

Lent 2013 - Vol. 66



More of Him – Less of Me

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)

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It's Not About You!

by Bob Tedesco

Culture of self

Many of us live in a culture that is soaked in enthusiastic chants such as “You deserve a break today!” “It’s all about you!” “You’re worth it!” I think that most of us want to feel that we are needed so we welcome the chants and cheers that seem to affirm our importance and value. In the midst of all of this self-esteem building a growing narcissism is eroding the core values of our civilization. Narcissism is no longer considered abnormal by many therapists. Is it any wonder that a selfish and self-centered orientation to life blinds people of their responsibility for the common good of society and how they treat individual members of society? We notice the growing selfishness in our environment, yet we seem puzzled or even surprised at the atrocities that we hear reported on the daily news.

Narcissism not only erodes the core values of society, it also affects how Christians view their relationship with the Lord and his call on their lives.

Jesus is Lord and Savior

In a group setting, if you asked the question, “Who has accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior?” most Christians would raise their hands. Since most of us have been formed in a culture soaked in selfishness we might want to raise our hand only half way, or up and down quickly.

My point here is that we do a good job with the “savior” part: *my* salvation, *my* soul, *my* eternity, *my* health, *my* improvement, *my* growth, etc. (It’s all about me!). I like the title “Redeemer” because it implies that Jesus saves your soul *and* your life. And, how does he save our *lives*? He saves them by giving us the power to turn them over to

him. So, he saves our soul and in return we give him our lives. A fair trade, isn't it?

Consider the following scripture verses: Luke 17:7-10

“Will anyone of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what he was commanded? So, you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

This Scripture is very offensive to our modern sensibilities. We want to cry out, “It’s not fair!” “I’ve worked all day!” “You don’t appreciate me!” “I want to talk to your supervisor!” “Savior” is a lot about us (what we get), and “*Lordship*” is a lot about him! (What he gets: a life dedicated to him and willing to serve even when tired.)

How this life is given over to him is the next question. How do I love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ?

1 John 3:16-17:

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

One of the main ways that I love and serve him is in my love and service of the brethren.

The Path Between

We were all born selfish and maybe some of us became deluded with the notion that we were number one or the center of the universe.

We know that human maturity is moving away from that selfishness toward a healthy concern for the rights and the needs of others. The process of Christian maturity could be seen as the path between *my* salvation and *his* lordship. So, conversion to the Lord Jesus is the first step and not the destination. We can call that path between Savior and Lord discipleship: more on him and less on me. Or as John the Baptist said, “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

Discipleship and People

Scriptural emphasis

When presented the question, “What percentage of the Ten Commandments deals with spiritual things?” a professor of business administration quickly replied, “Thirty percent!” No matter how you arrange the Ten Commandments, a fraction of them are dedicated to spiritual directions; the rest deal with human relationships and interactions. The New Testament seems to be overwhelmingly about how we should orient our lives and how we should treat one another.

The Sermon on the Mount has been called Jesus’ greatest teaching, and much of it has to do with our postures, our attitudes, our relationships. And much of the teaching of Jesus is directed at or to the body of Christ, the people he has redeemed.

Jesus identifies with the body of Christ

Consider the judgment scene presented in Matthew 25:31-34, 44-46:

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ “

44-46 “Then they all will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Because it is a final judgment scene you could classify it as a “spiritual” teaching or a predictive prophecy. It has devils, angels, the King, his royal throne, eternal punishment, and eternal life. Stepping back from it though, it is simply the Lord saying, “I identify with my body, the people I have redeemed who are now joined with me. What you do to them, you do to me, and the consequences are eternal!”

We again see Jesus almost equating himself with his body in Matthew 18:18-20:

“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

The incarnation of the Incarnation

One final observation about Christ and his body on earth. Notice the parallel between the Incarnation and Pentecost. The angel announces to Mary that she will bring forth the Son of God (Luke 1:26-33) because the Holy Spirit “will come upon you” (vs. 35). Then at the Ascension, Jesus tells them to wait in the city until the Spirit comes “down upon you” (Luke 24:29), and at Pentecost, the church is born. The parallels are striking. Christ intends to be physically present in all the world through us!

Four levels of Christian responsibility

As a disciple of Christ and a member of his body – the body of Christ, I am responsible to the Lord for the way I live my life. I have certain responsibilities which the Lord expects me to carry out.

1. The first is a responsibility that concerns myself: I need to get myself in right relationship with the Lord.
2. The second is a responsibility for my immediate family. Whether single or married, I have a real responsibility toward my immediate family. The teachings of the New Testament mostly assume that you will understand this.

Matthew 5:46:

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

3. My third area of responsibility is for the Body of Christ (community, congregation, parish, denomination). These represent my nearest relationships outside of the family.
4. The fourth area of responsibility is for the world (local, country, continent, whole earth)

Discipleship has a very important place in this spectrum of responsibility.

Jesus' final days

When people know that they are about to die, their words, concerns, and directions take on a special importance. When that person is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, we should all take notice and give his words top priority.

Jesus' final prayer, given on the eve of his sacrifice on the cross, was for unity.

John 17:11:

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”

And that unity has a consequence: it is a life saver, not only for us who know the Lord Jesus, but for all who will come to recognize and believe in the Lord Jesus through his body here on earth!

John 17:20-21:

“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jesus' **final command** (to my way of thinking) is in John 15:12-17:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have call you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.”

There is also a **final warning** (John 15:18-25)

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’”

and a **final promise** (John 15:26):

“But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.”

and a **final purpose** (John 15:27):

“...and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

Considering the final prayer and final command, I draw the conclusion that the *third level of responsibility is the focal area of discipleship*. Our discipleship will result in service to the world; *the breakthrough area of discipleship is the body of Christ*. If we don't show real earnest care about the body of Christ, our love will never spill out of his family into evangelizing the world. Our unity and our love for one another will have the consequence of witnessing to the world.

Him and us

It's not about you...or me. Christianity is about him and us. The main substance of discipleship has to do with our life together and caring for each other.

Then if someone asks, “Who here has accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord,” we can happily raise our hands because we have accepted the call to follow him, not simply as individuals, but as members of his body who are united with him as the head!

> [See other articles by Bob Tedesco](#)



Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 38 years.

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The Readiness to Change

by Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1997)

“Put off the old man that belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

– Ephesians 4:22-24 (RSV)

These words of St. Paul are inscribed above the gate through which all must pass who want to reach the goal set us by God. They implicitly contain the quintessence of the process which baptized man must undergo before he attains the unfolding of the new supernatural life received in Baptism.

All true Christian life, therefore, must begin with a deep yearning to become a new man in Christ, and an inner readiness to “put off the old man” – a readiness to become something fundamentally different.

All good men desire to change

Even though he should lack religion, the will to change is not unknown to man. He longs to develop and to perfect himself. He believes he can overcome all vices and deficiencies of his nature by human force alone. All morally aspiring men are conscious of the necessity of a purposeful self-education which should cause them to change and to develop. They, too, – as contrasted to the morally indifferent man who lets himself go and abandons himself passively to his natural dispositions – reveal a certain readiness to change. But for this, no spiritual and moral growth would exist at all.

Yet, when man is touched by the light of Revelation, something entirely new has come to pass. The revelation of the Old Testament alone suffices to make the believer aware of man's metaphysical situation and the terrible wound inflicted upon his nature by original sin. He knows that no human force can heal that wound; that he is in need of redemption. He grasps the truth that repentance is powerless to remove the guilt of sin which separates him from God, that good will and natural moral endeavor will fail to restore him to the beauty of the paradisiac state. Within him lives a deep yearning for the Redeemer, who by divine force will take the guilt of sin and bridge the gulf that separates the human race from God.

Throughout the Old Testament that yearning resounds: "Convert us, O God: and show us Thy face, and we shall be saved" (Psalm 79:4). We perceive the desire for purification which enables us to appear before God, and to endure the presence of the unspeakably Holy One: "Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow" (Psalm 50:9).

God calls us to change

The New Testament, however, reveals to us a call which far transcends that yearning. Thus Christ speaks to Nicodemus: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Christ, the Messiah, is not merely the Redeemer who breaks apart the bond and cleanses us from sin. He is also the Dispenser of a new divine life which shall wholly transform us and turn us into new men: "Put off the old man who is corrupted according to the desire of error, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth." Though we receive this new life in Baptism as a free gift of God, it may not flourish unless we cooperate. "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste," says St. Paul.

A strong desire must fill us to become different beings, to mortify our old selves and re-arise as new men in Christ. This desire, this readiness to decrease so that "He may grow in us," is the first elementary precondition for the transformation in Christ. It is the primal gesture by which man reacts to the light of Christ that has reached his eyes: the original gesture directed to God. It is, in other words, the adequate consequence of our consciousness of being in need of redemption on the one hand, and our comprehension of being called by Christ on the other. Our surrender to Christ implies a readiness to let Him fully transform us, without setting any limit to the modification of our nature under His influence.

Readiness to change versus natural optimism

In regard to their respective readiness to change, the difference between the Christian and the natural idealist is obvious. The idealist is suffused with optimism concerning human nature as such. He underestimates the depth of our defects; he is unaware of the wound, incurable by human means, with which our nature is afflicted. He overlooks our impotence to erase a moral guilt or to bring about autonomously a moral regeneration of ourselves. Moreover, his infatuation with activity prevents him from understanding even the necessity of a basic renewal. He fails to sense the essential inadequacy of all natural morality, as well as the incomparable superiority of virtue supernaturally founded, let alone the full presence of such virtue – holiness.

His readiness to change will differ, therefore, from that of the Christian, above all in the following respects. First, he has in mind a relative change only: an evolution immanent to nature. His endeavor is not, as is the Christian's, to let his nature as a whole be transformed from above, nor to let his character be stamped with a new coinage, a new face, as it were, whose features far transcend human nature and all its possibilities. His object is not to be reborn: to become radically – from the root, that is – another man; he merely wants to

perfect himself within the framework of his natural dispositions. He is intent on ensuring an unhampered evolution of these dispositions and potentialities. Sometimes even an express approval of his own nature is implicit therein, and a self-evident confidence in the given tendencies of his nature as they are before being worked upon by conscious self-criticism. Such was, for instance, Goethe's case. Invariably in the idealist, the readiness to change is limited to a concept of nature's immanent evolution or self-perfection: its scope remains exclusively human. Whereas, with the Christian, it refers to a basic transformation and redemption of things human by things divine: to a supernatural goal.

A second point of difference is closely connected with this. The idealist's readiness to change is aimed at certain details or aspects only, never at his character as a whole. The aspiring man of natural morality is intent on eradicating this defect, on acquiring that virtue; the Christian, however, is intent on becoming another man in all things, in regard to both what is bad and what is naturally good in him. He knows that what is naturally good, too, is insufficient before God: that it, too, must submit to supernatural transformation – to a re-creation, we might say, by the new principle of supernatural life conveyed to him by Baptism.

Thirdly, the man of natural moral endeavor, willing as he may be to change in one way or another, will always stick to the firm ground of Nature. How could he be asked to relinquish that foothold, tumbling off into the void? Yet it is precisely this firm ground which the Christian does leave. His readiness to change impels him to break with his unredeemed nature as a whole: he wills to lose the firm ground of unredeemed nature under his feet and to tumble, so to speak, into the arms of Christ. Only he who may say with St. Paul, "I know in whom I have believed" can risk the enormous adventure of dying unto himself and of relinquishing the natural foundation.

Not all possess the radical readiness to change

Now this radical readiness to change, the necessary condition for a transformation in Christ, is not actually possessed by all Catholic believers. It is, rather, a distinctive trait of those who have grasped the full import of the Call, and without reserve have decided upon an imitation of Christ.

There are many religious Catholics whose readiness to change is merely a conditional one. They exert themselves to keep the commandments and to get rid of such qualities as they have recognized to be sinful. But they lack the will and the readiness to become new men all in all, to break with all purely natural standards, to view all things in a supernatural light. They prefer to evade the act of metanoia: a true conversion of the heart. Hence with undisturbed consciences they cling to all that appears to them legitimate by natural standards.¹

Their conscience permits them to remain entrenched in their self-assertion. For example, they do not feel the obligation of loving their enemies; they let their pride have its way within certain limits; they insist on the right of giving play to their natural reactions in answer to any humiliation. They maintain as self-evident their claim to the world's respect, they dread being looked upon as fools of Christ; they accord a certain role to human respect, and are anxious to stand justified in the eyes of the world also.

They are not ready for a total breach with the world and its standards; they are swayed by certain conventional considerations; nor do they refrain from letting themselves go within reasonable limits. There are various types and degrees of this reserved form of the readiness to change; but common to them all is the characteristic of a merely conditional obedience to the Call and an ultimate abiding by one's natural self. However great the differences of degree may be, the decisive cleavage is that which separates the unreserved, radical readiness to change from the somehow limited and partial one.

Transformation in Christ requires unqualified readiness to change

The full readiness to change – which might even better be termed readiness to become another man – is present in him only who, having heard the call “Follow me” from the mouth of the Lord, follows Him as did the Apostles, “leaving everything behind.” To do so, he is not required literally to relinquish everything in the sense of the evangelical counsels: this would be in answer to another, more particular call. He is merely required to relinquish his old self, the natural foundation, and all purely natural standards, and open himself entirely to Christ’s action – comprehending and answering the call addressed to all Christians: “Put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.”

Readiness to change, taken in this sense, is the first prerequisite for the transformation in Christ. But, in addition thereto, more is needed: a glowing desire to become a new man in Christ; a passionate will to give oneself over to Christ. And this, again, presupposes a state of fluidity, as it were: that we should be like soft wax, ready to receive the imprint of the features of Christ. We must be determined not to entrench ourselves in our nature, not to maintain or assert ourselves, and above all, not to set up beforehand – however unconsciously – a framework of limiting or qualifying factors for the pervasive and re-creative light of Christ. Rather we must be filled with an unquenchable thirst for regeneration in all things. We must fully experience the bliss of flying into Christ’s arms, who will transform us by His light beyond any measure we might ourselves intend. We must say as did St. Paul on the road to Damascus; “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

Brief biographical background on Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1997), from Ignatius Press:

Hitler feared him and Pope Pius XII called him a “twentieth century Doctor of the Catholic Church.” For more than six decades, Dietrich von Hildebrand – philosopher, spiritual writer, and anti-Nazi crusader – led philosophical, religious, and political groups, lectured throughout Europe and the Americas, and published more than 30 books and many more articles. His influence was widespread and endures to this day...

Soon after the end of World War I, Nazism began to threaten von Hildebrand’s beloved southern Germany. With his characteristic clear-sightedness, von Hildebrand immediately discerned its intrinsic evil. From its earliest days, he vociferously denounced Nazism in articles and speeches throughout Germany and the rest of Europe.

Declaring himself unwilling to continue to live in a country ruled by a criminal, von Hildebrand regretfully left his native Germany for Austria, where he continued teaching philosophy (now at the University of Vienna) and fought the Nazis with even greater vigor, founding and editing a prominent anti-Nazi newspaper, *Christliche Ständestaat*.

This angered both Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Hitler, who were determined to silence von Hildebrand and to close his anti-Nazi newspaper. Orders were given to have von Hildebrand killed in Austria. Although his friend and patron, Austrian Premier Engelbert Dollfuss, was murdered by the Nazis, von Hildebrand evaded their hit-squads and fled the country just as it fell to the Nazis.

It is characteristic of von Hildebrand that even while he was engaged in this dangerous life-and-death struggle against the Nazis, he maintained his deep spiritual life, and managed to write during this period his greatest work, the sublime and highly-acclaimed spiritual classic, *Transformation in Christ* (Cf. pp. xiv-xvii).

Fleeing from Austria, von Hildebrand was pursued through many countries, ultimately arriving on the shores of America in 1940 by way of France, Switzerland, Portugal, and Brazil.

[Excerpt from *Transformation in Christ*, Chapter 1, © 1948, 1976 Dietrich von Hildebrand © 1990 Alice von Hildebrand, 2001 edition published by [Ignatius Press](#), San Francisco. Used with permission.]

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Pursuing Holiness in an Unholy World

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

by Tom Caballes

This article is based on a talk given at a [Lamb of God](#) community men's retreat in Auckland, New Zealand.

Have you ever wondered why it is not easy to be a Christian nowadays? Why is it that it is not easy to be holy? Why is it very hard to bring other people to God? Why is peer pressure so hard to resist?

One big reason is that we live in an unholy world. It is like coaching a rugby, basketball, or cricket team; you are playing against an opponent who has extra men on the field; even worse, some of your players are injured and some are working for the other team (throwing the game away)! It is the same with the daily battle for holiness: it is extremely difficult for us to win the battle because the odds are stacked against us. It is an uphill battle. "Everyone else is doing it – why can't I?" Not only is the enemy everywhere, they are also inside us – our unredeemed human nature, the flesh.

Because everything in the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world (1 John 2:16).

The Incredible Salmon

The life of a salmon is a very interesting. From the fresh water rivers, they go through their normal life cycle as eggs and fingerlings and eventually live in the sea. But once they reach maturity, they have an absolute resolve to go back

to their spawning grounds, hundreds or thousands of kilometres away. The trip back to their spawning grounds is a seemingly impossible task, full of dangers, traps, and obstacles, as they will be swimming against the overbearing current of the rivers. Many of the salmon die going back to their grounds – bears and birds of prey catch them and eat them. Some of them hit the rocks, logs, and other obstacles along the way and die. Sometimes they have to swim through shallow waters just to get through their journey. But they never stop or rest from swimming against the current – otherwise it would carry them away from their destination. The incredible thing is, in order for them to reach their spawning grounds, they have to jump upstream, up a waterfall and sometimes more than once in their journey. Many of their jumps fail but they persist – until they get through the waterfall, or die trying. Against all odds, many of them eventually reach their spawning grounds and a new generation of salmon eggs are laid and later hatch to become fingerlings. You can probably count yourself lucky not to be a salmon!

But you are a Christian. And guess what? The odds are stacked heavily against you if you are resolved to follow God. And there is a very strong current that is sweeping across the face earth. A current of wickedness, immorality, blatant and not so blatant sin. Acceptance and practice of ungodly values and activities pervade the world we live in.

I really don't know who is in a better place – the salmon swimming upstream to their spawning grounds or us Christians trying to live holy lives in an unholy world.

Pursue...holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). God desires us to pursue holiness at all costs, because without holiness we cannot see the Lord. Make no mistake about it – the world that we live in is an unholy world. We need to actively pursue holiness if we desire to draw closer to God, because the world will not give us holiness on a silver platter but will put all hindrances and obstacles in front of us. It is extremely difficult to win the battle, and we need to learn from the salmon: to have an absolute resolve, come what may, to reach our “spawning grounds” – heaven.

The battle for holiness rages in various areas of our lives. Our hearts, our minds, our wills – these are the battle fronts, where most of the battles are lost and won. The battle for holiness takes place in our desires, our emotions, and attitudes, our judgment and reasoning, our relationships, our speech patterns, our past and its memories, and our use of media.

Our Strategy for Winning the Battle for Holiness

In order for us to win the battle of holiness in our lives, we need a good strategy. We need to have specific battle plans to succeed. Below are some specific action plans we can implement.

1. Yield to God's power – ask the Holy Spirit for power and strength. Therefore submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).
2. Every day commit yourself to put the flesh to death. Likewise count yourselves also to be truly dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lust (Romans 6:11-12).
3. Decide to be holy every day. Pray: “Today, I offer my day to you, Lord – I want to consecrate it to you, and I want to be holy, and I will be holy today. Today I will make a covenant with my own eyes before you Lord” (see Job 31:1).
4. Guard your hearts always, be aware when temptations come, where your weak points are – and flee. But you, O man of God, flee these things and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness (1

Timothy 6:11). If the salmon stops swimming, it will be carried back by the current – if you let your guard down, you will fall.

5. Be conscious of your thoughts: submit them to Christ. Do not sugar-coat or justify sin. Call sin a sin and do not make excuses for yourself. Count yourself dead to sin. [Say to yourself: “I do not do those things anymore – I am dead to those things.”] We take every thought captive so that it is obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

6. Live a life with accountability now – live in the light! Make commitments and be accountable to one another for those commitments; we can help each other – not judge, but help. You yourselves used to be in the darkness, but since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light. So you must live like people who belong to the light, for it is the light that brings a rich harvest of every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Try to learn what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the worthless things that people do, things that belong to the darkness. Instead, bring them out to the light (Ephesians 5:8-11).

One day, everything that we do in darkness will be brought to light; God will expose all our hidden thoughts and actions. It is better to be accountable here now (where we can change) rather than when God judges us. There is nothing that can be hid from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves (Hebrews 4:13).

7. Get rid of all our grudges, resentments and lack of forgiveness and live in freedom! All these are chains that bind us in prison and prevent us from growing in holiness.

8. Fill your mind with God's word. As it says in Philippians 4:8: Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, and whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things.

9. Guard your eyes always – especially with the media: "I have made an agreement with my eyes. Then how can I look with lust at a virgin?" (Job 31:1)

10. Develop good holy habits – for new Christians, this will include habits of prayer, reading Scripture, and doing service. For older Christians, habits like simple living, generosity, dying to one's self, simplicity, humility, and being Christ-like in all that you do are things for you to grow in.

11. Review your day before you sleep. How did the battle for holiness go today? Were there battles lost and is there anything you need to repent of?

12. For married people, decide to be a “one-woman man” or a “one-man woman.” We should not have any intimate or special relationship with anyone of the opposite sex aside from our spouse, including those in fantasies and daydreams. For all men, God desires us to treat “older women as mothers, the younger as sisters in all purity” (1 Timothy 5:2) and the same would go for women in their relationships with men. For single people, you need to offer your sexuality to God daily and decide to be chaste in all of your relationships. Unless you are in a courting relationship in preparation for marriage you should have no intimate or special relationship with anyone of the opposite sex, including those in fantasies and daydreams.

13. Avoid situations and circumstances that are not healthy for purity. “Wax melts before fire.” One pitfall many Christians face daily is the area of media, especially use of the internet. While there are many good things the internet provides us, there are also many bad things available out there – where the flesh and the world can cause havoc in our lives. You need to live a life with accountability in the way you use the internet.

14. Live in the present and not in the past – do not re-live the “sins of our youth.” Consider yourself dead to sin, including your past sins. *Avoid the passions of youth, and strive for righteousness, faith, love, and peace, together with those who with a pure heart call out to the Lord for help* (2 Timothy 2:22).

15. Be patient – never give up; it is a battle for a lifetime. Like the salmon, press on.

The Answer to an Unholy World – Christian Community

Living in a Christian community is a great blessing to anyone who desires to follow God. The Christian community is an antidote, a counter-culture, the opposite of what the world offers us. If we compare ourselves to the salmon, it is a “counter-current” which makes our journey easier. Although communities and their members are imperfect, they give us an alternative and a place where we can experience love, acceptance, care, and support as we strive for holiness. We are not alone – we are side by side with other brothers and sisters who dare to “swim against the current and swim side by side” with us. They are the people who can help us to live our lives with accountability, where we can receive guidance and practical help, not judgment or condemnation.

I have been in Christian community for so long that sometimes I take it for granted. One time, I thought of what my life would be like if I decided not to follow Christ in Christian community – and I can see the results all around me. Temporal and fleeting pleasures, breaking the law, depression, gloom, life without a purpose, broken family and relationships, all sorts of addictions, and sicknesses, among many other things. A life of short-term delights but long-term misery and despair, without any sense of direction, would have summarized my life now, if I did not insist on pursuing a life of holiness in Christian community.



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Jesus with Mary and Martha

He Must Increase...

Finding our identity in Jesus Christ

by Jan Munk

Who am I? Where do I fit in? What can I do to be recognized by others?

In Western society there is a strong value on personal identity. We learn that we are to be assertive and decide what we want and go after it. We are regarded as fools if we let family or religious commitments stand in the way of going anywhere and doing anything to advance our personal careers. Self-fulfillment has become a god, worshipped and sought after.

Family identity

In most places and at most times in human society, this was not the case. Children took on the name – and the reputations – of their families, and identified with them.

When Abraham's servant wanted to know who Rebekah was, he did not ask her what her name was, he said, "Tell me whose daughter you are" (Genesis 24:23). Men's "last names" were really just their father's names: "Simon, son of John."



In Scripture, the folks who set out to establish their own selves and their own identities were not highly regarded – for example, the people who settled on the plain in the land of Shinar decided to build a fabulous city and tower (Genesis 11). They said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves...” God was not pleased, and scattered them so that their Tower of Babel was never completed.

When we become God’s children, and members of his family, we take on his name and identity. Our concern needs to shift from our own reputation to his. We in the western world may find this difficult to embrace, as our society does not value that kind of thinking.



Ruth and Naomi

Important Nobodies

When I look in Scripture and see the people who are highly regarded, I notice that many individuals mentioned there seem like nobodies. Why, for instance, is an entire book of the Bible devoted to Ruth, who’s only claim to fame was that she gave up her identify with her people, took on Naomi’s identity –“your people will be my people, your God, my God” – and worked hard. For this she ended up the great-grandmother of King David, and was awarded a place in the Messianic line.

How about Mary, the mother of Jesus? She was willing to totally lose her identity for the Lord: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.” The Orthodox Church never even portrays an icon of her without the infant. Orthodox sometimes say that all the hymns sung about the Theotokos (a Greek title which means “God bearer”) can refer to the church as well – truly she is someone who has totally lost her own identity, and because of it many think of her as the most highly regarded human being of all time.



Finding by losing

There is only one recorded instance in Scripture in which an apostle raised someone from the dead. What had Tabitha done that was so great that the church in Joppa could not stand to lose her? Was she a gifted healer with a well-known ministry? Did she have a lot of money the church needed? Well, what she did was many “good works and acts of charity.” She made garments for the widows and the poor; in other words, she was a tremendous example of a servant of Christ (Acts 9:32-43).

Jesus tells us that it is by losing our life that we find it (Matthew 10:39). The Lord, of course, was the perfect example of this: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him...” (Philippians 2:5-9).

What about St. Paul, whose writings make up a large portion of the New Testament? What kind of name did he seek for himself? “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win the Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law ...that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law ..To the weak I became weak ...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). He even goes so far as to say, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

Having not yet attained the spiritual maturity of Ruth, Mary, Tabitha, or Paul, I sometimes find myself influenced by the call of the world to desire recognition and influence. This is especially true when day-to-day life seems too hard: when the needs of others demand that I make some personal sacrifice, when “my” time is being infringed upon, when I feel too tired to really follow the Lord.



Servants of Jesus

It is at times like these it is especially important for me to remember who I am. I am a servant of Jesus Christ, I have been bought with a price, I am a new creation, a daughter of the king of the universe, a member of the body of Christ, one for whom the Lord trampled down death!

What if the Lord's will for me is to serve in an "unrecognized" way for my whole life? What if I am called to "waste" my life for Jesus?

We have all heard of and admire Mother Theresa; what about her thousands of fellow workers all over the world whose names we do not know and who receive no honor from other people for pouring their lives out for the poor?

I have (not so recently now) read about the "new Serbian martyrs": 750,000 Orthodox Christian, men, women, and children in Croatia were slaughtered in horrible ways because they were Orthodox. This happened in 1941, but up until now I had never heard of them. Does this mean that their lives and deaths were wasted on the Lord? Perhaps it does in worldly terms, but they, as we, belong to the Lord, and our lives can bring him glory whether we live or die.



Precious ointment

It helps me to remember the precious ointment that Mary of Bethany poured on Jesus shortly before he died on the cross. Those around murmured because of the “waste,” but Jesus commends her (Mark 14: John 12). Remembering her example, I can feel free to pour out my life as a precious ointment for him, and not worry that the world disapproves of the waste.

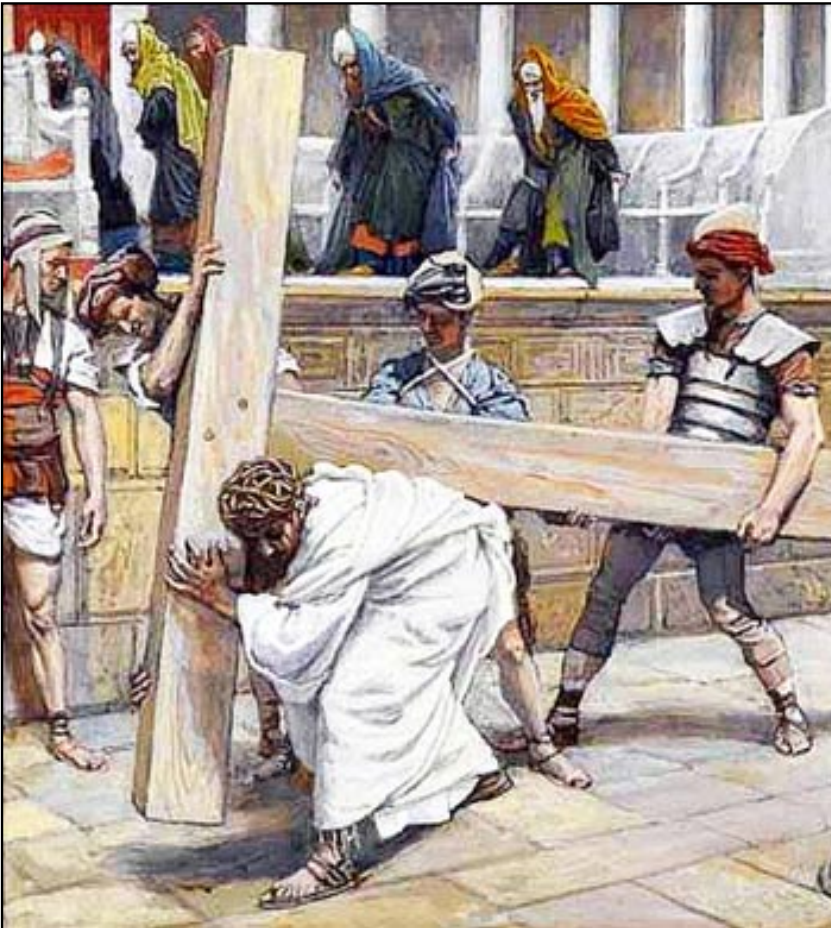
When I am open to the Holy Spirit lovingly whispering these truths to me, the things that the world says I need in order to be fulfilled simply pale and are revealed for what they are: sad replacements for the full life in Christ that I can have if I am willing, and an eternity more abundant than anything I can think or imagine.



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Lent 2013 - Vol. 66

Discipleship

“Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me”

By Jeanne Kun

The Cross symbolizes the life of an apostle of Christ. It brings a strength and a truth that delights both soul and body, though sometimes it is hard, and one can feel the weight.

– Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Most likely Jesus’ followers had seen criminals and insurgents against Roman rule hanging on crosses along the roads of Palestine and knew the horrors and shame of this excruciatingly painful form of execution used by the Romans. So Jesus’ challenging call to his disciples to “take up their cross” must have both scandalized and stunned them. Perhaps they wondered whether, at such a cost,

Matthew 16:24-27

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

27 “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.”

(See also Mark 8:34-38 and Luke 9:23-27)

Mark 15:20-21

20 Then [the soldiers] led [Jesus] out to crucify him. 21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

(See also Matthew 27:31-32 and Luke 23:26)

Galatians 6:2

2 Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

In the Spotlight

Simon of Cyrene Takes Up Jesus’ Cross

What irony – Christ’s own had fled, no friend to share the pain and lend him aid when he faltered.

Simon, a stranger: Carefree and casual, you happened along the way that morning and unexpectedly your life was changed forever. The choice was not your own, yet not one to turn away from: “It is not you who have chosen me, but I who have chosen you” (John 15:16)

they wanted to follow him after all.

To “take up the cross” means to willingly give one’s life without reservation to Jesus and “follow in his steps” – even to death for his sake, if necessary.

Jesus’ declaration of the conditions of discipleship came after he had foretold his death and resurrection. Peter reacted strongly; he took Jesus aside “and began to rebuke him, saying ‘God forbid it, Lord!’” (Matthew 16:22). But Jesus rebuked Peter, calling him “a stumbling block,” for Peter was “setting his mind not on divine things but on human things” (16:23). The conditions of discipleship also require us to set our minds on divine things. As the nineteenth-century Spanish archbishop and missionary St. Anthony Mary Claret explained:

The Christian who desires to follow Jesus carrying his cross must bear in mind that the name “Christian” means “bearer or imitator of Christ” and that if he wishes to bear that noble title worthily, he must above all do as Christ charges us in the Gospel; we must oppose or deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow him.

“Deny” – *aparneomai* in the Greek of the New Testament – is a judicial term meaning to “disavow or abjure connection with someone or something.” Thus, to *deny* oneself is to renounce self-interest; to disregard the gratification of one’s own needs and desires; to relinquish one’s own will to do the will of God, imitating Jesus who gave himself over to his Father’s plans for our salvation in total trust. The evangelist Luke adds a detail not found in Matthew’s or Mark’s account of Jesus’ words: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross *daily* and follow me” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added). Following Jesus is a matter for everyday life – a life of perseverance and steadfastness. Faithful discipleship involves making decisions every day to live Jesus’ way, not our own. This involves making numerous choices and resolutions, even small ones, to serve our brothers or sisters in need, even if that involves foregoing our own needs and preferences. To “take up the cross” we often have to die to self in these seemingly mundane, everyday ways.

In Jesus’ time, the Romans required those who were to be crucified to carry the wooden crossbeam – usually behind the nape of the neck like a yoke – to the place of execution, where an

What welled up within your heart as the soldiers compelled you to shoulder this man’s load? Burning anger, resentment, bitterness to be so put upon and shamed? Fear to be involved and identified with one rejected and despised by others? Or were you moved to pity, glad then to bend your strong back to help?

It came to you unsought – yet what a privilege to have eased his burden for even a short stretch of his way!

Dare I take up the cross with you, Simon, and follow? What answer would you give me now?

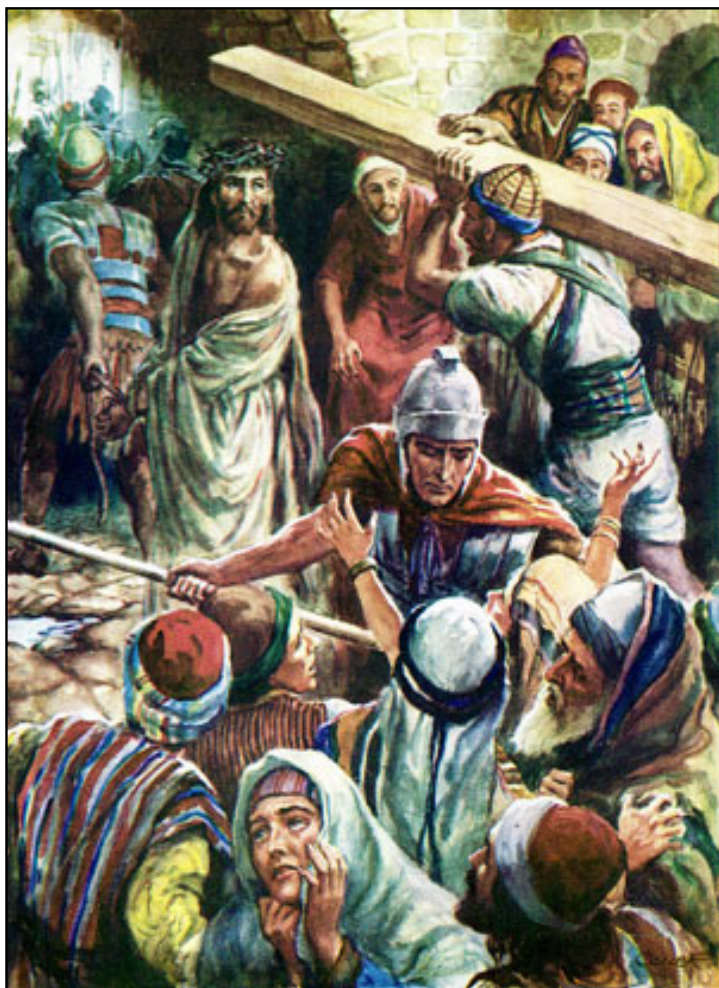
“If any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matthew 5:41, RSV).

“Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, RSV).

Understand!

1. Why, in your opinion, does Jesus require such radical steps of those who would follow him? Why does he state these requirements after his prediction of his passion? Why does Jesus connect the fate of the disciples with his own fate?
2. What images and thoughts would the expression “take up the cross” have brought to Jesus’ followers’ minds? Why do you think Jesus used this graphic expression?
3. Explain in your own words the paradox Jesus speaks of in Matthew 16:25 – “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” How does this truth affect your daily choices and your present life? Your perspective on the life to come?
4. “What will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?” (Matthew 16:26). Do you think

upright beam (called in Latin *crux simplex* or *palus*) was already implanted in the ground. Or they shouldered a T-shaped cross formed of both a vertical and a horizontal beam. Roman soldiers had the right to press people into temporary public service, so they “compelled” Simon of Cyrene (modern Libya) to relieve Jesus of his burden, probably because he was so weakened by exhaustion and the loss of blood from the scourging (Matthew 27:31-32; Mark 15:20-21; and Luke 23:26). It is noteworthy that we find the same term – in Greek, *angareuo* – in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: “if anyone forces [compels, KJV] you to go one mile, go also the second mile” (Matthew 5:41). It is when we “bear one another’s burdens” that we “fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).



Thus conscripted, Simon of Cyrene literally took up the cross for Jesus’ sake – and so through the past two millennia he has been looked to by Christians as a model of discipleship. His unexpected encounter with Jesus must have had a great impact on him, since the evangelist Mark’s mention of Simon’s sons Alexander and Rufus (see 15:21) would imply that they were known to the early Christian church. Through his service to Jesus, did Simon become a believer and true and lasting disciple of his?

Jesus makes his point effectively with this principle of profit and loss? Why or why not? What answers would you give Jesus if he asked you these same questions?

5. “The Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (Matthew 16:27). What does this verse indicate about the final judgment? On what basis will we be rewarded or held accountable? See Matthew 7:21-27 for additional insight into the conduct Jesus holds to be important.

Grow!

1. Recall an instance when you acted to “save” your life – when you did something that did not take God or his plan for your life into account – but then “lost” something important in the process. What did you learn from this experience?

2. Consider some examples of how you do, in fact, deny yourself, “losing” your life to “find” it. How do you see the truth of this paradox at work in your life? In your experience, what “gain” outweighs the costs of discipleship? What do you hope to gain in the future?

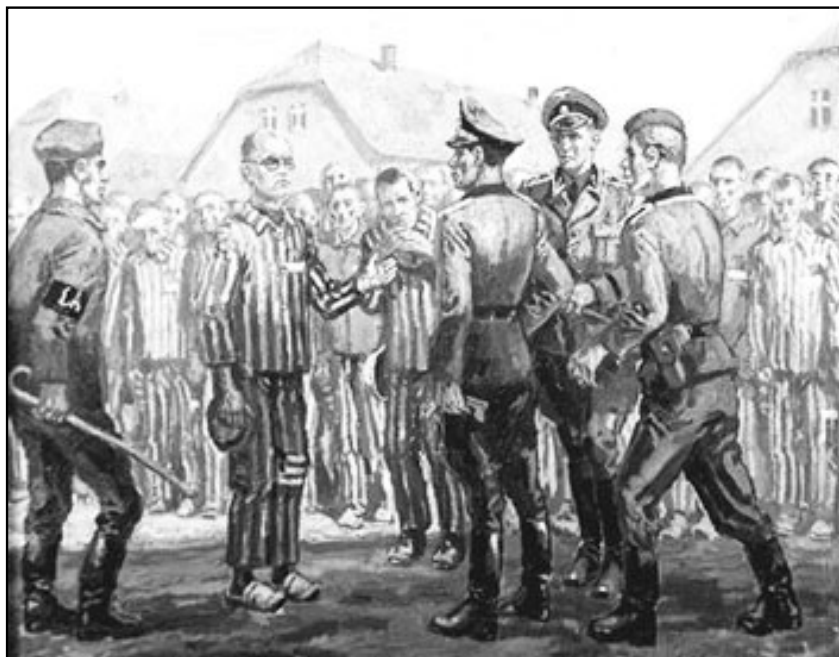
3. What is most challenging to you right now about the conditions of Jesus’ call to be his disciple? What might you do to relieve your fears or reservations about denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following him?

4. In what ways do you identify with Simon of Cyrene? What does Simon’s example teach you about discipleship? Have you ever been “compelled” to bear another person’s “cross”? If so, what impact did this have on you?

5. Imagine how Jesus felt toward Simon.

Called to be disciples of Christ, we are to follow in our master's path. Our threefold course of action – denying self, taking up the cross, and following Jesus – sets us decisively on the road to eternal life. For Jesus promised that “those who lose their life for [his] sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). If we hold fast, an everlasting reward will be ours, for when he comes “with his angels in the glory of his Father, . . . he will repay everyone for what has been done” (16:27).

In the Spotlight



No Greater Love Than This

On the evening before his death, Jesus told his apostles, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). On the cross he gave them the example of ultimate love, dying for their sake and that of all humankind. From the earliest days of the Church to the present, countless followers of Jesus have taken his words and his example to heart, denying themselves and selflessly giving their lives for others.

In Auschwitz, the notoriously inhuman Nazi extermination camp, Franciscan priest Fr. Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to take the place of Francis Gajowniczek, a Polish soldier who had been chosen to be a victim of retaliatory execution for the escape of a prisoner. Fr. Kolbe told the Nazi commandant: “I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children.” The commandant returned Gajowniczek to the camp ranks and confined Kolbe and nine other chosen prisoners in a starvation bunker. After being deprived of food and water for fourteen days, Kolbe and three others who were still alive were given lethal injections by the camp executioner on August 14, 1941. Pope John Paul II called Maximilian Kolbe a “martyr of love” and declared him a saint in 1982.

Has anyone ever helped you carry a burden you were struggling with? If so, how did you feel toward that person? What did you learn from this person's generosity and service to you?

Reflect!

1. *Simon of Cyrene did not volunteer to carry Christ's cross, so this incident reminds us that sometimes “crosses” seem to be arbitrarily laid on us by life, burdens we might not of our own volition have chosen to carry. In Christian spirituality there is a sense in which “bearing our crosses” means accepting that through these crosses, God fosters our Christian growth and transforms us into his likeness. He is not the author of our difficulties and misfortunes or the cause of our pains, but he turns such things to his purposes for us and works through them. Meditate on the following words of saints who have recognized this, and let their perspective shape your outlook on your own personal crosses:*

Let us bear our cross and leave it to God to determine the length and the weight.

– Rose Philippine Duchesne

You must accept your cross; if you carry it courageously it will carry you to heaven.

– John Mary Vianney

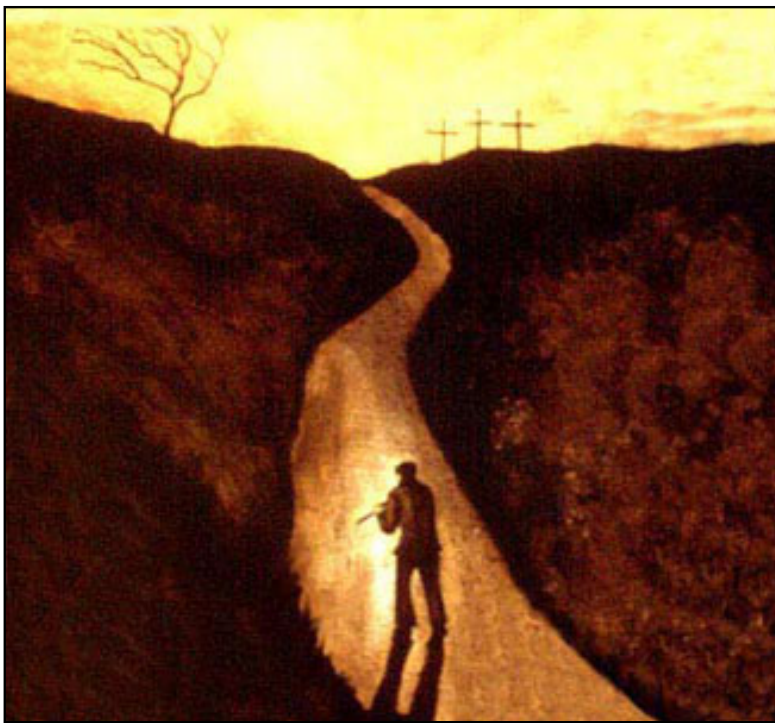
2. *Reflect on the following passages that challenge us to greater discipleship and selfless giving of ourselves to others in love and service:*

Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus]; and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see

Another profound act of sacrificial love took place on April 30, 1997, when the African nation of Burundi was torn by ethnic wars. Hutu rebels invaded the small Catholic seminary in Buta. Armed with knives, machetes, clubs, and machine guns, the rebels told the young seminarians to divide into two ethnic groups, Hutus and Tutsis. Even though the Hutu students could have saved their lives by separating themselves from the Tutsis, they refused to abandon their classmates. Ultimately, the assailants massacred the forty-one Hutu and Tutsi companions together, “martyrs of brotherhood.”

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

In the Spotlight



painting by [Michael O'Brien](#)

The Royal Road of the Holy Cross

Why do you fear to take up the cross when through it you can win a kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life, in the cross is protection from enemies, in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the cross is strength of mind, in the cross is joy of spirit, in the cross is highest virtue, in the cross is perfect holiness. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross.

Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life. He Himself opened the way before you in

whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” (Luke 14:25-33)

[Jesus said:] “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.” (John 12:24-26)

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (James 2:8)

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)

Act!

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Reach out this week to someone in your parish, neighborhood, or workplace who is in need or weighed down in some way (for example, by illness, unemployment, loneliness, or difficult family

carrying His cross, and upon it. He died for you, that you, too, might take up your cross and long to die upon it. If you die with Him, you shall also live with Him, and if you share His suffering, you shall also share His glory.

– Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Excerpted from [The Life-Giving Power of the Cross: Sharing in Christ's Victory](#), by Jeanne Kun ([The Word Among Us Press](#), © 2011). Used with permission. This book can be ordered [online](#).

Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

> [See other articles by Jeanne Kun](#)

Illustrations: James Tissot (first), Harold Copping (second)

relationships). Like Simon of Cyrene who relieved Jesus of his burden, help this person carry his or her cross. You might offer a word of encouragement, perform an act of kindness, do some practical service such as preparing a meal, or simply be present to share his or her sorrow. Be generous, not grudging, as you support and assist this person on his or her personal “way of the cross.”

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Focus for Fasting

*Fasting helps remind us of our higher calling
to serve and worship Jesus Christ*

By Jerry Munk

I do not know about you, but I really dislike fasting. It is not that I start every day thinking how much I hate it, but about this time each year (several weeks into Great Lent for the Orthodox, a season for prayer and fasting) I find myself thinking, "Boy, I really don't like this." You see, I like to eat. I like good food and I like to feel full and content. The Orthodox Church, however, calls me to give up what I like for a few weeks every year. She asks that I give up food that I enjoy and suggests that I eat less of what I do not enjoy. With a wisdom that surpasses my own, she leads me to stop pleasing my own body long enough to notice the spiritual realities which I may have overlooked.

Ever since my childhood I have often gone to my grandfather's cottage which is nestled among the trees on the shore of northern Lake Michigan. After a week or two I return to my home in Lansing and find myself bombarded with the noise of a good-sized city. Horns, sirens, trains, whistles and bells all fill the background. I did not notice them before I left, and after a few days back in town they again move out of my awareness. For those few days in between, however, I realize just how noisy my life really is.

In a sense, I think fasting is something like my time at the lake. For a few days we take a break from our regular routine. We stop giving in to the clamor of our physical bodies: "Feed me, entertain me, let me sleep, let me play, I want to feel full and satisfied." For a while we are free from this clamor--free to spend a special time with our Lord and to examine our spiritual state. When the fast is over and we return to our regular routine, we may realize in a new way just how noisy our physical desires really are. We can begin to see that our bodies make a lot of demands

but not all those demands need to be met. Also, we have hopefully learned to listen to the still small voice of God, a voice that seems louder and clearer when not drowned out by the din of our physical appetites.

Thus, the Orthodox Christian begins forty days of fasting. It seems that all know what to fast from and when our fast begins and ends (any good Orthodox Church calendar will tell you that), but I have found that very few really know why we fast. Someone once said, "If you aim at nothing, you can be pretty sure to hit it." I think a lot of people take this approach when it comes to fasting. They do not know why they fast, but the Orthodox Church says that they should and so they do. While it is good to simply obey the authority of the Lord as exercised through his church even when we do not understand the whys and wherefores, it is much better to obey with understanding.

God has not been silent about his reasons for calling us to fast. Therefore, we can know why we fast and, using this knowledge, better cooperate with the Lord's work in our life. Let us examine a few of the more prominent reasons for fasting so we can begin to put more into our fast and thus get more out of it as well.

Preparation

First, and perhaps most obviously, we fast to prepare ourselves. During Great Lent we prepare to participate in the liturgical re-enactment and remembrance of Christ's suffering and death, followed by the celebration of his glorious resurrection. Fasting helps remind us that "our bodies were not made for the things of this world" (I Corinthians 6:13-20); rather, we have a higher calling to serve and worship Christ and build his body, the Church.

"Abstaining from worldly things," writes St. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD), "presents the soul pure and nimble." It is this purity and spiritual nimbleness which we seek to gain in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. The apostle Paul elicits the image of an athlete in preparation for a race, "Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline ...I buffet my body and bring it under complete control" (I Corinthians 9: 25-27). Indeed, the word "asceticism" is derived from a Greek word meaning practice or training for the attainment of a goal. A very important goal for the Orthodox Christian throughout the observance of Great Lent is to more fully participate in and spiritually identify with Christ's suffering and death and to fully celebrate his resurrection.

Humility

Another reason we fast is to grow in humility. David said, "I humble myself with fasting" (Psalm 69:10). When we fast, we come to see more clearly just how dependent we are upon food. St. Clement reminds us, "It [fasting] declares that as the life of each one of us depends upon food, total abstention is the sign of death." Human beings have a great capacity for pride. We like to feel that we alone are in control, we make things happen, we are independent. How important and humbling it is to remember that without God's provision of something as basic as food we would quickly die.

I find it interesting that eating is so intricately bound up with pride in the very first sin, eating the forbidden fruit. By eating, Adam and Eve sought to become like God--a noble goal approached in the wrong way. By fasting we humble ourselves before our Creator and Sustainer and, in that humility, allow Him to make us partakers of his divine nature. Similarly, we should take note that the Prodigal Son did not even begin to think of reconciliation with his father until he had experienced the humiliation of hunger.

As we fast we can also grow in our appreciation of the humility of Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God, the King of Creation, became man, experiencing the weakness of creation. He himself fasted for forty days and the Bread of Life hungered for want of food. We, as humans, will never really know that total humiliation which Jesus gladly accepted on our behalf, but through fasting we can begin to taste it and identify with it more and more.

Jesus, however, warns that fasting will not always produce humility. In fact, if approached in a wrong spirit, pride

can just as easily emerge. “And when you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do. They neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. When you go without food, wash your face and comb your hair, so that others cannot know that you are fasting--only your Father, who is unseen, will know. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18).

The Orthodox Church looks to the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) as the way to approach spiritual asceticism. The Pharisee stood apart, praying with himself, extolling the virtue of his own deeds, while the tax collector did not even raise his head but only beat his breast, saying, “God, have pity on me a sinner!” “I tell you,” Jesus said, “the tax collector and not the Pharisee was in the right with God when he went home. For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled and everyone who humbles himself will be made great.”

Mourning

The death of Christ was the ultimate tragedy of history. We must never lose sight of the fact that our sin, our rebellion, required the penalty of death. Jesus Christ was murdered by human hands, not because of any wrong He committed, but because He willingly offered himself as payment for our sins. The absolute darkness which Christ endured, he endured for us and because of us.

The Orthodox Church will not allow us to push this event into the deep recesses of past history. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, exists outside of time. His death and, indeed, his resurrection are not simply commemorated during Holy Week and Easter, but in a mystical sense they are relived. As we mourn the suffering and death of Christ in Holy Week services, we do not speak of Christ’s death as a past event. Rather, we proclaim it today! “Today, Judas forsakes the Master...Today, the Jews nailed to the cross the Lord.. .Today they pierced His side with a spear...Today is hung upon the Tree He who suspended the land in the midst of the waters.” It is also today that, “Every member of Thy Holy Body endured dishonor for us: Thy Head, the thorns; Thy Face, the spittings; Thy Mouth, the vinegar and gall; Thy Ears, the blasphemies; Thy Back, the lash; Thy Bands, the reed; Thy Body, extension upon the Cross; Thy Joints, the nails; and thy Side, the Spear” (from the vespers of Holy Thursday).

Great Lent allows us to express through fasting and prayer sorrow for the sins which required the suffering and death of Christ. During Bright Week and, indeed, each and every Sunday, we celebrate His resurrection, but now during Lent we set aside time to mourn. We should have genuine sorrow for our own sin and repent, repairing the wrongdoing we have committed.

We also sorrow over and seek mercy for the sins of our family, our fellow believers and those of our country. The prophet Daniel provides a tremendous example and inspiration for us in Lent, “I prayed earnestly to the Lord God, pleading with him, fasting, wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes [an Old Testament expression of severe sorrow]... and confessed the sins of my people...Lord, hear us and forgive us” (Daniel 9:3-19).

Viewing Great Lent as a time of preparation, humility and mourning will help us find more meaning in our fast. There are, of course, many other things which may provide a useful focus, but these three can serve as a place of beginning from which we can grow and develop a great appreciation of both the fast itself and the celebration we anticipate.

Fasting alone is not all that we are called to do during Great Lent. Prayer, reconciliation, attendance and participation at Lenten services, acts of mercy and charity and other spiritual labors must also be included to create a balanced and profitable Lenten experience. What is important is that we never become lethargic in our Christian walk, simply going through the motions of our spiritual obligations, void of understanding and appreciation of their challenge to us. The Pharisees during the time of Christ kept every minute law and tradition of the Jewish faith, yet

they did not profit from all their labor and failed to recognize their own Messiah when he stood before them. Throughout Great Lent may we seek to see with spiritual understanding the meaning of our fast, that we may more clearly discern the risen Christ when he is revealed in all his glory as we receive the Light.

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Clues for Evangelism

*Learning to exercise the spiritual gift of “words of knowledge”
in evangelistic outreach*

By Joe Difato

“Brown hat, and brown sweater in the bookstore” – “Big husky guy with black shoes and black jeans” – “Three black women walking together” – “Woman with extravagant jewelry a matching red purse and red shoes” – “Backache, broken heart, depression, migraine, common cold in the whole family” – and seven specific names and places – “Ross, Target, local bookstore, Chick fill A, Home Depot, and church.”

So, what is the connection between all of these descriptive words? These are some of the “clues” we get before we go out and try to evangelize people with “words of knowledge” prompted by the Holy Spirit. Small teams of 3 to 4 people in our Christian community regularly come together to pray and ask the Lord to guide them in speaking and praying with others about receiving the Lord Jesus and experiencing his power in their lives. They ask the Lord to give them “clues” about who they should speak with and what the Lord might want them to say or pray with them for. After a time of seeking the Lord together for any “clues” he might want to give them, they then write down any word or image that comes to their mind, or maybe a particular sensation they feel – like some sort of pain or heat in their arm or back. After they share with one another the different senses which they perceive as clues from the Holy Spirit, the team then goes off to find the people the Lord wants them to speak and pray with.

Finding clues

Here in our covenant community in Jacksonville we have been experimenting with the exercise of the spiritual gift of “words of knowledge” since last summer (2012). Since this kind of spiritual gift and ministry is new to us, we really do not exactly understand what we are doing in seeking “words of knowledge” from the Spirit, and we are all a bit on the cowardly side of stepping out in faith, but we are willing to learn through experimenting with the gift of “words of knowledge” as we seek the Holy Spirit’s prompting and direction.

The amazing thing is how successful our efforts have been rewarded by the Holy Spirit. I would say that seventy-five percent of the time when we step out after receiving a clue from the Holy Spirit, what we say as we speak or pray with individuals, really touches them.

What can be most uncanny for us are the times when we go up to a complete stranger and ask that person, “Is your name Melissa” or “Is your name Bob,” and then the person replies, “Yes, that is my name, how did you know my name?” When we respond by saying, “It came from the Lord” and then show the person their name written on a piece of paper they are really touched. So many of them say, “I never thought God knows me or would do anything for me.” The worst case scenario seems to be when some people we approach will politely say to us, “Thank you,” and then walk away. So far, none of us has experienced any overt hostility, and no shedding of blood for witnessing to Christ.

A recent experience

I recently received a “clue” from the Holy Spirit that a married couple was going to come to church on Sunday and sit right behind my wife and myself. I sensed that the Holy Spirit wanted me to tell this couple how much Jesus loved them, and then I would see where the conversation might go from there.

When the Sunday Mass started no one was sitting behind us. I was kind of relieved – and felt “off the hook.” But just then a couple in their thirties came and sat directly behind us. The coward in me turned to my wife Felicia who has a really kind touch with people and said, “Maybe you can talk to them.” She replied, “It was your word of knowledge, you do it.”

So, when mass ended, I turned around and told them what a nice couple they appeared to be and how much it appeared that they really like each other, and then I told them that God loved them very much. As the conversation moved along – the couple told us how they first met, and about their child, and what they do for work. I gave my personal testimony of God’s work in my personal life and talked about what God was doing in our Christian community. We ended the 10 minute conversation by exchanging phone numbers and email addresses. A week later this couple came to our community prayer meeting and they were touched by the Holy Spirit. They have continued to come weekly to our prayer meetings and have recently joined the Life in the Spirit seminars. I praise God for how he has been blessing this couple.

A Kairos venture

On the first of January, two young people from our community, Joel Laton and my blind daughter Christine and her guide dog Dina, went up a few days early to participate in the [North American Kairos](#) Conference, an evangelistic outreach to university aged people, which was being held in Lansing, Michigan. They spoke to a few young Kairos participants and set up two teams to go out into the city with specific “words of knowledge” they had sensed from the Holy Spirit. After the team had prayed and received some “clues,” they went to a local shopping mall. The results of their encounter with people were amazing. A number of the clues the groups came up with hit home. Both teams came back excited at how the Lord touched people who were perfect strangers through their stepping out and following the “words of knowledge” they sensed from the Spirit. When I heard the results of the Kairos venture in Lansing, I felt like the 72 disciples must have felt when they returned home from a mission trip (See Luke 10:17).

Joel and Christine share some highlights of their evangelism team experience

The two evangelism teams were really inspired by how the Lord worked with them as they spoke with people about the Lord. They were also able to share many stories of their experience with several of the people who were attending the [Kairos](#) conference. Many Kairos folk said they were encouraged and emboldened to step out in faith in sharing the gospel with others. We have found that even when some people do not want us to pray with them or tell us that their life is working fine, we are still encouraged to bring the Lord to the forefront of their minds and to help them draw closer to him.

Clues: Books, purple flower, spine

Joel's team went into a bookstore, and quickly spotted the exact purple flower that Joel had pictured in his mind when praying for clues. At that moment a man walked up while pushing a cart. They struck up a conversation, and the man said that he had a lot of back trouble, which was why he was pushing the cart. They prayed with him, and he really seemed to feel the presence of the Lord, and his back felt better.

Clues: books, tan cap

A girl on Joel's team spotted a guy wearing the tan cap she had pictured in the clue. She went up to talk to him, and immediately recognized in his face some emotional distress. He had just gotten off the phone with his sister who had told him that his brother-in-law had been diagnosed with leukemia. He was so touched that the Lord would send someone right then to pray with him and encourage him.

Clues: butterfly, Samantha, sore throat

Christine's team went into a glass-blowing shop. They started chatting with the manager and her brother and his two children. As they chatted, they found out that the people wanted prayers for their business and for a friend named Bob who had been in a really bad car accident. The team had a sense that they might have sore throats based on the clues. It turns out that they had had colds and sore throats. As they introduced themselves, we learned that the little girl's name was Samantha, and she had a butterfly in her hair – that really struck us as an amazing clue. As the team was about to leave, the brother and sister started asking us more questions and they wanted to know where we attended church. We told them about the Work of Christ community and invited them to come to a prayer meetings where they could learn more about the Lord Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

A spiritual gift for everyone

I believe that every disciple of Christ who wants to be led by the Holy Spirit can experience the spiritual gift of “words of knowledge.” I think it’s more a matter of actively being alert and open to what the Holy Spirit wants to say to us. I suspect many of us are used to having a variety of thoughts and images come into our minds from time to time. We know from experience that some of the thoughts that go through our minds are not good, especially thoughts that are temptations to sin. Other thoughts are simply normal or natural things that just happen to come to our own mind. At the same time, as incredible as it may sound, thoughts that come into our minds might also be inspired of the Holy Spirit. I think that this is especially true when a group of earnest Christians who want to evangelize others will come together specifically to sit and pray for an hour or more to receive “words of knowledge,” or “clues” as we call them.

Being alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and believing that the Spirit wants to give us clues in our evangelistic work is only half the battle. Stepping out in faith is the other half. So, what have we learned so far about finding clues? I think that there are a number of ways that the Spirit can give us clues. A key way we have experienced receiving “clues” from the Spirit is when we pray together as a team, and then individuals within the team begin to experience some kind of tangible sensation, such as a feeling of heat, tingling, or pain somewhere they normally do not have – say in their foot, arm, neck, or back. Through practice we have come to see that there is a good chance that this momentary sensation is a sign from the Holy Spirit. Another key way we receive “clues” from the Holy Spirit is when particular words or images come to our minds while we are praying – clues like “brown hat, red dress, Home Depot,” and, in my story above, when I sensed a “clue” that I would meet some specific people during Sunday Mass, in this case a couple who were sitting right behind my wife and myself.

I try to encourage people in our community to trust that we can regularly receive “thoughts” or “clues” from the Holy Spirit, and these thoughts can come to our minds whenever the Holy Spirit wishes to give them to us. For instance, the Lord might want to give you a “clue” or sense that you should talk to someone who just happens to be passing by you – maybe someone at work or at church. The Spirit may want you to say something to them to encourage or help them. We can pass up the opportunity or we can step out in faith and see the Lord work through us as we take the “word” or “clue” he gives us for the other person. If we want to be led by the Spirit, then the more we are open to his promptings, the more opportunities he will give us to step out in faith even if it might be simply an opportunity to speak with someone walking past us.



Philip the Evangelist was led by the Spirit to speak with a man in a chariot

In Acts of the Apostles, chapter 8, verses 26-39, we see a remarkable account of the evangelist Philip receiving two words from the Lord. The first word tells him to follow the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. And the second word is to go up and join the chariot which he sees in front of him. Philip obeys the leading of the Holy Spirit and begins to speak with the Ethiopian official in his chariot. The Ethiopian has been reading a passage from scripture and Philip offers to explain the meaning of the passage to him. Philip then explains the good news of Jesus Christ

and the Ethiopian asks to be baptized so he can become a disciple of Jesus.

Expecting God to work

Here in Jacksonville, we are committed to seeking the spiritual gifts and to experimenting with them. Of course we believe God wants strong and mature Christian communities and we are trying our best to build a strong community. To date, after seven years, we are weak, disorganized, and need to mature more as a community. At the same time we think God wants us to go out – and not be overly inward focused. We have decided to direct significant time and energy to evangelization. We are asking the Holy Spirit to bless our efforts with demonstrations of spiritual power and miracles even though we are beginners and do not have the experience and understanding for how to exercise the gifts of the Spirit and be led in evangelizing with spiritual gifts of power.

Creating a culture of divine power is exciting. People are coming to our weekly prayer meetings expecting God to work. We expect some healing or some small miracle. We expect ingrown toenails to be remedied, painful backs healed, headaches to disappear, and inner hurts soothed or even removed—and often they are initiated through the gift of prophecy or a “word of knowledge.”

Of course, not everyone is healed when we pray with them. Not every “word of knowledge” hits home. But, we do believe that the only thing stopping us from exercising more of God’s power is our own lack of expectant faith. Our God is not stingy.

We sincerely believe that we are called to be bright lights – by our deep love for Jesus, by our genuine love for one another, by our desire to live a radical life as disciples on mission and being covenanted together, and by our being led by the Spirit and exercising the spiritual gifts as a regular part of our life as charismatic Christians.

In our day and age of spiritual apathy and unbelief the task is overwhelming. That’s why I think the spiritual gifts are so valuable and so needed in today’s world. People need to see signs and the power of God working in and through his people. These gifts produce fruit and the Lord wants us to take hold of them and use them in bringing his love, mercy, and the good news of salvation to others.

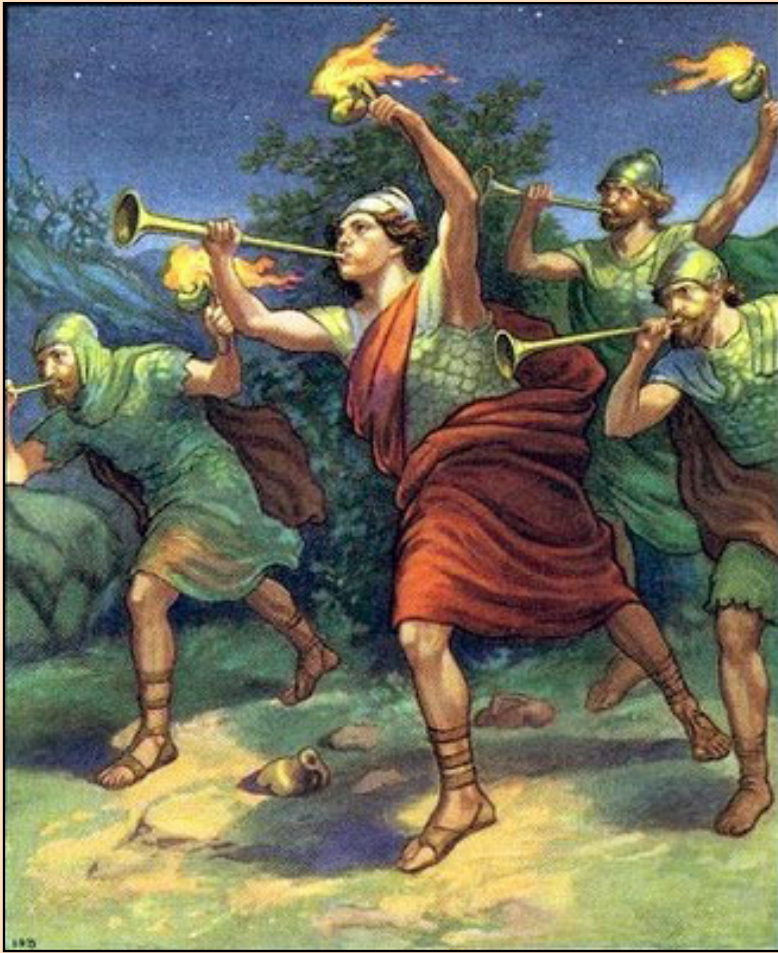
If you want to enter into an exciting realm in the exercise of spiritual gifts, where you “sense” what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you, and if you are willing to “step out in faith” then there is no question that you can receive “words of knowledge” from the Holy Spirit.

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"Go in the Strength You Have!
Am I not Sending You!"
(Judges 6:14)

Some Lessons from the Call of Gideon for Today's Reluctant Evangelists

by Joe Fahd

“Whatever...”

“Good for you, but not really for me.”

“I don’t want to have regrets.”

“I don’t want to become bigoted, inauthentic (insert your own adjective variant).”

“It’s too early to worry about this.”

These are the kinds of responses I sometimes hear when I get into conversations about God and religion with university students in London and other European cities. Presenting the good news of Jesus Christ to young people today can be a real challenge in a society that seems to be tuned out. Truth is relativized in the secular environment, values and morals are watered down,

From the Book of Judges

Chapter 6

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. 2 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. 4 They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. 5 They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. 6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

relationships and communities are broken, and common sense and decency is evaporating.

It is very easy for student mission workers to wonder: “If God is with us, then why is it so hard to bring the good news of Christ to people today?” “Why are we seeing so little fruit in our efforts?” I do not know the full answer, but I do believe that the Lord is with us today as we strive to bring the gospel to people. I believe that the Lord wants to give us fresh confidence and hope as he teaches us how to respond to him with faith and trust. I have experienced the Lord renewing my faith and courage as I have reflected on the call of Gideon in the Old Testament book of Judges, chapter 6 and 7. I think that Gideon is a good example for us today, because Gideon had to face similar challenges of facing his own fears and the obstacles that stood in his path as he tried to follow the Lord.



God's call and challenge for Gideon

At the time of Gideon, the Israelites were facing a spiritual, political and economic crisis as their livelihood (food, crops, wealth, manpower) was being devoured by the Midianites, a pagan nation that was over-running their land. Scriptures mentions two reasons why the people of God in Israel were facing this crisis: First, they were being unfaithful to their God by worshipping false gods of their enemies (Judges 6:10). Second, their enemy had stronger military power - they had the advantage of speed in overtaking their foes through the use of trained camels (Judges 6:5). This was a new element in warfare for the desert nations at that time.

How did the Lord call Gideon and convince him to save his people from their enemies? When the Lord sent his messenger to Gideon, he found him threshing wheat in a wine press (hiding to avoid getting caught by a Midianite raid). The angel addressed Gideon: “The Lord is with you oh mighty man of valour.” But Gideon replies with an objection. He says, ‘If God is with us, then why has all this happened to us’? The Lord does not answer his

7 When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, 8 he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 9 I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. 10 I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

11 The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. 12 When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”

13 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

14 The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

15 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

16 The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

25 That same night the Lord said to him, “Take the second bull from your father’s herd, the one seven years old.[b] Tear down your father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole[c] beside it. 26 Then build a proper kind of[d] altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second[e] bull as a burnt offering.”

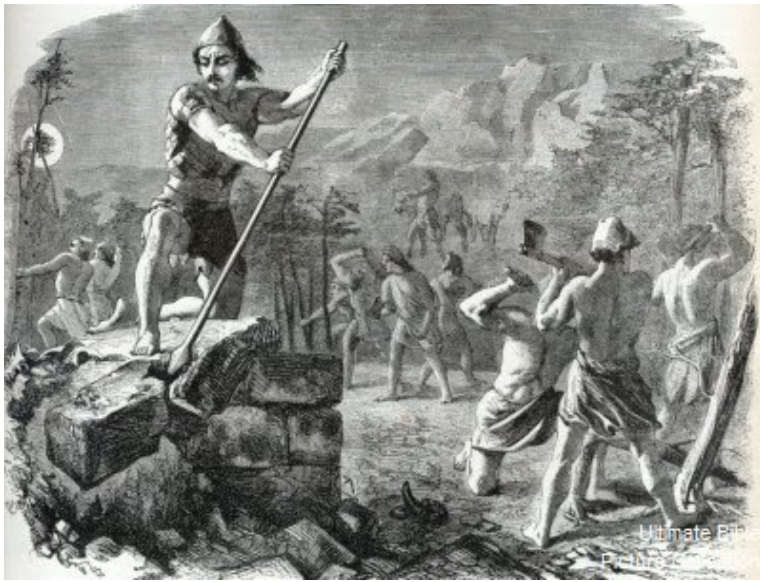
27 So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as

question per se but gives him a clear command: “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” (Judges 6:14).

Those of us who do evangelistic outreach work in a post-Christian environment also want answers, like Gideon, to why it is so challenging. God’s response to Gideon, I believe, gives us an important clue to how he wants to work with us today. The Lord ignores our question, just like he ignored Gideon’s, but he gives us the same command. ‘Go in this strength of yours, am I not sending you!’

God calls us by what he sees we will become

The Lord knew Gideon very well – he knew all of Gideon’s weaknesses and limitations. More importantly, He knows who He (God) is and what He is capable of doing in and through Gideon. He also knows who each one of us is as well – with all our weaknesses and limitations. I believe that He calls us by what He sees we will become, not where we’re at this present moment. I don’t think He is trying to ‘butter us up’ and make us feel good in spite of our weaknesses. He knows not only what we’re capable of in and by ourselves, but more importantly what He is capable of doing in and through us if we cooperate fully with him.



Courage causes people to see truth

God next tests Gideon’s obedience in small things. He asks him to go and tear down an altar that his father built for Baal, a pagan god and offer as a sacrifice to God one of his father’s bulls. (Judges 6:25 and following) Gideon obeys this command, choosing to apply it during the night, rather than the day as he was quite scared. When the men of the town find out that this altar was destroyed, they come looking for Gideon to take revenge. It is quite interesting to observe his father’s change of

the Lord told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

28 In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal’s altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

29 They asked each other, “Who did this?”

When they carefully investigated, they were told, “Gideon son of Joash did it.”

30 The people of the town demanded of Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”

31 But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, “Are you going to plead Baal’s cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.” 32 So because Gideon broke down Baal’s altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal[f] that day, saying, “Let Baal contend with him.”

33 Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

Chapter 7

Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. 2 The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, ‘My own strength has saved me.’ 3 Now announce to the army, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two

attitude: previously, he was a worshiper of Baal and had built an altar for him. Now, following Gideon's actions, his father faces the men of the town with 'if Baal is god, let him defend himself' (my paraphrase of Jud 6:31)

I believe it is the passion and zeal of his son Gideon that causes him to see truth. Courage causes people to see truth.

"The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' (Judges 7:2) The Lord next asks Gideon to reduce the size of his army so that it is very clear to everyone that God is the one who will bring victory. So, thirty one thousand and seven hundred Israelite soldiers leave Gideon's army, and he only has three hundred left. By rough calculations, Gideon's pack of three hundred is 0.2% the size of the army of the Midianites. Gideon was not coming up with a new physical weapon of mass destruction, but he was obeying the Lord who wanted to win the battle in Gideon's stead. That sure requires courage and trust.

If you are afraid, go into the enemy's camp

Further down in the passage (Judges 7:10 and following), the Lord gives Gideon a similar command which requires obedient courage: if you are afraid (to face an army which is 99.8 % the size of yours), go down to the camp of the Midianites with your servant. Just as God had earlier commanded Gideon to go in the strength of His might when Gideon was looking for a very different kind of answer, here God calls him to do something similar: 'If you're afraid, just go into the enemy's camp!' While Gideon does steal into the enemy's camp along with his servant, Gideon happens to overhear two soldiers discussing a dream one of them had and the prophetic interpretation of the dream declaring that "God will give all the Midianites over to Gideon" (Judges 7:14).

It is the power of God that gives the Midianites into Gideon's hand. It is not Gideon's tact or his wisdom nor even the resources he employs. God asks us today to trust in the same power he gave to Gideon, the power of his Holy Spirit. God does not ask us to put our confidence in our own wisdom, strength, or human resources. He knows we lack what we need and that our limited resources are insufficient. The Lord has spoken prophetically to the Sword of the Spirit that he would equip us with his gifts and strength as we engage in the mission he entrusts to us. We are only called to take a micro step of faith, and then watch God work in and through us. He wants to pour out this same Holy Spirit on us today as He did with our parents and many others who chose to be disciples on mission in the Sword of the Spirit. We see this same pattern, time and again in the history of the

thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." 6 Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

7 The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home." 8 So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. 9 During that night the Lord said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. 10 If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah 11 and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. 12 The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

13 Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."

14 His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."

church, as God poured out his Spirit on those who responded to his call with faith, obedience, and generosity.

God asks us to obey him and to respond with faith and courage to his call. Let us pray for the grace and strength to obey Him wholeheartedly, and let us remind ourselves that the power and the glory belongs to Him.

[Joe Fahd directs [Koinonia](#) Mission School in London, a program that trains gappers and volunteer missionaries to do outreach in the heart of London's student world. He is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#) and originally comes from the People of God community in Lebanon.]



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Keeping The Lord's Day Holy - Part 2

What the New Testament Says About It

by Nico Angleys

I. New Testament Teaching on the Lord's Day

I will first examine what the Gospels teach on the sabbath, namely by looking closely at Jesus' actions on the sabbath, then I shall take note of what the Epistles say on the subject. Yong-Eui Yang, in his work on the sabbath in the synoptic Gospels, writes that the sabbath passages are mainly Christological and eschatological in nature.²⁷ These pericopes do not contain much on the observance of the sabbath nor the directive to transfer sabbath observance to the Lord's Day (that is, the first day of the week, the day Jesus rose from the dead). As Benedict XVI points out, the question of "what does and does not belong to the sabbath is at the heart of Jesus' differences with the people of Israel of his time."²⁸ All of the Gospel writers highlight the dispute between the Pharisees and Jesus on the issue of sabbath observance. At the heart of this controversy lies the stunning declaration²⁹ that Jesus is the central reality of the sabbath and "the Lord of the Sabbath." Jesus threatens the "sacred structure and imperils an essential element that cements the unity of the People of God."³⁰

1. What Does Jesus Do on the Sabbath?

Nine different episodes in Jesus' life are recorded in the Gospels as having taken place on the sabbath. Three themes emerge from the study of these pericopes: healing, teaching, and resting.

a) He Heals (and Delivers)

Most of the passages (seven out of nine) that mention the sabbath involve some form of healing or deliverance. Five

specific healings take place on the sabbath.

In Luke 4:31-39 (cf. Mark 1:21-31), Jesus heals the demoniac in Capernaum and then Simon's mother-in-law. The healing of the demoniac highlights Jesus' authority over the sickness born of the spiritual realm, while his healing of Simon's relative underlines his authority over the sickness born of the physical realm. The combination of these two healings suggests a restoration of the created order by the One who created all things. We will examine the teaching aspect of these passages below.

In Luke 13:10-17 he heals a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. In this pericope Jesus connects this healing work with the unbinding of Satan's work. She was crippled because of Satan and Jesus clearly makes a point of saying that he has freed her. This healing brings about a dispute regarding the proper use of the day. According to Jewish custom, at least as taught by the Pharisees, saving a life on the sabbath is a duty; caring for the seriously ill is permitted but only when they are in substantial pain in their whole body, and treating minor ailments is prohibited.³¹ This woman does not fit the tradition's accepted sabbath healing practices. Therefore, Jesus seems to break the sabbath according to the Pharisees' interpretation and he challenges their customs by declaring freedom from infirmity for a daughter of Abraham. When confronted about his presumed blatant sabbath law violation, Jesus (v. 15) points to the fact that the Jews of his day made exceptions to those same laws.³² Thus his healing challenges the way the Pharisees understood the sabbath. In this episode, Jesus reveals two principles regarding the sabbath. First, Jesus brings freedom from the slavery of Satan, as verse 16 announces. This harkens back to Deuteronomy 5 and the deliverance from slavery which the sabbath commemorates. Keeping the sabbath holy reminds us of the ongoing freedom from the slavery of Satan which our Redeemer wishes for all the sons and daughters of Abraham. Second, Jesus has authority to interpret the laws concerning the sabbath. This principle is repeated in many of the sabbath episodes. Jesus is the center of Israel's sacred institution.³³

In Matthew 12:9-14 (cf. Mark 3:1-6 and Luke 6:6-11), Jesus enters the synagogue and heals a man with a withered hand. One commentator proposes that the man was placed in the synagogue as a test to see if Jesus would break the sabbath law.³⁴ The withered hand clearly does not constitute a threat to life and therefore his healing constitutes a breaking of the Pharisaic halakhic law. Jesus uses this healing to point out the inconsistency of the sabbath laws and his answer to the Pharisees' test is a bold proclamation³⁵ that "it is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (Verse 12). This draws the ire of the Pharisees who then begin to plot to destroy Jesus. In all three versions of this incident (Matthew 12:14, Mark 3:6, and Luke 6:11), the manifestation of Jesus' lordship of the sabbath concludes with the Pharisees' response to seek Jesus' destruction.

In John 5:1-30, Jesus heals a paralytic by the pool of Bethesda. The name of the pool means house of pity or mercy.³⁶ Perhaps John gives us the name to indicate both the mercy Christ shows to the paralytic and the kind of action appropriate for a day that is kept holy.³⁷ This healing miracle resembles the one in Luke 13 in the sense that the person healed had long been ill and the miracle led to controversy about healing on the sabbath. The end of the passage shows another altercation between the Pharisees and Jesus on the issue of obeying the sabbath commandment. Jesus responds by defending his work on the sabbath and giving what Brown calls his "discourse on his sabbath work."³⁸ Brown proposes that there are two kinds of work which Jesus does on the sabbath: to give life and to judge. Jesus draws his argument for this from a Jewish understanding that divine activity on the sabbath did not cease. The work of God on the sabbath could be seen by the fact that life and death of men occurred on that day. Both the creation of life and its termination – with the ensuing judgment – belong to the realm of God's work.³⁹ Jesus' defense of his healing work on the sabbath is also an assertion of his divinity (see John 5:19) which is recognized as such by the Pharisees and precipitates another wave of opposition against Jesus. The rest which God commands for the sabbath allows us to see the work of God and in particular the work of his Son: the bringing of life and the restoring of life. Already, in this passage, Jesus presents a hint of the resurrection by commanding the paralytic to rise, a foreshadowing of the resurrection power he will make available to all through his own resurrection.

In John 9:13-17, Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth and is confronted for healing on the sabbath. Jesus' action of making clay, anointing, healing a chronic condition, and washing are all understood to be forbidden as sabbath activity.⁴⁰ John highlights the tension this produces among the Pharisees: either Jesus is a sinner because he

transgresses the sabbath oral traditions or he is not a sinner because he performs such a sign. This healing proposes that Jesus has the authority to correct the current interpretation of the sabbath law and that he is able to restore the defects found in creation by healing blindness from birth.

Jesus himself initiates all of the healings he performs on the sabbath.⁴¹ In all three synoptic Gospels he proclaims that he is lord of the sabbath (Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, and Luke 6:5) and as such he rules over his enemy, the Devil, and all the effects of sin. This lordship inaugurates “the new creation by which humanity is restored to the fullness of life that God intended from the beginning,”⁴² a creation that is healed and able to receive the dwelling of God forever (Revelation 21:3-5).

b) He Teaches

Jesus is also on record, in both Mark and Luke, for teaching in the synagogue and at a Pharisee’s house. As with the healings, his teaching draws vehement opposition.

We return to Mark 1:21-27 (cf. Luke 4:31-37), which we have already looked at in the context of the healing and deliverance that takes place on the sabbath. Here, Jesus, having just called the Apostles, begins his active ministry by teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. The teaching is recognized as having authority. Mark tells us that this authority is greater than the scribes’ (verse 22) which is remarkable on two counts: first Jesus does not appear to have rabbinical training; second he claims authority directly from the Father (as John 12:44-50 makes clear).⁴³ In the middle of this scene a man with an unclean spirit disrupts things and Jesus delivers him. The greatness of Jesus’ authority, in its divine origin, thus further manifests itself through the healing and deliverance from evil spirits. The audience recognizes the connection between Jesus’ teaching and his power over the evil spirit,⁴⁴ which then suggests that the sabbath is a day suited to hearing the teaching of Christ and observing its power over evil.

In Mark 6:1-6 (cf. Luke 4:16-30), Jesus preaches in the synagogue in Nazareth on the sabbath but then marvels at his hometown’s lack of faith. Luke tells us that Jesus’ custom was to attend the synagogue on the sabbath. The sabbath is the day when the faith is taught during the assembly of the faithful. Through the reading from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, and through the teaching the rabbis gave following these readings, the assembly learned about the Lord. This pericope shows that Jesus adhered to the practices of his people and that he taught on the sabbath, even in his hometown.

In Matthew 12:1-8 (cf. Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5), the Pharisees question Jesus’ disciples for picking heads of grain on the sabbath. At the conclusion of his defense Jesus declares that he is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, and Luke 6:5). This startling statement is no less than a claim to divinity because it places him above a divine institution.⁴⁵ Yang notes that these passages use the sabbath as an illustration of what Jesus means when he says in Matthew 5:17-20 that he has come to fulfill the law. The law, according to Matthew 5:17-20, has a prophetic role in salvation history which Christ fulfills. The law as given in the Old Testament is “incomplete and temporary”⁴⁶ and Jesus’ first coming announces its fullness and permanence. Finally, the law announces the kingdom of heaven which requires a righteousness that exceeds the current Pharisaic legalism.⁴⁷ Mark’s account of this episode adds the phrase in 2:27 that “the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.” One explanation for this addition in Mark is that Jesus is extending the application of the sabbath beyond Israel and making it applicable to all mankind.⁴⁸ The central message of this sabbath episode is Jesus’ declaration of his authority as Lord of the Sabbath.

In Luke 14:1-24, Jesus eats with Pharisees on a sabbath and heals a man with dropsy in their midst. The healing in this passage is described very briefly (in one verse, Luke 14:4) and seems to be mainly an occasion for Jesus teaching. Jesus uses the healing itself to teach about the nature of the sabbath (verses 3-6), then he gives a parable on humility (verses 7-14), and finally he concludes with a parable on the banquet invitation which is about the kingdom of God. As we have seen previously, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and thus has authority to interpret the commandment concerning the sabbath. Jesus “pulls out of the well” by his healing power the man with dropsy (in

Greek *hydropikos*, meaning “full of water”⁴⁹ and justifies this to the Pharisees by asking them if they would not retrieve a son or an ox fallen into a well, presumably “full of water” (verse 5). The sabbath is for healing. In the parable on humility, Jesus speaks of a marriage feast (verse 8) that concludes with a radical lesson on the importance of humbling oneself. The marriage feast context, read in conjunction with Revelation 19 and the marriage of the Lamb, suggests an eschatological dimension to the sabbath. Jesus tells this parable because he notices how the guests surrounding him chose the places of honor. The marriage feast with its eternal significance becomes the context for the lesson of the moment. This sabbath meal is the time to hear the lesson on humility which is a character trait of those called to the eternal sabbath meal. Jesus then proceeds to teach his host and the guests about the great invitation of God to the kingdom of God. The sabbath is used by Jesus to make a proclamation of the kingdom through the parables.

c) He Rested from his Work of Salvation (i.e. in His Death)

All four Gospels make a point of connecting Jesus’ death with sabbath rest as they indicate that the resurrection occurs after the sabbath (Matthew 28:1, Mark 15:42, 16:1, Luke 23:54, 56, and John 19:31). The sabbath in these passages seems to be primarily a time marker for the reader to understand the chronology of the events surrounding the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In John 19:30, the last recorded words of Jesus are: “It is finished.” Interpreting these words to be applied to his work of redemption, one might then view the sabbath references in the timeline to suggest that the work of re-creation is complete and that God once again rests on the seventh day. This particular sabbath rest at the end of holy week is the final seventh day which is the day he rests in death. Brown writes that “the work is now finished, and the Sabbath that begins after Jesus’ death is the Sabbath of eternal rest.”⁵⁰ This rest is the “last of the Old Dispensation (which passed finally with Jesus’ resurrection).”⁵¹ Jesus’ bodily earthly ministry is complete, the Savior of the World now rests in death before rising on the eighth day, the Lord’s Day. The old creation is complete, the new creation can now begin.

2. Other NT Teaching on the Lord’s Day

a) Entering into God’s Rest

The author of Hebrews warns “while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged” (Hebrews 4:1), and exhorts his readers to “strive to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4:11). As one commentator puts it, the hortatory subjunctives in both these verses suggest an *inclusio* which contains both a warning and a promise that shed light on the image of the sabbath.⁵² The promise of entering into God’s rest is an encouragement to hope and to persevere in faith. The warning is the example of Israel who did not receive the promise because of judgment and disobedience. The promise and warning frame the discussion for the new Israel to live in hope of a homeland that is God’s rest. The New Testament church is the spiritual Israel which looks to earthly Israel in the Old Testament to understand her roots. In the old covenant, Israel did not enter God’s rest because of her lack of faith (verse 2) and her disobedience (verse 6). Yet verses 8-10 point to a day in the future when God’s people will enter into his rest, the rest of the seventh day alluded to in verse 4. Rest in the Old Testament has many different meanings: the land of Canaan, the temple, the place of God’s dwelling.⁵³ While the sense of rest in the Old Testament is in the realm of promise, in the New Testament the sense of rest is fulfilled. This is observed when Jesus invites all who labor and are heavy laden to enter his rest (Matthew 11:28).⁵⁴ Guthrie explains that the rest described in the Hebrews passage has two noteworthy meanings. First, because of the verb tenses used in verse 3 and the contrast with ancient Israel highlighted by the use of Psalm 95, “the rest he [the author of the letter] is thinking of is an experience already in process of being fulfilled. [...] It is an essential part of the present reality for Christians.”⁵⁵ This rest is not simply to come but is already present for the believer. Second, the word *sabbatismos* in verse 9 shows that God’s rest is connected with the sabbath in some way.⁵⁶ We can identify a third sense of rest, namely, a future reality that is conveyed by the exhortation in verse 11⁵⁷ and the sense of promise⁵⁸ contained in the term *katapausis* (“rest”).

The rest spoken of here is participation in the divine life⁵⁹ entered into through baptism and faith where we as sons and daughters participate in the sabbath rest of our Father.⁶⁰ This perspective highlights the “already and not yet” reality that we live in.⁶¹ Keeping the Lord’s Day holy through worship, particularly in the dominical assembly of the people of God, is an expression of the believer’s faith, a visible participation in the sabbath rest that we experience now in part but also await for

full completion.

b) A Day to Be “In the Spirit”

The only reference to the “Lord’s Day” in the New Testament is found in Revelation 1:10. This is the first instance of the term “Lord’s Day” in Christian literature, although by the second century its use to designate the first day of the week, Sunday, was commonplace.⁶² In the introduction to the book John says that he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10). We are thus led to conclude that John’s revelation contained in that book occurred on the Lord’s Day. This suggestion on John’s part that Sunday is an important day for hearing the LORD is relevant to our topic. Keeping the Lord’s Day holy involves an active listening to God who wishes to speak to his creatures through the Spirit. The imagery and message of the book of Revelation are complicated and mysterious, yet they do bear witness to the reality that the Spirit wishes to speak to every generation of Christians to direct and guide them through the trials and tribulations of the age. The Lord’s Day seems to be a special time in which the Spirit speaks to His Church. Hahn, interpreting the idea that earthly liturgy is a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy,⁶³ proposes that the entire book of Revelation points to the Mass. The Sunday liturgy is the “clean, well-lighted place where John had his vision: worship in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”⁶⁴

3. From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day

The early church transferred the fulfillment of the sabbath commandment, the understanding of its beautiful purpose in the economy of salvation, and its various practices to Sunday, the first day of the week (that is, the Lord’s Day). The resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week was such a momentous event in the history of creation that “for Christians this ‘first day’ – the beginning of the creation – became the ‘Lord’s day.’ The essential elements of the Old Testament sabbath then naturally passed over to the Lord’s Day in the context of table fellowship with Jesus.”⁶⁵ John Paul II summarizes the Church Fathers’ view that the eighth day is the image for eternity. It is “that truly singular day which will follow the present time, the day without end which will know neither evening nor morning, the imperishable age which will never grow old.”⁶⁶ As we have already seen, the kernel of the eternal sabbath is already found in the Old Testament interpretation.

The Church affirms that the resurrection on the eighth day transforms the spiritual truth regarding the Jewish sabbath into the keeping of Sunday as the Lord’s Day.⁶⁷ In light of the Paschal Mystery, “the meaning of the Old Testament precept concerning the Lord’s Day is recovered, perfected, and fully revealed in the glory which shines on the face of the Risen Christ.”⁶⁸ The reasons for the transference of the sabbath to the Lord’s Day are threefold. First, the resurrection stands as “first of all days,”⁶⁹ as the day of highest importance, “at the heart of all worship.”⁷⁰ Second, Christ has ushered in a new creation through his passion, death and resurrection. This is the day of light, the day of salvation, the day in which Christians are called to remember their rebirth.⁷¹ Third, the Christians of the early church seemed to have made Sunday the primary day of worship.⁷² Most Christians have accepted this transference although there remain some groups that hold to a seventh-day sabbath practice.⁷³

[See > Part 1. Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy in the Old Testament](#)



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Keeping The Lord's Day Holy: [Part 2 on New Testament Teaching](#), by Nico Angleys

Footnotes

- [27](#) Yong-Eui Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath In Matthew's Gospel* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 306.
- [28](#) Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 106.
- [29](#) Mark 2:27-28, Matthew 12:8, and Luke 6:5.
- [30](#) Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 111.
- [31](#) David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 117. Another commentator explains that “the prohibition of healing is assumed rather than argued in the various rabbinic writings, and the only exception to it is when life is in immediate danger.” Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath In Matthew's Gospel*, 199. The rabbinic texts that contain these prohibitions date several centuries later than the New Testament but they very likely reflect the oral traditions of Jesus’ time.
- [32](#) Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 212 and 214.
- [33](#) Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 111.
- [34](#) Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: a Reader-response Commentary* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 160.
- [35](#) Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath In Matthew's Gospel*, 205.
- [36](#) *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, ed. Allan C. Myers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), s.v. “Bethesda” 141.
- [37](#) Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (1-12) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 206-207. Brown shows that the exact name of the pool is not entirely certain. Thus the suggestion that the name of the pool has to do with the sabbath is made tentatively.
- [38](#) *Ibid.*, 212-221.
- [39](#) *Ibid.*, 217.
- [40](#) R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1998), 176.
- [41](#) Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 68.
- [42](#) *Ibid.*, 68.
- [43](#) Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 85-86.
- [44](#) Healy, *The Gospel of Mark*, 46.
- [45](#) “To be lord of a divine ordinance is to have a very high place indeed.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 122.
- [46](#) *Dei Verbum*, 15.
- [47](#) Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath In Matthew's Gospel*, 301.
- [48](#) Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), 104.
- [49](#) Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 223.
- [50](#) Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (13-21) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 908.
- [51](#) Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 619.
- [52](#) James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 94.

- [53](#) Thompson, *Hebrews*, 84.
- [54](#) J.G. Thomson, "Rest" in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 1085.
- [55](#) Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 112.
- [56](#) *Ibid.*, 116.
- [57](#) "Thus 'sabbath rest' combines in itself creation-commemoration, salvation-experience, and eschaton-anticipation as the community of faith moves towards the final consummation of total restoration and rest." Gerhard Hasel, "Sabbath," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 856.
- [58](#) Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, Translator and Editor: Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 627. "Comprehensive reflection on these two facts [that Joshua had the task of bringing the people to rest in the promised land and that God rested on the seventh day] lead to the conclusion that here, too, the O.T. points beyond itself, and that the rest is still in the sphere of promise. [...] The distinctive LXX use of the term is the normative linguistic instrument by which to describe the way the O.T. via the to-day of the N.T. leads to the final ends of God."
- [59](#) Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 129.
- [60](#) Much more could be said here about this participation in the divine life, notably through the Eucharist as "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). The sacramental dimension of this rest is significant but beyond the scope of this work. Johnson hints at it in his comments on Hebrews 4:10: "Human who accept this gift 'cease from their work' not in the sense that they cease from human effort, but in the sense that, like God, their works are no longer a striving to fill a need, but a share in an outpouring of abundant life." (emphasis mine) Johnson, *Hebrews*, 130. The Eucharist is the "primary means for ongoing participation in the life and power of God." Daniel Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 44.
- [61](#) "[The promise remaining to the people] is a life extended to them through the pioneer of their salvation, Jesus, who has gone before them to the place they approach. The 'sabbath rest' is therefore to live as God lives." Johnson, *Hebrews*, 130.
- [62](#) "L'usage fréquent du mot [jour du Seigneur] au deuxième siècle impose pratiquement la traduction "dominical", ce qui exprime une relation à la fois au Seigneur et au jour de la semaine qui porte son nom." Trans. "the frequent use of the word [the Lord's Day] in the second century practically imposes the translation 'dominical', which expresses the relationship between the Lord and the day that bears his name." Pierre Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (Geneva : Labor et Fides, 2000), 98.
- [63](#) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8.
- [64](#) Scott Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: the Mass as Heaven on Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 139.
- [65](#) Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 112.
- [66](#) *Dies Domini*, 26.
- [67](#) CCC 2175.
- [68](#) *Dies Domini*, 18.
- [69](#) CCC 2174.
- [70](#) *Dies Domini*, 19.
- [71](#) *Ibid.*, 24-25.
- [72](#) CCC 2178 and "Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death." (CCC 2175 quoting Ignatius of Antioch)
- [73](#) For a fuller description of the five different sabbath-holding views in various Protestant traditions, see Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath in Matthew's Gospel*, 14-15.

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Manna and Mammon

A battlefield on which the Lord challenges us to show our mettle

by Daniel Propson

For many years, when the subject of tithing came up, I laid low. Many of my fellow Christians seemed rather uncompromising about it, thinking that every Christian ought to tithe a full ten percent of his income, no excuses.

I didn't disagree to their faces, of course; they had the Scriptures to back up their claims. I had – what? A few petty rationalizations, at best. I could cite circumstances that would justify withholding a full ten percent (to pay for an unanticipated surgery, for example), but this line of reasoning was no good; my friends weren't out to deny me my needs. So in the end, the brutal fact staring me in the face was this: I didn't *need* a tenth of my income; I kept it because I wanted it.

Moreover, my own church's attitude toward tithing confused me (and still does). Like many other churches, mine seemed rather casual about this whole “offering” business. The word “tithe” never came up, and no one spoke of the *necessity* of giving to the church. It was as if the concept of giving one's first fruits to the Lord had been blotted out of the Scriptures and replaced with the kindly injunction, “Just give what you can spare—that is, if it isn't any trouble.”

But tithing *is* trouble. If it weren't, God wouldn't have to ask us for it.

As time went on, I became ever more convinced that the Lord wanted my life to be totally devoted to him, and that giving “my” money was a necessary expression of this devotion. He who has freely given all to us has commanded us to give back. If we do not obey, how are we better than thieves? The man who does not tithe is in danger of becoming corrupted. He risks becoming like Judas, a man of such reckless audacity as to think that stealing from the

moneybag of the living God could win him any lasting gain.

Living on Manna

Tithing a full ten percent forces a man to face up to his attachment to material things; it draws out the battle in our souls between manna and mammon. Given how absorbed most of us are in financial concerns, given how hard we work for our money and how tenaciously we cling to it, money becomes a battlefield on which the Lord challenges us to show our mettle.

Therefore, when we offer our lives to God, we must not be astonished if, first of all, he demands of us our money. If we will not part with it, how are we different from the rich young man who would not impoverish himself even to follow God himself? Money may be the mote, or even plank, in our eye that blinds us. If we are not willing to part with one of every ten dollars for the Most High God, of what account are our earnest attestations that he is our all? What *are* we willing to give, if we refuse this token?

Tithing also presents us with the opportunity to express our faith in the body of Christ, which *is*—as the Bible teaches – the Church. Put your money where your mouth is, they say. Surely we would not deny our money from Jesus suffering before us in the flesh, so how can we deny it to his people?

It is in giving that we receive. This truth is a lens through which we might see the Incarnation: Christ, who gave up every ounce of his life for us, was raised up in incomparable splendor, receiving blessing from his Father. Just so, when we give what the Lord requires of us, we will find blessing. This blessing exists in Paradise, but it can also become a temporal reality – as Jesus promised that those who give up their houses for his sake will receive houses in this present age (Mark 10:30).

An Acceptable Sacrifice

There is often a tendency toward legalism in discussions about tithing. They often become discussions about certain passages of Scripture, about the exact amount that is required of us, about the suspicion that churches are seeking to exploit the words of Christ. Is this anything but a search for adequate excuses?

While there are some things more important than tithing, and even some purposes for money that may have a claim to being more important, there is only one passage necessary to form our attitude about tithing: “Then God created man in his own image.” The disposition of a man who knows God is thankfulness, and thankfulness finds its natural expression in generosity. A generous person is always looking to give more. This attitude – “What more can I do?” – will, in itself, be life-giving to us, will make giving ten percent, or more, the most natural thing in the world.

What would happen if we each gave ten percent of our income to the Lord? The question is something of a weathervane, revealing our true attitudes toward God’s church. On the one hand, there is a fear that we would not have enough money to live on comfortably, that we would have to make sacrifices. On the other, there is a fear that the money would be wasted, that the church is not to be trusted with such large amounts (although it is to be trusted with our souls?).

Regarding the first concern, yes, we likely *will* have to make sacrifices. Our standard of living may go down, and we may struggle more financially. But these sacrifices – or even just the willingness to make them – can be a blessing to the believer, because he knows that God will give him everything he needs. The blessings we provide to our families are, after all, impossible without the benediction of the Lord. If we tell our children that “they are worth” thousands of dollars in schooling, how is the Lord not worth every dollar in our bank accounts? If we refuse to make sacrifices, then our love has been tested and found wanting.

Okay, some say, but *how will our churches use the money?* If everyone started tithing at once, could our churches—our bumbling, inefficient, unreliable churches – properly manage such a windfall? This is a vain line of questioning. Our faithfulness, like Hosea’s faithfulness to Gomer, is not predicated on results. Though we do not see the church triumphant through our tithe, yet the body of Christ is being built up through it. And we must take care not to fall into the reasoning of Judas who, seeing precious oil poured out to anoint our Lord, cynically invoked a soulless kind of utilitarianism.

We give to the Lord, not to our church; our church is our trustee. If she has not seemed trustworthy before, perhaps it is because we did not hazard to trust her. Pastors – like spouses and children – all too often live up to our expectations. Our role is to make ourselves vulnerable, to give God the opportunity to transform the gift we have given for his kingdom. At worst, we have done what we ought to do, and grown in character. We have lived with less, and leaned on God more. We have been tempted by the devil to turn stone into bread, and we have resisted.

In some rare cases, perhaps, a believer’s church is so irresponsible as to make it imprudent (perhaps even sinful) to contribute to it. His commitment to tithing then presents him with the obvious choice to stop attending that church, or – if such a move would be difficult – to reconsider the life that cuts him off from a truly *faithful* congregation.

The Sermon on the Amount

If we all gave ten percent, what a witness it would be! Yet, when the call for tithing comes from the pulpit, the only thing many in the congregation hear is the same old Sermon on the Amount. It is natural (and sometimes accurate) for individuals in a church to interpret this sermon as an expression of personal selfishness on the part of the pastor. This can create a rebound effect, of course, unintentionally excusing the churchgoer for his own selfishness.

But if the Sermon on the Amount will not do, neither is it decent that the mission of the Church should be crippled by a people who have not dutifully repaid the Source of all good things. Perhaps a grass-roots campaign would help, a variety of different speakers and writers rediscovering and communicating the meaning of the tithe.

Or perhaps all we need is the movement of the Holy Spirit in hearts open to receive it, a movement more pure and more powerful than the force of a thousand sermons.

[“Manna & Mammon” first appeared in the May/June 2010 issue of [Touchstone](#). Used with permission.]

Dan Propson has been actively involved in Detroit Community Outreach since the summer of 2000 when he first joined the DSO summer program. He moved to Detroit shortly after the summer program. He married Priscilla in 2005, and is raising his five children here in the city. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Philosophy at Wayne State University in Detroit.

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By The Way, Just In Case You're Curious

by Sam Williamson

About thirty-five years ago, I lived in a community of a hundred men who kept everything in common. We literally pooled our money. Out of that pool we paid for our clothes, food, rent, and even our cars.

Before we had a non-profit name, the cars we bought were registered in one of the men's names (usually whoever was convenient at the time). We had a little fleet.

One day I was in a car with Bruce (the first time I've used a real name) when he was pulled over for speeding. The officer sternly asked for a driver's license and the car registration. We always kept the registration in the glove box; always ... except this time.

Bruce told the officer he didn't have the registration, and the officer asked Bruce who owned the car. Bruce glanced at me red-faced, turned to the officer and stuttered, "Sir, I don't know who this car belongs to."

The officer replied incredulously, "Let me get this straight. You are speeding in someone's car; you can't find its

registration. You don't even know who it belongs to; but you don't want me to think you are stealing it." He strode back to his squad car.

A few minutes later he marched back with a speeding ticket. After handing the ticket to Bruce, he leaned in the open window and he dead-panned,

"By the way, sir, just in case you're curious, this car belongs to you. You own it."

I long to own so lightly

I long to hold onto my life (talents, and calling) the way Bruce held onto his car. What I admire about Bruce's ownership is not his *self-denial* giving; it is his *self-forgetfulness*.

There are a whole set of services we offer to others out of conscious self-denial. Let's not stop. The world needs people who give money to the needy and time to good causes. It is good and right for us to offer from *conscious self-denial*.

But there is a better way. There is *unconscious self-forgetfulness*. C. S. Lewis portrays the biblical vision of believers using their gifts as artists when he paints this picture,

God wants to bring us to a state of mind in which we could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) ... glad at having done it ourselves than we would be if it had been done by another. (*Screwtape Letters*, slightly edited)

I long to live my life with this artistic self-forgetfulness, creating art for the sake of beauty not acclaim; I long to turn my service into art, and to give it freely.

Giving or getting

Has anyone ever "given" you something when the reality was they wanted to "get" something? It's like the time a friend invites us to dinner and we discover—to our dismay—that the dinner is a network marketing promotion. We hoped for discussion with friends; we became a business target for entrepreneurs.

It's easy to "give" our service—our art—in the same self-serving way, to feed our ego, to satisfy a thirst for applause, or to gain prestige.

We know people like this. There is a force field around them; there is a gravitational pull to applaud their "gift." It feels like the goal of their giving is to get.

We not only *know* people like this, we often *are* people like this. But God is working to free us from this self-focus. Lewis continues,

God wants us, in the end, to be so free from any bias in our own favor that we can rejoice in our neighbor's talents as frankly and gratefully as in our own—or in a sunrise, an elephant, or a waterfall. (*Screwtape Letters*, slightly edited)

God is shaping our hearts to offer service as art, and to appreciate it simply as beauty.

But how is he doing that?

Our giving to get—our cosmic self-consciousness—comes from a type of pain. When was the last time you thought about your elbow? I never do. Last week I slipped on the driveway and smacked my funny bone. Now I think about my elbow all the time.

When my elbow was working perfectly fine, it would bend and straighten and twist and turn beautifully, like an oiled machine or a work of art (can't you see my beautiful elbow in the Louvre?). When my elbow worked, I enjoyed it with unconscious forgetfulness.

But when my elbow got banged, I noticed it's every movement. The reason we “give to get” is our pain from a banged up heart; we look for applause to salve the pain.

God's plan to salve our hearts with long term satisfaction is for us to know his love. Lewis describes this love:

To please God... to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness... to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in her work ... it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is. (*Weight of Glory*)

As we come to know his love for us—indeed his delight in us—as his artistic masterpiece, it is then that we begin to receive the salve our heart has been longing for.

Artistic self-forgetfulness

My friend—from the beginning of the article—lived in a community of men who shared their money, time, and their fleet of cars. Nothing was their own.

I long to offer to others what God has given me in a way that is simply giving; without comparing, envy, or restraint; not to feel good about myself but to offer beauty in a way that would delight me just as much if someone else had done it.

Someday God may knock on my window lean in and chuckle, “*By the way, Sam, just in case you're curious, this art belongs to you. You made it.*”

Because I wouldn't have known. Or cared.

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish [Antioch](#), a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men's retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. He is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.



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Honoring God With Our Time

by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

Your time is your life. As a time coach and trainer and the author of [The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment](#), recently published by McGraw Hill, I've spent a great deal of my time thinking about how to empower people to live holistically successful lives.

As members of community, we have committed to a certain way of life that naturally leads to investing our time in certain ways. For instance, regular times of prayer, group accountability and support, and one-on-one mentoring happen automatically through prayer meetings, men's and women's groups, and pastoral meetings. However this increased number of commitments, particularly if you participate in one or more areas of service, can make investing your time in other important areas of life more difficult.

Each community and each person has slightly different needs and challenges. But in general, I've noticed both through participating in Word of Life, in Ann Arbor, and through visiting communities on five continents that it's important as individuals and families or households to intentionally make time for these key areas. I've listed out some suggestions of how we can encourage one another in living balanced, God honoring lives.

Health & Wellness

Adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition can often be pushed aside as mere fleshly considerations that must be

sacrificed for a higher cause. While during certain seasons, we may be called to such sacrifices. In general, not investing in proper health and wellness leads to an unsustainable pace and drastically reduces the quality of life for community members.

Here are some ways we can support one another in the area of health and wellness:

- Watch the end times of group meetings so that we can support those who need to rise early in getting an adequate amount of sleep.
- For those working in university outreaches where late meetings are inevitable, avoid early morning meetings.
- Encourage one another to take the vacation time permitted by our jobs even if the holiday is taken at home.
- If practical, walk during pastoral meetings to increase both spiritual health and physical health.
- If someone in your men's or women's group desires to have a more healthy lifestyle and wants accountability, make room for talking about areas like physical exercise as part of sharing times.

Primary Relationships

If you live a highly structured and/or busy life, you may end up doing many things with the people around you, but not actually connecting with them. Maybe you went to a committee meeting with your husband or wife but never had the opportunity to find out about a contentious conversation he or she had with a colleague that day. Maybe you spent the day with your son at a youth event but never gave him enough space to tell you how someone picked on him at school. Maybe you celebrated the Lord's Day with your housemates but never found out that one of them just found out her mom has cancer. If we're not careful, we can become completely estranged from the people around us in the hustle and bustle of life.

Here are some ways we can support one another in meaningful connection:

- Encourage one another in having regular husband-wife meetings or house meetings. See those as times not only to talk through practical concerns but also to share about any significant happenings in one another's inner or outer lives.
- Make time to connect with your family and friends on a regular basis. For instance, my family has weekly conference calls where we dial in from around the United States and share our latest updates. I have regular meetings with close friends either in person or over the phone to make sure that I'm keeping in touch in a meaningful way.
- Pay attention to any changes in those around you and if something seems off, ask about it. Many times people get neglected because their way of indicating something is wrong is not to make a big fuss but to retreat. Be aware of those behavioral changes, and don't shy away from asking if anything has happened.

Solitude and Contemplation

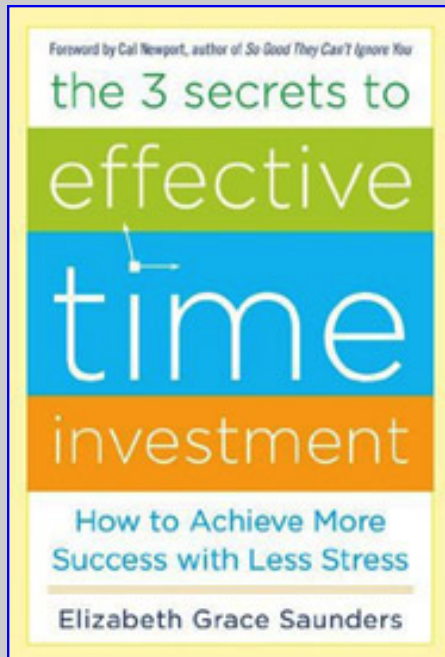
God doesn't need our works, but He longs for our affection. I'm pretty convinced God's primary love language is quality time. If you do all the service in the world but neglect spending time with Him, you hurt His heart and miss out on the richness and abundance of life that He longs to give you.

Here are some ways we can support one another in keeping our first love first:

- Give one another time and space to think and pray. Particularly in household or family life, there can be a tendency to think that constant interaction with one another should trump all other activities. However, respecting one another's needs for solitude is one of the best ways that we can encourage one another in our faith walks. To help in this cause, you could set up regular times when a member or members of the family are not to be disturbed from communion with God.

- Aim to have at least one evening a week without any organized activity. This allows time and space to recalibrate, catch up on life, and to gain perspective on what you should or should not be doing.
- Help one another in going on regular retreats. This could look like making it possible to attend a men's or women's retreat or it could look less formal like going to a retreat center or even a hotel every three to six months. Although this may require some special logistical coordination and extra expense in the short-term, in the long-term it will lead to a richer, more centered life.

As community members, we have the blessing of having much of our time investment naturally aligned with a life in pursuit of God. But by keeping the above points in mind, we can do an even better job of fostering a healthy, sustainable, balanced, Holy Spirit empowered life together.



Elizabeth Grace Saunders is a member of the [Word of Life Community](#) in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Elizabeth is a time coach and trainer (www.RealLifeE.com) and the author of [The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment: How to Achieve More Success With Less Stress](#). Her book is available in bookstores and on [Amazon](#) in hardcover and Kindle editions.

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Deliver Us From Evil

Some practical tips on praying with youth

by Michael Shaughnessy

The end of the Lord's prayer might be better translated from the Greek as "deliver us from the evil one." At least some of the temptations we encounter come not from the world or the flesh but from the devil. Parents and youth workers personally experience the slings and arrows, the lies and temptations, of the evil one. The same is true for our youth.

They too are under attack from the evil one, but when was the last time they received prayer to be delivered from his work? There are at least four good reasons to believe your children are under spiritual attack from the evil one: because the Lord said so, because they are Christians, because they are human and because the evil one is, well, evil. We can help youth be delivered from evil by praying with them.

Praying with youth

When praying with your children or the youth in your youth group, it is helpful to keep a few things in mind. Some temptations, possibly most, are attacks on the mind. They are lies from the Father of Lies. The three most helpful things we can do are 1) expose the lie, that is, bring it into the light, 2) rebuke the lying spirit in the name of Jesus, and 3) pray for strength for the person not to believe the lie anymore.

Some temptations are attacks on the emotions. Often discouragement, anger and fears faced by youth are magnified by the evil one. Simply identifying that this is the case can help youth deal with their emotions better, but praying with them is important to do also.

Some temptations are attacks on the will. In such cases it is important for the person to renounce the evil spirit at work on their will and reclaim their freedom in Christ. It is then possible to bind the spirit in prayer and to ask the Lord to strengthen the person's resolve not to yield again.

When youth workers and/or parents pray with youth for deliverance, two good things result. First, the devil is bound and limited in his power over them. And second, those receiving the prayer experience a support alliance with those who pray with them. Together they have faced and defeated a common enemy.

Have you prayed with your youth lately?

[Mike Shaughnessy is an elder in [The Servants of the Word](#) and the Director of [Kairos in North America](#). Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.]

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The Ten Plagues

Scriptural reflections from the Book of Exodus

Reflections by Don Schwager / Art work by Yvette Rock

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Introduction

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment – Exodus 6:6

The Book of Exodus in the Old Testament gives the account of how God raised up Moses, his servant, to deliver the chosen people from oppression in the land of Egypt. Exodus recounts a seven-fold promise which God made to Moses and the people (Exodus 6:6-8):

1. I will free you from the burdens which the Egyptians have laid upon you.
2. I will release you from slavery to them.
3. With strokes of power I will deliver you.
4. I will adopt you as my own people.
5. I will be your God.
6. I will bring you to the land I swore I would give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
7. I will give this land to you for your inheritance.

This seven-fold promise forshadows the fulness of redemption which Jesus Christ fulfilled for the human race when he delivered us from slavery to sin and death through his victory on the cross.

The ten plagues demonstrated God's power and presence in a land that worshiped idols and oppressed the people of God. Pharaoh was worshiped as a divine person in Egypt. His defiance and refusal to submit to God is a type or symbol of the Angel of Light (also called Lucifer and Satan) who was thrown out of heaven for his defiant refusal to serve God.

The plagues brought judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians for enslaving Israel, and judgment on all the gods of Egypt. They demonstrate that the Lord is the only true God and greater than all other gods.

They also demonstrated for Israel, and for all believers, both the depravity of sin and our need for God's redemption.

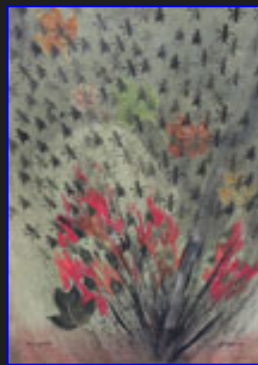
The Book of Revelations also describes plagues which will take place at the end of the age, when the Lord Jesus returns to judge the world and to usher in his kingdom of righteousness and peace. See Revelations 15:1, 16:3-7.



plague of blood



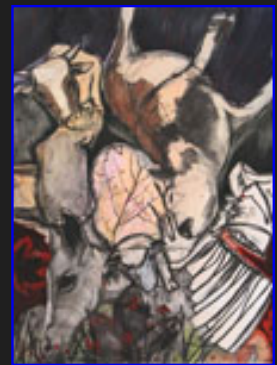
plague of frogs



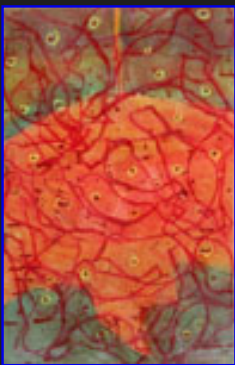
plague of gnats



plague of flies



plague of livestock



plague of boils



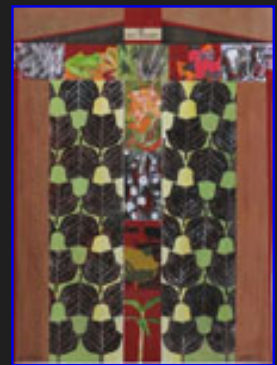
plague of hail



plague of locusts



plague of darkness



plague of the firstborn

click on each box to view scriptural reflection for each plague

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A Scriptural Reflection on the First Plague



Plague of Blood, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

God's purpose of the plagues was not only to secure the release of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, but also to make himself known to the Egyptians as the one true God who not only acts with power and judgment, but also with grace, blessing, and protection for those who serve him.

And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord,
when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring

The plague of blood

Exodus 7

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; wait for him by the river's brink, and take in your hand the rod which was turned into a serpent. 16 And you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold, you have not yet obeyed." 17 Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood, 18 and the fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile shall become foul, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink water from the Nile.'"

19 And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

20 Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the rod and struck the water that was in the Nile, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood. 21 And the fish in the Nile died; and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same by

out the people of Israel from among them (Exodus 7:5-6).

In the open warfare between God and Pharaoh, God demonstrates his power and shows his wonders to all of Egypt.

The first plague – turning the waters of the Nile into blood – is a sign of death. The waters of the Nile nourished Egypt's fertile lands enabling this desert climate to flourish. The plague of blood not only polluted the fertile river, but led to death both on land and in water. This sign would culminate with the harsh reality of death in the final plague – the destruction of the firstborn of all Egypt. There is a moral message in this plague:

The wages of sin is death,
but the free gift of God is eternal life
in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

"Lord Jesus Christ, you died that we might no longer live in bondage to sin. Strengthen my hands for battle against the corrupting force of wrongdoing and rebellion in my life (Psalm 144:1-2,7-8). Increase my hunger for your righteousness and holiness that I may renounce sin, Satan, and the world for your kingdom and your glory."

their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said. 23 Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not lay even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians dug round about the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

25 Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

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See also > [The Ten Plagues: A biblical art work series by Yvette Rock](#)

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A Scriptural Reflection on the Second Plague



Plague of Frogs, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

After the first plague, God had Moses wait one full week before confronting Pharaoh with his refusal to let the Israelites go and worship in the wilderness. Here we see God's patience (Romans 9:22-23). He gave Pharaoh time to reconsider and repent of his stubborn opposition. Since Pharaoh did not repent, Moses had to go and perform a second sign.

The second sign – the plague of frogs, which are creatures of the

Plague of frogs

Exodus 8

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 2 But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs; 3 the Nile shall swarm with frogs which shall come up into your house, and into your bedchamber and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls; 4 the frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.'"

5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the rivers, over the canals, and over the pools, and cause frogs to come upon the land of Egypt!'" 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7 But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt.

8 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Entreat the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."

9 Moses said to Pharaoh, "Be pleased to command me when I am to entreat, for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." 10 And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "Be it as you say, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. 11 The frogs shall depart from you and your houses and your

night – now overtakes the land and its people. This plague which covers everything, including people's personal effects, and which deafens the ears with its croaking chorus, symbolizes the spiritual darkness of sin and worldliness which clouds the mind and heart in a cloak of moral confusion, pride, and rebellion.

Frogs in Egypt represented the idols of fertility. God confounds these idols and their worshippers by turning the frogs into a deafening force of oppression. (See also Revelations 16:13-14, which describes demonic spirits like frogs waging battle on God's people.) When Pharaoh's magicians perform the same sign, they make the situation worse by doubling the number of frogs, but they could not remove the plague. Pharaoh knew that only Moses had the power to remove it. So Pharaoh asks Moses to pray that the Lord will remove the plague. Moses could have refused if he really wanted Pharaoh and his nation to suffer. God was more than ready to remove the plague at the first sign of repentance.

Moses prays for his enemies who are persecuting his people, and God hears his prayer. Moses explains to Pharaoh that God's purpose in this sign is to show that the Lord has no equal (Exodus 8:6) – he alone is the one true God who has power to raise up and to put down as he chooses. Only stubborn pride and rebellion can keep us from God's mercy, healing, and restoration. Repentance frees the heart and mind to receive pardon and freedom, forgiveness and love, mercy and blessing.

"Lord Jesus, you came to dispel the darkness of sin, Satan, and pride, and to silence the din of those who would lead us into hurtful desires and worldly corruption. Open my ears to hear your voice and set me free to walk in your way of truth and holiness."

servants and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile."

12 So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. 13 And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; the frogs died out of the houses and courtyards and out of the fields. 14 And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.

15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the LORD had said.

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A Scriptural Reflection on the Third Plague



Plague of Gnats, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

The plague of gnats, which are possibly mosquitos, mercilessly oppress the land of Egypt, striking every man, woman, and child, as well as every living beast. Their bite, which draws blood from their prey pollutes and spreads infectious disease – an apt symbol for the power of sin which makes people spiritually impure and unclean when they are given over to wrongdoing. (See Romans 1:18-32 which describes how the wrath of God punishes those who suppress the truth because of wickedness.)

Plague of gnats

Exodus 8

16 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, `Stretch out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.'"

17 And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and struck the dust of the earth, and there came gnats on man and beast; all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.

18 The magicians tried by their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. 19 And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said.

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When Pharoah's sorcerers could not match the power of this third plague, they recognized that the God of Israel was stronger than their gods – "This is the finger of God," they exclaim (Exodus 8:19). With each new plague, Pharoah's stubborn pride and defiance grow harder.

Unless sinful pride is put to death in our lives, it will only harden our hearts to God's word of life and truth.

"Lord Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Teach me your ways and give me a docile heart that is teachable and ready to obey. May I never stray from the path of truth and holiness which leads to everlasting life with you."

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A Scriptural Reflection on the Fourth Plague



Plague of Flies, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

If the plague of gnats was not enough of an affliction upon the Egyptians, the plague of flies was unbearable. These were biting flies which afflicted the Egyptians day and night such that they could not work or sleep.

In all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by reason of the flies (Exodus 8:24).

Plague of flies

Exodus 8

20 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and wait for Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, `Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 21 Else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. 22 But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there; that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. 23 Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. By tomorrow shall this sign be."'"

24 And the LORD did so; there came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses, and in all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by reason of the flies. 25 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land."

26 But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so; for we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God offerings abominable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? 27 We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he will command us."

28 So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make entreaty for me."

29 Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you and I will pray to the LORD that the swarms of

The land of Goshen, the region of Egypt where the Israelites lived, was spared this plague (Exodus 8:22). God put his protection between them and the idol worshippers of Egypt. The battle line was clearly drawn between those who serve God and those who serve other gods. This discrimination must have infuriated Pharaoh and his priests the magicians. They had no power over this plague.

Since no one could work under these conditions, Pharaoh's resistance cracks a little when he says to Moses – "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." But Moses wanted out of Egypt altogether, since the land was polluted with the worship of false gods. Pharaoh's heart remains stubborn because he refuses to serve God.

God cannot tolerate idolatry in any form because it worships the creature above the creator, and useless idols in place of the One God who alone is worthy of our adoration and obedience. Are there any idols in your life which take precedence over God? Anything can become an idol – money, wealth, fame, status, job, food, drink, sex, drugs – when we give it control of our desires and allow it to possess us. Only God can free us from bondage to our unruly appetites, addictions, and obsessions.

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24) Do you allow any idols to master your life?

"Lord Jesus, you alone have power to free us from our unruly desires and sinful habits. Come take possession of my heart that you may rule every thought, desire, and intention. May all that I do and say bring you glory and honor."

flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow; only let not Pharaoh deal falsely again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."

30 So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. 31 And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one remained.

32 But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go.

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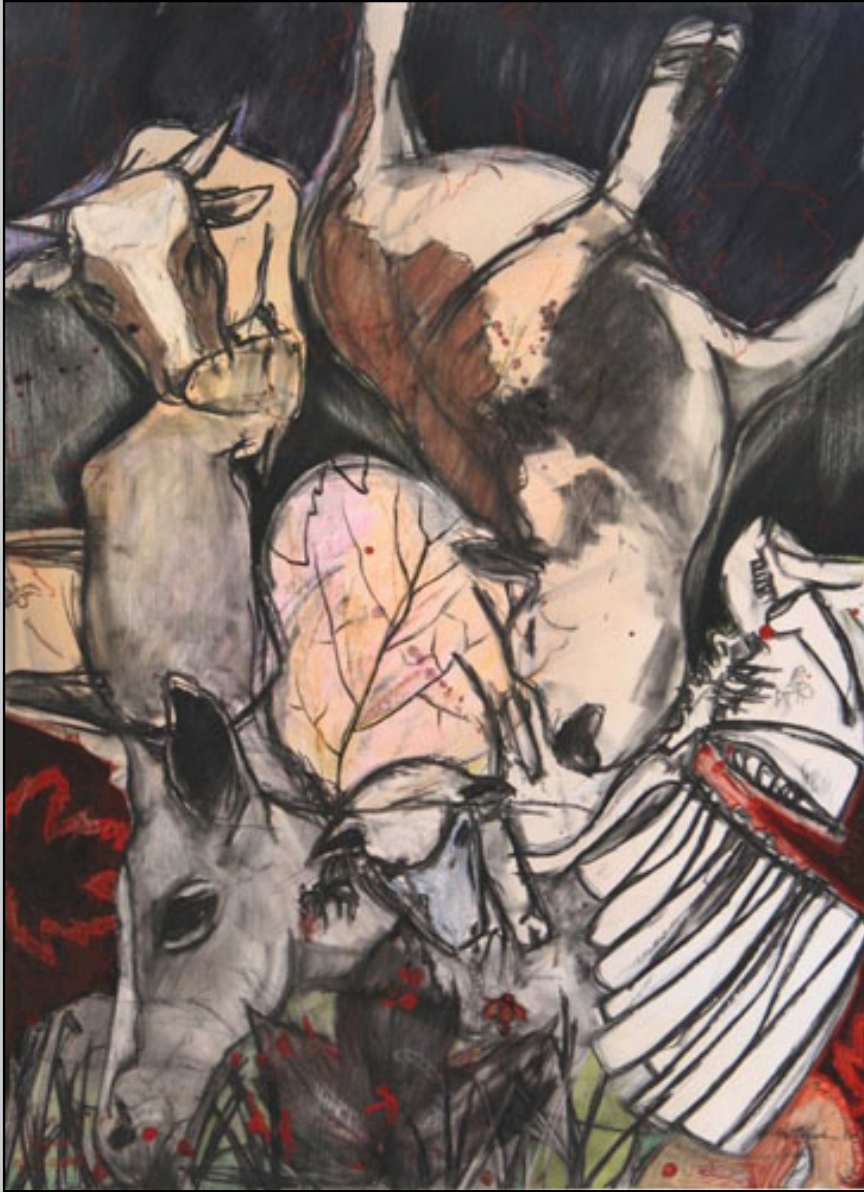
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A Scriptural Reflection on the Fifth Plague



Plague of Livestock, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

In the fifth sign, the plague of the destruction of the Egyptians' cattle and other livestock, God again makes a distinction between those who serve him and those who serve idols, sparing the livestock of the Israelites.

Pharaoh put a higher value on his livestock than on the Israelites whom he maltreated as slaves. Because of his stubborn pride and refusal to serve God, he is now dispossessed of his cattle and

Plague of livestock

Exodus 9

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me. 2 For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, 3 behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your cattle which are in the field, the horses, the asses, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. 4 But the LORD will make a distinction between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the people of Israel.'" 5 And the LORD set a time, saying, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land."

6 And on the morrow the LORD did this thing; all the cattle of the Egyptians died, but of the cattle of the people of Israel not one died.

7 And Pharaoh sent, and behold, not one of the cattle of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

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livestock. This plague is more severe than the previous plagues because the loss of livestock threatens the livelihood of the Egyptians.

Jesus issues a similar warning to those who put their trust in possessions rather than in God. In the parable of the rich fool he says: "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 11:20-21)

"Lord Jesus, you are my treasure and there is nothing more that I desire besides you. Take possession of my heart, that I may find joy, contentment, and refuge in you alone."

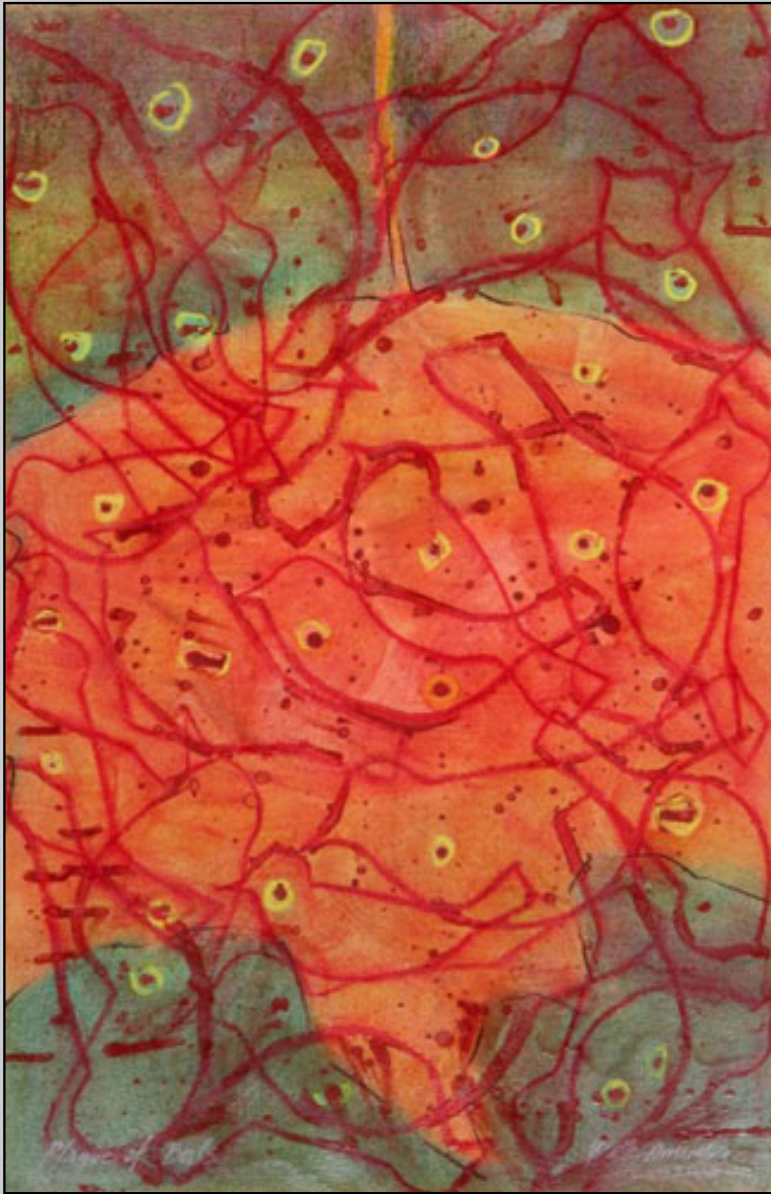
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A Scriptural Reflection on the Sixth Plague



Plague of Boils, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Plague of boils

Exodus 9

8 And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of ashes from the kiln, and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh.
9 And it shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt."

10 So they took ashes from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw them toward heaven, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast.

11 And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians.

12 But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them; as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

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Reflection by Don Schwager

As Pharaoh's defiance grows, so does God's severity. The sixth plague threatens not only the Egyptians' livelihood, but their very lives as well. The plague of boils afflicted every Egyptian and his livestock with erupting sores all over their flesh. God spares the Israelites and their livestock of this affliction.

The ashes which Moses used to demonstrate this plague came from a kiln - most probably the one next to Pharaoh's palace

which was used for burning human sacrifices to one of Egypt's idols. Human sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord. God literally took the remains of their pagan sacrifice and threw it in Pharaoh's face.

The ten plagues of Egypt prefigure Jesus' ministry in which he frees people who are oppressed by evil spirits, infirmity, and even death itself. Jesus came to set us free from sin, Satan, and the world which is hostile to God.

"Lord Jesus Christ, by your cross you have set us free. You are the savior of the world. Deliver me from every weight of sin and evil that would keep me from serving you with joy and trusting obedience."

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A Scriptural Reflection on the Seventh Plague



Plague of Hail, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

God is patient not only with his friends but also with his enemies, giving them time to consider their sinful ways and to repent of their wrongdoing. But after Pharaoh has rejected God's offer six times, God's warning becomes more severe than ever:

"I will send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants and your people, that you may know that there is none like me in all the

Plague of hail

Exodus 9

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, `Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me.

14 For this time I will send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants and your people, that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

15 For by now I could have put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth; 16 but for this purpose have I let you live, to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

17 You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. 18 Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 Now therefore send, get your cattle and all that you have in the field into safe shelter; for the hail shall come down upon every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home, and they shall die."

20 Then he who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh made his slaves and his cattle flee into the houses; 21 but he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his slaves and his cattle in the field.

22 And the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch forth your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man and beast and every plant of the field, throughout the land of

earth" (Exodus 9:14).

The purpose of God's discipline is to get us to acknowledge that he is a God of justice and goodness, holiness and truth, mercy and forgiveness, steadfast love and faithfulness. He can even work through the sinfulness of his rebellious creatures to show his glory on the earth (Exodus 9:16).

In the seventh plague God caused the rain and hail to destroy the crops and every living thing in the fields. God warned the Egyptians to seek shelter for themselves and their livestock. Those who heeded the warning were spared. When Pharaoh saw the destruction, he repented to Moses, acknowledging that he had sinned and that the God of Israel was in the right (Exodus 9:27). Moses, however, knew that Pharaoh's repentance was insincere. As soon as the plague ceased, Pharaoh hardened his heart once again.

God's discipline trains us to renounce sin and irreligion and it produces the fruit of holiness and goodness in those who cooperate with God's grace (Hebrews 12). Do you resist God's discipline or do you receive it with humility and the readiness to change and be transformed into the likeness of Christ?

"Lord Jesus, warm our cold hearts by the fire of your love that we may hate sin and love your commandments. Give us a fervent love for you and a generous spirit of mercy and kindness towards our neighbor."

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Egypt."

23 Then Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt; 24 there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the field throughout all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and the hail struck down every plant of the field, and shattered every tree of the field.

26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, there was no hail.

27 Then Pharaoh sent, and called Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Entreat the LORD; for there has been enough of this thunder and hail; I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." 29 Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. 30 But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." 31 (The flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) 33 So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured upon the earth.

34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35 So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

See also > [The Ten Plagues: A biblical art work series by Yvette Rock](#)

A Scriptural Reflection on the Eighth Plague



Plague of Locusts, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

Moses is a man of patience and persistence. He goes an eighth time to Pharaoh to request the release of the Israelites so they offer sacrifice to God in the wilderness. Pharaoh knows he is dealing with a man of great spiritual authority and supernatural power. Moses goes to the heart of Pharaoh's resistance – If you would but humble yourself before the One true God (Exodus 10:3), then he would lift all these afflictions from your land. Pride is the root of all sin – the stubborn refusal to serve and obey.

Plague of locusts

Exodus 10

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them,

2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son's son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them; that you may know that I am the LORD."

3 So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. 4 For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, 5 and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land; and they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours which grows in the field, 6 and they shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians; as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.'" Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

7 And Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?"

8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh; and he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God; but who are to go?" 9 And Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our

Moses threatens with a plague of locusts – feared in the desert climate for their ability to suddenly swoop down and wipe out every crop and vegetation in a few short hours, leaving a barren wasteland, and bringing famine in their wake. Pharaoh's courtiers warn him that Egypt is on the brink of ruin and disaster. Pharaoh again tries to compromise with Moses. "You and the men can go into the wilderness, but leave your women and children here." Moses knows that Pharaoh will keep them as hostages until the men return. Moses refuses to compromise.

It is easy to compromise with sin or to only go half-way in obeying God. God is not satisfied until we love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He is a jealous God who loves us totally, unconditionally, and without reservation. "For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). To ransom a slave God sacrificed his beloved Son. Total love demands total sacrifice.

"Lord Jesus, you humbled yourself to raise us up. You became poor to make us rich. You died to give us new life – abundant, everlasting life with you and the Father. I want to give my life fully to you and bring you honor and glory in all that I say and do."

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flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD."

10 And he said to them, "The LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. 11 No! Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left."

13 So Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning the east wind had brought the locusts. 14 And the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt, and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again. 15 For they covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left; not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

16 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. 17 Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the LORD your God only to remove this death from me." 18 So he went out from Pharaoh, and entreated the LORD. 19 And the LORD turned a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. 20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

See also > [The Ten Plagues: A biblical art work series by Yvette Rock](#)

A Scriptural Reflection on the Ninth Plague



Plague of Darkness, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

The ninth plague came over the land of Egypt without warning. Darkness covered the Egyptians for three whole days and nights. The darkness was so heavy "it could be felt" (Exodus 10:21). No one could see one another or even move safely about their houses. All work and activity ceased, except for the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived. This was an extraordinary sign – light dwelt with the people of God, but darkness covered the idol worshippers of Egypt.

Plague of darkness

Exodus 10

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt."

22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days; 23 they did not see one another, nor did any rise from his place for three days; but all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt.

24 Then Pharaoh called Moses, and said, "Go, serve the LORD; your children also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind."

25 But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. 26 Our cattle also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there."

27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

28 Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me; take heed to yourself; never see my face again; for in the day you see my face you shall die."

29 Moses said, "As you say! I will not see your face again."

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This was an apt symbol for the darkness of sin and unbelief which clouds the mind in moral confusion. Sin not only cripples us from doing good – it blinds us to the truth of God's word and causes us to stumble in our own ignorance and unbelief. Sin suffocates love for God and makes the heart cold towards our neighbor. Only the light of Christ can dispel the darkness of sin and restore sight to those who hunger for God.

Isaiah the prophet pointed to Jesus as the one who would bring light out of great darkness:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

Jesus' teaching repeats the same message :

Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. (Luke 11:34-35)

After the ninth plague, Pharaoh again tries to compromise with God's servant, Moses. "Your people may go and worship in the wilderness, but you must leave behind all your livestock." Pharaoh knew they would starve in the wilderness and return to the fleshpots of Egypt. Moses refused to budge from God's command.

If we compromise with sin in any form, we chain ourselves to its prison, unable to escape until we repent and allow the Lord Jesus to set us free.

"Lord Jesus Christ, you took our sins upon yourself and nailed them to the cross. Set me free to walk in your truth and love and to reject the glamor of worldliness and moral corruption."

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A Scriptural Reflection on the Tenth Plague



Plague of the Death of Firstborn, mixed media by [Yvette Rock](#)

Reflection by Don Schwager

When God acts on behalf of his people, he makes his presence and his power known to all. Moses warned the Egyptians that God would perform one last sign to demonstrate his sovereignty not only over the Israelites, but over the whole land of Egypt as well. In the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, God foreshadows the death of his only begotten Son who would ransom not only the Israelites, but the whole world from slavery to sin and Satan.

Plague of the death of firstborn

Exodus 11

1 The LORD said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. 2 Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and of gold."

3 And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

4 And Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt; 5 and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits upon his throne, even to the first-born of the maidservant who is behind the mill; and all the first-born of the cattle. 6 And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever shall be again. 7 But against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, not a dog shall growl; that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel. 8 And all these your servants shall come down to me, and bow down to me, saying, 'Get you out, and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out."

And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. 9 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 10 Moses and Aaron did all

God instructed the Israelites to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and to smear the blood upon the doorposts and lintels of their homes. At midnight the angel of death struck down every firstborn son among the Egyptians, but passed over the Israelites who followed the Lord's instructions. The celebration of the passover meal that night prefigures the passover of the Christian people when Christ defeated death for us through the atoning sacrifice of his blood upon the cross of Calvary.

Melito of Sardis, an early church father from the 3rd century explains the significance of Christ's passover for us:

He was led forth like a lamb; he was slaughtered like a sheep. He ransomed us from our servitude to the world, as he had ransomed Israel from the hand of Egypt; he freed us from our slavery to the devil, as he had freed Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He sealed our souls with his own Spirit, and the members of our body with his own blood.

He is the One who covered death with shame and cast the devil into mourning, as Moses cast Pharaoh into mourning . He is the One that smote sin and robbed iniquity of offspring, as Moses robbed the Egyptians of their offspring. He is the One who brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of tyranny into an eternal kingdom; who made us a new priesthood, a people chosen to be his own for ever. He is the Passover that is our salvation.

"Lord Jesus, by your cross you have redeemed the world and ransomed us from slavery to sin. Through your death and resurrection, we, too have died to sin and risen to new life with you."

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these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

Exodus 12

29 At midnight the LORD smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. 30 And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead. 31 And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also!"

33 And the Egyptians were urgent with the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said, "We are all dead men." 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders. 35 The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing; 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians.

37 And the people of Israel journeyed from Ram'eses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. 38 A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very many cattle, both flocks and herds. 39 And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any provisions.

40 The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.



plague of blood



plague of frogs



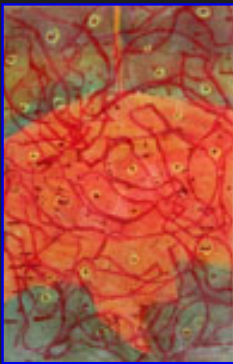
plague of gnats



plague of flies



plague of livestock



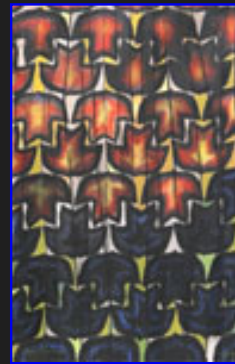
plague of boils



plague of hail



plague of locusts



plague of darkness



plague of the firstborn

click on each box to view large illustration and scriptural reflection for each plague

The Ten Plagues

Art series by Yvette Rock

Artist Statement

The Ten Plagues series revolves around biblical themes, imagery and language. I am drawn to the truth and beauty found in the Old and New Testaments – from the harshness and awesomeness of the ten plagues, to the glory and compassion of the crucifixion.

I connect scripture to everyday life – using painting, drawing, collage and mixed media to reflect universal experiences such as love, anger, violence, hope, disparity, poverty, sickness and redemption.

[Christianity Today Magazine](#), January 2013 Issue, featured a special video presentation on Yvette Rock and her recent series of art work, *Ten Plagues of Detroit*.

[The Art of Restoration Amidst Detroit's Ruined Walls](#) How the vision of a restored city informs Detroit artist Yvette Rock's haunting work.

Yvette Rock currently resides in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan with her husband Joshua and their four children. They are members of Word of Life community and Detroit Community Outreach. Joshua is the Director for [Youth-Works Detroit](#), an inner city youth outreach of the Sword of the Spirit.

See related *Living Bulwark* article on Yvette's recent new series: [Ten Plagues of Detroit](#)

To see more of Yvette's art work and a complete bio, visit her website: <http://www.yvetterock.com/>

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