

GOD'S REVIVALIST

January/February 2018

and Bible Advocate

An underwater scene with a sunburst breaking through the surface, creating rays of light that illuminate the water. Two whales are visible: one in the upper left and another in the lower right. The overall color palette is a mix of deep blues and golden yellows from the sunlight.

HOLINESS

the call to go
deeper



about this issue

THE DEEPER LIFE

Growth is natural—a beautiful thing to behold! All parents are amazed to watch their children develop from totally dependent newborns to toddlers, teens, and young adults. The early stages of growth are so fleeting that we often overlook their importance.

There are “critical moments” which support healthy bonding between parent and child. Such moments can be maximized if the parents intentionally comfort, caress, and protect their child, thus assuring their emotional attunement and sense of security. The result? Children develop healthy relationships and are able to make the adjustments necessary to move into adulthood.

On closer examination, while growth is natural, it is also “supernatural.” No one can listen to a baby coo and later say its first words without acknowledging God’s wonderful gifts. No one can watch a toddler struggle to stand and then take those memorable first steps without thanking God for how He so marvelously made us.

Yes, some of these things appear to be natural, and, on one level, they are. Take, for instance, learning your first language. One begins with babbling, but then progresses to all the complexities of different sounds, tones, and those tricky rules of grammar. Amazingly, it is something that children are hard-wired to handle effectively in the first three years of life. Infants have vocal plasticity—the ability to produce any possible sound. Even rough guttural sounds and diphthongs are readily assimilated and employed with facility by the child. However, only the relatively few sounds that make up the language of their native environment capture their attention and are mimicked. One’s environment determines the language “naturally learned.”

All of this is just to get to my point—the local church is the environment in which the newborn Christian develops along a unique path to spiritual maturation. Newborn Christians need to be in a safe environment. They need to be exposed to the sounds of praise and testimonies of God’s blessings. They need to know they are part of a family of believers that love and support each other. They need to be given the space to develop at the right pace. Are you doing your part to make your local church a place that nurtures spiritual growth?

Enjoy this special issue on the deeper life!—KF ■

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God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate (ISSN 0745-0788) is published monthly except for combined issues in January-February and June-July-August for **\$12.00 per year (\$28.00, Canada; \$60.00, other countries)** by the Revivalist Press of God’s Bible School, College and Missionary Training Home, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202. Periodical postage paid at Cincinnati, Ohio, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER: send address changes to God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.**

God’s Revivalist and Bible Advocate, the official organ of God’s Bible School, is a magazine founded by Martin Wells Knapp in July of 1888. We seek to proclaim the good news of salvation; to stir a revival spirit among Christians; to stimulate Christian growth and responsible Christian living; to present the happenings and interests of God’s Bible School.

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the president's page



SINKHOLES OF THE SOUL

by Rodney Loper, President

According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, sinkholes are common. The state sits on top of bedrock made of limestone which can be eroded by groundwater, thus producing voids that may collapse when they can no longer support the weight above them.

In 2013, a Florida man fell into a sinkhole that opened suddenly beneath the bedroom of his Tampa home. He called out to his brother for help as he fell. His brother said, "I ran toward my brother's bedroom because I heard my brother scream. Everything was gone. My brother's bed, my brother's dresser, my brother's TV. My brother was gone."

He frantically tried to rescue his brother by standing in the hole and digging at the rubble with a shovel until police arrived and pulled him out, saying the floor was still collapsing. "I did everything I could," he said through tears.

It is scary to think about the ground giving way beneath one's feet—voids collapsing when they can no longer support the weight of what's above them.

I believe that this very thing can also happen to us figuratively. A look around at our world reveals such sinkholes everywhere. The collapse may be triggered by many things: being let go at work, a relationship break, criticism, a health crisis, or other difficult circumstances. It might even result when the stress of "normal" issues of life accumulate and overwhelm. Regardless of the trigger, our world can begin to crumble under our feet.

We have all witnessed these kinds of things in the lives of our family, friends, and even ourselves, and we have asked, "How does that happen?" Perhaps it is because we have grown comfortable in managing life in a segregated fashion. We have an inner life and an external life. Our external life consists of our career, possessions, social connections—the stuff that

everyone sees. However, the inner life is spiritual in nature—not as tangible or easily seen. This is where values are born and held. Humility and integrity flow from this inner life.

Because our external life is visible, and even measurable, it is easier for us to be preoccupied with it. Because this is what people see, this is what we tend to focus on. The result is that our inner, spiritual world is neglected at the expense of the outer.

It is frightening that the inner world sometimes can be ignored for long stretches because it is not visible on the outside. In fact, I believe there are people who can go through all of life managing to cover up their inner sinkholes.

WHAT ARE SOME INDICATORS OF SINKHOLES WITHIN US?

First, we have trouble making good decisions. When there is an inner void, we can never be sure what temptations are worth resisting. Should I view porn? Can I gamble on a business trip? Should I lie to protect my own interest? When our inner-world is where it should be spiritually, the answers are simple, and these questions can be easily dismissed as an attempt by Satan to ensnare. However, when we don't have an inner core that governs and guides, these questions become a real struggle. Often the initial temptations are followed by a second round of questions. Who will know? Who might see? Can an effective plan to disguise my actions be formulated? The focus is on making things look good for the moment.

Second, we are vulnerable to the influence of people and circumstances. We care more about what people think than what God thinks. We are so focused on the outside that we have grown to believe that the inside is of secondary importance. Although we would never say this, it is expressed in the way that we conduct our lives. Sleep overrides the need for morning devotions. Going out with friends overrides our prayer time. Surfing Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat replaces our quiet time with God. The inner life isn't a priority. But somehow we have time to fix our hair just so-so. We have time to iron our clothes, play Xbox. We have the time to do everything that will make the external life look good while our inner-world crumbles.

Third, we lack patience. In the book of Numbers, the children of Israel were tired of the long journey and

grew impatient with God's direction for their life. Why? Because they were not where they needed to be spiritually—inwardly (Num. 21:4). Sampson, when he had "done his own thing" for so long, found himself entangled with Delilah. It was then that he discovered that neglecting his inner world made him vulnerable to the craft of a woman whose design was to destroy him (Judges 16:16).

Last, we find our identity in externals. There is nothing on the inside to which we can point. There is nothing on the inside to "brag about." So we begin to define ourselves by our accomplishments, physical appearance, title, or friends. Perhaps even our conservative holiness values become our badge of worth. In a world where we place emphasis on externals, this can become deadly.

Does God require obedience to His Word? Yes. Will this obedience impact every aspect of our lives—even the external? Yes. But what is seen on the outside must flow naturally from the inside.

SINKHOLE ALERT!

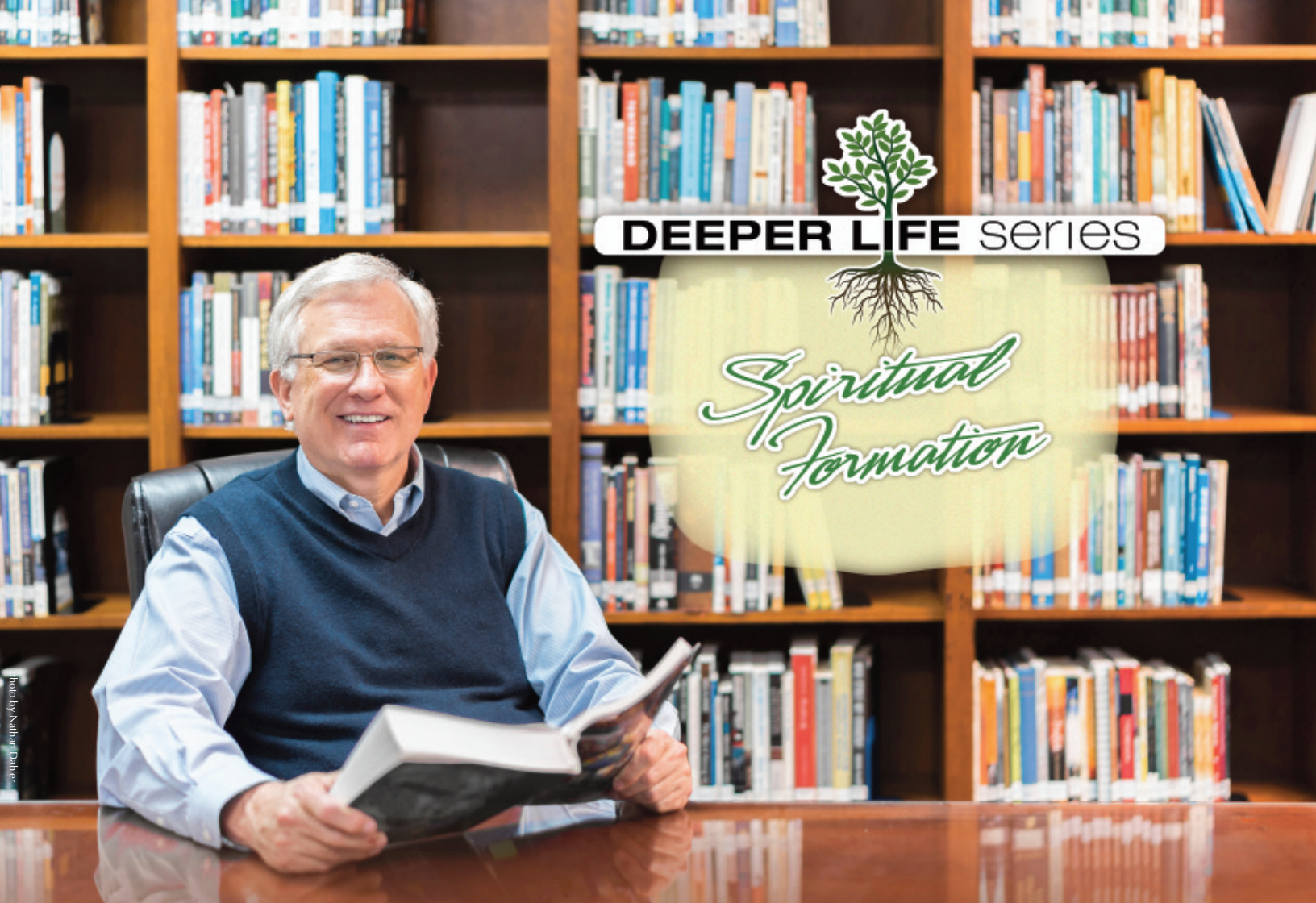
Friends, if you are reading this article and your inner world is in shambles, take heed. A dangerous collapse may be just ahead. If you haven't found rest for your soul, then you are treading water in a danger zone! It is unlikely that you will have the stamina to withstand the attacks of the enemy. You will become weary in well doing because your focus is on the external without a solid inner core upon which to build your external world.

If you find yourself in such a place, I want to point you to Jesus. The God of the universe extends the invitation: "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest!" "Christ's rest is not a rest *from* work, but *in* work, 'not the rest of inactivity but of the harmonious working of all the faculties and affections—of will, heart, imagination, and conscience.'"^{*} In Christ we have satisfaction; we have an inner life; we have rest.

I pray that "God will grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). ■

* J. Patrick in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, James Hastings, Hendrickson Publishers, 1963. Quoted in Margaret A. Blincoe: *Message in a Word: Inspired Succinct Sermons Uniquely Expressed*. Message in a Word Enterprises, 2010, p.10.

Does God require obedience to His Word? Yes. Will this obedience impact every aspect of our lives—even the external? Yes. But what is seen on the outside must flow naturally from the inside.



DEEPER LIFE series

*Spiritual
Formation*

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. —2 Corinthians 3:18

The Bible assumes it to be self-evident that we can know God intimately. On almost every page of Holy Writ, we meet a God who affects us and is affected by us. The Old Testament reveals Him speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself to His people. He walks with Adam and Eve in the garden, eats with Abraham by his tent, and argues with Moses on the mountain-top. The Gospels give us a front-row seat as the eternal Son wraps the garments of human flesh about Him, steps onto the stage of life, and interacts in loving relationship with those He meets.

The Early Church Fathers, and later the Reformers, taught that Christian spirituality involves a deepening trust and developing friendship with God for all Christians. More specifically, they taught that true spirituality is an ever growing, experientially dynamic relationship with our Trinitarian God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—through the agency of His Word and the indwelling of His Spirit, in order that we may be formed into the character or likeness of Christ (personal holiness).

Moving Towards a Process

John Wesley, more so than any other Reformer, took an explicitly systematic approach to spiritual formation. The class meetings and the careful application of the spiritual disciplines as a means of grace preserved the fruit of the Wesleyan Revival and, for a hundred years afterwards, turned Methodist converts into stalwart saints. This vision for spiritual formation was highly effective because it defined Christianity itself as a way of life and not just a creed or doctrine. Wesley believed that a transformed heart ultimately results in a transformed life (holiness or Christlikeness), so much so that he begins *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* by describing it in terms of a heart shaped or formed by the Spirit.

We Live From the Heart

Dallas Willard, whose spiritual formation emphasis was influenced by Wesley, says correctly that “we live from the

heart” (Prov. 4:23). The Bible says that the “heart” is the metaphorical center of our life, and it is in our hearts that we are called to be made new when we come to God. This “spiritual center” has been defiled by sin, developed by the experiences of life, and formed by the choices that we have made. Out of this formation we see the world, interpret reality, make our choices, and break forth in action. Put simply, all life flows “out of the abundance of the heart.” Based on this reality, Willard says that the greatest need of collective humanity is the “renovation of the heart.” It has been formed by a world away from God. It is defiled and damaged by sin. Hence it must be regenerated and renovated so that out of a transformed heart we can live a transformed life. The process that we go through to make all of this happen is called “spiritual formation.” Dallas Willard defines this process like this:

Spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.¹

Robert Mullholland states it succinctly when he says that spiritual formation is “the process of being conformed to Christ for the sake of others.”² If this formation to the inner life is successful, then the outer life of the Christian becomes a natural expression or outflow of the character and teachings of Jesus. Thus the goal of all true spiritual formation is obedience or conformity to Christ that flows from an inner transformation of the heart. This level of spiritual maturity allows us to exercise an easy, relaxed obedience to all that God asks or requires. It also enables us to do effortlessly what Christ would do when in our situation.

It is important to note that the goal of spiritual formation is not “external” manifestations of Christlikeness. If this becomes the goal, defeat and deadly legalism are certain to follow. We will become judgmental, critical, and performance oriented. The goal of spiritual formation is to renovate our hearts and form the character of our “inner man,” so much so that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are at the center of the deep habit-structures of our lives. This is far more than merely altering our personalities to fit presumed ideas of Christlikeness. Spiritual formation goes beyond mere external personalities and seeks to transform the heart so thoroughly that we are able to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...[and] love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39). This alone prepares us to live effectively and labor in the kingdom of God (Eph. 1:3-4; I Peter 2:9; Rom. 8:29).

Understanding the Big Picture

This kind of spiritual formation is a process that includes both pivotal and incremental change. A lost man

can be saved in the miracle of a moment, but transforming that same man into a mature disciple of Christ takes years of disciplined commitment to time-honored processes. However, the “big picture” of spiritual formation has three significant components:

- First, we must pursue God with the intent of knowing Him personally and correctly. As we know God rightly, we can learn what He expects from our lives.
- Second, we must be willing to see ourselves—to see both the defilement and the damage that sin has wrought in our lives.
- Third, we must be willing to encounter the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to become all that God desires us to be. He alone has the power to cancel our past sins, cleanse our hearts, conquer our problems, and change the person we are now into the person that God says we can be.

Interspersed through these three big picture steps are the applications of the spiritual disciplines.

The Goal

I believe the ultimate goal of spiritual formation is to create a community of “called out” ones who have been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit; who enjoy a life of victory over sin and circumstance; and who love God supremely and one another selflessly; so that this community may become a “touch point between heaven and earth, where the healing of the Cross and the Resurrection can save the lost and grow the saved into the fullness of human beings in Christ.”³ This is the Church as she ought to be. This is the kingdom of God on earth! ■

Michael Avery is the former president of God’s Bible School and College (1995-2017) and its current chancellor. This is the first article in a year-long series.

1. Willard, Dallas and Eugene H. Peterson. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. NavPress, 2002, p.22.
2. Mullholland, M. Robert, Jr. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. InterVarsity Press, 1993, pp.40-44.
3. Willard, Dallas and Eugene H. Peterson. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ*. NavPress, 2002, p.11.

COMING NEXT: “Knowing God”

“If your concept of God is wrong, the more religion you get, the more dangerous you become to yourself and to everyone else.”

DEEPER LIFE resources

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This list was compiled by various members of the faculty and staff of God's Bible School, including Dr. Michael Avery (chancellor) and Dr. Tim Cooley, Sr. (GBS adjunct and PVBI academic dean). Some of these books are available from different publishers/dates and in various formats, including eBook. The books thought to be "among the best" by members of the compiling team are highlighted in blue.

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GOING DEEP

How Do I Start?

by Sonja Vernon

GOD'S REVIVALIST and BIBLE ADVOCATE

Have you ever been sitting in a church service, listening to a motivational talk or conversing with a friend who recently made life changes, and you were suddenly overwhelmed with the desire to “do better”? If the speech was on nutrition and weight loss, you determined to eat right and take off those pounds. If your friend had recently gained financial freedom, you committed to cut up your credit cards and get your financial house in order. If the message spoke of a deeper life with Christ, you promised to read your Bible, pray more often, and cultivate a more meaningful relationship with God. But then you got up the next morning, and that donut looked really good, and you needed to put one more monthly payment on the credit card, and you were simply too busy to spend time with God. Bottom line: it’s hard to get started. Intentions are great. Determination is important. But intentions and determination alone won’t change habits or alter lifestyles. So how do we break the cycle of good intentions followed by zero life change? How do we send our roots deep and grow into mature representations of Jesus? A true Christ-follower desires to plumb the depths of the knowledge of God, to know Him in His fullness, but how do we start? How do we overcome the inertia of spiritual stagnation and change intention into action?

WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE

The first step, and likely the most important, is realizing that we cannot become holy on our own. Going deep is not about picking ourselves up by our own bootstraps, gritting our teeth, and purposing to make ourselves like Jesus. Absolutely not! Instead, it is about realizing our complete dependence on a Source outside ourselves to do for us what we can never do. I cannot make myself like Christ. But what I can do is place myself fully at His disposal, admit my complete neediness, and give Him complete control of my heart. I can submit myself without reservation to the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells me to cleanse and to guide.

BUT WE DO HAVE A PART

When I am fully surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit in my heart and life, I must also realize that, while I can never make myself like Christ, this process of going deep into God’s heart is not an entirely passive one. I

do not simply lie down one night and wake up the next morning as a perfect representation of Jesus (although there are days when this seems like a very good plan to me)! Instead, I partner with the Holy Spirit to walk in the light He sheds on my life. I respond in obedience to His prompts and cautions. And I begin, with His help, to purposefully go after a life in Christ.

PARTICULARS OF OUR INVOLVEMENT

Hebrews 12 paints a beautiful picture of our involvement in this pursuit of holiness. The Hebrew writer reminds us that God disciplines His children “for our good, so that we may share His holiness” (v.10). That is Him working in us. But then He goes on in verses 12-17 to remind us of our part in this process. He says we are to: (1) lift drooping hands, (2) strengthen weak knees, (3) make straight paths for our feet, (4) strive for peace with our fellow man and holiness before God, (5) refuse to allow bitterness to spring up within, and (6) abstain from sexual immorality and living for instant gratification. In other words, one of my tasks, if I desire to go deep, is purposefully to shore up my weak areas. Do I have “drooping hands” or “weak knees”? Are there propensities that have caused me to fall? If so, I partner with the Holy Spirit by removing from my life anything that would cause my hands to falter or my feet to stumble. I ask God to reveal these areas to me and show me if there are allowances I have made that should be unmade. I become brutally honest about the things that cause me to trip or dull the sharp edge of my spiritual sensitivity, and I deal with them decisively. I “make no provision for the flesh” (Rom. 13:14). Instead, I fill my heart and life with things that will increase my spiritual appetite and my desire to know Christ. I cultivate “straight paths” for my feet. I walk with purpose toward Jesus and make it difficult for myself to be distracted or led astray.

I involve others in my life as well. God created me to live in community as part of His body (1 Cor. 12), and I embrace that community by making myself accountable to it. I find mentors who have walked the road before me to speak truth into my life and to hold me steady when my knees would buckle and my hands would tremble.

The Hebrew writer says that I am also to pursue peace with everyone (12:14), so I honestly evaluate my relationships. Am I living in peace with those around me? If not, why not? Scripture bears out that sometimes

this may be impossible, but am I using that as an excuse or are my reasons truly legitimate?

I am also challenged to strive for holiness. All of this process of partnering with the Holy Spirit is part of that striving. I must never do so in my own strength, but I must absolutely commit to do whatever it takes to be holy. As I respond in obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I will be transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

The final part of the Hebrew writer’s challenge to us reminds us to stay away from bitterness (12:15) and to beware of the lure of instant gratification, including sexual impurity (12:16-17). I partner with the Holy Spirit in this way by praying for God to reveal my heart to me. Is there any grudge I am holding or any bitterness I am nursing? If so, I must release it! This passage cautions me that

harboring these feelings will not simply affect me but will also reap a harvest of defilement and devastation for those around me.

The final warning concerns Esau—both his sexual immorality and his impatience. Are there areas of impurity that have entered my life? If so, I must allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse them and to forge within me a zero tolerance policy for any hint of uncleanness. And just like Esau’s impatience lost him his birthright, the need for instant gratification will absolutely derail my journey into the deeper life because it is just that, a journey. While there are certainly crisis moments, there is also a life to be lived, a life-long transformation that will last until we reach the gates of Heaven—and perhaps even beyond! So I partner with the Holy Spirit by committing to the long haul, by realizing that the deeper life is one that is ultimately cared for and cultivated by the great

Vinedresser of the soul over years of growth and maturity. My job is to remain surrendered to His hand, to trust the sometimes painful pruning which yields the beautiful fruit of holiness.

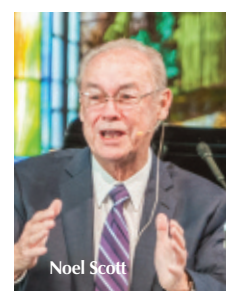
So you want to go deep? Admit your neediness, that you cannot do it alone, and partner with the Holy Spirit to strengthen your weak places proactively and purposefully, make your paths straight, pursue peace and holiness, refuse bitterness, and commit to the beautiful process that our faithful God has promised to complete in us (Phil. 1:6). He’s ready. Are you? ■

Sonja Vernon has been the Dean of Women at God’s Bible School and College since 2000. All Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

I partner with the Holy Spirit by removing from my life anything that would cause my hands to falter or my feet to stumble. I make it difficult for myself to be led astray.



on the impact of pastoral ministry followed by a meal and time of fellowship in the cafeteria's private Martin Room. Both staff and students shared about the influences their own pastors had had in their lives, and each pastor received a gift and complimentary membership to our Pastors' Association.



Scott preached a fabulous message on love from 1 Corinthians 13, noting the 14 listed qualities, seven positive (what love does) and seven negative (what love doesn't do). His focus was on "the kind of love that can suffer long and be kind when suffering." The service is available for view on the GBS Facebook post of November 10.

PASTORS' LUNCHEON

A wonderful group of area ministers participated in our first annual Pastors' Luncheon on Friday, November 3. Pastors first attended a special chapel service that focused



CINCINNATI AREA INTERCHURCH HOLINESS CONVENTION

GBS students had the opportunity to participate in local services sponsored by the Interchurch Holiness Convention (IHC). A number of our ministerial students spoke during the evening services, November 7-10, and our church relations singing groups Vision, Legacy, and Liberty provided special music.

The services were moderated by James Plank, IHC General Secretary. In addition to stops in five area churches, the group met at GBS for Friday chapel on November 10. After greetings from Rev. Plank and special music by the Stetler Trio, Dr. Noel

CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

On December 8, 9, and 10, the GBS campus festively welcomed visitors to three presentations of "Condescension," a program of music and drama involving the combined college and high school choirs accompanied by the Symphonic Wind and String Ensemble. The story, derived from a parable by Søren Kierkegaard and written by Ben Durr, Jr., is about Baruch, a son of privilege who is attracted to Tamara, a God-fearing peasant girl. Unable to interact with her due to the vast social and cul-

REVIVALIST FAMILY

On these pages, we feature items about GBS alumni, significant events scheduled throughout the "Revivalist Family," and brief news notes from across the Holiness Movement.

BIRTHS



To **Brennan (BA '10) and Ivon Garcia (BA '11) Muir**, a son, **Jared Stuart**, born November 28 at the Witham Hospital in Lebanon, IN. Brennan and Ivon are missionaries ministering in the southern Mexico village of San Gabriel (state of Oaxaca) since 2013. In their partnering role with the Mexico Bible Methodist Church, Brennan currently serves as As-



sistant National Youth Pastor and Ivon teaches children and youth. The Muirs have been splitting their time between their parents: Frankfort, IN (Garcia) and Cincinnati, OH (Muir) while in the U.S. on deputation. Jared joins 17-month old brother, Brennan.

To **Lucas (BA '11) and Alanna Smith (AAS, BA '12) Ryder**, a daughter, **Alice Fern**, born December 5, at the Martin Memorial North Hospital in Stuart, FL. Lucas chairs the music department at Hobe Sound Bible College and teaches piano at Lucas Ryder Music Studio. Alanna teaches kindergarten at Hobe Sound Bible Academy. The Ryders live in Hobe Sound, FL.



tural barrier between them, Baruch devises a ruse to become a shepherd and win Tamara's acceptance and affection. During his adventure as an "incognito shepherd," Baruch himself becomes a character in the ultimate story of condescension—Baruch's condescension parallels the self-humiliation of Jesus.

The last rehearsal before the program had been dedicated to prayer, not only for the performances, but also for unsaved friends, family members, and guests who would be in attendance.

From the opening prelude music to the time of fellowship and free re-

freshments following each presentation, all had an enjoyable time. Pray



GBS Trustees at their December meeting

that the message will continue speaking to hearts.

SEMI-ANNUAL BOARD MEETING

The GBS Trustees met on December 1 and welcomed President Rodney Loper to his first board meeting in his new role as chief executive. Warmly received, Loper challenged the trustees to maintain a passionate relationship with Christ as they and the administration chart the ministry's course. The board is also pleased to announce the addition of Dr. David Boardman to its governing roster. ■

DEATH



Stan Toler, 67, passed away November 18. He was born in 1950 in Welch, WV, and raised in Ohio. He earned multiple degrees in higher education and saw growth and success as a pastor and church planter, served as an executive for John Maxwell's INJOY Ministries, and established a worldwide reputation for leadership training. Over the span of 53 years in ministry, he preached nearly 15,000 sermons, speaking to over 200 denominations and groups in all 50 states and in 80 countries around the world. In 2009, he was elected a General Superintendent for the

Church of the Nazarene and in 2013 was honored with the designation "General Superintendent Emeritus." Stan wrote more than 100 books that have sold in excess of 3 million copies. He loved gospel music and recorded multiple projects, including several with his siblings, who performed across the USA as the Toler Brothers. During the last several years, he pursued his passion for leadership training through his nonprofit ministry, Toler Leadership International.

Stan is survived by his wife of 44 years, Linda; two sons, Seth and Adam; five grandchildren; two brothers, Terry and Mark; mother, Loreta; and stepfather, Jack Hollingsworth. A Celebration of Life service was held at Bethany First Church of the Nazarene in Bethany, OK. ■

Different Levels of Christian Life

Even *holiness* churches have no shortage of people who are dedicated to service but stop short of surrender.

by Daryl Muir

Decades after founding Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago and his popular “seeker sensitive” approach to church growth, Pastor Bill Hybels commissioned a study to identify the programs most effective in producing spiritual growth. He and his leadership team were convinced that involvement in church activities—small groups, weekend worship services, volunteering, etc.—was the key to producing spiritual growth. They thought they only needed to identify which activities most successfully replicated the deepest levels of spirituality in order to implement church resources advantageously.

While the survey did identify some good traits about the church, some much more negative findings bothered Hybels so deeply that he “wanted to strangle the messengers.” He continued, “It was hard for me to admit that I’d poured thirty years of my life into this thing, and part of the findings showed that we’d fallen short in some ways.” In reality, extensive involvement in church activity “*barely moved* people to love God and others more” (emphasis original). Only about fifty percent of the church claimed

to “love God more than anything else,” and many of those felt spiritually stalled, unable to get to the next level, and considered the church no help to them. And they were on the verge of leaving.

The REVEAL study,¹ later used in over a thousand churches, categorizes four levels on The Spiritual Continuum:

- **Exploring Christ**—Those who have a basic belief in God, are not yet Christians, but are interested in who Jesus is.
- **Growing in Christ**—Those who are recently converted and learning what discipleship means.
- **Close to Christ**—Those who are dedicated Christians and are dependent on Christ for daily life.
- **Christ-Centered**—Those who have fully surrendered their personal dreams, desires, and agenda, and have exchanged them for Christ’s.

Spiritual maturity follows a fairly predictable path. Although the journey looks different for every person, in-

volving meandering variations, the stages are generally the same. As one encounters the claims of Christ, he commits to following Him and moves from exploring to growing in Christ. As a person learns the basics of Christian life and fundamental theology, his faith becomes personal, and he exercises spiritual disciplines that enable closeness to Christ.

However, the study revealed the deepest level of spirituality to be pitifully scarce. What astounded Hybels most was that, “By far the largest, toughest chasm is between those who are ‘Close to Christ’ and those who are ‘Christ-Centered.’ People who are close to Christ are still fundamentally self-centered. They believe ‘God is for me, and my plans, and my agenda in this world.’ Those who are truly Christ-centered, however, are fully surrendered.”²

Without using the term, Hybels describes the Wesleyan-Arminian theology of entire sanctification. The deepest level of spirituality is no more nor less than unconditional surrender and abandonment to the full control of the Spirit. It is a step no less drastic than death, hence the call to be crucified with Christ, and therein lies the enormity of the chasm between closeness and Christ-centeredness. It is the difference between insisting that God helps with my plans versus offering to be a tool with which He can implement His plans. The two are mutually exclusive paradigms, and worlds apart.

The “spiritual continuum” is merely a technical name to describe the path along which God directs every true follower of Christ, regardless of theological background. Those who are fully obedient to the Spirit’s daily guidance arrive at the fourth category. Those who resist, follow at a distance, or refuse to align all their beliefs with Scripture never will be more than *close* to Christ and are more likely to be stalled somewhere along the path between *growing* and *closeness*.

That “largest, toughest chasm” seems to affect all churches, even those that clearly teach entire sanctification. In my quarter century of pastoral experience, and in listening to many other pastors, it seems apparent that even holiness churches have no shortage of people who are dedicated to service but stop short of surrender.

Asbury Theological Seminary Professor Dr. John Oswalt observed that, due to the chasm, those who merely are *close* to Christ are closer to being a non-Christian than a fully surrendered person. The spiritual weakness and dryness characterizing some churches may be attributable to that backward-leaning orientation.

Untold spiritual power results when one’s own agenda can be displaced fully by God’s, and the Holy Spirit can do His work of directing and empowering. The more Christ-centered believers there are in any given church, the more freely the Spirit can work while leading still more people to unconditional surrender.

Nearly every pastor has experienced the heartbreak of watching someone slow and stall in their spiritual progress. As long as the Spirit can work without resistance, the growth of new Christians can so far remove them from their old lives as to cause even seasoned disciplers to be amazed! But let resistance set in, and the regression in attitude and impetus is just as dramatic.

There are many inhibiting factors to spiritual growth, but possibly one of the most malignant is a faulty concept of God.

Since perception is reality, your view of God determines how you relate to Him, as well as how—and whether—you communicate with Him. Some fail to see Him as the Loving Father that He is and are unable to trust Him. Others misread God’s righteousness and hatred for sin, and their obedience is cursory. Those and other misconceptions result in faulty relationships with God and far-reaching spiritual dysfunction.

A man I’ll call Drew began attending our church and soon gave his life to Christ. He joined a small group Bible study, participating enthusiastically, growing exponentially, and exhibiting high sensitivity to spiritual things. He knew he had to overcome his besetting sin of addiction to nicotine, and he tried to quit smoking multiple times, only to fail as raging cravings overwhelmed him.

Reaching a point of desperation one day, Drew left his home to walk and pray in a nearby park. Crying out in silent prayer, he earnestly begged God to give him strength to quit. Slowly, a Spirit-borne realization dawned on him: It wasn’t for him to have enhanced power in himself—this was something to be relinquished. He conceded, “God, I can’t do this myself—I surrender it to you.”

Not everyone’s experience is as striking, but Drew, from that moment on, lost his (p22)➡

The deepest level of spirituality is no more nor less than unconditional surrender and abandonment to the full control of the Spirit. It is a step no less drastic than death, hence the call to be crucified with Christ.

STRUC- TURE:

DOORWAY TO GREATNESS ...OR GUILT?

by Ryan Watters

The name “Methodist” was meant as a slam against John Wesley and his followers, but it became a term embraced for both its power and accuracy. Our history is bathed in a beautiful tradition of methodical, consistent, habituated progress toward God. Few would contest the value of this structure in the process of spiritual formation. Unfortunately, it has often become a common source of disappointment and guilt in the life of the believer. It has been said that if you want to shame a man, ask him about his prayer life. The intent of this article is the antithesis of that sentiment. In fact, I hope it is both encouraging and empowering.

In the realm of spiritual formation, structure can be defined as a set of guiding principles that are habituated

for the purpose of spiritual growth. Structure in the lives of believers means consistently placing themselves in a position to receive what God has for them. A few common examples are:

- **Setting Aside a Regular Block of Time Each Day to Commune with God**
- **Scheduling Regular Retreats for Solitude**
- **Regularly Meeting with an Accountability Partner or Spiritual Mentor**
- **Following a Scripture Reading Plan**

Rather than being one of the spiritual disciplines, I prefer to think of structure as the deliberate practice of ordering one's life to be able to partake of the spiritual disciplines.

It is important to note that structure does not earn spiritual brownie points with God. Rather, it opens one up to benefit from what God wants to give. Further, while structure is essential for spiritual growth to occur, it is not sufficient. Structure is not the only ingredient in God's recipe for spiritual progress. Structure is the fuel which drives the vehicle down the road of spiritual growth, but fuel without a vehicle or destination is at best fruitless and at worst dangerous. Finally, structure is not always correlated with an emotional response in the believer. The believer may not always feel like carving out time to pray or to read Scripture. The believer may not always feel an emotional response to the day's devotional material. There are certainly times of great emotion that arise in the routine of structure, but it should not be a litmus test for its success or failure.

Nevertheless, let's take a closer look at some hallmarks of healthy structure in the life of the believer.

HALLMARKS OF HEALTHY STRUCTURE

1. Enough Consistency Without Being Rigid

Relationships wither in rigidity but thrive in consistency. The same is true in the spiritual life. Rigidity can be described as the inability to cope with the unavoidable ambiguities of relationship. This could take the form of a performance trap. Extreme emphasis is placed on meeting a performance threshold, and any failure to meet that threshold results in guilt and frustration. So this could be the believer who sets a goal of praying for one hour every morning at 5:00 a.m.—an admirable goal, indeed. However, when sickness forces him to miss a day, or the alarm fails to awaken him, there is overwhelming guilt and frustration. That may be a sign of rigidity rather than consistency.

2. Enough Personality To Be Authentic

When thinking about structure, it is vital to take individual personality into account. The glory of God can be seen in the diversity of humanity—not just racially and culturally, but also intrapersonally. Each of us has an affinity either for structure or spontaneity. How we arrive at this affinity is unique to each individual. It is usually a combination of influences from our family/environment and those from our genetic makeup. It seems some folks come hard-wired from the womb to think and act in systematic ways with little tolerance for variance. Others thrive on the joy of spontaneity and find great meaning in the unexpected. Both are beautiful embodiments of God's creative and ordered nature. Healthy structure should acknowledge where one falls on that spectrum.

3. Enough Time To Be Unhurried

The purpose of structure is not to cram as much into a time slot as possible. Instead, the purpose is to provide

space for unhurried communion with Christ. Creating a space in your daily routine for this communion is vital. Look for a time slot that is: (a) realistic for your current season of life, (b) sufficient to guard against feeling hurried, (c) works best for your biological disposition (i.e., early bird/night owl).

4. Enough Awareness To Be Present

Healthy structure is more than just a time slot. You must also be fully present in the time you set aside. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who was physically present but mentally roaming? Without intentionality, you can slip into the same habit in your structured times with God—you read the words, say the prayer, but do so without really inhabiting the moment. In doing so, you short-change the process and fail to place yourself in a position to receive what God has for you.

5. Enough Direction To Be Orderly

If relationships wither in rigidity, they flounder in chaos. Structure is important, not just in the creation of time and the quality of presence, but also in the ordering of progress. Trying to grow without a systematic approach is like pouring concrete without support forms—you get a mass of hardened rock, but not a solid foundation. Many young believers falter here, and finding a spiritual mentor to help guide them through this part of the journey is especially important. Having a plan or a course of study helps ensure the trajectory of their efforts are channeled in a positive direction.

6. Enough Spontaneity To Be Malleable

Spiritual formation is sometimes a system of paradoxes, and this is one of them. While you must have enough structure to create order, you must also have enough spontaneity to give the Spirit freedom to move. The believer must be consistent enough to maintain routine, but malleable enough to hear and respond to the Spirit's whisper to deviate from that routine.

7. Enough Accountability To Be Stretching

It's unfortunate that spiritual formation has become so ardently individualistic in Western culture. It was never intended to be so. A favorite professor of mine often said, "There are no Lone Ranger Christians!" This is profoundly true for the young believer, but remains true over the course of one's life. We need community, and in that community, accountability. Accountability does several things: (a) It warns us of self-deception, (b) it motivates us to stay true to our priorities, (c) it guards against the subtle encroachment of pride, and (d) it allows us to be more fully known by both God and others. Naturally ordered believers may need someone to call them on falling into a performance trap, or stifling the Spirit's call to flexibility. Naturally spontaneous believers (p27)➡

Devotional *Life*

FOR HEALTHY SPIRITUAL FORMATION by Aaron Proffitt

Dallas Willard liked to say that everyone has a spiritual formation—the only question is whether it is good or bad. Defining this idea of spiritual formation, Willard wrote, “The spiritual side of the human being, Christian and non-Christian alike, develops into the reality which it becomes, for good or ill.”¹ How, then, can we practice a devotional life that supports good spiritual development?

The New Testament provides a purpose for this kind of devotional life: knowing Christ intimately and being made like Him—conformity to Christ, or Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:4, 11). Note that this life is a relationship with God. This truth can be easily overlooked in making plans or checklists of spiritual behaviors—but God is a person, as Christians we are in a relationship with Him, and devotional practices are in service of that relationship, not ends in themselves.

A devotional life can become just that—a life, an all-encompassing way to live, much like Israel was to integrate God’s commands throughout their way of life (see Deut. 6:6-9, 11:18-20). Such a way of living includes many devotional practices—it can even affect how we stand, how we hold our hands: the Kingdom of God rarely needs our fists clenched, for example. The focus here, though, is how to begin to practice or develop such a life, and I am focusing on two practices I think are essential—Scripture reading and prayer—followed by a few additional devotional activities. Devotional life encompasses all of who we are, so it involves our minds (cognition), our emotions (affect), and our bodies (behavior, or actions). I think generally it is wise to focus on cognition and action, with affect less directly addressed, and that is the approach in this article.

Scripture Reading

Devotional life begins with hearing from God, by which I primarily mean reading His words, the Bible. The almighty, eternal, perfectly wise, all-knowing God gave us a book—surely reading it matters? We tend to like the instant, the shortcut—I am quickly impatient when my computer or phone takes just a few seconds to load a web page or an app. This can make us impatient with reading, especially reading of much length or difficulty. Most worthwhile parts of life, though, require substantial investments of time.

Two common approaches to reading Scripture have value. One approach seeks to read more quickly, with

longer daily readings. This provides a greater sense of Scripture’s scope, much like looking at a map gives an understanding of how a territory is laid out. This is a “higher-elevation” view. The second approach reads more slowly, with shorter daily readings often accompanied by other resources or practices to engage with the Scripture more deeply. This approach focuses on Scripture’s richness, much like exploring a neighborhood on foot. Effective “slow” reading needs to interact with the text in some way, for example studying its historical context, reading others’ thoughts on the passage, reflecting on how its truths apply in our current life situation.

Slower or in-depth reading often benefits from study resources. But whatever our approach to reading the Bible, resources can deepen our understanding. Especially we should turn to tools when we are unsure about a passage’s meaning. The most important resource is divine: we access it through prayer for the Holy Spirit to illuminate God’s word as we read. Other, human resources help as well. Study Bibles include helpful introductions and notes.

Additionally, I often find commentaries useful in my devotional time. I generally compare multiple commentaries to see how different Christians view a passage. In particular, I have benefited from commentaries listed below, which are freely available online; because I think theology matters, I’m including each commentator’s general theological orientation.

found @ BibleGateway.com

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/asbury-bible-commentary/toc/>

Asbury Bible Commentary

(multiple 20th-century authors in the Wesleyan tradition)

found @ StudyLight.org

<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/>

Wesley’s Explanatory Notes

Adam Clarke Commentary

(18th-century Wesleyan)

Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible

(Jamieson, Fausset and Brown; 19th-century Presbyterian)

Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable

(20th-century Reformed Dispensationalist)

Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament

(early 20th-century Reformed)

GOD’S REVIVALIST and BIBLE ADVOCATE

Others will find other resources more personally helpful. Using materials that enable us to understand Scripture better and engage it more deeply provides important depth in our devotional development.

Prayer

Prayer is the second essential devotional practice. As Scripture is God's primary way of speaking to us, prayer is our primary way of speaking to Him—though He knows our thoughts, prayer is our deliberate, intentional communication to Him. Prayer can frustrate us, can feel mysterious or mystical, but Christians through history have found it a vital lifeline. Jesus seemed to draw particular strength from His prayer life, showing us its importance.

Speaking as an often-bumbling student in the school of prayer, I'm here presenting some tools and behaviors I have found beneficial. As in any relationship, I find in prayer a need for varied approaches, for different practices from time to time, so I present these not as a checklist for daily prayer, but as various ways of enriching our times of focused conversation with God.

A List

I organize my list into sections, including: particular reasons for worship (attributes of God particularly meaningful to me at this time in my life, for example); confession (weaknesses, vulnerabilities where I sense a particular need for God's grace and intervention); thanksgiving (specific blessings I want to remember before God); requests (also organized into areas—for example, my family, my church, my workplace, people for whom God has called me to pray, etc.).

I keep at the bottom a section of answered specific requests, which I "reset" each year—it's a delight to watch God grow that list through the year! This list of answered prayers helps me see examples of God's provision in my life and others' lives. It helps me establish a record of my responses to God's voice, the grace I am given for difficult situations, help with conversations and decisions, physical healings, and more. This part of my list reminds me that God continues to build His kingdom, in large ways and small.

It is important that prayer lists not become legalistic burdens. Lists help us remember to pray for people and situations; they are not requirements that we name every request every day. My prayer list's length or brevity does not impress or depress God; it's simply a tool I find often helpful.

Honest Transparency

I sometimes fall into a trap of habitual pious language with God rather than raw honesty. If I am struggling to pray, if I am angry, if I am discouraged there is no point in my dodging this reality. I find it much wiser, and simpler, to begin where I am, not where I wish I were. So I may begin a prayer, "God, I'm angry, and I don't want to pray right now." If that is true, He knows anyway. When I pray honestly, I find that God quickly responds to



my need, often showing me a root problem—for example, my anger may arise from selfishness about an issue, selfishness I had not known about. God’s response enables confession and repentance, which leads to effective prayer.

Focus Days

Periodically it can be helpful to focus our entire devotional prayer time in a particular way. For example, I can pray through my prayer list focusing on thanksgiving—every request becomes a reason for thankfulness. If a friend’s physical need is listed, I can pray something like, “Father, thank you for being our Healer, the source of all our physical health. I know I can trust my friend in your hands; thank you for that! Please do remember my friend in your perfect love.” Praying about a financial hardship becomes, “Lord, thank you for being my provider! I know you have every resource I need, and I know you’re working all things together for my good, conformity to Christ. Thank you that you are perfectly trustworthy, including with my current need! Help me to walk in joy, knowing that you provide well.” Prayer times can also be focused on only parts of our lists—perhaps praying for unsaved people, or for ministries, or for government officials in our city, county, state, and country. Such days not only bring variety to our ongoing conversation with our heavenly Father, but can also help us pray more specifically and deeply for people and situations.

Beyond Scripture reading/study and prayer, I want to mention several devotional practices that can promote our growth in grace.

Music: Singing to God can engage our emotions (affect), often more quickly than other devotional practices. Websites like Hymnary.org provide not only familiar songs but can introduce us to additional lyrics. I’ve been blessed by the less-known hymn “My Goal Is God Himself” and by seeing familiar lyrics in a new way as they are turned into a personal prayer.

Journaling: Journaling during devotional times creates a record of God’s grace to us. Journals can include written prayers as well as reflections on our Bible reading, notes about God’s emphases to us, particular burdens for intercession, etc. Like a list of answered prayers, devotional journals can be read later to remind us of God’s work in our lives.

Fasting: I believe fasting is less about getting a response from God and more about reminding us that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” In this way, fasting is part of the Biblical theme of Sabbath, practices that tangibly remind us that God is our hope, our only source of help—practices that highlight our dependence on Him. (Other examples in Scripture include the Sabbath year, the Jubilee year, attending feasts in Jerusalem and leaving

the land unprotected [Ex. 34:24], and, of course, the weekly Sabbath.) Fasting focuses us on God for the resources we need. While He is always the ultimate source, fasting removes some intermediary sources to rivet our attention on Him.

Feasting: Probably we fast better than we feast. Scripture instructs us to do everything, including eating and drinking, for God’s glory (1 Cor. 10). Every meal, then, can become a celebration of God’s good provision, a chance to thank God that He chose to make the necessary process of fueling our bodies pleasurable, a chance to thank Him for satisfying us with good (Ps. 103:5), for richly providing us with everything to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). While this can mark our daily routine of eating, it may help us cultivate this mindset to practice “feasting,” occasional times when we enjoy a special food in a deliberate celebration to God. Something I especially like about this way of feasting is its inclusiveness: our children can easily join this devotional practice as our whole family rejoices in God’s goodness.

Witnessing: God’s meetings with us in devotional times are not for us alone; we can share with others how God is working in us. Christians can struggle to talk about God with others, particularly about their personal spiritual life. Our devotional life gives us something to share, whether in a church service or Sunday school class, or with coworkers and friends. We can talk about what God is teaching us in His word, or how a thanksgiving-focused prayer helped us see new ways God has blessed us. For Christians, talking about God can become as natural as talking about the news—but this won’t develop automatically. Our devotional relationship with God provides material to talk about Him simply, opening for others a window into Christian living.

Scripture reading and prayer, feasting and fasting, singing and journaling, and sharing our experiences in these practices nurture and nourish our growth into and in Christlikeness. Most crucially, these practices, as valuable as they are, remain a means, not an end. In all this, we are seeking most of all that we may know *Him*, personally and intimately. May it always be true of us that “My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace, / Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God; / ’Tis His to lead me there—not mine, but His— / At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.”² ■

Aaron Proffitt joined the GBS faculty in 2005 and has been Vice President for Academic Affairs since 2013. He and his wife, Lisa, have three sons.

1. Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2014, p.69.
2. Brook, Francis. “My Goal is God Himself.” In *C.M.S. Gleaner*, March, 1896, p.34. Retrieved from <https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/185177>.



— Called Unto Holiness —

In this space we use writers both past and present to discuss various aspects of Christian holiness.

A BOUQUET OF GRACES (Colossians 3:9-13)

by J.M. Hames

“Put off the old man with his deeds... and put on the new man.” This means that the very image of Christ takes the place of the old man. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy.” The Apostle is here describing the Christian experience under the figure of spiritual robes. God clothes everything He makes. He clothes the trees with leaves, the animals with a garment of their own kind, and the saints with the graces and virtues of the Spirit. The phrase “put on” means to put on as the grape vine puts on leaves from the inward sap until the whole vine is covered. So the Holy Ghost clothes the saints.

Let us notice some of the garments that are to be put on. **“Bowels of mercy”** means softness and tenderness of heart. The Holy Ghost cannot live in a hard, crusty heart. As flowers and plants grow more rapidly in tender, mellow soil, so the graces and fruits of the Spirit flourish in a tender heart....

There are some things that are non-conductors of electricity, such as glass and dry wood and cotton string. So there are a great many lives that are non-conductors of the Holy Ghost. They are narrow, little, selfish, and harsh. The Lord may get such to Heaven, but they will never be used very much of the Spirit here unless they have a breaking down, a smashing-up time in their souls.... We need to pray much over keeping our hearts tender.

“Put on kindness.” Divine kindness is a plant that does not belong to this world, but is introduced into the heart in the new birth. Under the mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost, it becomes natural and easy to be kind. It will unlock more old rusty hearts’ doors than any one thing in the world. “Kindness” is a slight change of the word “kin-ness.” It means to have the mutual feeling for each other that we have for our own family or kin....

“Humbleness of mind.” This means to be so little in our own eyes that we can be contradicted, corrected, and reproved without feeling sore or touchy. The reason some are so easily provoked and offended is that they have such

a great opinion of themselves. They must be looked up to, flattered, and praised in order to be gotten along with. A humble saint...can be overlooked, set aside, and not feel hurt.... Such a soul is easy to warm up to and live with.

“Meekness.” This is the attitude of the soul toward God. All the self-life has been burned out. “It is perfect love with a bowed head.”

“Longsuffering.” This means that one bears all that men or devils may put on him with a sweet, Christlike spirit, without complaining or grumbling. The beauty of perfect love is that it can suffer long and still be kind. Some can suffer, but after a while their patience gives out. The very same trials, sorrows, crosses, and losses that make a heart in which Satan reigns turn in open rebellion and bitterness will make a believer more Christlike, tender, and sweet.

“Forbearing one another” means to put up with each other’s faults and peculiarities. Just so long as we live in a fallen world, we might as well make up our minds that we are going to have to bear some things if we grow in grace and keep an even, sweet temper....

“Forgiving one another” means to carry a heart full of forgiveness for everyone that may have injured us. People often wonder why their prayers are not answered, their sicknesses healed, and their lives filled with joy and peace.... Remember, no prayer reaches God so long as we harbor an unforgiving spirit. A spiritual heart would rather forgive than not forgive.

These are the seven beautiful graces or garments we are to put on by the power of the Holy Ghost. These garments are very popular in Heaven. If we want to be in style with the heavenly world, let us see to it that our souls are clothed with these graces. Above all these things, put on charity, which is Divine love. This is the outer garment that is to cover all the others. ■

J.M. Hames (1887-1978) was a holiness evangelist and author who traveled extensively throughout the Wesleyan Methodist Church. This selection is from Deeper Things (Revivalist Press, 1926, pp. 27-31).

© iStock / LeArchitecto



by Larry D. Smith

*“Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heav’n we take our place.
Til we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.”*

For generations we have sung these words from the final stanza of Charles Wesley’s soaring hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” Its basic concept, as well as its vivid phraseology, is borrowed from 2 Corinthians 3:18. Here St. Paul assures us that the Christian life is a movement of spiritual progress during which we are changed “from glory to glory”—or as a newer translation phrases it, “transformed with ever-increasing splendor”—by the Holy Spirit into Christ’s own likeness. But

along this ascending way to spiritual fullness, there are decisive moments of crisis when the hallowing Spirit especially invades the nature of every questing soul with both enabling and ennobling grace. Although the circumstances may be different for each believer, this journey is to bring us triumphantly at last to heaven and home, as all the while we are being “changed from glory into glory.”

CHART FOR THE JOURNEY

This is dramatically illustrated by the accompanying chart sometimes used to help theological students to grasp our Wesleyan understanding of the “Order of Salvation,” as well as the “System of Spiritual Nurture” which is so essential to it. But this chart also can be of immense value to encourage and challenge the rest of us. For no one will do well on the climb to Christian fullness if he disregards the direction of his godly counselors or ignores the usual disciplines of spiritual formation suggested here or the diligent practice of prayer and the other means of grace.

Not for a moment would we confine the gracious work of the Spirit to the lines and spaces inked by someone on a piece of paper. But since we are called to explain and defend the great truths of our Christian faith, we may well employ useful signs, devices, and symbols—as well as other graphics such as charts—to do this as long as we understand their limitations. This chart, then, is not an attempt to squeeze the Spirit into a rigid mold, but to explain the usual pattern of His operations as He leads us onward and upward to Himself.

CONDITIONS WE MUST UNDERSTAND

Look then at the chart. As you will note, it represents this entire movement of the soul from “prevenient grace” to “God the Holy One” as a staircase which we must faithfully climb. This immediately implies certain conditions of our journey. First, **it is intentional**, demanding from its beginning to its end that we “bend our will” firmly to embrace God’s purposes, doing all that He commands and shunning all that He condemns. “I cannot slack my pace for earth’s fantastic show, For like a flint I’ve set my face, that I’ll to Zion go.”

Second, **our climb to glory is enabled**, embracing the overtures of the Holy Spirit, who continually dispenses abundant grace to strengthen our faltering faith

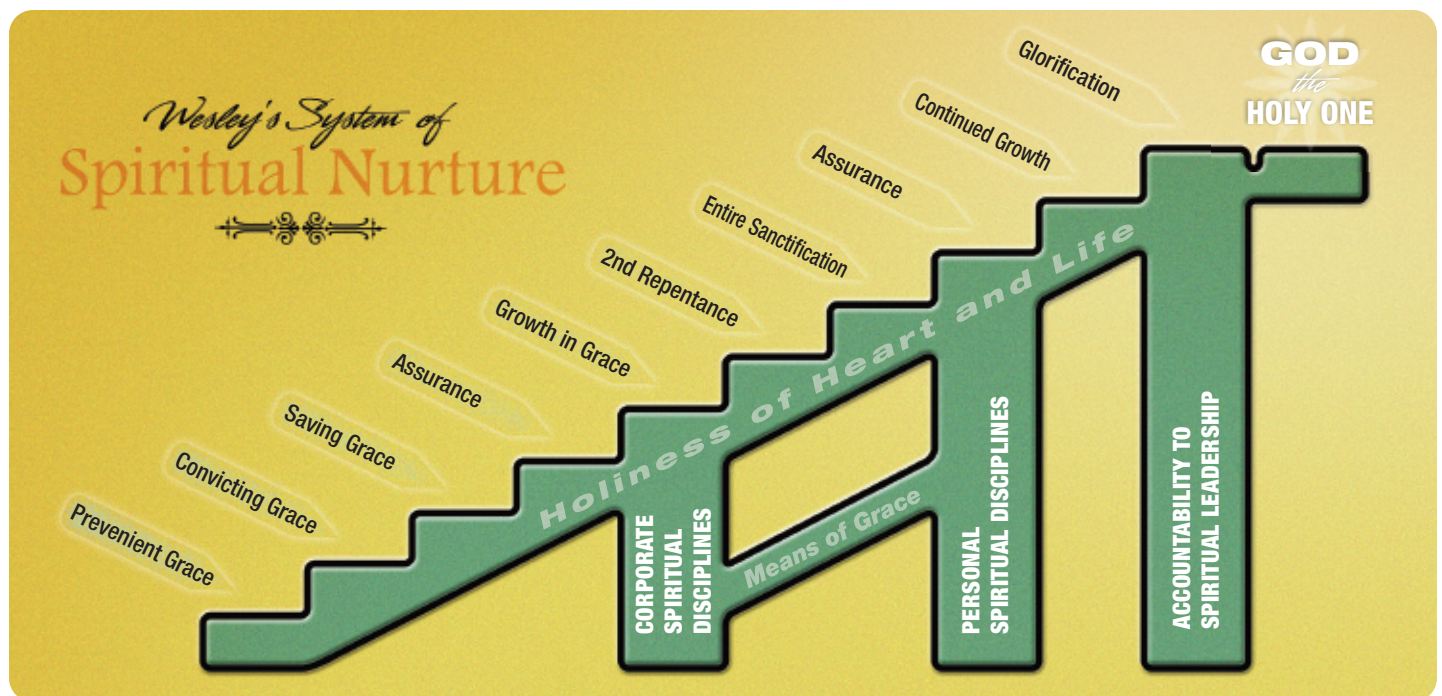
and feeble purpose. Salvation is altogether the gift of God, but that gift must be received by us in obedient faith. Third, *it is sanctified* by the Spirit, a steadfast walk in “Holiness of Heart and Life,” as the chart demonstrates. For holiness is not the rarified experience of a few saints of extraordinary virtue, but the common experience of all true Christians from the moment of their conversion. For without holiness none of us will see the Lord. Fourth, *it is focused*, leading steadfastly onward and upward through “many dangers, toils, and snares” to journey’s end, where the pure in heart will see God, enthroned in eternal splendor.

TEN STEPS FOR US TO CLIMB

In our pictured staircase, there are ten steps which chart our pilgrimage to glory. In moments of human failure—which are never normative in healthy Christian life but always the result of our lapse in faith or obedience—we must climb again the steps from which we have fallen. But ideally, at least, earnest Christians live in continuing victory, purposefully and faithfully climbing each step in unbroken succession, led by the Holy Spirit who indwells, nurtures, and protects them. There are three steps which mark three moments of realization in our spiritual life, sometimes called “works of grace,” though, of course, the whole way is a work of grace. These three special works of grace are the third step, which is “saving grace”; the seventh step, which is “entire sanctification”; and the tenth step, which is “glorification.”

Now we consider briefly but more especially each of the ten steps in a believer’s pilgrim way to God and heaven:

1. **Prevenient Grace:** that grace which “goes before or prepares the soul for entrance into the initial state of salvation,” as Dr. Wiley explains, mitigating the effects of sin and strengthening human resolve to forsake it and follow Jesus;
2. **Convicting Grace:** that work of the Spirit which convicts us of sin, righteousness, and coming judgment and moves us to embrace the claims of Christ;
3. **Saving Grace:** that moment when faith grips divine promise and a repentant sinner is converted by the Spirit—forgiven, born again, and adopted into God’s family;
4. **Assurance:** that inner testimony of the Holy Spirit that the newly converted is truly God’s child;
5. **Growth in Grace:** that continuing movement of the believing soul—fortified by the means of grace and yearning for closer communion with Christ—toward a richer experience in Christian maturity;
6. **Second Repentance:** that deep sorrowing for, and thorough renunciation by a Christian of, the remaining dregs of inward sin evidenced by such symptoms as pride, covetousness, and worldliness;
7. **Entire Sanctification:** that “second work of divine grace” in which the Holy Spirit cleanses the Christian soul from remaining sin, perfects it in love, and empowers it for service;
8. **Assurance:** that inner work of the Spirit indicating that a believer has been entirely sanctified;
9. **Continued Growth:** that expanding movement in believers’ lives in which they continue to develop in grace, wisdom, and love;



10. **Glorification:** that climax of the Christian's journey home when the last marks of fallen humanity are removed and in the exalted presence of "God the Holy One" he lives in joy and holiness.

SPIRITUAL NURTURE AND FORMATION

Because of His great love for us, God Himself initiates and sustains this entire structure of spiritual growth and nurture. But we should adopt its emphasis on grace, faith, holiness, and progress for ourselves and then diligently practice the system of spiritual formation it suggests. It is a *system*, to be sure—an orderly, structured, disciplined pattern used in principle by saints through the centuries and especially by our Methodist ancestors who received their name because of their use of spiritual method. In this system they emphasized both loving affirmation and careful accountability as they monitored each other's spiritual progress. Every believer enrolled in a Methodist society was committed to obey the spiritual guidelines that required him to renounce all sinful practice, fill his life with good works, and use the means of grace, especially prayer, Scripture, fasting, the Lord's Supper, and Christian fellowship. No one was expected to grow in grace without using the means of grace which were God's appointed channels of His favor. Moreover, he was to meet often with his class leader, a soul doctor of sorts, to check on his progress in grace.

This is admirably illustrated by our chart which shows three pillars supporting our pilgrimage to glory. These are (1) corporate spiritual disciplines, the expectations of the Church, which in a sense is our spiritual mother; (2) personal spiritual disciplines, which we impose upon ourselves; and (3) spiritual leadership, which mandates our submission to godly leaders over us in the Lord sometimes called "spiritual directors."

"Changed from glory into glory." As St. Paul assures us, the Christian life is a movement of spiritual progress during which we are progressively changed "from glory to glory" by the Holy Spirit into Christ's own likeness. But along this ascending way to spiritual fullness, there are holy patterns and disciplines we may use to help us complete the journey safe at last, as all the while we are being "changed from glory into glory." ■

Larry D. Smith is former editor of *God's Revivalist* and a retired member of the faculty of *God's Bible School and College*. He and his wife Carol (Wiseman) live in the Cincinnati, OH, suburb of Oakley.

➡(p13) craving for cigarettes. For weeks he had zero inclination to go back to smoking, and his joyful walk with Christ was an inspiration to the rest of the church.

At work one day, Drew went outside during a break to the smoking area where he had once hung out with fellow smokers. Since cigarettes no longer controlled him, he felt he could smoke just one—just to identify with his old friends. But with that one cigarette, the addiction gripped him as fiercely as it ever had, and he was back in bondage.

When he next spoke to me, Drew was angry at God, not himself. "God should have stopped me from taking that one smoke! He shouldn't have allowed the cravings to return!" Never mind his own rebellion or his cavalier treatment of God's miraculous work in him. So far as I know, he refused even to repent of his sin, and nothing I could say convinced him God wasn't at fault.

Faulty perceptions of who God is and what He should and shouldn't do led Drew to walk away from an incredible work of grace. Fortunately, not all misconceptions end that tragically, but they invariably stunt spiritual growth in one way or another.

Whatever the hindrance to spiritual depth, the REVEAL study pinpointed one main solution:

Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives. The numbers say most churches are missing the mark—because only one out of five congregants reflects on Scripture every day.³

If you are one of the eighty percent who do not read and absorb Scripture daily, I hope you will see its necessity. Spiritual transformation is impossible unless the mind is renewed through a daily infusion of the Word that reshapes our understanding, and realigns our thought processes. Only then can the human mind mirror the mind of Christ and become centered on Him alone. ■

Daryl Muir (BRE '86) is the Dean of Men at *God's Bible School and College*. He also is the chairman of the *Men of Integrity Men's Retreat*.

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THE RELEASE OF THE NEW COVENANT

by Nathan Purdy

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3

On January 9, 2007, Steve Jobs stood on the stage at the Macworld Conference in San Francisco, California. He said, “This is the day I’ve been looking forward to for two and a half years.” This was vintage Jobs—expertly setting the scene and slowly building suspense for a new product release. He wanted everyone to know how great this moment was! The crowd clapped enthusiastically. Some cheered. “Every once in a while,” he said, “a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything.” What was this remarkable product he was about to unveil? The first ever iPhone. He proceeded to extol its key features. Later that year, people lined up for days to get their hands on it. When they finally did, they cheered, laughed, and cried. It seemed this was a product worthy of every superlative and accolade. *Unbelievable! Life-changing! Earth-shattering!*

Ten years later, that first generation iPhone is dead. It no longer supports updated operating systems, rendering it functionally obsolete. It can no longer be used for its original purpose of making phone calls! At best, those iPhones are now buried at the bottom of unused drawers. In fact, it is quite surreal for someone who has used a recent iPhone to come across an older version. Now the old one does not seem special at all. It seems truly bizarre that at one time it did seem special. What has happened? The new phone is so much better and its features so vastly superior that it makes the old seem useless.

That is, in some small way, a helpful illustration when reading 2 Corinthians 3. In this chapter, Paul is talking about a number of “releases” that are infinitely more important than the iPhone. First, he speaks of the old covenant.

I. The Old Covenant: A Key Feature

Paul takes us back to the “release” of God’s covenant with Israel in the book of Exodus. The “stage” was Mt. Sinai. This occasion makes even Apple releases seem pathetic! God’s glory rested on the mountain, appearing as a devouring fire (Ex. 24:17). There was thunder, lightning, and the mountain trembled. This was a truly glorious event. God was entering into a covenant with the people He had graciously rescued from the grip of Pharaoh!

In looking back to the unveiling of that covenant, Paul, we might say, highlights its key feature. The word he uses is *letter* (v.6). God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, with the *letters* engraved in stone (v.7). These letters were glorious—written by the very finger of God (Ex. 31:18)! The commandments expressed the glorious character of God. These laws were good, pure, holy, and righteous. This was a glorious day!

However, while the dust from the engraving was still settling, a problem was already becoming obvious. These laws were potent at telling people how they ought to live, but impotent at helping them in their endeavor. This leads Paul to highlight two effects of this covenant. He describes it as a...

- **Ministry of Condemnation** (v.9). When people broke this law, it declared a verdict of guilt upon them. While the law was gloriously *good*, man’s fallen heart was shamefully bad. This letter, Paul argues, pronounces a verdict of guilt over every life. We’ve all sinned (Rom. 3:23).
- **Ministry of Death** (v.7). Having declared a verdict of guilt, this law sentenced the culprit to death. Or, as he states it dramatically, “the letter kills” (v.6).

Therefore, throughout the Old Testament, access into the immediate presence of God was limited to one man, one time each year. God’s presence was behind a thick curtain. Before that person could ever get into God’s presence, he had to walk through the squeal of animals sacrificed on altars and smell the stench of their death. Sin condemned and killed.

II. The New Covenant: A Key Feature

Paul fast forwards us quickly to the fact that there is a new covenant! The key feature of this covenant is the Holy Spirit. What a staggering upgrade, we might say. This is no longer a law written on external tablets of stone with covenant members failing at conforming.

This is the Holy Spirit working and living in the believer, succeeding at transforming! This, therefore, is a...

- **Ministry of Life** (v.6). In this new covenant, believers are regenerated, born again, and raised to newness of life. We are made new creatures in Christ by the Holy Spirit! God's laws are now engraved on our new hearts (Jer. 31:33) and in the Holy Spirit we have the potency of God enabling us to keep them! As Peter puts it, we are "partakers of the divine nature," where "his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3-4).
- **Ministry of Righteousness** (v.9). Now, through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus to which all those others pointed, our sins can be forgiven, our condemnation lifted (Rom. 8:1), and our consciences truly cleansed. His sacrifice is enough, forever enough, and therefore brings an end to all sacrifices!

Entrance into this new covenant comes when one turns in faith to Christ (v.16). When we take this saving look at Jesus, our eyes are opened to see His glory—the matchless, indescribable beauty of God's heart, His character, His nature. We see a holiness so pure that every one of our sins is punished to the fullest extent. We see a love so deep that instead of us taking what we deserve, He takes it for us! We come into His presence—neither hearing the squeals of slaughtered animals nor seeing the sight of sheep's blood—no, we come through the atoning death of this spotless Lamb! The Lamb, so pure, was the final sacrifice for all. His sacrifice is so perfect that the curtain veiling His presence in the Temple was ripped in two, and we are now urged to come with *boldness* into His presence!

If the iPhone X makes the 1st generation iPhone seem useless, how does this new covenant make the old seem?! Paul describes the new as more glorious (v.8), much more glorious (v.11) and far more glorious (v.9) than the old. In fact, he says, the new covenant is so glorious that when we look back at the old, it seems to have no glory at all (v.10)! Indeed, the old is obsolete!

III. The Two Covenants: A Key Contrast

Having outlined the covenants, Paul brings us to another stunning contrast between the two. In the unveiling of the old, there was a particularly eye-catching moment. When Moses came down from meeting with God, "the skin of his face shone" (Ex. 34:29). As he met with God and beheld the glory of God, unbeknownst to him, his countenance was

changing! When he came down the mountain, people were afraid to look at him. While Moses talked with them, he would cover his face. Then, when he went back to meet with God, he would uncover it. As he looked again upon the glory of God, his countenance would once again be changed. It's a remarkable moment. *All of this is still in the old covenant!*

If what happened to Moses in the old covenant causes us to gasp, can you begin to imagine what happens to us in the new? It's breathtaking. When we as God's children behold God's glory, as revealed in the person of Jesus in the new covenant, the Holy Spirit is actively changing us (v.18). Moses' change was typical of the old covenant—superficial, skin-deep, external, and fading away. However, ours is typical of the new—a heart-deep transformation, a metamorphosis of our very character! As we gaze upon the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus, our hearts are being changed—from glory to glory—by the Holy Spirit. Changed into what? Into the very likeness of Jesus!

A face beaming with the glory of God! Glorious. A life shining, radiating, beaming with the beauty of Christlikeness? More glorious. Much more glorious. Very much more glorious! So much more glorious that it makes the old seem like it had no glory! How does it happen? It's the key feature that Paul highlights of this remarkable covenant—the Holy Spirit. As we gaze upon Jesus, the Spirit changes us.

The Spirit does a remarkable saving work when we "turn" to look at Jesus in faith. Moreover, the Spirit does a remarkable sanctifying work as we keep looking at Jesus. And, when we finally see Him with our physical eyes, "we shall be like Him!" (1 John 3:2).

Child of God, in the hustle of life, do you gaze upon Jesus? Christianity is far more glorious than a focus on our endeavors at *conforming*. It is to have our eyes open to see Jesus! As we focus on Him, the Spirit is *transforming* us. Listen to these words of counsel from Robert Murray M'Cheyne: "Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in His beams. Feel His all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in His almighty arms.... Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him."* ■

Nathan Purdy, formerly of Northern Ireland, pastors the Bible Mission Church, Lock Haven, PA.

* "Live Much in the Smiles of God" by Robert Murray M'Cheyne posted on the Tolle Lege blog, December 8, 2014.



CHRISTIANITY FLOURISHING WHERE COMMUNISM THRIVED

According to a recent Pew poll, “Christianity across Central and Eastern Europe continues to grow and flourish a quarter of a century after the fall of the Soviet Union and atheistic Communist regimes.” For example, from 1991 to 2015, the number of Orthodox Christians has dramatically increased: Russia, from 37% to 71%; Ukraine, from 39% to 78%; and Bulgaria from 59% to 75%. This turn toward traditional Christian beliefs is radically changing these former Soviet-bloc countries.

NEW FINDS AT TEMPLE MOUNT

Archaeologists uncovered previously unearthed sections of the Temple Mount’s retaining wall in Jerusalem and part of a theater thought to be 1,800 years old in an area abutting the wall. It is possible that the continuing excavation will uncover artifacts from the First Temple, built by King Solomon of the Old Testament and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Jews consider the Temple Mount the holiest site on earth.

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

The Church of England released a report (“Statistics for Mission 2016”) which found that nearly 25% of their congregations have zero children who attend weekly

worship services. This, coupled with their concern with its declining overall membership in recent years, has the denomination hoping to reverse these trends.

JUST SIX COMMANDMENTS?

A poll by YouGov shows that only six of the Ten Commandments are considered important to British Christians, with most saying the other four are not “important principles to live by.” The six that people are more inclined to follow deal with relations with other people. Ranging from not killing (93%) to not coveting the possessions of others (61%), these six averaged a high 79% acceptance/approval. Sadly, the four commandments that many of these British Christians feel are less relevant today are the first four, which deal with mankind’s relationship to God. From not worshipping idols (31%) to keeping the Sabbath holy (19%), this combined group of four garnered only 23% acceptance/approval.

UNITED METHODIST RULING

The United Methodist Church’s highest court declined two petitions attempting to get a ruling labeling the denomination’s official stance against homosexuality unconstitutional. At issue was the UMC Book of Discipline’s declaration that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.” ■



student focus

ERICA BIGGERS hasn’t always had it easy. She was a shy child both in school and at home and even experienced being bullied. While she did not grow up in a Christian home, she was always interested in learning more about God. At the age of nine, she became a Christian, and later she fully surrendered herself to God.

No one really knew that Erica loved to sing because she was too shy to sing in front of people. That changed when she started attending Aldersgate Christian Academy. “Mrs. Foster heard me sing by myself for the first time. After that she worked with me a lot because she saw potential.” It was during her senior year in high school that she knew that God wanted her to attend college at GBS. She is thankful for the relationships she has built there with others and with God. Being in a school PR group taught her how to present herself professionally and minister to others. Erica is a junior, and she would like to teach music when she graduates. ■

Seventy-five percent of our students receive some form of financial aid which enables them to attend GBS. If you would like to support students with financial needs, you may send a gift to:

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www.gbs.edu/givenow

Dear Phil



BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We see a lot written in books, some contemporary and some old, concerning spiritual growth and development. The terms can get confusing. What terms does the Bible use for spiritual growth? —Ken

Dear Ken,

The Old Testament describes spiritual growth in many ways, including having one’s way established to keep God’s statutes (Psa. 119:5), beholding more wonderful things from God’s word (Psa. 119:18), having one’s heart being enlarged to keep His commandments (Psa. 119:32), learning from affliction (Psa. 119:71), moving from folly and naivety to wisdom and understanding (Prov. 1:22-30), and gaining holiness from Yahweh’s discipline (Prov. 3:11-12; cf. Heb. 12:5-10).

The New Testament uses a range of metaphors to describe spiritual growth: infancy to adulthood (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:13), immature to mature (1 Cor. 14:20), pupil to teacher (Heb. 5:12), untrained to trained (Heb. 5:14), milk to meat (Heb. 5:13-14), elementary to maturity (Heb. 6:1), planting to harvest (1 Cor. 3:6), some fruit to much fruit (John 15:1-5), and foundation to final structure (Eph. 2:20-21). It also speaks of growth in specific dimensions of the believer: knowledge of God (Col. 1:10), faith (2 Cor. 10:15), grace (2 Pet. 3:18), hope (Rom. 15:13), love for others (2 Thess.

1:3), love for God (Phil. 1:9-11), salvation (1 Pet. 2:2), body unity (Col. 2:19), Christlikeness (Eph. 4:13), pleasing God (1 Thess. 4:1), perfecting holiness (2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:5-10), being renewed in knowledge according to the image of our Creator (Col. 3:10), building endurance (James. 1:2-3), growing “in every way” (Eph. 4:15), and ultimately becoming perfect, complete, lacking nothing (James 1:4).

Beyond its metaphors and specific terminology, Scripture sketches a picture of movement from an old corrupt life to a constantly renewed life (Eph. 4:22-24), from purity to greater purity (1 John 3:3), from sons of God by adoption (John 1:12) to sons of God by characteristic behavior (Matt. 5:44-45; Luke 6:35; Eph. 5:1), from love for others to abounding love for others (1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9), from initial sanctification to resurrection perfection with entire sanctification as a notable milestone on the journey and increasing maturity as a lifelong goal (1 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 3:11-12; 1 Thess. 5:23; Phil. 3:13-15).

The scriptural key to growth is desiring the genuine milk of God’s word (1 Pet. 2:2), receiving the soul-

saving implanted word (James 1:21), and implementing it (James 1:22). To paraphrase a Chinese saying, we grow by doing. Faith grows by believing despite doubts (James 1:2-3). Appetite grows with eating. We must graze widely through God’s pastures so that we progress from milk to meat. The untrained have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:14).

Yet, growth is not one-sided with all the responsibility on us. Jesus tells His disciples that greater fruitfulness flows from greater dependence upon Him. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). God must cause our love for others to increase and abound so that our hearts are established unblamable in holiness when Jesus returns (1 Thess. 3:12-13). Growth is a cooperative progress of grace-enabled obedience and Spirit-empowered change. Entire sanctification, vital though it is, does not plateau our growth. As my predecessor, Leslie Wilcox, has noted, there is much territory to be taken “beyond the gate.”

Paul models a commitment to growth beyond entire sanctification and the development of Christlike maturity. He longs to know Christ both in the power of His resurrection and in the fellowship of His sufferings. Maturity isn’t a place to retire. It is a platform for further growth. “Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). This is the mindset of the mature (Phil. 3:15).

Blessings,
Phil ■

A. Philip Brown II is the Graduate Program director and a member of the ministerial faculty at God’s Bible School and College.

➡(p15) may need someone to nudge them back to a more ordered approach and away from chaos.

DITCHES TO AVOID

There are also ditches to be avoided on this journey towards a structured life. Let's take a look at a few of these.

1. Assuming Character or Spiritual Problems Exist Because of a Struggle With Structure

It is important to recognize two potential realities. First, it is true that disobedience to Christ and failing to nurture your relationship with Him could well indicate character or spiritual problems. Second, it is also true that some believers are less inclined toward structure and more inclined toward spontaneity. Denying the existence of these differing inclinations can cause problems, even for those walking in all the light they have (1 John. 1:7).

I encourage you to remember that both those inclined toward structure and those naturally averse to it can be beautiful examples of the order and spontaneity of God's nature. Both bring strengths and weaknesses to the discussion of structure. Those inclined toward structure may form systems of progress as naturally as breathing, but they may also struggle with flexibility and getting "outside the box." Those inclined toward spontaneity may revel in the moment-by-moment guidance of the Spirit, but may struggle with the floundering that comes from a lack of intentional living.

2. Becoming Comfortable With Chaos

The longer you live in structural chaos, the more natural it feels. That's one reason accountability is so important—it forces you to face the reality of your self-delusion. If you are unable to identify deliberate patterns of spiritual structure in your life, then you may have become comfortable with chaos.

3. Becoming Comfortable With Hollow Formality

If you are unable to remember a time when the Spirit led you spontaneously down a new path; if you cannot remember the last time your structured efforts actually produced palpable spiritual fruit; if you feel "stuck" in the rut of empty routine, you may be dealing with hollow formality.

Wherever you are in your spiritual walk, it is important to remember that the Spirit desires to draw you even more closely into communion with Him. Structure is an essential component of that process. My prayer is that you will join with the Spirit as He guides you into this deeper life. ■

Ryan Watters (BA '11) serves as the Director of Student Affairs at GBS. He has completed a master's degree in counseling (MA '14) and is a licensed professional counselor in the State of Ohio. He is trained as a Certified Sexual Addiction Therapist (CSAT-Candidate) and in Developmental and Relational Trauma (DART). He is also an adjunct professor in the area of theological and psychological integration. Ryan and his wife, Danielle, have one daughter and are expecting their second child.



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THOUGHTS

for the quiet hour

by Sonja Vernon

TRUSTING THE SCALPEL

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." —Hebrews 4:12 ESV

Have you ever had surgery? Were you nervous? I was, because I'm a normal human being who realizes that hearts are delicate organs, and the thought of my heart in a surgeon's hands was a bit unsettling. But I also knew that my heart had a problem. It wasn't working properly. And if I wanted to live a full and healthy life, I needed to trust the surgeon and the scalpel he wielded. I knew that his desire was not to hurt me (though there would be months of painful recovery) but ultimately to fix my defective heart and restore my quality of life.

In my quest for a deeper life with Christ, I've also had to trust the scalpel in the hands of the ultimate Surgeon. When I came to Jesus, my spiritual heart was defective and needed major surgery! But even since that life-changing event, my brokenness still sometimes shows through, my head gets wrong ideas, and there are areas that need to be strengthened and healed. My loving Surgeon continues His work by using the steady scalpel of His Word, and I must expose myself to its blade if I desire to become fully like Him. I must allow it to cut deep, to refuse to shrink back from its piercing truth, to lay myself open to its faithful probing. Going deep requires complete openness and vulnerability, but if I want to experience real life, abundant life, it is worth every painful moment. Our Surgeon is good, and His scalpel is trustworthy. ■

Sonja Vernon is Dean of Women at God's Bible School and College.

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2018

COLLEGE CHOIR LATE-WINTER TOUR

February 22, Thursday, 6:00 PM
Talladega Bible Methodist Church
120 Brecon Access Rd. Talladega, AL
Rev. Bob Blankenship (256) 362-8446

February 23, Friday, 7:00 PM
South/Central Alabama GBS Rally
Bibb County Board of Education Auditorium
721 Walnut St., Centreville, AL
Rev. Steve Vernon (334) 624-4298

February 24, Saturday, 7:00 PM
Oak Ridge Wesleyan Church
11000 110th Ave. North, Largo, FL
Dr. Phillip Gray (727) 393-9182

February 25, Sunday, 10:00 AM
Light and Life
5730 Deeson Rd., Lakeland, FL
Dr. Eldred Kelley (863) 858-6361

February 25, Sunday, 2:30 PM
Lakeland Holiness Camp
Florida Holiness Campground
3335 South Florida Ave., Lakeland, FL
Rev. Glen Allison, camp president
(863) 646-5152 (camp office)

February 25, Sunday, 6:00 PM
First Church of the Nazarene
1875 Nursery Rd., Clearwater, FL
Rev. Ernie Lewis (727) 536-1498

February 26, Monday, 7:00 PM
Avon Park Camp Association
1001 W. Lake Isis Ave., Avon Park, FL
(1200 block of US Hwy 27 North)
(863) 453-6831 (office)

February 27, Tuesday, 7:30 PM
Easley Bible Methodist Church
855 Gentry Memorial Hwy., Easley, SC
Rev. Jonathan Slagenweit (864) 395-7247

February 28, Wednesday, 6:30 PM
Haven of Rest Bible Church
2757 Fishers Gap Rd., Galax, VA
Rev. David Spivey (276) 236-4966

March 1, Thursday, 7:00 PM
Zanesville Bible Methodist Church
925 Grove Rd., Zanesville, OH
Rev. William Blair (740) 452-5677

March 2, Friday, 7:00 PM
Locust Grove Wesleyan Tabernacle
State Route 41, Locust Grove, OH
Rev. Richard Williams (937) 587-6275

March 3, Saturday, 6:00 PM
Faith Mission Church
1817 26 th St., Bedford, IN
Rev. Mark Stetler (812) 583-5712

March 4, Sunday, 10:40 AM
Southport Church of the Nazarene
920 E. Southport Rd., Indianapolis, IN
Rev. William Swesey (317) 784-4610

March 4, Sunday, 6:00 PM
Franklin Bible Methodist Church
6000 S. Dixie Hwy., Franklin, OH
Rev. Ben Durr (513) 520-9678

COLLEGE CHOIR

2018 TOUR

