



Hiding from Hope

Vic Reasoner

Ever since Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden, people have been hiding from help. The average man will not make his own doctor's appointment. All too often we are afraid to ask for help.

Our world is filled with self-help books and lectures, seminars, revivals, conferences, and counselors. People of all ages continue their education. But with all the expertise available, some people have withdrawn into their own house and will not come out.

Lazarus had been buried in a cave. Jesus commanded that the stone be rolled away, but he did not go in after Lazarus. Instead, he stood outside the cave and called for Lazarus to come forth. Had Lazarus refused to come out, he never would have been set free!

I often wonder how the story would have ended if Lazarus had been so depressed that he had responded, "I'm not coming out." Many people are buried by their own fears. Hope stands outside and yet they will not walk through the door.

What if Lazarus had run away from Jesus instead of walking toward him? Pastors regularly watch people who withdraw from church and friends, becoming more and more despondent. In their isolation, they try to cope with life's problems, and they find themselves sinking. But instead of grabbing hold of the lifeline, they cut themselves off from every offer of help.

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The biggest barrier to hope is our fears.

The hardest step is often the step of asking for help. The biggest barrier to hope is our fears. God will help those who ask for it, but he will not force it upon anyone. It is an unspeakable tragedy when people who are so close to freedom give up. It is always too early to quit. The invitation hymn promises, "His power can make you what you ought to be." Regardless of what you may be facing, don't hide from help.

Nothing that comes into our lives can defeat us unless we lose faith. Nothing can separate us from God's love except our own doubt (Rom 8:31–39). In Romans 8:24–25, Paul distinguishes between faith and hope. We are saved by faith; we live in and with hope. The basic difference between faith and hope is that hope is always future oriented. Hope is not daydreaming; it is disciplined waiting. The Greek word carries the idea of expectation or confidence. One translation for Romans 8:19 says that the whole creation is on tiptoe.

Augustine explained that a doctrine, such as the punishment of the wicked, may be believed but not hoped for. Yet everything which is hoped for is based upon faith. However, "hope has for its object only what is good, only what is future, and only what affects the man who entertains the hope." Augustine concluded that there is "neither love nor hope without faith." The gospel not only provided a present deliverance from sin but also a future hope of glory (Col 1:27). Christianity alone offers hope for all of God's creation. We

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The Hope of the Gospel

John Fletcher (1729–1785)



John Fletcher had been designated by John Wesley to succeed him as the leader of Methodism, but Wesley outlived Fletcher. In this article, which has been lightly edited for a modern audience [Works, 1:507–512], Fletcher explains the covenant of grace, defending the promise of reward to those who work by faith. Fletcher rejects fatalism, that if everything is predestined then we need not do anything. He also rejects mysticism, that to be motivated by the enjoyment of God in glory amounts to greed and makes us

nothing more than hirelings. He connects holiness and obedience with the enjoyment of God and the hope of heaven. He continues by linking holiness and happiness, our duty and God's favor.

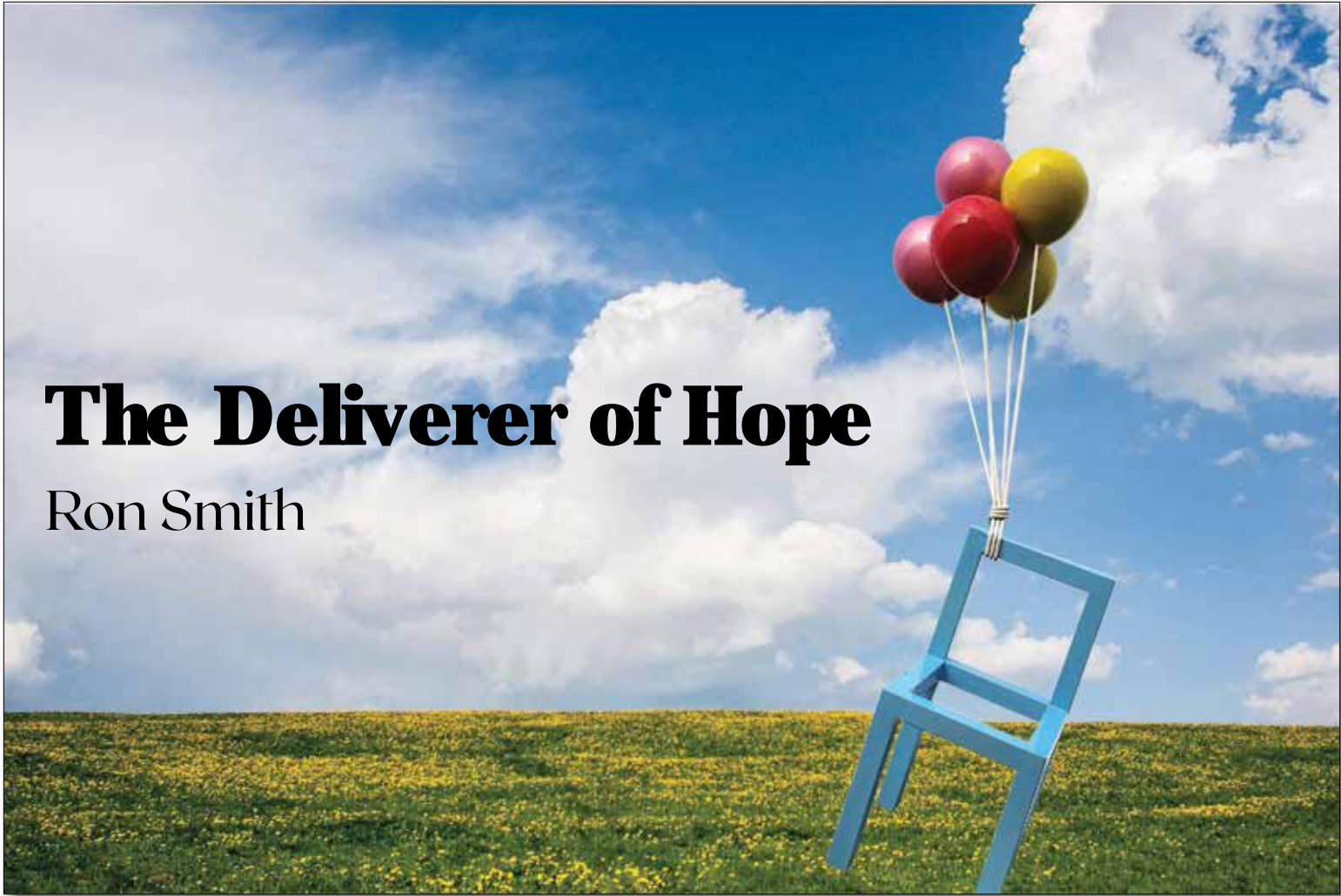
Hope has a specific reference to *promises* and *good things* to come. Excellent things are spoken of that grace. If St. Paul says, "You are saved through faith," he says also, "We are saved by hope." Hence St. Peter observes that "exceeding great promises are given to us, that we might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4); and St. John declares, "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn 3:3). Now hope never stirs except to obtain good things in view—a motive which our "gospel refiners" represent as narrow and unworthy. Their scheme therefore directly tends to ridicule and suppress the chief Christian grace, which faith guards on the left hand and love on the right.

Their error springs from a false conclusion. Because it is sorry to relieve a beggar with an eye to a reward from him, they infer that it is sorry to do a good work with an eye to a reward from God; not considering that a beggar promises nothing and can give nothing valuable; whereas the Parent of good promises can give "eternal life to them that obey him." Their inference is then just as absurd as the following argument: "I ought not to set my heart upon an earthly, inferior, transitory good; therefore, I must not set it upon the chief, heavenly permanent good. It is foolish to shoot at the wrong mark; therefore, I must not shoot at the right: I must not aim at the very mark which God himself has set up for me ultimately to level all my actions at, next to his own glory, namely the enjoyment of himself, the light of his countenance, the smiles of his open face, which make the heaven of heavens."

God says to Abraham and in him to all believers, "I am your exceeding great reward." Hence it follows, that the higher we rise in holiness and obedience, the nearer we shall be admitted to the eternal throne and the fuller enjoyment we shall have of our God and Savior, our reward and rewarder. Therefore, to overlook Divine rewards is to overlook God himself, who is "our great reward;" and to slight "the life to come," of which "godliness has the promise." ✠

The events of my life are under thy control. No danger can happen to me without thy foresight; thou seest what is prepared for or meditated against me; thou canst therefore deliver me from mine enemies.

—Adam Clarke



The Deliverer of Hope

Ron Smith



*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray.
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off! My heart was free!
I rose, went forth and followed Thee!
—Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be"*

If ever there was a hymn stanza that articulates the anticipation of hope we have in Jesus it is this stanza. It shows the saving work of God to deliver us from our bondage to sin and defeat. Have you ever felt the bite of iron shackles cutting into you, reminding you that you are in the tyranny of bondage because of your sin? The Good News is there is great hope for you!

We find ourselves now in the season of the Christian calendar known as Epiphany. The word denotes a time of journeying, initially the journey of the Magi to Jerusalem to see Jesus. No doubt the Magi believed their journey would lead them to a better future. But their journey led them to Jesus. Would Jesus create a better future? If so, how? The plain answer is: Jesus claimed to be God's promised One, the Messiah. It was prophesied that he was humanity's best hope to be delivered from their bondage to sin and the maladies of the flesh. He was—and is, and evermore shall be—the deliverer of hope.

When John the Baptist was in the height of his ministry, he was pursuing the promised salvation of God. He had heard of the profound ministry of Jesus and wondered if, in fact, Christ could be the promised Messiah. Jesus sent word through his disciples to John: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor." Jesus is the fulfillment of Malachi's claim that one day the "Sun

of righteousness would rise with healing in his wings" (4:2). The poet expressed it this way:

*My great physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save.
For me his precious blood he shed,
For me His life He gave.
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea.
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

—Eliza Edmunds Hewitt, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"

The Hebrews writer says, "Faith is the evidence of things unseen, the substance of things hoped for" (11:1). So, we see the very substance of faith is rooted in hope. Moreover, the Apostle Paul went so far as to say in Romans: "We are saved by hope" (8:24). What a theological study that one is!

Today we quickly acknowledge the darkness of our culture. In a pandemic world, the darkness presents itself as a paralyzing force. We seem locked in sickness, poor mental health, failures, poverty,

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"We will not give up the cause—we will not abandon the world to infidels."

Francis Asbury, *Journal*, 1 August 1815

The Triumph of the Kingdom

Steve Gregg



This article is excerpted from *Empire of the Risen Son* (2020). Used by permission.

We may easily underestimate what the power of the Holy Spirit working mightily through the gospel of the Kingdom is capable of accomplishing in transforming societies. Whole societies have been transformed by the power of the Kingdom of God.

Near the end of World War II, in the process of liberating Okinawa, American troops came upon a village called Shimabuku. Approaching the village warily, they were met by two old men carrying a Bible. As they suspiciously entered the village, the Americans were stunned by what they found. In stark contrast to the depravity and dilapidation of the surrounding Okinawan villages, Shimabuku had no poverty, no crime, no divorce, no prostitution, no drunkenness. The people were happy and industrious. Their village and farmlands were orderly and there were crops in the field. Why was this village so different from those around it?

Thirty years earlier, an American missionary on his way to Japan had visited Shimabuku and had converted those two men. He had left them with a Japanese translation of the Bible and urged them to live by its teachings. In the following thirty years, having no other contact with Christianity, these two men had converted and transformed their village. The story was reported in *Reader's Digest*, where the Army driver is reported to have said, "Maybe we are using the wrong weapons to change the world!"

The limits of the power of God's Kingdom to conquer darkness through His Word have not yet been discovered. What can happen in one village obviously can happen in a whole district or province—which is confirmed historically in a number of the great evangelical

revivals. What can happen in a single province can even happen in a whole nation.

The Kingdom of God is the last of the world empires—an empire of spiritual transformation through the living Word of God. It conquers and rules its subjects not by unwelcome imposition nor with weapons of war but by the cheerful consent of the governed who are won over by the living Word of God.

Though the methods of conquest are not militaristic or political, such an advance of the influence of the King cannot fail to have social and political impact. In the Roman Empire the growth of Christianity eventually brought about even the conversion of the pagan emperor and the banishing of paganism from the corridors of sociopolitical power. The benign influence of the Kingdom has now successfully penetrated every nation on the planet through the valiant sacrifices of heroes and heroines who "did not love their lives unto the death." The missionaries of the Kingdom have been the *shock troops* who have cleared the way for massive and beneficial transformation of societies, both large and small.

For example, when Charles Darwin first visited Tierra del Fuego, he found the inhabitants in a state of misery and moral degradation, but when he returned some years later after the gospel had been introduced by missionaries, "The change for the better was so indescribable that he not only testified of his astonishment but became a regular contributor to the missionary society."[†]

The modern world is too little aware of the debt it owes to the gospel of the Kingdom of Christ. As the influence of Christianity is being viciously challenged in Western Civilization, at this particular moment

[†] Blanchard, *Does God Believe in Atheists?*, 411.

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“The Lord Be With You”

Harold Burgess



As the part-time minister of a rural Indiana church, I stood beside the bed of Cecile. She was in a deep coma and totally non-responsive. A nurse came by several times to tell me that it was useless to stand there. But I continued by her bedside, remembering an afternoon when Cecile had asked me to review her lovingly cared for catechism book. It was from one of the German Lutheran communions, but, thankfully, in English. I remembered and quoted to her a number of the items that we had reviewed.

Eventually, it was time to leave. As I left, I said “Goodbye” using one of the formulas recommended in the catechism: “Cecile,” I said “the Lord be with you.” I turned to leave but heard a rustle in the bed. When I turned back, Cecile was sitting up, eyes wide open and full of the fire of life. In a clear, strong voice, she repeated the four words recommended in her old catechism book: “And also with you.” She quietly laid back in the bed and reentered the coma she had been in for many hours.

It was a marvelous moment. One that I have always treasured—as on the doorstep of the reality beyond this life, one generation of Christian said “Goodbye” to another. ✠



The Deliverer of Hope continued from page 3

brokenness, destroyed relationships, lost businesses, and so much more. Dr. Judith Rich writes: “Hope is a match in a dark tunnel, a moment of light, just enough to reveal the path ahead and ultimately the way out.” The journey of the way out leads to Bethlehem’s baby. It may seem a difficult path. Jesus said in the world we would have trouble. But in his first epistle John said that the faith (whose substance is hope) is the victory that overcomes the world (5:4).

Some years ago, I went to an Asbury University chapel to hear a friend and fellow Methodist colleague preach. In his message he referenced a guy from popular culture who got nicknamed “Lawn Chair Larry.” On July 2, 1982, Larry Walters fastened forty-two helium-filled weather balloons to his lawn chair. When the rope-tie broke he was amazed at the lift he got. An air traffic controller received a report from a commercial pilot that he had nearly hit a guy in a lawn chair at 16,000 feet! Before landing he hit a high voltage power line and knocked out the power, yet he survived. He was arrested and fined \$1500. When reporters and officials asked why he did it, he said, “You just can’t keep sitting there.”

In this season of Epiphany, we find ourselves in a world awry, a dark world. But we must not keep sitting there! By God’s grace that is free to all, we see a path that leads us “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9). The end of that journey is Bethlehem’s newborn babe. So, we sing, “Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” ✠

See How Great a Flame Aspires

Charles Wesley #209 *A
Collection of Hymns* (1780)

*See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesu’s love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze.
To bring fire on earth he came;
Kindled in some hearts it is;
O that all might catch the flame,
All partake the glorious bliss!*

*When he first the work begun,
Small and feeble was his day;
Now the word doth swiftly run,
Now it wins its widening way.
More and more it spreads, and grows,
Ever mighty to prevail;
Sin’s strongholds it now o’erthrows,
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.*

*Sons of God, your Saviour praise!
He the door hath opened wide;
He hath given the word of grace,
Jesu’s word is glorified.
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
He alone the work hath wrought;
Worthy is the work of him,
Him who spake a world from naught.*

*Saw ye not the cloud arise,
Little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,
Hangs o’er all the thirsty land!
Lo! the promise of a shower
Drops already from above;
But the Lord will shortly pour
All the spirit of his love!*

Renewing the Covenant

Larry D. Smith



Portrait of Larry Smith © 2016 by D. Curtis Hale. Used by permission.

Larry Smith was a professor at God's Bible School and College where, in addition to editing the *Revivalist* magazine, he taught courses in the history of Christianity and Methodism. This article is taken from *When Steeples Are Falling* (2002), 243–47.

“If I perish, I perish on Thy shoulder; if I sink, I sink in Thy vessel; if I die, I die at Thy door.” These determined words punctuate the famous Covenant Service held in early Methodist societies, especially

on the first Sunday of the New Year. John Wesley, who adapted it from the writings of the Puritan divine Richard Alleine instituted the service in 1755 and spoke frequently of it thereafter. “At six in the evening” he noted on one occasion:

We met in the church . . . to renew our covenant with God. It was a blessed time; the windows of heaven were open, and the skies poured down righteousness.

Never was there any doubt about its purpose, for the Covenant Service pointedly called those present to remember what God had done for them and what they owed Him in return. Its challenge could have hardly been more gripping.

Choose Christ and His ways, and you are blessed forever. Refuse and you are undone forever. Which wilt thou have, the cross or the curse?

To choose Christ meant to choose His will, even in pain and reproach. For there were some services He asks of us “wherein we cannot please Christ but by denying ourselves . . . sailing against the wind, swimming against the tide, steering contrary to the times, parting with our ease, our liberties, and our accommodations for the

name of our Lord Jesus.” In every case, His claims were final and absolute. To be a Christian was to submit to them without argument or qualification.

It is not wonder, then, that eternal value and eternal consequence weighed heavily upon those sturdy Methodists as they pondered the “cross or the curse.” Soberly they sang the hymn Charles Wesley had written for the moment:

*Come, let us use the grace divine,
And all with one accord,
In a perpetual covenant join
Ourselves to Christ the Lord.*

The second verse was more specific:

*Give up ourselves through Jesus' power;
His name to glorify;
And promise in this sacred hour;
For God to live and die.*

Then “without guile or reservation,” they stood up to “renew the covenant.” This was rather like repeating the marriage vows to God, for it was to Him—“the Lord Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy Ghost”—that they now swore supreme allegiance. “I do here with all my power accept Thee and take Thee for my Head and Husband, to love, honor, and obey Thee before all others, and this to the death!”

If Christian marriage symbolizes “the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church,” as the traditional wedding ceremony asserts, it also symbolizes the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and each of us who are its members. Just as the relationship between husband and wife is based on holy, binding, and irrevocable covenant, so

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The Year Crowned with Bounty

Richard Watson (1781–1833)



“Orthodox or Evangelical Methodism, and indeed Protestantism in general, owes Richard Watson a great debt. He showed that Methodist theology was not just ‘lay’ theology or ‘revival’ preaching but was just as capable of producing systematics as the Lutheran or Calvinist traditions... Watson’s Institutes and Wesley’s Standard Sermons were the original required reading for all Methodist ministers in the mid to late 19th century in North America”

(Ben Witherington III). This article is taken from Watson’s sermon, “The First Sabbath in the Year,” #122.

The first Sabbath of the new year shines upon us. We have completed the circle of the past year, and are now just entering upon another of those revolutions which are so rapidly measuring out our earthly existence. As we watched in the new year, we remembered the sins of the past year and humbled ourselves before God. Let us now renew our covenant, bound not only by the obligation of duty, but also by the affections of a thankful spirit. Of the year that is past, may we say, “You crown the year with your bounty” (Ps 65:11). And in calling to mind the many instances of this which rush to our memory, let us take an adequate view of God’s goodness.

We have personally experienced divine goodness. What a picture does the dealings of God with mankind present—of condescending, patient, anxious, watchful and unreserved goodness. We were plucked from the depth of misery and danger. Once we were like sheep going astray, but now we have returned to the shepherd and overseer of our soul. We passed from death unto life. We began the year in the world and ended it in the church.

Others have known God’s grace longer. We have been brought low and he has helped us. We were in the furnace and he was there with

us. The wind was boisterous, and we felt the hand of preserving omnipotence. God has not dealt with us according to our failures. The Intercessor has pleaded for us, and we see another year.

It is right for us to remember God’s mercies toward our families. The circle of our family hearth is unbroken, and all its members offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving. However, for some a dark line of trouble has run through the year. Yet I call even upon you to join in the work of thanksgiving. You have had afflictions but have likewise had mercies. You have learned more of your own weakness, and more of the strength of God. You see more clearly the vanity of earthly things, and the value of spiritual and eternal good.

Our nation is far from being grateful for its mercies. It is still chargeable with a mighty amount of guilt and stained with crimes which ought to cover us with mourning. But a bright light of evangelical truth is shining amid the darkness. In the midst of vice there is still virtue.

As true piety always connects us in spirit with our country, so does it identify us with the universal church. The communion of saints is not confined to the narrow circle of our religious acquaintance. The church has a mighty mission to the world, a glorious destiny to accomplish. If we are part of this church, how glad our hearts should be if she has been faithful to her high calling and has prospered in her work. In these last days God has revived his work. As we see proof of his gracious visitation, then may we gratefully acknowledge, “You crown the year with your bounty.”

Every renewed mercy increases our obligation to love and serve him and happy is that person, who, under the full power of joyous and grateful feeling, so surrenders himself to God—to live for no other purpose than that of glorifying him. ✠

Face Value

Vic Reasoner



The Christian faith must fight a perennial battle so that the God we cannot see is not reduced to a philosophical construct or merely a logical necessity. He is not the God of the philosophers but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, according to Blaise Pascal.

In the second century, in his apologetic for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Tertullian adapted the word *persona* to explain that God is one in essence and yet comprised of three personalities. In his presentation, Tertullian used this Latin word which described the masks that actors used on stage. The Greek synonym carried much the same meaning.

To switch masks, for actors, was to shift personas. Thus, our word person came to mean a role or character. One of the Hebrew words for person means face. It occurs in references such as Exodus 33:16, where God promised that his face would go with Moses. It is also significant that the Aaronic benediction in Numbers 6:25 promises that the Lord would make his face shine upon us; and in the following verse he promises to turn his face toward us, giving us peace. There is no greater anxiety than that which comes when God hides his face from us.

Thus, for a preacher to teach the attributes of God is like putting a face on God. When we go to prayer, we seek God's face. Spiritual worship produces transformation. Paul explained, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who

with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17–18).

In human relationships there is no substitute for face-to-face reconciliation. Yet some people are faceless because we don't know them or because they do not know themselves. C. S. Lewis explained this in his 1956 novel *Till We Have Faces*.

Fellowship is extremely hampered when we cannot worship with an unveiled face. Because of the pandemic, we are told that we must protect ourselves and others by wearing a mask. Certainly, there are situations when a mask is necessary. However, some people have always worn a mask. They have always lived behind a facade. They are afraid for people to know them.

As much as possible, we must tear down barriers. One of the unintended consequences of the required mask is that it tends to dehumanize people. I feel like I am in a netherworld when I enter Walmart. I see faceless spirits flit past me. I cannot recognize my neighbor, much less hear anything they must say, since I must read lips to hear. I feel like I am walking through a morgue. It is surreal.

My wife and I returned from a church service. God was present in his Word and through his Spirit, but we still feel lonely and disconnected. Our need for fellowship was not satisfied as we maintained our social distance from faceless spirits whom we used to know. This

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"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."

Numbers 6:24–26

the need for Christianity in the world is being defended, ironically, by the most unlikely advocates—modern atheists!

In the first decade of this century a number of atheist writers launched a concerted attack on all religion—especially Christianity. More recently, Richard Dawkins wrote: “Whether irrational or not, it does, unfortunately, seem plausible that, if somebody sincerely believes God is watching his every move, he might be more likely to be good.”

Another recent non-Christian book, *Dark Agenda*, was written by David Horowitz, an agnostic Jew. While rejecting the truth claims of Christianity, Horowitz argues that the benefits enjoyed by Western Civilization arose almost entirely from the influence of that faith. He argues that the continuation of these benefits to future generations depends on the continuation of Christian influence in the world.

Jonathon Van Maren posted an article called *Atheists in Praise of Christianity?* in which he notes “a trend” of atheists who are beginning to recognize that Christianity is a necessary influence for the preservation of civilization.

Modern inhabitants of Western Civilization might mistakenly assume that our moral instincts that the weak and disadvantaged should be relieved and lifted up, that men and women are equal, and that those of every race should be treated with undifferentiated human dignity, are the natural instincts of every person and culture. Such an assumption is naïve in the extreme.

Some poorly informed Christians have been heard to insist that the world is today in worse condition than it has ever been before! The truth is almost exactly the opposite. The beneficent transforming power of the Kingdom of God has fashioned for us a world that would not be recognized by anyone living in the times before Christ’s Movement invaded the world. In former times, warfare between nations was so barbaric as to defy tasteful description to people of our cultural sensitivities. In Roman times, infidelity of husbands to their wives was regarded as neither unusual nor immoral. In many societies, slaves could lawfully be beaten to death at the whim of their masters. Other than the early Christians, few had any conscience about leaving unwanted newborns out to die of exposure or to be eaten by dogs. Before the advent of modern medicine, whole towns and even continents were sometimes decimated by plagues.

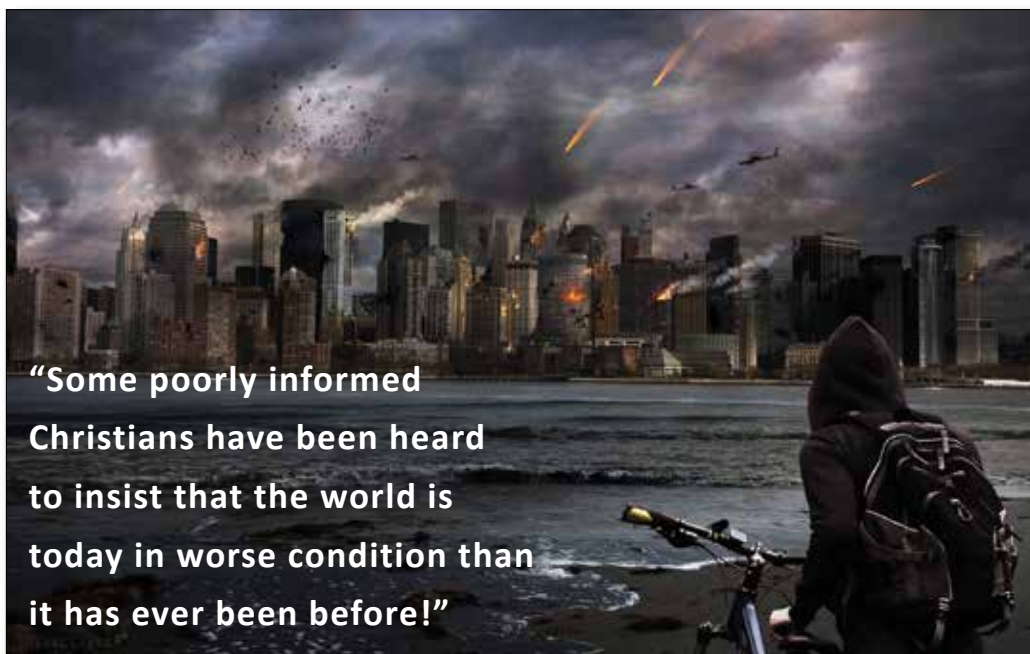
The concepts of human rights, freedom of religion, liberty of conscience, and the equal status of women to men, are ideals that we may take for granted, thinking them to be natural human instincts—unless we are acquainted with history. Prior to the coming of Christ’s Kingdom, conditions worldwide—in terms of justice and human rights—were similar to those still found in the strictest Islamic countries. No wonder the Psalmist saw the victory of the Kingdom as just cause for global rejoicing!

*The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice;
Let the multitude of isles be glad!
Clouds and darkness surround Him;
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.
A fire goes before Him,
And burns up His enemies round about.
His lightnings light the world;
The earth sees and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord,*

*At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
The heavens declare His righteousness,
And all the people see His glory. (Psalm 97:1–6)*

Jesus described the Kingdom’s growth as progressing incrementally by stages. In one parable, He likened the Kingdom to a wheat stalk, growing imperceptibly from a seed without human notice. Whether the farmer slept or was awake, the seed continued steadily growing to maturity, passing through various stages of development, “first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head” (Mark 4:26–29).

This is how the Kingdom has come and continues to advance. The preaching of Jesus in His lifetime was one stage in which the Kingdom was present. His death, resurrection, and ascension marked a very important next stage in the Kingdom’s coming—and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was another stage still. Even the destruction of Jerusalem and of its defunct priestly order marked another stage of the Kingdom’s “coming.” In our present time the Kingdom is increasing in size and maturity. The final stage will be when Jesus returns and His reign becomes universal. Each of these developments, in its own context, may be referred to as the “coming of the Kingdom of God” in one of its progressive stages.



Since the first century, the stalk has grown larger, the heads more numerous, and the unripe grain in the heads have been maturing. Again, this progress is seldom noticed over the short term. However, the growth continues inexorably toward the final consummation.

Our perception of the historical movement in the Kingdom’s progress, even over the period of our lifetime, is like looking at the spot price of gold as it fluctuates in the course of any given day or week. We need to step back to see the larger picture. When we do this, we find that the biblical predictions concerning the increase in the Kingdom have been remarkably fulfilled up to the present—and the trajectory is continuing upward. 🙌

My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

Psalm 31:15

also is the relationship between us and God; and in either case, the commitment is the same:

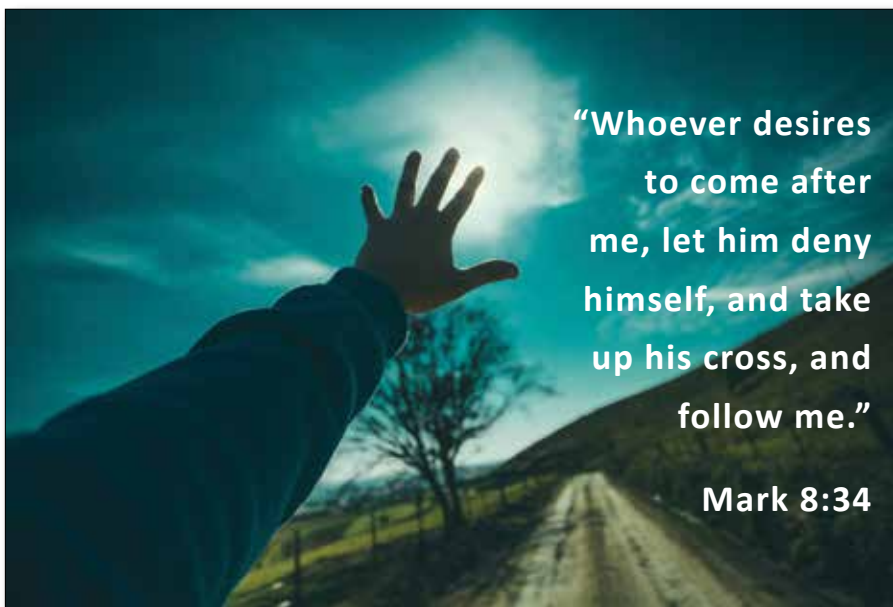
Put me to doing; put me to suffering. Let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee, exalted for Thee or trodden underfoot for Thee. Let me be full; let me be empty. Let me have all things; let me have nothing. I freely resign all to Thy pleasure and disposal.

Here is the heart of the covenant to which we, too, are called. Again the New Year has come, and it is time to register again our choice between “the cross or the curse: and to “renew the covenant” with the Lord Jehovah. Granted, we will not do this the way our ancestors did, for a century has passed since the Covenant Service echoed throughout our churches. It is our tragedy that we are worlds removed from this type of solemn rite and this type of earnest Christianity.

Even the language of the old service would seem jolting in today’s “seeker-sensitive” congregations where itsy-bitsy choruses and itsy-bitsy sermons and itsy-bitsy dramas entertain itsy-bitsy Christians who go to church primarily to be “blessed” by “fulfilling” emotional experiences. These have never taken the Lord God as “head and husband;” nor have they ever vowed to “love, honor, and obey Him before all others.” Indeed,

anyone who suggests that they should do so should prepare for anguished howls of “legalism.”

Legalism is contemptible, of course, since it is our attempt to bypass grace to save ourselves by keeping rules. Covenant, on the other hand, is all about grace, for it is a solemn, yet joyful, contractual agreement which we make with Heaven and which Heaven makes with us, all within the framework of Heaven’s offered grace enabling our offered response.



Covenant with God does take seriously what that grace requires as well as what it offers. This means “that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 1:12–14). This means undivided loyalty to

the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

This means holy vows, steadfast purpose, and accountable obedience. “Whoever desire to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

But even in the “holiness churches” like ours, there are many who never deny themselves of anything and never take up their cross to follow Jesus. Constantly they shrug off their shabby, slothful, and sensual lives with the excuse that they’re “under grace, not law.” This is what the theologians call *antinomianism*, which claims that the grace of God releases us from the law of God, and like legalism, it is damning heresy. But since we are as determined to be religious as we are determined to be sinful, antinomianism is precious to those whose religion is a sentimental mixture of “warm-fuzzies and sloppy agape.” St. Paul made short work this. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” he asks, then answers bluntly: “God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:15–16).

“Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forsaken” (Jer 50:5). This call to ancient Israel was basic to John Wesley’s Covenant Service, and it is personalized in us as we affirm its forthright terms, which we now consider.

First, this covenant is personal. Each of us is called to make holy transaction with the living God. He is infinitely beyond us and above us, and yet for our blessing and benefit He stoops down to all who believe the promises which He gives and respect the obligations which He imposes. In the “New Covenant” which He instituted by the sacrifice of His Son and sealed with His blood, He embraces the world with hope and gladness. This is contracted and confirmed by each of us at the moment of our New Birth, but it must be continually affirmed thereafter.

*High heaven that heard that solemn vow
That vow renewed shall daily hear;
‘Til in life’s latest hour I bow
And bless in death a bond so dear.*

Second, this covenant is pervasive. It includes everything we are and everything we have—absolutely and unconditionally! Thousands have

wept at our altars, prayed, and claimed all kinds of “experiences” but have never known the piercing joy of right relationship with God, because they have never “placed all on the altar.

From the very moment we begin to follow Jesus, the Christian life is the surrendered life, for by a decisive, unrelenting, and continuing act of our will, He is made Lord of everything. “For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health.” Emotions may soar or falter, friends may affirm or deny, conditions

may be pleasant or horrendous. The covenant embraces all of it, and all of it belongs to Christ.

Third, this covenant is perpetual. Never is there any provision for its modification or dissolution. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” This is our firm and considered choice: we will be entirely the Lord’s, and “this to the death!” All trifling, compromise, and backsliding are treason against Him and His Kingdom. Yet God is faithful, even when we are not, and in our worst failures, He invites us to return and “renew the covenant.” The condition which He requires is that “we walk in the light as He is in the light,” and He assures us that as we do so, “we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Light given here will lead us finally to the light which will be given us hereafter.

“If I perish, I perish on Thy shoulder; if I die, I die at Thy door; if I perish, I perish on Thy ship.” This is the “fixed bent of the soul”—as those old Methodists would have called it—with which we “renew the covenant” with the Lord Jehovah. We are now His “covenant-servants,” as they concluded in that old service which Wesley prepared for them, and God is now our “Covenant-Friend.”

“And the covenant which I have made on earth,” we add, as they did, “let it be ratified in heaven!” ✠

alone interpret creation’s groan as the pain of childbirth. A new world is coming (2 Pet 3:13).

Hebrews 6:11 describes the full assurance of hope. According to William Burt Pope, the full assurance of faith, of hope, and of understanding are three various forms of the same thing—the sure conviction of the reality of the object personally trusted in, hoped for, and apprehended in knowledge. If any distinction can be made, it seems that the full assurance of understanding refers to objective truth, the full assurance of faith refers to personal salvation, and the full assurance of hope describes a confidence for the future. Perfect love always hopes (1 Cor 13:7).

When it is properly understood, the book of Revelation offers hope, not fear, for the people of God. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ. In this revelation, the curtains are parted and his followers see his deity, his majesty, and his authority. They are assured he is on the throne, he is in control, and everything is operating according to his schedule. But in the cosmic struggle between two kingdoms—the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light—things would temporarily get worse before they would improve. As the gospel is preached, strongholds brought down, Satan routed, and the kingdom of God established, there will be opposition, persecution, and periods of apparent defeat. But the church will triumph through tribulation. Hilaire Belloc observed, “The church is a perpetually defeated thing that always outlives her conquerors.”

This issue of *The High Calling* is intended to welcome the new year with Christian hope and confidence.

*We have a hope within our souls,
Brighter than the perfect day:
God has given us His Spirit,
And we want the world to hear it,
All the doubts are passed away.
—William G. Schell (1893) ✝*

may be an unintended consequence from a sincere attempt to protect our health. But the emotional and even the spiritual health of our culture have been badly hurt through masks of fear, which result in depersonalization. Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression have risen from 11% of the population before Covid in 2019 to 41% now.

We are created in the image and likeness of God. God has created us for relationship with him and with each other. He never intended for us to live in a cyber-world of virtual relationships. Our sexual desires cannot be fulfilled through depersonalized pornography. Our need for fellowship cannot be fulfilled by texting. Our need to worship cannot be met long-term through virtual online worship sessions. I applaud the creativity of pastors who are trying to use whatever technology is available to keep people connected. But fear can produce anger and hate. It is easier to dismiss people when we cannot see their faces. It is also harder to love people without seeing their faces. Right now, our culture is in free-fall because we have been reduced to a depersonalized, virtual cyber-world.

John wrote that we are now the children of God, but when He is revealed, we shall see Him as he is (1 John 3:2). This is the tension between the now and the not yet. The anticipation of this beatific vision compels us to live in holiness. Thus, our eschatology should not generate contention, but it should produce transformation. Charles Wesley wrote:

*That great mysterious Deity
We soon with open face shall see;
The beatific sight
Shall fill heaven’s sounding courts with praise,
And wide diffuse the golden blaze
Of everlasting light.*

May God, in his mercy, soon bring us to the place where we can start tearing down walls and taking off masks! I am afraid that if we wait too long we may find many who were only virtually alive. ✝

What If?

Empower the Nations

“What if the wellbeing and happiness of the world depend on the wellbeing and happiness of Christ’s Body in the world, which depend on the wellbeing and happiness of the people in the local church, which depend on the wellbeing and happiness of my own soul?” With this question, President Ron Smith challenged the Francis Asbury Society to expand its mission internationally with his vision, Empower the Nations.

The mission of the Empower the Nations initiative is to equip a network of leaders in all nations to reach those in their local communities to:

- Bring times of refreshing and spiritual hope—revival/awakening—through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Provide resources that promote the message of Scriptural holiness, the self-giving love of God.
- Offer support, encouragement, and accountability through discipleship and mentoring groups.

This mission will be accomplished through godly, exemplary, loving, intimate interpersonal relationships. The Apostle Paul has instructed us:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly

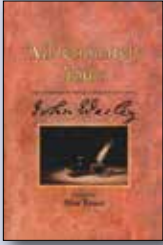
passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11–14)

In 1777 John Wesley wrote:

Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

And early Methodism did advance the kingdom in a mighty way. Now the Francis Asbury Society says, “Give us a hundred young men and women from around the world on July 6–12, 2023. We will train them to disciple others and send them back with a strategic long-term structure for accountability. With God’s help and the support of his people, we can advance his kingdom in our generation.”

Please pray and consider how much you can contribute today. We will need \$300,000 to facilitate this initiative. For more information, please visit our website at: <https://francisasburysociety.com/ministries/empower-the-nations>. ✝

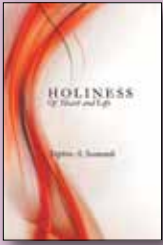


Affectionately Yours

Daily meditations on practical holiness from the letters of John Wesley

\$25.00 (paperback; 373 pages)

For half a century John Wesley advised the Methodists on such matters as marriage, health, spiritual formation, education, employment, and finances. Thus, the Methodists were instructed, encouraged, and directed by timeless wisdom, rooted in God's Word and good common sense. May Wesley's words of faith and love excite each reader's heart to yearn for, to ask, and to receive of God that same faith and piety.



Holiness of Heart and Life

By Stephen Seamands

\$11.95 (paperback; coming soon)

How do we recover a passion for the clear sense of identity and mission which John Wesley called "holiness of heart and life"? Drawing from Isaiah 6:1-8, Dr. Seamands sets the stage for that recovery by identifying the ingredients to holiness and their implications for us as people of God.

Giving that Pleases God

Charlie Fiskeaux, Special Assistant to the President for Financial Affairs

This world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what God pleases will live forever. (1 John 2:17 NLT)

As redeemed Christ-followers, we exist in two environments: A temporal-physical one and an eternal-spiritual one. The physical world in which we exist is experienced through our five senses, while the spiritual domain is experienced through the "eye of faith." One is temporal and fading away; the other is eternal, existing forever.

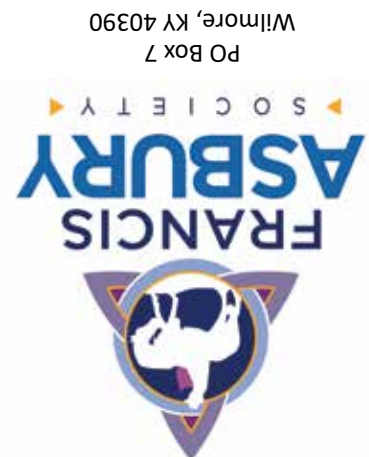
All that is of this physical world will eventually cease to exist, including our tangible investments: stocks, bonds, cash, houses—even land itself. Scripture tells us that eventually all this world will be purged by fire. Yet investments in the eternal dimension that are pleasing to God will survive and last forever.

With this dichotomy in mind, what plans are you making to move a portion of your tangible, earthly assets into the eternal-spiritual domain? The planned distributions through your will are your final opportunity to make a difference.

The Francis Asbury Society is a ministry that invests in persons in eternal-spiritual ways that please God and purposes to be worthy of your support. Details for various methods of giving to the ministries of the Francis Asbury Society are available on the website <http://www.francisasburysociety.com/support>.

Sign up to receive our companion e-newsletter, *Ministry Matters*, at www.francisasburysociety.com

The High Calling—January–February 2022
The High Calling is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.
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The High Calling

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