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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



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



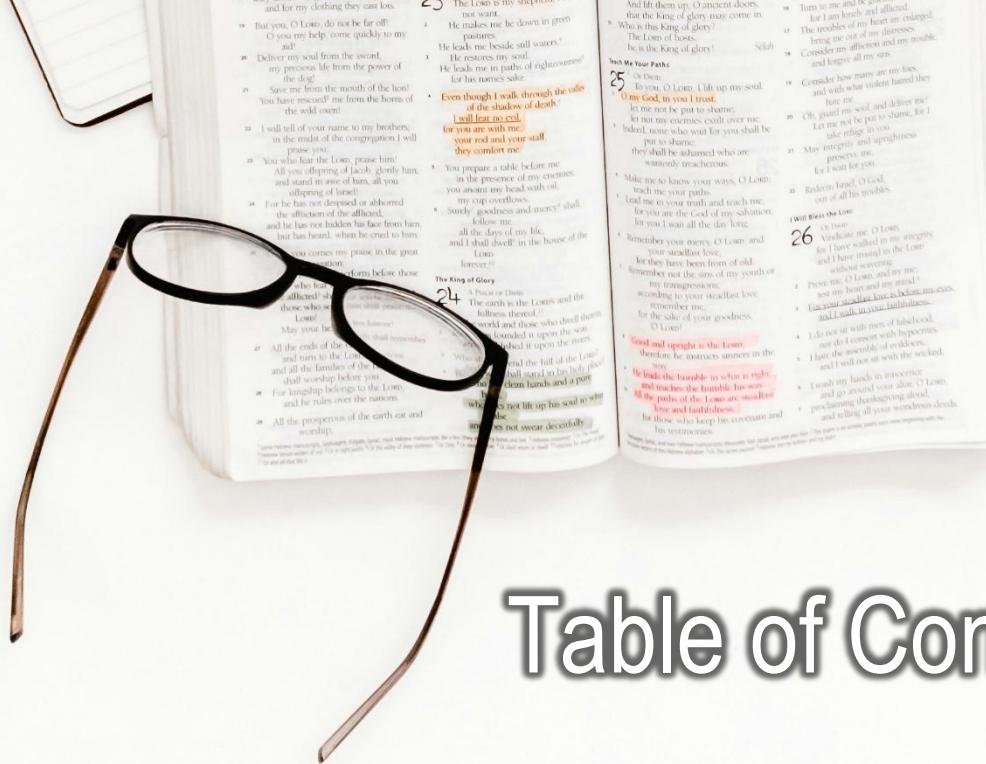


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From the Editor...

Solomon wrote:

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven."
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)

This is true in many areas of life, and is even exemplified in the seasons. Spring is a time of planting, of newness, of youthfulness; summer is a season of growth, productivity, and increase; and autumn is a juncture for maturity, completion, and fulfillment. It is a season of change.

As a child of God, may we work our way through the times of youth and newness and growth and increase in our faith, and pursue with diligence the season of maturity and completion - not viewing it as a end or culmination, but having the determination expressed by the apostle Paul,

"I press toward the goal for 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. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind."
(Philippians 3:14-16)

Let us always be pressing towards full maturity, that God will be glorified by the final reaping and ingathering of our faith.

Thank you for your interest in GROW magazine and for being a subscriber. Thank you to the authors in this edition, and indeed, to the writers who produce this spiritually helpful content each quarter. If you find the material herein to be beneficial, feel free to share it with others. You can forward this email, share links to the PDF copy, our website, or specific articles on social media, or print out a physical copy using the print feature at the bottom of each article page on our site.



Now, let's GROW together!

William Stewart
editor & designer

The Hall of Faith: Rahab the _____

REAGAN McCLENNY | LUFKIN, TEXAS

What word immediately comes to your mind to fill in this blank? Rahab the ... what? If you're like me, "Harlot" is the word that comes to mind. Indeed, that's the way the New Testament authors identify her.

Hebrews 11:31, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace."

James 2:25, "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?"

It has long bothered me that she is identified in this way. Doesn't it bother you? Think about it personally: If you had to put your most egregious ("worst" or "greatest") sin after your name, what would it be? Reagan the _____? Now imagine that this is preserved in print as the way you are identified for all generations to follow! We would likely judge this to be cruel if it were done to us. So, why does the New Testament text do this to Rahab? Surely this phrase is chosen as more than just the easiest way to identify the specific Rahab to which the authors are referring.

I suggest that referring to her as "Rahab the Harlot" is for our benefit. This description is not a "scarlet letter" implying she is still being punished or she hasn't been forgiven her immoral past. Instead, it is to remind us, the readers, that she was a harlot. Why?

Rahab Was a Harlot: Expressed in 4 Ways

This is a true, accurate description of who she was when we come to know her in the text, and the Bible purposely doesn't minimize

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the sins of its people. Often, this makes us uncomfortable. Even with Rahab, scholars going back to Josephus^[1] have tried to turn this description of her in **Joshua 2:1** ("a harlot named Rahab") into something besides a harlot, like an "innkeeper."^[2] Perhaps there is some argument from the Hebrew for this interpretation, but from the Greek there is none. James and the Hebrew writer both use the Greek word *porne* meaning "prostitute" or "whore"^[3] (See **Matthew 21:31; Luke 15:30; 1 Corinthians 6:15; and Revelation 17:15**). The Bible *purposely* doesn't minimize her sinful profession because sin is destructive and should not be minimized or swept under the rug. It is what it is—and we are better off dealing with it head on than dancing around it. The Bible never hides sin because sin thrives in darkness; it grows and spreads when it's hidden or allowed to continue (**1 Corinthians 5:6**). Sin can only be defeated and dealt with when brought to the light of reality by confession and repentance. We see this play out over and over, in the Bible and in our own lives.

What would follow the "the" if we filled in the worse sins of some of our favorite Bible heroes?

- Noah the...strangely undressed drunkard
- Jacob the...deceptive, heartless trickster
- David the...lying, murderous adulterer
- Peter the...impetuous, arrogant denier
- Paul the ... insolent, persecuting, blasphemous chief of sinners

Paul describes himself in these terms in **1 Timothy 1:12-16**:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, (13) although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. (14) And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (15) This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (16) However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Paul uses himself, and his sinful past, as an example of what God can do with *any* sinner! The sins of Bible characters are ugly, shameful, and destructive, just like our sins, but God includes them in His Word as clear opportunities to show the beauty and power of His redemption. Whatever our sins are (whatever fills your blank), God can forgive and restore.

Specific examples of the sins God can forgive in the lives of real people are found in the list in **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, (10) nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor

extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Are there sins on this list we are tempted to think are irredeemable? Perhaps, but what does the text say? **1 Corinthians 6:11** “**And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**” Whether you are “the” fornicator, the felon, the addict—whether drugs, pornography, or food—the liar, the thief, the tax-cheater, the marriage-cheater, the homosexual, the drunkard, or whatever other sin it might be, God has the power to forgive. Do you believe that about others? Do you believe that about yourself?

This is who she “was,” but then she wasn’t anymore. Like her, **your greatest sin doesn’t have to define you.** Acknowledging the reality of the sin in the past doesn’t mean that that is who you are now, nor who you have to be forever. We may be tempted to look at ourselves or others that way. Others may look at us this way, too. But this is not how God views us, and He is the only one that matters. So where should our focus be placed? ***When we are the sinner ourselves, we need to be concerned about making that sin right with God and those we’ve sinned against.*** Beyond this, we can only “***bear fruits in keeping with repentance,***” (**Luke 3:8**) and let the test of time prove that our repentance is genuine.

When we see other sinners, we need to be concerned about who someone is and who they have the potential to be, not who they were in their sin. Again, this perspective imitates the viewpoint of God.

This is where she started, but not where she ended up among God’s people. Wherever you’re starting from, **God can use you in unimaginable ways, if you have faith that works.** Rahab has this kind of faith. This is seen

clearly in the account in Joshua (**Joshua 2:1-13; Joshua 6:22-23**) and in the New Testament. Some people try and use this passage to justify lying under certain circumstances, but that totally misses the point of Rahab's story! Rahab was not praised for lying any more than she was praised for being a prostitute—these are merely recorded facts of the account.

Instead, she was praised in **Hebrews 11:31** for “**receiving the spies in peace**” in contrast to those who “**did not believe.**” She was praised for her faith and acceptance of the God of heaven and earth (**Joshua 2:11**). She was praised for the part she played in God’s plan, and she was spared from destruction because of her faithful actions or “**works**” (**James 2:25**).

God commends her faith because it enabled Him to work through her. God can work with real, active faith. Obviously, she couldn’t continue being a harlot and she couldn’t continue lying, but the fact that she did do those things is not what is most important, it is what she did from that point forward! And, while she is not mentioned by name again in the Old Testament, we do know something of what she continued to do by faith. **Joshua 6:23** says she continued to dwell in Israel, and the **Gospel of Matthew** tells us who she married, and who her son was.

Matthew 1:1, 5-6a “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham... (5) and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, (6) and Jesse the father of David the king...*”

Rahab “the Harlot” became Rahab “the Great-Grandmother of King David” and one of the matriarchs of the Messiah. God used her to bring about His Son.

There is one more point hidden in this detail. *Can anything good possibly come from the sins you have committed?* Please don’t misunderstand the question: sin has consequences, and it is

always better not to have sinned than even to sin and be forgiven. Yet, God is so great that He can take the circumstances of sin (especially repentant sin) and make it “**work...for good**” (**Romans 8:28**).

This truth about her past likely framed how she viewed others and taught her loved ones to view others. Likewise, **you can influence others in a different way because of your sin, and the empathy it gives you for sinners.** Why was Boaz, the son of Rahab, willing to marry Ruth “the Moabitess” (as she’s called 5 times in the **Book of Ruth**)? On the surface, a “Moabitess” is not as bad a description as a “harlot,” but for an Israelite, it was essentially the same. In the time of the Judges, the women of Moab were the worst example of being led astray by foreign wives in the history of Israel. **Numbers 25:1** says that Israel “**committed harlotry with the women of Moab**” at the temptation of Balaam. In that time and place, “Moabitess” was almost synonymous with a “harlot.”

Ruth even says to Boaz, “**why have I found favor in your eyes since I am a foreigner?**” (**Ruth 1:10**). Thank God, Boaz was apparently a man who has been taught (by his mother, Rahab, perhaps?) to look beyond who someone was—where they came from, what they had done in the past—to who they are now. This is how he judged Ruth. He had empathy for her circumstances because of his own mother’s past circumstances.

Whatever temptations or sins you have experienced (and overcome by the grace of God), you have the responsibility to influence others facing similar temptations. When you see their plight, do not hide your past, but go to the one being tempted. Like Solomon in Ecclesiastes, say to them, “I know where this path leads because I’ve walked it, and I beg you not to walk it, too.”

I encourage you to be the fulfillment of God’s promise in **1 Corinthians 10:13** which says, “**No temptation has overtaken you that is not**

common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Conclusion

Rahab the Harlot is a true, accurate, and Biblical description of this woman of faith. However, in the final judgment, that's not how she will be known. To use the terms of Hebrews 11-12, she will be known, along with many others, as Rahab the "faithful" (Hebrews 11:31), Rahab the "perfected" (Hebrews 11:39-40; 12:23), Rahab the "witness" (Hebrews 12:1), and Rahab the "child of God" (Hebrews 12:5-8). Whatever your sin, you can be known by a new term, too: "the Christian!"

Bio:

Reagan McCleenny was raised in Afton, Texas (a small community near Lubbock). Upon leaving home, he earned his B.A. in Biblical Studies from Florida College, followed by a M.Ed in Educational Leadership from UTTyler. He has preached the gospel since 2004, at the Lindale church of Christ in Lindale, Texas from 2004-2010 and at the Timberland Drive church of Christ in Lufkin, Texas from 2010-Present. Reagan and his wife Stephanie have two daughters: Madison and Brooklyn.

^[1] *Antiquities of the Jews*, 5.1.2

^[2] Wiseman, D.J., "Rahab of Jericho." Tyndale Bulletin 14 (1964), 8-11.

^[3] William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854.

How Christ Relates to the Church: King of Kings

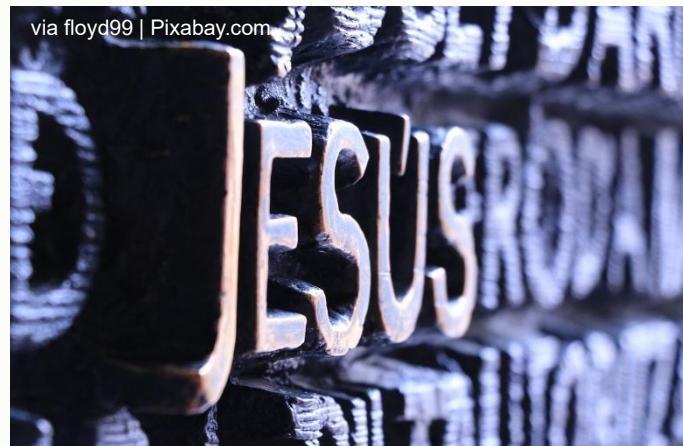
WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

The Title “King of kings” is attributed to Jesus of Nazareth in three New Testament texts (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Implicit to the image is the understanding that Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, is a King. But not just a king, the King. The moniker stands as a powerful proclamation of the supremacy of our Lord over all things in His creation, but particularly over every other power, authority, and ruler. Let us delve into this monumental statement about Jesus Christ so we may better understand the significance of His role as King of kings.

The King is Prophecy

Several Old Testament texts point to the expected Messiah fulfilling the role of King. The level of detail varies from one prophetic depiction to the next, but the consistent message is that He would be a monarch. Genesis 49:10 spoke of a ruler who would come from the tribe of Judah, identifying Him with the word Shiloh (tranquility, peace). 2 Samuel 7:12-16 revealed One who was the seed of David would build a house for the Lord and reign over His people forever. Though Solomon was an immediate fulfillment (1 Kings 8:20), there was another who would come, for after David and Solomon were deceased, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a Child who would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). This One would be lauded with descriptions such as “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” and He would reign in peace forever (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Long after Solomon was dead, Zechariah foretold One identified as “the BRANCH” (cf. Zechariah 3:8; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15) who “...shall build the temple of the



LORD...”, would “...sit and rule on His throne...,” and be “...a priest on His throne...” (Zechariah 6:12-13). This coming Messiah would be both King and priest, which calls to mind Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18). David, in a Messianic psalm would speak of a ruler to come who would sit at the right hand of God, rule over His enemies, judge the nations, and be “...a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4).

The prophet Daniel recorded multiple statements about an everlasting kingdom which was to come (Daniel 2:44; 4:3, 34; 6:26). Then, in the details of a vision given to Him in chapter 7, he saw “...One like the Son of Man...” coming from heaven to whom “...the Ancient of Days...” gave “...dominion and glory and a kingdom... an everlasting kingdom, which shall not pass away ... which shall not be destroyed...” (Daniel 7:13-14). This King and this kingdom were foretold time and again in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets.

The Fulfillment of the Prophecies

The oracles detailed in the preceding section find fulfillment in the New Testament, and specifically in the Person of Jesus Christ. Indeed, He is the

fulfillment of every Messianic prophecy. As Jacob foretold, Jesus would come from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-33), but He would also be the intermediary between man and God, resulting in peace (John 14:27; 16:33; Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14). Acts 2:29-31 does not specifically reference 2 Samuel 7, but Peter identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of details given in the Samuel text. The father/son relationship between God and the anticipated Ruler of 2 Samuel 12, which also appears in Psalm 2:7 and 89:26-27, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5).

Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 in the opening chapter of his gospel account, identifying the virgin birth of Jesus as fulfillment of this ancient prophecy. Though no New Testament writer quotes Isaiah 9:6 directly, Matthew does cite Isaiah 9:1-2 and links it with the ministry of the Messiah.

Zechariah's builder of the temple, who would sit on His throne, and serve as a priest, is Jesus. He is our High Priest: Hebrews 3:1 identifies Him as "...the Apostle and High Priest of our confession..." (cf. Hebrews 4:14-15). But He is not just any priest within a random priesthood, He is revealed to be the High Priest and serving "...according to the order of Melchizedek..." (Hebrews 6:19-7:28), in fulfillment of Psalm 110:4. Jesus is the builder of the house of God: Hebrews 3:3-6 speaks of Him building the Lord's house, the church (Matthew 16:18). The New Testament reveals Christians as the spiritual house being built for God to dwell in (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5). Jesus is sitting on His throne: Peter, having cited David's messianic message from Psalm 16, declared that Jesus not only was raised from the dead, but that He sat down on His throne at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-36; cf. 5:31; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 12:2).

What of the astounding prophecies of Daniel? They too are fulfilled in Jesus. The angel who

appeared to Mary said of the Child who would be born:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:32-33)

The "...One like the Son of Man..." (Daniel 7:13) seen by Daniel in his vision is Jesus Christ, who identified Himself as the Son of Man, a powerful king who would reign (Matthew 9:6; 12:8; 13:41; 16:27-28; 19:28; 25:31; etc.). Stephen, the first martyr for the faith, identified Jesus as "the Son of Man" (Acts 7:55-56), as did John in the Revelation (Revelation 1:13, 18; 14:14).

Not Just a King, but the King of Kings

This title, "King of kings" was used of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 26:7; Daniel 2:37) as well as the Persian king, Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12). Both were mighty monarchs, reigning over not just their own people and land, but they had subdued and were in authority over many other nations (and kings). However, Jesus' claim as "King of kings" is far greater than these.

Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC and Artaxerxes died in 424 BC. At their death, each man ceased to be king – another took their place. Within a generation of Nebuchadnezzar's death, his kingdom fell to the Persians, and eventually ceased to exist. The Persian empire was defeated and effectively dissolved by the Greeks less than a century after Artaxerxes' death. They were great kings and ruled over historically significant kingdoms, but both they and their kingdoms have ceased.

Given the fulfillment of the wonderful prophecies discussed above (and many, many more), and the endless duration and spiritual nature of His kingdom as described in Scripture, Jesus is rightly proclaimed "King of kings." After His

resurrection and before ascending to sit at the right hand of the Father, our Lord declared, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...” (Matthew 28:18). Though Nebuchadnezzar and Artaxerxes, and perhaps other rulers would like to make such a claim, they cannot. Jesus, however, is

...far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1:21)

Peter states that Jesus,

...has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. (1 Peter 3:22)

Jesus is the King over His people, His Kingdom, His church. He is the Monarch to whom we must render obedience, before whom we should prostrate and worship, and for whom we ought to yield not only our will, but our lives. He is a loving King, who willingly and purposefully gave His life for the people – all people, and has risen again, offering eternal life to all who choose to submit to His authority. This promise is available to citizens of every nation (Acts 10:35; Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:28), including rulers and kings (Acts 9:15; 24:24-25; 26:2-29).

Paul emphatically speaks of the scope of our Lord’s sovereignty, saying,

...God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

Those who will bow before Him in this present age and confess His name are His subjects, the people of His kingdom. However, Paul said

every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess. All are under His authority, whether they acknowledge it or not. Those who do not acknowledge and serve Him in the here in now will bow and confess that He is Lord when they stand before Him in judgment. This is true of the peasantry and their princes alike, for all are made subject to Him (Matthew 28:18; 1 Peter 3:22; Psalm 110:1).

Conclusion

There are so many wonderful songs we sing in our assemblies which acknowledge the kingship and reign of our Lord and Saviour: All Hail the Power of Jesus’ name; Crown Him with Many Crowns; He’s My King; O Worship the King; Here I Am To Worship; Majesty; etc.. He is our King, but more – He is the King over all kings. He is our Lord, but more – He is the Lord over all lords.

In Revelation 17, those who yield their power and will to the beast make war with the Lamb, and will be overcome, “...for *He is the Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.*” In Revelation 19, He is portrayed as the victorious ruler over the nations, who “...*has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’*”

Acknowledging that victory belongs to the Lord, and that all who oppose Him, whether great or small, will stand condemned, Paul wrote:

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who along has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and

HOW CHRIST RELATES TO THE CHURCH: KING OF KINGS | WILLIAM STEWART

everlasting power. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:13-16)

He is above all and worthy of our reverence, adoration, and dutiful submission. May we

present ourselves as subjects of the King of kings this day, and every day, to His glory and honor, and culminating with the salvation of our souls.

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Sing With The Understanding

KEVIN KAY | KOKOMO, INDIANA

“What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” (1 Corinthians 14:15)

Have you ever been reading along in a book, you get to the end of a page, and you suddenly realize that you have no earthly idea what you've just read? It happens to me quite often. We can read without understanding for at least two different reasons. Sometimes it happens because the material we are reading is difficult and complex. However, more often than not, it happens simply because we let our minds wander. We are reading the words, pronouncing them in our minds or even out loud, but our minds are a million miles away.

Well, just as we can read without understanding, we can also sing without understanding, and that is a problem because Paul tells us that we should “sing with understanding.” What does that mean? In the original context, Paul emphasizes that prophecy was more important than tongue-speaking, unless the tongues were being interpreted, because prophecy edified the church while untranslated tongues edified no one but the speaker (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). Although I believe that spiritual gifts like prophecy and tongue-speaking are no longer available for Christians today, it is still vitally important that we sing with understanding.^[1] May I suggest that singing with understanding involves at least three things: (1) Understanding the purpose(s) of singing; (2) Understanding the message of each hymn; and (3) Understanding at least a little something about the “mechanics” of music.



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Understanding The Purpose(s) Of Singing

We are to sing in worship for various reasons. First, we are to sing to praise our great God. The writer of Hebrews says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15). In song, we express our love and devotion to God and pour out our thanksgiving to Him. Praising God should be a natural and normal activity for one of His children. It should be something that we want to do, not just have to do. It was for David (Psalm 28:6-7). Is there a better way to praise God than in song? Think of the praise we offer when we sing *How Great Thou Art* or *Worthy Art Thou*.

Second, we are to sing to teach and admonish one another (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Congregational singing is congregational teaching. Our singing reminds us of specific Bible passages. We are reminded of 2 Timothy 1:12 when we sing *I Know Whom I Have Believed*. We are reminded of Colossians 3:17 when we sing *Do All In The Name Of The Lord*. We are reminded of Amos 4:12 when we sing *Prepare To Meet Thy God*. We are reminded of John 15:1 when we sing *I Am The Vine*. We are reminded

SING WITH THE UNDERSTANDING | KEVIN KAY

of Isaiah 1:18 when we sing *Though Your Sins Be As Scarlet*. Our singing also reminds us of great Bible doctrines. When we sing the words:

*"They are nailed to the cross,
they are nailed to the cross,
O how much He was willing to bear!
With what anguish and loss,
Jesus went to the cross!
But He carried my sins with Him there,"*

we are reminded of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. When we sing the words:

*"As the life of a flow'r,
As a breath or a sigh,
So the years that we live
As a dream hasten by;
True, today we are here,
But tomorrow may see
Just a grave in the vale,
And a mem'ry of me,"*

we are reminded of the brevity of life, the certainty of death, and the inevitability of judgment. When we sing the words:

*"There's a great day coming,
A great day coming,
There's a great day coming by and by;
When the saints and the sinners
shall be parted right and left,"*

we are reminded that one day we will all stand before Christ to give an account of our lives. When we sing the words:

*"No tears in heaven, no sorrows given,
All will be glory in that land;
There'll be no sadness,
All will be gladness,
When we shall join that happy band"*

we are reminded of that home of the soul that God has prepared for the faithful.

We also admonish one another when we sing. When we sing the words:

*"E're you left your room this morning,
Did you think to pray?*

*In the name of Christ, our Savior,
Did you sue for loving favor,
As a shield today?"*

we are admonished to bow our heads and bend our knees in prayer. When we sing the words:

*"When upon life's billows
you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged,
thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings,
name them one by one,
And it will surprise you
what the Lord hath done,"*

we are admonished to look at the sunshine instead of the shadows in our lives. When we sing the words:

*"Have you counted the cost,
if your soul should be lost,
Tho' you gain the whole world
for your own?
Even now it may be that
the line you have crossed,
Have you counted,
have you counted the cost?"*

we admonish the unconverted and the unfaithful to think seriously about their souls.

Third, we are to sing to express the joy in our hearts (James 5:13). With bleeding, aching backs and feet fast in stocks, Paul and Silas sang to God expressing their joy in being Christians (Acts 16:25). We do the same thing when we sing,

*"I'm happy today.
Oh yes I'm singing today.
In Jesus Christ I'm praying today.
Because He's taken all my sins away.
And that's why I'm living today."*

We need to understand the purpose(s) of our singing.

Understanding The Message Of Each Hymn

It's so easy to get caught up in the melody of certain hymns and overlook their messages. But we will only make melody in our hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19) when we focus on the message. It should go without saying that we should not sing hymns that teach unscriptural messages, and yet I think we do that sometimes. Can we really supply book, chapter, and verse to support the messages in the hymns *It Won't Be Very Long* and *Jesus Is Coming Soon?* No one knows when Jesus will return, and if it might be very long, how can we sing it won't be very long.

At the risk of ruffling feathers, may I ask some thought-provoking questions. Does the third verse of *He Gave Me A Song* teach the Calvinistic doctrine of "once saved always saved"? Is it really scriptural to sing

*"He had no tears for His own griefs,
But sweat drops of blood for mine"*

in the second verse of *I Stand Amazed* (cf. Hebrews 5:7; Luke 22:44^[2])? Does the fourth verse of *My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less* teach the Calvinistic doctrine of imputed righteousness (i.e. the imputation of Christ's personal righteousness)? Does the third verse of *Heaven Came Down* teach the Calvinistic doctrine of "once saved always saved"? These are just a few examples, and others could be offered, of messages that at the very least are questionable in my own mind. However, what disturbs me most is that I sang these hymns for years without really noticing what they were saying. What about you? I certainly believe that there is a place for "poetic license," but there must be a limit to it as well. We need to understand the message of our hymns.

Understanding The "Mechanics" Of Music

Let me say a few things primarily to song leaders. First, while you don't have to be a trained musician to be a capable song leader,

you do need to know a little something about the "mechanics" of music. Second, you need to be able to "carry a tune." If you can't, it's going to be very difficult for anyone else to carry it either. Third, you need to know the melody of the hymns you lead. If you don't, and if no one else does, the hymn will not be very edifying. Fourth, you need to know how to pitch the song correctly. If you pitch it too high or too low, the congregation will not be able to sing the hymn very well. Fifth, you need to learn to count time. This will help the congregation start, stay, and stop together. Sixth, you need to lead hymns at the tempo (fast or slow) that is appropriate to the message of the song. For example, if we sing *We're Marching To Zion* so slowly, as if we are being dragged every foot of the way, that detracts from the message of the song. Seventh, you need to observe the dynamics of the hymn. For example, the dynamics (speed and volume) in *Master The Tempest Is Raging* are designed to emphasize the message. Eighth, you need to wisely introduce new hymns to the congregation. Leading a string of new songs that no one knows but you will not make for an edifying song service (1 Corinthians 14:26). I'm all for learning new hymns, but this needs to be done judiciously. Ninth, you need to work at it. In my opinion, if you do your job well, you should be tired when you're finished. Finally, you need to move from being a song starter to a song leader and from a song leader to a worship leader. We all start out as song starters because there is no other way to begin; but we need to progress beyond that. How do you become a worship leader? Well, you do all the things we've mentioned above, and then you need to plan your song service, leading scriptural hymns first and foremost, leading the appropriate hymns for what's going on in the worship service, perhaps leading hymns based on a particular theme sometimes, briefly explaining the background of the composition of the hymn or the message of the hymn, selecting the verses to sing with care and forethought. Years ago, a song leader ended

a worship service by singing the first verse of *Now The Day Is Over*. Think about what that verse says: the day is over and it's getting dark outside. That's it. That's all. What spiritual message is conveyed in that first verse? There is none. We needed to keep singing the other verses to get a spiritual message.

We are instructed to sing with understanding. We can do that if we understand the purpose(s) of singing, the message of our hymns, and a little something about the "mechanics" of music.

Notes:

[1] Although I would like to explain why I believe spiritual gifts are no longer available to Christians today, such an explanation is outside the scope of this particular article.

[1] Did Jesus really sweat blood? Luke says that "His sweat became *like* great drops of blood." Furthermore, there is a textual question about this verse, since it is not found in some of the oldest Greek manuscripts.

Becoming Like Jesus: The Humble Servant

JOHN MADDOCKS | TORONTO, ONTARIO

In a world driven by ambition, self-promotion, and the pursuit of power, the life of Jesus stands in stark contrast. Jesus, the Son of God, came not to be served but to serve, and His life offers us the perfect model of humility and selfless love. To become like Jesus is to embrace the radical call to servanthood, where humility is not just an attitude but a way of life.

The Humility of Jesus

The humility of Jesus is evident from the very beginning of His earthly life. Born in a humble stable in Bethlehem, Jesus entered the world not as a king in a palace, but as a servant in the most modest of circumstances. Throughout His ministry, Jesus always chose the path of humility. He associated with the outcasts of society, touched the untouchable, and welcomed those whom others rejected. His life was a testament to the truth that greatness in the kingdom of God is found not in being served, but in serving others.

One of the most powerful examples of Jesus' humility is found in John 13, where He washes the feet of His disciples. In the culture of that time, foot washing was the job of the lowest servant. Yet, here is Jesus, their teacher and Lord, took on this role, demonstrating that no act of service is beneath us if it is done in love. He then told His disciples, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15, NIV).

The Call to Humility

To follow Jesus means to follow His example of humility. In Philippians 2:5-8, the Apostle Paul urges us to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who,



being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

This passage highlights the depth of Jesus' humility. Though He was God, He did not demand His divine privileges. Instead, He emptied Himself, taking on the nature of a servant, and obediently followed the path that led to the cross. This is the humility we are called to emulate—a humility that puts others first, that serves without seeking recognition, and that is willing to sacrifice for the sake of others.

Practical Steps to Becoming a Humble Servant

1. Embrace a Servant's Heart: True humility begins in the heart. Ask God to give you a heart that is willing to serve others, even in the most menial tasks. Look for opportunities to help those in need, whether it's through acts

- of kindness, offering your time, or simply being present for someone who needs support.
2. Put Others First: Humility is about considering others as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). This means listening more than we speak, being quick to forgive, and showing compassion to those who may not deserve it. It means putting the needs and well-being of others ahead of our own desires.
 3. Practice Self-Denial: Following Jesus often requires us to deny ourselves—our desires, our pride, and our need for recognition. This doesn't mean neglecting self-care, but rather, being willing to let go of our own plans and comfort to serve others.
 4. Learn from Jesus: Spend time in the Gospels, studying the life of Jesus. Reflect on how He interacted with people, how He responded to criticism, and how He loved unconditionally. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you apply these lessons in your own life.
 5. Seek Accountability: Surround yourself with fellow believers who can encourage you and hold you accountable in your journey towards humility. Being part of a community that values servanthood can help you stay focused on becoming more like Jesus.

The Reward of Humility

Jesus taught that those who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23:12). This exaltation is not about earthly recognition or reward but about being lifted up in the eyes of God. When we live as humble servants, we reflect the character of Christ, and our lives become a powerful testimony of His love and grace to the world around us.

In the end, becoming like Jesus the humble servant is not just about imitating His actions but about embodying His heart. It is a lifelong journey of surrendering our pride, embracing humility, and living out the love of Christ in all we do. As we walk this path, we will find true fulfillment—not in being served, but in serving others, just as our Lord did.

Take Every Opportunity

JEFF CARR | LAKELAND, FLORIDA

“Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Your speech must always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.” (Colossians 4:5-6)

This passage of Scripture is a marvelous passage where Paul talks about how we should teach the Gospel to those who are outsiders and how we should interact with others. This verse presupposes that we will be interacting with non-Christians about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Are we praying and looking for such opportunities? Are we praying to “make the most” of each opportunity that comes our way? Since we are to “conduct ourselves with wisdom” we need to prepare for this and make sure our speech and actions are full of Godly wisdom. The Apostle Paul is telling each of us that we need to think about our opportunities and that we need to make sure we are doing the best we can in trying to reach out to others who are not Christians.

One example of this is Jesus in John 4 with his interaction with the woman at the well. Here is a situation where Jesus took advantage of an opportunity. Jesus began talking with this Samaritan woman about water and turned the discussion into “living water” that can quench thirst for spiritual things and she will never thirst again. Opportunities like this happen to each of us all the time. Are we looking for them? It might be the person at the grocery store, the convenience store, your neighbors, people you work with, people you live with, etc. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 “Let your light shine so that others may see your good works.” Jesus was NOT talking about being ostentatious like the



Pharisees who had a “holier than thou” attitude to bring attention to themselves for selfish motives. When Jesus says to let your “light shine” He is saying to His disciples to let your life as a Christian be observed and not to hide that, don’t be fearful of allowing others to see how you live your life. Why? Ultimately this might lead to an opportunity to engage with another person in a meaningful spiritual conversation.

Consider 1 Pet 3:15, “... always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect.” Peter also talks about opportunities that will come our way and how we should be ready for these. If someone were to ask you ‘why are you a Christian’ could you give a quick answer? Or the question of ‘why do you worship the way you do’ (every Sunday with a weekly Lords Supper observance, why do you sing, why is there a collection, etc.), could you answer such questions? This is part of the ‘always be ready’ command. Exercises can be done by Christians to help us be ready for such opportunities. I keep a list of every question I have ever received from seekers. I take those questions and randomly ask Christians who are

unaware of the question coming and make them give an answer. This is great training! Remember that according to Peter we are “called to be ready to give a defense.” What are you doing to be ready?

Part of being ready means that we have short, concise, and succinct answers to questions that force the questioner to want more. If we aren’t careful we can try to cover ‘everything’ in one setting. Please don’t do that. If someone asks you what time it is you don’t tell them how to build a clock. Yes we can get excited and think we have to cover all the controversies about a passage but you will just drown your audience with details. If someone asks what Ephesians 2:8-10 means simply tell them what that means without going into how others get that passage wrong. If a person is versed in the Truth about that passage they will identify any false teachings about that passage.

As opportunities arise please keep this in mind: one thing you are trying to accomplish is to make the current conversation to not be the last conversation you are having. You want more discussion and more interactions. That means you have to be reasonable and approachable (Cf. Philippians 4:5). You also have to be credible. If you start with a respect for God’s Word and His authority then you better stick to that. As opportunities arise you will likely run into people who are from broken homes and they have trust issues. What you are regularly praying for is for barriers to be removed so this person feels comfortable talking with you. You need to set that table for them to want to come and feast on spiritual things.

Speaking of Biblical Authority this is a great place to start any Bible study. Either we are going to accept the Bible as the Word of God or we are not. Get that established early on in the conversation. The conversation will go much better if we start with the fact that the Bible is the Word of God and Jesus is our King and Savior.

If a person believes in these principles then you won’t have many arguments over Bible study habits, prayer habits, attendance habits, how we worship, etc.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation.” Do you believe that? If so why don’t you invite people to the Assemblies? Since there is great “power” in the Gospel why not try to expose more people to the Gospel. Our Assemblies are where we worship and we encourage others, and where visitors (outsiders) can be encouraged as well. Where else in the world do we focus intensely on spiritual matters? The Gospel has great power when it is taught publicly. When an outsider is sitting in our Assemblies consider what they see. They see followers of Jesus Christ respecting the Word of God. Even the first time visitor can understand what is going on and understand generally what the message is. Think about a first time visitor who is looking to get right with God and how this makes a positive impression on them! There is something powerful about this kind of setting, people of diverse backgrounds (social, economic, racial, education, etc.) united on one thing. There is something wonderful about people with differences coming together and working (uniting) towards one common goal. The visitor sees that and can be impressed with the many different kinds of people trying to serve Jesus Christ. We don’t have to do this alone. God gave us “one another” for a reason (this phrase, “one another” appears 149 times in the NASB20. It is clear that God gave us “one another” for a reason!).

Colossians 3:5-6 reminds us to consider how we are to connect with outsiders and how we should use Godly wisdom in doing so. We need to think about our responsibility to be prepared in areas of evangelism. We need to think of ways where we can make the most of our regular opportunities. Think and pray about the best ways you can establish and continue to have

TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY | JEFF CARR

conversations to talk about the Gospel. It may change lives forever as it has done with so many of us.

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Love One Another

KYLE BOYD | WICHITA, KANSAS

At the time of me penning this article it has been one year and two months since the tragic loss of someone whom I loved dearly, Sean Cavender. He was someone who loved others dearly but most importantly exemplified the love of Christ to the world. When thinking of a word to describe Sean, love is the first word that comes to mind and love is what this article is about. Sean was a Bible preacher and few topics are talked about more in the Bible than love. Few are also the number of people that come to mind that manifest this love for people as much as Sean did. People were Sean's hobby.

Sean introduced me to GROW Magazine two years ago by asking for my participation in the writing of an article about the Gospel of Matthew. In preparing for this writing it didn't take long for me to understand that Matthew's goal was to prove Jesus was the Messiah but while doing so he also highlighted what Jesus emphasized while on earth and that is the kingdom and kingdom citizenship behavior. Unquestionably being a follower of Jesus requires a certain way of living and Matthew wanted to make sure his readers knew what this life looked like by carefully describing how Jesus lived this out Himself. Jesus wants His followers to display true love to the world and so He showed that love first and left an example for us. He desires citizens with humble pure hearts that put others' needs in front of their own. He wants His followers to show the world the Father through the way they live their lives because this is the only way they would know. Sean worked hard at this. He wanted to preach the good news of Jesus to the world and he knew that preaching Jesus meant living like Jesus which meant showing love to



all. A couple verses come to mind that begin capturing this thought. Paul, speaking to the Philippians about Jesus' example said,

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 2:3-5)

In **Galatians 5:13**, Paul says, "serve one another through love." Putting others first like Jesus did is Christianity 101. The apostle John describes this beautifully by quoting Jesus in **John 13:34-35**,

"I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."

Much can be said and much has been said on these short and powerful verses. What I want us to note though is that this love we're to extend to others started with God (**John 3:16**), was exemplified by God, shows God to the world and

ultimately glorifies God. It's a love that goes as far as it needs to go. It's not a quick emotion or a matter of sentiment or feeling. It's a sacrificial love of choice. It's a love that includes all people both good and bad. This is Agape love, the highest level of love. It's intentional, pure and noble.

Let's consider some thoughts that arise from the teaching while keeping in mind that this is kingdom citizenship behavior. Full stop. If we want to exercise discipleship, if we want to share Jesus, if we want to do as Paul says in **Ephesians 5:1-2** and "*Be imitators of God ... and walk in love*" then this teaching must be studied and practiced. We must not take anything in the Bible lightly and Jesus says to, "*love one another*" three times in just two verses, this is critical teaching.

The first comment is that loving one another was not something that they had never heard before. For centuries, Jewish followers of Yahweh had heard and read the command to "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" **Leviticus 19:18**. This love though, discharged by Jews seemed limited and narrow, at least in its application. What was new was its "*breadth, and width, and scope*" (Woods). Also new was that they now had the perfect model in the flesh. Jesus left the glories of Heaven and showed the ultimate act of servitude by putting on flesh, living a perfect life and taking on the sins of the world by sacrificing Himself for the world. **John 1:29.** **1 John 2:2** says, "*and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*" This changes everything. Now everything we do, every decision we make, every word we utter has something to copy or mimic. There's now a criterion, a standard we can reference and reflect on that offers us guidance and puts everything into perspective. When "**Jesus died for ME**", or "**Jesus saved ME**" is the backdrop of our life then following the command of "*love one another*" becomes easier. It

becomes easier because it helps us see ourselves as we really are. It levels the playing field and helps us recognize we are all the same. We are sinners and in need of grace and mercy. Thankfully, Jesus has made this possible. Because of this, there is zero reason why we shouldn't be reciprocating such love to others. Paul says in **Romans 5:8**,

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This should make extending love especially easy towards family, friends and even strangers. But it should also extend beyond the easy to the difficult. When we've been wronged, when we've been sinned against, when our feelings are hurt, loving one another can prove challenging. We live in a world that tests and pushes us to our limits. Blatant evil is being praised, corruption is everywhere you look, children are being bullied, people are disrespecting authority, etc... It seems like the world has turned its back on civility and every day living the life of a Christian is easier said than done. The devil is no dummy and he steals our compassion on the regular. When this happens to us and we're resisting showing the love God wants us to show, just remember there's nothing anyone can do to us that compares to what we've done to God. We sinned and we deserve condemnation just like our enemies. Let this humble us and remember that the proper response is still love. "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" **Matthew 5:44** The proper response is love in action as described **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**. Study these verses carefully as you work hard practicing Agape love. Also ask yourself these questions; how could we not extend love to others when God extended love to us? How could we not show mercy to others when we want God to show mercy to us? Don't forget "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*" **Matthew 5:7** And then read **1 John 3**, a chapter that perhaps we don't think

about much but highlights well the call to love one another. Friends, this selfless sacrificial love is the center of Christianity and it started with God. It's the badge of discipleship. Thinking of these things can help us ensure we're showing love just like Jesus loved us.

Perhaps you're not a member of the kingdom. Perhaps you haven't recognized that God truly loves you. He desires for you to be saved and so He put a redeeming plan in place involving His Son. It was the ultimate display of unconditional love. He did His part and now all that remains is you doing your part. Surrendering yourself to the divine one who mimicked us by coming to earth in the flesh and giving His life for our sins. Let us mimic Him by showing love back to Him and to the world. Let's

remember He said, "*if you love Me, you'll keep My commandments.*"

Maybe you struggle with putting others first. Maybe you're weak in showing Agape love to the world. Pray to God for help and remember that all God wants is our best effort accompanied with our best heart. Keep working, keep trying and never give up. When it seems like you've sacrificed all you can for someone, sacrifice even more.

I will never get to see or speak to Sean again. I'll never get to create anymore memories with him but what I can do is remember him through my efforts in trying to imitate Christ just like he did. This will honor Sean's memory but more importantly will honor God.

JANUARY 2025 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Jeffrey Smith will write our next article in the Hall of Faith series from Hebrews 11, focused on the faith of Gideon.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Brian Sullivan will write our next article looking at How Christ Relates to the Church, looking at Jesus as our Mediator.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Keith Sharp will present our next article on worship in song as a teaching tool.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Lee Edgar Elkins will pen our next article in our “Becoming Like Jesus” series focused on obedience.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Ken Weliever uses Proverbs 11:30 to speak about the importance of saving souls.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Larry Fuller focuses on the transition between the first and second covenants.



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