

PRESSING ON



the e-magazine for growing Christians

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Pressing On

The Magazine for Growing Christians

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On the Mark

by Mark Roberts

[Editor's Note: I ran across this little piece I wrote back in February of 1999 and thought it was still worth thinking about. -mdr]

I made a product change last month. I switched from Product A to Product B. Why did I leave behind good ol' A? It wasn't because I had seen commercials or print advertising for the new wonder Product B, although I had. Lots of television commercials had touted insistently that I needed Product B, but mostly I ignored them. Then a good friend mentioned that he was using B and really liked it. Almost immediately I was moved to try B, found it to be good, and decided to use it regularly.

Now I have purposefully kept from you the exact products involved in all of this because I don't want this to be a commercial for Product B. *Instead, I want you to think about the value of a trusted friend recommending something.* You have probably done just as I did: gone to a restaurant, seen a movie, visited a vacation spot, or bought something because a friend in whom you had confidence made a recommendation. When we respect someone we will listen to them and even make large-scale changes based on what that individual says. Now, how long has it been since you recommended Jesus to a friend? We easily say "Such does no good" but we've already learned otherwise, haven't we? I'm not urging you to become obnoxious or be a jerk. Further, I am particularly opposed to trying to turn folks into "church of Christers" as if the church saves or church membership is key issue. But in gentle careful conversation we can and must tell people how Jesus has made a difference in our lives, that there is a place where they can go and worship (instead of being the object of manipulation or hype), and that the Bible still means something to some people.

Not everyone is interested in the Gospel, not everyone will respond well to what you say, but then again, not everyone switched from Product A to B this week either. But one person did. Recommend Jesus to someone this week!



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 still smiling because his Ohio State Buckeyes won the national championship, even though that was last month. 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

What It Takes To Stand

A firm foundation

A commitment to stay put

A willingness to hurt some

A long range focus

What It Takes To Fall

A poor footing

A short vision

A nominal persuasion

A short attention span

Now, you apply the passages and you have a sermon—one for you and one for another.

All About Anger

No matter how true it is or how you say it, if there's no love in it, it won't be very readily received.

According to the Scriptures, you have only about 12 hours to tolerate anger (Ephesians 4:26).

One good way to prevent anger: Would I want that said to me? And would I want it said that way?

There's usually a good amount of pride before there's anger.

He who is constantly looking for faults in others seldom looks at himself.

There is yet a place for righteous indignation—being angry about failure, about invasions of impurity, being disgusted with the flesh.

There is an old Slovakian proverb which says, "anger is the only thing to put off till tomorrow."

Aristotle may have had it right when he averred that meekness is the mean between extreme anger and extreme angerlessness.

Anger usually has in it at least a moderate amount of agitation. The word *agitate* comes from Middle English and originally meant “to drive away.” Need more be said?

Snippets

“Truce is better than friction.” (Charles Herguth) Sometimes.

A good education is based on truth not speculation.

Be yourself! You can’t actually be anybody else anyway.

Life changes. Get used to it.

Holding a grudge is like having a constant stomach ache.

“Behold thyself.” That’s hard. We kind of have the mirror fixed so that it reflects not what we are, but what we want to see.

It’s never too late to start over.

The Practical Side Of The Beatitudes

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” They will acknowledge the King in their hearts. That’s what blessedness is all about.

“Blessed are those that mourn.” They will find a place for comfort and consolation in the kingdom.

“Blessed are the meek.” They will find way to God through a spirit of total submission and commitment to Him.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Their appetite for the right things will be satisfied. They will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful.” They will have the joy of reaping for themselves the mercy they have given to others.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Physical sight sees only physical things. Faith can see past here, see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” What an honor to hear it said, “you look like your Father.”

“Blessed are the persecuted.” Kingdom-lovers will suffer– but willingly– for the kingdom of God is the main focus in his life.



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

The Bachelor Solomon's Harem Revised

by Wilson Adams

The Book of *Jeremiah* chronicles the prophet's lament over the sinful condition of God's people. They had reached a point where they no longer cared about God, about morality, or about right and wrong. Using an infamous movie title, everything had become *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Jeremiah had the courage to declare that they should have experienced *fifty shades of shame*.

*They were not ashamed at all;
They did not even know how to blush.*

Jeremiah 6:15

And neither do we.

Our moral standards have been lowered in many ways: the way we dress, the cultural acceptance of homosexuality, pornography, and what we label as "entertainment." As a result, human sexuality (which is intended to be a God-given expression of genuine love within the boundaries of sacred marriage) is painted in shades of gray. Truly, we have lost our moral compass. Sure, we pay lip service to Scripture: "abstain from sexual immorality" (*porneia*—from which we get the word "porn") and then turn around and swoon over shows like ABC's *The Bachelor*. Inconsistent? It certainly is.

Trash TV

I'm guessing there isn't a show on television these days as twisted about sex as *The Bachelor*. The popular dating show (now in its 19th season) purports to find a wife for an eligible and good-looking rich bachelor. There are a few TV reality shows with some measure of redeeming value. *The Bachelor*, however, has none.

You might argue in favor of their success rate. Okay, I checked. In the previous eighteen seasons, one couple is still together. That's one out of eighteen. In baseball, that's a batting average of .055. - so much for their success rate.

In spite of its dismal failure at match-making, *The Bachelor* continues to advertise itself as a romantic mystery adventure to help a young man find his lifelong soul mate. Truth be known, the show is more in tune with a pimp and his harem.

The Bachelor assembles a cast (aka harem) of attractive and narcissistic women (how else do you explain it?) who attempt to win the favors of the eligible bachelor. They do so with their charm and their bodies to get his attention and win his love. They also suppress their feelings of discomfort in knowing that the same man who spoke so lovingly to them the night before and offered passionate kisses, is doing the same tonight with someone else.

Of course, in all of this, *The Bachelor* plays the innocent prude and only speaks or hints at sex in the most coded and vague terms. You know, like a pimp who feigns innocence and shock when someone would dare suggest that his business is not exactly legitimate.

Public Escort Service

It doesn't take much research to learn that potential contestants on this romantic drama must pass an STD (sexually transmitted disease) test before qualifying. They must also be on birth control. Hmm. I wonder why...

The Bachelor's resemblance to a public escort service is kept under wraps until late in the season when he has narrowed the field down to three potential suitors. Those three are then invited to spend the night with him in a "fantasy suite" –three successive evenings of romance in an exotic location where the TV cameras are turned off and leaving the bachelor and bachelorettes to do whatever they want to do. I'm guessing they are playing cards and enjoying some quality time and conversation. Yeah, and I've got some ocean-front property in Arizona...

Apparently having an off-camera sexual encounter with a rich bachelor who can give you an engagement ring the size of a grapefruit seems like a good idea to some, but in practice it means that he has sex with three women three nights in a row—all of whom will do anything to win him over. It's a shallow and sordid story-line more in tune with the *Playboy Channel* than with *Hallmark*. Of course the glitz and glamour of romance and roses, champagne and chauffeurs, gives it an air of legitimacy and acceptance.

Our Young People Are Falling For It

My wife made me sit in front of the TV the past two nights and watch four hours of this mindless garbage after learning that some young people were discussing it and falling for it. Truthfully, I would have rather gone to the dentist (at least he would have given me anesthesia). After two nights of double episodes, we'd seen enough.

We saw enough to know this isn't what our young people need to watch.

In one episode last night, one of the finalists takes the prudish bachelor to her work—a fertility clinic in Chicago where he is shown a room equipped with sex magazines and movies and encouraged to make a “donation.” In a separate scene, another finalist reveals a secret past. She had posed for *Playboy* magazine. Subsequently she opens her computer to show *him* the real *her*.

Enough.

Parents, wise up. We need dads and moms who will take the reins of responsibility and leadership and help our teens understand what God-directed wholesome love looks like. We need dads and moms who will provide godly counsel—like what you find in Proverbs 1-7—about life and love and sexual boundaries. We need dads and moms who will take seriously the injunction of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “This is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality” (*porneia*).

Two things are true: (1) Shows like *The Bachelor* will continue to be popular, and (2) the networks will continue to lower the bar and push the envelope. Yet while culture lowers the bar, Christians must raise it. And if we fail to do so, Satan will be more than happy to accommodate as he claims your kids.

I wonder what Jeremiah would say if he had to sit through four hours of *The Bachelor* ? Oh, I think I know...



Wilson and Julie Adams live in Murfreesboro, Tennessee where he works in a two-preacher arrangement with the Veterans Parkway church while devoting much of his time to meeting work. In addition to gospel meetings and lectureships, Wilson does several “Where Is God When I Hurt?” weekends based on the book, “A Life Lost and Found,” which he co-authored. When home, he pursues a passion for writing and is on a two-year mission to produce twenty-four adult study books in the “Courageous Living” series. Seventeen are now available (see the advertisement in this issue of Pressing On) and several churches are using these books with great success.

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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. <http://www.courageouslivingbooks.com>

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Marriage Matters: Keeping the "Holy" in Matrimony

Co-Parenting with God: Equipping Your Kids for Life

The Beatitudes: Life-Changing Essentials

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Romans I: Finding a Fresh Start with God

Romans II: Finding a Fresh Start with God

The Ten Commandments: Our Character Crisis Revealed

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I Corinthians II - Calm Answers for Church Problems (chapters II – 16)

I Corinthians I – Calm Answers for Church Problems (Chapters 1-10)

12 Choices – Life-changing Decisions You Must Make

A Life Lost ...and Found

Around the House ... Again

Conversion – Getting Back to Basics

Ecclesiastes – in Search of the Good Life

GPS - God's Positioning System

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Turning Point

Nehemiah – Let Us Arise and Build

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Mind Your Faith

Love Is a Powerful Testimony

by Doy Moyer

How paramount is love in the message of the gospel? How much of this idea of love was found in the surrounding culture of the day? Consider the following:

“Love of fellow humans was not a familiar concept to Greco-Roman philosophers, or to the ordinary person in that culture. At best the philosophers strove for justice – Plato’s Republic is a lengthy and unsuccessful effort to define the term – but even that quality is perceived as something needful for the benefit of the community, not the individual. Neither philosophy nor religion taught philanthropy or charity. What generosity we do find record of is usually self-serving, designed to enhance the donor’s reputation or to obligate the recipient (cf. Pliny...). One of the things about the early believers that most astounded their pagan neighbors was the Christians’ willingness to minister to the poor and needy for no ulterior purpose.” (Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World*, 165)

It is often argued that the Bible, or even Jesus Himself, is just a reflection of the society back then. It is said to mimic the culture in which it was written, and thus was no different from other works. However, right here is a powerful testimony to the fact that the gospel really is different from what the ancient world reflected. It is a gospel of love. It teaches us to deny ourselves and become servants of others. It teaches us to love others, even as we would love ourselves. That is not what the culture at large was taught to do. The Bible clearly reflects something different and higher.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God. The second greatest was to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36-40). When charity was shown it was often self-serving, perhaps obligating the recipient to the donor in some way. Contrast that with what Jesus taught:

“Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.” (Luke 6:31-36)

This teaching and application does not reflect the cultural times in which Jesus lived. It challenged the people to rise above what their culture had taught them to do. The philosophers of the Greco-Roman world did not teach people how to love, but the God of heaven surely did through Jesus.

Jesus taught, as a new commandment, that His disciples were to love one another as He loved them (Jn. 13:34-35). No quality of love is greater than that of Jesus. The disciples taught this same principle as they went about spreading the gospel. For example, Paul taught that if we engage in great activities, but do not have love, then it becomes meaningless (1 Cor. 13). He taught that love is essential to our relationships, to “owe nothing to anyone except to love one another” (Rom. 13:8). It must be without hypocrisy, and we must be devoted to it (Rom. 12:9-10). John taught that love for one another was paramount. Failure to show love was equated to abiding in death, or even murdering your brethren (cf. 1 Jn. 3:11-18). Peter taught that, above all things, Christians must “keep fervent in your love for one another” (1 Pet. 4:8). Obedience to the truth leads to purified souls, and purified souls have a sincere and zealous love for others (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

The message of the gospel was one that would radically change how many would have thought back in the first century. Today, we hear about love, but we still see tendencies in the direction of a self-service “love” intended to benefit the donor. As Christians, we must rise above our culture, above the thinking of the day, and conform ourselves to the thinking of Christ, so that every thought will be in captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Have you discovered the gospel of love? God loved you enough to send Jesus to die for you (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Given the greatness of the love He has shown, it is only right that we love Him in return. The love of God is rich indeed. Why not spread the wealth?



Doy Moyer 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 after him and you will find that you are thinking more clearly on critical matters that affect your faith. You can read more of his good work at his blog, located at www.mindyourfaith.com.

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Text and Context: Still Non-Denominational

by Josh Creel

“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1.10 NASB)

The bumper sticker caught my eye with its simple message, “Generic Christian.” Perhaps some of you have seen the same bumper sticker. At first it seemed an unusual way of describing a follower of Christ, but the more I thought about it, the more I liked it. We live in a branded world. Our cars have brands on them, so do our clothes, coffee, favorite cookies, etc. Ask me what car I drive and I’ll tell you a Camry. Ask me what cookies I like the best, I’ll tell you Oreos. Ask me what church I attend and I’ll tell you... that one is a little trickier. The easy answer would be, “I’m part of the University church of Christ.” That answer would be factual and it’s an answer I’ve given many times, but it may leave the impression that the brand of Christianity I like is the church of Christ, as opposed to any of the other brands (Catholic, Baptist, Mormon, Pentecostal, etc...). Of course what I mean is that I’m just a Christian, worshipping with a bunch of other Christians. I’m just a generic Christian, unbranded except by the name of Christ.

We’re non-denominational. That has become a loaded term as the number of “non-denominational” groups continues to increase. The primary goal of most non-denominational churches is to be more unlike other churches, rather than be like the church of the Bible. They’re doing their best to not look like a church at all. Brother Sewell Hall observed the same several years ago, “The idea of being undenominational Christians has become increasingly popular in recent years. However, this preference does not seem to result so much from a study of the scriptures as from disaffection with ‘organized religion.’ Often those who claim to be undenominational have no sense of responsibility to any group of Christians and participate in no organized worship or service to God.”¹ That’s not what we mean by “non-denominational.” We simply mean that our allegiance is to Christ and not to any man or man-made creed.

Yet, the derisive charge has been made by some that we are the “non-denominational denomination.” The charge is typically made by someone young, someone who’s dissatisfied with their local congregation and with restrictive doctrine. According to them we’re just another denomination, Command-Example-Necessary Inference is our creed and we err to say that anyone else is wrong. The charge is false.

I imagine the charge is made because of perceived uniformity in Christian belief and church practice. I've heard some brethren rejoice over how "no matter where you are in the world, you can worship on Sunday with Christians who do the exact same things." Well, that's true... kind of. There are Christians all over the world worshipping on the Lord's Day, singing praises, observing the Lord's Supper, studying the Scriptures. But a worship service in India isn't going to look or feel the same as one in Tampa. And while we strive for the unity of the faith, brethren do disagree over many Scriptural points. I doubt there's a local church in the world where the brethren all agree on every point. So, if we're just another denomination, following some "COC" creed, we're doing a really bad job of it.

That's not to say that Christians aren't overwhelmingly united in faith and practice. We are. Furthermore, we're supposed to be! Jesus prayed that we, "may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in unity," (John 17.22-23 NASB). Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their divisions and urged that they, "all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment," (1 Cor. 1.10 NASB). Paul taught the same thing in every church (1Cor. 4.17; 7.17) and warned against any departure from the delivered doctrine (Romans 16.17). Generally speaking, the difference between nondenominational Christians and denominational Christianity is simple: denominations are united in faith and practice because a man, church council or creed book establishes their faith and practice; generic Christians approach the Scripture with logic and common sense to determine what Christ says they are to believe and how they are to practice that belief.

We are still non-denominational, but there are a few things we need to be mindful of lest we slip into a denominational mindset. First, we need to use the name "church of Christ" (just one of many Scriptural designations) correctly. That name doesn't stand for the church buildings scattered across the country or even for the people assembled in those buildings. That name is reserved for those who submit to Christ, their King and their Head. That name is for *anyone* who will submit their will to Christ's will. Second, know what *you* believe, not what *we* believe. We don't believe in baptism for the remission of sins, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, marriage between man and a woman, etc. All of those principles are taught by Christ and His apostles, but it is up to *you* to believe them and follow them. Do *you* believe those things? Why do you believe those things? It cannot be because that's what a group of people you associate with believe. It must be because *you* see those things to be taught by Christ. Finally, don't treat kids and teens like they were born in the church. Most denominations believe and teach that babies are born into their church or that they become part of that

denomination via some ceremony conducted early in life. That doesn't happen in the Lord's church. Kids and teens with Christian parents have a great advantage. Kids and teens who worship with the saints have a great advantage. But, they do not "grow up in the church." As with any adult, once a young man or woman comes to understand what Christ teaches and he/she believes in Him and determines to follow Him, they become part of His church. Our job is to help them know Him.

Paul didn't need a "generic Christian" on the back of his chariot. Unfortunately today we must untangle true Christianity from the world's counterfeit versions. As we do that, let us make sure we are just that: generic Christians who are "branded" with our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

¹ Hall, Sewell, ed. "Theme Editorial: Questions Our Neighbors Ask: 'What Is Your Denomination?'" *Christianity Magazine: August 1999, Number 8*. Jacksonville, FL: Christianity Magazine, 1999.



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

The Condemnation of Evil Leaders

by Rusty Miller

What happens when the leaders of God's people fail them? What is God's reaction to evil leadership?

We are not left to speculate on this matter, because God Himself answers the questions in Ezekiel 34. To set the scene, God's people have for twelve years been in captivity in Babylon (33:21), and though they still believe they are entitled to the land of Canaan, Ezekiel is instructed to preach to them about the sin that has caused their captivity. In chapter 34, God tells Ezekiel to preach condemnation to the elders of Israel. We would do well to pay careful attention to God's words so that we might avoid such condemnation. Listening to Him, we need to contemplate our own actions and motives as we seek to lead God's people.

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep" (vv. 2-3).

What does God desire from His shepherds? That they feed the sheep! Our food is God's word, and we need to be certain that we are providing as many opportunities as possible for the flock to eat. We want grounded Bible teaching from the pulpit and in our Bible classes. We want to provide instruction and opportunities for those we lead to be reading their Bibles every day. We want to be available, after services, by telephone, by email, for people to talk to us about their questions concerning God's word. In short, if the church we lead is spiritually hungry, we need to provide food.

"The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them" (vv. 4-6).

Further, God desires His shepherds to help those who are struggling. Let's say we are providing multiple opportunities for the flock to eat. Still, some are starving because they are struggling with illness or economic difficulties. Some are starving because they are losing the battle with a sin that threatens to overtake their lives. Some are starving because they have wandered away. God wants us, His shepherds, to care for those in our charge who are struggling for whatever reason. This is more difficult, and when I examine my own life, this is the area where I fail most often. This requires more effort, more outreach, more compassion on my part, and it is there I need the most improvement.

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them” (vv. 7-10).

This is the result of poor shepherding, that God will be against us! May that never happen. God goes on to say that He will rescue His people and care for them, even when His shepherds do not. But that does not excuse the shepherds who failed Him so miserably. May we take these words to heart so that we do not fall into the condemnation of the Lord!



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

“Calvin Ball” Doesn’t Work

by Chuck Durham

In the 2009 Big 12 championship game Colt McCoy, who was the quarterback for the University of Texas, almost lost the game against Nebraska in the waning seconds of the fourth quarter. He thought he had more time on the clock than was really there. He scrambled in the backfield looking for a receiver, taking his time while precious seconds ticked off the clock, until he finally threw the ball out-of-bounds. The scoreboard clock showed zero seconds left. Texas was trailing Nebraska (12-10). If there truly was no time left on the official clock, then the game time ran out and Texas would have lost. But the “instant replay” allowed the officials to make the crucial call that there was one precious second left on the clock when the ball touched a railing that was out-of-bounds. Texas kicked a field goal on the last play of the game and beat Nebraska (13-12).

I have no love for the University of Texas (being a graduate of Texas Tech). I also reside in College Station, Texas - home of Texas A&M University, the most ardent foes of the Longhorns! It was interesting to listen to the comments regarding the game – “How the officials always call in favor of Texas,” etc. The obvious insinuation was the call was incorrect. The NCAA Football Rules and Interpretations, Rule 4, Section 2, Article 3 “Ball Out of Bounds” states: “A ball not in a player’s possession...is out of bounds when it touches the ground, a player, a game official or anything else that is on or outside a boundary line.” That rule is backed by the authority of the NCAA Football Rules Committee which states on page eight: “These guidelines form a harmony of agreement between coaches, players, game officials and administrators that places each contest in an environment of fairness and sportsmanship.” Further, page 13, “The American Football Coaches Association Code of Ethics states: “To gain an advantage by circumvention or disregard for the rules brands a coach or player as unfit to be associated with football.” The rule is plainly stated. All can read it and understand its meaning. Yes, the referee’s “interpretation” of the “instant replay” could have been wrong, but even viewers were treated to the official time clock on the television screen at the moment the ball touched the ground out-of-bounds. Given the “facts” and the “rule” of the sport, we should come to agreement that the particular play in question matches the rule in the book. In this instance, Texas had one more second to kick a field goal!

What’s the point? Simply this: almost everyone in America cares about some college football team. Almost everyone in America *therefore* cares about the Football Code when it affects “their” favorite team. If we cannot agree on the “rules” that will govern the game, then we end up with “Calvin ball” and not “football.” Remember the iconic figure “Calvin” in the comic strip “Calvin and Hobbes?” When Calvin and Hobbes

played “Calvin ball” the rules were made up as they went along. That’s what made those particular strips so humorous because of the numerous times Calvin extricated himself from binding “rules” by making up rules to “unbind” himself. Collegiate football may at times look like “Calvin Ball” due to a referee’s call, but no one argues for throwing the rule book out the window. Everyone who truly loves the game agrees that all must follow the “rules” of the game to play the sport of football in a fair and sportsman-like manner.

If I’m talking to my friend about the authority that backs up baptism for the remission of sins; singing praises to God without musical instruments; or not using the church building for recreational purposes – we must *first* agree about the “authority” to which we will appeal for common ground in answering these questions. We cannot begin to agree about these matters until we settle the crucial issue regarding “who” and “what” will govern us. Once we establish that the God of the Bible possesses all authority (Matthew 28:18) and that the Bible is His inspired word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), then we can discover the appropriate passages applying to the question at hand. If my “Texas Longhorn” loving friend doesn’t see this, I have a ready comparison to make from his “football” experiences to the ultimate reality of God’s Kingdom and His word.

God created us therefore having the right to rule over our lives (cf. Romans 9:20-21). No one would know what pleases Him without His word telling us what He wants us to do (and not do). We would all be playing spiritual “Calvin ball” without the common ground of the Bible. God expects us to read and understand the Bible (cf. Matthew 12:3; 19:4; 21:16, 42; Eph. 3:4). He expects us to live by it because we will be judged by it on the Last Day (cf. John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10). My football-loving neighbor can see this when it comes to the game of football. Football fans agree that the “who” (Rules Committee) has the authority to issue the “what will govern the game” (Football Code); and all collegiate football games in America will be played according to these “rules.” Without this common ground, we don’t have “football,” we have “Calvin ball.”

The next time we are in a spiritual discussion, remember these things. It may help us get our point across and eternally impact lives for the 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

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The Broken Wing

by Dene Ward

I saw him first in the early spring, the days still cool and breezy, the sun only barely warming the greening grass. I am not sure exactly how he reached the feeder next to my window, but later I saw him hopping down one limb at a time to the ground. His right wing was broken, dragging on whatever surface he stood; he was unable to lift it at all. Yet by hopping upward one limb at a time, I surmised, he had managed to get to a plentiful food supply and ate as much as he needed.

All spring he came, usually after the other birds had eaten their fill and left. I made sure he had plenty and he seemed to appreciate it, eying me from the safety beyond the window where I sat as he pecked the seed. Finally his wing began to mend. After a couple of weeks he was able to pull it up a bit. Gradually he pulled it closer and closer to his body, and suddenly one afternoon he gave it a try and flew to the feeders out in the yard, the ones on straight poles that he couldn't reach before. His flight was wobbly, swooping down toward the grass in a dive I thought would crash-land, but then he managed to flap a bit and rise to land on the red plastic perch.

His wing and his maneuvers have both improved. I can still tell which one he is, though, because that wing healed crookedly and still bows out from his body as if he has his hand in his pocket, elbow stuck out, but his flying is straight and sure now. He survived what might have brought death to any other bird probably because of the free and easy meal he could still manage to reach while he healed.

Isn't that why God put us here together? When one of us has a broken wing, the rest of us do what we can to help. It may be physical—taking meals to the ill or injured or those recovering from surgeries. But far more often it is a spiritual break, a soul in jeopardy from the pitfalls of life that have left him maimed and unable to care for himself.

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves (Romans 15:1)

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

In this way we follow the example of our Lord: *“a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench”* (Matt 12:20). Just as he healed so many broken souls, he expects us to do the same.

Sometimes it is difficult to deal with these broken souls. It takes time, it takes effort, sometimes it even takes heartache and tears. It means we might miss a planned outing, a meal, or maybe some sleep. Taking care of those in pain can take up your life—but then, isn't service supposed to be our life when we give it all to the Lord? Service by definition is never convenient.

Look around for those broken wings. God expects you to be His agent in taking care of His ailing children. Feed them, care for them, listen, advise, and if necessary, correct. Above all, be patient—healing takes time. If you aren't willing to do that, then maybe the broken wing is *yours*.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.” Isaiah 35:3-4



*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. 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

Sensory Overload? Who Me?

by Warren E. Berkley, assistant editor

Sensory overload occurs when one or more of the body's senses experiences over-stimulation from the environment. There are many environmental elements that impact an individual. Examples of these elements are urbanization, crowding, noise, mass media, technology, and the explosive growth of information. [source: Wikipedia]

We like to call it "multi-tasking," and we may boast of all we are able to do simultaneously. We argue that it is a part of life, even a dimension of responsibility and productivity. "There is so much to do," we may claim. Even when folks come to the worship assembly, in the foyer we greet people quickly, then return to our cell phones. Perhaps during the time worship should be taking place, we are seeking to hide our access to email, messaging or the internet. And we may think there is no distraction. We can do it. Can we? Should we?

We may be fooling ourselves. Did you know, in war time, it is commonly known that "good" torture methods can be found in these two extremes: sensory deprivation and sensory overload. Put a prisoner in a dark, quiet place with no contact with anyone and that may break him. Likewise, put a prisoner in a room that is filled with flickering colored lights and a mixture of noise, with cold and hot air, etc. and that may break him.

There are children with serious issues of coping with either end of this spectrum. There are older folks, stroke patients for example, who do well until you fill the room with people, several conversations, two different kinds of music and lots of movement. We understand that. But should these exceptions cause us to dismiss the whole issue?

Sensory overload may be something we should not explain away. Example: you are sitting in your living room doing your daily Bible reading, glancing at the blaring television, admonishing your kids, and never with your cell phone more than a reach away (asking for interruptions). That is not the optimal environment for you to listen to God's Word. You may mark that day's reading off your list. But have you really been nourished?

Most of us have prayed while driving (perhaps asking the Lord to keep us from being an instigator or victim of road rage). It cannot be argued we are giving full attention to our praying, if we are also engaged in safe driving. Should multi-tasking include prayer?

Without being dogmatic, may I suggest this whole subject of sensory overload deserves some good thought by each of us. **Maybe too many things are thrown at us to catch at**

the same time. Have we reached a place where we are unable to enjoy quietness and use it for spiritual value?

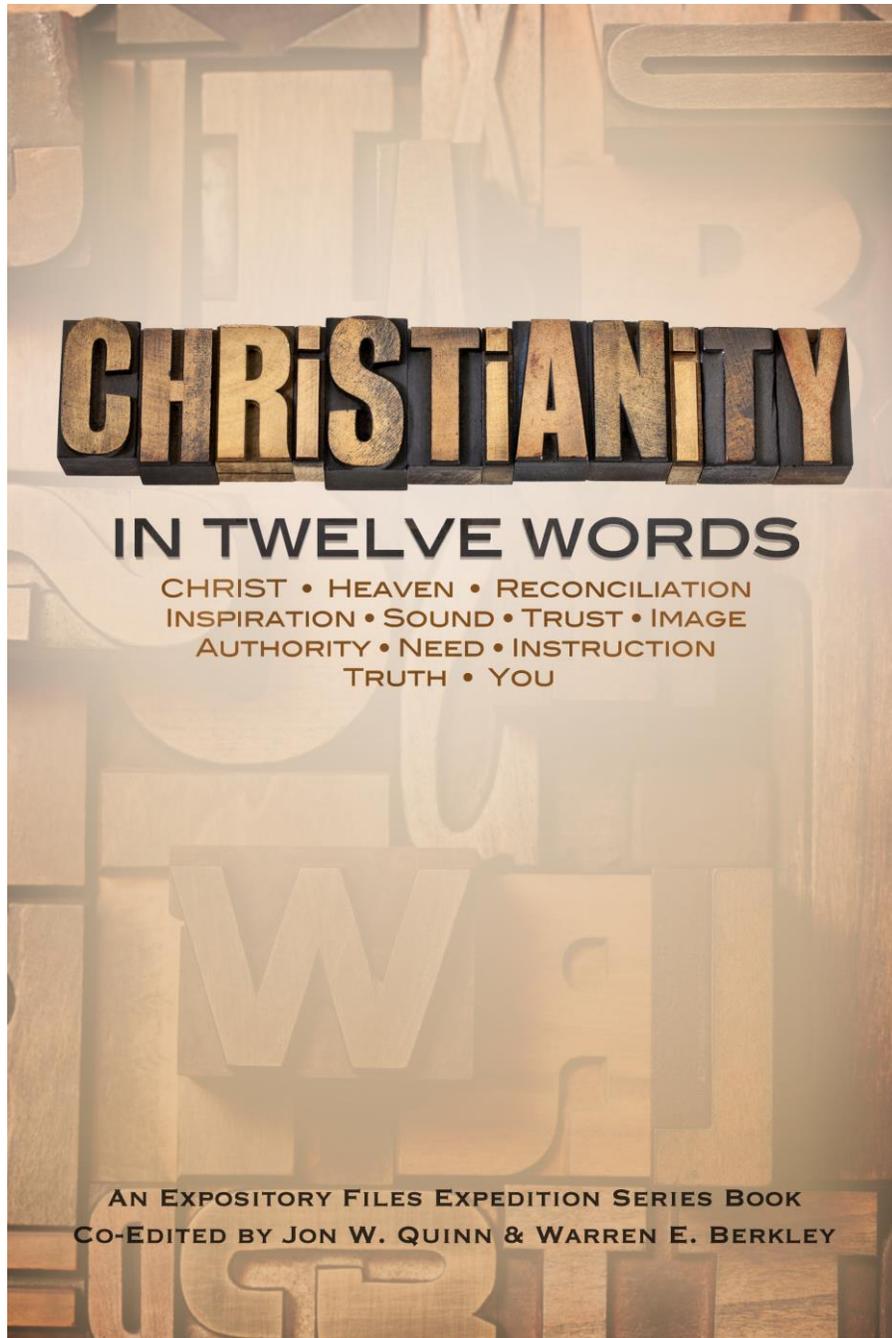
Let's see now. Is there some bible pattern of One who – by His own example – instructs us in the value of solitude with God?

Truth Connection (Luke 5:16): “But He would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” (See also Mark 4:19, Mark 6:31-32, Luke 10:39, Matt. 14:13).



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).

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What's On My Kindle?

New Book On Heaven

by Warren E. Berkley

Here's a good book written by Christians, available on Kindle and in print format: **Heaven: O For A Home With God**, by Steve Klein and Jeff May. [Click here to purchase.](#)

There is so much going on recently, in the secular market place, about heaven. Claims of being there and returning to write a book. Movies, TV, and surely we will soon see a reality TV show claiming to be filmed inside the "Pearly Gates," (there, the title).

Wash your mind out with this refreshing journey into Biblical teaching. Rich in illustrative material, written in workbook format, touching on the pertinent Scriptures and made practical through motivation and hope, you'll want to read this book.

Chapter titles include: "Heaven: God's Eternal Home ... Jesus Christ – Trailblazer to Heaven ... Unless One is Born Again ... Living a Heavenly Life on Earth," and others.

In the Foreword, Bill Hall says, "Steve Klein and Jeff May jolt us into seeing heaven as a reality." The only negative about the Kindle edition is, the Table of Contents is not hyperlinked.

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