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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.

GR W

magazine

a quarterly e-magazine designed to promote
growth in faith and service to God

– in memory of Sean Cavender –

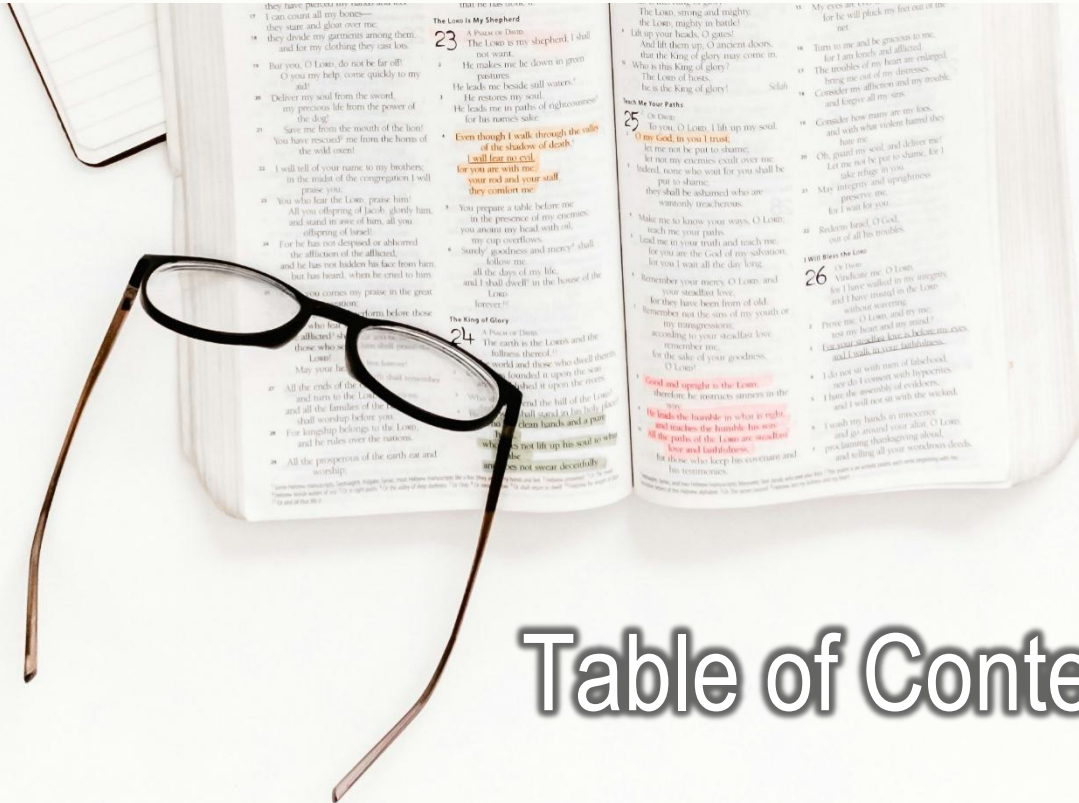


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From the Editor...

If spring is the season of planting and new beginnings, summer is the time for endurance and steady maturation. The excitement of spring planting gives way to the daily, quiet work of maintenance. The sun is high, the days are long, and the landscape is lush, but sustaining that life requires deep roots.

In our spiritual lives, summer reminds us that growth is a long-term commitment. It is one thing to enthusiastically begin a journey of faith; it is another to maintain it through the heat of daily life. As we navigate this season, perhaps three words can guide our focus: deepen, endure, and refresh.

Deepen – when the summer sun dries the surface soil, a plant must push its roots deeper to find moisture. Jeremiah 17:8 speaks of the one who trusts in the Lord as a tree planted by the water that “does not fear when heat comes.” We must deepen our foundation in Scripture and prayer to withstand life’s pressures.

Endure – summer growth requires perseverance against intense heat, sudden storms, and encroaching weeds. Spiritual endurance means remaining steadfast in faithful habits, even when our routines change or distractions multiply.

Refresh – a vibrant garden relies on regular watering to survive the summer heat. Likewise, our souls need the constant, restoring presence of God to avoid burnout. Christ offers us living water (John 4:14) to sustain and refresh us through every dry spell.

The goal of GROW magazine is to promote thoughtful study, urge faithful living, and encourage spiritual maturity. Our contributors for this issue have provided wonderful material designed to help us weather the season and thrive.

Thank you, our readers, for your continued interest. If this issue enriches your faith, please share it with others – whether by forwarding this email, sharing a link on social media, or passing along a PDF copy of the magazine.

Now, let’s GROW together!

William Stewart



Hall of Faith: Kingdoms, Righteousness, & Promises

JEFF CARR | TUSTIN, CALIFORNIA

Faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as *“the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen.”* We are to have confidence or trust in things that we cannot see. For God to ask us to live by faith is really not a stretch at all from our daily routine. Every day I start my car, use a microwave oven, etc. and I “live by faith” in that I hope those things will work. I do not look under the hood nor break open the machine every time I use them. Sometimes these items let me down. God will never let us down!

Another definition of faith comes from a few verses later in Hebrews 11:6 which comes in two parts: faith is 1) understanding that God exists, and 2) God will reward those who seek after Him. If you want an example of what that looks like, look no further than the rest of Hebrews 11 where various godly individuals are named as they meet these definitions of Biblical faith.

For this publication and this particular article, I have been asked to write from Hebrews 11:33, *“who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises.”* No specific names are mentioned in this particular verse but the Hebrew writer is calling our attention to various stories that we can find in our Old Testament that meet these criteria of faith that is pleasing to God.

Conquering Kingdoms (11:33a)

Hebrews 11:32 reads,

“And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.” (NASB20)

I understand that verse was covered in earlier editions of this publication. I will summarize 11:32-33a this way: Barak overcame the forces of the Canaanite king Jabin (Judges 4:23-24; 5:19), Gideon defeated the Midianite kings (Judges 8:3, 12, 26), Jephthah defeated the king of the Ammonites (Judges 11:12-13), and David conquered the kings of the nations around Israel (2 Samuel 8:3, 11-12). Also, Samson fought the Philistines. All these individuals were successful because of their faith in God.

Specifically let us consider David and Joshua as they also lived by faith. Joshua conquered the kingdoms of Canaan, and David conquered kingdoms that were around the country such as Moab, Ammon, and Syria. Both David and Joshua were able to conquer through believing (Hebrews 11:1, 6).

Another kingdom that has conquered all other kingdoms is the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 6:33). Christ is the king and the territory He rules is in our hearts, if we allow Him to! How is Christ's reign still in effect today when countless empires have come and gone such as the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, etc.? It is because people like us, Christians, are living by Faith! The two principal kingdoms that we are called to conquer is the flesh and the world. We are to discipline our bodies and make it our slave (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul describes this battle in Romans 6:19,

“...For just as you presented the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your body's parts as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.”

If enough Christians would follow these precepts, we can help to grow and expand the borders of

Christ's kingdom.

Performed Acts of Righteousness (11:33b)

In establishing justice, Israel's leaders practiced righteousness rather than injustice. Samuel is mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. 1 Samuel 7:15-17 tells us about Samuel, who,

"...judged Israel all the days of his life. And he used to go annually on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would make his return to Ramah, because his house was there, and there he also judged Israel; and there he built an altar to the LORD."

What does it mean when one practices justice or performs acts of righteousness? It means they are doing the right thing according to God. Many good people in the Old Testament did the right thing, even standing for God and His principles when that was not popular to do so. Samuel ruled during the time of the Judges, a time that is highlighted by people being utterly selfish and where chaos reigned (Judges 21:25). There are over 40 kings listed in our Old Testament as ruling either the United or Divided Kingdoms. Only 8 kings listed are classified as "good." That is not a good ratio. Only 8 out of over 40! It is tempting to be popular and rule by what seems to be right (Proverbs 14:12). Performing acts of righteousness and executing God's justice is doing what is right all the time.

As we endeavor to perform acts of righteousness we must remember that we must first have the right motives. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount tells us that we can give to the poor, pray, and fast for the wrong reasons, that is if our motive is "to be seen by men" (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16). There is nothing wrong with giving, praying, or fasting. But if our motive is for selfish reasons then these

actions become wrong. Living by faith means to glorify God. The absence of faith leads to selfishness and sensuality, and opens the door to all sorts of injustice and unrighteousness. Evil must be hated before good can be loved (Amos 5:15), self must be denied before Christ can be followed (Matthew 16:24), the old man must be put off before the new man is put on (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Obtained Promises (11:33c)

When there is real trust in the living God great difficulties can be overcome. Gideon was given a heavy test when he was commanded to take 300 men to destroy a powerful army (Judges 7). Joshua conquered Canaan, Gideon conquered the Midianites, etc. These faithful individuals did what God said because they believed that God would reward them for their service (Hebrews 11:6).

Consider the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Even though Abraham did not live long enough to see the promises come to fruition, he is still highlighted for his faith. Genesis 15:6 tells us, *"he (Abraham) believed in the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness."* That one verse is quoted five times in our New Testaments (Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23). When the New Testament writers cite Abraham and quote one verse five times the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us something. If you want an example of a man who lived by faith (defined in Hebrews 11:1, 6) look no further than in the life of Abraham. Abraham is the one who had a wife who was barren but was told she would have a child, and she eventually did! That child would be a blessing to all nations. When that child came, Isaac, Abraham was told to go sacrifice his only son (Genesis 22). What allowed Abraham to even go through with this test? Abraham believed that God could raise people from the dead (Hebrews 11:19) even

though Abraham didn't ever see God actually raising someone from the dead previously (Hebrews 11:1). When God told Abraham to move he would do so, and go exactly where God told him to, and he would always put God first at every stop (Genesis 15:6, 8; 13:3, 18, etc.). That leads up to Genesis 15:6 mentioned above.

Abraham is the epitome of believing God exists and acting out in a way that God will reward him for his actions (Hebrews 11:6). He

acted on God's promises. We sing a hymn in our assemblies called "Standing on the Promises." Here is the first verse to that great hymn:

*Standing on the promises of Christ, my king;
Through eternal ages let His praises ring!
Glory in the highest I will shout and sing -
Standing on the promises of God.*

The Church at Philadelphia: Seven Churches of Asia

MARSHALL McDANIEL | ATHENS, ALABAMA

Small Churches Can Make a Big Difference

A recent survey of American churches determined that the median size of a congregation is 60 regular participants. Half the churches are bigger than 60 and half smaller, though 70% of churchgoers attend larger groups.¹ Still, most churches are not big churches. They, like the church in first-century Philadelphia, appear only to have “a little power” (Revelation 3:8 NASB).² But they are not really without strength. Small churches can make a big difference in the world. It is imperative, then, that we, especially if we are members of little congregations, listen carefully to what Jesus said to Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13 because his message for the churches then is the same for churches now, whether they be small or big (verse 18).

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.’ (Revelation 3:1, NKJV).

Jesus opens doors for his people (and shuts doors on their enemies). He has every right to do so because of who he is and what he does. He is “holy” and “true” (verse 7a). He holds “the key of David” (verse 7b, cf. Isaiah



22:23). The mention of “the key of David” echoes the prophecy concerning Eliakim in Isaiah 22:20-25. God replaced a prideful steward, Shebna, with his pious servant, Eliakim. Eliakim is a picture of Jesus. Jesus is the “servant” of God and “father” (or “king”) of his people (Isaiah 22:20,21). God has “drive(n Jesus) like a peg in a firm place” and caused him to “become a throne of glory to his father’s house” (verse 23). Jesus opens the doors of salvation and service for his people, and no one, not even the powerful “Shebnas” of the world, can close them.³ Thus, as William Boyd Carpenter eloquently affirms,

Jesus Christ is the true Steward of the house of David ... The faulty, self-seeking stewards, the Shebnas of Jerusalem and Philadelphia, vainly claimed a right of exclusion from synagogue or church, where Jesus, the God-fixed nail in the sure place, upon which the bundle of earth’s sorrows and sins might securely be suspended..., the Eliakim of a greater Zion, had the key of the sacred and royal house.⁴

Christians with “little power” need not fear rejection

because the King holds the key and will not allow them to be excluded from his kingdom.

Though small churches may feel that their works are insignificant and that no one appreciates what they are doing, Jesus affirms that he knows their deeds (verse 8a). Similarly, though some Christians may assume that they have few, if any, opportunities, Jesus promises to “*put before (them) an open door*” (verse 8b). Even if small churches possess only “*a little power*,” when they commit themselves to the word of Jesus and refuse to renounce his name, he offers them opportunities to use their “*little power*.” Instead of comparing ourselves with others who are stronger than us, whether the “*synagogue(s) of Satan*” or even other, bigger churches of Christ, small churches should look to Jesus and trust that he by his royal, divine power is going to open doors for them. Small churches do not need more power, they need only opportunities to use their power, and Jesus promises to give them an open door. Are we praying for God-given opportunities to serve (Colossians 4:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:8-9; 2 Corinthians 2:12-14)? We should! Jesus wants to answer those kinds of prayers.

Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes

down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Revelation 3:9-13).

Small churches, though they possess little power, still receive great rewards. Jesus promised the Philadelphians that he would give them prominence (verse 9; cf. 11), protection (verse 10), and permanence (verse 12). In other words, he pledged to exalt his “*weak*” people (“*the church in Philadelphia*”) over and above their “*strong*” enemies (“*the synagogue of Satan*”) and to place a victor’s crown on their heads. He sheltered them from the worldwide conflict to come and made each one of them “*a pillar in the temple of ... God*” (verse 12). The imagery of an immovable pillar must have been especially meaningful to the Philadelphians, who lived in a city that was “*ever subject to earthquakes*” and that was devastated by seismic activity earlier in the first century.⁵ Jesus would judge those who had subjugated, shamed, and shaken his people. He makes similar promises to small churches today. Though Christians may suffer oppression from outsiders, they need not fear because Jesus vows to reward them now and in eternity.

Nevertheless, the promises of Christ are not unconditional. Christians must keep “(the) word (of Jesus),” that is, “*the word of (his) perseverance*” (verses 8, 10). The “*word of (his) perseverance*” likely refers to Jesus’s own perseverance, that is, his facing suffering and death and emerging victorious. Consequently, only those who are willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel will triumph with their Lord. Christians must also “*hold fast what (they) have*” (verse 11). What they have may be “*little*,” but they must use their “*little power*” to cling to the Christ. Christians must overcome (verse 12). But what must they overcome? The church in Philadelphia faced various challenges (e.g. religious opposition, social exclusion,

temptation to compromise). Do we not face the same kinds of pressures today? Yet, the first-century Christians overcame. Jesus therefore promised them a place in the heavenly Jerusalem, so long as they remained faithful to the end. The same promise stands for us. Will we overcome, as the Philadelphians did? We can, we must, for it will be worth whatever we must sacrifice. Churches with *“little power”* will face trials and temptations, but God gives them hope (Romans 8:28-39). Whether members of small or big churches and whether we face minor or major struggles, we should remember that,

“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us” (verse 18)

Whether Jesus keeps us from *“the hour of testing,”* we can rest assured that he will keep us for *“a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:5). Let us remain faithful to him, knowing that he will be faithful to us.

A word of warning! We live in a culture that allows or even encourages the shifting of blame, and some Christians and churches participate in it. “If our young people hadn’t moved away,” little groups sometimes say, “we would be a thriving group,” “If we had a more eloquent preacher,” others add, “we would reach the community.” “It’s not our fault that local Christians choose other congregations.” These excuses are ultimately inexcusable, for they betray a “victim mentality.” Akos Balogh defines a “victim mentality” and its consequences:

If you have a victim mentality, you will see your entire life through a perspective that things constantly happen “to” you. Victimization is thus a combination of seeing most things in life as negative, beyond your control, and as something you should be given sympathy for experiencing as you “deserve” better. At its heart, a victim mentality is actually a way to avoid taking any responsibility for yourself or your life. By

*believing you have no power, then you don’t have to take action.”*⁶

Churches – small or big – must be careful not to try to justify their own failures by asserting victimhood. Jesus did not want the Philadelphians to see themselves as less than victors. We, like they, have the power of God working in us (Philippians 2:12-16). We to find purpose in Christ (3:12-16). We ought, then, to *“hold fast what (we) have, so that no one will take (our) crown,”* and what we have, though perhaps *“little,”* is great (Revelation 3:11b).

The *“little power”* of small churches may not actually be a liability. Jesus gives little congregations unique opportunities. For instance, small churches can specialize in close connections with other members since they have fewer members. (This does not mean that members of large churches cannot have close connections.) Members of small churches can more easily have all the other members into their home at once for singings or meals. Since small churches need the participation of every member, they can find work for every member – thus making every person feel valuable to the group. Older members have the opportunity to mentor younger ones on a one-on-one basis. All the members can comfort one another, pray together, evangelize together, and the list goes on and on. The *“little power”* of small churches becomes one of the greatest assets as they work and grow together in Christ.

Small churches are not alone; Jesus is with them. They are not powerless; Jesus is their strength. They are not worthless; they can make a big difference for the Lord. Will we, like the church in Philadelphia, persevere through the trials and influence others for good? Each of us must give an account to God for what we do with our own little or great power. May we continually remember the words of Jesus: *“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much”* (Luke 16:10a). And may we use our little power to his glory.

References:

¹ This survey was conducted in 2023 by the organization Faith Communities Today and is available on the Hartford Institute for Religious Research website: <http://hrr.hartfordinternational.edu/fast-facts-on-american-religion>. See also <https://faithfcommunitiestoday.com>

² Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.Lockman.org.

³ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Baker, 2003), 104-9.

⁴ William Boyd Carpenter, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine" in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible: A Verse by Verse Explanation*, ed. Charles John Ellicott (Zondervan, 1959). 8:548.

⁵ Strabo, *Geogr*, 13:4.10 (Jones, LCL); see also Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, 97-98, 109-10.

⁶ Akos Balogh, "Beware The Dangers of a Victim Mentality," *The Gospel Coalition Australia*, August 12, 2020, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beware-the-dangers-of-a-victim-mentality>

Going to the Erēmos

CHADWICK BREWER | ATHENS, ALABAMA

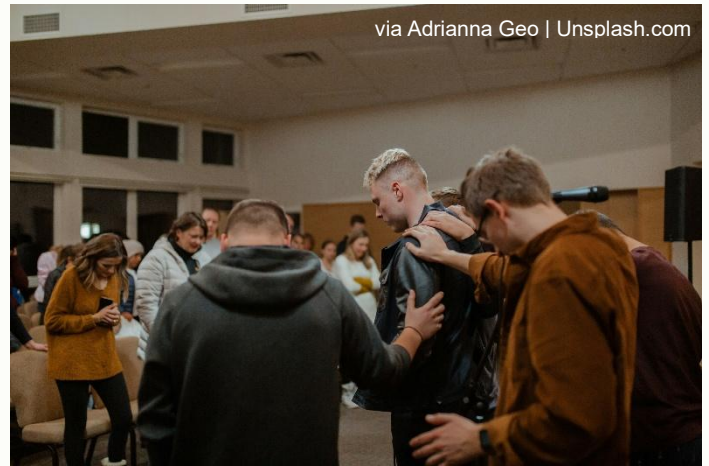
It's early spring in the region around Galilee. You have been traveling with Jesus while He has been performing miracles and teaching about the kingdom of heaven, which is at hand. Yesterday, He healed the mother-in-law of your companion Simon. People everywhere are seeking Jesus, and there is clearly so much work to be done.

But it's late morning, the dew has disappeared, and Jesus is nowhere to be found. He was here when we went to bed, but now He cannot be found. What is He doing? Does He not sense how precious His time is? The crowds are looking for Him. There is so much to be done. How could He possibly not care about the work that God has given Him?

Yet in Mark 1:35, we see that Jesus found it of supreme importance to go to the erēmos and pray, rather than cater to the crowds. How could Jesus find the wilderness / deserted place / erēmos more important than the work of the kingdom?

The quick and easy answer is prayer. Clearly, a solid prayer life is essential to the work. But if that were the only answer, why didn't He just pray in the house? Or in the town square? Or in His room with the door closed? Why does Mark point out that Jesus went to a deserted place to pray? Why does this word erēmos show up in such important parts of Jesus's life?

The first time we encounter this word is in Mark 1:12. Jesus is led out into the erēmos / wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. Typically, we look at this occasion as Satan tempting Jesus while He is at His weakest. He is alone and hungry; what better time to pounce could there be? But what if we have been misreading this? What if quiet time



with God, fortified by fasting, is the perfect setting for Jesus to rebuff those temptations? Perhaps being out in the wilderness with God for a time was beneficial rather than merely detrimental. The temptations were true temptations (after which Jesus needed to be ministered to by angels), but perhaps elements of the narrative that we think of as inherently unfavorable were also working in His favor.

After Jesus spends forty days in the erēmos being tempted, He begins His ministry, calls His first disciples, and heals many. But by Mark 1:35, He wants to return to the erēmos. This certainly does not sound like a desire to return to a place of hardship. It sounds like Jesus needed something and found it in the erēmos.

By Mark 6:31, the fame of Jesus had spread so much that people were constantly coming and going, to the point that they had no time even to eat. Instead of digging in and saying, "Look at this profitable work! We need to knuckle under and just keep plugging. We'll sleep when we're dead," Jesus calls them away by themselves to the erēmos. When Jesus was finding such success, why would He interrupt that to go into the wilderness?

In Matthew 14:13, Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist. This was His cousin according to the flesh, the one sent to prepare the way for Jesus, and the one of whom Jesus said that there was no one greater born of women (obviously excluding Himself). When Jesus heard of this great man's death, He withdrew to the erēmos. He didn't bury Himself in His work, nor did He distract Himself with His smartphone. He went to the erēmos.

Luke summarizes it this way: "He (Jesus) would often slip away to the erēmos" (Luke 5:16). While Matthew and Luke record specific instances where Jesus withdrew and went out to a desolate place, Luke states that this was His habit or custom.

While the trail of this word runs dry, the idea behind the word still leads forward. In Mark 6:46, Jesus went to the mountain to pray all night. Geographically, this is not an erēmos, but it serves the same function. In Luke 6:12-13, before Jesus chose the twelve apostles, He spent time on the mountain praying. And finally, in Luke 9:28, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on the mountain to pray. Again, we might ask, "Why not just pray where they were?"

There is another geographical place that served the same function: gardens. Though not technically an erēmos, these places served the same purposes: spaces removed from noise and distractions where Jesus could commune with the Father. In John 18:2, John tells us that Jesus would often meet with His disciples in the garden outside Jerusalem. Luke 22:39 says that He went out to the garden, as was His custom.

From all of this, we can make some fairly solid conclusions. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus walked away from the wilderness with tested and proven identity, purpose, and work. When He was grieving and weary from ministry,

He found rest and comfort in solitude with God. And before making big decisions or facing difficult moments, He sought time alone with His Father. Finding time in solitude with God was utterly important to His life, work, and mission.

When we read through the Gospels, we are quick to notice how much time Jesus spent in prayer, and we rightly conclude that we also should spend much time in prayer. But we often overlook the fact that Jesus would withdraw from everything that might distract Him and find time with God in solitude. We rightly emphasize prayer, but we often neglect the intentional solitude that surrounded Jesus's prayers. Jesus sought out time with God, and He sought it in solitude.

It is imperative that we make some very clear distinctions between solitude, isolation, and escapism. Solitude ≠ isolation. Solitude is engagement with God; isolation is an attempt to escape. Solitude is having God as your refuge; isolation is putting yourself in danger. Solitude is giving your heart to God; isolation can heighten fear and anger. Solitude is nourishment for the soul; isolation is often what we seek when we have neglected true nourishment.

Jesus did not try to escape the pressure of His task by taking a sabbatical. He didn't lose Himself in a project or simply enjoy a day of fishing. He was not running from the crowds, the obligations, or the stress; He was running toward God, who was His shelter in the storm.

We are often overrun with stress, overworked, and burned out. Worldly wisdom tells us to take a vacation, find a good hobby while we unwind, retreat from everyone, and distract ourselves with something else. Jesus lays out a different pattern, one in which we should walk in His steps. He withdrew to a place where He could be alone with God and spend time in prayer. We should do the same. Be followers of Jesus in all aspects of life.

Becoming Like Jesus: In Boldness

T. SEAN SULLIVAN | PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS

Introduction

Our Lord and Savior demonstrated great boldness (John 7:26), and we can have the same (Hebrews 13:6).

Boldness is confidence, and confidence is from the knowledge of truth. Jesus was bold in His approach to teaching, preaching, and living, because He certainly knew truth in an absolute way. Are we bold in the knowledge of truth, like Jesus? Or, do we allow for doubts to ruin our boldness? The timid can be convinced that faith is an empty fairy tale.

With confident boldness in truth, we will change our lives and all our actions to follow God's rules. We will surrender our will to God's leadership, and we will seek Heaven beyond this life.

Jesus was bold in the knowledge of these three statements: God is real. His directions are the truth. He is worthy of our confidence. We need to take on the boldness of Jesus in all truth, including these thoughts.

Boldly Declare: God is Real

For most souls who will read this lesson, the word of God alone is their immediate source for proof of God – and that is a good thing, because we believe the Bible. We know Psalm 14:1 that begins with, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’”. And, Proverbs 1:7, which says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...” We embrace the New Testament wherein the declarations of God are direct and emphatic, with no room for doubt. Paul's lesson at Athens is an example. Paul declares, “God, who made the world and everything in it...” (Acts 17:24-27). We should



all know the Hebrew writer's statement in 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

However, there may be those who lack the boldness of faith in God. Perhaps these logical observations will help us all to become bold. There can be no other reasonable explanation that works with this proven scientific law than a supernatural being who is beyond (outside of) our material nature, and more powerful than our material world, to have made it happen. God who made all the parameters of our existence: time, space, matter, force, and motion (Genesis 1:1-2).

- “In the beginning” – time.
- “made the heavens” – space.
- “and the earth” – matter.
- “...the Spirit of God moved over the face of the water” – force and motion.

God is the answer to our origin. God is eternal (Revelation 4:8). God is all-knowing (1 John 3:20). God is all-powerful (Revelation 19:6). God is the only explainable, rational, and valid conclusion that fulfills the need of all that is required to explain this world's existence.

Be boldly confident that God is.

Boldly Declare: The Bible is Real

The Bible is God's given word (James 1:17-22), the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), and the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15-17). James describes the word of God as among His good and perfect gifts (James 1:17-18). He continues to tell us that in order to work, as it should, we must confidently accept and boldly apply His direction – being doers of the word (James 1:19-25).

Do not let those who question the Bible cause you to lack confident boldness. The Bible always stands the test. The Bible is not “a History Book,” but it contains absolutely accurate history. One example is “The Hittites” – Some “experts” have questioned the existence of the people referred to as Hittites in the Bible (Genesis 15:20; Genesis 23:10; and 46 other references). The proof of the Hittites was unearthed in the early 1800s, and by the early 1900s, it was verified. Of course, believers knew all along, from reading and trusting the Bible, without having to dig. In Acts 18:12-17, Luke wrote that Paul was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, and, even though many doubted this reference over time, archaeology confirmed this as fact. We can also consider that we have fragments of the New Testament as early as 150 AD and full Greek manuscripts from the mid-300s AD (Codex Sinaiticus). We have over 20,000 fragments, which prove our New Testament. Every scroll and piece of a scroll fully supports the New Testament that we have right now. The critics also help demonstrate the accuracy of the Scriptures. For centuries, the enemies of God's word have searched for evidence of error that they can use against God's word, and they have never found any true reason to reject these words.

Be boldly confident that the Bible is real.

Boldly Declare: Faith is Our Obedience

Some people refuse to accept God's promises, because others who claim to be believers do not live as they should. We must have a great confidence, a great boldness, to live God's will consistently – remembering that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:16).

We boldly declare faith by living in faith, like Paul, who said,

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.”
(Philippians 3:12-15)

The bold practice of faith provides us with a better way to live today (Galatians 5:22-25) and the opportunity to gain eternal life after this life is over (1 John 2:24-25).

The way to Heaven is clearly revealed in the Scriptures (John 14:1-6). The pathway is not a “random hope” or “luck of the draw”; it is bold obedience to God. To boldly obey God, we must know what He expects (Ephesians 5:8-10). To boldly obey God, we must properly understand His directions (2 Timothy 2:15). To boldly obey God, we also must do what He expects (Matthew 7:21).

Be bold in your faith and confidently obey God always.

Conclusion

Doubt and misgivings are the opposite of the example left for us to walk in (1 Peter 2:21-23). Do not allow any doubts to creep into your hearts. Throw away your doubts, take on true belief. Be

bold in your life's declaration: God is real, His confidence in hope of Heaven can be yours if you word is real, and faithful living is real. Bold are willing to begin right now.

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Satan's Lies About Evangelism

SEAN P. CAVENDER | 1987-2023

Jesus stated that the devil is the father and source of lies and the truth could not be found in anything the devil says (John 8:44). Satan speaks of his own authority and refuses to submit to the rule of God. The devil has always been a liar, slanderer, and accuser against the people of God, from the very beginning when he lied to Eve, to the time that he slandered Job's good name and accused God of protecting Job, to his constant work against Christians today (1 Peter 5:8).

When it comes to the kingdom of God, Satan wants to see it destroyed. He will try his best to get Christians to quit working for the cause of Christ. If he can stunt the growth and effectiveness of the church then he will be pleased with his progress. The devil has many lies about a vast number of subjects, but perhaps one of the most dangerous set of lies that he has is in regard to evangelism. Sadly, many Christians have a lackluster approach to evangelism. Or, in an opposite extreme, Christians evangelize using unscriptural means and methods. Either way, it is due to the influence of Satan.

"Times have changed."

Perhaps this is Satan's most used and most believed lie. Many people think back to the "good 'ole days" to when "times were better and times were different." This general philosophy of thinking that times have changed is not limited to the religious realm, which is what makes it such a believable lie.

This lie has caused many people to give up on efforts of the Lord's church to teach, evangelize, and plant the seed in the hearts of men.



via Ben White | Unsplash.com

Brethren will start saying, "times are different now ... we must have too much to compete with." We think of the influence of TV, sports, work, school, and family events. "People are just busier than they have ever been. Times have changed," we are told.

When has there ever been a time that leisure, entertainment, recreation, family, work, and education have never been around? These influences have always been around!

One problem that has not changed is the problem of sin. Consider the immorality of the Gentiles while reading Romans 1:26-32. Homosexuality, fornication, covetousness, envy, murder, strife, whispering, backbiting, hating God, and disobedience to parents are all mentioned. It almost sounds as if we turned on the evening news in 21st century America. Are times really all that different? Sin is still prevalent in the lives of men and it will continue to bring folks to eternal damnation.

Realizing the great problem of sin ought to motivate us to preach with more zeal and affection. The sad reality is it's not the times that have changed, but it's that Christians have

changed. Too many Christians have been swept away by the influence of Satan. Too many Christians are enthralled with the world of television, sports, school, and family. They have lost their commitment unto the Lord of hosts. Zeal that once ignited churches to influence a community has been extinguished.

Instead of accepting Satan's lie that "times have changed" let's begin taking the message of change and repentance to the lost world around us (Matthew 3:8; 4:17)!

"Gospel meetings will NOT work."

There seems to be a growing attitude that gospel meetings are antiquated and ineffective today. This lie of the devil's usually finds great company with the lie that "times have changed." Often in times of despair, brethren will think back to the days when people would attend gospel meetings, and several baptisms might occur as a result of those meetings. This goes back to some of the same problems as we have already identified. Who has changed: the world or Christian's attitudes?

There once was a time when Christians would attend a gospel meeting for two weeks or more to listen to an hour long (if not longer) sermon. Would Christians do that today? Perhaps we have lost confidence in the preaching of the gospel!

A big indication that this is a lie from the devil is that it uses his favorite three letter word, the word "not." Just as the devil told Eve a lie and added the word "not" to tempt her to sin, the devil wants us to accept this falsehood. If you take out the word "not" then the truth is revealed: gospel meetings will work!

Gospel meetings remain an opportune time to teach someone the gospel. It is through the instruction from God's word that faith is formed in the hearts and minds of alien sinners (Romans 10:17). Gospel meetings can still be effective today, but we need Christians to make

a commitment to this opportunity to teach lost souls. Do not believe Satan's lie. The problem is not in the meetings, but the problem may lie in us and our attitude.

"They'll never obey the gospel."

When we meet people that are not Christians we quickly realize just how pitiful their lives are without the blessing of salvation. Many are ruined by sin, and it is obvious to us. Sometimes people's lives are in such a wretched state that we begin to think they would never take the time to listen to us teach them, much less actually repent and obey the gospel.

The Scriptures are full of wonderful examples of those who were in some dire situation who did, in fact, repent of sin. The woman at the well had been married a number of times, yet she believed Christ (John 4:16-18, 28-30). Cornelius was a captain in the armies of Rome and he was a Gentile, yet he obeyed the gospel of Christ (Acts 10:47-48). One of the greatest antagonists against the Lord's church was the apostle Paul. He was a blasphemer before his obedience to Christ. Yet, even he changed his life!

Imagine the great effect of just these examples. The woman at the well went and immediately told others of her conversation with the Christ. Cornelius' household also was converted to the Lord. And the great effect that the apostle Paul had in his preaching and travels so impacted the early church.

Perhaps if we speak to that person we are just so certain "will never obey the gospel," we would end up being surprised. If that person did obey the gospel of Christ, then just imagine the effect that they might have upon others (friends and family). How zealous might they be to teach others? Would you become more zealous and encouraged to engage in conversations about the forgiveness of sins through Jesus? We should never be ashamed of the gospel that has the power to save men's souls (Romans 1:16).

“You must be their friend first.”

This is a lie that seems to be catching on like wildfire among several folks. It is argued to have any success in teaching your neighbors the gospel then you must first become their friend. This is greatly influenced by the mindset of the social gospel. It is thought that a friendship must first be formed before someone will listen to us teach them the gospel.

This is not to suggest being unfriendly or a poor neighbor. However, we must ask what your actions reveal about you. Are you really concerned about a person's soul or are you concerned about having a friend to go out with? Are you marketing the gospel? Do you really love your neighbor as yourself? Paul did not believe this lie of Satan's. He went into the city of Athens, noting their blatant involvement with idolatry, and began preaching a message of repentance (Acts 17:16-30).

Paul did not attend every assembly for an idol. Neither do we need to attend any denominational meetings to try and get others

to come to our assemblies. Paul did not befriend the religious leaders in Athens to be accepted in the community. The apostle preached the gospel and when he did some believed (Acts 17:34).

Imagine the effectiveness of simply preaching the gospel of grace. It will interest those with good and honest hearts. We should give up on any man-made ploy and tactic to try to disguise the preaching of the gospel. If we try to disguise the gospel under the cloak of friendship then what else will we be willing to disguise about the gospel?

Conclusion

We need to dedicate ourselves to the preaching of the gospel. Let us not be gullible to believe the lies and deceptions of the devil, but let us be ready to combat him. We may become effective teachers in the service of the kingdom once we are no longer handicapped by these lies. Just think about how effective the church might be in your community if we all commit ourselves to the work of the Lord!

[via Meditate On These Things, December 2013]

The Wiles of the Devil

JEFFREY SMITH | MELBOURNE, FLORIDA

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11, KJV)

The word translated “wiles” is the Greek *methodeia* – the root of our English word “method.” Paul is telling us something important: the devil is not a random force of chaos. He has methods. He has schemes. He has a playbook.

And here is the sobering part: he wants to run those plays on you.

The Greatest Trick

The French poet Charles Baudelaire observed that the greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world that he did not exist. More than a century later, that trick is still working. Many people – including some who sit in church pews – think of Satan as a cartoon character with horns and a pitchfork, a relic of medieval imagination, a metaphor at best.

Jesus did not think so. Speaking to His opponents, He said,

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44)

According to the Son of God, the devil is real, the devil is a murderer, and the devil is a liar.

Scripture gives him many names, and each one is a window into his character. He is,

“the great dragon...the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9)



Dragon. Serpent. Devil (slanderer). Satan (adversary). Deceiver. These are not flattering titles, and they were not meant to be.

Now, no one would fault a general for studying the enemy's tactics before a battle. Armies send out scouts. Coaches watch film of their opponents. Paul himself said of Satan that *“we are not ignorant of his schemes”* (2 Corinthians 2:11). If we are going to resist the devil, we need to know how he works. So let us scout the adversary. What does Satan want to do to us? The answer can be summed up in five words that all rhyme – and all wound.

Satan Wants to Confuse Us

His first recorded words in Scripture are a question designed to muddy clear water:

“Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” (Genesis 3:1)

God's command to Adam and Eve had been simple and unmistakable. One tree was off limits. That was all. But *“the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field,”* and his craftiness took the form of confusion. By the time he finished talking, Eve was rethinking what God had said, what God had meant, and whether God could be trusted.

He still works this way. He wants us to believe that God's commands are hard to understand, or unreasonable, or open to endless reinterpretation.

He loves the phrase, “Well, that’s just your interpretation.” He delights when plain Bible teaching gets buried under a fog of “scholars disagree,” God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) – but Satan certainly is.

Satan Wants to Excuse Us

Confusion was only half of the serpent’s work in Eden. Once Eve’s confidence in God’s word was shaken, he moved to step two: “*You surely will not die!*” (Genesis 3:4). In other words: go ahead – the consequences will not really come. He excused in advance the very sin he had just encouraged.

This may be his most popular method today. Everybody does it. It’s not hurting anyone. God wants me to be happy. I was born this way. I’ll make it right later. Satan is a tireless defense attorney for sin, always ready with a reason why this particular disobedience in this particular case does not really count. But the wages of sin is still death (Romans 6:23), no matter how eloquent the excuse.

Satan Wants to Amuse Us

While Moses tarried on Mount Sinai receiving the law of God, the people grew restless at the foot of the mountain. They made a golden calf, and then, “*the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play*” (Exodus 32:6). Forty days earlier they had heard the voice of God from the mountain; now they were dancing around an idol. They had traded worship for entertainment.

Satan does not always need to make us wicked. Sometimes he only needs to keep us busy having fun. Paul warned Timothy that the last days would produce people who are “*lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*” (2 Timothy 3:4), and he wept over those whose “*god is their belly... with minds set on earthly things*” (Philippians 3:19). A Christian who is too entertained to pray, too busy to study, and too distracted to serve has been just as effectively

neutralized as one who has fallen into open sin. Amusement is one of the quietest weapons in the devil’s arsenal – and one of the most effective in our age of endless screens and ceaseless diversions.

Satan Wants to Abuse Us

When subtlety fails, Satan is perfectly willing to use a sledgehammer. Consider Job. With God’s permission but Satan’s malice, Job lost his livestock, his servants, his ten children, and finally his health – all in the devil’s attempt to break his faith (Job 1-2). Satan had no reservations about any of it. That is how he works.

He wanted to do the same to Peter. Jesus warned him,

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31-32).

Sifting wheat is violent work – shaking, beating, tossing. That is what Satan wanted to do to Peter, and it is what he wants to do to us. Peter never forgot the warning. Years later he wrote,

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8)

Lions do not negotiate with their prey.

Satan Wants to Accuse Us

The name “devil” (*diabolos*) means slanderer, and Revelation calls him

“the accuser of our brethren ... he who accuses them before our God day and night.” (Revelation 12:10)

Accusation is his native tongue.

His servants accused Jesus. The chief priests “kept trying to obtain false witness against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death”

(Matthew 26:59) – and when the truth would not convict Him, they settled for lies. His servants accused Paul, stirring up mobs and dragging innocent men before the authorities (Acts 17:5-7). And he accuses us still – to God, to others, and perhaps most painfully, to ourselves. How many Christians have been paralyzed by the whisper, “You call yourself a Christian? After what you did? God could never use you.” When the accusation drives us to repentance, that is the work of the Spirit. When it drives us to despair, that is the work of the accuser.

What He Is Really After

Confuse. Excuse. Amuse. Abuse. Accuse. Five methods, but only one goal – and Peter named it: the devil is “*seeking someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). He is not playing games. He confuses in order to devour. He excuses in order to devour. He amuses, abuses, and accuses in order to devour. Every wile is in service of that single appetite.

What God Wants to Do for Us

If the article ended there, it would be a frightening article indeed. But Peter does not end there, and neither does God.

“But resist him, firm in your faith... After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:9-10)

Satan wants to devour us; God wants to establish us. Satan wants to destroy us; God wants to save us.

And God has made resistance possible. “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Peter adds that if we diligently practice the qualities of Christ, “you will never fall,” and an entrance into the eternal kingdom “will be richly provided” (2 Peter 1:10-11). The devil is powerful, but he is not all-powerful. He is crafty, but he is not irresistible. He could not hold Job. He could not keep Peter. He could not defeat Christ. And with God’s help, he cannot defeat us.

Picture yourself standing in a completely dark room at night. Now picture striking a single match. What power does the darkness have to resist the light? None at all. Darkness cannot push back against light; it can only flee from it. So it is with Satan and God. The darkness, however vast, has no power over the light.

Martin Luther – a man who felt the devil’s assaults as keenly as anyone – put it this way in his great hymn:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

On earth, perhaps not. But our fortress is not of this earth. The ancient foe has his wiles – but we are not ignorant of them, we are armed against them, and the battle belongs to the Lord.

JULY 2026 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Jeff Carr will pen our next article in the Hall of Faith series focused on Hebrews 11:33-34 (stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire).

CHURCH ARTICLE

Jim Mickells brings our final article in the series on the seven churches of Asia. He will address the church at Laodicea, a church which the Lord described as “lukewarm.”

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Paul emphasized in 1 Corinthians 14 that all things should be done for edification. A yet to be enlisted writer will use this text to encourage us to be focused on edification.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

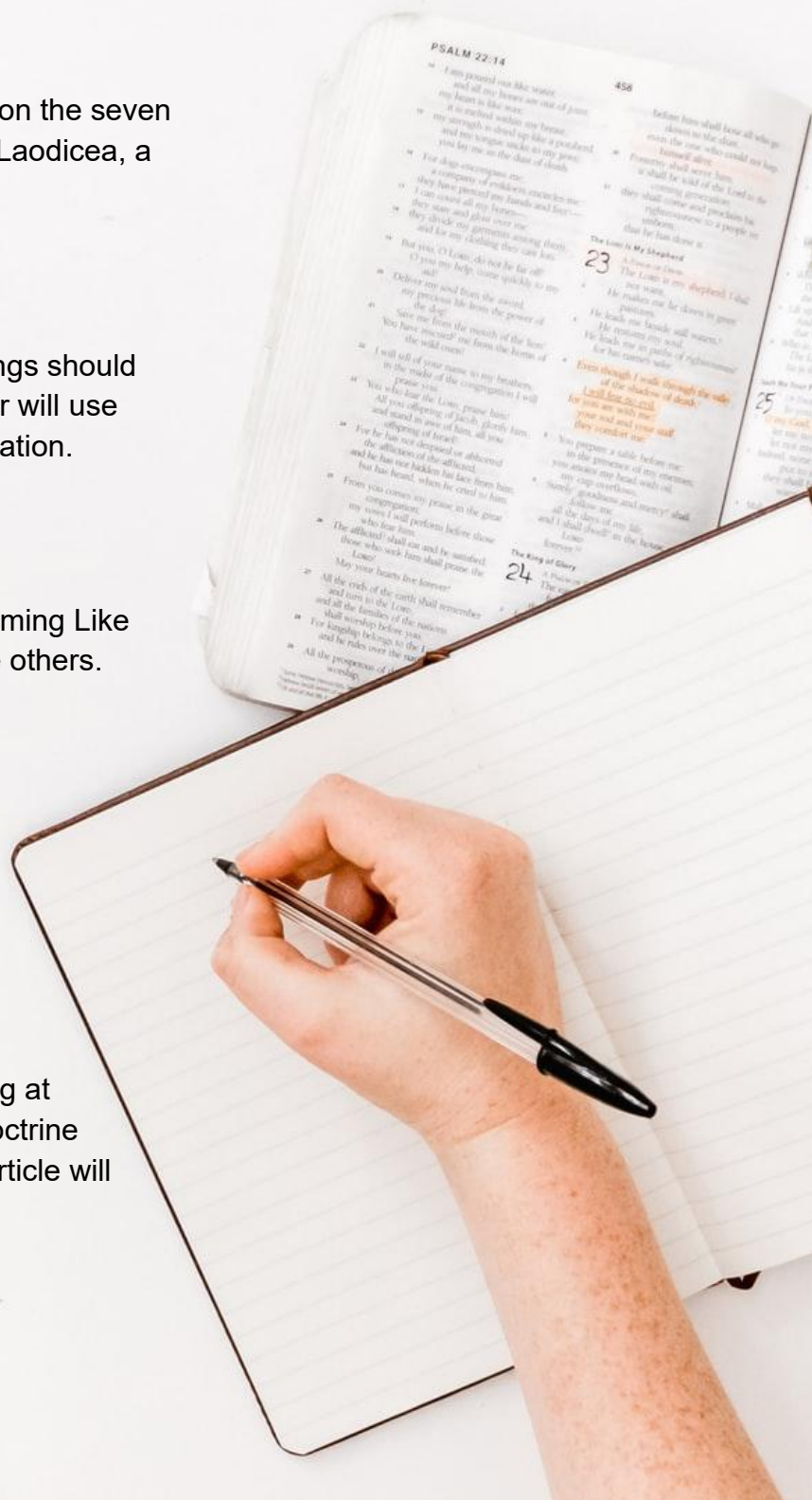
Sean Sullivan gives our next article in the “Becoming Like Jesus” series. He will address the need to serve others.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba brings our next evangelism article, asking the question, “Can we turn the world upside down?”

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

William Stewart brings the first in a series looking at proof texts used by those seek to support the doctrine of hereditary depravity or original sin. The first article will focus on Romans 5.



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