



BALANCE

2015 DEEPER YOUTH CONFERENCE

Edited by Luke Dockery and Jake Greer



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LUKE DOCKERY



JAKE GREER

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Another Deeper Youth Conference is in the books!

DYC '15 was our second attempt at putting on a conference which focused on providing quality classes to help teens deepen their faith and learn what Christianity is really about while they are still teens.

The weekend was a huge blessing as we experienced significant growth in attendance, the presence of new congregations, and many outstanding lessons. DYC '15 was also the first time where we clustered our lessons around a specific theme and also incorporated student speakers into our schedule.

This year's theme was "Balance," and it came from a realization that a lot of times, on a lot of biblical topics, we get ourselves into trouble when we gravitate to extreme positions. In reaction to this, we do not want to suggest a default middle-of-the-road approach, but rather, a *biblical* approach: rather than going to an extreme or reacting to one extreme by going to the other extreme, we want to see what Scripture teaches. As you will see, this year's lessons engage that theme in a variety of different ways.

We would like to thank all of the teachers and speakers who were not only willing to take part in the 2015 Deeper Youth Conference, but

were also willing to do extra work by providing us with manuscripts of their lessons. Obviously, this book would not exist without their efforts.

A huge thank you is in order to Matthew Howard, who proofread the entire book, caught a lot of typos, and made many helpful editing suggestions. The product you hold in your hands (or read on your screen) would have been greatly diminished without his masterful touch. Any errors which remain are, obviously, the responsibility of the editors.

And finally, thank you to our wives, Caroline and Tasha, who work alongside us daily, supporting us in the work of Deeper Youth Ministry, encouraging us and consoling us as needed. You're the best!

Luke Dockery and Jake Greer
Co-Directors Deeper Youth Ministry
June 2015



ROSS COCHRAN

teaches in Harding University's College of Bible and Ministry. He has twice received Harding's Distinguished Teacher Award (1999 and 2006).

Ross served on the preaching staff of the Downtown Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas for ten years, and currently serves as one of the 25 elders at Downtown.

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OVER THE TOP

ROSS COCHRAN

Extraordinary Action

What do we mean when we say someone or something is “over the top”? The dictionary defines it this way: “beyond normal, expected, or reasonable limits; excessive; outrageous.” You might say something like, “He has always had an independent style, but don't you think purple spiky hair is a bit *over the top*?” When we say something is “over the top” we are emphasizing that a person is bold, or their actions are outrageous or excessive, beyond what is normal or expected.

The theme of this year's Deeper Youth Conference is “Balance”. One possible meaning of the balance is “stasis,” and stasis can mean “status quo,” which means things as they presently are or things as they usually are. Common. Equilibrium. There is a *gravitational pull* to be “normal.” We don't want to stand out. We don't want the ridicule we might receive if we put ourselves out there and are perceived as different.

But here is an important idea that I want you to take from this lesson: **while you may feel comfortable in the common and be oriented to think of yourself as ordinary, Jesus calls you to extraordinary action.**

What does “extraordinary action” look like?

My friend Landon Saunders once went car shopping and told the salesman, “I want that car, but I don't want to get into a negotiation

about the price. I am just trusting you to give me the lowest price you possibly can. What is your lowest price for that car?" The salesman gave him a price, and then Landon said, "Well, I want to add \$100 to that price to make sure you get what you need out of this deal." That is certainly extraordinary, isn't it? Trusting the car salesman and then being generous with him?

I have another friend, Dave, who was being heavily criticized by some people who wanted to see him fired. Later I was talking to him about it and asked, "What did you do?" Dave said, "I just responded with an unconquerable goodwill." Unconquerable goodwill in the face of extreme criticism? That is pretty extraordinary as well.

There's a video clip from the movie *October Sky*¹ which illustrates this point very well. Who does complicated math and physics problems on their lunch break? Homer exhibits an "over the top" commitment to his dreams.

You may have heard the scandal that came out a while ago when a video was released of some members of a University of Oklahoma fraternity (Sigma Alpha Epsilon) on a bus singing a racially offensive song (in the song they use the "n" word). The University of Oklahoma has disbanded that fraternity and ordered all its members to move out of the frat house. Two young men's faces can be seen in the video and they have been identified. One has published an apology. The other young man's parents have issued an apology. Some former members of the fraternity have said things like, "That song was taught to us," "Alcohol was involved," "They are just 19-year olds," etc.

What would it have looked like to be on that bus? Imagine that was the band or chorus you are a part of at your high school. You're on that bus. Would you have said anything? Would you have done anything?

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udHB3tftPz4>

Exploring Matthew 5

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds (surpasses, NIV) that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5.20)²

And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
(Matthew 5.47)

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a lot of examples of “over the top,” or extraordinary, responses.

Pluck out your eye; cut off your hand:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.
(Matthew 5.27-30)

Turn the other cheek:

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
(Matthew 5.38-39)

Give your tunic:

And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.
(Matthew 5.40)

²Scriptural quotations come from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Go the second mile:

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

(Matthew 5.41)

Love your enemy:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

(Matthew 5.43-48)

We should probably say some more about loving your enemy. The idea of hating your enemy has always been popular, but it was not what was taught under the Law of Moses. There, too, God called for extraordinary action:

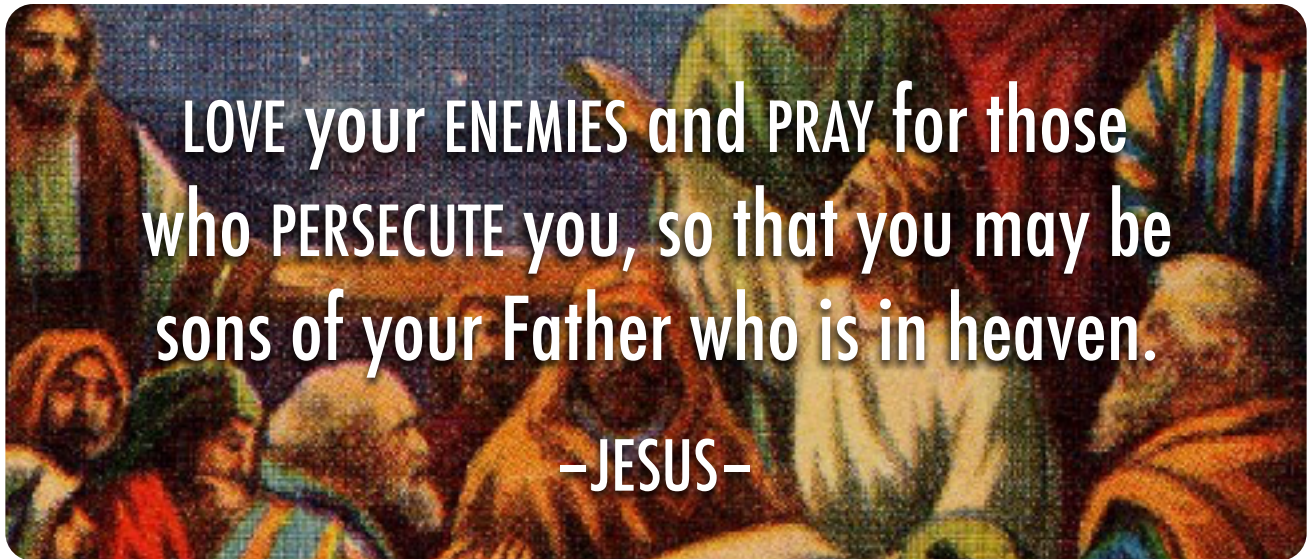
If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

(Exodus 23.4-5)

This Old Testament passage clearly teaches the same idea that Jesus was getting at. The Israelites were instructed to return their enemy's donkey, and furthermore, to *become* their enemy's donkey; they were supposed to *serve* their enemy and help him rescue his donkey!

All of this gets back to the idea of **meekness**, which is not a highly-prized characteristic in today's society. *Meekness is not weakness, though!* Meekness is an incredible gesture of strength where you exercise high levels of self-control to act in

disarmingly powerful ways. This trait can be seen in the non-violent resistance of the Civil Rights movement, which was characterized by the commitment and determination to not respond when verbally ridiculed or physically assaulted.



Clearly, as Christians we are called to extraordinary responses! What is involved in becoming a person capable of extraordinary responses?

Truths About Your Life

1. *Your life is lived in a trajectory, so begin practicing being the person you want to be **now**.* Your life follows a path, and *you* are choosing it now. The final result is determined by the present path.
2. *You will not likely become a better person than you are now without intentionality.* We sometimes say, "Practice makes perfect," but that isn't true. *Perfect* practice makes perfect. *Intentional* practice makes perfect. Unintentional practice shapes your life as much as intentional practice does, though less visibly. You will not likely become a better person than you are now attempting to become.
3. *Your life is a garden.* Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.

4. *Who you are determines what you do and desire, and what you do and desire determine who you are.* You do what you are. Being, Doing and Desiring are interconnected. Who you are determines what you do and desire.
5. *Your life is capable of extraordinary Christlikeness, and God calls you to extraordinary action* (turning cheek, second mile, loving enemy, becoming enemy's donkey). Meekness is not weakness; it is an extraordinary act of strength through voluntary submission with the goal of disarming defensiveness.

Extraordinary Responses in Your Life

We talked earlier about the status quo and how tempting it is to just go along with what everyone else is doing in order to be viewed as normal. Peer pressure and gravity (the status quo) pull us to the ordinary.

Did you ever blow bubbles when you were a kid? What do bubbles do? They sink when *gravity* pulls them down, and they pop when they face *pressure* from the outside (evaporation, a dry object, their own thin wall and fragile nature). We are similar to bubbles in the kinds of pulls and pressures we face. We don't want to stand out. We don't want the ridicule we might receive if we put ourselves out there.

As a student, there are areas in your life *right now* where you can respond in extraordinary ways:

- **Race relations:** We are naive if we choose to believe that we do not still have a problem in our society in this area. If racially offensive statements are made or jokes are told, what will you do?
- **Gay bashing:** We know what the Bible teaches about homosexual practices and need to be clear about that, but the Bible also teaches us to love all people. It is

never acceptable for us to ridicule or dehumanize other people. Will you avoid this type of behavior? How will you respond to it when you see it?

- **Peer behavior:** When you find yourself in a group of friends that is doing the wrong thing, how will you respond? Will you cave in to the gravitational pull or are you willing to be different? Are you willing to say, "If that's what you're doing, pull the car over and let me out"?
- **At home:** How will you respond to your parents? How will you treat your siblings?

It is important that here and now, you make the decision to step up and stand up. We are influenced by those whose **lives** we admire, whose **minds** we respect, and whose **hearts** we trust. Our **lives** become admirable when we learn to respond in ways that are in contrast to the typical ways people usually respond. Our **minds** become respectable when we can think critically about information, understand opposing views and make our case with gentleness and respect. Our **hearts** become trustworthy when we treat *all* others well.



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TIGHTROPE WALKING

ROSS COCHRAN

Life Trajectory

When you throw a ball, where it ends up depends in great deal upon its beginning: How hard did you throw it? What was the trajectory of the ball? How good is your aim? It is much easier to affect the destination of the ball at the beginning, *before* you throw it, rather than attempting to alter the ball in mid-flight.

The same is true in your spiritual life. Why not desire and pursue *now* the righteous life God desires? The end is determined by the beginning. How do you get to an *end* that (1) you are proud of, (2) contributes significantly to the well-being of others, and (3) delivers the web of relationships we all want in terms of family and friends?

A Balancing Act

Nik Wallenda is a famous tightrope walker. He is a seventh generation member of The Flying Wallendas family. He has been doing professional tightrope stunts since the age of 13, and has set the record for the longest and highest bicycle ride on a high-wire. He has crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope, and also has Guinness World Records for walking the steepest tightrope incline between two buildings and for the highest tightrope walk while blindfolded.



Tight-rope walking requires balance. Weight has to be dispersed equally on both sides of the rope. In some ways, it is kind of like a guitar string: it cannot make music without the right amount of tension.

Scripture teaches that our spiritual lives also require balance. There are two truths which serve as the opposite ends of the “poles” we use to help us balance as we walk the tightrope of life:

- (1) We are to be different from the world (holiness).
- (2) We are to be engaged in the world (ministry).

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

(James 1.26-27, NIV)

In some ways these two truths may seem to be paradoxical, but they help us stay in balance. Just like a guitar string, the tension is important; it is the tension that makes the music. These two tasks—**holiness** and **ministry**—are summarized well in Jesus’ teaching to His disciples that they be “in the world” but not “of the world” (John 17.14-18). Unfortunately, we have strayed from that teaching. We somehow let **different from sin** become **distance from sin**, and then **distance from sinners**.

But Jesus calls us to be salt and light, and that can only happen if we engage in ministry and interact with the world around us. Inevitably this will lead to conflict, but conflict *shows* who we are and also *grows* who we are. Trials bring about maturity, and conflict can lead to unity. We must treat our enemies with love and treat dissidents with respect.

Truths About Your Life

(6) *One of the primary tests of your life is your character.* Your life needs to pursue both holiness and ministry (in a life-giving tension).

(7) *A second primary test of your life is how you treat others, especially those most different from you.* Do you know how to be with another person in a way that invites transformation?

(8) *Your life is transformed by people whose lives you admire, whose minds you respect, and whose hearts you trust.* Strive to be a transformer. Your life is transformed by people whose lives you *admire*, minds you *respect*, and whose hearts you *trust*. Know what? Those are the kind of people who also influence others. While **incarnation** is not a substitute for **explanation**, **incarnation** is more persuasive than **explanation**. As Francis of Assisi famously said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel...and if necessary use words." Our righteous living is the bridge across which our messages walk.

(9) *Your life must transition from child to adult, and your parents are not going to determine the path of your life.* A sheep found a hole in the fence and crept through it. He wandered far and lost his way back. Then he realized that he was being followed by a wolf. He ran and ran, but the wolf kept chasing him, until the shepherd came and rescued him and carried him lovingly back to the fold. In spite of everyone's urging to the contrary, the shepherd refused to nail up the hole in the

fence.³ As you become an adult, it is up to you to decide whether or not to stay inside the fence.

(10) You must partner with God's Spirit, God's Word and God's people in order for you to become the person you were meant to be.

Two Commitments: Holiness and Ministry

Holiness (difference from the world) and ministry (engagement with the world) pull us in opposite directions. It is the tension between these two pulls that produces the music. This idea is taught repeatedly in Scripture. Jesus told His disciples to live in the world, but not to be of the world (John 17.14-18). Peter told the Christians to whom he was writing to "abstain from sinful desires...[and] live such good lives among the pagans" (1 Peter 2.11-12, NIV). And of course, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers that they needed to be salt and light (Matthew 5.13-16). To make a difference, you must be *different*, and be *present*.

When we think about our commitment to **holiness**, Jesus is our model. The Bible teaches that He was without sin (Hebrews 4.15). In 1 John 2.15ff, John commands us not to love the world (the lust of the flesh), but he also says in John 3.16 that God loved the world (the people in it).

It may appear to be wise to have a long list of rules to govern our behaviors, but rules cannot restrain sensuality (Colossians 3.20-23). It is true that a large part of temptation is access (if you never have access to alcohol, you will never give in to the temptation to drink it!), but our real problem with holiness lies in our *internal desires* as well as our *external circumstances*.

³Anthony de Mello, "The Lost Sheep" in *The Song of the Bird* (Image Books: 1984).

If we are not careful, we will fall into the same old problem:

[Different *than* sin ⇒ Distance *from* sin ⇒ Distance *from* sinners]

That leads to our commitment to **ministry**, and here as well, Jesus serves as our model: despite being without sin (Hebrews 4.15), He was also a friend of sinners (Matthew 11.19).

Look at the story of Jesus eating at Matthew's table:

As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

(Matthew 9.9-13, NIV)



HOLINESS and MINISTRY pull us in opposite directions. It is the TENSION between these two pulls that produces the MUSIC.

—ROSS COCHRAN—

When Jesus talks about “mercy, not sacrifice” here, He is quoting from Hosea 6.6. This occurs two times in the Book of Matthew. The Pharisees had made rules about who they should be with and who they should avoid, but for Jesus, this statement frames His willingness to spend time with sinners. As Larry James said, “People and their pain take priority over religion and its rules.”

What would it require of us to be sinless *and* friends of sinners? Who are the Matthews in our lives? In our churches?

Balance and Maturity

It is important that parents have conversations with their children about behavior. When children are young, parents often give specific rules about behaviors which need to be avoided, and then as they become more mature, the conversation shifts to the rationale behind the rule, or *why* certain behaviors should be avoided.

For example, it used to be very common for Christian parents to tell their kids, “Don’t dance.” Are all types of dancing inherently sinful? Square dancing? Line dancing? Celtic clogging? No, but there are some types of dancing which lead to sensuality and are, therefore, inappropriate for Christians who are trying to live holy lives. As their children get older, instead of telling them, “Don’t dance,” parents should teach them to avoid sensuality, and with their increased maturity, young people can understand the difference.

Similarly, when children are small, parents teach them, “Be careful who your friends are,” as young children do not possess the maturity and understanding to appropriately balance holiness and ministry. But as they grow and mature, that conversation should change. Rather than avoiding all bad influences, parents should teach their children to befriend others, including “sinners”, in order to be a good influence to *them*. Nothing has changed in regard to sin; what has changed is the

maturity of the children to better understand the balance that God requires us to have: flee sin, pursue sinners.

Repeatedly, Jesus places great emphasis on loving others and treating them right:

- the Golden Rule (Matthew 7.12),
- the Greatest Commandment(s) (Matthew 22.34-40),
- the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (criteria for final judgment. "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to Me.") (Matthew 25.31-46),
- forgiveness from God being linked to forgiveness of each other (Matthew 6.14-15),
- reconciliation to God being linked to reconciliation with others (Matthew 5.23-24),
- love for enemies and kindness to them (Matthew 5.43-48).

As we go through our lives walking on a spiritual tightrope, it is essential that we have balance. **Holiness** pulls us away from sin and encourages us to be different, following the example of Jesus. **Ministry** demands that we engage the world, love people, and, again, follow the example of Jesus. It is only in the tension between holiness and ministry that we can please God with the music of our lives.



GARRETT BEST has served as the preaching minister for the Oliver Creek Church of Christ since 2010.

A graduate of Freed-Hardeman University and Harding School of Theology, Garrett considers himself to be a lifelong student of the Lord, and enjoys sharing what he has learned with others.

Garrett and his wife, Robin, live in Memphis, Tennessee and they have a dalmatian named Gage.

A BALANCED VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

GARRETT BEST

Francis Chan, a popular preacher and writer, wrote a book on the Holy Spirit in 2009 with an eye-catching title, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*.⁴ The premise of the book is that although the American church says that she believes in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is strangely absent from our language, teaching, and everyday lives. Is Chan right? Have we tragically neglected the Holy Spirit?

My own lifetime experience in churches of Christ leads me to answer that I do believe this is one area where we have, and continue to, miss the mark. As I contemplate how to address the topic of the Holy Spirit to an audience of teenagers, I reflect back to my own teenage years. I cannot recall receiving much if any thorough teaching on the Holy Spirit, at least not any that impacted me in any real way. I remember occasional sermons or classes on topics like “why Christians don’t speak in tongues” or “why miracles do not continue today.” I had no real concept of who or what the Holy Spirit was or is, and I had no idea what, if anything, the Holy Spirit does for us.

⁴Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado City, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).

For the last five years, I have preached for a congregation in Memphis, Tennessee. I have taught a Sunday School class on the Holy Spirit twice. Each time, I have begun by asking the questions, "Why are you in this class? Why do you want to study the Holy Spirit?" And each time, the responses astound me. One sister who has spent her entire life in churches of Christ said, "It was just not something that was discussed when I was growing up. I have never been taught on the Holy Spirit." Each time I've taught it, over 50% of the class admitted they had never received any thorough teaching on the Holy Spirit during their lives. What are we so seemingly afraid of? Why are we not addressing this important and essential topic in our churches?

The Azusa Street Revival in 1906 is typically regarded as the beginning of the movement known as Pentecostalism. Currently, around 280 million Christians around the world claim to be Pentecostal. Although there are many different variations within Pentecostal Christianity, they all have a common belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit which leads to supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. According to Pentecostalism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs separately from conversion. The converted believer who experiences the baptism of the Spirit is empowered by the Spirit to speak in tongues and perform healing miracles.

Pentecostalism is based on a particular reading, or better, a misreading, of the book of Acts in the New Testament. I believe that many, including churches of Christ, have



The Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California was the location of the Azusa Street Revival, which began in 1906 and is widely regarded as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement.

There are currently around 280 million Pentecostals in the world, who are united in their belief that the baptism of the Holy Spirit leads to supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

been right to criticize the spiritual excesses of Pentecostalism. However, history and experience teaches us that many times, when we are criticizing the excesses of another, we have a tendency to swing the pendulum to the opposite extreme. So the thought goes, "If I agree with the Pentecostals even a little bit, then it might lead me to agree with them in other areas, so I'm going to distance myself as much as possible from Pentecostalism and disagree with anything they believe." The irony is that when we do this, we have actually let the Pentecostals influence what we believe. We start looking for things in the Bible that will help us prove them wrong. Instead of developing a healthy, biblical theology of the Holy Spirit, we have let the Pentecostals dictate how we read Scripture. This type of fear of controversy leads us to neglect the subject of the Holy Spirit altogether. Have no fear! You can affirm the active work of the Holy Spirit in your life without becoming Pentecostal!

In response to the spread of Pentecostalism, some churches of Christ resurrected the idea that the Holy Spirit works only in and through the written Bible. W. Carl Ketcherside, a prominent preacher in churches of Christ, recounted a visit he had to a church in Missouri in the 1960s. A man in the Sunday morning Bible class asked the teacher "Well, just what is the Holy Spirit, anyhow?" Ketcherside records the teacher's response, "This Book is the Holy Spirit, and all the Holy Spirit there is. When I have it in my overcoat pocket, the Holy Spirit is in my pocket. The Holy Spirit is the Word of God, and that's what this Book is, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit."⁵ While that certainly represents an extreme view of the Holy Spirit, it is a view that has influenced Southern churches of Christ nonetheless. In the church in which I was raised, and even in my current ministry, I still feel the influence of the Word-only Holy Spirit position.

⁵W. Carl Ketcherside, *Heaven Help Us (The Holy Spirit in Your Life)* (Cincinnati: New Life Books, 1974), 7.

To oversimplify the issue, twentieth-century Pentecostalism represented a **Spirit-only** view of the Holy Spirit's work while many in Churches of Christ taught a **Word-only** view. I grew up in a church that affirmed the literal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Usually, when the work of the Holy Spirit was discussed, a disclaimer was issued. It went something like, "The Holy Spirit does work in the life of the Christian, but the Holy Spirit never does anything contrary to the Bible." Why the need for a disclaimer? My suspicion is that disclaimer arose as a way to avoid the **Spirit-only** view while also avoiding the **Word-only** view. My goal in writing this is not merely to lay out a middle viewpoint between those two extreme positions. My goal is to be neither conservative nor liberal, Pentecostal nor Word-only. My interest is in being biblical. As with all teaching, my words should be judged against the revelation that we have in Scripture.

Writing this has forced me to reflect on the most fundamental ideas associated with the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. This presentation will certainly not even scratch the surface of all that could be said. I intend only to present what I believe are the three most important things I believe every Christian ought to know about the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and in the church.

The Sanctification of Believers

The word sanctification comes from the Latin word *sanctus*, which means "holy". In the New Testament, the word holy means to be different from the world in the way we think and live. For example, the Bible says we should refrain from having sex before marriage. This is because God wants us to be holy. When we keep ourselves pure before marriage, we are living in holiness before God. "Sanctification" is the process of being made holy. Someone who is sanctified is someone whom God has made holy. We cannot become holy on our own. This is a status that only a holy God can

bestow upon us. The only title attributed to God three times in Scripture is "holy" (Isaiah 6.3; Revelation 4.8).

The million dollar question is, "How can a sinful, unholy person like me be made holy?" The answer is that we are sanctified (made holy) by the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter calls this the "sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1.2) and Paul "sanctification by the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2.13). In order for us to be made holy, God gives us His Holy Spirit. We are called to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1.15-16), but we cannot be holy by our own doing. We are sinful. We have to be made holy. Paul says that God's will for all of us is for our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4.3). God wants us to live holy lives. He has called us to holiness, not impurity (1 Thessalonians 4.7). If we choose to be impure rather than holy, we have rejected "God, who gives his Holy Spirit" us in order to make us holy (1 Thessalonians 4.8).

The Bible does not teach a "bootstrap theology." Bootstrap theology says that it is all up to me. I have to pull myself up by my own power. The Bible teaches that I am not alone. I couldn't make myself holy if I wanted to. I am reliant on the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work. It is God's Spirit who works in us to make us more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled (Galatians 5.22-23). The heading to this section in my study Bible is not the "Fruit Of Garrett's Own Effort To Be Good." It is the "Fruit Of The Spirit" because it is the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. This is how we know we have the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we are being conformed into the image of Christ, and if the fruit of the Spirit is manifest in our lives, then we know we are living by the Spirit's leading.

Would you be surprised to know that the word "Christian" only occurs twice in the New Testament (Acts 26.28; 1 Peter 4.16)? Early Christians did not refer to themselves as "Christians." In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that this name was used as a derogatory name for followers of Christ. The apostle Paul never even used the title

“Christian.” The most common designation for early followers of Jesus was “saints.” It occurs 60 times in the New Testament to label Christians. The word “saints” means “holy ones.” Those who are sanctified are called saints, or holy ones (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.2). The richness of the gospel message cannot be conceived without an appreciation for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Mission of the Church

The book of Acts records for us the beginning and growth of the early Christian church. The very name “Acts” implies action. Someone is doing something in this book. In order to specify the kinds of “acts” that are discussed in this book, it is sometimes called the “Acts of the Apostles.” This was the name of a course I took in college. Certainly, the acts of Peter, John, Paul, and the other apostles are main parts of the story of Acts. However, I would suggest to you a far more accurate title for Acts is the “Acts of the Holy Spirit.” In reading Acts, it is clear to me that without the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, there would have been no early church, or certainly not one that would have spread all over the world.

Acts 1 provides a picture of 120 disciples in Jerusalem who were waiting for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1.4-5, 14-15). Then, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles. Luke reports that it happened “suddenly” (Acts 2.2). Despite the promise of Jesus, it seems that this wasn’t something they were expecting to happen: the response to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was bewilderment (2.6), amazement (2.7), astonishment (2.7), and a perplexed multitude (2.12). Everyone there that day was instructed to repent and be baptized in order to receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2.38). That day, 3,000 were baptized and the Christian church emerged. It wasn’t that Peter and the rest of the apostles had planned or prepared for that

happen. It was the work of the Holy Spirit that caused the gospel to spread among the Jews in Jerusalem for Pentecost.

Throughout Acts, it is clear that without the leading, guiding, and empowering of the Holy Spirit, the early church would not have been able to grow and spread. The Holy Spirit empowered the bold preaching of the early church (2.1-4, 14; 4.8, 29-31). It was the Holy Spirit who appointed Paul and Barnabas for their first missionary journey (13.2). The Holy Spirit was even showing them where to go on their journey (13.4). On Paul's second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit forbade Paul from going to Asia to preach (16.6) and even forbade he and his traveling companions from going to Bithynia to preach (16.7). The Spirit directed them to go preach in Macedonia, where they had success and gained new converts to the faith (16.9-10).

In Acts 2, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the event that confirmed that God had fulfilled His promises to save His people through Jesus Christ. In Acts 10, Peter was hesitant to take the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius. He had to be shown a vision three times in order to even go to Cornelius's house. While Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he had the Jews in Acts 2. Peter had to go down to Jerusalem to report to the Jewish leaders that the gospel had been preached to the Gentiles. He said, "If then God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (11.17). The mission to the Gentiles was certainly not Peter's idea, and the rest of the apostles had to be convinced this was God's plan. Had the Holy Spirit not shown Peter that the Gentiles were given the repentance that leads to life, Peter and the rest of the Jewish Christians would not have understood God's plan.

Acts tells us of the unstoppable progress of the gospel from Jerusalem out to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8). The success of the early mission of the church was not due to the abilities or talents of the church leaders. In fact, people were amazed that

these “uneducated, common men” could preach with such boldness (Acts 4.13). It was the Holy Spirit who used 120 confused people to spread the gospel of the kingdom. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered the early Christians to speak boldly. It was the Holy Spirit who commissioned Paul for his missionary journeys and even guided him as to where he was and was not to go. It was the Holy Spirit who initiated the mission to the Gentiles. As believers today, the Holy Spirit is no less involved in the success of our mission. As we go out into our communities and world to spread the gospel, the Holy Spirit is at work in and through the mission of the church.

Christian Hope

I have a fig tree in my back yard. I enjoy picking the figs, freezing them, and making my own jelly from them. Each spring, the fig tree begins to bud and I know that my fig tree is alive and ready to produce more figs. When I see those first fruits, I know they are promises that there will be more figs to come. This is concept is exactly the background of Paul’s teaching in Romans 8.23. The Holy Spirit is the “firstfruits” that God will redeem us. If the Holy Spirit is making us holy now in this life, then God will surely make us completely whole in the next. The Holy Spirit is the promise of greater things yet to come.

Another metaphor Paul uses is that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance (Ephesians 1.13-14; 2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5). The Holy Spirit is God’s down payment or guarantee to us that He will redeem and renew us in the end. If you have God’s Spirit, then God guarantees that you will be raised from the dead to live with Him for eternity. Paul says, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8.11). If we want to be raised from the dead, then we have to have the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. We

have to have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. If the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is in us, then we have the **firstfruits** and the **guarantee** that we will be raised from the dead. Having the Holy Spirit dwelling within us is the confidence that we have before God that we will live with Him for eternity.

I do believe churches of Christ have been guilty of neglecting the Holy Spirit. Some do better than others, of course. Somewhere along the way, discussing the Holy Spirit became a very controversial subject. My fear is that while attempting to deal with the Spirit-only approach of Pentecostalism and the Word-only approach of some churches of Christ, we just avoided the topic altogether. The Holy Spirit, through no fault of His own, became too controversial for us. What an unfortunate reality. The Holy Spirit is essential for our sanctification. The Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ and makes us holy. The Holy Spirit is essential for the leading and empowerment of the church's mission to the world. Lastly, the indwelling

Holy Spirit is God's guarantee to us that He will raise us from the dead in the end to live with Him forever. Much more could be said about the Holy Spirit, but I have selected these because I believe they represent a few of the most essential biblical teachings. May "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13.14).



THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

(1) The Holy Spirit
MAKES BELIEVERS HOLY.

(2) The Holy Spirit EMPOWERS
THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

(3) The Holy Spirit IS THE PROMISE
OF GREATER THINGS YET TO COME.



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He is passionate about exploring the wondrous design of the human body, and using his research as a platform for theological insight.

KEEPING OUR BALANCE: SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM BIOMECHANICS

JUSTIN BLAND

Introduction

Balance is beautiful, is it not? If you do not think balance is beautiful, then you have no idea what you are missing! If you have never had an issue standing upright and walking, then I am confident you are currently taking for granted your ability to walk.

One of my goals today is to give you a brief introduction to how our incredible bodies maintain balance. It is an absolutely astounding process, and I am only able to understand the very tip of the iceberg. More and more research into this area reveals more and more of the mystery that is balance. This mystery of balance is only possible through a multitude of complex systems being integrated at a magnificent and incomprehensible level. At the same time, you are able to go about your daily tasks without thinking twice about this unbelievable system working like mad to maintain an upright posture in spite of expected and unexpected perturbations (or disruptions in the environment). The Almighty Creator God, the Designer, has set in place a beautiful design that we get to explore and find how

incredible He is (or at least, begin the process, because we will never know the vastness of His greatness).

I want to make another statement before we begin this journey. In general, once we reach a point in the “knowledge” where we, or the scientific community, no longer understand the depth of physiology, there exists a temptation for Christians to reflexively respond, “Oh, God must have done it...” This is a tragedy. Yes, God *did* do it. In the beginning He spoke and it was so. He created by the breath of His mouth. So to say “God must have done it” *only* when we reach something we do not understand is a tragedy and, in my opinion, marginalizes God. God created everything we understand and everything we do not understand. Our *first* statement is “God must have done it,” and *then* we get to say, “Here’s what we know right now.”

Balance is the *result* of a multitude of systems and signals (many of which researchers still do not understand), allowing for functional movement in the ever-changing environment. Try something with me for a minute:

- Which is easier: standing on one leg with your eyes open or closed? Why?
- Which is easier: standing on one leg while tilting your head or keeping your head stable? Why?
- Which is easier: standing on one leg while it is slightly bent or substantially bent? Why?

We have just begun to explore things you have already known about, but may or may not have been able to articulate. A few of the crucial variables involved with balance are: vision, vestibular (inner ear), and proprioception (or, our understanding of where our joints are in space). But the “resources,” or variables, required for appropriate upright stability are substantial.

Figure 1, pictured below, is from a research article published in 2006, depicting several of the contributing factors for us to remain upright.⁶ Notice that learning and attention contribute to our control of our posture as well as what is called “sensory integration” and “sensory reweighing.” I love thinking about these two variables. “Sensory integration” is what we just demonstrated: the intensely complicated and beautiful combination of vision, vestibular, and proprioception (for now just equate proprioception with “feeling”).

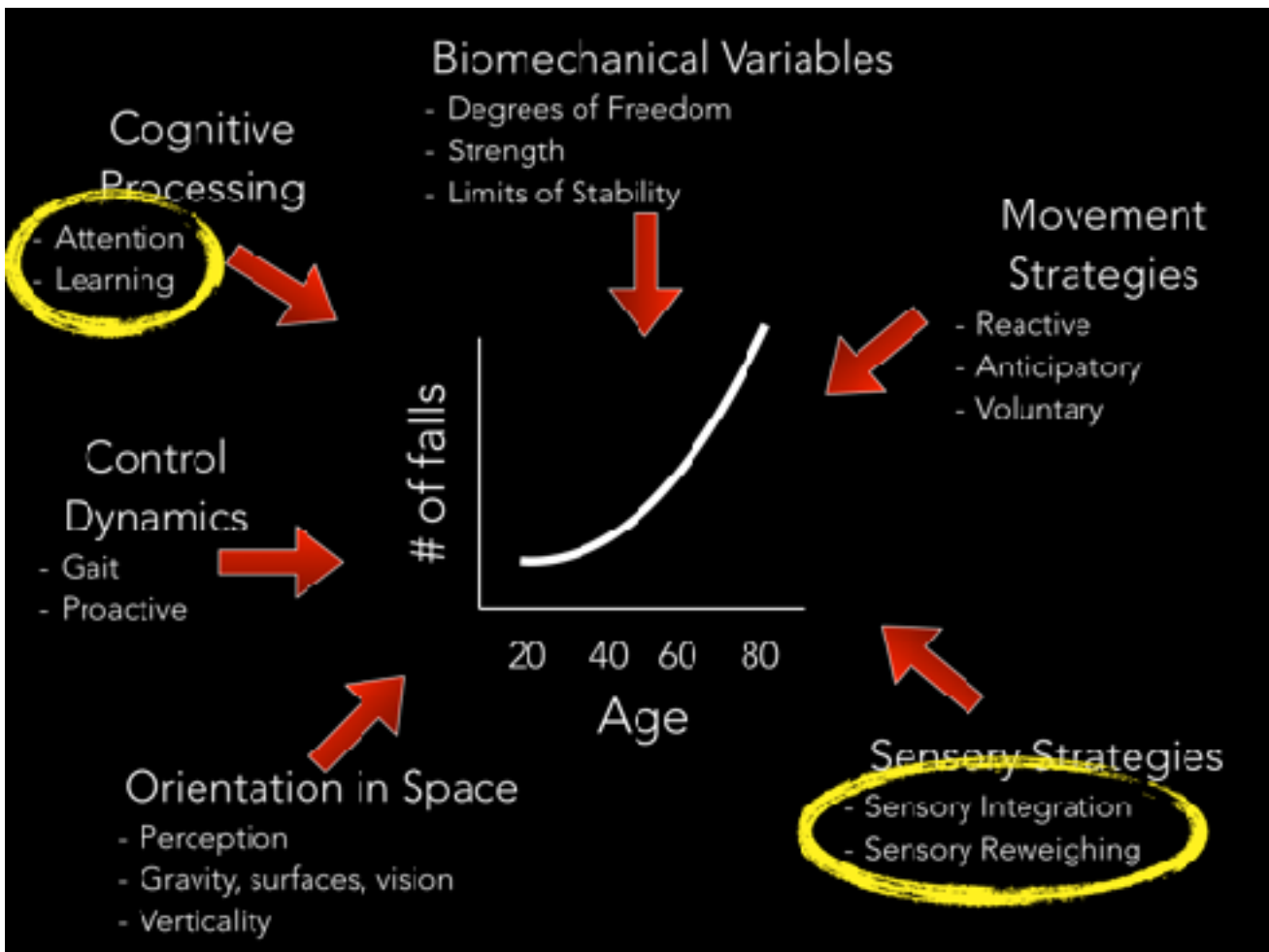


FIGURE 1

⁶Fay B. Horak, “Postural Orientation and Equilibrium: What Do We Need to Know About Neural Control of Balance to Prevent Falls?,” *Age Ageing* 35, no. 2 (2006): ii7-ii11.

One part of balance is the integration of all sensory information; this “input” allows the brain and spinal cord to respond appropriately in order to maintain balance in the ever-changing environment. Interestingly enough, what we experienced in our exercise was the “weighing” of our sensory information. Let me say that another way. Which sense do *you* rely on more heavily to remain upright? What do you think? Vision, vestibular, or “feeling” (which we call proprioceptive)? In a brightly lit room on a stable surface it has been scientifically observed that proprioceptive sensory information contributes 70% of postural control, vestibular 20%, and vision only 10%.⁷ In other words, in that particular context, the body uses mostly proprioceptive information (or feeling) to maintain balance. When the surface becomes unstable, we “reweigh” our senses to primarily use vestibular and vision information and less from proprioceptive. Because the surface is unstable, we receive “bad” information from the proprioceptive sensors; the brain compares this “bad” information to the information being received from vestibular and vision sensors. Thus, sensory integration and sensory reweighing are significant contributors to postural control (maintaining balance). The same reweighing would occur with any change in environment, not just surface.

Somatosensory/Neuromuscular

Proprioception is essentially your perception of where your joints are in space. For example, close your eyes and raise your arm. Now bend your elbow. How do you know you successfully completed that action without looking at your arm? Your response might be, “Well, duh, I can feel my arm” (do people say “duh” anymore?). Exactly, that feeling is your body sending signals back to your brain, telling you that your arm is raised and is bent. That is proprioception.

⁷R.J. Peterka, “Sensorimotor Integration in Human Postural Control,” *Journal of Neurophysiology* 88, no. 3 (2002): 1097-1118.

The nervous system integration here is very complex, and there are receptors all over your body, throughout your joints, skin, and muscles sending and receiving information to and from the brain. The brain sends a signal: "bend elbow." Obviously, it is *much* more complicated than just "bend elbow," because you can bend it a specific degree and address different tasks that all require huge amounts of information to be sent and received through complicated signal pathways and feedback loops. For now, we'll just say your brain says "bend elbow." The signal is sent to several muscles using several different pathways, but the biceps is one muscle to which the neurological signal is sent, and the result is elbow flexion. This is where it gets fun. How does your brain *know* you have accomplished the demanded task? We know that a neuron only carries one signal in one direction, so we *must* have some other "intelligent" system in place that sends information back to the brain. We will look at just one mechanism: the wonderfully beautiful muscle spindle (see Figure 2).

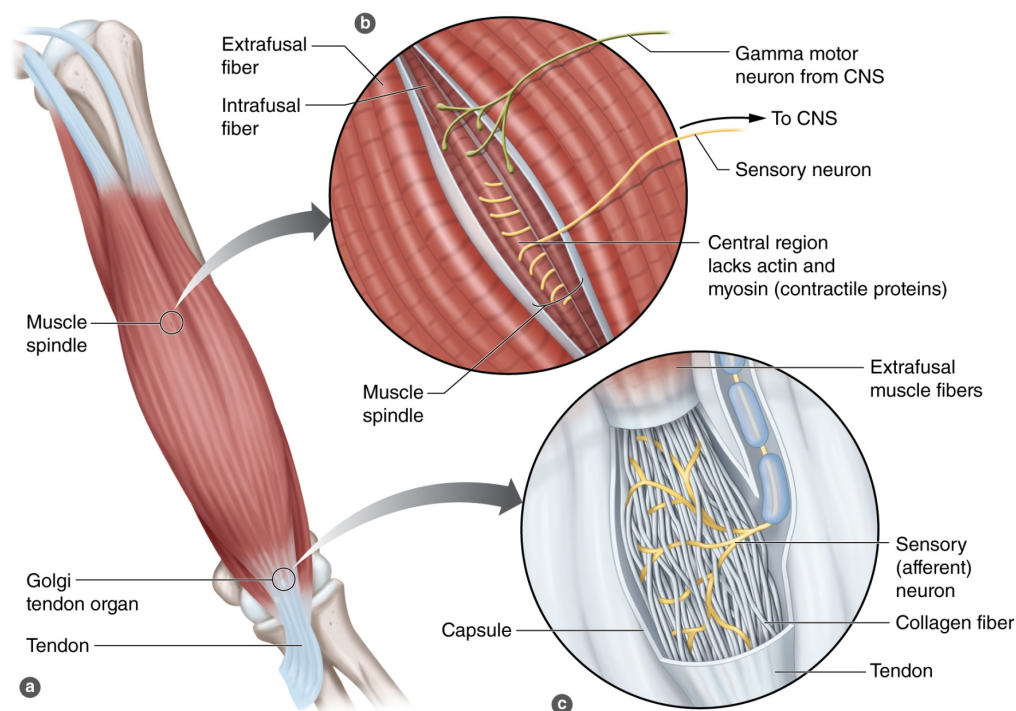


FIGURE 2

Muscle spindles are a group of intrafusal fibers (or, “fused within” the muscle), commonly called “non-contractile” muscle tissue (which just means that they do not contribute to the force production of the muscle, because part of it does contract), imbedded between muscle fibers and attached on each end to the muscle itself. This location is designed (notice that word there) such that the muscle spindle will be stretched when the muscle lengthens and will become slack when the muscle contracts. Muscle spindles are essentially a separate entity from the muscle—you would do well if you thought of it as a gauge. Attached to the muscle, this gauge is continuously sending information to the brain as to what is happening. Let’s take a closer look at a muscle spindle, as it has a few key anatomical features that we will highlight. We have gamma motor neurons, which cause the muscle spindle to contract; we have a coil system of afferent (sensory) fibers, which send information back to the brain; and we have what is called the “nuclear bag,” which is what the sensory fibers are coiled around. When the biceps receives the signal from the brain to contract and thus bend the elbow, the entire muscle shortens as well as the muscle spindle within the muscle. The reduction in muscle tension causes the coiled afferent (sensory) neuron in the muscle spindle to send a signal to the brain about the change in tension, and this is *one* of the many methods by which you can “feel” your arm moving: the change in tension of the muscle spindle sends information to the brain about the current state of the muscle. Essentially, the muscle spindle says, “Brain, we are experiencing slack in the muscle spindle and therefore the muscle itself.” Within a few milliseconds, a signal is sent back to the muscle spindle via the gamma motor neuron, which causes a contraction of the muscle spindle. The shortening of the muscle spindle increases the tension to what is considered normal, or baseline, tension (please keep in mind that we are ignoring the multitude of receptors and feedback pathways in the joint itself and surrounding tissue). The opposite is true when the muscle lengthens—the tension in the muscle spindle increases, and

feedback information is sent to the brain about the change in tension, which then relays that information again to make you aware of the changes in muscle length and also back to the muscle spindle to relax to the point where the tension is at baseline. We must have tension here in the muscle spindle in order to transmit accurate and rapid information.

This process is similar to a thread held between two hands. If the thread is tight, and if someone were to barely touch it, the person holding it would feel the vibration immediately. In other words, information concerning the current state of the thread is relayed accurately and quickly. However, if the thread is loose, if someone were to barely touch it, the holder would not feel anything different. In this case, it would take a greater change, or force, for any information to be sent concerning the state of the thread. Tension is essential. Without tension, we would not have proprioception. Without proprioception, we would not have vital information regarding the state of our muscles, and balance would be exceptionally difficult, if not impossible.

What about “balance,” as in the context of standing upright? Standing on two legs is a significant feat of human development. This is called **static balance** and is inherently unstable.⁸ But we do not start off standing, do we? Learning to stand is a long and quite involved process of development. While babies lie down or crawl, their center of gravity (or as we will talk about it, center of mass) is very close to the ground. Center of mass is the location where the sum of all the body’s mass is centered or balanced.⁹ Babies have the advantage (if you want to call it that) of having their center of mass close to the ground; however, they need to worry about their enormous heads perched precariously on top of their tiny necks. Controlling those things is a

⁸ibid.

⁹Fay B. Horak and Jane M. Macpherson, *Postural Orientation and Equilibrium* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011).

fantastic feat of strength and coordination; in fact, an infant's head comprises approximately 20-25% of total body height (compared to an adult's 10-13%).¹⁰ Depending on the task, the individual, and the environment, the center of mass could be located inside or even outside of the body. Think about a high jumper bending themselves around the high bar, much of the time their center of mass does not actually clear the bar, even though their body does (see Figure 3). Having a low center of mass provides substantial stability. Stability is also influenced by ground contact area, or base of support—greater area of contact produces greater stability.

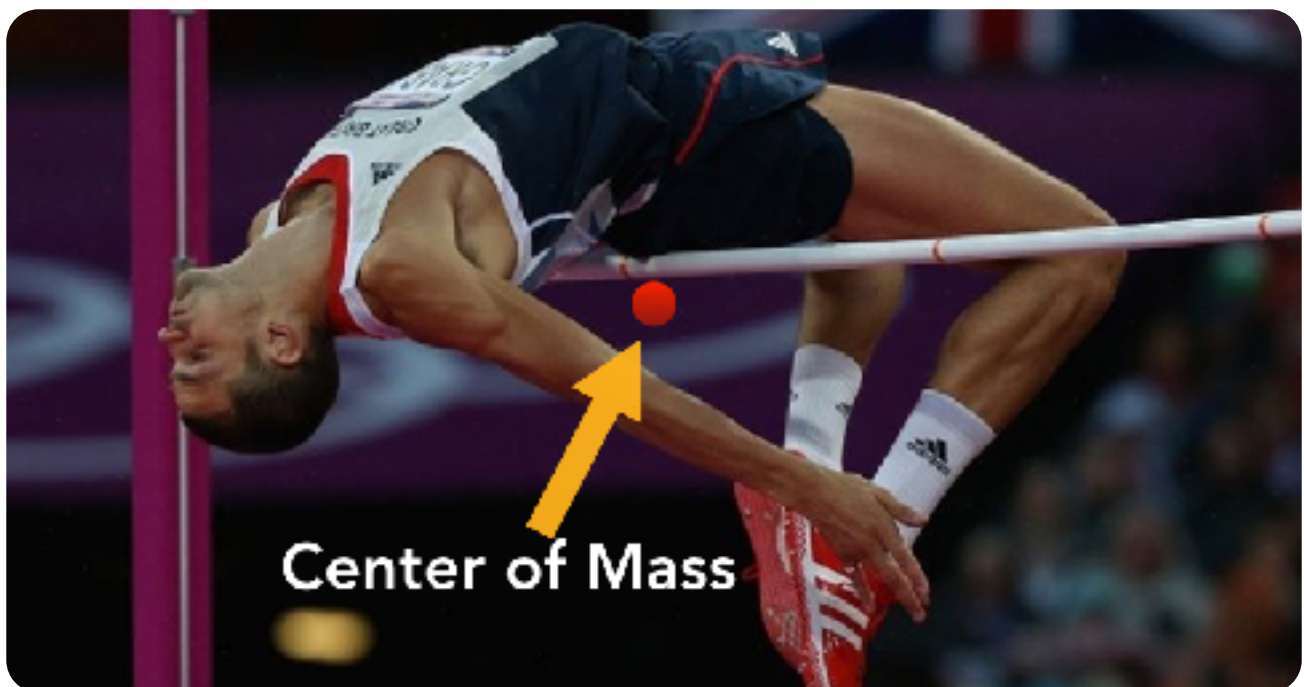


FIGURE 3

So, an infant doing “tummy time” (where the infant is playing on their stomach in the prone position) has a low center of mass inside of a large area of ground contact (or base of support), which equals a large amount of stability (except for the head as previously discussed). However, as infants develop and explore new skills and

¹⁰Robert Malina, Claude Bouchard, and Oded Bar-Or, *Growth, Maturation, and Physical Activity* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2004).

movement patterns, such as sitting, crawling, and pulling to stand, they begin to raise their center of mass and decrease their base of support, resulting in lower and lower stability, and requiring greater and greater balance (see Figure 4). Watching a child stand for the first time is a wonderful experience, but as I begin to understand the complexity of the task, it becomes an experience that leads me to worship the amazing Creator God.

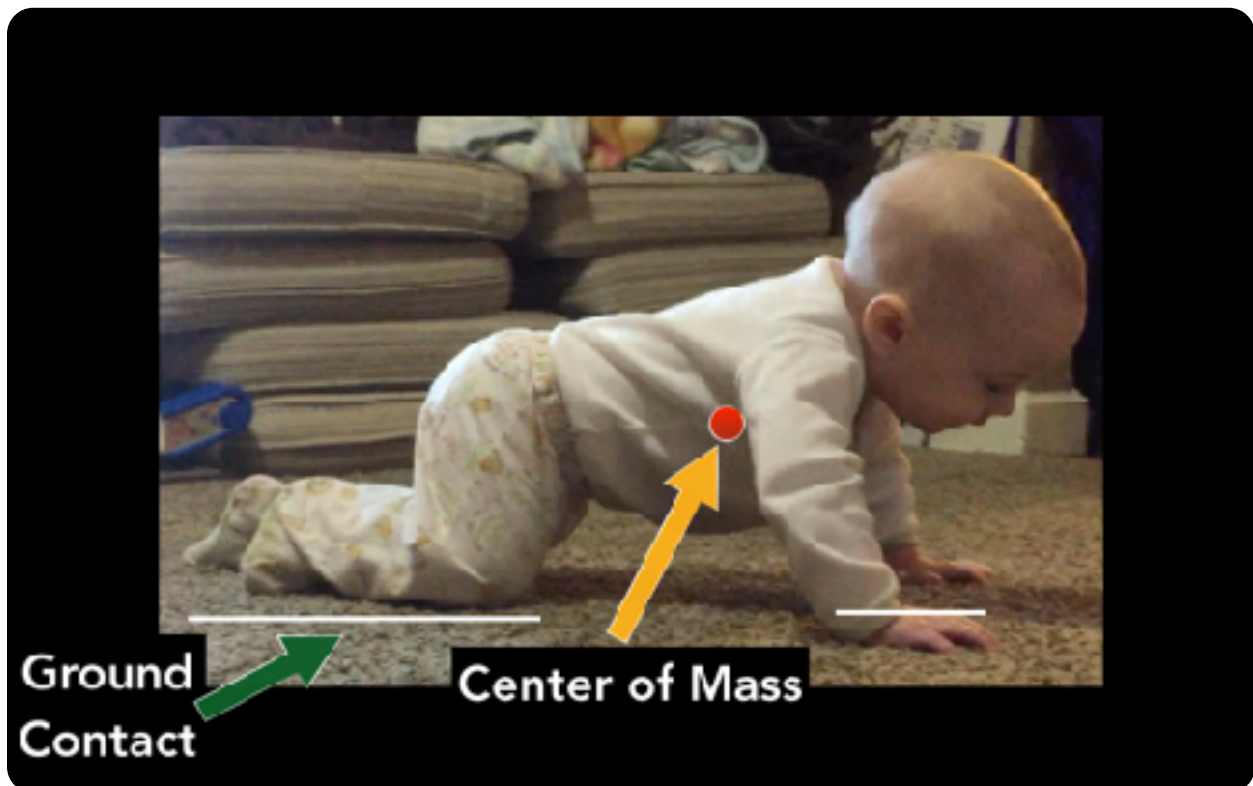


FIGURE 4

When standing, an adult's center of mass is located slightly above the level of the belly button; however, even when standing still humans are in motion, and thus our center of mass remains in continuous motion.¹¹ So, if we are constantly in motion, what are we doing to maintain an upright posture? One part of the answer can be found in our musculature. Opposing muscles throughout the body contract

¹¹Horak and Macpherson.

simultaneously in a highly controlled and calculated manner, producing a significant amount of tension, which in turn stabilizes the body. The tension created and the constant feedback that the joints receive from many sources (one is the muscle spindle as we now know) allows for the body to be ready for any alteration in the individual, task at hand, or environment that could threaten the integrity of the system, resulting in a catastrophic failure (or a fall). If you were to look closely at two muscle groups on the front and back side of the leg (quadriceps and hamstrings) acting at the knee joint, you would see a constant struggle, both muscle groups contracting against each other. An outsider observing only the knee joint may conclude that there was something wrong with the muscles, since they are “clearly” contradicting each other—literally contracting against each other. On the contrary, it is *this* struggle, this seemingly contradictory effort between muscle groups that allows for the body not only to attain an upright posture, but to move forward and perform incredible acts!

However, balance is not quite this simple. One author informs readers that body segments are not isolated, but connected by joints and the force produced by any particular muscle creates inertia and has far-reaching effects on other body segments, not just the joints that particular muscle.¹² So, when I move my lower leg, the force produced at the knee also causes movements in the upper body. In addition, we not only have to be able to measure internal forces and respond appropriately, but we need to estimate and anticipate all forces (internal and external) and coordinate timely and effective strategies to maintain upright posture.¹³ And we have to do all of this as close to instantaneously as we can so that we do not fall over. If we do succeed in standing, we have obtained what we call equilibrium, or balance. But balance is not the

¹²F.E. Zajac and M.E. Gordon, “Determining Muscle's Force and Action in Multi-Articular Movement,” *Exercise Sport Science Reviews* 17, no. 1 (1989): 187.

¹³Horak and Macpherson.

objective (wait, I thought this whole time we were talking about balance!). Simply maintaining an upright posture is not the point, is it? Balance is only a good thing *if* we are then able to be functional. We don't *just* stand up do we? We do not stay in one spot when we stand; we then do "stuff": we engage in our environment and respond to tasks and environmental demands, at which point balance becomes an even more significant challenge. We do not balance for balance's sake; to have life we must move forward.

Walking substantially changes the scenario. Not only is our center of mass constantly moving, but it is regularly outside of our base of support (which has been reduced to standing on one leg for much of the walking/running pattern)—we *should* be falling, but our other foot catches us. In fact, our center of mass *must* be in front of our base of support in order for us to move forward. In addition, our base of support is not only reduced to standing on one leg at a time, but it is also reduced laterally, meaning instead of standing with our feet "shoulder width" apart, our feet begin to land closer and closer together (imagine yourself walking while keeping your feet shoulder width apart: what does that feel like/look like?). If a line was drawn directly down to the ground from our center of mass and we called it our midline, our feet would come closer to that line than they would if we were standing (normally). By decreasing the width of our stance, we decrease how stable we are, so we sacrifice stability to increase mobility—the classic balance that we have been struggling with since the beginning of our development and since the beginning of time. Do we want to be stable? Then we must be closer to the ground and our stance wider apart. Do we want to be mobile? Then we must raise our center of mass and decrease our base of support. For example, when running, it is not uncommon to run just to the outside of the imaginary line of your center of mass—a highly unstable scenario allowing for high level of mobility. Reduction in stability is essential to our ability to move. As my colleague, Bryan Phillips, has said, "If you want to move forward, you must be willing

to be in disequilibrium.” If our body is balanced, or in equilibrium, we cannot move. It is the disequilibrium which allows for movement to happen, and we are left with trusting our senses and the strength and tension of our muscles to prevent us from falling when, technically, we should be.

But that is not all: have you ever walked up a flight of stairs in the dark? Do you remember that time you miscounted the steps or thought there was another step when there was not? Hilarious. What does that tell us about the role our *belief* plays in our balance? So, our perceptual information is assessed and run through the “filter,” if you will, of our belief systems. The *fear* of falling is a serious issue in older individuals or individuals with balance issues. What do you believe about the surface you are walking on? The shoes you are wearing? What about if you are performing a mental exercise? It has been observed that balance *decreases* when performing a task requiring cognitive resources (math problems or word puzzles).¹⁴ What does this imply? It implies that to maintain balance (even when just standing), we must use some percentage (small, but significant) of higher level thinking—the cognitive resources that are used during mental exercises are “shifted” away from the balance task. This is incredible!

It is also critical that you understand that each sensory variable (vision, vestibular, proprioceptive), by themselves, is unable to provide the brain and spinal cord with enough information to allow for successful balance. The eyes are able to detect a movement of the environment, but unable to differentiate between the movement of the environment and the head tilting or turning. The vestibular system (inner ear) is able to detect tilt and motion of the head, but cannot differentiate between the effect of gravity alone or the acceleration produced by the body itself when walking, running, or turning. We should think of each sensory organ contributing to an

¹⁴N. Teasdale and M. Simoneau, “Attentional Demands for Postural Control: the Effects of Aging and Sensory Reintegration,” *Gait Posture* 14, no. 3 (2001): 203-10.

“information puzzle,” resulting in a “complete” picture put together in the brain and spinal cord using conscious and unconscious thought, allowing for appropriate action to be taken. It is only by the successful integration of these very complicated signals from all over the body (and inside the body) that we have a chance of achieving balance.¹⁵ And balance is *not* the end goal. We do not achieve balance for the sake of balance. When have you ever stood up and said, “Ta Dah!” (Although maybe we should!) Balance must be achieved in order for us to be functional, so that we can perform tasks and activities of daily living. For us to be functional, we must first achieve this intensely complicated process. We should also recognize that when balance is “achieved,” the *sum* of the parts, or, the result, is balance *only* because internally there is no balance. No part of the process is balanced itself; it is the sum of the processes. Balance is not the absence of motion, but the result of innumerable processes in motion.

I hope you are beginning to see that the act of standing and moving is astoundingly complex, requiring resources from all over the body and cannot be achieved by a single system alone. A major theme running throughout these processes is that **tension** must be established and maintained. There *must* be a struggle that is integrated throughout the system, one member of the body producing forces or information seemingly contrary to the others. However, it is the struggle and integration of those signals that results in the maintenance of balance.

Implications

I find the theme of balance, tension, and struggle to be prevalent in Scripture. Here are a just a few verses:

¹⁵Horak and Macpherson.

*Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.
(Proverbs 26.4)*

What does the very next verse say?

*Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.
(Proverbs 26.5)*

What is that all about? Which one is right? The answer is both; it depends on the situation. What about Proverbs 8 and 9? Both wisdom and folly are personified by women, and both stand at the highest point in the city!

What about “the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20.16), or “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16.25)?

I find the passage in 1 Samuel 2.2-8 to be of particular interest considering this topic. Notice the tension in this passage in the context of the holiness of God; does this tension contribute to balance?

*There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides You; there is no rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.
The LORD kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and he exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust; He lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them He has set the world.
(1 Samuel 2.2-8)*

In Genesis 32.24, Jacob wrestles with God, but according to verse 25, “the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob.” What is this all about? It is not only a physical struggle, but a spiritual one as well. He even received a name and a blessing—Israel. What does that name mean? It means “one who contends or wrestles or strives with God.” Jacob was *blessed* because he wrestled with God. His struggling with the LORD resulted in a new name and a new identity—the tension experienced between the two was essential for Jacob’s growth.

Has there ever been a time of struggle or tension in your life? How have you handled that? Listen to Psalm 89, which begins with:

I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

(Psalm 89.1)

The next section (Psalm 89.5-18) is a beautiful section on God’s power and faithfulness. And then comes a section reflecting on David’s dynasty and prophecies of Jesus, but then listen to the following verses:

*How long, O LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever?
How long will Your wrath burn like fire?
Remember how short my time is!
For what vanity You have created all the children of man!
What man can live and never see death?
Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?*

Selah

Lord, where is Your steadfast love of old, which by Your faithfulness you swore to David?

Remember, O Lord, how Your servants are mocked, and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations, with which Your enemies mock, O LORD, with which they mock the footsteps of Your anointed.

(Psalm 89.46-51)

Wait, what?! I thought the Psalmist was just talking extensively about God’s faithfulness? Do you remember that he said that he will “sing of his steadfast love of

the LORD forever“?! What happened? Verses 46-51 seem to be all about the absence of God and therefore His lack of faithfulness! But that is not the end of the psalm. What is the last verse?

Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

(Psalm 89.52)

This is not the only psalm that moves like this—listen to the tension in Psalm 10:

Why, O LORD, do You stand far away?

Why do you hide Yourself in times of trouble?

(Psalms 10.1)

Then in 10.17-18:

O LORD, You hear the desire of the afflicted;

You will strengthen their heart; You will incline Your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.”

(Psalms 10.17-18)

I have many other questions and can think of many other passages which seem to produce in me a significant amount of tension. Some of these passages seem to be contradictory and others are heavy with tension. If you have spent time in Scripture, I am sure there are passages that you struggle with as well, and we should.

Remember the following promise that Jesus made to His disciples:

*In this world you will have **trouble**. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

(John 16.33, NIV, emphasis added)

We have been promised struggle. Struggle is absolutely essential for balance. In fact, balance can only be achieved in the context of struggle and tension. Remember, our muscles develop tension and seem to contradict each other, but in reality, the tension developed between muscle groups allows for our body to be stabilized—to be

balanced—so that we may move and function. In the same way, the challenging passages in Scripture encourage us to dig deeper in order to understand God’s Word better by considering contexts and balancing different statements against each other. The tension developed in Scripture is wonderful and necessary, just as the tension developed by our muscles is necessary.

For us to function in this world, our body must be so in tune with the environment that perturbations are immediately assessed and rapid, appropriate, adjustments are made. These adjustments can only be rapid if strength and tension exist in the muscles, if eyes are clear, and if ears are open. I submit that struggle is essential for spiritual growth—not only personally, but also corporately in the body of Christ.

What about the body of Christ? A great place to go is 1 Corinthians 12:

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

(1 Corinthians 12.14-26)

We are the body of Christ. But how “balanced” are we? Are we even attempting balance? Are we aware of the “environment” around us? Are we able to respond appropriately to changes in that environment? Are we collaborating with our very different gifts to contribute to the function of Christ’s body? Or are we exalting a particular gift above others and looking down on individuals who do not have that gift? If we are, we should expect to fall, because each sensory variable, each spiritual gift independent of others, does *not* provide enough feedback or contribute enough to the function of the body for us to remain upright. Too much emphasis on a single gift does not allow for accurate assessment of the needs of the body based on the ever-changing environment. At the same time, do we expect there to be tension within the body of believers?

My dad, a minister for most of his life, believes every family and every church to be dysfunctional. Please hear me correctly. This tension between believers is not what your knee-jerk reaction would be (you think of tension between two people as negative); what I am speaking of would be similar to the tension you and another develop in the process of moving large furniture: both of you must produce at least some force *counter* to each other for the couch to be lifted. Remember the opposing muscles we spoke about previously? In the same way, we must expect and demand tension to be developed in the body of Christ so we sharpen each other (Proverbs 27.17), strengthen each other, and allow each other to balance. What do people with poor balance look like? Their arms are up; they are fearful, lack trust, are worried how others will effect them, are consumed with thoughts only about themselves, and take short steps with wide stances. They increase their stability as much as they can and therefore limit, or eliminate, their mobility. They do not move forward—they may have achieved what could be called balance, but they are not functional.

Remember, **attaining balance** is *not* the end goal! Balance must be achieved in order for us to then be functional. To be functional, we must move. In order to move, we must step outside our center of mass and experience disequilibrium, a loss of balance. We must experience tension. We must struggle. Do you have the courage to step outside of your center of mass? To “disrupt balance” such that movement and growth can occur? This is the cost of discipleship: disequilibrium. When Jesus said, “Come, follow Me,” He was not suggesting balance; He was requiring movement.

Attaining balance is NOT the END GOAL! Balance must be achieved in order for us to then be FUNCTIONAL. To be functional we must MOVE. In order to move we must step outside our center of mass and experience DISEQUILIBRIUM, a LOSS of balance. This is the COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: disequilibrium. When Jesus said, “Come, follow Me,” He was not SUGGESTING BALANCE; He was REQUIRING MOVEMENT.

–JUSTIN BLAND–





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OUR PHYSICAL NEED FOR LIGHT AND DARKNESS

JUSTIN BLAND

Our Physical Need for Light and Darkness

Light is something we appreciate, isn't it? We find comfort in light; things seem to be better in the light. We feel more at ease. When light is not readily available, we seek it out. When you are laying in bed in the dark, what do your eyes naturally focus on? The tiny light of your computer, or the crack in the door, or the little bit of light coming from the street light between the curtains. We seek light and seem to need it for emotional security. If there is only a little light available, our entire attention is focused on it. Light is a good thing.

I spent a few years in Michigan, and those that live up north have a special connection to light that we just do not have here in the south. The winters up north are long. In addition to the short days, the weather is cloudy much of the time with falling snow or the potential for it. It gets old. You really do not know how much you miss the sun until that first day of spring. The sun is an amazing thing. Throughout the fall and winter, people pretty much keep to themselves. Not many exercise outside, and there are not many smiles (not that the people are cold or inhospitable—there are amazing people up north). But oh, that first day of spring, after such a bleak, arduous winter. The sun is

out! The glorious sun! I have never seen so many people outside laughing and running. You just feel good all over, greeting strangers and smiling for no reason whatsoever. Light is a beautiful thing.

We physically need light. Our largest organ is our skin, and it is beautifully designed (we need an entire series of lectures on the exquisite complexity of our beautiful skin). Our skin has two main layers: the **epidermis** and the **dermis**. The epidermis is the top layer (*epi* can mean on top or over), and the dermis is the bottom layer. Both layers have crucial functions to play in protection of our body. But we will just briefly discuss one function of this amazing organ. It all starts when we experience sunlight. When light from the sun (or UVB light from a lamp) reaches our skin, a wonderful reaction happens, resulting in the synthesis of Vitamin D, a highly important vitamin to our health (see Figure 5). Simply being exposed to sunlight allows us to “make” a

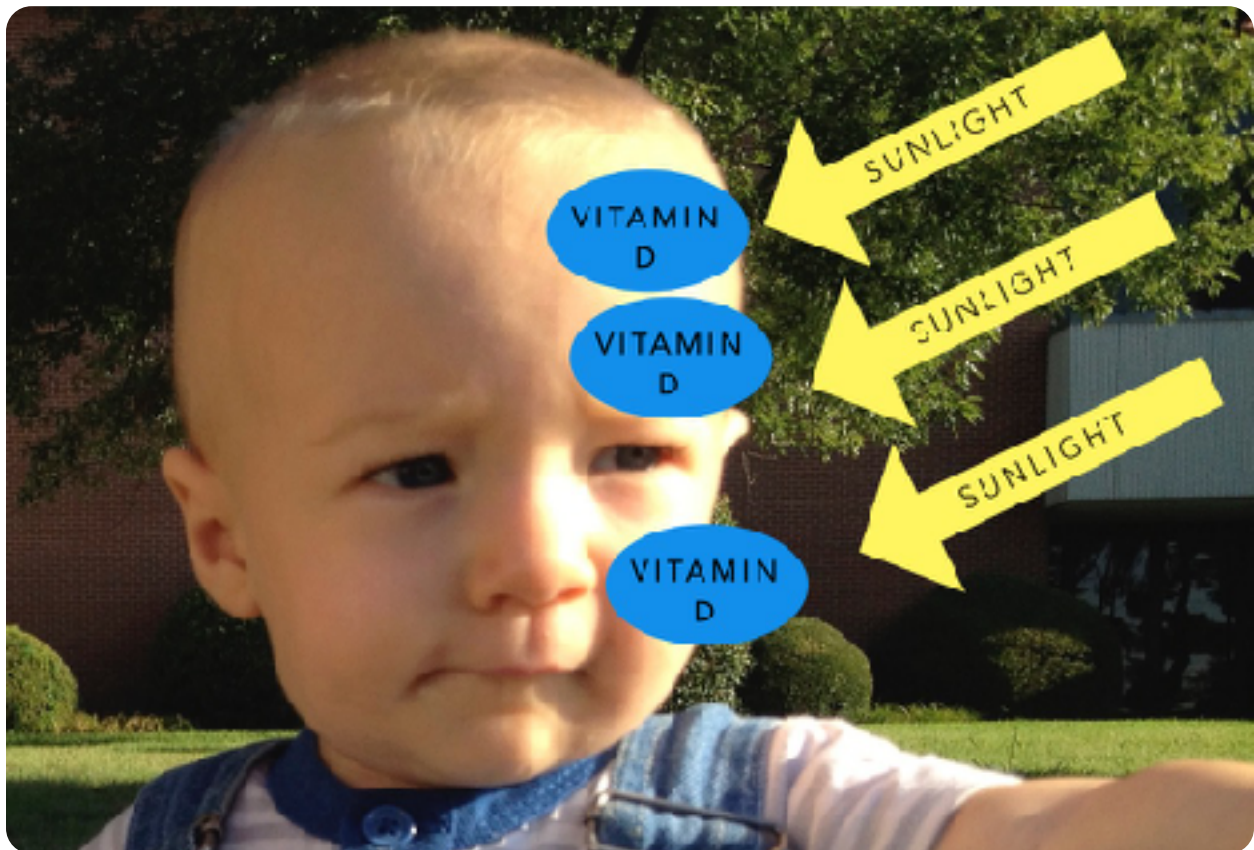


FIGURE 5

molecule that is important for us to function. Vitamin D seems to play a role in the regulation of around 2000 genes involved in mental, cardiovascular, and muscular health, as well as cancer suppression and immune function.¹⁶ Furthermore, it seems to have its hand in the regulation of 80 or so metabolic processes, and plays an important role in DNA repair.¹⁷ Vitamin D allows us to absorb calcium; without it we could only utilize 10-15% of the calcium we consume.¹⁸

Calcium is crucial for the strength of our bones at every stage of life. For example, a major health concern of the elderly is a disease called osteoporosis (characterized by weak and brittle bones). You may have heard of older people “falling and breaking their hips.” In reality, what could be happening is that their bones are so brittle and frail from lack of calcium that they broke their hips which caused them to fall. In too many cases, this is a death sentence as recovery from a broken bone in someone with osteoporosis is extremely taxing on the body, to a point of complete loss of function, resulting in the steep decline of health. Besides bone health (which is a very big deal), calcium is necessary for every muscular contraction and allows for the adjustment of the forcefulness of contraction. An increase in calcium into a muscle will increase how much force that muscle will produce.

Metabolism (our body’s way of producing energy necessary for life and function) results in a damaging “waste” product, called **free-radicals**, which cause dysfunction all over the body. Vitamin D is an anti-oxidant, which binds powerfully to those

¹⁶Arash Hossein-nezhad and Michael F. Holick, “Vitamin D For Health: A Global Perspective,” *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 88, no. 7 (2013): 720-55.

¹⁷Michael F. Holick, “Vitamin D and Brain Health: The Need for Vitamin D Supplementation and Sensible Sun Exposure,” *Journal of Internal Medicine* 277, no. 1 (2015): 90-93.

¹⁸Michael F. Holick, “Vitamin D Deficiency,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 357, no. 3 (2007): 266-81.

damaging free-radicals and removes them from our bodies.¹⁹ One theory of why we age is called the “free-radical theory” (we have not confirmed the “real” reason behind why we age, isn’t that strange?). What happens when we age? We slow down, our strength is not what it was when we were 18, our metabolisms are slower, we are more likely to have diseases (how many medications are your grandparents on?), and our bodies lose their ability to function as well as they did when we were younger. This is the aging process.

What causes aging? Possibly free-radicals. Free-radicals wreak havoc on our system, essentially damaging or destroying much of what they come across. It is the accumulated damage of these free-radicals that could contribute to the changes we see when we age (certainly there is good evidence to support this claim, though I am confident it is not the only reason that we experience the aging process). Vitamin D combats these free-radicals, extending our function. But that is not all.

Vitamin D reduces our risk for Type II Diabetes (a metabolic disease of another mechanism), as well as autoimmune diseases such as Type I Diabetes, Multiple Sclerosis, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and Crohn’s disease.²⁰ In addition to that, we have not even discussed Vitamin D’s role in pregnancy health and child development or the changing physiological needs as we age. We just do not have time to go into any of these important areas of study. The point is: we need Vitamin D—we need direct sunlight.

I believe the spiritual implications of light to be enormous. What were God’s first words in Genesis? Let there be *light*. God is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1.5). Jesus said several times that He is “the Light of the world. Whoever

¹⁹Holick, “Vitamin D and Brain Health.”

²⁰Hosseini-nezhad and Holick.

follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8.12). And He encourages us to be "sons of light" (John 12.36), or as Paul said it, "children of light" (Ephesians 5.8). I love what the Psalmist says about light:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*
(Psalm 27.1)

Light is so powerful in Scripture and represents glory, righteousness, truth, holiness, and many other things. Light is beautiful, lovely, and wonderful. Our most powerful image of God is blinding light, because there is an inability to know about it. That unknown is so pure and so holy that it produces stimuli so unimaginable, we associate it with the largest stimulus with which we have experience: the blinding, direct light of the sun. We need light.

Since light is so important, you might find yourself thinking about ways you can get more light all the time. That would be a standard American response, "If some is good, more is better!" But what is the theme of this conference? Balance!

Yes, we need sunlight for us to live and function. But that is not all we need. We need darkness as well. My goal today is to present to you some information that may help you see the world slightly differently.

The eye is incredibly complex and beautifully designed. We gather the light reflected off objects and form an image in the back of our eye, which is transmitted through a wonderfully amazing network of neurons to our occipital lobe in the most rearward aspect of our brain (the development of this is *stunning*, ask me about it sometime). We are aware of this light we gather, and we believe the images which are formulated to be an accurate representation of the reality of the world. But, there are more receptors in the eye than just those associated with image formation. There are receptors in the eye that sense the *presence* of light. That is all they do. Upon

cessation of light, something wonderful happens—the receptors send a signal. This is amazing to me. The signal is sent to the brain *not* when light hits them, but when light *stops* hitting these receptors. This neurological signal results in a downright astounding process: the release of melatonin.

Melatonin is a hormone (and has been called the “darkness hormone”²¹). Hormones are very similar to neurological impulses, as they are both signals providing instruction, but they are a different form of signal. We were just talking about the signal from the eye to the brain, which is a neurological signal—it travels down a single tract to a specific target exceptionally quickly, but lasts a very short duration. Hormonal signals are released in the circulatory system and travel through the whole body in the blood stream to cells with specific receptors for that hormone. As long as the hormone is on the receptor, then the cell continues to “do what it is told to do” by the hormone. In the end, the hormone is simply a signal, which doesn’t “do” anything by itself. However, it is a powerful signal, and if the cell has receptors for it, the signal will last seven to ten times longer than a neurological signal will last.

You may have heard of melatonin before, and if you have you have, most likely associated it with sleep. That association is true, and it is very important for us to know—melatonin secretion induces the sleep cycle. Upon the cessation of light, the neurological signals from our eyes reach a particular location in our brain, which causes melatonin to be secreted into the blood stream and begins the process of our whole body slowing down and preparing for sleep. This is an important phase of life that should happen on a regular basis, or rhythm. This rhythm is called the “circadian rhythm” (or “internal clock”). Melatonin is the *primary stimulation* for the

²¹Debra J. Skene and Josephine Arendt, “Human Circadian Rhythms: Physiological and Therapeutic Relevance of Light and Melatonin,” *Annals of Clinical Biochemistry* 43, no. 5 (2006): 344-53.

synchronization of our circadian rhythm,²² which influences most physiological activities.²³ And that is crucial for you to understand. There are many variables that can contribute to the regulation of our circadian rhythm (eating and activity levels are somewhat influential), but none nearly as powerful as the natural cycle of light and darkness. Upon secretion of melatonin (which happens in darkness), many things happen: we see a reduction in mental alertness, body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, and our blood vessels relax (yes, our blood vessels actually can relax; think about that when you are experiencing stress), as well as other changes associated with sleep.²⁴

These changes all occur because of the presence of darkness. In a healthy circadian cycle as dictated by the secretion of melatonin (and therefore appropriate darkness), sleep occurs at regular times for extended periods of time. Sleep is critical for appropriate function of our body. Just a simple observation: how beautiful is sleep when you haven't had it in a while? Sometimes when I am downright exhausted—I mean drop dead tired—and I start to crawl into bed, I feel like laughing while I think to myself, "This is about to be *beautiful!*" Sleep rejuvenates us and it allows us to recover and function at a high level. We essentially are resetting our system. Sleep is of vital importance in our lives. Just to illustrate, sleep deprivation "surpasses alcohol and drugs as the greatest identifiable and preventable cause of accidents in all modes of transport."²⁵ There exists some debate about the connection of melatonin and sleep—some have proposed melatonin essentially prepares the body for sleep or "opens the

²²Ibid.

²³Ueli Schibler, "The Daily Rhythms of Genes, Cells and Organs. Biological Clocks and Circadian Timing in Cells," *EMBO Reports* 6, supplement 1 (2005): S9-S13.

²⁴Skene and Arendt; Shantha M.W. Rajaratnam and Josephine Arendt, "Health in a 24-H Society," *Lancet* 358 (2001): 999-1005.

²⁵Rajaratnam and Arendt.

sleep gate.”²⁶ Melatonin does not *cause* sleep, but it certainly lays the groundwork for sleep to occur. Since we are discussing darkness, we can leave sleep and its systemic implications for another time, but before we do, I want to leave you with two very, very important questions that I hope you hold onto for the rest of your life:

- Are you who you want to be when you are deprived of sleep?
- Do you do things you should not be doing when you should be sleeping?

I want to challenge you to commit to getting enough sleep.

Back to melatonin: melatonin does not act alone; its influence is system-wide. It directly affects the secretion and suppression of other hormones (see Figure 6). For example, melatonin secretion suppresses cortisol, which is a hormone associated with stress. Cortisol mobilizes energy storage and prepares the body for action (cortisol is one of several hormones that does this). One way that physiologists are able to measure the stress response is to measure cortisol levels in the blood. For example, if the researcher is trying to determine how much stress a particular stimulus evokes (such as ice held on a forehead), he or she would measure cortisol levels. So, cortisol is an active part of the body's preparation. It is clear that those who experience excessive stress (leading to excessive cortisol production and secretion, among a myriad of other things) will have greater likelihood for cardiovascular disease and premature death. Melatonin seems to suppress cortisol production.

Interestingly enough, melatonin also seems to stimulate the secretion of growth hormone. Growth hormone regulates and encourages cells to grow, hence the name. So when melatonin is highest (in darkness), growth hormone is also at its highest secretion as well; cells are growing and recovering. Did your mom ever say to you

²⁶S.R. Pandi-Perumal et al., “Melatonin: Nature's Most Versatile Biological Signal?,” *FEBS Journal* 273, no. 13 (2006): 2813-38.

that you need sleep to grow? She wasn't just saying that so she could have some peace and quiet (though that is true enough), she was saying that because growth hormone peaks during sleep. We *do* need sleep to grow. Recovering during sleep is absolutely crucial. In fact, recovery is the mechanism behind how we get stronger. Yes, we need to work out and exercise, but sleeping enough is *just as* important. If you are interested in getting bigger, stronger, or faster, and you are not sleeping enough, you are limiting your ability to do so. If we are not exposed to enough

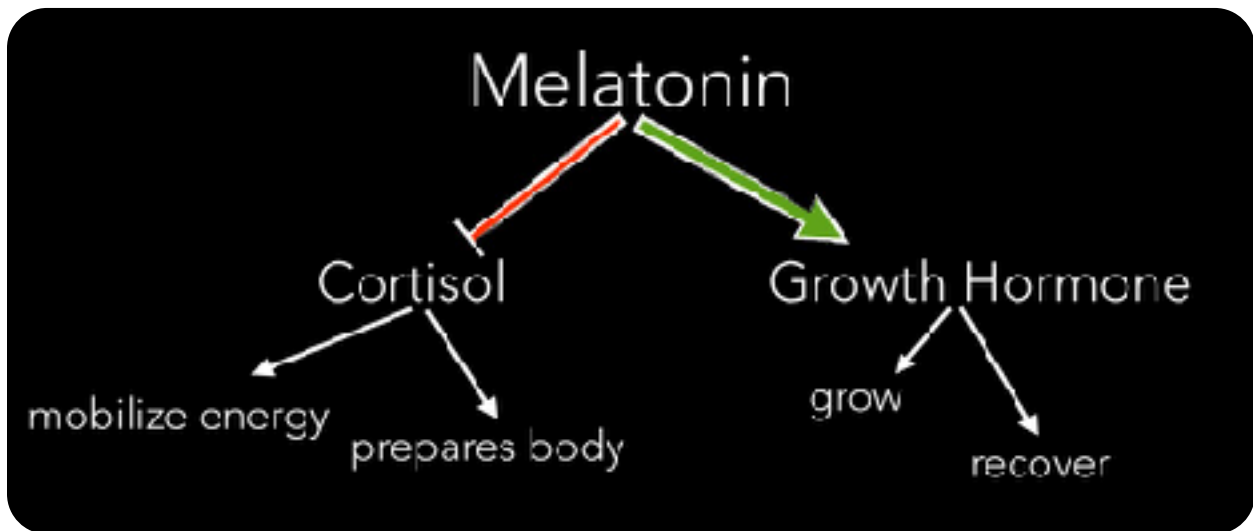


FIGURE 6

darkness, melatonin will not stimulate the secretion of growth hormone, growth hormone then would not tell your cells to repair themselves or to grow and divide, and thus you *would not* get stronger (please do not assume that recovery is just limited to this pathway, it is an extensive process). Recovery is just as important as the hard workouts. Do you remember a guy named Lance Armstrong? He won seven Tours de France, and then it was discovered that he was using illegal drugs (cheating) and had all his titles stripped from him. He was also the most drug tested athlete of all time. How did he evade the tests? His cheating took place during the off-season. He was using drugs specifically so that he would recover faster. He never took drugs



**LANCE ARMSTRONG
CHEATED IN OFFSEASON
TO RECOVER FASTER**

during the competition because then he would have been caught. Recovery is important. Darkness is necessary for melatonin secretion and for the recovery of the body, which is necessary for appropriate growth.

Furthermore, the evidence seems to suggest that *every cell* in the body has a receptor for melatonin. What are the implications? This means that melatonin is needed for every cell to function properly. We have talked about the circadian rhythm, the 24-hour cycle of sleep and wakefulness, but because each cell has receptors for melatonin, we are able to observe that each cell and tissue type has its own rhythm controlled by the "timekeeper" melatonin. Light and darkness affect the function of every tissue, every organ. Heart rate is different in the morning than in the evening. Liver function is different at night than during the day. Blood vessels respond differently at different times throughout the 24-hour day. Every tissue has its own rhythm. In exercise physiology, we call this "diurnal variation," and it has everything to do with the levels of melatonin in the blood. Light (and its absence) is the primary timekeeper for the body. It is clear in the scientific literature that if our circadian

rhythm is off—if we are not exposed to enough darkness—then our health will deteriorate and so will our ability to function. Apart from being an effective hormone that keeps our entire system on track, melatonin is also a powerful anti-oxidant.²⁷ Do you remember that Vitamin D is an anti-oxidant? Do you remember why that was important? The free-radicals produced by metabolism cause immense and systemic damage (remember, without metabolism, there is no life). These free-radicals are picked up by melatonin as well as Vitamin D, preventing damage. The diversity of melatonin is astounding.

Why are we afraid of darkness? We are scared of the unknown, scared of what could be lurking. The darkness is where our imaginations run without boundaries—possibilities are not restricted to what we think to be real. So what do we do? Turn on a light. We live in a 24-hour society—people are awake and working at all hours, and light is all around us all the time. Certainly our productivity has increased substantially because of the advent of artificial light, but I believe (supported by strong research) this has come at a substantial physiological, mental, and, I submit, spiritual cost. What is the cost of 24-hour light? I do not believe this can be known exactly, but in regards to sleep-related accidents alone (as a consequence of long-term exposure to light), it is approximately \$16 billion a year in the United States and around \$80 billion worldwide.²⁸ And sleep-related accidents are only a tiny speck of the big picture. Disruptions in circadian rhythms have a strong correlation, and in some cases can

²⁷R.J. Reiter, "Oxygen Radical Detoxification Processes During Aging: The Functional Importance of Melatonin," *Aging (Milano)* 7, no. 5 (1995): 340-51.

²⁸Rajaratnam and Arendt.

even be identifiable factors, in the development and spread of cancer.²⁹ An interesting side note: individuals who are totally blind have *half* the risk for developing cancer than a sighted person does.³⁰ Strong evidence also suggests that an unbalanced circadian rhythm contributes to cardiovascular disease, which is by far the number one killer of Americans (behind cardiovascular disease is cancer). Cardiovascular disease could be nearly any abnormality in the heart and/or the blood vessels—exposure to appropriate amounts of darkness reduces the risk for heart and blood vessel disease.³¹ Cardiovascular disease in 2010 alone cost this nation upwards of \$444 billion.³² The cost of 24-hour light is substantial. We have access to too much artificial light and it is killing us.

I know we mentioned this before, but I would like to repeat this statement in a slightly different way: melatonin is responsible for the feelings of sleepiness. Suppression of melatonin secretion also suppresses the feeling of sleepiness. Interestingly enough, there has been quite a bit of research into the threshold of light at which melatonin is

²⁹L.G. Sigurdardottir et al., "Circadian Disruption, Sleep Loss, and Prostate Cancer Risk: A Systematic Review of Epidemiologic Studies," *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers & Prevention* 21, no. 7 (2012): 1002-11; D.E. Blask et al., "Light During Darkness, Melatonin Suppression and Cancer Progression," *Neuroendocrinology Letters* 23, supplement 2 (2002): 52-56; Vladimir N. Anisimov et al., "Light-At-Night-Induced Circadian Disruption, Cancer and Aging," *Current Aging Science* 5, no. 3 (2012):170-77.

³⁰Vladimir N. Anisimov, "Light pollution, Reproductive Function and Cancer Risk," *Neuroendocrinology Letters* 27, no. 1-2 (2006): 35-52.

³¹Francesco Portaluppi et al., "Circadian Rhythms and Cardiovascular Health," *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 16, no. 2 (2012):151-66; N. Takeda and K. Maemura, "Cardiovascular Disease, Chronopharmacotherapy, and the Molecular Clock," *Advanced Drug Delivery Reviews* 62, no. 9-10 (2010): 956-66; K. Maemura, N. Takeda, and R. Nagai, "Circadian Rhythms in the CNS and Peripheral Clock Disorders: Role of the Biological Clock in Cardiovascular Diseases," *Journal Of Pharmacological Sciences* 103, no. 2 (2007): 134-38.

³²A.S. Go et al., "Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2013 Update: A Report From the American Heart Association," *Circulation* 127, no. 1 (2013): e6-e245.

suppressed. How much light is needed to affect melatonin production? We do not know exactly, but one study found melatonin suppression to be a low threshold event, meaning just a little bit of light is enough to alter the secretion of melatonin.³³ There are a plethora of variables contributing to why we do not know exactly how much light is required for alteration in the circadian rhythm; however, it does seem even dim light of a night light may be enough to see clinically significant reductions in melatonin secretions, thus shifting the circadian rhythm. The most interesting and applicable bit of information I came across in my research when I was preparing for this talk is this: blue light seems to have the greatest impact on melatonin suppression.³⁴ Why is that interesting? Well, the LED displays of your smartphone or tablet emit a relatively large amount of blue light, thus, when you are tired at night and you decide to play a game instead of going to sleep, you soon find that you are not as tired as you previously thought. Physiologically, what just happened? Exactly! You have suppressed your production of melatonin; you have made yourself less sleepy. You have altered your circadian rhythm! We need darkness. It is hard to say



³³Richard E. Kronauer, Daniel B. Forge, and M.E. Jewett, "Quantifying Human Circadian Pacemaker Response to Brief, Extended, and Repeated Light Stimuli Over the Photopic Range," *Journal of Biological Rhythms* 14, no. 6 (1999):500-15.

³⁴R. Brennan, J.E. Jan, and C.J. Lyons, "Light, Dark, and Melatonin: Emerging Evidence for the Importance of Melatonin in Ocular Physiology," *Eye (London)* 21, no. 7 (2007): 901-08.

exactly how much darkness we need because that varies from person to person, but we can use a substitute measure: The National Sleep Foundation recommends 8-10 hours of sleep each night for 14-17 year olds and 7-9 hours for the rest of life.³⁵ Are you getting enough darkness? Does the sin you struggle with occur when you should be experiencing complete darkness? Are you becoming the person you want to be? If not, I would venture a guess that you are not getting enough darkness.

We need darkness.

What does the Bible say about darkness? A lot. It seems as if entire books are dedicated to darkness, such as the Book of Job. Many of the Psalms discuss darkness. I need to be careful here and I want you to listen carefully now because I do not want to misrepresent what the Bible says about darkness. For the most part, darkness represents evil, sin, and death. That is not what I am talking about here. I am *not* saying that you need more sin in your lives. That is contrary to everything the Bible teaches about holiness and being conformed to the image of Christ.

What I want to talk about is the darkness in Scripture that is not typically discussed—the relationship between darkness and God. Hear me carefully: “God is Light and **in Him** there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1.5, emphasis added), but that certainly does not mean that God’s presence cannot be *in* darkness. What do some of the first words of the Bible say?

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, **darkness** was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

(Genesis 1.1-2, NIV, emphasis added)

God was present in the darkness!

³⁵<http://sleepfoundation.org>

Exodus is a wonderful book of the account of the Israelites' escape from Egypt. God chooses Moses to lead his people to the Promised Land (which took a little convincing), and early on in the journey God leads the Israelites to a mountain—Mount Sinai. What happens at Mount Sinai?

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

(Exodus 19.16-20)

This does not sound like a pleasant meeting. What is happening? What is the point of this meeting? God is establishing His covenant relationship with His people. He then presents the Israelites with the Ten Commandments in the beginning of Exodus 20, but listen to what happens immediately after the giving of these commandments: the people want Moses to go speak with God.

*The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the **thick darkness** where God was.*

(Exodus 20.21, emphasis added)

"The thick darkness where God was"; what a powerful statement! God was establishing His covenant with His people by descending upon Mount Sinai in darkness, a thought that is repeated in Deuteronomy 4.11 and 5.22, as well as Hebrews 12.18, all of which highlight the Lord coming down in thick darkness.

God's presence in darkness is found elsewhere too, such as in Psalm 18, for example. In this beautiful passage we have the servant David crying out to be rescued, and we have this amazing response from the Lord:

*In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help.
From His temple He heard my voice, and my cry to Him reached His ears.
Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains
trembled and quaked, because He was angry.
Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from Him.
He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under His feet.
He rode on a cherub and flew; He came swiftly on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him, thick clouds
dark with water.
Out of the brightness before Him hailstones and coals of fire broke
through His clouds.
The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His
voice, hailstones and coals of fire.
And He sent out his arrows and scattered them; He flashed forth
lightnings and routed them.
Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the
world were laid bare at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of
Your nostrils.
He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out of many waters.
He rescued me from my strong enemy and from those who hated me, for
they were too mighty for me.
They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my
support.
He brought me out into a broad place; He rescued me, because He
delighted in me.*

(Psalms 18.6-19)

"He made darkness his covering." I love this psalm; the Lord will stop at nothing to save His servant. He will tear heaven and earth apart to do so. He is the Great Rescuer, the Victorious Warrior, and it is a terrible thing to contend with the Almighty:

The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!

Clouds and thick darkness are all around Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

Fire goes before Him and burns up His adversaries all around.

His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.

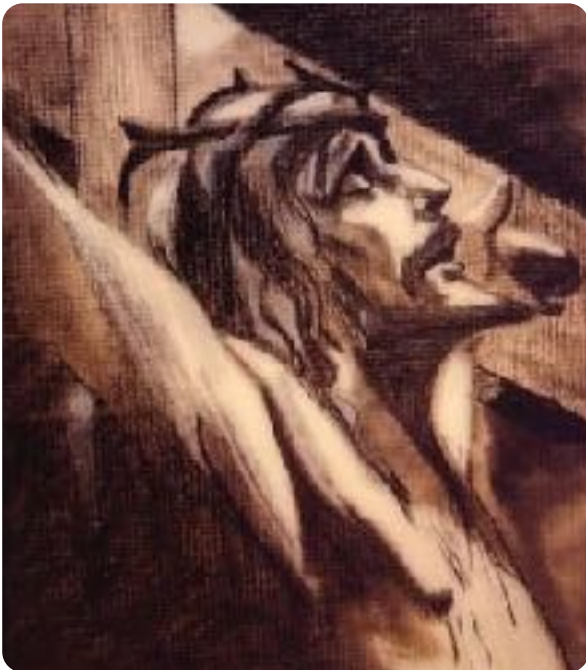
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth.

(Psalm 97.1-5)

“Clouds and thick darkness are all around Him.” But these are not the only places we see darkness in Scripture associated with God. We have not looked at 1 Kings 8.12, 2 Chronicles 6.1, or Job 38.9, among others. I want to focus on a very puzzling passage in Matthew:

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

(Matthew 27.45-46)



Much of my life I would hear people mention that this darkness at the crucifixion was God’s absence. “God turned his back on Jesus,” people would say. When I was in college, I would regularly hear messages from the pulpit about God turning His back on Jesus (it seemed every Sunday the preacher would say that!). This concerned me—you mean to tell me that at the most crucial moment in all of history, God wasn’t even there? What about the promise, “Never will I leave you; never will I

forsake you” (Hebrews 13.5, NIV)? And if it is true that God wasn’t at the crucifixion because of the darkness, what are the implications when I experience darkness?

So what do we do with this darkness at the crucifixion? I believe we treat it the way Matthew wanted us to treat it, as the fulfillment of prophecy—many prophecies, actually: the Passover Lamb in Exodus, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, and Psalm 22, just to name a few. I just want to read a bit from Psalm 22; if you have not read this, you need to. Read it today. Here is a selection, but you need to read the whole thing several times:

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”*

(Psalm 22.1-2)

“For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

(Psalm 22.16-18)

*“You who fear the LORD, praise Him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you offspring of Israel!
For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted,
And he has not hidden His face from him, but has heard, when he cried to Him.*

(Psalm 22.23-24)

You see, when Jesus says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?”, He is quoting from Psalm 22, a song that the Jews knew very well. In fact, it even went to a specific tune they knew called “The Doe of the Dawn” (whatever that song is).³⁶

If I were to sing, “Create in me a clean heart, _____” what words would come next? Exactly, you would know the rest of the song. Jesus is doing the same thing, and what He is reminding them of is the *whole* psalm, including the part that says, “For He

³⁶See the notes in your Bible before Psalm 22.

has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted and has not hidden His face from him, but has heard, when he cried to Him.”

Jesus was not abandoned at the cross, and I know He wasn't, because of Psalm 22 and the fact that the cross is the establishment of the new covenant between God and His people, all people. The cross was the new Mount Sinai. And how did God descend upon Mount Sinai? In darkness. **You see, darkness at the cross is not evidence of God's absence; it is proof of His presence.**

We need darkness.

I do not know where you are in life. But I do know that in this world you will have trouble, but take heart: Jesus has overcome the world (John 16.33). You will experience darkness, you will have a wilderness experience where you will not “feel” God's presence. You will feel like you are in darkness. Jesus sure felt it, but He knew God was with Him. For God said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13.5, NIV), and I believe He meant it. We need darkness for physical growth and I believe we need it for spiritual growth. We need to find the balance between light and darkness.



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DIVINITY OR DUST? A BALANCED VIEW OF JESUS

STEVE COMER

Does It Matter?

-Gnostics

- Matter is evil. The material world is shunned. The spiritual world is embraced.
- If Jesus came in the flesh, He must be evil.
- Conclusion: Jesus did not come in the flesh.
- Consequences of Gnosticism: If Jesus doesn't come in the flesh, how can He die?

-John vs. the Gnostics

- 1 John 4.2: Test the spirits by asking if Jesus actually did come in the flesh.
- 2 John 1.7: Those that deny Jesus coming in the flesh are the antichrist.
- So, yes, it very much matters.

Jesus as God

-Passages that express Jesus' Divinity:

- Matthew 9.4: Jesus knows the thoughts of the scribes.
- Matthew 12.25: Jesus knows the Pharisee's hearts.
- Matthew 8.27: Even the winds and the sea obey Him.
- Matthew 14.33: Disciples worshiped Him after walking on water (Jesus accepted it).
- Matthew 14.14: Jesus healed a multitude of sick people.
- John 5.18: Jesus made claims of being equal with God.
- Colossians 2.9: The fullness of deity remained in Him.

Jesus as Man

-Passages that express Jesus' Humanity:

- Matthew 4.2: Jesus became hungry.
- John 11.35: Jesus wept.
- Matthew 8.24: Jesus was sleeping.
- John 4.6: Jesus grew tired in his long journey.
- John 19.28: Jesus was thirsty.
- Hebrews 4.15: He was tempted in all ways.
- Luke 23.46: Jesus died (breathed his last: He needed to breath). Death is the ultimate expression of humanity.

Jesus as the Son of God

-Romans 1.3-4

- Jesus was the Son of David according to the flesh (1.3).

- Jesus was the Son of God according to the Spirit (1.4).
- Jesus is both the “Son of Man” (as He often referred to Himself) and the “Son of God” (as others referred to Him). Note: “Son of God” is a New Testament phrase. Jesus has not always been known as the “Son.” This concept didn’t come about until Jesus was born of woman and the Spirit.

Why Experience Humanity?

-To be a sacrifice (Hebrews 10)

- A body is required to experience death.
- Hebrews 2.14: To render death powerless.

-To show us the Father

- John 1.14: Behold the glory of the Father.
- John 14.8ff: Philip: “Show us the Father”.

-To be tempted and overcome

- Hebrews 4.15: Jesus was tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin.
- Matthew 4.1-11: Jesus was tempted by Satan.

What Are You?

-Spiritual being having a physical experience?

-Physical being having a spiritual experience?

-Does it matter how you look at yourself?

-God has made us to be body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5.23).

- On top of this He has given us His Spirit to live in us (Romans 8.9-11).

-There are two sides to your existence: Flesh and Spirit.

- Jesus faced this battle in the wilderness (Matthew 4.1-11) and in the garden (Matthew 27.36-46).
- Paul faced this battle (Romans 7.14-25).
- Will you be led by the flesh, or will you yield to the Spirit of God in your life? Just because you are in the flesh doesn't mean you have to bow to its desires!



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MERCY RATHER THAN SACRIFICE: BALANCING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELIGION

BOBBY DOCKERY

Introduction

A scripture from the Old Testament that Jesus was fond of quoting was Hosea 6.6: "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (NASB).

Matthew records two different occasions when Jesus quoted it, suggesting that it was central to the message He came to the world to proclaim. The words were first given as an indictment of Israel in Hosea's time and later as a rebuke to the Pharisees in Jesus' own day. They still speak insistently to us in our own lives today.

Let's look at the three instances where the words occur in the Bible in order to see the point that God is making.

What was God's message to Israel through His prophet Hosea (Hosea 6.6)?

Compare some different translations (emphasis added):

- “For I desire **steadfast love** and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (ESV).
- “...**loyalty** rather than sacrifice...” (NASV).
- “...**mercy**, not sacrifice...” (NIV).
- “...**goodness**, and not sacrifice...” (ASV).

The Hebrew word is *chesed* (חֶסֶד). It can be translated as “mercy, goodness; loving-kindness, faithfulness, loyalty.”³⁷

In *Hosea 6.6*, God calls the religious practices of Israel seriously into question. He accuses them of forsaking His word and ignoring His commandments. He says:

*What shall I do with you, O Judah?
For your loyalty is like a morning cloud.
And like the dew which goes away early.*

(Hosea 6.4, NASB)

Israel’s phony, fading dedication to God would only wilt in the heat of the day. Real loyalty demands something more than empty promises that quickly fade away.

What had gone wrong? They had put their trust in the outward forms of religion (rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices). They believed that as long as they went through the proper forms—as embodied in the sacrificial system of the Law of Moses—they were good with God. They saw their sacrifices as an end in themselves. The external act became a substitute for real loyalty to God. In their daily lives, they really no longer even acknowledged God.

³⁷Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1906).

God wanted more than that! Their sacrifices meant nothing to God because there was no love, no self-examination, no real repentance behind them.

What was Jesus saying to the Pharisees in Matthew 9.1-13?

Quoting Hosea from the LXX³⁸, Jesus says, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9.13). The New American Standard Bible has "compassion" instead of "mercy." The Greek word used here is *eleos* (ἔλεος). It means "mercy, compassion, pity, clemency."³⁹

The Pharisees had appointed themselves the guardians of God's Law. They made up their own elaborate system of commandments on how to keep God's commandments. They were so busy trying to keep their own rules that they lost sight of God's will and what He was all about! **Like their forefathers, they had lost their purpose in life.**

They were not concerned about the One they were supposed to be looking for. Jesus brings this home to them as they grumbled about the fact that He was consorting with "sinners." Going back to Hosea, Jesus shows that God is the Physician of sick souls:

...for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up.

(Hosea 6.1)

Jesus came on a salvage mission; His was a work of reclamation and recovery. He had power to mend broken lives, redeem lost souls, and re-make sin-wrecked lives. The Pharisees couldn't see that; they were sure they were in good spiritual health

³⁸"LXX" is an abbreviation for the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures which was translated in the third century B.C.

³⁹Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd rev. ed., edited by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), 316.

and had no need for anything Jesus was offering. They trusted instead in the laws they had made about keeping the Law; they elevated their rules and restrictions above God's mercy!

That brings us to the other time Jesus quotes Hosea, found in Matthew 12.1-7. This time, the disciples were accused of violating the law by picking grain on the Sabbath. This rule is not biblical—it is one the Pharisees made up for themselves. It was not wrong to eat on the Sabbath! It was no more wrong to pick a few grains of wheat and put them in the mouth than it was do the same thing with a piece of bread. But the Pharisees said that the disciples were "working." Interestingly, if they chewed the grain directly from the stalk the Pharisees would have approved!

Jesus declares that the disciples were "innocent." The Greek word here (*anaitios*; ἀναιτιος) means "not guilty."⁴⁰ *They had done nothing wrong.*

But then, Jesus took the discussion to another level. He pointed out that David had broken biblical law, when he and his men were weak from hunger, by eating consecrated bread (showbread) which only priests were allowed to eat. And Jesus said that *David was right to do it* because compassion took precedence over the law!



⁴⁰BDAG, 64.

Jesus went on to point out that the priests regularly violated the law against working on the Sabbath, which was actually the busiest day of the week for them. But they did it in the service of their fellow Israelites and for the glory of God. So, once again, mercy trumps the letter of the law. Jesus asserts “the superiority of inward life over outward form, for the form is nothing if the heart is wrong.”⁴¹

What conclusions should we draw from these three episodes?

Religion is Both Internal and External

We should not be squeamish about using the word “religion.”

In the eyes of a lot of people, “religion” has become a dirty word which refers to something universally bad. Of course, this has always been the mentality of unbelievers and opposers of truth. They lay the blame for practically everything wrong with the world at the feet of religion: war, suffering, racism, crime, hypocrisy, and so on.

Strangely, in recent times, many who call themselves Christians have joined the chorus heaping abuse on religion. They sneer at religion as something contrary to the will of God, something which actually gets in the way of a relationship with God!

A while back, a young man named Jefferson Bethke posted a YouTube video entitled, “Why I hate religion, but love Jesus,” which has been viewed more than *29 million* times. Bethke begins by declaring that Jesus came to abolish religion!⁴²

⁴¹J.W. McGarvey, *The Four-Fold Gospel* (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1914), 213.

⁴²https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1IAhDGYlpqY&safe=active

A popular catch-phrase today is the claim, "I'm spiritual, but not religious." Many Christians are declaring, "I'm not interested in *religion*, I just want to have a *relationship* with God."

What is religion? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines religion as "belief in, obedience to, and reverence for" a divine being. Mircea Eliade, noted professor of the history of religion at the University of Chicago, defined religion as "focusing on what is sacred."⁴³

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, "religion" comes from the Latin word *religare*, which means "to tie or bind." Religion, then, is what binds us to God. It is fundamentally and essentially relationship—men and women seeking to connect with God. It is nonsensical for a Christian to say, "I'm not interested in religion, I just want a relationship with God!" That is like saying "I'm not interested in a relationship with God, I just want a relationship with God!"

Never does the Bible teach that *all* religion is bad; it teaches that religion can be true or false. It can be empty or uplifting. It can be pure or corrupt. It can be God-given or man-made.

Colossians 2.23 refers to some who were "promoting self-made religion" which had "no value." The Bible declares that some religion is worthless. "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (James 1.26). But there is also religion that is pure and true! "Religion that is pure and undefiled ("genuine", Phillips) before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1.27).

⁴³Austin Cline, "What Is Religion? Defining Religion: The Problem of Definition," About Religion, n.d., <http://atheism.about.com/od/religiondefinition/a/definition.htm> (accessed June 16, 2015).

Religion involves both **mercy** and **sacrifice**. There are both internal and external elements—what we *are* and what we *do*. What we *are* is *internal*: it involves faith, godliness, goodness, and mercy. This is *attitude*—the condition of our heart! What we *do* is *external*: it involves *actions*—acts of worship (sacrifice), obedience, and service. Religion is about both *believing* and *behaving*.

Scripture often uses the words “heart” and “hand” to describe these two facets of religion. In the Bible, the heart is not just the *emotional* part of a person, but it stands for all the things that make us uniquely human—the feeling, reasoning, decision-making, risk-taking part of us. It is the center of our being and the origin of every activity. The hands represent the acting, doing, working part of us: offering sacrifice, rendering obedience, and performing service.

In our relationship with God, the internal and the external are inseparable:

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...

(Psalm 24.3-4)

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

(James 4.8, NASB)



**RELIGION involves both MERCY and SACRIFICE.
There are both INTERNAL and EXTERNAL
elements—what we ARE and what we DO!**

—BOBBY DOCKERY—

External Forms of Religion Are Not Optional

It is disappointing how many Bible teachers interpret “mercy rather than sacrifice” to mean that God repudiates external expressions of religion.⁴⁴ In their view, God never commanded sacrifice; it was merely a device borrowed by the people of Israel from the pagan cults around them.

However, neither Hosea nor Jesus is saying that God utterly rejected the Old Testament sacrificial system. If that were true, God was rejecting what He Himself had commanded! The very first acts of worship we read about in the Bible, in the story of Cain and Abel, involved sacrifice. Both offered sacrifices, but the Bible says this:

And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

(Genesis 4.4-5)

Something stands out here very clearly: there was a type of sacrifice that God approved and accepted and another type that God despised and rejected. But the connection between worship and sacrifice was ordained by God. It was required of the Patriarchs, and it was an essential part of the covenant He made with Israel at Sinai.

Hosea and Jesus were not condemning people for offering sacrifices, but for omitting the true goodness, mercy, and loyalty to God, which were the essential motives for sacrifice. The external acts of religion—sacrifices and offerings—ought to have been an expression of truly dedicated lives, not a substitute for them.

Frequently, Old Testament prophets denounced the immorality, idolatry, and self-righteousness of Israel, which violated their covenant with God and voided their sacrifices (Isaiah 1.11-15; 43.22-24; Amos 5.21-25; Micah 6.6-8).

⁴⁴James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets Volume 2: Hosea, Obadiah, and Micah*, Rev. ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 1986), 115-16.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their meticulous attention to the tiniest items of the sacrificial system while neglecting the big things:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, **without neglecting the others.***

(Matthew 23.23, emphasis added)

God gave the sacrificial system to prepare the world for the ultimate sacrifice He would make in sending His Son in the flesh to walk among His people. Animal sacrifice as practiced in the religion of the Old Testament was a brutal, shattering thing—but it was also awe-inspiring. An Israelite would bring his sacrifice—typically a year-old lamb—to the temple. He would place his hands on its head, symbolizing the transfer of his own guilt to the sacrificial animal. Then he would slash the animal's throat while a priest caught its blood in a golden bowl. The blood would be thrown against the base of the altar of burnt offering by the priest as he intoned the words of Psalm 118.26, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD..." (NASB).

In the first century, Emperor Nero had a count taken of the number of lambs slain in one day during the Feast of the Passover in Jerusalem. The total was 256,500 lambs!⁴⁵ Imagine the scene: hundreds of priests cast thousands of basins of blood against the altar until their arms ache with weariness; the stench of blood fills the air. There is so much blood that the temple courtyard becomes a red sea, and blood flows in a stream out of the temple and down into the Kidron valley below the Temple Mount.

The irony is that those sacrifices, which were offered continually, year by year, could never "make perfect those who draw near" (Hebrews 10.1). The Bible says that "... it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10.4).

⁴⁵Johann Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Kings* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1872), 102.



According to ancient records, hundreds of thousands of lambs would be sacrificed during the celebration of the Passover. This grisly practice reminded people of the seriousness of sin, the need for atonement, and the coming of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Why, then, would a merciful God ever command such a grisly practice?

First, God wanted people to see the devastating consequences of sin. As a consequence of sin, the sinner deserves death (Romans 6.23). Sin is not trivial. It is not something that can be shrugged off or laughed away. Sin is destructive, ruinous, disastrous, savage, degrading, and lethal.

Second, God wanted people to see that atonement must be made for sin. In His mercy, God allowed the sinner to offer up a substitute, whose life would be a symbol of his own. The blood of the innocent was shed to pay for the sin of the guilty. Guilt must be covered.

Third, God wanted people to look to the coming of Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13.8, KJV). The law was a shadow of good things to come (Hebrews 10.1). The mercy shown to us by God through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son is our only hope of salvation. Jesus Christ is "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29, NASB).

God Desires Proper Balance Between the Internal and the External

God wants sacrifice rooted in mercy and He desires mercy expressing itself in sacrifice. Attitude takes precedence over action because all external acts begin in the heart.

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

(Luke 6.45, NASB)

The heart is the center of spiritual life, the seat of all our spiritual failures. What is wrong with the world? All the wickedness, the depravity, the inhumanity? It is a reflection of the hearts of men. Trouble always starts in the heart. It's not enough to compel a change of habits; you must go deeper and change the heart!

Call it goodness, mercy, steadfast love, loyalty—all refer to the same thing: what we are at the center of our being; what the Bible calls the “hidden person of the heart” (1 Peter 3.4, NASB). Until we get right there, we can't do right anywhere. Jesus said:

Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

(Matthew 5.23-24, NASB)

Note that Jesus does not say, “God doesn't want your sacrifice.” He says, “God doesn't want your sacrifice until things are right in your heart.”

Mercy and sacrifice are interdependent! Without steadfast love, goodness, mercy, and loyalty on the inside, we can never offer acceptable sacrifice externally. Mercy and sacrifice are complementary; they work in tandem. True faith must be expressed in true deeds. Neglect of either the internal or external element of religion leads to grotesque distortion.

Israel in the time of Hosea and the Pharisees in the time of Christ were all about the **external forms** of religion; they basically thought that it didn't matter what was in the heart or how they lived as long as they observed the correct forms of religion.

In today's world, the pendulum has often swung to the opposite extreme. It is widely believed that it doesn't matter what you do (or don't do) in worship to God as long as you are honest and sincere about it: "If your heart is right then your worship can't be wrong!"

Some argue that worship in a formal sense—going to church, taking part in certain prescribed forms of worship—is not necessary at all. They say things like, "I worship God in my own heart when I read a beautiful sonnet, or hear inspiring music, or see God in nature."

But getting mercy right will teach us to get sacrifice right. Getting our hearts right compels us to get our worship right. This leads to some obvious conclusions.

First, we cannot dispense with obedience. Many want to twist the words of Jesus (and Hosea) into a pretext for removing the concept of obedience from God's Word. The Bible is a book of imperatives, or commands. It provides a divine blueprint for living; it is a pattern to be followed—an explicit, unambiguous call for obedience. The idea of "commandments," to many people, has a musty, antiquated quality at odds with the spirit of this age. It is fashionable to say instead that the Bible is a love letter, an appeal to the heart. Those who emphasize obedience to commands are legalists, and a call for obedience is somehow a betrayal of love.

But Jesus insisted that obedience is the ultimate proof of love.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.

(John 15.10, NASB)

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.

(John 14.23, NASB)

Second, we cannot dispense with worship. Sacrifice/worship is not optional. Attending the assemblies of God's people is not optional. Respecting God's chosen patterns for worship is not optional. Jesus insisted that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4.24). Our worship must be subject to the discipline of revealed truth; it must be offered in compliance with God's revealed will (John 17.17). And it must also be offered in spirit, sincerely, from the heart, in full assurance of faith. The absence of either spirit or truth will invalidate and spoil our worship.

Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

(Hebrews 13.15, NASB)

Third, we cannot dispense with good works. Today's religious world frowns on "good works" as something THAT diminishes the grace of God. But God's grace allows no alternative but good works!

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2.8-10, NIV)

Note that we are saved not *by* good works but *to do* good works. The expression "good work(s)," or "good deed(s)," is found more than 25 times in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2.14, NIV). Hebrews 10.24 instructs, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...." The word for "good" in these verses is *kalos*

(καλος), which basically means “beautiful, physically or morally.” It is “the beauty which comes from harmony (or balance), the beauty which arises from symmetrical adjustment in right proportion, in other words, from a harmonious completeness” of mercy and sacrifice.⁴⁶

Conclusion

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice....’”

What is God telling us today? As with Israel, God wants us to know Him intimately and love Him steadfastly. As with the Pharisees, He wants us to see that the condition of our hearts can strip our deeds of any real value or meaning. And as with the Pharisees, He wants us to see that we have all been diseased, deformed and damaged by sin, and only the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross gives hope of healing!

Out of mercy comes redemption; in sacrifice we have the conduct of the redeemed. Mercy without sacrifice is a distortion; sacrifice without mercy is a distraction!

Jesus is our perfect example of what balanced spiritual living requires. We must keep Him as the center of our focus:

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

(Hebrews 12.2, 1, NASB)

May God help us to see the world with His eyes, love the world with His heart, and serve the world with His mercy. May we learn to live as Christ lived, think as He thought, serve as He served, and obey as He obeyed. May we choose to esteem what He esteemed, despise what He despised, and to love unstintingly and sacrifice ungrudgingly.

⁴⁶NET Bible, “καλον.” <http://classic.net.bible.org/strong.php?id=5893> (accessed July 3, 2015).



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NO BALANCE ALLOWED! THE RADICAL DEMANDS OF CHRISTIANITY

LUKE DOCKERY

Introduction

Our theme for Deeper 2015 is “Balance” and most of our lessons are focusing on how we need balance in our faith—a lot of the time we get ourselves into trouble when we adopt extreme positions on biblical issues.

But in this class, we are going to talk about two different approaches to the Christian faith. First, we are going to talk about “Christianity” as it is generally conceived of and practiced by American teenagers, and then we are going to compare that with what Scripture records Jesus asks—no, *demands*—from His disciples. And this is an area where there is no balance allowed. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to follow Him under the conditions that He sets. We don’t get to decide what it means to be a follower of Jesus; He does.

Before we continue, I want to make something clear. I am going to be talking today a lot about what American Christian teenagers believe and how that differs from what the Bible teaches. But I am not trying

to *blame* teenagers for this. Teens believe what they do because we—adults, parents, youth ministers, the church, whoever—have failed to teach them any better. And that is what I want to talk about today: confronting our cultural religious trends with the truths of Scripture.

First, I want you to reflect on these three questions:

- What does it mean to be a Christian? What is living the Christian life really about?
- What is the gospel?
- What does God want for your life?

Cultural Christianity: The Faith of American Teenagers

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) was a massive research study conducted from 2002-2005:

- More than 3,300 American teenagers between 13-17
- 267 follow-up face-to-face interviews
- 2,500 of the same teenagers revisited to see how their religious lives change as they age
- Teens from all different religious backgrounds (not just Christian)

What the NSYR revealed was that three out of four American teenagers claim to be Christian, but only about half consider their faith to be important, and less than half practice their faith as a part of their daily lives.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

Furthermore, the report showed that “the vast majority [of U.S. teens are] incredibly inarticulate about their faith.” In other words, even those teens who claim to be Christians are unable to explain what it means to be a Christian or what they actually believe.⁴⁸

When asked questions about what they believed religiously, here were some of the actual responses:

Uh, I haven't really thought about that [pause]. I don't know.
I believe in the [pause], I, ohhh [pause], I don't think I'd really like to talk about that.
Hm, I don't know, I'd have to like ask somebody or something, I don't know.
Um, I guess I believe...[laughs], um, I don't know. I don't really know how to answer it.⁴⁹

As a means of comparison, how did you do in answering the reflection questions from the previous page? Were you able to put your faith into words?

After the NSYR was completed, some of the experts who analyzed all of the data from the study realized that, although a lot of young people claim to be Christian, what they mean by “Christian” is not what that word has meant historically for the last 2000 years.

What the NSYR suggests, and what I am going to argue, is that many, many teenagers who consider themselves to be Christians do not really practice *Christianity* at all; they practice a different religious faith altogether. Listen to this quotation from sociologist Christian Smith, who analyzed the NSYR:

A significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually only tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the

⁴⁸Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131.

⁴⁹Ibid.

historical Christian tradition, but has rather morphed into Christianity's misbegotten stepcousin, Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.⁵⁰

Christian Smith says that a lot of people who consider themselves to be Christians are not really practicing Christianity, but instead a “misbegotten stepcousin” of Christianity—something that is kind of related to Christianity but really is not very similar.

Here is another quotation from Smith:

The language, and therefore experience, of Trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, heaven and hell appear, among most Christian teenagers in the United States at the very least, to be supplanted by the language of happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward. It is not so much that U.S. Christianity is being secularized. Rather more subtly, Christianity is either degenerating into a pathetic version of itself or, more significantly, Christianity is actively being colonized and displaced by a quite different religious faith.⁵¹

In other words, when most Christian teens talk about faith, they don't talk about the things the Bible talks about—holiness, sin, grace, communion, hell—instead, they talk about things like “being nice” or “being a good person” or “getting to go to heaven when we die.” What a lot of teens talk about when they describe their faith ***really isn't Christianity at all.***

And since it is not really Christianity, the researchers came up with a new name for it: **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.**

From the NSYR, here the central beliefs of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:⁵²

1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.

⁵⁰Ibid., 171.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Dean, 14.

2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

And this is why they call it **Moralistic Therapeutic Deism**.

What does **"Moralistic"** mean? If you are a moral person, you understand the difference between right and wrong, you try to do the things which are right, and generally try to be a good person (see central beliefs 2 and 5 above).

What does **"Therapeutic"** mean? Usually we think of this word in terms of going to therapy for something (physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, etc.). Therapy is a form of treatment you take in order to be healed or to feel better. So Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is therapeutic in the sense that God helps us with our problems, and the goal is for us to feel good about ourselves (3, 4).

What does **"Deism"** mean? You might be familiar with Deism from studying European history and the Enlightenment. Here we do not mean Deism in a technical sense, but more in a general sense: a belief in a god who created the world but is not *too* involved in everything that happens (1).

So, you can see why it's called "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." Since that name sounds really technical and it is hard to say, now that we understand what it means, instead we'll call it **"Cultural Christianity."** It is "Christianity" as our culture views it and practices it, but it is not Christianity as described in the Bible. But just know that I will be using "Cultural Christianity" as a synonym for "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism".

When you put all of this together, what American Cultural Christianity is all about is a watered-down version of Christianity.

Sometimes, it is not so bad to water something down. I like to play ultimate frisbee, and especially in the summer, I play in leagues and in tournaments. It gets really hot and I sweat a lot and in order to stay hydrated, I need to drink a lot of fluids. I don't like to just drink water, because after I drink a lot of water it quenches my thirst and I don't want to drink anymore, but I need to keep hydrating. I also don't like to drink straight gatorade, because the taste just seems too strong, and if I drink a lot of it, I just get too much sugar in my system and start to feel kind of gross. So what I like to do is to water down my gatorade: I have about 2/3 gatorade and 1/3 water, and it's perfect: it helps me stay hydrated, it tastes good, and I never feel full or heavy.

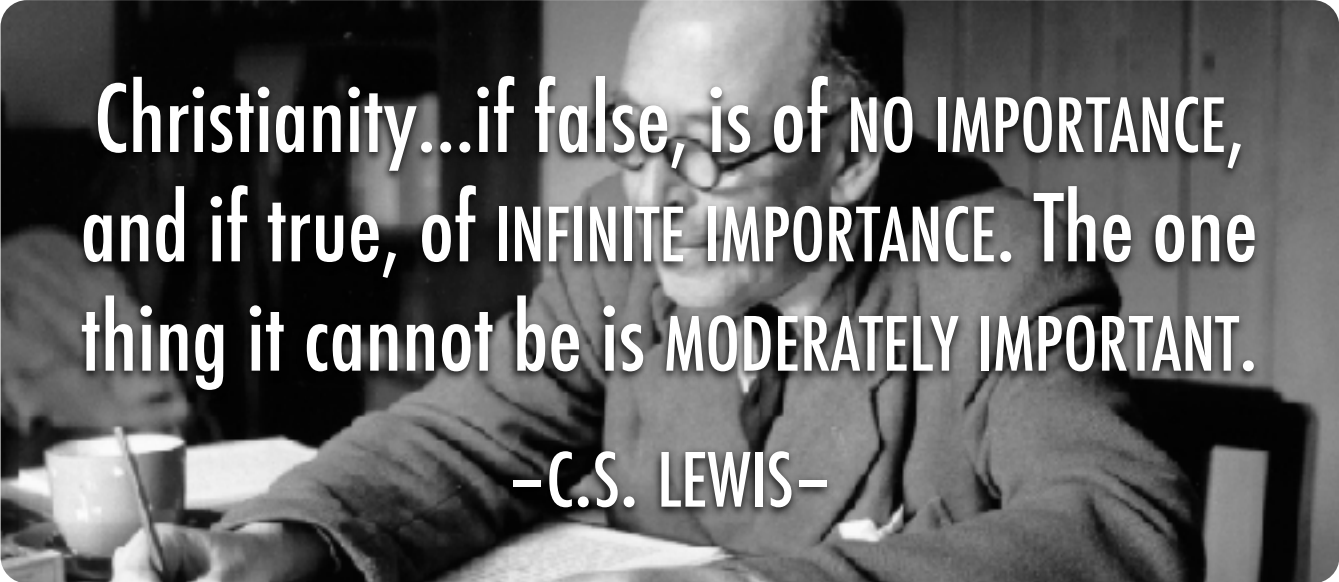


Sometimes we water things down in order to make them more pleasant or to suit us better, and that's okay. But Cultural Christianity is a watered-down Christianity, and that is *not* okay. Sure, in some ways it is more pleasant—Cultural Christianity is easier; it is less demanding. It is a religion which will not *offend* anyone, but neither will it save anyone.

Remember earlier how we said that three-fourths of American teenagers consider themselves to be Christians, but only about half consider it to be important, and less than half practice their faith as a part of their daily lives? That is what Cultural Christianity is all about: something you believe, but not something that is so important that it upsets your life or really impacts how you live too much.

Here is the problem with that sort of thinking: C.S. Lewis once said, "Christianity...if false, is of *no* importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."⁵³ Next, we will consider a different perspective.

⁵³C.S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 101.



Christianity...if false, is of NO IMPORTANCE,
and if true, of INFINITE IMPORTANCE. The one
thing it cannot be is MODERATELY IMPORTANT.

—C.S. LEWIS—

Biblical Christianity: The Demands of Jesus

I want to start this second part of our class with a simple question: what does the word “Christian” mean? It just means “follower of Christ.” Someone who follows Jesus. And if Jesus is the One we are following, that means that He gets to tell us what it means to follow Him, right? So first we will take a look at what Jesus says, and then compare Biblical Christianity to Cultural Christianity.

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

(Matthew 16.24-27)

Jesus says that if we want to be His followers, we have to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. In the ancient world, crosses were not used for jewelry or tattoos or t-shirt designs, they were used for death. People were executed on crosses,

and as we see in the crucifixion of Jesus, they were forced to carry their crosses to the place where they were hung on them to die.

So, what Jesus is saying here when He tells the people listening to Him that they have to take up their crosses in order to follow Him is that they have to die. They have to **die to self.**

That's not an expression we use a lot—what does it mean to die to self? It means that we crucify, or put to death, our own wishes, wants, and desires. We deny ourselves and what we want to do, and instead seek to do the things God calls us to do.

Now, that is completely different from the Cultural Christianity we have been discussing. Cultural Christianity is watered-down, which makes it easy to swallow. It does not offend anyone; it does not demand sacrifice. It says that God wants you to be happy, and that He will bail you out of trouble and let you live with Him in heaven some day.

That is *not* what Jesus said. Jesus did not say following Him would be easy. He said it would be death.

Let's go back and look at the core beliefs of Cultural Christianity and compare them to what Biblical Christianity says.

(1) A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.

Of the five central beliefs of Cultural Christianity, this one is probably the most on target. It is true that God created the world, ordered it, and watches over life on earth. Beyond that, Scripture teaches that Jesus was intricately involved in creation, and it is through Him that our world holds together (Colossians 1.15-20).

But God is not some distant, disinterested Creator. God cares so much about what is going on in the world that through Jesus, He stepped into the world in order to fix what was broken and save us when we were lost.

(2) God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

Does God want us to be good, nice, and fair? Of course He does. But that is a watered-down idea, because God wants us to be *so much more* than that.

In parables like the story of the Good Samaritan, we see that Jesus demands that His followers be hospitable and compassionate, which is a lot harder than just being good and nice. We can be nice and polite without actually lifting a finger to help someone in need. We can say “please” and “thank you,” smile, and go to church, but if we ignore those who are in need of food, clothing, or companionship, God will reject us in the day of judgment (Matthew 25.31-46).

And another thing about being polite: did you know that a lot of people in our culture consider it to be rude or impolite to talk about religion in most social settings? Jesus does not want His disciples to observe social niceties if it means keeping their mouths shut about their faith. As Christians, we know that the world is sick and Jesus is the cure. Our job is to share the medicine with as many patients as possible! We are called to care enough about other people that we tell them about Jesus, even if our culture tells us to keep that to ourselves.

(3) The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself.

This is maybe the best example of all of these central beliefs of how much more Cultural Christianity is influenced by *culture* than by *Christ*.

In our culture, the most important goal in life is to be happy. We're urged to "be true to ourselves," which is just another way of saying, "do what *you* want to do, do what *feels* good." We are told to choose colleges, churches, and jobs based on what will make us happy. People divorce their spouses or walk out on their families because they are not happy, as if somehow that justifies harming others.

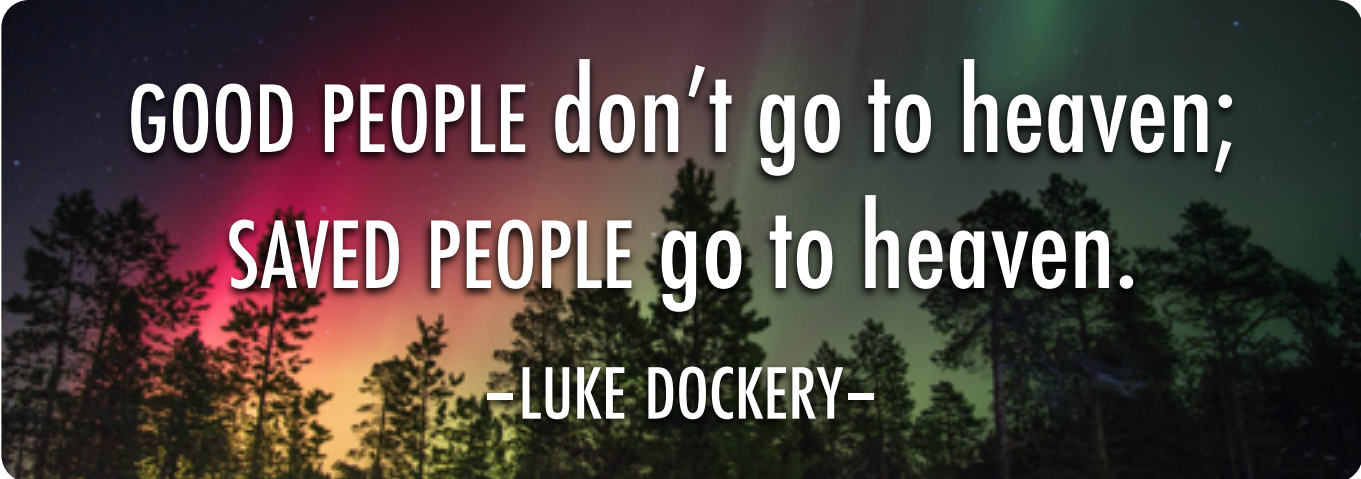
But God does not think that your happiness is the most important thing. It is not that God wants you to be miserable and *unhappy*; it's just that He cares a lot more about your *holiness* than your *happiness* (1 Peter 1.15-16). Jesus came and died on the cross to free us from sin and save our souls, not to enable us to selfishly go about in life doing whatever we can to be happy as often as we can.

The central goal of life is to be faithful to God, rather than to feel good about ourselves. Everything that exists, the whole arc of history, the eternal destiny of all things, is not about us—it's about God.

We *are* commanded to rejoice (Philippians 4.4; 1 Thessalonians 5.16), and as Christians we should be joyful people, but there is a difference between having *joy* in the knowledge that we are saved by the blood of Christ and are a part of His Kingdom and doing whatever we can to experience a self-centered and shallow feeling that our culture calls "happiness."

(4) God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.

The idea that God is some sort of cosmic parachute that we pull out and use only when things get really bad is entirely foreign to the message of Scripture. God is not just sitting there twiddling His thumbs, waiting for you to ask Him to help you pass an algebra test or to get you out of trouble for lying to your parents.



**GOOD PEOPLE don't go to heaven;
SAVED PEOPLE go to heaven.**

–LUKE DOCKERY–

The basic truth of the Incarnation—the Son of God putting on flesh and living as the man Jesus—is that God cares enough about us that He enters into life alongside us. Jesus showed us how to live and died to save us, and even today, through His word and His Holy Spirit, God is always a part of the lives of Christians; He is not just off to the side somewhere waiting for us to ask Him for help when we get really desperate.

I am not saying we shouldn't pray to God when we are in trouble and need His help—of course we should. But we should also pray to Him when things are great and everything is going well in our lives. And more than that, God should *always* be involved in our lives because as followers of Christ, our primary marching orders in life are not determined by what we want to do, but rather by what *God* calls us to do (remember: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus!).

(5) Good people go to heaven when they die.

This might not sound so bad at first. What is wrong with it?

First, the Bible argues that *there are no good people*. All of us sin and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3.23) and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6.23). I am not good, and you are not good. We are selfish and prideful and unkind. We do not deserve heaven, and there is nothing we can do to earn heaven. In fact, the Bible says

that all of the good deeds we do, all of our righteous acts, are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64.6). At our best, we have no hope of being “good enough” to earn heaven.

The good news is, *good* people don’t go to heaven; *saved* people do! And God, in His grace, is willing to save any of us, even though we are *not* good. Good people do not earn salvation; God graciously offers the gift of salvation to all people, no matter how bad they are. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2.8-9).

Those who respond to God’s grace through faith in Christ and submission to Him in baptism have their sins washed away, become a part of God’s people and God’s mission, and are also promised eternal life.

Conclusion

I hope you can see how different Cultural Christianity and Biblical Christianity are. Really, they are two very different belief systems. No wonder they were called “misbegotten step cousins.” They are barely related at all.

None of this discussion is intended to make you feel bad. When I asked the questions at the beginning about what it means to be a Christian and what you believe, maybe you didn’t know how to answer. When I described the characteristics of Cultural Christianity/Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, maybe you sat there thinking, “Uh oh, this is pretty much what I think Christianity is.”

But this is the Deeper Youth Conference—we are all about building a deeper and lasting faith in Jesus Christ. So if you have been drinking watered-down Christianity, don’t feel bad, just start drinking the real thing instead!

God created all things, and cares so much about His creation that Jesus came to redeem it and fix what is broken.

God wants us to be more than nice and polite; He wants us to be hospitable and compassionate and care about the needs and souls of other people.

God cares more about your holiness than your happiness. He is more concerned about you being faithful to Him than about you feeling good about yourself.

God cares deeply for you and wants to be an intimate part of your life—your priorities, your decision-making process, your goals—every day, not just when you are in trouble and need Him to bail you out.

God graciously wants to save you from your sin, enlist you in His mission, and live eternally with you. You cannot earn that by your good works, but you can humbly accept the free gift of salvation He offers.

That is real, Biblical Christianity. It is not as easy to swallow as the watered down stuff—in fact, it is really hard, and requires that we die to ourselves. But it is what Jesus demands, and it is the only way to follow Him.



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THE PARADOXES OF BAPTISM

JACK ENGLISH

A “paradox” is defined as a seemingly contradictory statement that is true. This definition certainly fits our subject of baptism. Bible baptism, in fact, has multiple paradoxes as revealed in the New Testament.

First, baptism is a **birth** and a **death**. Most believers are familiar with the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3. Here we find Jesus describing to a member of the Sanhedrin that “no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (John 3.3, NIV). He will later say, “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of the water and the Spirit” (John 3.5, NIV). Most Bible students, including me, believe this has reference to baptism. As a result, the expression “to be born again” must include a commitment to Christ involving the act of being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3.27). Thus we see that baptism is first of all a birth.

The paradox is that baptism is also a death. The apostle Paul tells the Roman Christians that we have been “baptized into his death” and that “our old self was crucified with Him” in this act of baptism (Romans 6.3,6, NIV). Death is literally defined as a separation. When we are baptized we are separated from or die to our past life as we are born into a new life. Baptism is therefore not only a birth but also death.

It is like moving to a new school. You now have the opportunity to be “born again” in the sense that you can be whatever you want to be. You separate yourself from your old reputation and have the opportunity to create a new one.

Second, baptism is a **burial** and a **resurrection**. The word baptism is transliterated rather than translated. That simply means the Greek word was given English letters instead of an English translation. If it had been translated, it would be found in our English Bibles as “to immerse, to dip, to overwhelm,” or even “to bury.” This is why Paul says we are “buried with him through baptism” (Romans 6.4; Colossians 2.12, NIV). A burial is a covering up or a submerging of a person in whatever element is chosen. The element God has chosen for us is water (Acts 8.36).

The paradox is that baptism is also a resurrection. Jesus arose from the grave following His burial on the third day. When we reenact the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in baptism, we come up out of the burial waters of baptism to “live a new life” (Romans 6.4, NIV). Jesus defeated death in His resurrection and we in baptism share the hope of being “united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Romans 6.5, NIV).

A burial is usually associated with a funeral because someone has died. The good news is that the burial of a Christian assures us there will be a resurrection to life.

Third, baptism is a **putting off** and a **putting on**. The person who commits his or her life to Christ in baptism is putting off the flesh or the sinful nature (Colossians 2.11). Sin is no longer his master or has dominance over him. He has received the gift of the indwelling Spirit and is no longer controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit (Romans 8.9).

The paradox is that baptism is a putting on of Christ Jesus (Galatians 3.27). When God looks at us after our baptism, He looks through Jesus, whose blood is continually cleansing us of our sins (1 John 1.7). He therefore now sees us as clean and sin-free.

It is like when we have dirty clothes on and how wonderful it feels to take them off and put on clean clothes. It makes us fresh, clean, and free from the stink and dirt that once covered us. Baptism washes the sins away and makes us clean again (Acts 22.16).

Those who have been baptized into Christ will have a story of how they were born again and yet died, of how they were buried and yet were resurrected; of how they put off some things but put on Jesus. If you have yet to be baptized into Jesus, I pray the paradoxes of baptism will cause you to consider your relationship to Him and that you will seek how you can find hope for your life and for eternal life.



— PARADOXES *of*

A BIRTH AND A DEATH

A BURIAL AND A
RESURRECTION



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A BALANCED VIEW OF THE CHURCH

JOSH GRISHAM

And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

(Luke 9.23-24)

My topic today is "A Balanced View of the Church." This was a difficult concept for me to really understand and get an idea of what I was going to say or even what "A Balanced View of the Church" meant. But I came to the understanding that it means to have our lives fully devoted to Christianity rather than a weekly activity. I want to give you a heads up that this will basically be a discussion based on the statement found in James 1.22 to be "doers of the word, not hearers only." You may have heard a lot of what I am going to say before, but I hope that you will be able to get something out of what is said today.

Many of you might know that the Greek word that we find for "church" most places in the New Testament is *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία). That word means "assembly," but the etymology of that word seems to come from the words "to call" and "out," so in a sense, the Church is those who have been "called out" to be something more. Church is not a building or something that we attend two or three times a week; it is who we are. The apostle Peter says we are:

...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of the darkness into His marvelous light.

(1 Peter 2.9)

A true balanced view of the Church is one that causes us live in a manner that would display the attitude of Christ to those around us.

Imagine we were to look at our lives on a scale, and the more “Christiandy” that we act, the more each day would weigh. I feel like it is safe to assume that the majority of us, when looking at the scale, would see that our Sundays, and possibly Wednesdays, would be the heaviest days of our weeks. I think that we know deep down that there is something wrong with this.

There is something so much more to our faith, so much more to living our lives as true disciples of Christ than something that we do for a few hours a week. Following the plans that God has for us as strange, called out people means that when we look at that scale, it should be even for every day of our lives. But, how do we really put this into action, and why is it so important?

How do we truly balance our lives so that church defines our lifestyle, rather than just a scheduled thing to do each week? Peter continues:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

(1 Peter 2.11-12, NASB)

James, probably one of my favorite books, gives us great instruction on how to make church part of our daily lives. In fact, I would go as far as to say that the major theme of the book of James is putting what we hear and believe into action. James is very

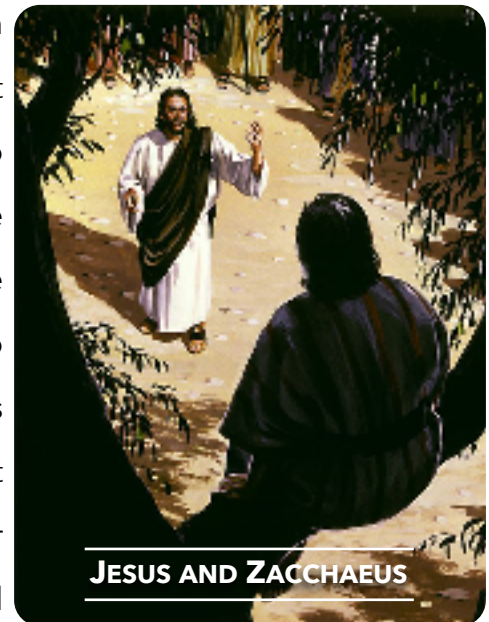
explicit and outspoken in his writings, and I love his section on faith and works in James 2. He says,

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

(James 2.14-17)

Why should we try to make church and Christian living the biggest priority in our lives?

I heard this a few weeks ago, and it has really stuck in my mind ever since. Have you ever thought about Zacchaeus, the rest of the story, like what happened to him after Jesus went to his home? Imagine this: you are traveling through Jericho in about A.D. 40. You come to the city gates, and a guard says, "Welcome to Jericho! Oh, you are here to see Zacchaeus? Well, he is probably down the road a little ways. He sits there most of time, and just tells that same story over and over again." So, you thank the man and head down the road



to find the wee little man. After a short bit of walking you see him. There are a few people standing around him, and he is telling the story about Jesus to anyone who will listen to him. What about the adulterous woman in John 8 or the Samaritan woman in John 4? Do you think that there was ever anything in their lives that was as important as what they experienced when Jesus came to them?

These stories speak to us and answer why we are to make church part of our daily lives. First, if Jesus has truly touched our lives and we have really seen Him in our lives,

is there really anything in our lives as important as telling everyone we can about the time we met Jesus and everything that He can do for them as well? Second, God has placed before us a huge opportunity to cause pivotal moments in the lives of those around us. We have been called out to be Jesus to others. We can be the Jesus in others' lives by truly communicating what the gospel teaches us, and if we completely exemplify grace and love, through works to those around us.

Why don't we really spend every moment of our lives trying to be Jesus to those around us? I thought a lot about what exactly it is that stops us from truly acting differently or showing that we are "called out." The two biggest reasons that I could think of are **comfort** and **fear**. Comfort keeps us from fully living out our calling, by causing us to be happy to live a non-confrontational type of life. We do not like to do things that will upset people or change the way we are. Fear is also a huge motivator that scares us into keeping church confined to a couple days per week. Two types of fear that come to mind are fear of what people will think and fear of what might happen.

We are called to be something much greater than just attendees. Fear causes us to be afraid of the consequences that our witnessing to others can cause. We can be afraid of what our friends can think, how others will perceive us, or offending someone. This would be one type of fear. However, in our world today, especially in the Middle East, there is a very real threat of dying for Christ's cause. Can I just say one thing about being afraid and comfortable? Jesus Christ died on a cross for the sake of the world, and I know that He was not comfortable or unafraid of what He was going through. We are on dangerous ground if we think that we are entitled to anything more than what our Lord and Savior went through. If Who we worship went to a cross to die, then we need to be willing to do the same.

Today, we have talked a little bit about a balanced view of church. I love this quote by G.K. Chesterton. He says, "Jesus promised his disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble."⁵⁴ I hope that from now on we will try to devote our lives to showing what it means to be called out. And, after we leave this conference, that we show the world what it means to have Jesus. We need to become a people who are willing to take up our crosses and follow Him wherever He may lead us. Let's go from here and be afraid of nothing and absurdly happy. And let's go cause some trouble.

⁵⁴As quoted in William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* in *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1956): 75.



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ISN'T FEEDING ENOUGH? A BALANCED APPROACH TO THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

JEFF GRISHAM

The topic that we will examine during our time together today is a balanced approach, a balanced view, of the mission of the church. I worded this as *the* mission because I believe that the mission that you and I share as followers of Jesus is a singular mission. So, together, we are going to dive into Scripture and deal with four questions concerning the mission of the church: What? Why? How? When?

This topic really came from the fact that we have a tendency (maybe it is more of a desire) to label things. We like to label things so that we can compartmentalize them. It helps to keep us organized and structured, so we want to label the things that we do. This helps, we think, not only us, but also those we talk to about what it is we are doing. The problem is that we tend to misapply some of these labels.

It has been a few years, but I can remember sitting in an assembly at the Christian school that Josh attends and the administrator talking about the mission work that the students would be doing as the year

progressed. There were things like painting houses, visiting nursing homes, etc. These things were labeled as “mission work,” but let’s call them what they are: service projects. I am not diminishing the value or the importance of service—it was important to Jesus, and it should be important to us. It is not, however, by itself, all there is to mission work.

What

I want to start by looking at what the mission of the church is. Where do we go to find what it is that we are supposed to be doing? We are to be followers of Christ. We are to be his disciples. In other words, we are to learn what Jesus did and how Jesus did it and follow that example. With that in mind, we will look at some scriptures where Jesus tells us His purpose, see if we can identify that purpose, and make the application in our context today.

One of the first things that came to my mind as I thought about this topic was something that Jesus said that was recorded in Mark 10. There are a lot of things packed into this chapter. It opens with Jesus talking with the Pharisees about divorce. Then we have the incident where the disciples were keeping the children away from Jesus, the rich young ruler makes his appearance, and then Jesus tells His disciples about His upcoming death. Right on the heels of Jesus describing His sacrificial death, we find James and John asking for positions of greatness in the kingdom. It is in the verses that follow that we hear, from His own lips, a purpose of Jesus:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

(Mark 10.42-45)

Jesus came to serve. As we read and study the life of Jesus, we can see that serving others is very important to Him. As we follow his public ministry we can see Him giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, cleansing the lepers, causing the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, healing all kinds of sickness, and even raising the dead. In the sheep and goat judgment scene, which Jesus paints in Matthew 25, we see the importance that He places on service. But is that it? Is that all there is to His purpose?

There is more. In addition to serving others, we find Jesus teaching and preaching the kingdom of God. We find places like Matthew 5-7 that record for us the Sermon on the Mount. We find Jesus teaching in the temple courts, in the synagogues, in the countryside, in houses, by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and pretty much everywhere He went. Look with me at Luke 4. In this chapter we find Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, then going to Capernaum and teaching. Here He casts a demon out of a possessed man, heals Peter's mother-in-law, and people are coming from all around, bringing their sick and the demon possessed so that Jesus can heal them. Then we read this:

And when it was day, He departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought Him and came to Him, and would have kept Him from leaving them, but He said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." And He was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

(Luke 4.42-44)

We just read in Mark that Jesus said that He came to serve. Now He says that the reason He was sent is to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Which one is it? Is there a singular mission, a singular purpose of Jesus that we can find and follow today? Yes there is. I believe that we can see that there is one purpose in several places within Scripture, but we are going to look at two. The first one is in John 17:

When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.

(John 17.1-5)

Notice that Jesus says that he has accomplished "the work" that God had given Him to do. Sounds like a singular mission, a singular purpose, doesn't it?

I think that Paul makes it even clearer to us as to the singular purpose of Jesus and the mission of each of us as a part of the church. Look with me at 2 Corinthians 5, beginning in verse 16.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Corinthians 5.16-21)

The singular mission that we have been given is the ministry of reconciliation. This was the purpose of Jesus—to reconcile us to God. In the words of Paul from Colossians 1, Jesus made "peace by the blood of His cross." Because of the work of Christ, the relationship that was ruined because of sin can now be repaired. If we are Christians and have taken advantage of the offer of God's grace, we are to share it, declare it, and make it known to others. We are in the peacemaking business. We have been

given the ministry of reconciliation. In this ministry, the other attributes of Jesus, serving and teaching, are both present. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the church as a singular body with many parts. I think we can see the mission of the church in a similar way. The ministry of reconciliation has different parts to it. But, we need to be aware that this ministry is not only made up of one part or the other. It takes both to make it complete, and that is where we need to seek balance.

We've seen the "what." Now we will take a look at the "why."

Why

When I was little, I remember one of the standard answers that my parents would give me when I asked why they told me to do something. Many of you will probably recognize this answer. I have used it, and to some degree still do. It goes like this: "Because I told you to." As parents, when the kids are little, we want to train them to be obedient. We want our children to do what we ask and trust us that what we ask is in the best interest of them and the family. It is very necessary training. It instills in them the habit of obedience. However, as they get older, we may have to take some more time and explain why we are asking them to do certain things. Again, I do not really think that there is anything wrong with this, but it is quite likely that the more we understand regarding the "why," the more wholeheartedly we complete the task. For example, if we do not see the importance or the purpose of something, we may just halfway do it. When we do recognize the purpose or the goal, we may be much more engaged.

With that in mind, I would like for us to take a brief look at why we are to be engaged in this ministry of reconciliation.

First, we need to see that we are commanded to be involved in this purpose:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

(Matthew 28.18-20)

There is not much getting around that one, is there? It seems pretty straightforward to me. We have been commissioned—commanded—by the King to be involved in this work. Teaching others to observe (some translations say "obey") everything that He has commanded, means that we live out the commands of Jesus for others to see. This, by the way, includes the commandment that He just issued here in Matthew 28.

But, we need to know that this is not something new. God, from the beginning, invited His creation in to help accomplish His purpose. Let's look at this briefly, beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation.

I think we can agree that Genesis 1-2 cover the same period of time. Genesis 1 gives us an overview of creation, and Genesis 2 deals with more of the details involved in God's creation of the world. Near the end of Genesis 1 we read:

Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

(Genesis 1.26-28)

This is one of those passages that we have heard repeatedly. We have talked about it in regard to the fact that we are created by God. We have talked about it to show the triune nature of God. What I want us to see now is that from the beginning, God

enlisted the help of His creation to accomplish His purpose. We see the first commands issued from God to humanity:

- Be fruitful and multiply
- Subdue the earth (bring everything under the reign of God)
- Have dominion over the rest of creation

When we move over to Genesis 2, we see more of how this is to work:

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

(Genesis 2.8-15)

God placed man in the Garden of Eden to work it, cultivate it, cause it to grow and expand. He also put man there in order to protect it. When we look at 2.10-12, we find something interesting. We find a description of a river that divides into four other rivers. It is tempting to just pass right by these verses and give them little or no thought. It can be equally tempting to think that this is a way in which we can find the original site of the Garden of Eden. I think there is something else we need to see. If the river was to water the garden, the four rivers dividing from it could indicate that

the Garden of Eden was to spread and grow. I believe this is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

After the Fall, we see God working to repair the relationship. Again, God enlisted the help of His creation in accomplishing this task. In Genesis 12.1-3, it is Abram. God called Abram to leave his country, his father's house, and his family and go to the land that God would show him. God goes on to tell Abram that through him, through the seed of Abram, all nations of the earth would be blessed. Again, here is this idea of the global reign of God. In Genesis 28, in Jacob's dream of the ladder that connects heaven and earth, we see God speaking to Jacob and telling him:

I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

(Genesis 28.13-14)

This theme continues in the nation of Israel, whom God placed in a strategic location so they would influence the Gentile nations that surrounded them. The theme also continued through the nation of Israel in that through that nation Jesus, the Messiah, would come. We know that God's purpose will be completed.



When we get to the end of the Bible, in Revelation 21 and 22, we find the time when all things are made new, and God's purpose is accomplished. We have been invited to work together with God in this accomplishment.

How

Next, we want to move on to how we are to accomplish the mission. We have hinted at it through the lesson so far, but we need to hit it head on at this point. The theme of the weekend is balance. We talked about finding a *balanced* approach to the ministry of reconciliation that we have been given. So, where is that balance to be found?

When it comes to keeping our balance, one of the most important things we can do is to find the center. A tightrope walker needs to make sure he is centered. I remember playing basketball and working on rebounding and the coach talking about lowering our center of gravity so we would not be pushed around easily. Center is important. As Christians, those who wear the name of Jesus, the center of our identity is Jesus Himself. If we want to know how to do the ministry of reconciliation right, we do it like Jesus did.

There is no doubt that perfect balance can be found in the life of Jesus. I want us to talk about what that balance was and where we can find it, specifically in John 1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the Light, that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but came to bear witness about the Light. The true Light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John 1.1-14)

Did you catch it? The balance that existed in the life of Jesus and his accomplishment of the work that God sent him to do is found in the fact that He was full of grace and truth.

We are going to look now at a couple of examples of the grace and truth found in Jesus. For that, we are going to begin by looking at John 6. We are not going to read this so much as we are going to talk our way through the narrative. I think this serves as a great example of how ministry needs both grace and truth.

Jesus has a huge crowd following Him, John says, because of the healings that were being done. It is beginning to get late in the day, and the disciples of Jesus are concerned about the crowd and knew that they would need something to eat. Phillip comes to Jesus to present this problem to Him. Andrew found a boy who had five loaves and two fish. Jesus has the people sit down, blesses the bread and fish, gives some to everyone. Everyone eats until they are full, and there were twelve baskets of leftovers after feeding 5000 men (not to mention women and children). Jesus now has a huge following, and these people want to “take Him by force to make Him king.”



These are devoted followers. But, Jesus slips away by Himself. That evening, the disciples get into a boat and cross the lake. Jesus meets them on the water (He is literally walking on the water), and they finish the crossing together.

The next morning, the crowd of loyal followers begins to look for Jesus. When they figure out that He has crossed the sea, they get in boats and go find Him. As I read this, it seems that when they get there, they are more interested in what is for breakfast than really following Jesus:

When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on Him God the Father has set His seal." Then they said to Him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

(John 6.25-29)

Jesus takes the opportunity, not to perform another miracle or feed them some more, but to speak the truth into their lives. He tells them that there are demands placed on His followers. There is something that they have to do. Their response is to ask for another sign. Remember that they had been following Jesus because of the signs—the miracles—and they had just been the recipients of a miracle themselves, but they want to see another. Instead of performing for them, Jesus tries to open their eyes to the miracle that is standing right in front of them. Jesus teaches them that He is the true bread from heaven. He is the bread of life. Do we remember how this chapter ends?

After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.

(John 6.66)

It is a heartbreaking thing to see people choose not to follow Jesus. And I think this is the reason that we tend to lean more toward grace (service) than to truth. Grace without truth can gather a following, but grace and truth accomplishes the mission. Look at the following verses:

So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God."

(John 6.67-69)



Not everyone left that day. In fact, most of these who remained followed Jesus and gave their lives in service to Him.

We need to look at one more place in John's gospel where we find this balance of grace and truth exhibited in the life of Jesus: John 8. We need to talk through what is going on a little as we make our way to the scene we are about to witness. John 7 really sets the stage well.

It was time to celebrate the Feast of Booths. Jesus and his followers were in Galilee, and some were getting ready to move toward Jerusalem for the feast. The brothers of Jesus thought He should go to Jerusalem and "perform" there to gather a greater following. After all, that is where the crowds would be. Jesus had them go without Him, and He came later. During the festival, Jesus made His way to the temple and began to teach there. The Pharisees had been on the lookout for Him, and they sent officers to arrest Jesus. The officers did not get it done. They returned empty-handed. The Pharisees were upset, they were afraid that the general Jewish population was going to follow, and they verbally attacked anyone who stood up for Jesus in any fashion.

Now, take a look at the events of John 8.1-11. It is a familiar narrative to most of us. Jesus was at the temple and people came to be taught. While he was teaching, here came the Pharisees. They had with them a woman who was caught in the act of

adultery. They brought her to Jesus and said, "Here she is. She was caught in the act of adultery and, according to the Law, should be stoned to death. What are You going to do about it?"

If you want to see a picture of truth and no grace, it was the Pharisees. They were absolutely right on the law, on the truth. But grace was completely absent. Jesus wrote on the ground, and as they continued to press Him for an answer, He said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her," then just continued to write on the ground. One by one, the Pharisees left. I think it is interesting to note that it was not only the Pharisees that left, but also the people whom Jesus had been teaching. When Jesus looked up again, it was just He and this adulterous woman. Jesus said, "Where are they? Does no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." To which Jesus replied, "Neither do I condemn you." Now if we left it there, we would see what many in our world want to see today. No judgment, no condemnation, and as long as it works for me, you have no right to try to pass judgment on my behavior. But, we know better. It did not end there. Again, we see that perfect balance of grace and truth in Jesus as He continued with, "Go, and from now on sin no more."

When it comes to the "how" of the mission and finding a balanced approach, I hope that we can see that it begins with the balance of grace (service) and truth (preaching and teaching). While grace with no truth can lead to a place where everything is acceptable, there is no judgment, and whatever seems right to *me* has to be acceptable to everyone else, truth and no grace can be just as ugly. In order to complete the mission, the ministry of reconciliation, we have to have balance.

When

We will conclude by taking a look at the “when” of the mission. We started today by talking about the need we seem to have to label things. These labels give us comfort and security. They help us to organize our lives and know what we are doing and when we are supposed to do it. When it comes to the ministry of reconciliation that we have been given, we need to stop treating it as a special event, and start to allow it to be who we are every day. Let me explain. We like to say that we are going on a mission trip, or we are going to work on a service project for a certain group, however we want to word it. We make the preparations and get everything in order, go complete that work for that time frame, and then we are done, until the next event. What do you suppose would happen if we had the ministry of reconciliation as a part of who we are on a daily basis? In other words, what would happen if we were always watching for someone to serve, someone to encourage, someone to help, someone with whom to share the good news of the forgiveness and hope that is found in Jesus? I think we know what could happen if that was our attitude:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

(Acts 2.42-47)

The lives of those first Christians were living examples of serving one another and speaking truth into the lives of each other. The ministry of reconciliation was in full swing and people were being reconciled to God on a daily basis.

What if we would stop looking at missions as special events reserved for a chosen few and would begin to see them as a way of life? May we stop calling it a "campaign" or a "mission trip" and instead just call it "Tuesday."



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GIRLS CLASS—THE OTHER 67: BALANCING OUR S.T.U.F.F.

STACI GRISHAM

Balance. That is what we are supposed to talk about today. I am curious, what do you think of when you hear the word balance?

When I was first asked to do this talk, my concern was what to talk about. If the topic were love or spiritual warfare, I am right there, but balance? I thought that maybe my problem was that I did not have a clear definition of what balance is. So like any good student I looked it up in the dictionary on my computer. I think there were about nine definitions for balance as a noun and ten definitions as a verb. As I started thinking through some of those definitions, I could see some really good lesson material from several of them. At that point, my dilemma became not so much what to talk about but rather which direction to go.

I was told once a long time ago that you should write or talk about things you know. I am an accountant, so I think of balance sheets and balancing the checkbook when I hear the word balance—numbers, obviously. So, I thought maybe we could start there.

Do you ever think about the number of hours that we have each week and how we spend them? It is a lot like getting a deposit on Sunday morning of \$168 (24 hours x 7 days a week) that we have to spend by

Saturday night. We cannot carry any of it forward.

So, if we spend eight hours a night for sleep, that is 56 hours a week. I know some of us would spend more here and some less, but just say for the sake of argument that eight is a good average. That leaves 112 hours.

I work 40 hours a week; you all go to school 40 hours a week, and just to make Mom and Dad happy, let's spend one hour a day studying (five for the week). That leaves us with 67 hours for all the other "S.T.U.F.F." in our lives. How are we spending it? Let's talk a little bit about that S.T.U.F.F.

S: Social Media

In 2010, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported the results of a study regarding the use of media by teens.⁵⁵ It said, "8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day (more than 53 hours a week). And because they spend so much of that time 'media multitasking' (using more than one medium at a time), they actually manage to pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those 7½ hours." Also, "girls spend more time using social networking sites, listening to music, and reading. Boys spend more time playing games and going to video websites like YouTube."

This study was from 2010; I wonder how much that has changed in the last five years. I know that personally my media usage has increased tremendously, so my guess is that the time spent on media probably has not decreased, though it is possible that

⁵⁵The Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation, "Daily Media Use Among Children and Teens Up Dramatically From Five Years Ago," January 20, 2010, <http://kff.org/disparities-policy/press-release/daily-media-use-among-children-and-teens-up-dramatically-from-five-years-ago/> (accessed May 21, 2015).

the breakdown is different—girls may be playing more games, boys might be doing more social networking.

We are listening to music, watching TV, texting, and emailing. We are on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Google, and Instagram. We are playing video games, Trivia Crack, Candy Crush, Flappy Bird and checking out YouTube videos. Have I left anything out?

As I was sitting at the dining room table working on this presentation, I looked across the room at the rest of my family. My son, a senior in high school, had his headphones on listening to music, he was doing homework on his computer, and he was texting on his phone, all while the TV was on. My 11-year-old son was kind of doing the same thing—playing games on his phone while watching TV. But it did not stop there. It is not just kids—my husband was playing games on his tablet and watching TV. But don't even mention turning off the TV!



2010 Study: 8-18 year olds average 53 hours per week on music, TV, internet, texting, emailing, video games, and social media.

So, if I understand all of this correctly, we spend a *lot* of time each week on media. At least 53 hours. That is mind-blowing. If we really spend that much time on just this, it leaves very little time for everything else—14 hours to be exact. Two hours a day for everything else we have to do. Spending 53 hours on this area just seems a little high to me. For our purposes, let's just say we spend about half that amount: 25 hours, or a

little over 3.5 hours a day. I would think that is reasonable when you consider TV, music, texting, Facebook, etc.

There was another article I found by Philip Telfer.⁵⁶ He compared the time spent on entertainment media to the time it would take the “average” reader to finish the entire Bible. Have you ever thought about that? Are you ready for this? It takes about 75 hours for an average reader to read the entire Bible! One of his students wrote to him and said they were going to put those statistics to practice and read the bible in 75 days by reading an hour a day. It occurred to Mr. Telfer that he had never practiced what he preached. So, he set his course, kept a timer with his Bible, and logged his progress. He timed himself every day, and the grand total after 101 days (I am assuming that is how long it took for him to completely read it) was 74 hours! That is about 45 minutes a day on average. That is definitely achievable!

This was really eye-opening to me. Going back to what we talked about earlier, if I spend the same amount of time reading the Bible each week as I spend on media (25 hours), I could read the whole thing in three weeks—definitely less than a month if I happen to be one of the slower readers. Amazing! Theoretically, we could read the Bible 12 times in one year. How many of us have read it once in the last year?

As I was telling my family some of the stuff I was learning in doing this research, my son said, “Yeah, but just think of the mission opportunities we’ve never had before.” He is absolutely right. We could post a Bible verse every day. We could encourage others—many that we may not see very often. We could reach one or one hundred people within a matter of seconds. I bet you all could come up with lots of things you could do.

⁵⁶Philip Telfer, “What Can You Do With 45 Minutes?,” *MediaTalk 101*, n.d., <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/What-Can-You-Do-With-45-Minutes-.html?soid=1102192934540&aid=xkSHTGJvu0M> (accessed May 21, 2015).

I do not have a Facebook account or Instagram account, etc., but I use my husband's account every now and then, mainly to check up on our boys. I do see some really good things—pictures people are posting of mission trips or the “ice bucket challenge” that probably raised some money for a good cause. These certainly bring glory to God. But most of the time, I just see pictures of what people are eating or wearing, or where they have been on vacation.

I am sure you have all heard it before, but I feel I would be remiss if I didn't reiterate that you need to be very careful what you are putting out there for the *whole world* to see:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

(Ephesians 4.29-30, NIV)

Are we grieving the Holy Spirit by the things we say on our Facebook page? Potential college recruiters, youth ministers, boyfriends (let's think about the kind of guy we want to attract), employers and yes, ladies, your future in-laws, are checking this stuff out. Believe me, I have checked out what my son's girlfriend has out there. Facebook is the first place moms go when they find out their son or daughter is dating someone. Many times, this is where they get their first impression of you. It really does matter.

Remember:

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5.14-16, NIV)

Is your light shining through the things you have out there for the whole “town” to see, particularly those “in the house”? Let me rephrase that. Is Satan threatened by

what you put on social media? Or would he consider you a team player? That leads us into our next topic.

T: Talent

Part of our purpose in life is to discover our God-given talents and then give them back to Him. What is a gift or talent? It is something you are good at, something that makes you feel like you have made a contribution, and usually something you enjoy doing. Is there something you enjoy doing, always have, even when you were little? Do others consistently compliment you on a specific ability?⁵⁷

I know you all got game! Since my husband Jeff took over as youth minister a few years back, I have been to softball games, basketball games, football games (many times just to watch the band), cheer/dance competitions, choir concerts, orchestra and band concerts, and drama productions. Not to mention watching Lads to Leaders events. I have seen (and proudly own) some truly amazing artwork and photographs taken by some of you. I know first-hand how talented you all are.

I also know these things take a lot of time. I know athletes practice a good two hours a day during regular season and almost that much during off season. That right there is another ten hours a week. Then there are games and tournaments. Music and drama have similar schedules with practices, performances and, sometimes, competitions. Artists spend lots of time getting their work just right—sometimes starting over several times.

Talent can be overwhelming and exhausting, both mentally and physically. It can certainly take its toll on our spare time, particularly our spiritual time. Believe me, my family has been there. We have missed Wednesday night Bible class because

⁵⁷Nancy Eichman, *Keeping Your Balance* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 2001), 128.

of practice. We have missed Sunday morning and evening worship because we were playing in a tournament somewhere. Sometimes, it is just a matter of needing the “church” time to finish homework because of getting home late from one of these events.

God will freely give His children gifts, but it is up to us to learn how to use them for His glory. Unfortunately, our gifts do not come gift-wrapped with instructions. Our challenge is to first discover what our gifts are and then to use them, not lose them.⁵⁸

We are probably going to talk about this more later, but for now, my question to you would be, “How are we using our talents in service to God?” Are you an athlete? Do you show good sportsmanship on the field or court? I remember being at a baseball game once where the batter on the opposing team hit an out-of-the-park home run. When that happens, there’s nothing you can do but watch him run the bases. But as he circled the infield, some of our players gave him high fives. That was really cool.

Okay, Mom is going to brag a minute, so just bear with me, it will not take long. When my oldest son played baseball, he wrote “Phil. 4.13” on the bill of his hat instead of his name. He also wrote on each of the Nike swooshes of his cleats. One said “Phil. 4.13” and the other said “Phil. 1.27.” Does anyone know what those verses say?

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

(Philippians 4.13, NKJV)

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel...

(Philippians 1.27, NIV)

⁵⁸Ibid.

At the time, his youth minister told him he did not think God really cared about a baseball game. That may be true, but these were reminders to him of who he was. Every time he picked up his hat in dugout and headed to the field, there was that little reminder that people were watching. At a baseball game, there may be several watching who are not Christian. Do you think they would notice if he “conducted himself in a manner worthy of Christ”? What about when he did not?

I recently heard another really neat story about one of the girls in our youth group who is on a cheer/dance team. She volunteers to help with a special needs cheer team once a week. She has this little girl that she helps with all her cheers and dance moves, and this little girl thinks she is the greatest. But here is the thing: the feeling is mutual. She thinks this little girl is pretty great, too. You can see it in the pictures of the two of them. How rewarding is that! She is just doing what she loves and bringing glory to God at the same time.

What are we doing with our talents? Are we encouraging others that may struggle with a note or a part or a role? Do we give our artwork as gifts to brighten someone’s day? Do we go to a nursing home and sing or play an instrument just to help them pass the day? That is giving our talents back to God.

U: Unplanned/Unwanted/Unexciting

In just the last couple months, my grandfather passed away; I was asked to speak here; our whole family has been sick; one of our boys had a wreck; two friends had personal issues in which we dropped what we were doing to go help; the faucet in the kitchen decided it wanted to leak everywhere, but since we had just replaced it, we had to wait on a part from the manufacturer (which took several days); and we got snowed-out in the Little Rock/Searcy area. (We were in Little Rock at a conference when the snow hit

Northwest Arkansas, and they closed part of Interstate 540, so we could not get back home. We ended up going to Searcy to see our son at Harding, so it all worked out.)

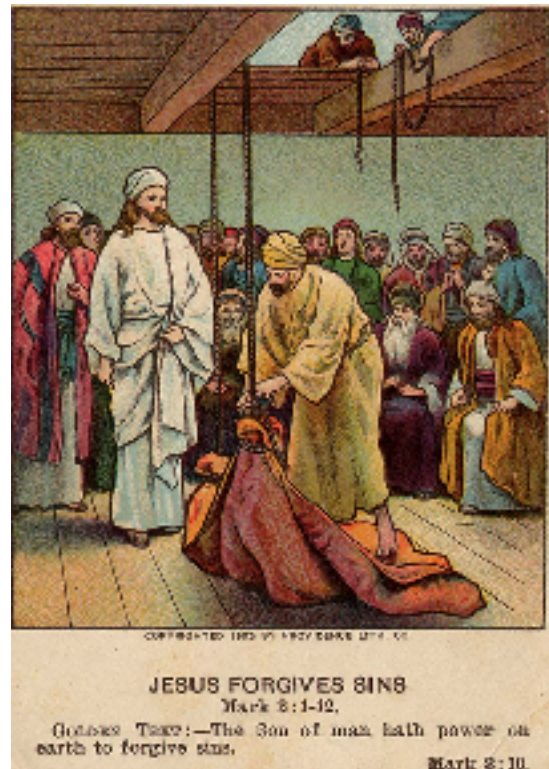
Many people would call these things interruptions. Jesus had many interruptions during his ministry. Remember this story?

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that He had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and He preached the word to them.

Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

(Mark 2.1-5, NIV)

I have often wondered about this whole scene. Let's just say for argument's sake that this happened today. I am standing up here, and suddenly someone drops from the ceiling. That would tend to be a little distracting, to say the least. It would probably be hard for me to refocus and get back on track. I think we lose focus a lot, don't we? But Jesus just takes it in stride. There is no indication that Jesus stopped preaching after this. He just dealt with the interruption and then continued with His purpose.



Here is another one in Mark 5. Jesus is on His way to heal a little girl:

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched My clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against You," his disciples answered, "and yet You can ask, 'Who touched Me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at His feet and, trembling with fear, told Him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

(Mark 5.25-34, NIV)

Jesus knew only too well His purpose, but He was never in too much of a hurry not to listen and help.⁵⁹ I cannot help but picture this scene in my head. Jesus is the superstar, right? People are everywhere, pushing and crowding to get a glimpse of Him. I have often thought about others that may have touched Him during that time, and yet we only hear of this one woman being healed. Surely, there were others that needed healing. I can only assume that she had a faith and a purpose that the others did not.

Okay, so my leaky faucet is not exactly comparable with these stories, but many of the other things are. Grandpa's death or friends in need were opportunities to show God's love to others. What opportunities has God presented to you that seemed like interruptions at the time? More importantly, how did you respond? Did you respond at all?

⁵⁹Eichman.

Some weeks it seems we have interruption after interruption. Other weeks, not so much. Let's just say we average another seven hours a week (one hour per day) on interruptions.

F: Family

If you are anything like I was at your age, your family might take a backseat to everyone and everything else. This is really sad, because your family has your best interest at heart. My husband has told the story of going to Myrtle Beach on family vacation a couple years ago. One of the boys brought a friend along. By the amount of luggage that we were taking, you would have thought we had a dozen girls traveling with us. Needless to say, we had to take two cars, and our oldest son and his friend drove the second car. We got to Atlanta and hit traffic. Jeff compares it to a giant water slide. You just get on and ride, whipping here and there, taking this exit and that. All the while we were watching to make sure they were still behind us.

There are two things I want to note: your parents have been there, in front of you, *and* they are doing their best to guide you. They are always watching to make sure you make the right turns:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

(Ephesians 6.1-3, NIV)

How are we honoring our parents? How do we know how to honor them if we never spend any time with them? I would hope that each of you has at least one meal a day with your family. Spend at least one hour with them—that makes another seven hours per week.

F: Friends

Friends tend to take over our lives. We probably spend twice as much time with friends as we do family—another 14 hours, at least. We are talking with them between classes, we're hanging out with them at lunch. We are meeting them at the mall or the ballgame or the movies. We are texting or FaceTiming them until all hours of the night. We are spending the night at their houses or vice-versa.

I did a quick survey of 21 of my friends. I asked them if they were still in touch with any of their high school friends, and if so, if it was more than just Facebook posts—did they actually have a relationship with them? Did they see them, call them, email them, etc.? Of the 21, eight said they had no contact whatsoever or only through Facebook. Of the other 13, only three said they saw them frequently (several times a year). Most said that they saw them when they could, when they were in town. They did email them, send cards, and occasionally they talked on the phone. But for the most part, they were not that involved in their lives.

What I am saying is that in 10 to 20 years, the majority of you will have very little contact with the friends you have now. These people who we love and spend all our time with will not have a big impact on your life down the road. So be very careful. Make sure that you choose your friends boyfriends wisely. Do not let someone who seems very important to you right now lead you down a wrong path, only to leave you there alone.

I would like to tell you a story about a girl I know. I have known her since she was six years old; she is about 20 now. I love this girl and think she is very special. I work with her mom and have watched her grow up to be a beautiful young woman. I know that she was raised with good Christian values. She got her heart broken recently, so that

may have contributed to some of what. Possibly what happened is her wall to protect herself from getting hurt again.

She started working at a shoe store, and one of her co-workers was homosexual. They became friends. Now, it seems that almost all of her friends are homosexual. She is going to places she probably should not be going and getting sucked into the homosexual culture, even though she is straight. She is not going places to meet a good Christian man.

Now, I believe that Jesus taught us to love the sinner and hate the sin. But I also believe that when you are aware of your sin, you should at least be trying to overcome it, not making excuses for it. I have no problem with her having these friends, especially if she can be an example for them. However, in this case, I wonder who is influencing who. She is going with them to different places, but they do not seem to be going with her to her Christian activities. As a matter of fact, her theology seems to be changing to "God loves everyone" and "He created these people the way they are." But we have to balance that love and grace of God upon which she seems to be focused with the truth and righteousness of God that seems to have been forgotten.

As I said earlier, there is a really good chance that these people will not even be that involved in her life down the road. My concern is what is going to happen when these new friends move on with their lives. I hope at that point she has not been led so far down the wrong path and off the road that she cannot find her way back.

There is something else I would like for you to consider here. As Christians, we already have a Best Friend. He is always available. He has written to us a lot, but sometimes He does not hear from us very much. God communicates to us through His Word. We talk to Him through prayer. Through these avenues, we meet our Best Friend. Meeting a friend usually does not happen by accident—the initial meeting,



It is important to realize that God is not just one of our priorities; He is THE priority.

—STACI GRISHAM—

maybe, but after that, we plan for it and make the time because it is important. It is just as important to set aside time for God. Friends do not last long in a one-sided relationship.⁶⁰

Adding It All Up

So, have you been keeping track of how much we have left of our 67 hours? After we subtract 25 for social media, ten for talent, seven for the unexpected, seven for family and fourteen for friends, we have four remaining. As I was working through this the first time and I ended with four, I thought how interesting is that! Because I think many times that is what we think Christianity is—four hours a week: Sunday morning Bible class and worship service, Sunday night worship, and Wednesday night Bible class.

But I hope that by now you have seen a common thread running through all this discussion: God is, or should be, in all our S.T.U.F.F. **You cannot take Him out of anything, including work and school.** Many Christians have tried to use a hierarchy for priorities. God first, family second, church third, work fourth, the community fifth, and self last. While I understand what they are saying, I do not think a hierarchy like that is possible. It is important to realize that **God is not just one of our priorities; He is the priority.** He is the Lord of our lives, in all of our actions, whether we are negotiating a

⁶⁰Ibid.

deal, drying an eye, or kneeling in prayer. It helps to see God in the center of our lives with His love radiating to everyone and everything that touches us.⁶¹

Christianity is more than four hours a week. It is a lifestyle.

*Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: **Love your neighbor** as yourself.”*

(Matthew 22.37-39, NIV, emphasis added)

***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,** just as in Christ God forgave you.*

(Ephesians 4.32, NIV, emphasis added)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

(James 1.27, NIV)

*For I was hungry and you **gave Me something to eat**, I was thirsty and you **gave Me something to drink**, I was a stranger and you **invited Me in**, I needed clothes and **you clothed Me**, I was sick and **you looked after Me**, I was in prison and you **came to visit Me**.*

(Matthew 25.35-36, NIV, emphasis added)

*Then they can **urge the younger women to love their husbands and children**, to be **self-controlled and pure**, to be **busy at home**, to **be kind**, and to **be subject to their husbands**, so that no one will malign the word of God.*

(Titus 2.4-5, NIV, emphasis added)

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility **value others above yourselves**, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

(Philippians 2.3-4, NIV, emphasis added)

⁶¹Ibid.

Ladies, don't you see there is much to do? Love God, love your neighbor. Be compassionate and forgiving. Look after orphans and widows. Feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite strangers, and help the needy and sick. Visit others, love your husband, be kind, and value others.

The Starring Roles

We tend to get so focused on the weekly worship services and the "starring" roles of them that we forget about all the other things that God want us to do. There seems to be a lot of talk about the role of women in the church lately. We come from different congregations with different stances on this topic. Some congregations are okay with praise teams and women serving communion. Others are not comfortable with little girls picking up attendance cards. As women, we sometimes get upset when we are not included in those more visible "starring" roles. I have had this struggle myself. I have often thought that if God thinks I am valuable and He gave me a mind so that I can think and reason, then why does He not want me to use it? Why does He limit what I can do?

I believe our culture has a lot to do with making us feel this way. We have been told since we were knee high that we can do anything we want to do and be anything we want to be. But 1 Peter tells us to be a peculiar people. Set apart.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you of of darkness into His marvelous light.

(1 Peter 2.9, KJV)

The church is going to be different than our culture, different than the society we live in. It always has been and always will be.

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume **authority** over a man; she must be quiet.*

(1 Timothy 2.12, NIV, emphasis added)

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

(Titus 1.6, NIV)

Now the overseer (elder, shepherd) is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...

(1 Timothy 3.2, NIV)

I think these verses are pretty clear that there are certain things that women are not to do. Women should not teach over a man. An elder must be the husband of one wife, which means that elders are men. As much as we want to debate what was going on in the culture or the church when it was written, sometimes we just have to take it for what it says. Personally, I think that where we have problems is that we do not have a clear definition of what is meant by the term "authority" that is referred to in 1 Timothy 2.12. If a woman serves communion, is she acting in a role of authority, or just serving? I have often wondered why it is that I could stand in the fellowship hall and give a "mission report" with no questions asked, but if I gave the exact same report from the pulpit it is a potential problem.

But regardless of those questions, my point is this: why do we get so hung up on what we *cannot* do? Men cannot have babies. We do not find them questioning God on that. We should focus on what we *can* do. Let's look at some women of the Bible.

Lydia was a business woman who opened her home to Paul and his companions. What did she do? She showed hospitality and welcomed strangers:

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

(Acts 16.14-15, NIV)

How about Ruth? She took care of her mother-in-law, who was a widow.

How about Esther? She saved her people. How did she save her people? She submitted to her husband, to the point that he would have done anything for her.

How about Tabitha (or Dorcas) in Acts? Who remembers her story? She was always doing good and helping the poor. When she died, the widows cried and showed Peter the robes and other clothing she had made for them:

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

(Acts 9.36-40, NKJV)

All of these ladies were important enough to be recognized by name in the Bible. Some even have a whole book about them. Yet, I do not see that any of them was preaching. In my old age, I have come to the conclusion that it is not that God does not want us to preach, He just has a different purpose for our talents. He has gifted us differently than our male friends. And that is a good thing.

Let's talk about one more important female in the Bible: Mary the mother of Jesus. She was probably about your age, 14-16 years old, when she was called by God to give birth to the Savior of the world. Talk about responsibility! Can you imagine? She was not wealthy. She was from Nazareth—considered to be the wrong side of the tracks at the time. She probably was not a beauty queen. She was not well-educated,

maybe even illiterate. She was just an ordinary, small-town kid. Sound like anyone you know? What made her so special?

Now let's look at another point in her life, 33 years later. She would be 47 or 48 (about my age) as she stood at the foot of a cross and watched her firstborn Son die. I have three boys, and I cannot imagine the agony she must of felt. I know what it is to watch when my kids are sick or hurting and I can do nothing. But this? Yet, I cannot remember reading that she ever cursed God or lost faith.

Have you ever thought that you are a lot like Mary? If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you; you are carrying Him with you all day everyday. That is a lot of responsibility. And just like Mary, God has a plan for you. Just look at what He can do with a teenage girl that is fully committed to Him.⁶² But we have to have faith. We have to be watching; we have to be paying attention.

Paying Attention To God

I'd like to tell you what happened that made me start paying attention.

It was around this time of year when a friend of mine showed up at my house and admitted to me that she wanted to commit suicide. I knew that she needed help, but I was not qualified to help her. Luckily, she agreed she needed help. I was not sure where to take her, so we went to the church. It was a Sunday afternoon, and my husband was there. I knew that our preacher was a chaplain at one of the hospitals and thought he would know what to do. He told us to go to the hospital emergency room; they would know how to handle it.

⁶²Shannon Kubiak, *God Called a Girl: How Mary Changed Her World—And You Can Too* (Minneapolis, Bethany House, 2005).

Now, I will be honest with you. I was pretty upset with God. It had been a pretty rough weekend, to say the least. The drive from the church to the ER seemed to take forever, and there were lots of things were going through my mind.

I know some of you are going to think this is crazy, because I am a bit of a skeptic myself. But as I turned into the hospital parking lot, it was like a water balloon dropped on my head, and this feeling of peace came over me. Suddenly, it was as if I heard a voice in my head say, "Do you get it now, Staci? I know she's been broken a long time."

I did not have time right then to really digest what just happened, but I suddenly had a feeling everything was going to be all right. I pulled into a parking spot, and we talked for a moment. Then we said a prayer. The one thing I remember saying in the prayer was, "God, I'm turning her over to you, but I need you to show us some good in this."

I asked her if she was ready and she nodded. Secretly, I was thinking, "What now? What do I tell her?" As I stepped out of the car, I got my text message from God—that is what I like to call it. Actually, it was from my husband, who said he had called another friend of ours who was a licensed counselor. This counselor said we should encourage her to be completely honest with the hospital staff. So, as we were walking in, I was able to give her some good advice.

We went inside and got checked in. The waiting room was pretty full, and it seemed like more patients just kept coming. I was thinking that we were going to be there all night. We sat down. She asked me if I could ask Jeff to call one of the other elders in our church to see if he could talk to her husband. She said that her husband really respected this man and if anyone could help him, it would be this man. So, I texted Jeff what she had said.

About that time, the hospital staff called us to the little room where they take your vital signs. The nurse had started explaining the procedure for this situation when another nurse walked in and started talking. I knelt down in front of my friend and whispered some words of encouragement to her. When I stood up and looked back out into the busy waiting room, I thought, "Wow, this isn't getting any better." When the other nurse left, I said, "Busy place," just trying to make small talk. She said, "Yeah, but funny thing, we just had a mass exit and we're going to be able to get these people into a room." We walked out of that room, around the corner, and into the room where we would be for the rest of the night.

Meanwhile, back at the church building, Jeff asked the other elders and their wives if they could get together immediately after services for a short meeting. He did not tell them why because he really did not have time to get into the details before services.

Also, Jeff was scheduled to speak the following morning at one of the nursing homes, but because of everything that had happened, he had not had time to prepare. He found the guy in charge of coordinating the speakers to ask him what time he needed to be there and where he needed to go. This guy was sort of puzzled by all the questions and finally told Jeff that someone else was scheduled to speak that morning. Magically, that was one less thing Jeff had to worry about in the midst of everything else that was going on.

As services were about to start, Jeff was worried about what to do about having his phone in church. He wanted to be available if I tried to call him, but he thought that would be setting a bad example. In the 15 plus years we have been attending at our church, he has never been asked to be a greeter. But, that night, as he was walking through the foyer, the worship coordinator stopped him and asked if he could fill in for someone that was sick. He has not been asked to greet since. But, that night, he was able to be in the foyer with his phone.

During the invitation that night, the elder that my friend had asked Jeff to call on behalf of her husband went forward in the church asking for the prayers of the church. Remember, at that point, he was not aware of my friend's situation.

Do you see all the coincidences? The feeling I got pulling into the hospital, the mass exit, the scheduling error at the nursing home, Jeff being asked to greet, and the elder that would be deeply involved asking for prayers of the church—all of this within a matter of six or seven hours.

There is much more to this story, and similar things continued to happen throughout the week. Here is the thing. I had been a Christian for a long time, but had never paid attention. That night—that week—changed my life. That is when I realized two things. First of all, God answers prayer. Second, God is still working. Since then, it is like I cannot help but see Him working. I had lunch with a friend a while back. I started telling her some of my stories, and I asked her if she thought it was weird. She said, "No, I think that's God." I will tell you that there have been so many things that I have started a binder of all these occurrences. Sometimes, I just write down when someone does something nice for me or something I don't want to forget, but I try to make sure I write down all the "That's God" stuff.

Let me give you some more recent examples. I was scheduled to go with my husband to NCYM (National Conference for Youth Ministers). This was to be a week-long trip, and I had looked forward to it for a year. We were scheduled to leave Sunday morning, when my youngest son got sick. So, Jeff went without me. My grandfather passed away just a couple weeks later. It then occurred to me that if I had used my leave (vacation time) for the trip, I would not have had the time I needed for the funeral. Two bad things happened—grandpa passing and missing the trip, but yet God worked it for good.

Here is another. I was on my way to church one night when I got a call from a friend who had had a very bad day. She was in a real battle with another person, and I was trying hard to give godly advice. But my friend was hurting, and I probably wasn't doing a very good job. I ended up talking to her for a few minutes in the parking lot before going into the building. Services had already started, and the church was singing "The Battle Belongs to the Lord" as I walked in. It was a song I had not heard in a long time, but one that fit this situation perfectly. It was almost like a little nudge that we should turn it over to God and let it go.

Here is another example. Our church has an annual couples' retreat on Valentine's weekend. Jeff and I usually coordinate this event with the help of some very dear friends, but this year they would not be participating because they were having serious marital problems. This was heartbreaking to me, and I really did not want to do this year's retreat. For two weeks prior to the event, I prayed that God would show me something good from this event, especially if He wanted it to continue. I really do not know what I was expecting in this prayer, maybe just for some positive feedback from the participants. But God has a way of exceeding our expectations. We had record attendance—16 couples (in the past we had averaged about 12 couples per year). Besides our own members, we had couples from the Bentonville church and from the Heartland congregation in the Kansas City area. So that was one good thing: record attendance.

The facility where we held the retreat is managed by a husband/wife team. He is a gourmet chef and she is an event planner. On Saturday night, we had a vow renewal service. These two ended up participating in the renewal with us and later were asking a lot of questions about our church because they said they liked "our people." That was two good things.

On Sunday morning, as the couples were checking out, the group from Kansas City told us that they enjoyed the retreat so much that were going to try to start a similar event at their home congregation. God was growing the event! That was three good things.

My point is that God is blessing us all the time, but many times we do not pay attention. We do not realize God is working in our life. Before last year, I probably would not have put all these things together. I would have thought, "That's nice," or, "That's quite a coincidence," or, "That's weird." Now I think, "That's God." I believe He is still working. I believe that the Story did not end with the last page of Revelation. I believe that the Story is continuing to this day and that we are all part of it.

Sometimes things happen that we do not like or do not understand, like my friend on the verge of suicide, or missing a trip that we were really looking forward to. But God can do great things with those circumstances if we let Him. I did not do anything special. I took a friend in need to the hospital, took care of a sick kid, encouraged a friend on the phone, put together an event and turned it over to God, and showed love to a couple needing a church home. Yet, I did not preach one sermon. By no means am I saying that I am the great example—we have that in Jesus. What did He do? He fed the hungry, befriended the outcasts, washed feet, and showed compassion—all things we can do.

Ladies, we do not have to do anything grand or extravagant. We just need to include God in all our S.T.U.F.F., whether we are posting something on Facebook, playing on the volleyball court, being interrupted, or hanging with our family and friends.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

(Colossians 3.17, NIV)

We need to remember **who we are** no matter **where we are**.

We have to be looking for the opportunities that He puts before us and then just do them. Give someone a pat on the back, tell someone they look nice, and buy a soda for someone who has had a rough day. Pay attention. I do not want you to be like me and be in your forties before you really see the power of God. God can do amazing things even when the situation seems pretty bad.

Remember how I said that I believe that the Story did not end with the last page of Revelation, that I believe that the Story is continuing to this day and that we are all part of it? Someday your story will be told in Heaven. What kind of story do you want it to be?



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BASEBALL AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

BEN HADLEY

I love the game of baseball. I enjoy playing it and watching it. During the high school baseball season, I am on the field as a second baseman or pitcher. Free time frequently includes attendance at a college game. If I am lucky, I get to go to a Major League ballpark once in a great while to watch the St. Louis Cardinals. Baseball practice begins for my team at 1:00 in the afternoon and runs past when school is out. The only improvement on that arrangement would be if practice started at 8:00 every morning and continued throughout the school day.

Babe Ruth, perhaps the best baseball player of all time, said, "Baseball was, is and always will be to me the best game in the world." And who can argue with the Babe?

There have been a lot of comparisons made between life and baseball. The nature of the game invites those kinds of comparisons. I would like us to consider a few lessons Christians can learn from baseball.

First, baseball teaches us that we can start fresh everyday. Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller said of baseball: "Every day is a new opportunity. You can build on yesterday's success or put its failures behind and start over again. That's the way life is, with a new game

every day, and that's the way baseball is."⁶³

The Christian life is like that, too. The apostle John wrote that even though all Christians make mistakes and sin, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9, NASB).

Even if a baseball player goes 0-4 with three strikeouts, he has the opportunity for a fresh start tomorrow. Yesterday's performance has nothing to do with today's opportunity.

One more thing about this fresh start. Since God makes new beginnings available to us, we owe it to Him to make the most of the opportunity. "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5.15-16, NASB).

Notice the three things we must do in order to fully take advantage of the fresh start offered to us by God: (1) we must walk carefully, (2) we must walk wisely, and (3) we must make the most of the time given us.

Second, baseball teaches us to take individual responsibility. Chad Harbach is a baseball writer. He has said, "What fascinates me about baseball is that although it's a team game...the players on the field are each very much alone. Your teammates depend on you and support you, but at the moments that count they can't bail you out."⁶⁴

A lot is said about individual responsibility in the Bible. Paul wrote: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For **the**

⁶³Bob Feller, BrainyQuote.com, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/bobfeller139608.html> (accessed June 8, 2015).

⁶⁴Philip Boroff, "Unemployed Harvard Man Auctions Baseball Novel for \$650,000," Bloomberg.com, March 30, 2010, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-03-31/harvard-man-unemployed-living-cheap-sells-baseball-novel-for-650-000>, (accessed July 3, 2015).

one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but **the one who sows to the Spirit** will from the Spirit reap eternal life (Galatians 6.7-8, NASB, emphasis added)."

The very first sinful incident recorded in the Bible involved a deflection of responsibility. Adam first blamed his wife, and then he blamed God, Himself, for making her!

The New Testament is filled with commands that we can only obey individually. Consider with me a few lines from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount:

"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

(Matthew 5.38-39, NASB)

We could go on and on, but we are personally responsible for living the way God would have us to live. We cannot blame someone else. God's buck stops here.

Finally, baseball teaches us to remember that it is still a team game. Jed S. Rakoff, a United States district judge, has written: "In baseball you have individual responsibility, and if you fail it, you get an error. But at the same time, your focus is on the common goal of the team to win. This is part of what resonates with people about baseball. This is how they would like society to work."⁶⁵

Individual responsibility—people, working together for the common good. That is a good description of baseball and of Christianity.

In the original language of the New Testament, the phrase "one another" is used over 240 times. In Romans 12-13 alone, it appears four times:

- *"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (12.10, NASB)*

⁶⁵Jed S. Rakoff, BrainyQuote.com, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jedsrakof620540.html> (accessed June 8, 2015).

- *“Give preference to one another in honor” (12.10, NASB)*
- *“Be of the same mind toward one another” (12.16, NASB)*
- *“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another” (13.8, NASB)*

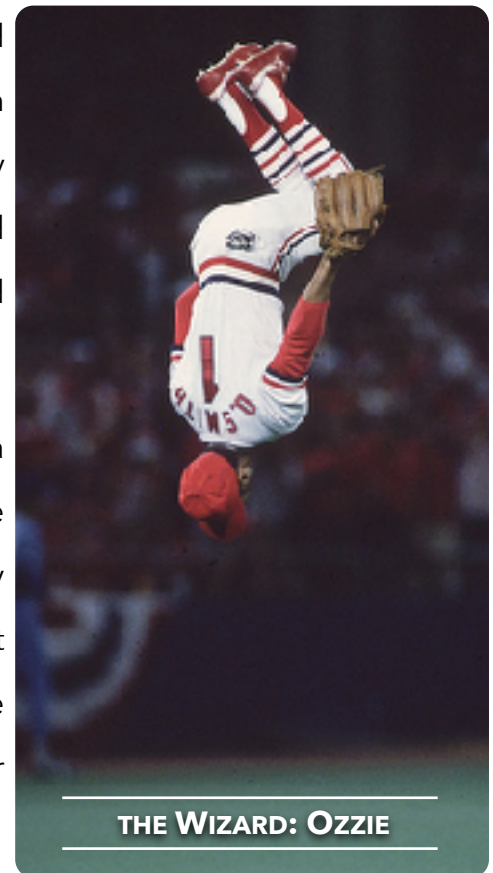
Just to read all the “one another” passages in the New Testament would take more time than we have, but it is clear that, while we each face individual responsibility, we also owe something to our fellow Christians. The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that worshiping together helps us, but that it also helps us help one another (Hebrews 10.25)!

Jesus calls on us to look out for one another, to care for one another, and to love one another.

My favorite baseball player is Ozzie Smith. Unfortunately, I never got to see him play. He retired from the game before I was born. I have watched and read a lot about The Wizard, however. He was an acrobat and not just as a baseball player. Frequently before games, especially in the postseason, he would run toward his position at shortstop, do a backflip and stick the landing. Every day seemed like a fresh start.

Ozzie also took responsibility in improving himself as a player. As a boy, he spent hours bouncing a ball off the side of his garage. The stucco surface produced crazy hops. His reflexes were lightning quick. Ozzie did not start out as much of a hitter, but through self-discipline and personal responsibility, he got better and better until he was an asset using the bat.

He was also a great teammate. Ozzie called plays from his shortstop position when runners were on first. At bat, he gave himself up for the good of the team.



We, as Christians, need to start fresh every day, take individual responsibility and remember that the Christian life is a team game.

We ought to be able to say of Jesus as Jim Bouton said of baseball: "You spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time."⁶⁶



⁶⁶Jim Bouton, BrainyQuote.com, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jimbouton104216.html> (accessed June 3, 2015).



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A BALANCED VIEW OF GRACE, FAITH, AND WORKS

ROBB HADLEY

Introduction

I am often troubled by some of the talk I hear about grace. Most of what concerns me has to do with people in the church who act as though they are the first people ever to discover that the word “grace” is in the Bible. Some claim to have been blinded to the subject by their preachers and Bible Class teachers as though there were some vast conspiracy to erase the word from the Bible. Sometimes, I suppose, the complaints may be legitimate. It is possible that some preachers and teachers in some places may have been foolishly fearful of the subject of grace.

Most of the time, however, I think something else is at work. Some of the folks I have read and talked to on this subject have actually become confused about what grace is and how it is dispensed by God. In discovering what is for them a new—and as I see it, incomplete—picture of the grace of God, they think they are actually discovering the topic for the first time.

But, the best way to deal with this is not for me to tell you what I think about it, but for us to open our Bibles together and find out what God says about it. We are going to examine this subject by considering

four facts from the Bible concerning salvation by grace. Four facts should help us bring the grace of God into focus—they will help us form a biblical picture of true grace.

Grace Cannot Be Earned

Sometimes, people get the idea that their relationships with God are measured by a set of old-style balance scales. The notion is that if a person can just put enough good deeds on his side of the balance, his relationship with God will be secure. But the Bible teaches that grace cannot be earned.

This fact is implied in the definition of “grace.” The Greek word for “grace” is *charis* (χαρις), which means “unmerited favor”; it is the word from which the English word “charity” is derived. This is why Paul wrote, concerning salvation, “If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 11.6, NASB).

“Unmerited” implies “unearned.” By its very definition, the meaning of the word in the original language tells us that salvation cannot be earned by us. We cannot put God in our debt so that He must save us—rather, to quote Paul again, salvation is “the gift of God.”

This fact is illustrated by Jesus. In the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18, Jesus told of a man who owed his master an unpayable debt. In fact, the man’s debt totaled something in excess of ten million dollars. Commentaries often state this ten million dollar figure, then they say something like, “but worth much more in buying power,” as if ten million dollars was not an impressive enough figure!

Notice the contrast between what this man owed and what he earned. He was a servant, meaning that his income was a denarius every day. That figures out to about sixteen cents a day. I do not know whether it represented more in buying power or not, but one would hope that it did.

Now, the servant in the parable represents us. Jesus used the absurdity of paying back a debt like that on an income like that and illustrated the absurdity of earning salvation. The servant—like many debtors—thought he could do the impossible and pay his debt. He asked for more time! But he could have lived a thousand years and never would have had the ability to pay. In fact, if he had been allowed to pay back the debt interest-free, and if he put every bit of his income toward the debt, never buying food or clothing for himself, he would still owe over \$9,800,000 today!

Clearly, the only way out for the servant was to accept his master's generous offer. Any system which proposes some sort of payment to God for what we owe is as ludicrous as a servant who lived at the time Jesus lived thinking he could pay back ten million dollars.

This fact is plainly stated by Paul. The apostle Paul's statement on this subject in Ephesians 2.5 plainly explains, "By grace you have been saved." He says exactly the same thing in verse 8 and takes it further by saying: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (NASB).

The great gospel preacher Guy N. Woods said it eloquently when he wrote:

A simple, but nonetheless full definition of "grace" is unmerited favor. I emphasize the adjective unmerited. It is not enough to say that grace is favor. It is indeed that, but more—much more. Genuine grace is favor of a special kind—that which is undeserved, unmerited, and freely bestowed by the Lord... We did not deserve it, we cannot earn it and, of course we cannot obligate God for it. Let this definition of grace impress itself indelibly upon our hearts: grace is the unmerited favor of God.⁶⁷

⁶⁷As quoted in Union Church of Christ, "Grace & Works—Mutually Exclusive?", <http://unionchurchofchrist.info/node/50> (accessed July 5, 2015).

We must firmly stand where the Bible stands on grace. Grace that is earned is not grace at all—a fact implied by the definition of “grace,” illustrated by Jesus, and plainly stated by Paul.

God’s Grace Saves Us Through Faith

This fact is implied in Hebrews 11.6. The writer of the book of Hebrews said: “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (NIV). If it is impossible for one to be pleasing to God without faith, then receiving the grace of God must depend upon faith.

This fact is illustrated in the life of Abraham. Paul (twice) and James both quote Genesis 15.6 concerning the fact that “he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” One definition of salvation is being made righteous. In fact, in Romans 5, Paul uses those terms interchangeably.

I would like us to notice something: God counted Abraham’s faith as righteousness. The Greek verb is *logizomai* (λογίζομαι). We need to examine this word for a moment. It is an accounting term. It is translated “credited,” “reckoned,” and “counted.” The idea here is that God had a ledger for Abraham which had to be balanced. The justice of God demanded it be balanced. God saw the books and put the faith of Abraham on the credit side of the ledger!

Abraham is an illustration of how God’s grace saves us through faith!

This fact is plainly stated by Paul. As we have already noticed, in Ephesians 2.8, the apostle Paul wrote: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (NASB). This statement does not apply only to initial salvation, but to the continued realization of the gift of salvation. Both are tied up together in this verse.

The Greek scholar A.T. Robertson says this use of the word “saved” here is a very special verb tense in the original language for which there is no English equivalent.



**Even though God unconditionally LOVES us,
He does not unconditionally SAVE us.**

—ROBB HADLEY—

The tense is called: “perfect passive periphrastic indicative...The full force of the construction...is that God’s past action in saving the sinner has brought about the present result of his having been and continuing to be saved.”⁶⁸

So, we can see that salvation by grace through faith is not only how God *brings* us near to Himself, but how He *keeps* us near.

There is something else very important I want us to notice here: in making faith part of the grace transaction, God has put conditions on grace! Perhaps this is where some folks get confused. Instead of understanding grace to be unmerited favor, they mistakenly define it as unconditional favor.

Even though God unconditionally loves us (John 3.16; Romans 5.8), He does not unconditionally save us. We live in a culture that has decided there is no such thing as taking responsibility for one’s actions. In our society, a person can do something wrong which hurts others, then point the finger of blame in several directions.

Now, when such thinking allows somebody to get away with murder, child abuse, or drug abuse, we are appalled. But that same kind of thinking can impact the way we view God and our responsibility—our accountability—to Him. If we fail to notice that the grace offered by God is conditional, we are listening to our culture and not to our God.

⁶⁸A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 1933).

So, grace saves us through faith—a fact implied in Hebrews 11.6, illustrated in the life of Abraham, and plainly stated by Paul. This leads us to our third point.

Works are a Part of Faith which Saves

This fact is implied by Paul. In Ephesians 2.10, Paul wrote: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* Having plainly stated that salvation is a gift from God and that we receive it through faith, the apostle continues by pointing out that works on the behalf of God are part and parcel of that faith.

Paul pictured the life of faith as a walk down a road—a road paved, if you will, with good works.

This fact is illustrated in the life of Abraham. The writer of Hebrews records this about the father of the faithful:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents...

(Hebrews 11.8-9, NASB)

The example of faith left for us by Abraham is one of works of obedience. This is not only true of Abraham in Hebrews 11, but also of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab and other great examples of faith.

This fact is plainly stated by James. James had a lot to say about the part played by works in the faith that saves:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for

the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.

(James 2.14-22, ESV)

Notice the point made by James: He says the completion of Abraham's faith was accomplished when his faith was working together with his works. The Greek word for "working with" is *sunergeo* (συνεργεω), from which we get our word "synergy." Faith, therefore, is not complete—it is not saving faith—until it is accompanied by works! In fact, James says that faith without works is dead, being by itself. He goes on to say that faith without works is useless.

Belief in the sense of "mental agreement" is not saving faith. Even demons, James says in verse 22, believe.

Works are part of a saving faith—a fact implied by Paul, illustrated by the life of Abraham, and plainly stated by James.

It would be good for us to pause and review for a moment. We started our lesson by stating the Bible fact that grace (and therefore salvation) cannot be earned. We followed with another fact: God saves us by grace through faith. Now we have learned that works are part of saving faith!

If grace cannot be earned, but comes through faith, and if faith is incomplete (not to mention dead and worthless) without works, then is there some kind of contradiction here? Our last point should help us see there is not a contradiction.

Works Do Not Earn Anything

Another way of saying this would be that the works which complete faith are not meritorious.

This fact is implied by Paul and James. We have already looked closely at how Paul describes the life of faith as a walk—a walk distinguished by good works (Ephesians 2.8). We have also noted what James says about the uselessness of a non-working, freeloading faith.

If James is to be in harmony with Paul, or if Paul is to be in harmony with himself, it can only be that the works which complete faith are not meritorious. By this, I mean that they do not earn favor with God, nor do they put God in debt to us. They do not obligate God to pay up with salvation.

This fact is illustrated in the Life of Abraham. Remember what James and Paul both quote from Genesis? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness,” (James 2.23). Notice, neither Moses (who originally wrote those words), James, nor Paul ever said that Abraham believed God and that *made* him righteous. They said he believed God (with a working, active faith) and that it was *reckoned* to him—*credited* to him—as righteousness.

Surely no one would suggest that Abraham was trying to put God in his debt through his faith. Surely no one would say God owed it to Abraham! But, God put it down on the credit side of Abraham’s ledger just the same! He did it by grace through Abraham’s working, living, faith.

This fact is plainly stated by Jesus. The Lord Himself made this clear:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will

*enter...Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house on the rock."
(Matthew 7.21, 24, NASB)*

"Do the will of My Father." "Hear these words of mine and act upon them." Those are direct commands from the mouth of our Lord. They are also works! But are they meritorious works? Do they earn us something? Do they put God in our debt?

Carefully consider these words of Jesus:

*Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come immediately and sit down to eat?" But will he not say to him, "Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink?" He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done."
(Luke 17.7-10, NASB)*

Do you hear an echo of Isaiah in that? Isaiah said, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64.6, NIV).

The works which work together with and complete our faith are simply not meritorious—they earn nothing, but they do complete our faith!

That is a fact implied by Paul and James, illustrated in the life of Abraham, and plainly stated by our Lord.

These are unchangeable, immutable, facts from the word of God. God loved you enough to send Jesus to die for you! Won't you do His will and come to Him? Please respond with the faith that saves—obedient faith. "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22.16, NASB).



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An energetic Bible student, Jared loves studying the Old Testament and showing how relevant it is to us today.

NEW TESTAMENT OR TWO TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY?

JARED PACK

Do your grandparents or parents have a particular saying that you recall them saying a lot? Maybe it's a saying you like, or maybe it's a saying you don't understand, but one way or another, it's a phrase you will never forget. Well, one of my favorite sayings that my grandfather had was, when presented with choices, "I like either, but I'll take both." This is one of my favorite mottos in life. When I'm sitting down to a meal and I'm trying to decide between the steak or the shrimp, it's a convenient motto. Or when I'm trying to decide whether I want chocolate cake or cheesecake, it's much easier to *not* decide and just eat both! Now, of course, not every choice we face in life can be resolved with this principle. I often quote this saying to elicit a laugh more than anything. I do, however, feel that far too often, we approach life and decisions in terms of mutually exclusive events. We live in a society that likes to have things in black and white, where it is either one thing or another. We view our options as either having one or the other, and in many situations, life is not so cut and dry.

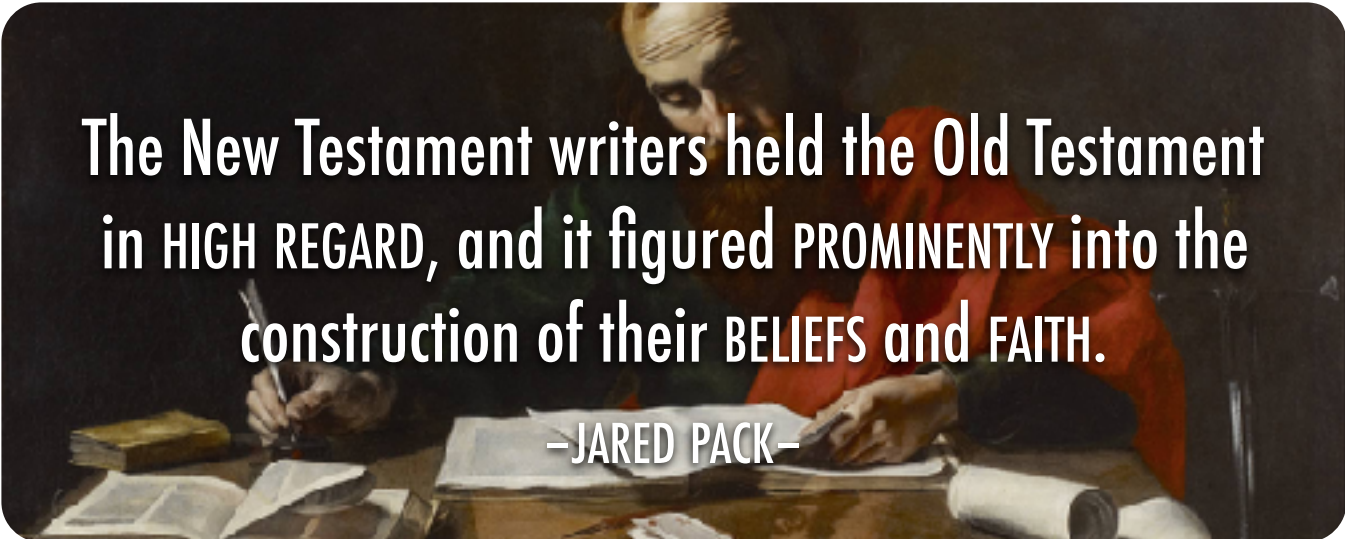
In some regards, our Christian lives are one such example. Now, before I go any further, I want you to understand that much of our Christian walk is in fact mutually exclusive. Sin and righteousness cannot coexist. We are either alive to Christ and dead to the world, or

we are dead to Christ and alive to the world. We cannot like and have both in that situation. Other things, however, are more flexible.

How many of you have ever heard someone say something like, “You Church of Christ people don’t believe in the Old Testament?” Or maybe if you have not experienced that, let me ask this. How many of you feel like you have heard probably twice as many sermons and Bible classes on the New Testament as you have the Old Testament? In churches of Christ, traditionally, we have struggled to present a balanced approach to Scripture. I know in my own experience at congregations that I have experienced some pushback from my elders even when I suggested that we pay more attention to the reading of the Old Testament. This past summer, I also spent a whole quarter teaching an adult Bible Class on the Minor Prophets, and it was the first time that many of the thirty or so people in my class had ever studied the last twelve books of the Old Testament. I mention these things simply to drive home the point that for far too long, churches of Christ have ignored the Old Testament in our efforts to restore New Testament Christianity. What I am suggesting for your consideration today is that we rethink this long running tradition and move past “New Testament Christianity” in favor of “Two Testament Christianity.”⁶⁹

Now, before we go any further, we need to define the terms of what we mean here and clarify a few points. One of the biggest reasons, in my opinion, that the churches of Christ have long ignored, or at least deemphasized, the Old Testament is because we have equated “canon” with “covenant.” As Dr. John Fortner observes, the canon, or testament, is merely the body of literature, whereas the covenant is the “dynamic

⁶⁹For a more detailed explanation of this argument, consult John D. Fortner, “A New Covenant/Two-Testament Christianity,” December 28, 2011, <https://fortnersthinkshop.wordpress.com/2011/12/28/a-new-covenant-two-testament-christianity/>. (accessed July 3, 2015). Dr. Fortner’s argument and thoughts on this topic serve as the basis of much of what will follow.



**The New Testament writers held the Old Testament
in HIGH REGARD, and it figured PROMINENTLY into the
construction of their BELIEFS and FAITH.**

—JARED PACK—

relationship initiated by God with his people.” What this means for us is that while the Old Testament contains the literature about the old covenant between God and the Hebrew people through the Law of Moses, it is merely just the literature, and not the covenant itself. An example of this from my world as an historian is how historians talk about the past. In the field of history, we write books on given subjects. All of the books on those subjects form the literature on the topic, but for all that we may have written, the literature is still separate from the actual events. The same applies here. While the New Testament may impart the knowledge of how we enter into the covenant with Christ today, it is not itself the covenant. The covenant is the relationship; it is the promise made by God to us that we can become His children and have a right relationship with Him through Christ Jesus His Son.

The reason all of this matters is that we know according to passages like Colossians 2.13-19 and Hebrews 10.1-12 that the old covenant was done away with. That does not mean, however, that the Old Testament was done away with and therefore has no value to us as Christians under the new covenant.

In fact, I think what we see from Scripture is quite the opposite perspective. The New Testament writers held the Old Testament in high regard, and they figured prominently into the construction of their beliefs and faith. The 27 books of the New Testament

contain 263 direct quotations from the Old Testament. When expanded to include various references they make without directly quoting Scripture, that number increases to 375. Let me say that again: the New Testament authors reference the Old Testament 375 times! That is a staggering number. Additionally, these 375 references come from 28 of the 39 Old Testament books, showing the breadth of the Old Testament scriptures in their application. While the Psalms and Isaiah are referenced in much higher numbers than most books, it does not take away from the very presence of these references in the New Testament. These statistics alone should alert us to the very significance of the Old Testament in terms of shaping the thought of Christians.

To further this point, I want us to look at a few specific ways the Old Testament was important to the New Testament authors and their theology. First of all, Paul placed high value on Scripture (that is, the Old Testament in particular) as a part of Christian's growth and development. When he writes in 2 Timothy 3.16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work," he is obviously making clear that Scripture was important. What is worth noting here, however, is that when Paul writes this to Timothy, somewhere around 66 AD, three of the four gospels had not yet been written, and aside from a few books, the only text of what would become the New Testament that had been written had been written by Paul himself. This makes clear that when Paul is talking about the profit of "all Scripture," he is saying that the Old Testament is still profitable even to people living under a new covenant.⁷⁰

Second, Old Testament language was used by the New Testament writers to explain Jesus' role and the significance of His life, death, and resurrection. Without a proper understanding of Israel's sacrificial system, it is impossible to understand the role and

⁷⁰Ibid.

place of Jesus. For there to be atonement for sin, it required sacrifice. Under the old covenant, that sacrifice was of a bull or a goat. When Jesus, living under the old covenant, became the final and perfect sacrifice, unblemished by sin, He did once and for all what could not have otherwise been done. He paid the ransom for all of mankind as the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, without understanding this system of sacrifice and atonement under the old covenant, we cannot understand and appreciate all that Jesus has done for us. That understanding comes through the literature on the old covenant—the Old Testament.⁷¹ The New Testament writers were keenly aware of this. Paul, in fact, spends much of the first half of Romans discussing this relationship between Christ and the Law.

Third, Jesus clearly embraced and expanded upon many components of the laws and commandments found in the Old Testament. In fact, much of Matthew 5 begins with, “You have heard it said of old...” In these instances, Jesus took familiar commandments and explained them with greater meaning and depth. He applied old covenant theology to a people who were soon to be under a new covenant. The point is that Jesus Himself highly regarded and saw the importance in emphasizing much of what God already asked of His people. It is here, however, that we must be careful not to limit our application too strictly. Some will argue that the only applicable parts of the Old Testament are those specifically mentioned by Jesus, but as Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart argue, this is a complete misunderstanding of the function of Scripture.⁷² To say that Jesus told us all that we needed from the Old Testament is to completely miss the importance of what we can learn from the Old Testament.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid; Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

Speaking of what we can learn from the Old Testament, let's turn our attention from the value of the Old Testament as seen by the New Testament authors toward the value of the Old Testament for us as 21st-century Christians. I believe what you will see is that the Old Testament has a lot to offer us in terms of our own theology and relationship with God. The first thing the Old Testament can offer us is a better understanding of the nature and character of God.⁷³ We find in God's encounter with Moses in Exodus 3.13-14 that when God identifies himself as "I AM," He is making a revelation about His very nature. God is saying that His nature is to be—that He has and always will exist; it is part of His nature. In Leviticus 11.44, we find that God is holy, and that no unrighteousness is found in Him. In Exodus 20.5, we learn that God is a jealous God, demanding that His children faithfully and obediently serve and worship Him and Him alone. In Exodus 34.6-7, we find that God is a God of mercy and grace; He is a God abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. He is a God that forgives our sins and iniquities, but also a God of justice. This list is far from exhaustive. What is important for us to see, though, is that if we want to understand and come to truly know God, we can do so by coming to know Him through the Old Testament, for God is an ever-constant, unchanging God (James 1.17).

Additionally, we see an idea of Christian theology emerge from the Old Testament that should inform our beliefs and actions in profound ways. Many times, we think that the Old Testament is nothing but rules and commandments, but that could not be any further from the truth. As Dr. Fortner observes:

These theologies undergird each of its individual 613 laws (civil, ritual, cultic, and moral). It is the theology underpinning the law, which transcends the time and culturally conditioned nature of those laws and of the Mosaic covenant. This is so because the undergirding theology is derived from the unchanging nature and character of God. The laws

⁷³Fortner.

themselves are provisional. They are culturally conditioned expressions of God's supra-cultural transcendent character. This transcendent aspect of the Torah and of all of the Old Testament literature is what continues to render it relevant and applicable to the Community of Faith.⁷⁴

What Dr. Fortner is saying here is that yes, there are commandments, but the commandments are merely reflections of the bigger picture. God had laws regarding cleanliness and food for the purpose of bringing about holiness and purity among His people. While we may not still have to perform ritual cleansing rites, God still demands His people to be pure. He also had laws proscribing punishments for sin. While we may no longer be stoned to death for committing adultery, God still condemns the practice and sees it as a matter of great severity. And, while we may no longer have to observe the Sabbath, God still calls us to be a people who stop what we are doing and reflect upon Him—to come together reverently and acknowledge Him, thank Him, and worship Him for being our God. And, while we may no longer have to make sacrifices to atone for our sins, the “theologies of holiness and of atonement reveal eternal truths of how God relates to humans and what He expects of them.”⁷⁵ All of these are just found in the Torah—in the first five books of the Bible.

From here, though, we must consider the prophets, and in particular I would like to suggest some theology that can be drawn from the Minor Prophets. In the book of Hosea, we see a theology of faithfulness. God calls Hosea to marry a prostitute for the purpose of teaching Israel a lesson about the importance of faithfulness in her relationship to Him. That message has not changed! God still calls us to be faithful to Him and repeatedly warns us of the dangers of spiritual adultery. Or, consider the message of the prophet Amos. In Amos 5.1-17, God speaks through Amos,

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

reminding the people that if they do not change their ways and repent, He will destroy them. The children of Israel had a lot of problems in their lives. The Lord accuses them of worshiping idols, perverting justice, mistreating the righteous, hating the truth and those who try to correct them, trampling the poor, taking bribes, ignoring the needy, and seeking evil. Amos offers them the solution to all of their problems, however, and it is twofold: seek God and seek good! The theology of this is still sound. The way to avoid sin is to seek God and seek good in all that we do. Or, finally, at least in terms of illustrating this point, consider the message God delivers to the people of Judah in Micah 6.8. Here God asks the question, "and what does the LORD require of you?" He then goes on to make it clear for them exactly what He wants. He tells them what He requires with all of its simplicity: "To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." This theology of justice, compassion, and humble obedience was nothing new. It was a message that is echoed throughout the Old Testament, as we see in passages like Deuteronomy 10.12-13, Amos 5.24, Hosea 6.6, and Isaiah 16.5. Yet, this theology continues to remain a crucial part of the Christian faith. All of these examples simply serve to remind us that the theology of the Old Testament is as relevant to us today as followers of God as it was to the people of Israel. Just because we are under a new covenant does not mean that we are divorced from the theology of the Old Testament.

Finally, I think the Old Testament offers us a fuller picture and understanding of the fullness of Christ. As has already been mentioned, it is impossible to understand the significance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection without a proper understanding of the theology of atonement found in the Old Testament. Yet, it is more than just the theology of atonement that applies to our understanding of Christ. As Dr. Fortner observes, "Jesus of Nazareth is portrayed in the Gospels as the embodiment of Torah,

a New Moses, the Davidic heir to the throne of Israel, the Passover lamb, the personification of Old Testament Wisdom, the Suffering Servant, the dynamic life-giving Word behind all creation in the beginning, and the I AM of the burning bush.”⁷⁶ This shows us that in regard to Christ, so much of what He embodies and who He is is wrapped up in an Old Testament understanding. If we truly want to know Christ, we have to know Him in His full context, and that context cannot be divorced from the Old Testament.

Thus, what I am suggesting is that we move past “New Testament Christianity” in the sense of that phrase. The very nature of the phrase implies that the new covenant is equal to the New Testament and that the old covenant is equal to the Old Testament. Under this logic, there is no room for Christians to use the Old Testament. We do not need it, because as New Testament Christians, the New Testament is our sole source for our beliefs. Such a position, however, backs us into a corner. It divorces our understanding of God and who He is from one of the most valuable sources of that revelation—the Old Testament. It encourages us to dismiss the first 39 books of the Bible as unimportant and theologically devoid, when nothing could be further from the truth. The theology of the Old Testament that undergirds many of the laws and the writings of the prophets still rings true for us today, in much the same way that it rang true for the men who wrote the New Testament. Thus, when we think about whether or not we will follow the Old Testament or the New Testament, it is my prayer that you will respond, “I’ll take both!” May we be more than just “New Testament Christians!” May we be people living under a new covenant, one sealed with the blood of Christ, and may we be “Two Testament Christians,” faithfully acknowledging that there is so much profit for us in *all* the Scripture that God breathed out!

⁷⁶Ibid.



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Tarren played football at FHS, works a part-time job, and is still incredibly involved with the work of the Farmington Church of Christ where he leads in worship, participates in the Lads to Leaders program, and is also a member of the Farmington Youth Group Leadership Council.

BALANCING OUR FAITH AND OUR COMMITMENTS

TARREN PETTIGREW

We all have busy schedules. Our days are filled with school, sports, work, church and our social lives. Personally, most of my days are cluttered with school, hanging out with friends, and work. Right now, I am not playing any sports, but I have grown up my whole life playing sports.

I love every aspect of being on a team. There are a lot of positive things that come along with being on a competitive team, but I am not focusing on those in this lesson. Sadly, there can sometimes be negatives, too. One of the biggest negatives about sports is that sometimes games are scheduled where they interfere with church. I grew up playing travel baseball. The team that I played on was very good. Every other weekend we played out of town and sometimes, out of state. Through many creative ways, my family and I were still able to make a church service while also attending the games. I remember times where we would be out of town, and we would search and find a congregation that seemed good. We would go to the service and then directly go to the baseball fields to play our game.

Sometimes, we did not have a church available. Once, we were playing in Gulfport, Mississippi, and many families were wanting to go

to a church but did not know where. The solution that we came up with was to have church in our hotel room with a couple of other families. My family eventually stopped playing travel ball because of the recurring problems with our church attendance.

This leads me into a question that we all must face: "How do we balance our Christianity and everything else together?" Now, the problem with questions is that they require answers, and the problem with answers is that you have to use your brain and think to come up with one! This sounds like work to me, and I do not like it, but in life we have some questions that are what I call **big** questions. Things like "Is there a God?" or "Why was I put on this earth?" I mean, those are **big** questions, and you and I have to think about those, because the answers to life's **big** questions will have an impact on our whole lives! Other questions like "What's for supper?" or "Who's the better singer: Katy Perry or Taylor Swift?" may seem important, but they really have no lasting impact on our lives.

So, you and I need to answer this **big** question: "How do we balance our Christianity with our obligations in life?" Let's start with some perspective on where we have been and where we are as people.

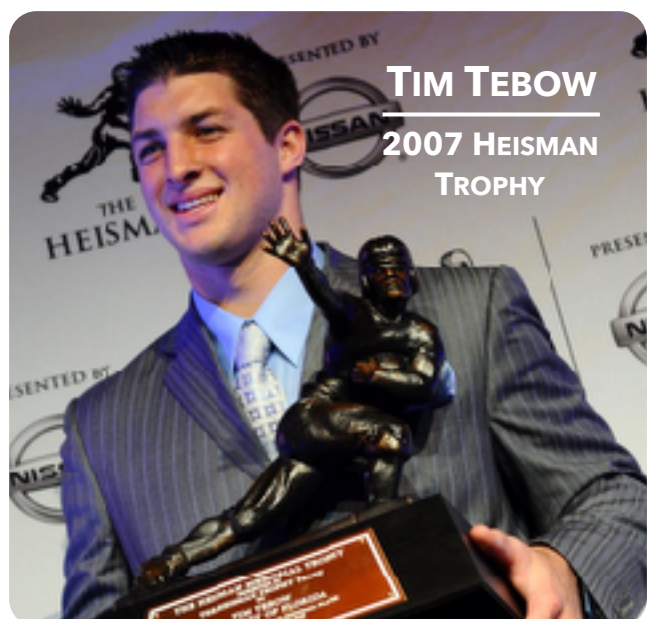
Balancing our Christianity and our lives is challenging. Up until two hundred years ago, the entire planet was mostly an agricultural society. Families spent most of their days together working in the fields and tending livestock. Families did chores together like gathering firewood, making repairs on the house, making tools or even hunting and fishing. But, the family was together. Today, things have changed dramatically. Husbands and wives may only see each other for an hour or two each day. Sometimes, dads are out of the house before the kids get out of bed, then go to the kids' after-school activities, and then get home, wolf down some supper, and everyone goes to bed.

The fragmenting of the family creates some challenges for us all. In the past, husbands and wives spent hours each day together, so they bonded and learned to understand each other better. Also, they may go for days or weeks without interacting with other adults, so they learned to rely on and respect each other much more. Today, because their time together is limited, husbands and wives must be more purposeful in their time together. Sometimes, they need to attend classes together or counseling sessions, not because their relationship is in trouble, but because they need to find different methods to connect to each other.

Parenting is the same way. "Dinner nights," where the family sits down for a meal together, and vacations together are more and more important as families do not have as much time together today. As I mentioned, I work, go to school, hang out with friends, and attend church, so this does not leave much time for being with my family.

So, you can see we are facing some challenges today that are relatively new to Christians. In life, I have learned that when I want to get better in an area, I simply go and find someone that has already been successful at it, and I follow them. I want to look at a modern example of balance and then one from the Bible.

Tim Tebow is one of my favorite athletes of all time. If you do not know who Tebow is, he was a quarterback for the Florida gators and went on to have a rather short NFL career. He is famous for being a great football player. But he is even more widely known for his dedication to the Lord. He was a Christian leader on and off the field. While in college, he received the most prestigious award in football, the Heisman



Trophy. After being awarded the Heisman, Tebow gave a very interesting speech. In his speech, he told those watching that football was very important to him, but it was not his top priority in life. He made a list: God was first, then family, then school, and lastly football. Fans may have viewed Tebow's life as revolving around football, but Tebow said that football was last on his list. Just like Tebow, we have to make a list for ourselves that will make this process of balancing our priorities easier.

In Scripture, Job was faced with adversity, and in the sight of Satan, he fully relied on God. All of his wealth and his entire family were taken from him, but Job knew what to do. Job knew that God was and always is with him. Job was faced with a decision: would he trust that God was going to be with him, or was he going to give up and curse God? Since Job was a very faithful servant, he trusted God even in difficult times. We are faced with this same decision every day. When talking to my dad about this topic, he suggested a quote from motivational speaker Jim Rohn. Jim says, "In life the wrong choice is always available, but the right choice is always available, too." When you have a baseball game on a Wednesday night, you may be scared of getting benched for missing the game. Are you going to be able to fully rely on God to help you? Every decision we make should be with God. The way we talk to God about these problems is through prayer.

The last point that I want to make is that balance does not mean separate. When writing this, I kept catching myself viewing our spiritual life on one side of the scale and then our everyday lives on the other side. This is true in terms of time, but should they really be separate? This past fall, I was on the varsity football team at Farmington. I was elected to be a captain. There were not too many roles that a captain was supposed to fill besides leading by example. I made the decision later on that I wanted my teammates to know that no matter what happened, I was going to do the

right thing. God is my first priority; how awesome would it be to be able to serve God while playing sports?

Tyson Foods is the largest supplier of beef, chicken, and pork in the United States. In fact, one out of every five meals consumed in the United States includes protein from Tyson Foods! The CEO of Tyson, Donnie Smith, has a speech he sometimes gives about how to live your life. He says that you have standards *of* living and standards *for* living. Standards *of* living include things like how much money you want to make, what kind of house you want to live in, what kind of clothes you want to wear, etc. Standards *for* living are things like always telling the truth, putting God first, loving and protecting your family, and being kind to other people. Mr. Smith says that in every case in which he has seen people put their standards *of* living above their standards *for* living, they burn themselves up. They end up lost and miserable.

That is the way I see balancing my faith with my worldly commitments. If I operate my life with my commitments to sports, or work, or upgrading my phone or my car as the most important things, then I know that ultimately, I will end up being miserable in life. But I know that if I place my relationship with God and doing His will first in my life, my relationships with my family and friends in second place, and everything else third, I will have a rich and fulfilling life. A balanced life leads to a life of purpose.



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BALANCING OUR FAITH AND OUR FRIENDS

JACOB MOSELEY

Who are your friends?

Jesus was a “friend of sinners.” It is mentioned twice in the gospels, in Matthew 11.19 and Luke 7.34. Jesus was called this because it was true; He was a friend of sinners. Jesus Himself said that He didn’t come for the spiritually healthy, but for the sick: “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5.31-32).

We too are to be friends of sinners! We ourselves *are sinners*! We are commanded as Christians to seek and save the lost. We must strive to have the hearts of servants. Let’s look at two real life examples.

Life Situation 1

A friend of mine confronted me with an issue that had been bothering him for quite some time. As a Christian, I was more than willing to sit with him and discuss what was going on in his life. I wanted to help in any way that I possibly could!

And then, it all came out: my friend told me that the problem he faced was bisexuality. At that moment, I became fearful. I had never dreamed of being the person caught up in this situation. All I wanted to do was run away! I wanted to be as far away as possible from my

friend because I was afraid and extremely uncomfortable. In that moment, being a Christian, I did not know whether I needed to leave and save myself from this exposure to this sin or try to find a way to pull my friend out of this hole he thinks he belongs in.⁷⁷

So, I chose both: I made it clear to my friend that I still was his friend, but that in no way would I ever condone this lifestyle he was choosing to live. From there I told him that I would contact him after I sought help from my youth minister on how I could deal with this situation and better help him.

Think about this situation. What would you do if you were in my place? Be honest with yourself! What *should* you do?

Life Situation 2

Another friend of mine attends a private Christian university. She too has faced a difficult situation in which she had to make a tough choice. One of her best friends was caught drunk on campus and was told that he would be kicked out of school. He pleaded with the administration to allow him to finish out the last two weeks of the semester, and the administration allowed him to do so. My friend explained to me that in the last two weeks of his time on campus, people gave him dirty looks, shunned him, and made him feel worthless for the poor choices he had made while at school. She wanted to help him but was not sure how. He was in a bad place, and she knew she had to do something. She already knew that he was not a strong Christian, and her worst fear was that because of this sequence of events he would fall away from the church.

Because of this fear, she stepped out of her comfort zone and put her own reputation on the line. She would eat with him when he ate alone, and, most importantly, she

⁷⁷A lot of times we perceive this sin as far worse than others, but the Bible teaches that all sin separates us from God.

took time to sit down with him and study the Bible. She did everything she could to make him understand that God had not given up on him and that God would help him find meaning in his life. Because of her willingness to help a friend in need despite the criticism she would face, she strengthened his faith as well as her own. He moved back home to Georgia where he still remains a faithful member of the church.

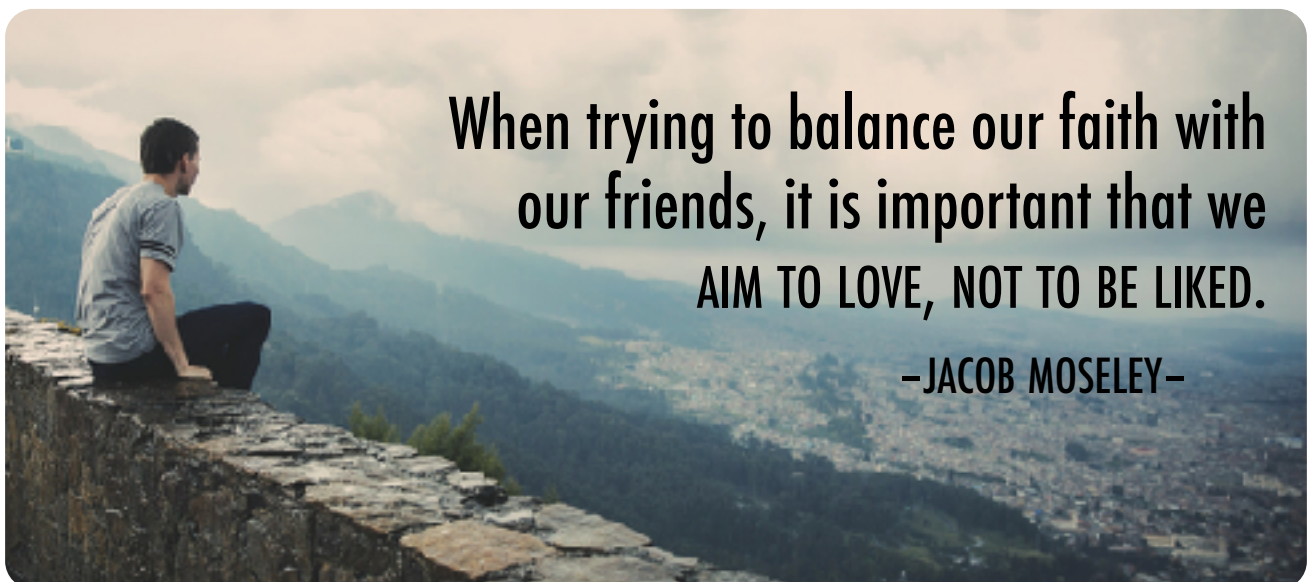
Again, think about this situation. What would you do? Be honest with yourself! What *should* you do?

When trying to balance our faith with our friends, it is important that we **aim to love, not to be liked**. Sometimes, doing the right thing is really hard to do. You must trust in God and have faith. Think to yourself about the Day of Judgment and how you would like to answer God at that moment. Put the gospel to work! It is our duty as Christians to seek and save the lost, not to sit back and watch them perish. Evangelism is the occupation of a Christian.

And, of course, remember Jesus, the greatest example ever:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

(Mark 10.45)





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Mike is passionate about saving souls and is a tireless worker in God's Kingdom. He and his wife, Donna, have three adult children: Rachel, Joshua, and Caleb, and one granddaughter, Macy.

FREE RAINE

MIKE RAINE

Pulling on Both Oars

An old Scotsman operated a little rowboat for transporting passengers. One day, a passenger noticed that the good old man had carved on one oar the word "Faith" and on the other oar the word "Works." Curiosity led him to ask the meaning of these oars. The old man, being a well-balanced Christian and glad for the opportunity to testify, said, "I will show you."

Then, he dropped one oar and plied the other called Works, and they just went around in circles. Then, he dropped that oar and began to ply the oar called Faith, and the little boat just went around in circles again—this time the other way around, but still in a circle.

After this demonstration, the old man picked up Faith and Works, and plying both oars together, sped swiftly over the water, explaining to his inquiring passenger. "You see, that is the way it is in the Christian life. Dead works without faith are useless, and faith without works is dead also, getting you nowhere. But faith and works pulling together make for safety, progress, and blessing."⁷⁸

⁷⁸Dennis Davidson, "Authentic Faith Works," Sermon Central, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/authentic-faith-works-dennis-davidson-sermon-on-faith-vs-works-140493.asp?Page=5> (accessed July 3, 2015).

Freedom and Balance

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!"

(Joshua 24.15-16, NIV)

Notice the wording: "choose," "you," "me," and "us." Our individual choices will determine the roads and paths of our lives. There are some roads where we can make U-turns, yet others are dead ends. Then again, there are some choices that lead us down a road where there is no turning back.

As young folks, you have the freedom to leave home and pursue your independence. This means getting a job, doing your own cleaning, laundry, and paying your own rent and utilities. With freedom comes tremendous responsibilities.

...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free...So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

(John 8.32, 36, NIV)

If one is not free in Christ, then he is a slave to sin. This means sin is your master and you work for Satan and owe him a payment.

What are we free to do? Do our social life and spiritual life clash, or are they to be one and the same? In what context do we have free reign (or Raine!) in life?

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

(John 10.28.30)

Are there borders and boundaries if you have true freedom? You may be in the Lord's hand, but you are free to walk away (Hebrews 10.25, cf. 2 Timothy 4.10).

In Galatians 1, the Jews were trying to bind Judaism on Christians and therefore bind them to a system of bondage and slavery. When God, through Christ, sets us free, we are free to do whatever we like *as long as it does not lead to sin*. But do keep in mind:

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.

(1 Corinthians 6.12)

In most cases, our freedom is only enjoyed after great discipline. A football player, after years of discipline, along with learning, is then free to enjoy the game. A member of an orchestra, after years of practice, is free to enjoy playing in front of an audience. Christians learn to relax to fully enjoy their freedom when they learn and understand their relationship as well as their fellowship found in Christ. No better scriptures are given on this than 1-3 John. We are in fellowship with all our brethren who are in fellowship with God.

In fly-fishing, we blame knots in our leaders on the wind.⁷⁹ We call them "wind knots." But really, they are not "wind knots"; they are caused by poor casting that results from poor learning and bad skills. Whatever is produced on the back cast is reproduced and exaggerated on the front cast. If we have been taught incorrectly, we will cast poorly and be frustrated with what is supposed to be a relaxing, enjoyable day of fly-fishing. It takes discipline and practice to master the art of fly-fishing. If you are not willing to discipline yourself and learn right, you will end up throwing your rod down, never picking it up again.

⁷⁹The "leader" is the end of the line, to which the fly is tied.

The same is true with your Christian relationship with God. If your structure of Christianity is always and only about rules and regulations, you will become frustrated and throw it down, because you cannot keep all the rules correctly. It is the discipline of knowing where your freedom lies in your relationship with God that helps set you free.

In building, if a wall stud is leaning two degrees at the bottom, the further it goes up, the more it will stick out. Catching the problem and correcting it early will produce a straight wall. In your walk with God, know the path and walk it with honesty and integrity. When you realize there is a problem, correct it quickly through repentance, and keep walking straight. God knows the end of your path; you just see the here and now. What maybe looks good now or feels good now could be your biggest disaster in your future.

All our freedoms are not total freedoms. Our freedoms are framed within an arena where there are boundaries and borders placed for our protection. When God says, "you shall not," it is because if we do, it will hurt our relationship with our Redeemer. He does not want us estranged from Him, and therefore protects us even within the arena of freedom with limitations:

- You are free to marry whomever you wish. To please God, it will be within His borders. They must be a satisfactory candidate: opposite sex, not currently married, one suitable according to God's standards for marriage.
- You are free to travel wherever you please, but sometimes you must have appropriate documentation. You are free to be in the Kingdom, via the blood of Jesus Christ applied to your life through immersion in baptism.

It is the same way in other parts of life. You may say, "I am free to play in the NFL or the NBA." Well, you may be *free* to play, but you are still *limited* by your four-foot height or 80-pound weight!

With your freedom comes choices. With those choices comes the fruit of your choice, be it good or bad:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

(2 Corinthians 5.10, KJV)

Conclusion

Do we really and eternally know what is best for us? We see the here and now, what looks good and feels good at the moment. God sees the end of a man.

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

(Proverbs 14.12, KJV)

O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

(Jeremiah 10.23, KJV)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

(Jeremiah 17.9, KJV)

You are free to be in Christ. You are just as free to be in bondage. Only you have the freedom of choice within your own life.

You are free to live in and under the protection of a loving Father. You are free to know right from wrong. You are free to know right from wrong and make choices accordingly. You are free to know choices produce fruits; you will eat those fruits, good or bad. You are free to know a life well lived will produce hope. Hope gives us strength to live with eternal guarantees, but remember, **your freedom in Christ is not free**. It is not free to you nor the Lord. For you, it will be trading your carnal life for a

life governed by the watchful eye of the Lord (Galatians 2.20). It cost God His Son and the Son His life (John 3.16; Romans 5.8-10; 2 Corinthians 5.21).

Remember poor Judas; he went to the place of his choosing. He went to "his own place" (Acts 1.25). Don't be a Judas. Be an Elijah, swept up to heaven in a mighty way. Take time to bring the Lord (through prayer) into all your decisions, and you will be a blessed person.

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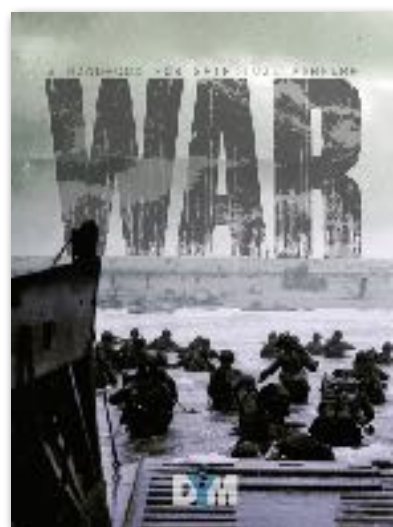
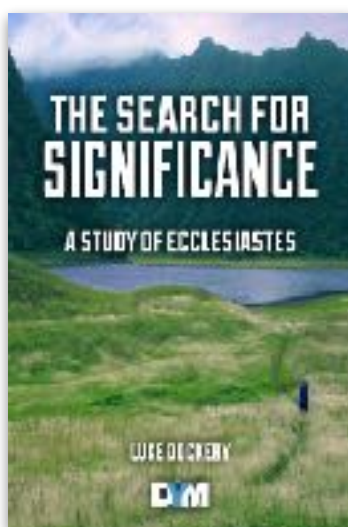
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