

Pulpit Outlines Series

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52 Topical Sermons Volume 4

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1. SECURE IN CHRIST

ILLUSTRATION:

¹Suppose you were exploring an unknown Greenland glacier in the dead of winter. Just as you reach the sheer cliff with a spectacular view of miles of jagged ice and mountains of snow, a terrible storm breaks in. The wind is so strong that the fear rises in your heart that it might blow you over the cliff. But in the midst of the storm you discover a cleft in the ice where you can hide. Here you feel secure.

But, even though secure, the awesome might of the storm rages on, and you watch it with a kind of trembling pleasure as it surges out across the distant glaciers. Not everything we call fear vanishes from your heart, only the life-threatening part. There remains the trembling, the awe, the wonder, the feeling that you would never want to tangle with such a storm or be the adversary of such a power.

And so it is with God. The fear of God is what is left of the storm when you have a safe place to watch right in the middle of it. Hope turns fear into a trembling and peaceful wonder; and fear takes everything trivial out of hope and makes it earnest and profound. The terrors of God make the pleasures of his people intense. The fireside fellowship is all the sweeter when the storm is howling outside the cottage.

1. THE WORK OF CHRIST PROCURES SALVATION

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. – Hebrews 9:12

2. THE WORD OF GOD ASSURES SALVATION

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. – Acts 16:31

3. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT SECURES SALVATION

¹ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Multnomah, 1991), pp. 205-206

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. – Ephesians 4:30

1) The Work of the Cross is unchangeable.

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

2) The Word of God is unbreakable.

But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. – 1 Peter 1:25

3) The Witness of the Spirit is unanswerable.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. – Romans 8:15

2. WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE YOUR SINS FORGIVEN?

ILLUSTRATION:

²Noble Doss dropped the ball. One ball. One pass. One mistake. In 1941, he let one fall. And it's haunted him ever since. "I cost us a national championship," he says.

The University of Texas football team was ranked number one in the nation. Hoping for an undefeated season and a berth in the Rose Bowl, they played conference rival Baylor University. With a 7-0 lead in the third quarter, the Longhorn quarterback launched a deep pass to a wide-open Doss.

"The only thing I had between me and the goal," he recalls, "was twenty yards of grass."

The throw was on target. Longhorn fans rose to their feet. The sure-handed Doss spotted the ball and reached out, but it slipped through.

Baylor rallied and tied the score with seconds to play. Texas lost their top ranking and, consequently, their chance at the Rose Bowl.

"I think about that play every day," Doss admits.

Not that he lacks other memories. Happily married for more than six decades. A father. Grandfather. He served in the navy during World War II. He appeared on the cover of Life magazine with his Texas teammates. He intercepted seventeen passes during his collegiate career, a university record. He won two NFL titles with the Philadelphia Eagles. The Texas High School Hall of Fame and the Longhorn Hall of Honor include his name.

Most fans remember the plays Doss made and the passes he caught. Doss remembers the one he missed. Once, upon meeting a new Longhorn head coach, Doss told him about the bobbled ball. It had been fifty years since the game, but he wept as he spoke.

² Max Lucado, *Fearless* (Thomas Nelson, 2009), pp. 31-32

Some people are like that with their sin – they just continue to hold onto all the mistakes of the past, but they don't need to. Your past can be forgiven.

1. CHRIST DIED TO PROCURE IT

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. – Colossians 1:14

2. CHRIST LIVES TO IMPART IT

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. – Acts 5:31

3. THE GOSPEL FREELY PROCLAIMS IT

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. – Acts 13:38

4. THE BELIEVING SINNER POSSESSES IT

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. – 1 John 2:12

3. SEE JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

³Two years ago, Chris Downey had just started a promising architectural job at a successful design firm. A few weeks after he took the job, he noticed that there was something wrong with his vision. The doctors told him he had a tumor wrapped around his optic nerve, which required immediate surgery. After the surgery he could see with blurred sight; five days later everything went dark. Downey had become permanently blind.

Downey tried to maintain his architectural work, but he couldn't read the plans or use the design software. Initially, Downey's limitations jeopardized his job, until he found a blind computer scientist who had devised a way to read tactile architectural plans. Much to his surprise Downey discovered that his blindness actually gave him a unique way to "observe" interior spaces—not with his eyes, but with his fingers. As one of the company vice presidents would later say, "At first I thought, *Okay, this is going to be a limitation.* But then I realized that the way he reads drawings is ... the way we experience space."

Downey is now able to use his fingers to "walk" through a space and "view" it from a different (and sometimes a better) perspective. Due to his blindness, he can also envision new possibilities for the creative use of space. As a result, his limitations, or weaknesses, have become gifts and strengths—not only for himself, but also for his community.

1. AS THE UPLIFTED SAVIOR

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. – Isaiah 45:22

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. – John 3:14

2. AS THE GLORIFIED LORD

³ Douglas McGray, "Design Within Reach," *The Atlantic* (October 2010)

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:2

3. AS THE COMING DELIVERER

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. – Philippians 3:21

4. WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO?

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴Ever since he was a kid, Bob Goff had a dream to sail across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii. So Bob and four of his buddies entered the Transpac Race, a semi-annual sailboat race from Los Angeles to Hawaii. With limited sailing skills, Bob and his friends loaded their thirty-five foot sailboat with canned chili and bottled water and set sail for Hawaii. But for Bob and his friends, the most moving part of the journey was the arrival at the finishing line. Bob writes:

There's a tradition in the Transpac Race no matter when you finish the race, even if it's two in the morning. When you pull into the Ala Moana Marina in Oahu, there's a guy who announces the name of the boat and every crew member who made the trip It's the same guy, and he's been announcing each boat's arrival at the end of every Transpac Race for decades.

Just when we came to the end of our supplies, we sailed across the finish line just off Diamond Head and into the marina. It was a few hours before dawn. It had been sixteen days since we set out from Los Angeles in our little boat knowing very little about navigation. Suddenly, the silence was broken by a booming voice over a loudspeaker announcing the name of our tiny boat Then he started announcing the names of our ragtag crew like he was introducing heads of state. One by one he announced all of our names with obvious pride in his voice, and it became a really emotional moment for each of us onboard.

When he came to my name, he didn't talk about how few navigation skills I had or the zigzag course I'd led us in to get there. He didn't tell everyone I didn't even know which way north was or about all my other mess-ups. Instead, he just welcomed me in from the adventure like a proud father would. When he was done, there was a pause and then in a sincere voice his last words to the entire crew were these: "Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home." Because of the way he said it, we all welled up and fought back tears. I wiped my eyes as I reflected in that moment about all the uncertainty that had come with the journey, all the sloppy

⁴ Bob Goff, *"It's the Journey that Makes Coming Home Sweet"* Donald Miller blog (3-19-12)

sailing and how little I knew. But none of that mattered now because we had completed the race.

I've always thought that heaven might be kind of a similar experience After we each cross the finish line in our lives, I imagine it will be like floating into the Hawaiian marina when our names were announced, one by one. At the end of our lives, after our many mistakes and midcourse corrections, our loving Heavenly Father will simply say, "Friends, it's been a long trip. Welcome home."

1. CALLED UNTO ETERNAL LIFE

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

2. CALLED INTO MARVELOUS LIGHT

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. – 1 Peter 2:9

3. CALLED TO HOLY LIBERTY

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. – Galatians 5:13

4. CALLED TO ETERNAL GLORY

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. – 1 Peter 5:10

5. STEP BY STEP

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵I 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. DELIVERANCE FROM THE SERVICE OF SATAN

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

2. DISCIPLESHIP TO THE LORD JESUS

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. – Matthew 28:19

3. DELIGHT IN THE SERVICE OF THE LORD

⁵ Harold L. Myra, *Living by God's Surprises* (Word, 1988)

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. – Isaiah 58:13-14

- 1) The *First* is Enjoyed when Christ is Received.
- 2) The *Second* is Manifested when Christ is Confessed.
- 3) The *Third* is Assured when Christ is Obeyed.

6. ALL ABOUT FORGIVENESS

ILLUSTRATION:

⁶There is a great story about a little boy who killed his grandmother's pet duck. He accidentally hit the duck with a rock from his sling-shot. The boy didn't think anybody saw the foul (sorry!) deed, so he buried the duck in the backyard and didn't tell a soul.

Later, the boy found out that his sister had seen it all. And she now had the leverage of his secret and used it. Whenever it was the sister's turn to wash the dishes, take out the garbage, or wash the car, she would whisper in his ear, "Remember the duck." And then the little boy would do whatever his sister should have done.

There is always a limit to that sort of thing. Finally he'd had it. The boy went to his grandmother and, with great fear, confessed what he had done. To his surprise, she hugged him and thanked him. She said, "I was standing at the kitchen sink and saw the whole thing. I forgave you then. I was just wondering when you were going to get tired of your sister's blackmail and come to me."

1. ITS FREENESS—BY GRACE

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:24

2. ITS FULLNESS—ALL TRESPASSES

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses. – Colossians 2:13

3. ITS CERTAINTY—"HATH FORGIVEN"

⁶ Steve Brown, *Three Free Sins* (Howard Books, 2012), p. 110

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. – Ephesians 4:32

4. ITS ETERNITY—NOT REMEMBERED

And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. – Hebrews 10:17

7. THE BIBLE IN ACTION

ILLUSTRATION:

⁷At age 35 I bought running shoes and began enjoying the smooth rhythms of long-distance running. Soon I was competing in 10K races every month or so, and then a marathon once a year. By then I was subscribing to and reading three running magazines! Then I pulled a muscle and couldn't run for a couple of months. Those magazines were still all over the house, but I never opened one. The moment I resumed running, though, I started reading again.

That's when I realized that my reading was an extension of something I was a part of. I was reading for companionship and affirmation of the experience of running. I learned a few things along the way, but mostly it was to deepen my world of running. If I wasn't running, there was nothing to deepen.

The parallel with reading Scripture is striking. If I'm not living in active response to the living God, reading about his creation/salvation/holiness won't hold my interest for long. The most important question isn't "What does this mean," but "What can I obey?" Simple obedience will open up our lives to a text more quickly than any number of Bible studies, dictionaries, and concordances.

1. BEGETS, WHEN RECEIVED

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. PURIFIES, WHEN OBEYED

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently. – 1 Peter 1:22

⁷ Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (William B. Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 70-71; paraphrased in the September 18 entry of *Men of Integrity* (September/October 2009)

3. FEEDS, WHEN DESIRED

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

4. JUDGES, WHEN REJECTED

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. – **John 12:48**

8. WHAT JESUS WAS ALL ABOUT

ILLUSTRATION:

⁸Most kingdoms do anything they can to protect their king. This is the unspoken premise of the game of chess, for example. When the king falls, the kingdom is lost. Therefore, the king must be protected at all costs. Another notable example comes from the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperately wanted to join the expeditionary forces and watch the invasion from the bridge of a battleship in the English Channel. U.S. General Dwight David Eisenhower was desperate to stop him, for fear that the Prime Minister might be killed in battle. When it became apparent that Churchill would not be dissuaded, Eisenhower appealed to a higher authority: King George VI. The king went and told Churchill that if it was the Prime Minister's duty to witness the invasion, he could only conclude that it was also his own duty as king to join him on the battleship. At this point Churchill reluctantly agreed to back down, for he knew that he could never expose the King of England to such danger.

King Jesus did exactly the opposite. With royal courage he surrendered his body to be crucified. On the cross he offered a king's ransom: his life for the life of his people. He would die for all the wrong things that we had ever done and would do, completely atoning for all our sins. The crown of thorns that was meant to make a mockery of his royal claims actually proclaimed his kingly dignity, even in death.

1. HIS COMING AND HIS MISSION

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. – 1 Timothy 1:15

2. HIS DEATH AND ITS OBJECT

⁸ From Philip Ryken's sermon "Long Live the King!" <http://www.sermonaudio.com>

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. – 1 Peter 3:18

3. HIS LIFE AND ITS 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

4. HIS ADVENT AND ITS ISSUES

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. – 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15

9. JESUS AND THE LAW

ILLUSTRATION:

⁹In the last days of the Civil War, the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, fell to the Union army. Abraham Lincoln insisted on visiting the city. Even though no one knew he was coming, slaves recognized him immediately and thronged around him. He had liberated them by the Emancipation Proclamation, and now Lincoln's army had set them free. According to Admiral David Porter, an eyewitness, Lincoln spoke to the throng around him:

"My poor friends, you are free—free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it Liberty is your birthright."

But Lincoln also warned them not to abuse their freedom. "Let the world see that you merit [your freedom]," Lincoln said, "Don't let your joy carry you into excesses. Learn the laws and obey them."

That is very much like the message Jesus gives to those whom he has liberated by his death and resurrection. Jesus gives us our true birthright—spiritual freedom. But that freedom isn't an excuse for disobedience; it forms the basis for learning and obeying God's laws.

1. JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE LAW IN HIS LIFE

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. – **Matthew 5:17**

2. JESUS CAME TO BEAR THE CURSE OF THE LAW ON HIS CROSS

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. – **Galatians 3:13**

⁹ James L. Swanson, *Bloody Crimes* (William Morrow, 2010), p.46

3. JESUS CAME TO REDEEM US FROM THE POWER OF THE LAW BY HIS DEATH

To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. – Galatians 4:5

1) By the First. He magnified it.

The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable. – Isaiah 42:21

2) In the Second He silenced it.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. – Galatians 3:24

3) Through the Third He satisfied it.

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. – Romans 7:4

10. THE PATH OF THE SINNER

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁰Do you think you can handle temptation on just the strength of your own willpower? If so, you're probably setting yourself up for a crash. That's not just advice from the Bible. It also comes from current scientific research.

Dr. Loran Nordgren, a senior lecturer at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management in Chicago, ran a series of experiments that placed college students in "tempting situations" to smoke, eat junk food, or forgo studying. The research found that we often display what's called a "restraint bias." In other words, we tend to overestimate how much self-control we will have against temptation when we're not in the "heat of the moment." Our "restraint bias" causes us to think that we can handle more temptation than we actually can. Dr. Nordgren warned that "Those who are most confident about their self-control are the most likely to give in to temptation."

How do we deal with our deluded sense of self-control? Dr. Nordgren, who works for a secular university, offered some biblically sound advice: "The key is simply to avoid any situations where vices and other weaknesses thrive and, most importantly, for individuals to keep a humble view of their willpower."

1. BY NATURE, A CHILD OF WRATH

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. – Ephesians 2:3

2. BY PRACTICE, A WANDERER FROM GOD

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. – Isaiah 53:6

¹⁰ Jeanna Bryner, "Temptation Harder to Resist Than You Think, Study Suggests," *Live Science* (8-3-09)

3. IN MIND, AN ENEMY TOWARD GOD

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. – Romans 8:7

4. IN GUILT, A CRIMINAL BEFORE GOD

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. – Romans 3:19

11. SEARCHING FOR PEACE

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. – Deuteronomy 20:10-12

ILLUSTRATION:

¹¹In the 1870s Swedish missionaries arrived in Mongolia—what was called "Outer Mongolia." After four decades of several teams' blood, sweat, and tears, not a single indigenous church had been established. Then in 1921 Mongolia earned the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world to voluntarily invite the Soviets to bring communism to their country. In the ensuing purge, every vestige of Christianity—as well as any other religion—was erased, and more than one million Lamaistic Buddhist priests were slaughtered. Religion was dead in Mongolia.

In 1980 a young Mongolian whom we'll call Yi (Mongolians traditionally have only one name) went to study at a university in Moscow. Yi received an English-language Bible from a fellow student from Tanzania. "You can study English with it," the Tanzanian student explained. Yi then studied the Word for seven years, returning to Mongolia and rising to a top English interpreter position with the government. In 1987 Yi was assigned to an American big-game tourist group, which had come to Mongolia to hunt bear. Doug Coe, a Christian, was one of the tourists.

During the hunting trip Yi found the opportunity to secretly ask Doug, "Do you know God?" Doug nodded.

Three hours later, Yi was able to whisper, "What is his name?"

"Jesus Christ."

¹¹ Bill and Amy Stearns, *20/20 Vision: Amazing Stories of What God Is Doing Around the World* (Bethany House, 2005) pp.73-74

In bits and pieces of stolen conversations throughout the rest of the big-game hunt, Doug was able to introduce Yi to Jesus.

"Don't worry," he told Yi. "I know it's illegal to be a Christian, and it will be hard for you. But friends will come." Then the foreign hunters left Mongolia.

Three years later Yi was assigned to another foreign tour group—a cowboy team of Navajo, Winnebago, Cocapaw, and other Native Americans who came to Mongolia to perform in the national nadim, a competition in horsemanship. Of course, the group was a Christian Native American cowboy team. So Yi translated their testimonies on national TV and interpreted their explanation of the Gospel to press groups and officials. Several Mongolians responded to the team's challenge to receive Christ, and Yi spent hours and hours drinking in everything the team knew about the Word. Then they too had to leave Mongolia.

Yi began discipling those who'd come to Christ through the cowboys' ministry. Then another tour group came, a few members of which happened to be pastors. The ministers, after days of intense discipling, realized the depth of Yi's Bible knowledge and the unusual bursts of his spiritual insights. So they all gathered in a hotel room in Ulaan Bataar one very cold day in November 1990 and ordained Yi as an elder of the first Mongolian church in the history of the world!

1. PEACE PROCLAIMED

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it.
– **Deuteronomy 20:10**

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! – **Romans 10:15**

2. SURRENDER DEMANDED

And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. – **Deuteronomy 20:11**

Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. – Acts 20:21

3. SUBMISSION SECURED

And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. – Deuteronomy 20:11

And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. – Acts 11:21

4. RETRIBUTION EFFECTED

And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. – Deuteronomy 20:12

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. – 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

12. GRACE, GRACE, GOD'S GRACE

ILLUSTRATION:

¹²Back in 1993, Muhammad Ali was interviewed for Reader's Digest and he made the following statement:

"One day we're all going to die, and God is going to judge our good deeds and bad deeds. If the bad outweighs the good, you go to hell. If the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven."

You couldn't get much further from the Gospel of Grace than that!

1. JUSTIFIED BY GRACE—OUR DELIVERANCE

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. — Romans 3:24

2. STANDING IN GRACE—OUR POSITION

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. — Romans 5:2

3. DISCIPLINED UNDER GRACE—OUR TRAINING

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. — Titus 2:12

4. HOPING, THROUGH GRACE—OUR PROSPECT

¹² "Ali," *Reader's Digest* (December 2001), p. 93

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. – 2
Thessalonians 2:16

13. GIVE HIM YOUR TRUST

ILLUSTRATION:

¹³In 2005, a Vietnamese pastor known as Silas was told by local authorities that he could expect to see trouble if his church continued to operate without a permit. "Be careful," one official told him. "Watch out."

This was a threat as much as a warning. In Vietnam, as in many other Communist (and some Islamic) countries, governments commonly deny or delay church permits, then jail Christians for meeting without a permit.

Silas shot back: "I don't have to watch out or be careful; God will care for us." He went on to thank the official for the harassment and opposition that Vietnamese authorities had meted out, as he felt it had unified the country's Christians.

"Your persecution has made us stronger," he told the officer.

Moreover, the pastor told him that he loved him. "You can shut down our churches, jail us, torture us. It doesn't matter, because we'll still love you," he said. "We'll love you, because God loves you and wants to see you come to know Christ's salvation." Then he delivered the final, loving blow—asking the official if he didn't feel badly about mistreating Christians. Silas told him he suspected it was tearing him up inside.

The official stalked away. Late one night, he came back. When the pastor heard him knock on the door, he assumed he was going to be hauled off to jail. But the official's manner was more like that of Nicodemus visiting Jesus, the pastor said. He needed to talk. He was depressed.

Silas invited him in, and in tears the officer told him how he did, indeed, feel badly about forcibly restraining Christians from worship. Most upsetting, though, was that he feared for his job if he did not beat and otherwise harm Christians. He himself felt mistreated at the office; peers who were lesser officers than he looked

¹³ Jeff Sellers, "Cure for the IDOP Holiday Blues," *ChristianityToday.com* (11-16-05)

down their noses at him, advancing through the ranks by purchasing successively higher positions. The force was rife with such corruption.

Silas told him that God had a sterling plan for his life, and that he would care for him and guide him if he would only follow his son, Jesus. Before the night was over, the official prayed to receive Jesus. The next miracle was that the official advanced to a high position—without bribes. He advanced high enough to know when church raids were about to take place, so he could tip off Silas.

"He would tell us on Saturday that the police were coming on Sunday morning, so they'd come and find nobody there," the pastor said. "Then we'd meet for worship in the afternoon."

These miracles, the pastor concluded, could not have happened without the prayers of believers worldwide. Many other oppressed believers tell of receiving supernatural consolation in the midst of their ordeals. Suffering Christians are actually protected, comforted, and rescued through our prayers.

1. FOR SALVATION

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. – Acts 4:12

2. FOR PEACE

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:7

3. FOR GUIDANCE

Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. – Psalm 37:5

14. WHAT GOD SHARES

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁴A Christian musical group, Sixpence None the Richer, had the opportunity to perform on "The Late Show with David Letterman." Leigh Nash, the lead singer of Sixpence, was given the rare chance to be interviewed by Letterman after the band performed.

Letterman's first question was why they chose Sixpence None the Richer as their band's name.

This gave Nash the opportunity to share C.S. Lewis' story of a father giving his son a sixpence to buy him a present. "When the father received the present, he was none the richer because he originally gave the sixpence to his son. The analogy is to God who gives gifts for us to glorify him. He is not richer because of our presentation since he originally gave the gift."

Letterman responded, "That's a beautiful story. If people could stop being so stupid and actually hear that, and live by that sort of thing, then our world would be a better place. God bless you, thank you for playing, and thank you for being here."

1. THE GOSPEL FOR THE SINNER, TO BE RECEIVED

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. THE TRUTH IS FOR THE SAINT, TO BE DESIRED

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings. – 1 Peter 2:1

3. THE LIGHT IS FOR SERVANTS, TO FOLLOW

¹⁴ "The Industry of Christian Music," *Trinity Magazine* (Summer 2001)

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! – **Psalm 119:1-5**

1) The Gospel is for 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**

2) The Truth is for our Sanctification.

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

3) The Light is for our Edification.

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. – **Psalm 43:3**

15. MINE, ALL MINE

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁵Many years ago, my wife and I were having a marital "moral discourse," and I was becoming increasingly agitated. In my fury, I yelled at her and aimed my fist at a section of the dining room wall. Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit failed to guide my hand between the studs, as he usually had done, and instead I hit a stud right on. I broke a knuckle.

A deathly silence settled in the room. While I came from a family in which nothing got done until someone yelled, Barb came from a family in which yelling brought things to a standstill. She was not going to speak to me for weeks. As I writhed in physical pain, I also writhed in emotional pain. I was a moral failure of a husband.

...

As I tried awkwardly, with one hand, to sweep up the bits of sheetrock strewn on the floor, I felt a hand on my arm. I turned around, and it was Barb. She said something apologetic. I said something apologetic. And then she embraced me for a long time.

She had every right to pronounce a grand moral imperative, condemn my behavior, and distance herself from me. That surely would have taught me a lesson. Instead, she embraced the angry sinner, and rather than teaching me a lesson, she helped heal me.

[On Good Friday] we Christians celebrate a similar event, albeit one of cosmic proportions. In his life, Jesus so identified with the immoral, spent so much time with them, that the good people of his day mistook him for a sinner. On Good Friday Jesus continued the story. He did not distance himself from sin as much as embrace it in himself. And by this embrace, he made redemption possible.

1. MY SINS—A WEIGHTY BURDEN

¹⁵ Mark Galli, "The Good Friday Life," *Christianity Today* (4-4-07)

Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.
– **Isaiah 28:17**

2. MY SAVIOR—A MIGHTY DELIVERER

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. – **Luke 1:47**

3. MY SALVATION—A JOYFUL POSSESSION

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**

4. MY LORD—A PERSONAL CONFESSION

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 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 3:7-11

16. THREE FACTS ABOUT BELIEVERS

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁶A number of years ago, my husband and I had the wonderful opportunity to vacation in Europe. In about three and a half weeks we visited thirteen different nations. When we'd enter a country, we'd get our passports stamped, exchange currencies, learn a few key phrases, and then off we'd go to visit the natives. We'd wander through outdoor markets, peruse museums, and sample the cuisine. We'd exchange a few niceties with the locals, sit on the steps of cathedrals, watch the life of the town go by, take a picture or two, and purchase a little something to remind us of our time there, and then we were off. We had a wonderful vacation. Our hearts weren't changed in any significant ways by our little visits, but then they weren't meant to be. We were tourists.

It seems to me that what I've just described is very close to many people's understanding of the congregational life of the local church. On any given [weekend], many tourists can be found in church. They pop in for forty-five minutes or an hour, sing a chorus or two, and exchange niceties with the locals They sample some of the local cuisine, they might purchase a book or CD to remind them of their visit, and then they race to their cars to get to their favorite restaurant before the rush or home before the game. For many people, church is simply ... about being a tourist, and our land is filled with tourist-friendly churches.

But shouldn't it be much more than that? Shouldn't the church be a gathering place for true believers in Christ? Shouldn't it be filled with people who...

1. HAVE BEEN REDEEMED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. – 1 Peter 1:19

2. HAVE BEEN REGENERATED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

¹⁶ Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Because He Loves Me* (Crossway, 2010), pp. 173-174

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
– **John 3:6**

3. HAVE BEEN RENEWED BY THE WORD OF GOD

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. – **2 Corinthians 4:16**

- 1) The *First*, meets our need as slaves of sin
- 2) The *Second*, as sons of Adam
- 3) The *Third*, as children of God

17. “IN THE LORD”

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁷Christian comedian Ken Davis tells the following story about waiting for a "sign from God." A Christian gets on an empty city bus, walks to rear, and sits down. *Lord, he prays, if you want me to speak to someone about you, please give me a sign.* At the next stop another passenger boards the bus, goes all the way to the back, and sits down right next to the Christian. The passenger asks, "Do you know anything about Jesus?"

The Christian excuses himself for a moment and slowly bows his head and once again prays,
Lord, if you really want me to talk to this stranger, I need just one more sign. Please turn the bus driver into an armadillo.

Have you been praying for armadillos?

Have you been waiting for a sign from God you really hope never comes before you get serious about following him? What will it take for you to start doing the following, “in the Lord?”

1. TRUST IN THE LORD—SALVATION

Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. – Psalm 37:3

2. DELIGHT IN THE LORD—COMMUNION

Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. – Psalm 37:4

3. COMMIT THY WAY TO THE LORD—GUIDANCE

¹⁷ Clare De Graaf, *The 10-Second Rule* (Howard Books, 2013), page 51

Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. –
Psalm 37:5

4. REST IN THE LORD—PATIENCE

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. –
Psalm 37:7

5. WAIT ON THE LORD—HOPE

*Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land:
when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. –* **Psalm 37:34**

18. LEADERSHIP ROLES

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁸In 427, the Arian Vandals advanced into North Africa, where Augustine lived and ministered. Genserik, the Vandal King, specifically sought out Christian churches Refugees poured into Hippo, the city where Augustine was serving, and it wasn't long before Genserik had laid siege to Augustine's city.

The refugees not only brought heightened responsibilities for Augustine, they also brought disease. In the fifth century, so many people packed into so tight a space, it inevitably created a sick environment. At this point, Augustine had three choices: He could flee ..., he could stay holed up in his palace and ignore the needs of his people but perhaps preserve his own health, or he could get his hands dirty, and risk becoming ill himself.

Augustine didn't know how to be a bishop from afar, so he kept up his active schedule, being present with the people—and paid dearly for service. During the third month of the siege, in August of 430, Augustine developed a high fever from which he never recovered. This powerful man of God, whose books Christians still read ... gave his last hours ministering to the most basic needs of a frightened flock.

1. WOOING AND WINNING—THE EVANGELIST

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. – Proverbs 11:30

2. WATERING AND WATCHING—THE PASTOR

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. – Hebrews 13:17

3. WITNESSING TO AND WARNING—THE TEACHER

¹⁸ Gary Thomas, *Authentic Faith* (Zondervan, 2001), pp. 25-26

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. – Colossians 1:28

19. JESUS DOES IT ALL

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁹On a cold January night in downtown Minneapolis, a 22-year-old man stumbled into Maxwell's American Pub on Washington Street. At first the bartender thought the man was asking for a shot of something. Instead, the man was trying to say that he had been shot.

Actually, he had been shot six times, twice in the abdomen and twice in each leg, and the man's clothes were soaked in blood. Fortunately the man had come to the right place. Six off-duty nurses were just a few feet away. "Like a well-oiled triage team, they sprang into action The most serious wound involved his femoral artery, an injury that could cause the man to 'bleed out' if not dealt with quickly." The team of nurses used their expertise, applying pressure with towels and using the man's belt as a tourniquet. At the same time, other nurses talked to the man to keep him conscious. "They managed to slow the bleeding until paramedics arrived and placed a better tourniquet around the man's leg, wrapped him in a blanket and hoisted him onto a stretcher."

One of the nurses, 40-year-old Tim Carew said, "He would have bled out and died right in the bar if we didn't help him." Carew and the other off-duty nurses paid a price for their willingness to get involved. Carew said, "I had to bag up my clothes and throw them in the garbage. I was coated in blood." The unidentified man sure appreciated their efforts. Throughout the ordeal, he kept looking at the nurses and saying, "I love you guys."

Do we tell Jesus that we love Him for all He has done on our behalf?

1. HE DIED AS OUR RANSOM—DELIVERANCE

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. – 1 Timothy 2:6

2. HE ROSE AS OUR JUSTIFICATION—LIBERTY

¹⁹ David, Chanen, "Off duty at Mpls. bar, nurses save a gunshot victim who staggers in," *Minneapolis Tribune* (1-7-13)

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. –
Romans 4:25

3. HE LIVES AS OUR SAVIOR—OUR SECURITY

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**

4. HE COMES AS OUR GLORIFIER—OUR GOAL

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. – **2 Thessalonians 1:10**

20. GOD'S WORK ON YOUR BEHALF

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁰Theologians use a phrase to talk about how Christ-followers are already redeemed but will not experience the fullness of redemption until they live with God in heaven. The phrase is, "The already and the not yet." How does that work exactly?

A little girl in England, Josie Caven, was born profoundly deaf. Growing up, she often felt isolated because of her inability to hear, but that changed after receiving a cochlear implant during the Christmas season. At the age of 12, she heard clearly for the first time. The first sound she heard was the song "Jingle Bells" coming from the radio.

Was Josie's hearing restored? Yes—completely. Was she hearing well immediately? Not exactly. Her mother said, "She is having to learn what each new sound is and what it means. She will ask, 'Was that a door closing?' and has realized for the first time that the light in her room hums when it is switched on. She even knows what her name sounds like now, because before she could not hear the soft 'S' sound in the middle of the word. Seeing her face light up as she hears everything around her is all I could have wished for this Christmas."

Josie's hearing was restored, but that restoration introduced her to the daily adventure of learning to distinguish each new sound in the hearing world. It's the already, and the not yet.

1. COMMENCED AT REGENERATION

*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. – **Philippians 1:6***

2. CONTINUED THROUGHOUT LIFE

²⁰ "Christmas Carols Music to the Ears of Deaf Girl," Yorkshireposttoday.com

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. – Philippians 2:12-13

3. COMPLETED AT GLORIFICATION

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. – Philippians 3:21

21. BE A BEREAN

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. – Acts 17:10-13

ILLUSTRATION:

²¹A good translation or translator really does matter. Professional translator Nataly Kelly tells the following story about what journalists have called the "\$70 million word."

In 1980, 18-year-old Willie Ramirez was admitted to a Florida hospital in a comatose state. His friends and family tried to describe his condition to the paramedics and doctors who treated him, but Willie's family only spoke Spanish. They told the hospital staff that Willie was *intoxicado*. The word is what translators call a "false friend"—it doesn't mean what you'd assume it means. In Spanish, *intoxicado* refers to a state of poisoning, usually from ingesting something toxic to the system. Ramirez's family was trying to say that Willie was suffering from food poisoning—literally, "he is poisoned."

But when the doctors grabbed a hospital staff person to translate for the Ramirez family, the staff worker said that Willie was "intoxicated." The doctors treated him as if we were suffering from an intentional drug overdose. Willie was misdiagnosed and, because of the wrong course of treatment, became a quadriplegic. The hospital finally settled in court with the Ramirez family for \$71 million.

When it comes to God's Word, it is even more important that we understand it for what it says and what it means. It is a life or death issue. Let's be like the Bereans!

²¹ Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetsch, *Found in Translation* (Perigee Trade, 2012), pp. 3-5

1. THE WORD PREACHED BY PAUL—IN FAITHFULNESS

2. THE WORD READILY RECEIVED—IN CONFIDENCE

3. THE WORD DAILY SEARCHED—FOR CONFIRMATION

22. JESUS AND ME

ILLUSTRATION:

²²Imagine you come into contact with a man who is innocent, but who is being hunted down by secret agents or by the government or by some other powerful group. He reaches out to you for help. If you don't help him, he will probably die, but if you ally with him, you—who were perfectly safe and secure—will be in mortal danger. This is the stuff that movie plots are made of. Again, it's him or you. He will experience increased safety and security through your involvement, but only because you are willing to enter into his insecurity and vulnerability.

Consider parenting. Children come into the world in a condition of complete dependence. They cannot operate as self-sufficient, independent agents unless their parents give up much of their own independence and freedom for years. If you don't allow your children to hinder your freedom in work and play at all, and if you only get to your children when it doesn't inconvenience you, your children will grow up physically only. In all sorts of other ways they will remain emotionally needy, troubled, and overdependent. The choice is clear. You can either sacrifice your freedom or theirs. It's them or you. To love your child well, you must decrease that they may increase. You must be willing to enter into the dependency they have so eventually they can experience the freedom and independence you have.

All life-changing love toward people with serious needs is a substitutional sacrifice. If you become personally involved with them, in some way, their weaknesses flow toward you as your strengths flow toward them

How can God be a God of love if he does not become personally involved in suffering the same violence, oppression, grief, weakness, and pain that we experience? The answer to that question is twofold: First, God can't. Second, only one major religion even claims that God does.

1. JESUS—THE SAVIOR—FOR ME

²² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 201–202

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. – Matthew 1:21

2. CHRIST—THE ANOINTED—IN ME

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. – Galatians 2:20

3. LORD—THE OWNER—OVER ME

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. – John 13:13-14

23. ARE YOU AN UN?

ILLUSTRATION:

²³In 1948 in Europe I met for three days with a group of 25 German fellows. I talked to them every evening for three hours, laying before them the Great Commission and the idea that not only did Germany need to hear the gospel, but that Germans themselves needed to obey the Great Commission by sending out missionaries.

Every once in a while a hand would go up. One of them said, "But Mr. Trotman, you don't understand. Some of us right in this room don't even own an Old Testament. We only have a New Testament." But I pointed out, "When Jesus Christ gave these commands, they didn't have even a New Testament."

Later another spoke up. "But Mr. Trotman, we have few good evangelical books in this country like you have in America." I asked, "How many books did the disciples have?"

Scattered through our nine hours together were other protests: "In America you have money." "You have automobiles; we have bicycles." "In America you can hear the gospel any day." Every excuse was brought up. Each time I replied, "But the 12 apostles didn't have that either, and Jesus sent them out."

Finally, near the end, one fellow who was a little older than the rest, and who had a bitter expression on his face, rose and said, "Mr. Trotman, you in America have never had an occupation force in your land. You don't know what it is to have soldiers of another country roaming your streets. Our souls are not our own." I responded by reminding him of the Roman soldiers who occupied Palestine at the time Jesus Christ and his disciples lived.

Then it dawned on me that when Christ sent out his men, they were in a situation so bad that there could never be a worse one: no printing presses, no automobiles, no radios or television, no telephones, no church buildings.

²³ Dawson Trotman, "The Need of the Hour," *Discipleship Journal* (Jan/Feb 1982)

He left them with nothing except a job to do. But with it he said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore."

1. GOD'S LOVE IS TO THE UNLOVELY

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. – 1 John 4:10

2. CHRIST'S DEATH IS FOR THE UNGODLY

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. – Romans 5:6

3. SALVATION IS FOR THE UNDESERVING

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

- 1) No call for any Virtue.
- 2) No need for any Reform.
- 3) No place for any Claim.

24. GOD'S LAMB

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁴If you go over to Scotland, or anywhere there are lots of sheep, sooner or later you're going to see a very unusual sight. You'll see a little lamb running around the field, and you'll notice this lamb has what looks like an extra fleece tied around its back. In fact, you'll see there are little holes in the fleece for its four legs and usually a hole for its head. If you see a little lamb running around like that, that usually means its mother has died.

And without the protection and nourishment of a mother, any orphaned lamb will die. If you take the orphaned lamb and try to introduce it to another mother, the new mother will butt it away. She won't recognize the lamb's scent and will know the new baby is not one of her own lambs.

But thankfully, most flocks are large enough that there is a ewe that has recently lost a lamb. The shepherd will skin the dead lamb and make its fleece into a covering for the orphaned lamb, then he'll take the orphaned lamb to the mother whose baby just died. Now, when she sniffs the orphaned lamb, she will smell the fleece of her own lamb. Instead of butting the lamb away, she will accept it as one of her own.

In a similar way, we have become acceptable to God by being clothed with Christ.

1. A LAMB DEMANDED

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? – Genesis 22:7

2. A LAMB PROVIDED

²⁴ From Peter Grant's sermon, "In What Way Is Jesus Christ Different?"

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. – Genesis 22:8

3. THE LAMB MANIFESTED

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 1:29

4. THE LAMB SACRIFICED

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. – 1 Peter 1:19

5. THE LAMB GLORIFIED

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. – Revelation 5:6

25. WHAT KIND OF MAN IS JESUS?

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁵Many treatments of Jesus get bogged down in a discussion of the possibility of miracles; properly speaking, that is a philosophical rather than a historical or even a theological problem. ... [A]ll that need be noted is that ancient Christian, Jewish and pagan sources all agreed that Jesus did extraordinary things not easily explained by human means. While Jesus' disciples pointed to the Spirit of God as the source of His power, Jewish and pagan adversaries spoke of demonic or magical forces. It never occurred to any of the ancient polemicists to claim that nothing happened.

1. A MAN APPROVED OF GOD—IN LIFE

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. – Acts 2:22

2. A MAN OF SORROWS—IN DEATH

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. – Isaiah 53:3

3. A MAN GLORIFIED—IN HEAVEN

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. – Acts 7:55

²⁵ John P. Meier in the *New York Times Book Review* (Dec. 21, 1986). *Christianity Today*, Vol. 31, no. 16.

26. FULFILL YOUR CALLING

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁶Before Bill Curry was an ESPN analyst, he was a college football coach, and before that he was a lineman in the National Football League. Today he sports two Super Bowl rings. But in the spring of 1965, it was unclear whether he'd ever wear an NFL uniform. He had been drafted in the 20th round by the Green Bay Packers of the Vince Lombardi era. He was convinced he would never make the team unless he gave himself an edge. So, a few months before the tryouts, Curry began lifting weights—and taking steroids. They worked. He went from 220 to 240 pounds in just a few weeks.

When his father, a weightlifter himself, came to visit him, Curry excitedly told his dad about his accelerated improvement. "It's just incredible what these pills can do, Dad!"

His father asked, "Can I see the bottle?" He looked over the pills, walked to the bathroom, and began pouring them down the toilet. The younger Curry panicked, "What are you doing?"

His father then sat him down and warned him about steroids, how they would eventually destroy his body. Curry was shaken, but convinced, and he never took steroids again. Today he simply says, "I'm so glad I had a father who loved me like that."

1. CALLED OUT OF DARKNESS

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. – 1 Peter 2:9

2. CALLED SAINTS

²⁶ Mark Galli, *Jesus Mean and Wild* (Baker, 2006), p. 98-99

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 1:7

3. CALLED SONS OF GOD

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. – 1 John 3:1

4. CALLED BY GRACE

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace. – Galatians 1:15

5. CALLED TO GLORY

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. – 1 Peter 5:4

6. CALLED UNTO FELLOWSHIP

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. – 1 Corinthians 1:9

7. CALLED INTO LIBERTY

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. – Galatians 5:13

27. LOVE IN THREE PERSONS

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁷Skye Jethani relates a story about holding a series of meetings with college-aged students. The topics ranged across the spectrum—doctrine, hell, dating—but each conversation had three rules: be honest, be gracious, and be present. On one night the students wanted to discuss habitual sins. Although they struggled with a variety of sinful behaviors, they all agreed on one thing: God was extremely disappointed with them. One student said, "My parents were students at a Christian college in the early '90s when a revival broke out They were on fire for God. And here I am consumed by sin day after day." Often through tears, many other students shared similar stories about how they believed God must be disappointed with them.

After listening to their stories, Jethani asked, "How many of you were raised in a Christian home?" They all raised their hands. "How many of you grew up in a Bible-centered church?" All hands stayed up. Shaking his head in disbelief, Jethani said, "You've all spent eighteen or twenty years in the church. You've been taught the Bible from the time you could crawl, and you attend Christian colleges, but not one of you gave the right answer. Not one of you said that in the midst of your sin God still loves you."

Jethani concluded: "I did not blame the students for their failure. Somewhere in their spiritual formation they were taught, either explicitly or implicitly, that what mattered was not God's love for them, but how much they could accomplish *for* him.

1. THE LOVE OF GOD

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8

2. THE LOVE OF CHRIST

²⁷ Skye Jethani, *With* (Thomas H. Nelson, 2011), pp. 80-82

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? – Romans 8:35

3. THE LOVE OF THE SPIRIT

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me. –

Romans 15:30

28. GOD'S WORD CHANGES LIVES

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁸I remember flying into Midway Airport in Chicago during a blizzard. An engineer from India was sitting next to me. As we talked, I found out he was planning to take a bus all the way to O'Hare Airport and then have his pregnant wife drive from a distant suburb with his two young children to pick him up.

"Look, I have a car at Midway," I told him. "How about if I give you a lift home?"

He was grateful, and during our drive he asked why I had been willing to go out of my way for him. I tried to explain: "Has anybody ever done something so kind for you that it makes you want to pass a kindness along to someone else?"

He nodded slightly.

"Well, Jesus Christ has done something incredibly kind for me," I said.

As we talked, he began to understand that God's outpouring of grace had motivated me to help him. When we arrived at his house, he thanked me and said, "I'm going to have to do some thinking about all of this."

There is no doubt in my mind: My words about Jesus registered with him because he experienced the love of Jesus through my practical deed of giving him a ride through the storm.

1. THE WORD RECEIVED—IN FAITH

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. – 1 Thessalonians 1:6

2. THE WORD OBEYED—IN PRACTICE

²⁸ Lee Stroebel, *Men of Integrity, "Why Do You Care?"* (May/June 2010)

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. – 1 Thessalonians 2:13

3. THE WORD SOUNDED FORTH—IN TESTIMONY

For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. – 1 Thessalonians 1:8

- 1) The Message of Reconciliation.
- 2) The Means of Sanctification.
- 3) The Mission of Evangelization.

29. WHAT HAPPENED TO MY SIN?

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁹In December of 2005, 19-year-old Jonathan Baldino was caught while attempting to buy electronic merchandise from retail stores at extreme discounts. After downloading a program from the Internet, police say that Baldino printed out barcode labels for a \$24.99 CD Player, and then attached them to more advanced music systems retailing for \$249.99. He was eventually caught, however, when a Target security guard noticed him paying \$4.99 for an iPod worth \$149.99.

After his arrest, Baldino pleaded with police for his release. In a written statement, he said: "Please let me go, for I am terribly sorry! I'm only a kid, help me out ... I just want to go home! I did this not knowing the serious penalty that lies behind it. Please!"

His plea was ignored by police, who charged him with a class 5 felony for forgery and two counts of misdemeanor theft.

We should be grateful that when we sincerely appeal to God, He takes away all of our sins.

1. CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. – 1 Corinthians 15:3

2. CHRIST 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

3. CHRIST BARE OUR SINS

²⁹ "Cops Crack Holiday Barcode Caper," FoxNews.com (12-6-05)

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. – 1 Peter 2:24

4. CHRIST WASHED US FROM OUR SINS

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. – Revelation 1:5

30. GOD CARES FOR US LIKE...

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁰Time magazine carried an interesting story about former President George Herbert Walker Bush. It described a trip he took back to the South Pacific. During World War II, Bush had been a bomber pilot, and was shot down by Japanese antiaircraft fire. The article detailed Bush's return to the very spot where he was rescued from his downed aircraft.

During his return visit, Bush met with a Japanese gentleman who claimed to have witnessed Bush's rescue back in 1944. The man related that as he and others were watching the rescue take place, one of the man's friends remarked, "Surely America will win the war if they care so much for the life of one pilot."

How much more, does God care for each one of us?

1. A MOTHER COMFORTS

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. – Isaiah 66:13

2. A FATHER PITIES

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. – Psalm 103:13

3. A NURSE CHERISHES

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. – 1 Thessalonians 2:7

4. A SHEPHERD SEEKS

³⁰ Canadian Edition, Time Magazine (11-23-02)

As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. – Ezekiel 34:12

5. A HEN GATHERS

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! – Matthew 23:37

6. AN EAGLE FLUTTERS

As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings. – Deuteronomy 32:11

7. A BRIDEGROOM REJOICES

For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. – Isaiah 62:5

31. LIVE AN ABOUNDING LIFE

ILLUSTRATION:

³¹For most of my life, my father and I have struggled to connect with each other. We are very different men, and our differences have grown during the passage of the years. Nevertheless, there were occasional exceptions to this distancing, and I think I remember almost every one of them. They were the events when, for a short while, there was—between him and me—a sense of sublime closeness.

One of the more memorable of those moments came when I was a second grader at P.S. (Public School) 33 in New York. On a spring day shortly before lunch hour, my father came to the door of my classroom. After a brief word with the teacher he gestured for me to join him. "Son," he said, "clean off your desk and come with me." Soon after, we were walking down the hallway and out the front door of the school.

Only when we reached the privacy of his car did my father speak again and disclose his real purpose in taking me out of school. "I thought you'd like to go to the ball game with me today," he said. Sixty years later I can still see his mischievous grin as he disclosed this wonderful plan.

Muse on this! You're seven or eight years old. It's the middle of a school day, and your father springs you from school to see a baseball game.

Ninety or so minutes later, my father and I, hotdogs and Crackerjacks in hand, were in our seats along the third-base line at old Ebbits Field in Brooklyn where Jackie Robinson, just feet away, was warming up to play one of his first games as a Brooklyn Dodger. Does this smell like Heaven?

Somewhere in the early innings of the game, a batter, the New York Giants' Johnny Mize, hit a towering foul ball. An instant replay deep in my memory recalls the trajectory of that ball going almost straight up, losing its momentum and beginning its descent ... right over my seat. Down and down and down it came.

³¹ Gordon MacDonald, "Dodger Heaven," *LeadershipJournal.net* (6-4-07)

Then, when it was close enough for me to see the stitching on the ball, a hand (my father's hand!) reached out and snatched it from the air.

In one of my young life's über-glorious experiences, my father handed the ball to me. Given my age, the keys to a brand new Mustang convertible could not have been a better gift. I was filled with abounding love and admiration for him.

"Where is the Life we have lost in living?" T. S. Eliot once asked. It is quite possible that Eliot had far more ponderous notions in mind when he wrote those words that contrasted Life and living. But for me anyway, that afternoon spent with my father at Ebbits Field fell distinctly into the Living category. ...

These are not only experiences that can be classified as Living; they are a foretaste, I think, of Heaven.

1. ABOUND IN FAITH

Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. – 2 Corinthians 8:7

2. ABOUND IN HOPE

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. – Romans 15:13

3. ABOUND IN LOVE

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment. – Philippians 1:9

4. ABOUND IN GOOD WORKS

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

32. NONE BUT CHRIST

ILLUSTRATION:

³²The central assumption of many in the interfaith dialogue business has been that at their core, all religious people—Hindus and Buddhists, Muslims and Jews, Christians and Animists—are striving for the same thing, and are just using different words and concepts to get there But how true is that assumption?

Let's take a closer look at the four world religions that represent about three-quarters of the global population And let's start with the most basic belief in each religion: the idea of God. Within the various streams of Hindu thought alone, there are multiple answers to the question, "Who or what is god?" Hindus can believe that there is one god, 330 million gods, or no god at all. The Vedas, the most ancient of Hindu scriptures, which are accepted by most Hindus as normative, teach that atman is Brahman, or "the soul is god," meaning that god is in each of us and each of us is part of god. The common greeting, Namaste, which means, roughly, "The god within me recognizes and greets the god within you," reflects this belief.

In his apologetic for the Buddhist faith, Ven S. Dhammika, the author of several popular books on Buddhism, writes, "Do Buddhists believe in god? No, we do not. There are several reasons for this. The Buddha, like modern sociologists and psychologists, believed that religious ideas and especially the god idea have their origin in fear. The Buddha says, 'Gripped by fear, men go to the sacred mountains, sacred groves, sacred trees and shrines.'" So, for most orthodox Buddhists (in the Theravada tradition), the concept of a personal supreme being is at best unimportant, at worst an oppressive superstition.

What about Islam? In the Qur'an, sura 112 ayat 1-4, we read, "Say: He is Allah, the One and Only. Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. He begets not, nor is he begotten. And there is none like unto him." This passage in a primer for Muslim children puts it simply: "Allah is absolute, and free from all defects and has no partner. He exists

³² Ed Stetzer, "Proselytizing in a Multi-Faith World: Why mutual respect and tolerance require us to witness for Christ," *Christianity Today* (April, 2011)

from eternity and shall remain eternal. All are dependent on him, but he is independent of all. He is father to none, nor has he any son."

In contrast, Christians believe that there is one God who is creator of the world. He is a personal God, a conscious, free, and righteous being. And he is not only a personal God but a God of providence who is involved in the day-to-day affairs of creation. He is a righteous God who expects ethical behavior from each of us. He expects his followers to live out their belief by loving him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and by loving their neighbors as themselves. God, while one in essence, also reveals himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So according to the four largest world religions, God is one with creation and takes on millions of forms, God may or may not exist, God is one and absolute, and God is one but exists in three persons.

If we cannot agree on even the basic definition of God or his character, how can we say that all the major religions are on the same path toward the truth about God?

1. NO OTHER NAME—FOR SALVATION

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. – Acts 4:12

2. NO OTHER RIGHTEOUSNESS—FOR ACCEPTANCE

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

3. NO OTHER LORD—FOR SUBMISSION

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. – 1 Corinthians 8:6

33. GO TO JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

³³In his love for us Jesus acts like a hound-dog, intense and focused as he pursues the hunt. That image comes from Francis Thompson, a 19th century British poet who wrote "The Hound of Heaven." Although Thompson was a follower of Christ, he struggled with poverty, poor health, and an addiction to opium (which in those days was sold as an "over-the-counter" medication).

In the depths of his despair, Thompson described his flight from God: "I fled him, down the nights and down the days. I hid from him, and under running laughter. I sped ... from those strong feet that followed, followed after [me]."

But Thompson also knew the unrelenting love of Jesus, the hound of heaven. In the poem Jesus pursues Thompson with "unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, and majestic instancy [or urgency]." He hears the feet of Jesus beating after him as Jesus calls, "All things betray those who betray me."

In a recent biography of John Stott, Stott refers to Thompson's poem. According to Stott, he owes his faith in Christ not to his parents or teachers or even his own decision, but to Jesus, "the hound of heaven." Stott writes:

[My faith is] due to Jesus Christ himself, who pursued me relentlessly even when I was running away from him in order to go my own way. And if it were not for the gracious pursuit of the hound of heaven I would today be on the scrap-heap of wasted and discarded lives.

1. FOR SALVATION

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. – Luke 15:1

2. FOR TEACHING

³³ Roger Steer, *Basic Christian: The Inside Story of John Stott* (IVP Books, 2009), pp. 262-263

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. – Mark 6:30

3. FOR WORSHIP

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. – Hebrews 13:13

4. FOR FELLOWSHIP

And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. – Matthew 13:2

5. FOR GATHERING

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him. – 2 Thessalonians 2:1

34. FELLOWSHIP IS MORE THAN A MEAL

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁴I recently heard from a friend who visited a barrio in São Paulo, Brazil. He grew nervous as he noticed the foot soldiers of drug lords standing guard holding automatic weapons. They were glowering at him, a gringo invading their turf. "Then the chief drug lord of that neighborhood noticed my T-shirt, which had the logo of a local Pentecostal church. He broke out in a big smile: 'O, evangelicos!' he called out, giving us hugs. Over the years, that church had cared for the children of the barrio, and now we were joyfully welcomed."

1. FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. – 1 John 1:1-3

2. FELLOWSHIP IN LIGHT

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. – 1 John 1:7

3. FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be

³⁴ Philip Yancey, "O, Evangelicos!" *Christianity Today* magazine (November 2009)

perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. – 1 Corinthians 1:10

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. – Acts 2:42

4. FELLOWSHIP IN SERVICE

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. – 1 Corinthians 3:9

Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) – Colossians 4:10

35. GOD'S A SEEKER TOO

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁵Before I decided to live for Christ, I'd party with friends. As a guy who wanted to be a "cool and popular jock," I thought it was the thing to do. I'd drink, act stupid, and end up making a fool of myself. But I didn't care, because I was popular and one of my school's top athletes. As for God, I thought he was for weak people. If Christians tried to tell me about Jesus, I'd make fun of them. I thought Christians who always talked about God were crazy. Then something happened my sophomore year that changed everything.

My little sister Ashley, who was a freshman at the time, was riding in a car driven by one of her friends. Worried about getting home late, Ashley's friend started speeding. The car hit a rough railroad track and flipped over. Ashley soon lay in a hospital on life support, in a coma, very close to death.

At first, I was angry with God for what happened to my sister. I shouted to heaven, "If you are who you say you are, how could you let this happen?!" As angry as I was at God, I began to think about how much I really loved my family. It wasn't like I hadn't cared about them before, but all the pain—all those trips to the hospital and all those times we cried together—just began to bring us much closer together. My family suddenly seemed more important than anything else in the whole world.

Even though my sister managed to survive, we were told her brain injury was so severe she'd probably never walk or talk again. But in the months that followed the accident, I helped coach her along as she struggled to stand, and then, eventually, take a few tiny steps. I also listened in amazement as she began to put words together and form sentences. Slowly, very slowly, she was getting better. And slowly, very slowly, I was starting to change.

Along with realizing how important my family was to me, I also thought a lot about God and his place in everything that had happened. Instead of blaming him for it all, I began to thank him for my sister's life and for my whole family. I also

³⁵ *Dustin Armstrong, "My Faith Is My Witness," Ignite Your Faith (June/July 2006), p. 8*

began to see that all those things I'd lived for—like partying and acceptance by the popular crowd—weren't really important. Even sports no longer seemed as important as they used to.

Instead, I started going to youth group and really enjoying it. I liked having conversations with my friends about God and Christianity. I wanted to know as much as I could about following God. During my junior year, I committed my life to Christ.

1. CHRIST SEEKING SINNERS

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. – **Luke 19:10**

2. THE FATHER SEEKING WORSHIPERS

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**

36. APOLLOS – A GREAT EXAMPLE

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. – Acts 18:24-26

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁶What the Roman emperor Claudius meant for evil turned out for good for Priscilla and Aquila. They were living in Rome in 49 when Claudius expelled all the Jews because of a riot over a certain "Chrestus," probably an allusion to Jewish arguments over Christ. Jewish Christians like Priscilla and Aquila were also forced to leave.

So the couple moved to Corinth, where they set up their tentmaking business. When Paul arrived, Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to him and invited him to work with them. The trio later worked and ministered together in Ephesus, which may be where Priscilla and Aquila "risked their necks" for Paul, possibly when he "fought with beasts at Ephesus." Priscilla is sometimes pictured with two lions who refuse to attack her, lending credence to this tradition.

When Claudius died in 55, Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome and again hosted a church in their home, to whom Paul sent greetings in his letter to the Romans. A tradition of the sixth century claims that the Roman church "Prisca" on the Aventine Hill stands over their original house-church.

1. "AN ELOQUENT MAN"

2. "MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES"

³⁶ "Paul and His Times," *Christian History*, no. 47.

3. "INSTRUCTED IN THE WAY OF THE LORD"

4. "FERVENT IN SPIRIT"

37. HOW IS YOUR HEART?

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁷Imagine you're out for a hike on a beautiful spring day and you come to a creek. But there's something wrong with this picture. You notice that someone has dumped trash into the stream—an ugly sight. Judging by some of the empty soda cans, the trash has been there awhile. And there is an ugly film on top of the water. You can't just leave the scene as you found it, because it would bother your conscience. So you stoop down and begin gathering the trash.

It actually takes several hours before you can begin to see a difference; it's amazing how much junk is there. You sit back, rest for a moment, and realize you'll have to keep returning each day until the site is truly clean. But when you come back the next day, it's as if your work has been undone.

In fact there's more trash than before. Somehow the garbage bred overnight. You think about the unlikelihood of someone coming to this very spot to dump their garbage in the few hours while you were away, and you realize that something smells fishy—so to speak. So you begin to follow the creek upstream.

Sure enough, you come to a garbage dump that has been there for years. It's emptying into the passing creek. Your cleaning job only opened up a gap for more stuff to settle. You could go and clean every day If you want your creek to be clean, that means going directly to the source and dealing with what's there.

Possible Preaching Angles: According to the Bible, your heart is the source from which your life flows. Unfortunately, we spend great amounts of time, money, and energy—even in the church—doing trash removal "downstream." But real transformation begins when we travel upstream to the source of our heart. Our real battles take place in our heart.

1. A TRUE HEART—DRAWS NEAR TO GOD

³⁷ Kyle Idleman, *Gods at War* (Zondervan, 2013)

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. – Hebrews 10:22

2. AN EVIL HEART—DEPARTS FROM GOD

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. – Hebrews 3:12

38. LIVING OUT THE 4 Ls OF JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁸Ruben Pavon was driving down the road in Derry, New Hampshire when a store caught his eye. It was a large building with lots of stuff out front just sitting on the sidewalk. But it was the name on the building that got Ruben into trouble: Finders Keepers.

Ruben was caught on surveillance video carrying off a grill from out in front of the store. But Ruben actually confessed to taking other things the security camera didn't catch—a DVD player, for one. But can taking things really be wrong if the store is named Finders Keepers?

The store's owner, Laura Barker, said, "I don't know of any stores where there's free stuff. It would be nice if there were. I'd be there on a regular basis myself." But in his defense, Ruben claimed that the store's sign, "Finders Keepers," created specific expectations in his mind. That's why later on he said, "I thought it was there for the taking. The sign did say 'Finders Keepers.' So I took that DVD player, took it home. A couple of weeks later, the stuff is still there on the porch, so I'm thinking to myself, 'Finders Keepers.' They probably just put stuff out there for people to take."

Ruben eventually returned all of the merchandise that he "found" in front of the store, but maybe Laura Barker should consider a new name for her store.

Thankfully Jesus presents Himself to us with clarity. There can be no mistaking who He is, what He came for, and what our response to Him should be.

1. LOOKING UNTO JESUS—OUR EXAMPLE

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:2

³⁸ WCVB.com, "Man accused of stealing says he took the store's sign literally" (5-2-13)

2. LEARNING OF JESUS—OUR TEACHER

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

3. LEANING ON JESUS—OUR STRENGTH

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. LOOKING FOR JESUS—OUR HOPE

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. – **Philippians 1:20**

39. CHRIST GIVES ALL

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁹In November 1964, anarchy broke out in the Belgian Congo. Assemblies of God missionary J. W. Tucker knew he was at risk, but he stayed where God had placed him. One day, a mob attacked and killed him with sticks, clubs, fists, and broken bottles. They took his body, threw it in the back of a truck, drove a good distance, and then tossed his corpse to the crocodiles in the Bomokande River in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

J. W. Tucker had risked everything, yet he seemingly had nothing to show for it. But 30 years later, John Weidman, a close friend of Tucker's, was in the country (by then known as Zaire) and learned how God used that missionary's sacrifice.

The Bomokande River flows through the middle of the Mangbeto tribe, a people virtually without the gospel. During a time of civil war, the Mangbeto king became distressed with the violence and appealed to the central government in Kinshasa for help. The central government responded by sending a man called the Brigadier, a well-known policeman of strong stature and reputation who came from the region of Isiro. J. W. Tucker had won the Brigadier to the Lord just two months before he was killed.

The Brigadier determined to reach the Mangbetos with the gospel, the only way to peace. Being a relatively new Christian, he did his best to witness, but he was met with no response. Then one day he heard of a Mangbeto tradition that said: "If the blood of any man flows in the Bomokande River, you must listen to his message." This saying had been with the Mangbetos from time immemorial.

The Brigadier called for the king and all the village elders. They gathered in full assembly to hear his address. "Some time ago a man was killed, and his body was thrown into your Bomokande River," the Brigadier began. "The crocodiles in this river ate him up. His blood flowed in your river. But before he died, he left me a message.

³⁹ *George O. Wood, general secretary of the Assemblies of God*

"This message concerns God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to this world to save people who were sinners. He died for the sins of the world; He died for my sins. I received this message, and it changed my life." As the Brigadier preached, the Spirit of God descended and people began to fall on their knees and cry out to the Lord. Many were converted.

Since that day, thousands of Mangbetos have come to Christ and dozens of Assemblies of God churches have opened as a result of the message from the man whose blood flowed in the Bomokande River.

1. HE GAVE HIS LIFE

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. – John 10:11-15

2. HE GAVE HIMSELF

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. – Galatians 2:20

3. HE GIVES HIS SPIRIT

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. – 1 John 3:24

4. HE GAVE HIS WORDS

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. – John 17:8

5. HE GIVES HIS PEACE

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. – John 14:27

6. HE GAVE HIS EXAMPLE

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. – John 13:15

7. HE GIVES HIS GLORY

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. – John 17:22

40. GRATITUDE EARNED

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. – Colossians 1:12-13

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁰The Nigerian city of Jos sits on Africa's great fault line between the Muslim north and Christian, and thus has faced terrible things in recent years. A Nigerian Baptist church was attacked by Muslim extremists who burnt the church building and the house of the church's leader, Pastor Sunday Gomna. On the second Sunday after the violent outbreak, when the people of that Baptist church returned for worship, they gathered in a little mud wall community center about one kilometer from the burnt church.

Pastor Gomna stood up and offered some beautiful words of gratitude. He said, 'First, I am grateful that no one in my church killed anyone.' Apparently, during the chaos of the attacks, Pastor Sunday had gone around the community and some of the Muslim people said, "Pastor, thank you for the way you taught your people. 'Your people helped to protect us.'" So Pastor Sunday was proud that his people did not kill any Muslims.

"Second," he said, "I am grateful that they did not burn my church." Everyone looked at Pastor Sunday with disbelief. After all, everyone was meeting in a small, uncomfortable Mud hut had been burnt to the ground. But Pastor Sunday continued: "Inasmuch as no church member died during this crisis, they did not burn our church. They only burned *the building*. We can rebuild the building but we could not bring back to life any of our members. So I am grateful that they did not burn my church."

⁴⁰ Mark Meynell, "What to say when they burn down your house and church," *Quearentia* blog (10-21-13); David Smith, *The Kindness of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2013)

He continued, "Third, I am grateful that they burned my house as well. If they had burned your house and not my house, how would I have known how to serve you as pastor? However, because they burned my house and all my possessions, I know what you are experiencing and I will be able to be a better pastor to you. So I am grateful that they burned my house as well."

1. WHO DELIVERED (v. 13)—A GREAT DELIVERANCE

2. WHO TRANSLATED (v. 13)—A MIGHTY TRANSITION

3. WHO MADE MEET (v. 12)—A FULL QUALIFICATION

41. AN OBEDIENT LIFE

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴¹The city of Cairo has its own unique version of poverty called Garbage City Each morning at dawn some seven thousand garbage collectors on horse-carts leave for Cairo, where they collect the garbage left behind by the city's seven million citizens. After their day's work they return to Garbage City, bringing the trash back to their homes, sorting out what's useful In Muslim countries there are certain religious restrictions on sifting through refuse, so the inhabitants of Garbage City are either nonreligious or from some Christian heritage These are the poorest of the poor—outcasts among outcasts.

In 1972, a young Egyptian businessman lost his wristwatch, valued at roughly \$11,000. As you can imagine, it would have been unthinkable to have a valuable timepiece returned by a member of Garbage City. Yet an old garbage man dressed in rags, found the man's name on the watch and returned it, saying, "My Christ told me to be honest until death."

Because of the garbage man's act of obedience, the Egyptian businessman later told a reporter, "I didn't know Christ at the time, but I told the garbage man that I saw Christ in him. I told him, 'Because of what you have done and your great example, I will worship the Christ you are worshiping.'"

The businessman, true to his word, studied the Bible and grew in his faith. Soon he and his wife began ministering to Egypt's physically and spiritually poor. In 1978, he was ordained by the Coptic Orthodox Church and now leads a church that meets outside Garbage City.

1. THE PROOF OF CONVERSION

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? –

Romans 6:16

⁴¹ Rick James, *A Million Ways to Die* (David C. Cook, 2010), pp. 14-15

2. THE RECOGNITION OF GOD

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. – Acts 5:29

3. THE MARK OF CHILDREN

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. – 1 Peter 1:14

4. THE MANIFESTATION OF LOVE

If ye love me, keep my commandments. – John 14:15

42. WHAT SHOULD I SACRIFICE?

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴²Certain ants in South and Central American rainforests will lie down in the potholes that stand between their army and food. Their bodies form a makeshift bridge, allowing other ants—sometimes numbering over 200,000—to make better time in getting to the source of nourishment.

This pattern in the life of ants was discovered through research done at England's University of Bristol. Researchers took a wooden plank and drilled different sized holes in it, simulating a narrow trail. Ants would find holes equal to their size and lay down inside, letting others walk safely over them. When the raiding party accomplished its mission and was returning to its nest, the faithful few climbed out of their holes and followed the raiders home.

1. MY PRAISE

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. – Hebrews 13:15

2. MY BODY

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

3. MY SERVICE

Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. – Philippians 2:17

⁴² Associated Press, "Ants form living pothole plugs to make super highways," University of Bristol Press Release (5-27-07)

4. MY MEANS

*But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. – **Philippians 4:18***

43. HOW TO APPROACH LIFE

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

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴³While staying alone in her convent, an 85-year-old Catholic nun got trapped inside a broken elevator for four nights and three days. She tried pushing the inside elevator door, but the electricity went off. She had her cell phone with her, but there wasn't a signal. Fortunately, she had carried a jar of water, some celery sticks, and a few cough drops into the elevator.

At first she said to herself, *This can't happen!* But then she decided to turn her elevator into a personal prayer retreat. "It was either panic or pray," she later told an interviewer for CNN. She started viewing the experience as a "gift." "I believe that God's presence was my strength and my joy—really," she said. "I felt God's presence almost immediately. I felt like he provided the opportunity for a closer relationship."

1. BE CAREFUL FOR NOTHING—NO BURDENS

2. BE PRAYERFUL FOR EVERYTHING—NO RESERVES

3. BE THANKFUL FOR ALL—NO MURMURS

⁴³ Jenny Wilson, "Nun Stuck in Elevator Survives Four Nights on Celery Sticks, Water and Cough Drops," *Time.com* (4-28-11)

44. LET IT BE

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁴In our lives in the world, the temptation is always to go where the world takes us, to drift with whatever current happens to be running strongest. When good things happen, we rise to heaven; when bad things happen, we descend to hell. ... I know this to be true of no one as well as I know it to be true of myself. I know how just the weather can affect my whole state of mind for good or ill, how just getting stuck in a traffic jam can ruin an afternoon that in every other way is so beautiful that it dazzles the heart. We are in constant danger of being not actors in the drama of our own lives but reactors.

1. LET THE PEACE OF GOD RULE IN YOUR HEARTS—PEACE

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. – Colossians 3:15

2. LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU—STRENGTH

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. – Colossians 3:16

3. LET HIS MIND BE IN YOU—CONFORMITY

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. – **Philippians 2:5**

4. LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN UNTO ALL—CHARACTER

⁴⁴ Frederick Buechner, *The Longing for Home: Recollections and Reflections*, p. 109

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. – **Philippians 4:5**

**5. LET YOUR CONVERSATION BE WITHOUT COVETOUSNESS—
CONDUCT**

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. – **Hebrews 13:5**

6. LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN—TESTIMONY

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. – **Matthew 5:16**

7. LET YOUR LOINS BE GIRDED ABOUT—WATCHFULNESS

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning. – **Luke 12:35**

45. BIBLE FEET

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁵On the previous night we had arrived in Bariloche, Argentina, in the middle of heavy rain. The street was muddy and, as a result, by the time we got to the room that had been assigned to us our shoes were covered with mud. In the morning, as I woke up, I heard the sound of a brush—John was busy, brushing my shoes.

"John!", I exclaimed full of surprise, "What are you doing?"

"My dear René," he responded, "Jesus taught us to wash each other's feet. You do not need me to wash your feet, but I can brush your shoes."

1. SET ON A ROCK—SALVATION

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. – Psalm 40:2

2. CLEANSED BY THE WORD—COMMUNION

Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. – John 13:10

3. KEPT BY DIVINE POWER—PRESERVATION

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. – 1 Samuel 2:9

4. SHOD WITH PEACE—WARFARE

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. – Ephesians 6:15

⁴⁵ Tim Stafford, "John Stott Has Died," *Christianity Today* (7-27-11)

5. RUNNING WITH THE GOSPEL—SERVICE

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! – Romans 10:15

6. BRUISING, SATAN—VICTORY

And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. – Romans 16:20

46. JESUS GIVES

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁶A pocket-sized book sits on my bookshelf. The cover promises that it contains a "compact guide to the Christian life." But when I scan the pages, I discover to my chagrin that there is no reference in the 228 pages to a Christian's commitment to be world minded, globally aware, or outreach oriented. Sadly, it reflects the attitudes of many who say, "Well, there are so many needs right here at home that we cannot think beyond our own worlds."

In contrast to such a narrow view, Gordon Aeschliman describes the globalized world in which we live:

In a village a thousand miles up the Amazon, people are reading the French-owned magazine *File* and the U.S.-produced *Better Homes and Gardens*. Guatemalans are ordering chicken chow mein, American youth are wearing Russian designer jeans, the Japanese are displaying their latest cuts at top Paris fashion shows, the French are eating Big Macs, the world is doing the lambada, and Japanese Ninja Turtles have given Batman the boot.

In such an internationalized world, even a compact guide to the Christian life must include a global perspective. Our world-class commitment is to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), not just the end of the street or the extent of our Zip Code. God calls us out of our church pews and beyond our own comfort zones into other cultures.

1. ETERNAL LIFE

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. THE WORD

⁴⁶ Paul Borthwick, *How to Be a World-class Christian (Authentic, 2009)*, pp. 24-25

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. – John 17:14

3. THE GLORY

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. – John 17:22

47. IN FULLNESS

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁷You and your friend are hiking in the Black Hills of South Dakota. As you round a hill, you come upon a sight that stops you in your tracks. In front of you are four giant faces carved into stone. Each head is as tall as a six-story building. The faces are a perfect likeness of four American presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, and Lincoln.

After taking photos of this magnificent find, what conclusions would you come to concerning its origin? How did these faces appear on this mountainside? What reasonable options are there to explain it?

Perhaps they happened through chance. Over the years, wind and rock slides combined to produce these four faces. But that seems silly, doesn't it? We know that Mount Rushmore exhibits the three signs of design: forethought, planning, and intention.

Mount Rushmore is the brainchild of sculptor John Gutzon Borglum. Borglum wanted to create a memorial of America's most revered presidents (intention). Borglum and his four hundred workers devised an ingenious method of removing more than eight hundred million pounds of stone created by the blasting (planning). Before the blasting could begin, designers mapped out the size and shape of each president. The presidents' noses are twenty feet long and rest above mouths that are eighteen feet wide. Each of the presidents' eyes is eleven feet across. The carvings are scaled to individuals who would stand 465 feet tall (forethought). After fourteen years of work, the four busts were completed, and Mount Rushmore opened to the public in 1941.

Just as we attribute the design of Mount Rushmore to the work of John Gutzon Borglum, so we ought to attribute the design found in nature and in the human body to the handiwork of God.

⁴⁷ J. P. Moreland & Tim Muehlhoff, *The God Conversation* (InterVarsity Press, 2007)

Now when you consider that this great Designer, this Creator of the Universe, stepped down into our world specifically on your behalf, it has to blow your mind.

1. FULLNESS OF THE TIME—THE INCARNATION

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. – Galatians 4:4

2. FULLNESS OF TIMES—THE MILLENNIUM

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. – Ephesians 1:10

48. GOD'S WORD

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁸Late one night, Emanuel Lighe returned home to find police waiting for him. There was a death in the village, and Lighe's name topped the suspect list. Cuffed and detained, Lighe was questioned well into the night at the police station. He was refused the right to leave.

Hours turned into days; days dragged into weeks. Lighe remained at the police station, then was transferred to Prison Civile de Lomé, the main prison in the capital city of Togo in West Africa's Togolese Republic. He remained there for five years and four days.

Lighe was innocent.

Prison Civile de Lomé is a perilous place. Amnesty International cited the prison for its basic human rights violations. Built to house 500 inmates, the prison is packed with 1,800 inmates who live and sleep in one cramped, open-air yard. Infectious disease is rampant, and many prisoners die, often before they've served their sentences.

Lighe spent half a decade of his life in this [prison]—always hungry, always scared, always wondering how he, an innocent man, landed in this place.

"Life in prison is so difficult that it's hard to understand for outsiders: people get raped, beaten up. Money and possessions get stolen. There's a lot of violence and pressure," he says.

For years, members of the Bible Society of Togo ... have visited the prison, bringing food for the inmates and supplying them with another life-giving gift: the Bible.

For Lighe, the Bible became a source of life and hope. It inspired him daily to reach out to his fellow inmates, spreading God's Word through preaching and living out its message. Although Lighe struggled to understand why he was placed

⁴⁸ Benjamin Leama, "Wrongfully Accused," *American Bible Society RecordOnline*

in prison, God began to teach him that his detainment had a purpose: He was there to minister to his fellow inmates.

"I believe in God's power and God's Spirit, so I continued my work, because I am not ruled by man," says Lighe. With his purpose found and forged in the unlikeliest of places, Lighe thanked God for bringing him to prison.

After Lighe was released, he struggled to find work and was lost in the business of daily life. He knew something was missing, so he began to return to the prison regularly to visit friends and continue his ministry. Even though he's no longer a prisoner, Lighe commands the same respect among the inmates. Inside the walls he is the real, breathing picture of God's hope.

"A clear conscience fears no accusation," says Lighe. This message rings loudly through the Prison Civile de Lomé, a place transformed by men like Lighe and the powerful message he brings: there is true freedom in Christ.

1. REGENERATES

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

2. FEEDS

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

3. SANCTIFIES

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

4. BUILDS UP

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. – Acts 20:32

5. ENLIGHTENS

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. – Psalm 119:105

49. DEALING WITH CONFLICT

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁹The story is told of a certain African tribe that learned an easy way to capture ducks in a river. Catching their agile and wary dinner would be a feat indeed, so they formulated a plan.

The tribesmen learned to go upstream, place a pumpkin in the river, and let it slowly float down into the flock of ducks. At first, the cautious fowl would quack and fly away. After all, it wasn't ordinary for pumpkins to float down the river! But the persistent tribesmen would subsequently float another pumpkin into the re-gathered ducks. Again they would scatter, only to return after the strange sphere had passed. Again, the hungry hunters would float another pumpkin. This time the ducks would remain, with a cautious eye on the pumpkin, and with each successive passing, the ducks would become more comfortable, until they finally accepted the pumpkins as a normal part of life.

When the natives saw that the pumpkins no longer bothered the ducks, they hollowed out pumpkins, put them over their heads, and walked into the river. Meandering into the midst of the tolerant fowl, they pulled them down one at a time. Dinner? Roast duck.

What an illustration of how Satan uses temptation to attack us. If you want to keep from becoming a roast duck, then you're going to have to learn to rely on God in times of spiritual struggle.

1. INTERNAL, WITH THE FLESH

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. – Galatians 5:17

⁴⁹ Wayne Cordeiro, *Jesus: Pure and Simple* (Bethany House Publishers, 2012), pp. 128-129

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. – 2 Corinthians 10:3

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. – Romans 13:12

2. EXTERNAL, WITH THE WORLD

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. – John 16:33

3. INFERNAL, WITH THE DEVIL

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. – Ephesians 6:12-13

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. – James 4:7

50. RECEIVING GOD'S BLESSING

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵⁰On a cold January night in downtown Minneapolis, a 22-year-old man stumbled into Maxwell's American Pub on Washington Street. At first the bartender thought the man was asking for a shot of something. Instead, the man was trying to say that he had been shot.

Actually, he had been shot six times, twice in the abdomen and twice in each leg, and the man's clothes were soaked in blood. Fortunately the man had come to the right place. Six off-duty nurses were just a few feet away. "Like a well-oiled triage team, they sprang into action The most serious wound involved his femoral artery, an injury that could cause the man to 'bleed out' if not dealt with quickly." The team of nurses used their expertise, applying pressure with towels and using the man's belt as a tourniquet. At the same time, other nurses talked to the man to keep him conscious. "They managed to slow the bleeding until paramedics arrived and placed a better tourniquet around the man's leg, wrapped him in a blanket and hoisted him onto a stretcher."

One of the nurses, 40-year-old Tim Carew said, "He would have bled out and died right in the bar if we didn't help him." Carew and the other off-duty nurses paid a price for their willingness to get involved. Carew said, "I had to bag up my clothes and throw them in the garbage. I was coated in blood." The unidentified man sure appreciated their efforts. Throughout the ordeal, he kept looking at the nurses and saying, "I love you guys."

1. THE FORGIVEN MAN

Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. – Psalm 33:1

2. THE TRUSTING MAN

⁵⁰ David, Chanen, "Off duty at Mpls. bar, nurses save a gunshot victim who staggers in," *Minneapolis Tribune* (1-7-13)

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. – Psalm 34:8

3. THE SEPARATED MAN

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. – Psalm 1:1

4. THE DISCIPLINED MAN

Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law. – Psalm 94:12

5. THE OBEDIENT MAN

Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. – Psalm 112:1

51. FAITHFULLY ABIDING

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵¹Helen Roseveare is a British medical doctor who worked for many years as a missionary in Zaire. During the revolution of the 1960s, she often faced brutal beatings and other forms of physical torture. On one occasion, when she was about to be executed, she feared God had forsaken her.

In that moment, she sensed the Holy Spirit saying to her: Twenty years ago you asked me for the privilege of being identified with me. This is it. Don't you want it? This is what it means. These are not your sufferings; they are my sufferings. All I ask of you is the loan of your body.

The privilege of serving Christ through her sufferings overwhelmed Dr. Roseveare. After she was delivered, she wrote about her experience with God: "He didn't stop the sufferings. He didn't stop the wickedness, the cruelties, the humiliation or anything. It was all there. The pain was just as bad. The fear was just as bad. But it was altogether different. It was in Jesus, for him, with him."

1. FOR FRUITFULNESS

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. – John 15:4-5

2. FOR PRAYER

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. – John 15:7

3. FOR CONFIDENCE

⁵¹ Philip Ryken, *The Message of Salvation* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2001)

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. – 1 John 2:28

4. FOR HOLINESS OF WALK

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

52. SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵²As my wife Lynne and I approached our car, I spotted a frail, elderly woman pulling into the nearby apartment complex. She parked her car and began to slowly and laboriously pull grocery bags out of her trunk. "How about helping that woman with her groceries?" the Holy Spirit seemed to prompt.

I initially brushed past the whisper because Lynne was with me and we were ready to go. But I had just made that offer to God, "If there is something you would like me to do ..."

I knew I had to comply. "Lynne," I said, "I've got this little pact going with God, and I need to go help that woman with her groceries for a minute." I approached the elderly woman. "Can I give you a hand with your groceries?" I asked. "Oh, yes! Thank you!" she said, relieved.

The driveway leading back to her apartment ... was roped off, meaning residents had to walk a few hundred yards just to get from their cars to their homes. I knew that this small act of kindness would honor God and help meet a real need; what I didn't know was that those grocery sacks boasted thirty pounds of fresh peaches each. Pretending the added weight didn't affect me a bit, I said, "All set here. You lead the way." She began winding through backyards that had become swamps due to recent rains. [It turns out the] woman was extremely arthritic [and] had some sort of emphysema that forced us to take a breather every forty-five seconds or so. It took us a full thirty minutes to make our way to her apartment, and by the time we arrived, we were tight. I had learned more about this dear woman's life than I could ever have hoped to know.

We entered her modest home, and ... I set the sacks on the counter before turning to shake her hand and then let myself out through the front door. The woman left her bony, wrinkled hand in mine long after the handshake was done. "I will believe to my dying day that God sent you to help me just now," she said.

⁵² Bill Hybels, *The Power of a Whisper* (Zondervan, 2012), pp. 54-55

The whole deal felt so inglorious—the wet feet, the longer-than-expected trek, the lack of any earth-shattering results—and yet as I walked away from the apartment complex, something in my spirit felt right. God had whispered a simple instruction my way, and this time I had actually slowed down enough to listen. There is no greater feeling in the world than to hear—and heed—God's voice

I have come to believe over time that it is the little acts of obedience that invite God's power to fully flow in our lives. When you and I prove ourselves faithful with the small whispers, he entrusts us with bigger ones. And when we follow through on those big ones, big kingdom results can be gained.

1. WIND—TO AWAKEN

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. – Acts 2:2

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. – John 3:8

2. BREATH—TO GIVE LIFE

And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD. – Ezekiel 37:14

3. WATER—TO CLEANSE AND HEAL

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. – Ezekiel 36:25-27

4. OIL—TO ANOINT AND ENLIGHTEN

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

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. – 1 John 2:20