

# PRESSING ON

the e-magazine for growing Christians

January 2015

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## On the Mark

### It's Easy to Criticize

*by Mark Roberts*

*Happy new year!* It is hard for me to realize that I'm writing "January 2015" at the top of this column. It seems like only yesterday we were worried about Y2K and beginning a new millennium. Now we are fifteen years in and no one even thinks of the big change we made from writing "19" at the beginning of the year to writing "20." Time passes, doesn't it?

As we begin a new year at Pressing On we thank you for your interest, readership and kind words of encouragement. We continue to be committed to being the e-zine that helps you follow Christ more closely. May the Lord bless us all to press on in a new year.

*And now the first column of the year...*

The other day I played hooky from work and took my nephew to Dallas Cowboys stadium for the Texas high school state championship games. Several years ago the high school football folks arranged to play all the state championships of the various divisions in one stadium. That was done largely so the TV networks could easily broadcast the games, but it also means that fans can head out to the stadium, pay one price, and see a bunch of games. For Truth and me that meant a full day watching three state championship games in a row. For football junkies like us it was a grand and glorious day.

But as the day wore on we had the questionable privilege of sitting in front of an old sorehead. He was old enough to be the coach's grandfather, and he was sour from the kickoff until the very end (when his team won the game). Along the way he growled and grouched and complained about nearly everything. After one bad play he shouted "Why didn't you tackle him?!" at a poor defensive back he had just watched his man get loose for a first down. By then my patience was all used up so I turned around and said "Because he wasn't fast enough to catch him!" It was true. The receiver was the fastest man on the field and had been racing around catching passes all day. He looked like someone had suited up a jackrabbit - he was just a blur. The old grouch was shocked that anyone would say anything to him about his (ridiculous) complaints. Finally he stammered "he's not that fast!" I looked him square in the eye and said "Not when you're sitting up here!"

Isn't it true? When you're not involved it is very easy to criticize. Indeed, what is happening looks easy to do and we can't understand how anybody can mess it up. Can you see an application to our worship together? Leading prayer in the assembly looks so simple. Ever heard someone criticize the brother leading prayer because he didn't word it "just so?" Yes, we want to be careful in our prayers, and we want to pray accurately and scripturally. But as someone with a little experience standing in front of a crowd I can assure you that a lot goes tearing through your mind when the whole congregation is all looking at *you*. Sometimes the words don't come out "just so" in the moment. What about complaining about our song leaders? Have you ever tried it? Sure, the singing shouldn't drag and it ought to sound better but sometimes the folks the fellow is leading don't want to sing faster and they don't sing out and they aren't on key and it doesn't sound exactly like Handel's *Messiah*, but maybe it's not all the leader's fault!

Yes, we want worship to be wonderful, for the God we serve deserves our best. Yet the pressure of being in front of our peers, and the import of what we're doing, can overwhelm even the most veteran worship leader. Instead of shouting "He isn't that fast!" let's remember that when you're in the stands it looks considerably easier than it is. Let's be gentle with one another, brethren. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32).



*Mark Roberts is the editor of Pressing On. He has been working with the Westside church in Irving for the last twenty-two years. Mark is excited about the prospects of a new year, and is in full hope it may begin with his beloved Ohio State Buckeyes winning the national championship. Mark and his wife Dena have two daughters, Becca (married to Stephen Hunt) and Sara (in grad school at Lipscomb University).*

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# **Be Wise Small**

*by Dee Bowman*

## **Some Three Point Shots**

### **The tongue:**

1. Should be used as an instrument of wisdom (Psalm 34:13).
2. Should be used as an instrument of truth (Proverbs 15:23).
3. Should be an instrument of peace (Proverbs 21:23).

### **Let us watch:**

1. Where we're going (Philippians 3:12-14).
2. Who we go with (1 Corinthians 15:33).
3. How to get there (Hebrews 12:1-2).

## **Some Short Stops**

### **Let us stop:**

1. The lack of interest (Hebrews 4:1-2).
2. The lack of prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
3. The lack of good influence (Matthew 5:17).

### **Let us stop:**

1. And see what's up ahead (Hebrews 9:27).
2. Treating others as if they didn't matter (Romans 12: 3-6).
3. Talking when we should be listening (Luke 8:18).

## **Some New Beginnings**

### **Let us begin again:**

1. To love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37).

2. To seek to teach our neighbor (2 Timothy 2:2).
3. To be of service even when we're tired (Galatians 6:10).

**Let us begin again:**

1. To make every assembly with the saints (Hebrews 10:25).
2. To provoke one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:23).
3. To provide for the work of God in every good way (Galatians 6:10).

**Let us begin again:**

1. To give God the best we have to offer (Romans 12:1-2).
2. To leave off what gets in the way of our service (2 Peter 1:8-9).
3. To be a "new man." (Colossians 3:1-12).

**Some Things To Remember**

**Remember the simple but sure things:**

1. The precious death of Jesus on the Lord's Day (1 Corinthians 11:26).
2. That false teachers will come (2 Peter 2:1-3).
3. That part of the way is not enough (Philippians 2:12).

**Remember the rewards for the faithful.**

1. The joy of the association with faithful brethren (Philippians 1:1-10).
2. The joy of overcoming (James 1:12).
3. The joyful prospect of a heavenly abode (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

**By the way—**

Have a great year and remember to Be Wise Small!



***Dee Bowman** has been preaching for about 50 years. He is the author of several books, was one of the editors of Christianity Magazine, and for several years was an adjunct professor at Florida College. He has been associated with the Southside congregation in Pasadena, Texas for over 35 years. His wife is Norma and his children are Russ and Denise.*

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# Be Strong and Courageous

## Porn Nation (Part 2)

*by Wilson Adams*

*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...and his wives turned his heart away. 1 Kings 11:1, 3*

Men and women are different (that qualifies as the understatement of the year). For example, men are wired visually. That's why Job said (31:1), "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how can I gaze at a virgin" [young woman]. And why Jesus said, "...everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

It's important to note what the problem "isn't." *Seeing* by chance is not the problem. Job doesn't say, "I have made a covenant with my eyes not to notice a pretty girl..." By the way, that works only if you are blind. There is a difference, however, in seeing a beautiful woman and *seeing*—as in lusting. For example, it wasn't the first look at Bathsheba that caused trouble for King David. What spelled trouble was that he fixed his eyes on her and did not look away.

The problem with pornography is not that it is calculated to cause one to admire beauty (some have used that argument to justify its use). The problem with pornography is that it incites lust. It is designed to do the very thing that Jesus said we cannot do.

### **Temptation is not a sin; it's a call to battle**

Godly men understand the seriousness of the sexual war zone (1 Peter 2:11). Every Christian man walks daily into enemy fire (lingerie ads, female joggers, billboards, commercials, etc.). That's why sexual purity demands a daily decision. No one said walking in purity is easy. It's not—which is why you must be proactive. You must not become a walking casualty when it comes to sexual impurity (Proverbs 5).

### **10 Steps to Breaking Free**

**1. Acknowledge the problem.** Many caught in the sexual trap will adamantly deny the problem. Proverbs 28:13—"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper. But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

- *Go into your closet and shut the door* (Matthew 6:6). Your sin is first against God. Confess to Him, repent, and seek forgiveness.

- *Get real with Him.* You can't trick Him (Galatians 6:7). Be aware that He knows the condition of your heart and the depth of your sincerity.
  - *Read Psalm 51.* It was written by Solomon's father after his having committed sexual sin.
  - *Embrace His promise of forgiveness.* You must understand that this sin has not removed you from the Lord's reach. He can and will forgive (1 John 1:9).
2. **Stop justifying.** *I'm not hurting anyone... It's no big deal... We all sin and fall short...* Want truth? You *are* hurting someone (yourself and your marriage), and it *is* a big deal (Matthew 5:28). And, yes, we all sin from time to time. However, **do not** allow that to become an easy excuse to justify what you know is wrong.

*Why are you picking on me, I'm only human...* Yes, you are "only human." Do you know what that means? It means you have a choice: (1) a choice to do right, or (2) a choice to do wrong. Last time I checked, it's just as "human" to do one as well as the other. No one makes you sin. Each gives in to temptation by his/her own free will.

3. **Stop blaming.** The "blame game" is as old as the Garden of Eden (Gen.3:12-13).
- *If my spouse was just more affectionate...*
  - *If I had a better relationship with my parents...*
  - *If I had another release for my frustrations...*

You can always blame someone else. That's easy. What's hard is to stand up and take personal responsibility for your behavior.

I can't recall how many times I've heard, "I know what I did was wrong, but..." If we are ever going to make progress in overcoming destructive behavior, we must do away with the conjunction "but." Take the conjunction away and focus on the reality of the problem. Here it is: "I know what I did was wrong." Period. No comma and no conjunction.

4. **Flee temptation.** You have to remove the temptation and destroy any pornography in your possession. You cannot wean yourself from it. Use your computer *only* when someone else is in the room. Purchase software that blocks undesirable sites. Above all, "Flee!"
5. **Identify your emotional triggers.** Are there work associates, certain times of the day, stressful situations, or too much "alone time" that trigger the temptation? Identify what they are and develop a course of action. Use **H.A.L.T.** —an acronym

standing for **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired**. These are four “mood triggers” that are often associated with temptation.

Satan knows your weaknesses, and you must know them, too. Find competing behaviors that will offset these times—e.g., calling a friend, calling your wife, taking a walk, reading Scripture, praying for strength, etc.

6. **Make yourself accountable—to someone who can help you.** It needs to be a mature Christian brother (if you are a male) and someone outside your peer group. Everyone needs a “safe” friend with whom you can share your struggles (James 5:16; Ecclesiastes 4:10).

An accountability friend is not a “yes man.” Rather, he is someone who will hold you “accountable.” And that means telling you what you *need* to hear instead of what you *want* to hear. There is a reason those in combat dig a foxhole big enough for two. This is a serious battle—do not try and fight alone. If you seek out a professional counselor, he must be someone who is “faith-based.” That is, he stands upon the same moral footing (God’s word) as do you.

7. **Study the Word of God about sexual purity.** While this sin is not the by-product of a lack of knowledge, there are certain scriptures that we must keep at the forefront of our minds: Psalm 51; Proverbs 5; Romans 13:14; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7; James 1:21; 4:7; 2 Peter 2:14, etc. Make a list in the front of your Bible and label them as your own personal “H.A.L.T.” verses. Make Scripture your shield by which you can deflect the “incoming” temptations of Satan.
8. **Become a 4:8 thinker.** In Philippians 4:8, Paul gives us boundaries to help define our thinking. Winning the battle over sexual temptation is the same as over any temptation—it starts in the mind (Romans 12:2). And why? Because...“as a man thinks within himself, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). You will never affect any change for good until you first discipline your mind.
9. **Refocus on Christ.** Rather than throw a pity party about how hard this is, focus on what Jesus did, how He lived, and how He wants you to live. Become a genuine disciple and “follow in His steps.” Don’t worry about everyone else or nit-pick the faults of others (including your spouse). Focus on becoming God’s man or God’s woman.
10. **Pray, pray, and...pray some more!** Each time the godly fell in Scripture, there was an absence of prayer during that time in their life. I know of no exception (and you won’t be the first). “But if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...” (James

1:5). James goes on to say that you must ask “in faith without doubting.” When it comes to sexual and moral purity, you must go all in. There is no half-way. There is no middle ground. This is serious stuff. Your soul is at stake.

### **Final Thoughts**

“Beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you...” (Hebrews 6:9a). God calls His people to a higher standard where we rise above “a crooked and perverse generation” (Philippians 2:15). Yes, we find ourselves in the “midst” of a darkened world. And few things are as dark and as perverse as is the world of pornography.

Christians—both men and women—must arm themselves for the battle. It cannot be ignored. This monster has already done considerable damage to the homes of many. Guard your heart, your marriage, and your family. Don’t become Satan’s next victim.

Adapted from the book, *Solomon—The Half Has Not Been Told*  
[www.courageouslivingbooks.com](http://www.courageouslivingbooks.com)



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## Courageous Living Series

The *Courageous Living* series of workbooks by Wilson Adams includes a variety of textual and topical studies that are grounded in the Word of God. Well-written, fresh and relevant, they serve as great tools for individual study, small-group discussions or congregational Bible classes.

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# Mind Your Faith

## Armchair Bible Interpreters

*by Doy Moyer*

“Well, you believe in a god who commanded murder, permitted rape, and condoned slavery and homophobia. The same Old Testament forbade wearing different fabrics in the same garment. How naive do you expect us to be?”

These types of comments are not uncommon in discussions about the Bible, particularly among atheists. They take potshots at Bible passages that they think demonstrate the folly of the Bible itself, and thus justify their disbelief, then give no real considerations to responses.

It is amazing how flippant some of these comments can be. They show little to no respect for historical or literary context. They give no thought to the overall themes of Scripture. They just cherry-pick passages that sound bad when they are isolated and then use them (abuse them) to make their point.

This illustrates a problem with what we might think of as “armchair Bible interpreters.” These are people who sit on the sidelines in their comfy chairs while they take their shots at Bible passages. They haven’t done the hard work of really trying to understand the contexts, the covenants, or the themes. They see isolated passages that sound bad, pick them out, throw them at believers, then sit back and enjoy their self-proclaimed victory over those gullible nuts who accept those ancient myths and superstitions.

It is always easier to make a mess than it is to clean it up, and people know this. A sentence or two, or perhaps a paragraph, can make a real mess out of an issue, and it takes a much longer response to set things straight. One sentence can make a mess, and it takes a chapter to fix it. Looking at themes, contexts, and fuller considerations cannot be done in a sentence or two. It takes time, patience, and hard work, which is not typically what people want to do when they are trying to justify a preconceived position.

Bible study is indeed hard work. There is no short cut. There is no way to do justice to a passage or a context in a post of 140 characters. To do the work, one must be committed to it, roll up the sleeves (of the mind), and dig in. Once we do that, many of those alleged problems are not so much of a problem anymore. I’m not saying there still won’t be difficulties; I’m not saying we’ll know all that we wish to know. I am saying that difficulties are exaggerated and worsened when given by armchair interpreters

who are too apathetic to dig in and do the work that is actually needed. Misrepresenting Scripture is easy. It is also lazy.

To clarify, I'm not talking here about an elite group of professionals who alone have the authority to interpret. Scripture should be in the hands of everyone, but that doesn't make study easy. I'm speaking of the need for everyone to do the hard work of striving to grasp a text instead of just taking a cursory look and making major judgments about its meaning and application.

Even among believers, it is easy to cherry-pick and proof-text. We see a passage that says something we like for it to say, so we go with it before we've done any of the hard work of putting it in context and grasping the actual meaning. We might get lucky, but Bible study isn't supposed to be about luck.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Of course, this passage is more than just studying (as the KJV puts it). Our diligence needs to go beyond reading the text into the application of our lives. Nevertheless, handling the word accurately is a prime concern for believers, and proper application begins with the initial meaning of a text.

Armchair interpreters are content with finding statements in the Bible that say what they want, whether it be believers or unbelievers. We must not be content with such an attitude. Be diligent. Get in the game. Do the work. Only then will we be in a proper position to talk about the text with more than an unstudied opinion.



*Doy Moyer brings his clear thinking and concise assessment of the issues of our day to our pages. Doy was a Bible professor at Florida College for over a decade and is now preaching with the Vestavia church in Birmingham, Alabama. He is an avid reader and is well aware of the attacks against our faith that the enemy mounts. Read him and you will find that you are thinking more clearly on key matters that affect your faith. You can read more of his good work at his blog, located at [www.mindyourfaith.com](http://www.mindyourfaith.com)*

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## Bonus Content

### The Nine – Where Are They?

Luke 17: 11-19

*By Josh Creel*

There was probably nothing remarkable about the village, just a little settlement near the border of Galilee and Samaria. There were probably small plots of land for farming and larger areas where the sheep were kept. The inhabitants were normal, leading normal lives. But just outside lived 10 men who led anything but normal lives. They were outcasts, but their ostracism had nothing to do with their personalities or their morality. They were outcasts not because of anything they had done, but because of the disease they shared: leprosy. Various diseases, all described as leprosy, are described in Numbers 13. Some might have been nothing more than a bad rash, but others would afflict the whole body resulting in tremendous pain and eventual death. "This disease 'begins with specks on the eyelids and on the palms, gradually spreading over the body, bleaching the hair white wherever they appear, crusting the affected parts with white scales, and causing terrible sores and swellings. From the skin the disease eats inward to the bones, rotting the whole body piecemeal.'" (Easton's Bible Dictionary). But worse than the physical pain of the disease was the social death these men experienced. According to the Law these men could not live in the village, could not be in the same room as their families, could not kiss their wives, could not hug their children. They had no one except each other for company, and their condition apparently made them not care about former racial hatreds (for one of them was a Samaritan, vs. 16).

But then Jesus came and changed everything. He was on His way to Jerusalem, on His way to change the fate of humanity through the cross, but He first changed the fate of these 10 men. These men had some faith in Jesus, because rather than shouting "Unclean, Unclean!" as Jesus approached (as they were commanded to do in Leviticus 13.45), they shouted, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" And Jesus did! He told them to go and present themselves to the priests, which was the required protocol under the Law for a leper to be pronounced clean. Even though their leprosy had not yet disappeared, the 10 men left apparently believing that they would be cleansed. And they were, their leprosy disappearing as they went on their way. Nine of the men continued on their way to the priests, the other (the Samaritan) made his way back to Jesus to give Him thanks. Jesus wondered aloud at the result, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine-where are they?"

I'm a little hesitant to blame the nine, or at least I find it difficult to throw them under the proverbial bus. I don't think they were evil men, they were just men. I believe that they were thankful (how could they not be?), but they were ready to move on with their lives. They needed to see the priest, they needed to make the required sacrifices, they needed to get back to their homes and families. Perhaps they thought they could thank Jesus later? I can sympathize with these men because I see myself doing the same thing on a daily basis. I acknowledge the great things that Jesus has done for me, I'm thankful, but I find myself very busy enjoying His blessings. He gave me my life back, now I'm busy living it.

The lesson of the nine and the one is that thanks needs to be expressed. The nine may have been thankful, but they failed to express that thanks to the One who had so greatly blessed them. By contrast, the one "turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him," (vss. 15-16). He still needed to see the priest, he still needed to make the sacrifices, he still had friends and family waiting for him, he had a new life in front of him, but he knew that Jesus was deserving of His thanks and that must come first. Let's take the example of this one Samaritan to heart. Let's not get so caught up in the blessings of God and Christ that we fail to give them the thanks they deserve. Here are three ways you can show Him the proper thanks this week:

- Make thanksgiving a **big** part of your prayers. Prayer isn't supposed to be a long list of wants and needs. Yes, He desires that we bring our supplications to Him (He knows what they are already), but prayer is also our opportunity to give Him thanks. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus," (1Thessalonians 5.16-18).
- Be thankful in worship. You do it every week. It can become routine. It can become about self, rather than God. We want the preacher to hold our attention better, we want the song leader to lead the songs we know and like, we want the service to end at the right time so we can eat. But God has blessed us this week, just as He does every week. He deserves us coming together, bowing in His presence and giving Him thanks.
- Make the choices He wants you to make. One of my favorite passages is 1 Peter 2.1-3. The passage begins by warning against certain behavior (malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander) and then moves to something we should do (grow in the word of God). Why should we do these things? "If you have tasted the kindness of the Lord," (vs. 3). In other words, follow God's will because you're thankful for what He's done for you!

Let's be like the one who returned to give thanks. How tragic it would be for our Lord to say, "Were you not cleansed? Where were you?"



*Joshua Creel works with the University church of Christ in Tampa, Florida. He and his wife, Jana, have been married for 10 years and are parents of two young boys: Jared (age 5) and Ethan (age 2). Josh attended the University of Alabama to pursue a medical degree, but decided while in school to change course and work for the Great Physician. He graduated from UA in 2000 and has worked with churches in Alabama and Florida since then. He is a frequent contributor to Pressing On Magazine.*

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## From the Pasture

### Self-Examination

*by Rusty Miller*

I have never been much for New Year's resolutions. It seems most of the world thinks of them as good ideas with virtually no follow through, and that seems like a waste of time and opportunity.

However, the beginning of a new year does, I believe, offer an opportunity for self-examination and reflection on the past year. Having done that, we are then presented with the opportunity to revise old goals and rededicate our efforts toward ongoing goals. That seems like an especially good idea for the shepherds of God's people. In fact, it is an idea rooted in Scripture (2 Corinthians 13:5).

**Example.** In examining self, the first question we should ponder is whether or not people can look to us as an example. Peter defines this as one of the ways we actually shepherd the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3). In other words, rather than issuing proclamations and decisions, an elder's job is actually to show others how to live as a Christian. By truly living as God would have us, we present an example to others. Am I lazy in my Bible study? Am I slow to encourage? Am I quick to anger? I can expect those I lead to be the same.

On the other hand, am I forgiving, tender-hearted and caring? If so, it is natural for the church to follow that lead.

A wise shepherd once told me I should read 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 often, and he meant that I should read them with the idea of constantly measuring myself against those standards, set by the Holy Spirit, for God's shepherds. Further, I can read Romans 12. Do I meet that standard?

Finally, for a humbling experience, I recently read a suggestion to consider the characteristics of love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Read those characteristics, but substitute your own name every time it says, "love" (Rusty is patient. Rusty is kind. Rusty does not envy, etc.). Does that really describe me?

**Pray.** One area where almost all of us could improve is in prayer. If my prayer life is lacking, I need to map out a plan to pray better. Example: On Sunday, I will praise God for His great character. On Monday, I can pray for the sick (by name). On Tuesday, I will pray for the weak (again, specifically). On Wednesday, I will be thankful for God's blessings in my life, and for His blessings in this church. On

Thursday, I will pray for men this church supports in preaching the Gospel. On Friday, I will pray for opportunities to talk to a specific person in my life about God's word. On Saturday, I will praise God for answering prayers.

If I follow that kind of prayer map, it will make me a better leader by causing me to focus less on my needs and more on the needs of those I shepherd.

**Study.** Another area that applies to all who would lead God's people is the study of His word. How can we lead people to do God's will if we are ignorant of His will ourselves?

At Westside, we have daily Bible reading that we do as a church (this year's reading will focus on the New Testament), but I need to do much more than that. Ideally, I need to pick one or two books of the Bible and determine to learn all I can about them. At the end of the year, if I am called on to preach at a moment's notice, I should be able to turn there and preach directly from the text.

**Engagement.** Finally, it is impossible to lead people if you don't know them. I need to make it a point to get to know people better, whether that is engaging people in the foyer after services, inviting them to dinner or taking advantage of other opportunities when we are together. I can also teach their children in Bible class, essentially doing anything to make them more comfortable talking with me about spiritual issues.

There are certainly other areas ripe for self-examination, but an elder willing to start the new year with a plan to work in these areas will do well toward establishing a better foundation for his shepherding. That is my goal in the year to come.



*Rusty Miller has served the Westside church in Irving, Texas as one of her shepherds for thirteen years. One of his great joys is that he got to serve with his earthly father for almost ten of those years. He enjoys writing, having blogged through Westside's daily Bible reading for several years, and he hopes this column will have an impact on fellow shepherds.*

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## Now and Then

### Minority or Majority

*by Chuck Durham*

David McCullough's book, John Adams, cites an interesting comment Adams made to a friend in regard to himself in a letter he wrote in 1787. *"Popularity was never my mistress, nor was I ever, or shall I ever be a popular man. But one thing I know, a man must be sensible of the errors of the people, and upon his guard against them, and must run the risk of their displeasure sometimes, or he will never do them any good in the long run"* (323).

Every Christian needs to take this to heart. We cannot be popular with the world and serve God. Sometimes we cannot even be popular with brethren and serve the Lord. I am persuaded the latter is more dangerous to our eternal welfare than the former. The danger is far more subtle.

We must make up our mind that the Lord is first in our lives. That's the bottom line of a heart truly devoted to Him. It means that if we want to do the world or our brethren any good, we must confront them with the truth. If we seek popularity where will we end up? We will do what the rulers of the Jews did, who, though believing in Jesus, were too afraid to confess Him openly, "lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43).

This danger especially plagues preachers and teachers who proclaim God's word. There is much to risk to run counter to the "prevailing" view of brethren on a given topic. The church belonging to Christ has long fought the idea of drawing up "articles of the faith" which must be written in a creed that all must give allegiance to in order to remain in "fellowship" with the body of Christ. This notion of "denominating" what *must* be believed in order to be considered "faithful to the Lord" is at the heart and soul of forming "denominations." Instead of being simply New Testament Christians who hold to "all" written in the text of Jesus and His apostles and prophets, we become something "more" or "less" than what Jesus intended. We end up belonging to "that group" and not simply Christians who hold to "all" the words of Scripture.

"Unwritten" creeds are as powerful and dangerous as any codified ones, too! Every major doctrinal battle historically among God's people has resulted in division with the "majority" considered as possessing the "truth" of the Bible. Majorities have a way of creating the impression that "they" are the ones who are *always* right on a given matter because of their "superior numbers." We think, "How could so many good people be

wrong?" How many Bible stories do we need to trot out to decimate this wrong-headed view? In fact, more often than not, it is the majority-view that is wrong and the minority-view which is true to God's Word!

We must have the heart of the prophet Micaiah who boldly confronted King Ahab with the truth. Four hundred false prophets were telling the king to go to war with Syria; God would deliver them into his hand. The messenger sent by King Ahab to fetch Micaiah warned him to speak the same thing as the false prophets. But Micaiah said, "As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that will I speak" (2 Chronicles 18:13). Four hundred-to-one are not very good odds if the "minority" avers that its view is the **Truth**. It did not matter to Micaiah. Only one thing mattered: "Preach only what the LORD says." Speaking the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11) is the **only** way we can do any worthwhile and lasting good.

Athanasius was a fourth century theologian who held a "minority" view regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. Arian, who held the predominant view during his day, said that Jesus Christ was created (did not always exist!) and therefore of "distinct substance" from God the Father, not to be placed on par with Deity. Athanasius fought almost singlehandedly against this false doctrine. On one occasion a friend said to Athanasius: "Do you not know that the whole world is against you?" Athanasius simply replied: "Then is Athanasius against the whole world." The spirit of Micaiah, Athanasius and John Adams must live in us if we ever hope to "do the people any good."



*Chuck Durham preaches for the Twin City church of Christ in College Station, Texas. He is an amateur history buff who loves working with college kids building their faith. Chuck writes "I owe what I am to the grace of Jesus Christ and the loving work of my wife, Wilna. I am the proud father of a great young man, Jonathan." In his spare time Chuck enjoys reading history, gardening, beekeeping, and walking "Suzy" the dog. You can reach him at [durhamchuk@aol.com](mailto:durhamchuk@aol.com).*

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# FROM FEAR TO FAITH

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MATTHEW ALLEN





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## A January Daisy

by Dene Ward

It had been unseasonably warm for a few weeks, so warm the blueberries had begun to bloom. Not good in January, for up here in North Florida we could be sure more frosts and freezes awaited us. But there was nothing we could do about it, so we went on about our business, and one morning as I pulled myself along with the trekking poles, walking Chloe around the property, I suddenly came upon a yellow daisy right in the middle of a patch of green grass, another product of the warm spell. It sat there only four inches off the ground and a little scraggly. Still, it made me smile.

Then I got a virus and found myself in the sickbed for over a week. Finally, the chest congestion drained, the ears stopped aching, and the nose could suddenly breathe again, so after one more day of recovery, I took Chloe on another walk. As I came around the blueberries I saw it again, still hanging on in spite of the now cooler temperatures--and once again I smiled.

I suddenly wondered if we aren't supposed to be like that lone little daisy out in the world. Do we make anyone smile? Or are we just like everyone else, hurrying along, consumed with ourselves and our business, impatient, or even angry, with the ones who get in our way and slow us down? We have an obligation to others we pass along the way.

*You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again (Deuteronomy 22:4).*

That one is pretty easy, we say. Who wouldn't stop for a brother on the side of the road whose donkey (or car) was broken down? Keith stood by the side of the road next to a disabled car one night, and watched brother after brother pass him on the way to the gospel meeting that was being held just a mile or two down the highway, so don't be too sure of yourself.

Yet the law also says this: *"If you meet your **enemy's** ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of **one who hates you** lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him (Exodus 23:4-5).* How many of us feel any obligation at all to bear the burden of an enemy, or just a stranger?

Let's not make it one of those situations where we excuse ourselves by talking about crime and good sense. How about this? Did you make the cashier's day a little brighter or a little tougher when you went through the line this morning? Did you stop and

help the harried young mother who dropped her grocery list and sent coupons scattering across the aisle, or did you sigh loudly at the inconvenience of her, her cart, and her three rowdy children because you were in a hurry to get home? Did you make small talk with the waitress who poured your coffee, or did you treat her like a piece of furniture? Did you slow down and make room for the car that cut you off in traffic, or did you talk and gesticulate and lay on the horn long enough for someone to think we were in an air raid? Did you make *anyone* smile this morning?

*At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me*, Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:16. Nearly impossible to imagine, isn't it? Yet the night before Keith was scheduled to testify in a trial where we knew the only defense was to try to discredit him, a brother decided he needed to call him up and castigate him for an imagined slight, something that he had simply misunderstood. When all we can think about is ourselves instead of bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), instead of helping the weak, (1 Thessalonians 5:14), instead of comforting one another, (2 Corinthians 1:4), that's exactly what happens.

Yes, we get comfort from God, but guess how that often happens? *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus*, (2 Corinthians 7:6). We are the comfort that God gives. We are the help that He provides. It's up to us to pay attention and think of someone besides ourselves.

Today, be a January daisy, something lovely and unexpected in the life of someone who needs it, whether a brother, or an enemy, or just a stranger. Make someone smile.

*Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad* (Proverbs 12:25).

*Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body* (Proverbs 16:24).

*I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus... for they refreshed my spirit...* (1 Corinthians 16:17-18).



**Dene Ward** has been a farm wife, a law enforcement officer's wife, a preacher's wife, and a music teacher recognized for excellence and elected to state office. As a young woman she became concerned with the lack of depth in women's Bible class literature and developed *Born of a Woman* and its companion teacher's manual, which has become a classic. When encroaching blindness took her music career away, she turned to writing devotionals and eventually created the blog, [www.flightpaths.weebly.com](http://www.flightpaths.weebly.com). Dene also speaks at women's retreats and lectureships.

*She lives in Lake Butler, Florida with her husband of 40 years, Keith. She is the mother of two sons, Lucas and Nathan, and grandmother of two grandsons, Silas and Judah.*

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## Truth Connection

### Big Problems from Small Things

*by Warren E. Berkley*

A few years ago I enjoyed the recreational pursuit of riding a horse through a beautiful Ozark mountain trail. I'm not an experienced horse rider. The experience to navigate the steep, rocky trail belonged to the horse, not the rider. The horses available at West Mountain Trails were raised and trained for nothing but carrying inexperienced tourists through the mountain trails near Devil's Den, Arkansas.

There is a purpose in all the equipment the horse wear, like the bit. Even the inexperienced rider can learn quickly to use the reins and bit to guide this powerful animal. As well trained as the trail horses are, you can actually lead them away from the familiar path, if you know how to use the equipment. While the bit is a very small instrument in proportion to the animal, it holds great power.

This is like the human tongue. One of the smallest members of the human body, but what great power it holds for good or evil! One false accusation can arouse suspicion about an innocent person - suspicion that will never really go away (though no sin may have been committed). One lie can hurt a whole family; one false doctrine can destroy a soul; one insult can discourage a struggling young person; one angry word can divide a church. And, when you read all of this, plug in the modern keyboard and internet!

Truth Connection: "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body . . . Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles . . . no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison," (James 3:2,3,5,8). "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless," (James 1:26). – Adapted from the Kindle Book, "As James Said," by the author; [click here to get the book](#).



*Warren Berkley is widely known as an excellent student of God's Word, and as a faithful preacher of that Word. He is an assistant editor for Pressing On. He and his wife Paula work with the church in McAllen, Texas which is just across the border from Mexico. You can follow Warren on Facebook - which will brighten your day and amuse you considerably - and read more from his pen at Expository Files ([www.expositoryfiles.com](http://www.expositoryfiles.com)).*

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# What's On My Kindle?

*by Warren E. Berkley*

## **New Book – Christianity In Twelve Words**

When driving on long trips, my wife and I have discovered various ways to occupy all that road time. A few years ago, on our way to Arkansas for a meeting, we took the word “Christianity” and after several revisions, came up with a list of fundamental subjects having to do with New Testament Christianity, each beginning with a letter from the term. It works out to 12 words. From this seed, Expository Files (an online magazine that I edit) published a book that is available January 1 for your Kindle.

This book falls in the devotional category, giving readers access to some of the key subjects from the New Testament, having to do with our relationship with God. Since the chapters are not tightly connected, this book can become something you pick up to read one chapter at a time, not necessarily in sequence.

Preachers and teachers may find the book helpful as reference material for these twelve subjects. It can easily be adapted to a class course. Available January 1 on Kindle, for \$4.99.

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