

10-1-1999

Theology, News and Notes - Vol. 46, No. 03

Fuller Theological Seminary

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Recommended Citation

Fuller Theological Seminary; Morrison, James H.; Bruner, F. Dale; and Johnson, Darrell W., "Theology, News and Notes - Vol. 46, No. 03" (1999). *Theology News & Notes*. 138.

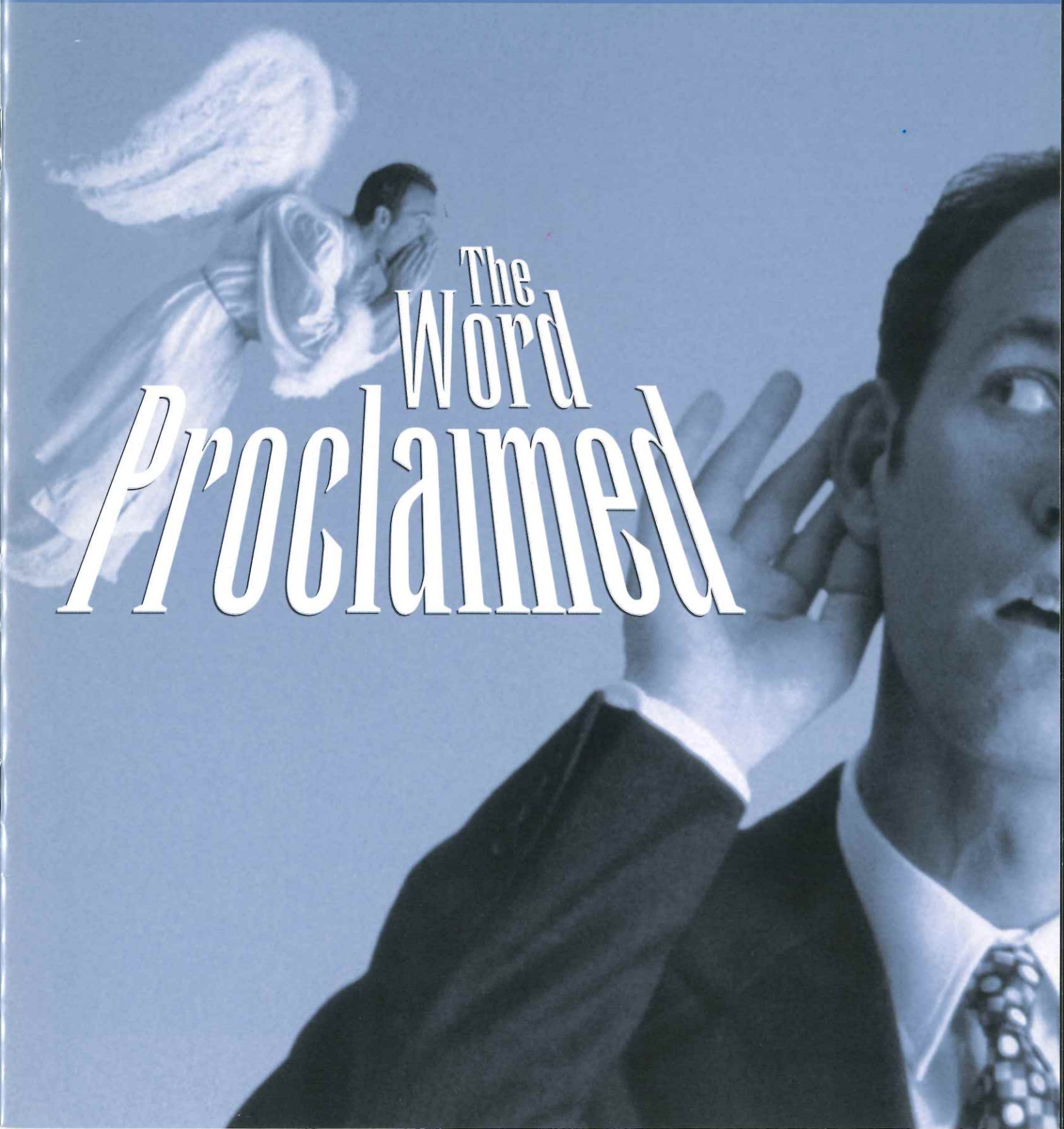
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THEOLOGY, NEWS AND NOTES

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

OCTOBER 1999



The
Word
Proclaimed

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Theology, News and Notes is published for the Fuller Theological Seminary alumni/ae.

Vol. 46, No. 3 USPS627220

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A publication of Fuller Theological Seminary, 135 N. Oakland Avenue, Pasadena, California 91182. Published four times a year in March, June, October, and December.

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Postmaster: Periodical paid at Pasadena, California. Send change of address to FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 135 N. Oakland Ave., Pasadena, CA 91182.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

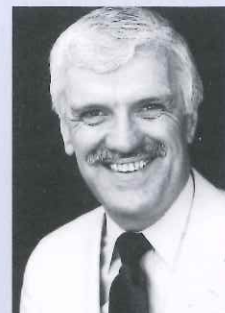
The Word Proclaimed

BY JAMES H. MORRISON

We are inundated with words. Our modern penchant for increasingly comprehensive and speedy communication has created a certain immunity to the surfeit of verbiage, both written and oral. As a pastor/preacher/teacher, I sometimes wonder if anyone is really listening. Humanly, it is gratifying when someone on occasion tells me of something I said which penetrated his or her mind to touch the spirit. I must admit that frequently, I am told of something I am supposed to have said which I am sure I never said. Often it sounds so good that I tell the person I must remember that! Of course, that is part of the mystery of the word proclaimed.

In a theological seminary, students and faculty are exceedingly acquainted with the written word. We are also aware that seminaries train men and women to be proclaimers of the word through courses in homiletics. It is easy to forget that the word is frequently proclaimed in the seminary itself. I suppose we could call that *modeling*, but it is often far more than offering students a picture of what it means to preach. Here, too, the proclaimed word, by the working power of the Holy Spirit, can touch and transform life—yes, even in a seminary!

Unless one is exposed to a variety of sermons and lessons, a person may assume that proclamation has some standard format—or even content. The chapel messages in this issue of *Theology, News and Notes* offer a delightful variety of approaches of interpretation and proclamation. Of course you are reading what was originally a proclaimed word. Those of us who do not preach from a manuscript know to our horror that the transcription of our proclaimed word makes for a very garbled and often unintelligible text without extensive editing. If our preachers in this issue of *Theology, News and Notes* had that difficulty, we will never know, nor will most of us ever know how we would have received these messages had we heard them as the proclaimed word. Nonetheless, I hope that you will be helped by the variety presented here, messages given at Fuller Seminary over the past year. May the power of the word proclaimed and written accomplish the purpose for which it was given. ■



JAMES H. MORRISON, chair of the Editorial Board of *Theology, News and Notes* and integrator of this issue, has been pastor of the Beverly Hills Presbyterian Church in Beverly Hills, California, since 1974. One of Fuller Seminary's "first generation," he earned a B.D. degree from Fuller in 1956 and a Th.M. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1958.

Is Jesus Inclusive or Exclusive?

JOHN 14:1-14

BY F. DALE BRUNER

This text has an introduction about trust and the Second Advent ("I'm coming back for you") and then three main points following the programmatic sentence, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life":

- Jesus is the exclusive Way to God (verses 4-6)
- Jesus is the personal Truth of God (verses 7-11)
- Jesus gives miraculous Life from God (verses 12-14).

"Do not be anxious people," says Jesus. "You believe in God; come on, believe in me, too!" It is not becoming to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time, to be an anxious person.

The best parable of trust that we have in our home is our cat, Clement of Alexandria. (He had a companion cat, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, but a local coyote ate the archbishop recently.) When our cat goes outside, he lives in terror. He looks around as though it's a jungle, and he is terrified. But when he comes in the house, he lies on the floor right between the kitchen and the dining room—where we walk most frequently—and falls asleep in total trust. Kathy or I could squash Clement's head, but he completely trusts us. Our cat lives in complete, total confidence in his human companions. (In this connection, I think the best *animal* synonym for faith is purring.) Every time I see Clement just lying there, I say to myself, "That's what Jesus wants me to do—to trust him." I really believe that the kind of trust the cat shows in us is the kind of trust the Lord Jesus Christ invites from us.

And then, finally, in the introduction, is this wonderful text. I think it may be the only reference to the Second Coming in the whole Gospel of John—which, as

you know, is a gospel focused on the present. "I Am" is its great signature phrase, but there is this one future text: "On my Father's estate, there are many mansions. If this were not the case, would I have told you I am going to prepare a place for you?"

I counted the explicit and implicit first-person Greek pronouns in verses 1 to 3; there are

Jesus Christ is the one and only way to God and God's one and only way to us.

no less than ten references to Jesus in these three verses!

"Believe in me. On my Father's estate, there are many mansions; if that were not the case, would I have told you that I am going . . . ? But if I am going and I am preparing a place for you, that means I am coming again, and I will take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also." The future Kingdom of God is, above all else, the *presence of Christ*.

The best recent illustration I've heard about the meaning of the Second Advent is from our former pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Spokane, Washington, David Peterson. He told about a time when he was preparing his sermon. His little daughter came in and said, "Daddy, can we play?" He answered, "I'm awfully sorry, Sweetheart, but I'm right in the middle of preparing this sermon. In about an hour, I can

play." She said, "Okay, when you're finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug." He said, "Thank you very much." She went to the door and (these are his words): "Then she did a U-turn and came back and gave me a chiropractic, bone-breaking hug." David said to her, "Darling, you said you were going to give me a hug after I finished." She answered, "Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!"

I think this is a wonderful description of the meaning of the First Advent (the first hug) in its relation to the Second Advent (the promised hug). Didn't we see God's great embrace of the world in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? One meaning of Christmas is that God wants us to know, through this First Coming, how much we have to look forward to in the great Second Coming.

JESUS IS THE EXCLUSIVE WAY TO GOD. (verses 4-6)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." I had a personal, yet very public experience with this text not long ago. I was giving Bible studies in the mornings at a week-long Lutheran pastors' conference, and Dr. Prasanna Kumari, a lovely Asian-Indian woman, was giving the evening platform addresses. Dr. Kumari is the president of the Lutheran Church in India and was (I believe) the executive director of the Theological Commission of the Lutheran World Federation. She is a very impressive woman.

In the mornings, I was teaching John, chapter 1, for all I was worth. The theme, as it is everywhere in John's Gospel, is the *exclusivity* of Christ. (One thinks, for example, of John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God before, but God the only Son, who is at the very heart of the Father, he has explained God.") In the evenings, Dr. Kumari was teaching that, indeed, Christ is the way for the Christian. But, she added, in India a sincere Hindu could also go to God, and Buddhists could find their way to God too. The ordinary way of salvation is sincere devotion to one's own religious tradition; the extraordinary way

of salvation is Jesus Christ (Hans Küng and others). As long as people are sincere, they can get to God or to saving truth as they understand it.

Dr. Kumari and I were going in two different directions!

It is bad form at a conference for one speaker to contradict another. All week long I wrestled with this *inclusive/exclusive* issue. This is the conclusion I came to and shared with the conference on the last morning:

In the past, when asked what my theological position was, I have described myself as a Christocentrist, but I now realize that that is not an adequate answer. I am a Christoexclusivist! Dr. Kumari is absolutely Christ-centered. She loves the Lord Jesus Christ—no question about it. But I have come to realize this week that, for me, Christ is not only the center—he is the *circumference*. He is the only way to the responsible knowledge of, or participation in, saving truth. Christ is *exclusive*. Dr. Kumari, as we have heard, makes a strong case that Christ is *inclusive*—that he includes all people.

Is it possible that these two positions, representing (and sometimes dividing) our church, can be brought together? Let me try.

The holy Scriptures, the confessions of our churches, and the Christian tradition require us to say that Jesus Christ is the one and only way to God and God's one and only way to us. That is not up for grabs. That is the truth. Now the moment one takes this truth seriously, we are in for some surprises because this Christ, to whom we are to hold *exclusively*, is himself very *inclusive*.

You see this throughout the New Testament. When Jesus picks a model for human love, he talks of a Samaritan, the religious/cultural/racial outsider of his time, as we see in his well-known parable (Luke 10). Today it would be like Jesus telling the Parable of the Good Muslim or the Parable of the Good Secularist. Again, when Jesus picks a model of piety, he points to a Jewish widow putting her penny (her "mite") in a treasury, saying she was doing the will of God (Mark 12). When Jesus illustrates the model person of prayer, he passes over the very religious man who thanks God—

who gives God a kind of intelligence briefing about what good he has done—and instead holds up a secular man who beats his chest and cries, "God, please forgive me for being such a sinner!" And Jesus says that *this man* went home in a right relationship with God, not the first man (Luke 18).

Jesus Christ's *person* is exclusive; Jesus Christ's *teaching* is inclusive. Yet, paradoxically, this *inclusive-teaching* Christ tells us, his disciples, to be very *exclusive* in

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proclaiming his person alone as the one way to and from God.

Let me illustrate. The cross has two dimensions: the vertical and the horizontal. Christ everywhere commands us to hold to him alone, *vertically*. He is the only way to God. "No one comes to the Father except by me." We are called to be absolutely *exclusive*. Now imagine Christ standing on my shoulders; I am to hold *him* straight up. Then Christ himself holds out his long arms like the *horizontal* beam of the cross. His arms are very, very, *inclusive*, embracing the whole world (cf. John 1:29; 3:16; 1 John 2:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:19).

I think we are going to be surprised on Judgment Day. Twice Jesus says, "Many people who are last are going to end up first, and many who are first are going to end up last" (Matt. 19:30; 20:16). I think God right now can break the heart of a Tibetan and have that man cry out, "Dear God, have mercy on me, a sinner," and apply the blood of Christ to that man, bringing him into God's Kingdom. Or God can help a Jewish lady, walking into her apartment in New York City, as she cries out in desperation, "Oh,

God, help me!" The whole gospel teaches me this. (See, for example, the beginning of Jesus' State-of-the-Universe Address in Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, where his Beatitudes embrace the whole world. Jesus does not say, for example, "Blessed are the *Christian* poor in spirit.")

The Reformers had a 12-word formula that I think is sound: *God is not bound to the means of grace, but we are.* (See, for example, Calvin's *Institutes* IV.1.5.) The means of grace are all the outward physical facts by which God reaches the world: missionaries, preachers, Bible teachers, Christian people, the Scriptures, the Sacraments, the Church. But *God* is not bound to these. God is absolutely free. God may do what God pleases. God is absolute Lord of the universe and is at work everywhere.

But we are bound exclusively to God's one great self-revelation. We are bound to God's appointed means of grace (see Rom. 10:13-17). It therefore does not seem right to say, "You can find God anywhere if you are sincere, if you will just be good." No, we are to preach Christ and Christ alone. But when we meet him in the canonical Scriptures, we discover that Jesus Christ is himself a very surprising and inclusive gentleman.

So the first point in this text is that the breathtakingly *inclusive* Jesus Christ is God's equally breathtakingly *exclusive* way to us and our exclusive way to God. May we hold on to him and to him alone.

JESUS IS THE PERSONAL TRUTH OF GOD. (verses 7-14)

"I am the way, and I am the truth," Jesus said. "If you have come to know me, you will come to know the Father as well. In fact, from now on, you do know him. You have even seen him." Philip said, "Oh, Lord, please show us the Father. Then we won't ask you for any more favors." Here Philip expresses the ancient longing for the vision of God, the deep desire of the human person to know God. To be made in the image of God means, in fact, to want to have a relationship with the Creator.

We long to know God, but God is not very visible. Jesus says

to Philip, "Have I been around you all this time, Philip, and you haven't recognized that the person who has seen me *has* seen the Father?" This text thrills me! Jesus Christ is the human face of God. Jesus is the autobiography of God. In Christ, God was spelling himself out, expressing himself. Jesus was the audible, visible Word who expressed the heart of the inaudible, invisible God. "No one has ever seen God before, but God the only Son, who is at the very heart of the Father, *he* has explained God" (John 1:18). Jesus Christ is God's great Visual Aid.

Origen, in the third century, had a great analogy. He told of a village with a huge statue—so immense that you couldn't see exactly what it was supposed to represent. Finally, someone miniaturized the statue so that one could see the person it honored. Origen said, "That is what God did in his Son." Paul tells us that Christ is the self-miniaturization of God, the visible icon or image of the invisible God (Col. 1). In Christ we have God in a comprehensible way. In Christ we have God's own personal and definitive visit to the planet.

Bertrand Russell, in describing the scientific method, wrote: "Wherever possible, substitute constructions out of *known* entities for inferences to *unknown* entities." That is called the inductive or scientific method. And that is what God did for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave us a known entity, well recorded in the New Testament. And by means of that known entity, Jesus, we can make responsible inferences to the great invisible God. So Jesus Christ is not only the exclusive way to God, he is the full truth of God.

JESUS GIVES MIRACULOUS LIFE FROM GOD. (verses 12-14)

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus gives us powerful life from God. By the way, this passage is one place one could think Jesus mistaken. Is this possible? Listen to what Jesus says: "The person who believes in me will do the very same works I am doing. In fact, that person will do even greater works than I am doing because I am going to the Father; and whatever you ask in my name, I will do it." Then a sec-

ond time he says, "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

How could we ever do greater things than Jesus Christ? Can we reconcile the world to God? Take away the sins of the world? Defeat the devil? Can we kill death dead on Easter morning? Can we satisfy the justice of God? No way! The commentators are helpful here. Vertically, Christ did the big thing *qualitatively*. But *quantitatively*, he never left Palestine. He never wrote a book. The Gospel of John has probably done more quantitatively than Jesus

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did, by spreading all over the world the news of what Christ did *qualitatively* in that little corner of Palestine. The Gospels themselves have done more *quantitatively*, if you can understand me here, than the historical Jesus did.

We must note the important rider placed inside the text: It is not just praying for anything that gets Jesus' promise; it is praying for that by which "the Father is glorified in the Son." Then the text twice says of the believer, "The works *he* or *she* will do." But the text also says twice, "Ask me in prayer, and *I* will do it." The two "what we do's" are made possible by the two "what *he* does" through prayer.

I do not think there is any secret, any magic trick, to the Christian life except saying our prayers and going to church. Prayer is the aperture, the orifice, that opens us to God's power. And as we say our prayers, God comes down in power and does things. Corrie Ten-Boom, the great Dutch Christian woman, said, "When Christians have meetings, the

devil smiles. When Christians make great plans, the devil laughs. When Christians pray, the devil trembles." We often have more committee meetings than prayer meetings in our churches. We need the restoration of the old-fashioned prayer meeting, as the Presbyterian Church in Korea is teaching us.

So first, Christ is the exclusive *Way to God*. May we hold only to *him*. He will take care of the world. (And may we take him to it! Or better, theologically, may *he* bring us to it.) Second, Christ is the full *Truth of God*. May we look to him only for our full knowledge of God. And third, Christ gives us terrific *power from God*. We can do *miracles* when we say our prayers.

Herbert Butterfield, professor of history at Cambridge University, concluded his book *Christianity and History* with these words: "We can do worse than remember a principle that both gives us a firm rock for our faith and a maximum elasticity to our minds, and that principle is this: Hold fast to Christ, and for all the rest remain totally uncommitted." That is the inclusive principle of Christoexclusivity. ■

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Learning to Worship

JOHN 4:19-26

BY DARRELL W. JOHNSON

I have been "going to worship" on the Lord's Day all of my life. And in my 51 years, I have missed Sunday worship less than 30 times. The longest I have gone without going to worship on the Lord's Day was during a time when I was teaching at a seminary in the Philippines. Because I came down with typhoid fever, I missed four consecutive Sundays.

It was during a worship service in Los Alamos, New Mexico, when I was 11 years old, that I went forward to surrender my life to Jesus Christ. So, although I have been going to worship all my life, only in the last few years have I begun to understand what it means to worship. You see, one can go to worship and *not* worship, just as we can say our prayers and *not* pray. Not that I *never* worshiped in all those years. But I have only begun to understand what it *means* to worship.

Come with me to a conversation Jesus has with a woman at a well, wherein Jesus teaches us how to worship. The part of the conversation I want to focus on is in John 4:23: "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."

The woman at the well has been deeply moved by Jesus' actions and words. No one has ever treated her with this kind of dignity. Although he sits on the wall of the well the whole time, Jesus has jumped over all kinds of walls to reach her. He has jumped over the Jew-Samaritan wall. He has jumped over the male-female wall. The woman is stunned. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?"

Jesus has done it to offer her an incredible gift. "Living water" he calls it—water which, he says,

will spring up to give her eternal life.

Jesus says to the woman, "Go call your husband, and come here." Why does he say that? Why does he bring up what had made her an outcast? It was because of her "husband problem" that she was out there by the well alone in the heat of the day. Other women could come together, either in the morning or the evening when it

One can go to worship and not worship, just as we can say our prayers and not pray.

was cool. But not her—she wasn't welcome.

And now this stranger who has treated her with uncommon decency brings up all that pain. Why does he do that? To help her know that he realizes who she is. Had she returned to her village without Jesus bringing up the husband problem, she would have wondered if he would have bothered with her, had he known who she was. "Go call your husband" is Jesus' way of saying, "Woman, I am offering the gift of living water to you—to the real you. I know who you are." (Her words "I have no husband" reveal that she is beginning to drink the water.)

"You have said well, 'I have no husband,'" Jesus says, "for you have had five husbands, and the one who you have now is not your husband."

"Sir," answers the woman, "I perceive you are a prophet." As you know, many argue that here the woman is shining Jesus on—that she shifting the subject, diverting the flow of the conversation. "Our ancestors worshiped in

this mountain, and you people say that Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship," she says. But she is not shining Jesus on at all. Leslie Newbigin, an Anglican missionary to India, helped me see this. Jesus is a prophet. And he is doing what prophets are supposed to be doing—exposing us to the truth, making us face reality, helping us see ourselves in the light of the living God. But he is a whole lot *more* than a prophet.

The woman at the well realizes that she has had a prophetic encounter and that she now needs to deal with the living God. She needs to *go to worship*. But where? Where can she meet God? She brings up what would be natural in a conversation between a Samaritan and a Jew. She brings up the issue of the *place* of worship. Samaritans and Jews differed about the place. Samaritans believed the place was Mount Gerizim, near Shechem, where Abraham first built an altar and called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 12:6-7). Jews believed the place was Jerusalem, where David had commanded the temple to be built, where the sacrifices were offered. The Samaritan woman knows she has to face reality. She needs to go to worship. But where? Here, on Mount Gerizim? Or there, in Jerusalem? She needs to know the place.

Jesus discloses something more fundamental. "God is Spirit," he tells her. That is basically a way of saying that God is not like human beings, confined to one place at a time. Because God is Spirit, *place* is not the issue. The living God can meet human beings anywhere, even by a well on a hot afternoon. "Woman," Jesus says, "believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father." Jesus is saying that the ground by the well is just as sacred as the ground on Mount Gerizim and just as sacred as the ground in Jerusalem. God is Spirit. It is God's presence that makes a place holy.

So Jesus moves the woman beyond the question of *where* to the question of *how*. "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the

Father in spirit and truth," Jesus says.

"In spirit and truth." One preposition: not "in spirit and in truth" but "*in* spirit and truth"—the implication being we cannot separate the two words. They always go together. We cannot worship in truth without worshipping in spirit.

What does this mean? As I see it, the key to understanding this lies in the little phrase "now is:" "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship in spirit and truth."

The crucial question for learning to worship is, What is *now is*?

- *Now is* is that the living God has come into the world in person.
- *Now is* is that the Word, the Logos, God's self-expression—who was in the beginning with God, and who from all eternity has been God—has come to the world as one of us.
- *Now is* is that the living God has been exegeted by Jesus of Nazareth.
- *Now is* is that, in Jesus of Nazareth, the living God has become a human—which is what Jesus claims at the end of the conversation with the woman at the well.

The woman likes what she is hearing about worship. But just to be safe, she will wait until Messiah comes. She says, "I know that Messiah is coming; when that one comes, he will declare all things to us." Jesus answers her, "I am the one who is speaking to you." No version of the Bible I know grasps the startling thing Jesus is saying here. Not just "Woman, I am the Messiah you are waiting for," but *I am*—the same words the living God speaks to Moses at the burning bush. *Ego eimi*. "I am." Not just "I am Messiah," but "I am the I am. I am the one you feel you need to deal with. I am he."

- *Now is* is that the invisible one has put on a face.
- *Now is* is that the Father has revealed himself in the Son who has taken on our flesh and blood.

- *Now is* is that Jesus then goes to the cross and is raised from the grave.
- *Now is* is that the God with whom we must deal in our sin has now dealt with our sin.
- *Now is* is that the God with whom we must deal has jumped over the wall!
- *Now is* is that the God with whom we must deal has taken the sin of the world upon himself!
- *Now is* is Jesus' cry from the cross, "It is finished!"
- *Now is* is that everything that needs to be done in order to enter into genuine encounter with

"Worship in the truth" means to worship in light of Jesus the Truth.

the holy God and live has *been* done by God!

- *Now is* is that as a result of Jesus' atoning death, the Holy Spirit can come. God the Spirit can come, and *has* come, to dwell in us!
- *Now is* is a radically different situation. The living God, still transcendent, still awesomely holy, has moved into the neighborhood and taken up residence among us and in us!

"An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth."

"Worship in truth" means to worship in light of the truth, in light of the *now is*. "They who have seen me have seen the Father." The Father is just like Jesus! Just as available, just as involved, just as present, just as compassionate, just as vulnerable, just as inviting. Which is why Richard Foster can say, "The Father's heart is open wide, and we are welcome to come in." Foster can say that because that *is* the "now is." Jesus says so. Jesus the Son of the Father says so. "My heart is open wide, and my heart is the Father's heart."

"Worship in truth" means to worship being grabbed by this great fact of the universe—to worship realizing that the door into God's presence is open and that we are invited, like the woman at the well, to come in.

"Worship in truth" means to worship in light of Jesus the Truth. Why do we not do it? Why do we hold back? Because we are afraid, right? Afraid of what? Of not being worthy, right?

"Worship in truth." The truth is, in and of ourselves, we are not worthy. We never will be, which is the whole point of the gospel. We who are unworthy, in and of ourselves, are invited to come because of the worthiness of God's mercy. What makes us worthy to be in the presence of the holy God is the worthiness of the cross.

"Worship in truth" therefore also means to worship just as we are. No faking it. Is that not what the woman at the well learns? She didn't realize it, but she was worshipping in truth. Without her mask. No longer pretending. No longer hiding behind religiosity.

—Please turn to page 19.

DARRELL W. JOHNSON, M.Div., is senior pastor of the Glendale Presbyterian Church in Glendale, California, and the director of Fuller's Chapel services. He has been associated with Fuller in both a teaching and mentoring capacity since his days as a student in 1973. His contributions to a number of publications include study notes for the *NIV Quest Study Bible* (Zondervan) and articles in the multivolume *Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology* (Baker Books). His Sunday sermons are broadcast each week into Asia and Australia by the Far East Broadcasting Company.



Go with Confidence!

JUDE 24-25

BY MARGUERITE SHUSTER

The road to hell," someone said—shortening the familiar aphorism—"The road to hell is paved."¹ It's been made smooth and seductively easy to travel, that is—unlike the road that leads to a more desirable end. That other, narrower road is *not* paved but is full of rough spots and threats and hazards. Hazards: the whole little letter of Jude paints a picture of an environment beset with them. Before the wonderful ascription of praise that constitutes my text brings his letter to a conclusion, Jude presents a horrendous picture of heresy and moral failure—the two go together—heresy and moral failure threatening those to whom he writes. In images piled on top of one another, he warns of those who are "blemishes on your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves . . . waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved forever." Stick with those images of emptiness a minute—hungry blemishes, waterless clouds, twice-dead trees, the foam of waves, wandering stars of no use for navigation. Not a reassuring portrait. Don't be deceived: it's not safe out there, as some of you know very well indeed already! The road to hell is paved, but not the road the church must travel before the Lord returns; not the road *you* must travel as you leave this place. Be a little wary if the road seems too smooth!

But that context of danger gives a necessary urgency to Jude's reference to the One who is able to keep us from stumbling—

that's the sense of the word translated "fall" in the text. Face it, apart from a situation that is really urgent, that One tends not to be where we first turn for a sense of stability and security. Mostly, we have our own favorite ways of achieving a measure of presumed safety. For instance, just for amusement's sake, I did a little search on the Internet for the word "stumble." Among other hits, I came up with the "Safenet Menu" of approved sites for children, and also a collection of exclusively Christian sites where one

The real world, the world where we are called to minister, does not come equipped with content filters.

could feel confident that one would not *stumble* upon anything compromising. Well, all right; there is something to be said for avoiding temptation, for not going looking for trouble. But the real world, the world where we are called to minister, does not come equipped with content filters. And even taking along a large Doberman cannot keep away the pebbles on the path—not even the little ones, the ones too small to notice until your feet go right out from under you, not to mention the big boulders.

We know that. So, mostly, we tend to take the tack of hanging onto something that looks as if it can keep us up, something that seems to offer security and, preferably, seems to testify to our virtue and God's favor in our

lives. Mostly, I suppose, we hang onto the usual stuff (which is why it's the usual stuff!)—the tall-steeple or fast-growing church, the number of converts, high-achieving kids, fame, money. But anything will do, provided that to us and to the group we identify with, it demonstrates that we are doing *the right thing*. Maybe those you most admire actually reject the usual symbols of achievement and assume that any pastor or missionary or therapist who is being genuinely faithful will be poor and will show no signs whatever of earthly success. Don't be deceived: relying on a criterion like that is dangerous, too. Relying on any criterion of our own is dangerous.

I'm reminded of a story I heard Myron Augsburger tell many years ago about this fellow slaving away over his desk in his sixth-floor office, struggling to see what he was doing after the seven-foot fluorescent light above his desk stopped working. Calling maintenance produced no help, so he decided to scramble up on the desk and take a look himself. Sure enough, the bulb was burned out. He unscrewed it, measured it carefully, and went off to the hardware store for a replacement. Success! He screwed in the bulb and the office was flooded with light. When five p.m. came and he was ready to leave, he saw the burned-out tube standing forlornly in the corner. Leaving it there didn't seem like a very good idea, since he wasn't a part of the maintenance people's union. He decided he'd better take it with him; he thought he remembered a construction site on the way home where he could dump it. So, he carried it down the street, into the subway station, onto the train; but how do you sit down with a seven-foot tube in your hand? You know the way those seat backs slant? So he stood up. The train stopped at the next station, five people got on, and four of them grabbed hold of the tube. Now what? Pretty soon it occurred to him that all he needed to do was get off at his station and leave the

pole. Picture, then, the last person left holding that wobbly pole. . . .

When a number of people have all grabbed hold of something, it looks as if it really can hold us up. But don't count on it. In the end, there is only One who can keep you from stumbling. Let the rest go, no matter how many people may be clinging to it.

One can keep us from stumbling. But *does* he? Really? Don't we all stumble, not just occasionally, but over and over again? The testimony of ordinary Christians and of great saints has been everywhere and at all times the same. We stumble, we are marked by sin, we are *blemished*. As a modern prayer from India put it, "Like an ant on a stick both ends of which are burning, I go to and fro without knowing what to do and in great despair. Like the inescapable shadow which follows me, the dead weight of sin haunts me."² Back in the fourth century, Eastern Church Father St. Gregory Nazianzus wrote, "I did indeed pray, and I thought to stand blameless at eve, but somehow and somewhere my feet have stumbled and fallen."³ The opening stanzas of English poet John Donne's "Hymn to God the Father" capture the heavy, helpless dismay of it all:

Wilt thou forgive that sin
where I begun,
Which is my sin, though it
were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sins
through which I run,
And do them still, though
still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou
has not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by
which I won
Others to sin, and made my
sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin
which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed
in a score?
When thou hast done, thou
has not done,
For I have more.⁴

Ah, yes: we, too, have indeed sinned before, and we, too, have more. Ugly blemishes.

Maybe not dramatic stuff, where we go down like the *Titanic* hitting an iceberg; though those who get to be Titans can count on there being a lot of icebergs around. Usually, though, it's more the little pebble under the shoe, not worth paying any attention to except that it turns out to be in just the wrong place at the wrong time. And stumble we do. To claim otherwise, or to suppose that we will eventually be triumphant in this life, is to determine to deceive ourselves, or to set ourselves up for despair.

So, what of my text's affirmation? Is it void? Or a cruel taunt—God *can* keep us from stumbling, but actually doesn't? No; I rather think that we need to

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read Jude's words sort of along the lines of Paul's in Romans 11:11, where he uses a similar term to speak of the Jews' not having stumbled *so as to fall*: in spite of everything, we will not in the end go down completely. The context in Jude is clearly eschatological: *in the end*, we will know that God has indeed held us up and kept us safe, *despite* all the times we've tripped.

It's good news. And yet—there remains that awful, oppressive knowledge of sin and our repeated defeats by it. It's done and cannot be undone and there will be yet more of it, as John Donne said. It clouds our vision; and the more it makes us feel helpless, the more it can make us cynical and crassly pragmatic in our choices, since what difference does a little

more compromise make, under the circumstances? Martin Marty recently wrote of a kind of grayness that plagues the soul—a grimy, dingy cheerless state in which one looks in the mirror and knows that the slate of one's life is stained. Clarity and purity are gone—perhaps chased away not so much by something horrible we have done as by the swarm of little goods we have left undone.⁵

And then what? For we have no stain remover, no magic way to change what has been done, or left undone. In fact, the tale is told that Thomas Aquinas was once asked, when lecturing on the divine omnipotence, whether there was anything that God could not do. He stunned his class by saying that yes, there was one thing God could not do: God himself could not make the past not to have happened. On this point, though, I like to think that Charlie Brown is a better theologian than Thomas Aquinas. Linus, feeling all anxious about something or other, offered the common wisdom, "I guess it's wrong, always to be worrying about tomorrow. Maybe we should think only about today." Charlie Brown replied, "No, that's giving up. I'm still hoping that yesterday will get better." "I'm still hoping that yesterday will get better." You too?

It *can* get better, you know. Not that it didn't happen—Aquinas was that far right. But that its meaning changes—a tiny bit like the way an event that seemed to be a supreme evil at the time looks different in the light of final outcomes. You know—like the time you lost the love of your life, the one you hoped to marry, because of a foolish bit of selfishness and pride, a sin. It was your own fault; nobody to blame but you; and the person you cared about most in all the world was gone, and gone for good. You repented most earnestly and for good reason. Time passed—more time, more lonely time, than you care to recall ever again. Then the impossible thing happened and you met the person yet more right for you: God turned even the evil of your sin to good. Its power to harm was gone. And the past looked different. In fact, it was dif-

ferent, because the way it affected the present had become different. It's impossible, but it happened.

People like us being presented faultless, "without blemish," before God is a little like that—impossible, but what is really and truly going to happen because of the work of Christ. Imagine it: being presented before God—God himself, "the presence of his glory"—not dingy and gray and scuffed and broken, but so clean and pure that you have no failures to hide. Not all the little kindnesses, and the bigger ones, you failed to perform. Not all of that unsavory stuff you would have done, would have done eagerly, if only you had had the nerve, or the power. Not even what you *did* do that day—remember? Not even that. Pure, spotless, without blemish. That's real joy, exceeding joy. Every happiness, every pleasure, that falls
—Please turn to page 19.

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Following the Lord into the Unknown

HEBREWS 11:1-8

BY GREGORY J. OGDEN

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called by God to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going." It was this verse more than any others that helped me understand what God was doing as I was trying to comprehend God's call to come to serve at Fuller.

One purpose of Scripture is to give meaning to the subjective

All of God's people are summoned to fulfill a passion, a destiny, or a positive burden.

work of the Holy Spirit in our personal experience. The way God worked with Abraham served as a paradigm for what he was doing with me. That may sound like a rather grandiose claim, but I believe that the intent of the writer of Hebrews was just that. God is a storyteller. The Lord spins out his redemptive story in history by writing our characters into his reclamation drama. The writer of Hebrews catalogs the stories of the faithful who responded in the obedience of faith to the call of God—because he intended for us to complete the story.

Eugene Peterson's translation of the final two verses of Hebrews 11 makes that clear. After we have been reminded of Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, and others, he says: "Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised. God had a better plan for us; that their faith

and our faith would come together to make one complete whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours." The pattern that they established we step into.

For the past 24 years since graduating from Fuller in 1973, I have served as a pastor in various roles, primarily within the Presbyterian context. Prior to coming back to Fuller, though, I served an independent church in California's Silicon Valley called the Saratoga Federated Church. My world was the church. Its mission and health were what I ate, lived, and breathed. I journeyed out for various ministry forays, such as teaching my D.Min. class at Fuller, but my home base was the church. My energy and focus were spent trying to be an equipping pastor who grew in my ability to enable all God's people to come alive to their ministry potential.

That all changed with a phone call from Dr. Ray Anderson in June 1997. Would I consider being a candidate to direct the D.Min. Program at Fuller Seminary? I knew as soon as I hung up that this was no ordinary phone call. This fit the general direction that I sensed God was leading me, but it was out of phase with my personal timetable by about five years.

That phone call precipitated a journey. I want to take you on that journey through these words from Hebrews 11:8. I am assuming that the biblical account of Abraham's call will provide a frame to help you understand the way God works with us to call us more deeply into our role in God's redemptive drama.

We will look at three key words from this verse: *call*, *faith*, and *obedience*.

CALL

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called." Though call is not first in the sequence of words, it precedes and evokes the response of the obedience of faith. God, the Covenant Maker and Promise Keeper, is the initiative-taker. The Lord comes to us with a claim on our lives and something for us to do. The call is a summons from the Caller. Abram's familiar call is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'"

Let me acknowledge that call has a variety of biblical nuances. In this context call has to do with the major, overarching meaning of our life as assigned by the Caller, our purpose in God's redemptive story. Abraham's purpose was to be the spiritual father of a favored people through whom the Savior would come.

Most of us do not have such an imposing purpose, but that does not mean that we do not have a life-defining call—and I am not talking about a religious vocation. I am speaking more broadly about the belief that all of God's people are summoned to fulfill a passion, a destiny, or a positive burden. Os Guinness in *The Call* defines call as follows: "Deep in our hearts, we all want to find and fulfill a purpose bigger than ourselves. Only such a larger purpose can inspire us to heights we know we could never reach on our own. For each of us the real purpose is personal and passionate: to know what we are here to do. Soren Kierkegaard wrote in his journal: 'The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die.'"

My life has been a variation on a theme. Same song, tenth verse. My passion is focused on assaulting the bifurcation that has been entrenched as a class distinction between clergy and laity. My life has been about redefining the role of clergy from a dependency, care-giving mode

(that turns God's people into perpetual children) to an empowering, equipping model of partnership with God's people—so that they can assume their biblical identity as people of God who have a ministry every bit as valuable as the paid professionals.

The summer of 1995 was a turning point in adding another verse to my theme song. I came away from teaching my annual D.Min. course titled "Empowering God's People for Ministry" with a deep burden for the quality of training that pastors were receiving to become equippers in their congregations. I feared that pastors were getting just enough from this class to make them

Faith . . . is proactive and risk-taking. It is to follow God into the uncomfortable.

dangerous. They were leaving the class with a new paradigm of ministry, but returning to churches that were paying them to be caregiving chaplains. Something had to be done to deepen the training of these pastors as disciplers, coaches, and leadership developers, while providing supportive and encouraging contexts to make the needed changes. The job was not getting done.

I knew from that summer on that my coming ministry was to be a part of shaping the agenda for the content, standards, and training methods for the present and future generation of pastoral leadership. Though my personal timetable to make a transition to a role (something like becoming the D.Min. director) was five years beyond that summer.

Yet at a time of deep pastoral ministry satisfaction, the Holy Spirit seemed to be saying that I should pay attention to this inquiry.

FAITH

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called." In the beginning of chapter 11, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that our response of faith is what places us under the pleasure and approval of God. As Philip Yancey writes: "There is no better way to express love to God than by exercising fidelity to him."

Words in these verses such as *approval*, *acceptable*, and *pleased* are associated with the results of faith. I could add *delight*, *favor*, and *pleasure* to that list.

What is faith? We use it in a number of ways:

- Faith is simultaneously a confession of our abject spiritual bankruptcy while trusting in Christ alone as the sufficient One for our salvation.
 - Faith is apprehending in the present what God will do in the future. F. F. Bruce summarizes the characteristics of the heroes of the faith illustrated in this chapter: "The promise related to a state of affairs belonging to the future; but these people acted as if that state of affairs were already present, so convinced were they that God could and would fulfill what he had promised."
 - Faith is the safety net that catches us when our quality of life is threatened. The faith that is predominant in our comfortable Western world is what I call *passive* faith. It is faith held in reserve. It is what we run to when we can't handle life's traumas. It is the safety net that is there, just in case, for the trapeze artist. It is what breaks our fall, but otherwise we can pretty well handle things on our own. A friend of mine confessed that he often treats faith like a spare tire. He is glad it is there in the case of an emergency, but he hopes he never has to use it.
- Certainly biblical faith is enough to encompass the contingencies of life. But when it becomes the predominant way we exercise faith, then we have left biblical faith. Passive faith is a mark of self-satisfied, comfortable, well-educated people who can

generally manipulate the variables of life toward their own end. Os Guinness says: "We have too much to live with and too little to live for."

The faith I see in Abraham is proactive and risk-taking. It is to follow God into the uncomfortable. It is setting out on an adventure, the dimensions of which we can't scope out ahead of time. "By faith Abraham obeyed . . . not knowing where he was going." It is putting ourselves in a position that if God doesn't show up, we are in trouble.

In June 1997, I had just started a three-month sabbatical leading to the completion of nine years of service at Saratoga Federated Church. So excited was I about what was happening in my ministry that I even questioned taking the sabbatical at that time. After nine years my leadership had taken hold. My wife had been serving as an elementary school principal at a school just two blocks from the church. There we were nestled against the foothills of the perpetually green Santa Cruz Mountains; our lives were a nice tidy package.

Yet the inner draw to this call was unmistakable. The best way I can put it is that as I spoke to the Lord about this call, there was in my spirit an open highway to these responsibilities. Hardly had the inner direction ever been more compelling, singular, and clear. But all of that singularity occurred while I was on sabbatical apart from those whose welfare and future had become my own.

That is why there is a third step. The call of God elicits the response of faith, which is made manifest in the exercise of the will—*obedience*.

OBEDIENCE

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called." *Obedience* is inseparable from faith. Faith is the inner disposition that says I believe God is. I believe God is good. I believe God guides. Obedience is the outward demonstration that expresses the inward disposition of faith. Paul brings faith and obedience together when he writes to the Romans that the purpose of his apostleship

is to bring about "the obedience of faith" among the Gentiles.

F. F. Bruce writes of Abraham: "Abraham's faith was manifested first of all by the readiness with which he left his home at the call of God, for the promise of a new home which he had never seen before and which, even after he entered it, he never possessed in person."

I can't imagine that the exercise of faith in obedience for Abraham didn't cause a tug-of-war between the comfortable and unknown. It did for me. As clear as was my sense of call during my

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sabbatical, it got very muddy after my return to my church in the fall.

The principal issue was timing. I couldn't understand why the Lord would pull me out of a ministry where the hard battles to establish the credibility of leadership had been fought, and now we were into the fruit-bearing years. Now, Lord? Maybe this call from Fuller is a confirmation of the right direction for my future, a sign of what is ahead, but not now. For days I would be convinced that I was to stay put. Then for days I would be convinced that I was to respond to this call now. Back and forth. Happy to stay—right to go. Which is it, Lord?

After a few weeks of this divided heart, I came into my office one morning feeling pulled apart. I got down on my knees, draped over my office chair, and cried to the Lord, "What should I do?" Then the Lord broke in, not with the answer, but with an insight. It was as if the Lord was saying to me, "Greg, do you see what your divided spirit means? It means that you truly want to know what my will is for you." In that moment, even though I

didn't have any clearer guidance than I had before, I had assurance that in time the Lord would make his will known.

My wife and I finally came to believe that we had to respond to the call and that we were not omniscient. To try to figure out the issues of timing was beyond us. Only the Lord had the big picture, and his message seemed to be now. We had to respond to our inner conviction.

Does knowing that we are called to go to a new place mean that we won't feel dislodged and disoriented? Hebrews 11:9 tells us that Abraham dwelled in tents in the Promised Land as though it were foreign. I have missed the pastorate and my church intensely. There have been days when I have come to work at Fuller with a hollowness in the

—Please turn to page 19.

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Holy Protest

GENESIS 18:16-33

BY LAURIE RUTH WHEELER

I remember reading a *Time* magazine interview with a psychiatrist who worked with people who survive devastating earthquakes. The doctor made the observation that it is harder to recover after an earthquake than any other natural disaster. He said it is because human beings have to trust the ground. When the ground under your feet begins to sway violently in a large earthquake, and there is nothing to hold on to that will not betray you, you don't recover from that quickly. Some people never do.

This insight fascinated me. Maybe because some earthquakes aren't physical. They hit the social or emotional ground that we depend on. We've experienced this during the last 20 to 30 years with divorce. Children and spouses depend—it is bedrock—that there be a commitment and a trust in that home. And when it's broken, something is shaken that takes years to recover from. Some of us never have.

Earthquakes also happen spiritually, and maybe these are the scariest experiences of all. When a bedrock belief that we rely on concerning who God is or who God has to be for us to trust in him is shaken, it's incredibly painful. Some of us have never recovered.

Historically, the Holocaust has shaken bedrock beliefs about the goodness of God—particularly for Jews. A friend of mine, who is married to a Jewish man, was speaking to a rabbi. She asked this rabbi if he still believed in God. He answered, "Yes—but I wouldn't ask him for anything."

How are we supposed to respond? How do we respond

when *who* God is—his wonder, his power, his majesty, his love—does not match up with *what life* is? How is trust restored? What makes the ground stop shaking?

There is a great story in the Old Testament. It's the story of Abraham, the father of the whole Jewish nation. He was called by God while he was in a pagan country. He had a beautiful wife named Sarah, and they left everything—as did his nephew Lot, who came with him as well—to follow God into the Promised Land. The promise of God to Abraham was that some day, his descendants would be a blessing to every nation in the world—that the stars in the sky would not

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match the number of his descendants—that "the sands on the shore, Abraham, will not match the number of your descendants." Those solid promises of God were bedrock areas of trust for Abraham.

Well, the experience of Abraham 25 years later—still waiting—was that he had a barren wife and no children. Sarah was well past menopause. On this particular day, God shows up. He has two angels with him. They sit down for dinner, and God says, "Abraham, at this time next year, your wife Sarah will have a son."

Then, on their way out, God lets Abraham in on his purpose for visiting Sodom and Gomorrah. And suddenly the ground starts to shake under Abraham's feet. And

as the two angels walk toward the cities, Abraham is left standing before the Lord, trying to regain his balance. His nephew Lot lives in Sodom. Lot's entire family lives in Sodom. Earlier, Abraham went to war to rescue all the men, women, and children in Sodom and Gomorrah and bring them home. Now this God who just promised him a son—life in the womb of a barren woman—has announced that he is about to destroy *all* of the life in Sodom and Gomorrah and all of the cities on the plain. How can that be? What's to stop this God from one day becoming angry at Abraham's descendants—from scourging them from the face of the Promised Land? How does Abraham respond when *who* God is doesn't match up with *what life* is?

For Abraham, for his descendants, and for us, the Lord gives the conversation that follows. Look ahead to chapter 19. The story doesn't need this next conversation. Exactly what God said was going to happen *happened*. Abraham wakes up and overlooks a smoking valley—everything on the plain below has been destroyed, just as God announced. There was extravagant wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah, and an outcry had reached God's ears. So God makes it clear to future generations that events such as the Holocaust—great acts of evil perpetrated by entire societies—will not go unanswered by him. The Lord answers our outcry against the wicked. But first, he answers the outcry from Abraham.

Notice what God does in our text. Notice that it is *God* who says, "Shouldn't I tell Abraham about this?" Notice that this is the first time in the Old Testament that God ever sticks around after he's announced his judgment and discusses that judgment with a human being. In the Hebrew text, where our translation reads, "Then Abraham remained before

the Lord," the original language is ambiguous. One could equally translate it, "The Lord remained before Abraham." The Lord remained.

Abraham's first question reveals what has shaken his world. Abraham asks whether or not the God of the earth will do justice. "Can I trust you? Can my descendants trust you to act with justice?" For Abraham, for his Jewish descendants, God's justice is a bedrock assumption. Without justice, there is no God.

Notice that God doesn't answer Abraham's question. Something more is happening here. God engages Abraham in conversation. It is as if he is saying, "Find out what kind of God I am. Don't just walk away. Engage with me. Am I the sort of God who would wipe out 50 people who have done nothing because I am so angry at all the other people who are sinning? Would I do that?"

At this point in the dialogue, I imagine a giant scale—like the kind that Lady Justice holds. I imagine all of the wickedness of the plains on the left side of the scale, and the innocence of the 50 people on the right side of the scale—and at this point, the scale is in balance. "If there are 50 there, I won't destroy them."

But Abraham shakes it up, moving five people over, imbalancing the scale. "Now what will you do? How merciful are you when you judge?" And God rebalances it, and says, "I won't do it."

Abraham shakes it up again. He moves 10 more over—and imbalances it. "How merciful are you when you judge? Would you destroy all of these people to save your good name, even if you are killing the innocent?" And God rebalances it.

Dissatisfied, Abraham shakes it up again. "Would you do it with 15?" "No."

Abraham still isn't satisfied, God is still standing there, and the angels are still walking toward Sodom and Gomorrah. So Abraham imbalances it again. "Ten—if there are only 10 there,

will you let all of the people who cried out against Sodom and Gomorrah and against all of this wickedness think that you do not exist and that you are not going to answer wickedness because 10 innocent people could be destroyed? Will your mercy on behalf of 10 people rebalance this scale?" God says, "Yes. For the sake of 10, I will not destroy it." For some reason, Abraham is satisfied, and he goes to bed.

I'm not satisfied. Why stop at 10? Why not go all the way? Who can say? Remember, how-

When the chaos of our experience shakes the very ground under our feet, we humbly acknowledge, like Abraham, that we are only dust and ashes.

ever, why this conversation was started in the first place. Remember that we are not dealing with theological abstractions here. Abraham will be the father of a great nation—a nation whose existence depends on the promises of God. It is essential that he know what kind of a God has made the promise. Some day, if this God gets angry enough, will this whole promised nation of his be wiped out? Abraham pursues into the heart of God and God says, "Keep coming—engage with me until this is settled." And for some reason, it is settled at 10. At 10, the ground beneath Abraham's feet can be trusted again. At 10, Abraham goes to bed.

Abraham protests. When the very real chaos of experience shakes the bedrock promises of God, Abraham stands before God in protest, and God invites it. And in the invitation, in the engaging, in the risk of protesting with God,

Abraham discovers something more than the justice that he asked for at the beginning. Abraham encounters God's mercy—and the ground stops shaking.

What do you do? A friend is sick and prayers don't bring healing. Disaster happens someplace in the world and you can't answer why. Your own prayers in your own life aren't answered. It appears that God isn't listening to people's cries. What do you do?

If you are a good Christian, what you probably do is figure that it is the will of God and you attempt to deal with it. We say goodnight to God and go to our beds, tossing and turning alone with our fears and our pain.

Have you ever read Chaim Potok, a Jewish author? In an interview in the *Mars Hill Review*, Potok speaks about the way that Christians have, for some reason, stopped protesting to God. Jews protest. At some synagogues around the world, it is still a custom that during a Saturday Sabbath worship, if a person has a complaint against God, he can interrupt the service to walk to the front and scream it into the ark, until the rabbi gently leads him away and worship continues. For Jews, faithful worship includes protest.

Chaim Potok was telling this to a group of Norwegian pastors, and they were very uneasy with the idea that one would scream at God. They discussed it for quite some time. Finally, one after another, these pastors approached Potok and said that they wished they'd known this a year ago. A year before, there was a terrible ferry disaster. A number of people had been killed. "When our parishioners came to us with their anger and their questions, we didn't know what to do. We wish we would have known. We wish we could have told them to remain before God and protest."

What about you and me? Do we worship a God who remains before us to engage us in protest? If not, bitterness and cynicism will grow in the place of faith. If not, God may become the

distant deity that we dare not ask for anything. When no one knew to tell those Norwegian people that they could go to the face of God in protest, they were abandoned to their own fear that God would nonchalantly wipe out their friends and loved ones in a ferry disaster. Without protest, maybe our hearts grow cold—either to God, or to love. A theologian, Helmut Thielke, writing on intercessory prayer, says that "the globe itself lives and is upheld, as by Atlas arms, through the prayers of those whose love has not grown cold. The world lives by these uplifted hands and by nothing else."

I wonder if we have lost the heart of intercession. What if intercessory prayer is not fancy words to try and get God to do what we expect him to do? It is not bartering with God, it is protesting. It is engaging with the very heart of God—remaining before the God who remains before us in Jesus Christ and saying, "Since you are just, since you are loving, since you are the Creator and Redeemer of this world, rebalance me. Because at this moment, nothing that I see supports those claims."

What if we pray like Abraham? What if we start with the bedrock belief that God is just—that he will keep his promises? But when the chaos of our experience shakes the very ground under our feet, we humbly acknowledge, like Abraham, that we are only dust and ashes. And from there, we launch our protest. Listen, the world is crying out for the protest of those whose hearts have not grown cold.

Listen for it from our songwriters. Tracy Chapman sings, "Tell it like it is. What breaks your heart? What keeps you awake at night? What makes you want to break down and cry?"

But say you'll never turn your back. Say you'll never harden in the world. Say you'll never try to still the rhythms in your breast. Say you'll never look at the evil among us and try to forget."

"Say you'll never look at the evil among us and try to forget." We are called not to forget the promises of God that our existence depends on—and not to forget the cries of the world. We are called to protest—to tell it like it is.

I have a friend named Florida who protests. She has grandchildren, nieces, nephews,

We are called not to forget the promises of God that our existence depends on—and not to forget the cries of the world. We are called to protest—to tell it like it is.

brothers, sisters, cousins, who are in this city, facing the destruction and decay of the African-American community. And she is protesting. She is not going to stand by. Florida's prayers rise up in protest to God. She stands on behalf of others before God, and calls on him to keep his promises to his people. Some day, when Florida is face to face with the Lord, he will thank her for protesting.

Two earthquakes shook Jerusalem in one year. The first happened on a Friday, when the God of the universe hung on the cross taking the punishment of the wicked. The earth itself shook in protest, because gods aren't supposed to do that—gods aren't supposed to die.

The second earthquake hit three days later, when Jesus Christ

rose from the dead. God has drawn near to hear your protest. Engage until you encounter his mercy. ■

Laurie Ruth Wheeler, M.Div., graduated from Fuller Seminary Northwest's Master of Divinity cohort program in 1998. She won the prestigious David H. C. Reed Preacher/Scholar award of \$10,000 that year for the above sermon, over candidates nominated by 22 seminaries. Her decision to prepare for the ministry followed a three-year youth ministry experience in Scotland. She is currently a candidate for ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and seeking her first call.



Suffering and Worship

1 PETER 4:1-6, 12-13; 5:10

BY SIANG-YANG TAN

Several months ago, I started a new series of messages in my church on worship. As I looked at Scriptures and all the books on worship, I thought maybe I would speak on how to give thanks to God, how to worship God, how to love him, how to praise him, how to sing, how to pray, how to wait upon him—all the different elements of worship. But I sensed that the Lord wanted me to speak first on the connection between *suffering* and worship.

Usually, when we reflect on worship, when we think about worship, we do not put suffering and worship together. Some of us have a certain idea about worship. We think that it is so esthetic, that it is a very deep spiritual experience with God. And so it is. But I believe that if we are to understand what worship is all about, if we are to be moved by the Spirit of God deeper into the very core and heart of God himself, we have to understand that, as fallen human beings, we live in a fallen, sinful world.

We all know theologically that the Kingdom has come—but that it is not *fully* come as yet. We have glimpses of heaven to come, but heaven has not fully come on earth yet. We long for heaven to come. We long for that day when we shall see the Lord face to face. Then there shall be no more pain, no more sorrow, no more tears, no more suffering. But until then, we are living in a fallen world.

We Christians too, even if we are redeemed, are fallen people. So in order to understand and to know God in a deeper way, in order to worship him, we need

to understand the place of suffering in our lives.

I have only one main point today. (The homileticians will say that this is not good homiletics, I know.) The one point I want to share with you from our text in First Peter is this: Jesus himself suffered in the flesh, not in terms of the sinful nature, but in the body (see the NIV translation). He suffered in human suffering when

There is a special place for suffering in our lives that enables us to move deeper into worship of God.

he was on earth. And First Peter tells us we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude toward suffering. We are to understand that there is a special place for suffering in our lives that enables us to move deeper into worship of God. If we are open to the place of suffering in our lives, our suffering will enable us to cease more and more from sin and to obey more and more the will of God. Then, ultimately, we will come to know him the way that he wants us to know him. Then we will find our deepest satisfaction in God.

John Piper wrote that God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in him. As human beings, we derive our deepest satisfaction and fulfillment in God himself. We are to have no other gods, no other idols, no other substitutes before us.

So my point is this: We must learn to embrace suffering, whether allowed—or even appointed by God. Whether we understand that such suffering is

sent by God, or allowed by God, we are to yield to God and embrace our suffering and cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work in our school of life. Then our suffering will enable us to become more purified, more purged from sin, and we will be able to live more within the will of God. Then we can be driven (in a good sense of the word) deeper into the very heart of God and his love—into deeper worship of God.

As a psychologist, of course I would be one of the last people on earth to try to glorify suffering. We must not misunderstand the text and the point I am trying to share with you. If we know anything about pain in human hearts and human beings, we know that we do not want to wish suffering on anyone. I am not trying to glorify suffering.

We know that there is some suffering that needs to be healed. And there is some suffering that God will give us grace to overcome. Our text, however, is talking about suffering that comes after we have chosen to follow Jesus—and then suffering happens. Trials and tribulations. The ups and downs of life. Suffering that is there, given, allowed, or appointed by God. What do we do about such suffering? Is there a place for suffering in our lives? Can suffering help us in our worship of God?

In chapter 1 of the book of James, in verses 2 to 4, we read: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

In the school of life, this is not an elective course. Chuck Swindoll pointed out one time that "suffering is a required course." And we will move from suffering 101 to 201 to 301 and beyond. As long as we are on earth, suffering will exist. But there is something about suffering that can purify us and drive us

deeper into the very heart of God that nothing else can do.

As I visit with people (especially the terminally ill)—and as you face illness in your own life, or as I face illness in my own life, or my family's life, or in other people's lives—there is something about suffering from physical disability or illness or infirmity that reminds us that life is frail, that life is fragile, that life is not going to last forever on this side of the Kingdom.

There's something about physical suffering that enables us to realize that we are 100 percent dependent upon God. And all the things that we hold so dearly, all the things in life that can become idols, that can become false gods in our lives, will tend to fade into mere insignificance. For example, the idols of money, sex, pleasure, or power oftentimes become gods in our lives. Only a certain amount of suffering in our lives can help us let go of those false gods and idols in our lives. Suffering will make us realize that those things are not what ultimately satisfy us. And suffering will enable us, as we respond appropriately to God, to be driven deeper into the heart of God, into deeper worship of him.

I want to share just a few thoughts that John Piper has written in *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. In chapter 3 he says: "We need to make the call even more clear. Peter says, 'Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought' (1 Peter 4:1). The suffering of Christ is a call for a certain mindset towards suffering. Namely, that it is normal and that the path of love will often require it. Thus Peter says, 'Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you' (1 Peter 4:12). Suffering with Christ is not strange. It is your calling, your vocation. It is the 'same experience of suffering required of your brotherhood throughout the world' (1 Peter 5:9). This is the 'thought' that we need to put on like armor, lest we be vulnerable

to suffering as something strange."

This is why suffering is so central to the mission of the church. The goal of our mission is that people from all the nations worship the true God. But worship means cherishing the preciousness of God above all else, including life itself. It will be very hard to bring the nations to love God from a lifestyle that communicates a love of things. Therefore, God ordains in the lives of his

There's something about physical suffering that enables us to realize that we are 100 percent dependent upon God.

messengers that suffering will sever our bondage to the world. When joy and love survive this severing, then we are fit to say to the nations with authenticity and power: Hope in God.

I believe that these words are powerful and true. And based on First Peter, and on James, and many other passages in Scripture, we know that the Bible does teach us that there is a place for appropriate suffering and trials in our lives from time to time. Because God knows that there is no other way to prune us, to purge us, to purify us to the point where we love God for who he is, and not just for the gifts that he gives us.

Roger Helland, senior pastor of a New Life Vineyard Fellowship in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, wrote in *The Revived Church*: "The key to pure spiritual power is humility. As Jim Cymbala declares: 'God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him.' The Bible says, 'Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life' (Proverbs 22:4). As in Saul's case, we can be filled with the Spirit and still be no good. We can look

for God's power, but not his presence. We can seek his hand, but not his face. God doesn't build revived churches with powerful people. He builds them with pure people. Again, Gene Edwards says: 'What does this world need? Gifted men [and women] outwardly empowered? Or broken men [and women] inwardly transformed?'"

And so suffering and worship are connected. Because suffering, if we cooperate with God in the process, enables us to become purer people—and humbler people. It is the pure and humble who have truly learned to love God for who he is and to worship him most deeply.

I want to share with you a true story, published in *Leadership Magazine* recently, in an article titled, "Taking Care of Busyness" (Fall, 1998). It is about a friend of mine that many of you know. He is on our Board of Trustees at Fuller Seminary—Dr. John Ortberg. He is also a graduate from our School of Psychology. Dr. Ortberg is a pastor. A few years ago, he and I wrote a couple of books together on depression. And shortly after we finished one manuscript, he accepted a call from Bill Hybels to become an associate pastor at Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago. Every Wednesday night he teaches the Bible to thousands of people. That's lot of people to minister to! So, one day, John called one of his spiritual mentors long distance, and this is what he asked his spiritual mentor:

"What do I need to do to be spiritually healthy?" There was a long pause. This very wise mentor told John, "You must ruthlessly eliminate *hurriedness* from your life." John then asked, "What else should I do?" There was another long pause. And then this very wise spiritual man said to John, "There is nothing else that you should do. You must only ruthlessly eliminate *hurriedness* from your life."

John Piper emphasized that missions is not ultimate—*worship* is ultimate. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Once we are all worshipers, missions will be over, and we will be in heaven

worshipping God forever. But in order to learn to worship like that, we must have *time* and *solitude* to be with God. We therefore need to ruthlessly eliminate hurriedness from our lives.

I'm going to close with two "S's" for us to consider. The first S refers to the spiritual discipline of *solitude*—to take time, long periods of time, to just bask in the presence of God, to be in the wilderness alone with him. There's no other way to really know God and worship him except to practice the discipline of solitude. So we need to make time for God, and ruthlessly eliminate hurriedness from our lives.

Solitude alone, however, is not going to cut it. The second "S" is the S of *suffering*. Embrace it. Thank God for the trials and tribulations that come from time to time. And thank God that they do not come *all* the time. God is gracious; God is merciful. But go through that suffering. Let us ask the Spirit of God to help us become better people, not bitter people, through all of our suffering, with a deeper and more purified worship of God himself.

We tend to have two other S's in our church life here in America. We tend to go after self-esteem, and satisfaction. But God is calling us to embrace solitude and suffering, so we can come to know him and worship him more deeply. Then satisfaction and appropriate self-esteem will come to us as side effects.

May God bless us and help us, by his Spirit, to learn to grow in redemptive suffering and worship of him. ■

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His recent books include: *Understanding Depression and Coping with Depression*, with John Ortberg (Baker, 1995); *Managing Chronic Pain* (InterVarsity, 1996); and *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit*, with Douglas Gregg (Zondervan, 1997).



Learning to Worship

—From page 7

To worship in truth means we come into the presence of God, not as our ideal selves, which we can never be, but as our real selves.

What a relief! We will never have to go to worship and jack ourselves up to be other than we

"Worship in spirit" means to step forward with our essential selves—spirit to Spirit.

are. In truth—the real us. We do not have to get to the place where we are our ideal selves. "Lord, I come as my real self—in my twistedness, with my fears, my doubts, my weariness. I come saying, 'Here I am, and right now, I am not at all the person that you made me to be. I am not trusting you as you are worthy to be trusted. I am afraid of the future, which means I am afraid that you are not going to be faithful to me. I come to you, and I am.'" And we hear the answer, "This you have said truly. Welcome!"

"Worship in spirit" means to step forward with our essential selves—spirit to Spirit. Spirit is deeper than the intellect. Spirit is deeper than the imagination. Spirit is what we are at the core of

our beings. So the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, speaks of worshipping with his mind and worshipping with his spirit. Not that they are separate parts of our being. It's just that "spirit" is the deeper, more essential part of our being.

Which means that worship in spirit will involve the whole of us: mind, heart, mouth, eyes, ears, hands, knees, feet. When we enter into the Presence, and spirit encounters Spirit, our whole person is eventually engaged.

"Worship in spirit" also means worship in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. In cooperation with the truth, the Spirit speaks. And in cooperation with the life, the Spirit breathes. To worship in spirit means to step out on the dance floor and follow the spirited moves.

This is finally what makes worship happen. The Holy Spirit, the very life of God, comes to help us step forward with the Son to the Father. The Spirit comes and softens our hearts and quickens our minds to overcome our weariness and lethargy, to free us from our inhibitions. And the Spirit convicts us of the things that displease God, and move us to come clean.

Have you ever had this experience? You are singing your heart out during worship and you suddenly become aware of some sin in your life. I used to think it was the work of the evil one, seeking to distract me. And sometimes it is. But I now know it is more often the work of the Spirit, bringing my sin to light where it can be forgiven and cleansed. He knows who I am. Now when it happens, I just cry out, "Lord, I agree. That is sin. Wash me in your mercy." The Spirit's passion is to see the Father and the Son enjoyed and glorified. To worship in spirit means allowing the Spirit to ignite the same passion in our spirits.

Which means, as Maryanne Meye Thompson says, "Worship in spirit is finally the work of God the Holy Spirit." Which tells us that when we go to worship, we go to participate in a supernatural event. Not only because we are

in the presence of a supernatural Person, but because the supernatural Person is at work in us! "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers." ■

Go with Confidence

—From page 10

short of purity falls short of the joy God has for us.

Oh yes, it's true that it's sacrificial imagery being used here: as you know, it was a proper sacrificial victim that was regularly spoken of as being unblemished, without spot. There is indeed a self-sacrificial aspect of the Christian life; no point in denying that. After all, we follow the One who laid down his life for us and told us that we ought likewise to love one another. But remember the motive the Letter to the Hebrews attributes to Jesus? "For the sake of the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross." It's not sinning without getting caught, or at least without getting punished, that brings real joy—not for Jesus, and not for us. Don't let go of the longing to be pure, to be blameless.

Because, you see, there really is a God who is *able*. The word has a strong sense when Scripture uses it of God: Romans 16:25—"Now to God who is *able* to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages"; Ephesians 3:20—"Now to him who by the power at work within us is *able* to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine"; and here, Jude 24—"Now to him who is *able* to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing." He is able because he is the God of "glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever." Transcendent,

mighty, sovereignly free, the One who will not—who cannot—be defeated: he is the God for whom no good thing is impossible. And he is not only able but also willing. He is our Savior, the God who came to us in Jesus Christ to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

So, don't hold on very tightly to anything else: nothing else will hold you up in the end. Do hold on to your longing for purity: there is One who can and will make it possible. And do hold on to your hope for joy: to stand firm and clean before God will be

In the end, we will know that God has indeed held us up and kept us safe, despite all the times we've tripped.

the epitome of joy.

Go with confidence. However rough the road, you go with One who is able to bring you home. ■

ENDNOTES

¹ Joel Cunningham, quoted by Martin Marty in *Context*, August 15, 1994, p. 5.

² From *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, ed. George Appleton, quoted by Martin Marty in *Context*, October 1, 1986, p. 6.

³ Quoted in F. Forrester Church and Terrence J. Mulry, eds., *Earliest Christian Hymns* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 183.

⁴ In *Eerdmans Book of Christian Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 20.

⁵ *The Promise of Winter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 31.

Following the Lord into the Unknown

—From page 12

pit of my stomach. The complete picture of the way God is to use me in this new chapter is only just emerging. The new mix is still taking shape. All in time; I am here under orders.

I tell this story through the grid of Abraham's call because this is the way that God works with us. I am sure that you have been reliving and processing your own story even as I have tried to intertwine mine through Abraham's pattern. After all, the writer of Hebrew expects us to complete Hebrews 11 through our faithfulness to the call of God. What the Greats of the past apprehended by faith was the completion of the promise of God through lives of faith.

"Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39,40). ■

Upcoming Events

NOVEMBER

- 3-4** SCHOOL OF WORLD MISSION 1999 MISSIOLOGY LECTURES, featuring guest speaker Samuel Escobar, Ph.D., at First Congregational Church, Pasadena
- 9** INSTALLATION OF ALVIN C. DUECK, Ph.D., into the Evelyn and Frank Freed Chair of the Integration of Psychology and Theology, at First United Methodist Church, Pasadena.
- 11-13** AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR CHURCH GROWTH CONFERENCE, Lowell W. Berry Institute, at Adams Mark Hotel, Indianapolis, Indiana

JANUARY

- 6-7** SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ALPHA TRAINING CONFERENCE, Lowell W. Berry Institute, in Anaheim, California
- 13** PROFESSORIAL INAUGURAL LECTURE BY MARIANNE MEYE THOMPSON, Ph.D., Professor of New Testament Interpretation, School of Theology, at First Congregational Church, Pasadena.
- 19-21** SYMPOSIUM ON THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND PSYCHOLOGY, School of Psychology, featuring guest lecturer Everette V. Worthington, Ph.D.

FEBRUARY

- 18-19** REGIONAL RENOVARE CONFERENCE, Lowell W. Berry Institute, at Valley Cathedral, Phoenix, Arizona
- 24-25** PHOENIX ALPHA TRAINING CONFERENCE, Lowell W. Berry Institute, in Phoenix, Arizona

(Unless otherwise noted, events will be held at Fuller Seminary.)