



PROFILES IN FAITH

John Wesley (1703-1791)

Pioneering Evangelical Spiritual Director

by Dr. Arthur Dicken Thomas, Jr.



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Pioneering
Evangelical
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This year Methodists from all over the world are celebrating the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of their founder, John Wesley, who was born at Epworth, England, on June 17, 1703, and died in London on March 2, 1791.

Although Methodist denominations have sprung up from the Methodist renewal movement that Wesley commenced in the Church of England, Wesley never belonged to the Methodist Church: he remained an Anglican priest and desired his evangelical followers to stay in this national church. He is known as one of the great preachers and leaders of the Evangelical Revival during the First Great Awakening.

During his ministry Wesley rode over 250,000 miles on horseback, a distance equal to ten circuits of the globe around the equator. He preached over 40,000 sermons—sometimes four or five a day—which led to the conversion of thousands. He succeeded in reaching the poor and simple commoners through the practice of open air preaching to audiences estimated in the tens of thousands. At his death in 1791 his followers numbered

79,000 in England and 40,000 in America. In 1995 there were approximately 23 million affiliated with Methodist churches worldwide in 108 countries.

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Not famous as a systematic theologian, John Wesley was an exponent of “practical theology,” in which he theorized on the Christian’s experience of grace. This type of theology is not inferior to systematics, but it is directed to concerns of spiritual theology—the study of the Christian life with attention to the spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation, and accountable discipleship.

He was for his day what Richard Foster and Dallas Willard have been for ours in their attention to the cultivation of the disciplined spiritual life. Unlike some revival preachers

who are all emotion and no intellect, Samuel Johnson once said that John Wesley was the most widely read man in England. His theology derived from his extensive readings in the early church fathers, Protestant reformers, Puritans, Pietists, Anglicans, Orthodox, and Catholic mystics. The contributions of John along with his brother Charles, the famous hymn writer, have left the church with a rich hymnody.



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In the legacy of
C.S. Lewis,
the Institute
endeavors to develop
disciples who can
articulate, defend, and
live
faith in Christ
through personal and
public life.



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Take Time to Feed Your Soul this Summer
by Thomas A. Tarrant, III, *President*

Dear Reader,

We all know that proper nutrition is essential for an infant to grow into healthy adult maturity. What we sometimes forget is that the same thing is true spiritually. If we are to grow from the spiritual infancy of our new birth into full maturity in Jesus Christ, we must have spiritual nourishment.

God calls us to grow into maturity in Christ and gives us the resources to nurture that growth. If we become intentional and seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will be increasingly transformed into his likeness. If we neglect God's grace, we will remain immature and unhealthy in our spiritual lives. Among the most important means God has given us to grow in grace are the Word of God, prayer, worship, and fellowship. To this list we might also add "good books." A "good book" is one which especially helps us to understand and embrace truth about God, ourselves and life—and leads us to better know, love, trust, and obey him.

The somewhat slower pace of summer life gives us special opportunities to nourish our souls. Consider spending more time in Scripture and prayer this summer. We trust, too, that the rich articles in this issue of *Knowing & Doing* will benefit you. Then go on to some of the classic books that have proven their value over the years in nourishing the soul and transforming spiritual life. For a few suggestions see Steve Garber's article, "Good Books, Bad Books," and our website: www.cslewisinstitute.org.

Your brother in Christ,

Tom

C.S. Lewis on Death and Immortality

by Art Lindsley, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute

One of the great problems which every philosophy or religious view has to face is the significance of death. Do we just go around once, with death being the end of it all? Are we reborn in an almost endless series of reincarnations, or is there a personal continuation of ourselves after death? Are we mere mortals or immortals?

Part of evaluating a worldview is considering the adequacy of its answer on death. Consider the contrast between atheism and the biblical view of life and death as shown in this chart:

	ORIGIN	MANKIND	DESTINY
ATHEIST	Death	Life	Death
BELIEVER	Life	Life	Life

According to the atheist, life comes spontaneously out of the cosmic slime. All life springs from inert or non-living matter. Life comes from non-life through evolution. Our origin, in other words, is out of death. Since there is no life after death, our destiny is death. What then is the point or value of life? *Life is merely an unnecessary chance interruption in the midst of cosmic death.* For the believer, on the other hand, God is our creator. We are given the gift of life. Our destiny in Christ is eternal life. *Death is merely a very temporary interruption in the midst of cosmic life.* Notice the radical contrasts between these views of life. No wonder that atheist Bertrand Russell said that his view led to “unyielding despair.” No wonder atheist Albert Camus maintained that, in light of the meaninglessness of this picture of life, the only really serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide.

When we contrast major religious options, we also see radically different and contradictory views about our destiny:

RELIGION	PICTURE	DESTINY
Hindu	Drop in ocean	Absorption
Buddhist	Candle and flame	Extinction
Believers in Christ	Prodigal son	Restored relationship

The destiny for Hinduism (Shankara) is transcending this world of distinction and merging yourself with the One, as a drop of water would be absorbed into the ocean. The destiny of Buddhism (Theravada) is to extinguish desire as you might blow out the flame of a candle. In Sanskrit, the word Nirvana comes from a root word meaning to be extinguished—to be blown out. Since in this view there is no self, then there is no self to exist after death. By contrast, believers in Christ have maintained that the human predicament is a broken relationship with God, and its solution is reconciliation with God through Christ. This broken and yet later-restored relationship is then enjoyed for all eternity. The story of the prodigal son illustrates this alienation-then-restoration.

There is not a great difference between Hindu and Buddhist views of our destiny. Absorption and extinction are not very different from each other. Both mean that our destiny leads to a loss of personality or individuality. Whereas note the contrast with the third view—eternal extension of individual, personal relationship of love with God and others forever.

(continued on page 4)



Dr. Art Lindsley

C.S. Lewis on Death and Immortality

(continued from page 3)

C.S. Lewis on Death and Immortality

Since this issue is so central to our view of life, it is not surprising that C.S. Lewis meditated often on death and immortality. In fact, Lewis scholar Walter Hooper argues that C.S. Lewis's central theme was that all men and women are immortals. In one of his most famous quotes, Lewis maintains, "There are no ordinary people" because "You have never talked to a mere mortal." He says:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you may talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. *There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.* Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry,

snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

It is because of the remnants of this view that our society places such emphasis on the value and rights of the individual. The nation, cultural pursuits, the arts, and civilization have their value, but their existence is finite, whereas the life of each individual continues on into eternity. As a nation, the United States has existed for more than two hundred years, but compared to an immortal soul, its time in history is as the "life of a gnat."

C.S. Lewis manifested this belief by responding personally to everyone who wrote to him. At a C.S. Lewis Institute conference some time ago, a woman who attended brought a copy of a letter she received from Lewis when she was six years old. She had written to him after reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, because the story's portrayal of Aslan the lion had pointed her to Christ. Lewis's reply was a beautifully handwritten letter that kindly addressed her comments. Lewis kept up a constant stream of letters, and some collections have been published—*The Letters of C.S. Lewis, Letters to an American Lady, Letters to Children, Letters to Calabria*, and so on. Even though, at the height of his popularity, this correspondence consumed an hour or two of every day and was a task which he did not relish, he answered every

letter. Why did he feel a need to individually answer each letter? I believe that it was due to his view that there are no ordinary people.

Lewis also gave away—often anonymously—most, if not all, of the proceeds of his books. He did not raise his style of life. He stayed in the same modest house; he kept his same rather shabby professional garb. He never bought a car and he never learned to drive. He did not travel—never coming to the United States and seldom crossing the English Channel. He put his money in an "Agape Fund" and gave it away, so much so, in fact, that a friend had to advise him to keep a third for taxes. Why would he give away so much of his income, except that he believed he had never met a mere mortal.

Sometimes a person's deepest belief comes out in casual conversation in the midst of ordinary life. Walter Hooper recalled a discussion he had with Lewis about

...a bore whom we both knew, a man who was generally recognized as being almost unbelievably dull. I told Lewis that man succeeded in interesting me by the very intensity of his boredom. "Yes," he said, "but let us not forget that our Lord might well have said, 'As ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my bores, you have done it unto me.'"

C.S. Lewis's central theme was that all men and women are immortals. In one of his most famous quotes, Lewis maintains, "There are no ordinary people" because "You have never talked to a mere mortal."

He sometimes felt that it was his duty to visit such people, because as he did, he was doing it as to Christ.

This view of life invests tremendous significance not only to the individual person but also to individual choices. Lewis says that in every choice we pick the beatific or the miserific vision. In *Mere Christianity* he writes:

Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part that chooses, into something a little different from what was before...you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature...to be one kind of creature is heaven; that is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other.

Again, the kind of choices we make moves us down the road to a certain kind of destiny.

Destiny and immortality were not always prominent in Lewis's thinking. When Lewis first came to faith, he did not think a great deal about eternal life but simply focused on enjoying God in this life. He parallels his experience to those who in the Old Testament did not have a clear understanding of eternal life and came to understand deeply that

...He [God] and nothing else is their goal and the satisfaction of their needs, and that He has a claim on them simply by being what He is, quite apart from anything He can bestow or deny."

Lewis says that the years he spent before coming to focus more on immortality "always seem to me to have been of great value" because they taught him to delight in God, not just in any thought of reward.

Paradox of Reward

Lewis did come to appreciate the place of reward. In fact he later delighted in it. But, he saw that the paradox of reward might be a stumbling block for some. On the one hand, it seems that true faith in God believes in Him for nothing. It is truly disinterested in what benefits might follow. On the other hand, reward is received for what is done. This might seem to pander to self-interest and a mercenary spirit. Lewis addresses this paradox in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*:

Tyndale, as regards the natural condition of humanity, holds that by nature we can do no good works without respect of some profit either in this world or in the world to come....That the profit should be located in another world means, as Tyndale clearly sees, no difference. Theological hedonism is still hedonism.

Whether the man is seeking heaven or a hundred pounds, he can still but seek himself, of freedom in the true sense—of spontaneity or disinterestedness—nature knows nothing. And yet by a terrible paradox, such disinterestedness is precisely what the moral law demands.

One way to resolve this tension is to realize that *self-interest is not the same thing as selfishness*. In fact, Jesus appeals to self-interest as a motive for self-denial. In Mark 8:35-36 Jesus formulates his own paradox. This verse, I have been told, is Lewis's most quoted section of Scripture. Jesus says:

For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel shall save it. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Jesus said that if anyone wanted to be his follower, he or she needed to deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow Him. What would ever induce someone to pay that kind of cost? I've heard it said that unless there is a sufficient reason why we ought to sacrifice something we like, the cost will always be too great. Jesus gives a sufficient reason why we ought to pay that cost. First, if we try to save our lives by seeking our own pleasure, in our own way, we will lose not only

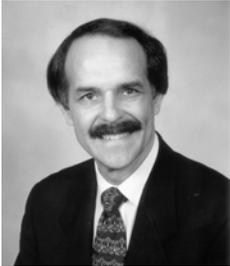
*...self-interest
is not the
same thing
as
selfishness.
In fact, Jesus
appeals to
self-interest
as a
motive for
self-denial.*

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To Glorify or Enjoy Forever?

by DENNIS P. HOLLINGER, PH.D.

*Vice Provost and Professor of Christian Ethics
Messiah College*



Dr. Dennis Hollinger

A number of years ago while teaching a seminary class I was explaining the opening lines of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The opening question, in the language of the 17th century, asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The catechist is then to respond, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

On this particular day in class one of my students raised her hand and said, "My problem is that I can never decide which it is I'm really to be about—to glorify or to enjoy God forever." She went on to describe her dilemma. To glorify God seems to imply that we should put controls on ourselves and our personal enjoyment in life. Glorifying God is to move beyond our own self interests to the interests of God. It focuses on commitment, discipleship, and a giving of self to our Lord and to the needs of others. On the other hand, she noted, enjoying God focuses on all the good things that God brings in life. The enjoyment of God seems to end up inadvertently focusing on ourselves as we celebrate the blessings and gifts of God, and in turn this enjoyment appears contrary to the pursuits of God's glory.

My student's comments set off a wonderful discussion in class that day. Since then I've thought often about her dilemma and the tension that we no doubt often feel between glorifying and enjoying our maker, for the reality is that believers often do seem to fit into one category or the other. Some are enjoyers and others are glorifiers. In fact down through the history of the church, this typology seems to be quite pronounced with the two approaches frequently moving in very different directions.

Enjoyers of God

Enjoyers of God are those who focus primarily on all the good things that flow from our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. The enjoyment of God includes the benefits that accrue from salvation by God's grace: forgiveness of sin, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, hope of eternal life, personal meaning, and empowerment for daily living. Enjoyers tend to talk frequently of how God answers their prayers and meets their personal needs, whether they be spiritual, economic, physical, emotional, or relational. God is always there doing great things for the enjoyers of Christian faith.

The enjoyer types like to emphasize the wonderful world in which God has placed us and his good gifts to the human race. Music, art, sports, friendships, intellectual pursuits, food, family, and hobbies are among the wonderful gifts that God provides as gifts of general grace to all humanity. They are meant for human enjoyment.

When I think about the enjoyers of God I sometimes recall Beth. She loved to reiterate the ways in which God met her needs and answered her prayers. God always seemed to be there at every turn and in every hardship, no matter how mundane. She often told the story of being in college and needing \$1,500 to pay the rest of her semester bill. She was down to the last day, thinking she would need to drop out, when in the mail that day she received a check for that exact amount of money from a person unaware of her need. Later in life Beth was downtown with her two children in tow, attempting to find a parking space so she could do her shopping. Around the block she went several times seeking a spot to park; none was available. Finally, in desperation she prayed to God for

a space. As soon as she said amen, a car pulled out and she pulled in. For Beth, God always seemed to be meeting her needs; and she enjoyed it.

Glorifiers of God

Other Christians are more the glorifier type. These are the believers who talk of a deep, sincere, uncompromising commitment to Christ. Following Jesus in life means giving up comfort and ease for the sake of God's kingdom. Glorifiers focus on responsibilities we have as Christ's disciples, not all the good things that come our way due to our faith. They remind us that we are called to a life of worship and spiritual disciplines. We have a responsibility to share the gospel of Christ with others, seek justice and mercy within our world, and attempt to influence the culture as salt and light.

The glorifiers of God tend to remind us that we are not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed (Romans 12:1-2), and thus set apart from the patterns of the world around us. We are to seek God's way, not the easy way. The glorifiers contend that we must stop focusing on ourselves, our own agenda or personal enjoyment, and rather seek the vision of God and the needs of a hurting humanity.

When I think about the glorifier types, I often think of Dan, a young man I knew in college. While some of us were down at the gym playing basketball, Dan was often on his knees in fervent prayer. While some of us were out on dates on a Saturday night, Dan was down at the local rescue mission preaching the gospel to the homeless and alcoholics. While some of us were spending time with that gift of God called friends, Dan was nurturing his spirituality through reading the Bible, contemplation, spiritual disciplines and giving himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Jesus.

While some of us as fellow students were reflecting on the future and how to use our talents and gifts in ways that might include at least some personal satisfaction, Dan was talking about going to the most difficult spots on earth to feed the poor and to preach the good news. Dan was clearly into the glory of God. It was his ultimate aim in life. Enjoyment was not on his agenda.

So what do we do with these two orientations to faith? If my student was right, that most of us tend in one direction or the other, and that the two ways are at odds with each other, what should we do? Are we to be enjoyers of God or glorifiers of God? Which takes precedence?

Psalm 67: Holding the Two Together

Psalm 67 is a text that can help us resolve our dilemma, for it powerfully holds the glory and enjoyment together. The Psalm begins with enjoyment, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us" (v. 1). The psalmist is clearly asking God to bring blessing to life, and does so by referring to a familiar blessing or benediction from the Old Testament:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace (Numbers 6:24-26).

Throughout the Bible there is reference to the blessing of God with a sense that it is something to be enjoyed by the recipients. In the Old Testament these blessings often came in more visible, external or material forms. As God's unfolding revelation occurs and climaxes in the coming of Christ and the apostolic witness of the New Testament, the blessings become more internal and spiritual in nature.

God has created us in such a way that we can and should experience his good gifts of life. When we embrace the greatest blessing of all, salvation in Christ, it is to be enjoyed. After all, Jesus said, "I am come that you might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

But Psalm 67 does not stop with blessing and enjoyment. The next verses go on to add another perspective, as they remind us that the benefits of grace and the enjoyment of God are not for our own self-centered gain. The invocation for God's gracious blessing in verse 1 is followed by this goal:

(continued on page 12)

“
The
enjoyment
of God
seems to
end up
inadvertently
focusing on
ourselves as
we celebrate
the
blessings
and gifts of
God, and in
turn this
enjoyment
appears
contrary to
the pursuits
of God's
glory.”



Barbara Bradley Hagerty

Looking at Life through Bifocals *Thoughts of a Journalist*

by Barbara Bradley Hagerty
Religion Correspondent, National Public Radio

*Our employer is God,
and everything we do must run
through the filter of this question:
How does God see my performance?*

It was back in the spring of 1977—long before I was a follower of Christ—that I learned a key insight into the Christian life.

I was a senior in high school and decided to join the orienteering club. Orienteering was, and is, a fairly obscure sport. It requires acres and acres of woodlands and more than a little concentration. Alone in the woods, armed with a topographical map, a compass, and directions for the course you are to traverse, you run from one marker to another until you complete a loop that is several miles long. This is much more difficult than it sounds: the markers (a milk bottle hung from a tree, for example) can be hundreds of yards apart and by no means visible. If you are off by even a degree on the compass—if you run a compass reading of 89 degrees instead of 90 degrees—you will miss your mark completely and become quite lost, with almost no way to recover except to find your way back to the starting point, and begin again.

So the trick to orienteering is this: look at the map, take a compass reading, and fix your eyes on an object (a tree, or a bush) and run toward that object, never taking your eyes off of it until you reach it. Then you take another compass reading, fix your

eyes on another object, and run to that point, never averting your eyes from that target. In this way—by constantly checking with the map and compass, then focusing on the terrain—you eventually reach your first mark, and the next, and the next, until you return to home base.

Orienteering is about reconciling your physical position to something far less concrete: a map that someone else made, and which you must trust is accurate. It is about operating on two levels: the physical level of the terrain, and the theoretical level of the directions you are following, hoping that the two will bring you to the goal, even though you cannot see much farther than that tree a few yards away.

Christians, too, live on two levels: the human and the spiritual. In front of our eyes, screaming for attention, is the rough and tumble of everyday life. But just as real—albeit not as intrusive—is the spiritual realm and the guiding hand of God. As Christians, we live ever conscious that everything we do and everything we experience occurs on two levels.

The best illustration of this bifurcated world, and our need to see things spiritually and humanly at the same time, occurs in 2 Kings. One morning, the prophet Elisha and his servant awakened and walked outside their house in Dothan to find thousands of enemy soldiers and chariots circling the city, with the intent of seizing Elisha. When Elisha's servant saw the army, he was terrified.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the

Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:16-17).

This is spiritual perception. Elisha saw God's reign and His forces where the servant saw only the chaos of human circumstances.

Jesus referred to spiritual perception when He told His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:16), implying that their spiritual senses had been awakened, while the rest of the world slumbered. And, one of the gifts that followers of Christ receive is spiritual discernment. It's the visual equivalent of faith—seeing what is not apparent to human eyes.

Spiritual perception—seeing human circumstances from God's point of view—helps a Christian cut through the confusion and fear one might feel when confronted by a bad set of circumstances. The reason is simple: If one sees the world spiritually, then one knows that God is sovereign; He always has a purpose; and He always prevails—in other words, there is always more than meets the human eye. Or, to change metaphors, this spiritual perception is like wearing bifocals, and it changes one's approach and one's reaction to circumstances.

It is that dual vision that has allowed me to survive at National Public Radio. I have no doubt that if I did not see—no, if I did not actively *look for*—God's hand in the chaos of daily deadlines, intense personalities, confusing stories and partial truth, I would feel just as overwhelmed as Elisha's servant.

This dual vision has helped me in many areas, but I'll mention just two: It has changed the way I look at my audience, and it has changed the way I report a story.

"Whatever you do," Paul writes to the Colossians, "work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (3:23-24).

Here Paul tells us that when you or I, as Christ followers, go to work each day, we must perform our jobs in a fundamentally different way from others. Our employer is God, and everything we do must be run through the filter of this question: How does God see my performance?

That raises the bar higher than the most demanding editor or supervisor ever could. If in fact God is your employer, your Audience of One who is judging your performance for eternity, that means you have an obligation to exhibit more integrity, more earnestness, more kindness and selflessness than the co-worker in the next cubicle. It means that you are judged not just by your outward actions—did you do the job well, even if you stepped on someone to do it?—but also by internal standards. Your thoughts and motives come under the microscope as well, because Christ, who lives within you, hears every thought and understands every motive.

I recall grappling with this issue a few years back, when I was a contract reporter for National Public Radio. Being on a short-term contract—as opposed to being a staff employee—is an ulcer-inducing state of affairs. In essence, I was only as good as my last story, and once that contract is up, I could have been out on the street. So, from a human calculus, it was important to get on air as often as possible.

Several years ago, I was forced to wrestle with these two pulls—to glorify God for eternity, and to glorify self for job security. Several members of a cult called Heaven's Gate killed themselves, and I was assigned to help track down family members and conduct interviews for a staff reporter on the scene in San Diego. I managed to find several family members and persuade them to talk with me. I then transcribed the interviews, selected the best sound bites, and—when I learned that the other reporter had been unable to find any interviews on his own—I proceeded to write the script for him. He then read my script on the air, and received euphoric kudos from the managing editor, the vice president for news and others—praising him for his quick work and sensitive handling of such a delicate story. Almost no one knew about my role.

I remember smiling as I heard the piece on *All Things Considered*. Since I was a contract reporter with my contract nearly up,

*Christians,
too, live on
two levels: the
human and
the spiritual.
In front of
our eyes,
screaming for
attention, is
the rough and
tumble of
everyday life.
But just as
real...is the
spiritual
realm and the
guiding hand
of God. As
Christians,
we live ever
conscious that
everything
we do and
everything
we experience
occurs on
two levels.*

(continued on page 10)

Looking at Life through Bifocals

(continued from page 9)

...I believe we live in eternity, and our judge is not our boss or anyone else, but God. I also realized that God had given me a gift that day: He had allowed me to store up a little treasure in heaven...An act that goes unnoticed by everyone but God still finds its place... in heaven.

I could have used those commendations for myself. But I believe we live in eternity, and our judge is not our boss or anyone else, but God. I also realized that God had given me a gift that day: He had allowed me to store up a little treasure in heaven. A friend of mine once said to me: An omelette made to the glory of God finds a place in heaven. An act that goes unnoticed by everyone but God still finds its place—creates treasure—in heaven, and that day, I had made a heavenly deposit.

I have found another benefit to serving the Lord in everything I do: It brings immeasurable peace. Why? Because God will never fire me. A child of God has complete job security. God did not die on a cross for me just so He could watch me waste my life in a dead-end job or no job at all—Jesus made that much clear in the parable of the talents. Having paid such a steep price, He fully intends to use the talents and passions and temperament He gave me—albeit for His purposes, not mine.

I remember the exact moment I fully understood that God was my employer. I had applied for a staff reporting position with NPR, the only staff reporting position that had come open in several years. I had really been doing that job for the past year anyway, and I thought I had a very good chance.

I was working in a dark little room called an edit booth, going through tape and writing a story. My editor came into the room, and, averting her eyes, told me that someone else was getting the staff reporting job. Apparently, she said, the managing editor preferred another contract reporter, and (she let slip), the managing editor didn't particularly like me. With that, she quietly left the room, and left me to my own dark thoughts.

My immediate response was despair. Reporting jobs at NPR open up once every few years. But after a couple of minutes of self-pity, I began to think in spiritual terms, not human. If Christ is my employer, I reasoned, then I am guaranteed fulfilling work, harvesting in His fields, regardless of who signs my paycheck. Okay, I thought, since Christ is my employer, what does He want

me to do in this circumstance? Does He want me to become bitter, to slacken off in my work? Of course not: That would bring Him dishonor.

So I began to think through how Jesus Christ would want me to behave. It occurred to me that I needed to welcome this new reporter, help him learn about the Washington beat, and share my sources with him. I decided in advance when people tried to commiserate with me about not getting the job, I would take the high road, not complaining but expressing gratitude for the privilege of working at NPR. As I rechanneled my thoughts—thinking on the true, noble, pure, lovely, praiseworthy, as Paul advises us—I found myself growing excited about what God had in store for me as His little worker bee. If NPR is not a good enough plan for my life, I thought, then I cannot wait to see what God had in mind.

Two weeks went by with no announcement about the job. One day, my editor called me into her office. "Well, Barb, if you didn't believe in God before, you should now," she said, knowing full well that I did in fact believe in God. "In my 15 years here, I have never heard of this—the reporter who was offered the job accepted it, and then changed his mind. The job is yours."

In reflecting on this later, I wondered why God had dragged me through the emotional brambles—why hadn't He just let me have the job? But it became clear that God had a lesson for me to learn: Namely, that He—and not a human employer—is in control of my destiny. If I am supposed to have a certain position, no one can keep me out of it, not even the managing editor. If I'm not supposed to be in a certain position, no amount of maneuvering on my part or anyone else's will keep me there. This has given me not only peace, but also a sense of adventure about how God might choose to employ me in His grand plan.

Finally, this bifocal approach has changed the way I report my stories for NPR. Professionally, I am searching for truth—that is, accuracy, fairness, and insight into any particular story I am covering.

Spiritually, I am searching for Truth—that is, seeing God’s hand in the story I am covering.

The most dramatic instance of that occurred in April 1999, when I was sent to cover the shooting in Littleton, Colorado. I arrived at Columbine High School the day after the shooting, and walked into a scene surreal with grief—literally hundreds of teenagers shivering under the cold, steely sky, not talking, just hugging each other as they cried.

As I stood there, loathe to approach anyone with a microphone, I saw five young men standing in a huddle. I drew closer, and heard they were singing praise songs to Christ (“Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is Your name...”). Then they stopped singing and prayed, thanking Christ for His love, for sustaining them through this grief, for allowing them to be witnesses for Him during this time. As I watched, more and more teenagers joined the huddle. Within a few minutes, the group had grown to 60 or 70, and the sound of their singing took my breath away. I remember thinking, “Oh my goodness, in the midst of this grief, here is God.” At that moment, I could sense the chariots of fire—God’s presence—even as an army of tragedy and sadness appeared to overwhelm.

As a journalist, I could and did report the tragedy and its aftermath as accurately as possible. But as a Christian, I had my antenna up for the spiritual story. Because I believe in a God who is both good and omnipotent, one who will not be defeated by evil. In other words, I expected another shoe to drop.

That shoe to drop was the story of Cassie Bernall. It took little time for her story to be circulating among the students of Columbine: the story of a girl who was in the library when the shooters spotted her and asked her if she believed in God. “Yes,” she said, and a second later, Cassie Bernall was shot and killed.

I was the first to report the story, and every other media organization followed. And it prompted a spiritual revival among teenagers. At Cassie’s funeral, more than 75

young men and women made a commitment to follow Christ. Later, there were revivals at high schools across the country. Indeed, God used that moment of faith to defeat evil and draw many young people to Himself.

In many ways Cassie Bernall became the story of Columbine—a story that might have been overlooked, had there not been a Christian there on the ground, trying to look at this human tragedy with spiritual eyes. I’m not taking credit—spiritual perception is a gift that God gives to all His children. I was merely privileged to be there at the right time.

And, that’s what it is all about: being God’s man or woman on the scene. Because as Christians, we know we are players in a larger drama that can only be perceived when our eyes are opened by God and to God. It’s a spiritual drama that is more lasting and more powerful than any drama earth has to offer; and ultimately, it is the spiritual that gives meaning to our daily lives. ■

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Barbara was the lead correspondent covering the investigation into the September 11 attacks. Her reporting was part of NPR’s coverage that earned the network the 2001 Peabody and Overseas Press Club awards. She has appeared on the PBS programs, “Washington Week in Review,” and “The Lehrer News Hour.”

Barbara came to NPR in 1995, after attending Yale Law School on a one-year Knight Fellowship. Before that, she worked at The Christian Science Monitor for 11 years. She is a 1981 graduate of Williams College.

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To Glorify or Enjoy Forever?

(continued from page 7)

“...the enjoyment of God and the glory of God can never be pulled apart. They walk hand in hand.”

“That your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations” (v. 2). Here the blessing of God, clearly meant for our enjoyment, serves a wider and grander purpose—that God’s saving power would be known throughout the world.

The psalmist goes on in v. 3-5 to push out the implications further:

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

Here the enjoyment of God is seen in the context of God being praised and honored throughout the world. In fact our enjoyment of God actually brings a worship and glory to our maker and redeemer.

The psalmist certainly wants to enjoy the blessings of God. They are wonderful gifts that remind us that God is a self-giving God of grace and mercy. We follow a God who wants the very best for us in life and desires that we experience joy, peace, hope, meaning, and a sense of divine presence and power within. But it is equally clear that we cannot stop there, for the enjoyment of God is not for our own self-centeredness. It is true enjoyment, but never narcissistic. It is true pleasure, but never pleasure as an end in itself apart from a wider context, purpose, and meaning.

The enjoyment of God always has a larger vision in mind: That God’s purposes on earth be fulfilled and that God’s name be honored and praised. In other words, the enjoyment of God and the glory of God can never be pulled apart. They walk hand in hand.

I think my student was on to something when she spoke of sensing a tension between enjoying God and glorifying God. She was right to grapple with that tension. But ultimately the two sides need each other, for without the harmony of the two we get a lopsided, distorted faith.

Distortions

What happens if we emphasize only the enjoyment of God? We end up with a very superficial, self-centered faith that ultimately undermines the glory of God. We end up using God for our own purposes. Faith becomes a device for getting what we want.

Will Herberg nearly half a century ago described American religiosity this way, and his portrayal still has a contemporary ring: “In this kind of religion it is not man who serves God, but God who is mobilized and made to serve man and his purposes—whether these purposes be economic prosperity, free enterprise, social reform, democracy, happiness, security or peace of mind.” Herberg further adds, “What should reach down to the core of existence...merely skims the surface of life, and yet succeeds in generating the sincere feeling of being religious. Religion thus becomes a kind of protection the self throws up against the radical demand of faith” (*Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, pp. 268, 260).

Today there are many enjoyers of God who embrace a health and wealth gospel that says, “Name it and claim it.” The movement is a vivid expression of the enjoyment type. One preacher embracing this type of faith says, “If the mafia can ride around in Lincoln Continental Town Cars, why can’t King’s kids?” Some in this movement have spoken of actually commanding God and teach that, “You can have what you say.”

Most of us are likely not tempted to such egregious distortions, but it is quite easy to end up with a faith that tends in this direction. When we examine the way we “use” our faith, the way we pray, and the elements of faith that most occupy our thinking, we easily slip into an enjoyment-only kind of Christianity.

But what happens if we emphasize only the glory of God? Faith in this type tends to become an austere legalism. Here following Jesus becomes a joyless burden that we must carry as appointed by a God who sternly stands over us. It is a faith without grace, as we dig deep down into our own finite resources to give something to God and to others out of a sense of obligation or fear, not overflowing grace and love.

The glory of God distortion is often a faith that lacks spontaneity, creativity, and joy. And in fact, there's usually not much joy in being around some glorifier types that I have known. Their very presence can feel burdensome and oddly incongruent with a Savior who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Those who emphasize only the glorifying of God tend to lack the wonderful sense of God's enabling presence in their lives, as they seek to mobilize their own resources for God's purposes.

The glory of God imbalance is theologically deficient in two ways. First, it lacks a theology of creation in which we embrace the goodness of creation, including the wonder of humans made in the image of God. As such, this approach overlooks general grace and the wonderful gifts of creation available to all humanity. But secondly, it lacks a theology of special grace, as it places so much emphasis on the human need to glorify God that it undermines the gracious divine gift that motivates and sustains us to live all of life for the glory of God, while simultaneously finding utter delight in the God who gives.

Conclusion

The reality is that we need both the glory of God and the enjoyment of God to be faithful believers. Those old Westminster Divines surely got it right when they asked the question of our chief end in life, and answered that it is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. But, the key is that they are pursued together and never pulled apart from each other. They need each other and feed each other, and in this dual affirmation we begin to understand and experience something of the marvelous, mysterious, ever-present God of the universe. The psalmist concludes with the harmony and the balance we all need:

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God has blessed us. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him (Psalms 67:6-7). ■

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Over the years Dennis has served in both pastoral and teaching ministries, including seven years as a professor of Church & Society at Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, New York. He has served as an adjunct or visiting professor at several seminaries internationally, including Moscow Theological Seminary in Russia, Union Biblical Seminary in India, and the Alliance Theological Seminary extension program in Ukraine.

He is a frequent speaker in churches, pastor's conferences, seminaries, colleges, and academic forums. He is the author of nearly 50 articles, mostly in ethics, and two books, his most recent, Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World (Baker Books).

Dennis received a B.A. from Elizabethtown College, an M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, an M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Drew University, and did post-doctoral studies at Oxford University. He and his wife Mary Ann live in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania and have two daughters, Daphne (21) and Naphtali (20).

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Good Books, Bad Books

Windows into the Human Heart

by Steven Garber

Fellow & Lilly Faculty Scholar, Calvin College



Steven Garber

Dr. Steven Garber is Fellow & Lilly Faculty Scholar at Calvin College, in addition to serving as Senior Fellow for the C.S. Lewis Institute. The author of *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, he speaks widely on the relation of learning to life. A member of The Falls Church along with his wife Meg and children, he teaches in several settings within the life of the congregation.

*What we believe about who we are –
our origin, nature, and destiny –
affects everything else.*

“**B**ad books always lie. They lie most of all about the human condition.” The very idea offended her, and she wanted to talk.

And so on a cold winter evening in the Poconos, I sat down with a Princeton University Ph.D. candidate who had joined several dozen graduate students for a weekend of reflection. Drawing from Cornell, Columbia, Rutgers, and Princeton, they were described to me in this way: “These are bright students, and they love God – but they typically don’t know how to connect what they believe with their studies. Can you help?”

As I pondered how to approach the weekend, Walker Percy’s insight about literature and life – that “bad books always lie...” – came to mind, and I thought that I would start the weekend off with a discussion of his argument. The thesis is true beyond the world of novels, echoing into every area of study, every arena of human existence. Bad economic visions always lie. They lie most of all about the human condition. And the same is true for politics and painting, for biology and sociology – all across the curriculum it is the view of the human condition which sets the terms of the debate. What we believe about who we are – our origin, nature, and destiny – affects everything else.

She and I sat down for what turned out to be a three-hour conversation. Several years into her work, the focus of her study was early modern Japanese literature, Buddhist literature, she explained. And she was

offended at Percy’s argument, where he moves from “Bad books always lie...” to asking, tongue-in-cheek and yet with the deepest seriousness, “Have you read any good Marxist novels lately? Any good behaviorist novels lately? Any good Freudian novels lately? Any good Buddhist novels lately?” And with each worldview, he points out why it fails to provide the necessary grist for a good story. Audaciously, given the pluralizing and secularizing character of contemporary life, he then says that novels are dependent upon the Jewish and Christian view of human nature and history.

Simply said, Percy saw the issues as a line in the sand: either one worked out of the Jewish and Christian tradition, with its narrative-shaped understanding of the human condition, or one did not have what was required for a good story. In his own words, “Judeo-Christianity is about pilgrims who have something wrong with them and are embarked on a search to find a way out. This is also what novels are about.”

For the first half hour she was mad, at me and at Percy. I listened, and asked several questions. She became less angry, and then, much to my surprise, said, “You know, the Buddhist literature isn’t very interesting to read... in the end, it’s always the same story. This life means nothing. There is no point to anything we say or do.” She looked me straight in the eye and said, “But I can’t say that to my professors or my peers. I wouldn’t be allowed to finish my degree. I have to find a way to celebrate this ‘important voice’ in global literature; that’s what I’m supposed to do.... but it’s not very much fun.”

On Stories

What is it about stories? Why are we as human beings so drawn to good ones? And so disappointed with bad ones? One of my first memories is, as a young boy, putting my pencil and paper aside during a sermon whenever the pastor would begin to tell a story. Something changed in the very air of the sanctuary, it seemed to my little ears.

I love good stories – whether they come in books, films, songs, or poems. When I was

nine, ten, and eleven years old, I lived in biographies. I suppose the librarians loved me, because I came in week after week, wanting more to read. At age twelve I discovered the stories of Ralph Moody, an autobiographical series which followed the life of a young boy in a Colorado ranching family. As a native of the Colorado mountains myself, and the grandson of a cattleman who invited me into his life summer after summer, these tales of family, horses, cows, choices, and consequences shaped my sixth-grade life.

Years later stories continue to form my understanding of myself, and my understanding of the world around me. And though I still read Moody's books to my children, my own reading is more Dickens and Dostoevsky. It is true of me what C.S. Lewis said of himself: "You can't get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me." There is something about the way we are made—something about being created in the image of God and created with imaginations that can be awakened by grace to the truth about ourselves and the world—that loves a good story.

But like all of God's gifts, even stories can be skewed; we can miss the point, making too much, or too little, of their meaning. Rather than being meaningful, because they take their rightful place in God's world, they become meaningless. Think of the Princeton graduate student and her Buddhist literature.

To press the point: in the movement from modern to post-modern, in leaving behind the certainties of the Cartesian universe with its too neat-and-clean dichotomy between facts and values, *everything* becomes a story. It is a "narrative vision of this" or a "narrative understanding of that." One's perspective—read "story"—on reality becomes more important than reality. But of course that is where the rub is. The post-modern world grants no access to reality, to truth, to the way the world really is; all we are only allowed is "my story," which means an individual's particular perspective and viewpoint. The Princeton student was asked to celebrate the Buddhist "story" about life and the world—whether it was a meaningful one or not, whether it satisfied deeply human aspirations

for coherence and dignity or not. The "story" is the point. Period.

The history of the world of ideas is one of pendulum shifts, and this is its most recent expression. The Enlightenment insisted that what we know is either "objective fact" or "subjective value"—and of course it prized most of all what is "objective" because the "impersonal" character of facts is trustworthy and true for everyone everywhere. Or so it was argued. In effect it canceled out the more profoundly human ways of making sense of one's place in the universe; it ruled "out of order" more biblically rooted ways of knowing, where confidence about truth is possible without being dependent upon the scientific method to prove it so.

How do we weigh faith, hope, and love? Can we quantify responsibility? One of Walker Percy's characters, Tom More—a fictional descendent of Sir Thomas More, "the man for all seasons"—creates "the quantitative-qualitative ontological lapsometer." And just what does a lapsometer do? It measures lapses, of course... in the human soul. Percy is smiling here.

In contrast, the post-Enlightenment writers—hanging onto the pendulum as they do so—insist that everything is "personal," by which they mean one's own private, subjective perspective. Nietzsche saw into this moment, over a century ago, observing—even as he joined the atheists in their celebration—that when God goes, so does any possibility of continuing to talk about meaning and morality. He said that we would limp on through the 20th century "on the mere pittance" of the old decaying God-based moral codes. But then, in the 21st would come a period more dreadful than the great wars of the 20th century, a time of "the total eclipse of all values." Epistemologies do have ethical implications.

The Theology of a Good Story

There are writers who see the problem of the Enlightenment, but do not fall into the abyss of the nihilism for Everyman which post-modernism too often means. Walker Percy is one of the best. But there are others—two of my favorites are C. S. Lewis and

(continued on page 22)

The post-modern world grants no access to reality, to truth, to the way the world really is.

Profiles in Faith: John Wesley, Pioneering Evangelical Spiritual Director

(continued from page 1)

Besides all of these accolades, I prefer to celebrate Wesley's three-hundredth birthday by describing his role as a pioneering Evangelical spiritual director. Spiritual direction, simply put, is guidance given to people in their relationship with God.

His Parents, Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley Wesley

Samuel was Anglican rector of Epworth Parish, Lincolnshire. This spiritual director wrote an advice column in *The Athenian Oracle* in response to questions from his readers. Unfortunately, Samuel was not popular with all of his parishioners at home. To persuade him to step down as rector (pastor), some parishioners set the Epworth rectory on fire while Samuel, Susanna, and their children were sleeping. Seven-year-old John was rescued at the last minute through a window in an upstairs room. His mother thought that her son was "a brand plucked from the burning" and consequently resolved thereafter to be "more particularly careful for the soul of this child, which God had so mercifully provided for." Susanna guided John to believe that God had a special purpose for the life of one that God had so miraculously rescued from the flames. This was probably John's first encounter with spiritual guidance.

Susanna Annesley Wesley, the brilliant daughter of a dissenting Puritan minister, Dr. Samuel Annesley, read the Bible and works of devotion, prayed, and journaled in a methodical manner. Journal writing became an important part of the spiritual life of her son. In 1711, she began to meet with each of her nineteen children alone one-half hour each week to talk about their faith issues. This was her spiritual direction for each of her children.

Wesley's Oxford Conversion of 1725

After being raised by two spiritual directors at home, John Wesley entered Christ Church College, Oxford University, in 1720 where he subsequently completed requirements for the B.A. degree in 1724 and the M.A. degree in 1727. The moral laxity and worldliness of Oxford was a subject of common knowledge.

Around the turn of the year 1725 John began to consider his faith more seriously. We call this Wesley's Oxford ethical conversion of 1725. A conversion is an

experience of God in which one turns from self as the center of life to making God the center. Two events ensued that led Wesley to the experience of an ethical conversion in which he began to strive for Christian perfection: (1) he met a spiritual friend, Sally Kirkham, who provided him with counsel and with whom he fell in love, and (2) he read at her insistence Jeremy Taylor's *Rules for Holy Living*, an Anglican manual for the spiritual life, and Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, a book which has enjoyed a popularity through the centuries second only to the Bible. These works prompted Wesley to pursue the devout and holy life with greater urgency. The experience of reading Thomas à Kempis set Wesley on a thirteen-year journey towards mystical union with Christ.

Wesley's first conversion of 1725 was moral in nature in contrast to the 1738 Aldersgate conversion that brought about his evangelical awakening with an accompanying assurance of salvation. The Oxford conversion involved the turning of a man of the world to God and holiness.

Wesley's conversion was later reinforced in 1727 by reading the Anglican William Law's *Christian Perfection and Serious Call to the Devout and Holy Life*. Wesley noted the inspiration these books had had on him: "These convinced me more than ever of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian." Wesley continued, "And I determined through His grace...to be all devoted to God—to give Him all my soul, my body, and my substance." This was a decision from which Wesley never wavered the whole of his life's career. He began to regulate his life with all the rigor of a monk. Influenced by Taylor and Law, he called idleness a gross sin, and he abandoned leisure forever. He arose from his bed at four every morning and gave his first hour to prayer. Once during each succeeding hour of the day he gave a further five minutes from each that he might have continued conversation with God. Wesley was very disciplined and methodical.

After graduation from Oxford, John Wesley served as a priest at Wroot, Lincolnshire while his brother, Charles Wesley, commenced his studies at Christ Church College, Oxford. In May 1729, Charles persuaded two or three students to gather for study. Later in November, John returned to Oxford as a fellow of

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Lincoln College and united with this group for the purpose of mutual religious instruction. Here he passed on what he had obtained from God through the Oxford conversion of 1725. Under John's direction, the student friends of Charles composed a scheme of study consisting of classical and theological works. Their spiritual rule of life included frequent attendance at Holy Communion and regular periods of prayer and Bible reading.

Wesley's Leadership of the Holy Club

While this society chose no name for itself, its members were variously labeled by mocking classmates as the "Sacramentarians," the "Bible Moths," "the Holy Club," or the "Methodists." In time they came to practice methodical devotion. They distributed pious books. They relieved prisoners' material wants. They supplied the poor with food and clothing. They assisted in the release of debtors from prison.

Most of all, Wesley is remembered as a spiritual director and leader of the Holy Club of Oxford Methodists who looked to him for spiritual advice. In 1729 three or four young men assembled at Oxford to read the Bible and "saw that they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do." Wesley's journal records that these Oxford Methodist students "desired me as a favor that I would direct them in all things." From 1729 to 1735 there were no more than forty-five Oxford Methodists. Wesley's oversight of the Holy Club constituted a form of group spiritual direction. He also wrote letters of spiritual counsel to these students and others.

Growing Dissatisfaction with the Path to Perfection

John and Charles Wesley left Oxford for missionary work in Georgia in 1735. John wanted an assurance of going to heaven. He became dissatisfied with the approach to mystical union through the asceticism he had been practicing at Oxford. He found something very real in the faith of the Moravians while he was traveling on the ship *Simmonds*. All feared the ship would be lost in a great storm. The Moravians were calmly singing hymns in the midst of the storm, whereas Wesley found himself unprepared to die. He

became envious of their assurance of salvation and certainty of faith. He returned from Georgia feeling he had failed as a missionary.

The Aldersgate Conversion of 1738

Upon his return to London, Wesley attended a Moravian service at Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. Upon hearing Martin Luther's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, John Wesley received an assurance of salvation and a belief that he was justified by faith alone. "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans," Wesley chronicled his Aldersgate conversion. "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." We call this Wesley's evangelical conversion that led him to preach the new birth and justification by faith alone.

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The Change of Spiritual Direction after Aldersgate in an Evangelical Direction

Aldersgate changed the way Wesley went about spiritual direction. He saw that there was an easier way to experience union and communion with God. One could respond to the preaching of the gospel, "Believe and be saved." One did not first need to go through an arduous path of asceticism, self-denial, mortification, and dark night of the soul before experiencing union with Christ. One needed to experience justification by faith alone as Martin Luther taught and the assurance of salvation as the Puritans believed and his father had experienced. John Wesley and his fellow Oxford Methodist George Whitefield preached the necessity of the new birth. Multitudes came to the joyous experience of God's grace.

However, Wesley, who felt that Luther did not emphasize sanctification enough, kept his commitment to the devout and holy life found in Anglican devotion and attached it to his new evangelicalism.

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Profiles in Faith: John Wesley, Pioneering Evangelical Spiritual Director

(continued from page 17)

Wesley should go down in history as one of the great Protestant spiritual directors not only of Methodism but of the universal church.

At first he felt that the Catholic path to reach mystical union with God through asceticism and a dark night of the soul to be a blind alley. He put his confidence in the reception of justifying grace through conversion and new birth. In time, however, he once again advocated some of the treasures of Catholic mystical spirituality as suitable reading for his followers if they were balanced with the Protestant concept of justification by faith alone. In his editing he deleted doctrinal assertions that were incompatible with evangelical faith.

Wesley's audience increased as he began preaching in churches and later in the open fields. He could no longer give such concentrated time for spiritual guidance to a small number as he had in the Holy Club at Oxford, but here is what he did.

1. He composed letters of spiritual guidance urging people to pursue the life of prayer, devotion, and holiness. He even wrote William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament, to urge him to take up the cause of ending the practice of slave trading and slave holding. Wilberforce secured in Parliament the abolition of the slave trade and later the institution of slavery in the British Empire. Previously in 1774, Wesley had written *Thoughts on Slavery*, an influential antislavery work. We have thousands of letters by Wesley with spiritual counsel on personal and social holiness.

2. In addition to his massive correspondence, Wesley instructed his followers to read classics of Christian spirituality. These are found in his Christian Library. He translated, edited, and published fifty volumes of these between 1749 and 1757 in the Christian Library. He had his followers read works by Catholic, Orthodox, Puritan, Pietist, and Anglican authors. Assisting people to grow in their faith through the spiritual discipline of study is an important role of a spiritual director.

3. Wesley also directed his followers through classes, bands, and select societies.

In fact, John Wesley delegated the responsibility of spiritual direction to a host of lay people who led Methodists in their growth in holiness through small groups. Wesley brought his convictions on the pursuit of Christian holiness within the structure of accountability through spiritual direction of individuals and groups.

Wesley's approach to spiritual direction changed by urging evangelistic preaching through which inquirers would be won to faith in Jesus Christ and the experience of justifying grace. He advised people how to experience the new birth and the joy of Christian assurance. However, he continued his commitment to directing souls that he had gained from Anglicanism while a tutor at Oxford University. Wesley continued to make spiritual formation a priority during the evangelical awakenings as he repeatedly made Christian perfection one of the major emphases of his preaching and guidance of souls.

Many evangelists have put almost all of their emphasis upon the conversion of the lost and getting them into church. They have often forgotten the important work of helping these converts mature in the faith and grow in holiness. Wesley was both an evangelist and a spiritual director. Unfortunately, this dual emphasis has been lost by many evangelicals since his time. Wesley should go down in history as one of the great Protestant spiritual directors not only of Methodism but of the universal church. He calls upon us to seek out spiritual direction ourselves and invites evangelicals to rediscover the blessings of spiritual guidance lost in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to mass revivalism. ■



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C.S. Lewis on Death and Immortality

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eternal life but also the fullness of life right now. Second, if we "lose" our lives—give them away to Christ and others—we will not only gain eternal life but also the fullness of life in the present. Who wouldn't, seeing the end result, choose accordingly? Jim Elliot, the missionary martyr, once wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Especially when the things we cannot lose are of immeasurably more value than the things we cannot keep.

Jesus' argument here is in effect that self-denial is in your self-interest. If you say no to yourself and follow Him, you will gain everything worth having. But this sense of reward or self-interest does not necessarily make our motive impure. Lewis says in *The Problem of Pain*:

We are afraid that heaven is a bribe and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be interested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to. There are rewards that do not sully motives. A man's love for a woman is not mercenary because he wants to marry her, nor his love for poetry mercenary because he wants to read it, nor his love for exercise less disinterested because he wants to run and leap and walk. Love by its very nature seeks to enjoy its object.

Loving God is not only right but also in the interest of our own joy. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever are not two different purposes or ends but unite together as the greatest purpose of life. We get our greatest delight when we are lost in wonder awe and praise of God.

In that very praising of God we can see why the pursuit of self-interest is not necessarily selfish. When we are lost in wonder awe and praise, we are the happiest we can become, but also the least self-conscious because when we are focused on God, we are not focused on self. This is the same dynamic that we experience in a good friend-

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C.S. Lewis on Death and Immortality

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ship. With people we don't know we might feel self-conscious and wonder how they are responding to what we say and do. But with a really good friend we can lose ourselves in conversation, each conveying their deepest feelings without self-centeredness. Our joy is great, but we are focused on the other and the delight in the discussion we are having. Lewis summarizes this experience:

...the happiest moments are when we forget our precious selves...but have everything else (God, our fellow humans, the animals, the garden, and the sky) instead....

In this experience, we are not self-oriented but extremely happy. We are doing that which is in the interest of our own joy but not selfishly. We are joyous but "disinterested."

Images of Heaven

The movie *Shadowlands* indicates that Joy fell in love with C.S. Lewis due to his images of heaven. There is probably more to it than that, but his images are glorious. I remember my professor, Dr. Gerstner, who always conducted his classes by dialecture (dialogue), asking us, "Who has ever been perfect?" We responded, "Jesus" and "Adam and Eve before the fall," but then we ran out of concrete examples that could survive his scrutiny. When we gave up, Dr. Gerstner said, "You've just missed countless millions of people." We asked, "Whom do you mean?" He responded, "All those who have died and are now in heaven with Christ." C.S. Lewis shares something of the same insight towards the end of *The Silver Chair*. The children were at this point in Aslan's country beyond Narnia. King Caspian lay under a clear stream. They all wept—even Aslan. Aslan told Eustace to get a thorn and push it into his lion paw. As a result, a drop of blood falls into the stream and King Caspian leaps up no longer old, but a young man. He rushed to Aslan "...and flung his arms as far as they would go round the huge neck; and he gave Aslan the strong kisses of a King, and Aslan gave him the wild kisses of a Lion."

Eustace, afraid to touch the dead, said:

"Look here! I say," he stammered. "It's all very well. But aren't you—? I mean didn't you—"

"Oh, don't be such an ass," said Caspian.

"But," said Eustace, looking at Aslan. "Hasn't he—er—died?"

"Yes," said the Lion..." He has died. Most people have, you know. Even I have. There are very few who haven't."

In other words, if our eyes could be opened for just a minute to the eternal dimension in the present, it would change our view of death and of our life. Many more people have died and now live than those who are presently on earth.

My favorite passage in what has become my favorite Narnia Chronicle is at the end of *The Last Battle*. In the chapter "Farewell to Shadowlands," the children are afraid of again being sent back from Narnia to England. Aslan assures them that this time they will not have to go. A "wild hope" arises in them. Aslan tells them that their transition from a train to Narnia in the beginning of the book was because there was a real railway accident. Aslan tells them in the final paragraphs:

"Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the *Shadowlands*—dead. The term is over; the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: This is the morning...." The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And as for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

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What a glorious vision. An infinitely creative God creating infinite, wonderful adventures for all eternity.

Encounters with Death

C.S. Lewis had a number of painful encounters with death. His mother died while he was a young boy. He lost friends in the war, particularly his best friend Paddy Moore. He lost his father and finally, most painfully, his beloved wife Joy. Her death caused him to ask deep questions as can be read in *A Grief Observed*. We will probably get no clear answer as to why people die when they do. But perhaps if we saw it all from their point of view or from an eternal perspective, everything would look different. Lewis writes:

Heaven will solve our problems, but by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. These notions will be knocked from under our feet. We will see that there was no problem.

However, all kinds of problems emerge this side of eternity. It might be interesting to note that when Lewis had to face his own death he faced it bravely and calmly. For instance, when he had to decline a certain lecture invitation that he would have enjoyed, his face grew sad; he paused and said simply, "Send them a polite refusal." Once close to the end, he passed into a coma from which he was not expected to emerge. When he awoke, Lewis was rather disappointed because he, like Lazarus (raised by Jesus after four days dead), had his dying to do all over again.

How Can We Know?

How can we know that these things are true? It all comes down to the credibility of Christ and to the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead. If Christ was raised from the dead, then He provides the guarantee that we will be raised. If Christ is not raised, then as the Apostle Paul said, our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, and we might as well eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow

we die. (See I Corinthians 15.) Either Christ was lying when He told us about eternal life, in which case, He ought to be utterly rejected for telling us such an untruth. Or, maybe He was a lunatic who truly believed what He said, but was deluded about his own deity and about eternal life. In this case, He ought to have been confined to an asylum next to a person who believed themselves to be a poached egg. The remaining option is that He is telling us the truth and that He is our risen Lord. His claims were either true or false. If false, He either knew that they were false, or He didn't. If He knew they were false, He was a liar. If He didn't know they were false, He was a lunatic. If his claims were true, He is Lord.

Not only is there a strong historical case for the resurrection of Christ (which you can find elsewhere), but there are also plenty of empirical results to back up his claims. Could whopping lies or raving lunacy change people's lives from insanity to sanity, from slavery to freedom, from hostility to love, from instability to stability, from brokenness to wholeness? Many testimonies bear out the effect of this "lunacy" on real lives throughout history.

However, Lewis's argument for these things was not experiential. As we will see in future articles, he came to believe that the account of Christ's life in the New Testament was not mythical but grounded in solid history. Although there are myths that seemed similar to the story of Christ, Lewis came to believe by historical standards that Jesus was the "myth become fact." He argued against those theologians who believed these stories were mythical.

If Christ died for us, rose for us, reigns in power for us, and prays for us, then our lives are decisively different. It is impossible to truly believe these things without them having a revolutionary effect. Sometimes people have critiqued those whom they felt were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. Lewis argues that it is the other way around. Those who are the most heavenly minded are the most earthly good. ■

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Good Books, Bad Books

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Wendell Berry – who stand in a long line of writers whose moral imaginations were shaped by the truths of the Christian vision of God and his world, writers who offered history a way of understanding the world that is really there, without being of the world.

What does that world look like? Several years ago I was asked by an Anglican bishop to help develop a curriculum for “the young theologians” of his diocese; in particular he wanted to give them tools to think theologically about the culture. One of the many books we drew upon was Lesslie Newbigin’s *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.

I still remember the chills that ran down my spine the first time I read his account of a conversation with a Hindu scholar, a man who became his close friend over the 40 years Newbigin spent in India as a missionary. The Hindu said to him, wonderingly,

Why is it that Christian missionaries have told us, ‘Read our sacred text, too. Add it to your supply.’ Now I have read your Bible, and it seems to me a completely unique book. Its view of history, a story with a beginning and an end which makes universal claims, as well as its view of the human person as a responsible actor in history, make this different than any other book I have read.

The words still ring in my heart. The Hindu saw more clearly than most Christians. Immersed in a Hindu understanding of history and human nature, he could see the stark contrast set forth in the story of the Christian Scriptures. No, not another book to add to his supply, at all! Rather it was a book with a completely unique story, and its implications rippled out into the universe.

Some truths are true, anytime and anywhere. It does not matter whether one lives in the pre-modern, modern, or what we call post-modern era; whether one lives in the East or the West. They are ideas which are true, they reflect the reality of the way things really are. In his own effort to break through the language problem in a culture moving from modern to post-modern – people using words to mean anything and

everything – Francis Schaeffer called these ideas “true truths,” and saw them as the contours of the biblical vision of reality, of human life in space and time.

The Hindu was right, profoundly so. The Bible is a story, a story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. In Stanley Hauerwas’ image, the Church is “a story-formed community”; we understand ourselves in relation to God, each other, and the world, by the ideas and images of the biblical narrative. How else do we make sense of the theology embedded in the unfolding story of God’s work over time, spanning centuries and cultures? It is a story of human beings making their way in a world where the choices are real, and therefore where there are consequences – for blessing and for curse.

Think about David’s sorry and shameful stumble. Called by God “a man after my own heart,” David uses his political position to steal another man’s wife and puts her husband in mortal danger, somehow imagining that he can find true happiness in flaunting the commandments of God. From the text, it seems that it was at least several years before David was able to see himself truthfully. How could that be? Psalm 51 offers us a window into his heart, but David’s repentant cry only comes after he sees himself in a story told by the prophet Nathan.

Angry, moved to judgment by the injustice of Nathan’s account of a powerful man abusing a powerless man, David rises from his throne – only to meet the finger of Nathan, the prophet of God, saying to him: *You are the man!*

The moral universe implicit on every page of the Old Testament is brought into the New as God, incarnate in the person of a Palestinian rabbi, reveals himself to those with ears to hear. Most of his teaching is given in parables, like the story of the two houses which are in truth a story of two hearts, at the conclusion of what we call “the sermon on the mount.” In setting after setting, conversation after conversation, Jesus chooses to tell stories as the means of offering the truths of the kingdom.

Take the story which we call “the good Samaritan.” It grew out of questions asked

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and answered between an expert in the law and Jesus. The expert wanted to “test” Jesus, Luke writes, and therefore his question was not altogether honest. Jesus knew that, and asked him a question as a means of answering. They went back and forth, and finally the expert decided he would rather retreat into an academic conversation. In our terms, he tried to deconstruct the word “neighbor,” to abstract it from life. Knowing his heart, Jesus told him a parable.

When the short story was over, Jesus asked another question: So, who was the neighbor? One more time, the expert in the law gave the right answer; that was not his problem. And Jesus told him, “Go, apprentice yourself to the Samaritan.” In Percy’s imagery, this is the parable of the man who got all A’s but was flunking life.

This is not an isolated incident in the pedagogy of Jesus. Time and again, confronted by people who knew the outlines of biblical faith but whose hearts were not open to the truth about God and themselves, Jesus chose to tell a story.

Good Books and the Human Condition

Good stories tell the truth about the human condition. That is the divine brilliance in Nathan’s prophetic tale and in the parables of Jesus. Bad books, on the other hand, distort the story about human nature and history—and Princeton graduate students and the rest of us do not find them compelling.

If the coming summer nights find you wanting a larger cup of tea and a longer book, then allow me to suggest some wonderful stories. They will probe the hidden places of the heart—if you have ears to hear. That of course is the mystery of the moral dynamism of the human heart, and the deeper reality: good story or not, truth is always for those with ears to hear.

One of the very best is one of our oldest, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. Written as a guide to Christian discipleship in the 13th century, the tales of Lancelot, Gawain, and Percival are full of true temptation and true grace. It is a culture-wide loss that most of us know more about the Quest from Monty Python

and Indiana Jones than we do from this morally rich story.

Every night that the play, *Les Miserables*, is done on the stages of London’s West End or New York’s Broadway, the gospel goes out. But as great as that production is, it pales in comparison to the richness of Victor Hugo’s novel. For example, where we get a few minutes to ponder the bishop’s remarkable gift of grace to Jean Valjean on stage, the book offers us 50 pages, telling the story of the formation of the bishop’s soul, why his open door is a true reflection of his open heart. And of course its uncanny echo of Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son makes it even more extraordinary.

The trilogy by Sigrid Undset, *Kristen Lavransdatter*, is a favorite among my friends. It seems that whoever reads these stories of medieval Scandinavia, deeply wrought as they are from a Christian consciousness, falls in love with them—not because they are happy, in a cheap sense; in fact they are full of disappointment and sorrow. It is more because they are so true; we see ourselves, the secrets of our hearts, the vanities which skew our own true happiness. But when all is said and done, they are stories of great grace.

And finally, Wendell Berry’s stories of “the Port William membership,” the community of family and friends over a century who populate his novels and short stories, have become companions to me and to mine. With unusual skill, he writes of griefs and graces that only make sense if God is there; a meaning and morality that are marked by love are at the heart of his literary universe. His stories, like the best stories, are always for those with ears to hear.

Stories—good stories—have a way of finding their way into the deepest places.

Shakespeare understood this very well. Generations later we continue to see ourselves in his plays; the comedies, the tragedies, the tales of glory and shame, young and old alike find a world that is strangely familiar. At heart, Hamlet’s observation so many seasons ago, is still true: “The play’s the thing to catch the conscience of the king!” Still true, that is, for those with ears to hear. ■

Good stories tell the truth about the human condition...Bad books, on the other hand, distort the story about human nature and history.

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