a great swarm of suitors,” preferring a life of Christian asceticism. She persuaded her mother to give up their “rather ostentatious lifestyle,” treat her maids as “sisters and equals instead of slaves and servants” and turn their home into a monastery for women.

Peter founded a men’s monastery near Macrina’s community on the banks of the river Isis. Basil became the father of a monastic tradition that still forms the basis for much Orthodox monasticism today. But it seems he wasn’t always inclined toward renunciation. Gregory relates that when “the great Basil” returned from school as a young man, “he was monstrously conceited about his skill in rhetoric” until Macrina gave him a talk. “So swiftly did she win him to the ideal of philosophy that he renounced worldly appearance” to follow his life of poverty and virtue.

Gregory heard her last philosophical discourse on a visit he made to his sister at the end of her life. (“I kept wishing that the day could be lengthened so that she might not cease to delight our hearing,” he wrote.) He was with the many women at Macrina’s bedside when she died in 379. News of her death “spread like wildfire,” and crowds of people poured in for the funeral procession, many telling Gregory about miracles “the great Macrina” had performed while she was alive.

Basil on his Conversion to Radical Discipleship

...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies – 2 Corinthians 4:10

When Basil had finished his advanced education, and was about to embark on a professional career teaching rhetoric in his hometown of Caesarea, he experience a profound conversion and call to leave all for Christ. In a letter to a friend, he described his sudden change from lukewarmness to repentance and fervor:

"Much time had I spent in vanity, and had wasted nearly all my youth in the vain labour which I underwent in acquiring the wisdom made foolish by God. Then once upon a time, like a man roused from deep sleep, I turned my eyes to the marvellous light of the truth of the Gospel, and I perceived the uselessness of the wisdom of the princes of this world, that come to naught. 1 Corinthians 2:6 I wept many tears over my miserable life and I prayed that guidance might be given to me to admit me to the doctrines of true religion.

First of all was I minded to make some mending of my ways, long perverted as they were by my intimacy with wicked men. Then I read the Gospel, and I saw there that a great means of reaching perfection was the selling of one's goods, the sharing them with the poor, the giving up of all care for
Living Bulwark

this life, and the refusal to allow the soul to be turned by any sympathy to things of earth. And I prayed that I might find some one of the brethren who had chosen this way of life, that with him I might cross life's short and troubled strait.

And many did I find in Alexandria, and many in the rest of Egypt, and others in Palestine, and in Cœle Syria, and in Mesopotamia. I admired their continence in living, and their endurance in toil; I was amazed at their persistency in prayer, and at their triumphing over sleep; subdued by no natural necessity, ever keeping their souls' purpose high and free, in hunger, in thirst, in cold, in nakedness, 2 Corinthians 11:27 they never yielded to the body; they were never willing to waste attention on it; always, as though living in a flesh that was not theirs, they showed in very deed what it is to sojourn for a while in this life, and what to have one's citizenship and home in heaven.

All this moved my admiration. I called these men's lives blessed, in that they did indeed show that they bear about in their body the dying of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:10). And I prayed that I, too, as far as in me lay, might imitate them.


A new domestic asceticism

"The fourth century marks the beginning of a golden age of monasticism in the church, and in the forefront of our minds here are the great founders and fathers of Christian asceticism. We think, rightly, of Antony the Great (d. 356), about whom several lives were written, though Athanasius’s became the most famous. We think of Pachomius (d. 346), whom we regard as the founder of coenobitic monasticism and who wrote the first rule to guide the common life for communities of both male and female ascetics. We think of Rufinus (d. 410) and Jerome (d. 420). The pioneering female ascetics should not be forgotten: Marcellina (d. 398), Demetrias (after 440), Melania the Elder (d. 410) and the Younger (d. 439). And, of course there are our Basil and Macrina (d. 379).

"We do well to recognize, however, that this golden age is not limited to the institutionalized forms of asceticism but also embraces the less organized and more inchoate movement, from which some of the more organized forms grew. At least two factors spurred the growth of this movement, as they did of organized asceticism: persecution before Constantine’s conversion and the secularization of the church that followed it. While persecution must have affected individual families differently, Gregory of Nazianzus indicates how it affected Basil’s paternal grandparents. During the reign of Maximinus, he tells us, Basil’s ancestors steered the virtuous mean between cowardice and foolhardiness in the face of persecution (Or. 43.5–6). They fled to the mountains of Pontus as a small company without servants and stayed there for around seven years. “Their mode of life,” Gregory relates, “delicately nurtured as they were, was straitened and unusual, as may be imagined, with the discomfort of its exposure to frost and heat and rain, and the wilderness allowed no fellowship or converse with friends” (Or. 43.6; 397).

"Gregory describes here a sort of forced ascetic life. The wilderness forced on Basil’s grandparents not only the bodily discomfort turned asceticism brought on by the elements but also ascetic isolation, a sort of social abstinence. As a very famous and later example of the former, we can call to mind Augustine’s dear friend Alypius, who “tamed his body to a tough discipline by asceticism of extraordinary boldness: he went barefoot on the icy soil of Italy” (Conf. 9.6.14; 163).

"Basil’s grandparents and their companions, Gregory tells us, did not grumble as did the Israelites in the desert. Rather, in piety and faith they cast themselves upon the mercy and bounty of God, who provided them wild game for food. These animals were not hunted or chased with dogs but with prayers, at which “their quarry lay before them, with food come of its own accord, a complete banquet prepared without effort, stags appearing all at once from some place in the hills” (Or. 43.7; 397). Persecution became the occasion for prayer and ascetic struggle, and Basil’s grandparents took advantage of it. Indeed, Gregory wonders at these

wild animals presenting themselves as food to Basil’s relatives, not hunted by them but “caught by [their] mere will to do so” (Or. 43.8; 397). He sees this both as a foretaste of heaven and a reward for the “struggle” (athlēsin) in which they had been engaged (Or. 43.8).

"With the conversion of Constantine, mediocrity and sometimes corruption replaced persecution as a spurring influence on both formal and domestic asceticism, for Constantine’s beneficence to the church was a mixed blessing. It meant the production of Bibles, the building of churches, the restoration of property, tax breaks and some civil powers for clergy, and so on, but it also meant lukewarm half-converts from paganism and unscrupulous men seeking ecclesial office for worldly reasons. We will see later that one of the moving forces behind Basil’s ascetic thought was his conviction that the church of his time experienced so many difficulties and internal divisions because Christians, especially Christian leaders, had abandoned the commandments of Jesus and the order and peace that flow from keeping them (On Judg. 1–2).

"Anna Silvas describes well the household asceticism that resulted from Christian families devoting themselves to living the gospel: The values of the Graeco-Roman civic politeia gradually yielded to more explicitly Christian virtues. The cultural shift is seen especially in the fostering at home of the Scriptures and church traditions, in the practice of hospitality, personal frugality, and a Gospel charity in which the ruling idea is no longer philanthropy with a view to civic kudos, but self-effacing succour of the poor in imitation of Christ. (Silvas, 68)

"We see a shift to from the ascetic practices of Basil’s grand-parents to those of his parents. There was a movement from the forced and prayerful austerity of living in the woods to avoid persecution to the “community of virtue” notable “for generosity to the poor, for hospitality, for purity of soul as the result of self-discipline, [and] for the dedication to God of a portion of their property” (Or. 43.9; 398). This is not quite the shift that Silvas describes above, but, of course, the one type of shift is not exclusive of the other, and we will see in Basil himself as in his family a gradual abandonment of the trappings and values of the secular culture in which they lived as they ever more thoroughly embraced the gospel and its social implications."

Excerpt from Basil of Caesarea by Stephen M. Hildebrand, (c) 2014, published by Baker Academic
Basil the Great reformed the monastic movement in Cappadocia by instructing his brother monks to live together in monastic communities so they could fulfill the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." The monks also were at the service of the local population, providing spiritual help, education, and charitable works for the disadvantaged.

The first monastic communities were small structures built to provide the Christian monks with solitude and a place for meditation. They were located near sources of water. Daily worship took place under the supervision of a member of the clergy. Everything was shared, the sick were tended, and there were no differences that would cause a rupture with the local Christian population.

Basil created a “new city” of charitable works for the disadvantaged

When famine struck Cappadocia in 369 AD, Basil and his fellow monks began a daily service of providing food for the poor. Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa describes how he daily gathered together the poor to “set before them basins of soup and meat.” Basil’s soup kitchen served as an impetus for Basil to appeal to the wealthy to join him in financing and creating a “new city” devoted to charitable works on behalf of the disadvantaged.

Basil's vision included a complex of hospitals for lepers and invalids, an orphanage and place to care for the elderly, and a training center for the unskilled, and a hospice for travellers. Basil staffed the hospitals with competent doctors. Monks, nuns, and laypeople served as caregivers. His “new city” of charitable works inspired other bishops and communities to build similar facilities in their cities, such as Constantinople and Alexandria.

When Basil the Great died in 379, he close friend, Bishop Gregory Nazianzen, during the funeral oration reminded his audience of Basil’s charity towards the poor:

Go forth a little way from the city, and behold the new city, the storehouse of piety, the common treasury of the wealthy… where disease is regarded in a religious light, and disaster is thought a blessing, and sympathy is put to the test...

My subject is the most wonderful of all, the short road to salvation, the easiest ascent to heaven. There is no longer before our eyes that terrible and piteous spectacle of men who are living corpses, the greater part of whose limbs have mortified, driven away from their cities and homes and public places and fountains, aye, and from their own dearest ones, recognizable by their names rather than by their features… no longer the objects of hatred, instead of pity on account of their disease...

[Basil] took the lead in pressing upon those who were men, that they ought not to despise their fellowmen…Others have had their cooks, and splendid tables, and the devices and dainties of confectioners, and exquisite carriages, and soft, flowing robes; Basil’s care was for the sick, and the relief of their wounds, and the imitation of Christ, by cleansing leprosy, not by a word, but in deed.
Standing 1,000 meters above sea level, the Cappadocian relief is a high plateau, pierced by volcanic peaks that create a visually stunning landscape, which includes dramatic expanses of rock, shaped into towers, cones, valleys, and caves. From a distance, Cappadocia appears like a deserted land, however, with closer examination, it is possible to spot the small, winding paths and beautifully carved homes scattered within the unique land formations.
The rock formations that make up Cappadocia were created by volcanic eruptions, erosion, and wind. Over three million years ago a volcanic eruption deposited a blanket of ash across the 1500 square mile landscape which formed into a soft rock. This rock, slowly eaten away by wind and time, has created some spectacular forms.

Wind, climate, mechanical weathering, rain, snow, and rivers caused the erosion giving to Cappadocia its unusual and characteristic rock formations. The Cappadocian climate, with sharp changes of temperature, heavy rains, and melting snow in the spring, plays an important role in the formation of the Cappadocian landscape.

In addition, mechanical weathering is responsible for fragmentation because rocks expand when heated and break up as they cool. Frozen water in the cracks can also cause fragmentation. However, the most important sources of erosion are rain and rivers. Heavy rainfall transformed the smooth surface of the plateau into a
A vast number of churches and chapels were cut out of the soft lava rock in Cappadocia. The rock cut cave churches were expanded from early cave dwellings and were also cut out in the underground cities of Cappadocia. More than a thousand rock-cut churches and monastic dwellings, dating from the earliest days of Christianity to the thirteenth century, have been identified by archaeologists over the past few decades. They estimate that many more are yet to be discovered in the mountain regions and uncharted underground cities of Cappadocia.
Inside many of these cave churches are richly colored frescoes painted on the walls and ceilings. The most common themes depicted are scenes from the Bible, and especially the Gospel accounts. Many cave churches also feature paintings of renowned martyrs and saints, such as St. George of Cappadocia pictured on his horse slaying the dragon, which symbolically represents the martyr’s victory over the demonic forces of Satan and his kingdom of evil and darkness.

Saint George and Saint Theodore depicted on horses wielding their spears as they slay the dragon which is a biblical symbol of Satan and his kingdom of darkness, Karsi rock cut cave Church of Saint John, Goerme, Cappadocia, 5th-6th century AD
The land of Cappadocia offered Christians secure places of refuge during intense periods of persecution. Numerous cave dwellings and underground cities with connecting tunnels between cities offered protection from their persecutors and invading forces who came to plunder the land.

More than forty complete underground cities and 200 underground structures have been discovered in recent times in Cappadocia, many of them connecting to each other via tunnel. Most people didn’t live in the underground cities full time. Underneath the cities was a vast network of tunnels, connecting each home in the area to the city. When the area came under attack, families would flee to their basements, rush through the dark tunnels, and gather in the underground city.

In the first few centuries of the Christian era, numerous Christian communities flourished in the cities and villages of Cappadocia. During periods of persecution by the Romans in the first four centuries (and later by invading Arabs), the Christian communities took refuge for periods of time in underground tunnels and interconnecting underground cities. Some archaeologists believe they were started by the Hittites (c.1200 BC).
The Christian communities expanded and fortified these underground cities and added several new levels of underground tunnels and dwellings to house families, animals, and storage of food and supplies. They also built numerous underground churches and cemeteries.

Unwary soldiers could be caught in the many traps laid throughout the labyrinthine corridors, such as stones which could be rolled to block doorways, and holes in the ceiling through which spears could be dropped. Invaders were further outwitted by the Christian builders who made their tunnels narrow, forcing their enemies to fight, and be picked off, one by one.

[source from Ancient Origins 2014]
Two video clips from the History Channel describe how the early Christians lived underground during times of persecution:

- First clip of the Christian persecution period begins at 5:00: [https://youtu.be/85M6wZBYQNo](https://youtu.be/85M6wZBYQNo)
- Next clip continues the description of Christian underground cities: [https://youtu.be/SiZTHfasPYA](https://youtu.be/SiZTHfasPYA)

Don Schwager is a member of the Servants of the Word and author of the Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations website.

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“All of us have a race to run towards our appointed end”

by Basil the Great

Life's journey

We read in the Book of Psalms: “Blessed is the one who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor follows in the way of sinners.”

Life has been called a ‘way because everything that has been created is on the way to its end.

When people are on a sea voyage, they can sleep while they are being transported without any effort of their own to their port of call. The ship brings them closer to their goal without their even knowing it. So we can be transported nearer to the end of our life without our noticing it, as time flows by unceasingly. Time passes while you are asleep. While you are awake time passes although you may not notice.

All of us have a race to run towards our appointed end. So we are all on the way'.

This is how you should think of the ‘way’. You are a traveler in this life. Everything goes past you and is left behind. You notice a flower on the way, or some grass, or a stream, or something worth looking at. You enjoy it for a moment, then pass on. Maybe you come on stones or rocks or crags or cliffs or fences, or perhaps you meet wild beasts or reptiles or thorn bushes or some other obstacles. You suffer briefly then escape. That is what life is like.

Pleasures do not last but pain is not permanent either. The ‘way does not belong to you nor is the present under your control. But as step succeeds step, enjoy each moment as it comes and then continue on your ‘way’.

The Soul's Dizziness

There are two different roads, one broad and easy, the other hard and narrow. And there are two guides vying with each other to attract the traveller's attention.

Now that we are grown to years of discretion we see that life is an amalgam of vice and virtue. The soul by casting its gaze first on one and then on the other can calculate the consequences of each.
The life of the sinner presents all the pleasures of the present moment; the life of the righteous points to future benefits.

The easy undisciplined way of life leads to pleasure to be enjoyed now, not later; the way of salvation is hard in the present, but promises a beautiful future.

The soul is confused and dithers in its calculations. It prefers pleasure when it is looking at the present; it chooses virtue when its eye is on eternity.

Commentary on Psalm I, 4, 5 (PG29, 22. 1ff.)

Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, were three important 4th century theologians born in Cappadocia who were responsible for precisely defining the doctrine of the Trinity and clarifying the errors of Arianism. They became known as the Cappadocian Fathers.

Basil the Great (329-379) was the older brother of Gregory of Nyssa. After the best possible education available at the time, Basil withdrew from the world to a monastic life near Neo-Caesarea in Pontus. He returned to public life at the call of his bishop, Eusebius of Caesarea, in Cappadocia, to join in the battle against Arianism. He was ordained priest to help Eusebius and in 370 succeeded him as bishop of Caesarea; this office he held until his death. In 371 he came into conflict with the Arian emperor Valens, who divided Basil's province. Basil was renowned in his own lifetime for his learning, eloquence and personal holiness. His exceptional organising ability left a lasting imprint upon the shape and form of Eastern monasticism and his charitable foundations to help the needy survived several hundred years.
The Spiritual Meaning of Fasting

by Carlos Alonso Vargas

When people talk about fasting these days, it is most common to focus on what we might call its “social” or “horizontal” dimension: it is said that fasting finds its meaning in giving to the poor the food that one didn’t eat when fasting (or the monetary equivalent of such food.) Therefore, we deprive ourselves of food in order to share it with the needy.

That is, without a doubt, a praiseworthy expression and justification for fasting. It encourages us to share our material goods with those who regularly need them, when we regularly have them. Moreover, it brings us to a true solidarity with them: by not eating, we experience “in our own flesh” (literally) what they commonly experience because of their destitution.

Not only is it good to regard fasting in this way, but it has a clear foundation even in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 58:3-12 (especially vv. 6-10) the Lord rebukes those who fast while exploiting their laborers, and states what true fasting is, the fast that is pleasing to him – releasing the captives, being kind to the needy, not exercising brute force. I must clarify, however, that the point of this passage is not so much that we should give to the poor the food that we don’t eat or the money we don’t use, but that our life ought to be consistent.
In order for fasting to be pleasing to God, it must go together with a righteous life, a life in which we treat others fairly and do not take advantage of them, and in which we share our goods and help the needy. If, on the other hand, we are unfair and selfish, our fasting and other religious practices will be something merely external which is worthless before God.

Even some Fathers of the Church, (1) in the early centuries of Christianity explicitly mention this practice of giving to the poor the food that we give up when fasting. And it has been a part of all of the major streams of Christianity throughout the centuries.

It seems, however, that in modern times there is a tendency to emphasize exclusively this “social” aspect of fasting, which, even if it has solid foundations in both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, does not exhaust the meaning of fasting. This social dimension is so strongly emphasized today that it seems as if other dimensions, which also give value and meaning to the practice of fasting, have been forgotten or set aside.

In Catholic tradition (I speak of it because it’s the tradition I know best) there is also a certain tendency to view fasting as a “sacrifice” understood as “deprivation.” This also has its foundations (which I will refer to further on,) but it is easily distorted into a “commercial” relationship: people have a tendency to think that depriving yourself of things “earns you points” before God. This matches a wrong way of understanding what “sacrifice” means – it is not necessarily a negation or deprivation, but rather an offering, a gift given to God to worship him and recognize his lordship.

People also highlight the practical reality that when we are fasting we have more time available for prayer. This is true, and it is also true that it is very advisable to turn to prayer during the times one would normally be eating. It is also true – as we will see further on – that fasting and prayer are closely related to each other. But that does not mean that this is the reason for fasting, or that it completely explains the practice of fasting and gives it meaning. That would be like saying that Christian fasting is for losing weight – it is true that if you fast you may lose weight, but this will be a by-product of the fast, not its main objective. (If that were the main objective, then we can no longer refer to it as Christian fasting nor to fasting as a religious practice.)

**Background in Scripture and in Christian Tradition**

In the Old Testament we find that fasting is practiced mainly with two purposes: “to afflict the soul” and “to seek the face of the Lord.” By “afflicting the soul,” the Old Testament mainly refers to breaking our own pride: by depriving yourself of food, we are no longer satisfied and don’t have anything to boast about. We are in a kind of mourning. Meanwhile, “seeking the face of the Lord” refers to engaging into a personal relationship with God, characterized by righteousness and obedience to his commandments.

As for Christians, we know for sure that fasting was practiced from the very beginning; this is indicated in the New Testament (Mt 6:16; 9:15; Acts 13:3; 14:23; 27:9; 1 Cor 7:5) and it is clearly stated in the Didache (2) and other ancient writings. But the so-called “Desert Fathers” (pioneers of the monastic movement in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, from the 4th century on) were the first ones to state at least two very clear purposes for fasting – communion with God and Christian growth. For them, fasting is one of the main means for fighting against the passions – that is, acquiring self-control, and fighting against temptation – and also a form of spiritual warfare against the enemy.

**Dimensions of the spiritual meaning of fasting**

When speaking about the “spiritual” meaning we are referring directly to what relates to our personal relationship with God, our Christian growth and our lives of holiness, which include, of course, every aspect of our lives. This is a relationship of communion with God in the Holy Spirit, and hence we call it “spiritual.” Thus, we are not in any way using the word “spiritual” in dualistic terms, as it is commonly understood.
Living Bulwark

among the followers of esoteric or occult schools, where it is opposed to the “material,” which is considered as evil – or at least inferior to the unseen.

On the contrary: as we shall see, precisely because Christianity is not dualistic but considers the human being as a unified entity, something material like fasting (which is a practice directly related to our body, our matter) has its implications for and effects in our spiritual life. So, what gives fasting a spiritual meaning?

1. **Fasting as “seeking the face of the Lord”**

Fasting is something whose physical effects, especially after a few hours, we can feel, experience or perceive: this sensation, perhaps not always of true hunger, but at least a “desire to eat,” helps us remember – whether we want to or not – that we are fasting. And if we remember that we are fasting, we will immediately remember why we are fasting. We could then direct all of our attention to ourselves (what are we feeling, how much we think we need food…) or if we truly are serious as Christians, it won’t be hard to instead direct our attention towards God, because, regardless of the purpose of that specific fast, we are ultimately doing it for God’s sake and for the sake of our relationship with him.

This is why fasting has been traditionally understood as a means of “penitence,” that is, of conversion to God, of personally turning back to him. Fasting, then, as prayer, is a means for what the Old Testament calls “seeking the face of the Lord,” that is to say, relating personally to him, being in his presence, seeking intimacy with him. This is clearly seen when, in a day of fasting, we devote ourselves to prayer: it is much easier to pray – be it praise, repentance, petition or any other kind of prayer – to relate personally to God, when we are fasting than when we have our stomach full and are totally satisfied.

Fasting allows us, indeed, to vividly experience the reality that God is our greatest good, our treasure, what we most long for. When we feel physical hunger we will more easily be hungry for God, for his presence and his power, and we will be able to live out the truth that he is the only one who can truly fill us and satisfy us. Moreover, by fasting we are declaring with our bodies that what we are interested in above all is being close to the Lord.

Then the answer that Jesus gave to the devil at the end of his fast in the desert, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, is fulfilled in us: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4). That is why, precisely, fasting is directly related not only to prayer, but also to our feeding on the Word of God in Scripture. It is also an expression of how earnestly we are “seeking the face of the Lord”.

2. **Fasting as a means of “afflicting the soul”**

The Hebrew expression “afflicting the soul” refers to humbling ourselves. It is the opposite of “being puffed up” or “becoming vain.” A person who has everything material, or who is satisfied and full after a banquet, will easily boast about his abundance. “Afflicting the soul” is in a certain way to mourn. That is why parties and banquets prevent us from “afflicting our soul.” Thus, fasting is a practical way of humbling ourselves, limiting ourselves and putting ourselves in a situation of need.

Food is something necessary and good. It is part of God’s creation and he provides it for our sustenance and our joy. Thus, when we fast we are not giving up something bad, but depriving ourselves of something good, something that we need.

In other words, fasting is becoming poor. By doing without something that is necessary, something to which we are entitled, we are making ourselves needy before God. We are presenting ourselves before him empty-handed, in poverty. We recognize ourselves as in need of him, hungry for him. And this is nothing less than being “poor in spirit” – recognizing ourselves as poor, recognizing that we cannot attain blessedness by our own means, that the power to save us is not in our own hands. And these poor in spirit, Jesus says, are
blessed because “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:3). When we recognize ourselves as poor and limited before God, we open ourselves to the blessing, the salvation and the happiness he has for us.

3. Fasting and spiritual sensitivity

If much food easily makes us sluggish and distracts us (cf. Luke 21:34), being deprived of it through fasting may help us to be more sensitive and alert to spiritual realities: the presence of God and his power, the message of his Word, the guidance of the Spirit. Hence it is possible that, when we are fasting, some gifts of the Spirit (like discernment) may become more intense or manifest themselves more easily.

That is why the Desert Fathers saw fasting as one of the main ways of “vigilance,” of watching before the Lord, as Jesus commands us in the Gospel (Mt. 24:42-44). Much food makes us drowsy. Fasting helps us to stay awake and be ready for the Lord’s action. This is the reason why fasting is recommended to those who are about to be baptized as adults or who are being prepared for confirmation.

4. Fasting, prayer and sacrifice

Fasting in a certain way is prayer. It amounts to making our whole body participate in prayer by presenting it empty, poor and needy before God. It is precisely because we are unified beings (we are not a soul “locked” into a body-prison or a body-shell, but a unified being consisting of body and soul, a material element and a spiritual one,) that our body “participates” in prayer. Prayer is not something exclusively mental or interior – prayer belongs to the whole human being. In the same way, when we pray we stand or kneel, raise our hands or fold them, close our eyes, sing.

In the case of fasting, it is the whole body that is entering into prayer. Fasting is taking prayer to a corporal level, showing that our prayer is so “serious” that we come to it with our whole being, that we are able to go “from words to deeds”.

We thus arrive at a correct understanding of fasting as sacrifice. These days, many Christians have the idea that a sacrifice involves, first of all, denying themselves something instead of enjoying it, or even having that deprivation cause pain. But sacrifices in the Old Testament were not so much things that people would deny themselves of, but mainly things people offered or delivered to God as a gift of worship to him. (Of course, when people would “give” an ox or a sheep to God in sacrifice, the animals would have to be killed, or when they “gave” him an offering of wine they poured it out as a libation, because that was the way of saying that they were renouncing their own use of these things and giving them over to the Lord, consecrating them to him. In that sense they were “depriving” themselves of them. But the main thing about a sacrifice is not the deprivation itself, nor the suffering that may cause, but the giving or the dedication/consecration.) We can then see that sacrifice, in the biblical sense, has a positive dimension. It is giving more than it is taking away.

In the New Covenant, only the sacrifice of Christ gathers all the Old Testament sacrifices in itself, surpasses them and abolishes them, as is explained at length in the letter to the Hebrews. This unique sacrifice is the maximum and definitive expression of worship to God, which all Christians join ourselves to as the body of Christ we are. But precisely because of that union with Christ, the New Testament claims that we too, in our worship to God, “offer spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pet 2:5). The letter to the Hebrews mentions two examples of such sacrifices: our praise, and sharing what we have with others (Heb. 13:15-16).
In addition, Paul tells us that the authentic or “spiritual” worship we must offer to God is to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1). Even though it is possible that by “body” he means our whole being, it is precisely about our whole being because it encompasses our physical body. We would be stretching the text too much if we said that Paul is specifically referring to fasting. But at the same time, if fasting is something we do with our body, it is a concrete expression of this authentic worship in which we present our body and our being before God.

5. A form of intercession
Because of its strong connection with prayer, fasting can specifically be a form of intercession. Some Christians believe that even during the times of the day when they are not praying, our body, in fasting, continues the prayer: it is like an ongoing intercession, not with words nor with the mind but with the body that is being “presented to God” as an offering.

That is why we could say we are fasting “for” a given need or petition that we are bringing before God. Fasting to intercede could be a way to make our intercession more intense, serious and complete before God.

6. “Fighting against the passions”
As we have said, fasting is depriving ourselves of something necessary and good – food. In order to fast, we must exercise willpower, because what we would “instinctively” or by nature do is eat. Fasting is a decision that requires self-control, but it doesn’t just require it – it exercises it. By controlling ourselves in something that is natural and good (the desire to eat, hunger,) our character is strengthened and we acquire more self-control in general. Self-control, let us recall, is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23) – that is to say, it’s part of mature Christian character.

Therefore, fasting is a way in which we learn to control all those other desires which are not good. It is a way to defeat our inclination towards evil and overcome temptation. It is, in that sense, a “spiritual exercise,” a “discipline.”

7. Spiritual Warfare
Precisely because fasting strengthens our Christian character, it equips us to face the enemy’s wiles and temptations. It is, then, a weapon of Christian warfare against Satan. That is why fasting is associated with exorcism (Mk. 9:29, in some versions); that is why fasting is one of the typical practices for Lent, when we intensify the Christian warfare against all the manifestations of evil in our life.

Some practical instructions on fasting
Like many other traditional Christian practices, fasting declined much in Western societies from the times of the Enlightenment (18th century,) and was impacted, of course, by the resulting secularization and de-Christianization of society. This caused many good Christians to stop fasting, or never to learn how to do it, because they could not find persuasive reasons to do so.

The modern emphasis on the “horizontal dimension” that I spoke about the beginning of the article has emerged in modern times as the only valid reason many would accept for fasting, not taking into account the spiritual meaning I have presented here.

In the specific case of the Catholic Church (the tradition I know best) its requirements concerning fasting were loosened greatly around the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), largely with the intention of facilitating the participation of the faithful in the liturgy and their experience of conversion in a deeper sense, in the midst of modern society. Even though that intention had some good in it, its negative result has been the almost complete disappearance of fasting as a spiritual discipline amongst Latin rite Catholics.
Catholic Church’s precept on fasting is still in force (although only for Ash Wednesday and Good Friday,) but the norm is extremely lax, since it describes fasting as having three meals during the day, only one of which is to be “a main meal” (a non-defined term) and such that the other two together are smaller than the main meal; and not eating anything in between meals. In my estimation, it qualifies as a “light fast.” On top of that, many Catholics, not understanding the meaning of fasting, limit themselves to doing the minimum required to obey the norm. Other Christian traditions may practice fasting with more rigor.

The relaxed definition of fasting from food encourages people to “fast” from (deprive themselves of) other things that are not food – smoking, drinking alcohol, eating sweets, going to the movies, watching too much television, etc. As a result, many people do not fast from food itself but deprive themselves of these other things. Those forms of self-denial are often admirable and can certainly have their place in the Christian life, and they can help in self-control. They are related to fasting and share some of its spiritual meaning, but are not in themselves fasting or a replacement for an actual fast.

Here are some ways of fasting that can, in general, be practiced in the circumstances of modern life.

1. **“Normal” or “basic” fasting**
   This, I would recommend, be a fast for one day. It can be repeated over several days, but always with a meal at the end of each day. It consists of the following:

   - The day before, meals must be normal; dinner must not be too abundant (not “filling up” the day before in order to endure the fast).
   - Do not have breakfast or lunch; you can drink something at those times.
   - Eat dinner in the evening, but a rather light dinner (if not, it may cause indigestion; and it is also not the case that we want to fill ourselves up to compensate for having fasted).
   - Do not eat between meals; you can drink water or other liquids.

2. **The “half-fast” or half-day fast**
   This is a milder version of the previous one:

   - Normal meals the day before.
   - No breakfast; you may drink something.
   - Eat lunch normally, that is, break the fast at noon.
   - Do not eat between breakfast and lunch; water or other liquids may be drunk.

3. **Mild fast**

   - Normal meals the day before.
   - Do not eat breakfast or lunch, but at those times (or at one of them,) in addition to drinking, you may eat something small like a piece of bread, a fruit or some salad.
   - Eat dinner in the evening.
   - Do not eat between meals; water or other liquids may be drunk.

4. **Bread-and-Water fast**
   This form of fasting was quite common among Christians in former times. It is stricter than the “normal” one and can be very helpful when fasting for two or more days.

   - Normal meals the day before.
Living Bulwark

- Do not eat breakfast, lunch or dinner, but only a piece of bread and some water at those three times.
- Do not eat in between meal times; water may be taken.

Many Christians, if they do a “normal” fast, do it for one day. If they decide to take on a stricter fast, they may repeat the “normal” fast over many days or (if they are experienced) do the “bread and water” fast. It is also possible to combine in a week one day of “normal” fasting (e.g. Wednesdays and Fridays are traditional fasting days) with a “moderate” fast or a “half-day” fast the remaining days (except Sunday. Christian tradition indicates that one does not fast on Sundays, not even during Lent, with the exception, at least in my tradition, of fasting before taking Communion. Sunday, the Lord’s Day, is the day when “the Bridegroom is with them” and is a feast day.)

**For the Christian practice of fasting, here are some guidelines:**

- In order to care for your own health, do not stop drinking water on fast days. Dehydration is very dangerous.
- Do not “feast” before a fast nor at the time of breaking it; not only would this take away its meaning but it may cause physical problems.
- Small children and sick people must not do a “normal” fast. Older people should only fast if they are capable of doing it. These people, if they are to fast, can do it in a reduced way, like the “moderate” fast or the “half-day” fast described above.
- The same applies to people whose health condition prevents them from spending many hours without eating, as is the case with some types of diabetes.
- Someone who has never practiced fasting or who has practiced it only a little should not venture into suddenly fasting for more than one day. Even more, a fast like that should only be undertaken for serious spiritual reasons, after having discerned (hopefully with advice from other people, and especially from a wise spiritual advisor) that it is the right thing to do, for a special reason, in order to further spiritual growth.
- In the practice of fasting in its various forms, each person must find what works best for their physical condition and their age, and what is most fruitful in their Christian life.

Fasting has been an immensely valuable discipline in the whole biblical and Christian history. Today’s Christians can recover its meaning and its practice, always seeking “the fast that the Lord chooses” (Is 58:6-10), that is, a consistent Christian life and not merely external practices. If we do so, we will discover the great fruit fasting can bear in our Christian growth, in our personal relationship with God and in our communion with the rest of the Christian people.

**NOTES:**

1) Leo the Great (fifth century): “May our fasting contribute to the relief of the needy. No sacrifice by the believers is more acceptable to the Lord than one the poor can benefit from” (Sermon 48, 5; PL 54:300). Similar ideas might perhaps be found in other Fathers.
2) The Didache or “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” is the most ancient non-biblical Christian writing; it dates probably from the late first century or the middle of the second.

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Some Spiritual Reading Resources for the Forty Days of Lent

- **God Has Reigned from a Tree**: Meditations on the Cross of Jesus Christ
- *Ecce Homo!* - Behold the Man!, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *He Bore Our Pride In His Body on the Cross*, by Raniero Cantalamessa
- *What Happened on the Cross*, by the early church fathers
- *The Cross - the One True Glorification of God*, by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI
- *Emptied for Our Sake*, by Bernard of Clairvaux
- *Worship at the Cross*, by Charles Simpson
- *The Holy Spirit Reveals the Merciful Father*, by Raniero Cantalamessa
- *God Calls Sinners to Make Them Saints: Simon Peter's Story*, by Jeanne Kun
- *Whose Side Are You On – Witnesses of the Passion*, by Carlos Mantica
- *The Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt - Master Painter and Storyteller
- *The Great Downfall*, by Steve Clark
- *A Mirror to see Inside Ourselves*, by Gregory the Great (540-604 AD)
- *The Mountain of Your Sins Will Never be too High*, by Cyril of Jerusalem (349-386 AD)
- *Why Does God Allow Temptation?* by Maximus the Confessor (580-662 AD)
- *Dead to Sin*, by John Chrysostom (349-407 AD)
- *Discipleship: “Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me,”* by Jeanne Kun
- *The Readiness to Change*, by Dietrich von Hildebrand
- *Surrender to God*: An orientation to Lent, by John Henry Newman
- *Focus for Fasting: Pursuing our higher calling to serve and worship Christ*, by Jerry Munk
- *Fasting and Feasting*: A selection of readings for Lent from the early fathers
- *Conquering Ourselves and Overcoming the Evil One*, wisdom from early fathers
- *Walking in the Light*, by Gregory of Nyssa
• The Ladder of Divine Ascent: spiritual wisdom from John Climacus
• Christ Calls Us Deeper Still by John Henry Newman

• It's Not About You! by Bob Tedesco
• Pursuing Holiness in an Unholy World, a strategy for winning, by Tom Caballes
• He Must Increase: Finding Our Identity in Jesus Christ, by Jan Munk
• Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing, by Soren Kierkegaard

• True Holiness, by Bruce Yocum
• Manna and Mammon: A battlefield on which the Lord challenges us to show our mettle, by Daniel Propson

• Repentance, Forgiveness, Heaven, and Hell: quotes from C.S. Lewis
• There Are No Ordinary People, by C.S. Lewis
• Growing Downward to Grow Up: The Life of Repentance, by J.I. Packer
• The Danger of “I Would Never Do That,” by Sam Williamson

• No Fig Leaves, Please: Confession before Repentance, by Sam Williamson
• Repentance After Confession: Filling the Emptiness, by Sam Williamson

• The Fall and Rise of David, by Patrick Henry Reardon
• Exiled from Eden, by Jeanne Kun
• Jesus: A Portrait of Obedience, by Jeanne Kun
• Christ's Humility and Victory by Steve Clark

• The Obedient Son: the humility of the Son of the King, by Steve Clark
• The Redeemer Who Died, by Steve Clark

• Salt and Light: Our Vocation to Holiness, by Donald Bloesch
• Why the Church Needs Saints, by W.E. Sangster
• On Saints and Saintliness, by John Henry Newman
• The Agony in the Garden: Love's Surrender, by Jeanne Kun

• Confessions: Excerpts from Augustine of Hippo's autobiographical book (354-430 AD)
• Prayer of Augustine, song by Ed Conlin
• My Confession, by St. Patrick of Ireland (389-461 AD), and Song of Patrick, by Ed Conlin
• Your Word Beat upon My Heart: from the Confessions of Augustine of Hippo

• Saints or Sinners? by Jerry Bridges
• The Discipline of Confession, by Richard Foster
• A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Lent, by Jeanne Kun

• Holy, Holy, Holy: Isaiah's Call and Mission - and Ours by Tom Mangan
• Sloth – the deadly vice of our present age, by Peter Kreeft

• The Lavish Love of the Prodigal Father: reflection by Don Schwager
• Countering Vice with Virtue: Part I – Faith and Virtue, by Don Schwager
• Attaining True Greatness - Humility versus Pride, by Don Schwager

• Prayer Shaped by the Word of God: hungering for God's word, by Don Schwager
• With Jesus in the Wilderness for Forty Days, by Don Schwager
• The Ten Plagues: Spiritual Lessons for us today, by Don Schwager