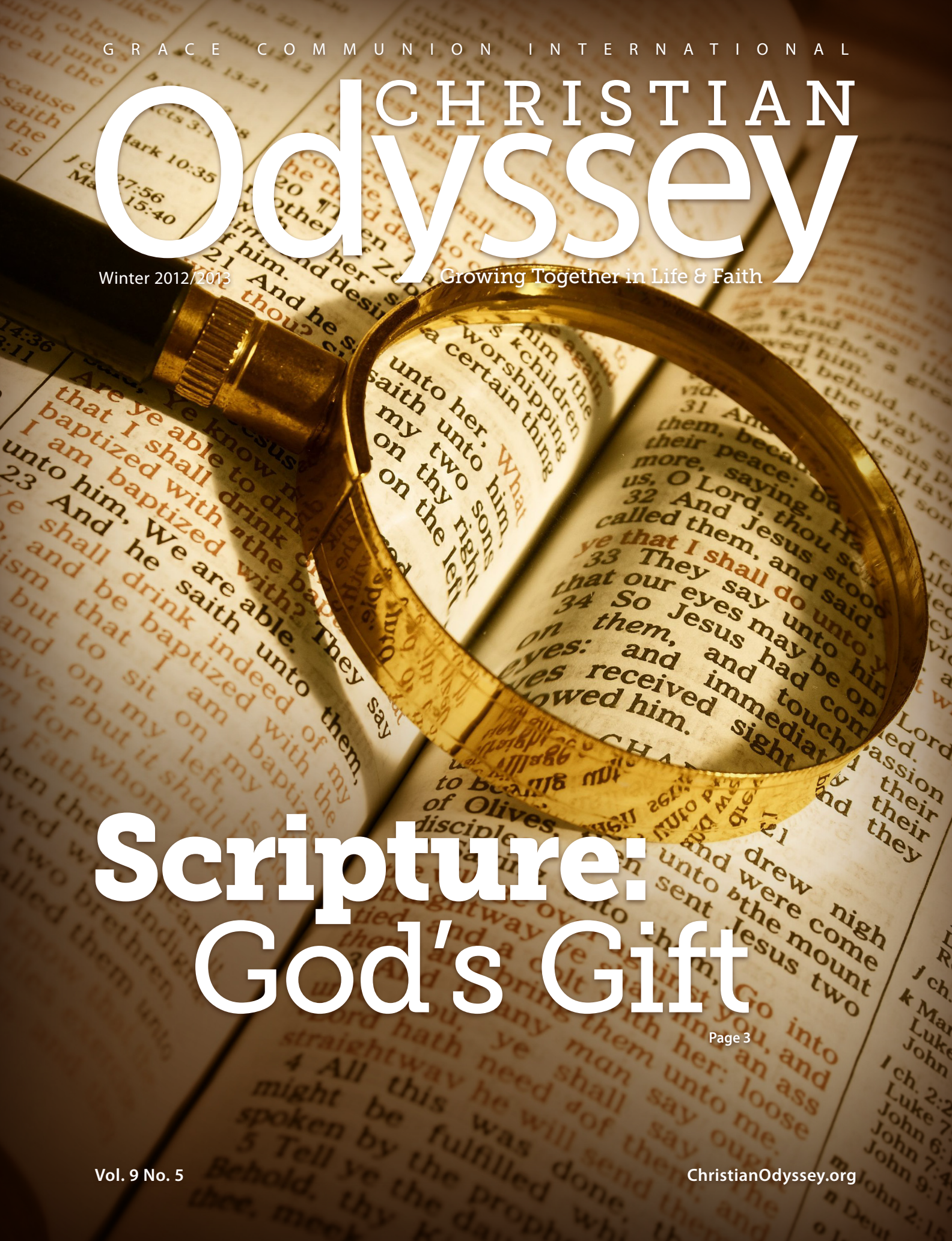


# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

Winter 2012/2013

Growing Together in Life & Faith



## Scripture: God's Gift

Page 3

# Here Be Dragons

Driving around the Bible Belt states in the USA, you will sometimes see a bumper sticker that proclaims, "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it." Simple and straightforward, right?

I wish it were. But in my nearly 50 years of ministry, on all five continents, I have learned that it is not always simple and straightforward. I agree that if the Bible says it, I should believe it and do it. The key is to understand what it is the Bible is saying.

Recently, while in Hong Kong, I visited with some Chinese friends that I have known for several decades. We were young and idealistic when we first met, full of confidence that we understood "the truth."

Our conversation reminded me how Westerners underestimate how strange the Bible can seem to someone who approaches it from a Chinese background. Even what we would consider an obvious teaching can be riddled with contradiction. Take, for example, what Jesus said in Luke 11:11, to illustrate God's overflowing love for us. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?"

My answer would be "Yuck! No way." But, my Chinese friends explained, the obvious answer for them is, "Of course he would if he could afford it." You see, snake meat is a delicacy in their culture, to be enjoyed on special occasions. So the simple and straightforward reading of this scripture would lead to an opposite conclusion than was intended.

The symbolism in Revelation is quite

enigmatic enough without additional cultural barriers. For example, Revelation 17:3-4 describes "a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls." At least those of us from a Judeo-Christian background have no trouble recognizing this vision as malevolent. But what is a Chinese person, who has grown up believing purple and scarlet are the colors of celebration, and dragon-like creatures are a symbol of good luck, to make of it?

Maybe these are extreme examples. But we all approach the scriptures with cultural baggage that can get in the way of understanding. So perhaps it is not as simple as

**Our conversation reminded me how Westerners underestimate how strange the Bible can seem to someone who approaches it from a Chinese background.**

"The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it." God's Word must not only be timeless; it must also be timely. In this issue, we are beginning a series of articles by Gary Deddo that will help you discern the true intent of God's Word, no matter who you are and when or where you encounter it.

In the first installment, Gary shows how God did not leave his Word frozen in time. He stays involved, working to preserve it, and through the Holy Spirit, helps us to interpret and apply it intelligently, whether we live in the first century or the twenty-first. **co**

## CHRISTIAN Odyssey

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# Scripture: God's Gift

By Gary Deddo

**The Christian church down through the ages has always regarded Scripture as indispensable for its worship, devotion and life. Its very existence is bound up with it. The church would not be what it is without it. Holy Scripture is part of the air it breathes and the food it eats.**

I learned of the importance of the Bible as a young child and was encouraged and taught to read it and memorize it. I studied it both on my own and with others, and I'm glad I did. The study of the Bible has always been an essential part of my ministry in serving others, whether it was teaching it, preaching from it, studying it with small groups of Christians or referring to it when counseling others. When I attended seminary, my primary focus was the study and interpretation of Scripture. It was so important to me that I was willing to try to learn Hebrew and Greek to see if I could understand it better!

Along the way, I learned there were various ways the nature and place of Scripture were understood and also a variety of ways to make use of it. Some of those explanations and ways of approaching Scripture seemed better than others. Some ways seemed to actually lead to the misuse of Scripture or even make it irrelevant. I ended up reading books and even taking courses

to sort out these issues, hoping I could find some wisdom in it all, not only to help me, but to pass on to others.

Scripture is so essential to the Christian faith that nearly every denomination of the church has some official statement about the importance and place of Scripture. These summaries can be a good place to start reflection on the nature, purpose and right use of Scripture. Grace Communion International's statement is brief, to the point and fairly comprehensive: "The Holy Scriptures are by God's grace sanctified to serve as his inspired Word and faithful witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel. They are the fully reliable record of God's revelation to humanity culminating in his self-revelation in the incarnate Son. As such, the Holy Scriptures are foundational to the church and infallible in all matters of faith and salvation."

I'd like to explore with you what's behind this theological summary of our denomination's understanding of Scripture. We do so not so we can enter into endless debate or prove ourselves superior to other Christians who might take a different view. And I don't think we simply want a theory about it. We seek understanding of Scripture because we value it highly and want to honor and make proper use of it. We want to handle it well so we can get the most out of it. This is what Holy Scripture itself encourages us to do.

We also can recall that others in church history have benefitted greatly through a deep understanding of Scripture and how to interpret it. But in the end I think we want to grasp and use it well because we hope to get to know the God of the Bible, in whom we put our faith, even better.

### By God's grace

Many of us have sung the childhood song that says: "Jesus loves me, this I know—for the Bible tells me so." And that's true enough. However, there's a different way to sing that verse that is also true: "Jesus loves me this I know—*so* the Bible tells me so!" This second way is reflected in the GCI statement that the Bible is God's gift to us, a gift of grace and therefore of his love. Because God loves us in and through Christ, he has graciously provided us his written Word.

God didn't have to do so, but his love for us, his creatures, has moved him to provide us with his Word in written form. God's love for us comes first, and this led to his provision of the Bible. We wouldn't really be able to know and love God if God hadn't first loved us and communicated to us through his written Word. God gives us his Word in Scripture because he loves us and wants us to know that he does. We should always remember that the Bible is God's gracious gift of love to us.

### God continues to empower his Word

But that's not the end of it. Human words in and of themselves don't have the capacity to reveal to us the truth and reality of God. Human words are just that—human. They derive primarily from our human experiences. But God is not a creature and cannot be simply grasped in creaturely terms, concepts and ideas. Words, when referring to God, don't mean exactly the same thing as when they refer to creation. So we can say we "love" and God "loves." But God's love far exceeds our love. Yet ours can be a dim mirror image of God's love. So God himself has to sanctify, make holy and adequate, mere human words so that we can actually come to know, in an accurate and faithful way, the God of the Bible.

God is continually gracious to us by superintending our reading and interpretation of Scripture, helping us to see how they uniquely make God and his ways known to us. The God of Holy Scripture has not become mute since the Bible came into existence. This God continues to speak in and through his written Word, enabling what was written to refer to him and



## We have been told that the Spirit can and has empowered first the prophets of the Old Testament and then the apostles of the New Testament.

not just to creaturely ideas or realities. God continues to give his Word to us through this gift of revelation. If God ceased to be personally involved, empowering the written Word to accomplish the miraculous feat of enabling us to know him, God would not be truly known.

### Inspired by the Spirit

If we ask, "How has God made himself known?" it turns out that this work involves the whole of God, that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word "inspired" means "God breathed." The Holy Spirit is identified as the wind or breath of God. By the Spirit of God, certain people down through the ages were called, appointed and specially enabled to speak authoritatively for God. They were "inbreathed" by the Spirit. *How* exactly the Spirit works we do not and cannot know. But we have been told that the Spirit can and has empowered first the prophets of the Old Testament and then the apostles of the New Testament.

The Spirit seems to take into account every talent and quality of a particular prophetic or apostolic author and graciously makes use of them. The Spirit incorporates their language, culture and social-political background as well as their own relationship with God. The Spirit uses the human elements of the selected prophets and apostles to provide us a written form of communication that God can continually use to make himself and his ways known to his people down through the ages. If the Spirit were not at work with these individuals, we would not

have any authoritative and trustworthy access to God’s Word. So we can thank God for choosing certain individuals and, by his Spirit, inspiring them to speak faithfully for him.

### Providential preservation

We have these written words because they have somehow been preserved for us down through the ages. This too must be regarded as the gracious work and gift of God. Because of his great love for us, the God of the Bible not only kicked things off by selecting and inspiring certain individuals, but also by overseeing their written testimonies being passed along and finally collected together. We call this form of God’s grace his “providence.” Apparently an aspect of God’s providential oversight also included the inspired editing of preexisting materials. God providentially maintained contact with his written words and the process by which it was canonized (brought together in an authoritative collection). Of course, if the God of the Bible wanted us to have written witness to his Word, then we shouldn’t be surprised that he would plan for its preservation.

### The self-revelation

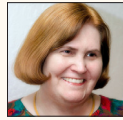
The gracious gift of revelation as it traces through history does reach a crucial high point. All the prophetic words prepare for and look forward to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And all the apostolic writings look back to the time and place where God himself, as himself, reveals and interprets himself in and through Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we don’t have simply another inspired word about God, but we have the Living Word of God himself, in person—in time and space and in flesh and blood. So Jesus tells us that he is, himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He does not show us a way or tell us about the truth or give us things that lead to life. He himself is these things. Thus God’s gracious revelatory work reaches a qualitatively different level with the birth of the Word of God in human form.

The written Word of God’s Spirit-inspired prophets and apostles point and bear authoritative witness to the Living Word. Jesus himself is the center of God’s revelatory work, so he stands at the very center of all of Scripture.

### Faithful and infallible

The written Word, then, derives its authority and faithfulness from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. Because God is the Living and speaking God, we have a written Word that puts us in touch with the Living Word of God, all by the Spirit. The Bible’s authority is established and maintained by a living and real connection to the God of the Bible. Scripture can serve as it does because it remains connected to the infallible God. The Bible does not have its own authority or faithfulness apart from God, but in actual and daily connection with the whole God, Father, Son/Word and Spirit. So whenever we read or listen to Scripture, we can expect to hear the living God speak to us once again. **co**

## If I Were God



Let’s be perfectly honest—sometimes it’s hard for me to understand God. He just doesn’t make the decisions I would make if I were God. For example, if I were God I definitely would not give rain to mean, hateful farmers. Only good and fair farmers would get my rain. But the scripture says God sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45 KJV).

If I were God, only bad people would die prematurely. Good people would live long, happy lives. But the scripture says sometimes God takes the righteous so they will escape the perils to come (Isaiah 57:1).



### If I were God I definitely would not give rain to mean, hateful farmers!

If I were God, I would always let everyone know exactly what lies ahead. There would be no question about what I had in mind. It would all be cut and dried and easy to understand. But scripture says God only lets us see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV).

If I were God, there would be no suffering in this world. But God says this is not his world; it’s Satan’s world. Therefore he doesn’t always intervene, so bad things happen that we can’t understand (2 Corinthians 4:4).

If I were God, Christians would not have trials. After all, they are trying to obey God and do what is right. But God says those who follow him will have trials (2 Timothy 3:12).

If I were God, we would all run the same race. But scripture indicates each of us has a specific course to run, tailor-made for us. Our trials are for us, not for someone else (Hebrews 12:1).

Fortunately for the world, I am not God. God has a distinct advantage over me. He knows everything and I don’t. For me to judge the decisions God makes for my life or the lives of others is folly because only God knows when we should get rain and when we shouldn’t. Only he knows when we should live and when we should die. Only he knows when it would be in our best interest to have certain understanding and when it wouldn’t. Only he knows which trials will produce the best results in our lives and which ones won’t. Only he knows how to work in us so he is glorified.

You see, it’s not about us; it’s about him! That’s why we’re told to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrew 12:2). I must admit this is not always easy for me to do, but it’s a much better alternative than thinking I could do a better job than God. **co**



# Angry At God?

## Build A Bridge and Get Over It!

By Marikay Ross

**H**ow many years ago did our church change from legalism to grace-based? Years. I was pretty angry with God back then. I lost 2,000 years of Hebrew relatives, ancestors I could trace back to the ten tribes of Israel and even back to Adam and Eve. My family.

I was a part of something big. I had the truth. I was important, special, set apart, and the vast majority of everyone else in the world wasn't. They were wrong. They were deceived. I was right and attached to being right, judgmental of those who *didn't know*. Actually I was putting myself in the place of God. But let's skip that and move right along.

Then I was told that much of what I had devoted more than 30 years of my life to was in error, not necessary, and that we were a cult. I had done what I thought God wanted me to do, and what did I get for it? At that time, I was only saved by stepping into the peace in the eye of the storm—my relationship with God. Time passed, but I was still angry. I expected my obedience and submission would be rewarded by a pleasurable life, a wonderful marriage, a beautiful home, children who loved me, social events, and in my retirement years I'd be financially secure, do meaningful volunteer work and travel throughout Europe. But God did not meet my expectations. I was miffed, peeved, disillusioned.

Are you angry at God? Oh no. Who could be angry at God? I'm not angry at God. Think again. What in your life isn't what you planned for yourself, what you wanted? What gnaws at you still? What are your regrets? What do you wish had been better?

If issues from the past, even from childhood, still bother you, there could be a barrier between you and God.

Once, after listening to my litany of woes from childhood to the present, a friend told me, "Well, you must think you're a victim of God." What a shocker! But it was true! What could I do? My first solution was to mostly avoid the whole question and shove it down with TV, busy-ness and over-spending, too much food, too many worthwhile projects and computer games. I had prayed and prayed, and my dissatisfaction with God didn't budge.

Here's what finally worked for me. I hope it will help you too.

Life is a program of action. This is your assignment. Give it a try. How about sitting down in a comfortable chair in a quiet spot with pen in hand and writing down everything you don't like about your life and what's happened to you? Start your sentences with, "God, I am angry at you because ..." or "I'm mad because ..." Take stock of resentments from the past that are still smoldering in your mind today. They're blocking you from true surrender and trust in your relationship with God. Ultimately, I found that everything I wish were different in my life is God's fault. You see, I don't know the plan. I'm not God.

Finally, I read my list out loud to God from my living room chair. I cried. I told God I didn't like being angry at him but I couldn't heal these long-term resentments. I lifted my many pages of writing over my head and told God he'd have to take them. It was hurting me to hold on to them. I sang my favorite hymn. I can't say that anything special happened to me at the time, but I'm not angry at God anymore. **co**

# The Parable of the Ugly Cat

By John Halford



mas last year. It might even have been the Feast of Stephen, although the moon wasn't shining brightly and the snow didn't lie round about deep and crisp and even. But there was enough snow for me to clear it from the driveway. That's when I first met Ugly Cat, standing at the edge of the pool of light from the open garage door. She meowed piteously but kept her distance. I saw that she had been badly wounded. She was dragging her right back leg, and one eye was just a bloody pulp. She looked like she had been in a fight or perhaps hit by a car. I didn't want to leave her to suffer, but she would not let me get close. After a minute or so, she stumbled off into the darkness, leaving a trail of blood in the snow.

"Poor critter," I thought. "She won't last long out there." There was nothing I could do for her. By morning, the snow had covered her tracks, and after a day or two I forgot about her. But she had not forgotten me.

One morning, several months later, we met again. She was standing by the edge of our garden pond, looking at me cautiously, wondering whether to take her eyes—er—eye—off me to risk a drink.

"It's OK," I said. "Help yourself." I noticed that her wounded eye had healed. The eye was gone, but the socket looked clean and not infected. I noticed also that, although she still limped, she was moving better. "How on earth did you survive the winter?" I wondered. This little animal was a survivor, and at least she deserved respect. "You're welcome to have a drink from the pond whenever you want," I told her. (You shouldn't give feral cats milk.) But I really didn't want her to become too friendly.

That did not seem to be a problem—the cat wasn't interested in being too friendly either. She could look after herself. I left some scraps of food out for her, but she ignored them. She was not as hungry as she looked.

Later I found out why. When she wasn't drinking from my pond, she would help herself to the local dogs' food while they watched in frustration. You didn't mess with this cat. Nobody owned her, and she didn't seem to want to belong.

## More mouths to feed

Ugly Cat hung around the neighborhood all through the spring. I began calling her "that Ugly Cat," and the name stuck.

**J**esus drew lessons from lilies, trees, sparrows and fish and even has some complimentary things to say about dogs. I can see that about dogs. They are loyal, unselfish and seem to be able to show unconditional love. However, he did not say anything about cats. In fact, cats are the only domestic animals that are not mentioned in the Bible. Maybe it's because the ancient Egyptians worshipped them.

Unlike the ancient Egyptians, I am not particularly fond of cats. For one thing, I am allergic to them. I also find them greedy and self-centered compared to the unquestioning devotion of dogs. I am quite willing to share the planet with them, providing it is not the same part of the planet. I certainly don't want one as a pet. So I was not particularly happy when Ugly Cat limped into my life.

I first saw her on a dark, cold evening just after Christ-

She would disappear for days but would always show up again, looking for a handout. But she didn't grovel—if nothing was forthcoming she would, so to speak, shrug her shoulders and limp away. She obviously wasn't starving. In fact, she seemed to be putting on weight.

One day in early summer, I noticed a change. She came around meowing as usual. However, this time there was a different tone to it—more insistent and demanding. I got the impression that if a cat could tug at your trouser leg, she would have done it. It was if she was saying, "I want some food, and I want it NOW!"

She also seemed to be staying around our house more. One morning I discovered why. While watering the flowerbeds, I found two kittens under a bush. Ugly Cat soon ran up and stood guard. One of the kittens looked like her. The other was the same color as a local fat cat, who spends all day lying around the house but obviously gets out at night. I understood now why Ugly Cat needed food. She had extra mouths to feed. I gave in and bought several cans of cat food, much to the amusement of my wife, who told everyone, "He's just a big softie."

As is the way with cats, Ugly Cat had brought her kittens close to our house because she thought they would be safe. "You know," I told her, "this really isn't such a good place to bring your children." Their shelter was only a few feet from the highway. It normally isn't too busy, but a bridge over the river was under repair, and so a steady stream of traffic went by our house. I thought it was only a matter of time before I would be scraping the kittens off the road. However, they had inherited their mother's ability to survive.

My sister, who knows about cats, told us we shouldn't leave the kittens with their mother longer than necessary. They learn fast, and if you leave them too long, they will never become domesticated. Yeah, right, but what were we going to do with them? I didn't want one cat, let alone three.

My daughter thought she could find homes for the kittens but was not able to pick them up for a few days. She suggested I take them from their mother as soon as they could feed themselves. When they could, they were ready to leave the nest. But moving them was easier said than done. The two kittens were cute from a distance, but when I tried to pick them up they hissed, spat, and tried to scratch me with their tiny claws. These were wild animals. Eventually I extracted them and put them in a large box in the garage. Ugly Cat didn't seem to care. She probably wanted to be rid of them so she could resume her vagabond lifestyle.

My daughter and granddaughters eventually came to pick up the kittens. "Be careful," I warned them. "They may look adorable,

but they are lethal." Sure enough, the little spitfires resisted my granddaughters' attentions at first. But within half an hour, both were purring contentedly as they rode off to their new homes.

### The cat comes back

Two down—one to go. Except Ugly Cat won't go. She disappears for days but always comes back expecting a handout. We now keep several cans of cat food on hand. Against my better judgment, I find myself becoming rather fond of Ugly Cat. I have a feeling that she may be around for a while, never quite belonging but knowing where to come when she does need help. I have even given her a new name, because "Ugly Cat" began to sound unkind. It so happens that there is a Jamaican fruit called an "Ugli." It is a hybrid variety—a cross between grapefruit (which I am also allergic to) and oranges (her color). Perfect—Ugli it is!

I have made an effort to reform Ugli, but she only listens long enough to eat. Then she is off on her wanderings. It looks like she



Cute from a distance—the little spitfires

is pregnant again (sigh!). I told her sternly not to expect us to find homes for the kittens this time, but we probably will. (Update: We did – five this time. If this goes on, a visit to the vet is in Ugli's future.)

This tough little cat reminds me of many people I have known in my years as a minister. Wild, independent, tough survivors—living on the edge of a church community but never joining. Life has not been kind to them, and for all sorts of reasons, they are reluctant to make a commitment. But they know where to come when they need help. They can be annoying, and it is tempting to want to push them away. But we must not do that. They may not have accepted God's grace, but they have not rejected it either. My friend, Professor Eddie Gibbs, has a saying "Treat everyone as if they were Christians until they find out that they are not."

Because you just never know. **co**





# Four Kinds of Nothingness

By Dr. Joseph Tkach

**One of the more enigmatic questions posed by our understanding of the cosmos is “Why is there something instead of nothing?” You might think that is a rather dumb question. However, to many scientists, this is of major importance. Why does matter exist at all, and—since it does—where did it come from?**

The first words of the Bible inform us that God created the heavens and the earth. This fundamental revelation is what guided the children of Israel away from the false gods they had worshipped in Egypt, and turned them towards the true Lord of Creation. Through prophetic revelation God taught these people, in language they could understand, foundational truths about his own identity and the nature of his relationship to all creation.

Genesis was not intended to be the last word about the intricacies of exactly how the various parts of the cosmos work together. Using what we call scientific methods and tools we know much more about the details of the inner workings of creation than those ancient people did. However, the biblical revelation has not been superseded as a first word and starting place for researching the nature of creation. The biblical word provides us theological/philosophical presuppositions upon which we can build our scientific research of creation which science cannot provide itself.

Many scientists scoff at the biblical and Christian answer as to why there is a cosmos at all, considering it science fiction—with the emphasis on fiction. I enjoy good science fiction. For me, some of the most enjoyable of this genre comes from the *Star Trek* series. Captains, Kirk, Picard and Janeway tackled all

kinds of social and moral issues with a backdrop of all kinds of imaginative devices to beam them from one place to another, travel at warp speed, eat and drink items synthesized from a machine, and explore all kinds of life forms. What makes *Star Trek* so good is that it has a real basis in science. You can read about it in a book entitled *The Physics of Star Trek* by a theoretical physicist, Lawrence M. Krauss.

Krauss has written another book entitled *A Universe from Nothing: Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing*. Dr. Krauss is one of several scientists who try to prove that every particle and force sprang into being “from nothing,” but without God being part of that process. To reach this conclusion, Dr. Krauss explains that there are three kinds of nothingness.

The first kind of nothingness is a concept we inherit from Greek observation and thought—the nothingness of empty space. This kind of nothingness is not really “nothingness”

**Many scientists scoff at the Christian answer as to why there is a cosmos at all, considering it science fiction.**

because we know that so-called “empty” space is teeming with energy and particles. These are the features of creation that we currently have the ability to investigate, but it has been estimated to comprise only 6% of what is there. It seems that the other 94% of space is filled with what we call dark matter and dark energy. These aspects of the universe are, so far, beyond the reach of our physical senses and the instruments we have made

to enhance them. So we can't explain exactly what they are and how they work. But we know something else is there since what we can detect is being affected by things other than what we can now detect.

Krauss describes a second kind of nothingness as the "nothing without space and time." His conjecture is that whole universes bubble up out of this kind of nothingness. Each bubble has its own space-time and simply pops into existence. But even if this is true, Krauss notes, we still have to ask, where did the bubbling something come from?

A third kind of nothingness is a more profound nothingness in which even the laws of physics are absent. Krauss attempts to explain how this happens by saying that an infinite assembly of universes exists in this nothingness. It's called the multiverse and each universe in it has its own randomly determined rules, particles and forces. This, for Krauss is where the story ends—or should we say, begins.

But does it? Once again, if such a third kind of nothingness contains an infinite assembly, we must still ask, "Where did that infinite assembly come from?" And furthermore we can ask, just how the idea of multiverses amounts to a scientific claim at all? What empirical research has provided any evidence that this is the case? Indeed, could this assertion ever be verified scientifically at all?

Science fiction author Theodore Beale has pointed out the fatal problem with Dr. Krauss' ideas. Being a bit facetious, Beale says: "There is, of course, a fourth type of nothingness. And that is the amount of scientific validity contained in Krauss's desperate attempt to use a fraudulent veneer of science to avoid the obvious conclusions driven by the relevant philosophic logic. This isn't even science fiction, it's just purely evasive fantasy. If I were to seriously propose that full-grown unicorns, little rainbow-colored horned equines, could simply pop into existence, like bubbles in boiling water, *ex nihilo*, people would rightly dismiss me as a fantasist and a possibly insane one at that. But substitute 'universes' for 'unicorns' [as Krauss has done], and suddenly, we're talking science!"

Krauss's position, as Beale notes, is not the result of scientific experiment, but rather a pure philosophical speculation. And it certainly doesn't explain why there is something rather than nothing. His view amounts to saying that there has always been something of some sort. The universe we currently know came from other stuff that simply existed in a different form. There are just multiple forms of cosmic existence.

The biblical and Christian answer as to why there is something rather than nothing is entirely different. Its answer is theological and is based on a particular revelation granted to the ancient Hebrew people through particular persons, and preserved for us in Scripture.

In continuity with the revelation of Genesis the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews (11:3) tells us "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which



**If I were to seriously propose that "full-grown unicorns could simply pop into existence from nothing, people would rightly dismiss me as insane. But substitute 'universes' for 'unicorns' and suddenly, we're talking science!"**

are visible." Theologians refer to this as "creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing)." What is meant by the word translated here "worlds" and other biblical words such as "heaven and earth" the "cosmos," the "universe" or "creation"? The biblical writers are referring to all that is, that is not God. Thus they would include "bubbles" "multiverses" and anything else either actually existing or hypothesized by cosmologists.

What is meant by "from nothing" in this theological statement? It means that prior to the moment of creation, there was nothing except God, not even space or time (or multiverses!). In other words, God didn't make the universe from anything eternally preexisting—there was nothing at all pre-existing along with God before God created. So when speaking of Creation in a way consistent with divine revelation, we mean all that has ever and will ever exist that is not God and in any and every form, whether discovered by scientific research or imagined by philosophers or fiction writers.

Continues on page 12

# Strip These Words From Your Communication

By Beverly Caruso

**T**he young couple across the restaurant aisle were obviously angry with one another. The portion of their conversation reaching our table was peppered with two common phrases. “You always get home late.” “Well, you never have dinner on time anyway, so what difference does it make?” “Why should I if you’re never there to eat it with us?”

We tried to ignore their conversation, but it was so familiar. Not the “late to dinner” part. It was those phrases “you always,” and “you never” that clanged so loudly.

As senior pastors for thirty-five years and now ministers-at-large, we’ve counseled our share of couples. Most folks know that poor communication is the greatest source of problems in marriages. Few realize that small changes can make drastic improvements in their communication resulting in greater marital harmony and less stressful daily life.

Two of the most abused phrases in English are “You always” and “You never.” The worst thing about using them is that they are usually inaccurate. It’s seldom true that a person “always” or “never” does what he is accused of. As a result, the person who hears those words immediately responds internally by thinking of the exceptions to the accusation. Instead of hearing the heart of the person, he prepares to defend himself. Furthermore, we usually don’t realize that when we say, “You always” or “You never” we are, in fact, using a tactic of Satan, for, “The accuser of our brothers ... accuses them before our God day and night,” (Revelation 12:10 NIV 1984 throughout except where noted).

## Communicate from feelings

How much better if we look for ways of expressing ourselves by beginning with the words, “I feel.” Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They may not even be based on fact. Feelings are real and cannot be argued with. We can feel lonely in a crowd. A wealthy person can feel as though he doesn’t have wealth. A beautiful person can feel plain or even ugly. Their feelings cannot be disputed. They are real.

Most emotionally healthy people who learn of another



person’s negative feelings want to help alleviate those feelings. Especially with those we love, we want them to feel safe, secure, and happy.

If we will stop long enough to get in touch with our feelings, then put those feelings into words beginning with “I feel,” we can more readily be understood and get our needs met. A husband whose wife says, “I feel lonely,” will more likely look for ways to make time for her than if she complains of being neglected.

One big problem with this concept is that most men have been taught from childhood to hide their feelings. Many men have conditioned themselves not to feel except for the feeling of anger. As a result anger is what they express when they are threatened, when they are unable to identify their feelings, and even when they are fearful. A man might see that others are being laid off at work and he fears he might be the next to lose his job. Believing he must be strong, he doesn’t share his fears with his wife. When something disrupts the peace at home he lashes out in anger, maybe at his wife or his child. The fear is the true feeling, masked by anger.

There are thousands of words in the English language that describe emotions. If we stop and think about what we’re truly feeling, we can more accurately express them and deal with them. In a quick internet search I found more than a dozen

articles and lists of emotions we humans can experience. Perhaps it's time to get in touch with those feelings and communicate about them to our spouse.

### The source of our words

When seeking to improve our communication skills it pays to stop and think about the source of our words. They don't start in our head. Rather, they start in our heart; and they reveal the contents of our heart.

Our heart is like a garden. God wants us to till the soil and prepare it, through prayer and Bible reading for his work in our lives. The Holy Spirit is standing ready to provide the seeds for the good that our lives are meant to produce. If we allow Satan to plant weeds of negative, evil and judgmental thoughts in the garden of our heart, those will choke out God's seeds. We can test what is growing in our heart's garden by the light of God's Word: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent, or praiseworthy, think about such things" (Philippians 4:8). "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34 NASB). God does not take lightly the way we speak. We "will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word [we] have spoken" (Matthew 12:36).

### It's not a matter of winning

Most of us have lived in a state of competition much of our

lives, competing with siblings, playmates, classmates, and colleagues. As a result, we tend to view even our conversations with friends and family from a win or lose standpoint. By approaching conversation with a competitive attitude we build barriers that prevent open exchange. The goal of our communication should be to gain understanding of the other's ideas and to make our own thoughts known to the other, not to come out a winner.

### Bring God into communication through prayer

God has provided the greatest help available for overcoming communication problems. The first person to recognize communication difficulties simply needs to suggest, "Let's stop and pray together." This can be done in the home, or when the family is at play together. It works in church settings and in other gatherings of Christians. If in a public setting such as a restaurant or a park where a normal prayer mode might be awkward, we can merely address the Lord with our eyes open. It is always appropriate to take the time to bring God into a conversation and ask for his help in our communication. ☪

Bev Caruso, and her husband Pete, have served the Lord together for over 50 years. The above article was adapted from her book, *God's Gift of Friendship: Tools for Improving Relationships*. The Caruso's recently coauthored *Keeping It Fresh: A Love that Keeps on Growing* based on the Marriage Enrichment Seminars they team-teach. They can be contacted at: [Caruso@across2u.com](mailto:Caruso@across2u.com). Or visit their website: [www.PeteandBevCaruso.com](http://www.PeteandBevCaruso.com).

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## Four Kinds of Nothingness

... From page 9

There was a time when the cosmos was not, when there was only God and nothing else in any form. Creation has not existed eternally along with God. God does not exist alongside or within the time and space of any universe or multiverse. Time and space (and multiverses, if there were such) are created things that came into being by the agency and act of God. Unlike everything else that ever existed in any form, there was never "a time" when God was not.

So the Christian answer is neither that the cosmos existed eternally (along with God and so always was) nor that the cosmos was generated by nothing. God gave existence itself to that which has ever existed and in fact he continues to hold everything in existence. If God forgot about the universe even for a nanosecond all that is not God would cease to exist!

This revelation means also that creation is not an extension or emanation or a part of God. The cosmos is not divine and God is not created or made. Creation and its entire history is dependent upon God even for its existence. Creation is neither self-existent nor eternal or divine. God, however, is no way dependent upon creation. Only God has eternal self-existence, what theo-

logians have called down through the ages, God's aseity. There never was a time when God was not. God is not a created or made thing. So the biblical revelation, from the Old Testament through to the New, informs us as to why there is a universe, a cosmos, at all. It does not exist on its own but exists because of the agency and act of God. Now there's an answer to the question!

We have made, and continue to make, astounding discoveries that are increasing our understanding of the cosmos and its history. But those working at the leading edges of the experimental spectrum—the very big and the very small—admit that they still may be just beginning. Each breakthrough seems to open up new phenomena to investigate. In describing their work, quantum physicists find they must resort to language that is more metaphysical than scientific. Some admit that, scientifically, there may be a limit to "knowability." And it is widely admitted, especially by philosophers of science, that the entire scientific enterprise is based on philosophical (or theological) assumptions that the scientific method itself cannot provide.

That is why those first words of Genesis should be taken seriously. God told us something we cannot discover for ourselves, and cannot disprove. Why is there something rather than nothing? Because, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, making a cosmos that we can touch, feel and measure—all out of, well, nothing. ☪

# Missing In Action . . . Good News?



I'm glad the 2012 presidential election is over in the U.S. It was the most polarized election I've ever voted in, with so many people having such strong opinions that they were so quick to talk about. Many referred to it as the most important election of our lifetime. Almost everyone seemed to have a strong opinion about which candidate was best (or at least better) for our nation.

I found myself involved in more email discussions about politics than ever before. In fact, one day I received almost 80 messages from friends expressing their political opinions. We argued about who would make the better president for our nation. We displayed charts and graphs showing what would happen to the economy if our favorite candidate won or lost. We shared news items and opinion pieces that either agreed or disagreed with our points of view. It was an interesting ex-

**It all got so bad I didn't want to turn on the television. What happened to the good news? Did it get lost in the clamor?**

change of ideas, opinions, facts and quotes. But something was missing—any good news. We were focused on faltering economies, the dropping value of the dollar, unemployment and weaker military. We were not focused on which candidate would make it easier to share the gospel. We were so caught up in “what might happen if...” scenarios that we lost focus on what is truly important and *who* is truly in charge.

I noticed that more conversations at church were about politics and the state of our nation than they were about our journey with Jesus and what God was doing in our lives. When I was with pastor friends, we spent more time talking about politics than we ever had in the past. We were much more likely to talk about politics than about the kingdom. Then I started noticing how depressing the TV news was—and how many of the politicians had resorted to negative campaigning. It got so I didn't want to turn on the television. What happened to the good news? Did it get lost in the clamor?

God called us to be the salt of the earth, to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). He commissioned us to be the bearers of good news, to be beacons of hope people can look to when the problems of the world overwhelm them. We are called to rise above arguments among Republicans, Democrats, Independents and the Tea Party and to never forget who we are—adopted children of God.

The apostle Peter reminds us that we have been chosen

to be the bearers of good news. “But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted” (1 Peter 2:9-10, *The Message* throughout). The good news is not only telling others the night-and-day difference God made in my life, it is also telling others about the night-and-day difference God has made in their lives through Jesus. This has little to do with politics and politicians.

Peter continues: “Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life among the natives so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives” (1 Peter 2:11-12). These verses remind me I am to be a peacemaker in the political process. Of course I will have opinions and will vote for whomever I believe is best for our country. But I also acknowledge that others have their opinions, and they will vote as their consciences direct. Our opinions may differ, but God loves us all.

Then we come to the “political” section of Peter's letter. “Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government” (1 Peter 2:13-14). The best political actions I can take are to vote as wisely as I can, pray for all officeholders and share the gospel.

People need good news. They need to hear that God is in charge. They need to know that nothing is done without God's knowledge and agreement. (And agreement does not necessarily mean endorsement.) They need to know God loves them. That he is not and never has been mad at them. That he sent his Son for them because of his steadfast love. They need to know the wonder of the Incarnation and what it means that Jesus became one of us so we could become like him. They need to hear about the blessing of being adopted by God. They need to know the blessing of mercy, the hope of reconciliation and the grace of forgiveness. They need to know and hear some good news.

I'm glad the election is over. Now it's time for us to refocus on sharing some good news, on encouraging and inspiring people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's my plan. Will you join me? **co**

# Good People Needed

## A Study of 1 Timothy 3



Paul gives Timothy instructions about how the church should function and how to address some problems in first-century Ephesus. In chapter 3, Paul describes the kind of people Timothy should appoint as leaders for the churches.

### A virtuous person (verses 1-3)

Paul says, “Anyone who desires to be a church official wants to be something worthwhile” (Contemporary English Version used throughout). The Greek word translated as “church official” comes from root words meaning to “look over”; it refers to someone who looks after others. Paul does not say whether it is good or bad to desire this role; he simply says that the role is good.

Then he gives some personal qualities needed for this position: “That’s why officials must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage.<sup>1</sup> They must be self-controlled, sensible, well-behaved, friendly to strangers, and able to teach ...”

Paul is focusing on the person, not the duties. Being “able to teach” suggests that leaders are supposed to teach, but Paul doesn’t say much about the details. The character of the person is more important than the specific duties. If you have good people, they will be good for the church.

Paul continues the virtues needed: “They must not be heavy drinkers or troublemakers. Instead, they must be kind and gentle and not love money.” (see also 1 Peter 5:2).

### Good management (verses 4-7)

“Church officials must be in control of their own families, and they must see that their children are obedient and always respectful. If they don’t know how to control their own families, how can they look after God’s people?” The church is like a family—we are children of God, and Jesus is our brother—but a church is not exactly like a family. A person might “control” the family, but leaders “look after” the church.

Families and churches are different today from what they were in the first century. In ancient times, a “family” could include dozens of people: children and their spouses, grandchildren and servants, all living together. Culture gave the head of household (usually the oldest male) nearly absolute power over the family. First-century churches were usually small and met in houses; they found it natural to interact as a household.

People now have different expectations of family and church leadership. The biblical culture was not perfect, and neither is ours, but we all need to work where God has placed us. Paul’s point is that leaders in the church should care for the church in a similar way as they care for their own families, and that their success in their own family life is some indication of how well they will do in the church.

Paul is describing the ideal candidate – he is not creating a list in which every item must be perfectly met. We see an example of that when he writes, “They must not be new followers of the Lord. If they are, they might become proud and be doomed along with the devil.” Paul did not include that requirement for the church leaders in Crete (Titus 1), because all the believers there were new. Titus just had to pick the best he could.

Paul is not saying that all church leaders must be heads of household; a single person might be an effective leader in some cases. Similarly, personal failures 20 years ago need not disqualify a person who has more recently been a good example. Paul expects Timothy to use common sense and good judgment in the way he applies this list. If no one meets all the qualifications, then Timothy should just pick the best person he can find.

Last, Paul says, “they must be well-respected by people who are not followers. Then they won’t be trapped and disgraced by the devil.” Paul himself wouldn’t meet this qualification very well. He was frequently in trouble with religious leaders and government officials. This again shows that Paul is presenting a list of “things to look for” rather than absolute requirements.

## THE GREEKS HAD A WORD FOR IT

### ἐπίσκοπος

The word *episkopos* comes from the Greek roots *epi* and *skopos*, meaning “over” and “one who looks.” It refers to someone who looks after other people. The word *supervisor* is similar, because it comes from Latin words for looking over. “Overseer” is the English-root equivalent. *Episkopos* was eventually shortened to *piskop*, and then became *bishop*, and that is the traditional translation.

The New Testament uses several words for church leaders—overseer (or bishop), elder (presbyter) and shepherd (pastor). The terms seem to be interchangeable. Peter wrote to the elders and told them to be shepherds (pastors) watching over (like a bishop) the believers (1 Peter 5:1-2). Paul gave Timothy qualities of an *episkopos* (1 Tim. 3:2) but not for an elder, even though Ephesus had elders (1 Tim. 5:17). In Ti-

tus, the description of elders blends right into that of bishops (Titus 1:6-9).

The Bible does not describe exactly what these leaders were to do—that may depend on local circumstances. **co**

**Dr. Michael Morrison** teaches classes in the New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary. More information about the seminary can be found at: [www.gcs.edu](http://www.gcs.edu).

## Good assistants (verses 8-14)

Paul next describes the personal characteristics needed for another leadership role in the church—the Greek word is *diakonos*; the traditional translation is “deacon.” In many respects, they should be like people in the first group. These are qualities needed not just in church leaders, but in all mature Christians:

“Church officers should be serious. They must not be liars, heavy drinkers, or greedy for money. And they must have a clear conscience and hold firmly to what God has shown us about our faith.” Paul does not say that they should be able to teach; this indicates that deacons did not have a teaching role.

Paul suggests a probationary period: “They must first prove themselves. Then if no one has anything against them, they can serve as officers.” In one sense, all church leaders need to “prove themselves” through good personal conduct ahead of time. They need to be “doing the job” before they are formally appointed. Paul also seems to suggest here that the congregation has a role in approving such appointments.

Paul next mentions qualities needed by another group: “Women must also be serious. They must not gossip or be heavy drinkers, and they must be faithful in everything they do.” Paul will say more about the proper behavior of women in chapter 5. Here, he continues his description of a good deacon:

“Church officers must be faithful in marriage. They must be in full control of their children and everyone else in their home.” A person whose home life is chaotic would probably be unreliable in the church as well.

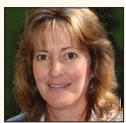
“I hope to visit you soon,” Paul writes. “But I am writing these instructions, so that if I am delayed, you will know how everyone who belongs to God’s family ought to behave.” Most likely, Paul was never able to visit Timothy in person, but his letter could address a few urgent needs. He saw a need to say more about Christian behavior.

Timothy knew well that grace was the basis of our salvation. But perhaps he needed to be encouraged to say more about the way that people should respond to God’s grace. The gospel of grace teaches that we should have good behavior (Titus 2:11-12). God is sharing his life with us; we are to let him live in us and change us. God gives us eternal life, yes, but if we are going to enjoy that life, then it matters a great deal about the way we choose to live. **co**

<sup>1</sup> Some translations say “married only once,” but this is misleading, since the Greek word was used for behavior within a marriage, not the number of marriages. A single person can be a good leader for the church; so can a person who has remarried after the death of a spouse or a divorce. For a lengthy study of whether women can have positions of leadership in the church, see [www.gci.org/church/women](http://www.gci.org/church/women).

**TAMMY’S TURN** By Tammy Tkach

## Oh Come, All Ye Wasteful



No kidding—I really did see “Oh Come, All Ye Wasteful” on a store window! The message is no longer subtle or unstated—’tis the season to be greedy. Retailers begin their advertising barrage earlier every year, inundating us with catalogs, commercials and email offers. More and more people buy gifts for themselves while shopping for others. All that matters, it seems, is that we buy as much as possible, whether we need it or not. I want to shut it all out, but it’s everywhere. I can’t escape.

No one likes the commercialism of Christmas, but what can we do? Is the craziness unavoidable—the frenzied shopping, decorating, parties, cooking, company and all the stress?

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.” I love the line “the world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.” The phrase “solemn stillness” makes me think of a universe-wide pause in all activity, everyone and everything holding their breath, as Jesus is born and the angels announce his birth with their amazing song.

Although I shop, cook and have company during the Christmas month, a big part of my celebration is stillness. I love to sit and look at my nativity set while listening to the great Christmas hymns. I enjoy the silent glow of lights from my tree and fireplace mantle. As I take time for solemn stillness and holy silence, I feel a

sense of expectation, of waiting with the whole creation for the coming of the Messiah.

The world waited for thousands of years for the One who would change the course of human history and usher in new covenant grace. It doesn’t seem much of a stretch to think a hush came over the angelic world as that moment drew near. It was a birth like no other, and nothing has been the same since.

The world is full of noise and clamor. It seems to me our Christmas celebrations would be much more meaningful if we celebrated with less noise and activity, rather than trying to cram in more. Get the shopping done early, decorate only a little, scale down the activities and spend the rest of your time in solemn stillness. Then, when it’s over, instead of being exhausted, you’ll start the new year with a sense of wonder at what happened two thousand years ago.

The Christmas message isn’t one of stress, exhaustion and frenzied activity. It’s a message of expectation and change, of an event so momentous the whole universe might indeed have held its breath as the Christ child made his appearance.

The last verse of the original lyrics of the hymn also looks forward to a future time,

“When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling,  
And the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.”

As we drink in the marvel of the Incarnation, let’s take time for some solemn stillness and then give back the angels’ song in joyous celebration. **co**

He who knows no hardships will know no hardihood. He who faces no calamity will need no courage. Mysterious though it is, the characteristics in human nature which we love best grow in a soil with a strong mixture of troubles.

**Harry Emerson Fosdick**

Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.

**Edmund Burke**

Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of men but from doing something worthwhile.

**Sir Wilfred Grenfell**

Every Christian has to decide whether he or she has a "stingy God" or a "generous God." The God that I read about in the Bible is an overwhelmingly generous Creator and Redeemer. I worry a lot about how evangelicals sometimes try to turn him into a stingy God. We try to contain him within our favorite theological systems and to limit his faithfulness to our favorite projects and causes. He will not be restricted in that manner. "His ways are not our ways."

**Richard Mouw**

There is too much tendency to attribute to God the evils that man does of his own free will.

**Agatha Christie**

Christianity is not primarily a moral code but a grace-laden mystery; it is not essentially a philosophy of love but a love affair; it is not keeping rules with clenched fists but receiving a gift with open hands.

**Brennan Manning**

To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.

**Karl Barth**

A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue but the parent of all other virtues.

**Cicero**

In teaching, you can't see the fruit of a day's work. It remains invisible, and remains so, maybe for 20 years.

**Jacque Bouzum**



Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.

**G. K. Chesterton**

We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone.

**Ronald Reagan**

Songs of all kinds make me feel thoughts of God—sometimes directly, more often indirectly. This appears to be a universal phenomenon. Songs can give rise to the sensation that almost all believers say they have experienced: the sudden "flash" of understanding that this world is not all that there is.

**Roy Williams, God Actually**

"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

**Dorothy Nevill.**

The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop and help this man, what will happen to me?" But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop and help this man, what will happen to him?"

**Martin Luther King Jr.**

## "Where did I read that?"

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