The Joy of Discipleship

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” – Matthew 11:28,30

In This Issue:
- Following Christ Together in Community by Dan Keating
- The Gospel As the Costly Adventure of Discipleship by Dan Keating
- If Anyone Would Come After Me by Steve Clark
- The Joy of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- The Visible Community of Faith by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- The Choosing of the Twelve by Fulton J. Sheen
- Twelve Men by G. K. Chesterton
- Surrendering Your Whole Life to God by Kim Smith
- Deepening Our Love for God by Tom Caballes
- A Yes Like Theirs by Mary Rose Jordan
- Shut Down by a Sneer by Tom Caballes
- How Do We Measure the Fruit of Our Lives by Sam Williamson
- On Misguided Adventures and Breeding Spotted Mice by A.W. Tozer
- A Thief Named Comparison: The Truth Shall Set You Free by Jacqueline Giles
- I Came to Know and Love Him by Esa Vance
- Kairos Mission Trip by Mark Nitkiewicz
- Is Christianity Hard or Easy by C.S. Lewis
- That Fair Beguiling Thread – Prayer Poems for Every Occasion by Sean O'Neill
- Holy, Holy, Holy: Isaiah's Call and Mission – and Ours by Tom Mangan
- Spiritual Food for the Forty Days of Lent: Hunger for More of God's Nourishing Word by Tom Mangan
- It is I, Be Not Afraid poem and Surrender to God reflection by John Henry Newman

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.


Following Christ Together as a Community of Disciples

“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:28–30)

In This Issue

What is the essence of being a Christian? It is certainly more than doctrine, precepts, and commandments. It is first and foremost a relationship - a relationship of trust, affection, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, compassion, mercy, encouragement, support, strength, protection, and so many other qualities that bind people together in mutual love and unity as brothers and sisters in Christ.

God offers us the greatest of relationships - union of heart, mind, and spirit with himself, the very author and source of love (1 John 4:8,16) and with his people who have been redeemed in Christ who shed his blood for us on the cross and rose again to give us abundant new life now and forever.

The Lord Jesus calls all who believe in him to follow as his disciples. Discipleship is not optional but an integral part of being a Christian. This issue explores what discipleship entails and how we can grow and be renewed in this call in living together as a community of disciples on mission.

Dan Keating in his new book, The Adventure of Discipleship, writes:

To hear and believe the good news of Jesus Christ (the Gospel) is to set out on the costly adventure of discipleship. “Being a Christian” or “becoming a Christian” involves much more than staking a claim to a religious identity. It means more than taking on a set of practices or attending services – though practices and services are essential. When Jesus says, “Come, follow me,” he is inviting us to become his disciples. When we respond to this call, we leave behind our own plans and enter into an adventure not of our own making. This adventure of discipleship is costly – it requires the cost of our lives.

[Read his article in this issue here.]

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, Discipleship, probes what it means for Christians today to hear the Lord's call and joyfully entrust their lives and future into his hands - both individually and together as a brothers and sisters in Christ. He writes:

https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/february2019p1.htm[04/02/2019 09:30:30]
Where will the call to discipleship lead those who follow it? What decisions and painful separations will it entail? We must take this question to him who alone knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows where the path will lead. But we know that it will be a path full of mercy beyond measure. Discipleship is joy.

[Read article by Bonhoeffer here.]

Steve Clark in his article explains both the costs and rewards in choosing to live a life of discipleship.

If you want to deepen your love for God and grow in discipleship, let this issue be a source of rich spiritual food, wisdom, and encouragement for you, and also aid in your preparation for the upcoming season of the Forty Days of Lent which begins in March.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor
The Gospel as the Costly Adventure of Discipleship

by Dan Keating

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.

– Mark 8:34–35, ESV

To hear and believe the good news of Jesus Christ (the Gospel) is to set out on the costly adventure of discipleship. “Being a Christian” or “becoming a Christian” involves much more than staking a claim to a religious identity. It means more than taking on a set of practices or attending services – though practices and services are essential. When Jesus says, “Come, follow me,” he is inviting us to become his disciples. When we respond to this call, we leave behind our own plans and enter into an adventure not of our own making. This adventure of discipleship is costly – it requires the cost of our lives.

Think of Peter and Andrew busily casting their fishing nets into the sea – or James and John mending their nets by the seaside. Jesus walks past and calls them to follow and their lives are never the same (Matthew 4:18–22). Or consider Matthew sitting at his tax booth, minding his
business. Jesus approaches and says, “Follow me,” and Matthew’s life is turned upside down (Matt 9:9). Or recall Saul of Tarsus, chasing Christians all the way to Damascus. Jesus reveals himself in blinding light and piercing words, and the arch-persecutor becomes the great Apostle (Acts 9:1–9).

These, of course, are the dramatic stories of the first followers of Jesus. All too easily we bracket them off as exceptional and unique encounters with Jesus, fit only for the first generation. We do the same bracketing of the saints through the ages: these are the especially holy men and women who experienced a dramatic, life-changing encounter with Jesus. Yes, there is something exceptional about the first disciples and the saints throughout history. But if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we recognize that the kind of experience they had is a model for us as well. You and I are also given a personal invitation to follow Jesus the Lord on a path of costly, adventurous discipleship.

Why this book? Because in my experience many people, especially young Christians today, lack an imaginative vision of the Christian life. They reduce their faith to one of its parts: to a set of beliefs, or to a moral code, or to attending religious services, and so on. These are all essential but they often lack the element of personal discipleship that the Gospels so clearly display. Crucially, we often think about being a Christian primarily as something we do, something we choose, something that we arrange and put in order. We place ourselves in the driver’s seat and we construct our life – and our understanding of God – according to our own ideas and preferences. We forge our own religious identity in the same way that we select ingredients from a salad bar.

But this is entirely the wrong way round. The life of a disciple begins when Jesus breaks in and calls. We become apprenticed to him and learn from him (and from our fellow disciples) what is true and good and right. He takes us on a path we did not expect to traverse. For sure, our choice is an essential part of this, but it is the choice of whether or not to follow Jesus on his terms. Will we follow as Peter and Matthew did, or will we turn and walk away in sadness like the rich young man?

The thesis of this book is that the adventure of discipleship to Jesus Christ is the true and real story of the world. All other adventures that we create, read, and retell are reflections and refractions of this one great adventure. To become a follower of Jesus Christ is not the private expression of the religious or spiritual side of my personality that I express whenever it suits me. No, becoming a disciple means that we are taken up – swallowed up, really – into Jesus’s own life. And it means embarking on a path not of our own making. We are not in charge of the itinerary.

C. S. Lewis, a Christian writer of the twentieth century, recounts a crucial episode in his conversion from atheism to Christianity: it suddenly dawned on him that the story of the Gospel is the true story of the world. Lewis had rejected the Christianity of his youth, but he loved the ancient myths and lived imaginatively inside of them. Through the help of his friends at Oxford (one of whom was J. R. R. Tolkien), Lewis came to recognize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is actually the “true myth,” the real story that all other myths merely reflect. Once Lewis recognized this, many of the obstacles to faith fell away and he was enabled by grace to open himself to the approach of the God he had long been denying.¹

This book is a product of my own love for adventure. I owe a great debt to C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and many others who have fed my imagination from early boyhood to the present time. My hope is that by presenting the Christian life in terms of the costly adventure of discipleship, others will be able to see and embrace this adventure for themselves and may be inspired to offer themselves freely and fully to the Lord who is worthy of their whole lives.

I should say at the start that this book is not intended as a primer on every aspect of the Christian faith or a substitute for the Catechism – though the Scriptures, the Creed, and the Catechism are the foundation for everything I will say. Rather, my hope is to describe what it
means to be caught up in the costly adventure of following Jesus on the path of discipleship. Along the way I will call upon some of the adventures told (and retold) in our culture today, to show how they help us grasp what it means to be caught up in that great and true adventure of following after Christ. But the most profound examples for us are the holy men and women of the Scriptures and throughout the ages: the saints. They exemplify in the most perfect way what it means to follow the path of costly discipleship. Each chapter, therefore, will conclude with a brief portrait drawn from these saints to serve as a lamppost for us along the path.

The chapters in the book are ordered to give a coherent and connected picture of what it means to follow Christ as his disciples, but each chapter also stands on its own and carries its own message. Readers will profit most by reading the chapters in their given order, but they can also skip over chapters that they find less interesting and still find benefit.

This book is addressed primarily to Catholic readers, and a Catholic understanding of the faith will be assumed throughout. But I have learned much from Orthodox, Anglican, and Evangelical fellow-travelers – I am greatly indebted to them. I hope that what I write will be insightful and inspiring for all Christians – and for anyone who loves adventure.

-------------------------------------------

1 For Lewis’s account of his conversion, see C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1955)

Dan Keating (Doctor of Philosophy, University of Oxford) is professor of theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA and an elder of *The Servants of the Word*, a lay missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord.

---

The Adventure of Discipleship

by Daniel A. Keating


The book is available in print or ebook at Amazon and Emmaus Road Publishing.
“Using the lens of ‘adventure,’ Daniel Keating presents a wonderfully fresh vision of Christian discipleship. He is equally at home drawing from Scripture, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and contemporary adventure tales like Lost and Batman Begins—appealing especially to young adults who are seeking more in their spiritual life. The Adventure of Discipleship is the sort of book that engages, invites, and challenges. You may want to buy several and give them away to your young adult friends.”

— MARY HEALY —
Professor of Sacred Scripture, Sacred Heart Seminary, Detroit, MI

“This book is about true friendship, how to endure suffering, and how to offer our lives to God along the path of real peace. At the same time, drawing upon The Lord of the Rings, superhero movies, and other rich storytelling, Keating shows that most of us don’t actually want peace—we want our lives to be a meaningful and glorious adventure. The inspiring achievement of this book, then, is to demonstrate that life in Christ provides the peace that is also the greatest possible adventure.”

— MATTHEW LEVERING —
James N. and Mary D. Perry, Jr. Chair of Theology, Mundelein Seminary, Mundelein, IL

“Daniel Keating is an excellent scholar with a keen pastoral sense. His book, The Adventure of Discipleship, exemplifies both of these virtues. Keating carefully articulates the story—the adventure—of what it means, in all its various facets, to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ and he does so as a man who has lived this journey himself and has pastorally shepherded others to live this venture as well. As all adventures are exciting, so the reading of this book is itself invigorating. One cannot help but be caught up into the adventure of following Christ, no matter what the cost, for one perceives that it is a journey of faith, hope, and love together with Jesus himself. This is an admirable book for those Christians who wish to be more fully Jesus’s disciples and an effective book to place in the hands of those who are being evangelized. Both will set out on the grand adventure that is Christianity.”

— THOMAS G. WEINANDY, O.F.M., CAP. —
Scholar in Residence at Capuchin College, Washington, DC, and Former Member of the Faculty of Theology at Oxford University and of the Vatican’s International Theological Commission

“The sense of adventure has been drowned out in modernity, but an ember remains, ready to burn brightly and engulf us. The Adventure of Discipleship reminds us that our lives are a drama so significant that Jesus Christ came into the world to take us on adventure with him. The only adequate response is a no-holds-barred life of discipleship, on mission to bring others into the embrace of Our Lord—and Keating’s book helps us begin this adventure!”

— CURTIS MARTIN —
Founder and President, Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS)
If Anyone Would Come After Me

Jesus is no ordinary master. And what he asks of his disciples is no ordinary commitment.

by Steve Clark

Jesus invites us to follow him

“Come follow me.” Jesus says these words many times in the gospels. He says them to Peter and Andrew, and they leave their nets to follow him. He says them to Matthew the tax collector, and Matthew leaves his post. He says them to Philip, to James and John, and to others. Those who accept his invitation become his disciples.

Jesus also invites us to follow him. And while we want to say yes and follow, it is not always immediately obvious what following him means. We call ourselves disciples of Jesus, but we may not understand exactly what being a disciple involves.

In the time when Jesus lived, the master-disciple relationship was a familiar one. It was the most common way to train or educate people for their life’s work, and it was very different from education today in the typical classroom.

To begin with, you would actually go to live with your master. There would be a much more personal connection than the average university student has with any of his professors. You would, in fact, be entering into a personal relation that would last for the rest of your life. The training you would get from your master would also be more personal than today’s student receives. It would include training in how to handle all the situations that arise in normal life. You would learn these things primarily by modeling yourself on your master. One of the purposes of living with him would be to watch how he handled various situations so that you could imitate him.

At the end of the process, when the master was satisfied that you were fully trained, he would commission you to do the things he had trained you to do.
A different kind of master

Jesus followed this model in his relationship with his disciples. They lived together. He gave them personal training, and the disciples modeled themselves on him. At a certain point, Jesus sent his disciples out to do the work he had trained them for.

Yet being a disciple of Jesus involved – and still involves – something beyond discipleship to any other master. First of all, this particular master is not just another wise man. He is the Lord himself, the Son of God. Those who become Jesus’ disciples become disciples of the Lord of all creation. Such a master expects of his disciples a personal loyalty and dedication that go beyond just getting some personal training.

The first disciples, of course, did not fully realize all this when they decided to follow Jesus. The gospels tell us that gradually over the course of Jesus’ ministry they learned who he was and what he was asking of them. As we reflect on the things Jesus taught them about being disciples, we learn what it means to be disciples of Jesus today.

If anyone would come after me

One of the passages in the gospels that speaks most directly about being a disciple of Jesus is in the gospel of Mark:

“And he called to him the multitude with his disciples and said to them, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it’” (Mark 8: 34-35).

It is important to notice the context in which Jesus is speaking. The disciples have just witnessed the multiplication of the loaves and fishes; they have seen Jesus walk on water; they have seen him heal. They have begun to realize that they have something more than an ordinary master. When Jesus asks them, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Christ” – in other words, the Messiah sent by God (Mark 8:29-30).

At that point, Jesus begins to teach his disciples what being the Messiah means. Contrary to what they and most Jews of their time believed about the Messiah coming as a glorious king, he said “the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). The disciples are clearly taken aback; Peter even earns himself a strong rebuke when he takes his master aside to tell him not to say such things.

It is in this context, then, that Jesus calls together his disciples and the multitude, the whole crowd of people who followed him. Some of these followed him with belief and commitment, others just thought he was the most interesting thing they had seen in years.

To all these people Jesus says, “This is more serious than you realize. You cannot just tag along with me to benefit from my miracles and healings. That is not an option. If you want to follow me, it is going to involve commitment and some real cost.” He spells out what that cost will be: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” What are these three demands Jesus makes on his disciples?

Let him deny himself

The word we translate “deny” has a specific meaning as it is used in the New Testament. Along with the word “acknowledge,” it speaks of a particular kind of relationship. The meaning can be seen in Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus says, “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

In other words, when a disciple is brought before authorities who are hostile to Jesus, he has to say either, “Yes, I belong to this man,” or, as Peter would do during Jesus’ trial, “No, I don’t know him.” He either acknowledges or denies having a relationship with Jesus. In the same way in heaven when
we stand before the judge of all, Jesus will either acknowledge or deny us. He will say, “Yes, he belongs to me,” or, “No, I don’t know this one.”

To deny one’s self, in this context, means more than what we sometimes talk about as works of self-denial – fasting or other kinds of personal sacrifice. It means to deny a certain relationship with one’s self. It’s saying, “I’m not my own man or my own woman. I don’t belong to myself; I’m not my own master. I belong to the Lord Jesus.”

**Take up his cross**

When we read the words “take up his cross,” we understand them in terms of centuries of Christian spirituality that focuses on the cross of Jesus. A cross has come to mean for many any kind of suffering that we bear in union with the Lord. The disciples, to whom Jesus was speaking, however, did not yet attach any spiritual significance to the cross. They were familiar with it in only one context – as a common instrument of execution, like the gallows or electric chair today.

In fact the cross would have represented something far worse to them than what the electric chair represents to us. Crucifixion was a particularly painful, degrading kind of execution. The Romans reserved it as a punishment for the most serious crimes, especially the crime of rebellion against the government. When there was a rebellion in any part of the Roman Empire, the Romans would seize the people involved and hang them on crosses along the roads outside the cities of the region to make of them a warning. Usually they would have the upright pieces in place and make each prisoner carry the crossbar with him to the place of execution.

The Palestine of Jesus’ day was the scene of many uprisings, and we can easily imagine that Jesus and his disciples had walked along roads lined with crosses. And now Jesus tells them, “Take up your cross.” It is like saying, “If you are going to be my disciple, you might as well get ready for execution. You have to be ready to die for my cause, and to die a painful, degrading death. Go ahead and get your piece of wood and start carrying it, because that is what we are headed for.”

**Following the master**

The disciples have already responded once to an invitation to follow Jesus. As disciples, they had walked behind their master in his journeys, as was the Jewish custom for disciples. But now they know how the journey will end. To follow Jesus means to share his fate, to die as he will die. This is no pleasant stroll or business trip. It is an all-or-nothing proposition. In saying, “Follow me,” Jesus is demanding of his disciples total dedication, total commitment, and an almost reckless disregard for their own lives.

It is the type of dedication expressed in the following letter, written not by a Christian but by a young man in Mexico who had recently become a Communist. He is explaining to his fiancée why he is breaking their engagement.

> “We Communists have a high casualty rate. We’re the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered and ridiculed, fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive.

> “We Communists don’t have the time or the money for many movies or concerts or T-bone steaks or decent homes or new cars. We’ve been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one overshadowing factor: the struggle for world Communism.

> “We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves to a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos seem to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing something new and true and better for mankind.
“There’s one thing about which I am in dead earnest, and that is the Communist cause.”

This young man followed his cause, Communism, with the dedication and seriousness which Jesus demanded of his disciples. The Christian cause, however, often lacks such disciples. There are not nearly enough people willing to leave the crowd and follow Jesus with total dedication.

**The reward**

Even in Jesus’ time, there were people for whom the price of discipleship was too high. One was the rich young man who asked Jesus the way to eternal life. Jesus said, “Sell all that you have and... come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). The rich man says, intelligently enough, that is a steep price; and he turns away.

Then Jesus’ disciples say, “Lord, we have given up everything. We are really on your side.” And Jesus says to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).

The Book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the fulfillment of this promise (see Revelation 14:1-5). It speaks in picture language of a company of 144,000 who have the name of the Lamb and his Father written on their foreheads. One hundred forty-four thousand is a symbolic number, representing a vast multitude of God’s people. The name written on their heads is a seal, the sign of God’s protection. It is the way God says, “These belong to me.”

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. In other words, they are the disciples, and they follow Jesus on his path. They are in the middle of the great final conflict, about to suffer persecution, but Jesus is with them.

This great company of disciples sings a new song, a heavenly song that they alone can learn. In the midst of the persecution they are able to sing the song of heaven. That is, they are able to experience the very life of heaven.

Only those who are truly disciples of Jesus can live the life of heaven here on earth. Only they can experience the protection of God and the Lamb in the midst of them as they deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.
In times of church renewal Holy Scripture naturally becomes richer in content for us. Behind the daily catchwords and battle cries needed in the Church Struggle, a more intense, questioning search arises for the one who is our sole concern, for Jesus himself.

What did Jesus want to say to us? What does he want from us today? How does he help us to be faithful Christians today? It is not ultimately important to us what this or that church leader wants. Rather, we want to know what Jesus wants. When we go to hear a sermon, his own word is what we want to hear. This matters to us not only for our own sakes, but also for all those who have become estranged from the church and its message.

It is also our opinion that if Jesus himself and Jesus alone with his word were among us in our preaching, then quite a different set of people would hear the word and quite a different set of people would again turn away from it. It is not as if our church’s preaching were no longer God’s word, but there are so many dissonant sounds, so many human, harsh laws, and so many false hopes and consolations, which still obscure the pure word of Jesus and make a genuine decision more difficult.

We surely intend our preaching to be preaching Christ alone. But it is not solely the fault of others if they find our preaching harsh and difficult because it is burdened with formulations and concepts foreign to them. It is simply not true that every word critical of our preaching today can be taken as a rejection of Christ or as anti-Christianity. Today there are a great number of people who come to our preaching, want to hear it, and then repeatedly have to admit sadly that we have made it too difficult for them to get to know Jesus.

Do we really want to deny being in community with these people? They believe that it is not the word of Jesus itself that they wish to evade, but that too much of what comes between them and Jesus is merely human, institutional, or doctrinaire. Who among us would not instantly know all the answers which could be given to these people and with which we could easily evade responsibility for them? But would an answer not also demand that we ask whether we
ourselves get in the way of Jesus’ word by depending perhaps too much on certain formulations, or on a type of sermon intended for its own time, place, and social structure? Or by preaching too “dogmatically” and not enough “for use in life”? ¹ Or by preferring to repeat certain ideas from Scripture over and over and thus too heedlessly passing over other important passages? Or by preaching our own opinions and convictions too much and Jesus Christ himself too little?

Nothing would contradict our own intention more deeply and would be more ruinous for our proclamation than if we burdened with difficult human rules those who are weary and heavy laden, whom Jesus calls unto himself.² That would drive them away from him again. How that would mock the love of Jesus Christ in front of Christians and heathen! But since general questions and self-accusations do not help here, let us be led back to Scripture, to the word and call of Jesus Christ himself. Away from the poverty and narrowness of our own convictions and questions, here is where we seek the breadth and riches which are bestowed on us in Jesus.

We desire to speak of the call to follow Jesus. In doing so, are we burdening people with a new, heavier yoke? Should even harder, more inexorable rules be added to all the human rules under which their souls and bodies groan? Should our admonition to follow Jesus only prick their uneasy and wounded consciences with an even sharper sting? For this latest of innumerable times in church history, should we make impossible, tormenting, eccentric demands, obedience to which would be the pious luxury of the few? Would such demands have to be rejected by people who work and worry about their daily bread, their jobs, and their families, as the most godless tempting of God?

Should the church be trying to erect a spiritual reign of terror over people by threatening earthly and eternal punishment on its own authority and commanding everything a person must believe and do to be saved? Should the church’s word bring new tyranny and violent abuse to human souls? It may be that some people yearn for such servitude. But could the church ever serve such a longing?

When Holy Scripture speaks of following Jesus, it proclaims that people are free from all human rules, from everything which pressures, burdens, or causes worry and torment of conscience. In following Jesus, people are released from the hard yoke of their own laws to be under the gentle yoke of Jesus Christ. Does this disparage the seriousness of Jesus’ commandments? No. Instead, only where Jesus’ entire commandment and the call to unlimited discipleship remain intact are persons fully free to enter into Jesus’ community. Those who follow Jesus’ commandment entirely, who let Jesus’ yoke rest on them without resistance, will find the burdens they must bear to be light. In the gentle pressure of this yoke they will receive the strength to walk the right path without becoming weary.³ Jesus’ commandment is harsh, inhumanly harsh for someone who resists it. Jesus’ commandment is gentle and not difficult for someone who willingly accepts it. “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Jesus’ commandment has nothing to do with forced spiritual cures. Jesus demands nothing from us without giving us the strength to comply. Jesus’ commandment never wishes to destroy life, but rather to preserve, strengthen, and heal life.

But the question still troubles us: What could the call to follow Jesus mean today for the worker, the businessman, the farmer, or the soldier? Could it bring an intolerable dilemma into the existence of persons working in the world who are Christian? Is Christianity, defined as following Jesus, a possibility for too small a number of people? Does it imply a rejection of the great masses of people and contempt for the weak and poor? Does it thereby deny the great mercy of Jesus Christ, who came to the sinners and tax collectors, the poor and weak, the misguided and despairing? What should we say to that? Is it a few, or many, who belong with Jesus?

Jesus died on the cross alone, abandoned by his disciples. It was not two of his faithful followers who hung beside him, but two murderers. But they all stood beneath the cross: enemies and the
Living Bulwark

faithful, doubters and the fearful, the scornful and the converted, and all of them and their sin were included in this hour in Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness. God’s merciful love lives in the midst of its foes.\footnote{Living Bulwark} It is the same Jesus Christ who by grace calls us to follow him and whose grace saves the thief on the cross in his last hour.\footnote{Living Bulwark}

Discipleship is joy

Where will the call to discipleship lead those who follow it? What decisions and painful separations will it entail? We must take this question to him who alone knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows where the path will lead. But we know that it will be a path full of mercy beyond measure. Discipleship is joy.

Today it seems so difficult to walk with certainty the narrow path of the church’s decision\footnote{Living Bulwark} and yet to remain wide open to Christ’s love for all people, and in God’s patience, mercy, and loving-kindness\footnote{Living Bulwark} (Titus 3:4) for the weak and godless. Still, both must remain together, or else we will follow merely human paths. May God grant us joy in all seriousness of discipleship, affirmation of the sinners in all rejection of sin, and the overpowering and winning word of the Gospel in all defense against our enemies.

“We come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

> See related article: Costly Grace versus Cheap Grace


Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Lutheran pastor and a founding member of the Confessing Church. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews and the evils of the Nazi ideology. In spring of 1935 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was called by the Confessing Church in Germany to take charge of an “illegal,” underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). He served as pastor, administrator, and teacher there until the seminary was closed down by Hitler's Gestapo in September, 1937.

In the seminary at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer taught the importance of shared life together as disciples of Christ. He was convinced that the renewal of the church would depend upon recovering the biblical understanding of the communal practices of Christian obedience and shared life. This is where true formation of discipleship could best flourish and mature.

Bonhoeffer’s teaching led to the formation of a community house for the seminarians to help them enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community. In 1937 Bonhoeffer completed two books, Life Together and The Cost of Discipleship. They were first published in German in 1939. Both books encompass Bonhoeffer’s theological understanding of what it means to live as a Christian community in the Body of Christ.

He was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo in April 1943. On April 8, 1945 he was hanged as a traitor in the Flossenburg concentration camp. As he left his cell on his way to execution he said to his companion, “This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life.”

photo of Bonhoeffer in the courtyard of Tegel prison, summer 1944; source: Christian Kaiser Verlag

https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark_february2019p4.htm[04/02/2019 09:30:35]
The Visible Community of Faith

“Called into the grace of discipleship of the Crucified”

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16

The addressees here are those whom the Beatitudes called into the grace of discipleship of the Crucified. Those who were called blessed in the Beatitudes, while being considered worthy of the kingdom of heaven, obviously nevertheless appeared to be utterly unworthy of life on this earth,1 or to be superfluous. Here, now, they are designated by the symbol of a substance which is indispensable for life on earth. They are the salt of the earth. They are the earth’s most noble possession, its most precious asset. Without them, the earth cannot continue to live. The earth is kept alive by salt. For the sake of precisely these poor, ignoble, weak, whom the world rejects, the earth itself lives. It destroys its own life by expelling the disciples, and—a miracle!—precisely for the sake of these outcasts the earth is permitted to live on. This “divine salt” (Homer)2 maintains its efficacy. Its effects permeate the whole earth. It is the earth’s substance.

Thus are the disciples not only directed toward the Kingdom of Heaven, but also reminded of their mission on earth. As those bound only to Jesus, they are directed to the earth, whose salt they are. By calling not himself, but his disciples the salt of the earth, Jesus assigns to them an activity on the earth. He draws them into his own work. He remains among the people of Israel while the disciples are commissioned to work on the entire earth.3 Only insofar as that salt remains salt, and maintains its purifying, seasoning powers, can it maintain and preserve the earth. For its own sake as well as for the earth’s sake, salt must remain salt, and the congregation of disciples must remain what through Christ’s call it really is. Its activity on earth and its preserving power will consist in remaining true to its calling. Salt is supposed to be imperishable, and thereby an enduring power of purification. This is why the Old Testament uses salt in sacrifices, and why in the Catholic baptismal rite salt is put into the child’s mouth (Exodus 30:35; Ezekiel 16:4). The guarantee of the permanence of the community of faith resides in the imperishable quality of salt.
“You are the salt”—not: You should be the salt! It is not for the disciples to decide whether they are or are not to be salt. Nor is any appeal made to them to become the salt of the earth. They are that salt, whether they want to be or not, in the power of the call they have encountered. You are the salt—not: You have the salt. It would be an unwarranted abbreviation were one to follow the Reformers and equate the disciples’ message with the salt. What is meant is their entire existence insofar as it is grounded anew through Christ’s call to discipleship, this existence of which the Beatitudes speak. Those who have been called by Jesus and stand in his discipleship are, through precisely that call, the salt of the earth in their entire existence.

The other possibility, however, is that the salt loses its taste, and ceases to be salt. Its activity ceases. And then, indeed, it is good for nothing except to be thrown away. That is the distinction of salt. Everything must be salted. But salt that has lost its taste can never again be salted. Everything, even the most rotten stuff, can be saved by salt; only salt itself that has lost its taste is hopelessly ruined. That is the other side. That is the threatening judgment hovering over the community of disciples. The earth is to be saved by the community of faith; only the congregation that ceases to be what it is is hopelessly lost. The call of Jesus means being the salt of the earth or being destroyed. Either follow in discipleship or the call itself will annihilate the person called. There is no second chance for being saved. There cannot be.

Along with Jesus’ call, the congregation of disciples receives not only the invisible efficacy of salt, but also the visible radiance of light. “You are the light”—again, not: You should be the light. The call itself has made them into this. Nor can it be otherwise now; they are a light that is seen. If this were not so, the call itself apparently would not be with them. What an impossible, nonsensical goal it would be for Jesus’ disciples, for these disciples, to want to become the light of the world! They have already been made such by the call itself, and within discipleship itself. And again, not: “You have the light,” but “You are the light!” The light is not something given to you, for example, as your proclamation, but rather you yourselves are that light. The same one who says of himself in direct speech, “I am the light,” says to his disciples in direct speech: You are the light in your entire lives insofar as you abide in my call. And because you are the light, you can no longer remain hidden, whether you want this or not. Light shines, and the city built on a hill cannot be hid. It cannot. It is visible from afar, either as a secure city or as a guarded citadel or as collapsed ruins.

This city on the hill—what Israelite will not think of Jerusalem, the city built on high!—is the congregation of disciples itself. Those who follow are now no longer faced with any decision of this sort. The only decision relevant to them has already been made. They must now be what they are, or they are not followers of Jesus. Those who follow are the visible community of faith. Their act of following, of discipleship, is a visible activity singling them out from the world—or it is not discipleship. And this discipleship is as visible as light in the night, as a hill on the plain.

To flee into invisibility is to deny the call. A congregation of Jesus that seeks to be an invisible congregation is no longer a congregation of disciples. “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand.” That is the other possibility, namely, that the call is denied by consciously concealing the light and extinguishing it under the bushel basket. This bushel basket under which the visible community of faith hides its light can be both fear of human beings and conscious accommodation to the world for whatever purpose—for missionary purposes or because of misunderstood love for human beings.

But it may also—and this is even more dangerous—be a so-called reformational theology that even dares to call itself theologia crucis, a theology which is characterized by a rejection of “Pharisaic” visibility for the sake of “humble” invisibility in the form of total accommodation to the world. The mark of the community of faith here is not that it is visible in some extraordinary form, but rather that it lives up to the iustitia civilis. That the community’s light not shine has here been made into the criterion of Christian existence. But Jesus says: Let your light shine before the Gentiles. In any event, it is the light of Jesus’ call that shines here.
What kind of light is this light in which these disciples of Jesus, the disciples of the Beatitudes, are to shine? What kind of light is to come from that particular place to which the disciples alone have a claim? Considering that the disciples stand beneath the invisible and hidden cross of Jesus, what does this have to do with the light that is to shine? Does not the very fact that the cross is hidden imply that the disciples, too, are to remain concealed rather than stand in the light? It is an evil bit of sophistry that concludes from the cross of Jesus that the church is to accommodate itself to the world.

Would it not be clear to an unsophisticated listener that precisely there, on the cross, something extraordinary has become visible? Or is all this perhaps *iustitia civilis*, is the cross itself accommodation to the world? Is the cross not something that to the horror of others became scandalously visible precisely in its obscurity? Is it not visible enough that Christ is rejected and must suffer, that his life ends before the city gates on the hill of shame? Is this invisibility?

It is in *this* light that the disciples’ good works are to be seen. It is not you, but your good works that others should see, Jesus says. What are these good works that can be seen in this light? They can be no other than those Jesus himself created in them when he called them, when he made them into the light of the world beneath his cross: poverty, life as a stranger, gentleness, peaceableness, and finally also persecution and rejection, and in all this especially one thing, namely, to bear the cross of Jesus Christ.

The cross is the peculiar light that shines and in which alone all these good works of the disciples can be seen. None of this says anything about God becoming visible. It is the “good works” that are meant to be seen, so that over them people give glory to God. The cross becomes visible, and the works of the cross become visible. The poverty and renunciation of the blessed become visible.

In view of the cross and such a community of faith, however, it is no longer humankind that can be praised, but God alone. If these good works were actually human virtues, then glory would be given to the disciples themselves rather than to God. As it is, however, there is nothing to praise in the disciples who bear the cross, or in the community of faith whose light thus shines and that stands visibly on the hill—in view of their “good works” it is alone the Father in heaven who is praised. Thus do they see the cross and the congregation of the cross and believe God. That, indeed, is the light of the resurrection.

Notes:

1. Beginning in 1939, the evaluation of life as “unworthy of life” in the sense of the “Law for the Prevention of Descendants with Hereditary Diseases” (June 15, 1933) cloaked euthanasia activities in the Third Reich.
4. Martin Luther: “With the word salt he [Jesus] shows them what their [the addressees’] office is to be.”
5. Cf. Martin Luther, Weekly Sermons on Matthew 5–7: There is no greater “ruin of Christendom than when the salt with which one must season and salt everything else itself loses its taste.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor and a founding member of the Confessing Church. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews and the evils of the Nazi ideology. In spring of 1935 Deitrich Bonhoeffer was called by the Confessing Church in Germany to take charge of an “illegal,” underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). He served as pastor, administrator, and teacher there until the seminary was closed down by Hitler’s Gestapo in September, 1937.

In the seminary at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer taught the importance of shared life together as disciples of Christ. He was convinced that the renewal of the church would depend upon recovering the biblical understanding of the communal practices of Christian obedience and shared life. This is where true formation of discipleship could best flourish and mature. Bonhoeffer’s teaching led to the formation of a community house for the seminarians to help them enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community.

In 1937 Bonhoeffer completed two books, *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*. They were first published in German in 1939. Both books encompass Bonhoeffer’s theological understanding of what it means to live as a Christian community in the body of Christ. He was arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943. On April 8, 1945 he was hanged by the Gestapo as a traitor in the Flossenburg concentration camp. As he left his cell on his way to execution he said to his companion, “This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life.”

Top photo: North American Kairos Conference
The Choosing of the Twelve

by Fulton J. Sheen

Our Lord's great command was: "Follow Me!" By calling others to Himself, He introduced the idea that man should have charge over man. It was a prolongation of the principle of His Incarnation: He Who is God would teach and redeem and sanctify through the human nature which He had taken from Mary. But He would work also through other human natures, starting with those first twelve whom He called to be His followers. It was not to be the angels who would administer to men: the government of the Father would be placed in the hands of human beings. Such is the meaning of His apostolic call to the twelve.

One is struck at once by the gigantic aim He proposed for His followers, namely, the moral conquest of the whole world; they were to be the “light of the world,” the “salt of the earth,” and the “city that cannot be hid.” He bade rather insignificant men to take an almost cosmic view of their mission, for on them would He build His Kingdom. These chosen lights were to cast their rays over the rest of humanity, in all nations.

In his essay The Twelve Men, dealing with the British jury system, G. K. Chesterton wrote, “Whenever our civilization wants a library to be catalogued, or a solar system discovered, or any other trifle of this kind, it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing around. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.”

It is evident that from the beginning, Our Blessed Lord intended to prolong His teaching, and His reign and His very life “unto the consummation of the world” but in order to do this He had to call to Himself a body of men to whom He would communicate certain powers that He had brought with Him to earth. This body would not be a social body such as a club, united only for the sake of pleasure and convenience; nor would it be a political body, held together by common material interests; it would be truly spiritual, the cement of which would be charity and love and the possession of His Spirit. If the society or Mystical Body Our Lord wanted to found was to have continuity, it would need a head and members. If it was a vineyard, as He declared in one of His parables, it would need laborers; if it was a net, it would need fishermen; if it was a field, it would need sowers and reapers; if it was a herd, or a flock, it would need shepherds.
In these days he went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles; Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Luke 6:12-16

The night before the choice He spent praying on the mountainside that they who were in the heart of the Father would also be in His own. When morning broke, He came down to where His disciples were gathered and, man by man, called those whom He had chosen. Of Peter the most is known. Peter is mentioned 195 times; the rest of the Apostles only 130 times. The one mentioned next in frequency to Peter is John, to whom there are 29 references. Peter's original name was Simon, but it was changed by Our Blessed Lord to Cephas. When he was brought to Our Blessed Lord,

Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

John 1:42

The word Cephas meant "rock" we do not get the full flavor of it in English, because Peter, the proper name, is not the same as our word "rock." The words were identical in the Aramaic which Our Blessed Lord spoke, just as they are in French, where the proper name Pierre is the same as pierre, or rock. In Scripture, whenever God changed the name of a man, it was to raise him to a higher dignity and role in the community to which he belonged. Our Lord might have been saying to Peter, "you are impulsive and fickle and unreliable, but one day all this will be changed; you will be called by a name that no one would dare give you now—Rock Man." Whenever he is called "Simon" in the Gospels, it is a reminder of the Apostle's uninspired and unregenerate humanity; for example, when he was sleeping in the garden, Our Blessed Lord addressed him:

Simon, are you asleep?

Mark 14:37

Peter had by nature great qualities of leadership. For example, after the Resurrection when he said, "I am going fishing," the other Apostles followed suit. His moral courage was manifested when he left his business and his home for the Master; that same courage, expressed impetuously, made him smite off the ear of Malchus when the leaders came to arrest Our Lord. He was boastful too, for he swore that though others would betray the Master, he would not. He had a deep sense of sin, and he begged the Lord to depart from him because of his unworthiness. His very faults endear him. He was deeply attached to his Divine Master. When other disciples left, he maintained there was no one else to whom they could go. He had courage, for he left his wife and his business to follow Our Lord.

To the credit of all mothers-in-law, it must be said that Peter showed no regret when Our Lord cured her of a serious illness. He was impulsive to an extreme degree, guided more by feeling than by reason. He wanted to walk on the waters and, given the power, became frightened and screamed in fear—he a man of the sea. He was an emphatic man, swinging swords, cursing, protesting against the Savior washing his feet; though named head of the Church, he had none of the ambition of James and John. But through the power of his Divine Master this impetuous man, as fluid as water, was turned into the rock on which Christ built His Church.

The Divine Savior constantly linked Himself verbally with His Heavenly Father; but the only human being He ever united with Himself and spoke of Himself and that one as "we," was Peter. From that day on, Peter and his successors have always used "we" to indicate the unity between the invisible Head of the Church and its visible head. But this same Peter, who is always tempting Our Lord from the Cross, proves to be a rock of fidelity, for later on in his life the constant theme of his letters was the Cross of Christ.

But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:13

Andrew, the brother of Peter, is referred to eight times in the New Testament. After being called from his nets and his boats to be a “fisher of men” along with his brother Peter, Andrew is seen next on the occasion of the feeding of the five thousand, telling Our Lord that there was a boy present with five loaves and two fishes. Toward the end of the public ministry, Andrew is met with again when some Gentiles, probably Greeks, came to Philip asking to see Our Lord. Philip then consulted Andrew and they both came to the Lord. At the very first meeting of Andrew and Our Blessed Lord, Jesus asked him:
Andrew had been a friend of John the Baptist. When he met Our Lord, to whom John the Baptist had pointed, he immediately went and told Peter that he had found the Messias. Andrew is always spoken of as Simon Peter's brother. He was an "introducer" because he brought his brother Peter to Our Lord; he introduced the lad with the barley loaves and fishes to Our Lord; and finally with Philip, came to introduce the Greeks to Our Lord. When it is a question of dispensing some benefits of the Lord or bringing others to the Lord, Philip and Andrew are mentioned together. Andrew was rather silent, being overshadowed by his brother Peter, but apparently he was never jealous. There was room for envy when Peter, James, and John were selected on three occasions for intimacy with the Divine Master, but he accepted his humble place; sufficient it was to him to have found the Christ.

Like Peter and Andrew, James and John were brothers and fishermen. They worked together for their father Zebedee. Their mother Salome was apparently not lacking in ambition; for it was she who, one day, thinking that the Kingdom that Our Blessed Lord had come to establish would be without a Cross, asked that her two sons be picked to sit at the left and right side of Our Lord in His Kingdom. To her credit, however, it must be added that we find her again on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross. Our Blessed Lord gave her sons a nickname—Boanerges or "sons of thunder." This happened when the Samaritans refused to receive Our Blessed Lord because He had set His Face towards Jerusalem and His death. The two Apostles, discovering this, manifested their intolerance to Our Lord: Lord, wouldst Thou have us bid fire come down from Heaven, And consume them? But He turned and rebuked them,

And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

Luke 9:54–58

The two "sons of thunder" did not fail to drink deeply of the chalice of suffering. John was later plunged in boiling oil, which he survived only through a miracle. James was the first of all of the Apostles to suffer martyrdom for Christ. John described himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and to him was accorded the guardianship of the mother of Our Lord after the Crucifixion. John was known to the High Priest probably because of his cultural refinement which justified his name, which in the original Hebrew means "favored of God." His Gospel revealed him truly as an eagle who soared to heaven to understand the mysteries of the Word. No one better understood the heart of Christ; no one penetrated more deeply into the significance of His words. He too was the only one of the Apostles to be found at the foot of Christ; he is the one who tells us that "Jesus wept," and he gives the New Testament definition of God as "Love." James his brother, who is called "the Greater" belonged, together with Peter and John, to that "special committee" which witnessed the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead, and the agony of Gethsemane.

The Apostle Philip came from Bethsaida and was a fellow-townsman of Andrew and Peter. Philip was the curious enquirer; and his enquiry was crowned by the joy of discovery when he found Christ.

Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

John 1:45-46

Philip declined all controversy with a man who was so prejudiced as to believe that a prophet could not come out of a despised village. Philip is not met again until the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, and again he was enquiring:

Two hundred silver pieces would not buy enough bread For them, even to give each a little.

John 6:7

Philip made a last enquiry on the night of the Last Supper, when he asked Our Lord to show him the Father. Philip brought Bartholomew, or Nathanael as he was also called, to Our Blessed Lord. As soon as He saw him, Our Divine Savior read his soul and described him as follows:

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom
is no guile!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

John 1:47,48

Then Nathanael answered Him:

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

John 1:49-51

When Our Lord told him that He had seen him under a fig-tree, Bartholomew was willing immediately to make the affirmation that Christ was the Son of God. His first contact with Our Lord had already lighted the lamp of faith within him, but Our Lord quickly assured him that there would be greater experiences in store; in particular, the great vision which had come to Jacob would be realized in Him.

Our Lord said that Nathanael belonged to the true Israel. Israel was the name given to Jacob. He, however, was very shrewd, and full of guile. Nathanael is characterized as a true Israelite, or one without guile. A sudden transition from the plural to the singular happens when Our Lord says: "You will see heaven opening" Jacob had seen the heavens opened and angels ascending and descending on the ladder, bringing the things of man to God and the things of God to men. Jesus was now telling Nathanael that he would see even greater things. The implication was that He Himself would henceforth be the Mediator between heaven and earth, God and man; in Him, all the traffic between time and eternity would meet as at a crossroad.

This prophecy of Our Lord to Bartholomew shows that the Incarnation of the Son of God would be the basis of communion between man and God. Nathanael had called Him the "Son of God" Our Lord called Himself the "Son of Man": "Son of God" because He is eternally Divine; "Son of Man" because He is related humbly to all humanity. This title, used in close relationship with another title that had been given to Our Lord, namely, the "King of Israel," still carried with it a Messianic meaning; but it took it out of the limited context of one people and one race, into the sphere of universal humanity.

Of Matthew or Levi, the publican, there is a record of his vocation and how he responded to it. The great and imperishable glory of Matthew is his Gospel. Matthew was a publican under the government of Herod, a vassal of Rome.

A publican was one who sold out his own people and collected taxes for the invader, retaining for himself a fairly large percentage. Very understandably, because a publican was a kind of Quisling, he was held in contempt by his fellow men; yet he knew at the same time that he had the power and legal authority of the Roman government behind him. The particular place where we first meet Matthew is at the head of the lake, near Capharnaum where he was gathering in the taxes. His calling demanded that he should be a careful recorder of the accounts. His submission to the Savior was immediate.

The Gospel relates:

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

Matthew 9:9

He who had been wealthy would now have nothing to look forward to but poverty and persecution; and yet, he accepted this condition at the first summons. "Come," says the Savior to a despised man, and he follows immediately. His response was all the more remarkable because he had been immersed in a trade which attracted mostly the unscrupulous and the unethical. It was bad enough that the tribute of homage from Israel should be collected by a Roman, but for it to be collected by a Jew was to make him one of the most despised of men. And yet, this Quisling who had forfeited all love of country, and who had completely suffocated the virtue of patriotism in his lust for gain, ended by becoming one of the most patriotic of his own people. The Gospel which he wrote might be described as the gospel of patriotism. A hundred times in his Gospel, he goes back into the history of the past, quoting from Isaias, Jeremias, Micheas, David, Daniel and all the prophets; after piling them one upon the other in a great cumulative argument, he says to his people in effect: "This is the glory of Israel, this is our hope, we have begotten the Son of the Living God; we have given to the world the Messias." His country, which had yesterday meant nothing at all to him, became in his Gospel of the highest importance. He was declaring himself a son of Israel, ready to lavish on her all his praise. As men love God, they will also love their country.
Thomas was the pessimist of the Apostles, and probably his pessimism had something to do with his skepticism. When Our Lord tried to console His Apostles, on the night of the Last Supper by assuring them that He would prepare the way for them in heaven, Thomas responded by saying that he wanted to believe but could not. Later on, when the news was brought to Our Lord that Lazarus was dead:

"Let us also go, that we may die with him."

John 11:16

Thomas was called Didymus, which is merely the Greek translation of a Hebrew name and means “twin.” Thomas was a twin in another sense, for in him lived side-by-side the twins of unbelief and faith, each contending for mastery. There was faith, because he believed it was better to die with the Lord than to forsake Him; there was unbelief, for he could not help believing that death would be the end of whatever work the Lord had a mind to accomplish.

Chrysostom says of him that while he would hardly venture to go with Jesus as far as the neighboring town of Bethany, Thomas would travel without Him after Pentecost, to farthest India to implant the Faith; even to this day, the faithful in India still call themselves “St. Thomas Christians.”

Two of the Apostles were relatives of Our Lord, namely, James and Jude. They are called “brethren” of Our Lord, but in Aramaic and Hebrew this word often means cousins or distant relatives. We know that Mary had no other children but Jesus. The phrase “my dear brethren,” as used so often in the pulpit, does not imply that all the members of the congregation have the same mother. Scripture often uses “brethren” in the wide sense. For example, Lot is called the “brother” of Abraham, whereas he was actually his nephew; Laban is called the “brother” of Jacob, but he was his uncle. The sons of Oziel and Aaron, the sons of Cis and the daughters of Eleazar are called “brothers,” but they were cousins. So it is with the “brethren” of Our Lord. These two Apostles, James the Less and Jude, were probably the sons of Cleophas, who was married to Our Lady’s sister.

Jude had three names. Having the same name as Judas the traitor, he is always described negatively as “not the Iscariot.” The night of the Last Supper, he questioned Our Lord about the Holy Spirit, or how He would be invisible and yet manifest Himself after His Resurrection. There had always been lurking in the minds of many of the Apostles a desire to see some great flashing Messianic glory that would open blind eyes and capture every intelligence.

"Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"

John 14:22

The answer of Our Lord to Jude was that when our responsive love melts into obedience, then God makes His dwelling within us. Later on, Jude, sometimes called Thaddeus, wrote an Epistle beginning with words which reflected the answer he received on Holy Thursday night:

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Jude 1:1-2

Another Apostle was James the Just, also called James the Less, to distinguish him from the son of Zebedee. We know he had a good mother for she was one of the women who stood at the foot of the Cross. Like his brother Jude he wrote an Epistle which was addressed to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, that is, to the Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the Roman world. It began:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:

Greeting.

James 1:1

James who like all the other Apostles failed to understand the Cross when Our Lord foretold it, afterward came like the others to make the Cross the condition of glory.

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials... Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:2, 12
Simon the Zealot is one of the twelve Apostles about whom we know the least. His Aramaic name meaning “Zealot” suggests that he was a partisan to a sect which would use violence to overthrow the foreign yoke. This name had been given to him before his conversion. He belonged to a band of patriots who were so zealous for the overthrow of Roman rule that they revolted against Caesar. Perhaps the Lord chose him because of his wholehearted enthusiasm for a cause; but a Niagara of purification would be needed before he would understand the Kingdom in terms of a Cross instead of a sword. Imagine Simon the Zealot, an Apostle with Matthew the publican! One was an extreme nationalist, while the other was by profession virtually a traitor to his own people. And yet both were made one by Christ, and later on they would both be martyrs for His Kingdom. The twelfth Apostle was Judas, “the son of perdition,” who will be treated later.

The number twelve is symbolic. The Book of the Apocalypse speaks of the twelve foundations of the Church. There were twelve patriarchs in the Old Testament, and also twelve tribes in Israel; there were twelve spies who explored the promised land; there were twelve stones on the breast of the High Priest; when Judas failed, a twelfth Apostle had to be named. The Apostles are most often referred to in the Gospels as “the twelve,” that title being attributed to them thirty-two times. In choosing these twelve, it was evident that Our Lord was preparing them for a work after His Ascension; that the Kingdom He came to found was not only invisible but visible; not only Divine but human. But they had so much to learn before they could be the twelve gates of the Kingdom of God. Their first lesson would be the Beatitudes.

[This article is excerpted from Life in Christ, chapter 10, Copyright 1958 by Fulton Sheen, and first published in Great Britain 1959 for Peter Davies Ltd by The Windmill Press Ltd, Kingswood, Surrey.]

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979) was an American theologian and bishop, first in New York City and then in Rochester, New York. He became well-known for his preaching, especially on television and radio. He hosted the night-time radio program The Catholic Hour for twenty years (1930–1950) before moving to television and presenting a weekly program called, Life Is Worth Living. The show ran from 1951 until 1957, drawing as many as 30 million people on a weekly basis. He wrote 73 books and numerous articles and columns. Mother Theresa of Calcutta always kept a copy of Sheen’s book, Life of Christ, with her wherever she traveled for daily reflection and meditation.

top illustration: The Calling of Matthew, painting by Caravaggio

Return to Table of Contents or Archives • (c) copyright 2019 The Sword of the Spirit
Twelve Men

by G K Chesterton

On the paradox of entrusting ordinary people with serious important things
an essay written for the Daily News in London, Great Britain in 1906

Why do 12 ordinary people get chosen for jury trials?
The other day, while I was meditating on morality and Mr. H. Pitt, I was, so to speak, snatched up and put into a jury box to try people. The snatching took some weeks, but to me it seemed something sudden and arbitrary. I was put into this box because I lived in Battersea, and my name began with a C. Looking round me, I saw that there were also summoned and in attendance in the court whole crowds and processions of men, all of whom lived in Battersea, and all of whose names began with a C.

It seems that they always summon jurymen in this sweeping alphabetical way. At one official blow, so to speak, Battersea is denuded of all its C’s, and left to get on as best it can with the rest of the alphabet. A Cumberpatch is missing from one street – a Chizzolpop from another – three Chucksterfields from Chucksterfield House; the children are crying out for an absent Cadgerboy; the woman at the street corner is weeping for her Coffintop, and will not be comforted. We settle down with a rollicking ease into our seats (for we are a bold, devil-may-care race, the C’s of Battersea), and an oath is administered to us in a totally inaudible manner by an individual resembling an army surgeon in his second childhood. We understand, however, that we are to well and truly try the case between our sovereign lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, neither of whom has put in an appearance as yet.

Just when I was wondering whether the King and the prisoner were, perhaps, coming to an amicable understanding in some adjoining public-house, the prisoner’s bead appears above the barrier of the dock; he is accused of stealing bicycles, and he is the living image of a great friend of mine. We go into the matter of the stealing of the bicycles. We do well and truly try the case between the King and the prisoner in the affair of the bicycles. And we come to the conclusion, after a brief but reasonable discussion, that the King is not in any way implicated. Then we pass on to a woman who neglected her children, and who looks as if somebody or
something had neglected her. And I am one of those who fancy that something had.

Why untrained jurors rather than panels of experts and legalists?

All the time that the eye took in these light appearances and the brain passed these light criticisms, there was in this heart a barbaric pity and fear which men have never been able to utter from the beginning, but which is the power behind half the poems of the world. The mood cannot even inadequately be suggested, except faintly by this statement that tragedy is the highest expression of the infinite value of human life. Never had I stood so close to pain; and never so far away from pessimism. Ordinarily, I should not have spoken of these dark emotions at all, for speech about them is too difficult, but I mention them now for a specific and particular reason to the statement of which I will proceed at once. I speak of these feelings because out of the furnace of them there came a curious realisation of a political or social truth. I saw with a queer and indescribable kind of clearness what a jury really is, and why we must never let it go.

The trend of our epoch up to this time has been consistently towards socialism and professionalism. We tend to have trained soldiers because they fight better, trained singers because they sing better, trained dancers because they dance better, specially instructed laughers because they laugh better, and so on and so on. The principle has been applied to law and politics by innumerable modern writers. Many Fabians have insisted that a greater part of our political work should be performed by experts. Many legalists have declared that the untrained jury should be altogether supplanted by the trained Judge.

The paradoxes of experience and religion

Now, if this world of ours were really what is called reasonable, I do not know that there would be any fault to find with this. But the true result of all experience and the true foundation of all religion is this. That the four or five things that it is most practically essential that a man should know, are all of them what people call paradoxes. That is to say, that though we all find them in life to be mere plain truths, yet we cannot easily state them in words without being guilty of seeming verbal contradictions. One of them, for instance, is the unimpeachable platitude that the man who finds most pleasure for himself is often the man who least bunts for it. Another is a paradox of courage; the fact that the way to avoid death is not to have too much aversion to it. Whoever is careless enough of his bones to climb some hopeless cliff above the tide may save his bones by that carelessness. Whoever will lose his life, the same shall save it; an entirely practical and prosaic statement. [Luke 9:24]

Now, one of these four or five paradoxes which should be taught to every infant prattling at his mother’s knee is the following: That the more a man looks at a thing, the less he can see it, and the more a man learns a thing the less he knows it. The Fabian argument of the expert, that the man who is trained should be the man who is trusted, would be absolutely unanswerable if it were really true that a man who studied a thing and practiced it every day went on seeing more and more of its significance. But he does not. He goes on seeing less and less of its significance. In the same way, alas! we all go on every day, unless we are continually goading ourselves into gratitude and humility, seeing less and less of the significance of the sky or the stones.

Now, it is a terrible business to mark a man out for the vengeance of men. But it is a thing to which a man can grow accustomed, as he can to other terrible things; he can even grow accustomed to the sun. And the horrible thing about all legal officials, even the best, about all judges, magistrates, barristers, detectives, and policemen, is not that they are wicked (some of them are good), not that they are stupid (several of them are quite intelligent), it is simply that they have got used to it.

Strictly they do not see the prisoner in the dock; all they see is the usual man in the usual place. They do not see the awful court of judgment; they only see their own workshop. Therefore, the instinct of Christian civilisation has most wisely declared that into their judgments there shall upon every occasion be infused fresh blood and fresh thoughts from the streets. Men shall come in who can see the court and the crowd, and coarse faces of the policemen and the professional criminals, the wasted faces of the wastrels, the unreal faces of the gesticulating counsel, and see
it all as one sees a new picture or a ballet hitherto unvisited.

**When serious things are too important to be trusted to trained experts**

Our civilisation has decided, and very justly decided, that determining the guilt or innocence of men is a thing too important to be trusted to trained men. It wishes for light upon that awful matter, it asks men who know no more law than I know, but who can feel the things that I felt in the jury box. When it wants a library catalogued, or the solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.

This essay was published in *Tremendous Trifles* (1909), a collection of essays written by G. K. Chesterton. The essays originally appeared in the Daily News, a newspaper published in London, Great Britain, which Chesterton contributed to from 1901 to 1913.

> See other essays by G. K. Chesterton in Living Bulwark

---

**Who Was G. K. Chesterton?**

by Dale Ahlquist

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) cannot be summed up in one sentence. Nor in one paragraph. In fact, in spite of the fine biographies that have been written of him, he has never been captured between the covers of one book. But rather than waiting to separate the goats from the sheep, let's just come right out and say it: G.K. Chesterton was the best writer of the 20th century. He said something about everything and he said it better than anybody else. But he was no mere wordsmith. He was very good at expressing himself, but more importantly, he had something very good to express. The reason he was the greatest writer of the 20th century was because he was also the greatest thinker of the 20th century.

Born in London, G.K. Chesterton was educated at St. Paul's, but never went to college. He went to art school. In 1900, he was asked to contribute a few magazine articles on art criticism, and went on to become one of the most prolific writers of all time. He wrote a hundred books, contributions to 200 more, hundreds of poems, including the epic Ballad of the White Horse, five plays, five novels, and some two hundred short stories, including a popular series featuring the priest-detective, Father Brown. In spite of his literary accomplishments, he considered himself primarily a journalist. He wrote over 4000 newspaper essays, including 30 years worth of weekly columns for the Illustrated London News, and 13 years of weekly columns for the Daily News. He also edited his own newspaper, G.K.’s Weekly. (To put it into perspective, four thousand essays is the equivalent of writing an essay a day, every day, for 11 years. If you’re not impressed, try it some time. But they have to be good essays – all of them – as funny as they are serious, and as readable and rewarding a century after you’ve written them.)

Chesterton was equally at ease with literary and social criticism, history, politics, economics, philosophy, and theology. His style is unmistakable, always marked by humility, consistency, paradox, wit, and wonder. His writing remains as timely and as timeless today as when it first appeared, even though much of it was published in throw away papers.

Chesterton debated many of the celebrated intellectuals of his time: George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, Clarence Darrow. According to contemporary accounts, Chesterton usually emerged as the winner of these contests, however, the world has immortalized his opponents and forgotten Chesterton, and now we hear only one side of the argument, and we are enduring the legacies of socialism, relativism, materialism, and skepticism. Ironically, all of his opponents regarded Chesterton with the greatest affection. And George Bernard Shaw said: “The world is not thankful enough for Chesterton.”

His writing has been praised by Ernest Hemingway, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Jorge Luis Borges,

Chesterton argued eloquently against all the trends that eventually took over the 20th century: materialism, scientific determinism, moral relativism, and spineless agnosticism. He also argued against both socialism and capitalism and showed why they have both been the enemies of freedom and justice in modern society.

And what did he argue for? What was it he defended? He defended “the common man” and common sense. He defended the poor. He defended the family. He defended beauty. And he defended Christianity and the Catholic Faith.

Excerpted from an essay, Who Is this Guy and Why Haven't I Heard of Him?, by Dale Ahlquist
Surrendering Your Whole Life to Christ

by Kim Smith

Ruth, a woman who was an ancestor of the Lord Jesus, the great-grandmother of King David, had given up everything. As a young girl she expected to follow in her mother’s footsteps, to be married and raise her children in the land of her ancestors. Instead she married the son of a widow, a family from another country, where there was much famine. She grew to love this whole family as her own. They treated her with honor and respect. They told her about their life in Bethlehem, their God, and their traditions. After many years of joy, both sons of this widow died. Now this young woman is a widow herself. Her mother-in-law has made plans to return to Bethlehem and urges the young widow to return to her own family, she is still young and can marry again. But God has been at work in this young woman’s heart! She gives up everything to go with her mother-in-law, and God provided! Her new husband was Boaz. Their son was Obed, the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David, who became the anointed king of Israel.

Jesus surrendered his life

Jesus, the promised heir who established David’s throne forever, shows us how we can share in the inheritance of his kingdom. In John 12:24-26 Jesus states:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the
In this passage Jesus is talking about his own impending death on the cross for our salvation. He surrendered his whole life – including the decision to go to the cross – to the will of the Father. His example shows us the way he wants us to serve him and reign with him.

**Meaning of surrender**

What does it mean to surrender my whole life to Jesus? I want to offer a brief reflection on the key words in this beautiful expression.

*Surrender* means the yielding of one’s person, rights, and possessions to another. Person involves more than just one’s physical body. It includes one’s heart, mind, spirit, emotions, thoughts, talents, and gifts. *Yield* means to give way before a force or power that one can no longer resist. If someone placed a bowl of chocolate candy in front of me, I would have to make a choice. I couldn’t just ignore it or wish it would go away. I would have to take action and make a decision, a choice – whether to eat it or put it away.

When I talk about *my* life, I’m talking about something that I possess. It belongs to me. To surrender my whole life to the Lord is a decision that only I can make. No one else can make that decision for me. Many Christians have made a concrete decision to open their hearts to Jesus and to say “yes” to his will. Many have opened their lives to receive the gift of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. These are actions and choices one can make to follow the Lord as his disciple.

**The road to holiness**

If we are following the Lord Jesus then we are all on the same journey. We’re all on the same road to holiness of life. We’re all aiming for eternal life in heaven with the Lord God Almighty. But each of us will encounter different challenges and trials along the way. We each may stumble over different rocks and get stuck in different dead ends. We can encourage each other. We can walk beside each other. We can hold each other’s hands, but the decision to move forward, be it one step at a time or to run, is ultimately your own decision.

The *life* I am offering to Jesus includes the very state of my being alive - breathing, sleeping, waking, every moment from birth to death. Life is an outright gift – from the day I was conceived and came from the womb, up to this very present moment. What I have lived up to this present is now past. I can’t return to the past, but I can choose how I will live my life today, tomorrow, and the next day. And this includes my good and bad days, healthy and sick ones. I believe that regardless of our present circumstances and state of life – whether single, married, widowed, with our without children, young or not so young, tall or short, a long time Christian or a new babe in Christ – the Lord Jesus wants each of us to surrender to him our very lives. Any of us at any moment could find ourselves called by God to “give up everything” just like Ruth did when she was called to leave her home and
land to follow the Lord.

**My whole life for Christ**

Christ wants my *whole* life and not just one part, or even most of it. Whole means complete, total, full, all, entire. I have left the word *whole* for last because I believe that it’s the key to discovering the abundant life and fruitfulness which Christ wants for each of us. I know that Christ wants nothing less than the surrender of my *whole* life to him. I think that this is often the biggest stumbling block for many disciples who want to follow Jesus. We might be willing to give some parts of our lives to the Lord. But to give all?

“Lord, I am still young. What will happen if I give *all* my life to you?”

“Lord, my life is almost over. What more do I have to give?”

“Lord, I already have my life planned out…”

“Oh, that’s right. My life – all of my life – is from you, Lord. You created me – all of me. In fact, you created me in your image and I am a new creation through Jesus.”

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 the Apostle Paul says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

I know from experience that it is easier for me to surrender the big things than the little things. Big ones, yes. I had occasion to surrender into the Lord’s hands my 14-month-old son who was severely burned and hospitalized for 5 days. I had to surrender into the Lord’s hands my husband when he had a heart attack. I surrendered into the Lord’s hands my 22-year-old son when he got in his van and drove some 3,000 miles across the United States. I had no way to contact him. He was gone for 9 months. I surrendered my daughter into the Lord’s hands when she decided to travel on her own to Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and who knows where else.

It was easier, somehow, for me to place the really big things into the Lord’s hands because I knew there was nothing I could do to control the circumstances and outcome. But it hasn’t been so easy to let go of the things that I think I can control. I know that worrying accomplishes nothing. One of my relatives worries for a hobby. I’ve prayed, “Lord, please don’t let me be a worrier.” But I know that God wants me to hold nothing back from him, not even the things that I think I can control and handle by myself.

“I can do this. I can take care of that. This is no problem.” Those are the things that I have a hard time giving to the Lord.

Time and time again the Lord has taught me to surrender to him both the big and all the little things in my life because his grace is sufficient for me.
A Yes Like Theirs

by Mary Rose Giles

It started with my grandparents, who sought the Lord as they fled communist Cuba and suffered through the separation of their family. They rebuilt their life, in a new country, new culture, and centered their family on Christ. They would move again and again, always, following the lead of Christ, always saying ‘yes’. I consider myself very blessed to be one in a long line of men and women who have said ‘yes’ to the Lord.

When I made the decision to move to Scotland, my grandparents were the ones I was most afraid to tell. They had worked so hard to build a life for their family, and I was about to forsake it all for something new, or so I felt.

When I told my grandfather, he responded simply by saying ‘Mary Rose, all we have ever done is move for the Lord. Why would you think your life would be any different?’

How could I forget, my heritage was one of saying ‘yes’ to the Lord.

When I was younger, someone once told me that I should focus on being present and continuing to say ‘yes’ in my current stage in life, not pining away for what, or who, was in my future. This struck me, because most of my ‘adult life’ at that point was being lived at a crazy speed- a fast paced job, more money than I had ever made. I was constantly yearning after whatever was coming next. I wanted to know what was coming, and generally, I wanted it now. I would anxiously say ‘yes’ to the Lord because I was mostly interested in whatever good thing the Lord had next for me.

But that thought stuck with me and I felt a conscious slowing down, a desire to treasure my life
more. But even in the midst of that conscious/unconscious decision, I was still relying on MY ability to focus on the present and treasure things and still yearned for all the good things I was sure the Lord had for me- I was still making it about me and what I wanted. I wasn’t truly saying ‘yes’ to the Lord because all I was really interested in was how my ‘yes’ would benefit me.

Fast forward to my current stage of life. Without a doubt, saying ‘yes’ to the Lord in my current stage of life as wife, mother and daughter has been the hardest. I feel I have learned, in the last couple of years, more of what it means to truly say ‘yes’ to the Lord because this ‘yes’ has involved sacrifice, and a lot of it. I have had to make some hard choices, choices that have cost me a lot. And the Lord has required of me not one yes, but a multitude of never ending ‘yes-es’. The most recent ‘yes-es’ seem to be required at all hours of the night as well…making for a new and rather exciting and sanity-stealing kind of sacrifice.

But in spite of the exhaustion and of thinking, ‘Lord, I cannot say yes again, I cannot give up another thing…’, there has been grace and my flailing spirit has been met and carried by Christ himself. When I say flailing, I mean that quite literally. I’ve lost count of the number of moments where I have given in to tears, shouting, anger, frustration, anxiety, and exhaustion and have cried out to the Lord in desperation.

All of the expectations I had of myself as a super wife/mom, or even a good wife/mom, have fallen by the wayside as I’ve realized, humbly, that none of this really has anything to do with my abilities, but has everything to do with my ‘yes’ to Christ and embracing my role as his daughter.

All of the expectations I had of myself as a super wife/mom or even a good wife/mom have fallen by the wayside as I’ve realized, humbly, that none of this really has anything to do with my abilities, but has everything to do with my ‘yes’ to Christ and embracing my role as his daughter.

What have I realized? That the point is always God. Often, in the most trying times, it’s a small voice I hear saying ‘will you still praise me now? Will you turn now, to me? Do you trust me?’ And as I say ‘yes’ and acknowledge, each time, his sovereignty, love, patience, and mercy, he has then opened my eyes to the treasures of this stage of my life.

Each time I have had to make a difficult choice and said yes to Christ, a treasure has been given me. The most obvious one is leaving my home for a life here: the cost was extremely high, but look at the family I have been given! I have an amazing husband and the smiliest son in the whole world! I’ve experienced smaller gifts as well- It might be a sign of affection from my son, a great conversation with my husband or a moment of inspiration for my work, or even occasionally a moment of recognizing in myself some kind of growth. But slowly, Christ has been opening my eyes to the joy and grace and…dare I say…fun-ness of this stage of my life.

Each time I have had to make a difficult choice and said yes to Christ, a treasure has been given me... slowly Christ has been opening my eyes to the joy and grace and...dare I say... fun-ness of this stage in my life.

This is been a welcome relief for me, because as I’ve seen the Lord’s hand at work, bearing the weight of my current responsibilities and daily sacrifice, has become easier and I am encouraged to continue saying ‘yes’ to the Lord.

My hope, ultimately, is that I can live up to the heritage I have been given and that my son will grow up remembering and knowing what it looks like to see his parents, grandparents, and great
grandparents say ‘yes’ to the Lord. I pray too that he also be blessed with the opportunity to say a ‘yes’ to the Lord that requires great sacrifice.

[Mary Rose Jordan lives in the Community of the Risen Christ in Glasgow, Scotland. She is the executive director for The Lovely Commission, a website encouraging young women to follow the Lord.]

This article was first published in The Lois Project. Used with permission.

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.

www.loisproject.com
Instagram: @theloisproject
facebook.com/theloisproject
Deepening Our Love for God

by Tom Caballes

"...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:17-19 ESV

Being a Christian involves growing in maturity. Our ultimate goal is to reflect the character of Jesus in our lives – as if Jesus is living in us. Growing in maturity takes a lifetime. Maturing is a matter of changing our old ways of thinking and doing things to the ways of God little by little. At the center of those changes is our love for God.

As we mature and face different challenges in our lives, is our love for God increasing and deepening? Or are hardships and trials making our hearts calloused – resentful and bitter? How easy is it for us to give in to sin? How determined are we to seek and follow God’s will for our lives? How much do we reach out to those who do not know God?

Our love for God may start small, but as we get older, it should become more like a blazing fire – a fire that consumes our very being, rather than one like a dying ember that can barely make it to the end. Which one resembles your love for God – a raging and consuming fire or a slowly fading ember?

So How Do We Grow in Deepening Our Love for God?

1. In the Bible, the Ephesians were rebuked because they lost the fervor of their first love – see Revelations 2:4 to 5. They were corrected for not doing the same things they did at first. How about you – what where were the things you were willing to do when you first said yes to God that you are not willing to do now? In what ways have you compromised your life? How can you restore the fervor of your first love for God?

2. Jesus challenged His disciples to “put out into the deep” [Luke 5:4]. Growing in spiritual maturity calls us to go where it would be inconvenient, hard, and risky at times. Are you willing to live an inconvenient life and go to the road that is less traveled? See Matthew 7:13 to 14. There is something wrong if your spiritual life is too cozy all the time – it might mean you stopped growing in your faith. Stop living a very comfortable life!
3. Let your mind be held captive by the Word of God, so that your thinking, attitude in life, and your behaviour reflect the Word of God alive in you. See 2 Corinthians 10:5. Let God’s Word penetrate your values, habits, opinions, thoughts, deepest longings and desires, dreams and ambitions, and your time and energy.

4. Welcome trials in your life as an opportunity for spiritual growth. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* (James 1:2-4 ESV)

5. We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19 ESV) The manner by which we love God is dependent on how we understand the love of God is for us – the depth, the height, and the width of God’s love. (Ephesians 3:19)

6. Live a martyr’s life daily. Live as if you are dead and live the life that Jesus would have lived. Have the love and the compassion of Jesus for all the people around you. Think and act as Jesus would. See Galatians 2:20.

7. Take risks in sharing the Gospel to your friends and neighbors. Many times we are too timid to grab golden opportunities to share the Good News with our friends. Share your love for God with others.

8. Grow in holiness – there is no greater concrete fruit of loving God than by seeing a changed and holy life. Although we will always be a sinner until the day we die, little by little, we can grow in becoming more like Jesus. The fruit of a holy life means sinning less and less, loving God more day by day, until God calls us home.

**Other Scripture passages:**

1. *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20 ESV)

2. *We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...* (2 Corinthians 10:5 ESV)

3. *Other Bible verses: 1 John 3:1; 1 John 3:18; 1 John 5: 3*

**For personal reflection or group sharing**

- In what ways have you lost the fervour of your first love for God and how can you restore it?
- How rooted and founded is your life on God’s Word?

---

Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of 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.

Top image: *Did Not Our Hearts Burn Within Us?* (Luke 24:32), painting by (c) Michael Malm 2006
The Trap of Hypocrisy

by Tom Caballes

"Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’" Matthew 7:21-23 ESV

While He was here on earth, Jesus showed love and compassion to sinners. He reached out to tax collectors, social outcasts, and adulterers. He also met a lot of hypocrites. Out of His concern for the hypocrites, He chastised and warned them. Why? Hypocrites are like blind people – they think they are okay and doing well, but in reality, they are not. Some of them call Jesus “Lord,” but their actions are very different from what they say. The term hypocrisy comes from a Greek term for actors – “mask-wearers” or pretenders. People can wear masks for a long time that they forget about it. Hypocrisy is a trap; once you fall into it, it blinds you to see that you are trapped. Is there a trace of hypocrisy in your life? Root it out before it completely blinds you.

So How Do We Avoid the Trap of Hypocrisy?

1. Be clear what do you want to accomplish in your life and be consistent with it. Aim to please God, not people. Most of the times, people-pleasing is not in accord with God-pleasing. It is better to be respected by other people rather than be liked. People-pleasing is a slippery slope towards hypocrisy. Let your approval and appreciation come from God alone; if people approve of you, that is fine; but do not seek it.
2. Always be humble before God. We will all be sinners until the day we die. We want to grow in holiness in our character, but all of these is due to God’s grace. We cannot even be proud of our own growing in holiness before God. Honesty and humility prevent us from wearing masks in front of other people.
3. Live by the truth all the time and do not lie – it is wearing a mask - hypocrisy. Aim to root out sin in your life. Call sin a sin and do not sugar-coat it. Seek a trusted person for help in rooting out stubborn sins in your life.

4. Do not live a double life – we act one way with Christians and another with others. This is the essence of hypocrisy. Aim to live an integrated life that all people can see, including God; for God sees everything.

5. Forgive from the heart. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 John 4:20 ESV) You can only truly love God if you have no grudges against anyone; otherwise, you are a hypocrite. Set yourself free and forgive.

6. Control your tongue. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. (James 1:26 ESV) Use your tongue to give grace to others; otherwise, tuck it in.

7. When you see someone’s sins or failings, remind yourself of your own. If you want to cast stones, judge, and criticise others, throw one at yourself as well – we are all sinners in God’s eyes. Develop the habit of throwing the first stone at yourself when you are tempted to condemn or lash out at others’ sins and faults.

8. In the end, life is a matter between you and God. It will not matter how many people you have pleased or not in your lifetime. It will not matter how you appeared before anyone. God sees your actions and your heart. If you did what you did because you love God, that is enough, no matter what others may say. What you should long and wait for are to hear these words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25:23 ESV)

Other Scripture passages:

1. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:2-3 ESV)

2. Beware of practising your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1 ESV)


For personal reflection or group sharing

- In what ways have you been a people-pleaser rather than a God-pleaser?
- Is there a tinge of hypocrisy in your life? How often do you lie?

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.
Shut Down by a Sneer

by Sam Williamson

Six weeks ago, I flew back from a Hearing God retreat in Seattle. I sat next to a young man—thirty-ish—who was returning home from a job interview. He scoffed at the interview process, saying he was interrogated by a bunch of “suits.”

“Suits?” I asked, “Surely no one actually wore a coat and tie.”

“Naw, they were just puffed up buffoons, hot air balloons, all show and no substance.”

We talked more about his life. He started college studying English, but his professors were idiots, so he dropped out. He currently worked at Lowes stocking shelves, but his passion is stories. He was even writing one. He thought he could help a computer gaming company in Seattle with his plots and characters. But those interviewers didn’t really “get” him.

He jeered at the airplane coffee because it was only Starbucks, not “real” gourmet; he turned down the snack because it wasn’t gluten free; he scoffed at my Surface Book laptop because it wasn’t a Mac; and he ridiculed the movies because they were all “make-a-buck” sequels.

The Sneer

Adam and Eve enslaved the entire human race when the fell for Satan’s sneer. Satan’s first words were, “Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?” He wasn’t looking for information. He was sneering and inviting Eve to join him. His question was a jeer: “What kind of God would prohibit that? Really? Yikes!”

They fell for a smirk. We too get shut-down merely by a jeer. When Christian kids go off to college and lose their faith, it’s never because they heard a well-reasoned argument against theism; it’s because they cowered under a chortle:

- “You seem a smart kid. Do you really believe in a God who let the holocaust happen?”
- Professor Bultmann once said, “It is impossible to use electric lights and the wireless …
and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.”

I want to say, “Really? You mean, God could exist if stone age man never invented the wheel, but once modern man invented a light switch, it killed him? The radio is your proof of no God?” (Sometimes we just have to be cynical about the world’s cynicism.)

Sneers and sarcasm never engage in discussion. They just look down from their lofty heights of arrogance. By dehumanizing anyone who disagrees—and with no reasonable conversation or cause—they despise everyone else.

**The Downward Spiral of The Jeer**

The first verse of the book of psalms describes the downward-regression of evil: it begins by “walking in the counsel of wicked,” and soon it “stands in the way of sinners,” and it ends up “sitting in the seat of scoffers.”

This perfectly describes the world we live in. We began by listening to the “common sense” worldly wisdom to solve our problems; soon we participate in the godless way of life (not necessarily atheistic, just deist, like God doesn’t matter); and we end up scoffing and sneering.

We’re cynical. As ten-year old kids, we loved the zoo. By the time we’re fifteen we jeer at those gullible kids fascinated by striped horses. As we grow older, we snicker at people who drink Folgers coffee, we chuckle at folks who eat at Big Boys, and we disdain movies with a happy ending. We’re too smart for all that.

We are derisive, critical, and sarcastic about the world. We don’t write a book, volunteer at a charity, or take an entry-level job. Instead, we mock authors who write “half-assed” books and laugh at friends who are becoming “suits.”

We all fall for the jeer, and we all look down on others. As I inwardly considered that young man on the plane, I felt my face begin to form a sneer. I was smirking! G. K. Chesterton once wrote,

> The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.

The only cure for my sneering nature is to wonder, to wonder at a God who would choose me, a scoffing cynic, to be his very own treasures, flawed as I am. Because he did choose me, and you: not because we were good, nice, smart, or successful. He chose us simply because he loves us.

It kind of makes me wonder.

Sam

---


Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, [www.beliefsoftheheart.com](http://www.beliefsoftheheart.com), and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.

---

article © Copyright 2019, Beliefs of the Heart, Ltd. All rights reserved. Used with permission.
How Do We Measure the Fruit of Our Lives?

by Sam Williamson

My father pastored five different churches between 1949 and 1994. His first four churches averaged 200 members, and his last church grew from 250 to 750 during his ten years of care.

A few years before dad retired from that last, rapidly growing church, I came home for Christmas. We went out for coffee, and he shared with me some reflections on church growth.

When he pastored his first four churches, he felt the “fruit” of his ministry was show in the parishioners’ growth in prayer, Scripture meditation, fruit of the Spirit, and outreach. But when his last church doubled in size, he began to think of “fruit” in terms of Sunday-morning attendance.

He said he had never thought about numbers until he saw the membership increase. And when he saw numbers increase, he began to think of little else. He concluded,

Who would ever imagine that spiritual fruit could be measured by numbers, the same way GM measures a good year, by the sum of the pickup trucks produced?

Significance

The details of my dad’s temptation differ from ours. Most of us easily see through his bogus gauge of attendance. He did too. We are not pastors. We are nurses, mechanics, bus drivers, engineers, and homemakers. But we still have his exact temptation. Ours just looks different.

We each long to make a difference, to live a life that matters, to leave lasting footprints on this earth. And we scrutinize our lives, sifting through each conversation, studying each interaction with friends, hunting after that elusive quarry called “fruit.”

We stalk significance like the lion prowls its prey. Will I be remembered? Will my children ever thank me? Will my colleagues every miss me? Did anyone notice my brilliant idea?
When we see hints of harvest we rejoice, and when we make mistakes, we despair. *Why did I give that stupid answer? Why did I run from that risk? Why did I never listen to my kids?*

**Spiritual Fruit**

Jesus says that genuine, lasting fruit is the result of abiding in him, with him and his word abiding in us. *Period!* That he is the vine—the source of all fruit and nourishment—and we are branches through which his crop is unveiled.

I once heard a pastor say that if Jesus preached this today, he would say that he, Jesus, is the electrical outlet and we are the plugs. I suppose the pastor is partly right. When we are plugged into God, his life flows through us, and our lamps give light to the world around us.

But mostly the metaphor is horribly wrong. It’s too mechanical. Every metaphor God uses of his connection to us is relational not machine-like. He never says, “I am the piston and you are the crankshaft.” He says he is our Father, friend, and (breathtakingly intimate) our spouse.

We would never cut an engine in half to make it produce more horsepower, but the Father prunes us—his branches—so that we produce more fruit. Why prune? Pruning drives into us a thirst of desperation to cling to the vine. All lasting fruit arises from that *spiritual, quantum-algorithm* of our inner-soul grasping onto God for all we are worth.

*Actually, for all he is worth.* Any other bountiful fruit—no matter the numbers—is bogus.

The world says fix your eyes on, examine, and measure your fruit; and you’ll know your worth. God says, “Come to me, thirst for me, hunger for me, cling to me, and I will satisfy you beyond all you can imagine.” Our fruit is not the cold assemblage of transmission gears but the cluster of grapes created by an intimate relationship with Him.

Spiritual fruit is the explosion of intimate theology.

Sam

---

Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, [www.beliefsoftheheart.com](http://www.beliefsoftheheart.com), and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.


---

article © Copyright 2019, *Beliefs of the Heart, Ltd*. All rights reserved. Used with permission.
On Misguided Adventures and Breeding Spotted Mice

"The Spirit-illuminated Christian cannot be cheated – heaven is more important than earth and eternity more important than time"

by A.W. Tozer

The Associated Press lately carried an interesting if somewhat depressing story out of London about a certain British peer who had died just a few days short of his eighty-ninth birthday. Having been a man of means and position, it had presumably not been necessary for him to work for a living like the rest of us, so at the time of his death he had had about seventy adult years in which he was free to do whatever he wanted to do, to pursue any calling he wished or to work at anything he felt worthy of his considerable abilities.

And what had he chosen to do? Well, according to the story, he had "devoted his life to trying to breed the perfect spotted mouse."

Now, I grant every man the right to breed spotted mice if he wants to and can get the cooperation of the mice, and I freely admit that it is his business and not mine. Not being a mouse lover (nor a mouse hater for that matter; I am just neutral about mice), I do not know but that a spotted mouse might be more useful and make a more affectionate pet than a common mouse colored mouse. But still I am troubled.

The mouse breeder in question was a lord, and I was born on a farm in the hill country of Pennsylvania, but since a cat can look at a king I suppose a farm boy can look at a lord, even look at him with disapproval if the circumstances warrant. Anyway, a man's a man for a'that, and I feel a certain kinship for every man born of woman; so I cannot but grieve for my
brother beyond the seas.

Made in the image of God, equipped with awesome powers of mind and soul, called to dream immortal dreams and to think the long thoughts of eternity, he chooses the breeding of a spotted mouse as his reason for existing. Invited to walk with God on earth and to dwell at last with the saints and angels in the world above; called to serve his generation by the will of God, to press with holy vigor toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, he dedicates his life to the spotted mouse not just evenings or holidays, mind you, but his entire life. Surely this is tragedy worthy of the mind of an Aeschylus or a Shakespeare.

Let us hope that the story is not true or that the news boys got it mixed up as they sometimes do; but even if the whole thing should prove to be a hoax, still it points up a stark human tragedy that is being enacted before our eyes daily, not by make believe play actors, but by real men and women who are the characters they portray. These should be concerned with sin and righteousness and judgment; they should be getting ready to die and to live again; but instead they spend their days breeding spotted mice.

If the spiritual view of the world is the correct one, as Christianity boldly asserts that it is, then for every one of us heaven is more important than earth and eternity more important than time. If Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be; if He is what the glorious company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs declared that He is; if the faith which the holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge is the true faith of God, then no man has any right to dedicate his life to anything that can burn or rust or rot or die. No man has any right to give himself completely to anyone but Christ nor to anything but prayer.

The man who does not know where he is is lost; the man who does not know why he was born is worse lost; the man who cannot find an object worthy of his true devotion is lost utterly; and by this description the human race is lost, and it is a part of our lostness that we do not know how lost we are. So we use up the few precious years allotted to us breeding spotted mice. Not the kind that scurry and squeak, maybe; but viewed in the light of eternity, are not most of our little human activities almost as meaningless?

One of the glories of the Christian gospel is its ability not only to deliver a man from sin but to orient him, to place him on a peak from which he can see yesterday and today in their relation to tomorrow. The truth cleanses his mind so that he can recognize things that matter and see time and space and kings and cabbages in their true perspective. The Spirit-illuminated Christian cannot be cheated. He knows the values of things; he will not bid on a rainbow nor make a down payment on a mirage; he will not, in short, devote his life to spotted mice.

Back of every wasted life is a bad philosophy, an erroneous conception of life's worth and purpose. The man who believes that he was born to get all be can will spend his life trying to get it; and whatever he gets will be but a cage of spotted mice. The man who believes he was created to enjoy fleshly pleasures will devote himself to pleasure seeking; and if by a combination of favorable circumstances he manages to get a lot of fun out of life, his pleasures will all turn to ashes in his mouth at the last. He will find out too late that God made him too noble to be satisfied with those tawdry pleasures he had devoted his life to here under the sun.

[Excerpt from Man - The Dwelling Place of God, by A. W. Tozer. In the public domain.]

Aiden Wilson Tozer (April 21, 1897 - May 12, 1963) was an American Christian pastor, preacher, author, magazine editor, Bible conference speaker, and spiritual mentor. For his work, he received two honorary doctorate degrees.

Among the more than 40 books that he authored, at least two are regarded as Christian classics: The Pursuit of God and The Knowledge of the Holy. His books impress on the reader the possibility and necessity for a deeper relationship with God.
Living a simple and non-materialistic lifestyle, he and his wife, Ada Cecelia Pfautz, never owned a car, preferring bus and train travel. Even after becoming a well-known Christian author, Tozer signed away much of his royalties to those who were in need.

Tozer had seven children, six boys and one girl. He was buried in Ellet Cemetery, Akron, Ohio, with a simple epitaph marking his grave: "A. W. Tozer - A Man of God."

Prayer was of vital personal importance for Tozer. "His preaching as well as his writings were but extensions of his prayer life," comments his biographer, James L. Snyder, in the book, In Pursuit of God: The Life Of A.W. Tozer. "He had the ability to make his listeners face themselves in the light of what God was saying to them," writes Snyder.
A Thief Named Comparison

by Jacqueline Giles

This article first appeared in The Lovely Commission, an online journal of Kairos North America for single Christian women. The Scriptural truths and practical wisdom presented are timeless and helpful for all who desire to be conformed to the image of Christ their Lord.

Part 1: The Truth Will Set You Free

I recently read an article by Elisabeth Elliot in which she said, "It is for us women to receive the given as Mary did, not to insist on the not-given, as Eve did." Mary received God's call on her life, Eve looked at what she wasn't given, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and wanted it. When I compare myself to another, in a way I am wondering: Why wasn't I given that in the way that she was? A good starting point in reflecting on this is to accept what Elisabeth Elliot encourages us in: This is lovely. A woman was created to receive - and our loving Father, who knows what we need, has given us good things! When a woman is distracted by comparing herself to others, she is unable to focus on receiving what God has given her.

My next encouragement then is to consider the unique woman God created you to be and what He has given, and is giving you, to receive. Take a moment to reflect on these questions:

- How has God created you?
- What gifts has He given you?
- What call has He given you?
- How can you receive what God gives you?
I believe that comparison can be a weapon of the evil one. Satan uses comparison to distract us from what God has given us and what He has called us to do. Satan uses comparison to cause division in our relationships with the women in our life. However, I believe that God has defeated Satan and given us power and truth.

If we take hold of His Word, and the power He has given to us, we can be transformed.

The first truth we need to allow our flesh to be penetrated by is this: MY IDENTITY IS IN THE LORD. I do not need to find my worth in the ways I can compare myself to another. God has created me and I want to be the woman He has created me to be.

The second truth is this: GOD HAS GIVEN ME WOMEN TO BE MY SISTERS IN CHRIST- TO CALL ME ON AND TO ENCOURAGE ME. I should not allow comparison to divide me from these women, but unite me to them and Him.

The third truth: I AM A MEMBER OF HIS BODY AND I AM ONE PART OF WHAT HE IS DOING. I need to do what He asks of me and not worry about what He has called someone else to do.

No matter where you are in your struggle with comparison, my guess is that you can relate to one of the stages of comparison I have experienced in my life.

1. Physical appearance
2. Holiness
3. Measuring up

As young women we are sometimes especially aware of our appearance. This should be a good healthy awareness, so that we can learn to take care of ourselves and care for our appearance. In this time of life though we often also compare our appearance to others. We are paying attention to how beautiful or not the other women around us are. And we are wondering, constantly measuring: Am I prettier than her? Am I smarter than her? Funnier? More popular? Why are we measuring? BECAUSE WE WANT TO BE VALUED. We are insecure and want our worth to be affirmed, so we try to affirm it ourselves by comparing ourselves with another. Remember that first truth: MY IDENTITY IS IN THE LORD. I need to understand that my worth comes from the Lord. I need to live as a new creation and learn to know myself as He sees me: His lovely daughter.

When I was in college my focus changed from outward appearance to inward beauty: Is my heart prettier than her heart? Am I holier than her? She is way holier than me! I experienced my college years as a grace-filled time to grow in my relationship with the Lord. Holiness and being set apart for the Lord was a huge focus for me, and slowly comparison crept right into that area of my life as well. Satan tried to discourage me with comparison. I had to remember that second truth: GOD GAVE ME MY SISTERS TO CALL ME ON AND ENCOURAGE ME. During college, I was called on especially by the women around me who knew and loved the Lord. By their example I was encouraged to begin praying daily and forming a deeper relationship with God. The witness of the way they lived their life as daughters of the Lord also encouraged me to make changes in my life and live fully for God.

Now, as a married, stay at home mom, I still find myself in the comparison boat as I examine whether I am measuring up to other mothers and wives. Am I doing as much as she is? The third truth: I NEED TO DO WHAT HE ASKS OF ME. God has given me a specific call. I need to listen to what He asks me to do and do it faithfully. I need to receive the call He gives me!

God loves you so much! He has given you good things. Know and receive what He has given you. We need to live with confidence in our identity as daughters of God. If we truly know our
worth from the Lord we will not look elsewhere for it. The Lord wants us to be blessed by the
women in our life and encouraged. He has a specific plan for each one of us and we need to
discover what that is. We need to know what God is asking of us and focus on serving Him.
Receive what God has given you!

Come Lord Jesus! May I know your truth and may it set me free. Thank you that my identity is in
You! Help me to know this more and more and to live it out. Thank you for the women you have
given me in my life to be my sisters. Help me to see them in this way. May I be an
encouragement to them and be called on by these women. Thank you Lord for your call upon my
life. Help me to know what you want me to do and to do it by your grace! Free the hearts and
minds of all women from the lies of the evil one. Come with your power and truth. Allow my
mind to be transformed by You.

Part 2: Transformation

In Part 1, we focused on knowing and receiving what our heavenly Father has for us as well as
different areas (appearance, personal holiness) where we are often tempted to compare ourselves
to others.

I now want to offer a few suggestions on how we can take the ugly side of comparison and
transform it into something more helpful and lovely. Here are some reminders I’ve found
helpful:

- The attribute of someone else that has caught my eye should not drive me to envy or self-
pity. I **should not allow myself to measure my worth through comparison**. Rather, I
should acknowledge what God has given to someone else and glorify Him. I can
acknowledge the beauty of God's creation. I should thank God and tell the person what I
admire about her or simply compliment her.

- I can allow this acknowledgement of what God has given to someone else to draw me to
an inward reflection that considers: **What has God given to me and how can I receive
what He gives to me in a daily way?** I need to recognize the beautiful way in which God
has created me and the gifts He has given to me. And most importantly I need to find my
worth in being His daughter.

Sometimes our comparison to another can be the catalyst for the growth we need in that area of
our life. The Lord intended women to have others in their life to call them on! Our sisters are
there to encourage us, maybe even just by example of their prayer, hospitality, service or maybe
their sense of style or their love for others. Instead of getting beat in the comparison game by
saying "she has a much better prayer life than me" and pitying myself, I can tell her, "Wow, you
have a strong relationship with the Lord!" And ask her, "How did you get to the place you are?
I want to grow in my prayer life, can you give me some tips?" Or maybe she has great hair, tell
her! Then ask her for help with yours! Maybe she has a great sense of style and you want to
improve yours, tell her and ask her for help!

Comparison can drive a stake between relationships with our sisters, don't
let it, instead let your attention be directed in positive way that brings you
closer to your sisters.

Allow the beauty you see in your sister to strengthen your relationship, not tear you apart. Build
her up and allow yourself to rely on her help. Allow her example to call you higher up, not in a
competitive way, but in a way that builds you up and encourages you to try harder and to
persevere.

Sometimes I look at a sister and I see all that she accomplishes and I **wonder, why am I not
doing that?** Satan can really use this thought to distract us from what God has called us to do.
Really, if we are so focused on what others are doing, how can we be focused on what God has
called us to do? I need to evaluate and discern. Here are some questions that help me do that:

- Have I taken time to discern what God has called me to do?
- Is He asking more of me?
- Is He asking something of me that is different?
- Is He asking me to do less so I can focus on him?

Once I have evaluated and discerned, I can simply say to myself confidently, "THIS is what God has called me to, and I will rejoice in it". We need to recognize what God has called others to, be glad that God has given them the gifts to do it and then do what God has called us to do, faithfully and joyfully.

Want to change your habits of comparison? Here are some points to review and help you grow!

1. Acknowledge the beauty of God's created human beings. Thank God and tell the person, give her a compliment.
2. Acknowledge what God has given you and receive it. Know yourself! What gifts has He given you? Discover the unique woman He created you to be.
3. Ask The Lord to help you grow and let yourself be called on by another's example.
4. Resolve to keep working at prayer, hospitality etc. Ask her for help, since she appears to be good at it!

Take time to discern! What is the Lord asking of you? Is the Lord calling you to do more? Is He calling you to do less? Are you using your gifts to upbuild the body? Are you using those gifts to build God's kingdom? Rejoice in what God has called you to do and be faithful to it. Do not allow comparison to distract you.

Lord, my identity is in you. I am your daughter, your creation. Help me to be the woman you have created me to be. Protect me Lord, do not let me be distracted from what you have called me to do. Help me to receive what you have given me. Protect me from the divisive nature of comparison. Help me to acknowledge your glory in others and rejoice in it! May I be encouraged by the beauty I see in my sisters. I want to live my whole life for the rest of my life, beginning with today, this hour, this minute, for your glory.

Jacqueline is joyfully married to her husband, Peter, and so grateful to be staying home with their four children. She attended Ohio State University, where she studied Human Development, Family Science and Spanish. She became an active member of Saint Paul's Outreach (SPO), a Catholic group on campus. Being a part of SPO has shaped her understanding of and the way she lives out her Christian faith, especially with regard to daily prayer, scripture, relationships, continual conversation, community and relational evangelism. After graduating, she worked for YouthWorks-Detroit and later worked for Kairos. Jacqueline enjoys homeschooling her children and encountering new ways to love them and the Lord daily. She loves to be outdoors, exercise, play guitar, paint and read. She is passionate about building God's kingdom. Jacqueline resides in the beautiful state of Michigan and is a member of the Work of Christ Community, a community in the Sword of the Spirit.

This article first appeared in The Lovely Commission, a publishing venture and brand of Kairos North America. Used with permission.

The Lovely Commission is run by Molly Kilpatrick and Mary Rose Jordan and a team of contributors from various Christian communities in North America and beyond. Together they are working to build a culture of radical love, femininity, modesty of heart, mind, and body amongst young women.
Their aim is to inspire and equip young women to embrace and promote a culture of Godly femininity in which we live out our rich identity as daughters of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.

Top illustration: Christ in the House of Martha and Mary (cropped image), by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, 1655
“I Came to Know and Love Him Because He Loved Me First”

By Esa Vance

“God loves you.” I grew up hearing this all eighteen years of my life, but I had never been convinced that it was true. What faith I did have I wished to preserve during my college years so I applied to the 2017-2018 Kairos GAP Program because of the transformation I saw in some of my friends who had interned with Kairos.

After being accepted into the GAP Program I had three months to begin raising ten thousand dollars to fund my GAP year and prepare to move to Lansing, Michigan for nine months. “That is a crazy thing to decide” and “aren’t mission years supposed to be in exotic places?” I would repeat these doubts in my head, but long before applying there was an assurance about the GAP Program set in my heart that would not be shaken even though I tried.

I arrived in August 2017 after God pretty much dragged me to Michigan. It was a new place, a new environment, full of new people, and a list of things I had never done before. I quickly discovered that if I tried to do everything set before me by myself I would fall fast and fail. I could not do it all on my own, and not so coincidentally the GAP Program put me in a position where I needed to accept the hand of God. From living in a household with the other female interns to serving the local Lansing community to managing youth retreats, I could not rely solely on myself. I needed to turn to the power of prayer daily to move the mountains before me and through this need, I forged a relationship with the Lord.

One day I was having a really tough go of it. I was riding the city bus (my main mode of transportation) surrounded by strangers that I did not enjoy sitting next to. I was waiting on the Lord to work in my life and in that moment of blinding judgment and ignorance, the Father shone through in His clarity. I was not waiting on Him; He was waiting on me, to open my eyes and see Jesus Christ in every person on that bus. This was Christ’s presence: me sitting on the bus on my way home from services called to be an instrument of love to those around me.

I was called to a city in Michigan, not somewhere exotic. I went to bed every night thinking “God worked today, and I am not who I was yesterday.” It was not a single moment that transformed me but rather each day of those nine months. Every time I would look to the Father to see He was already looking at me. I experienced the Father’s love by the presence of
His Son in my life and I was able to be Christ to others by the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Amidst these nine months of adventure, joy, friendship, service, humility, hardship, laughter, risk, trial, and peace, I needed the Lord. Moreover, I came to know and love Him because He loved me first.

“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 2:18 ESV

[This article was first published in the North American Kairos Update Reports.]

**Esa Vance's brief bio:**

Hey, I am Esa ("ee-suh") Vance and I hail from the cold doldrums of St. Paul, Minnesota USA, which contrary to popular belief, does not mean I like or tolerate the cold so just my luck I ended up in the most similar place to Minnesota. I am a summer baby through and through and enjoy many laughs with good company under the quickly fading summer sun or just a good book in hand with a puppy in my lap. This GAP year has increased my capacity for peace, joy, and hope through the people I met and the experiences I journeyed through. I never knew how stagnant the life I had built for myself was until I allowed it to be flooded with movement. So thank you Kairos North America GAP Program for moving me!
My Experience on a Kairos Mission Trip to Agua Prieta

By Mark Nitkiewicz

While serving on the 2018 Kairos Mission Trip to Agua Prieta in Mexico God worked through me in a profound way. Back home I was used to running through a tight schedule getting things done and not building relationships along the way. I felt constantly controlled by a wristwatch.

When I arrived in Agua Prieta my internal clock was thrown off and I often didn’t know what time it was, which drove me crazy. However, something that seemed difficult turned out to be a huge blessing.

Throughout the next few days, I learned to trust others and experienced the ability to relax without people constantly calling me for work or school and having to schedule events every day. During this time away from my busy life back home I was able to see how God had blessed me with peace and faith in Him.

God wasn’t done working in me though, during the rest of the trip I formed valuable friendships with many people, something I had taken for granted back home. Serving with the other guys on my trip and learning new skills at the worksite in place of my fast-paced work back home was an awesome experience and some of the best fun I’ve ever had.

Overall God blessed my trip with peace, faith, love, charity, and many great skills and friendships.

[This article was first published in the North American Kairos Mission Trip Update Reports.]

Mark Nitkiewicz is a high school student from Ypsilanti, Michigan, USA

Return to Table of Contents or Archives • (c) copyright 2019 The Sword of the Spirit
Is Christianity Hard or Easy?
by C.S. Lewis

How much of myself must I give?
The ordinary idea which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as a starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else – call it “morality” or “decent behavior,” or “the good of society” – has claims on this self: claims which interfere with its own desires. What we mean by “being good” is giving in to these claims. Some of the things the ordinary self wanted to do turn out to be what we call “wrong;” well, we must give them up. Other things, which the self did not want to do, turn out to be what we call “right;” well, we shall have to do them. But we are hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life and do what it likes. In fact, we are very like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there will be enough left over for him to live on. Because we are still taking our natural self as the starting point.

Giving up or becoming unhappy
As long as we are thinking that way, one or other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, “live for others” but always in a discontented, grumbling way – always wondering why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you have become that, you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish.

Harder and easier
The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says “Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.”
Both harder and easier than what we are all trying to do. You have noticed, I expect, that Christ Himself sometimes describes the Christian way as very hard, sometimes as very easy. He says, "Take up your Cross"—in other words, it is like going to be beaten to death in a concentration camp. Next minute he says, "My yoke is easy and my burden light." He means both. And one can just see why both are true.

**The almost impossible thing**

...The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self— all your wishes and precautions— to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call "ourselves," to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be "good." We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition— and hoping, in spite of this to behave honestly and chastely and humbly.

And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. As he said, a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.

[excerpt from *Mere Christianity*, Book 4, Chapter 8, first published in Great Britain by Geoffrey Bles 1952, © C.S. Lewis Pre Ltd 1942]
“That Fair Beguiling Thread – Prayer Poems for Every Occasion”

by Sean O’Neill

The following Introduction and selection of prayer poems are excerpted from the book, “That Fair Beguiling Thread - Prayer Poems for Every Occasion”, by Sean O'Neill. While it was written from a Roman Catholic perspective, the material can be beneficial for Christians from other traditions as well. – ed.

Introduction

With the fresh and, to a some extent, more esthetic translation of the text of the Mass there seems to be a new hunger among modern Catholics for religious and spiritual literature that is not only truthful and faithful to the mind of the Church, but also beautiful. Each of the pages of this volume uses rich imagery to express prayers and petitions, in a way that is, hopefully, lyrical and finely crafted. The resultant wording therefore aims to provide the person praying with a deeper and more heartfelt time of prayer which, in turn, gives greater glory to God.

This book is intended for anyone who is sincere about their relationship with God and wishes to express that in ways that reflect their experience of life and the cry of their heart. It is for the bereaved, the joyful, the steadfast and the wavering, the trembling and the strong. It is for husbands, wives, parents, and children, for those who are single by choice or by accident and for those who are lonely.

It is for anyone who wants to approach the throne of grace, to feel the love of the Father, the embrace of the Son and the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. It is for anyone who holds out their begging bowl for scraps of love, only to find it brimming over with sweetness and nourishment and healing.

Three samples of prayer poems from the book:
Morning prayer

O God, who turn the planets, rouse the sun, and spark the dawn-light in the eastern sky, hear me, I pray: to You who post Your sentinels along the vast horizon, heralding the sunrise, be the glory and grandeur that is due a king. You have made me by the molding of my clay. Such poor material You sculpt into personhood and breathe on, to wake the soul within, fanning into flame the answering instinct to turn towards the brightness of Your face and sing Your praise and humbly serve. I thank You for another day of life, the trials and satisfactions of each hour, the woeful sorrows, brimming joys, the guts and revelations of each minute past; for all this I render You my thankful heart. Be with me today in Your guiding Spirit and let me not turn from the narrow way to follow, unredeemed, the highways of ruin, but let me be steadfast in kindness and love, strong in hope and abounding in faith. I offer You my very self this day; take me, Lord, and do with me what You will.

Evening prayer

At the rose-tinted hour when light dies westward and the pulsing drive of the human body winds down, stepping from the heights of sterling work or depths of tedious occupation, I pause to lift my heart to God’s face. As though Jesus walked among us bodily, bodily I bow and calm myself in that bare brightness that bathes me now, as he passes with hand upraised to bless. Dear Lord of all that ails, delights, intrigues me, in all my commerce and toil, give me light, at this encroaching hour of dusk, to catch Your Spirit’s motion in the world. I thank You, caring master, for the pendulum of work and rest, that swings through all fulfillments and the struggles of the clogging carousel of work, through the accomplishment of steady hours. On the homeward journey keep me firm in mind and heart, in pleasing You.
and in my subtle service as ambassador of grace
to other soul-bearers that You place within my life.
And bless my evening with Your peace.
As the sun sinks, my heart will rise to You.

Prayer before a difficult task

On this way through the foothills of life
You, Lord, steer into my onward path
greensward and boulder, valley and peak,
broad metaled road and broken cattle track.
In the conjunction of a million threads of will,
here and now I face the fording of the river,
the task that must be tackled to proceed.
Lord, You know everything, the story and outcome,
keep my wits clear and my mind sharp
to bend lithely to every nuance and gradation;
Give strength of body and steadiness of hand
and confidence that You are with me as I strive.
Give me joyful trust in Your care for me
that I may broach this present task
with courage, whatever the result.
Your hand is at work in my life
to bring to fruition Your light in my heart,
Your longed-for perfection and gentle bliss.
Give me success and may it usher in
the glorious procession of Your kingdom.
And if my enterprise should come to naught
let me accept, joyfully, my cross united to Yours.
May Your precious will be done in my life always.

(c) 2017 Sean O'Neill, from That Fair Beguiling Thread - Prayer Poems for Every Occasion

For many years Sean O'Neill was a leader in a lay Christian community in Glasgow, Scotland. Along with his wife, Liz, he is currently involved in offering healing prayer to all-comers in his parish in the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, USA.

That Fair Beguiling Thread - Prayer Poems for Every Occasion
by Sean O'Neill

Each of the prayers in this volume uses imagery to express ideas and petitions in a lyrical and finely-crafted way. This affords the person praying a more...
heartfelt time of prayer which, in turn, gives greater glory to God. The book is intended for anyone who is sincere about their relationship with God and wishes to express that in ways that reflect their own experience of life and the cry of their heart.

The book contains 57 prayer poems spanning a wide range of themes, including prayers for family members, for work, for driving, in a difficult task, in sickness, distress, bereavement, for an addict, etc.

The book is available on Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk in both print and ebook format.
It is dangerous to write about holiness because others could easily draw the conclusion that the writer is holier than he really is. In truth, I write about holiness precisely because it is an area in my life in which I desperately need to grow.

I would like to begin by addressing the importance of mystery in life. I don’t know about you, but I like a mystery. I like the fact that there are unknowables, undefinables, and “black holes” in our data bank of spiritual knowledge. That God can be known and yet remain unknown is fine by me. I accept the fact that I can grow in the knowledge of him, yet never completely penetrate the deep mystery of his Being.

Religion, faith, and God are not just interesting – they are compelling, specifically because they can never be fully known. Finding the “X” in algebraic problems and in “who-done-it” mysteries is fascinating since they present the challenge of possible discovery or they remain forever elusive. In many instances we will never reach the bottom of certain realities. “X” won’t be found, and some real-life “who-done-its” will remain unresolved.

What part of God’s mystery does he want to reveal to me?
When I read scripture, I try to read it as though I’m reading it for the first time. I like to read from different versions so I don’t become overly familiar with particular passages. I try to imagine that I’m in the story and what I’m reading is actually happening to me. In reading scripture I want my Bible to be “active and alive.” I want it to speak to me and reveal what God is opening for me now. In other words, I want the Holy Spirit to pull back the veil and show me a bit of his mystery. I don’t need to know all of it. Just some of it would be great.

I’ve read the sixth chapter of Isaiah many times. It is, therefore, quite easy to say to myself, “I
know what this is about. It’s the call of Isaiah and his response to the Lord.” Taken like this, it is easy to overlook the drama that is taking place here. In so doing, we can miss God himself and his fresh word to us. So I ask myself the question: what is actually happening here and what part of God’s great mystery does he want to reveal to me today? In that spirit, let’s look at Isaiah 6:1-5.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. ”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Encountering the King of all Kings

As I read this, I thought, What a prayer time Isaiah was having! He thinks he is simply going up to the temple to honor the memory of his revered leader now deceased, but instead, he encounters the supreme King of all Kings! Wow – what an experience he had! He got a lot more than he bargained for! Prayer times are a mysterious business. A person can have a hundred regular prayer times and experience nothing particularly striking, but then there’s that one time, as in this instance, when the Lord reveals himself in a spectacular way. Like Isaiah, we sometimes think we’re simply going to fulfill our obligation to pray, and this King, whom we know in part, decides (when we least expect it) to break into our prayer and reveal his presence in some remarkable way.

The first thing I noticed in Isaiah’s experience was that the angels didn’t say God was holy; they didn’t even say he was holy, holy; but rather they declared God to be “holy, holy, holy.” He was three times holy! This was their way of describing the Lord in the superlative degree. I believe this is the only time in scripture that an attribute of God is mentioned three times in succession. God is never described as “love, love, love” or “just, just, just.” His holiness stands alone. It is the distinctive attribute of the Living God; it is the hallmark of who he is. His holiness stands above any other of his many qualities. He’s magnificent. He fills the temple. He is mighty. He is great. The seraphim know it and express it. They stand in his presence daily and acknowledge that he is three times holy. His majesty is boundless. The liturgies of many of our churches have taken up this anthem and proclaim it in this three-fold way. Through the centuries it stands out as a most solemn hymn of the church.

I was also struck by the fact that like Moses at the burning bush who took his shoes off because he was on holy ground, the angels in this passage cover their feet in this most holy presence. Apparently this is a kind of protocol that is followed by all of God’s creatures when admitted into the Lord’s sanctuary. I see them acknowledging their lowliness by covering their feet in his glorious presence. There is a deep reverence, humility, and mystery in this gesture.

“We shall see him as he is”

In Exodus 33 Moses was only permitted to see the Lord from the back, and Isaiah only saw God’s reflected glory. What was just a hope to them now becomes a promise to us as his people, the church: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). We are destined to enjoy not the mere reflected glory of the Lord, but rather his pure nature in all his manifest glory! Alleluia!

A final observation for me from this passage was that in the presence of the Lord the door posts and thresholds quaked. And I think that Isaiah quaked as well. In fact, I think he shook
the most in this charged atmosphere. The body of Isaiah must have been visibly moved as he pronounced judgment upon himself, saying, “Woe is me!” To put it another way, Isaiah was undone. He came apart at the seams. He was “blown away.” In a moment he was totally exposed before the absolute standard of holiness. He became aware of his complete unworthiness: “I am a man of unclean lips,” he says. He saw his sinfulness. At that moment he knew who God was and who he really was.

**Awe draws us near to God**

Normally when we experience God and our own unworthiness it comes to us as a gradual revelation. The mystery unfolds before us slowly, but with this prophet it was instantaneous. However, as difficult as this experience was, it did not annihilate him. Look at how Isaiah responds to this overwhelming vision. Sure, Isaiah was undone, but after groveling, he makes one of the most important declarations in all of sacred scripture: “Here am I. Send me!” I think Rabbi Hershel, a renowned Talmudic scholar and professor at Yeshiva University in New York City, described a moment like this best when he wrote, “Awe, unlike fear, does not make us shrink from the awe-inspiring object, but on the contrary, draws us near to it.”

In the end, Isaiah was no “Humpty-Dumpy” who couldn’t be put back together again by anybody in his kingdom. God, seemingly in an instant, put Isaiah back together while leaving his identity intact. His personality was overhauled; he was changed, but not destroyed. Isaiah was still Isaiah when he left the temple as a new man.

There is a pattern in this whole process we mustn’t miss. After a divine encounter, Isaiah is greatly moved. God forgives and transforms him, but then he sends him forth. In this temple visit, Isaiah goes from brokenness to mission. In the end he stands up as a volunteer: “I am ready,” he says, “I will go!” His mystical vision propels him to ministry. His worship isn’t an end in itself. It yields a mission. Grace contained is grace lost. Isaiah has received a great grace, and he is about to be a means of great grace to others.

I believe that like Isaiah we, too, need to move from conversion to transformation to mission. We either need a missionary or we are missionaries. There is in the call of Isaiah a challenge for every disciple of Christ. Godliness demands manifestation. A world that cannot see Christ must see Christ in us! I invite each one of us to heed the call and bring others into God’s family by welcoming them into our homes, our churches, our community gatherings, and our times of fellowship. Many of us have experienced the Lord’s presence and work in our midst. Let’s share our Good News. I believe that it’s time to step forward and say, “Here am I. Send me!”

---

[This article was first published in the March 2008 Issue of Living Bulwark.]

Tom Mangan is a coordinator in the People of God Community located in Coraopolis and Pittsburgh areas of Pennsylvania, USA. Tom and his wife and Patty have been actively involved in the charismatic renewal since the late 1960s. They joined the People of God community in 1978. They moved their family from the North Hills of Pittsburgh to Coraopolis to live move closely with other community families in a neighborhood cluster. They are the parents of four children: Joy, Jeremy, Colleen, and James.

Tom is a member of the National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Associate Director of the Ark and the Dove Renewal Center, “Home of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Tom is a well know speaker to Charismatics in the Pittsburgh area. Over the years, he has spoken at hundreds of prayer meetings, parish organizations, conferences, and other churches. He usually speaks about the character of God, holiness, discipleship, Christian growth or our personal relationship to Jesus Christ. His style is easy, light hearted, anecdotal and inspirational. Tom draws deep lessons from Sacred Scripture in an easily accessible way for all listeners.

---

top image: fresco painting of Isaiah the Prophet by Raphael, 1512

Return to [Table of Contents](https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/indexp20.htm) or [Archives](https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/archivesp20.htm) • (c) copyright 2019 [The Sword of the Spirit](https://www.swordofthespirit.net)
Some Spiritual Reading Resources for the Forty Days of Lent

- **Surrender to God**: An orientation to Lent, by John Henry Newman
- **The Spiritual Meaning of Fasting**: by Carlos Alonso Vargas
- **Focus for Fasting**: Pursuing our higher calling to serve and worship Christ, by Jerry Munk
- **Fasting and Hungering for Righteousness**: A selection of readings for Lent from the early fathers
- **Discipleship**: "Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me," by Jeanne Kun
- **The Readiness to Change**, by Dietrich von Hildebrand

- **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)
- **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

• The Cross - the One True Glorification of God, by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI
• The Cross of Christ - the Measure of the World, by John Henry Newman
• Emptied for Our Sake, by Bernard of Clairvaux
• Worship at the Cross, by Charles Simpson

• 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

• 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
"It is I - Be not afraid"

Poem by John Henry Newman and [audio Song It Is I](https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/february2019p22.htm) by Tony O'Neill

Consolation

"It is I - Be not afraid."

poem by John Henry Newman

WHEN I sink down in gloom or fear,
    Hope blighted or delay'd,
Thy whisper, Lord, my heart shall cheer,
    "'Tis I; be not afraid!"
Or, startled at some sudden blow,
    If fretful thoughts I feel,
"Fear not, it is but I!" shall flow,
    As balm my wound to heal.

Nor will I quit Thy way, though foes
    Some onward pass defend;
From each rough voice the watchword goes,
    "Be not afraid! ... a friend!"
And oh! when judgment's trumpet clear
    Awakes me from the grave,
Still in its echo may I hear,
    "'Tis Christ; He comes to save."

*At Sea.*

*June 23, 1833.*
The song *It Is I* by Tony O'Neill (pictured 2nd from left with Servants of the Word musicians) is featured in *Sing A New Song to the Lord* music CD, available from Tabor House.

Click 🎧 to listen to an MP3 audio clip of the song

Music and lead vocal - Tony O'Neill

song (c) 2003 Servants of the Word

Return to Table of Contents or Archives  • (c) copyright 2019 The Sword of the Spirit
I suppose it has struck many persons as very remarkable, that in the latter times the strictness and severity in religion of former ages has been so much relaxed. There has been a gradual abandonment of painful duties which were formerly enforced upon all. Time was when all persons, to speak generally, abstained from flesh through the whole of Lent. There have been dispensations on this point again and again, and this very year there is a fresh one. What is the meaning of this? What are we to gather from it? This is a question worth considering. Various answers may be given, but I shall confine myself to one of them.

We must subdue ourselves to Christ
I answer that fasting is only one branch of a large and momentous duty, the subdual of ourselves to Christ. We must surrender to him all we have, all we are. We must keep nothing back. We must present to him as captive prisoners with whom he may do what he will, our soul and body, our reason, our judgment, our affections, our imagination, our tastes, our appetite. The great thing is to subdue ourselves; but as to the particular form in which the great precept of self-conquest and self-surrender is to be expressed, that depends on the person himself, and on the time or place. What is good for one age or person, is not good for another.

There are other instances of the same variation. For example …the present war with evil spirits would seem to be very different from what it was in former ages. They attack a civilized age in a more subtle way than they attack a rude age. We read in lives of saints and others of the evil spirit showing himself and fighting with them face to face, but now those subtle and experienced spirits find it is more to their purpose not to show themselves, or at least not so much. They find it in their interest to let the idea of them die away from the minds of men, that being unrecognized, they may do the more mischief. And they assault men in a more subtle way – not grossly, in some broad temptation, which everyone can understand, but in some refined way they address themselves to our pride or self-importance, or love of money, or love of ease, or...
love of show, or our depraved reason, and thus have really the dominion over persons who seem at first sight to be quite superior to temptation.

Now apply these illustrations to the case in point. From what has been said it follows that you must not suppose that nothing is incumbent on us in the way of mortification, though you have not to fast so strictly as formerly. It is reasonable to think that some other duty, of the same general kind, may take its place; and therefore the permission granted us in eating may be a suggestion to us to be more severe with ourselves on the other hand in certain other respects.

And this anticipation is confirmed by the history of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness. It began, you will observe, with an attempt on the part of the evil one to make him break his fast improperly. It began, but it did not end there. It was but the first of three temptations, and the other two were more addressed to his mind, not his bodily wants. One was to throw himself down from the pinnacle, the other the offer of all the kingdoms of the world. They were more subtle temptations.

Subtle temptations and subtle sins
Now, I have used the word "subtle" already, and it needs some explanation. By a subtle temptation or a subtle sin, I mean one which it is very difficult to find out. Everyone knows what it is to break the ten commandments, the first, the second, the third, and so on. When a thing is directly commanded, and the devil tempts us directly to break it, this is not a subtle temptation, but a broad and gross temptation. But there are a great many things wrong which are not so obviously wrong. They are wrong as leading to what is wrong or the consequence of what is wrong, or they are wrong because they are the very same thing as what is forbidden, but dressed up and looking differently.

The human mind is very deceitful; when a thing is forbidden, a man does not like directly to do it, but he goes to work if he can to get at the forbidden end in some way. It is like a man who has to make for some place. First he attempts to go straight to it, but finds the way blocked up; then he goes round about it. At first you would not think he is going in the right direction; he sets off perhaps at a right angle, but he just makes one little bend, then another, till at length he gets to his point. Or still more it is like a sailing vessel at sea with the wind contrary, but tacking first this way, and then that, the mariners contrive at length to get to their destination. This then is a subtle sin, when it at first seems not to be a sin, but comes round to the same point as an open direct sin.

To take some examples. If the devil tempted one to go out into the highway and rob, this would be an open, bold temptation. But if he tempted one to do something unfair in the course of business, which was to one's neighbor's hurt and to one's own advantage, it would be a more subtle temptation. The man would still take what was his neighbor's, but his conscience would not be so much shocked. So equivocation is a more subtle sin than direct lying. In like manner a person who does not intoxicate himself, may eat too much. Gluttony is a more subtle sin than drunkenness, because it does not show so much. And again, sins of the soul are more subtle sins than sins of the body. Infidelity is a more subtle sin than licentiousness.

Even in our Blessed Lord's case the Tempter began by addressing himself to his bodily wants. He had fasted forty days, and afterwards was hungered. So the devil tempted him to eat. But when he did not consent, then he went on to more subtle temptations. He tempted him to spiritual pride, and he tempted him by ambition for power. Many a man would shrink from intemperance, of being proud of his spiritual attainments; that is, he would confess such things were wrong, but he would not see that he was guilty of them.

Fertile excuses and evasions
Next I observe that a civilized age is more exposed to subtle sins than a rude age. Why? For this simple reason, because it is more fertile in excuses and evasions. It can defend error, and hence can blind the eyes of those who have not very careful consciences. It can make error plausible, it can make vice look like virtue. It dignifies sin by fine names; it calls avarice proper care of one's family, or industry, it calls pride independence, it calls ambition greatness of mind; resentment it
calls proper spirit and sense of honor, and so on.

…What all of us want more than anything else, what this age wants, is that its intellect and its will should be under a law. At present it is lawless, its will is its own law, its own reason is the standard of all truth. It does not bow to authority, it does not submit to the law of faith. It is wise in its own eyes and it relies on its own resources. And you, as living in the world, are in danger of being seduced by it, and being a partner in its sin, and so coming in at the end for its punishment. Now then let me in conclusion, suggest one or two points in which you may profitably subdue your minds, which require it even more than your bodies.

**Let us mortify our curiosity**

For example, in respect to curiosity. What a deal of time is lost, to say nothing else, in this day by curiosity, about things which in no ways concern us. I am not speaking against interest in the news of the day altogether, for the course of the world must ever be interesting to a Christian from its bearing upon the fortunes of the church, but I speak of vain curiosity, love of scandal, love of idle tales, curious prying into the private history of people, curiosity about trials and offences, and personal matters, nay often what is much worse than this, curiosity into sin. What strange diseased curiosity is sometimes felt about the history of murders, and of the malefactors themselves! Worse still, it is shocking to say, but there is so much evil curiosity to know about deeds of darkness, of which the Apostle [Paul] says that it is shameful to speak. Many a person, who has no intention of doing the like, from an evil curiosity reads what he ought not to read. This is in one shape or other very much the sin of boys, and they suffer for it. The knowledge of what is evil is the first step in their case to the commission of it. Hence this is the way in which we are called upon, with this Lent we now begin, to mortify ourselves. Let us mortify our curiosity.

**Let us mortify our excessive desire for knowledge**

Again, the desire of knowledge is in itself praiseworthy, but it may be excessive, it may take us from higher things, it may take up too much of our time – it is a vanity. The Preacher makes the distinction between profitable and unprofitable learning when he says, "The words of the wise are like goads and nails." They excite and stimulate us and are fixed in our memories. "But further than this, my son, inquire not. Of making many books there is no end, and much study" (that is, poring over secular subjects,) "is affliction of the flesh. Let us one and all have an end of the discourse: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man." Knowledge is very well in its place, but it is like flowers without fruit. We cannot feed on knowledge, we cannot thrive on knowledge. Just as the leaves of the grove are very beautiful but would make a bad meal, so we shall ever be hungry and never be satisfied if we think to take knowledge for our food. Knowledge is no food. Religion is our only food. Here then is another mortification. Mortify your desire of knowledge. Do not go into excess in seeking after truths which are not religious.

**Let us mortify our reason**

Again, mortify your reason. In order to try you, God puts before you things which are difficult to believe. St. Thomas's faith was tried; so is yours. He said "My Lord and my God." You say so too. Bring your proud intellect into subjection. Believe what you cannot see, what you cannot understand, what you cannot explain, what you cannot prove, when God says it.

**Let us bring our will into subjection**

Lastly, bring your will into subjection. We all like our own will – let us consult the will of others. Numbers of persons are obliged to do this. Servants are obliged to do the will of their masters, workmen of their employers, children of their parents, husbands of their wives. Well, in these cases let your will go with that of those who have a right to command you. Don't rebel against it. Sanctify what is after all a necessary act. Make it in a certain sense your own, sanctify it, and get merit from it. And again when you are your own master, be on your guard against going too much by your own opinion. Take some wise counsellor or director, and obey him. There are persons who cry out against such obedience, and call it a number of bad names. They are the very persons who need it. It would do them much good. They say that men are made mere machines, and lose the dignity of human nature by going by the word of another. And I
should like to know what they become by going by their own will. ...For one person who has been hurt by following the direction of another, a hundred persons have been ruined by going by their own will. This is another subject. But this is enough. May almighty God enable you.

Excerpt from a Sermon for the first Sunday of Lent given on March 12, 1848.

John Henry Newman, 1801-1890, was an influential writer and major figure from the Church of England in the Oxford Movement. In 1845 he became a Catholic priest and was made a Cardinal late in life in 1879.