

LEADING GRACE

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE

THIS ISSUE: HUMILITY

WHERE HAVE ALL THE HUMBLE GONE?
JOE DUKE

THE OVERVIEW EFFECT
JEREMY MIKKELSEN

NOT WHY BUT HOW CAN I NOT
LARRY MOYER

JESUS' LORDSHIP AND OUR SALVATION
BOB NYBERG

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CONTENT

WHERE HAVE ALL THE HUMBLE GONE? PG 5

A word of encouragement from Joe Duke on the importance of humility in the age of celebrity.

THE OVERVIEW EFFECT PG 9

A perspective from our own Jeremy Mikkelsen on the cognitive shift that occurs when we recognize the whole spiritual reality of God’s grace.

JESUS’ LORDSHIP AND OUR SALVATION PG 17

An exposition by Bob Nyberg on the early church’s defense of Free Grace in Acts 15, and how we can apply this Biblical narrative today.

NOT WHY BUT HOW CAN I NOT? PG 21

A look by Larry Moyer at four things that motivate us to share the gospel.

- KIDS MINISTRY NEW! PG 13
- Q&A PG 4
- NATIONAL CONFERENCE PG 14
- RECENT BOOKS PG 15
- PARTNERING WITH FGA PG 25

Humility: The false and the true

There’s a difference between the typical churchy view of humility and the biblical definition.

My experience with churchy humility persuades me that most of us have been taught that humility is not taking credit. So when someone sings a great solo, and the audience claps, it’s expected that the performer points to the sky. Interestingly, running backs and first basemen do the same thing. Apparently, once we’ve given God credit, we’re good in the humility department.

Biblical humility is most clearly defined in Philippians 2:5-11. Read it carefully, and you’ll soon understand that Jesus’ humility did not mean He didn’t want credit for being the Son of God and Rescuer of humanity and creation. Jesus’ humility was submitting to the Father’s will with abandoned trust. Consequently, the Father exalted Him rather than requiring Him to apologize for His work on the Cross.

If I follow Jesus’ example of humility, I trust God as I stand before Him, arms down, hands open, no matter the trial, heartbreak, or assignment.

I don’t know when the hokey view of humility started in churches. Still, I do know that when believers are living under the tyranny of shame and guilt theology, they’re vulnerable to a lot of nonsensical behavior to “prove” their worth to God.

That’s where we come in. We teach and defend the original gospel and the freeness of God’s grace in Christ.

There’s no need to credit God. You can simply say thank you because Jesus’ work has been credited to your account.

Ed Underwood

Ed Underwood
FGA Executive Council President

Philippians 2:5-11
Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore 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.

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The next generation needs to hear about grace. But who can convince the **AI algorithm** that FGA content should be shown to all these young people?

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YOU ASKED, WE ANSWER



What is Hebrews 6:4-6 telling us about people who have fallen away?

A young man who is new to Grace theology texted in the above question. I picked up the phone to discuss it with him. Here are the highlights.

The book of Hebrews contains several warnings like this passage. The first step to understanding them is to identify the audience and figure out the issue they needed be warned about. It is all too easy to read ourselves into a passage and jump to conclusions about its intent.

The original audience is clearly Jewish believers prior to 70 AD. No need to compare Jesus to the Aaronic priesthood or discuss the superiority of Christ compared to temple sacrifices if the temple has been destroyed.

Evidently some of these believers (who tasted of the heavenly gift, who have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, etc.) have fallen away. When we are presented with this Scripture we can have two basic responses:

– Hmmmm...real believers cannot fall away, so this must not be talking about real believers. The warning ceases to be a warning. Or as some would say, it is hypothetical.

– Yikes! Real believers can fall away. The warning remains a warning. But then we start wondering, what does that mean for eternal security? Why is it impossible to be restored—that doesn't line up with Jesus' statements about forgiveness.

Hermeneutically, "yikes" is the more likely interpretation. But we have to nail down what "falling away" means. What exactly were the original audience doing that this warning was intended to change? The meta-narrative of the book is clear, chapter after chapter: Jesus is better. The audience was tempted to go (and some had already gone) back to the Jewish worship practices to avoid persecution. Just go up to the temple and offer a sacrifice and all the persecution (from the Jews) stops.

But what happens to their testimony by going up and offering a temple sacrifice for sin? By doing so they are denying the finished work of Jesus to all of their neighbors. Or as the author of Hebrews puts it, they would be "putting Him to open shame."

If you keep reading into verses 7 and 8, the details fall into place.

⁷For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; ⁸but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

Hebrews 6:4-8 (NKJV)

⁴For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

Two basic options exist for them: produce fruit (enduring persecution), which results in blessing from God (i.e., eternal rewards) or yield thorns and thistles (avoiding persecution by denying Christ), which results in being "worthless" (no reward), "close to being cursed" (but importantly, not cursed), and ends up being burned.

The fire here is the same as the fire in John 15, referring to God's judgement at the Bema Seat rather than hell.

So if the issue is fruitfulness and reward and not justification or "hell," then what about this sin makes it impossible for them to be restored?

While you are willfully living in a public sin that is denying Christ, you are not able to make progress spiritually (sanctification). Restoration is not possible until they stop going up to the temple. Sin can hold us hostage and keep us from being fruitful. Fruitfulness requires diligence.

Here in 2025, most of us are not being tempted to go offer sacrifices at the temple mount. But we can apply this principle because we have plenty of other temptations to fall into that would result in denying Christ. If we continue in such sin, we will see our "wood, hay, and stubble" get burned and yet be saved "as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

We who shepherd should teach both the warning and the promise of Hebrews 6. We lovingly challenge people to endure because we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We also encourage people with the "strong encouragement" (v. 18) of the "unchangeable" promise of eternal security that is based not in our performance but the performance of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you have a question?

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Where Have All the Humble Gone?

By Joe Duke

I still laugh when I recall Larry Crabb's description of the worst sermon he ever heard. He said it was "delivered by a middle-aged man who made me think of a strutting peacock when he spoke."¹ I can't get that picture out of my head. It's hilarious and cringey at the same time. Unfortunately, you don't have to look far to discover that the American church is filled with strutting peacocks. And in full disclosure, I may have strutted a time or two during my preaching adolescence.

These days, pastors of large churches face a new insidious pressure: *celebrity*. In her book, *Celebrities for Jesus*, Katelyn Beaty notes that, "Celebrity is a distinctly modern phenomenon fueled by mass media."² And she suggests that "...the very nature of celebrity, especially in a digital era, is that it hides its power behind the illusion of intimacy."³ That's about as sneaky as you can get. "Celebrity is social power without proximity—the chance to influence without knowing or being known by those you are influencing."⁴ Can I say, that sounds slightly dangerous?

But you don't have to stand on a church platform or crave the spotlight in a worship center to be infected with the virus of celebrity. Instead, you can barter for a constant stream of infatuated followers. All those nameless, faceless people are crouched on your digital doorstep even as you read this. Attention seekers and those obsessed with image management will always be able to catch the eye of someone. No matter the cost. Whatever it takes. And it's likely we all desire to be noticed or appear better than we really are.

Can we just admit it? Narcissism has found its way into many churches—climbing through a window or walking unnoticed through the front door. And when the pulpit is polluted, the pews are likely contaminated.

Chuck DeGroat, an expert on narcissism, confronts us with the brutal truth when he says, "Ministry leaders and churches today are obsessively preoccupied with their reputation, influence, success, rightness, progressiveness,



relevance, platform, affirmation, and power."⁵ And the trend, he says, should give us pause about the future of churches. He writes,

Some church planting assessments I've seen practically invite narcissistic leadership... the narcissism in many young men in particular is baptized as spiritual giftedness in a way that does a great disservice to them and ignores deep wells of shame and fragility lurking within.⁶

We're sailing choppy waters these days. It might be easy for any of us to float with the rising tide of self-obsession. We might even try to make the case that selfishness is just part of the human condition, so why go against the current? Why try to fight it? But surely, we can hold out for a better alternative.

Enter Jesus.

For starters, Jesus' plan is upside down. Backwards. Counter-intuitive. Inefficient. Non-narcissistic.

He entered the world in *obscurity*. A single angel announced his birth. Then a multitude of angels joined in the celebration. But only a few shepherds were there to see it. It's almost like God wanted to keep the whole thing a secret.

We know little about Jesus' formative years. Only that he increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). As a 12-year-old, Jesus is in the

temple, participating in conversations that seem reserved for adults. It's the same temple visit when Jesus' parents left him behind (yes, they lost Jesus!).

Then, this God of the universe in human form became the sin-bearer for every person (John 3:16). He is the sin-satisfying sacrifice by *becoming sin for us* (2 Cor. 5:21). Again, Jesus' plan is upside down. Backwards. Counter-intuitive. Inefficient. Non-narcissistic.

But it's the prequel of the story that gives us one detail we can't afford to miss. Jesus humbled himself. Hear this clearly; He *humbled* Himself. Jesus chose *humility* when He had every right to embrace prideful self-centeredness. It would be impossible for Jesus to exaggerate His self-importance. He's infinitely important. Yet, He stepped out of heaven onto the path of *humility* instead—rejecting earthly showiness. That's astounding.

The backstory is found in Philippians 2. Paul urges his readers to have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had. That's why the Philippian believers were urged to:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in **humility** count others more significant than yourselves.⁷

We're to be people of humility because that's what Jesus did. We see his humility described in the great *kenosis* (Greek for *emptied*) passage.

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he **humbled** himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁸

Humility is not weakness. It's not indecisive. It doesn't play the victim card. Humility is strength. It's power. Humility is true greatness. Humility is loving. It's courageous. Humility is foundational to all virtues.

Perhaps Dostoyevsky was on to something when he wrote, "Loving humility is marvelously strong, the strongest of all things, and there is nothing like it."⁹

I like the way Andrew Murray describes humility when he writes,

Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of man. It is the root of every virtue. And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil.¹⁰

Humility is just another way of reminding ourselves we need God. Humility is about dependence on God, not selfish independence. Humility provides a daily posture

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HUMILITY

that deflates pride’s influence and bolsters our pursuit of God. And as Philip Yancey reminds us, “Why value humility in our approach to God? Because it accurately reflects the truth.”¹¹

Pride competes for credit. Humility has staved off the craving for recognition. Pride operates from a scarcity mindset—a perspective primarily driven by fear. But the humble person freely offers encouragement, knowing that giving to others can never diminish one’s own identity found in Jesus.

So, where have all the humble gone? Well, they’re out there. Just not always visible. Many are serving God in the ordinary. Many are content with obscurity. Many have embraced the upside-down life of following Jesus. All of them are *genuinely humble* people. But we may have never heard of them because humility advertised is really not humility at all. And truthfully, “In a culture where people clamor for attention and recognition, those secure in Christ have no need of the spotlight.”¹²

Notes

1. Larry Crabb, *The Pressure’s Off* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002), p. 21.
2. Katelyn Beaty, *Celebrities for Jesus: How Personas, Platforms, and Profits Are Hurting the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), loc. 173, Kindle.
3. Ibid, loc. 172, Kindle.
4. Ibid, loc. 1501, Kindle.
5. Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), loc. 129, Kindle.
6. Ibid, loc. 150, Kindle.
7. Philippians 2:3 ESV. (Emphasis mine).
8. Philippians 2:5-8 ESV. (Emphasis mine).
9. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005), p. 292.
10. Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness* (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1896), p. 12.
11. Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 37.
12. Joe Duke, *Reflections: Words to Inspire, Challenge and Encourage You* (Reisterstown, MD: LifePoint Press, 2023), p. 78.



Joe Duke is the Founder and Executive Director of GraceWorks International and the Co-founder and Pastor Emeritus of LifePoint Church where he served as Pastor for over 35 years. Joe is a graduate of Asbury College (University) and Dallas Seminary (ThM). He is a writer and speaker who is obsessed with helping people grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Joe is the author of *Reflections: Words to Inspire, Challenge, and Encourage You*. You can find out more about GraceWorks International at www.graceworks.international.

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PH-905	Seminar on Advanced Historical Theology	3
PH-906	Integration of Philosophy, Culture, & Theology	3
PH-907	Contemporary Theological Systems & Issues	3
PH-909	Seminar on Old Testament Theology	3
PH-910	Seminar on Theology of Gospels & Second Temple Judaism	3
PH-911	Seminar on Theology of Epistles	3
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The Overview Effect

By Jeremy Mikkelsen

The Overview Effect is a cognitive shift that occurs in many astronauts when they view the earth from space. Frank White coined the phrase in the 1980s after interviewing many astronauts. It is described as “a state of awe with self-transcendent qualities, precipitated by a particularly striking visual stimulus.”¹ In other words, once you see the big picture—the earth floating in a great black emptiness—your thinking is radically changed. I would like to suggest there is a similar cognitive shift, let’s call it the *Grace Effect*, that occurs in the heart and mind when one’s spiritual eyes gaze upon the whole spiritual reality of God’s grace.

Sometimes, it happens at the same moment a person comes to faith, and this is ideal. However, in my pastoral experience, I found that people often do not see the complete picture until they open the windows of God’s Word. It occurs at the moment a believer recognizes they have complete security in Christ—that there was nothing they had to do to earn or merit salvation—it was all a gift, nor is there anything they need to do keep salvation. In fact, there isn’t anything they could ever do to lose their salvation. We sometimes call it assurance, the state of being sure of our identity as children of God with a definite eternal destiny. When this assurance is based on God’s grace and Jesus’ finished work rather than our own, we can undergo a radical cognitive shift.

Tragically, many people who have believed the good news about Jesus—who are aware of their own shortcomings and sin and who have trusted in Jesus’ substitutionary work on their behalf, do not fully comprehend the grace in which they stand. Do not be alarmed by this, for this is a key purpose of pastoring and Bible teaching. Paul himself delineates the process: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have obtained—our introduction by faith into this grace in which we

stand; and we celebrate in hope of the glory of God” Romans 5:1-2.

The starting point is justification by faith. After we understand our justification, Paul teaches us about the peace we have through what Christ has done (rather than what we have done or will do). Not only peace, but an introduction into this grace in which we stand. This peace and this standing of grace is to be excitedly celebrated! The implication of an *introduction* into grace is that there is still more to learn and experience beyond justification and assurance. The next chapter of Romans begins the ascent to the next orbit—sanctification by grace.

As a former pastor, I found that a great many people are seeking to work toward sanctification without first being grounded in grace. My pastoral refrain was always the same: you cannot begin to grow in grace until you understand where you stand in grace. Our identity precedes our practice. A change of mind precedes our change of behavior. This change of mind is the cognitive shift of the Grace Effect:

The cognitive shift of the Grace Effect	
The Natural Mind	The Grace Effect Mind
Afraid of God	Loved by God
Worry if I have done enough	Resting knowing Jesus did enough
Looks to own performance for assurance	Looks to Jesus’ performance for assurance
Life is best when it is all about me	Life is best when it is all about Him
Afraid of Christ’s return	Excited for Christ’s return
Death is the end of everything	Death is the beginning of complete liberty

Not only is our thinking changed, but our changed thinking spills over into our behavior patterns. Not in an absolute sense—we are still quite human after all. Correct thinking doesn’t always result in the right actions. Instead, in the same way that Paul is speaking of in Romans 12:1, when he says, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” as our thinking changes, we undergo a transformation (progressive sanctification) that is experiential—both practical and observable.

¹ Yaden, David B.; Iwry, Jonathan; Slack, Kelley J.; Eichstaedt, Johannes C.; Zhao, Yukun; Vaillant, George E.; Newberg, Andrew B. (2016). “The overview effect: Awe and self-transcendent experience in space flight”. *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. 3 (1): 1–11.

Once you see grace, you suddenly realize that everything else is upside down.



The famous Blue Marble photo taken by the Apollo 17 crew in 1972. The original photograph was taken with the South Pole facing the top, however, it is most widely distributed in the above upside down manner. Flip this magazine upside down to see it from the vantage of the original astronaut and photographer.

This transformation is the change that we, as disciple-making Bible teachers, should seek to see in our disciples' lives as we ply God's Word and grace into their hearts and minds.

The transformation of the Grace Effect	
Natural Humanity	Grace Effect Humanity
Pursues the natural desires of humanity	Pursues the desires of God
Seeks the approval of others	Seeks what is approved of God
Puts the needs of self above others	Puts the needs of others over self
Hungers to satisfy their appetite	Hungers for intimacy with Jesus
Loves oneself, and sometimes one's own	Loves God through loving others and self

Years ago, I confronted a dear friend and Bible teacher who had, in his presentation, merged elements of justification and sanctification. As we spoke, he explained that in the service of brevity (which sermons do desperately need), he simply took a shortcut by merging them together. It isn't a popular opinion, but many (with some notable exceptions) who teach from a non-free grace perspective do, in fact, recognize a difference between positional justification and progressive sanctification. Often, the issue is they believe that one invariably leads to the other. They do not have a developed theology of failure. The fact that the Bible is full of exhortations to run the race well clearly reveals that failure to run the race well is a potential outcome. I'd like to suggest that when Bible teachers have not fully experienced the Grace Effect themselves, the natural result is that their teaching does not produce the Grace Effect. No one can teach what they do not

Grace Effect on Biblical Teaching	
Non-grace Teaching	The Grace Effect Teaching
Failure is a warning sign that someone is not saved	Failure is normal (confess, repent, and move on)
Faith must lead to works	Faith should lead to works
Focus on right-doing	Focus on right-thinking
Concerned with external behaviors	Concerned with inward attitudes (the heart)
Identity derived from behavior	Behavior derived from identity
Motivates by fear of hell (i.e., a gun?)	Motivates by heavenly reward (the carrot) and by earthly discipline (the stick)
Functionally merges justification and sanctification into a single topic	Distinguishes between justification and sanctification, teaching both in the proper order
Pride is the typical outcome	Humility is the typical outcome

comprehend themselves. Dust in the nebula makes for dark patches among the stars. Those who teach free grace are often accused of anti-nominalism or ignoring progressive sanctification. If our teaching does not point toward transformation, I would be first in line to admit we are in error. Thankfully, the accusations are unfounded. I continually observe free grace teachers seeking the progressive sanctification of their flocks. Thus, the real issue is more nuanced. We who teach free grace argue that the best way to bring about the transformation we want to happen is to teach clearly about God's grace in justification, grace in assurance, and grace in sanctification. Because we believe in the transformational power of the Grace Effect, our teaching reflects this grace. Our message is simple: as people who have received Jesus—by grace alone in faith alone in Christ alone—walk in your new identity in Christ, having fully seen the big picture of the gift of His grace toward us.

Paul teaches this exact thing (albeit with agricultural rather than aeronautical illustration) in Colossians 2:6-7: Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

Immediately after his October 2021 flight into space (aboard a New Shepard rocket), William Shatner, the actor who played the captain on the original series of *Star Trek*, told Jeff Bezos, "What you have given me is the most profound experience. I hope I never recover from this. I hope that I can maintain what I feel now."

Later in his biography, *Boldly Go*, he described what he had felt: "It was among the strongest feelings of grief I have ever encountered. The contrast between the vicious coldness of space and the warm nurturing of Earth below filled me with overwhelming sadness." What he had imagined as a great celebration—experiencing "space, the final frontier"—had brought a cognitive shift in his thinking about himself and about the fragility and value of the earth itself.

I pray that you and I will never recover from the overwhelming and transformational realization of the freedom, security, and assurance we have because of His gift—the grace of God in Jesus Christ.



Euclid (Visible-Infrared)

The first image (left) was released in November 2023, and features the Horsehead Nebula, a large collection of dust and gas approximately 1,300 light-years away. What we perceive as the horse-head shape is actually the shadow caused by the light behind being obscured.



Hubble (Infrared)

The second image (center) from 2013 is a zoomed in view from the Hubble Space Telescope that reveals the true nature of the nebula. The final image (right) taken April 2024 is zoomed in further with the new James Webb Space Telescope. The details allows us to see



Webb (Infrared)

the nebula in detail in the foreground as well as an array of galaxies in the background. In a similar way, the deeper we look into the grace of God through the telescope of His Word, the more clearly we can perceive the spiritual realities of God's universe.



Jeremy Mikkelsen first studied Aerospace Engineering at Purdue University prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. He is a former pastor and now serves as the Executive Director of the Free Grace Alliance.



ANNOUNCING A NEW MINISTRY TEAM FGA KIDS MINISTRY

We are excited to announced that Kimberly Hendricks has joined FGA's team as our Kids Ministry Lead. In this capacity she will connect, encourage, and equip Kids Ministry leaders throughout our alliance. We'll let her introduce herself and explain our goals for this new group.



Kimberly Hendricks
kimberly@freegrace.org

KidsMin Lead, FGA
Children's Minister, Forest View Church, Texas
Admissions Advisor, Grace School of Theology

It is my greatest honor to announce the Children's Ministry group of the Free Grace Alliance! My name is Kimberly Hendricks, and I am a Children's Minister and curriculum writer in the great State of Texas. As a graduate student and staff member of Grace School of Theology, I am excited to bring Children's Ministry resources to the Free Grace Alliance. This new ministry within FGA will curate and share resources, curriculum, and an interactive network of Children's Ministry leaders.

Working toward the shared goal of providing children with Biblically accurate, free grace-based education, it is my goal to create a culture of support, encouragement, and excitement to those who have the unique calling to serve the littlest hearts in the Kingdom. Now more than ever, it is a vital need that families study the Word of God and walk in the Truth of Christ.

As Children's Ministry leaders, we have the responsibility to share the love of Christ with every child. I invite you to join our Children's Ministry Network as we launch a worldwide connection to share experiences, build each other up, and change the world one child at a time.

JESUS SAID,

*"LET THE LITTLE
CHILDREN COME TO
ME, AND DO NOT
HINDER THEM, FOR
THE KINGDOM OF
HEAVEN BELONGS TO
SUCH AS THESE."*

MATTHEW 18:14

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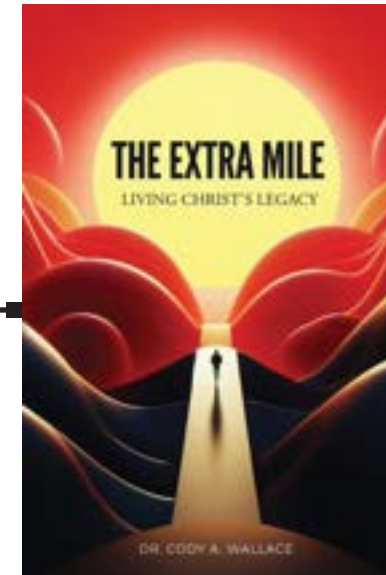
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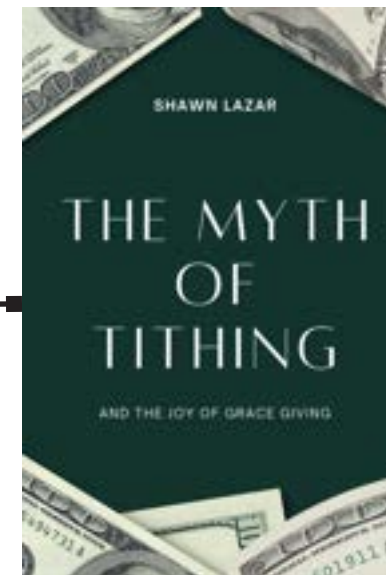
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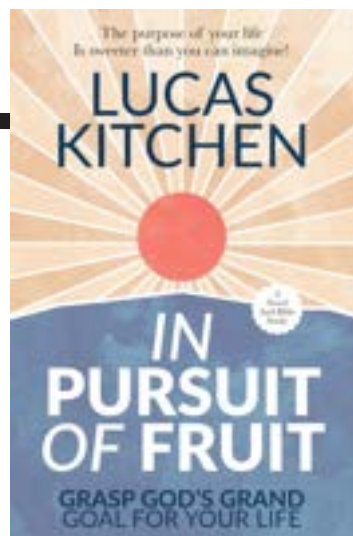
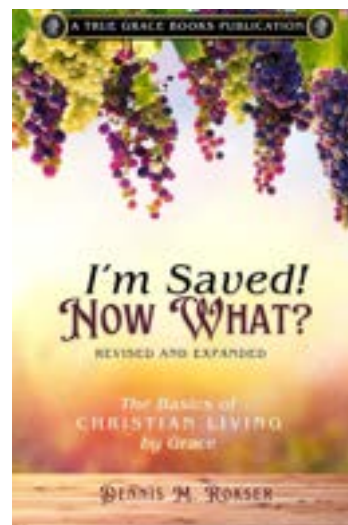
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Comes out April 29, 2025



David Zahl is the director of Mockingbird Ministries and editor-in-chief of the Mockingbird website. Born in New York City and brought up elsewhere, David graduated from Georgetown University in 2001, and then worked for several years as a youth minister in New England. David and his wife Cate reside in Charlottesville, VA, with their three boys, where David also serves on the staff of Christ Episcopal

Jesus' Lordship and Our Salvation

By Bob Nyberg

In 1628, the Swedish warship Vasa set sail on its maiden voyage, only to capsize and sink within minutes due to design flaws and poor communication between the shipbuilders and the king's advisors. The ship was top-heavy, with too much weight in the upper structure and insufficient ballast to stabilize it. Despite concerns about its stability, political pressure from King Gustavus Adolphus pushed for its immediate launch. On the day of the voyage, a critical decision to sail with the gun ports open proved disastrous. When a strong gust of wind hit the ship, it capsized, and water poured in through the open gun ports, causing the ship to sink rapidly.

This tragic event, caused by unclear directions and miscommunication, is a compelling reminder of the catastrophic consequences that can arise from a lack of clarity. Similarly, communicating a clear gospel message cannot be overstated. Just as unclear instructions sealed the Vasa's fate, the eternal destiny of lost souls hangs in the balance when the gospel is presented unclearly. Ensuring that the message of salvation is conveyed clearly is essential, as it directly impacts the ability of people to understand and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ.

A crucial element in presenting a clear gospel message relates to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus Lord of all? What does that mean? Does someone have to make Jesus the Lord of their life to be saved? These questions have significant ramifications for how we present the gospel.

According to God's Word, Jesus is indeed Lord of all. Peter made this clear as he presented the gospel to Cornelius. In Acts 10:36, we read, "He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news [εὐαγγελίζω; to announce the gospel] of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all" (HCSB).

Dr. Tom Constable elaborates on the significance of this verse:

... this verse is a kind of caption for Peter's announcement to Cornelius and his guests. Its three main emphases are: first, the message to follow was a presentation of revelation God had sent to the Jews. Second, it was a message resulting in peace through Jesus Christ. Third, Jesus Christ is Lord of all for both Jews and Gentiles.¹

Peter announced or proclaimed the gospel to this group of Gentiles. What exactly did he mean when he stated that Jesus is Lord of all? The phrase "Lord of all" was a title for deity used by Gentiles such as Cornelius. Christians adopted the phrase as an appropriate title for Jesus Christ. But that brings up an important question.

When Peter used this phrase with his Gentile audience, was he asking them to make Jesus Lord of their lives to be saved? Furthermore, how can mere human beings make Jesus Lord of all?

Actually, God is the One who made Jesus Lord. People do not make Him Lord. This is affirmed in Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (HCSB).

Eventually, everyone saved and unsaved alike, will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. That is His position. Philippians 2:10-11 emphasizes this truth: "So that at the name of Jesus, EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (NASB).

Lordship Salvation teaches that a person must make Jesus Lord to be saved. But people cannot make Jesus Lord when in fact, God has already made Him Lord. The trite cliché often encapsulates this concept: "Either Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all." However, this tired saying is contrary to God's Word.

God prepared Peter's heart in the book of Acts before sending him to present the gospel to Cornelius. We read:

"But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat!' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholly and unclean'" (Acts 10:10-14).



JAVIERKOHEN, CC BY-SA 3.0

Today, the Vasa (above) is on display in the VASA Museet in Stockholm, Sweden. – Dear Lord, please keep my mistakes to the size and type that future generations decide against building a museum to remember it it. – Editor

Notice Peter's response: "By no means, Lord." Even Peter here finds himself in open rebellion! If the standard for salvation is consistent obedience, then even the apostles should be worried. Is there anyone who always submits to the Lordship of Christ? The humble answer is, of course, "no." No one is consistent.

Lordship Salvation can lead us to a place of doubt and uncertainty—have I submitted enough? Is Jesus Lord, enough? This uncertainty results in a lack of assurance of salvation and greatly hinders spiritual growth in sanctification.

Free grace teaches that Jesus is Lord of all. This is His position, regardless of whether individuals "make" Him

Lord of their lives. How can a person "make" Jesus Lord when He already is Lord?

Lance Latham wrote,

Surely we must recognize who He is, or we will die in our sins (John 8:24). But this is vastly different from making Him your Lord in your life, in other words, promising to obey the rest of your life. This latter is preaching "works." His mercies, with all His graciousness to us, will lead us to making Him Lord, and that out of a heart of love and appreciation of Him. We feel that those who propose this way of salvation change the obvious meaning of Romans 10:9 to justify this.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. This cannot be made to say, “make Him Lord of your life.” Believing on Christ is distinctly not “turning the direction of your life over to Him.” It is looking in faith to our Savior crucified for our sins on Calvary! It is not of works, devotion, or full surrender. It is His work and His death that avails.

The self-reliant man feels that he must add something to Calvary in order to be accepted by God. He must be either self-denying, quite sorry for his sins, determined to live differently, or “do something” to fix up all his past. However, we find in Scripture that salvation is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy,” (Titus 3:5), “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9). We cannot add a thing to Calvary as our hope... Therefore, we must not frustrate the grace of God by adding works to grace.²

William R. Newell wrote,

... to preach full surrender to an unsaved man as the way of salvation will just make a hateful Pharisee out of him.³

Harry Ironside wrote,

When anyone comes promising salvation to those “who make full surrender” of all that they have to God, and who “pay the price of full salvation,” he is preaching another gospel, for the price was paid on Calvary’s cross, and the work that saves is finished. It was Christ Jesus who made the full surrender when He yielded His life on Calvary that saves us, not our surrender in any way to Him.⁴

Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ’s finished work. It is totally apart from good works, commitment to future obedience, or making Jesus Lord. Salvation is about what Christ did for us, not about what we do for Christ.

Those who teach Lordship Salvation set up a straw man argument by labeling free grace the “no lordship position.” Free grace theology rejects Lordship Salvation but absolutely acknowledges Christ’s Lordship. It distinguishes between the moment of salvation and the process of spiritual growth.

Lordship Salvation blurs the distinction between “justification” and “discipleship.” In contrast, free grace recognizes the difference between “justification” and “discipleship.” Discipleship is a component of sanctification. Justification refers to God declaring a sinner righteous through faith in Christ alone. It is a one-time event that occurs at the moment of salvation. On the other hand, discipleship involves the believer’s ongoing growth and commitment to following Christ, which is part of the sanctification process.

Sanctification is the process by which believers are gradually transformed into the likeness of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. This process involves learning, growing, and maturing in faith. Free grace theology emphasizes that while discipleship is crucial for spiritual growth and maturity, it is not a requirement for salvation. Salvation is based solely on faith in the finished work of Christ, not on the believer’s commitment or performance.

By making this distinction, free grace theology upholds the biblical teaching that salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, received through faith alone. It also recognizes the importance of discipleship in the believer’s life. This approach avoids the confusion and potential legalism arising from conflating justification with discipleship, ensuring that the gospel message remains clear and focused on God’s grace.

Although there are numerous differences between these two positions, this highlights some of the key distinctions between free grace theology and Lordship Salvation. Free grace theology firmly acknowledges the lordship of Christ. It emphasizes that salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, independent of good works or future obedience. It also teaches Lordship Sanctification, recognizing the importance of discipleship as part of the sanctification process, but not as a requirement for salvation.

On the other hand, Lordship Salvation conflates justification with discipleship, potentially leading to confusion and legalism. By maintaining a clear distinction between justification and discipleship, free grace theology ensures that the gospel remains focused on God’s grace while encouraging believers to grow and mature in their faith through discipleship.

This approach upholds the biblical teaching that salvation is a free gift, received through faith alone, and underscores the ongoing journey of sanctification as believers are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Notes

Tom Constable, Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003).

Lance B. Latham, The Two Gospels (Rolling Meadows, IL: Awana, 1984), p. 46.

William R. Newell, Romans Verse-by-Verse (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938), p. 253.

Harry A. Ironside, Another Gospel? (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1919).

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NOT “WHY” BUT “HOW CAN I NOT?”

By Larry Moyer

As an evangelist, I am often asked a very simple question, one with eternal value. That question is never what gospel I share. Anyone who knows me also knows that I am convinced there is only one gospel and it can be expressed in 10 words—Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. Instead, the question is, “What motivates you to share it?” The only answer to “why” is “why not?” Four things come to mind.

1. IF I SINCERELY CARE FOR PEOPLE, WHAT BETTER THING COULD I TELL THEM?

If I prioritize any other message, it shows how little I care for people. After all, the gospel is the only message that could change their eternal destiny. Anything else I might tell them explains how to live on earth. This, though, is the **one** message that tells them how to live in the presence of God—forever. I constantly bear in mind Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:15, “And He died for all, that those

who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”

If I am going to be the friend of sinners that He was, what better message could I share with them than the gospel?

2. WHAT BETTER WAY IS THERE TO MAKE WHAT WAS FOREMOST WITH HIM ALSO BE FOREMOST WITH ME?

I am not speaking for myself. I am speaking on behalf of the One who died for me. So, whatever is the first thing that would come from His mouth ought to be the first thing that comes from mine.

Once more, a Scripture that cannot be misunderstood comes to mind. In 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, we read, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be

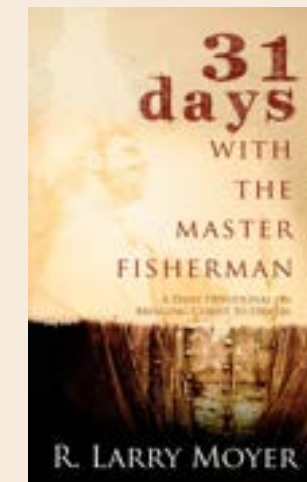
sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

Since He is not walking on earth today, it is my highest privilege to speak on His behalf and tell them the first thing He would want them to know.

3. WHAT BETTER WAY IS THERE TO LIVE FOR THE HEREAFTER INSTEAD OF SIMPLY LIVING FOR THE HERE AND NOW?

I have never forgotten the statement, “The only thing you can take with you to heaven is a friend.” That is biblically correct. Any rewards we have earned will be there when we arrive. But the only thing we can take with us from here to there is a friend. So, why live my life for the present instead of the future? Everyone you meet is going to live forever. The only question is, where? What are you doing to make the difference?

Did you notice Larry’s clear gospel message? It comes through in all of his evangelistic tools and teaching. If you or your church desire to grow in your ability to share the gospel, we’d highly recommend checking out some of Larry’s other writings. You can be confident the gospel is always clear. Here are our favorites. — *The editors*



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4. IF THEY DO NOT HEAR IT FROM ME, IS THERE A POSSIBILITY THAT THEY WILL NOT HEAR IT CORRECTLY AND CLEARLY?

I do not have everything correct, nor do I claim to. But the one thing I know is the gospel, because that has already been defined for me. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 we are told, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, and then by the twelve.”

But many people muddy or confuse that gospel. So much so that Paul the apostle was forced to say in Galatians 1:9, “As we have said

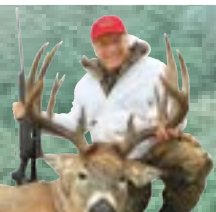
before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you, than what you have received, let him be accursed.” My mentor Haddon Robinson once said, “Satan’s goal is to get you to be as much like God without being related to God as possible. That way he can deceive you right into hell.”

I always remind myself that if they do not hear it from me, they may not hear it right. The next person may be a cultist or someone who, though sincere, does not know the Lord.

All four of these points make sharing the gospel a “want to” out of desire, not a “have to” out of demand. That is why when someone asks, “Why do you share the gospel?” my bigger question is, “How can I not share the gospel?”



Dr. Larry Moyer has degrees from Cairn University (B.S.), Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M.), and Gordon-Conwell Seminary (D.Min). In 2001, Cairn University awarded him the honorary Doctor of Sacred Theology degree (S.T.D.). Since 1973, Larry continues to speak all over the world, write to thousands, and lead his evangelism organization, EvanTell, to reach people with Christ in their location, their language, and on their level.



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As people departed, we handed out a feedback form that included this question: “What was the most important thing you learned today?” Here are some of the responses:

“The most important thing I learned is grace frees so much that even [when] I don’t feel worthy, God sees me wholly. Grace is for All!”

“The most important thing I learned today is Salvation is freely given from God through Christ Jesus. Grace is a free gift.”

“It is not by your works you can enter in the kingdom of God, but by His Grace.”

“Grace is not costly, and it is not cheap! Grace is free.”

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