

# GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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JULY/AUGUST 2019

## LABOR FOR THE FOOD WHICH ENDURES (JOHN 6:27-29)

**PLUS** THE GLORY OF THE LORD / THE HAND OF GOD PREVAILS / SPIRITUAL SIGHT / HURT BY  
THOSE WHO ARE CLOSE / ANNUAL CONFERENCE / CELEBRITY PASTORS / **AND MORE!**

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## GRACE IN FOCUS

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**W**e're now entering the second half of 2019. Soon we will be in what I call our "vision year"—2020.

Shawn and I have been having a lot of fun with our radio program/podcasts. Well, it is fun, but it is also a lot of work. We find it exhausting to do more than 4 or 5 shows in a day. Since we need 22 shows a month, we need to record 5 or 6 times a month. With all our other responsibilities, it is challenging at times to find time to record.

In January we started a daily 15-minute program on five stations plus our website.

We have covered the following topics in the first six months of the show:

- *Confident in Christ* (one show per chapter)
- *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (one show per chapter)
- 1-3 John
- Romans 5-8
- *Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance* (one show per chapter).

We are currently recording a series on James that should come out in July.

We plan to have Ken Yates come in and record a series on his book, *Hebrews: Partners with Christ*.

We also plan to bring in Lucas Kitchen to record shows about his book, *Eternal Rewards*.

And we will be recording shows, Lord willing, on Shawn's books on assurance, *Beyond Doubt*, and election, *Chosen to Serve*.

We began on five stations. In May we added a station in Dallas. So now we are on stations in Dallas, Shreveport, Pensacola, Mobile, Scranton, and Albuquerque.



## Working On the Radio

Bob Wilkin, **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

We hope to add several more stations by the end of 2019 and then more again in 2020.

Thank you for supporting our ministry. We are truly partners in grace. 

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bob Wilkin".





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# Labor for the Food Which Endures (John 6:27-29)

BY BOB WILKIN

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*“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:27–29).*

Jesus had just fed 5,000 men, plus women and children. He had provided them with food. However, like the water from the well in John 4, that food was only a temporary solution to their physical needs.

As becomes clear later, the audience wants the Lord to give them a continuous supply of food to eat (John 6:34, “Lord, give us this bread always”).

The Lord is not saying in John 6:27 that it is wrong to labor for one’s daily bread, which is food that perishes. What He was saying is that it is much more important to labor for food which endures forever.

His audience—unbelieving legalists—is confused. They think He is saying that if they do the right works, they will earn everlasting life. They ask, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (John 6:28). Jesus’ response is not what they expected: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29).

For anyone familiar with John’s Gospel up to this point, this is a straightforward statement that the sole condition of everlasting life is faith in Christ. Not works which we may do, whether before or after the new

birth. Ephesians 2:8-9 grows out of the Lord’s teaching.

However, what you discover when you look at commentaries on John is that the Lord’s words in vv 27 and 29 are only partially understood by most commentators.

## FOOD THAT ENDURES TO EVERLASTING LIFE

Considering the question asked in John 6:28 and the Lord’s answer in John 6:29, the audience misunderstood (see Carson, *John*, p. 284). They thought the Lord was challenging them to labor to produce good works that would result in them having everlasting life.

The Lord is talking about working for food “which endures to everlasting life.” A few moments later, the Lord Jesus calls Himself “the Bread of Life” (John 6:35). This

passage is parallel to the water of life teaching in John 4. Once a person partakes of the Bread of Life, he has everlasting life that can never be lost.

But why would anyone need *to labor for that food*? We don't have to labor to receive gifts, do we? Isn't that what Rom 4:4-5 says?

We do not need to labor for everlasting life *itself*. It is a gift. And as Rom 4:4-5 says, we cannot labor for a gift. But we might need to labor for the food, i.e., *the message*, that endures to everlasting life, and which may be believed or rejected. Hence, the Lord is talking about laboring for the message of life, not for everlasting life itself.

It might be relatively easy to come to faith in Christ if you grow up in a home that teaches the faith-alone message. But it is hard for most people to believe a message that is widely rejected even among people who call themselves Christians.

The Jews of Jesus' day were steeped in works salvation. They thought that good Jews got into the kingdom (cf. Luke 18:9-14; Acts 15:1; Gal 1:6-9). For people in such a culture, it might take effort to receive Jesus' message. They are concerned about doing the right works. They are not concerned about the singular work of believing in Jesus.

Remember that Jesus said, "Strive [*agōnizesthe*] to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24).

That is what I argued in our *Grace New Testament Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 394-95). Check it out for more details.

Tasker says that the Lord either was talking about "the food which endures...and results in eternal life" or "the food which lasts to eternity" (*John*, p. 99). The latter option does not contradict the faith-alone message. The former option would contradict the faith-alone message of John 6:29, unless Tasker meant that it results in *fullness of eternal life* (but that's not what he meant).

### **THE SON OF MAN WILL GIVE YOU EVERLASTING LIFE**

The audience did not yet have everlasting life. But anyone in the audience who did "the work of God" would have it immediately.

Everlasting life is a present possession for the believer.

### **WHAT DID JESUS' QUESTIONERS THINK THE WORKS OF GOD WERE?**

They expected to hear some of the Ten Commandments and maybe more of the Law of Moses. They surely hoped for the Lord to identify a few of the most crucial commandments.

When the Lord did not talk about *works* (plural), they were surely surprised.

## **WHY DID JESUS SPEAK INSTEAD OF THE WORK, SINGULAR, OF GOD?**

The Lord's wording here was intentional. They asked about "the *works* of God." He answered about "the *work* of God."

The works are plural works.

The work is singular.

The Lord specifically identifies what "the work of God" is—believing in Him.

It is possible that the Lord is using the word *work* ironically. Some think it must be since Paul said that salvation is not of works. However, Paul did not say that salvation is not of *work*. Like the Lord Jesus, Paul speaks of *works*, plural.

The other possibility, which seems most likely to me, is that the Lord means that the only *action* that a person can do to obtain everlasting life is to believe in Him.

Is believing in Jesus Christ an action? Of course. Anytime we believe, we act. While it is a passive action, it is action, nonetheless. And it may take some effort on our part to hear the right message. If there are false messages out there, we need to take care that the one we believe is indeed the true message from God.

Why would the Lord pronounce a *blessing* on Peter for his belief in Him? "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven'" (Matt 16:17). Peter had something

to do with it. Compare Acts 13:46, where Paul rebukes a Jewish audience for rejecting the gift of everlasting life. See also Luke 13:24, discussed above.

But regardless of how hard or easy it is for us to believe, believing in Christ is not works.

## COMMENTARY HITS AND MISSES ON JOHN 6:27-29

Commentators often make helpful observations. But not always. The comments found in most commentaries on John 6:27-29 are a mix of helpful and hurtful.

As mentioned above, Tasker suggests that the Lord might mean that the audience was to labor for “the food which endures...and results in eternal life” (*John*, p. 99). While he does mention a second option, it is disconcerting to see the first option put forth as viable when it is contradicted by the verses which follow (John 6:28-29) and by the entire faith-alone message in John’s Gospel.

Leon Morris, often quite insightful in his comments, mixes in great comments with confusing ones. He says, “There is another kind of food, that which remains forever and issues in eternal life...If they seek this food, then the Son of Man will give them eternal life” (*John*, p. 359). That is confusing.

But Morris also makes this comment which is both good and bad, “Life is not a reward for work. Life is always a gift.” It is more accurate to say the present possession of everlasting

life is always a gift. However, future fullness of eternal life is indeed a reward for works done.

Again, Morris makes a great comment, “But one thing is needful. That this one thing, He makes plain, is faith” (p. 360). Unfortunately, he immediately follows that up with this confusing statement, “They must believe on Him; the present tense here denotes the continuing attitude, not the once-for-all decision” (p. 360).

Raymond Brown mixes in terrific and puzzling comments. He says, “Jesus, in turn (vs. 29), puts the emphasis on faith [terrific]. Paul and James are the NT names we associate with the problem of faith and works [puzzling], but here we have the Johannine solution. Obtaining eternal life is not a question of works, as if faith did not matter [terrific]; nor is it a question of faith without works [puzzling]...Acts 16:30-31 shows a scene in the early Church life that illustrates for us the life-situation in which vss. 28-29 of John 6 would have had meaning and would have been preserved [terrific]” (*John*, Vol. 1, p. 265).

In 1553, John Calvin wrote a commentary on John. His comments on John 6:27-29 are a mixture of clarity and confusion. His comments on v 27 are confusing. He says, for example, that “Christ points to eternal life as the goal of our lives” (*John*, p. 153). If he were talking about the reward of fullness of everlasting life, that would be correct. But he is talking about


the mere possession of everlasting life as a gift.

His closing comment on v 29 is excellent, “[Faith] is, if we may use the expression, a passive work, for which no reward is given, and it gives people no other righteousness than what they receive from Christ” (*John*, p. 156).

## CONCLUSION

There is a lot of confusion in the Christian world about the saving message. Faith itself is under attack today. No longer is believing in Jesus merely believing in Him. Instead believing is turning from sins, surrendering to Jesus, and resolving to obey Him. Faith has become a work for many today.

In John 6:27-29, the Lord Jesus addresses the faith and works issue. We cannot be born again by works. We can only be born again by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ for everlasting life. Works are not a regeneration issue. Faith is a regeneration issue.

The Free Grace position unlocks the meaning of Scripture. I’m so thankful I came across a professor named Zane when I was just starting out in my seminary studies. 



*Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 43 years,*

*Sharon. His latest book is Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance.*

# The Glory of the Lord (Mark 9:2-3)

By Ken Yates

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One of the exciting things about studying the Bible is that no matter how long we have been studying it, we can always learn something new. We have all studied a passage we have examined many times before and see something in it for the first time. I had such an experience this week.

## JESUS IS THE KING

In Mark 9:2ff, we have the account of the Transfiguration of the Lord. I have heard people speak on it many times, read it many times, and read many articles about it.

The account occurs in the section of Mark known as the discipleship section. This section runs from chapters 8-10. In this section, the Lord tells the disciples three times that He is going to Jerusalem to die.

I had always understood the account of the Transfiguration in light of that context. Jesus is telling the disciples that He is not going to Jerusalem to rule. He is going to be rejected by the religious leaders and the nation, and be killed. Right before the Transfiguration, Jesus tells them this for the first time (8:31).

The point of the Transfiguration is to show the disciples that even though He will go through these things, Jesus is the King. He is the promised Christ of the OT prophets, as Peter had just confessed Him to be (8:29).

## ESTABLISHING GLORY

All of that is certainly true. But there is something else in this account that I had never noticed before. I know it is a simple thing, and many readers have, no doubt, seen it before. But I am a simple man, sometimes slow, and it hit me for the first time.

In the verse immediately before the Transfiguration Jesus spoke of His coming to establish His kingdom with “glory” (8:38). That certainly fits with my understanding of the Transfiguration. On that mountain, the disciples got a glimpse of the glory with which Christ will come. The One who is to be placed on the cross is a King of infinite glory.

In Luke’s account of the Transfiguration, he is even more explicit in making the connection between what Jesus had just said to the disciples and the Transfiguration. Jesus says that He will



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**“What I saw is that the Transfiguration is also a powerful motivation to live for the rewards the Lord will give when He comes in glory. He will share that very glory with those who take up their cross and follow Him.”**

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come with glory (Luke 9:26), and they saw His glory (same word) on the mountain (Luke 9:32).

When Jesus was transfigured the disciples saw Him shine, and Mark describes the light they saw as something that could not be produced on earth (9:3). The light and glory of the coming Kingdom will be greater than anything on earth. It was here that I saw something that I had somehow overlooked.


In the previous verses Jesus had spoken of rewards. He told the disciples that they needed to take up their cross and follow Him. Whatever price they paid in doing so would be better than anything the world had to offer (8:35-36). Jesus is clearly speaking of rewards in Mark 8:34-38.

What I saw is that the Transfiguration is also a powerful motivation to live for the rewards the Lord will give when He comes in glory. He will share that very glory with those who take up their cross and follow Him. Just as there is nothing on earth that is worth losing the rewards He will give for faithfulness (Mark 8:34-38), so there is nothing on earth that can accurately express the coming glory (Mark 9:3). The Lord had just told them they would pay a big price in order to

follow Him. With a very dramatic picture, He showed them that the price would be worth it.

Peter also interpreted the significance of the Transfiguration in this way. In 2 Pet 1:3-11 he speaks of rewards for faithfulness. Immediately afterwards, he points to the Transfiguration to make his point (2 Pet 1:17-18).

## THE COMING GLORY

When we look at the Transfiguration, we certainly see the coming glory of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. But we can also be encouraged by the fact that because of that glory, faithful service to the King is worth more than anything this earth can offer. 



*Ken Yates is the pastor of Little River Baptist Church in Jenkinsville, SC. He teaches at Bible institutes all over the world on behalf of GES.*

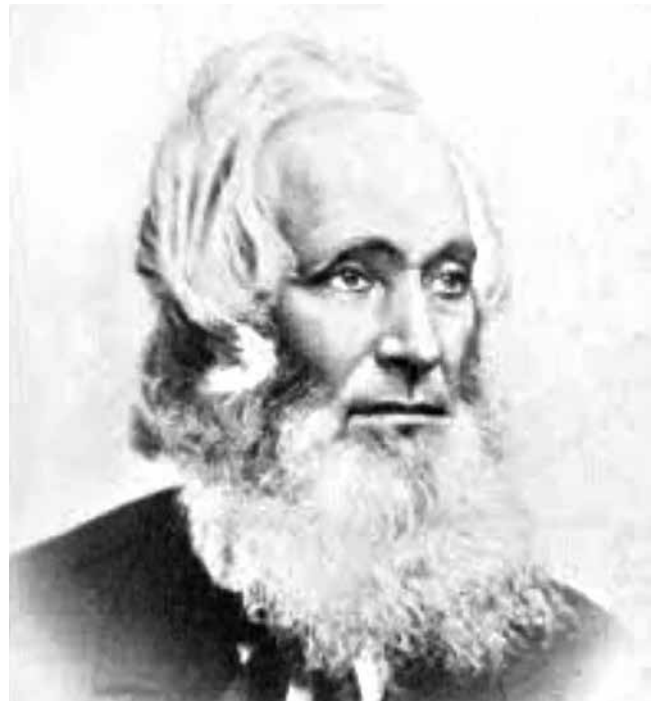
# Asa Mahan's Assurance

By Shawn Lazar

**A**sa Mahan (1799-1889) was an Arminian philosopher and theologian. He was Presbyterian at a time when many Presbyterians were becoming Arminian (following the so-called “New Haven Theology”). Mahan was also the first president of Oberlin College when it was a revivalist school and not the ultra-liberal place it is today. He was also a co-worker with the famed Charles Finney, sharing Finney’s belief in Christian perfection. Mahan wrote a book on free will that I found helpful.

This intriguing excerpt is from the Introduction of Mahan’s *Autobiography: Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual*. Notice what Mahan says about his assurance of salvation:

Not long after my conversion I attained, by long and fervent prayer, to that form of full assurance in which I could say most unhesitatingly, “I know that I love God, and have eternal life.” This assurance of present acceptance, after a time, merged into “full assurance of hope,” an assurance which has not, and never had, any connection with the belief that a soul, once converted, is absolutely certain of final salvation. At the time of my conversion, “the eyes of my understanding were enlightened” to know my past character and life as they were, even to “a discernment of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” No one who has not been thus enlightened can form the remotest apprehension of the utter and absolute abhorrence with which that old and godless life was regarded by me at that time. The thought of perdition was not, in my distinct



regard, so fearful as was the idea of a return to that old life. Hence it was that for a long period I made it the constant subject of specific and most earnest prayer, that God would keep me from apostasy, and also from being a backslider, even in heart. The result was, that I became possessed of a fixed inward assurance, into which no element of doubt entered, that I should have grace to “hold the beginning of my confidence steadfast unto the end.” As far as the question of present acceptance and final salvation is concerned, I have, during these sixty-five years, “served God without fear”—would that I could add, in regard to them all, “in righteousness and holiness before Him.”

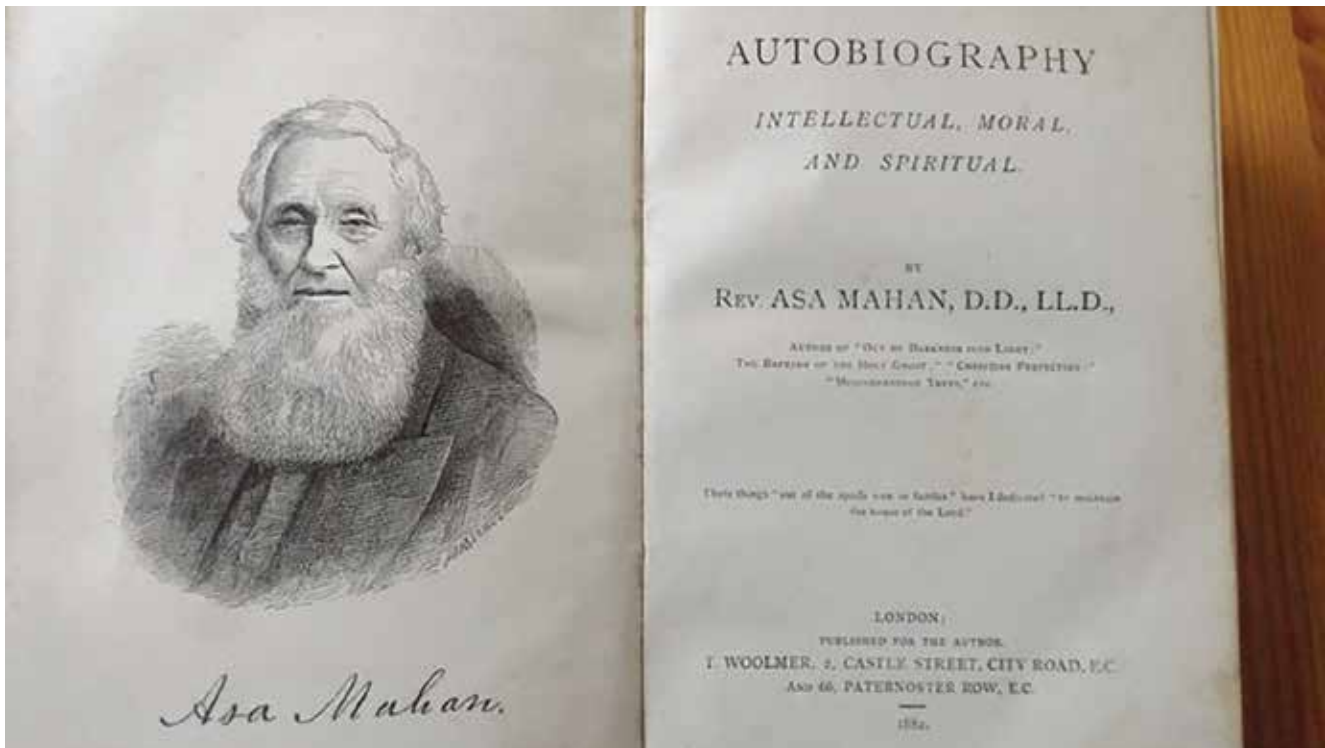
What is so notable about Mahan’s treatment of assurance is that it is almost the exact opposite of the Free Grace view.

Let me break it down for you.

## THE BASIS OF MAHAN’S ASSURANCE

First, Mahan says his assurance was attained by intense prayer, not by simply believing Jesus’ promise: “Not long after my conversion I attained, by long and fervent prayer...”

Second, Mahan received assurance of eternal life based on his love for God, not based on faith that God would keep His saving promise: “I



could say most unhesitatingly, 'I know that I love God, and have eternal life.'"

Third, Mahan was assured of his present acceptance by God, not of being eternally accepted by God: "This assurance of present acceptance..."

Fourth, Mahan expressly denied eternal security: "an assurance which has not, and never had, any connection with the belief that a soul, once converted, is absolutely certain of final salvation."

Fifth, Mahan was sure he would keep on being saved, not because eternal life is eternal, but because he would continue believing and being holy until death:

"I became possessed of a fixed inward assurance, into which no element of doubt entered, that I should have grace to 'hold the beginning of my confidence steadfast unto the end.' As far as the question of present acceptance and final salvation is concerned, I have, during these sixty-five years, 'served God without fear;'—would that I could add, in regard to them all, 'in righteousness and holiness before Him.'"

In sum, this is assurance attained by performance and kept by performance.

## BIBLICAL ASSURANCE

Biblical assurance is so much simpler. Think of it as a syllogism:

Premise 1: Jesus said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

Premise 2: I believe in Jesus.

Conclusion: Therefore, I have everlasting life.

That's it. That's assurance of salvation.

It's not about praying yourself into a feeling.

It's not about believing you'll continue to love God and be faithful and holy until you die.

It is based entirely on believing His promise to you.

Assurance is not about what you can do for God, but what God has promised to do for you. **GH**



*Shawn Lazar lives in Denton, TX with his wife Abby and their three children.*

A painting of a prison cell. The walls are made of rough, grey stone or concrete. A small, square window with three vertical bars is set into the wall, letting in bright light. Below the window is a simple wooden bed frame with a mattress. A chain is attached to the wall and hangs down. The floor is dark and appears to be made of stone or concrete. The overall mood is somber and confined.

# The Hand of God Prevails

(Acts 12:6-11)

By Zane Hodges

**A**cts leads all NT books in recording prison escapes (Acts 5, 12, 16). And all the rules for a prison escape are violated. For example, in Acts 12:

1. Light illumines their escape (v 7).
2. Peter is awakened, not by a whisper, but by a blow to his side (v 7).
3. He is told to “Arise up quickly.” This could have jerked the guards awake, but Peter’s chains fall off instead (v 7).
4. They do not escape in haste. Instead, Peter is to dress fully (v 8).
5. They simply walk past the sentry posts and approach a gate to which they have no key.

The result? They defied the possibility of being seen, or of being blocked by the gate, and succeeded in escaping (v 10).

## GOD’S WILL IS SUPREME

God rides roughshod over Herod’s maximum security arrangements. He treats them as though they did not exist (perhaps he knew of the escape in Acts 5). Human efforts to hinder God are always equally vain and amount to nothing.

Perhaps Herod’s success in the murder of James (v 2) emboldened him to suppose he could do likewise with any servant of Christ. But God’s will, not man’s, is supreme in what becomes of



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**“Peter’s escape shows us that,  
for the child of God who is  
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enemy, there is freedom.”**

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His servants. God may deliver one servant to death (and thus fulfill His own prophetic Word), while another He may deliver “out of the hand” of rulers and “from all the expectation of the people” (cf. v 11).

This story demonstrates it is not “the hand” of Herod or earthly authority that prevails, but the hand of the Lord; not “the expectation” of the people, but the purpose of God.

Our times are in His hands.

### **THE PRISON ESCAPE AS TYPOLOGY**

Peter slept. This was an act of courage. Peter must have felt sure, especially in light of Christ’s prophecy (John 21), that this was the night before his death. (In James’ case, prophecy fulfilled.) But it was not his time.

In type, however, the believer captured by Satan is often asleep as well (cf. 2 Tim 2:25, 16). They may not be merely awakened by the light of divine truth or the spoken Word alone (cf. v 7). The Lord may find it necessary to “smite” them in chastening. The captured believer is chained by the twin guards of “sin and death” (cf. Rom 8:2). But the proper response to truth causes these chains to fall off (cf. vv 6 and 7). Satanic sentinels must watch helplessly as the believer passes out into spiritual freedom (vv 6, 10).

Hence, there is a second prison escape here, in type (cf. the concept of “awaking” in Rom 13:11-14 and Eph 5:14). The story pictures a prince of this world (Herod) laying hold of a believer (Peter) to deprive him of liberty until the day of his death. Hence, it depicts the Prince of this world (i.e., Satan) in his effort to deprive believers of their liberty in Christ until the day they die.

Before emerging into the pathway of Christian living, the believer should gird himself (with truth), bind on the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace, and put on the still spiritually fashionable garment of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6; Rom 13:14; cf. Acts 12:8).

There remains, then, only to respond to the Lord’s voice, “follow me” (cf. v 8). He leads us forth into His freedom. (The “angel of the Lord” is the Lord’s representative. Thus typically he shows what the Lord Himself does.)

We may imagine barriers and obstacles to our walk in freedom, but the “iron gates” of circumstances automatically open when we are following the Lord (v 10). Such an experience may seem too wonderful to be true, at least at first (v 9). Peter thought he saw a vision, a revelation of God. In type, we see one, too.

### **FREEDOM FOR THE CHILD OF GOD**

Peter’s escape shows us that, for the child of God who is snared and captured by the enemy, there is freedom. The Lord desires to awaken us, give us light (cf. v 7 and Eph 5:14), cause the chains of sin and death to drop off, clothe us with His own character (Rom 13:14), and lead us forth from the prison house of the “authority of darkness” (cf. John 8:34-36). **GH**



*Zane Hodges was a Bible teacher and Professor of Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary. He passed away in 2008.*

# Top 5 Reasons to Memorize Scripture

By Summer Stevens

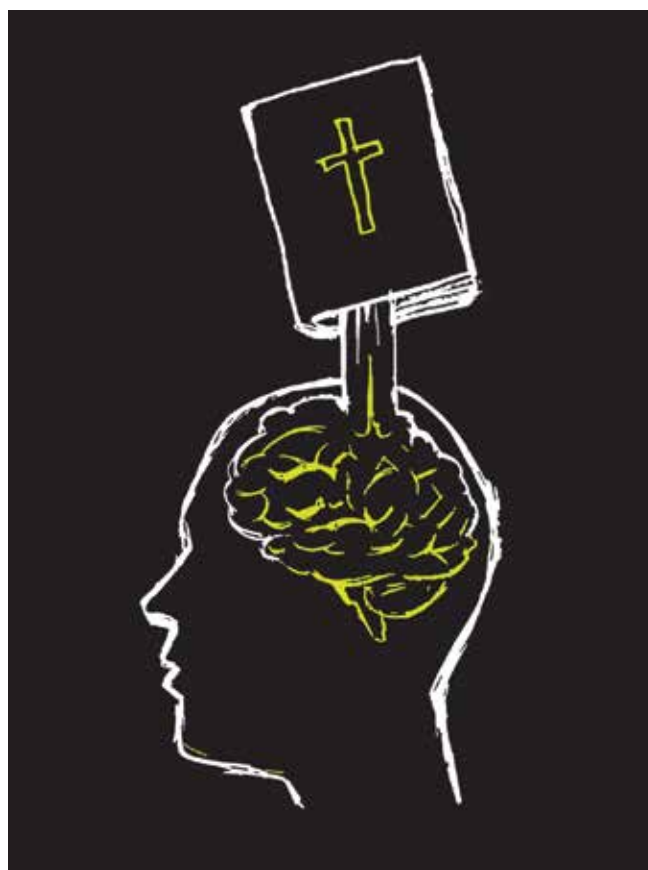
I still remember memorizing Awana verses in the King James Version when I was in third grade. “Verily, verily, I say unto you...” with a little box next to the verse that defined “verily.” Awana has a great statistic that says that 96% of people who participated in the club for six years still attend church weekly as adults. It’s a great testament for the program, but I think the truth is, when you absorb so much of God’s Word into your soul, it changes you.

Here are my Top 5 reasons for memorizing Scripture.

## 1. THERE WHEN YOU NEED IT

The Holy Spirit can bring it to mind when we need it. You may have read the Bible cover to cover, perhaps many times. But how many verses do you know by heart just because you’ve read them several times? Maybe a few. The vast majority of the verses in our arsenal are there because we’ve made a focused effort to commit them to memory. Here are times when recalling God’s Word can help us in the moment:

- When facing sin and temptation (1 Cor 10:13)
- When sharing the Gospel (John 3:16, Acts 16:31)
- When feelings of impatience and bitterness creep in (2 Cor 12:9)



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- When we doubt our identity in Christ (1 John 3:1)
- When we are struggling to love well (1 Cor 13)
- When we are tempted to judge or criticize others (Matt 7:1-2)
- When we are fearful (2 Tim 1:7)

## 2. KNOWING GOD BETTER

The process of memorizing Scripture causes us to consider each word. We end up knowing God better and understanding key Scriptures more thoroughly. Seldom do most Christians take one verse and meditate on it. When we are attempting to commit a passage to memory, we take time to learn every word. Deeper spiritual truths are revealed when we savor and consider His words to us carefully.

When I think about the character of God I am reminded first of passages I know by heart—the tender leading of a Shepherd (Psalm 23); the eternality of my Creator, who does not grow tired or weary (Isaiah 40:28); and the sacrificial love of a Father (John 3:16).

### 3. EASY ACCESS

We never know when we might not have access to a Bible. The world is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity. In parts of the world, Christians are imprisoned for their faith and locked in a cell without their most precious possession. Their only access to God's Word lies in the portions of Scripture they can recall in their minds. If your Bible was taken from you and you only had the verses you've memorized, would that be enough for you?

### 4. BE STRENGTHENED

God's Word brings strength. "My soul melts from heaviness, strengthen me according to Your Word" (Ps 119:28). Memorization takes time. It takes brain power. There is much competition for our thoughts. When I am working on a new verse, it fills my mind. At the end of the day when I might be tempted to replay conversations or worry about the day to come, my verse comes to mind and I try to recall it. I consider its truth, its power, and it strengthens my mind and brings me peace. What a wonderful way to end the day!

### 5. A LIFELINE

Scripture is our lifeline. Just like in the famous game show where contestants reach out to a

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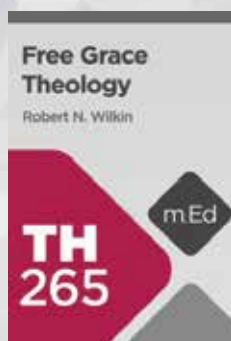
Reading the Bible is necessary, certainly. But there is a transformation of our lives that occurs when we have access to God's Word, through our memory and by the help of the Holy Spirit, at every point throughout our day. **GIF**



*Summer lives outside of Pittsburgh with her husband Nathanael and their five children. She has a Masters in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and enjoys running (but mostly talking) with friends and reading good books to her kids.*

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# Walking in the Light?

## Two Views of 1 John

By Don and Kim Reiher

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**H**ow should you interpret 1 John? This article contrasts two options. Your interpretation of 1 John depends on the perceived purpose of the book.

### TWO VIEWS

The first interpretation proposes that 1 John provides proofs of true saving faith.

All to whom God gives saving faith will show evidence of such faith. In other words, those who possess true saving faith—and thus eternal life—will pass John’s stated “tests” and can have an assurance of their everlasting life. The “these things” of 1 John 5:13 are tests scattered through the epistle, written so his audience can know if their belief is genuine. This is better known as the “Tests of Life” view of 1 John.

The second interpretation notes that the epistle is written to born-again believers who already *have* everlasting life. The theme can be found in 1 John 1:3-4, “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have *fellowship* with us, and truly our *fellowship* is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full” (emphasis added). Characteristics of that

fellowship are enumerated in 1 John, along with instruction on how to gain and maintain that fellowship (i.e., by abiding in Christ). The attitudes and activities attributed to believers in 1 John are manifestations of a regenerate person who abides (remains) under the control of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 5:18b). Throughout the epistle, fellowship with God is described as “walking in the light.” This is known as the “Tests of Fellowship” view of 1 John.

Let’s contrast the two views using thirteen key passages.

### 1 JOHN 1:6-7

*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).*

**Test of Life:** The claim to “have fellowship with Him” can be restated as, “If we say that we are saved.” “Walk[ing] in darkness” describes people who “say” or profess they are saved, but who





aren't. "Walk[ing] in the light" is a *condition* that proves one's salvation.

*Test of Fellowship:* "Fellowship" denotes a *practice* of being in fellowship. To "walk in darkness" is to be out of fellowship; "walk in the light," to be *in* fellowship. First John 1:6 does not say that if we walk in darkness, we do not *have* the truth; rather, it indicates that if we walk in darkness, we do not *practice* the truth.

## 1 JOHN 1:9

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*

*Test of Life:* Confessing our sins—leading to cleansing and eternal forgiveness—describes what we do to get saved. "Confess" and "believe," therefore, are synonyms.

*Test of Fellowship:* Confessing our sins describes what we do to get back in fellowship, not what we do to get saved. Confessing our sins is a work, so it cannot be equated with belief. In many of the nearly one hundred uses of "believe/faith" in John's Gospel, everlasting life is promised as a result of merely believing in Jesus for it. There is nothing about eternal life in 1 John 1:9. [Note that Rom 10:9-10 does not teach that confession or "calling upon the name of the Lord" is an additional requirement, beyond faith, needed to be born again.]

## 1 JOHN 2:3-4

*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3-4).*

*Test of Life:* This cannot mean that we need to keep God's commands perfectly to get saved. But if one desires to keep God's commands, and is heading in that direction, then that person has reason to believe they are truly saved.

*Test of Fellowship:* In John 14:15, 21; 15:10, the one who loves Jesus, and abides in His love, will obey His commandments. Keeping His commands enriches and strengthens our fellowship with Jesus. This is a normal expectation in personal relationships. We normally do—or try to do—what our friends ask of us.

## 1 JOHN 2:9-11

*He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:9-11).*

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**"Fellowship" denotes a *practice* of being in fellowship. To 'walk in darkness' is to be out of fellowship; 'walk in the light,' to be *in* Fellowship."**

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*Test of Life:* If a person hates (and continues to hate) his brother, this confirms that they are *in* darkness, that is, they are not truly saved.

*Test of Fellowship:* This passage continues the point found in 1 John 1:6-7. These verses do not speak about whether a person has everlasting life, but about a believer abiding or walking in the light versus walking in darkness. Being in darkness (i.e., being out of fellowship with God), is the same thing as walking in darkness.

## 1 JOHN 2:15

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).*

*Test of Life:* If a person loves the world, they are giving evidence they are not saved. The phrase, "the love of the Father is not in him," means that this person is not truly saved.

*Test of Fellowship:* The phrase, "the love of the Father is not in Him," refers to that person being out of fellowship. Being out of fellowship is characterized by God's love not being actively displayed, through us, to others. There is nothing



in this context about a world-loving person needing to be saved.

## 1 JOHN 2:17

*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:17).*

**Test of Life:** The person who desires to do the will of God, and who is moving in that direction, is truly saved. The phrase, “abides forever,” signifies a person going to heaven.

**Test of Fellowship:** The preponderance of the uses of the word “abide” in John’s writings do not deal with the issue of receiving everlasting life. Instead, abiding is a command to believers to get to work *after* they come to saving faith (cf. John 15:7).

## 1 JOHN 2:18-19

*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us (1 John 2:18-19).*

**Test of Life:** Those who depart from the teaching of the Apostles, and/or of the church (i.e., “us”) and who deny that Jesus is the Christ, show they were not genuinely saved and only had spurious faith.

**Test of Fellowship:** There are two possibilities. First, the departures could refer to revisionists who had pretended to believe Jesus had come in the flesh. They were really unbelievers and later left the group. Second, it could be people who had believed Jesus came in the flesh. However, they were influenced by the revisionists, which caused them to leave the group. In neither case does this test prove whether they were ever saved or not. It does not say they were “never” of us or they could never return to “us.” As of the time of John’s writing they were no longer in good

standing with the Apostolic circle or its teaching. One hopes they eventually returned to right standing again.

## 1 JOHN 2:28

*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28).*

**Test of Life:** This view believes in one final judgment for eternal destiny which takes place at Christ’s appearing. “Abide in Him” so you will have confidence that you will go to heaven, instead of being ashamed and going to hell as a result of this final judgment.

**Test of Fellowship:** There are multiple judgments in Scripture. This refers to the Bema judgment. Abide in Him so you will be confident at the Bema Seat of Christ (the judgment for believers regarding rewards; the Bema does not determine who gets into the kingdom). Believers who do not abide in Him now will experience profound regret and shame at this particular judgment.

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**“Keeping His commands enriches and strengthens our fellowship with Jesus.”**

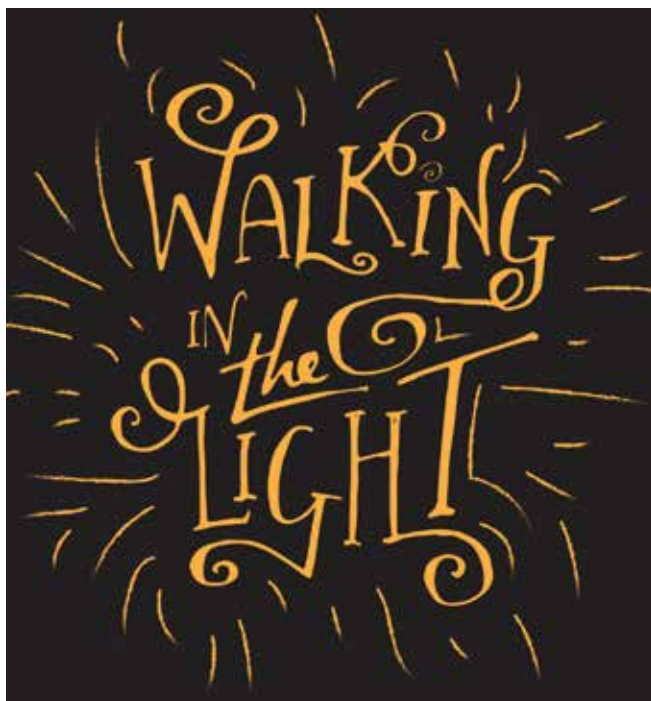
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## 1 JOHN 2:29

*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him (1 John 2:29).*

**Test of Life:** Doing righteousness gives reason to believe that you are truly saved.

**Test of Fellowship:** Doing righteousness is an outward manifestation of the “born-again” part of believers. It only occurs while walking in the light, meaning, while we are in fellowship with God. Otherwise, how much righteousness would be necessary to “prove” we are truly saved?



## 1 JOHN 3:6-9

*Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:6-9).*

**Test of Life:** This view does not claim that believers will be sinless in this life, but rather that if your sins are bad and numerous enough—and you sin too long—then you have reason to believe you are not truly saved. [The NIV, ESV and NLT add words to the text to convey the sense of “habitual sin.”]

**Test of Fellowship:** The NKJV is correct—there is no need to add “continuing to” or “practicing” to the Greek verb, “sin.” Born-again believers, John’s audience here, have already received salvation and eternal life. The working out of eternal life—in their lives on earth—is only possible while they are abiding in Christ. An out-of-fellowship believer is walking in the darkness and needs to get back in fellowship.

## 1 JOHN 3:14-15

*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:14-15. NIV removes “abiding” from v 15).*

**Test of Life:** The phrase “does not have eternal life abiding in him,” means that you are not saved. The NIV’s rendering, “no murderer has eternal life in him” is preferred. If a person who claims to be a believer has no desire to love his brother, and is not moving in that direction, then they have reason to believe they are not truly saved.

**Test of Fellowship:** Born-again believers, John’s audience here, have already received salvation and eternal life, so they cannot be *seeking* to “have eternal life abiding in [themselves],” i.e., salvation. The working out of eternal life—in their lives on earth—is only possible while they are in fellowship. An out-of-fellowship believer is walking in the darkness and needs to get back in fellowship.

## 1 JOHN 4:7-8

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-8).*

**Test of Life:** The contrasting phrases, “knows God” and “does not know God,” are references to the saved and the unsaved. If you do not desire to love other believers and are not moving in that direction, then you have reason to believe you are not truly saved.

**Test of Fellowship:** The word “know” can also refer to a deeper, more intimate knowledge gained through time, by growth in knowledge of a person. A new believer cannot have this kind of knowledge because it takes time. The text does not say you are *not* born of God; it says you do not *know* God. See v 11 (“ought to love”) and v 21 (“should live”). These verses do not say you *won’t* experience love and life. But if you don’t



love fellow believers, your Christian experience lacks the enjoyment of God's love.


## 1 JOHN 5:1

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him (1 John 5:1).*

*This actually is a test of whether or not a person is born again!* When one believes that Jesus is the "Christ," in the Johannine sense of the term, at that moment, they are truly born again.

After sharing with Lazarus' sister the implications of His being "the resurrection and the life," Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" (John 11:26b). Beyond an acknowledgement that Jesus is the Christ (John 11:27), Martha's response was a statement of her faith/belief that He is the grantor and guarantor of everlasting life (John 11:25-26).

John 20:31b admonishes, "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing, you may have life in His name." Note the shared themes in John (11:25-27; 20:31) and 1 John (5:1, 11-13).

These passages reveal that believing Jesus is the Christ is a command to have faith in His promise and ability to give everlasting life, thereby obtaining that life. 



*Donald Reiher received his MDiv from Capitol Bible Seminary and his ThM from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. Don and Kim have been involved in evangelism and discipleship with their family, church, and local community in Pennsylvania.*

## BAD QUOTE ON THE WARNING PASSAGES

**"Clearly, only those who endure to the end will be saved. So, do these passages contradict the other passages that clearly teach 'once saved always saved'?...These warnings ought to be taken at face value: however if we fall away, we will not be saved in the end. But since those who are truly saved can never lose it, we must conclude that a failure to heed the warnings demonstrates that we never possessed *true* saving faith to begin with. How else could all these verses be true?"**

**~J. D. Greear, President of the Southern Baptist Convention,  
*Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*, p. 79.**

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# I'm Amazed at Modern Evangelical Terminology

By Bob Wilkin

I read a few articles in the July-September 2018 issue of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, the journal of Dallas Theological Seminary. It is celebrating its 175th anniversary (since DTS took over an already existing journal). *Bibliotheca Sacra* is one of the leading theological journals today. And it has been for a very long time.

In this issue, Bruce Compton provides Part 3 in a series of articles in which he defends the case for faith preceding regeneration. I agree with him. Faith does precede regeneration.

However, as I read, I found certain words and phrases used by him which for the last ten years I've been seeing a lot in Evangelical publications. These expressions have become common. Yet they are inaccurate and misleading.

## THE NEW TERMINOLOGY

Here are a few examples:

*Initial salvation.* By my count, Compton uses this expression seven times (pp. 285, 287, 288, 291, 298, 301, 302). He never explains it.

*Repentant faith.* Seven times he refers to "repentant faith" (pp. 292; 294; 295, twice; 297; 303, twice). The closest he comes to explaining this expression is when he writes, "illumination logically precedes repentant faith (repentance and faith) and...regeneration logically follows" (p. 292).

*Repentance and faith.* In addition to the references to repentant faith, four times he speaks of repentance and faith as two separate things (pp. 292; 295; 301, twice).

I have difficulty with each of these expressions as they relate to soteriology, the doctrine of salvation (i.e., regeneration).

There is no such thing as *initial salvation*. The moment one believes in Christ, he is saved once and for all (John 11:26). Initial salvation is currently used to distinguish it from what is now called *final salvation*. Compton never uses the expression *final salvation*, and I'm glad.

Possibly by *initial salvation* all he means is the point at which one's everlasting life began. But in the climate

of today, I find it misleading to speak of initial salvation.

*Repentant faith* is also something not found in the Bible. The Bible knows of repentance, and it knows of faith. But it never speaks of repentant faith. What is that?

I wonder what is next. Committed faith? Submissive faith? Persevering faith? Obedient faith? Confessing faith?

The exact expression *repentance and faith* is not found in the Bible. Yet there are two texts which are close—Acts 20:21 (“repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”) and Heb 6:1 (“the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God”). However, neither of those passages says that repentance and faith are two conditions of regeneration. Biblically the sole condition of everlasting life is faith in Christ.

Interestingly, Compton most often merely speaks of faith as the sole condition of regeneration, which is great. I wonder why he occasionally instead spoke of *repentant faith* or *repentance and faith* as the condition(s) of everlasting life. None of the passages he cites support those expressions. I suspect he used those expressions because they are popular today.

## TEMPORARY LIFE?

Before I end, I feel compelled to point out one other oddity, which I have seen occasionally elsewhere, in Compton’s article.

In a section entitled “Two Provisions of Life,” he says, “two provisions of life are experienced in initial salvation. There is the initial temporary provision of life that logically precedes faith, and there is a subsequent permanent provision of life that logically follows faith. Again, it must be granted that this is a tension with placing faith prior to regeneration” (p. 301).

If I had not read the same sort of statement by other Calvinists, I would not know what he means. The way many Calvinists interpret

the Parable of the Four Soils (Luke 8:5-15), for example, is that God gives some sort of temporary spiritual life to soils two and three, but since they don’t persevere (soil 2) or produce mature fruit (soil 3), they fail to receive the “permanent provision of life,” to use Compton’s expression.

I find it odd for Calvinists to speak of a “temporary provision of life.” Where in the Bible do we find two-part regeneration? What is this temporary spiritual life? It is not everlasting life. But it is spiritual life. It sounds like a way for

Calvinists to adopt an essentially Arminian position, yet without going so far as to say that everlasting life can be lost. What can be lost is the “temporary provision of life.” Once one gets the “permanent provision of life,” then he is secure. But when does one get that?

Compton says that permanent life is given when we believe in Christ. Other Calvinists say that we only get

final salvation after we have persevered to the end of life in the race set before us.

I found it surprising to see Compton speak in this way since he earlier explains Acts 16:14—God opening Lydia’s heart that she might believe and be born again—as referring to illumination, not regeneration (pp. 292-94). However, when I re-read that section, I noticed that the final sentence does speak of some sort of spiritual life being given to Lydia when God opened her heart: “In short, illumination is that initial life-giving work of the Spirit that logically precedes and results in conversion” (p. 294).

Evangelicals need to be more careful in the words and phrases they use to discuss the saving message. Clarity is especially needed in soteriology. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He lives in Highland Village, TX, with his wife of 42 years, Sharon. His latest book is *Turn and Live: The Power of Repentance*.

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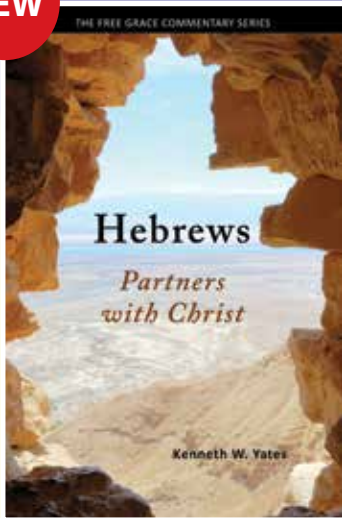
**“Evangelicals need to be more careful in the words and phrases they use to discuss the saving message. Clarity is especially needed in soteriology.”**

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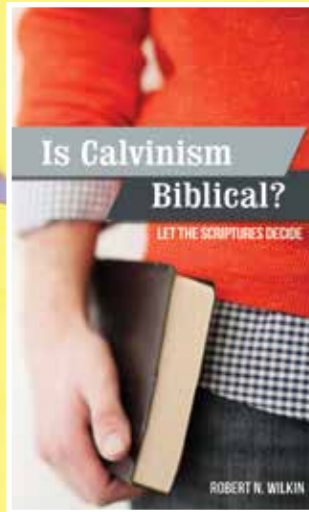
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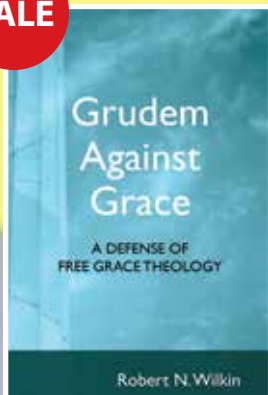
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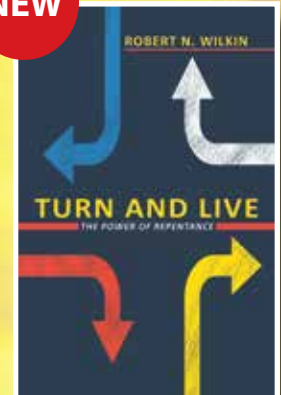
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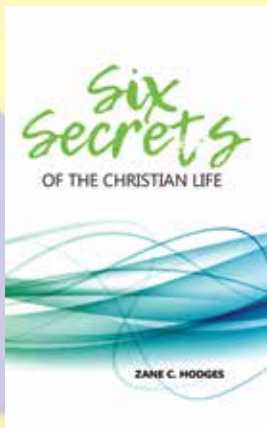
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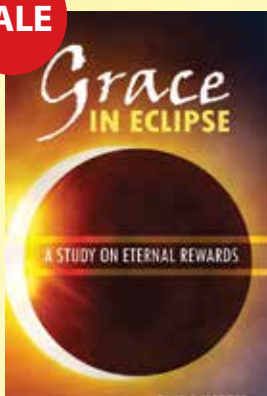
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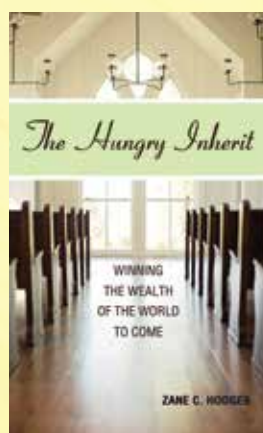


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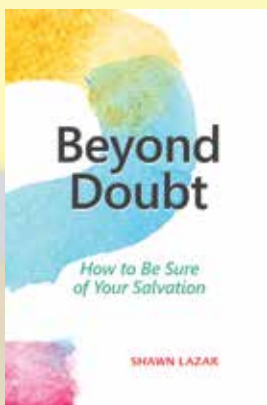


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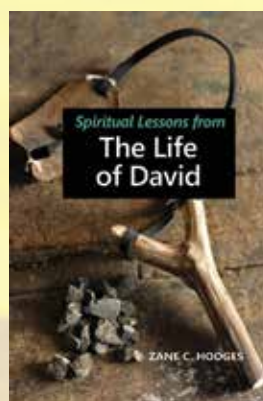


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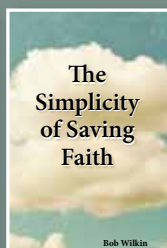
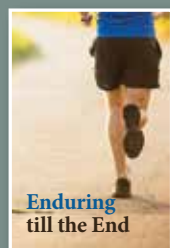


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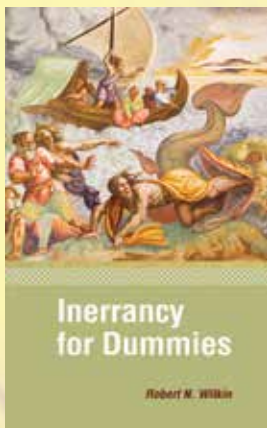


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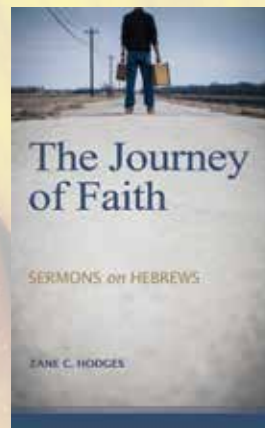


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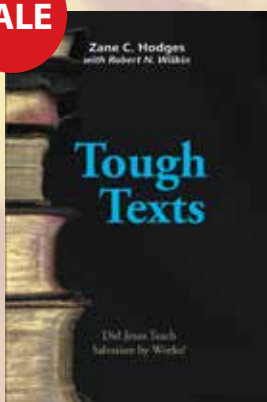
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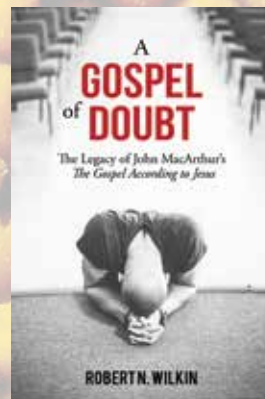


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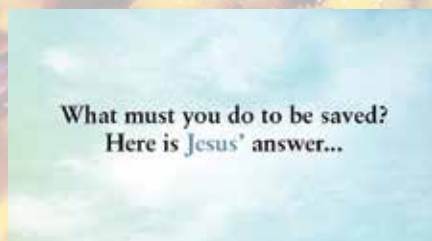


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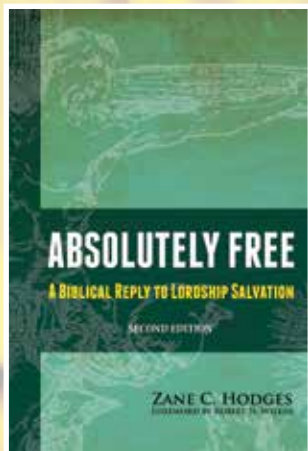
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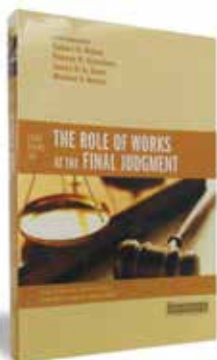
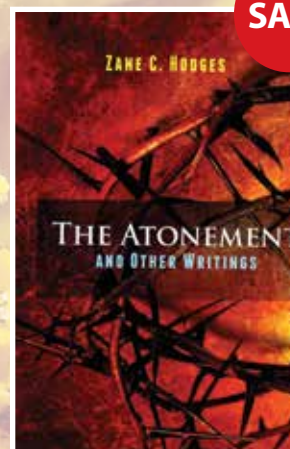
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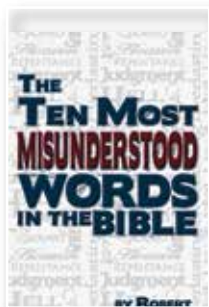
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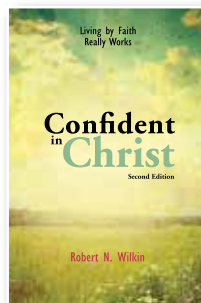
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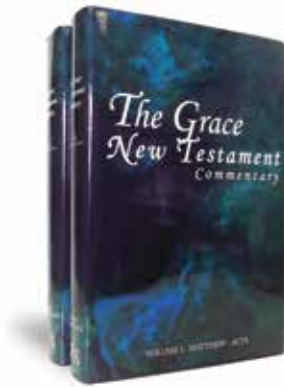
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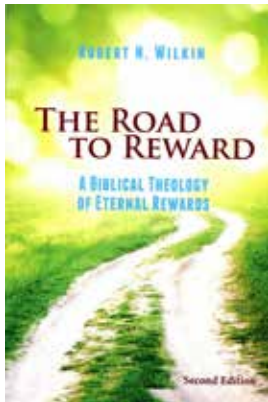
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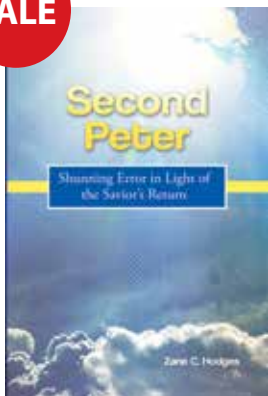
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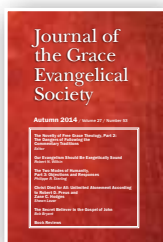
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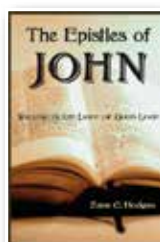
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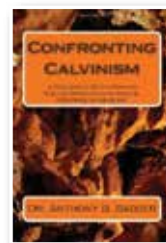


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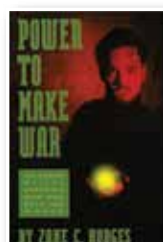


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# Spiritual Sight

By Nate Stevens

LIGHTSTOCK

## BEWARE OF SHORTCUTS

**T**he History channel played a documentary on the Donner Party, and it made quite an impression on me. I've sworn off all shortcuts.

The underlying cause of the tragedy that befell the Donner Party was a man named Lansford W. Hastings. For reasons that are somewhat unknown, but included fame and fortune, Hastings tried to convince the pioneers to take a shortcut off the Oregon Trail. The Donner family, the Reed family and about 60 others believed Hastings's account of a shortcut.

The "shortcut" led the party through hostile Native American territory. Many of the animals—oxen and mules—were either killed or stolen. The path led through barren waterless desert, places that taxed both the remaining animals and people. More than that it put them way behind schedule. At various points along their trek before the snow fell, the party had to make

difficult decisions about whether to continue to follow what had become an awful and disastrous route or turn around.

Their story has become part of western lore. Murder, starvation, cannibalism, and death were the ultimate result of the decision to follow Hastings's shortcut.

Ultimately, Hastings and the Donner Party lacked sight. Hastings was blinded by worldly desires. The Donner Party was blinded by the idea of finishing the arduous journey sooner.

The infamous Donner tragedy was the result of a lack of earthly sight. There were wise men and women who decided the Hastings Cut was not a good idea and continued on the Oregon Trail, arriving months before the last of the Donner Party was rescued (or dead).

## BLINDED TO GOD

Spiritual blindness is what put Jesus on the cross. People failed to see the good, loving, true,

and beautiful reality of God among them—His healing, feeding, and protecting. In their blindness, they put Him on a cross. To take it one step further, those who were spiritual experts, who knew the Bible, were so blind, that it was at their instigation that He was crucified. It is a terrifying thing to think of the damage and tragedy we walk in when we persist in our blindness.

Seeing clearly is so very important, spiritually and physically. There is no line between spiritual sight and earthly sight. It is not as though you have to choose one or the other. Spiritual sight sees all the physical reality, but as God sees it, from His perspective—it's the reason why only those who are in a good relationship with God have spiritual sight. Earthly sight only sees the physical; spiritual sight sees the physical and spiritual, and all from God's perspective.

Paul speaks of spiritual sight in the context of faith. "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." Paul uses the word "walk" for "live" (2 Cor 5:6-7). His point is that he chooses to view the world as God sees it, not as it appears to physical sight. Seeing things clearly means that we see the pain and groaning of this life honestly and hunger for heaven as a result. Seeing clearly means that you live courageously, knowing heaven is waiting to catch us when our last breath comes.

## SEEING WITH FAITH

But seeing things this way requires faith—seeing beyond what appears to mere physical sight.

What generates faith is truth.

Hastings got the Donner Party to follow his shortcut by lying to them. He told them it was shorter, that it was easier, that it was wagon ready. The reality was far from each of these


statements. In the final act of deceit, one that most probably saved his own life and doomed half the party, he refused to join the party and lead them on his "trail."

This is why the Bible is so significant for believers; it tells us how the world really is. It tells us who God really is; it tells us who we really are.

The world tells us that God hates us, irreconcilably. It tells us that life is found in the pursuit of worldly things, only. It tells us that we are unlovable and that God is unjust and undependable. These truths are shouted at us day after day, the stuff of our movies and songs, the stuff of our culture and society, everything is screaming to us in strident tones trying to get us to stand firm in our belief in a false reality.

Spiritual sight affirms that God loves His children deeply, that He created each one with purpose and delight, that He never leaves them, that their sins

have been totally forgiven.

Live in light of these truths, believe them, and see. 

---

**"Seeing things  
clearly means that  
we see the pain and  
groaning of this life  
honestly and hunger  
for heaven as a  
result."**

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*Nate Stevens is the campus pastor at the Bible Chapel Rostraver. Nate was born and raised in Boyertown, PA before graduating in 2010 with a Master of Theology (ThM) degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He is married to Summer.*



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LIGHTSTOCK



# Hurt by Those Who are Close

By Bud Brown

**W**e've all been mistreated by acquaintances, business people, and strangers. It is often inadvertent—an automobile accident or a good faith business venture gone wrong. Sometimes the wound is intentional—a merchant defrauds us, or a stranger commits a crime against us.

Though they have hurt us, these people are still “out there.” It is those who are close, to whom we have entrusted our hearts, who devastate us by betrayal. It's hard to imagine any pain worse than having a child killed by a drunk driver. But ask the grieving mother whose daughter has renounced Jesus and has descended into moral chaos or ask the desperate father whose son's rebellion threatens to destroy the family. They may say it would be better had the child died.

One father whose life has been ruined by betrayal expressed his anguish in Psalm 3:

*A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.*

*Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!*

*Many are they who rise up against me.*

*Many are they who say of me, “There is no help for him in God.” Selah.*

*But You, O Lord, are a shield for me,  
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.*

*I cried to the Lord with my voice,  
And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah  
I lay down and slept;*

*I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.*

*I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people*

*Who have set themselves against me all around.*

*Arise, O Lord;*

*Save me, O my God!*

*For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone;*

*You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.*

*Salvation belongs to the Lord.*

*Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah.*

David's naked emotional display of righteous anger confronts us with a miserable truth.

## THOSE WHO ARE CLOSE CAN HURT US THE MOST

The superscription reminds us of a sordid tale of lust, murder, and intrigue.

David's son Amnon raped his sister, Tamar.

Absalom, another son, murdered Amnon in revenge.

David would not forgive Absalom, and that destroyed the father-son relationship.

Absalom nursed his bitterness and years later he mounted a palace coup to seize power and kill David.

How dreadful to realize that loved ones may become bitter enemies who turn others against us.

News of Absalom's rebellion was followed by more bad news. No sooner had he learned of Absalom's treason than “a messenger came to David, saying, ‘The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom’” (2 Sam 15:13). Thus,

David cried, “How many are my foes! Many are rising against me.” What was that like for David? His own son became a bitter enemy and turned others against him.

## GO TO GOD WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN BETRAYED

David’s response shows us how to respond when this happens to us: go to God when you have been betrayed. When he sought the Lord, David found comfort when he remembered God’s past faithfulness and the promise of answered prayer.

David called the Lord “my shield” (v 3). Surely, he remembered God delivering from enemies like Goliath, the many enemies he battled in hand-to-hand combat, and even from the hand of Saul. David was comforted by remembering God. “He protected me before. He can do it again!”

He referred to God as “my glory.” He must have recalled how the Lord had exalted a humble shepherd, the youngest son of a poor family, to become the anointed king. God promised his kingdom would last forever. David was comforted with the certainty that “what God has given no man can take.”

His spirits were lifted by the “One who lifts my head.” Can you see David lift his chin toward heaven, stand up straight, and step out in confidence? Painful betrayal was put in proper perspective. David could rightly shout, “I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me” (v 4). David’s prayer was bold. It was audacious. It throbbed with joy because he had gone to God in pain and left in confidence.

This explains v 5’s remarkable shift in fortune. After fleeing for his life, David enjoys a good night’s sleep because the Lord “sustained” him. David’s troubles didn’t evaporate; God provided support that kept despair from overwhelming him. David rose to face the day, certain of his deliverance “I will not be afraid” (v 6), and certain that God would silence his foes (v 7).

Therefore, he could shout “salvation belongs to the Lord” (v 8)!

Because David went to God with his anguish and spoke honestly about his suffering, he found comfort in remembering God’s faithfulness and promises, and gained confidence to face the challenge before him.

Betrayal by someone close is a common Biblical theme: Cain betrayed Abel, the brothers betrayed Joseph, Delilah betrayed Samson, and Judas betrayed Jesus. We’ve all experienced betrayal by someone close to us. It happens because we are all stricken with sin.

The danger of betrayal is inherent in the nature of love. When we love others, we lower our defenses. We allow them in past emotional barriers designed to protect our frail hearts. We trust them with our most vulnerable selves. When you are betrayed, you face a difficult and painful choice: either deal with the pain of


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**“The danger of betrayal is inherent in the nature of love. When we love others, we lower our defenses.”**

---

betrayal and learn to trust once again or condemn yourself to a life of loneliness and hopeless anguish.

What will you do when it happens to you? Will you nurse your anger? Will you stoke your appetite for revenge? Will you surrender your soul to bitter anger against the one who betrayed you—remaining their victim forever?

Psalms 3 is a note of hope for those who have been betrayed by family or friends. *God gives comfort and courage to face the pain of betrayal when we turn to Him in prayer.* 



*Bud Brown is President and Co-Founder at Turnaround Pastors.*



## 24th Annual GES Conference May 20-23

**W**e were back for our second year at The Hope Center in Plano, TX. Again, we loved the facility and the staff there.

The attendance was up slightly. We ended up with 204 registered, but somewhat less than that in attendance since some who registered could not make it.



The theme was The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. We covered the entire book, verse by verse, in four days.

The banquet was at the Lutheran Church near the conference center. The BBQ and the fellowship were a big hit.

Here are some of the comments from the conferees: “Excellent—really enjoyed and looking forward to next year.” “High quality teaching

from the Word.”


“Very encouraging, sweet fellowship.”

“Great, thorough teaching.” “This

year’s conference was wind in my sails.” “It was our first year; we can’t wait to return.” “Loved it! Will be back!” “Awesome.” “Very refreshing being around relaxed Christians and enjoyed intelligent conversations.” “Well worth the expense, time, and risk of death on Interstate 35.” “I want to bring many with me next year.”

The audio and video from the conference should be available in about a month. Our thanks to Don Reiher for all his hard work in filming, once again.

Next year we will meet at the Hope Center again. Dates: May 18-21. The theme next year will be Great Doctrines of the Bible.

Be sure to register. It is free for first-timers. And if you can’t afford it, we’ll give you a scholarship. 





# Celebrity Pastors and Their Staff May Not Know

By Lucas Kitchen

From *Eternal Life! Believe to Be Alive* (forthcoming)



## CELEBRITY PASTORS MAY NOT KNOW

A few years ago, I attended a massive four-day conference at one of the largest churches in the nation. Its focus was to encourage and train church staff. Pastors and ministers from thousands of churches throughout the country come to this conference and soak up all there is to learn. The pastor of the hosting church is one of those celebrity-level preachers. If I told you his name, you'd likely know about him. In fact, you have probably heard him teach on the radio, TV, or internet. He's an incredibly talented speaker. He is not only the pastor of the church that hosted the conference, but he's the main speaker for the conference itself.

Night three of the conference was impressive as always. The worship band was flawless. The lights were mesmerizing. The service was intense. The pastor began his talk with a round of funny illustrations. As he settled into the meat of his presentation, I became transfixed by his powerful rhetorical style. Though, about three-quarters of the way through the talk, he made a reference that clung to my mind for the rest of the night.

## LOVE YOUR BROTHER

He read a few verses from 1 John. The way he explained the passage gave me an uncomfortable feeling. The impression I got was that he believed a person might not be saved if he doesn't *love his brother*. He didn't explicitly say that, but it was a possible implication. He left it vague enough that no one seemed to be bothered, except me.

As the service came to an end and the enormous crowd began filing out, I was swept up in

the flow. Though I couldn't shake the internal tension I was feeling. Was the pastor saying a person might not be saved if they don't love, or wasn't he? I had settled the theological matter for myself years earlier, and as much as anything I wanted to know what this famous pastor thought.

I stood along the curb at the front of the sanctuary when I remembered a man that could help. I had met a staff member named Todd before the service had begun. We had conversed for a few seconds as the lights dimmed. I knew there was no hope of getting a meeting with the celebrity pastor to discuss this issue. As far as I knew he didn't field questions from random attendees after his sermons. However, I thought I might be able to catch Todd for a quick talk. I turned and headed back into the building trying to spot my earlier acquaintance. I returned to the sanctuary and was surprised.

Standing in front of the stage was the pastor, the head cheese, the big kahuna. I totally forgot about Todd and set my sights on the main man. He had a crowd of people around getting selfies and chatting him up. I sped down to the front and began squeezing my way through the crowd of feverish fans. I waited my turn as the pastor's bodyguard eyed me. He sized me up, apparently determining that I was no threat.

A middle-aged couple snapped a selfie with #bestpreacher, and then my time came. My heart was beating fast because I knew I had only a few seconds to get my question answered. I didn't want to bumble or maim my intent. I turned the question over in my mind a dozen times in the

seconds before I shook his hand and thanked him for his talk. Then I plied my inquiry.

“Based on your sermon, I’m wondering: Can a person have eternal life even if they don’t do a good job of loving one another?”

I’m guessing he wasn’t excited about receiving a semi-barbed theological question from a stranger as dozens of selfie seekers watched expectantly. I did not mean the question as a trap. I merely wanted to know what the most successful pastor in America thought on the subject.

He replied with a surprisingly honest answer. He said, “I don’t know.”

I was stunned. Here was the pastor of the largest church in the nation (at the time), trained at one of the most respected Evangelicals seminaries, speaking to forty thousand congregants a week, and thousands more online, and he can say, “I don’t know.”

I found his honesty refreshing, but at the same time, the admission was disturbing.

He went on by saying, “I believe in eternal security, but 1 John is brutal to those who don’t love their brothers. So, I don’t know the answer to that.”

The conversation lasted for another 18 seconds as I thanked him and stepped out of the way for the next person to grab a selfie. His bodyguard finally removed his burning stare from the side of my smoking head. I stepped away trying to take in what I had just experienced. I had received an answer which made sense of the sermon. The pastor had been intentionally vague on the subject because he wasn’t sure whether a person who habitually misbehaves could actually be saved. He was admitting some confusion on this incredibly vital subject. I went back to the hotel that night trying to digest what this meant.

## THE STAFF IS CONFUSED

The conference’s work-force was made up of the 600 staff members of the host church. They

worked for the church where this famous pastor regularly spoke. One of the things that I had noticed was how consistent the conference staff used specific terminology. Clearly, they had been trained to use the same words when talking about the operation of the church. For instance, words like *irresistible*, *inviting*, *environments*, and a few dozen other terms were used continuously in every session. There was meticulous attention to detail in how the staff talked about their church. Even their celebrity pastor used the same terminology. They had a consistent way of explaining things.

As I considered this back in my hotel room, I decided to run a little experiment the following day.

The staff was consistent in the terminology they used to describe the church, but would they be as consistent when they discussed the gospel. As the morning approached, I developed a method for testing this research question.

The last day of the conference, rather than go to sessions and listen to talks,

I wandered around and surveyed the church staff. I wanted to poll a wide range of people in various positions. All of the staff had conference themed shirts, so it was not difficult to stop and harass—oops I mean survey—they in the corridors. I wanted to keep the survey simple, so I devised a single question. Obviously, each conversation went beyond the single question because I’m not a robot, but I was particularly focused on the answer to this basic question.

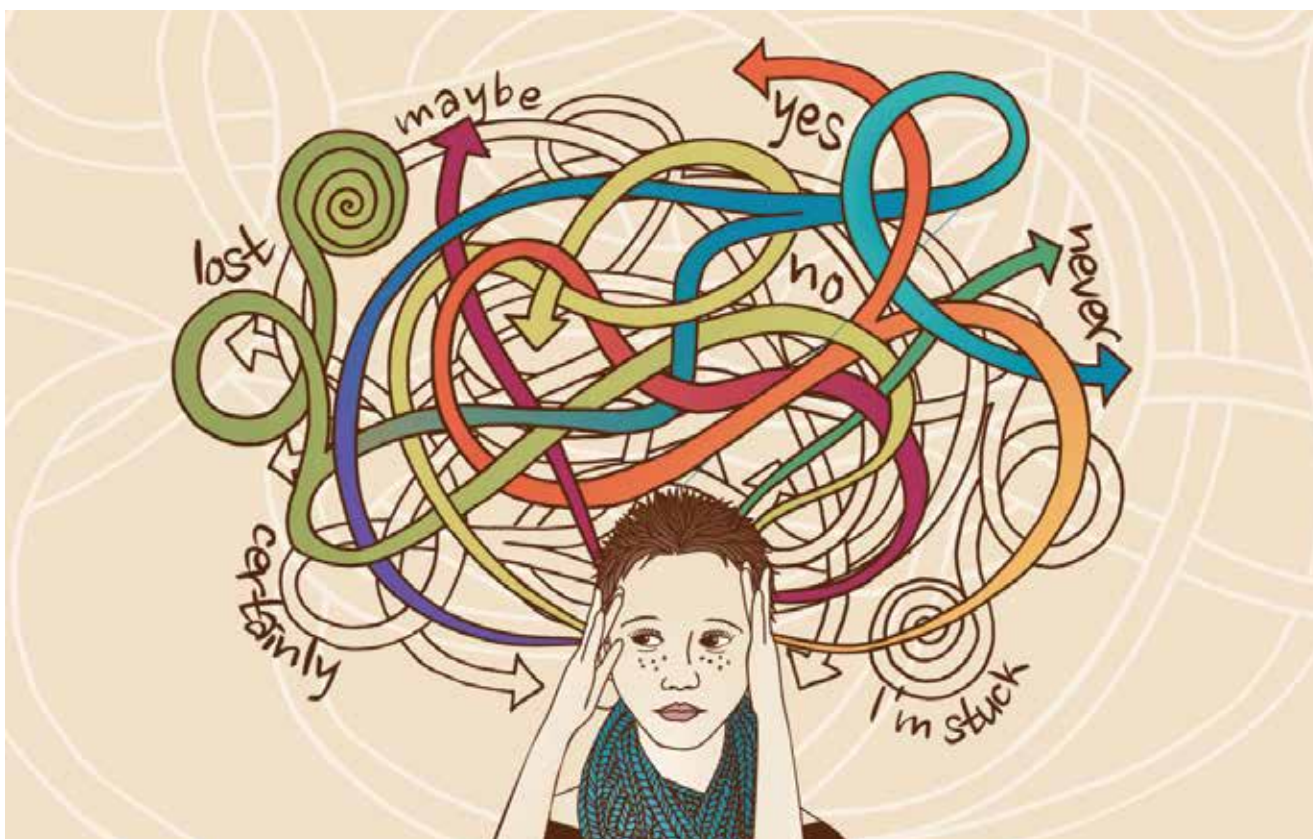
*What does someone have to do to receive eternal life?*

I felt like recording the conversations would be awkward, so I chatted and took notes afterwards. It’s for that reason that I have very few direct quotes in the following paragraphs. I’ve changed the names in the notes so that no one is being

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**“The pastor had been intentionally vague on the subject because he wasn’t sure whether a person who habitually misbehaves could actually be saved. He was admitting some confusion on this incredibly vital subject.”**

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defamed. This was what I learned from surveying the staff of the largest church in the nation.

## DIFFERENT ANSWERS

My first conversation was with a young lady named Amy. She was stationed at the main entrance to the conference sanctuary. We talked as people filed into the building. She had been a staff intern with the church for around a year. I asked her, “How does someone get eternal life?” She said that a personal relationship with Jesus was required to be saved. She defined that relationship by “becoming broken.” She said, “It happened when I realized I couldn’t do it on my own.” She then talked about the churches’ array of small group options and Christian friendships that can happen there. It seemed that she saw a connection between Christian friends, small groups, and salvation, though, she did not explain that connection.

My next survey conversation happened with Sarah, a member of the children’s ministry staff. On asking how to receive eternal life she had a ready answer. Without hesitation, she quoted

John 3:16. She specifically said, “Once they believe they are eternally saved.” I followed up by asking what it means to believe. Sarah defined it with the chair analogy. “Belief is not sitting halfway,” she said. Commitment and trust were used as synonyms for belief. As she explained and expanded upon her perspective, she used discipleship terminology. The way in which she described the requirements of salvation was very different from Amy. Maybe this was a fluke, so I continued.

Beverly was a copy editor, whom I talked with in the main hallway of the church. When asked how someone receives eternal life she said: “Most staff aren’t equipped to answer that question.” She went on to explain that most of the staff would direct a seeker (someone asking those kinds of questions) to a class for new believers that the church hosted. In this new believers class, they get in small groups and discuss issues, though I would later find out that the new believer’s class curriculum left the requirements for receiving salvation very vague. It was more of an onboarding program for church membership.



Beverly basically dodged the question, and it was clear she didn't want to attempt an answer on behalf of the organization.

"In your ministry how do you answer the question, 'how do I get eternal life?'" I said to Sam, the high school pastor a few minutes later. He didn't seem all that interested in having the conversation, but he humored me. He said, "Nobody ever asks that question, 'how do I get eternal life.'" He then explained that the student ministry shares the gospel about seven times a year from the stage, although he didn't specify what he meant by *share the gospel*. Seeing that he'd dodged the question I probed further for what he felt was the answer.

He talked about sin and separation from God. He explained the requirement as "having a relationship with Christ." He said it's rare, but he sometimes will ask an individual if they want to "place their faith in Christ." He then said, "but we don't go rogue and do things that are weird or make people feel uncomfortable" (in reference to sharing the gospel). "The priority," he explained, "is to make consistent environments that students can invite their friends to without having to worry that we are going to make their friends feel weird." Clearly, he was connecting sharing the gospel with making students feel awkward.

James, a member of the staff, said, "I've never been told, 'this is how you share the gospel.'" He confirmed that there is no training for sharing the gospel for staff or volunteers.

Jenny, another staff member, said that their new believer's class (the seeker ministry mentioned by Beverly) doesn't expressly focus on the plan of salvation. No attendee asks (in her memory) that question, "what does it take to be saved/have everlasting life?" She then asked me what I thought it takes to be saved. At this point, I explained what I believe to be the requirements for salvation. Then for the rest of the conversation, she used the terminology I had used. She was not the only one this occurred with.


I caught up with a man named Brian in the foyer of the church. He was over adult ministries and a graduate of a well respected Evangelical seminary. Brian gave a definitive answer when he said, "Eternal life comes by an intimate

relationship with Jesus." He didn't mention belief or faith in his answer. He then admitted something startling. He said, "You won't find consistency among our staff on salvation terminology." He said. "You will get different answers based on who you ask." He explained that there's no training for staff on gospel presentation, evangelism, or even terminology consistency.

Soak that up for a second.

The largest church in the nation (at the time) was an Evangelical church *which didn't train its staff in how to evangelize*. They were regularly trained in all kinds of areas, but this vital topic was left untouched.

My general impression was summed up well by Brian. I asked seven staff members how to have eternal life. I received seven different answers. This church, which at the time was the largest in the nation, was and still is a bastion of evangelicalism. They not only have tens of thousands of congregants weekly, but they also draw in thousands of other churches to come and learn their model. Many people are attracted by the way they structure their system. I admire the work they have done, with this one exception, and it's a big one. A random sampling of their staff could not consistently articulate the basic requirement of the gospel.

My impression was gospel clarity is a low priority in this massive church. It made me wonder if this was a phenomenon, or if this was consistent among a more extensive sampling of Evangelical churches. As we drove home after the conference I considered how I might test a larger sampling of Christians. Surveying a hundred would be great. Surveying a thousand would be even better. So I began to devise a plan. 



Lucas Kitchen (MTS, Liberty) is the author of 16 books, and a pastor at Shreveport Bible Church. He lives in Longview, TX with his wife, two kids, and his arrogant cat. Find out more about Lucas's plan in *Eternal Life! Believe to Be Alive* (forthcoming).



# The Mailbag

By You

**W**e love hearing from grace believers across the country.


“Blessings on your plans and all the details with the upcoming conference. Due to a change in my schedule, I’ll be able to attend a few sessions but not all. Grateful for all you do in spreading the grace message!” ~KP, Fort Worth, TX.

“Thank you for this excellent magazine! A true treasure and inspiration.” ~DS, Conroe, TX

“Praising the Lord for your consistent faithful accuracy of God’s Word.” ~DK, Rock Valley, GA.

“God bless you in Jesus’ name! All y’all on YouTube are great. I love listening to ‘ole Zane Hodges. Keeping helping people. Thanks!” ~CC, Dekalb, MS.



“I really want to thank the Lord for you all! You don’t realize this, but you have been a tremendous blessing to me. If you only knew how the Lord has used you to help me. I defend you all. I don’t care what anybody says. The Lord has really used you. And I will continue to support you because I believe in this ministry.” ~CS, email.” 

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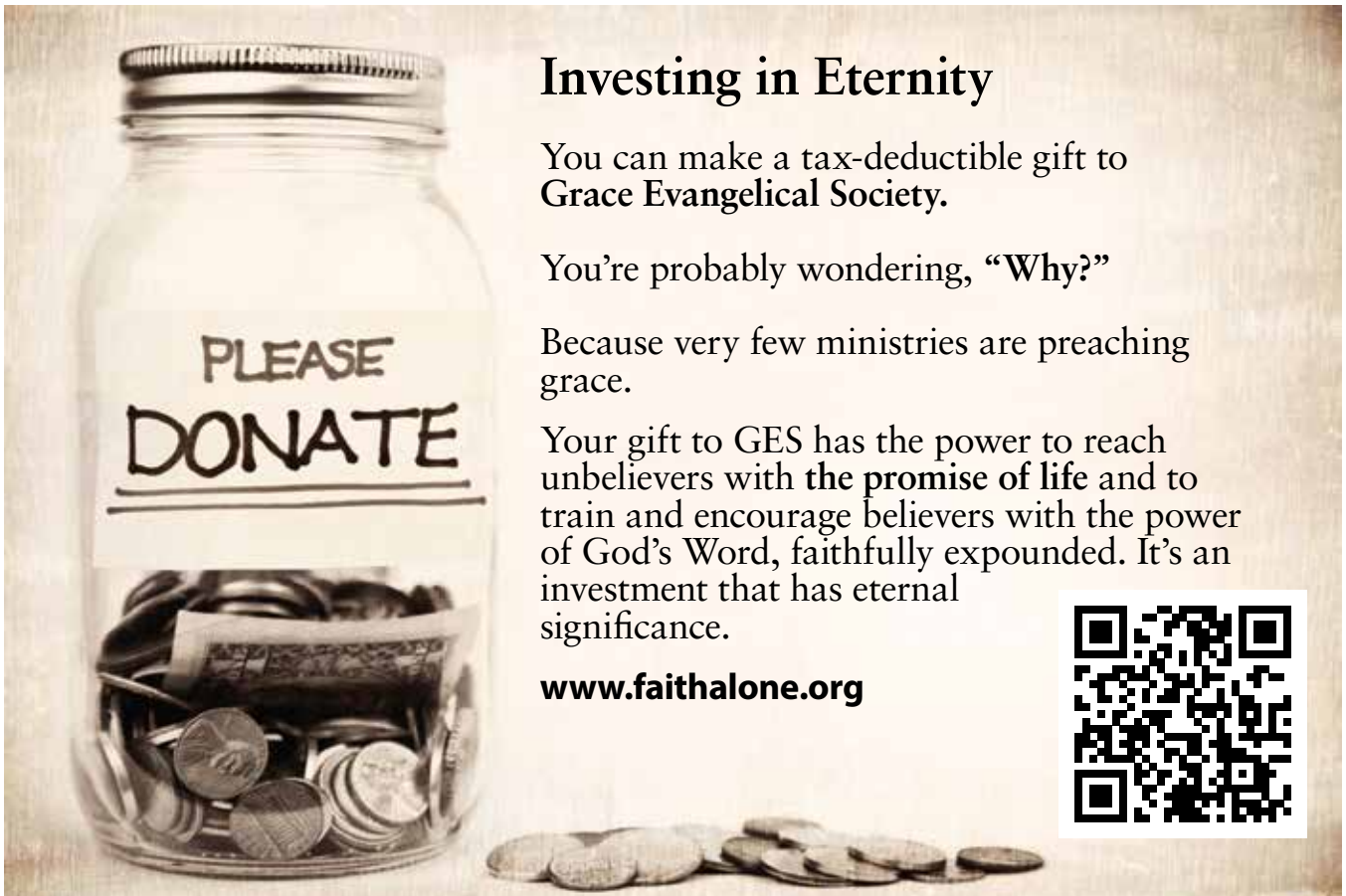
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# Three Ways to Comfort a Suffering Friend

(Job 2:11-13)

By Shawn Lazar

I was reading an article by a woman who lost her brother, sister, and her sister's children in a car crash.

Horrific.

She was in shock.

For days, she walked around as if in a fog, unable to think clearly.

Of course, friends offered to help. Several said, "Let me know if there's anything I can do to help."

The woman explains that while she found that well-meaning, it was unhelpful. She explained that the bereaved don't want to impose on other people. Or they can't think clearly enough to ask for help. Or they don't have the energy or desire to pick up the phone and call anyone. Moreover, saying, "Let me know if I can do anything" puts a burden on the sufferer to organize their own help, on top of dealing with everything else.

So how can you really help a friend who is suffering? This passage from Job is suggestive:



*Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him. And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great (Job 2:11-13).*

Here are three simple bits of help for loving your suffering friend:

*First, take the initiative.* Job's friends went to him without being asked. Likewise, don't wait to be asked for help.

Do it.

In the article, the woman tells the story of one neighbor who came by the house and asked for the family's shoes. When she asked why he said, "I remember when my father died, it took me hours to get the children's shoes cleaned and shined for the funeral. So that's what I've come





to do for you. Give me your shoes—not just your good shoes, but all your shoes.”


So the neighbor shined the family’s shoes. He saw a need and did something about it.

Likewise, if you have a suffering friend, take the initiative and do one simple, practical thing, for them. That might be taking their dogs to the kennel, cleaning their house, making meals, or picking people up from the airport. Think of something practical.

*Second, track with the person.* I once asked a pastor friend what he did when a congregant was going through a tragedy. “I track with them,” he said. What does that mean? “If they’re mourning, then I’m mourning. If they’re celebrating, then so am I. If they’re angry, then I am too. If they’re praying for a miracle, then I’m adding my amens.” Job’s friends mourned with him. He was sitting in the dirt. They covered their heads in dust. They saw him sitting silently. They silently sat with him. Paul said, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). Whatever stage of grief your friend is in, empathize with him or her. Track with your friend. (Later in Job, his friends became

oppositional. They stopped tracking with Job. Consequently, they became “miserable comforters,” Job 16:2).

*Third, exercise a ministry of presence.* Job’s friends left their homes to be with him in person. Simply having someone else nearby can be a comfort. It wordlessly says, “You matter to me.” And don’t feel you need to fill the silence with words. Job’s friends sat in silence. But being there was enough during that time (all the trouble came when they started to speak!).

There’s no easy fix for suffering. And you shouldn’t try to “fix” a sufferer at all. But you *can* be a help in a time of crisis. Simply put: *love sees a need and does something about it.* 



*Shawn Lazar lives in Denton, TX with his wife Abby and their three children.*

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