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BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

Hope of the Gospel



2022: Living the Gospel



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Blessed and Living Hope

Greetings, *Bible Advocate* readers! We have come to the last issue of 2022 and our yearlong exploration of the gospel. I hope the journey has brought you ever closer to Him of whom the gospel testifies: Jesus!

I used the word *hope* in that last sentence. That's what this BA is all about. How fitting to end our year of the gospel looking forward to the hope of the gospel. Paul speaks of it in Colossians 1:23:

If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. . . .

The "hope of the gospel" reminds us that the gospel is not just an event in the past but, like Jesus himself, is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). It is past, present, and future, as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians:

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us (1:9, 10).

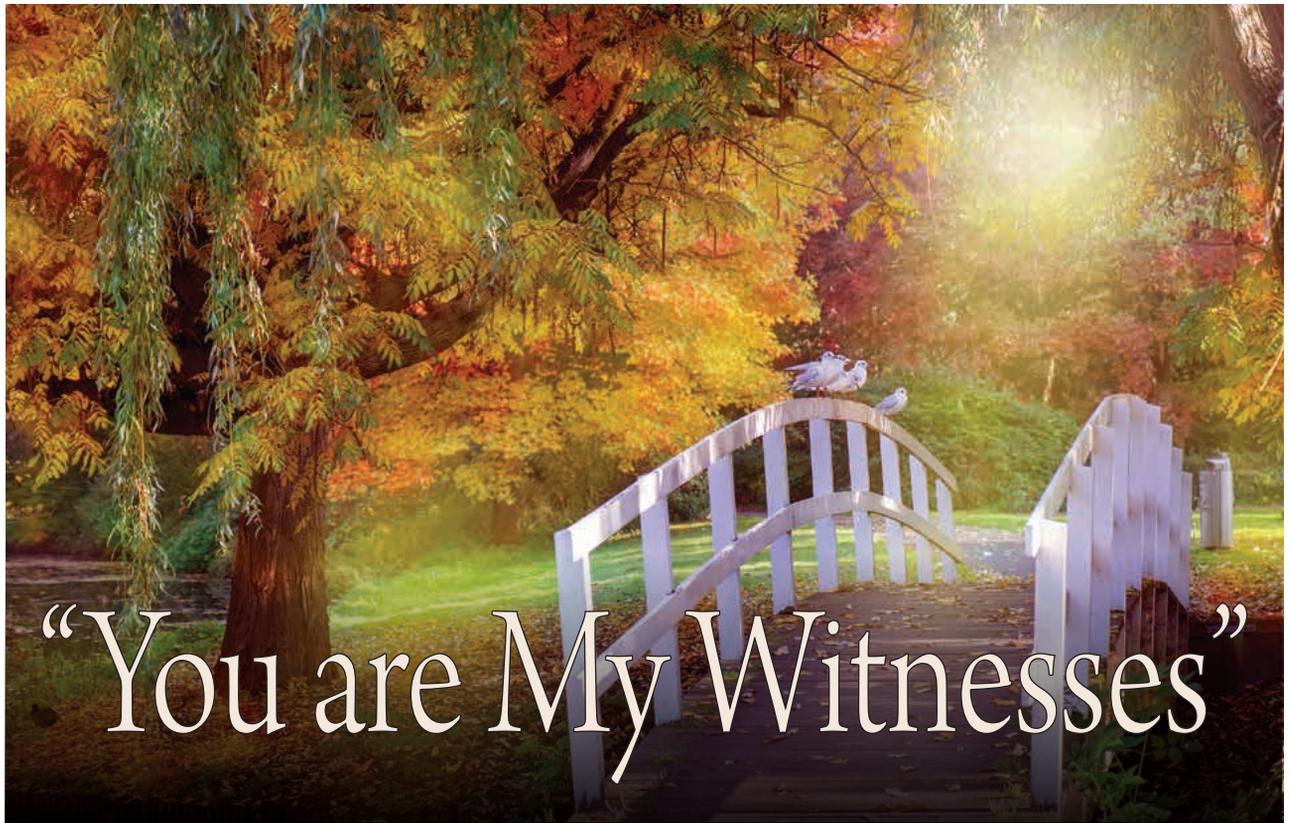
Our gospel hope is anchored in Jesus' resurrection as it leans toward His return and our resurrection. This hope is that God will do in all who trust Him what He has already done in Christ: defeat death itself. Looking back at Christ's resurrection, Peter calls this our "living hope," and looking forward to His return, Paul calls it our "blessed hope" (1 Peter 1:3; Titus 2:13). *Blessed and living*: Before us and behind us, there's hope. Gospel hope.

So how is your hope? As we look back at Colossians 1:23, Paul gives us two options: We will either be steadfast ministers of the gospel, like him, or be "moved away from the hope of the gospel." I hope your hope is not swayed by this present darkness, dread and doubt, but that it is founded in the good news of life and light that was, is, and will be in Jesus Christ.

Read and enjoy!

— Jason Overman





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Understanding the Great Commission of Isaiah.

by R. Herbert

One of the clearest identifying marks of God's people has always been their call to carry the gospel into all the world. As a result, we are all familiar with the Great Commission verses of the New Testament — passages like Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; and Acts 1:8 that lay out the gospel purpose and calling of the people of God. But often we are not as familiar with the Great Commission verses of the Old Testament. The most important of those passages is found in the book of Isaiah:

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed . . . You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God" (43:10-12).

The context of these verses is a legal one: God brings a charge against those who refuse to acknowledge Him (vv. 8, 9) and calls His people as witnesses to His existence, saving work, and nature (vv. 10-13). While the immediate fulfillment of these verses applied to the people of ancient Israel, it is clear Israel failed

in this commission (vv. 26-28).

It is also clear that the passage has a broader application to the people of God in a later age. In fact, just a few verses after stating His commission, Isaiah records God's promise: "I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants" (44:3). This signifies the spiritual Israel that would take up the commission (Galatians 6:16), also foretold by the prophet Joel and cited by Peter at the founding of the New Testament church (Acts 2:17).

God's witnesses

Isaiah outlines four great principles regarding God's calling His people as witnesses. The prophet tells us that the people of God are . . .

Imperfect. Sometimes we may

think we are not good enough to serve as witnesses for God, but the context of Isaiah's Great Commission passage shows that despite their failures, God desired to cover His people's sins and still have them serve Him. God made a point of telling them "You have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses" (43:24). But he continued, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (v. 25).

God did not choose people "perfect" enough to be His witnesses. He actually offered His Great Commission to them while they were in captivity in Babylon, the result of their earlier sins. Despite this background, God called them, flawed as they were, to witness for Him. He waited not till His people were perfect but simply repentant.

Chosen. Despite our flawed nature, God also emphasized through Isaiah that He has called us according to His divine purposes. The very beginning of Isaiah 43 makes this point with some of the most encouraging words in the Old Testament:

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. . . . Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you . . ." (vv. 1, 4).

God chose us according to His own will and purpose and calls His people "my servant whom I have chosen" (v. 10). This is the same message Jesus reiterated to His disciples regarding Himself, prophesied in Isaiah (Matthew 12:17, 18), and regarding His disciples (John 13:16).

Although Jesus made it clear that He regarded His disciples as friends as well as servants (15:15), we are still servants chosen and called to serve (18:36).

Believing. God next tells His people something that deserves careful thought: "You are my witnesses . . . so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he" (Isaiah 43:10).

If we read this verse carefully, we see something surprising. God does not say, "You are my witnesses . . . so that *others* may know and believe" but "that *you* may know and believe."

In other words, the better we know God, the better we can serve as His witnesses. Somehow, acting as a witness and servant opens our minds to a deeper belief in God and knowledge

through Isaiah, God had made it clear that the people He chose were called not only to serve Him but also to serve as witnesses for Him. God stated this truth repeatedly. Just as the Great Commission passage of Isaiah 43 begins with "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD" (v. 10), it ends in exactly the same way (v. 12). The statement is repeated yet again soon after: "You are my witnesses" (44:8).

God's message

Isaiah's Great Commission passage makes it clear that God's people were to serve as witnesses on His behalf. It also shows what the message of that witness was to be. Through the prophet, God summarized the message

“The better we know God, the better we can serve as His witnesses.”

of His ways. We witness and serve, Isaiah tells us, "so that" we can come to better understand God, and then, in turn, we better witness and serve. God's Great Commission affects us as much as it affects others.

Witnessing. Sadly, by New Testament times, many in the nation God had called focused on the fact they were the chosen people, not on what they were chosen to do. However, speaking

in a particularly powerful way: "I, even I, am the LORD . . . I have revealed and saved and proclaimed . . . you are my witnesses" (43:11, 12).

The three things that God emphasizes in this passage were to be the very core of His people's identity as witnesses: the revelation of God's existence, the offer of His salvation, and the proclamation of His righteous nature and way of life.

This Great Commission of the Old Testament becomes, of course, the Great Commission of the New. This is clear when we compare Isaiah 43:10-12 with the relevant New Testament scriptures, especially Jesus' final words to His disciples before His ascension: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Beneath the surface, we see a number of specific similarities between Isaiah's Great Commission message and that of the New Testament. For instance, through Isaiah God says, "I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me" (43:10). The words "I am he" are the identical words Jesus declares of Himself in John 8:24 and 13:19 and that are found in the Greek Septuagint translation of Isaiah 43:10.

The apostle Paul summarizes the Christian message:

The gospel . . . is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last (Romans 1:16, 17).

This is the same message as Isaiah 43: the revelation of God's existence ("the power of God"), God's salvation ("salvation to everyone who believes"), and God's righteous nature and way of life ("the righteousness of God").

Apostle Paul's gospel summary of the revelation of God's power, salvation, and righteousness in Christ draws directly from Isaiah's overarching and pro-

phetic gospel message (cf. Isaiah 40:9; 51:4-6; 52:7, 10; 56:1; 59:16, 17; 62:1, 2).

God's Word

Ultimately, the New Testament witness is entirely consistent with the Old Testament message in Isaiah: We are instructed to witness to the Son of God's existence, the salvation that comes through Him, and the proclamation of His nature and the way of life He commands. There is no essential difference, because God desires now, just as He did then, for "all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4; cf. Genesis 12:3). Isaiah again:

In that day they will say,
"Surely this is our God; we

trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation" (25:9).

In that day you will say: "Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted" (12:4).

That is the Great Commission given to the people of the gospel — both then and now. "That day" of Isaiah is today, so let's proclaim it. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds an earned doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. He writes for a number of Christian venues. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Membership Notice

All members of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) who will be at least 18 years of age as of July 11, 2023, and who wish to vote during our 2023 convention, should register for convention no later than **May 1, 2023**. They must indicate on the form their intention to vote. Because of the time it may take to validate some memberships, we cannot guarantee that those who register later will be able to vote.

Additionally, because of the time it takes to process membership applications, this deadline also applies to anyone wishing to become a member before our 2023 convention. **No new memberships will be issued the week of convention (July 10-16, 2023).**



A Man After God's Own Heart

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by **Cindy Arora**

“But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14).

King David is described in Scripture as “a man after God’s own heart.” I assumed that God was referring to David’s heart of worship — what David is famous for. He wrote many of the psalms and established a rotation of worshipers to play and sing in the tabernacle every day, year around. But in 1 Samuel 13, God is not highlighting David’s heart of worship. God is highlighting David’s heart of obedience.

In 1 Samuel 13, where God first mentions seeking a man after His own heart, it is war, not worship, that is brewing. Saul, the first king of Israel, had disobeyed God. He had told Saul — twice — to wait for the prophet Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice. Saul got impatient in the waiting and offered his own sacrifice.

In God’s eyes, to obey is better than to sacrifice (15:22). That is why God was seeking a man who totally obeyed Him. Shortly after this tragic event, God instructed Samuel to anoint David as king of Israel. He sought a man to lead His people His way. God cannot trust a man who does things his own way. God is looking for an obedient heart.

The New Testament reference to David being

a man after God’s own heart does not mention worship either. God said, “I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). God’s decision to promote David to king was based on David’s desire to *do God’s will* instead of his own. David’s heart of obedience attracted God’s favor and blessing.

Was King David perfect in his obedience? No! He made some major mistakes in his life. He committed adultery and murder. He failed to discipline his sons, which led to more adultery and more murders.

Yes, David missed the mark many times, but he was also quick to confess and repent. David’s heart was to do God’s will, even in his moral failure. That is the heart God is searching for.

“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (2 Chronicles 16:9). God searches the whole earth looking for obedient hearts so that He can support them. God wants to promote “His man” into positions of authority, influence, and favor.

All this inspires me to ask these questions: *Am I a woman after God’s own heart? Is my heart completely His? Do I have a heart of obedience? How about you?* **BA**

Cindy Arora writes from Redmond, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



How to Finish



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A reflection on 2 Timothy
and keeping Scripture close.
by **Jonathon Hicks**

I have always been afraid of not finishing what I start. As early as age eleven, I worried that I could not say with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

How did Paul remain faithful through more than thirty years of prisons, floggings, stonings, shipwrecks, danger, sleepless labor, and daily concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)? The answer is that Christ lived in Paul by the Holy Spirit. That indwelling presence manifested itself in a specific survival

mechanism: Paul cherished Scripture. This kept him in the fight.

Likewise, if we intend to keep the faith until the end, we must adore God’s Word by taking it into ourselves regularly and letting God transform us through it.

Paul wrote 2 Timothy from prison in Rome, where he would later be executed. Still, he asked for his personal copies of Scripture to be brought to him (4:13). Paul did not give up when the Christian way got hard. He did not cower from speaking about Jesus when suffering for Him. The only way we will do the same is if we follow the example of keeping Scripture close, especially when we face problems.

Christian challenges

When we recount all that Paul endured, our difficulties seem minor. But Paul would understand them. He did not say that he had

run *his* race but that he had run *the* race that is common to all believers.

Our trials may not be the magnitude of Paul’s, but they are real and hard. Christianity is not easy. Following Jesus is riddled with persecutions and broken relationships. As Paul acknowledges in 2 Timothy 3:12, there is no way to live a godly life in Christ Jesus and not “suffer persecution.”

The truth is that we cannot align our lives with Jesus without facing repercussions. Saying “Jesus is Lord” intimidates all who desire to control us. They spend billions annually in manipulating us to feel worthless if we don’t buy the new car, acquire the new look, and elect the new leader.

The good news that God finds us worthy to die for threatens these people. In the politics of ancient Rome and today, citizens

who find their primary identity in Christ instead of nationality are menaces to the governing powers.

Straying from who God created us to be further complicates our Christian lives. Loving our enemies, forgiving as Jesus forgives, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and loving God more than life itself often run contrary to our natural drives.

On top of all this, the sources of peace and rejuvenation for the Christian are often strained when we refuse to let the Holy Spirit change us. In his imprisonment, Paul had been deserted by everyone (4:10, 16). Perhaps this solitude near the end of his life gave him time to think about an argument he had regarding Mark. Years earlier, they went their separate ways and apparently never reconciled. The disconnection weighed on Paul; he wanted Mark back.

Our church and Christian relationships often have struggles. Further, our relationship with God goes through many seasons of silence and distance filled with pain and doubt. We come to God longing for restoration, yet receive only silence. This fact awakens the scared child in all of us. Like Paul, will we be able to follow Jesus all the way and celebrate persistent faithfulness to Him in thirty years?

External obstacles

We have good reason to believe that no external factor can thwart our commitment to God. In the past, Jesus' followers were not overcome by "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" (Romans 8:35). They

survived oppressive regimes and persisted through ages of doubt. The firm conviction they clung to is that our God, who gave His only begotten Son, will withhold nothing that we need to follow Him.

A few years before his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote to the church there, declaring, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (v. 37). Neither the power of death nor the struggles of life nor any influence of evil in this universe "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38, 39). Persecution, sin, broken relationships, and feeling distant from God will all be overcome.

“We must adore God’s Word by taking it into ourselves regularly and letting God transform us through it.”

External obstacles cannot stop God from drawing us to Himself. He has already reconciled all things to Himself by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19).

Internal obstacles

Given the truth of God's triumph over external obstacles, one question remains: Will we continue to believe that Jesus is our only hope of salvation? Or

will we allow internal obstacles to divert us?

With saddening frequency, Christians stop following Jesus. Maybe they allow the busyness of life to creep in, so they leave their relationship with God for calmer days. Perhaps they get hurt in a Christian relationship and decide they are done with the faith. Or they encounter evil and pain and can't see how God can still be good.

I don't want that to happen to me, and I assume because you are reading this, you don't want that to happen to you either. So how do Christians last? The key seems to be that they repeatedly fight the battle of their minds with Scripture and theology.

Right before declaring that he

finished the race and kept the faith, Paul commanded Timothy:

Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14, 15).

I have encountered the same advice from faithful mentors. A previous pastor in Lodi, Loren Stacy, is an avid reader of the Bible. So was another previous pastor, Melvin Reuscher. Before he died, Melvin was bedridden for twenty-three hours each day, yet he never waned in his daily Bible reading. He still wanted to study.

The advice he gave continues to nurture me. I was a young, able-bodied, new pastor. Melvin didn't say, "Since your body is working just fine, go and do work for God." Instead, he commanded, "Spend as much time as you can taking God's mission in Scripture into your own mind."

we renew our minds, then good actions will follow. If we put into our minds God's rescue of creation from sin and the destructiveness of evil and death, then our lives will be changed.

We must think about the world the way God does, to see it as designed to give Him glory, redeemed into relationship with Him, and loved beyond comparison. Paul said it best: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

The truth is, we don't have an obstacle problem; we have a

quently come to Scripture and think *about* it until we think *like* it.

That is why any Christian who has finished the race will not only tell young Christians to study Scripture, but will continue to lead by example.

Exemplary verse

I love 2 Timothy 4:13 for this reason. In prison and knowing his time was near, Paul wrote one last letter to his mentee and friend: "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come — and the books, especially the parchments." Paul wanted his books so that he could keep studying.

In thirty years, if that is not *our* attitude, then we will probably not finish the race. If we think that we will be more studious at the end of our lives, but not today or any busy day, then we will probably not finish. Without the constant renewing of our minds through studying Scripture, internal barriers will block our way.

This is not to say that the Bible saves us; only Jesus does. However, the saints who finish cultivate deep relationships with the Word of God. They cherish it.

Let's follow the same steps to finish the race that Paul did. Bring us our God-breathed books! [BA](#)

“We don't have an obstacle problem; we have a thinking problem.”

In essence, he was saying, "Get your mind right so you can think as the authors of Scripture think." That is the only way to live as the authors of Scripture lived: faithful to the end.

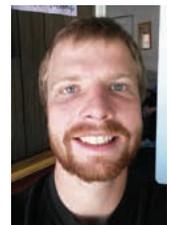
Mind power

The mind is powerful. We control what we put into it. If we fixate about our jobs, the ways we have been mistreated, or how we can get even, that will shape our behavior. However, if

thinking problem. Our minds will keep trying to find ways to get more power and wealth, rather than give more love. Our minds will continue to feel shame for what God has forgiven, rather than celebrate His liberation. Our minds will continue to see ourselves as worthless, rather than realize that God has given us infinite worth.

Our minds need to be aligned with Jesus' completed work. The best way to do that is to fre-

Jonathon Hicks
pastors the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Lodi, CA, where he lives with his wife, Danielle, and their son, Samuel.



Questions & Answers



Understand the concept of “soul sleep,” but doesn’t the Bible say that I have a home in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1)?

The belief that we go to heaven when we die is widespread within Christianity and without it. This in itself illuminates a truth buried in every human heart, that there must be more to life than *this life*. But despite its popularity, the Bible does not talk much about going to heaven. Rather, the Christian hope of Scripture travels in the other direction: Jesus is bringing heaven to earth in the resurrection at His return (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:3).

The hope of resurrection is the clear emphasis of the New Testament (Acts 23:6; 24:15). So is 2 Corinthians 5:1 an exception? Let’s look at the text closely: “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

First, Paul contrasts our earthly and eternal *tent*, a common metaphor for the body. It’s the same word John used for Christ’s incarnation: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us” (John 1:14). Paul’s tent imagery echoes his teaching from 1 Corinthians, where the body is “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (6:19). And his contrast of a corruptible natural body with an incorruptible resurrected spiritual body (15:42-53) parallels his contrast of our destructible “earthly house” with “a building from God . . . eternal in the heavens” in 2 Corinthians 5:1.

Second, Paul describes this eternal house as

“from God” and “from heaven” (vv. 1, 2). We are not going to it; it is coming to us. Unlike popular pagan thinking of the time, Paul does not view being “found naked” (without a “tent,” or disembodied) as our hope (vv. 3, 4). Rather, he anticipates us being clothed, with a heavenly body prepared in the heavens and coming to us from there.

Lastly, it is plain from 2 Corinthians 5:1’s wider context that Paul’s “tent” imagery has the resurrection of the body in mind. Our groaning to be clothed and “mortality . . . swallowed up by life” (vv. 3, 4) echoes resurrection passages like 1 Corinthians 15:54 and Romans 8:22, 23. Most significant is the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul has been talking about Christ’s return, the resurrection, and temporal vs. eternal since 4:14: “knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus.”

While 2 Corinthians 5:1-4 is not talking about what happens when we die, it does assure us of a heavenly hope and home to come. As Jesus promised, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself” (John 14:3).

So what happens between our earthly and eternal tents? Paul describes it best: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). “Sleep in Jesus” suggests that in death, we not only rest in Him but also will awake with Him. It means death itself does not — and cannot — separate us from Christ, for we are *in Him*: “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8).

— Elder Jason Overman



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Finding the light of survival
in the darkest of places.

by Leo Cardez

There is nothing like living in hell, but there is something close to it: incarceration. In my hell, where I'd lived since the winter of 2014, there was, as Dante understood, no hope.

People think the worst part of a life lived in the concrete jungle is the violence. They are wrong. The worst part is the loss of hope. You wake up every morning realizing your nightmare will continue into your waking hours. The loss you have suffered is permanent. In many real ways, you are already dead — just unburied. There is no healing, no improvement. But even worse, there is no possibility of any to come.

The most unbearable thing about your unbearable life is that you will always be forced to bear it.

A visit

In the midst of my horrific incarceration, alone and desperate, I wondered if anyone could hate me more than I did myself. Was anyone left to love me? Was I worthy of love?

My thoughts were interrupted by a light knock on my cell door.

Christian volunteer: "Are you saved, son?"

Me: "No."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No."

"OK. But know this: God loves you."

And just like that, the floodgates burst open. I cried as I told the volunteer I felt dead inside. He guided me through a prayer to be born again. I told him I

wasn't sure I really believed him or in Him. He gave me a Bible and instructed me to simply read one psalm a day and reflect on it. He would be back next week to discuss.

Psalm 16

The next few days were especially tough. My family had stopped answering my calls. They clearly believed everything being said about me. On a particularly dark evening, I started to believe those things as well. I doubted anyone could despise me more than I did myself. I could hardly stand to see my own reflection.

One can only fall so deep into the well before being consumed by the darkness. I admit, I considered the coward's solution, but I had made a promise to read a psalm a day.

I read Psalm 16:7-11:

I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Honest writing

I took out the little journal and pen the Christian volunteer had left me and wrote my reflection notes. I had so many questions and couldn't convey the magnitude of what these words meant to me. I refused to settle and postponed my act of desperation until I could speak with the volunteer again. Night after night, I read and wrote.

I wrote notes to Jesus and God. Prayers. Complaints. Whatever popped into my head. My only rule was raw honesty. I figured if God was real, there was no point in even trying to lie to Him. For the first time in my life, I could be completely transparent.

I didn't realize honest writing tears your guts out. Like when I wrote about the pain and shame in my mother's eyes when she came to visit me in prison. I knew it was my fault, and worse, I could do nothing to help her. It felt as if I was stuck in a barrel at the bottom of the ocean with no options. I could not imagine anything worse. Still, I read and wrote.

Second visit

I was reading about the steadfast love of the Lord when I heard the gentle rapping at my door.

"How are you, my son?"

I strained to get a better look at him, but the sliver of a window in my cell would not allow it. He spoke to me in his gentle, quiet way.

"I'm OK. Better."

I told him about reading Psalm 16 and how it had touched me. I didn't mention that I had been ready to open a vein.

"Keep reading, my son. The Word can give you hope and purpose through faith. Your faith can cause you to endure prison.

“I was reading about the steadfast love of the Lord when I heard the gentle rapping at my door.”

Read 2 Timothy. It was written by a follower of Christ named Paul while he sat in prison, falsely accused."

And just like that, he was gone.

Spiritual growth

Eventually I would be transferred to another prison, but still I read and wrote every day. I wrote by the light of the morning sun through my dirty cracked window or glare of the hallway lights through my cell bars. I

promised myself I would read the Word and write about it every day, no excuses. And I have.

Now, seven years later, I have learned that reading the Word and writing about it wasn't a diversion; it was my church. It offered me salvation in the promise of change. Escaping hell is difficult because sometimes you yourself believe you belong there. But with enough effort, grace — and, in my case, a well-meaning Christian volunteer — it can be done.

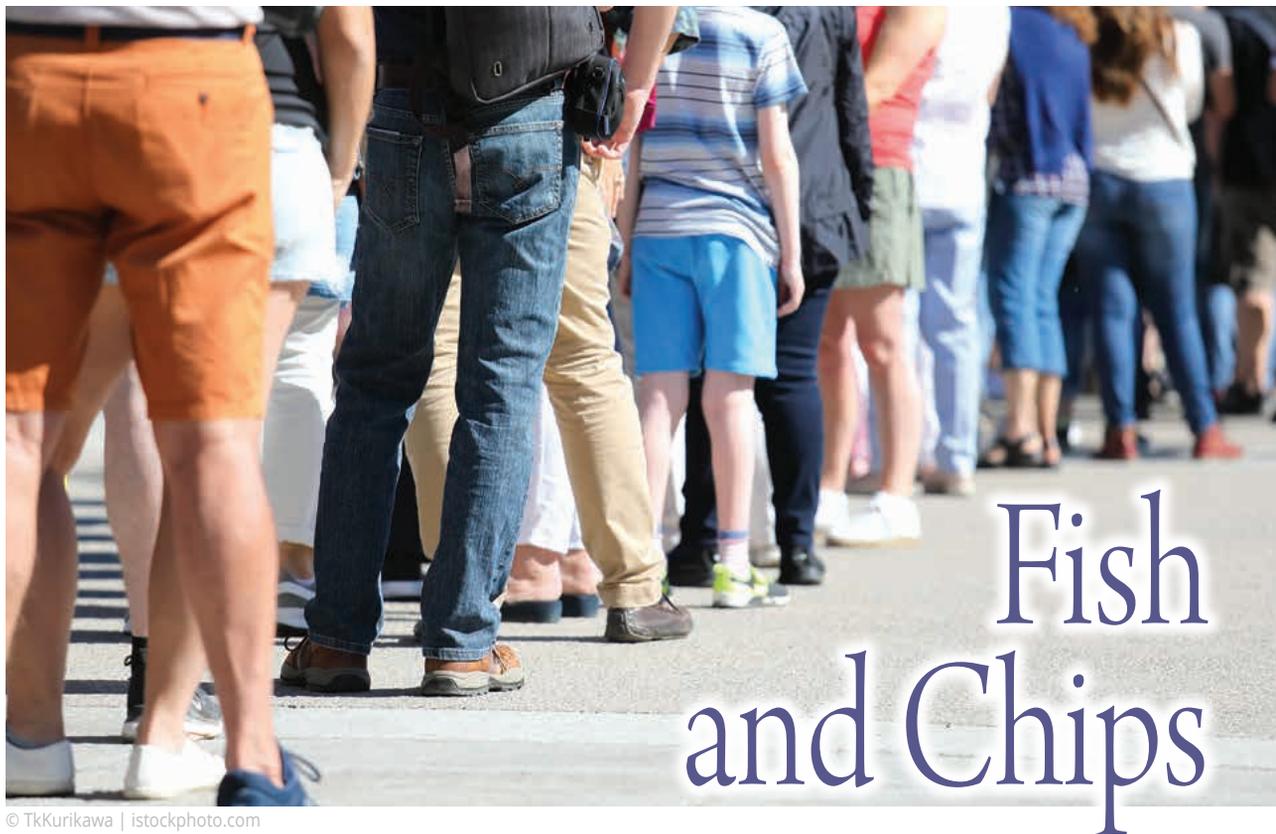
As I reread some of my earliest entries, I marvel at the flawed, broken person I once was. I also notice that as my thoughts oriented toward Jesus Christ, my life evolved into a more posi-

tive realm. My thoughts became prophetic. As I tried to make the best of things, as the Word instructs, every now and then I succeeded. Looking around today, I can see that reflecting on the Word has helped me appreciate life in a whole new light.

Word power

Today, when I see others suffering what I have endured, I gently knock on their door with

continued on page 26



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The promises of God are worth the wait.
by Mike Wallace

We were hungry and excited. The catering truck had come to Missoula, Montana! We showed up in the parking lot and got in line to place our order. The line kept getting longer as people flocked to get their fish and chips.

Freshly cooked, with a little salt and vinegar, fish and chips is one of the world's tastiest meals. This particular catering truck served excellent fish, and people had heard about it. The line continued to grow as folks anxiously waited to get their meal.

When you have a product

so good that folks stand in long lines to buy it and don't care about the price, you know you have a great product.

As the children of God, we have a message that makes the best fish and chips pale by comparison. Why are people not lining up at the doors of our churches, waiting anxiously to be a part of God's kingdom and receive the gift (product) of eternal life? Shouldn't they seek after the gospel? Likewise, shouldn't it inspire us to evangelize, to get others excited about Jesus and His kingdom?

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14). He said to seek it above everything else: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew

6:33). Jesus said this for a good reason: The kingdom is certainly better than fish and chips!

Gospel promises

There is a reward for those who are eternally saved. Jesus gave Peter, James, and John a glimpse of it when He took them up a mountain and, in a vision, showed them the future of God's family: "He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him" (Matthew 17:2, 3).

Years later, Peter, who saw the vision, wrote, "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that

is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

Reread this phrase: “Partakers of the divine nature.” Peter may have been recalling that day on the mount and the glorious vision of Jesus, and what it will be like to be part of God’s holy family one day in eternity. The apostle’s reminder of God’s promises and partaking of the divine nature should get everyone in the gospel line.

John, likely the last surviving apostle, wrote these words, harkening back to the Transfiguration he had witnessed: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Read this line again: “We shall be like Him.” John also saw the vision on the mountain of what we shall be like one day. We will be perfect as He is, with new bodies. Sixty years or so after that glorious event, John was still telling people about the future God has promised His children. “We shall be like Him” is something worth getting in line for.

Gospel glory

Paul also wrote of God’s precious product and promises. He shared the good news with the church in Rome that we are God’s family, His sons and daughters, heirs of the very glory seen by Peter, James, and John on the mount:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God . . . heirs of God and joint heirs with

Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:14, 17-19).

Paul explains that God’s product and promise are so great, so far beyond our small comprehension, that we should be willing to

to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” Peter tore off his outer garment and swam to shore. He recognized his Lord Jesus. There on the beach, in coals of fire, fish were cooking with bread. No fish and chips ever tasted better (John 21:1-13).

Are we ready to share with others what Jesus has shared with us? Are we willing to help people get into the gospel line for something so much better than a meal of fish and chips? We should be excited enough

“Why are people not lining up at the doors of our churches?”

stand in line and pay any price to enter into “the glory which shall be revealed in us.” How amazing is our Savior and God! What a fantastic gift He has for those who trust and serve Him. *And it’s free.*

Gospel meal

A Man stood on the lakeshore watching men fish from a boat. Their luck had run out; the all-night fishing trip seemed wasted.

Exhausted and ready to come to shore, they noticed the Man standing on the beach. He yelled

to tell others about the promises of glory for the saved, to do what Jesus told us to do: “Go and make disciples of all the nations.” **BA**

Mike Wallace, an elder in COG7, is the senior spiritual advisor for the Colorado Springs CoG7 and coordinator for the CoG7 in Montana. He lives in Florence, MT, with his wife, Bonnie.



Calvin Burrell: Honoring 57

Teacher - Spring Vale
Academy
(1964-1970)

Principal - Spring
Vale Academy
(1973-1976)

Pastor -
Denver, Colorado
(1978-1996)

President - General
Conference
(1987-1997)

Editor
Adv
(1997)

Pastor - Fort Smith,
Arkansas
(1970-1973)

Pastor -
Shawnee, Oklahoma
(1976-1978)

Director/Instructor
- Summit School of
Theology
(1978-1997)

Pastor -
Houston, Texas
(1996-2004)



Please see page 28 for reflections on Calvin's life.

Years of Service

er - Bible
ocate
7-2015)

Director - Ministries
Training System
(2001-2009)

IMC - 1st Vice
President
(2012-2016)

Artios
Instructor
(2016-2021)

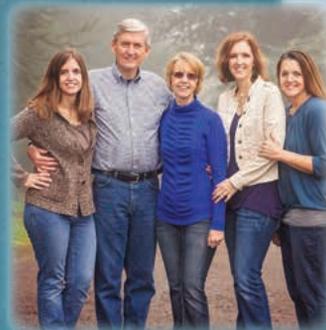
Contributor - BA
and BAP Literature
(2015-2022)

Served at MTS,
BAP, GC Missions
(2004-2015)

LifeSpring
Instructor
(2010-2012)

Sabbath School
Teacher -
Marion, Oregon
(Intermittent)
(2015-2021)

IMC Zone 1
Team Member
(2017-2022)





by **Brian Franks**

I love to tell the story;
Tis pleasant to repeat
What seems each time I tell it,
More wonderfully sweet. . . .
I love to tell the story;
For those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting
To hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
Twill be the old, old story,
That I have loved so long.
— “I Love to Tell the Story”

This favorite hymn stylizes the gospel as “the old, old story.” A message depicted as so “wonderfully sweet” is worth telling again and again.

What exactly is this gospel story? There are many ways to answer that question. Innumerable books have been written, songs sung, and sermons preached on the subject throughout thousands of years. In short, the gospel is the good news of Jesus, and it is news rooted in hope.

Leaning forward

Hope motivates us to keep supporting that team that never seems to do anything but lose. It urges us on when the gas tank is empty. We hope for something good when we open that wrapped present. More significantly, hope is what we cling to when a loved one is ill or running down the wrong path. A marriage proposal is swimming in hope — that the man will ask and that the woman will say yes.

Whatever the circumstances, in matters of hope, our hearts and minds lean forward, yearning for consummation of a desire. In the gospel, our hope finds its deepest desire, its most complete consummation and true soul mate, in our final reunion with our Creator through Jesus Christ. Nothing else will satisfy like being in the presence of God one day, with all creation perfected along with us. Our hope is spurred on toward God in the same way as all the examples above: We hope for what we do not see.

We have tasted a small measure of the results of hope in this life, and the returns to come are worth the continued investment of hope now.

Perfect peace

We find biblical examples of this truth. The apostle Paul faced the death of his mortal body by execution for the crime of being a Christian. But he leaned forward into what awaited him.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Paul’s hope granted him peace when the same circumstances would cause many to suffer fear. The God he knew, the God he had seen and walked with, waited on the other side of his coming sleep. Paul’s hope was not mere wish but assured fact. His desire was to be with God because he had experienced glimpses of the glory to come throughout his life. He knew the fullness of the kingdom of God awaited, and it was worth all his hope to look to its fulfillment. He may have written

Result of Hope

these hopeful words from the same prison: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . . My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (Philippians 1:21, 23, 24).

In these intimate passages, Paul shares a heart completely enthralled with the hope of the gospel, desiring to fulfill his longing to spend eternity in God’s presence. His only restraint was to stay and point others toward the same experience of God.

Gospel promises

The same hope that so enamored Paul — to see God face-to-face and be crowned with righteousness — was not merely for himself but for “all who have loved his [Jesus’] appearing” (emphasis mine). This hope of the gospel is a promise for *all* who believe it — all who taste it, all who love the old, old story.

Paul wasn’t the only one who felt this way. Peter had been changed from a hot-headed, foot-in-mouth expert to a refined and thoughtful leader. In glowing terms he wrote to believers of the living hope of the gospel:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Peter helps us see that our hope is rooted in the story of Jesus. Our hope is assured because just as Jesus Christ died and rose again, so we will die and rise again (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14). Peter assures us that the result of our hope is held secure in heaven for us by God himself; it cannot be spoiled. What amazing promises God grants to those who believe and have found this living hope in Him!

Transformative hope

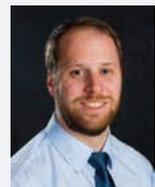
The hope of the gospel is one of the most transformational forces in the world. By this hope a headstrong fisherman became the wise Peter. The same force of the gospel took the murderous Saul and transformed him into the apostle Paul.

So many more throughout

history have been transformed by this living hope into bearers of the name *Christian*. The hymn “I Love to Tell the Story” traces the thread of hope found in the gospel down through the ages to glory.

That same hope stirs inside our souls today, searching for its source, the only thing that will satisfy our longings: the gospel, that old, old story. Nothing else will do. **BA**

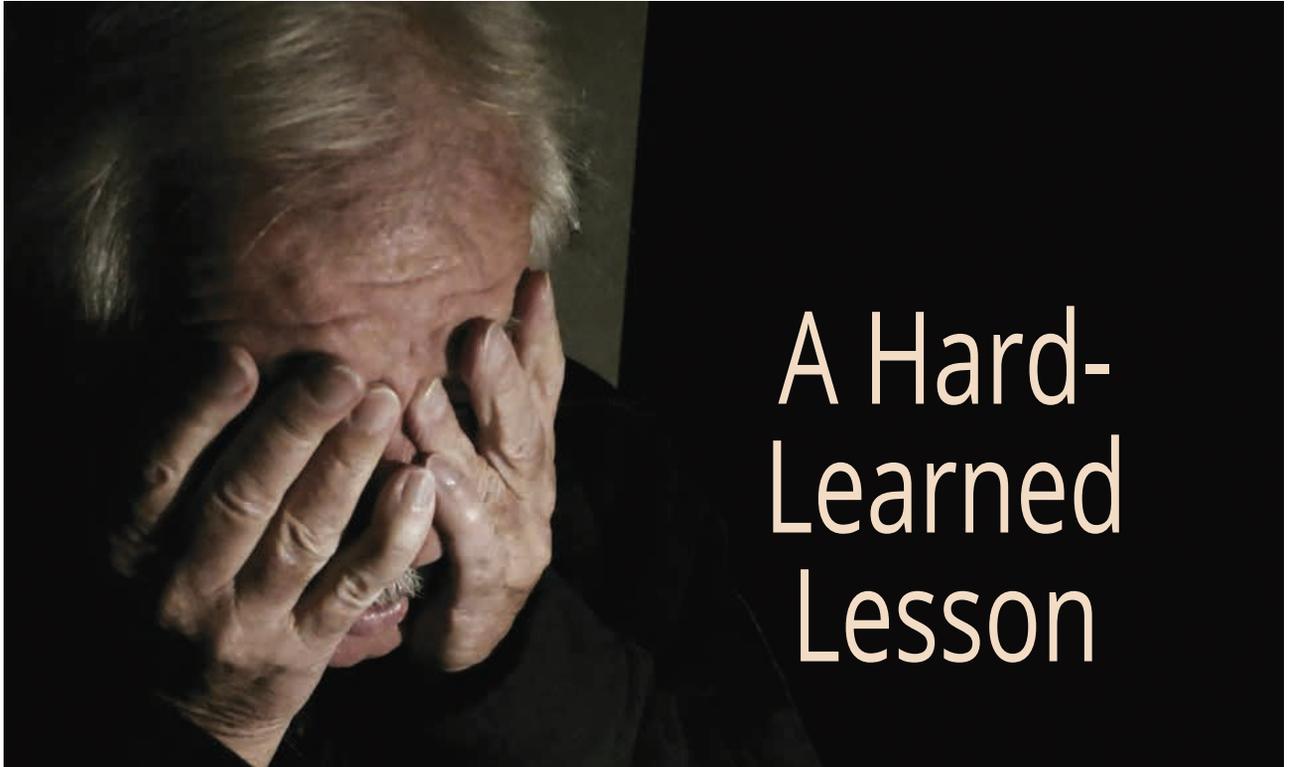
Brian Franks pastors the congregation in Tulsa, OK, where he lives with his wife and four children.



He is also the dean of Academic Affairs at Artios Christian College. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



**Don't miss this issue's
Online Extra: “Fractals”
by Bonita Hele
Visit baonline.org.**



A Hard-Learned Lesson

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by **Diana C. Derringer**

Discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you (Proverbs 2:11).

Head down, shoulders shaking, and tears flowing, this was not the Uncle Leonard we knew. Years of poor choices still showed in the crevices of his bony face. However, his wrinkles no longer widened with laughter that turned into a ragged cough. He wasn't regaling us with another of his drunken escapades, like the middle-of-the-night trip from Indiana to Kentucky when he realized he was driving the wrong way. He wasn't doubled over, slapping his legs, as he described heading north on I-65 while all the headlights shined south toward him.

Neither was he recalling child-

hood memories or catching up on extended family news with our mother. Gone was the confident man who discussed the economy, work details, or the latest ballgame with our father.

Never a mean alcoholic, Uncle Leonard emanated a love for life and others in spite of his addiction. We rarely knew when he was coming. He simply showed up at all hours to stay a day, a week, or several months while he sought sobriety. He knew drinking was prohibited at our house. But he also knew he was welcome any time and in any condition for however long it took to regain a clearer mind and healthier body.

Uncle Leonard had fallen off the wagon once again, but this time was different. As he sat across the kitchen table from my younger sister and me, his yellowed fingers danced as he

raised them for another puff of courage.

Sweating sorrow, he begged, "Girls, please listen to your old uncle. I've made so many mistakes. I didn't mean to end up like this." His head bobbed to his chest and then up again. Following several blows into his handkerchief, plus a couple of swipes at his eyes, he continued. "I love you. You know that, don't you?"

We nodded, and he kept talking. "Promise me you'll never take that first drink. Please, look at me. Listen to me. You don't want to live like this." As he spread his arms wide, the leathery skin hung to bits of flesh on his skinny frame. His eyes reflected broken relationships and missed opportunities.

We did listen and never forgot the hard-learned lesson from this gentle, hard-working man who loved us with his entire being, but suffered the demons of a

bottle tipped time after time.

Eventually, by remaining near the support of our father and others in his small but close-knit support system, Uncle Leonard managed to listen to himself. He grabbed hold of hope, held on to sobriety, remarried, reignited his relationship with a sympathetic Savior, and bought a house not far from ours. He lived well and laughed often until the day of his early death, a consequence of one drink that led to many.

In addition to learning from Uncle Leonard's mistakes, we learned from our parents who supported, confronted, and guided our uncle to a better way of life, which led to his reconnection to Christ. My sister and I took the way they lived for granted. Looking back, we see the impact they made and the example they set for us and anyone else who visited or lived with us.

Relatives, friends, and foster children found food, shelter, love, and spiritual guidance when they resided under our roof. Church attendance, family devotions before bedtime, and prayers before meals were the norm. Mom and Dad coupled unconditional love with firm standards for behavior. In this way, they bore witness to their Lord.

We value those childhood lessons from Uncle Leonard and our parents. As Solomon wrote, they preserve us and give us understanding in our lives today and help us reach out to others with the hope of Christ. ^{BA}

Diana Derringer
writes from Camp-
bellsville, KY.



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Fear-Free Fishing

“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

“When we fish for fish, we take them out of a beautiful life into death. But when we fish for men, we take them out of death into a beautiful life.”

A speaker at church provided this powerful contrast and motivation for witnessing. Indeed, Jesus called us to become fishers of men, something every Christian can do. We can all recall our lives before we became Christians, how we came to know Jesus as our personal Savior, and how our lives have changed since that time.

But we face a great hindrance. Despite God's clear call to share our faith, we suffer from absolute tongue-tying terror. Opening our mouths about the greatest event in our lives makes our palms sweat, our knees knock, our stomachs knot, and our mouths go as dry as Death Valley.

The following ideas help overcome this paralyzing panic:

- Pray for God's clear leadership, awareness of the people we need to contact, and courage to boldly cast our nets.
- Print out our unique stories, and add supporting Bible verses. Mark our Bibles at the beginning verse with the reference and page number for the next verse. Repeat for each verse.
- Practice with fellow Christians until we feel comfortable and can present a clear message.
- Pair with a mentor. Identify individuals with experience and enthusiasm, and ask if we can accompany them during a few contacts.
- Place the results in God's hands. We're commanded to go and tell — to fish. The results remain between the other person and God.
- Prepare for both chance and scheduled encounters. When we ask God to reveal witnessing opportunities, our eyes will open to needs all around us.
- Plan for a total life change. A witnessing lifestyle is contagious, with long-lasting effects.

In *Salt from My Attic*, author John A. Shedd wrote, “A ship in the harbor is safe, but that's not what ships were made for.” Let's venture from our comfort zones, cast our nets, and speak God's love and truth to all we meet.

— Diana C. Derringer

How to Combat Hate



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The good news, bad
news dilemma.

by **Renee Robinson**

I'm new to wearing glasses. After the first day of trying to adjust, I was convinced they made my vision worse rather than better. It seemed everything was actually blurrier than before.

I pulled the glasses off my face and held them to the light. That's when I noticed the problem. The lenses were plastered with smudges and needed to be cleaned. After giving them a thorough wipe down, I felt that I was seeing with perfect clarity. Amazing!

Now I'm slightly addicted to cleaning the lenses. The smallest smudge brings out the spray and cloth. After realizing the small

shift required in seeing better, why would I ever choose to look through dirty lenses?

Heart condition

I've learned that the same clear vision is needed in our spiritual lives. At times we see something from a new perspective or with greater clarity. From that moment forward, it's hard to look at circumstances through old perspectives. If we're going to grow in our walk with Christ and be His light in this world, however, we must.

This is not easy to do. Several years ago, the Be Kind campaign kicked off. I remember thinking how nice it would be if simply telling people to be kind could create the change the world yearns for. It won't. Likewise, telling people to end hate doesn't work. We can hashtag and post all day long, but the haters are

going to hate. It's a condition of the heart.

One day a friend and I discussed the issue of hate we see in the world. As Christians, our hearts naturally break because God's heart breaks. God is love; He hates hate because He is love. We are His image bearers, so our hearts are torn over what we see happening in the world. As it should be.

My friend and I also discussed the Atlanta murders in the Asian massage parlors, in the news at the time. While some of the media portrayed a race hate crime, the murderer actually said he targeted the parlors because of what they represented to him: his sexual addiction. His sin caused him to murder.

In this instance, it was not a race hate crime; it was a sin hate crime. The suspect was filled with hate, to be sure. But his hate

was at his own sin-natured heart, not a race of people.

Paul understood the human sin condition well:

So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. For in my inner self I delight in God's law, but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin (Romans 7:21-25).

Before any of us come to Christ, we are slaves to the sin nature that lives inside us. It looks different for everyone. Not everyone will murder someone out of their sin-natured self, but we all have a sin problem. The good news is that the answer is with us if we are willing to accept it: a relationship with Jesus.

Missed opportunity

As my friend and I discussed hate, she was bothered about this issue close to her heart that she feels no one is talking about. My initial response was that our world is weighed down right now with so much, we can't possibly talk about all of it. We feel it, as Paul expressed in Romans: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now" (8:22).

I continued pondering our conversation long after it ended.

I've never seen more Christians crying out and posting on social media about all the evil in the world. It's as if it is shocking to us.

I wonder if we are missing the greatest opportunity God has ever given to us during our lifetime. In my own life, I've never seen what we are seeing in the world and culture now. When I search the Scriptures, I don't see a command to go and tell the world about all the evil and hate. But I do see this: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

Telling someone to stop hating will never work. Covering our cars with bumper stickers,

“Covering our cars with bumper stickers, wearing t-shirts telling people to be kind will never work.”

wearing t-shirts telling people to be kind will never work. It might help for the next five minutes, but it won't change the heart. Only Christ can do that.

Command and calling

We have a command, a calling, an enormous responsibility if we claim to be followers of Jesus. The world is literally dying before our very eyes. Humanity is being exposed for the evil that lurks within. People are hungry for truth. Why are we posting

and sharing more about evil, hate, political unrest, and social justice than we are about a living God madly in love with His creation and because of His mercy, the world hasn't ended yet? His heart is for *all* to come to Him.

Not all will come to God; we know this. But His heart is that everyone will. So we see His patience, kindness, and mercy. Why aren't we shouting this from the rooftops? "My mouth will tell about your righteousness and your salvation all day long, though I cannot sum them up" (Psalm 71:15).

The media is out to get a reaction from us. They want us to feel angry and outraged. They want

to scare us. The media loves to tell a bad story. But God tells a good story. A very good story.

Let's tell His story to all who will listen. This is how to combat hate. This is how to fight evil: with love and truth. **BA**

Renee Robinson writes from Elkhorn, NE. Scripture quotations are taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*.





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by Roy Swanberg

LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am (Psalm 39:4).

When I was a lad, “I’m next” was a wonderful place to be: next in line for a ride at the fair or for carrying my plate to the smorgasbord. With some friends, parents, and in-laws out of the line now, being next doesn’t seem all that exciting.

I’ve been next in line to get back into school after recess and in lines all the way to a late college graduation. I’ve been in too many lines for jobs and three eternities of standing in line in the military.

Once I finished my military time, I faced lines for college and jobs. I was next to get married, after my sisters, and have children. After I married, I still was in line for my BS and MS degrees. I thought there was no end to lines I stood in.

In 1988, I stepped over the fifty-yard line of life and headed downhill. I started to appreciate the simple things in life: the blessings and burdens of home ownership, maintaining a yard, raising active children, sump pumps, parking spaces, and clean sheets on the bed — to say nothing of the increasing love of a good wife.

I stood in line to sign up for Medicare and became one of the aging ones. Throughout my life, lines have spread out like the Alaskan prospectors climbing the Chilkoot Trail during the Klondike Gold Rush. Now in my eighties, I’ve stood in line to be fitted with glasses, to be treated for diabetes and for a heart attack, and to be airlifted to a large medical center.

Three years ago, the crème de la crème: a set of hearing aids. Since then, a few more health issues. A month on the calendar looks like a local doctor directory.

After I graduated from high school, I worked on a truck dock from ten to twelve hours a day making some trucks empty and some full, without a hint of weariness. Now I have to pay someone to do my yard work. Sometimes my wife and daughter drive me to the doctor’s office or a clinic just as we used to do for our folks. I see the reflection of Mom and Dad as they gracefully stood near the front of their lines and surrendered their grip on active lives.

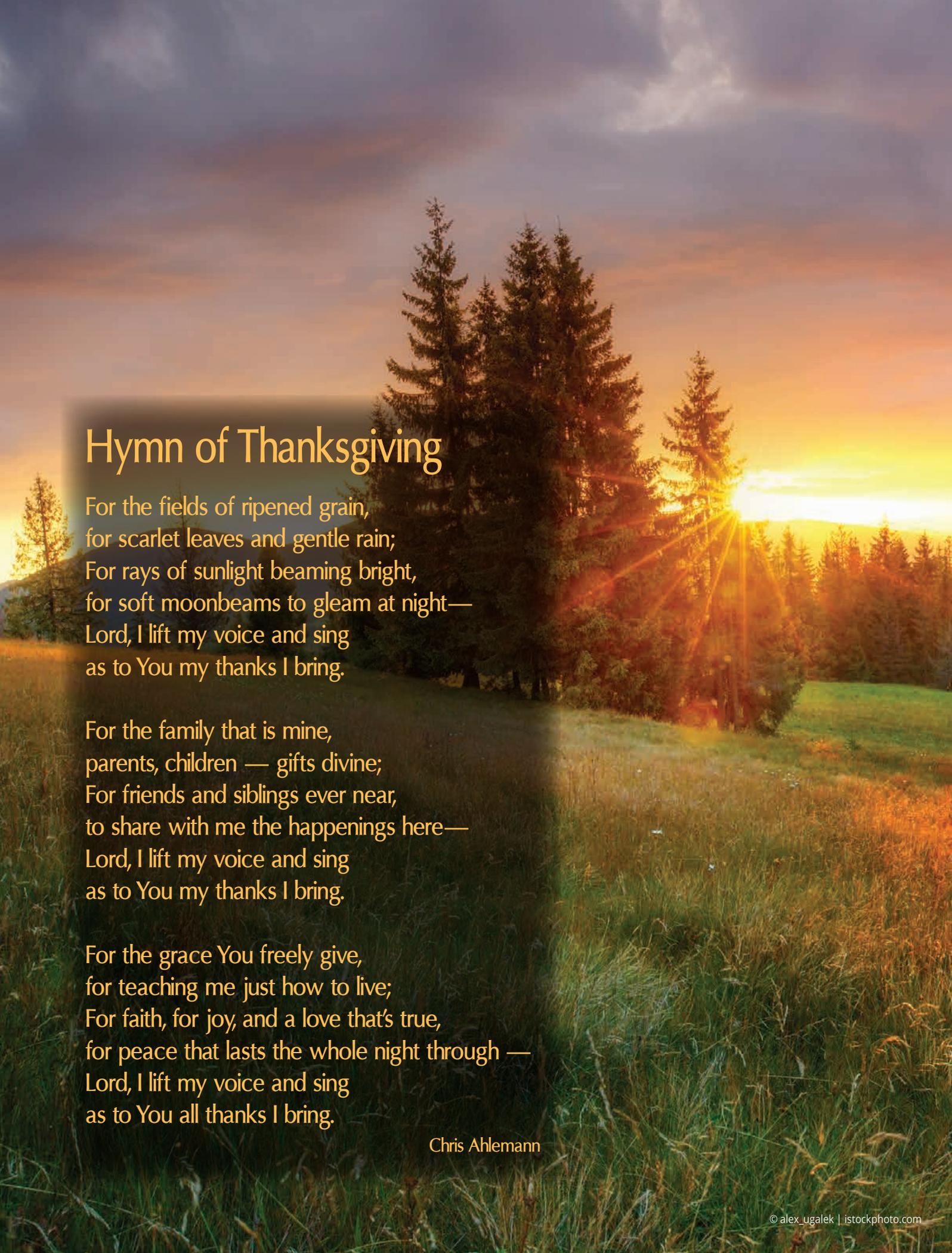
Now at eighty-four, my line is shorter, and I’m at the head of it. My entire attitude on life has changed, with a clearer view of the end of the line. I never had any guarantee the end of my line would be easy. Would I be at the head of the line for a long or short time?

Many family and friends of mine are bearing up under difficulties I do not know. They wear their struggles well. For me, the neuropathy around my waist from shingles is painful and makes me weak and constantly tired. Others do not make a public display of their issues, and I’m learning to not make an issue of mine.

But with all that I am about to let go of, I join the greatest line of all. To paraphrase Dr. Martin L. King Jr., “I’m next. Thank God almighty, I’m next!” I’m next to step over Jordan and be lifted by the nail-pierced hands of Jesus. He was with me in every long line I ever stood in: exciting lines, fearful lines, and dangerous ones too. Now I’m at the head of the line to face my Savior and say, “Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul.” I will never be next again. **BA**

Roy Swanberg writes from Princeton, IL.





Hymn of Thanksgiving

For the fields of ripened grain,
for scarlet leaves and gentle rain;
For rays of sunlight beaming bright,
for soft moonbeams to gleam at night—
Lord, I lift my voice and sing
as to You my thanks I bring.

For the family that is mine,
parents, children — gifts divine;
For friends and siblings ever near,
to share with me the happenings here—
Lord, I lift my voice and sing
as to You my thanks I bring.

For the grace You freely give,
for teaching me just how to live;
For faith, for joy, and a love that's true,
for peace that lasts the whole night through —
Lord, I lift my voice and sing
as to You all thanks I bring.

Chris Ahlemann

Hope

continued from page 13

a Bible, pens, and paper in hand. I remember the last passage I discussed with the Christian volunteer so many years ago.

Second Timothy 2:8-10:

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Recently, my parents wrote to tell me they were proud of me, even as I sat in prison. I am not ashamed to admit I wept. I cried again after my sister's most recent visit, seeing her changed and beautiful from the inside out. She found her faith, which she had been looking for, but not in the places she would have ever imagined.

I owe all of it to the power of the written word and the written Word. It has taught me how to look inward and upward in order to look forward. It has provided me with the escape from my hell and hope for the next chapter of my life. **BA**

Leo Cardez (a pen name) is an inmate at a facility in Dixon, IL.

Did You Know?

General Conference Convention '23 will be here soon!

This year, the Convention Committee is providing some behind-the-scenes facts and information about our convention. One big area of promotion includes room night counts and meal tickets. Hopefully, this is where you will find both useful information and answers to questions.

Convention costs and you. A team of volunteers works years in advance to identify locations for conventions. Contracts are crafted months ahead of time to benefit attendees and the GC Convention. In many cases, the local Convention and Visitors Bureau will grant us thousands of dollars if certain criteria are met. You are an important part of meeting those contractual issues.

Specifically, we have agreements concerning the number of rooms we book at hotels and the amount of money we spend on food. If we don't meet our contracted minimum room nights (the sleeping rooms you book) and purchase \$25,000 in meal tickets collectively, we will lose the over \$100,000 granted to us to help pay for the Convention Center. If every person who registers for convention purchases just one meal ticket, we could meet our meal ticket minimum.

Hotel rooms booked through the official registration link, to be included in the registration process, guarantees that our organization receives credit for your room. Rooms reserved through discount sites or hotel points will not count as our group rooms.

Registration. Registration fees cover the costs of the Convention Center rental; sound and video for our meetings; all printed materials; program costs for children, youth, and young adults; and many other convention costs.

You can save money by registering during the early bird registration period, generally by the end of April. Watch the website for details. You get a discount and the committee receives timely and valuable information for finalizing plans.

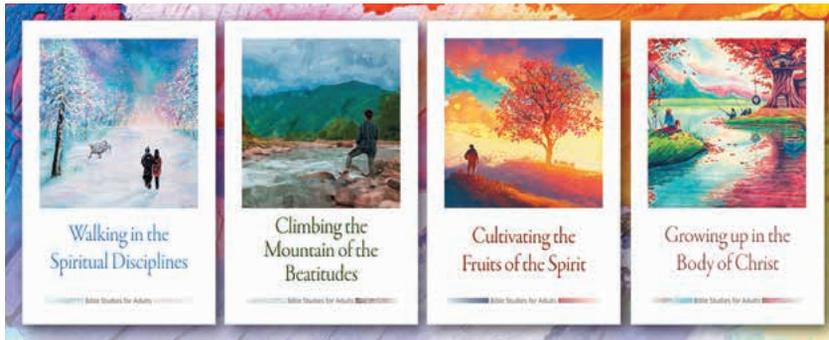
Hotel and center information. Discounted room rates for our three contract hotels are available three days prior and three days post-convention (July 7-18). All three will serve a complimentary breakfast.

Location. When you make airline reservations, your destination should be Cincinnati, Ohio (CVG). The Cincinnati airport is actually located in Covington, Kentucky. Only the Ohio River separates the two cities.

With everyone doing their part, our journey to Convention '23 will be a success. We look forward to your being with us!

— Convention Committee





New Quarterly Series 2023

Over the last year, I've asked Church leaders and teachers what kind of material they needed from the Bible Advocate Press. The overwhelming response was for lessons that aid local churches in developing deeper, intentional, and resilient disciples. So these lessons are our attempt to fulfill that request.

The Christian life lends itself to many metaphors. The Spiritual Formation series looks at four: our walking in the way, climbing the mountain, cultivating fruit, and growing up. It is a process — the walk, the climb, the fruit, the growth — and is a product of time and dedication and discipline. This is what authentic *formation* entails. It's what lifelong discipleship looks like.

But the word *spiritual* is even more important. *Spiritual* formation isn't self-help or a personal program. It is yielding ourselves to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit goes with us, guiding us. As Paul said, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit"; "as many

as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Galatians 5:25; Romans 8:14). This is what Jesus' disciples do and who they are.

The four quarterlies in this series are about our life and journey in the Holy Spirit toward conformity to Christ. Create a standing order at our online store and get all of our new studies as they're released each quarter. <https://cog7.org/online-store/standing-order-for-curriculum-materials-printed-and-digital/>.

Jason Overman
Editor

2023 Bible Advocate Theme: "Come and See"

Jesus invited would-be disciples to "come and see" (John 1:39). He still bids us to "come and see" today. But when we follow after Jesus, what is revealed? What do we see and experience? The BA dedicates our year to asking and answering this wonderful question. Come and see!

The six 2023 issues of the

Bible Advocate will progressively delve deep to understand what Jesus wants to show us when we follow Him. Once we come and see, we encounter God in His holiness and are confronted with our sinfulness. He is life, but we are lost. We see in part, but there is more. God is love. And the fullness of His grace and truth is seen in Jesus Christ, the salvation of God.

How do we respond to such a great and good God as this? Come and see! Repent and believe. Trust and turn from sin and death to Jesus, our Savior and Lord. See and serve God and neighbor in newness of life through the Holy Spirit. Come and see! God is at work saving and sanctifying. We follow to the end and see our final destination with Him forever.

For the list of themes for each issue, please visit baonline.org (About/Write for Us).

STATEMENT

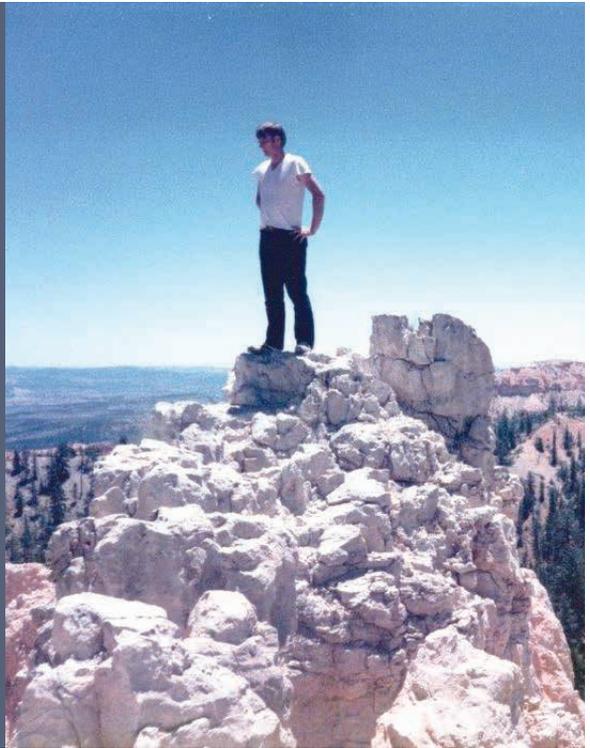
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Reflections on the Life of Calvin Burrell



Finishing Well



by Whaid
Rose

Few, it is observed, finish well. This underscores that finishing well isn't

automatic and that those who do are rare and are among the minority.

Such was Calvin Burrell, the General Conference's preeminent statesman of the last half a century, who recently crossed the finish line just days after his seventy-ninth birthday.

It's been said that the two most important decisions one will ever make are whether or not to accept Christ and how

to serve Him. Calvin made his decision for Christ at an early age and spent the remainder of his life serving Jesus humbly and faithfully.

He held just about every job title within the General Conference during his 51 years of full-time service. Reflecting on this remarkable profile, one of his mentees wrote: "I never saw Calvin wear his titles with anything other than humility, grace, or what sometimes seemed like awkward embarrassment. He would deflect any honor or status they implied to the grace of God and the partnership he enjoyed with others."

Even so, Calvin was teacher, preacher, and writer par excellence. He was unmatched in pinpoint precision in his use of words, embodying Francis Bacon's appealing maxim: "Reading makes a full man, speaking a ready man, and writing an

exact man." That was Calvin: full, ready, and exact — in every way.

Born and raised on an Oklahoma farm, Calvin developed an unusual love for the outdoors and, as an adult, made a hobby of mountain climbing. He climbed all 54 of the Rocky Mountain's 14,000 ft. peaks, as well as peaks elsewhere. "Never mind where a trail goes," he wrote in his memoirs. "I want to go with it — to walk it. What other use does a trail have, anyway? A good trail doesn't make anything except stronger bodies, clearer minds, and happier hearts."

This is why Calvin's passing is so difficult for many. This larger-than-life person who so loved the outdoors and took such good care of his health was supposed to live on into his nineties, perhaps make it to one hundred!

Yet his passing is a reminder that no one is excluded from the brokenness of this world.

As a boy growing up in CoG7's unique environment, Calvin, by his own account, often imagined himself standing in the church aisle with outstretched arms, pulling together opposing factions, reasoning that unity in Christ was not only possible but mandated, despite diverse views.

This fueled his passion for harmonizing grace and truth, to honor our church's historic commitment to biblical truth, while celebrating the wonders of God's grace given in Jesus Christ. This defined his writing and preaching and, in large measure, shaped his tenure as Conference President (1987-1997).

But a leader's greatest success is measured, not by how well he did publicly but by how he led his home and family. By this standard, Calvin Burrell was a highly successful man.

Looking back forty years, I am deeply moved by the realization that when I moved into the Burrell home as a young college student, Calvin was himself only in his late 30's. Even then, his level of maturity gave the appearance of an older, seasoned man.

Watching him nurture his wife and their girls, leading them in both spiritual matters and at play, helped frame my own vision for marriage and family. Thus, in the classroom he taught me preaching, systematic theology, New Testament epistles, spiritual leadership, and more. At home he unwittingly taught me about life and how to give myself to the

things that count most — key to finishing well.

I should add that because Calvin was a local pastor, I also got to see him in the pulpit on Sabbaths. From all vantage points — home, classroom, and church — I saw the same man, practicing what he preached, fully integrated.

If Calvin were reading this, he'd be at the height of discomfort at this point. He would remind us that he wasn't perfect and that it was his keen awareness of his own imperfections and need for grace that inclined his heart toward grace.

Yet this is what endeared us to him. Calvin thought so little of the things we so admired about him, crediting anything praiseworthy to the grace of God. How fitting, then, that the picture featured at his celebration of life service shows him standing at the top of a mountain with this caption: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

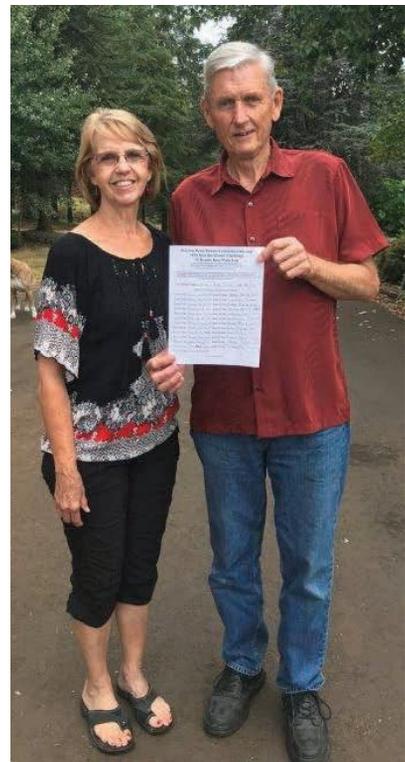
More than bragging about his successes, this farewell statement from Paul, penned while in prison awaiting execution, was a way of exhorting young Timothy on how he should finish: The good fight he must fight, the race he must finish, the faith he must keep.

Calvin Burrell did and, reflecting on his journey, could say, "CoG7 has been a good family of faith for me and mine. As a church employee for 51 years, I have no complaints and few regrets." Given the difficulties

and disappointments common to church life and ministry, that's impressive coming from a fifty-one-year veteran!

Yet it speaks to who Calvin was, deep down on the inside. Even on his deathbed, his wife, Barb, reports, he lamented the care and attention he was getting, not wanting it to be all about him. He preferred to put the spotlight on others, and he sought to see the best in everyone. His love for people knew no boundaries. One of Calvin's hallmarks was his capacity to immerse himself into other races and cultures with ease and genuine interest. He was fully present, listening, learning, and loving.

And because good finishers know when to quit, in 2015 Calvin officially retired and moved to Oregon to be closer to chil-



Calvin and Barb, having completed 25 hikes in Stayton, OR, in 2020.

dren and grandchildren. In 2020 he penned his memoirs titled *Things That Count Most: The people, places and times of my life . . . as recalled by one grateful guy*. Then on the evening of June 29, 2022, surrounded by his precious Barbara and the rest of the family singing “The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases,” he fell asleep in Jesus.

What a way to die. What a way to live. What a way to finish. Thank you for showing us how, Calvin. Knowing you has been our privilege. Your footprints mark the trail, pointing us onward. We’ll see you again — just up ahead!



Right Words

It’s hard to talk about Calvin Burrell in the past tense. He was so full of life, energy, and positivity. How can a voice like his be silenced?

I had the honor of working with Calvin for the 18 years he served as the BA editor. But he was more than an editor. At times I went to him for counsel over whatever was troubling me. His door was always open, and he took time to listen. He knew how to share just the right words I needed to hear. Sometimes he challenged my thinking on an issue, and other times he validated my convictions.

When our staff was informed that Calvin entered hospice care a few months ago, I really struggled. I couldn’t picture this man who had walked the roads around the GC offices, hiked trails, and climbed peaks losing a battle with cancer. But he did.

However, Calvin characteristically left behind a message of hope, so fitting for this issue. When he was in hospice care, I was editing the fourth quarter lessons in *This We Believe Part 2*, which Calvin wrote in 2009. As I read through his words in light of his waning days, his writing from over a decade ago in Lesson 8 jumped out at me:

Blessed are those who die in the Lord. We sorrow in losing them, but not without hope. May the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead give life to our mortal bodies now. And may the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ bring us immortal bodies forever. This is our blessed hope!

And in Lesson 12:

Because God has spoken about what lies at the end of the road called faith, we may have confidence of a new body without pain and a new life without end. May the blessed hope of every believer in Christ be based squarely on the blessed promises of our Lord.

Thanks again, Calvin, for sharing just the right words I need to hear.

— Sherri Langton
Associate Editor



Missing Calvin

Where does one begin — to memorialize one who means so much to so many? Calvin Burrell was not only a brother in Christ, but also like a sibling-brother. So much has already been so eloquently said that I have nothing new to add.

I can think of no one who so consistently made self-less choices, who avoided gossip (or even negative comment), who consistently chose the peaceful route — *always* the peaceful route. Calvin was a natural teacher, so easily adjusting to the level of his audience. He possessed the wisdom of a learned professor but the air of a commoner. In all the years I interacted with Calvin as a friend, as a student, as a parishioner, and as his administrative assistant, never once did I hear him direct attention or credit to himself. For anything he accomplished or conquered, he gave the credit to God.

There are no words to describe how much Calvin Burrell will continue to be missed. He left a hole in the hearts of so many. He is sorely missed . . . every day.

— Hope Dais Clark



Biblical Hope

The word *hope* regarding worldly matters means little more than wishful thinking. During baseball season, I *hope* that my favorite baseball team will win the World Series. During football season, I *hope* that my favorite football team will win the Super Bowl. When I go fishing, I *hope* I will catch a record-breaker (or any fish at all). When I play golf, I *hope* to finish under par. Most of those things rarely or never actually happen, but still . . . I *hope* they will.

Biblical hope is different. Rather than wishful thinking, biblical hope has been defined as “confident expectation” that though something God has promised has not yet taken place, it certainly will. We haven’t seen or fully experienced it yet, but we know we will.

Regarding biblical faith, the New Testament book of Hebrews says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (11:1, ESV). If the writer of Hebrews had been inspired to write “Now hope is the assurance of things believed in” instead, the message would be virtually the same. In a sense, biblical hope and biblical faith are synonymous.

What makes biblical hope different from worldly hope is its foundation. Whereas the latter is based on the wishes and desires of mere humans, biblical hope is based on the person and attributes of almighty God. Humans can desire and wish and hope and try for certain things, but ultimately, we do not have the ability to do or to be or to bring to pass anything and everything we desire. We often hope, in this worldly sense, because often that is all we can do. This kind of hope, in itself, recognizes that we are not sovereign and omnipotent. Almighty God, however, is. Beyond that, He is eternal, He is omniscient,

and He is the very definition and measure of righteousness. He will not lie. He will never break His promise. Whatever He says is true and trustworthy.

Therefore, biblical hope is faith that anything God has said or promised will come to pass. That is the basis for biblical hope in the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. God has said in His written Word, the Bible, that Jesus died in our place, for our sin (Romans 5); that God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21); that all who believe in Jesus will receive eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 6:23); and that Jesus will return for those who are His (John 14:1-3). We believe those things and hope with certain expectation for those things we have not yet experienced, because God has said those things and promised those things. Our hope as believers, then, is built on the firm foundation of God’s person, God’s attributes, and God’s provision, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

The biblical hope of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ is well expressed in Edward Mote’s hymn “The Solid Rock”:

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.

Solid Rock or sinking sand:
On what are you basing your
hope?

— Loren Stacy



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