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WORLDWIDE
CHURCH OF GOD

Living and Sharing the Gospel



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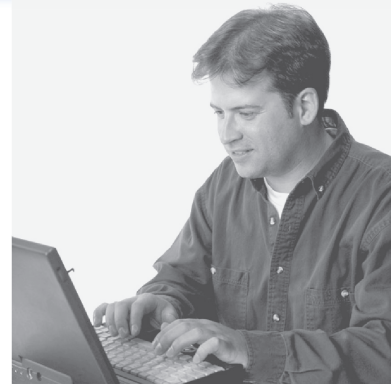
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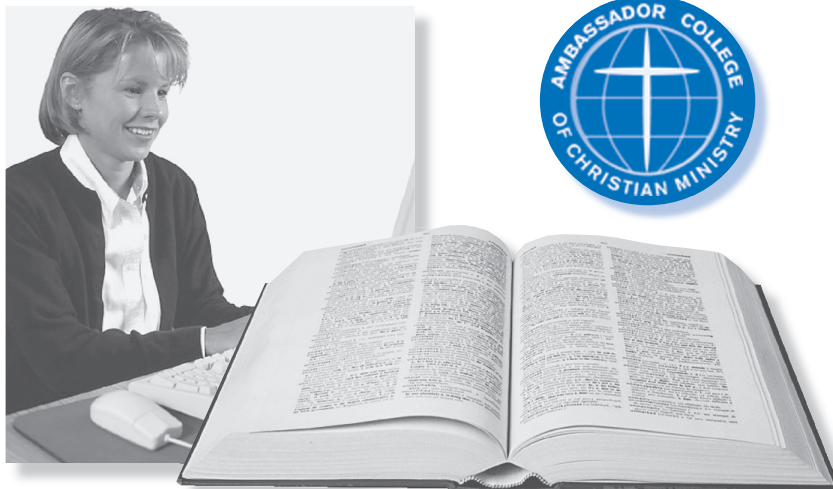
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Which voice do you hear?

By Joseph Tkach

Jesus told a parable and, as usual, the people did not understand him. So he explained it: “I am the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7). In this parable, the sheep are God’s people, and they are entering a safe place, a sheep pen, representing salvation. We enter salvation through Jesus.

“I am the good shepherd,” Jesus continued, and “the sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice” (vs. 11, 4-5). God’s people hear the voice of Jesus and recognize it, but they stay clear of other voices.

The voices we hear

If Jesus has the voice of salvation, what are the other voices (the “strangers”) that might call for our attention? In the first century, it might have been the Pharisees, who were trying to lead God’s people. And it would have included the Dead Sea Scroll commune, who had their own path to pleasing God. The Herodians offered another approach to life: do whatever it takes to stay on good terms with the Roman government.

In our own day, various groups offer different paths to salvation: Muslims, Hindus, New Agers and others offer people different paths—even different ideas of salvation. For some, salvation is physical pleasure; for others it is the absence of feeling. Some focus on the afterlife, others on life right now. “Come to my sheep pen,” they might be calling. “You’ll be safe here.”

But these voices do not sound



like Jesus. They do not have the message of grace from the God who loves us. Instead, they usually offer a message of “Do this and try harder.” Jesus says that we need a radical change, and just working harder will not

be effective. Humans cannot save themselves—we can be saved only because God himself came into our world, suffered the pain of our corruption himself, and not only paid the ultimate penalty, but also lived the perfect life in our place.

Some versions of Christianity fall away from grace, and begin to preach works—good works, usually, but works nevertheless.

There are conservative do-gooders and liberal do-gooders. Some people have the right words for Jesus (Lord and Savior, Son of God) but subtly drown out his voice by preaching about works as the key to salvation.

Such a message turns into a message about family values (which are very good) with a little Jesus thrown in for spice. Or it turns into political action, with a little Jesus thrown in for credibility. Some have even turned Jesus into merely a good teacher, a good example who encourages us to try harder and do more.

“Come into this sheep pen,” they might say. “This will give your life more meaning”—and it does, since

it gives a semblance of purpose in life, which is more satisfying than selfishness. But it still falls short of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because in the message of “do good and try harder,” people always fall short. Jesus says, “Come into my sheep pen, where the burden is light and there is no condemnation” (Matt. 11:30; Rom. 8:1). Do we hear his voice, or are we attracted to the gospel of good works?

God made us to do good works (Eph. 2:10), but he also made us to find our meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ. We were made through him, by him and for him (Col. 1:16), and we will never be fully satisfied until we find our meaning and purpose in him.

Thieves and robbers

If people try to get to the sheep pen in any way other than Christ, they are thieves and robbers, Jesus says (John 10:1). They are trying to get something in an unlawful way—they are trying to give life meaning without the Creator of life.

They may mean well. Maybe they don’t understand who Jesus is and what he is offering. Maybe Jesus’ grace insults their ability to

work hard and direct their lives on their own. Maybe they think grace sounds too easy, too cheap. Whatever the reason, if they try to achieve life’s purpose in any other

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Women in the Ministry of Jesus

Women are prominent in the story of Jesus—he was born of a woman, had numerous interactions with women, used women as good examples in his teaching, and was seen first by women after his resurrection.

Women as positive spiritual examples

Jesus often used women as illustrations in his teaching. “This is in stark contrast to the rabbis of the day,” Linda Belleville notes. “One looks in vain in their teachings for even one story or sermon illustration that mentions women” (*Women Leaders and the Church*, 48). In many of Jesus’ illustrations, women are presented as positive role models of faith, which men should follow.

For example:

- The Queen of the South, who

was wiser than the first-century Jews (Matt. 12:42).

- The woman mixing yeast into dough (Matt. 13:33), who is presented as an illustration of the way that the kingdom of God works.

- Women working when Christ returns, some of whom are ready and others are not (Matt. 24:41).

- Ten virgins, of whom five were prepared and five were not (Matt. 25:1-13).

- The widow of Zarephath, whom Jesus used as an example of a gentile that God favored (Luke 4:26).

- The woman who found the coin she had lost (Luke 15:8-10). In this parable the woman plays the role of God, just as the shepherd did in the preceding parable and the father does in the following parable.

- A persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), a model for disciples to imitate in prayer.

- A widow who gave everything she had (Luke 21:1-4).

In Luke 11, an anonymous woman called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you” (v. 27). Jesus did not deny that his own mother was blessed, but he said that the real blessing is given to “those who hear the word of God and obey it” (v. 28). A woman’s spiritual worth is based on her response to God, not in performing biological functions. Women are saved by faith, not by bearing children.

Jesus made a similar point when people told him that his mother and brothers wanted to speak to him (Matt. 12:47). He replied that

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Which Voice

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way, through any other gate, they will fail.

The people who offer other paths to salvation generally mean well. They honestly believe that they have a better way—and their way probably is better than what they had before. But it falls far short of what Jesus offers: full and unconditional pardon. They offer different sheep pens, and invite people to come in.

Many of us have tried those sheep pens. Some have tried Islam, some have tried Hinduism, some have tried liberalism and some of us have tried legalism. “My sheep hear my voice,” Jesus says, but by that he does not mean that our response is automatic. Rather, he is encouraging us to hear him, to listen for him, to respond to him in-

stead of the counterfeits. We need to train our ear so that we hear him better, so that we recognize a false gospel for what it is: a thief and a robber that will short-change our happiness.

The other gospels do not intend to maim and kill, but that’s what they end up doing. They offer something attractive, something good, but it’s just not good enough. It’s not Jesus, it’s not grace, it’s not finding our meaning in Christ.


Many voices can lead us away from Christ. If we have drifted away from Christ, what voices are we listening to?

Are we so consumed by business, sports, television, partying, politics, sex, alcohol or other diver-

sions that we have little or no time left for Jesus? Such things, when they crowd Jesus out, become thieves and robbers. They take our time, maybe even the rest of our life, but they will not give us life.

The shepherd who gives his life

“I am the good shepherd,” Jesus said. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away” (vs. 11-12). All the other shepherds will let you down. Only

Jesus died and rose for you. Only he deserves your full allegiance. Do you hear his voice? 

The other gospels do not intend to maim and kill, but that’s what they end up doing. They offer something attractive, something good, but it’s just not good enough.

What time is it?



By Joseph Tkach and Neil Earle

How many times a day do we ask the question, “What time is it?”

Sounds like a simple enough matter until we take the time to think about it. Then we realize it isn’t so simple at all.

Consider this: Before the 1800s, time-keeping was a local event. In Medieval Europe the town clockmaker was the key man. He would set official time geared to whenever the sun reached its zenith each day. This was hardly precise. When we advanced to pocket watches, people traveling between cities often had to adjust their clock, literally, from time to time.

Then came the railways in the 1800s. Because of scheduling issues, concern over freight rates and critical delivery of perishables, time issues became much more crucial. In 1878, a Canadian, Sandford Fleming, became a national hero by dividing the world into the 24 time zones we use today.

So, the United States has nine time zones spanning from Maine to Guam, and we are all familiar with Pacific, Mountain, Central and Eastern time. The former Soviet Union had 12 time zones! Even today, all of giant, sprawling Russia is on permanent Daylight Savings Time, and each region is an hour ahead of the actual time on record.

Pretty complicated stuff, eh?

God’s time

It took the Standard Time Act of 1918 for the U.S. Congress to make our four time zones mandatory. Otherwise the wheels of commerce would quickly grind to a halt. Time is even more important to God, and the biblical approach to time is a little more delightfully complicated than it at first seems.

Richard Kromer aptly summarized the biblical approach to time: “History has a beginning in God, it has its center in Christ and its end in the final consummation and the Last Judgment.”

Right. The Bible has a lot of respect for time. God is working out his purposes across time. On the other hand, God is not strictly bound by time, either.

Looked at one way, time is a created entity. One day is the amount of time the earth rotates on its axis. One year is the measurement of its orbit around the sun. But it is different on Mars or Venus. Thus time, in this sense, is a material, relative entity. But this is only one way of reckoning time.

In the Greek New Testament many words allude to time. One is *chronos*, from which we get our word *chronology*. This is the kind of time we are familiar with—the ticking of the clock, the realm of time and space we all inhabit.

The Bible pays attention to this

linear way of measuring. “Teach us to number our days aright,” sang Moses, “that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). And Jesus asked: “Are there not twelve hours of daylight?” (John 11:9).

Kairos refers to specially selected periods of divine determination.

But another altogether different word for time is also used in the New Testament. That word is *kairos*. (One more, *ainos*, refers to duration, but *kairos* will be our focus in this article.)

Kairos is the “fullness of time,” God’s time zone. Kairos time conveys notions of unboundness, of fluidity, of God’s purposes intersecting and overruling this finite world of chronological time. Kairos thus refers to opportunity, as Carl Henry writes in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. It represents “the arena of man’s decision on his way to an eternal destiny” (page 1096).

The kairos moment

Kairos thus conveys a more exciting concept than simple *chronos*. Kairos refers to specially selected periods of divine determination. It operates within profane human time but mainly as the focus of the fulfillment of God’s ultimate purposes.

When Jesus came the first time it was a definite *kairos moment*—a time of fulfillment, a time of judgment and a time for God’s promises to become operative (Mark 1:15; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

Note this from the book of Titus: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect ... which God, who does not lie, promised before the
See What time is it?, page 6

Chronos from which we get our word chronology is the kind of time we are familiar with—the ticking of the clock.



What time is it?

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beginning of time [Greek *chronon* from “chronos”] and at his appointed season [kairos] he brought his word to light” (Titus 1:1-3).

God created time, and in his sovereign kairos time he interacts and enters into chronos time according to his perfect will. This is one reason life with God is so exciting—we are not predetermined, the future is open to us and we are open to it.

New Testament writers related kairos to two cardinal events. These were times of repentance and times of God’s choosing to accomplish his mighty purpose. Once again, kairos refers to decisive turning points within the larger sweep of chronological time.

This concept of decisive moments has its roots in Old Testament thought. In the book of Daniel, the prophet appealed to vain King Nebuchadnezzar to get busy changing his ways right now to avoid future punishment (Daniel 4:27).

This sense of a divine turning point—“now is the time, now is the hour”—is central to kairos time. It helps us understand Paul’s earnest appeal to the wise men of Athens: “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). That “but now” is kairos time.

Kairos thus conveys expectation and excitement, times of decision, as stated by the author of Hebrews, quoting the psalmist: “Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8). The kairos theme is reiterated in the next chapter: “Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was

said before, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’ ” (Hebrews 4:7).

The central kairos

Germans speak of *Der Tag*—a specially appointed time calling for decision. In World War Two we had June 6, 1944, D-Day, a chronological date on the calendar but also much, much more. D-Day conveys urgency, importance, a call for momentous things to occur.

In that connection, note Carl Henry’s words: “While the New Testament gives prominent scope to the future ... its central kairos is the life and death and resurrection of the incarnate Christ, which is decisively significant for the kingdom of God.

‘The terms, ‘day [of the Lord]’ and ‘hour,’ ‘now’ and ‘today’ gain dramatic significance in the New Testament context whenever the eternal order impinges upon the sweep of ordinary events” (EDT, page 1095).

Thus kairos helps clarify another theme of Scripture, the fact that in the view of biblical writers the end time had already begun with the appearance and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice Hebrews 1:1-2, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken unto us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things.”

Now consider the implications of what we have been saying. Here are four.

First, in God’s divine time schedule where kairos intersects kronos, the decisive moment has

already come. Jesus has already appeared bringing salvation and healing to all who will accept him “Today”!

This was the inspired Peter’s plea that momentous Day of Pentecost: “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40). Or as Paul put it: “Now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by this man he has appointed” (Acts 17:30-31).

How true! The commission to the Christian church is to point people to that central kairos event already manifested: the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Accepting that ransom made for us means we enter kairos time here and now, already, and thus secure a better future.

A second point is to remind us why so many prophetic time schemes and prophecy charts based on chronological reckonings of the 1260 days, the 2520 days or even the three days and nights (Matthew 12:40) break down. These schemes are rooted only in chronological time, whereas kairos time can be any time God chooses.

When the Ninevites repented, God intervened and changed the future. Once again kairos intersected with chronos just as it did for those 3,000 converts who heard Peter’s sermon (Acts 2:41).

Yet you and I know of people who try to predetermine and preempt God’s sovereign freedom by choosing a date on a calendar when God *has* to intervene—maybe 1844 or 1917 or 1975 or 2000. How futile to try to pin down our Sovereign God that way!

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The gospel proclaims this thrilling truth—if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.



Repenting of Religion

Gregory Boyd

By Terry Akers

Karl Barth referred to religion as humanity's confusing the Creator with the creature, or the human tendency to make God into its own image.

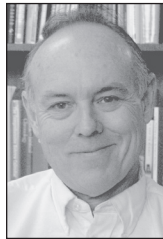
Religion can also be defined as humanity's attempt to ingratiate itself to God through its own efforts. When viewed this way, it becomes evident that Jesus did not come to start a new religion—he came to put an end to religion.

The gospel shows that the new covenant takes salvation out of the hands of humanity through the reconciling and redeeming work of Jesus Christ. This is the subject of theologian and pastor Gregory A. Boyd's book, *Repenting of Religion—Turning From Judgment to the Love of God*.

This book offers insight into how a believer can receive freedom from judgmentalism and self-righteousness—religion's baggage—by saying yes to Christ's healing grace.

In *Repenting of Religion*, Boyd demolishes the myth that human behavior, morality and religion's legalisms have something to do with salvation. He shows that Christ, through his atoning work for us, has offered his grace to a fallen creation and how humans experience true freedom when they enter into the process of new creation.

Through belief they can enjoy healing and liberation from the old person that has become a thing of the past—along with its baggage. The tendency among Christians



to harshly judge others and themselves keeps believers frustrated for not measuring up.

The back cover says: "God shares his unsurpassable worth with each of us, making the practice of judgment

foreign to Christian character. . . . Boyd shows you how to begin practicing a religion of love rather than embracing judgmental doctrine based on our human perceptions of morality. He exposes lies we have believed about ourselves and others and demonstrates the freedom we have for establishing true biblical community."

Gilbert Bilezikian, author of *Christianity 101*, says: "The local church is called to be God's community of redemption rather than the exclusive clique of rejection it has often become.

This [book] is a call to repentance."

Boyd proclaims freedom and transformation from our judgmental nature that has become one of religion's habits of the heart, to a new identity as real people in Christ.

Repenting of Religion reveals how we can become guilty of creating our own identities by setting up lists of rules for ourselves (and others) and being more concerned with what not to do than walking with the Spirit in the light of grace and truth. It

advocates that "the church must be the community of people who simply love as God loves."

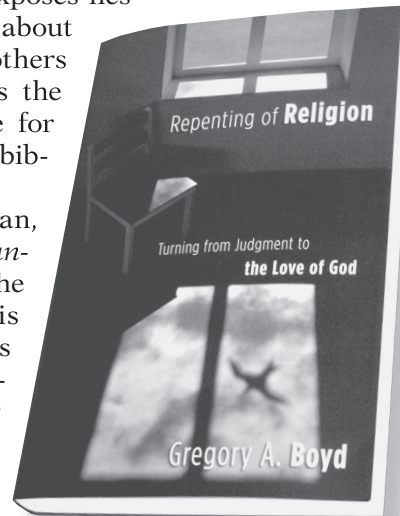
This book proclaims the same gospel message that Jesus did—freedom, peace and joy through grace, mercy and healing. Boyd in no way advocates license. He is merely emphasizing the theological truth that our salvation—both our justification and sanctification—is accomplished solely by God in new creation and not through human effort or behavior.

The focus throughout is that Christians are free not to judge. When we are free in Christ we are free indeed!

Repenting of Religion offers encouraging insight into the nature of the new covenant, showing how, under grace, the Law's power to condemn us has been broken. The only law that binds us is the Law of Liberty—faith expressing

itself in love.

Boyd sums up his thesis in an excerpt from page 60: "[We] are called to live in such a way that people can know God by knowing us. We are called to love. We are only balanced in our understanding of love when we understand that it is the one thing we must live in—to all people, at all times, in all situations, without exception. If we do this, everything else we need to do will get done. If we don't do this, there's simply nothing else worth doing." 🦋



BRING the children: Principles for effective ministry to children
Principle 3

Involve Children in Your Life

By Ted Johnston

Ministry to children, as is true of all effective Christian ministry, is relational. It's about building relationships among people who are growing together in relating to God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It's about people sharing together in community the life and love of the triune God.

As we've been discussing in this series, ministry to children starts as caring, believing adults, teens and older children reach out to bless children with Jesus' love.

It continues as they together get involved in the lives of those children—relating to them at their level. And it develops as the third principle of effective ministry to children is lived out: together they involve those children in their lives.

Children's ministry must not be limited to programs. Certainly children's ministry programs are vital—things such as Vacation Bible School, Sunday school

classes and camps—but such programs are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are tools to start and then grow relationships among people and with God.

We see this relational principle lived out in Jesus' earthly discipling ministry. In John 3:22 we are told that Jesus took his disciples into the Judean coun-



tryside where (in old King James language) he “tarried with them.” *Tarried* translates the Greek word *diatribo*, which means literally to “rub off on.” By involving these disciples in his life, Jesus was creating the opportunity through which he could “rub off” on his followers. This is ministry where the teacher (Jesus in this case), pours his life into the disciple.

I urge you to approach children's ministry using this same life-on-life approach. How can you invite children to share your life in ways that interest them and that create the time and space in which you can rub off on them?

Let's think this through together. Where do you live? Well, various places. One place is at your church's weekly worship service. I hope you consistently live there.

Indeed, the author of Hebrews admonished some early Christians who, for various reasons, were growing lax in this discipline: “Let

us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works,” he wrote. “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25, NLT).

At church we assemble to worship God—to share his life and

his love together. As we do, let's involve children actively, meaningfully and fully.

We can involve children in the life of the church in many ways as it assembles. I've been to churches where the children serve with adults as ushers. Where they help in receiving the offering. Where they help serve communion. I've seen pastors call children to the front of the church and, sitting down with them (getting down on their level), giving a short children's sermon—a biblical message tailor-made for the children. Kids love it (and so do the adults who are listening in)!

I've seen congregations that frequently have children on stage with the worship team, helping lead the congregation in praying, singing, reading Scripture and the like. This involves adults sharing

I've been to churches where the children serve with adults as ushers. Where they help in receiving the offering. Where they help serve communion.



We can involve children in the life of the church in many ways.

their lives (in this case their worship lives) with the children—and in ways the children relate to. The net effect of this involvement is the building of relationships among

the adults and children and among the children and the church and with God. The children come away feeling that this is MY church—MY God—MY family of faith.

Where else do you live? Can you involve the children you're ministering to at those places? Some of the most important rubbing off places in Jesus' ministry were the

regional camp listings). We're expanding the number and types of camps that reach out to teens and children.

What hobbies do you have? Fishing? Playing piano? Computers? How about sharing that part of your life with a child or two? Such sharing provides opportunities to cultivate relationships. And then as

a child for a career. When my son was about 12 or 13, a young man in our church went out of his way to partner with my son and his 12-year-old friend to teach them to program computers. Both of those young men (now both twenty-somethings) have careers that involve computer science. If I could go back in time I'd teach that young mentor how he could have also shared Christ with my son and his friend as they talked computerese—but we live and learn.

Where else do you live? Well, you get the idea. We live unique lives—with specific interests, gifts and passions. How can you share these with a child or two (or 20)? Why don't you think about it? Why don't you pray persistently about it? Seek God's direction—ask him to open windows of opportunity. And share your passion and intention with some other adults in your congregation—consider teaming

up to reach out to some children together.

Remember, of course, all the appropriate cautions and safeguards in working with children. An adult should never be alone with a child who is not their own. And all that you would involve a child in should be appropriate legally, ethically and developmentally. But let us not shy away from reaching out—from bringing children to ourselves and with us to Christ.

I close with reminding us all that God has made children dependent upon those who

are older so that those who are older may help children become fully dependent upon God. We walk in harmony with God's created order and in step with Jesus' way when we involve children in our lives inside and outside the church walls. 🦋



Children's ministry programs are vital—things such as Vacation Bible School, Sunday school classes and camps—but such programs are not ends in themselves.

times he shared with his disciples traveling the roads of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. He often took them with him into the wilderness—kind of like us taking kids with us camping. Time away. Time together. Camp ministries provide fabulous opportunities for life-on-life sharing.

What if you were to take a bunch of kids to camp with you? Can't stay the whole time? What if you drove them there, then picked them up and drove them home—sharing the experience with them? By the way, the Worldwide Church of God has a wonderful camp ministry program. You can find out about it at www.wcg.org (click on the youth ministry tab and then look for the



you do, you can plant into those relationships information about your own relationship with God. Look out! You may just reap a lifelong follower of Jesus who can walk with Christ right along with you.

In such sharing of your interests you may also help to equip

One ‘Mere Christian’ in Church History

He was listed as one of the 10 most influential Christians of the 20th century by *Christian History* magazine, along with such people as Karl Barth, Pope John XXIII, Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr. The magazine called him “the atheist scholar who became an Anglican, an apologist, and a ‘patron saint’ of Christians everywhere.”

He has also been described as “one of the best loved 20th century Christian apologists” and the “apostle to the skeptics” because he decisively answered common objections people throw up against accepting Christ as Savior. This individual was chosen for a 1947 *Time* magazine cover because he, having been perceived as a secular academic, was affirming publicly his Christian faith in his writings, on radio and in his relationships with others. By now, many of you know this person is none other than Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), or C.S. Lewis, as he is popularly known.

His varied background

Lewis, called “Jack” by his friends and family, was a distinguished professor at Oxford and Cambridge universities, renowned literary critic, and highly acclaimed author of science fiction and children’s literature. His best-known work in this genre is the children’s adventure tale, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which retells the story of the Creation, the Fall and redemption of humanity and contains other Christian themes in allegorical form. Lewis’ 25 books on Christian topics include *Mere Christianity* (1952), *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *Miracles* (1947), *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *Surprised by Joy* (1955) and *The Great Divorce* (1945). *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933) was a thinly disguised story of his personal road to conversion.

Between 1942 and 1944, Lewis went on British radio at the request of the director of religious broadcasting for the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC). Lewis gave a number of talks in those years on what he called “mere Christianity,” that is, the common or central beliefs of the faith. The popular weekly broadcasts reached a wide audience of receptive Brits in the dark years of World War II. The collection of radio talks were later brought

together in one of Lewis’ most influential books, *Mere Christianity*.

One of Lewis’ most-often-quoted statements is from *Mere Christianity*, where he insists that people are confronted with three choices by Jesus’ claims about himself. Thinking of Jesus as a profound moral teacher will not do, said Lewis. People must decide whether he is a liar, lunatic or the Lord, as he claims:

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up

for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Becoming a Christian

What is most fascinating about Lewis, especially to evangelical Christians, is the story of his own conversion. The history of the church is a history of human beings who in one way or another at various stages of their lives encountered the risen Lord and responded with a “Yes, Lord I will” to his “Yes, come.” The church, then, is the sum total of men, women and children who have been enabled by the Father to be drawn to Jesus Christ through the Spirit (John 6:44, 65). Virtually every one of their names is unknown to us, and so is their conversion story. But we are fortunate to know C.S. Lewis’ testimony because he has told it to us in his writings, especially in *Surprised by Joy*.

God works in many and diverse ways to bring his children to Christ—and he draws people to himself from all walks of life, cultures, intelligence rankings, ages, races and social levels. The Lord came to C.S. Lewis over several ways in a “small, still voice,” using various means—especially intellectual ones—to reach him. His conversion story is one example of how Christ has built his church over the centuries and continues to build it today.



Clive Staples Lewis

C.S. Lewis was born into a Protestant family in Belfast, today Northern Ireland, on Nov. 29, 1898. He endured a rather unhappy and lonely childhood. He was especially crushed by the unexpected death of his mother from cancer when he was not yet 10 years old. Her death left a hole in his heart and caused him to be disillusioned about God's nearness.

Early in his life he rejected any Christian beliefs he might have had, even as a youth, and became an avowed atheist. When asked at age 18 what his religious views were, he called the worship of Christ and the Christian faith "one mythology among many." By the time he had served in the British army on the front lines of France during World War I and began his studies at Oxford University as a student, now barely 20, he was a thorough-going materialist.

Lewis had been a voracious reader of what we would call good books from earliest childhood. What he didn't know was that Christ was beckoning him through his reading, slowly drawing the young man to himself.

Lewis was greatly influenced by two writers, George MacDonald, the 19th century Scottish Presbyterian minister and novelist, and G.K. Chesterton, a Christian apologist and London journalist. "In reading Chesterton, as in reading MacDonald," he wrote in *Surprised by Joy*, "I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere. . . . God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous."

Lewis' close friends also played a vital role in causing his heart to be open to Christ's love through their talks with him about Christianity and Christ. One was Owen Barfield, who had also trod the road from atheism to theism and finally to Christ. Another was Nevill Coghill, who Lewis was amazed to discover was a Christian. Two close friends on the English faculty at Oxford's Magdalen College, where Lewis also taught, Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien, were also among a group of diverse people who witnessed the Lord to Lewis.

Finding God

In 1929 C.S. Lewis found himself challenged with God's existence. This important milestone in his conversion journey was reached rather suddenly. As he tells the story, on one occasion during this time he happened to take a bus ride. When he got on the bus he was an atheist. When he came to his stop, he got off the bus believing in God's existence. Not that Lewis was seeking God. He said he didn't really want to find him. The revelation

about God's existence was something of a fright to him. He wrote in *Surprised by Joy*: "Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about 'man's search for God.' To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat."

But God was seeking C.S. Lewis and he found him. His call was coming and Lewis could find no place to hide. As Jonah running from the Lord, Lewis had been confronted with his own great "whale," so to speak. It was God beckoning to him. The reluctant prodigal finally knew it was time to come home. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis tells us about his feelings when he could no longer deny God's existence to himself:

"You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. . . . But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape."

When God drew Lewis' heart to himself, he became conscious of the presence of his own sinfulness. "For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose," wrote Lewis. "And there I found what appalled me: a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name is legion."

When Christ comes calling

Though Lewis was frightened by what he saw in himself, the Holy Spirit would open Lewis' heart and mind to Christ's forgiveness and love. It happened in September 1931, 74 years to this very month, when Lewis was converted to the faith. He had engaged in a lengthy conversation about Christianity with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson that started with dinner on the 19th and continued into the early morning hours of the 20th. The discussion challenged Lewis' thinking and set the stage for what happened two days later.

It was on Sept. 22, 1931 that Lewis said yes to the Lord's offer of himself—yes, according to his testimony, this was the exact day he became a Christian. It happened on a ride to the Whipsnade Zoo with his brother, Warren. Lewis tells about it in his book, *Surprised by Joy*:

See *Mere Christian*, page 16 

"I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere. . . . God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous."

C. S. Lewis

Women in ministry

Continued from page 4

the disciples were his real family: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (vv. 49-50).

Spiritual response is more important than biological origin. Jesus expanded the response to include “sister,” even though the original comment did not mention sisters; by doing so he implied that women were spiritually on an equal footing with men.

Shortly before Jesus was arrested and killed, a woman anointed him with a large amount of expensive perfume. The disciples grumbled about the expense, but Jesus praised the woman: “She has done a beautiful thing to me.... I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Matt. 26:10, 13).

What she did is a great illustration for all disciples: unrestrained devotion. Jesus said to the woman who anointed him, “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50), and the fact that this story is preserved in the Gospels means that her faith is an example to us today.

Similarly, a Canaanite woman was praised for having great faith (Matt. 15:28). As a gentile, she had no claim to any favors from him, but she appealed for grace and mercy, and received it.

Women in the ministry of Jesus

Most Jewish and Greek men had negative views of women, but Jesus treated women with dignity and respect. He viewed them not in terms of their sex, but in terms of their relationship to God. He healed various women, cast demons out of them, and raised their children from the dead.

Sheila Graham summarizes: “Jesus’ honor and respect was ...

extended to all women—an attitude largely unexpected and unknown in his culture and time. Jesus, unlike the men of his generation and culture, taught that women were equal to men in the sight of God.

“Women could receive God’s forgiveness and grace. Women, as well as men, could be among Christ’s personal followers. Women could be full participants in the kingdom of God.... These were revolutionary ideas. Many of his contemporaries, including his disciples, were shocked” (“Jesus and Women,” *The Plain Truth* [July 1994]: 15).

Let’s now look at some of the women in the life of Jesus.

Elizabeth

We begin our brief survey with a woman whose role occurred before Jesus was born. Elizabeth, wife of the elderly priest Zechariah, was noted to be “upright in the sight of God” and fully obedient (Luke 1:6). When Mary visited Elizabeth, “the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” and pronounced a blessing on Mary—and her words are now part of Scripture (vv. 41-45).

Mary

The mother of Jesus set a marvelous example with her words: “I am the Lord’s servant.... May it be to me as you have said” (v. 38). Mary was also inspired to say a poem of praise that is now part of Scripture (vv. 46-55). She again set a good example when she “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (2:19, 51). She was instrumental in Jesus’ first public miracle (John 2:1-11). At the cross, Jesus assigned John to take care of his mother, and Mary was counted among the disciples after his resurrection (Acts 1:14).

Anna

When Jesus was taken to the temple to be dedicated, an elder-

ly prophetess named Anna “gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). Unfortunately, we do not know what she said or how she spread the news.

Mary and Martha

Although Jewish rabbis said that men should not talk with women, Jesus counted women among his friends. “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5). Once when Jesus was visiting Bethany, “a woman named



Martha opened her home to him” (Luke 10:38). Since Martha owned a home; she may have been a widow. Her sister Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (v. 39). But Martha was busy preparing the meal, and asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her.

The rabbis said that women should not be taught Scripture, so Mary was shirking a typically female role in order to do something that was normally restricted to males. But Jesus did not “put her in her place.” Rather, he said that she had chosen the right place at the time. “Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (v. 42). Spiritual growth is more important than domestic duties.

Graham writes: “Jesus did not feel that women’s work—or men’s work, for that matter—wasn’t important. He was not saying it is

wrong to be diligent and careful about our responsibilities. Christ was saying we should get our priorities straight. Women were called to be disciples of Jesus, just as men were, and women were expected to fulfill their spiritual responsibilities, just as men were" (16-17).

In that incident, Mary set a better example than Martha did. But James Borland notes that Martha should be remembered for another incident as well: "On a later visit of Jesus to Bethany, it was Martha who was taught by Jesus while Mary sat in the house (John 11:20)... Martha gave a superb confession about Christ, saying, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world' (John 11:27, NKJV)" (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 118).

Samaritan woman at the well

The longest recorded discussion that Jesus had with any individual was with a woman—a Samaritan woman. The lesson Jesus gave her about living water was just as spiritually profound as the lesson he gave Nicodemus—and the woman had a better response. Unlike Nicodemus, she was willing to be associated with Jesus. She told her neighbors about Jesus, and many of them believed in Jesus "because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:28-29, 39).

A daughter of Abraham

When Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, a woman who had been crippled for 18 years came in, and Jesus healed her (Luke 13:10-13). The synagogue ruler criticized Jesus, but Jesus defended his action, saying that the woman was "a daughter of Abraham" (v. 16).

Graham writes: "Before his most venomous critics, Jesus publicly showed his concern and high regard for this woman, someone whom others had probably seen for years as she struggled in her

affliction to come to the synagogue to worship God. Someone whom they may well have shunned because she was a woman and because she was disabled" (18). By using the rare phrase "daughter of Abraham," Jesus was reminding the people that women were also among the descendants of Abraham and eligible for the blessings.

Joanna and Susanna

Luke tells us that several women who had been healed helped support Jesus "out of their own means" (Luke 8:3). These included "Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others." Although they were probably involved in meal preparation, Luke indicates that their most significant role was to pay the bills.

Graham writes: "Some of these women—possibly widows—had control of their own finances. It was out of their generosity that Jesus and his disciples were at least partially supported. Although Christ worked with the cultural traditions of the first century, he ignored the limitations that had been placed on women by their culture. Women were free to follow him and to take part in his ministry to the world."

Matt. 27:55-56 also mentions that "many women ... had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons" (Mark 15:41 reports that her name was Salome). Luke 23:27 reports that many women from Jerusalem followed him after his arrest, and he turned to them and taught them, saying that even worse times would come for Jerusalem.

A woman with bleeding

While Jesus was on his way to the home of Jairus, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12

years touched him, and was healed (Mark 5:22-29). She was afraid that Jesus would be angry (rabbis normally avoided women, especially unclean ones), but Jesus was not angry. He said, "Daughter, your faith has healed you" (v. 34)—addressing her with a term of affection and publicly praising her faith. Similarly, Jesus was not afraid of touching the other unclean daughter, the dead child of Jairus (v. 41).


Mary Magdalene

Luke tells us that Mary of Magdala had seven demons cast out of her (Luke 8:2), but Mary should be better known as the first to see the empty tomb, the first to carry the good news to the disciples.

Graham writes: "Mary is almost always mentioned first in a list of the female disciples of Jesus Christ. She may have been one of the leaders of that group of women who followed Jesus from the outset of his ministry in Galilee to his death and afterward. The risen Jesus appeared to her first. It's ironic that in a time when women could not be legal witnesses, Jesus Christ chose women as the first witnesses of his resurrection."

Although the men fled for their lives, the women faithfully followed Jesus to the cross (Matt. 27:55-56), and Mary sat nearby while Joseph of Arimathea put Jesus' body in the tomb (v. 61). Mary led the women who came to anoint Jesus early on Sunday morning (Mark 16:2), and an angel told them that Jesus had been raised (v. 6). They then told the news to the 11 disciples (Luke 24:10).

Jesus appeared first to Mary (John 20:14), and told her to tell the disciples, which she did (vv. 17-18). From birth to resurrection, women were an important part of the ministry of Jesus.

This article is an excerpt of a collaborative doctrinal research project. The full report may be seen at www.wcg.org/lit/church/ministry/women6.htm 

Faithful Heroes

a study of Hebrews 11:1-7

By Michael Morrison

Hebrews 11 is often called the faith chapter. It tells us how various people responded in faith to what God said to them. But these stories are not told as historical trivia—they encourage us to have faith in our situations, too.



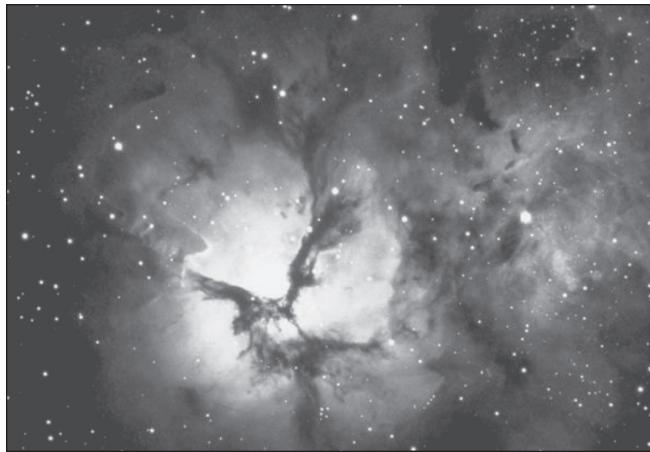
An introduction to faith

The epistle to the Hebrews has just told the readers that God wants his people to **“live by faith”** (10:38). He wants them to persevere, do the will of God and receive the blessing (v. 36). Christians are people **“who believe and are saved”** (v. 39).

Chapter 11 then describes what faith is like: **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”** (11:1, TNIV throughout). Ancient orators sometimes gave a brief definition of a word they wanted to talk about. This is not a complete definition, but it highlights one characteristic of faith.

Commentators argue at length about the precise meaning of the Greek words used here: Is faith a feeling of being sure (as the TNIV has it), or is it the “substance” (NKJ) of our hope? These debates often miss the point—the author is not trying to define faith, but to describe one of the results it has in our lives. His point is that faith means believing and acting on something we cannot see. This is the quality of faith that the author especially wants the readers to imitate.

“This is what the ancients were commended for” (v. 2). The element of faith is a thread that runs throughout the history of God’s people, and the author brings it down to the present day by adding, **“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible”** (v. 3, referring to Gen. 1:3 and Ps. 33:6).



By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

From the very beginning to the present moment, faith is needed. Creation itself shows that just because something can’t be seen, doesn’t mean that it won’t happen. The author does not say that God made everything out of nothing—he only says that he made the visible out of the invisible; that is the contrast he wants to make. Our future is based not on what we see today, but based on something we do not see: God.

Abel and Enoch

With that brief introduction, the author starts to give examples: **“By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead”** (Heb. 11:4).

Genesis 4 actually tells us very little about Abel: He brought an offering, and God looked on him with favor (Gen. 4:4). It does not tell us why his offering was better than Cain’s (in ancient Israel, grain was just as legitimate an offering as a lamb was), and it says nothing about faith. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews assumes that if God was pleased, then Abel must have had faith.

The next example is Enoch: **“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: ‘He could not be found, because God had taken him away.’ For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God”** (Heb. 11:5, quoting Gen. 5:24).

Again, Genesis says little about Enoch, but Jewish legends said that he was taken into heaven, and this is reflected in the author’s comments—that Enoch did not die. God took him because he **“walked with God,”** which our author takes as evidence that he had faith. We do not know exactly what he believed, or what he did.

The readers probably do not need any proof that Enoch had faith, because they already know that

Enoch was one of the “good guys.” The author is not trying to argue his case with logic here—he is painting a picture, presenting faith not as a strange thing, but as normal for the people of God.

The readers already know that faith is good, but the author is using his skill as an orator to build positive emotions for faith, when the readers already face possibly unpleasant consequences for having faith in Jesus Christ. For Abel, faith meant an early death; for Enoch it meant the opposite. Either way, the people of God need faith.

After these two introductory examples, the author states the lesson he wants to highlight: **“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him”** (Heb. 11:6). In this little creed, the author reminds us that God rewards the faithful—those who seek him. Although we cannot see him, we have evidence that he exists. In addition to supernatural rewards, faith has natural rewards in the here and now: Faith feels better than fear.

Noah

The author emphasizes his point more by beginning each sentence with “by faith”: **“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith”** (v. 7). For Noah, the author has more biblical information: God warned Noah about a flood, told him to build an ark, and Noah obeyed and saved himself and his family (Genesis 6-9).



Noah didn't really condemn the world (God did that, based on their behavior), but his faithful example made it obvious how hopelessly evil the world had become—no one repented even after 120 years of warning. And by his faith Noah became an heir of righteousness—he is the first person in the

Bible to be called righteous (Gen. 7:1). As it would later be said for Abraham, **“His faith was counted as righteousness”** (Gen. 15:6). He was considered right with God because he was faithful.

The Greek word *pistis* can mean either faith or faithfulness, and many people have noticed that Hebrews often uses it in the sense of faithfulness, or obedience, and it is sometimes hard to tell whether the author is focusing on belief or behavior. (Although Paul occasionally uses the same word in the sense of faithfulness, he usually refers to belief.) Obedience is evidence of belief, and both are needed. Noah did what God told him to do because he trusted God—he believed that God would condemn the wicked and save Noah and his family if they built an ark.

We will look at the example of Abraham in our next issue. 🦋

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

Questions for discussion

- If we are certain that something will happen, but it doesn't, is it still called faith? (v. 1)
- The universe is visible, but do we have visible evidence that it was created? That it was created by a command from God? (v. 3)
- How can Abel speak even when he is dead? (v. 4)
- Abel is dead, but Enoch did not experience death (v. 5). Why this difference, and where are they now?
- Is it really important for us to believe that God will reward us? (v. 6)
- In what way do people today “condemn the world” by having faith? (v. 7)

What time is it?

Continued from page 6

Third, Israel lived mainly in chronos time as evidenced by the sabbaths, festivals, set feasts and appointed times and seasons (Leviticus 23). The Hebrew calendar was lunar-solar, rooted to this world, this physical time and space system. But the gospel proclaims this thrilling truth—"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Christ-event changed everything. Radically. Christians celebrate their faith in kairos time regardless of the day of the week or a date on the calendar. This is the force of Acts 2:47, speaking of the early church: "Every day they

continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."


Step into eternity

Fourth, all authentic Christians live in two time zones—the temporal and the eternal. Eternity is one of those grand intangibles such as love and devotion, a can't-see-it, can't-touch-it concept that nevertheless looms large in the Christian life, especially as we near the end of our individual journeys.

"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness," Paul testi-

fied, "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul is speaking here of kairos time over chronos time, one reason Christians were not to know the day or hour of their Lord's appearing (Acts 1:7).

So, what time is it?

Time to call men and women to repentance, time for us all to turn more devotedly to God and accept that the center of history lies in the past in a kairos moment called Calvary. And by so doing we help affect eternity. 

Mere Christian

Continued from page 11


"I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. . . . It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake."

One recalls the experience of the apostle Paul, who was also on a road trip, in his case from Jerusalem to Damascus. When Paul started out for Damascus, he did not know the Lord. He, no doubt, as a rabbi, had an ardent belief in the God of Israel. But he had not yet been encountered by the living Christ. So when he started his journey he did not know Christ, when he arrived at his destination at Damascus, he was a converted disciple of the Lord (Acts 9:1-20).

Lewis, of course, was not struck down with blindness on the road to the zoo and didn't hear the risen Christ audibly speaking to him. Nevertheless, the still quiet voice of

Jesus had been dramatically impacting his mind and heart for some time, bringing him to the opportunity to utter the final yes.

In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis described that final time before he put his faith in Christ as a period of free and enlightened choice: "The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice. . . . I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. . . . I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armor or keep it on. Neither choice was presented as a duty; no threat or promise was attached to either, though I knew that to open the door or to take off the corslet meant the incalculable."

On Christmas Day 1931, C.S. Lewis joined the Anglican Church and took communion. For the next three decades he devoted much of his time to writing and speaking about Christ and the Christian faith. He had truly become a disciple of Christ who makes disciples. After several months of ill health and intermittent recovery, Lewis died peacefully on Nov. 22, 1963—the very day that U.S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. 

Lectionary Readings for September 2005

Sept. 4

Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 139:33-40
Ezekiel 33:7-11
Matthew 18:15-20
Romans 13:8-14

Sept. 11

Genesis 50:15-21
Exodus 14:19-31
Psalm 103:1-13
Matthew 18:21-35
Romans 14:1-12

Sept. 18

Exodus 16:2-15
Psalm 145:1-8
Jonah 3:10-4:11
Matthew 20:1-16
Philippians 1:21-30

Sept. 25

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 25:1-9
Ezekiel 18:1-32
Matthew 21:23-32
Philippians 2:1-13

Oct. 2

Exodus 20:1-20
Psalm 80:7-15
Isaiah 5:1-7
Matthew 21:33-46
Philippians 3:4-14