Pulpit Outlines Series

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52 Topical Sermons
Volume 1
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1. MY FAITH FOR ALL TO SEE

*I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.* – Psalm 40:10

**ILLUSTRATION:**

1Two weeks after 9/11, I was in Queens, New York, training church planters. Every night I walked down to a local Irish Pub to eat dinner with some friends. A waitress named Fiona not only served us well, but seemed curious about our faith and what we were teaching pastors. Each evening our conversation deepened.

"So, why would you help pastors lead their churches if churches really don't do much good?" she asked.

Knowing that one-third of her Irish friends in the 1980s and 1990s were sexually abused in the Catholic school system, and that two of her friends were killed in "Protestant/Catholic" fights, gave me ample reason not to judge her criticism of organized religion. What could I say? How could I explain my love for Jesus without bringing the church into it?

I simply talked with her about the Kingdom. "Fiona, Jesus came to offer an alternative way of life from all the exclusive, religious, sectarian, and sinful ways people live. He called it the Kingdom, and it was huge for people back in the day and also for anyone looking for the real God."

"I've never heard about the Kingdom," she said. "Tell me more."

My final night in town, as I came in to say goodbye before flying back to Oregon, I heard Fiona yell over a crowded room, "That's the guy I was telling you about! You've got to hear how he talks about God!" As the bar room split and she called her friends over, she looked at me and said, "Tell them what you told me—you know, all that stuff about the Kingdom!"

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1 Hugh Halter, "Making the Kingdom Tangible," Shapevine.com newsletter (1-12-10)
That night everything changed for me. I started an entirely new spiritual journey that pulled me out of my jaded, consumeristic Christianity. What happened next? We simply grabbed a few friends and started a community that [was committed to] living out and inviting others into Kingdom ways of life. Before we knew it, a church was started without us even trying.

1. GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS PROCLAIMED

_For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith._ – Romans 1:17

2. GOD’S SALVATION DECLARED

_Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it._ – Acts 28:28

3. GOD’S LOVING-KINDNESS MANIFESTED

_I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindesses._ – Isaiah 63:7

1) Faith receives Gods righteousness.

_For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek._ – Romans 1:16

2) Confession is made of His salvation.

_That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved._ – Romans 10:9
3) Testimony is given of His kindness.

*But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.* – **Titus 3:4**
2. DECLARING THE GOSPEL

ILLUSTRATION:

2Here's a little experiment: start a sentence with the words "I believe…," and then finish it with something deeply heartfelt. It is impossible to do without feeling uplifted and stirred.

The need to declare our deeply held beliefs is an irrepressible aspect of being human. In the act of defining what we believe, we define ourselves. I am one who can discern what is true and real and noble and bind myself to it. I believe. One of the most flattering things we can do is ask others their opinion, because what they believe matters. …

To be is to believe. One important question to ask myself is, what do I really believe, and what do I think I'm supposed to believe?

In the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, Sam is trying to encourage Frodo not to give up. He reminds Frodo that all the great stories are about characters who keep going when it seems too hard. They all find something to hang on to. "And what about us?" Frodo asks. "What do we have to hang on to?" Sam responds, "That there's good in the world. And it's worth fighting for."

That one line undid me. I found myself all choked up without even knowing why. I realized later what it was about those words that moved me so: I believed them without trying. Often—partly because of my job—there are statements that I think I should believe or that I want to believe. Sometimes, because I get paid or applauded for affirming those beliefs, I wonder if I really believe anything at all or if I just talk myself into it because I get rewarded. But my heart said yes with unforced passion to this belief: there is good in the world, and it is worth fighting for.

I believe.

1. THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD

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2 John Ortberg, Faith & Doubt (Zondervan, 2008), pp. 39–40
But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. – Acts 20:24

2. THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. – 2 Corinthians 4:4

3. THE GOSPEL OF OUR SALVATION

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. – Ephesians 1:13

1) Its character and its message.
2) The subject and its object.
3) Its purpose and its power.
3. WHAT THE CROSS REVEALED

ILLUSTRATION:

I'm a little like the duck hunter who was hunting with his friend in a wide-open barren of land in southeastern Georgia. Far away on the horizon he noticed a cloud of smoke. Soon, he could hear the sound of crackling. A wind came up and he realized the terrible truth: a brush-fire was advancing his way. It was moving so fast that he and his friend could not outrun it. The hunter began to rifle through his pockets. Then he emptied all the contents of his knapsack. He soon found what he was looking for—a book of matches. To his friend's amazement, he pulled out a match and struck it. He lit a small fire around the two of them. Soon they were standing in a circle of blackened earth, waiting for the brush fire to come. They did not have to wait long. They covered their mouths with their handkerchiefs and braced themselves. The fire came near-and swept over them. But they were completely unhurt. They weren't even touched. Fire would not burn the place where fire had already burned.

The law is like the brush-fire. I cannot escape it. But if I stand in the burned-over place, where law has already burned its way through, then I will not get hurt. Not a hair of my head will be singed. The death of Christ is the burned-over place. There I huddle, hardly believing yet relieved. Christ's death has disarmed the law. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

1. THE DARKEST EXHIBITION OF MAN’S SIN

*For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. – Acts 4:27-28*

2. THE BRIGHTEST DISPLAY OF GOD’S LOVE

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Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. – 1 John 3:16

3. THE GREATEST WITNESS OF SATAN’S DEFEAT

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. – Hebrews 2:14

4. THE MIGHTIEST WORK FOR MAN’S SALVATION

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:18
4. OUR QUEST FOR JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

4In 1911, Roald Amundsen became the first person to lead a successful expedition to the South Pole. Amundsen was also famous for his incredible commitment to prepare for this expedition. While in his late twenties, Roald Amundsen traveled from Norway to Spain for a two-month sailing trip to earn a master's certificate. It was 1899. He had a nearly two-thousand-mile journey ahead of him. And how did Amundsen make the journey? By carriage? By horse? By ship? By rail? He bicycled.

Amundsen then experimented with eating raw dolphin meat to determine its usefulness as an energy supply. After all, he reasoned, someday he might be shipwrecked, finding himself surrounded by dolphins, so he might as well know if he could eat one.

It was all part of Amundsen's years of building a foundation for his quest, training his body and learning as much as possible from practical experience about what actually worked. Amundsen even made a pilgrimage to apprentice with Eskimos. What better way to learn what worked in polar conditions than to spend time with a people who have hundreds of years of accumulated experience in ice and cold and snow and wind? He learned how Eskimos used dogs to pull sleds. He observed how Eskimos never hurried, moving slowly and steadily, avoiding excessive sweat that could turn to ice in sub-zero temperatures. He adopted Eskimo clothing, loose fitting (to help sweat evaporate) and protective. He systematically practiced Eskimo methods and trained himself for every conceivable situation he might encounter en route to the Pole.

Amundsen's philosophy: You don't wait until you're in an unexpected storm to discover that you need more strength and endurance. You don't wait until you're shipwrecked to determine if you can eat raw dolphin. You don't wait until you're on the Antarctic journey to become a superb skier and dog handler. You prepare with intensity, all the time, so that when conditions turn against you, you can draw from a deep reservoir of strength. And equally, you prepare so that when conditions turn in your favor, you can strike hard.

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1. TO BE FOUND IN CHRIST—THE BELIEVER’S SALVATION

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. – Philippians 3:9

2. TO KNOW CHRIST— THE BELIEVER’S OBJECT

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. – Philippians 3:10

3. TO LOOK FOR CHRIST— THE BELIEVER’S HOPE

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. – Philippians 3:20
5. WHAT GOD HAS PREPARED

ILLUSTRATION:

Imagine you are driving down the road and your car stalls at a railroad crossing. You are understandably nervous as you try to reignite the car's engine, but you become even more so when you see a train turn the corner in the distance and begin quickly closing the gap between it and you. The train engine's horn is blaring and the engineer has thrown on the brakes, but you are too close and he's coming too fast. You move from trying to get the car to start to trying to unfasten your seatbelt, but fear has made your hands stiffen and shake. You can't get your seatbelt unfastened. The train is rushing toward you, and you know you're going to be hit. And you are. Suddenly and from behind. A man in a truck behind you has decided to ram into your car and push you off the tracks, even as he is destroyed by the impact in the very spot you once occupied.

You get out of the car, shaken and still frightened. You are terrified by the gruesome scene, in shock over your rescuer's sacrifice. You are grateful in a way that you've never been grateful before. … Even in your terrified awe, it feels good to be alive. You feel woozy, so you sit down on the trunk of your car, and as you're trying to retrieve your cell phone from your pocket to call 911 and marveling at how little damage the violent shove did to the rear bumper, you hear a whimper from inside.

You didn't know that before you'd left the house, as your kids were playing hide-and-seek, your youngest son decided to hide in the trunk of your car. As you open it up frantically and discover that he is miraculously unharmed, you suddenly realize the total greatness of the loss you almost suffered. Your gratitude, your amazement, your new outlook on life takes a giant leap forward. That is the difference between the gospel wakefulness of conversion and the greater wakefulness that often occurs later.

As you grow in your spiritual walk, you will begin to experience a greater and greater wakefulness as you learn more of what God has prepared for you.

— Jared C. Wilson, Gospel Wakefulness (Crossway, 2011), pp. 24-25
1. SALVATION FOR THE SINNER

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. – Luke 2:30-31

2. SATISFACTION FOR THE BELIEVER

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. – Psalm 23:5

3. BLESSINGS FOR THE SPIRITUAL

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. – 1 Corinthians 2:9-10

4. A PLACE FOR THE GLORIFIED

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. – John 14:2

1) The First, is provided by the Cross.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:18

2) The Second, by the living Shepherd.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. – Hebrews 13:20
3) The *Third*, is revealed by the Spirit. 

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. – *John 16:13*

4) The *Fourth*, awaits us in Heaven.

*But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.* – *Hebrews 11:16*
6. WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO CONFESS

ILLUSTRATION:

6When the Ku Waru warriors of Papua New Guinea were about to launch any risky activity that required close cooperation—like going into battle—they first took time to set themselves right. Not only overt actions, but even hidden feelings had to be revealed.

The Ku Waru men would go to a secluded spot in the jungle, kill and roast pigs, and as they shared the meal, confess to each other the items they had stolen and the animals they had mistreated. But there was still more on the agenda. The Ku Waru believed that feelings such as anger or jealousy would sap their strength and cause them to be wounded or even killed. Only through confession could these pent-up negative emotions be neutralized.

Only by facing our faults, misdeeds, and hateful or jealous thoughts can we be made whole again. Only then can they, and we, be at full strength and ready to face a marauding tribe … or the kids at home.

1. CONFESSION OF SIN UNDER CONVICTION

*I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.* – *Psalm 32:5*

2. CONFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST’S PERSON

*And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* – *John 6:69*

3. CONFESSION OF CHRIST UNTO SALVATION

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That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. – Romans 10:9
7. DEFINING THE SON OF GOD

ILLUSTRATION:

[Note: John Mark Hicks's son Joshua was born with Sanfilippo Syndrome A, a genetic disorder that causes slow mental and physical deterioration.]

7From the first day Joshua saw a school bus, he wanted to ride one. He wanted to be like his older sister. She rode the bus, and so would he! Whenever a bus came into view, he would shout, "I wanna ride!" Finally, his day came. Every morning I would take him out to wait for the bus at a place near my office. When he saw it coming, he would jump and scream for joy …. 

But one day, for some reason, he did not want to get on. I took him by the hand and gently led him up the steps of the bus, and he got on. But he was whining, hesitant, and reluctant. I thought perhaps he was just having a bad day, but as the bus drove away I learned why he was hesitant, and I heard words that tore my heart. It was as if a knife had been stuck into my gut and twisted.

His schoolmates were ridiculing him. The older children were calling him names. They ridiculed his need for diapers and mocked his use of them the previous day. As the bus drove off, I could hear the mockery, and I could see my son stumble down the aisle as he looked for a seat.

Anger grew inside me. All morning I wanted to take some of those older kids aside and heap some abuse of my own on them. Let them see how it feels! Let them know what it's like to be hurt, ridiculed, and mocked. Maybe I should talk to the bus driver, or to the school principal, to the teachers, or to the parents! My helplessness increased my frustration.

Finally, I took my anger and hurt to God. I went to my office and poured my heart before him. I held nothing back. I complained bitterly, and then I complained some more. … Why was my son born with this condition? Why are others permitted to inflict pain upon the innocent? Why hadn't God answered our prayers for a healthy son? Why couldn't Joshua ever fulfill the dreams we had for him and honor the

7 John Mark Hicks, Yet Will I Trust Him (College Press Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 183-184

[19]
name which we gave him as a leader among God's people? Why hadn't the sovereign God of the universe blessed him with health?

[In the midst of my complaint], it was as if God had said to me, "I understand—they treated my Son that way, too." In that moment God provided a comfort that I cannot yet explain but one that I still experience in my heart.

Now, only now, do I have some sense of the pain that a father has when his son is ridiculed. Only now can I begin to appreciate the pain of my heavenly Father as he watched his Son be ridiculed.

1. GOD’S OWN SON

_He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?_ – _Romans 8:32_

2. GOD’S ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

_For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life._ – _John 3:16_

3. GOD’S BELOVED SON

_And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased._ – _Matthew 3:17_

4. GOD’S DEAR SON

_Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son._ – _Colossians 1:13_

5. GOD’S CRUCIFIED SON

_Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God._ – _Matthew 27:54_
6. GOD’S GLORIFIED SON

*The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.* – *Acts 3:13*
8. THE 3S FORMULA FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

ILLUSTRATION:

It has been called the greatest rescue mission of World War II.

Late in that war, American bombers were sent on dangerous missions over southern Europe to cripple the Nazis' oil supplies. Hundreds of crews in flying tin cans soared through storms of anti-aircraft shells. Many American pilots were forced to bail from their shot-up planes. The injured airmen drifted by parachute into occupied Yugoslavia, expecting to be captured or killed.

Instead, on the ground remarkable rescue teams were already in place. Serbian peasants tracked the path of the floating flight crews. Their sole mission was to grab the flyboys and bring them to safety—before the Nazis arrived.

Risking their own lives, the peasants fed and sheltered the downed solders. These rescued men were in friendly hands but on enemy soil. They still needed to escape.

The story of what became known as Operation Haylard builds toward a daring mission, a secret landing strip, and a clandestine evacuation plan. Amazingly, those Serbian peasants rescued every single American airman—over 500 in all.

Here's the fascinating subplot to the rescue. To travel to the evacuation site, the airmen had to spend weeks following the Serbian freedom fighters, who alone knew the path to the evacuation site. Despite the profound language barriers, the direction, the pace, and the destination were in the hands of their rescuers. The men had been saved from their enemy, but the journey had just begun. They still had to walk to freedom.

The story of Operation Halyard sheds light on an important spiritual reality: to be rescued from something sets us on the path toward something.

For the airmen it was a journey of survival. For us it's a journey of faith. The One who saved us is now calling us to walk. It's nonnegotiable. Though snatched from

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8 Dave Harvey, Rescuing Ambition (Crossway, 2010), pp. 63-64
spiritual death, we soon discover that the Christian life isn't an arrival; it's an adventure. Christ rescues us then he points us to the path of following him.

The apostle Paul describes this active view of the Christian life in his letter to the Ephesians, urging them to "walk worthy of the vocation to wherewith ye are called" (4:1).

1. SALVATION, BEING RESCUED BY GOD

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. – Romans 1:16

2. SANCTIFICATION, BEING SET APART FOR GOD

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God. – Hebrews 10:12

3. SERVICE, BEING DEVOTED TO GOD

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. – Romans 12:1

1) Salvation is Emancipation from Sin's Practice.

2) Sanctification is Separation from Sin's Pollution.

3) Service is Subjection to Gods Plan.
9. WHO IS DEAD TO GOD?

ILLUSTRATION:

In 1992, a Los Angeles County parking control officer came upon a brown El Dorado Cadillac illegally parked next to the curb on street-sweeping day.

The officer dutifully wrote out a ticket. Ignoring the man seated at the driver's wheel, the officer reached inside the open car window and placed the $30 citation on the dashboard.

The driver of the car made no excuses. No argument ensued--and with good reason. The driver of the car had been shot in the head ten to twelve hours before but was sitting up, stiff as a board, slumped slightly forward, with blood on his face. He was dead.

The officer, preoccupied with ticket-writing, was unaware of anything out of the ordinary. He got back in his car and drove away.

Many people around us are "dead in transgressions and sins." What should catch our attention most is their need, not their offenses. They don't need a citation; they need a Savior.

1. PROFESSORS WITH A NAME TO LIVE

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. – Revelation 3:1

2. PLEASURE-SEEKERS IN THE WORLD

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. – 1 Timothy 5:6

3. PRODIGALS IN THE FAR COUNTRY

9 Greg Asimakoupoulos in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker)
For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. – Luke 15:24
10. JESUS’ AUTHORITY

ILLUSTRATION:

A number of years ago, when I was playing in a friendly men's softball game, the umpire made a call that incensed our coach. My coach didn't agree with the ump's interpretation of a specific league rule. The game stopped, and a heated discussion ensued. Finally, the ump sighed as he pulled a rulebook from his back pocket and proceeded to read page 27, paragraph 3b, section 1.

"As you can clearly see," he concluded, "this rule means that my call must stand." Unconvinced, my coach yelled, "But you're not interpreting that rule correctly." To which the ump replied, "Uh, excuse me, I think I should know: I wrote the rulebook." After an awkward silence, my coach walked back to the bench, shaking his head and pointing to the ref as he told us, "Get ahold of that guy. He wrote the rulebook!"

Throughout his ministry, Jesus didn't just affirm and endorse the words of Scripture; he talked and acted like he had authored the Scriptures. He lived with the authority of the One who wrote the "rulebook."

1. OVER ALL FLESH

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. – John 17:2

2. IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. – Matthew 24:30

3. TO FORGIVE SINS

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. – Matthew 9:6

4. TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT

And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. – John 5:27
11. PROFESSION, POSSESSION, CONFESSION

ILLUSTRATION:

In the movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail, as King Arthur and his knights seek the Holy Grail, they come to a bridge that spans an abyss of eternal peril. A bridge keeper allows people to cross this bridge only if they can answer three questions. Get one wrong, and you're tossed into the pit.

Lancelot is the first tested. The keeper asks him, "What is your name?" Lancelot answers.

"What is your quest?"

Lancelot answers, "To seek the Holy Grail."

"What is your favorite color?"

"Blue."

"Right," says the bridge keeper, "off you go." Lancelot crosses the bridge, amazed this was so easy.

The second knight similarly states his name and quest. But the third question is now, "What is the capital of Assyria?"

"I don't know that."

The knight is hurled, screaming, into the abyss.

The third knight, Sir Galahad, is nervous as he's asked his name and quest, but he answers correctly.

"What is your favorite color?"

Sir Galahad panics. "Blue…no, yellow--Aaaahhhhh," he screams as he is hurled into the pit.

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11 John Ortberg, "True (and False) Transformation," Leadership (Summer 2002), pp.101-102
Finally, the king steps up. "What is your name?"

"Arthur, King of the Britains."

"What is your quest?"

"To seek the Holy Grail."

"What is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?"

"What do you mean," asks Arthur, "an African or European swallow?"

"What? I don't know that," answers the bridge keeper, who immediately is launched into the abyss. Arthur and his followers thereafter cross the bridge unhindered.

Many people's idea of the gospel is that some day we'll get to the bridge to paradise and be asked, "Why should you be allowed to cross?" As long as we answer correctly, we make it across. Answer wrongly, and we're cast into the abyss. The gospel is redefined to be the announcement of the minimal entrance requirements for getting into heaven….

Jesus never said, "Now I'm going to tell you what you need to say to get into heaven when you die." Jesus' good news is we no longer have to live in the guilt, failure, and impotence of our own strength. The transforming presence and power of God is available through Christ right here, right now. To live in that power, you must become his disciple.

1. PROFESSION, WITHOUT REALITY

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. – Titus 1:12

2. POSSESSION, WITH ENJOYMENT

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. – 1 John 5:9

3. CONFESSION, RESULT OF FAITH
That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. – Romans 10:9

1) Profession, without Possession, is Hypocrisy.

The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. – Luke 12:46

2) Possession, without Confession, is Cowardice.

Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. – John 12:42

3) Confession is God's Way of Blessing to others.

And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. – John 6:69
12. SALVATION DEMONSTRATED

ILLUSTRATION:

12 An old tale speaks of a man who died and faced the angel Gabriel at heaven's gates. The angel said, "Here's how this works. You need a hundred points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you have done, and I will give a certain number of points for each of them. The more good there is in the work that you cite, the more points you will get for it. When you get to a hundred points, you get in."

"Okay," the man said, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart."

Gabriel replied, "That's wonderful. That's worth three points."

"Three points?" said the man incredulously. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my money and service."

"Terrific!" said Gabriel, "that's certainly worth a point."

"One point?" said the man with his eyes beginning to show a bit of panic. "Well, how about this: I opened a shelter for the homeless in my city, and fed needy people by the hundreds during holidays."

"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," said the angel.

"TWO POINTS!" cried the man in desperation. "At this rate the only way I will get to heaven is by the grace of God."

"Come on in," said Gabriel.

1. THE PASSOVER (Exodus 12)—Shelter from Judgment

2. THE RED SEA (Exodus 14)—Deliverance from Sin

12 Bryan Chapell, Holiness By Grace (Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 22-23
3. THE RIVER JORDAN (Joshua 2)—In Christ: in Heaven

1) The First is by Faith in the Blood of Christ.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. – Romans 3:25

2) The Second is through Participation in His Death.

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. – Colossians 1:13

3) The Third is in Death and Resurrection with Him.

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. – Ephesians 2:5-6
13. JESUS PROVES HIS LOVE FOR US

ILLUSTRATION:

13 At least twice in the past year, I've been late for a meeting or an appointment and haven't been able to find my car keys. Certain that either my wife or one of my children had misplaced them, I've frantically run from room to room assigning blame. "Who was playing with my keys? I put them right here on the counter and now they're gone. They didn't just vanish into thin air! Who picked them up? Where are they? I'm late." And right when I'm about ready to order mass executions, I walk into my bedroom one last time to look (huffing and puffing, moaning and groaning), put my hand in my pocket, and find my keys. They'd been there the whole time.

Every time I tell that story, people laugh. And rightfully so. Who frantically looks for car keys that are in his pocket? Me. That's who.

The truth is, we all typically live this way: frantically and frustratingly searching for something we already have. The gospel is God's good news announcement that everything we need we already possess in Christ. Because of Jesus' finished work, Christians already have all of the justification, approval, significance, security, freedom, validation, love, righteousness, and rescue that we desperately long for, and look for in a thousand things infinitely smaller than Jesus …. Unfortunately, we allow our internal voice, one that constantly says, "Do this and live," to drown out the external voice that shouts, "It is finished!"

1. ON THE CROSS –Our Substitute

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
– 2 Corinthians 5:19

2. ON THE THRONE—Our Representative

13 Tullian Tchividjian, "God's Word in Two Words," Christianity Today (8-29-13)
For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. – Hebrews 9:24

3. IN THE HEART—Our Strength

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love. – Ephesians 3:17
14. WHICH WILL IT BE?

ILLUSTRATION:

In 2001 Tim Goeglein started running the White House Office of Public Liaison, providing him almost daily access to then President George Bush. All of that ended abruptly on February 29, 2008. A well-known blogger uncovered the startling facts behind some of Goeglein's published articles: 27 out of 39 of his written pieces had been plagiarized. When the facts came out, by mid-afternoon the next day, Goeglein's career in the White House was over.

"But I was guilty as charged," Goeglein admitted.

For Goeglein, this began "a personal crisis unequaled in my life, bringing great humiliation on my wife and children, my family, and my closest friends, including the President of the United States."

Although Goeglein was devastated, what happened next was an example of God's providence and mercy. Goeglein was summoned to the White House to face the President. Once inside the Oval Office, Goeglein shut the door, turned to the President and said, "I owe you an … "

President Bush simply said: "Tim, you are forgiven."

Tim was speechless. He tried again: "But sir … "

The President interrupted him again, with a firm "Stop." Then President Bush added, "I have known grace and mercy in my life, and you are forgiven."

After a long talk, a healing process was launched for Goeglein, which included repentance, reflection, and spiritual growth. "Political power can lead to pride," Goeglein concluded. "That was my sin. One hundred percent pride. But offering and receiving forgiveness is a different kind of strength. That's the kind of strength I want to develop now."

1. MERCY IS ETERNAL

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For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations. – Psalm 100:5

2. MERCY BRINGS SALVATION

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. – Titus 3:5

3. JUDGMENT BRINGS DAMNATION

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. – Hebrews 10:27
15. A GOD YOU CAN COUNT ON

ILLUSTRATION:

15 I gave birth to a son who just doesn't understand gifts. My wife and I would go out when he was a little guy to buy what we thought was the perfect gift. He would tear open the gift, and he'd end up playing with the box. It drove us crazy.

We decided on Christmas that we were going to find ... the gift of gifts that he would not be able to resist. We shopped and shopped. We found the gift. We were so excited.

We were much more excited at that moment when the gift came out from under the tree and he was about to unwrap it—much more excited than he would have ever been.

He ripped open the gift like a little boy would ... and, actually got out this toy and began to play with it. I had a feeling of such victory. I went into the kitchen to get something to drink, was in there for a few minutes, and came out and he was sitting in the box. I couldn't believe it.

If you're one of God's children, you have been given the most awesome gift that could ever be given. It's gorgeous from every perspective. It's a gift of such grandeur that it's hard to wrap human vocabulary around it and explain it. It's beautiful from every vista .... It's the gift that every human being needs. It's a gift that in all of your work and all of your effort and all of your achievement you couldn't have ever earned; you could have never deserved; you could have never achieved. It is absolutely without question the gift of gifts. It's the gift of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I am deeply persuaded in the face of this gift, there are many Christians who are content to play with the box.

1. HE GIVES US A SURE FOUNDATION TO BUILD ON

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. – 2 Timothy 2:19

15 Paul Tripp, from the sermon "Playing with the Box," Gospel Coalition
2. HE GIVES US A SURE HOPE TO LAY HOLD ON

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil. – Hebrews 6:19

3. HE GIVES US A SURE WORD TO GUIDE US

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. – 2 Peter 1:19

4. HE GIVES US A SURE REWARD TO FOCUS US

The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward. – Proverbs 11:18
16. A GOD YOU CAN TRUST

ILLUSTRATION:

16 Anson Hui is eleven-years-old. At the age of three, he was diagnosed with Glycogen Storage Disease (GSD), meaning his body can't break down or store sugars. He requires frequent daytime feedings (drinking raw cornstarch), and nighttime feedings through a pump that hooks into a surgically implanted tube to his stomach. At the age of five, he experienced developmental delays that doctors feared were connected to autism. At that point in his life, he couldn't speak sentences with more than three syllables. He also became a target for school-yard bullies. No wonder that Anson often asked, "Why did God put me here?"

However, Anson also discovered that he had a gift. He said, "While everyone else was busy talking, I listened and listened to all the sounds around me." His listening skills helped him develop another gift—perfect or absolute pitch. Anson discovered that he could memorize and then master complex piano pieces (such as Mozart's Concerto in D Minor) with astounding speed and proficiency. Anson has won numerous awards and even performed in Carnegie Hall. Anson's trials and his gifts have led him to declare his deep faith in the living God: "I can't decide many things that God has already planned, but I can still choose to work on my dream because I still have workable hands and a body to do it. I believe every single life is unique and special. Each has its own mission and purpose."

About a year ago he received more difficult news. An MRI revealed a benign tumor around his liver, which could lead to a liver transplant, a tricky procedure for any GSD patient. But once again, Anson finds solace in God's faithfulness. In a recent interview Anson said,

I know [there's] always a reason for God to give me a special body and talent. My dream is to be a tool of God … so in the end, I can hand in a beautiful [report] to my Lord in heaven with honor. And the most important thing is—I will never regret this journey on earth.

16 Julie Jordan, "Music as the No.1 Medicine (Part 2)," The Epoch Times (10-14-10)
1. A NOBLE CONFESSION

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. – Isaiah 12:2

2. A GOOD RESOLVE

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. – Job 13:15

3. A GRAND ASSURANCE

The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. – Proverbs 29:25
17. JESUS – THEN, NOW, AND FOREVER

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. – Luke 24:27

ILLUSTRATION:

17 Just in case you're unaware, identity theft occurs when someone steals your name and other personal information for fraudulent use. Most of us are dismayed by this new cyber-age crime, and we wouldn't assume that the theft of another person's identity is acceptable behavior. The surprising reality, however, is that Christian's are, by definition, people who have someone else's identity. They're called "Christians" because they've taken the identity of someone else: the Christ. Not only have you been given an identity that you weren't born with or that you didn't earn the right to use, but you're invited to empty the checking account and use all the benefits this identity brings! This is so much better than identity theft—it's an identity gift!

1. JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FOR OUR SINS

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father. – Galatians 1:4

2. JESUS PRESENTS HIMSELF FOR OUR PEACE

And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. – Luke 24:36

3. JESUS WILL COME HIMSELF FOR OUR GLORY

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. – 1 Thessalonians 4:16

18. WHAT JOHN SAID

ILLUSTRATION:

There's a line in the Old Testament written by Isaiah that tells the result of God's gamble, (Isaiah 53:6): "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." Although God has a right to own us because he created us, he gave us the option of freedom, and we all left. We chose sin and did not love him as he wanted to be loved. In response, he chose to send out his own son to look for us, to hunt us down, to find and redeem us at a terrible cost--the cost of his own life.

A shepherd notches the ear of a lamb born to his flock and has rightful ownership. That lamb deliberately walks away. The shepherd searches near and far to get that lamb back. A long time later, he finds not a baby lamb but a grown sheep for sale at an animal auction. The shepherd recognizes his mark on that sheep's ear. He goes to the auctioneer and says, "I can see the mark. That sheep is mine."

The auctioneer says, "Listen, you must bid and pay just like anybody else."

The shepherd bids and pays an outrageous price, far above any reasonable market value in order to get his lamb. He now has a double right to own this sheep: from birth, from redemption.

God has a right to own us as creator and because he has paid the blood of his own Son--an outrageous price far above our market value--in order to redeem us back again.

1. JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD

He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. – John 1:27-29

2. JESUS IS THE ONE WHO BAPTIZES WITH THE SPIRIT


[42]
And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. – John 1:33

3. JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. – John 1:34
19. THE NEED FOR ONE ANOTHERING

ILLUSTRATION:

19 We are tempted to think that our little "sips" of online connection add up to a big gulp of real conversation. But they don't. E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, all of these have their places .... But no matter how valuable, they do not substitute for conversation. Connecting in sips may work for gathering discrete bits of information or for saying, "I am thinking about you" .... But connecting in sips doesn't work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another.

We expect more from technology and less from one another and seem increasingly drawn to technologies that provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: that we will always be heard; that we can put our attention wherever we want it to be; and that we never have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved. When people are alone, even for a few moments, they fidget and reach for a device .... Our constant, reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being. Think of it as "I share, therefore I am."

1. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. – Romans 15:7

2. ESTEEM ONE ANOTHER

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. – Philippians 2:3

3. CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. – Hebrews 10:24

4. EDIFY ONE ANOTHER

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. – Romans 14:19

5. EXHORT ONE ANOTHER

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. – Hebrews 3:13

6. ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER

And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. – Romans 15:14

7. SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. – Ephesians 5:21
20. LIFE CHANGE IN THREE TENSES

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. – 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

ILLUSTRATION:

Bonnie Ware, an Australian nurse, has spent several years working in palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives. As Ware walked with her patients through the final stages of their lives, she witnessed how many of her patients gained "phenomenal clarity of vision" as they approached death. Ware claims, "When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently, common themes surfaced again and again." According to Ware, these are the top five regrets of the dying:

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. Bonnie Ware added, "Health brings a freedom few realize, until they no longer have it."
2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard. Ware observed, "This [regret] came from every male patient that I nursed."
3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings. "Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others …. Many [patients] developed illnesses related to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result."
4. I wish I'd stayed in touch with my friends. "There are many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying."
5. I wish I'd let myself be happier. "Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits."

1. PAST—"YE TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS"

2. PRESENT—“TO SERVE THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD"

20 Susie Seiner, "Top Five Regrets of the Dying," The Guardian (2-1-12)

[46]
3. FUTURE—"TO WAIT FOR HIS SON"

1) The *First* is proof of true Faith.

2) The *Second* is the result of real Love.

3) The *Third* is the outlook of good Hope.
21. HOW THE GOSPEL FUNCTIONS

ILLUSTRATION:

The primary reason the majority of kids from Christian homes stray from the faith is that they never really heard it or had it to begin with … Scratch the surface of the faith of the young people around you and you'll find a disturbing deficiency of understanding of even the most basic tenets of Christianity.

This is illustrated by a conversation I recently had with a young woman in her early twenties who had been raised in a Christian home and had attended church for most of her life. After assuring me that she was, indeed, saved, I asked her, "What does it mean to be a Christian?"

She replied, "It means that you ask Jesus into your heart."

"Yes, all right, but what does that mean?"

"It means that you ask Jesus to forgive you."

"Okay, but what do you ask him to forgive you for?"

"Bad things? I guess you ask him to forgive you for bad things, the sins you do."

"Like what?"

A deer in the headlights stared back at me. I thought I'd try a different tack.

"Why would Jesus forgive you?"

She fidgeted. "Um, because you ask him?"

I asked, "What do you think God wants you to know?"

She beamed. "He wants me to know that I should love myself and that there's nothing I can't do if I think I can."

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21 Elyse Fitzpatrick, Give Them Grace (Crossway, 2011), pp. 18-19
"And what does God want from you?" I asked.

"He wants me to do good stuff …. You know, be nice to others and don't hang around with bad people."

Apparently, we've transformed the holy, terrifying, magnificent, and loving God of the Bible into Santa and his elves. And instead of transmitting the gloriously liberating and life-changing truths of the gospel, we have taught our children that what God wants from them is morality. We have told them that being good (at least outwardly) is the be-all and end-all of their faith. This isn't the gospel; we're not handing down Christianity.

1. THE GOSPEL PREACHED—IN POWER

*For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.* – 1 Thessalonians 1:5

2. THE GOSPEL PERVERTED— IN OPPOSITION

*Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.* – Galatians 1:7

3. THE GOSPEL HID —FOR CONDEMNATION

*In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* – 2 Corinthians 4:4

4. THE GOSPEL RECEIVED—UNTO SALVATION

*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.* – 1 Corinthians 15:1

[49]
22. GOD’S WRATH

ILLUSTRATION:

My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry.

Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them?

Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love.

1. PREDICTED, FOR THE SINNER

Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. – Job 36:18

2. ENDURED, BY THE SAVIOR

Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. – Psalm 88:7

3. ESCAPED, BY THE BELIEVER

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22 Miroslav Volf, Free of Charge (Zondervan, 2006), pp. 138-139
And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. – 1 Thessalonians 1:10

4. UNLEASHED, ON THE UNBELIEVER

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. – John 3:36
23. FOUR FACETS OF LOVE

ILLUSTRATION:

23 Sometimes we joke and say about marriage, "The honeymoon is over." But that's because we are finite. We can't sustain a honeymoon level of intensity and affection. We can't foresee the irritations that come with long-term familiarity. We can't stay as fit and handsome as we were then. We can't come up with enough new things to keep the relationship that fresh. But God says his joy over his people is like a bridegroom over a bride. He is talking about honeymoon intensity and honeymoon pleasures and honeymoon energy and excitement and enthusiasm and enjoyment. He is trying to get into our hearts what he means when he says he rejoices over us with all his heart.

And add to this, that with God the honeymoon never ends. He is infinite in power and wisdom and creativity and love. And so he has no trouble sustaining a honeymoon level of intensity; he can foresee all the future quirks of our personality and has decided he will keep what's good for us and change what isn't; he will always be as handsome as he ever was, and will see to it that we get more and more beautiful forever; and he infinitely creative to think of new things to do together so that there will be no boredom for the next trillion ages of millenniums.

1. THE SON'S LOVE TO THE FATHER

But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence. – John 14:31

2. THE FATHER’S LOVE TO THE SON

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. – John 15:9

3. THE SON'S LOVE TO THE SAINT

\[23^{23} \text{ John Piper, The Pleasures of God (Multnomah, 2000), p. 188}\]
As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. – John 15:9

4. THE SAINT’S LOVE TO ONE ANOTHER

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. – John 15:12
24. THREE KNOCKS AT THE DOOR

ILLUSTRATION:

24 At the height of his worldwide fame, rock musician Alice Cooper drank a bottle of whiskey a day. But the bottle almost destroyed his marriage to Sheryl, his wife of 25 years. He started heading off to church with her and felt as if God was speaking to him every Sunday.

Now a believer, Cooper takes the opportunity to speak to curious fellow musicians about the reality of the Devil and the change in his life. "I have talked to some big stars about this, some really horrific characters, and you'd be surprised," he says. "The ones that you would think are the farthest gone are the ones that are the most apt to listen."

1. OF THE SINNER—WITH SALVATION

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. – Revelation 3:20

2. OF THE SAINT—FOR COMMUNION

I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. – Song of Songs 5:2

3. OF THE SERVANT—FOR REWARD

And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding: that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. – Luke 12:36-37

25. WHO ARE YOU?

ILLUSTRATION:

25"You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father.

"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all."

1. WHO WE WERE

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? – 1 Corinthians 6:2

2. WHO WE ARE

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doeth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. – 1 John 3:2

3. WHO WE SHALL BE

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doeth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. – 1 John 3:2

1) By Nature and in Practice.

25 J. I. Packer, Knowing God, p. 182
2) By Regeneration and Manifestation.

3) By Transformation and Glorification.
26. YOU ARE INVITED!

ILLUSTRATION:

In 2005, a store called MinneNAPolis opened in Minnesota's Mall of America. It rents comfy spots where weary shoppers can take naps for 70 cents a minute. Founded by PowerNap Sleep Centers of Boca Raton, Florida, the new store includes themed rooms such as Asian Mist, Tropical Isle, and Deep Space, and the walls are thick enough to drown out the sounds of squealing children outside.

The company's website says, "Escape the pressures of the real world into the pleasures of an ideal one." "It's not just napping," reads the press release. "Some guests will want to listen to music, put their feet up, watch the water trickling in the beautiful stone waterfall, breathe in the positive-ionization-filtered air, enjoy the full-body massager, and just take an enjoyable escape from the fast-paced lifestyle."

1. TO THE WEARY—COME AND REST

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. – Matthew 11:28

2. TO THE THIRSTY—COME AND DRINK

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. – Isaiah 55:1

3. TO THE HUNGRY—COME AND EAT

And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. – Luke 14:17

26 www.powernapsleepcenters.com (10-28-05)
27. YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

ILLUSTRATION:

Charles Colson tells the following story about his home town of Naples, Florida, which he calls "one of the garden spots of the world."

It's an absolute nirvana for all golfers, and they all come there. They're all CEOs of major corporations, and they retire to Naples, and this is "it"—twenty-seven golf courses and miles of sparkling beach and the best country clubs. I watch these guys; they're powerful people. They have this New York look on their face; they're determined. But now, all of a sudden, they start measuring their lives by how many golf games they can get in.

I often say to them, "Do you really want to live your life counting up the number of times you chase that little white ball around those greens?" And they kind of chuckle, but it's a nervous chuckle, because in six months they've realized how banal their lives are, and they've got beautiful homes—castles—and when they get bored with that, they build a bigger castle, and they're miserable. The object of life is not what we think it is, which is to achieve money, power, pleasure. That's not the holy grail. The object of life is the maturing of the soul, and you reflect that maturing of the soul when you care more for other people than yourself.

1. RECEIVED BY FAITH, AT NEW BIRTH

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. – John 20:31

2. SUSTAINED BY FEEDING ON CHRIST

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. – John 6:57

3. STRENGTHENED BY THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

27 Eric Metaxas, Socrates in the City (Dutton, 2011), pp. 172-3
That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. – *Ephesians 3:16*

4. MANIFESTED IN THE BELIEVER’S BODY

*For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.* – *2 Corinthians 4:11*
28. THE SAVIOR

ILLUSTRATION:

39.2 percent of shoppers will purchase a department store gift card for friends and family, followed by 33.4 percent of shoppers opting for a restaurant gift card. But according to estimates reported in the Journal of State Taxation, the typical American home has an average of $300 in unused or "unredeemed" gift cards. These cards are often misplaced, accidentally thrown out, or only partially redeemed. Between 2005 and 2011, $41 billion in gift cards went unused.

In a similar way, many have done the same with God’s gift of a Savior. The gift is waiting for them to simply accept and activate it through the means God has provided.

1. A SAVIOR PROVIDED BY GOD

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. – 1 John 4:14

2. A SAVIOR PRESENTED IN THE GOSPEL

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. – 2 Timothy 1:10

3. A SAVIOR POSSESSED BY FAITH

For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. – 1 Timothy 4:10

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29. GRASPING TRUE WORSHIP

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. – John 4:23

ILLUSTRATION:

When I was nine or ten years old, my parents gave me a birthday surprise …. [They] announced I was going on a mystery tour and needed to be blindfolded. First we drove a few miles. Then I was helped out of the car, giggling, trying unsuccessfully to see out of the blindfold's sides, and needing to hold on to my parents' hands. I had no idea where we were. At first we walked in the open air, then we entered a building and began climbing up steps. Up and up—I knew it must be a tower. Once or twice people passed by—"Kidnapping him?" they said. We climbed higher.

Reaching the top, I could feel the sun and breeze on my face. My mother and father took the blindfold off, and I blinked with happiness at the sight before me. I was at the top of the Cabot Tower in Bristol, England. The city lay below, the river danced beneath, countryside rolled beyond, and the sea glinted in the distance. It was dazzling and brilliant as I stood there with my kid brother and my parents. Reflecting now on that moment, I am fairly sure it was the first time in my life that I truly experienced being alive.

Up until then I had little perception of a world full of beauty, trust, love, purity, and joy. But right then its big picture just couldn't be beaten. Everything was good in the deep places of my body, mind, and spirit. Astonishingly good! As I have grown older, I have had a few other experiences like that, and definitely the best times have been in worship when I have known, joining with others, that I belong to God in depths of beauty, trust, love, purity, and joy.

1. THE LEPER WHO WAS CLEANSED

29 Michael Quicke, Preaching as Worship, (Baker, 2011), p. 74
And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. – Matthew 8:2-3

2. THE BLIND MAN WHO WAS HEALED

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. – John 9:38

3. THE DISCIPLES WHO FOLLOWED

And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. – Matthew 28:17

4. THE REDEEMED IN GLORY

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. – Revelation 5:11
30. WHAT A BORN AGAIN PERSON LOOKS LIKE

ILLUSTRATION:

In Victorian England, treadmills weren't found in air-conditioned health clubs—they were found in prisons. Treadmills, or treadwheels, as they were called, were used in penal servitude as a form of punishment. Some treadwheels were productive, grinding wheat or transporting water, but others were purely punitive in nature. Prisoners were punished by spending the bulk of their day walking up an inclined plane, knowing that all their hard labor was for nothing. The only hope the prisoner had was that, at some day in the future, he would have "paid his debt" to society and would be set free. He couldn't even look on his labor at the end of the day and know that, if nothing else, he'd been productive.

As you struggle with [sin in your life], remember that [Christ] has set you free indeed and that you're no longer sentenced to be chained to the treadmill of sin and failure. He has paid the ransom demanded for your release from sin, and you're now walking in the freedom of the glory of the sons and daughters of God.

1. HE HAS A NATURE WHICH IS FROM GOD

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. – 2 Peter 1:4

2. HE HAS AN IMAGE WHICH IS OF GOD

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. – Colossians 3:10

3. HE HAS A HOLINESS WHICH IS FOR GOD

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. – 1 John 3:9

30 Elyse Fitzpatrick, Because He Loves Me (Crossway, 2010), pp. 87-91
4. HE HAS A LOVE WHICH IS LIKE GOD

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. – 1 John 5:2
31. FOUR FRIENDS OF JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

31 Whoever said that you can't buy "friends" didn't know about the shallow shortcuts of our internet age. An article in Hemispheres magazine explored a number of sites that are dedicated to helping you find online "friends." These companies will create fake users or pay real account holders to follow and like you on various social media sites.

For instance, on the site Socialyup.com you can buy 500 likes for $30 or 20,000 likes for $699. For a mere $10, FanMeNow will find you 1,000 Twitter followers and for $1,750 you can buy a million followers. If you need to beef up views for your YouTube video, for $150 you can buy 30,000 views from a site called 500views.com. For $3,100 they'll make your video go "viral" by getting you a million views.

The article concludes with the following advice: "No matter what social network you're on, you can buy your way to popularity."

1. MATTHEW—“BEHOLD YOUR KING,”

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! – John 19:14

2. MARK—"BEHOLD MY SERVANT"

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. – Isaiah 42:1

3. LUKE—"BEHOLD THE MAN"

Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! – John 19:5

31 Eric Steuer, “Best Friend$” Hemispheres magazine (April 2013)
4. **JOHN—"BEHOLD YOUR GOD"

*O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!* – *Isaiah 40:9*
32. WHAT TYPE OF FAITH DO YOU HAVE?

ILLUSTRATION:

Anxiously anticipating the quite premature delivery of our triplets, I will never forget the moment that the doctor looked at me and announced, "They're all alive!" It was not a foregone conclusion (at least for one of them) and until that report, my wife and I were in suspense. All of the wishful thinking—even from certified medical professionals—could not alleviate that suspense, turning possibility into actuality. I could believe all I wanted in a successful delivery, but I had no promise to rely on, either from God or the doctors, and the intensity of my believing it had nothing to do with the state of affairs. My confidence developed entirely on the words that the doctor uttered. Similarly, the gospel is news because it reports a completed event. Faith does not make something true, but embraces the truth.

1. NO FAITH—THE UNBELIEVER

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. – Hebrews 10:38

2. LITTLE FAITH—THE DOUBTER

Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? – Matthew 16:8

3. GROWING FAITH—THE HEALTHY SAINT

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth. – 2 Thessalonians 1:3

4. STRONG FAITH—THE SENIOR SAINT

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. – Romans 4:20

5. FULL OF FAITH—THE FEARLESS SAINT

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. – Acts 6:8
33. TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

ILLUSTRATION:

33 AskMen.com, the largest men’s lifestyle website in the world, surveyed over 2,000 men and asked them: "Who do you consider your role model?" The survey results were broken down into four major categories:

- 8 percent of men said they look to actors or entertainers as their role model.
- 24 percent of men try to emulate athletes.
- 31 percent of men said "I'm my own role model."
- 35 percent of men looked to entrepreneurs as role models.

In other words, according to AskMen.com, many men either admire themselves or men who, like Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg, "break the mold." Or men described as those "who see the risks and take them anyway, achieving success on their own individual terms."

1. DISCIPLES—LEARNING OF CHRIST

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. – John 15:8

2. FRIENDS—COMMUNING WITH CHRIST

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. – John 15:15

3. SERVANTS—WORKING FOR CHRIST

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. – John 15:20

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33 Ricardo Poupada, "Meet Men's New Role Models," Advertizing Age (8-9-11)
4. WITNESSES—TESTIFYING TO CHRIST

And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.
– John 15:27
34. WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

ILLUSTRATION:

34 A number of years ago, our family was in the Dominican Republic on a mission trip. If you've ever driven in a developing country, you know how dangerous the traffic can be. Vehicles whiz past, coming within just a few feet of children playing close to the road. One night, my son Sam was playing a game in his own little world, in which he would zig and zag, back and forth from sidewalk onto the narrow street and back. It wasn't a heavily travelled road; but there was always loud music blaring, and it was pitch dark. From about 10 feet away, I suddenly shouted, "Samuel, don't move!"

Immediately he froze. About a second later a Moped zipped past him, going 30 mph with no lights on—right where Sam was about to step. My 6-year-old didn't ignore me, argue, or blatantly disobey. I said freeze, and he froze. That obedience probably saved his life.

1. WE ARE SONS TO LOVE

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. – 1 John 5:2

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints. – Colossians 1:4

2. WE ARE SERVANTS TO OBEY

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. – 2 Timothy 2:24

But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. – Romans 6:22

34 Dave Stone, "Teaching Respect Within the Home," Preaching (July/August 2012)
3. WE ARE SOLDIERS TO FIGHT

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. – 2 Timothy 2:3

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. – 1 Timothy 6:12

4. WE ARE STEWARDS TO OCCUPY

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. – Titus 1:7

And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. – Luke 19:13
35. THE POWER OF THE WORD

ILLUSTRATION:

I recently toured the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, England, famous as the location of the prime meridian. It is a remarkable location. I was able to take a picture of my children straddling the meridian, each standing with one foot in the Eastern Hemisphere and the other foot in the Western Hemisphere.

As delightful as that might be, I would have to add that the prime meridian itself is not physically impressive. In fact, you would not realize it was there at all if it were not for a bold line cut across the pavement. The demarcation is, in fact, of human invention. Prior to the International Meridian Conference of 1884, each local region kept its own time, a system that, if continued, would have rendered impossible our current arrangements for trade and commerce. While the meridian is humanly derived, its relation to the stars is not, and that heavenly correspondence allows us to find our place on the map and in the world.

The prime meridian came about through the work of John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal, who made it his life mission to produce a proper navigational chart of the heavens, mapping the location of thousands of stars. Eventually, based on Flamsteed's work, scientists were able to help people find their position on the planet, allowing them to answer that fundamental question of philosophy and physics: Where am I?

The power of the prime meridian is that it is a fixed position through which our knowledge of time and place can be understood. This is a metaphor for the effect of the Bible in human life. The Scripture is our meridian. It is the fixed position, given by God himself, through which we can understand who we are, where we are, and where we must go from here.

1. WE ARE BORN AGAIN BY THE WORD

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. – 1 Peter 1:23

35 Kenton C. Anderson, Choosing to Preach (Zondervan, 2006), p. 58
Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. – James 1:18

2. WE ARE CLEANSED BY THE WORD

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. – Ephesians 5:26

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. – Psalm 119:9

3. WE ARE SAVED BY THE WORD

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. – 1 Timothy 4:16

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. – James 1:21

4. WE ARE MATURER BY THE WORD

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. – 1 Peter 2:2

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. – Jeremiah 15:16

5. WE ARE SANCTIFIED BY THE WORD

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. – John 17:17

For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. – 1 Timothy 4:5

6. WE ARE ENLIGHTENED BY THE WORD
There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. – Psalm 19:3
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. – Psalm 119:105

7. WE ARE KEPT BY THE WORD

Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. – Psalm 17:4

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. – Revelation 3:10
36. “LAID UP” FOR YOU!

ILLUSTRATION:

The promise of a future inheritance is one of the many promises God makes to us in the Bible. But the concept itself is difficult for us to comprehend. One way to think about it would be to turn to some familiar names across the pond.

When Princess Diana died in 1997, she left a sizeable inheritance for her two sons, William and Harry, in the amount of $20.4 million. With investments and interest, that amount grew during their teens and twenties to $31.4 million. But the provision was such that William and Harry were only able to inherit this considerable estate after their 30th birthdays. In June 2012, William turned 30 and inherited his portion. Harry will inherit his portion on his 30th birthday as well. The estate is theirs. It is has been promised to them. It is in their names, and it has been set aside for them.

In the same way, as followers of Christ, we have an inheritance. Based on Jesus' promise, it is ours. It's in your name, and it's set aside for you. At the right time, you too will receive your inheritance in full.

1. THE LORD’S GOODNESS

_Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!_ – Psalm 31:19

2. THE HOPE OF GLORY

_For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel._ – Colossians 1:5

3. THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

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36 Frank Lovelace, "Prince William turns 30, inherits share of Diana estate," Newsday (6-20-12)
Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. – 2 Timothy 4:8
ILLUSTRATION:

Forgiveness was in the air Saturday, December 18th, 2004, in Boise, Idaho. That's where a cross-denominational group of pastors gathered outside of city hall and sat at tables for three hours with checkbook in hand. The members of the Treasure Valley Pastors Association proceeded to write checks to the city on behalf of those with unpaid parking tickets.

The much-publicized event called Grace Gift/Paid in Full Project was not all that complicated. To take advantage of the free offer, those with outstanding violations simply had to acknowledge their guilt by showing up and asking for the payment. Up to $10,000 was earmarked for the unprecedented demonstration of forgiveness. The money was raised from local businesses and was made available on a first-come-first-served basis.

"We wanted to help people understand, in a practical way, that even though we've all made mistakes, God's grace and forgiveness is received, just by asking," said Montie Ralstin, Pastor of Boise Valley Christian Communion and president of the pastors' association sponsoring the event.

Although the offer struck many as too-good-to-be-true, not all who heard about the modern-day parable were positively impressed. Some thought the pastors should donate the monies raised to charities that helped the poor. Responding to that criticism, Pastor Michael Boerner remarked, "I would agree, I think it's a really poor use of finances just to pay someone's parking ticket if that's all it was, but really it's not about that."

1. GRACE TO SAVE

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. – Ephesians 2:8-9

2. GRACE TO ESTABLISH

[KBCI TV 2 News (12-15-04)
Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. – Hebrews 13:9

3. GRACE TO SUSTAIN

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. – 2 Corinthians 9:8

4. GRACE TO SERVE

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. – 1 Corinthians 15:10
38. WHAT JESUS DOES

ILLUSTRATION:

38 For too long, we've called unbelievers to "invite Jesus into your life." Jesus doesn't want to be in your life. Your life's a wreck. Jesus calls you into his life. And his life isn't boring or purposeless or static. It's wild and exhilarating and unpredictable.

1. JESUS IS THE SINPURGER—TO CLEAR

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. – Hebrews 1:3

2. JESUS IS THE VICTOR—TO DELIVER

And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. – Hebrews 2:15

3. JESUS IS THE APOSTLE—TO SPEAK

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. – Hebrews 3:1

4. JESUS IS THE HIGH PRIEST—TO ASSIST

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. – Hebrews 4:14

5. JESUS THE FORERUNNER—TO REPRESENT

38 Russell Moore, "A Purpose Driven Cosmos," Christianity Today (February 2012)
Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. – Hebrews 6:20

6. JESUS THE COMING ONE—TO WELCOME

For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. – Hebrews 10:37
39. DO THIS! UNTIL JESUS COMES

ILLUSTRATION:

39 In the late 1600s and early 1700s a half-literate Italian craftsman named Antonio Stradivari designed and made a series of beautiful musical instruments. Today, those violins, named after the Latinized form of his name, Stradivarius, are considered priceless. In 2010, a Stradivarius was purchased for $3.6 million. It is believed there are only around five hundred of them still in existence, some of which have been submitted to the most intense scientific examination in an attempt to reproduce their extraordinary sound quality. But no one has been able to replicate Stradivari's craftsmanship.

Today we do know that Stradivari used spruce for the top, willow for the internal blocks and linings, and maple for the back, ribs, and neck. He also treated the wood with several types of minerals, including potassium borate, sodium and potassium silicate, as well as a handmade varnish that appears to have been composed of gum arabic, honey, and egg white.

But the genius craftsman never once recorded his technique for posterity. Instead, he passed on his knowledge to a number of his apprentices through what one scholar called "elbow learning." The apprentices of the great Stradivari didn't learn their craft from books or manuals but by sitting at his elbow and feeling the wood as he felt it to assess its length, its balance, and its timbre right there in their fingertips. All the learning happened at his elbow, and all the knowledge was contained in his fingers.

1. SHOW THE LORD'S DEATH—WORSHIPPERS

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. – 1 Corinthians 11:26

2. HOLD FAST HIS TRUTH—WARRIORS

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. – Revelation 2:25

39 Lance Ford, Unleader (Beacon Hill Press, 2012), pp. 177-178
3. OCCUPY IN HIS SERVICE—WORKERS

And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. – Luke 19:13
40. AN EXPLANATION OF PRAYER

ILLUSTRATION:

In the fall of 2005, my 9-year-old son, Austin, had his tonsils removed. Before the surgery, an anesthesiologist came in to start an IV. He was wearing a cool surgical cap covered in colorful frogs. Austin loved that "frog hat." When the doctor started to leave, Austin called out, "Hey, wait."

The doctor turned. "Yeah, buddy, what do you need?" "Do you go to church?"

"No," the doctor admitted. "I know I probably should, but I don't."

Austin then asked, "Well, are you saved?"

Chuckling nervously, the doctor said: "Nope. But after talking to you, maybe it's something I should consider."

Pleased with his response, Austin answered, "Well you should, 'cause Jesus is great!"

"I'm sure he is, little guy," the doctor said, and quickly made his exit.

When Austin's surgery was finished, the anesthesiologist came into the waiting room to talk to me. He told me the surgery went well, then said, "Mrs. Blessit, I don't usually come down and talk to the parents after a surgery, but I just had to tell you what your son did."

Oh boy, I thought. What did that little rascal do now? The doctor explained that he'd just put the mask on Austin when my son signaled that he needed to say something. When the doctor removed the mask, Austin blurted, "Wait a minute, we have to pray!" The doctor told him to go ahead, and Austin prayed: "Dear Lord, please let all the doctors and nurses have a good day. And Jesus, please let the doctor with the frog hat get saved and start going to church. Amen."

The doctor admitted that this had touched him. "I was so sure he would pray that his surgery went well," he explained. "He didn't even mention his surgery. He

prayed for me! Mrs. Blessit, I had to come down and let you know what a great little guy you have."

A few minutes later, a nurse came to take me to post-op. She had a big smile on her face as we walked to the elevator. "There's something you should know," she said. "Some of the other nurses and I have been witnessing to and praying for that doctor for a long time. After your son's surgery, he tracked a few of us down to tell us about Austin's prayer. He said, 'Well girls, you got me. If that little boy could pray for me when he was about to have surgery, then I think maybe I need his Jesus, too.'"

1. THE PLACE FOR PRAYER, "EVERYWHERE"

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. – 1 Timothy 2:8

2. THE TIME FOR PRAYER, "ALWAYS"

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. – Luke 21:36

3. SUBJECTS FOR PRAYER, "EVERYTHING"

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. – Philippians 4:6

4. ANSWERS TO PRAYER, "ALL THINGS"

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. – Matthew 21:22

5. CONDITIONS OF PRAYER, "IN MY NAME"

If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. – John 14:14
Asian Access (or A2), a Christian missions agency in South Asia, listed a series of questions that some church planters have been asking new believers who are considering baptism. The country is predominantly Hindu, but over the past few decades Christianity has grown in popularity—especially among poor and tribal peoples. The following seven questions serve as a reality check for what new followers of Jesus might experience if they decide to "go public" with their decision to follow Christ:

1. Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father?
2. Are you willing to lose your job?
3. Are you willing to go to the village and those who persecute you, forgive them, and share the love of Christ with them?
4. Are you willing to give an offering to the Lord?
5. Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?
6. Are you willing to go to prison?
7. Are you willing to die for Jesus?

The seven questions serve as a sobering reminder for all Christians from every continent of what it might cost us to follow Jesus. These questions also help Western Christians identify with the threats faced by our brothers and sisters from other countries as they seek to follow Christ.

1. OUR MASTER

*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.* – John 13:14

2. OUR BOOK

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* – 2 Timothy 3:16

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41 South Asian nation struggles to shape itself, Mission Network News (1-17-12)
3. OUR CLOTHING

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. – 1 Peter 5:5

4. OUR BADGE

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. – John 13:35

5. OUR CROSS

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. – Luke 14:27

6. OUR COMPANIONS

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts. – Psalm 119:63

7. OUR FRUIT

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. – John 15:8
ILLUSTRATION:

42 I remember being touched by the popular song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon." It tells of a man who's been sent to prison. He's served his time and is now coming home on the bus. But he admits that she who once loved him has every right to reject him. He's to blame. So he's written to tell her that if she forgives him, she should "tie a yellow ribbon 'round the old oak tree." If there's no yellow ribbon, he'll just go riding by on the bus.

As the miles roll by, all the man thinks about is that oak tree. When he gets home, will there be a yellow ribbon on it?

The song ends in triumph with the entire busload of people cheering as the man sees not one but a hundred yellow ribbons on that old oak tree! His lover not only forgives him, but she exuberantly welcomes him home.

Like the man on the bus, we're fearful of death and what's ahead. We know our own hearts, and we wonder if God will really forgive us, let alone celebrate our coming.

But the Word assures us of God's welcome. The yellow ribbons will be there.

1. TRANSLATED AT CONVERSION

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. – Colossians 1:13

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. – Acts 26:18

42 Harold L. Myra, Living by God's Surprises (Word, 1988)
2. TRANSFORMED BY CONTEMPLATION

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. – 2 Corinthians 3:18

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. – Romans 12:2

3. TRANSFIGURED AT GLORIFICATION

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. – Philippians 3:9-11
43. GOD GIVES US REST

ILLUSTRATION:

Bernard Lagat knows a lot about long-distance running. Lagat, a Kenyan-born citizen of the U.S., is a four-time Olympian. He owns seven American records, ranging from the 1,500 to the 5,000 meters. In the 2012 London Olympics he finished fourth in the 5,000 meters. Although long-distance running is a hard on the joints and muscles, 37-year-old Lagat shows no signs of slowing down.

But even in the midst of his rigorous training schedule, every fall Lagat does something that is completely foreign to most elite runners around the globe: he takes a five-week break—just like he's done every fall since 1999. According to an article in The New York Times, "He will toss his sneakers into a closet and pig out for five weeks. No running. No sit-ups, no heavy-lifting, except for a fork." He will also coach his son's soccer team.

Peter Thompson, a longtime running coach and track and field official, claims that Lagat's approach is unique. Thompson said, "In the U.S., runners are very obsessive about not letting go of training." But Lagat stands by his need for sustained rest. Lagat said that every athlete is different, but his schedule has been very effective. "My runs are very hard," he said. "Everything I do is hard .... But the body is tired. You're not a machine. Rest is a good thing."

1. REST TO THE CONSCIENCE—IN CHRIST

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. – Matthew 11:28

2. REST FOR THE HEART—UNDER CHRIST

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. – Matthew 11:29

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3. REST AMID SERVICE—WITH CHRIST

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. – Mark 6:31

4. REST IN HEAVEN—LIKE CHRIST

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. – Hebrews 4:9
44. OUR BELOVED LORD

ILLUSTRATION:

44My 5-year-old, Carl, and my 3-year-old, Conrad, love it when I dress like them. After they put on jeans and a blue T-shirt, they'll come ask me to wear jeans and a blue T-shirt. When I do, they have a saying. They will survey me, survey themselves, and say, "Look, Dad—same, same." For my birthday, Carl bought me a North Carolina blue mesh shirt ... because he has a North Carolina blue mesh shirt. We could be "same, same."

When I play living room football with my boys, Conrad will not let me play standing—so big and scary and towering above him. The theological term for this is "completely Other." Instead he insists I get on my knees. When I am down at eye-level, Conrad puts his hand on my shoulder and says, "There. See, Dad—same, same." They like it when I enter their world ....

This summer, I scraped my leg working on my house. When Conrad fell down and scraped his leg, he pointed at my scab, then showed me his and said, "Hey, Dad—same, same."

Here's the point ... God himself has felt what we feel. In the Incarnation, he chose not to stay "completely Other." He got down at eye-level, and in the Incarnation, God experienced what it's like to be tired and discouraged .... He knows what it's like to hurt and bleed. On the cross, Jesus himself prayed a psalm of lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1).

In your pain, you may be tempted to say, "God, you have no idea what I'm going through. You have no idea how bad I'm hurting." But God can respond, "Yes, I do." He can point to your wounds and then to his own and say, "Look: same, same. Me too. I have entered your world, and I know how you feel. I have been there, I am with you now, I care, and I can help." That is what Christmas is all about.

1. ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED—OUR PLACE

Matt Proctor, "Carols for Any Season of Suffering," Christian Standard magazine (12-23-07)
To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. – Ephesians 1:6

2. LISTENING TO THE BELOVED—OUR ATTITUDE

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
– Song of Songs 2:3

3. LEANING ON THE BELOVED—OUR DEPENDENCE

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee. – Song of Songs 8:5

4. SPEAKING OF THE BELOVED—OUR TESTIMONY

My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. – Song of Songs 5:10-16

5. WAITING FOR THE BELOVED—OUR HOPE

Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart. – Song of Songs 3:11
45. HOW DO YOU WALK?

ILLUSTRATION:

In the Sacred Museum of the Vatican, there is a sixteenth-century sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini entitled "Habakkuk and the Angel." In this masterpiece, Habakkuk is holding a packed bag, as if he is traveling somewhere, and his movement is forward, as if he is walking ahead. However, his movement is impeded by an angel hovering above him, who has grabbed this startled prophet by the hair, as if lifting him to heaven.

There is something about that image that is so apropos to us. Some of us are very much on our own way, walking in a very different direction than God would have us walk. We need to be redirected, to be pulled by the hair, if you will, up into the heavens to see what Habakkuk saw (1:1)—a vision of God. For only a vision of the triune God can produce this kind of … living, walking, moving forward, lifted high … kind of faith.

1. BEFORE GOD—REALITY

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. – Genesis 17:1

2. AFTER GOD—OBEDIENCE

Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. – Deuteronomy 13:4

3. WITH GOD—COMMUNION

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. – Genesis 5:22

46. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT

ILLUSTRATION:

46 By the time I graduated from seminary, I had many convictions and few questions, especially regarding the Holy Spirit …. But during a lifetime of ministry that has taken me around the United States and to many countries abroad, I have found that the work of the Holy Spirit continually keeps me off balance. I'm not alone in that. Those in church leadership seem afraid the Spirit is going to do something we can’t explain. I've found that disturbs many folks … but I'll admit it energizes me.

I've come to realize there are dimensions of the Spirit's ministry I have never tapped and places in this study about which I know very little. I'm on a strong learning curve. I have witnessed a dynamic power in his presence that I long to know more of firsthand. I now have questions and a strong interest in many of the things of the Spirit I once felt were settled. To say it plainly, I am hungry for more of him. I long to know God more deeply and more intimately.

1. "HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME"—REVELATION

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. – John 15:26

2. "YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME"—DECLARATION

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. – Acts 1:8

3. "OUR GOSPEL CAME IN THE HOLY SPIRIT"—ATTESTATION

46 Charles R. Swindoll, Embraced By the Spirit (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 25-26
For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. – 1 Thessalonians 1:5

1) The *First* is the Spirit's witness *to* us of Christ

2) The *Second* the Spirit's witness *through* us for Christ

3) The *Third* the Spirit's witness *in* others to Christ
47. SAVED BY JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:


News accounts say when rescuers found Cecelia they did not believe she had been on the plane. Investigators first assumed Cecelia had been a passenger in one of the cars on the highway onto which the airliner crashed. But when the passenger register for the flight was checked, there was Cecelia's name.

Cecelia survived because, even as the plane was falling, Cecelia's mother, Paula Chican, unbuckled her own seat belt, got down on her knees in front of her daughter, wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia, and then would not let her go.

Nothing could separate that child from her parent's love—neither tragedy nor disaster, neither the fall nor the flames that followed, neither height nor depth, neither life nor death.

Such is the love of our Savior for us. He left heaven, lowered himself to us, and covered us with the sacrifice of his own body to save us.

1. SAVED BY CHRIST'S DEATH—FROM SIN’S PENALTY

*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.* – Romans 5:9

2. SAVED BY CHRIST'S LIFE—FROM SIN’S POWER

*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.* – Romans 5:10

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47 Bryan Chapell, *In the Grip of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992)
3. SAVED AT CHRIST'S COMING—FROM SINS PRESENCE

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. – Romans 13:11
48. WHERE IS YOUR PLACE?

ILLUSTRATION:

48 We human being are so security-oriented. Whether it is conscious or not, we all need and want security in our lives. From the time we are born, we are clinging to something. That's okay, but we've got to be clinging to the right thing. When we are holding onto Jesus, that's when we are holding on to real hope.

1. IN HIS HAND—PLACE OF SECURITY

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. – John 10:28

2. ON HIS SHOULDER—PLACE OF STRENGTH

And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. – Luke 15:5

3. IN HIS BOSOM—PLACE OF LEARNING

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? – John 13:25

4. AT HIS FEET—PLACE OF COMMUNION

And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. – Luke 10:39

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49. SOUL FOCUS

ILLUSTRATION:

49 Albert Pujols, the first baseman for the St. Louis Cardinals, is a World Series champ, an eight-time All Star, the recipient of three National League MVP awards, and according to a 2008 poll of 30 MLB managers, the most feared hitter in the sport. But even more impressive is his life off the field. The Pujols Family Foundation he started offers support and care to people with Down syndrome and their families, while also helping the poor in the Dominican Republic. He and his wife of ten years provide a loving household for four little children. But most importantly, he is a passionate disciple of Christ.

While speaking at an event at Lafayette Senior High School in Missouri, Pujols told the audience of men and young boys, "As a Christian, I am called to live a holy life. My standard for living is set by God, not by the world. I am responsible for growing and sharing the gospel." Then, after reading Paul's words in Philippians 2:3—"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves"—Pujols told the crowd, "One way for me to stay satisfied in Jesus is for me to stay humble. Humility is getting on your knees and staying in God's will—what he wants for me, not what the world wants." He added: "It would be easy to go out and do whatever I want, but those things only satisfy the flesh for a moment. Jesus satisfies my soul forever."

1. "MY SOUL THIRSTETH"—DESIRE

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. – Psalm 63:1

2. "MY SOUL SHALL BE SATISFIED"—DECISION

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. – Psalm 63:5

3. "MY SOUL FOLLOWETH HARD"—DEVOTION

[100]
My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. – Psalm 63:8
ILLUSTRATION:

One day during my morning run I noticed a blind woman walking on the other side of the street with her Seeing Eye dog, a beautiful golden retriever. As I was about to pass them, I noticed a car blocking a driveway a few paces ahead of them. At that moment the dog paused and gently pressed his shoulder against the woman's leg, signaling her to turn aside so they could get around the car.

I'm sure she normally followed his lead, but that day she didn't seem to trust him. She had probably walked this route many times before and knew this was not the normal place to make a turn. Whatever the cause, she wouldn't move to the side and instead gave him the signal to move ahead. He again pressed his shoulder against her leg, trying to guide her on a safe path. She angrily ordered [the dog] to go forward. When he again declined, her temper flared.

I was about to speak up … when the dog once more put his shoulder gently against her leg. Sure enough, she kicked him …. And then she impulsively stepped forward—and bumped square into a car. Reaching out to feel the shape in front of her, she immediately realized what had happened. Dropping to her knees, she threw her arms around the dog, and spoke sobbing words into his ear.

1. OF GOD—WHOSE CHILDREN WE ARE

That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. – 1 Thessalonians 2:12

2. OF THE LORD—WHOSE SERVANTS WE ARE

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. – Colossians 1:10

3. OF OUR VOCATION—WHOSE EXPONENTS WE ARE

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I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. – Ephesians 4:1
51. GET READY

ILLUSTRATION:

I've imagined this scene in my head: I'm playing baseball with Jesus. The stands are full of fans, but out there on the field it's just him and me. I'm the pitcher. Jesus is the catcher, behind home plate. He settles into his crouch, ready to play, and I look for his signals—simple commands. What pitch will he want me to throw? I wait in anticipation, but also with one eye on the crowd. What will they think of me?

He signals a fastball.

I think for a moment and shake my head—no, not a fastball.

Next he signals a slider.

This time I look toward my teammates in the dugout for guidance. Then I glance up at the fans. No, I'm not comfortable with that one either.

He gives me yet a third signal.

No, not today, thank you!

Then I imagine Jesus silently and slowly withdrawing his signaling hand back into his mitt. There's a deep disappointment in his eyes. He's decided to let me throw whatever I want. So I do—and then I wonder why there's just no team spirit anymore!

Has Jesus stopped giving you signals?

I doubt it. He never stops speaking to his children. Is there a signal God's been trying to give you, even as you read this sentence, that you've ignored because you just don't want to obey?

1. TO HEAR—DISCIPLESHIP

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51 Clare de Graff, The 10-Second Rule (Howard Books, 2013), pp. 52-53

[104]
Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. – Ecclesiastes 5:1

2. TO DO—SERVICE

And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. – 2 Samuel 15:15

3. TO PREACH—TESTIMONY

So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. – Romans 1:15

4. TO DIE—DEVOTEDNESS

Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. – Acts 21:13
52. HOW TO BE GOOD FOR GOD

ILLUSTRATION:

I surveyed my church to see if people saw a relationship between ministering to others and spiritual growth.

When asked, "To what extent has your ministry or service to others affected your spiritual growth?," 92 percent answered positively. None responded that ministry had a negative effect on their spiritual growth.

Sixty-three percent indicated that service was equally significant in their spiritual growth compared to other spiritual disciplines, such as Bible study and prayer.

Twenty-four percent responded that ministry or service to others had been "a more significant factor" to their spiritual growth than Bible study or prayer.

Over half (58 percent) of those who were not actively ministering to others felt either "not satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their level of spiritual growth.

1. A GOOD MAN—RIGHT WITH GOD

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. – Acts 11:24

2. A GOOD MINISTER—READY FOR GOD

If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. – 1 Timothy 4:6

3. A GOOD STEWARD—TRUE TO GOD

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. – 1 Peter 4:10