

Pulpit Outlines Series

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52 Topical Sermons Volume 2

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1. JESUS IS...

ILLUSTRATION:

¹Jim Caviezel (whose initials are JC) was thirty-three when he played Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*. Caviezel has said his faith is his guide, both personally and professionally, and that God "called" him to the acting profession. Before casting the actor to play Jesus, Mel Gibson (the film's producer and director) told the up-and-coming actor that the role might cost him his career.

But Caviezel, a confessing Christian, wanted to honor his Lord by portraying his life and death. Caviezel responded to Gibson, "We all have a cross to carry. I have to carry my own cross. If we don't carry our crosses, we are going to be crushed under the weight of it."

As it has turned out, Caviezel's decision to "carry the cross of Christ" has definitely cost him career opportunities. Following his role in *The Passion of the Christ*, Caviezel's credits have been anything but impressive. He starred in the little-known thriller *Unknown*, had a supporting role in the Denzel Washington's film *Deja Vu*, and had the leading roles in *Outlander*, and *The Stoning of Soraya M*—both of which were panned by the critics.

Not until the fall of 2011 did Caviezel land a part that resulted in a positive buzz. His role in the CBS television series *Person of Interest* has been well-received.

Caviezel said he doesn't worry about the career price he paid with that film—a global box-office smash that led to fewer, not more, film offers for him. "The awards, the hall of fame" that actors get into here on Earth, he said, don't matter to him. His reward, he said, will come in heaven. Caviezel said, "Jesus is as controversial now as he has ever been. Not much has changed in 2,000 years We have to give up our names, our reputations, and our lives to speak the truth."

1. THE SOURCE OF 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

¹ "'Passion' star Jim Caviezel talks about Mel Gibson's troubles, and his own, at Orlando church," *Orlando Sentinel* (4-30-11)

2. THE AUTHORITY IN BAPTISM

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. – Acts 10:48

3. THE CENTER OF GATHERING

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. – Matthew 18:20

4. THE POWER IN DISCIPLINE

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. – 1 Corinthians 5:4-5

5. THE MOTIVE IN SERVICE

Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. – 3 John 7

6. THE PLEA IN PRAYER

If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. – John 14:14

7. THE RULE IN EVERYTHING

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. – Colossians 3:17

2. THE GOSPEL IN 4 Gs

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. – John 3:14-16

ILLUSTRATION:

²Consider the sun as an analogy. The sun only shines, just as God only loves. It is the nature of the sun to shine, to offer warmth and light. And it is the nature of God to love. We are free to get away from the sun—we can lock ourselves in a dark room—but we do not keep the sun from shining just because we put ourselves in a place where it cannot reach us.

So it is with God's love. We can reject it, but God keeps on loving us. No matter what our choices, God still loves. And because God loves us, a relationship with God is possible.

1. A GREAT NEED—MAN RUINED

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. – Romans 5:12

2. A GRAND PROVISION—CHRIST UPLIFTED

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

3. A GENERAL INVITATION—NO EXCEPTIONS

² Les and Leslie Parrott, *Relationships* (Zondervan, 1998), p. 172

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. – Acts 10:44

4. A GLORIOUS ASSURANCE—NO DOUBTS

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

3. WHO AND WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

ILLUSTRATION:

³Golfer Arnold Palmer once played a series of exhibition matches in Saudi Arabia. The king was so impressed that he proposed to give Palmer a gift. Palmer demurred; "It really isn't necessary, Your Highness. I'm honored to have been invited."

"I would be deeply upset," replied the king, "if you would not allow me to give you a gift."

Palmer thought for a moment and said, "All right. How about a golf club? That would be a beautiful momento of my visit to your country."

The next day, delivered to Palmer's hotel, was the title to a golf club. Thousands of acres, trees, lakes, clubhouse, and so forth.

The moral of this story is: In the presence of a King, don't ask for small gifts!

1. "ALL SAINTS"

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. – Ephesians 6:18

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. – Colossians 1:3

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. – Colossians 4:12

2. "ALL MEN"

³ Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1986), p. 165

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men. – 1 Timothy 2:1

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. – Matthew 5:14

3. "ALL THINGS"

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

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

4. WHAT FAITH DOES

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴Consider a bottle of penicillin, the famous antibiotic identified by Alexander Fleming, and first produced for clinical use in Great Britain. The drug was responsible for saving the lives of countless individuals who would otherwise have died from various forms of blood poisoning. Think of the three stages of faith like this. I may *accept* that the bottle exists. I may *trust* in its ability to cure blood poisoning. But nothing will change unless I *receive* the drug which it contains. I must allow it to destroy the bacteria which are slowly killing me. Otherwise, I have not benefited from my faith in it.

It is the third element of faith which is of vital importance in making sense of the cross. Just as faith links a bottle of penicillin to the cure of blood poisoning, so faith forges a link between the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ourselves. Faith unites us with the risen Christ, and makes available to us everything he gained through his obedience and resurrection.

1. JUSTIFIED BY FAITH—OUR RELEASE

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:1

2. SAVED THROUGH FAITH—OUR DELIVERANCE

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. – Ephesians 2:8

3. SANCTIFIED BY FAITH—OUR POSITION

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

⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *What Was God Doing on the Cross* (Zondervan, 1992), pp. 99-100

4. PURIFIED BY FAITH—OUR CONDITION

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. – Acts 15:9

5. IS JESUS YOUR LORD?

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵In 2006, a New York city judge allowed José Luis Espinal to legally change his name to Jesus Christ. Following the decision, Espinal said he was "happy" and "grateful" that the judge approved the change. He also said that he was moved to seek the name change about a year prior to the decision, when it dawned on him that, "I am the person that is that name."

We're all a little like José—we're just more subtle. We grab at the title of "Lord" every time we reclaim the management of our lives.

1. HE IS LORD OF ALL—BY PURCHASE

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) – **Acts 10:36**

2. HE IS LORD OF SINNERS—BY CLAIM

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. – **2 Peter 2:1**

3. HE IS LORD OF SAINTS—BY CONFESSION

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

4. HE IS LORD OF SERVANTS—BY OBEDIENCE

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. – **John 13:13**

⁵ Samuel Maull, "Judge Lets Man Change Name to Jesus Christ," *Breitbart.com* (12-23-05)

6. WHAT JESUS' DEATH ACCOMPLISHED

ILLUSTRATION:

⁶Imagine 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. IT WAS A PROPITIATION

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. – Romans 3:23

⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (Riverhead Books, 2008), pp. 201–202

2. IT WAS PEACEMAKING

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. – Colossians 1:20

3. IT WAS A PURCHASE

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. – Acts 20:28

1) This is Godward, and for all.

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) Once for all made, now proclaimed.

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

3) He purchased in order to possess.

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. – Titus 2:14

7. LORD, "I WILL!"

ILLUSTRATION:

⁷The young violinist came onto the stage and sat alone on a stool. He put his violin under his chin and played for an hour and a half. No music in front of him, no orchestra behind him, no breaks—just an hour and a half of absolutely beautiful violin music. After ten minutes or so, many critics put down their pads and listened, like the rest After the performance, the crowd rose to its feet and began applauding wildly—and they wouldn't stop.

But the young violinist didn't acknowledge the applause. He just peered out into the audience as if he were looking for something—or someone. Finally he found what he was looking for. Relief came over his face, and he began to acknowledge the cheers.

After the concert, the critics met the young violinist backstage They said, "You were wonderful. But one question: Why did it take you so long to acknowledge the applause of the audience?"

The young violinist took a deep breath and answered, "You know I was really afraid of playing here. Yet this was something I knew I needed to do. Tonight, just before I came on stage, I received word that my master teacher was to be in the audience. Throughout the concert, I tried to look for him, but I could never find him. So after I finished playing, I started to look more intently. I was so eager to find my teacher that I couldn't even hear the applause. I just had to know what he thought of my playing. That was all that mattered. Finally, I found him high in the balcony. He was standing and applauding, with a big smile on his face. After seeing him, I was finally able to relax. I said to myself, 'If the master is pleased with what I have done, then everything else is okay.'"

1. "I WILL TRUST AND NOT BE AFRAID"

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

⁷ Steven C. Roy, *What God Thinks When We Fail* (IVP Books, 2011), pp. 11-12

2. "I WILL BLESS THE LORD"

I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. – Psalm 34:1

3. "I WILL LOVE THEE, O LORD"

I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. – Psalm 18:1

4. "I WILL KEEP THY STATUTES"

I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes. – Psalm 119:145

5. "I WILL WALK BEFORE THE LORD"

I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. – Psalm 116:9

6. "I WILL PRAISE THEE"

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. – Psalm 139:14

7. "I WILL BEHAVE MYSELF WISELY"

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. – Psalm 101:2

8. THE POWER OF CHRIST'S NAME

ILLUSTRATION:

⁸I have two very special friends whose lives have been a blessing to countless children who have been deformed from birth. They have established an orphanage to give them a home and find medical help to correct what can be corrected. Then they look for families who will adopt them. One little boy had always been passed over for adoption because he has a particular brain malfunction that is very rare. He often doesn't connect thoughts. At about nine years of age, as I remember the story, he was becoming despondent as, one-by-one, he saw his housemates being selected by families and leaving. He began to ask those who were taking care of him why no one was adopting him. Why didn't anybody choose him?

Through an incredible series of events, a couple from Texas, who had already adopted one child from the same orphanage, called to ask if this boy was still there. Through the goodness of the parents' hearts, and the generosity of the couple who established the orphanage in agreeing to cover all the costs of his adoption, the day has been set for this little boy to be taken to his new home. The special part of the thrill for him is that he will be reunited with one of the little boys who was his housemate at one time.

His actual name is quite hard to pronounce, but it is quite a normal name in his native setting. His adoptive parents have sent him the name they want to give him—Anson Josiah, the initials of which are A.J. He now walks around that home, waiting for his new parents to come for him, telling everybody as he points to his chest, "You can call me A.J. My name is A.J." Is it not interesting that even with the debilitation of disconnected thoughts, he is able to pick up the redeeming thrill of relationship and his profound worth as evidenced in his new name?

1. FORGIVENESS IS PROCLAIMED IN 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

⁸ Ravi Zacharias, *Why Jesus?* (FaithWords, 2012), pp. 166-167

2. REMISSION IS MADE KNOWN THROUGH IT

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. – Acts 10:43

3. REGENERATION COMES THROUGH FAITH IN IT

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. – John 1:12

4. LIFE IS RECEIVED BY BELIEVING IN IT

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

5. SALVATION IS FOUND IN IT ALONE

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

9. THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

ILLUSTRATION:

⁹Jerry, whose parents own a sheep farm, frequently took a few days off from work every spring to look for sheep. I asked why he would have to look for sheep. Don't they know how to get home?

He told me that whenever a pregnant ewe goes into labor, she immediately sits down. But if she is facing downhill when she sits, she will stay in that direction, fighting against gravity to push the lamb out of the womb. If no one helps her, she will die in that position rather than simply turn around.

Jerry said every night his family has to carefully count the pregnant sheep. When even one ewe is missing, the whole family goes out to search for her. They either bring her home or stay with her until her labor is over. If the weather is harsh, they have to build a shelter around her, while using their bodies to keep her warm.

I am like that stubborn animal. I face trials with the attitude that I will conquer the obstacle myself. All I have to do is stop for a minute, look to my Shepherd, and I will discover that I can solve my problem by simply turning around. God has a simple solution already prepared for me. I am not the solution maker, my Shepherd is.

1. JESUS PURCHASED THEM—AT THE CROSS

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. – Acts 20:28

2. JESUS SEEKS AND SAVES THEM—BY THE GOSPEL

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find

⁹ Kitty Anderson, Lakewood, California

it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. – Luke 15:4-5

3. JESSUS KNOWS AND MARKS THEM—BY HIS SPIRIT

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. – John 10:14

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. – John 10:27

4. JESUS FEEDS AND LEADS THEM—THROUGH HIS WORD

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. – Psalm 23:2-3*

10. ‘IT IS’

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁰When I was done preaching, I decided to hop in my car, drive twenty minutes to the town in which I grew up, and look at the houses that I remembered from back then. As I drove into town, I passed a field where I once got into a fistfight with a kid named Sean. It was not a fair fight, and I did some shady, dark things in that fight. I completely humiliated him in front of a large crowd of people Then I drove past my first house, and I thought of all the wicked things I had done in that house. I passed a friend's house where once, at a party, I did some of the most shameful, horrific things that I have ever done.

Afterward, on the drive back to the conference, I was overwhelmed with the guilt and shame of the wickedness that I had done in that city prior to knowing Jesus Christ I could hear the whispers in my heart: "You call yourself a man of God? Are you going to stand in front of these guys and tell them to be men of God? After all you've done?"

In the middle of all that guilt and shame, I began to be reminded by the Scriptures that the old Matt Chandler is dead. The Matt Chandler who did those things, the Matt Chandler who sinned in those ways, was nailed to that cross with Jesus Christ, and all of his sins—past, present, and future—were paid for in full on the cross of Jesus Christ. I have been sanctified "once and for all" He remembers my sins no more And I no longer need to feel shame for those things, because those things have been completely atoned for.

1. "IT IS WRITTEN"—SINNER’S CONDEMNATION

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. – **Romans 3:10**

2. "IT IS FINISHED"—SAVIOR’S ATONEMENT

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. – **John 19:30**

¹⁰ Matt Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel* (Crossway, 2012), pp. 211-213

3. "IT IS I"—THE SAINT'S SUPPORTER

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. – **Matthew 14:27**

11. THE MIRACLE MAKER

ILLUSTRATION:

¹¹According to statistics gathered from recent surveys in 2012, Americans have a high level of belief in miracles:

- 55 percent of Americans are "certain" that miracles happen (a 20 percent increase from 1991)
- 80 percent believe that miracles "certainly" or "probably" occur.
- 42 percent of Americans with no religious affiliation believe in miracles (compared to 32 percent from 20 years ago). In other words, *the strongest gains in openness to miracles were reported by those who attend services infrequently.*
- 23 percent of respondents said they had witnessed a miraculous physical healing and 16 percent said they had received a miraculous healing.
- 75 percent of respondents said they had prayed to God to receive healing from an illness or injury; nearly 85 percent had prayed for someone else's healing.

1. SHE RECOVERED FROM DISEASE

And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. – Mark 1:31

2. HE WAS RESCUED FROM DEMONS

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. – Mark 9:25-27

3. SHE WAS RAISED FROM DEATH

¹¹ David Briggs, "Belief in miracles climbs in the age of Oprah," Association of Religion Data Archives (10-27-12)

And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. – Mark 5:41

All three are effected in the Sinner's Conversion:

1) He is Healed by His Stripes

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. – Isaiah 53:5

2) He is Delivered by His Power

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

3) He has Life as His Gift

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

12. JESUS IS FOR US

ILLUSTRATION:

¹²In May 2009, my family was in Azusa, California, because one of our kids was graduating from Azusa Pacific University. My wife, Nancy, was going to speak at the commencement ceremonies, so she and I were invited to a special gathering of about 50 people—people from the graduating class of 50 years ago and a few faculty members. During the gathering, John Wallace, the president of APU, brought out three students who were graduating that year and told us that for the next two years, they were going to serve the poorest of the poor in India.

These three students thought they were there just to be commissioned and sent out with a blessing—which they were. But then something happened that they did not know was coming. John turned to them and said, "I have a piece of news for you. There's somebody you do not know—an anonymous donor—who is so moved by what you're doing that he has given a gift to this university in your name, on your behalf."

John turned to the first student and said, "You are forgiven your debt of \$105,000." The kid immediately starts to cry. John turns to the next student: "You're forgiven your debt of \$70,000." He then turns to the third student: "You are forgiven your debt of \$130,000." All three students had no idea this was coming. They were just ambushed by grace—blown away that somebody they don't even know would pay their debt. The whole room was in tears.

1. BY HIS ATONEMENT ON THE CROSS, WE ARE JUSTIFIED

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

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. BY HIS ADVOCACY ON THE THRONE, WE ARE PRESERVED

¹² John Ortberg, in the sermon "Patch 'Em," Menlo Park Presbyterian, Menlo Park, California (preached 5-17-09)

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

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called. – Jude v. 1

3. AT HIS ADVENT TO THE CLOUDS, WE SHALL BE GLORIFIED

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. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. – 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16

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

13. JESUS' POWER

ILLUSTRATION:

¹³A minister was in Italy, and there he saw the grave of a man who had died centuries before who was an unbeliever and completely against Christianity, but a little afraid of it too. So the man had a huge stone slab put over his grave so he would not have to be raised from the dead in case there is a resurrection from the dead. He had inscriptions put all over the slab saying, "I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don't believe in it." Evidently, when he was buried, an acorn must have fallen into the grave. So a hundred years later the acorn had grown up through the grave and split that slab. It was now a tall towering oak tree. The minister looked at it and asked, "If an acorn, which has power of biological life in it, can split a slab of that magnitude, what can the acorn of God's resurrection power do in a person's life?"

The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It's the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know him, the more you grow into the power of the resurrection.

1. PROVED BY CREATION

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. – Colossians 1:15-18

2. MANIFESTED IN SALVATION

¹³ Nancy Guthrie, editor, *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross* (Crossway, 2009), p. 136

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:24

3. EXPERIENCED IN PRESERVATION

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. – 2 Timothy 1:12

4. ENJOYED IN WEAKNESS

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9

14. WHAT ARE YOU READY FOR?

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁴In 1911, Roald Amundsen became the first person to lead a successful expedition to the South Pole. Amundsen was also famous for his incredible commitment to prepare for this expedition. While in his late twenties, Roald Amundsen traveled from Norway to Spain for a two-month sailing trip to earn a master's certificate. It was 1899. He had a nearly two-thousand-mile journey ahead of him. And how did Amundsen make the journey? By carriage? By horse? By ship? By rail? He bicycled.

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

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

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

¹⁴ Jim Collins and Morten T. Hansen, *Great by Choice* (HarperBusiness, 2011), pp. 14-15

1. THE SINNER IS "READY TO PERISH"

And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. – Deuteronomy 26:3-5

2. THE SAVIOR IS "READY TO SAVE"

The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD. – Isaiah 38:20

3. THE SAVED ONE IS "READY TO ANSWER"

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. – 1 Peter 3:15

4. THE SERVANT IS "READY TO PREACH"

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

15. WHOM DO YOU SERVE?

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁵One evening, while watering the garden, the sheer sacrifice of true service overwhelmed me. There amongst the tomatoes and parsley, I realized that most of my previous attempts at service were very much like the garden hose in my hand: I was in control, dictating how, when, and to whom I would serve. With my nifty sprayer, I could even stop the water altogether when I felt like it. The "flow" of Christ's love that I gave to others depended on my mood, the health of my career, and even how much sleep I got the night before. Mine was (and still often is) a self-righteous, self-gratifying service.

In contrast, I noticed a soaker hose in the planter across from me. It watered the ground completely indiscriminately. Dozens of holes let the water loose and had no shut-off switch. Life-giving water oozed out all over the place, like it or not! To serve like a soaker hose means to pour out Christ's love from every pore of our beings, not concerning ourselves with the timing, the effect it might have on our productivity, or the worthiness of the recipients. If God has "turned on the water" in our lives, filling us with his life-giving springs, why would we hold them back from anyone? For fear of running out? Doesn't he have an infinite supply of living water?

1. BOND SERVANTS OF SIN BY NATURE

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. – John 8:34

2. BOND SERVANTS OF SATAN BY CONQUEST

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

¹⁵ Anonymous, *Embracing Obscurity* (B&H Publishing Group, 2012), p. 98

3. BOND SERVANTS OF CHRIST BY GRACE

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. – Romans 1:1

16. LIFE WITH JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁶In 1969, in a science lab in New Jersey, Canadian physicist Willard Boyle and his colleagues invented the concept of an electronic eye. Using their knowledge of mathematics and the behavior of light they provided the science behind digital cameras known as a charged-coupled device or CCD. The CCD technology revolutionized photography, as light could now be captured electronically instead of on film. CCD technology is used on the Hubble telescope and the Mars Lunar probe. It was Boyle's invention that allowed us to see the surface of Mars for the first time. In 2009 Boyle was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics.

A few years after the original invention of CCD technology, Boyle walked into a store to purchase a new digital camera based on his invention. During the visit, the salesman tried to explain the intricacies of the digital camera, but stopped, feeling it was too complicated for his customer to understand. According to one long-time friend, Boyle was normally a humble man, but on this occasion he was taken aback by the salesman's arrogance and disrespect. So Boyle bluntly replied: "No need to explain. I invented it." When the salesman didn't believe him, Boyle told the salesman to type "Willard S. Boyle" into his computer and see for himself. A Nikon representative in the store heard the exchange and immediately came over to have his photograph taken with the famous inventor.

At times we almost act like that impatient salesman in our relationship with God. We tell God how life works or how we *think* it should work. But God simply and confidently responds, "No need to explain. I invented life."

1. HE IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. – John 1:4

2. HE IS THE GIVER OF LIFE

¹⁶ Allison Lawlor, "Master of Light invents a photo revolution," *Globe and Mail* (5-21-11)

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

3. HE IS THE SUSTENANCE OF LIFE

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. – John 6:51

4. HE IS THE OBJECT OF LIFE

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. – Philippians 1:21

17. PRESENT DAY BABEL

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. – Genesis 11:1-4

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁷It began with mere barroom bravado; years later it got out of control. Werner "Jack" Genot wanted to be a hero. So, he concocted a story about serving with the Marines and being taken as a prisoner of war during a bloody Korean War battle.

Genot, now 71, is from the small Illinois town of Marengo, where he serves as an alderman. His story grew until the uniform he wore on special occasions became laden with fake medals he had ordered from a catalogue—a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, and two Purple Hearts. He would march in parades and talk to schoolchildren. He even got a special license plate reserved for wounded veterans by forging discharge papers.

However, a veteran's league eventually noticed a lack of records on file and numerous factual holes in Genot's military record. It began investigating his claims. For two years, Genot denied the accusations and excused his way around the questions. But he finally confessed his deception in an interview with a local newspaper, claiming that he couldn't stand the façade any longer.

"You can't imagine what I'm going through," he said. "I really didn't know how to shake this demon. But I went to bed with it every night, and I looked at it in the mirror every morning. I don't want to meet my Maker with this on my heart."

1. "LET US MAKE BRICK"—COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS

2. "LET US BUILD A CITY"—OUR CAUSE, OUR RELIGION

¹⁷ Jeff Long, "He Lied So He Could 'Be a Hero'" *Chicago Tribune* (11-22-05)

3. "LET US MAKE US A NAME"—OUR DENOMINATION

1) Babel is built of brick. Jerusalem of hewn stone.

O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. – Isaiah 54:11

2) Worldlings' home is here. Christians look for theirs.

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. – Hebrews 11:10

3) Professors exalt their own Names. Christians bear Christ's.

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. – Acts 11:26

18. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE LORD

I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. – Psalm 116:1-2

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁸According to new research from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity one out of five non-Christians in North America does not "personally know" a single follower of Christ. That's 13,447,000 people who don't have a Christian friend or even acquaintance. The percentages get higher for certain religious groups. For instance, 65 percent of Buddhists, 75 percent of Chinese people, 78 percent of Hindus, and 43 percent of Muslims in America do not personally know a follower of Christ.

Worldwide, the numbers are much worse: more than 8 in 10 non-Christians do not personally know a follower of Christ.

Todd M. Johnson, one of the researchers for the study, said that relatively small gestures—like inviting families into your home for Thanksgiving dinner—can have a bigger impact than huge mission campaigns. Johnson said, "You should really have lifelong friendships with Hindus, Buddhists, and so on. It's so simple, and yet it becomes a great deal."

1. A GRAND DECLARATION, v. 1—"I LOVE THE LORD"

We love him, because he first loved us. – 1 John 4:19

2. A GREAT DELIVERANCE, v. 2—"BECAUSE HE HEARD"

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. 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 40:1-2

¹⁸ Abby Stocker, "The Craziest Statistic You'll Read About North American Missions," *Christianity Today* (8-19-13)

3. A GOOD DETERMINATION, v. 2—"THEREFORE, WILL I CALL"

And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. –

Psalm 40:3-4

19. EVERYONE IS INVITED!

ILLUSTRATION:

¹⁹Under God, my own conversion was the result of one person's willingness to embody the mission of the "friend of sinners." ... One of the relics of Australia's Christian heritage is the once-a-week Scripture lesson offered in many state high schools around the country. ... One of these Scripture teachers—Glenda was her name—had the courage to invite [my] entire class to her home for discussions about God. The invitation would have gone unnoticed, except that she added: "If anyone gets hungry I'll be making hamburgers, milkshakes, and scones." ... As I looked around the room at all my friends—all skeptics like me—I was amazed that this woman would open her home (and kitchen) to us. Some of the lads were among the worst "sinners" in our school: one was a drug user (and seller), one was a class clown and bully, and one was a petty thief with a string of [breaking-and-entering charges] to his credit.

I could not figure Brenda out. She was wealthy and intelligent. She had an exciting social life married to a leading Australian businessman. What was she thinking inviting us for a meal and discussion? At no point was this teacher pushy or preachy. Her style was completely relaxed and incredibly generous. When her VCR went missing one day, she made almost nothing of it, even though she suspected (quite reasonably) it was [someone from] our group. For me, her open, flexible, generous attitude toward us "sinners" was the doorway into a life of faith. As we ate and drank and talked, it was clear this was no missionary ploy on her part. She truly cared for us and treated us like friends or, perhaps more accurately, like sons. As a result, over the course of the next year, she introduced several of us from the class to the ultimate "friend of sinners," Jesus.

1. COME – TO THE THIRSTY, FOR A DRINK

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. – John 7:37

2. COME – TO THE WEARY, FOR REST

¹⁹ John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission* (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 51-52

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

3. COME – TO THE SEEKING, FOR SALVATION

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. –
Luke 19:5

1) The *Freeness* of the *First* is seen in Rev. 22:17

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. – **Revelation 22:17**

2) The *Fullness* of the *Second* is proved by Isa. 14:3

And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve. – **Isaiah 14:3**

3) The *Guarantee* of the *Third* is given in John 6:37

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. – **John 6:37**

20. THE GOSPEL WE NEED

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁰As I sat down, I silently shot up a desperate prayer: *God, please give me someone in this crazy crowd I can relate to. If you don't give me someone, I'm walking out of here.* At that moment, the pastor told the congregation to stand up and shake a few hands. I introduced myself to Lisa, whose dyed-red hair and nose ring suggested we might be at a similar place. My black-and-white hair and spiked belt told her the same. Lisa, a fellow spiritual seeker, and I became fast friends.

Looking back, I wonder how the church members stood having me in their midst for so long. I was angry and exasperated as I sat listening to their "good news." How could there be only one way to God? At the end of each message, I marched down the aisle to the pastor and began firing off an onslaught of questions. After three or four weeks of verbal sparring, he humbly offered the associate pastor's ear. I made my rounds from one elder to another, finally ending up at a Friday night Bible study looking for answers.

As I sat on the floor in the leader's living room, I felt a peace amidst this group of people who seemed to care about each other. After the study, Lisa sat beside me as Scott, the leader, patiently listened to my New-Age arguments. But one by one, the Scriptures I'd carefully prepared to punch holes in the gospel came back at me with hurricane force. Scott's words—but especially the Bible's words—confounded my cosmic view. After we'd sat there for an hour debating, I was exhausted. My hardened heart and argumentative nature finally had enough.

As Lisa drove me home, my mind ached as I replayed Scott's words. All the Old Testament and New Testament verses had one oddly familiar voice—one tone, one heart. I wondered, *How could a book written by so many different people over the course of hundreds of years fit together perfectly as if one amazing storyteller had written the whole thing?* The Holy Spirit began melting my vanity and arrogance with a power stronger than any hex, incantation, or spell I'd ever used. Suddenly, the blindfold I'd worn for almost 30 years was stripped away, and instantly I knew what I'd been searching for: *Jesus!* The same God I'd neglected, whose name I'd used as profanity, whom I'd flat-out rejected, was the one who'd sent his Son to

²⁰ Kimberly Shumate, "I Was a Witch," *Today's Christian Woman* (Sep/Oct 2002), pp. 41-43

suffer for me, to take the guilty verdict so I could be found innocent. My eyes filled with tears as I exchanged the darkness with which I'd grown so accustomed for the light of God's truth. It was such a personal moment between the Lord and me that even Lisa, sitting next to me in the car, had no idea what was going on.

I soon realized my life was filled with empty props, and it was time to clean house. My first act of obedience was to throw out all my books on witchcraft and the paranormal, as well as my Tarot cards. But the most important possession—and most difficult to discard—was my treasured crystal ball.

I called Lisa. She came right over, and we immediately drove to the Pacific Ocean. My heart pounded as if the demons themselves weren't far behind us. We stood at the end of Malibu Pier, our beaming faces reflecting the radiance of the setting sun. I unwrapped the crystal's black velvet cover, and light streamed out like rainbows as the thick crystal met the sun's fleeting rays. As I dropped the ball into the deep blue water, I knew my future was secure. Now I had a Savior who would be with me always. It still moves me to tears to think he waited through all those years of anger, disappointment, fear, and bad choices. All the mistakes I'd ever made were wiped clean.

1. THE GOSPEL OF GOD—ITS DIVINE AUTHOR

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. – Romans 1:1

2. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST—ITS GRAND THEME

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. – Mark 1:1

3. THE GOSPEL OF SALVATION—ITS GREAT OBJECT

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. – Ephesians 1:18

- 1) Other Gospels are all Frauds.
- 2) Other Names have no Value.
- 3) Other Objects are all Worthless.

21. JESUS OVER TIME

ILLUSTRATION:

²¹The first physician to die of the AIDS virus in the United Kingdom was a young Christian. He had contracted it while doing medical research in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. In the last days of his life, his power of communication failed. He struggled with increasing difficulty to express his thoughts to his wife. On one occasion she simply could not understand his message. He wrote on a note pad the letter *J*. She ran through her medical dictionary, saying various words beginning with *J*. None was right. Then she said, "Jesus?"

That was the right word. He was with them. That was all either of them needed to know. And that is always enough.

1. PAST—"HE CAME TO MINISTER"

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. – Mark 10:45

2. PRESENT—"HE IS A MINISTER OF THE SANCTUARY"

A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. – Hebrews 8:2

3. FUTURE—"HE SHALL COME FORTH AND SERVE"

Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. – Luke 12:37

²¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Deserted by God? (Banner of Truth, 1993), p. 51*

22. THE SINCERE SEEKER

ILLUSTRATION:

²²In seminary my Bible professor was Manfred George Gutzke, a Canadian like myself who had an impressively large physique and had been the boxing champion of the Canadian Army in his youth. Everything about him seemed oversized: his huge hairless head, his enormous eyebrows, his low gravelly voice, his sweeping knowledge of the Scriptures.

Not only did he hold us spellbound with his grasp of the Bible; he also fascinated us with stories of his own life. ...

Manfred Gutzke was a man of God, as well as a teacher of preachers, but he had not started out religious in any formal sense. For many years he was an agnostic. Yet in the years when he was teaching in a one-room rural school on the prairies of western Canada, he began to be a seeker, wondering whether there might be a God and he could know him.

He was especially impressed by a devout farmer who moved into that small community. This man sold two cows and donated the proceeds to missionary work on the annual missions Sunday. This was cause for amazement at the small prairie church, where most of the farmers came because there was nothing better to do on a Sunday morning. Most of them stood outside and gossiped with their friends until long after the service began. But this new man arrived carrying a Bible, went straight into the church, and bowed his head in prayer.

Here was someone whose faith seemed central, and the young teacher was intrigued.

One afternoon after school, making his way across the fields to his boarding house, Gutzke was struck by this thought: *If God exists, then he can see me right now!*

"I stood in that field," he told us, "and pondered that thought. If God exists, he could see me.

²² Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life (IVP, 2008)*, pp. 79-80

"So," he said, "I took off my hat! That may seem strange, but like most men in those days I wore a brimmed hat, and I always took it off in the presence of women, older people, or other important persons. So I took my hat off to God.

"And then I prayed: 'God, I do not know whether you are there or not. And I don't mean anything bad by that. I just don't know. But I want to know, and you know that too. So please show me if you are real.'

"I felt," he said, "as if something very important had happened." Then he put his hat back on and made his way home.

He had taken the first step toward his spiritual home that day. For the very first time, Manfred Gutzke paid attention to God—the God who was already paying attention to him. And before much more time had passed, he would come to prove in his own life the affirmation of Jesus, "Seek and you shall find," and the promise in Hebrews 11:6 of a God who "rewards those who earnestly seek him."

1. COMES TO CHRIST FOR SALVATION

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. – John 6:37

2. ENTERS INTO CHRIST FOR SECURITY

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. – John 10:9

3. BUILDS ON CHRIST FOR STABILITY

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. – 1 Peter 2:6

4. EATS OF CHRIST FOR STRENGTH

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

23. THE LOWDOWN ON GRACE AND WORKS

ILLUSTRATION:

²³Grace is a bit like a roller coaster it makes us scream in terror and laugh uncontrollably at the same time. But there aren't any harnesses on this ride. We are not in the driver's seat, and we did not design the twists and turns. We just get on board. We laugh as the binding law of gravity is suspended, and we scream, because it looks like we're going to hurtle off into space. Grace brings us back into contact with the children we once were (and still are)—children who loved to ride rollercoasters, to smile and yell and throw our hands up in the air.

Grace, in other words, is terrifyingly fun, and like any ride worth standing in line for, it is worth coming back to again and again. In fact, God's one-way love may be the only ride that never gets old, the only ride we thankfully never outgrow. A source of inexhaustible hope and joy for an exhausted world.

So what are we waiting for? Scoot over, and let's take the plunge, once again, for the first time.

1. SALVATION IS BY GRACE, NOT OF WORKS

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

2. THE SAVED ARE CREATED TO GOOD WORKS

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

3. NOT BY WORKS, BUT IN MERCY GOD SAVES

²³ Tullian Tchividjian, *One Way Love* (David C. Cook, 2013), page 31

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

4. BELIEVERS ARE TO MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. – Titus 3:8

1) *Legalists* put works in a wrong place.

But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. – Galatians 6:4

2) *Professors* give them no place at all.

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. – Titus 1:16

3) *Christians* are zealous of good works.

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. – Titus 2:14

24. WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁴When a Christian sees prostitutes, alcoholics, prisoners, drug addicts, unwed mothers, the homeless, refugees, he knows that he is looking in a mirror. Perhaps the Christian spent all of his life as a respectable middle-class person. No matter. He thinks, *Spiritually I was just like these people, though physically and socially I never was where they are now. They are outcasts. (Spiritually speaking) I was an outcast.*

1. HUMAN RAGS OF SELFRIGHTEOUSNESS

Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. – Isaiah 64:5-6

2. GARMENTS PATCHED BY REFORMATION

No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. – Mark 2:21

3. THE BEST ROBE BESTOWED IN GRACE

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. – Luke 15:22

4. DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS RECEIVED BY FAITH

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference. – Romans 3:22

²⁴ Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (P & R Publishing, 2007), p. 60.

25. SATAN'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁵In an interview with *New York* magazine, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia explained his beliefs about the reality of the Devil. After mentioning his belief in a real heaven and hell he interjected, "I even believe in the Devil." The interview continued (with interviewer in bold):

You do?

Of course! Yeah, he's a real person

Have you seen evidence of the Devil lately?

You know, it is curious. In the Gospels, the Devil is doing all sorts of things. He's making pigs run off cliffs, he's possessing people and whatnot. And that doesn't happen very much anymore ... It's because he's smart.

So what's he doing now?

What he's doing now is getting people not to believe in him or in God. He's much more successful that way ... I mean, c'mon, that's the explanation for why there's not demonic possession all over the place. That always puzzled me. What happened to the Devil, you know? He used to be all over the place. He used to be all over the New Testament. What happened to him? He got wilier.

Isn't it terribly frightening to believe in the Devil?

You're looking at me as though I'm weird. My God! Are you so out of touch with most of America, most of which believes in the Devil? I mean, Jesus Christ believed in the Devil! It's in the Gospels! You travel in circles that are so, so removed from mainstream America that you are appalled that anybody would believe in the Devil! Most of mankind has believed in the Devil, for all of history. Many more intelligent people than you or me have believed in the Devil.

1. THE "PRINCE" OF THIS WORLD—POLITICALLY

²⁵ Jennifer Senior, "In conversation: Antonin Scalia," *New York* (10-6-13)

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. –
John 12:31

2. THE "GOD" OF THIS WORLD—RELIGIOUSLY

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

26. LOOKING AT JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁶Every animal on earth has a set of correspondences with the environment around it, and some of those correspondences far exceed ours. Humans can perceive only thirty percent of the range of the sun's light and 1/70th of the spectrum of electromagnetic energy. Many animals exceed our abilities. Bats detect insects by sonar; pigeons navigate by magnetic fields; bloodhounds perceive a world of smell unavailable to us.

Perhaps the spiritual or "unseen" world requires an inbuilt set of correspondences activated only through some sort of spiritual quickening. "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above," said Jesus. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned," said Paul. Both expressions point to a different level of correspondence available only to a person spiritually alive.

1. WE BEHELD HIM—DYING

And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. – Luke 23:35

2. WE BEHOLD HIM—LIVING

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

3. WE SHALL SEE HIM—REIGNING

²⁶ Philip Yancey, "Seeing the Invisible God" *Books and Culture* (May/June 2000), p.8

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

- 1) Faith's View of the Cross, in Salvation.
- 2) Loves Gaze to the Throne, for Transformation.
- 3) Hope's Outlook in the Future, for Association.

27. LEARNING ABOUT MYSELF

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁷In late 2012 seventy-five year old Marion Shurtleff purchased a Bible in a used book store near her home in San Clemente, California. After making her purchase and returning home, she discovered a couple of folded pages tucked in the middle of the Bible.

The contents of the yellowed notebook sheets contained a child's handwriting that looked familiar. To her amazement, Shurtleff discovered her name at the top of the first page. When she looked closer she realized that she was actually reading a four-page essay she had written as a ten-year-old to earn a merit badge for the Girls Scouts in Covington, Kentucky—more than 2,000 miles from where she had just purchased the Bible.

By her own account, Shurtleff was deeply moved. "I opened the Bible and there was my name," Shurtleff said in a phone interview from her home. "I recognized my handwriting. I was shaking, literally. I was crying."

Although it remains a mystery how the essay ended up in a Bible in a used bookstore half way across the country, one thing is certain. When we look deeply into God's Word we see evidences of our lives, too. In the pages of Scripture we see individuals just like us—people who pursue faith and hope in God, people who also battle depression, doubt, lust, and pride. As we read the biblical stories about Abraham, Ruth, David, Mary, and Peter we also recognize our own life story.

1. WHAT I WAS BY NATURE

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. WHAT I DID IN PRACTICE

²⁷ Brian Mains, "Marion Shurtleff makes amazing discovery in used Bible, finds childhood essay she wrote 65 years ago," WCPO Digital (5-28-13)

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. – Titus 3:3

3. WHAT I AM BY GRACE

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. – Ephesians 2:8

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

4. WHAT I SHALL BE IN GLORY

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

28. WHAT MUST HAPPEN

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁸The church in each culture has its own special challenges—theological blind spots that hinder Christians from growing to full maturity in Christ I think one of the most serious theological blind spots in the western church is a defective understanding of suffering. There seems to be a lot of reflection on how to avoid suffering and on what to do when we hurt. We have a lot of teaching about escape from suffering and therapy for suffering, but there is inadequate teaching about the theology of suffering

The "good life," comfort, convenience, and a painless life have become necessities that people view as basic rights. If they do not have these, they think something has gone wrong One of the results of this attitude is a severe restriction of spiritual growth, for God intends us to grow through trials.

1. WE MUST DIE

For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him. – 2 Samuel 14:14

2. CHRIST MUST SUFFER

Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. – Acts 17:3

3. THE SCRIPTURE MUST BE FULFILLED

Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. – Acts 1:16

²⁸ Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain* (Crossway Books, 2007), pp. 51-52

- 1) The Wages and Result of Sin.
- 2) The Only Way of Atonement and Reconciliation.
- 3) Alike in Salvation and in Judgment.

29. JESUS COMES THROUGH FOR US

ILLUSTRATION:

²⁹When I'm asked how I can claim a ridiculously good life when I have no arms or legs, [people] assume I'm suffering from what I lack. They inspect my body and wonder how I could possibly give my life to God, who allowed me to be born without limbs. Others have attempted to soothe me by saying that God has all the answers and then when I'm in heaven I will find out his intentions. Instead, I choose to live by what the Bible says, which is that God is the answer today, yesterday, and always.

When people read about my life or witness me living it, they are prone to congratulate me for being victorious over my disabilities. I tell them that my victory came in surrender. It comes every day when I acknowledge that I can't do this on my own, so I say to God, "I give it to you!" Once I yielded, the Lord took my pain and turned it into something good He gave my life meaning when no one and nothing else could provide it. And if God can take someone like me, someone without arms and legs, and use me as his hands and feet, he can use anybody. It's not about ability. The only thing God needs from you is a willing heart.

1. JESUS LOVED 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

2. JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FOR 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

²⁹ Nick Vujicic, *Limitless* (Waterbrook, 2013), pp. 147-148

3. JESUS BECAME MY SAVIOR

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

4. JESUS BECAME MY LORD

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. – John 20:28

30. NO MORE WINKING

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent. – Acts 17:30

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁰In January 2013, Sabine Moreau, a 67-year-old Belgian woman, was driving to pick up a friend in Brussels, about 90 miles from her home. But based on the faulty directions she got from her GPS, she drove all the way to Croatia—nearly 1,000 miles away. The journey took the woman across five international borders. She stopped several times to get gas and take naps, but she kept pressing onward until she hit Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.

After a few days her son got worried and called the police, who located Sabine by following her bank statements. She told a Belgian reporter, "I was distracted, so I kept going. I saw all kinds of signs, first in French, then in German, and finally in Croatian, but I continued driving because I was distracted. When I passed Zagreb, I told myself I should turn around."

To repent means to change the direction you are going, turn around, and start moving toward God.

1. A GREAT COMMAND—"GOD COMMANDETH"

2. A UNIVERSAL CALL—"ALL MEN"

3. A WORLD WIDE SPHERE—"EVERYWHERE"

³⁰ Ryan Grenoble, "Sabine Moreau, Belgian Woman, Drives 900 Miles Off 90-Mile Route Because of GPS Error," *The Huffington Post* (1-15-13)

4. A DEFINITE OBJECT—“TO REPENT”

5. A SPECIFIED TIME—“Now”

31. THE CALL OF GOD

ILLUSTRATION:

³¹Perceiving all of our labor as a vocation can have a substantial impact on how we go about any job. I worked as greenskeeper at a golf course in the summer when I was in school. I knew I had no intention to mow greens and fairways for my "career." But for the nine summers I was a greenskeeper, I regarded it as my calling from God *for the time*. I was ordinarily one of the first to arrive and the last to leave; I routinely volunteered for the most unpleasant or demanding work; and I could run any piece of equipment in the shop, which made me a "utility infielder" for my bosses.

In my judgment, there is far too much Christian conversation about "finding" our calling, and too little about "pursuing" the one we have.

1. IT IS BY GOD'S GRACE

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

2. IT IS OF HIS OWN

Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ. – Romans 1:6

3. IT IS THROUGH THE GOSPEL

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. – 2 Thessalonians 2:14

4. IT IS IN THE SPIRIT

³¹ T. David Gordon, "Vocation: Work Quietly with Your Hands," *Modern Reformation* (November/December, 2011), p. 29

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:24

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. – 1 Corinthians 2:4

32. JESUS IN THE PSALMS

ILLUSTRATION:

³²"Here is the cup, my Son. Drink it alone."

God must have wept as he performed his task. Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed in the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation. The spotless Lamb was blemished.

The King turns away from his Prince. The undiluted wrath of a sin-hating Father falls upon his sin-filled Son. The fire envelops him. The shadows hide him. The Son looks for his Father, but the Father cannot be seen.

"My God, my God...why?"

It was the most gut-wrenching cry of loneliness in history, and it came not from a prisoner or a widow or a patient. It came from a hill, from a cross, from a Messiah.

"My God, my God," he screamed, "why did you abandon me!"

Never have words carried such hurt. Never has one being been so lonely. The despair is darker than the sky. The two who have been one are now two.

1. PSALM 22, THE CROSS—A SUFFERING CHRIST

2. PSALM 23, THE CROOK—A RISEN CHRIST

3. PSALM 24, THE CROWN—A REIGNING CHRIST

³² Max Lucado, *The Cross (Multnomah, 2002)* p. 33-34

33. OUR CHRISTIAN POSTURE

ILLUSTRATION:

³³Living on the farm, as my grandfather did, enabled him to choose a different way of life and to live by his own light. And his light certainly was the gospel.

He wasn't a particularly successful farmer. He worked about 160 acres and raised dairy cows and a mixture of crops. His life was centered on his faith in a way that is impossible in the city.

He began every day with a family altar, right after breakfast. My Uncle Jim, who took over the farm when my grandfather died, carried on this practice. You milked the cows before breakfast. Then, after you had your Post-Toasties and your coffee, you went into the front room--seldom used for anything else--and you sat there and you read a chapter and you talked about it and then you knelt down and you prayed for as long as he figured was necessary--a long, slow prayer, everybody kneeling, putting your face into the sofa. I remember the smells of that sofa, of other members of the family. Only after this was done would you go out, hitch up the team, and cultivate the fields.

It was very lovely to a kid. It was a way in which we were different from other people. In the country you could do that.

1. SITTING BEFORE THE LORD—IN REST

Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? – 2 Samuel 7:18

2. STANDING BEFORE THE LORD—IN READINESS

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. – 1 Kings 17:1

³³ Garrison Keillor, *Leadership*, Vol. 12, no. 4.

3. SPEAKING BEFORE THE LORD—IN TESTIMONY

Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. – 2 Corinthians 12:19

34. BY GOD'S CHOICE

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁴Stan Telchin, a successful Jewish businessman, felt betrayed when his 21-year-old daughter, Judy, called home from college to say, "I believe Jesus is the Messiah."

Judy's conversion threw the Telchin family into philosophical chaos. Stan, in an effort to prove his daughter wrong, began an energetic quest for truth. The search for answers spread to Stan's wife, Ethel, and to their other daughter, Ann, who were both angered, perplexed, then curious, about Judy's radically transformed behavior. When the search created friction between Stan and Ethel, they agreed to pursue their studies independently.

Months later, Stan accepted an invitation to attend a National Convocation of Messianic Jews. He planned to "work the convention" just like he was used to doing with his business. He said, "I intended to meet with anyone who I thought could help me, always probing for more information."

After a series of meetings, Stan lay awake in his dorm room, thinking about his journey. He had arrived at a point of crisis. If the Bible was true—and he had concluded it was—then he really did believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He also admitted to himself that he believed in the Bible as God's inspired Word. But he couldn't quite say the words to himself, "Jesus is the Messiah."

He asked his roommate, Art, to pray for him. Art obliged, praying simply, "God give Stan your peace, and resolve his inner conflict."

The next morning at breakfast one of the men at Stan's table asked him to pray before the meal. Startled by the request, Stan bowed his head and said: "Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe. I thank You for the fellowship and the friendship at this table. I thank you for what we have learned at this meeting. I ask You now to bless this food, and I do so...in the name of Jesus, the Messiah."

³⁴ Stan Telchin, *Betrayed* (Chosen Books, 1981), p.95-100

For a moment, he sat there, amazed at what he had just prayed. It had not been planned. The others at the table didn't miss it. Their faces were suddenly jubilant. "Stan," said one of them, "You're a believer!" And one by one, they each got up from their seats and hugged Stan. Several cried with joy.

Stan began to weep as well. He wasn't sure how his wife would take the news, but he just had to call her. Instead of his carefully crafted speech, he found himself blurting out, "Ethel, honey, it's me. It's over. I've made my decision. Jesus is the Messiah!"

There was a pause on the other line as Stan held his breath. Then his wife's voice came back softly, "Thank God! That makes it unanimous. We've all been waiting for you."

Stan's entire family—his wife and both daughters—had also made their decisions to trust Christ as the Messiah. They had each been praying, and waiting patiently, for the Holy Spirit of Christ to draw Stan into a relationship with Himself.

1. CHOSEN TO SALVATION AND GLORY

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. – 2 Thessalonians 2:13

2. CHOSEN FOR HEAVENLY POSITION AND HOLINESS

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. – Ephesians 1:4

3. CHOSEN UNTO SEPARATION AND SERVICE

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. – 1 Peter 1:2

35. WHAT MAKES AN ANGEL SMILE?

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁵I accept the existence of angels as an element of the mysterious reality of God's plenitude. Obviously, with angelic choirs the creation must be a more complex, diverse, and manifold reality than one might want to imagine. Angels are a sign that God's goodness must be excessively fruitful; it overflows in creative energy. Infinite varieties of beings can be sustained and flourish in this good and bountiful system.

1. IN CREATION'S MORNING

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? – Job 38:7

2. AT CHRIST'S COMING

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. – Luke 2:13-14

3. FOR A SINNER'S CONVERSION

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. – Luke 15:10

³⁵ Sidney Callahan in *Commonweal* (Dec. 1, 1995). *Christianity Today*, Vol. 40, no. 2.

36. WHAT WILL WE FIND IN HEAVEN?

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁶Many of us go to extraordinary lengths to avoid learning the endings of films we haven't watched or books we haven't read. We get upset with friends who slip up and spill the surprise ending. The movie reviewer Roger Ebert once warned his fellow critics that they never have a right to play the spoiler.

But a study from two researchers at the University of California, San Diego suggests that spoilers don't spoil stories. Instead, contrary to popular wisdom, they might even enhance our enjoyment of a story. The study ran three experiments based on 12 short stories. Each version of the story was read by at least 30 people. Surprisingly, the researchers found that the study participants preferred the "spoiled" versions of suspenseful stories. For example, in one case, participants were told *before* reading the story that a condemned man's daring escape is all just a fantasy before the noose snaps around his neck. That spoiler alert helped them enjoy the story even more.

One of the researchers had an interesting theory about why people liked getting a spoiler alert. He said, "It could be that once you know how the story turns out ... you're more comfortable processing the information and you can focus on a deeper understanding of the story."

God has given us a spoiler alert – He lets us know how it's all going to turn out.

1. OUR SAVIOR

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

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

2. OUR MASTER

³⁶ ScienceDaily, "Spoiler Alert: Stories Are Not Spoiled by 'Spoilers,'" ScienceDaily.com (8-11-11)

And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. –
Ephesians 6:9

3. OUR NAMES

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. – **Luke 10:20**

And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life. – **Philippians 4:3**

4. OUR CITIZENSHIP

For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. – **Philippians 3:20**

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. – **Hebrews 12:22**

5. OUR HOPE

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

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. – **1 John 3:3**

6. OUR INHERITANCE

To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. – **1 Peter 1:4**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. – Ephesians 1:3

7. OUR REWARD

Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. – Luke 6:23

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. – Revelation 22:12

37. CONSIDER JESUS

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁷I remember an animated discussion with my high school freshman English teacher over the word *awful*. I insisted on using *awe-full* to describe something so exalted as to arouse reverence. She preferred that I stick with the word's common spelling and its usage to designate something dreadful.

We should have looked in the dictionary. My old *Webster's* lists as its first definition "inspiring awe; highly impressive." Not until its fourth entry does it supply the definition usually assumed in idiomatic English: "very bad, ugly, unpleasant."

But the teacher had the final word that day in class. Even at age 14 I felt that a vital perception was being lost—the sense that something, someone, was higher than we. I longed to verbalize awe-full-ness; my teacher made class awful.

Today teenagers apply the related word *awesome* to clothes, food, music, and cinematic effects. The word is so overused that when people sing Rich Mullins's "Awesome God," they seem to trivialize the Awe-full One and put the Trinity on the same level as toothpaste and togs.

As our culture has worked hard to establish equality among persons, we've somehow put God into that parity and gradually reduced our sense that this is a breathtakingly transcendent *GOD* we're talking about.

1. IN HUMILIATION—OUR EXAMPLE

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. – Hebrews 12:3

2. IN EXALTATION—OUR REPRESENTATIVE

³⁷ Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (William B. Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 98-99

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

38. CHRISTIANS REJOICE!

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁸While on a short-term missions trip, Pastor Jack Hinton was leading worship at a leper colony on the island of Tobago. A woman who had been facing away from the pulpit turned around.

"It was the most hideous face I had ever seen," Hinton said. "The woman's nose and ears were entirely gone. She lifted a fingerless hand in the air and asked, 'Can we sing *Count Your Many Blessings*?' "

Overcome with emotion, Hinton left the service. He was followed by a team member who said, "I guess you'll never be able to sing that song again."

"Yes I will," he replied, "but I'll never sing it the same way."

1. IN GODS SALVATION

Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.
– **Psalm 60:12**

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. – **1 Peter 1:6**

2. IN CHRIST JESUS

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. – **Philippians 3:3**

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. – **1 Peter 1:2**

³⁸ *The Pastor's Update (5/96). Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker)*

3. IN THE LORD

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. –

Philippians 4:10

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. – **Habakkuk**

3:18

39. WHAT SHOULD WE BE CALLED?

ILLUSTRATION:

³⁹Every day our naming of the people around us gives life and takes it away. ...

I can still feel the impact of a highly musical friend who one day called me musical. No one had ever called me that. I didn't really play an instrument. I was no soloist.

Yet what made this comment so remarkable was that I instantly felt known and loved. Why? Because I was being named in the way that always matters most: from the inside out.

The musicality of my life, fundamental and invisible as it is, has to do with my soul, not with instruments. It's about my way of being in the world, not about notes being played. The sheer, unexpected grace of being named "musical" stunned me. It's not the most important thing about me, but he "got me" in a way that noticed, validated, and appreciated something deeply true about me even though it is usually missed.

Being rightly named means being truly known. It changes our lives. ...

Dalits ("Untouchables") in India are required by Hindu law to be given one name, and it must be derogatory: Ugly, Dung, Stupid. Imagine the transformation when they discover that, in Jesus, God came as a dalit ... and that he has the power to rename them: Chosen. Holy. Beloved.

1. CALLED SONS OF GOD—BY THE FATHER

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

2. CALLED CHRISTIANS—BY THE SON

³⁹ Mark Labberton, "Leading by Naming," *Leadership* (Spring, 2007), p. 122

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. – Acts 11:26

3. CALLED SAINTS—BY THE SPIRIT

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

40. MY LIFE DIRECTED TO THE LORD

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁰For pro golfer Kyle Stanley, 2012 looked to be off to a perfect start. Stanley had never recorded a PGA win, but in January, it looked like that was about to change. At Torrey Pines in San Diego, Kyle held a four-shot lead going into the eighteenth hole on the final round.

Challenger Brandt Snedeker had almost no hope of winning. The only chance for Snedeker would be a complete meltdown by Kyle Stanley. On this fateful Sunday afternoon, Stanley quickly went from being anointed a rising star to pulling off one of the worst collapses in golf history. On the par five eighteenth hole, Stanley would take a triple-bogey eight.

Stanley's historic meltdown was sealed when Snedeker beat him in the ensuing playoff. The young pro had pried defeat from the jaws of victory. Afterward, when Stanley was asked what happened, he replied, "It's not a hard golf hole. I could probably play it a thousand times and never make an eight."

During the first of four rounds of golf, Stanley had dominated the eighteenth hole, but, when the championship was on the line, he shot an eight. Kyle Stanley's collapse is a reminder that it's not how you start that matters, but how you finish.

1. TURNED TO THE LORD—CONVERSION

And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. – Acts 9:35

2. ADDED TO THE LORD—FELLOWSHIP

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) – Acts 5:14

3. LIVING TO THE LORD—DEVOTION

⁴⁰ Gordon Dabbs, *Epic Fail* (Leafwood Publishers, 2013), pp. 169-170

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. – Romans 14:8

4. CLEAVING UNTO THE LORD—DISCIPLESHIP

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. – Acts 11:23

5. MAKING, MELODY TO THE LORD—WORSHIP

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

6. DOING IT HEARTILY TO THE LORD—SERVICE

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. – Colossians 3:23

41. PEOPLE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴¹In his book, *Witness Essentials*, Dan Meyer shared the following statistics:

- In 1900 Korea had no Protestant church. Today, there are over 7,000 churches in just the city of Seoul, South Korea.
- At the end of the 19th century, the southern portion of Africa was only 3 percent Christian. Today, 63 percent of the population is Christian, while membership in the churches in Africa is increasing by 34,000 people per day.
- In India, 14 million of the 140 million members of the "untouchable" caste have become Christians.
- More people in the Islamic world have come to Christ in the last 25 years than in the entire history of Christian missions.
- In Islamic Indonesia, the percentage of Christians is now so high (around 15 percent) that the Muslim government will no longer print statistics.
- In China, it is estimated that there are now more self-avowed disciples of Jesus than members of the Communist party. Even the most conservative estimates suggest that China will soon have more Christians than any country.
- Across the planet, followers of Jesus are increasing by more than eighty thousand per day.
- 510 new churches form every day.

Meyer concludes: "The irony is that, except for the Middle East (where Christianity was born) and Europe and America (to whose civilization it gave birth), Christianity is expanding everywhere today."

Let's take a look at where it all began.

1. BELIEVING ROMANS

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. – Romans 1:8

⁴¹ Daniel Meyer, *Witness Essentials* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), pp. 32-33

2. GENEROUS *THESSALONIANS*

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

3. OBEDIENT *PHILIPPIANS*

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. – Philippians 2:12

4. LOVING *COLOSSIANS*

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

5. FAITHFUL *EPHESIANS*

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. – Ephesians 1:1

6. CARNAL *CORINTHIANS*

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? – 1 Corinthians 3:3

7. FOOLISH *GALATIANS*

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? – Galatians 3:1

42. WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴²In October, 2011, the Associated Press ran a deeply moving story about a name-changing ceremony for girls in Mumbai, India. At birth the 285 girls had been named Nakusa or Nakushi, which means Unwanted in the primary Indian language of Hindi. The name Unwanted is widely given to girls across India where families often value sons much more than daughters. As a result, female babies have been aborted or neglected at an alarming rate.

But the renaming ceremony was an attempt to give the girls a new identity. The article reported, "The 285 girls—wearing their best outfits with barrettes, braids and bows in their hair—lined up to receive certificates with their new names along with small flower bouquets." Some of the girls chose new names that mean prosperous, beautiful, good, or even "very tough." One girl who had been named Nakusa by her grandfather who was disappointed in her birth said, "Now in school, my classmates and friends will be calling me by this new name, and that makes me very happy."

As a follower of Christ, by which name/title are you known?

1. WE ARE CHILDREN IN RELATIONSHIP

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. – 1 John 4:4

2. WE ARE SONS IN DIGNITY

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. – Romans 8:14

3. WE ARE PRIESTS IN NEARNESS

⁴² Chaya Babu, "285 Indian girls shed 'unwanted' names," Associated Press (10-22-11)

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 2:5

4. WE ARE SAINTS IN SEPARATENESS

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. – Ephesians 5:3

5. WE ARE KINGS IN AUTHORITY

And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. – Revelation 1:6

43. THE THREE Rs OF SALVATION

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴³In the fall of 2010, billions of people around the globe were captivated by the story of the Chilean miners. Trapped beneath two thousand feet of solid rock, the thirty-three men were desperate. The collapse of a main tunnel had sealed their exit and thrust them into survival mode. They ate two spoonfuls of tuna, a sip of milk, and a morsel of peaches—every other day. For two months they prayed for someone to save them.

On the surface above, the Chilean rescue team worked around the clock, consulting NASA, meeting with experts. They designed a thirteen-foot-tall capsule and drilled, first a communication hole, then an excavation tunnel. There was no guarantee of success. No one had ever been trapped underground this long and lived to tell about it.

Now someone has.

On October 13, 2010, the men began to emerge, slapping high fives and leading victory chants. A great-grandfather. A forty-four-year-old who was planning a wedding. Then a nineteen-year-old. All had different stories, but all had made the same decision. They trusted someone else to save them. No one returned the rescue offer with a declaration of independence: "I can get out of here on my own. Just give me a new drill." They had stared at the stone tomb long enough to reach the unanimous opinion: "We need help. We need someone to penetrate this world and pull us out." And when the rescue capsule came, they climbed in.

Why is it so hard for us to do the same?

1. RUIN IN ADAM—FALLEN

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

⁴³ Max Lucado, *Grace* (Thomas Nelson, 2012), pp. 53-54

2. RECOVERY IN CHRIST—RISEN

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

3. RESULT IN ME—REGENERATED

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

- 1) The First is what we inherit by Nature.
- 2) The Second is what we receive through Grace.
- 3) The Third is wrought by the Spirit.

44. THE PLEA FOR REVIVAL

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁴John was a priest in Kronstadt, Russia, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. That was a time and place of dirty marketplaces. Imperial Russia was decadent, rotting beneath its own weight, and the streets were dangerous, rife with poverty and depravity. Crime ran amok. Alcoholism was rampant. Prostitutes crowded the corners, thieves the alleys. There was no safe place, so most people who weren't part of that world didn't venture out into it. Most of the clergy, used to a life of privilege and status, used what waning powers they had to insulate themselves from the widespread peril and hardship.

Not so Father John. His daily practice was to don his robe and descend into the meanest part of the city. He'd walk among the addicts and the predators, the whores and the thieves, the orphans and the widows, and he did it with healing in his wings. He would find the most broken and dissolute man or woman he could track down, lying in a gutter or standing on a street corner. He would cup their chin in his large hand and lift their face so they were looking directly in his eyes. "This," he would say, meaning this way of life, this means of survival, this condition I found you in, "this is beneath your dignity. You were created to house the glory of the living God."

Father John, in his lifetime, was called the Pastor of All Russia. And everywhere he went, revival came with him.

1. "REVIVE ME"

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. –

Psalm 138:7

2. "REVIVE US"

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? – Psalm 85:6

⁴⁴ Mark Buchanan, *Your Church Is Too Safe* (Zondervan, 2012), pp. 88-89

3. "REVIVE THY WORK"

O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. – Habakkuk 3:2

45. HOW TO BE SAVED

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁵Abner, a young professional in Los Angeles, had a Christian roommate who was part of a local church for twenty-somethings. This church sponsored an outreach event called The Edge. The Edge was an event designed for skeptics, and these edgy meetings were not designed to call people to conversion, but only to get them ignited or reignited to pursue the spiritual side of life. Jesus was talked about, but in very non-cliché ways. For instance, one meeting was based on the adult cartoon *South Park* and was entitled "Jesus vs. the Easter Bunny." It was held during Easter season. Abner's roommate invited him to check it out. Abner wasn't interested in Christianity, but he was a *South Park* fan! So he came.

Later, Abner recalled his response. He was very upset. He had written off the Christian faith a long time before, but the people he heard that night were not like any Christians he had met. They talked very honestly about struggles and failures. They admitted they didn't have it all together, not just before they "got spiritual"—they still didn't. Doug, the speaker, told of his experiences with marijuana and marijuana look-alikes. He had tried to smoke oregano once, having heard that it gave a similar high experience. In the midst of the laughter, Doug then challenged those present, reminding them that neither oregano nor marijuana ever really delivered on what they seemed to promise. He also challenged people to pursue the spiritual part of life, not through getting high but through opening their hearts to the possibility of God.

Abner was ticked because he was a well-known stoner and drinker. He was rarely completely sober. And he felt like Doug had been reading his mind, or at least his mail. He disagreed with Doug, but Abner couldn't ignore the powerful way Doug's story connected to his own life story. So he asked to get together with Doug. At their meeting, Abner decided he would give God three weeks. And if God didn't show up in three weeks, Abner was done with God. Doug just smiled and nodded.

That night Abner got drunk again. He felt like a real hypocrite: he knew that if he kept getting high and drunk, he would not really be giving God a chance. That night he saw what his life was really like. He saw it going down the drain. So that

⁴⁵ Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism (IVP, 2006)*, p. 40-41

night he stopped drinking and smoking. That night he felt Jesus' presence, and he knew that in that presence he could stop getting drunk and high. During the next three days, he continued to sense Jesus' presence, and it freaked him out. *So this is what it feels like to feel God*, he thought.

That weekend, at a party with his friends, he took out his bong (his marijuana water pipe, for you non-stoners out there), and his friends got ready to get high with him. But Abner took the bong, lit it on fire, and burned it to ashes. His friends were shocked. "What are you doing? Are you out of your mind?"

Abner responded: "I'm getting rid of what I love the most. I'm not going to do this anymore. My life is going down the drain. I have to trust God." His friends were blown away. So was Abner's old way of life. He had committed himself to building his identity around a new center: Jesus. He was going to trust Jesus for his security and sense of well-being and no longer look to alcohol and pot.... Today, just a few years later, he works in ministry with a campus group, reaching out to students struggling just as he was.

1. BY GOD—THE SOURCE

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. – 2 Timothy 1:9

2. THROUGH GRACE—THE SPRING

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;). – Ephesians 2:5

3. IN CHRIST—THE CAUSE

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. – John 10:9

4. BY FAITH—THE MEANS

And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. – Luke 7:50

5. BY CHRIST RISEN—THE 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

46. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁶One recent summer, in a large urn that sits outside the front door of my house, a blue swift made a nest in which she laid six eggs. This beautiful, shy creature had made her home in (almost) my house. I felt privileged that I had been honored by her presence, even if my cat viewed it entirely differently.

If I felt privileged when a bird nested by my door, how much more privileged should I feel knowing that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in me? Our hearts should well up with gratitude and song at the mere thought of it. It is staggering.

Some of us take photographs when distinguished guests visit our homes. I love to glance through a "Visitor's Book" to see who has stayed in our home. On occasion I see the name of a well-known [person] or a dear friend. But none of this compares to having the Spirit permanently [dwell] in our hearts.

1. BRINGS GLORY TO GOD

*He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. –
John 16:14*

2. CONVICTS SINNERS

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. – John 16:8

3. INSTRUCTS SAINTS

All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. – John 16:15

⁴⁶ Derek W. H. Thomas, *How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home* (Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), p. 35

47. CHRISTIANS ARE...

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁷I heard once of an Italian peasant woman who happened to bump into a monk who lived in a monastery high on a hill above her village. Since she bumped into him in the middle of the road, she said "Father, I've always wanted to ask somebody what you men of God do up there on the top of the mountain that looks to me to be so close to heaven. I've always wondered about the life of holiness that you lead up there."

And this old man, a wise and honest interpreter, said, "What do we men of God do up there on the holy mountain? I'll tell you, my dear. We fall down; we get up. We fall down; we get up. We fall down; we get up."

That is the way of all Christian growth. It doesn't happen all at once. But it does happen when we glimpse what we have not yet achieved, and we want that so badly that we honestly say, "Here's where I am. I'm not going to try to get myself together and then ask God to move me to the goal. I'm going to ask God to come into this moment. It's the only hope of ever making it to that high range of development."

1. BABES—FEEDING

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

1 Peter 2:2

2. LIVING STONES—BUILT

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. –

3. A HOLY PRIESTHOOD—WORSHIPING

⁴⁷ John Claypool, "You Don't Have to Be Good to Come to Christ," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 83.

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 2:5

4. STRANGERS—AWAY FROM HOME

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. – 1 Peter 2:11

5. PILGRIMS—GOING HOME

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. – 1 Peter 2:11

6. SERVANTS—OBEYING

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. – 1 Peter 2:18

7. SUFFERERS—SUBMITTING

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. – 1 Peter 2:20

48. JESUS, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁸What a paradox that a babe in a manger should be called *mighty*! Yet even as a baby, Jesus Christ revealed power. His birth affected the heavens as that star appeared. The star affected the Magi, and they left their homes and made that long journey to Jerusalem. Their announcement shook King Herod and his court. Jesus' birth brought angels from heaven and simple shepherds from their flocks on the hillside. Midnight became midday as the glory of the Lord appeared to men.

1. SAVIOR—PAST

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. – **Luke 2:11**

2. PRIEST—PRESENT

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

3. BRIDEGROOM—FUTURE

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. – **Matthew 25:6**

⁴⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe in *His Name is Wonderful. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 18.*

49. WHERE WE STAND

ILLUSTRATION:

⁴⁹I was organizing campaigns for other evangelists, but I wanted to be an evangelist myself. So I was going through a lot of soul-searching and wondering, *Will the missionary society I was with understand that I want to be an evangelist? Or do they want me forever to be an organizer of somebody else's campaign?*

And the Lord gave me a verse. It sounds a bit bombastic, sort of big-headed, so I don't like to quote it in public. But to paraphrase, the Lord basically says, "I will open up nations to you." I took it personally, as a word from the Lord, and I wrote in the flyleaf of my Bible, "1966 (February, I think it was)—the Lord is going to do this for me."

At that point, we hadn't even had a big campaign in Colombia, let alone anywhere else. We had nice little campaigns. But then in Bologna, Colombia, Dec. 8-12, 1966, we had 30,000 people in the plaza, and the president was watching from the presidential palace. It was a breakthrough, and it just gave me the conviction: God is going to do what he promised.

Once in a while, when I feel things are going slow or income isn't up to par, I go back to that as reassurance. It happened in a great way, but I knew there was still more to come.

1. SAVED BY CHRIST—HIS PLACE

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. – 2 Timothy 1:9

2. SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST—HIS POSITION

⁴⁹ Interview, "Louis Palau," *Outreach Magazine* (March/April 2009), p. 87

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. – 1 Corinthians 1:2

3. SEPARATED TO CHRIST—HIS PATH

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. – Psalm 4:3

4. SATISFIED WITH CHRIST—HIS PORTION

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

5. SWIFT FOR CHRIST—HIS PRACTICE

He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. – Psalm 147:15

50. LOOK! LEAN! LIVE!

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵⁰Nearly seven years ago, I started a business. I prayed diligently about the decision and sensed God's confirmation to move forward. Because of my inexperience in retail operations, I depended heavily on God for wisdom and direction. Between the first time I caught a vision for this venture and the day we opened our doors, I prayed every step of the way.

On opening day, customers lined up around the building. With pounding heart and sweaty palms, I became acutely aware of the fact that the success or failure of this business rested on me. For the next four years, I ran the store as if this were true.

Instead of praying for God's wisdom or listening to the counsel of trusted advisors, like my husband, Dan, who was also my business partner, I relied on my own understanding. I simply was too busy and preoccupied to spend time reading my Bible. And when I did make time, I found myself re-reading the same passage over and over and never grasping the words. Daily preoccupation over my work took the place of daily quiet time with God.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). I discovered how true his words are. The longer I skimmed in my spiritual life, the further I fell from the vine. And the further I fell from the vine, the more all my efforts proved fruitless.

Making decisions apart from God and Dan started to have a snowball effect that eventually led to the demise of our business—and nearly our marriage.

Looking back on those four years, I know now what was at play: apart from Christ, I could do nothing. Instead of remaining in Jesus, as he instructs us to do in John 15:5, I ran on ahead without him.

1. LOOKING *TO* CHRIST—FOR SALVATION

⁵⁰ Marian V. Liataud, "Remain in Me," *Christianity Today's Kyria* blog (12-22-09)

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

2. LEANING ON CHRIST—IN COMMUNION

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. – John 13:23

3. LIVING UNTO CHRIST—IN SERVICE

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. – 2 Corinthians 5:15

51. GOD'S MEANS OF DISCIPLINE

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵¹Charlie Engle, Ray Zahab, and Kevin Lin know endurance better than most. For 111 days, they ran the equivalent of two marathons a day in order to cross the entire Sahara Desert on foot. They touched the waters at Senegal and then made their way through Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Libya, and Egypt to touch the waters of the Red Sea. Along the way, the trio faced blazing afternoons of over 100 degrees, jarring, freezing nights, sandstorms, tendonitis, violent sickness, and the usual aches, pains, and blisters. But the biggest challenge they faced can be summed up in one word: water. Finding it in its purest, cleanest form gets to be a bit of a chore while in the middle of nowhere!

Crossing the Saharan Desert on foot is an amazing accomplishment. But just as commendable are these marathon finishers:

- Christians who finish their lives still growing, still serving.
- Husbands and wives who stay faithful to each other "until death do us part."
- Young people who preserve their virginity until marriage, in spite of crushing peer pressure.
- Pastors who stay passionate about ministry until their last breath.
- Church members who weather the rougher patches and remain joyful, loving, and faithful.

The way we accomplish these things is by accepting and acting upon the Lord's discipline in our lives. There are many methods that God uses.

1. THE WORD—FOR CORRECTION AND INSTRUCTION

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

2. THE KNIFE—FOR PRUNING AND FRUITFULNESS

⁵¹ Jon R. Mutchler, Ferndale, Washington; source: Anna Johnson, "3 ultra-athletes run across Sahara," USA Today (2-20-07)

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. – John 15:2

3. THE THORN—FOR PREVENTION AND POWER

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. – 2 Corinthians 12:7

4. THE ROD—FOR CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? – Hebrews 12:5-7

52. THE BIBLE SAYS “NO!”

ILLUSTRATION:

⁵²My dad kept a coin jar on his dresser. Every night when he got home from work, the first thing he did was head upstairs to change his clothes. You could hear the familiar jangling of coins as they spilled from his pocket and he set them in the jar. When I was about nine years old, I decided his coins should be mine. Over time I pilfered a few nickels here, a handful of pennies there. Before I knew it, I had successfully swindled my dad out of his loose change, and he never even noticed.

Sometime later, guilt gripped me. I knew that what I'd been doing could only be considered stealing. I had no way to explain away my behavior. With a pounding heart, I penned an apology to him, confessing my sin and asking him to forgive me. I tucked it under his coin jar along with a pile of pennies as restitution.

I waited anxiously for my dad to confront me. Day One went by, and he didn't say anything. Another day passed; still nothing. And then another, and another. Eventually, I forgot about the note.

Then one day out of the blue, my dad stepped into my bedroom and said, "Marian, I got your note and the pennies." My heart raced; my throat felt like a marble was lodged in it I was expecting punishment, but ... he seemed on the verge of tears. But that didn't make any sense. I had wronged him. He had every right to be mad and punish me. Instead he said, "Thank you." And then he gave me a hug.

And then he left.

We never spoke of it again.

I stood there dumbfounded. Why, when I fully deserved my father's wrath, did he instead show me mercy? I didn't deserve it; I hadn't earned it. I felt like a criminal let off scot free!

This was my first powerful lesson on judgment and grace. Since then I've never gotten over the way grace feels. It's like waiting for the other shoe to drop, but it

⁵² *Marian V. Liataud, "The Sweet Relief of Grace," KyriaBlog (6-27-11)*

never does. It's experiencing utter relief and humility in the face of guilt because you know how bad you can be, but God (or your daddy) chooses to love and forgive you anyway. It is truly God's riches at Christ's expense.

1. NO CONDEMNATION, IN CHRIST

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. – Romans 8:1

2. NO SEPARATION, FROM CHRIST

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. NO RESERVATION, FOR CHRIST

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