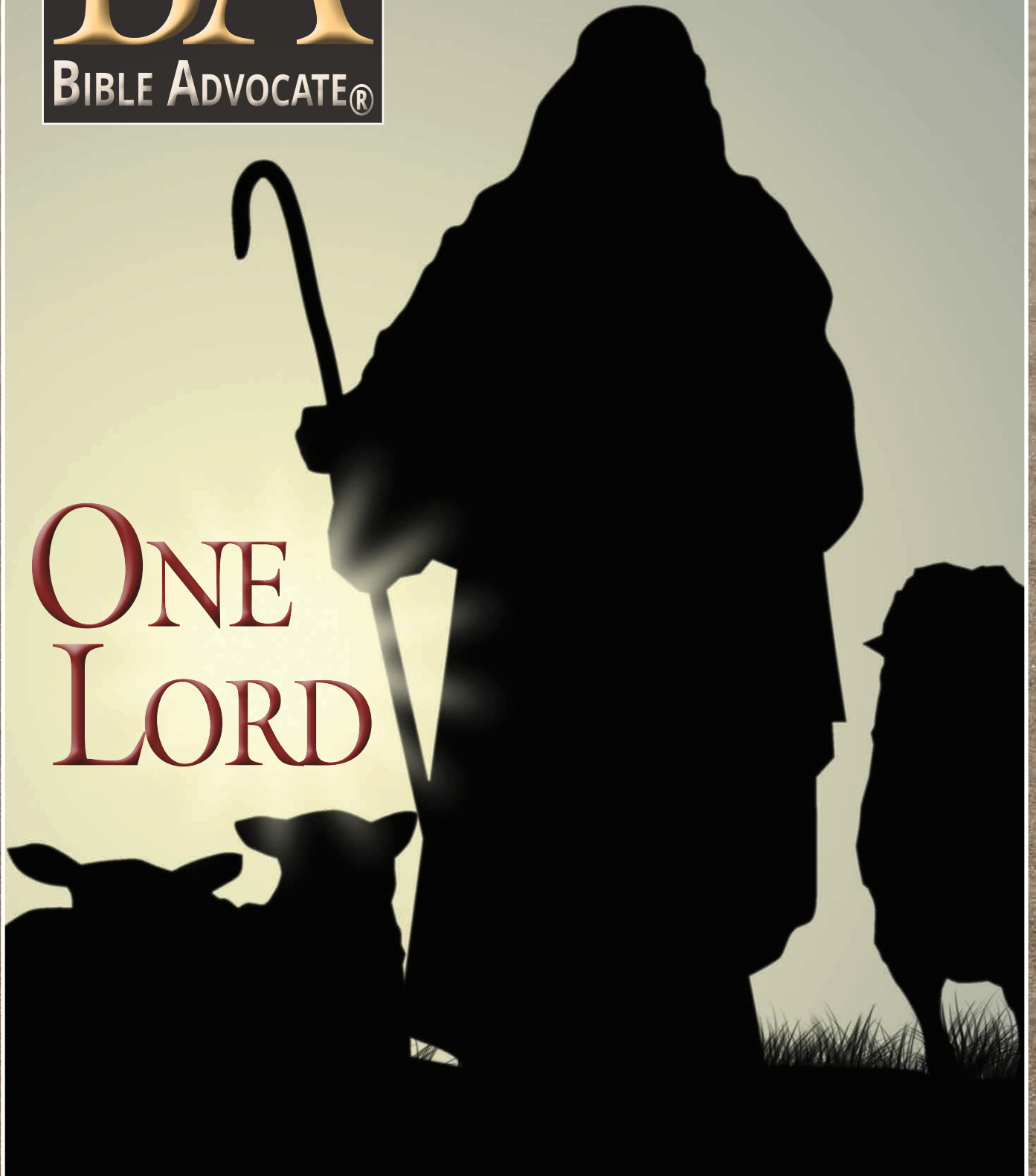


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2016: Discipleship

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Big Year of Discipleship

Welcome to the new year! As you are contemplating resolutions, the *Bible Advocate* has been thinking ahead and has already dedicated 2016 to exploring the big theme of discipleship.

What does it mean to be disciples of Jesus in our twenty-first century world? What does it mean to be equipped to follow Christ in our turbulent times?

To understand the big question about discipleship, we first submit ourselves afresh to Scripture and church. Paul writes that both were given to equip the saints to every good work and to the very fullness of Christ (2 Timothy 3:15-17; Ephesians 4:11-13). Think about that for a minute: *the fullness of Christ!*

Because discipleship is such a big word, and a bigger task, we're going to view all of its distinct colors through six lenses in our six BA's this year. Ephesians 4:4-6 offers the framework of Christian life and a prism through which we can focus on the facets of discipleship: one Lord, one baptism, one faith, one Spirit, one body, and one hope. What does it mean to be faithful disciples within the context of each of these?

Paul gives a seventh from which the other six originate: "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:6). His glory is the light that illumines Scripture and church and the path of each disciple as we follow hard after our *Lord* and His *Spirit*, learning how to live out our *baptism* and *faith*, from within His *body*, and by our *hope* in Him. That's BA '16 in a nutshell.

We cannot be disciples if we do not know the Story. But being disciples means more; it's *living* the Story. The gospel Story is about our King and His kingdom, about Jesus and His call to follow. To be a disciple is to be His pupil; to follow is to imitate Him. So discipleship is more than information; it is formation. It's more than just believing; it is *becoming*: body-acts, heart-desires, and mind-thoughts — our all, *in and for Christ*.

Disciples under one Lord: That's where we begin — with Jesus, our beginning and end. This year the *Bible Advocate* hopes to illumine Scripture and enliven the church for the big goal of equipping the saints to be more like Jesus for the world's sake. Join the journey. Resolve to make it your own.

Grace and peace!

— Jason Overman



With every centimeter of progress heralded by the hallway growth chart, my panic and trepidation become more deeply rooted in the reality that someday — long before I am ready, yet long after my nerves have fragmented — the circus that is my home will send its performers out into the wide open spaces of adulthood.

I have to prepare them, these four daughters of mine, to follow Jesus without my daily coaching, to discern His call to serve Him in vocations that light up their faces with an understanding of how they fit into His plan, to think critically and effectively communicate God's heart through their actions and words.

As if this task isn't daunting enough, I get to navigate the funhouse of potty training, bedtime (why won't they sleep?!), sibling squabbles, schoolwork, table manners, and housework.

Of course, my newsfeed and Google are always faithfully standing by, ready to identify all that I am doing wrong, how I can do it better, and the multitude of must-have life skills and experiences that are in grave danger of slipping through the cracks.

In the midst of this whirlwind of information (and misinformation), it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the One who held the knowledge of the world in His fingerprints disciplined those entrusted to Him with a message, methodology, and motivation of remarkable simplicity.

Jesus' message

Modern Christendom has a tendency to reduce the gospel — Jesus' good news — to "believe [in Jesus] and receive [eternal

Inch by Inch

Discipling under the big top of parenting.
by Amber Riggs



life]" and then spin off a thousand dizzying Christian principles for living. However, the cohesive theme in Jesus' teaching was of the good news of the kingdom of God. *Kingdom* (Greek: *basileia*) refers to two things: the *realm* and the *rule* of a king.

Realm refers to the ownership of the world. The world is *God's* realm. Psalm 89:11 proclaims, "The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it" (NIV). It is *not* Satan's realm. Satan does not own creation; God does. So my children chant with me, "The Lord our God is the greatest King. He's the Creator of everything."

The battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan occurs in the area of *ruling*. While Satan does not own the realm, he does have the power to rule "in the hearts of the peo-

ple and in the life of the world . . ." through those he rules.¹

When Jesus proclaimed His kingdom, He was calling people to turn the rule of every area of their lives over to God. He was saying, "The ruler of the universe has come to rule in your life. Turn away from all other demands for ownership of your life. Enter into my reign. Let me rule in the life of the world through my rule in you."²

This is the gospel invitation to even our youngest children: Will you let Jesus be your King? Will you let Jesus teach you the ways of His kingdom in every area of your life?

We need look no further than Jesus' teachings and the proph-

1. Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, p. 54.

2. *Ibid.*



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ets' descriptions of Jesus' millennial reign to see a vivid vision of a life free from the influence of Satan: joy, peace, holiness, comfort, justice, knowledge, healing, freedom from oppression, the Holy Spirit poured out.

We know that we must presently suffer for the kingdom (2 Thessalonians 1:5), but Jesus taught His disciples to live in such a way that they would be evidence of God's future kingdom.

Jesus viewed the message of the kingdom of God as being so important that after His resurrection, when He appeared to His disciples over those forty days, all we are told is that He spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

The kingdom of God is a gift — not just to the princess-obsessed daughters of the twenty-first century but to all of us. Let's

embrace Jesus as the embodiment of this kingdom and champion His gospel of the kingdom in our homes.

Jesus' methodology

Having been a rabbi, Jesus can empathize with mothers of children who are constantly at our heels asking questions. It is a key feature central to both vocations. In fact, Jesus was likely being followed most closely by twelve teenage boys between the ages of 14 and 21.

While Jesus held formal teaching sessions with His students, much of what we observe in the Gospels shows Him as a living, breathing manifestation of Deuteronomy 6:7: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you

lie down, and when you rise" (ESV).

Jesus' days were not about checking off a "Pinterest-perfect" to-do list of discipleship activities. He didn't rush from one town to the next when He was summoned. The journeys were just as important to the discipleship process as were the destinations. Every step Jesus took as He walked from one town to the next was a demonstration of the power of the kingdom of God over that corner of the realm. He talked of God's kingdom when He sat in homes, when He walked from town to town, when He rested, and when He rose.

Even so, as parents who struggle to comprehensively prepare our children for adulthood, we are invited to embrace the journey of demonstrating and expounding upon Christ's power as we fix breakfast, comb hair, blow noses, wipe bottoms, help with schoolwork, diffuse sibling arguments, soothe hurt feelings, wash dishes, and drag our children to bed each night.

We bring the kingdom of God with us to the library as we interact with the homeless woman by our side who patiently waits for the doors to open so that she has a warm place to sit. We bring it with us to the grocery store, to the soccer field, to the bank.

And when we fail miserably, Christ's kingdom is made manifest in our humble confessions and His redeeming grace.

Jesus' motivation

Jesus too knew that face-to-face time with His disciples was limited — that it was only a matter of time before they would no

continued on page 27

Faith in a Wheelbarrow

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When our knowing leads to doing.

by **Tim Steinhauer**

The story is told of an American who scoffed at a French tightrope walker. Despite the Frenchman's long list of daring accomplishments, the American challenged him to come to the United States and do the impossible: cross Niagara Falls blindfolded, on a wire, with a wheelbarrow!

After a few weeks of preparation, on a foggy, windy day, the Frenchman successfully completed the impossible challenge.

"Do you believe I am able to now?" the Frenchman tested the American.

"Of course I do."

"Are you sure?"

"Why, certainly! How could I doubt now?" the American countered.

"All right then," replied the Frenchman. "Get in the wheelbarrow."

Assent without action

Christendom has been like this American: believing without doing — masters of the "sinner's prayer" but failures at discipleship. Somewhere along the way, we've accepted the notion that in God's eyes, believing the right facts about Him is sufficient to give us right standing before Him.

Our denomination is not immune to this problem. In our early years, ministers would travel to neighboring towns where there wasn't a Sabbathkeeping presence and challenge the local pastors to public debates on issues like Sabbath observance, how much time Jesus spent in the tomb, or immortality of the soul. Our efforts were targeted not so much toward a lost and dying world but to brothers and sisters in the faith who held different beliefs. Our mindset seemed to be that if we could just get enough people on our side of Niagara to agree the Falls could be crossed, we'd reach the

other side — without getting into the wheelbarrow.

The apostle James addressed this problem of mere "faith thoughts" without "faith acts" when he asked the church these simple, poignant questions:

What does it profit . . . if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (2:14-16).

James finished with this verdict: "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (v. 17).

A faith that speaks truth but isn't dressed in work clothes is about as genuine and useful as a man who stands by a house fire and shouts that water can extinguish it, but does nothing else. James goes so far as to call this the faith of a demon (v. 19).

Genuine living faith

One evening a few years ago, I stood in a hospital emergency room with parents who had just lost a daughter (and whose son would pass soon) from injuries sustained in a car accident. That night I realized it didn't matter what I believed about the comfort of Christ, His ability to walk with us through grief, or His own experience with our pain. It mattered only that I was willing to get on the floor with Him and these grieving parents and pray with them, weep with them, and serve them.

Our ministries should be like Jesus': "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). If we're not willing to serve as Jesus served, it doesn't matter what we believe about Him. Our faith must translate into what we do.

I've noticed this characteristic in the Amish community located just to the north of our little town. Their faith affects every part of their lives. Their transportation, farm equipment, household amenities, schools, and religious services all reflect what they profess to believe. Even if you don't agree with the Amish lifestyle, their faith is visible by their actions.

My beliefs must be reflected in my actions as well. I can claim to be a Jesus follower, but where I spend my money, how I invest my energy, the quality of my work ethic, the trustworthiness of my word, my leisure activities, and my choices as a husband

and father all either affirm my position or reek of decaying faith.

Sadly, I often find I'm not willing to get into the wheelbarrow. I'll cheer from a comfortable distance, but please don't ask me to take a risk, do something that cuts into my schedule, makes me uncomfortable, or forces me to sacrifice.

Onto the tightrope

A few years ago, when we first lived in our three-bedroom house and had no children, the Lord

“Somewhere along the way, we've accepted the notion that in God's eyes, believing the right facts about Him is sufficient to give us right standing before Him.”

challenged my wife, Debbie, and me to begin foster care. We started by praying and asking the Lord if this was really His will for us. (Translation: *God, that sounds like a lot of work – and we're pretty comfortable with the way things are. Thanks for the idea, though.*)

As we prayed, however, we realized that God had supplied us with the resources to take in children, a love for little ones, and a clear command in Scripture to

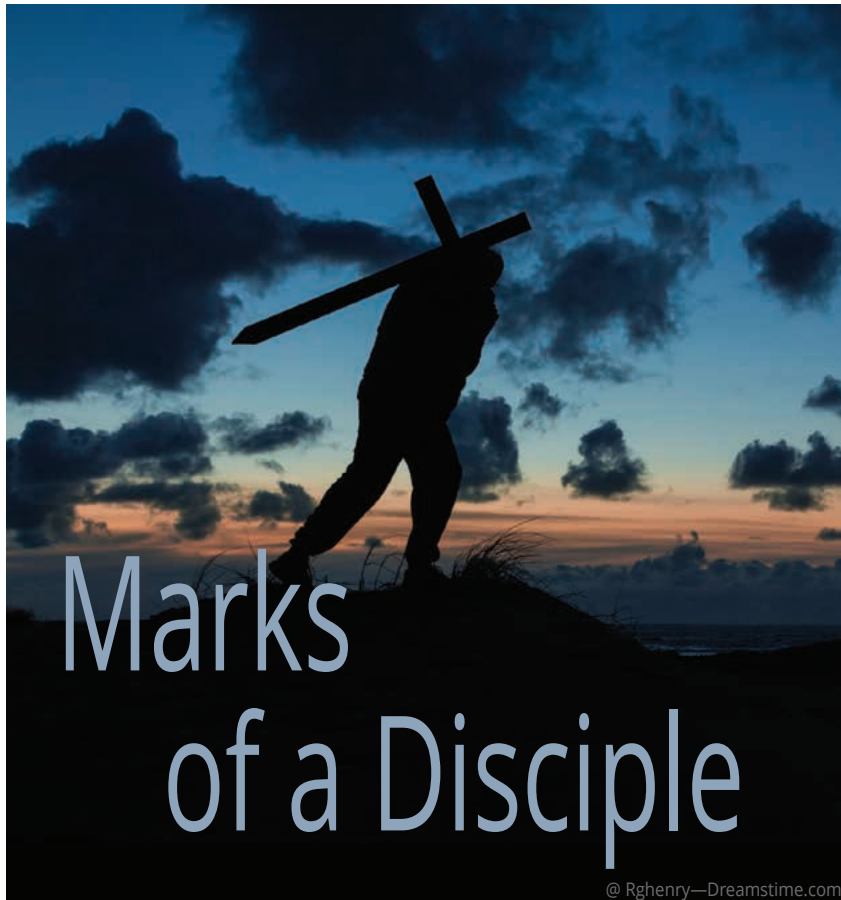
care for orphans. We didn't need to pray; we needed to obey. As children lived in our home, my wife and I were continually struck with the reality that this might be the only safe, secure, and loving place they had ever experienced.

Together we committed to love them as Jesus Christ loved them, and in a matter of days, we saw incredible changes. We sat on our bikes on a dirt road with a little girl as she watched her first rainbow. I worked on a transmission while a little boy practiced his wrench skills on every part of the car he could reach. We went to a carnival and brought home so many plastic prizes, I didn't know what to do with them. I served as a father, but more importantly, I got to be Jesus in the lives of these children.

I am convinced more than ever that the gospel of Jesus Christ is beautiful not just in its written form but as it comes off the printed page and demonstrates itself through our lives. As we choose not just to *know* about Jesus but to *live* like Him, the world will look in awe, and many will join us as we step to the edge, balance on the wire, and get in the wheelbarrow. **BA**

Tim Steinhauser and his wife, Debbie, pastor in Stanberry, MO. He also enjoys furniture building, working outdoors, and spending time with his two-year-old son, Donny.





The particulars of truly following Christ.

by Michael D. Vlad

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are often called Christians. Jesus, however, never referred to those who followed Him as Christians; He called them disciples. The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, which literally means “a learner.” A learner is not only a pupil but also an adherent to the teachings of Jesus. We prove to the world we’re followers of Jesus by what we say and do, by applying what He taught to everyday life.

In the Gospels, Jesus gives six marks that identify His followers as disciples. Let’s examine each one.

Application

The first is applying Jesus’ words to everyday life. Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31, 32). Disciples of Jesus put into practice what He taught. When we apply His words to life, we discover truth, and that truth sets us free from spiritual bondage.

In the parable of the wise man, Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). When the storms of life blew, the house stood firm.

Anyone can say he believes in Jesus and is a Christian. He can even call himself a disciple. But

the real proof is in applying His teachings to life. Many know the Word of God, but the true disciple of Jesus Christ obeys it!

Love

The second mark that identifies disciples of Jesus is love. In John 13:34, 35, Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

The word Jesus used for *love* is *agapao* – the same word that expresses God’s love for humanity and for His Son (John 3:16; 17:26). We’re to have this love for each other – a sacrificial and forgiving love, a love that extends to others despite their faults and failures. We must have *agapao* to be called disciples of Christ.

Fruit

Another proof is our fruit – and how much we bear. Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). It’s not just fruit that identifies us as His disciples but bearing *much* fruit. Though true disciples will do this, we don’t all bear the same amount of fruit.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus said only the good soil produced a crop (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23). This soil is the responsive hearts of His followers, and some yield a hundred times what was sown, some sixty times, some thirty times. But they all produce *much* fruit! When the Holy Spirit lives within us, we produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentle-

ness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

If we're led by the Holy Spirit, all of these fruits will be in our lives in abundance. If we aren't producing much spiritual fruit, we need to examine ourselves and discover why. The problem is not Christ or the Spirit living within us. The problem is whatever hinders us from being fertile soil. This third mark of discipleship is important because Christ desires His disciples to bear much fruit.

First place

The fourth identifying mark of a disciple is making Jesus our number one priority. Is He more important than anyone or anything else in our lives? It's not good enough for Jesus to be in the top ten of what we care most about. He's not satisfied with second place.

Jesus helps us understand the intensity of this priority: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, NKJV). Jesus was not telling us to actually have feelings of hate toward family members or ourselves. He was saying that our love and commitment to Him must be much greater in comparison to the most important things in our lives: father, mother, wife, children, siblings — even ourselves.

Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching" (John 14:23, 24). We may claim to love Jesus, but

the proof that we love Him more than anyone or anything else is our obedience to Him. If we aren't willing to make Him our first love and priority, we cannot be His disciples.

Carrying the cross

In Luke 14:27 Jesus gave a fifth mark of a disciple: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (NASB).

To carry our own cross means doing our part to grow into the character of Jesus Christ. We cannot depend on others to grow us to spiritual maturity. It's our responsibility to put the spiritual disciplines into daily practice: being in the Word, prayer, worship, and fellowship.

In carrying our cross as disciples of Christ, we die daily to self, and if need be, face physical death for the sake of Christ. Some people follow Christ from a distance, not bearing the responsibility of a disciple. Real disciples of Christ, however, carry their own cross daily and follow Jesus His way.

Counting the cost

The sixth mark is in Luke 14:28-32. Jesus said if a man is going to build a tower or a king is going to war, he must first count the cost to make sure he can finish what he's started. Then

Jesus made this profound statement: "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples" (v. 33).

It's our responsibility to count the cost to see if we can completely surrender every area of our lives to Christ. We cannot fully belong to Him when we're holding something back. Surrender is giving it all to Christ.

True disciples

Do we have the marks of disciples? Are we applying Christ's teachings, loving others, bearing much fruit? Do we love Jesus more than anyone or anything else? Are we carrying our own cross and following Him His way? Have we surrendered every area of our lives to Jesus?

If we can say "yes" to these six marks, we're true disciples of Christ. We have earned the right to the name *Christian* with the disciples who came before us — those who were called *Christians* first (Acts 11:26)! **BA**

Michael Vlad recently retired and lives with his wife, Debbie, in the Missouri Ozarks. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



“It's not good enough for Jesus to be in the top ten of what we care most about. He's not satisfied with second place.”

On the Fringe of Feeling



Anything is wrong when it takes God's rightful place in our lives.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

First love! Grade two. I could hold a book in my hand and read it cover to cover. By grade three, I had embraced a love of writing. My "roses are red" sonnet written to a fellow student was rejected and thrown away where my girlfriends found it. (Oh, the embarrassment!) In grade five, an overzealous suitor (a rejected one, I might add) leaned across the aisle and kissed me in class. I couldn't rub hard enough to remove the stain/shame of it all.

At an early age, I also developed a lifelong love affair with drawing. My three loves: reading, writing, and drawing. With a blanket spread in the backyard and a book in my hand, I spent many a summer day reading, daydreaming, and painting cloud pictures in the sky.

Books consumed me, and I lived many lives vicariously

through their pages. If I was upset and unable to sleep at night, I pulled a book off my mental shelf and read until lulled back into slumber. Throughout growing pains, baptism, work, marriage, and motherhood, books remained my friends. I had love for the Lord, family, and friends but never forgot the world of books that so consumed me.

Love! In love with love! It colored my reading as I devoured all the Zane Westerns in my great-uncle's library, as well as historical and Christian novels — all with a thread of love intricately woven into the books' warp and woof.

Paste version

In a recent seminar, a woman confessed, "I had to quit reading. It so totally consumed my life that I found I wasn't spending much time in God's Word." This brought me up short: I had fallen into the same trap.

My love affair with books was much like the paste jewelry worn by King George III and IV, along with other royals and high-ranking society members during the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Paste jewelry was hand-crafted, cut from leaded glass. The look of it was preferred to real gemstones that were harder to cut and fashion during that period. Paste is not considered a substitute for diamonds but is a sought-after product in its own right.

Looking back, I had unwittingly been "wearing" paste replicas of love, while the true treasure lay secure, locked in the Book on my bedside table — a Book I revered but seldom opened. I claimed the treasure of this love but seldom displayed it before others. I was no different from those who follow many paste versions of Christ's teachings, manufactured over time, and prefer them to the truth. They are easier to follow, and folks "like the look of them."

Was it through fear of rejection that I had kept that Love hidden, or did the paste version hold more appeal? My choice of reading material, though not inappropriate in and of itself, consumed so much of my time and thoughts that it left little time to

dwell on the things of God. I've since made a conscious effort to cut back, to be more selective in my choice of reading materials, to spend more time in reflecting on God's Word.

First place

A lawyer tested Jesus asking what he should do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus turned the question back on him, the lawyer quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5. He said we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love our neighbors with the same intensity as we love ourselves. God demands and deserves first place in our lives — what I had failed to do.

I'm not alone. We as a people have forgotten to grow in the love of the Lord. We are afraid to do more than dabble our toes in its waters. We've stood on the fringe of life long enough, unable or unwilling to let go and place ourselves completely in God's hands. We need to trust our lives to God, realizing that He is supreme, knows best, and will do His best on our behalf when we submit fully to Him.

Discipleship and desire

Discipleship and a desire to share this greatest of loves with a hurting world should naturally follow. We have God's Word at our disposal, along with the assistance of pastors and teachers, Bible classes, seminars, and other helps. It behooves us to utilize them.

Discipleship then becomes . . .

- mothers and fathers nurturing their children and bringing them up to know and love the Lord;

- one-on-one sharing of God's love with neighbors, close friends, and strangers we meet;

- sharing His love with immediate family members and other relatives; and

- standing for Christ in the strength of God's love when no one else speaks out.

Jesus sent twelve disciples to preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He promised that the Spirit would give them the words to speak should they be called to account by governors and kings. Taught by the Lord himself, the men had been ably equipped for service (Matthew 10:5-20). Yet one of them loved this world more than he loved the Lord. He was a thief who helped himself from the common purse and turned traitor. He had all the same advantages and training as the eleven, yet had failed to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Love! God's love! Embrace it. Plunge in and become completely immersed in that Living Water filled with pure love from above.

Right priorities

Perhaps we feel ill equipped to handle unexpected comments or questions that may arise when we reach out to others. Perhaps we have missed opportunities and utilized the "I should have said" and "Why didn't I?" remarks to chastise ourselves after each seeming failure. Perhaps we feel inadequate to vocalize the thoughts and meditations of our hearts.

Think of it like this. Do we push away and reject our Suitor in embarrassment or disinterest? Are we afraid others will discover our love letters to Him? Are we living a lie, as did Judas, more interested in the things of this world than in the Christ we claim to follow? Are our stocks and bonds and the rise and fall of the dollar and interest rates more consuming as books were to me, eclipsing the fate of those dying without Christ?

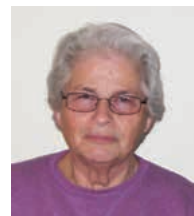
I didn't realize in my earlier years that anything that super-

“We as a people have forgotten to grow in the love of the Lord. We are afraid to do more than dabble our toes in its waters.”

sedes our love for the Lord becomes an idol, unintentional though it may be. We are called to love Him above all and to let that love take us beyond the fringe of our feelings to the world. **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk

and her husband, Nick (retired pastor), are isolated CoG7 members in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Dorothy co-edits *Afterglow* and writes and self-publishes books.



Questions & Answers



Jesus says that if I don't hate my family and forsake everything, I can't be His disciple (Luke 14:24-33). Was this extreme discipleship meant only for some people in Jesus' day, or is it for all Christians?

The word *hate* in verse 26 is recognized by most Bible scholars as meaning "to love less than." This is confirmed in Matthew 10:37, a parallel text, where Jesus says, "He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Christ does not require those who follow Him to literally loathe, detest, abhor, and recoil from anyone — neither our worst enemies nor our own family. To do so would be to reject His own example of compassionate care for His mother (John 19:25-27), His teachings about loving one another (13:34, 35), and loving our enemies (Matthew 5:44ff).

Rather, these instructions address the overarching issue of life's priority and chief relationship. Repeatedly, our Lord insists that those who would follow Him to the end must adopt the mindset of full surrender to His will by loving God with all their being and more than anything or anyone else. Seeking first His kingdom and righteousness, this is called in Matthew 6:33.

Thankfully, many believers are surrounded by believing family members who are fully surrendered to the same Lord as they. Those who are not "surrounded by the surrendered" are more likely to face the necessity of deciding between the will of their family and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In asking us to subordinate family priorities to kingdom priorities, Jesus affirms that "we ought to obey God rather than men" — even if those "men" are the closest people on earth to us. This is the family "hate" of Luke 14:26.

Jesus' words in verse 33 of Luke's fourteenth chapter summarize His extraordinary claims upon us: "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." Yes, this is a radical — total and complete — demand, but

it need not be seen as extreme, excessive, or disproportionate. Here's why.

The Bible paints a picture of our Lord as the divine Son who shared the Father's glory from the beginning, then gave it all up to become a Servant-Son of Man in this fallen world and to die for our sinful race. Then Scripture says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Just as His surrender and discipleship were radical for heaven's supreme cause, so ours can be total and complete in our human context.

Radical discipleship will not seem extreme to us if we accept the divine principle by which the universe operates: He who seeks to save his life shall lose it, but he who gives up his life for Christ's sake and the gospel's shall keep it unto life eternal. Jesus says this, or something much like it, in all four Gospels (Matthew 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 14:25-33; John 12:24-26).

In applying this principle, we must take care to distinguish between cause and effect. It is not because we commit ourselves fully in obedient service to Christ that He loves, accepts, and forgives us. On the contrary, He loved us and gave Himself completely to save us while we were yet sinners. We are saved by His grace, not by our surrendered lives. The more we see and grasp of God's grace in Christ, the more we are increased in devotion to Him who modeled total surrender in His radically obedient response to the Father in heaven.

We do not yet see all things in our lives brought into complete obedience to Him. But we see Jesus — who suffered in the flesh and, by God's grace, tasted death for us all — crowned with glory and honor. It is fitting for us, at it was for Him, that we be made perfect by the "suffering" of complete surrender to His will (Hebrews 2:8-10). This is the "forsake all that he has" of Luke 14:33.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



ONE LORD *Medley*

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Unity • Service • Mission

Corinthian Crisis

The church in Corinth was much like the church today: It struggled with its Christian identity in the midst of a pagan culture and was trying to deal with many problems as a result. One of them, and quite possibly the worst, didn't come from outside but from inside: their fleshly bent toward divisiveness, "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves" (2 Corinthians 10:12b).

Apparently, some of the Corinthians believed that their importance could be measured by comparing the effectiveness of their ministries and spiritual gifts according to outward appear-

ance. Others mistakenly believed that their spiritual training and discipleship ranked superior, based on their teacher's résumé and credentials (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 3:1; 10:7-17; 11:5, 6).

No surprise that these actions and attitudes caused dissension and division among the Corinthian brethren, partly because this young, carnal church (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) was looking to such expressions and accomplishments to measure an individual's worth in the congregation (2 Corinthians 10:7).

We too can fall into the same carnal trap and fail to live in unity as a church. But we can find help in Paul's epistles to the Corinthians.

To correct the Corinthians

and bring unity among dissension, Paul reminded them that, although there is "diversities of gifts . . . differences of ministries . . . [and] diversities of activities," the impetus of these gifts and ministries is the same: the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the God and Father of all (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Paul appealed for unity to those "measuring themselves by themselves," saying, "If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's" (2 Corinthians 10:7b).

The Spirit is the force that actuates the gifts given by the Father, through Jesus (Ephesians 4:8). The Spirit is the very presence of God who comes down from heaven and brings peace

among the members of the body. He is in complete agreement with the Father and Son and with all who have the unquenched Spirit dwelling in them. The Spirit does not disagree or compete with Himself; therefore, if anyone is divisive, the cause is of the flesh, not of the Spirit.

“There is . . . one Spirit . . . one Lord . . . one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). Paul stressed the fact that we, the church, are all disciples of one Lord. He sought to encourage the church’s unity, and stomp out contentions, by articulating our collective discipleship and individual gifting under one Lord for one common purpose: the salvation of humanity!

This Divine gifting is for His own program, not ours. Paul said:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v. 11-13).

Viewing the gifts and ministries of the body of Christ through the lens of our Lord is the greatest unifying factor for a divided church. We all have different gifts. We all have sat under the ministry of different pastors and teachers, and we all have different callings. But our common bond is that we are all disciples of one Lord, who uses each member of the body in different ways for one common purpose.

No member is expendable (1 Corinthians 12:15-31). The body of Christ is a community disciplined by Christ, put in place and chosen by God for the building up of itself, so that we may carry on God’s mission to share the good news.

If we remain babes, divisive and contentious, we cannot grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we fail to recognize our gifts as graces of God and that each member is just as important as another, we will be divided. If we compete against each other rather than engage in spiritual war against the Enemy, we will miss our opportunity to let our light shine before others. And if we compare ourselves among ourselves, forgetting our common call to the discipleship and ministry of the Lord, we cannot fulfill our common purpose.

Our gifts are deposited in us so that we may be conduits for the discipleship of one Lord, over one body, for one purpose.

— David Ross
Corunna, MI



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it’s so easy to focus on making ourselves comfortable and fulfilling every whim that we forget following Jesus means saying no to our desires and comforts for the sake of furthering His kingdom.

I used to think this meant I had to do something “big,” like become a missionary or start an orphanage. Now I realize following Jesus is serving Him where I am, with the people He has placed in front of me. At times I’ve felt bad because, as a housewife, I am around mostly Christians. It didn’t seem as important to serve them as it did to serve the lost.

Then I read Matthew 10:42: “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” This made me realize that God is pleased when we serve His people, even if we merely give them a glass of cold water. His people are important to Him, and He delights in seeing us care for them.

Every day I try to ask God to identify someone He wants me to minister to. God is faithful to bring people to my mind and show me what I can do. It can be as simple as calling someone on the phone and asking how they are doing, making a meal,

Serving Where I Am

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24, NIV throughout).

“What are you sacrificing for Jesus?” the Holy Spirit asked me one day. In our society

or visiting someone. Often times the people He wants me to serve are right in my own home, like my husband. Some days it's the widow at church, the Christian who feels alone and depressed, or someone who is sick.

But I repeatedly find myself saying, "Yes, Lord" and then not obeying, like the two sons in Matthew 21:28-31. It is easy to be busy with things that are important to me and forget what God asked me to do. This is especially true when I know that if I do what He wants me to, I will not have time to finish the tasks of the day.

Then God reminds me, "Take up your cross and follow Me. Sacrifice *this* for Me." My love for Him takes over, and I lay down my agenda for His. I always feel blessed when I obey, because I know I have pleased Him — even if my dishes don't get washed until tomorrow.

— Debbie Steinhauser
Stanberry, MO

Go!

Have you ever seen a field before or after it's been planted? An unplanted field has great potential, depending on different factors like seed and soil quality, as well as water and temperature. Once planted, the seed produces a harvest. The harvest is beautiful and the grain important for food, trading, and replanting next year.

Jesus said the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. He didn't say the harvest is small or hard to find. No, it is bountiful, ready and waiting (Luke 10:2).

Because of this great harvest of souls, Christ has commanded all His disciples to go into that field to proclaim the good news of His kingdom, to baptize and make disciples of all nations so they too may become children of God and citizens of His kingdom (Matthew 28:16-20).

Disciples love the Master and learn to do what He does. The Master loves His disciples and is eager to teach them everything He knows and does.

Christ's followers join Him in His work, just as He carried out the will of His Father (John 5:17, 19, 20). Their priorities are the same as their Master's. If Jesus had a heart for lost sheep who have no shepherd, shouldn't those who follow His teachings share His heart?

If disciples share the heart of Jesus, then they will go as He commanded. Depending on the skills and spiritual gifts God has given each follower of Christ, this will take various forms. However, the result is the same: making new disciples to continue the work of the kingdom.

If we truly are God's children and are to be rewarded as such, we must show evidence of His work in our lives through fruit-



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ful service in His harvest field. When the harvest is ready, too often those who should be active in God's vineyard lack proper understanding of His mission or have other priorities. This is the central problem Jesus states in Matthew 9:37-39.

Opening our hearts to being committed disciples of Christ can happen only if we surrender to God's call. If we haven't, are we seeking help from the Lord to do so? Are we seeking advice from others who understand the will of God and carry out His work with excellence? Are we adjusting priorities in every area of life to achieve His mission, weeding out what compromises our ability to fulfill it?

This is the cost of discipleship.

We must give God access to our lives and allow His seed to be planted in our hearts by the Word, prayer, and active participation in the body of Christ. We must sow that seed. Otherwise, we allow the Devil to plant his seed and distract us from the mission, leading us to destruction. Our fruit bears witness to who we are and whether our lives align with God and His purposes.

As we await the final harvest when Christ returns to set up His kingdom on earth forever, let's take seriously our responsibility to "go," joining Him in the harvest field now. Let's allow Christ to plant His seed in us so that we can share with others before the end comes. May God raise up a vast army of workers to go in His name! **BA**

— Bryan Cleeton
Thornton, CO



Sing a Morning Hymn

by Whaid Rose

The first time Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe, he half-heartedly said, “So you’re the little lady who wrote the book that started the war.” Stowe is famous for her novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), a heart-wrenching portrayal of the plight of slaves, credited for sparking the Civil War and England’s abolitionist movement.

But Stowe’s celebrated novel was only one of her many works. Her social activism was merely an outgrowth of a deeper passion.

Stowe’s work was driven by her faith, and her public life fueled by her private devotion. This woman habitually rose early to enjoy the freshness of a new day and time alone with God. Not surprisingly, the hymn she wrote is one for morning meditation, titled “Still, Still With Thee.” Four of the hymn’s six stanzas are in the box, right.

Daybreak symbolizes new life, fresh mercies, the beauty of sunrise, songs of wakening birds, flight of night’s shadows — “Until the day breaks and the shadows flee . . .” (Song of Solomon 4: 6; 2:17, NIV). But there’s something “lovelier than daylight.” It is waking to the “sweet consciousness” of God’s abiding presence: “When I awake, I am still with thee” (Psalm 139:18, KJV).

For context, Psalm 139 is David’s exploration of God’s omnipresence and omniscience, divine attributes whereby He is everywhere present all at once and is intimately acquainted with all His creation, including those made in His image. These are anchor points for the sanctity and dignity of human life, encouragement for those who spend themselves defending these inalienable rights.

They were for Stowe, and the hymn they inspired was deeply meaningful to fellow activist Booker T. Washington. Having fallen gravely ill while traveling in New York and sensing death was imminent, he requested (against medical advice) to be brought back to the Tuskegee, Alabama campus. Arriving there at dawn, and gazing across the sun-crowned landscape, Washington requested that the chapel choir sing “Still, Still With Thee.” As they did, he closed his eyes in death (November 14, 1915).

This hymn is sung at Tuskegee chapel services to this day. Don’t miss the resurrection theme in the final stanza. Morning is symbolic of resurrection, fadeless day, life’s shadows gone, forever with Him.

Until then, don’t let today’s microwave culture squeeze you into its mold. Take the crockpot approach — slow, unhurried. Do it early, day still unsoiled by life’s toils and cares. This was Stowe’s secret. Make it yours.



**Still, still with Thee,
when purple morning
breaketh,
When the bird waketh,
and the shadows flee:
Fairer than morning,
lovelier than daylight,
Dawns the sweet
consciousness, I am with
Thee.**

**Alone with Thee, amid
the mystic shadows,
The solemn hush of
nature newly born;
Alone with Thee in
breathless adoration,
In the calm dew and
freshness of the morn.**

**When sinks the soul,
subdued by toil, to
slumber,
Its closing eye looks up
to Thee in prayer;
Sweet the repose
beneath the wings’
o’ershading,
But sweeter still to wake
and find Thee there.**

**So shall it be at last, in
that bright morning
When the soul waketh
and life’s shadows flee;
O in that hour, fairer
than daylight dawning,
Shall rise the glorious
thought, I am with Thee.**

Unchanging Light

Overwhelmed by winter's
hard, withered hand,
aspen, oak, and elm stand
gray-haired and naked in a leafless stupor
as if those lush, green days,
those endless bouquets
of summer had never been;
darkness descends at 4 p.m.
Automobiles scurry across land
that no longer seems either familiar
or safe — as if our world had been abandoned
to the thick, oily grasp
of night, as if the light
was forever gone and would
be no more . . .

but there is a great Door.
Entering in, we find
the Light Himself
in whom is no change,
no darkness descending
in periodic shift —
thanks be to God for His
unspeakable gift.

Francis Freed
2 Corinthians 9:15





Stage acting reveals the importance of real life in Christ. **by Ron Gallagher**

When you're seventeen, finding anything about yourself that resembles an asset is a good thing. Regardless of whether or not you developed it on purpose, if having it or doing it helped to hide your insecurities and boost your basement-level self-esteem, it was to be treasured.

I found such a treasure. I discovered that I could take my right hand and push the index finger of my left hand backward until my fingertip touched the back of that same hand. As you would expect, everybody immediately recognized the coolness of that — except for some girls who screwed up their faces and asked, "Why would

you do that?" My notoriety was enhanced in that none of my friends could do it, and when new people came around, it was always a requested addendum to the standard introductions.

Some things you discover about yourself at seventeen don't go over nearly as well as others. I liked reading, for instance, which I was OK with. But then I discovered that I liked reading Shakespeare. I didn't mean to like it, so it was probably some inherited defect, and I would certainly never have discussed it out loud with anyone.

At seventeen, I was basically trusting of adults, and I don't recall ever thinking of librarians, in general, as being evil. You'd think you could trust a librarian to be discreet, especially one who noticed something as potentially destructive to a guy's life as liking Shakespeare. You'd think

she would keep it to herself, or at least only bring it up in conversations that take place outside of school, and at least three hundred miles away, and with people who don't know you.

Unfortunately, no such consideration was forthcoming from Loose Lips Lucy, the librarian. She managed to orchestrate an image adjustment for me that I couldn't have overcome even if I could have bent my finger into a square knot. The librarian's excitement over my Shakespeare affliction and the untimely demise of my ego transformed the vision of my future into a barren wasteland that stretched out forever, or at least for another year.

But God's grace emerged in the form of an unexpected and somewhat redemptive turn of events. The English Department decided to bring Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to life on our high school stage for the spring theatrical event. Let's just say that my name came up. My career as an actor blossomed that spring. It unfurled into the zenith of its glory and faded into oblivion in the course of three productions on that stage. I discovered new definitions of *Shakespearean tragedy* in that process. I also discovered that there is something strangely compelling about the whole "actor" thing.

Center attraction

Everyone fantasizes at times about being someone other than who they really are, someone radically different, someone more exciting, more accomplished, more revered — more loved. Actors get to do all that, to actually be that other person. OK, that's not quite accurate, is

it? They don't really get to "be" the imaginary character. They might become physically and emotionally involved in the lifestyles of those they portray, but that's as close as they get. The actors themselves are real, but everything they present is illusion. We know that, yet we're drawn to it, and to them, anyway.

Actors seem to have such freedom, with none of the downsides. They get to be the hero or the heroine without assuming any of the risks they would face if their pretended situations were even remotely real. Actors get to defend the innocent, punish the guilty, rescue the captives, and save the world. They get to kill people, seduce people, blow up buildings, and overcome incredible odds at just the right moment. They get to love with no devotion, hate with no animosity, cohabit with no shared commitment, and live and work in a world made by set designers, not architects. Actors can be everyone from serial killers to Jesus Christ and have no accountability for their actions. No wonder so many people want to be one.

We covet the idea of a world where our actions do not have attendant consequences, even though we know in our hearts that such a world doesn't exist. We cherish the idea of being someone else, without having to really "be" someone else. And therein lies an irritating truth: Actors and actresses must at some point exit the stage, because acting is temporary.

Eventually, the last line of the script must be delivered. Then the curtains come down. The cameras stop. Lights go off, cos-

tumes are discarded, and the makeup that hid all those defects finds its way down some bathroom drain. What awaits actors then? A life of waiting for another script, another mask, another stage, and another curtain to hide behind?

Enter Jesus

Jesus didn't do well among the Actors' Guild of His day — meaning, of course, the religious leadership. The life He called people to incited opposition

“Everyone fantasizes at times about being someone other than who they really are, someone more exciting, more accomplished, more revered — more loved.”

from them because they saw it as a threat. After all, if a "star" Pharisee's audience began to find fulfillment apart from watching him, and trying to emulate him, then his empty craft would soon be reduced to an idle and irrelevant curiosity.

The underlying problem confronting actors in any age is that the life they portray can't really be lived except in brief excerpts on a stage. In spite of that, the life of an actor is powerfully compelling because it seems to offer so much — so much freedom, so many privileges, so much at-

tention, so much pleasure; but mainly, so many ways to hide who we really are and what our life is really like.

Living fully

Perhaps we should put the brakes on our covetous desire to be like the actors we adore and ask a pertinent question: Which is more important for us to see? The fantasy they work so hard to reveal or the truth they work so hard to hide? Jesus countered the "thespian mentality" in His day with a call to be authentic, and He added a warning that all the actors, then and now, should hear: "There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2).

Our Lord calls us to abandon our pretenses and live life in all its fullness, the way God intended it — to have romance with all its uncertainties, love with all its pain, danger with all its risks, courage with all its fears, and rainbows with all their stormy backgrounds. From the painful reality of a cross, and bearing all our fail-

ures and weaknesses, Jesus cries out to offer something greater than any actor's role. He offers a life that can really be lived, a stage that has no curtain, an audience that fills the world, and a story that never ends. He offers us the glory of today without a mask and tomorrow without a script. No audition necessary. **BA**

Ron Gallagher
writes from Mechanicsville, VA.





Focused on the Father

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Talking to God is not a show of spirituality.

by Roger C. Palms

Three times a week I go to the health club. I need it to help control my cholesterol. So I ride the stationary bicycle, walk on the treadmill, work out on a couple of machines — and watch other people.

Directly in my line of sight is the weight-lifting area and next to that, a wall of mirrors. Sometimes people come in, stretch, and carefully start lifting weights. Except for an occasional glance, they ignore the mirrors. But not everyone does that.

Others stand in front of the mirrors, flex their muscles, lift a few weights, check their muscles again, and then walk back and forth in front of the mirrors to see themselves in motion. Then

they lift a bit more, check their muscles again, and head for the showers. They don't appear to take weight-lifting nearly as seriously as how they look while they are lifting.

One day it hit me. When I pray, do I do the same thing? Am I meeting God or looking at myself in the mirror? When I do my "spiritual exercising," what is my focus? Am I concentrating on the way I look to myself when I am "exercising," or focusing on what God has to say to me?

Prayer is a time to meet God. Its purpose is not to make me feel good about myself because I'm doing something "spiritual." The value is in what happens during prayer, not in the way I look because I have prayed. I think Samuel knew that; so did Ezekiel. But what they understood, I've found, is not so easy to learn.

Listening servant

God wanted to do something with Samuel just as He wants to do something with me. When He called Samuel, the boy did not recognize God's voice. Samuel thought, *It must be Eli calling me.* But it wasn't Eli. Finally, after being awakened three times by Samuel, Eli realized what was happening. He instructed Samuel, "Say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Eli didn't tell Samuel, "God is speaking to you, Samuel. Go enjoy His voice and savor the experience." He didn't instruct Samuel to focus on what was happening to him or how he felt because of what he was doing. Instead, Eli taught Samuel to respond to God's call by listening attentively. Samuel's response acknowledged the proper relationship between himself and God:

“You are Lord; I am your servant. You are speaking; I will listen.”

Samuel was not looking at himself or even at his ability to listen. He was simply open to what God had to say. He was focused completely on his Lord, as a servant should be, and was ready to receive a word from God.

Right focus

In my praying, am I listening to God, or am I noticing me listening to God? There is a difference. Where is my focus? Is it on God or on my own spirituality? If being too casual in prayer is one danger, being too intense as a pray-er is another. When I focus on how intensely I'm praying, that self-focused intensity can distract my focus from God.

Seeking the face of God has to be an intentional act. I shift from looking into the mirror that reflects my own image and focus instead on God and what He is saying. He is the purpose for the visit, not me. His voice is the one I need to listen to, not my own.

Listening and life

This does not mean that I have to leave who I am or what I am feeling outside the prayer closet door. Listening to God is not about going into some trance-like state in which I remove myself from my surroundings. I meet with God and listen to Him in the context of my life, not removed from it.

None of us is immune to what happens to us. All of life invades our prayer time. God knows that. He wants to hear about our anxieties and concerns. But voicing

those things is not the primary purpose of praying. Rather, we go to God in prayer to hear what He has to say to us.

I need to remember that I'm praying to a God who already knows who I am and what I'm facing. Knowing that, I don't have to focus on me; I can focus on Him. Many times the presence of God, not answers from Him, is the blessing of meeting with Him. I find great hope in the awareness that God wants to

“Prayer is a time to meet God. Its purpose is not to make me feel good about myself because I'm doing something 'spiritual.' ”

meet me in the context of who I am and what I am facing.

Meeting God

Just as He did with Samuel, God also spoke clearly to the prophet Ezekiel. When he went off to be alone with God on the plain, Ezekiel was given a responsibility that would make anyone tremble. He was to tell people what God said, to tell them the truth about themselves (Ezekiel 3:16-21). It was a frightening responsibility, enough to make anyone want to back away.

But God did more than speak

to Ezekiel; He showed the prophet His glory. God had that opportunity because Ezekiel was looking at Him, not at himself. God could reveal His glory because the prophet had responded to His invitation to meet with Him. In that encounter, Ezekiel didn't glean answers to great theological questions; instead, he experienced the very presence of God in His glory! Ezekiel's meeting with God was not self-centered but God-centered. In it, God chose to reveal His glory, and what Ezekiel saw overwhelmed him.

How great was it to see the glory? Ezekiel tells us: “I fell facedown” (v. 23). No mirrors, no muscle-flexing — just meeting God and experiencing His glory.

Does God have that chance with me? When does God have my full attention? When, if He chooses to, can God show me His glory?

Beyond self-evaluation

When I go to prayer seeking God, it isn't time for personal introspection, a “how-am-I-doing as a prayer warrior” kind of evaluation. I don't pray to be impressed with myself. I am not standing in front of a spiritual mirror in order to admire my spiritual muscles. There are no mirrors in the place of prayer. **BA**

Roger C. Palms, former editor of *Decision* magazine, writes from Fort Meyers, FL. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





Tabernaciling

by Melody Manwell

The Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot, gives us a vivid picture of what it means to follow Christ.

In Old Testament times, the native-born Israelites were commanded to build huts (or *sukkahs*) and live in them for seven days during the holiday.

Jewish people still do this today. They set up a 2'x4' frame and put up walls of plastic, then a roof of branches, leaves, and decorations. The structure must show some sky, or it isn't a *sukkah*. A tent won't do. Then, for seven days they eat, sleep, and spend time in the hut.

Why is this done? Leviticus 23:43 explains, "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

God says He wanted His people to remember the Exodus, when they were camping in tents, no longer in their houses back in Egypt. Just to reminisce? No! When you're camping, you're vulnerable to the elements, living in a temporary situation and constantly moving.

Think about the last time you were in a tent. Remember that storm? It's not as easy as putting up an umbrella and running into the house. You can't become set in your ways in a tent. Your vulnerability requires that you constantly adapt to change.

When you are in the *sukkah*, you are totally, physically dependent on God. So remembering the Exodus for Israel meant recalling moving when the cloud moved, depending on God for food and water — for their very existence.

In God's mind, those were the good old days because the ones who survived the experience had learned to rely on Him and knew Him in a tangible way. God was saying to the Israelites, "This is how I want you: totally dependent on Me, able to move when I say move, ready for any change."

Are we willing to be this vulnerable to God? *Vulnerable* means "being open to attack, capable of being wounded." Who wants that? But with God we must make ourselves open, knowing that everything He does to and for us is for our good.

The truth is, we often rely on our own strength and are set in our own ways. But if we want to truly dwell with and in God, we need to find that place of vulnerability and dependence.

Sukkot is a word for us today. Put up a *sukkah* at least once in your life, to experience vulnerability to God. Can you honestly say that you are ready and willing for any change He might bring to you? If He is truly Lord of your life, this is what He expects.

Even Jesus had to experience this dependence. The same word, *tabernacle* (or *hut*), describes what happened in the incarnation of Christ: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us" (John 1:14).

Think about it. God came down to His creation as a baby and was totally dependent upon His human mother and father. What if they made mistakes? What if they went the wrong direction in their lives? How would that affect the plan? *Becoming human made the plan of salvation vulnerable!*

If Jesus could be vulnerable like this, can't we give up our rights to live by our own strength in order to truly dwell with Him?

The physical vulnerability at the Feast of Tabernacles draws a concrete picture of what Christ desires from us: openness to His Spirit and dependence on Him. Just as Jesus consented to being vulnerable as a human being, to bring about the most revolutionary redemptive plan the world will ever know, so we can give Him our independent spirit and watch as He creates something amazing out of our lives.

Are you ready for the next level? **BA**

Melody Manwell is married with three children and lives with her family in Battle Creek, MI. She is currently a homeschool mom and early childhood education major. Scripture quotations are from the *King James Version*.



Live That Life



by Jael Banda Hamilton

My husband and I have been youth leaders for twenty years. Lately, we've noticed that our youth have a bold, almost reckless, abandon for their faith. We "older" folks proceed with caution, while they are unashamed in their worship, fellowship, and witness.

However, as we dig deeper into their faith, we find that the actual teachings of Jesus are not well known to them. They have their Bible knowledge and can quote Moses, David, and Paul. But when we ask them to quote Jesus, they freeze.

Yes, these youth accept Jesus as Savior. They bend their knee at the cross where He gave His life in atonement. But they don't see any more than that — the sacrifice on the cross.

Writing that sentence makes me argue with myself: *Isn't the cross enough?* I hope to not take away from the cross or add to it. My concern isn't just for youth but for adults as well. If we don't know the message of Jesus — His words and deeds — something is wrong.

In the Great Commission Jesus instructs us to make disciples and teach them to do everything He commanded (Matthew 28:19, 20). But what if we, and the disciples we make, don't even know or do His commandments? This should concern us.

Jesus preexisted His virgin birth and is God in the flesh. If this is true, then everything He said and did is necessary to our lives. But do we know it?

I see the same lack of knowledge among adults in this political season. Many are loyal to the teachings of a political party or candidate, even over Christ himself. We know the candidates' positions, aspirations, and goals for the country on social and economic matters, and we align ourselves accordingly. Meanwhile, many adults don't know the positions, aspirations, and goals of Christ for the church (Matthew 5-7).

Is Jesus only Savior? Is He not also Lord? If Jesus is Savior *and* Lord, must we not obey Him? John answers this question: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3a).

Recently, a youth asked me why Adam and Eve sinned. "They had it so good," she said.

I pondered this statement. Did they have it so good? Then why did they sin? Adam and Eve's sin was not eating a forbidden fruit but failing to obey God's command — failing to submit. Instead they followed their own will. I concluded that we have a disconnect with Adam and Eve because we don't recognize that their sin is our sin.

Submission has always been a negative word for me, creating an inner argument of rebellion and unwillingness. Submitting to someone else's will creates fear of abuse and of being misled.

It wasn't until I started reading the words of Jesus that I began to see submission as a positive thing: "not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus himself submitted to His Father's will, even when He was tempted and afraid.

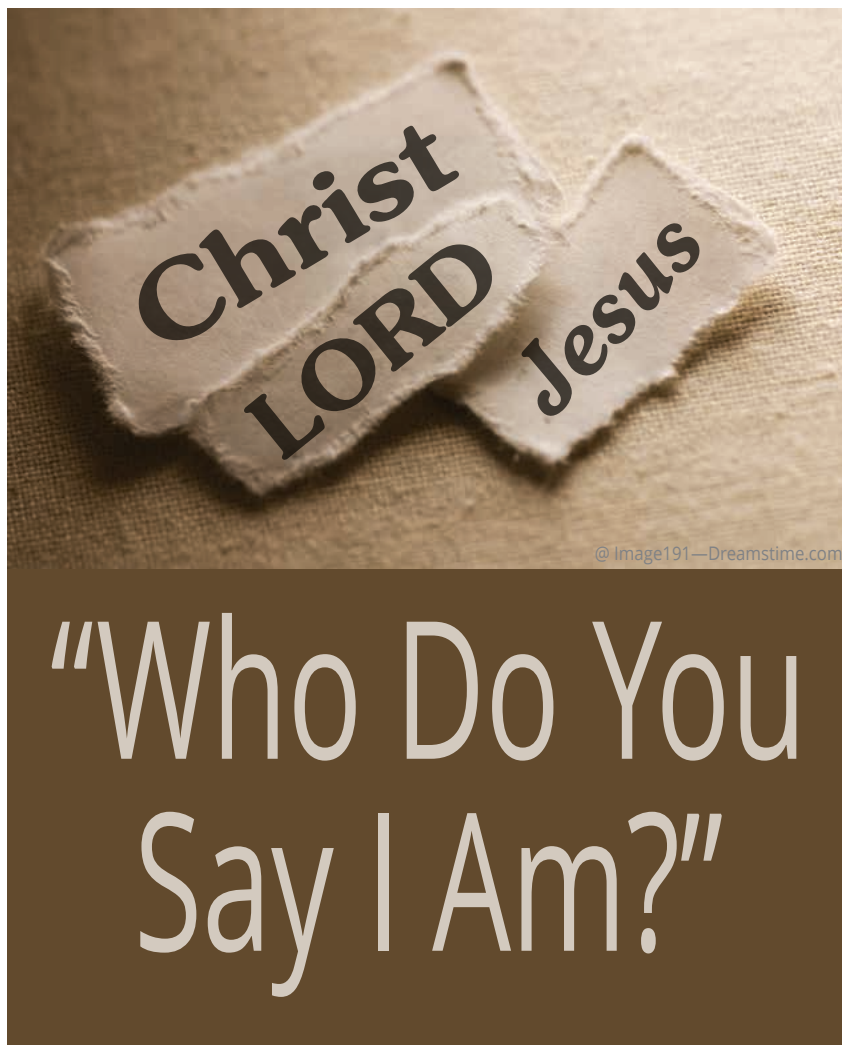
If my Savior submitted, then why can't I? "Lord, Your will, not mine, be done" became my prayer (after thoughts of "I don't want to," "I don't like this," and "Let me convince You why my way is better"). I started to relinquish control with that prayer of surrender.

Writer Ray Vander Laan describes Jesus as Rabbi (teacher) and His disciples as *talmudine* (students). In first century Jewish culture, the *talmudine* not only followed the rabbi wherever he went but also copied him. This is why Jesus says, "Follow Me" and why John writes, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

By imitating Jesus, we understand that an abundant life is one lived in obedience to His character and commands. Let's live that life. I bet our youth will follow too. **BA**

Jael Banda Hamilton lives in Houston, TX, and attends the Galena Park Church of God (Seventh Day), with her husband, Scott, and three children.





The singular question at the root of authentic discipleship.

by Jason Overman

If we are to be disciples, shouldn't we begin by asking just who we will follow? Or more pointedly, who is our Master? At whose feet will we sit and learn? At whose command will we get up and follow, leaving behind our old life? Who will be the object of our love and loyalty, the one we will trust and obey — even to death?

For the world, questions like these are simply offensive. "I'm

my own master," they'll say. "I surrender my freedom to no one." That would be an honest answer.

But most Christians would respond differently, quickly supplying a name: Jesus. In just the past year we have heard dramatic examples of those pressed to give an answer at the edge of the sword or the barrel of a gun. In our own country, and abroad, we have seen courageous witnesses claim "Jesus" and die.

Would you? Could you? It's a special Master who shapes disciples like this. Are we so formed to be witnesses such as these? Or do our actions, despite

words, show us to be more like the world — living as our own masters and coveting our own freedom?

Costly discipleship

We are not all called to martyrdom, but if we are disciples of Jesus, we are all called to follow Him and die. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this:

The cross is laid on every Christian. . . . It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death — we give over our lives to death. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.¹

Bonhoeffer's challenge is based on the words of Jesus in Mark:

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it (Mark 8:34, 35, KJV).

Jesus' call to "follow me" is a powerful command with a provocative condition: "Deny yourself and take up your cross." But note the "Whosoever will" at the beginning. It indicates that Jesus' call and condition for discipleship aren't forced. Following Jesus is a decision to be made, a cost to be weighed.

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), 89.

Who is Jesus?

This brings us back to our earlier questions: Who is this Master? Who is this Jesus? I suspect how we answer will determine what kind of disciples we will be. It is no accident that just before Jesus explains the cost of discipleship in Mark 8:34, 35, He first asks His disciples two questions:

“Who do men say that I am?”

“But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:27-30).

Whatever else “men” may say, the question for us is “But who do you say . . . ?” It must be true that the answers of mere men cannot produce the kind of disciples Jesus expects to make. Sadly, it is also often true that Christians who would answer as Peter did go on, not as disciples indeed, but more as those with lesser answers.

It’s not enough to have the right answer; we must be captivated and animated by its reality in our whole being. So again, who do you say Jesus is, and what does that mean?

The four Gospels are dedicated to answering these questions and showing how the answer changes everything. Let’s briefly survey what each Gospel says about who Jesus is.

Gospel answers

In Mark, Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question is “You are the Christ” (8:29). The very first verse of this Gospel introduces us to this Jesus *Christ*, and in quoting Isaiah 40:3, verse 3 cries concerning Him, “Prepare the way of the LORD.” The chief priests at the cross derisively state Mark’s last

reference to the Christ: “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (15:32).

In Matthew’s Gospel, Peter’s answer is expanded: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Matthew also introduces us to Jesus Christ in his opening sentence and goes on later in the chapter to identify this Christ as “Immanuel . . . God with us” (1:1, 23). In his closing reference to Christ, just before His crucifixion, Pilate asks the multitude what to do with “Jesus who is called Christ.” They reply,

“Do our actions, despite words, show us to be more like the world — living as our own masters and coveting our own freedom?”

“Let Him be crucified!” (27:22).

In Luke, Peter affirms that Jesus is “The Christ of God” (9:20). Luke first refers to Jesus as Christ at His birth when the angel of the Lord announces to the shepherds that Jesus is “Christ the Lord” (2:11). His final mention of Christ is on the post-resurrection lips of Jesus: “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day” (24:46).

In John’s Gospel, Peter an-

swers in a different setting, and like Matthew: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (6:69). The first reference of Christ in John discloses that “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). John’s last reference to Christ reveals He is Lord and God and that this Gospel was “written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:31).

From beginning to end, the four Gospels reveal that Jesus is Christ, that this Christ is Lord and Son of God, that Christ embodies the grace and truth that define the very nature of God (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 57:3, 10), and that Christ, mysteriously, *is God*. All the Gospels climax with the insistence that this Christ is inseparable from the cross and resurrection life beyond.

What’s in a name?

Jesus’ titles are now domesticated by familiarity, but their original weight, known to Peter and the Gospel writers, helps us answer Jesus’ question more meaningfully.

Christ is of Hebrew background: *Messiah*, translated “the anointed one.” *Messiah* is the long anticipated heir of David and *King of Israel* (Psalm 2:2; 89:20). *Jesus Christ* means “King Jesus.” He’s the promised potentate; His kingdom rule is over all. Disciples serve the king.

The title *Lord* carries the same royal connotations as *Christ*. In the Roman context of New Testament times, Caesar was Lord, priding himself as being the most

sovereign savior of the world. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar was an imposter. If Jesus is Lord, then His call to follow is command.

The title *Lord* gets even more interesting because in its Hebrew background, *Lord* is used to translate the personal name of God: Yahweh. The Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 is a classic example: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” “Christ is Lord” carries the profound claim that Jesus embodies the nature and glory of God (1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:5-11).

Besides the explicit Gospel citations noted above that link Jesus with God, many Old Testament quotations, like Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3, provocatively equate *Lord* Jesus with *Lord* God. Doing so grounds the life of discipleship in the worship of our Maker.

Who is Jesus? The Gospel witness is profound. Note that the very word *gospel* ratifies this by evoking Isaiah’s promised “good tidings” that Yahweh God is coming to reign, and to this Savior and Lord every knee will bow and tongue confess and in His name find justification (40:9; 52:7; 45:20-25). In the Lord Jesus Christ these gospel promises have come to pass (Luke 2:11; Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 5:14-21).

Caught between the Roman and Jewish context, it’s no wonder Christ the Lord ended on a cross. But that same weight of meaning also explains why He’s the resurrection and the life and calls us with authority to discipleship that is patterned after Him.

Glorious name

“But who do you say that I am?” We find that the Gospel answer is loaded. We find in Jesus Christ the Lord – this mysterious union of human son of David and divine Son of God (Luke 1:32; Romans 1:3, 4) – a call to discipleship that refuses to be taken lightly. It bids us to both imitation, as one would a big brother, and worship, as one would the Almighty (Hebrews 1:1-14; 2:9-12).

Son of God is the title at-

“*Jesus is the resurrection and the life and calls us with authority to discipleship that is patterned after Him.*”

tached to Christ that may best capture both His messianic and divine natures. It has that same royal association as *Christ* and *Lord*, as in Psalm 2, and much more (John 1:18; 10:36; 19:7). Psalm 72 helps us see how the promise of a faithful human heir of David and the faithful God of Israel unite uniquely in Jesus Christ our Lord:

Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king’s Son (v. 1).

Of this King and Son and God the psalmist continues to speak:

His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And men shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him blessed.
Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
And blessed be His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen and Amen (vv. 17-19).

Is there any doubt that this “glorious name” is Jesus – the name Paul says is “the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9)? Is there any doubt that this name lays a claim on our love and loyalty, to learn and follow, to find resurrection after a cross?

Right answer

“But who do you say that I am?” The answer rings in our ears. We know it; we know the Master’s name. In that name authentic discipleship finds itself and goes the distance. There is nothing left but to follow. As Acts says of Paul and Barnabas, they “risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26).

Called by the Master, let us do likewise. **BA**



Inch by Inch

continued from page 5

longer breathe in the dust from His feet and that their lives and spiritual lungs would soon subsist on the wind of His Spirit.

Jesus poured Himself into His disciples, aware that these men would be responsible for permeating future generations with the gospel. Jesus prepared not only them for this task but also their hearts for the reality that He would not always be with them in the flesh.

These children we are training — they will be the ones to carry the gospel to a generation beyond our time and prepare that generation to carry it to the one beyond theirs. If this is to happen, the kingdom of God cannot remain mere theory that dwells in their minds. They must walk its streets of gold from here into eternity.

That same road runs through our lives under the amazingly loud and colorful big top of parenthood, drawing us past the many intersections of the Information Superhighway, dwarfing its billboards with ones of its own that say, "Peace, be still" as we focus our eyes on the One we call King. **BA**

Amber Riggs is dean of Administration and Student Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry. She, her husband, Bryan, and their four daughters worship with the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Eugene, OR.



Revived and restored

So thankful and we are very blessed that the Lord has called my dear brother Pastor Donald Billy Abugan to serve our Lord Jesus ["Here I Am; Send Me," p. 9, September-October '15]. He used to be a very good nurse till our Almighty God called him to serve Him. Now my brother is the president of the National [Conference] in the Philippines and the ministries he did. He restored all the churches, and now the Church of God (Seventh Day) in the Philippines has revived and restored, and the spirits and souls are growing and getting stronger. Glory to God in the highest!

V. B.

BA Online comments

Enlightening issue

I wanted to congratulate you on the new BA [November-December '15], which I just downloaded and read today. The dramatic "light at the end of the tunnel" cover is very powerful — and I learned something [from], or was encouraged by, every article in the issue.

It was great to see what you did with the "Beast" motif [p. 10],

and I also particularly enjoyed David Kidd's article ["Prophecy: Salvation Issue," p. 8]. I thought your editorial on the "Prophetic Edge" gave a great balance to the issue's theme.

I'm very happy with the way my own article was laid out and produced ["Power Tool," p. 18]. Many thanks!

R. H.

BA Online comments

Thank you for writing and editing the November-December "prophetic" issue of the BA. The words of wisdom by the writers were wonderful expressions of God's love and the challenge we face in humility when we are called to share the Word of God with God's people.

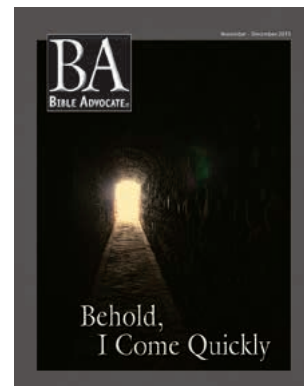
R. M.

Liberty Center, OH

God bless you, Pastor Israel [Steinmetz], 'cause there are other people still thinking that the Roman Catholic Church is the only whore, but thank you for reproof ["The Whore and the Bride," p. 4].

N. F.

BA Online comments





Publications: a World of Possibilities

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE

Behold,
I Come Quickly

**January is Publications
Emphasis Month**

*From the staff of the BAP,
thank you for your gifts
and prayers.*

A Light for Others

by **Bev Brenneise**

Serving others doesn't come naturally. Instead, people instinctively demand "me first." Yet we as Christians should make service a priority in our lives.

God's Word teaches us to serve others, and describes Christlike maturity: being a model, a pacesetter who influences others according to biblical standards. Modeling Christian virtues of spirituality is crucial to effective ministry in the world. Without biblical and godly models, we are cast into a restless sea that tosses up refuse and mud (Isaiah 57:20). Without making God's teachings a part of our lives, we drift from a godly life.

Paul says, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salva-



Thirty-seven young adults from the Pacific Northwest met for the Annual Fall SWORD Retreat in Goldendale, WA, November 6-8, 2015. The weekend was filled with encouraging words from Ben and Joy Sandford, centering on the theme "Building Upon the Cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19-22). Attendees were challenged to make Jesus their chief cornerstone. Saturday evening was a Decade Party, where everyone dressed representing their favorite decade.



Left to right: Ruben Arzet, Ricardo Mendez, and Ernesto Frausto

tion through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14, 15, NIV).

SHINE organizes annual missions in needy countries where team members and volunteers provide patient services. Being a SHINE team member is both fulfilling and humbling: You are allowed to touch others’ lives; you understand what an important part of Christianity this is; and you return home with a better appreciation of what being poor really is.

So it is inspiring when you observe young people in the CoG7 determining to serve God. This response occurred at a recent SHINE presentation.

“When I grow up, I want to be a nurse – and be in SHINE,” shared a young girl. “I want to help little kids!” Her mother has even given her permission to be on Facebook so she can be a friend to SHINE’s ministry (Facebook: *Shine Mission*). We pray that this happens more often.

Soon medical and dental services will be offered at SHINE’s mission to Bogotá, Colombia (February 7-13, 2016), and a lot of preparation has been made. Supplies (medical, dental, glasses, personal items, etc.) have been purchased and donated. A new mission team has been selected, and its members still gather sup-



Women’s Retreat. On Friday, October 30, 2015, one hundred ladies made their way to the Southwest District Women’s Retreat in Midlothian, Texas. Traffic was at a standstill in many places due to heavy rains and flooding. A normal six-hour drive for some took twelve hours. Our God is good all the time! Every one of the ladies arrived safely that night, sharing many miracles of how the Lord delivered them from close calls that could have resulted in accidents. The last group of ladies arrived at 3:00 a.m.

On Saturday, October 31, the ladies were richly blessed by the praise team: Laura Spicer, Josette Chavez, Laura Cortez, Marsha Garza, and Cindy Medrano. Mary Hinds, Judy Hamilton, and Janie Alcalá shared poems about aprons.

Sabbath speakers Priscilla Gilbert, Lisa South, Hannah Cummings, and Kathy Caraway provided a wealth of information on relationships, Bible study, homeschooling, and Christian education. Mari Cummings led the ladies in a group activity titled House Under Construction, and the Corpus Christi and Willard groups hosted an evening of creative activities. What a great way to fellowship!

Sunday, November 1, saw the ladies continuing in praise and prayer. Melissa Fauth put together a PowerPoint recap of the 2015 Southwest District Women’s Retreat.

The 2016 retreat will be co-hosted by the Midland, Texas and Muskogee, Oklahoma churches.

— Rosie Davila
Southwest District Women’s Coordinator



plies to transport as they do last-minute preparation.

Thanks to the many churches and individuals across the US and Canada who have supported SHINE and opened the door to its missions. In ten years, almost 30,000 people have been given free services. Without you, the

SHINE board knows that these missions would not be possible.

Please pray for the Colombia mission and donate funds for it. If you want to participate in services for SHINE missions, please contact Director Ernesto Frausto (cell: 916-896-9267; e-mail: ernestofrausto@att.net).



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International Congress

Baltimore to Buenos Aires

From Baltimore . . .

On October 14-17, 2015, six IMC officers met for planning (see “To Buenos Aires,” below). We also confirmed SHINE’s mission to Colombia in February 2016 and the work of Pastor Rogelio Rapp of Argentina as Cristo Viene missionary for Ecuador. Thank you for your valuable support of these ministries of world evangelism.

. . . To Buenos Aires

For God’s glory, we announce that IMC will have its quadrennial work session in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 10-16, 2016. Under the theme of “The Whole Word for the Whole World,” we will offer the biblical theology of world evangelism and answer the questions often asked about the Church’s mission: What truth should we preach and share? How should we do it? Who, when, where, and why?

The nine months until October is enough time for each member country and sympathizer of the congress to appoint and notify IMC officers of its delegates and potential alternates so they can prepare themselves for this important event. Knowing the price of airfare, lodging, and



IMC officers meeting in Baltimore (L to R): Henry Harley, Calvin Burrell, Heber Vega, Bryan Cleeton, Carlos Ceron, Ramon Ruiz

meals, each country must start saving money now to cover the cost of its delegates so that no one will stay behind because of finances. In many countries, saving one dollar per member this year will be more than enough to cover the expense of their delegate(s) to Buenos Aires.

The Nominating Committee for electing the 2016-2020 IMC officers is Carlos Ceron (Mexico), Paulo Coelho (Portugal), Robert Crawford (UK), and Calvin Burrell, chairman (US). You may contact one of these men to propose candidates.

All topics discussed in this reunion will deal with the main

purposes of the congress:

1) doctrinal unity of the Church and 2) development of programs for world evangelism. The Church in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, and all across Zone 3, is waiting with open arms for us — to share God’s love and the fruits that the Holy Spirit has given us mutually. In spite of the difficulties and challenges we face today in world evangelism, the words of Christ become reality in the church: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18b, KJV).

— Ramon Ruiz Garza (Mexico)
IMC President



Jesus Is Lord!

“Jesus is Lord!” may be the earliest Christian confession and the ultimate Christian creed. Indeed, God made Jesus Lord (Acts 2:36), Jesus acknowledged that He is Lord (John 13:14), and 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ [sincerely, I assume] except by the Holy Spirit” (NIV throughout).

The title “Lord” always indicates authority and, in the Bible, usually denotes Deity. On occasion, people addressed mere mortals as “lord,” not meaning that they were gods but using a title of respect. For example, 1 Peter 3:6 says that Sarah called her husband, Abraham, “lord.” But when the Bible talks about *the* Lord, it means Deity. It’s talking about “God-ness.” This is one of the reasons that early Christians were eventually persecuted by the Roman Empire.

In the Roman Empire, many people of position and property were called “lord.” Citizens of the empire might call their regional ruler “lord,” employees might call their employer “lord,” and certainly slaves would call their owner “lord.” But when it came to “Lord,” with a capital L, they recognized only one: Caesar! The Romans worshipped Caesar as a god.

This led to problems for early Christians. Within the Roman Empire, a standard greeting from a Roman soldier or official was “Caesar is Lord!” But knowing the connotations of *Lord*, Christians couldn’t say that greeting. When agreement was demanded, they would have to say, “No, Jesus is Lord.” Christians refused to worship Caesar, so they were persecuted by Caesar.

Back then, saying “Jesus is Lord!” really meant something. It was an incredible statement of faith and commitment.

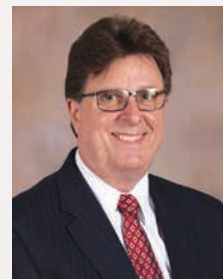
In his book *Disciple*, Argentinian Juan Carlos Ortiz suggests that *Lord* has lost its meaning. He points out that in Spanish, the word for *Lord* is *Señor*. But the word for *Mister* is also *Señor*.

So Jesus is *Señor*, but Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones are also *Señor*. The great declaration of Christ’s authority and Deity, the great declaration that used to indicate incredible faith and commitment, writes Dr. Ortiz, has in our day come to be “Jesus is Mister!” In English, we have separate words for *Mister* and for *Lord*, yet we face the same problem: The word *Lord* has lost much of its biblical meaning.

So what does “Jesus is Lord!” mean in our day-to-day lives? It means that we are obligated to obey and to serve Him. Jesus instructed, “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15). In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked some disobedient followers, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” “Jesus is Lord!” means that He is our Master and we are His slaves: “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:17, 18). It means that Jesus must be given first place in everything: “He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:18).

Supremacy is exactly what we, the members of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), wish to give to Jesus. When we say that we are Christ-centered, we acknowledge the position and authority that God the Father has given Jesus. He is Savior. He is Lord. He is God. He is at the heart and center of all that we are and do.

— Loren Stacy

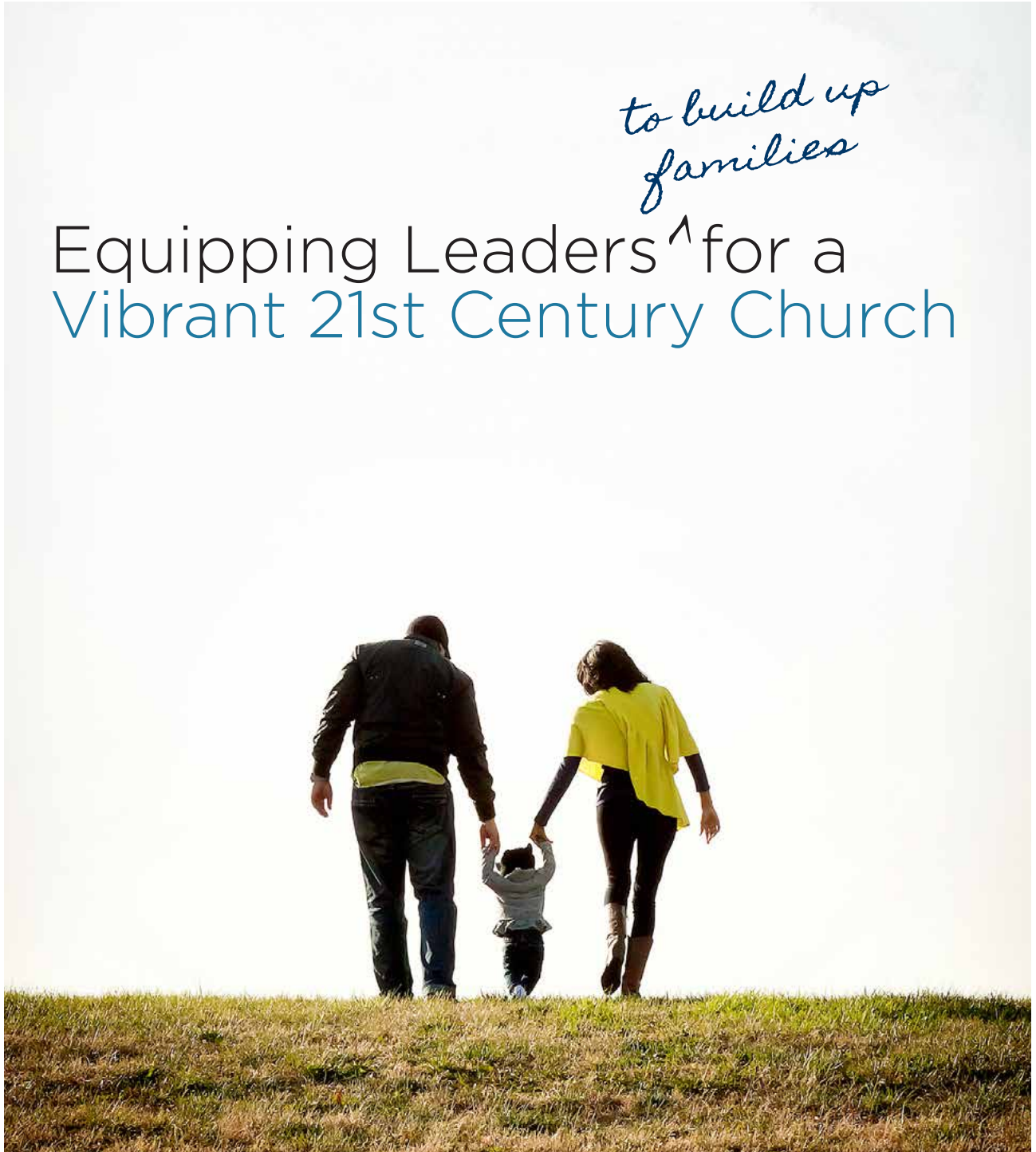


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