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The Simple Message of Jesus



Vol. 3, No. 11

November, 1983

—statement of faith—

This magazine is dedicated to three principal reference points of the Christian faith:

1. The centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ: The gospel centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ in history. Its principal modes of expression are those of law and covenant. In Jesus Christ God's final verdict on man has been rendered, and therefore the gospel anticipates fully God's decision in the final judgment. It is the window through which all life and history is to be seen and understood.

2. The authority, sufficiency, and clarity of the Bible: The Bible is exclusively authoritative in all matters of faith and practice. While its writers reflect their respective contemporary world views, these do not compromise the integrity of their witness. While we admit that all Scripture does not enjoy uniform clarity, we affirm that the Bible is essentially clear in its central message — the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. The priesthood of all believers: The gospel, through the Scriptures, is the central means by which God expresses himself in the world, and constitutes the basis on which all Christian fellowship is built. We believe that true fellowship is best expressed and preserved in a congregational setting. The primary purpose of church government is the orderly preservation, teaching, and promotion of the gospel message on the sole authority of Scripture alone, and we affirm all forms of government that prove compatible with this objective.

Our support of these objectives is without antagonism or prejudicial exclusiveness toward any individual or group. We feel a kinship with all who have embraced the good news of the cross, regardless of human distinctions such as race, color, denominational ties or forms of church government.

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—editorial—

The kingdom of God, we stated last month, is at the center of the Christian faith. Secondary issues should never displace this crucial idea.

A sense of proportion, of perspective is important in life. The person who goes job-hunting without some idea of his or her interests and abilities is courting disaster. To live, to make decisions, to survive in a complex world, we need to know our own set of nonnegotiables. Likewise, to recognize the heart of Christianity as the kingdom of God grants a perspective that starts to coordinate our life and faith.

It was the idea of the kingdom of God that Paul invoked when writing to the Roman church and rebuking them for abusing their freedom by using it in such a way as to cause others to fall. Such behavior damaged the reputation of the gospel.

Some weaker persons in the faith were being offended by the food that others were eating. Paul rebuked these stronger persons for not having greater respect for the sensibilities of those less established in the faith.

Paul's logic, or to coin a word, his theologic, is based on two key ideas. First, weaker persons must be treated with the utmost respect because they are persons for whom Christ died (Rom 14:15). The very God of the universe surrendered his life for such persons, in no way may they be treated callously or without respect.

Second, Paul writes that insistence on eating foods that offend one's brother demonstrates a lack of understanding of the nature of the kingdom of God. Here the Christian's priorities are spelled out clearly "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Rom 14:17).

The essence of the kingdom of God, writes Paul, is three things: the status of righteousness before God which he freely gives to those who believe; peace with God on account of being reconciled to him; and the joy that the Holy Spirit works in the life. Those who recognize these large priorities would never offend another citizen of Christ's kingdom of grace.

To belong to the kingdom of God means to acknowledge the rulership of God in the world, to receive his grace bestowed unworthily on us, and to live a life that indicates true priorities.

Calvin W. Edwards

The Simple Message of Jesus

Noel Mason

What was the message of Jesus? You may find it hard to believe but only a small percentage of the one thousand million Christians alive today would be able to answer that question correctly. It sounds incredible, but most Christians have only vague impressions about the central idea in the teachings of Jesus.

You may wish to discover this fact by submitting yourself and other Christian friends to the following simple test. Fill in the blank space after each of the well-known names with one or two words that sum up their key idea. You will find the answers at the end of this article.

1. Darwin _____
2. Marx _____
3. Freud _____
4. Einstein _____
5. Paul _____
6. Jesus _____

The fact that most Christians have no difficulty filling in the first five blanks but hesitate on the sixth becomes even more incredible when the key idea of Jesus can be found nearly one hundred times in the synoptic Gospels alone. This ignorance of the central idea in Jesus' teaching is even more surprising when we realize that "the one sure bit of historical content that **every** New Testament scholar, **skeptical** or **credulous**, will concede to the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth is the proclamation of **the kingdom of God**" (Bruce Vawter, **This Man Jesus**, p. 91). Why is it that most Christians are ignorant of this central idea in the teachings of Jesus? When Matthew, Mark and Luke write their story of Jesus, they use the expression "the kingdom of heaven" (or "God") almost one hundred times, and yet the phrase is strangely missing from many of the denominational creedal statements of today. Some years ago Dr. Leslie Weatherhead complained that:

The creeds of the church do not once mention the phrase that more than any other was on the lips of Jesus. . . the Thirty-Nine Articles elaborate doctrines about which Christ said nothing, but they are silent about the main theme of all his words. (*In Quest of a Kingdom*, p. 40)

Could this be one of the reasons why so many Christians today are ignorant of the simple message of Jesus? I have yet to see one denominational creed that faithfully reflects this striking emphasis on the kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus. It is a sad fact that many Christians today find themselves torn between two loyalties — loyalty to the historical teachings of Jesus on the one hand and loyalty to their particular denominational teachings on the other. I wonder what would happen if all Christians disposed of their denominational creedal statements which, for the most part, were formulated in an era of ugly sectarian "in-house" fighting, and simply returned to the historical Jesus.

Let us examine the simple message of Jesus.

The Proclamation of Jesus — Its Integrating Motif

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14, 15; see also Mt 4:12-17; Lk 4:14-21, 43)

The united witness of Matthew, Mark and Luke is that the central theme in the message of Jesus was the good news of the kingdom of God. This theme of the kingdom integrates all the words and deeds of Jesus. This is one reason why it is so important to understand this central motif. All of what Jesus said and did grew out of this basic conviction — "the kingdom of God is near." This one phrase sums up his whole ministry and his whole life's work. "The New Testament is virtually a commentary on this one single concept" (M. Grant, **Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels**, p. 11).

The Good News of the Kingdom of God — What It Meant

In the days of Jesus, Judaism was divided into a number of different religio-political sects. These included the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. With the presence of the Roman soldiers, the imposition of a double system of taxation, and the Zealots arming themselves in the hills of Galilee, Palestine was a political powder keg. Into this highly charged political atmosphere came Jesus with the startling proclamation that the kingdom of God was imminent. What did he mean by that expression?

The kingdom of God demands a radical conversion, a definitive turning from evil, and a resolute turning to God in total obedience.

The proper starting point for an understanding of Jesus' message is the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the expression "the kingdom of God" does not occur very frequently. What does occur is a variety of phrases that mean the same thing: God reigns, God is king, etc.

Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus understood the approaching reign of God as **good news**. For John the party was over, for Jesus it was only just beginning! More than five centuries before Jesus, Isaiah pictured a herald bringing "good tidings to Zion." This herald ran ahead of the exiles who were returning from Babylon. With powerfully evocative imagery, Isaiah depicted the people of Jerusalem straining their eyes, as they stood on the wall, to catch a glimpse of this herald as he appeared on the mountain peak. With the first glimpse, they broke forth into song:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Is 52:7; see also Ps 96:1-3, 10)

Your God, Israel's God - not those of Babylon or any other nation, is the one that "reigns." Good news indeed for those who had spent so many weary years in exile! It is obvious that Jesus had seen this connection between "good news" and the **reign of God** in Isaiah, for according to Luke his inaugurating sermon was based on a passage drawn from the same context:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Lk 4:18, 19)

So much for the "good news," but what did Jesus mean by the expression "the kingdom of God"? Once again the Old Testament provides the clue. The Bible is its own interpreter. Note the parallelism in Psalm 145:11ff:

They speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and tell of thy power,
to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

The text is an example of synonymous parallelism. The words "power" and "mighty deeds" are clearly parallel to "kingdom." The Old Testament concept of the kingdom of God is a dynamic one. The kingdom of

God is the inbreaking power of God. It refers to God's sovereign rule, his mighty deeds.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Old Testament prophets was that they looked toward the future. They looked for a moment in history when God would act decisively to visit and redeem his faithful community. Notice how Isaiah expresses this conviction:

On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will **reign** on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory. (Is 24:21-23)

Here, Isaiah looks forward to the moment when God will act decisively to punish the host of heaven, to imprison the kings of the earth, and to destroy evil. In short, to "reign."

In times of trial and bitter persecution, this Old Testament hope for the reign of God was intensified. This intense longing for the kingdom of God finds expression in the Kaddish prayer which pious Jews prayed in the synagogues in the times of Jesus. It is believed the prayer followed the following form:

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world which I has created according to his purpose. May he **establish his kingdom** in your days and in your lifetime and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time. And say ye, Amen. (D. Abernathy, *Understanding the Teaching of Jesus*, p. 46.)

The similarities of thought of this prayer with the Lord's prayer are plain to see. "Thy kingdom come" was on the lips of many pious Jews. The Gospels themselves afford an occasional glimpse of such faithful souls who were looking for the kingdom of God (Mk 15:43; Lk 23:51; Lk 2:25, 38; 14:15; 17:20; 19:11). Jesus used the phrase "kingdom of God" in Mark 1:15 just as it was used in the Kaddish prayer — a simple reference to God's kingly rule.

The Time Is Fulfilled

However, there is a unique, distinctive element in Jesus' understanding of the kingdom. We can sense it in his opening statement "the time is fulfilled." No one can miss the eschatological note of fulfillment in the proclamation of Jesus. According to Jesus, the fulfillment of the deepest longing of every pious Jew expressed in a multitude of images and symbols in the Old Testament was in the process of being fulfilled. Many commentators see the expression "the time is fulfilled" as a reference to Daniel 7:22. "And **the time came when the saints received the kingdom.**" One writer has said:

Of special importance for the background of the N.T. doctrine of the kingdom of God is the vision of Dan. 7, where the dominion of the successive world empires to which Israel was subject from the exile onward, represented by the beasts, is seen to be taken away, and the kingdom given to the "saints of the Most High" (7:18, 22, 25, 27), represented by "one like a son of man" (7:13). (O.E. Evans, "Kingdom," in *Interpreters' Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, p. 19.)

Jesus believed that Daniel 7 was being fulfilled. His preferred self-designation was "the son of man," a title drawn from Daniel 7. In this chapter "one like a son of man" (7:13) is given the kingdom. In the Gospels, Jesus is the Son of Man and identified his own followers as "the saints of the Most High" when he said to them "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32).

It was this idea of the fulfillment of Daniel's vision which excited the crowds. They were astonished at the awesome power and authority of Jesus. They sensed that something staggering, immense, overwhelming was happening. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 24:21). "The time is fulfilled. . ." They heard him say it in the synagogue. They heard him proclaim it on the hills of Galilee.

The Old Testament prophets thought in the framework of two distinct ages — this evil age, and the age to come. The distinctive, startling note in the teachings of Jesus was that the new age was already bursting into the present evil age. The new world was **already** at work. "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God **has come** upon you" (Lk 11:20; **see also** Mt 12:28).

There are passages which presuppose the actual identity of the kingdom with Christ:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, **for my sake and for the gospel**, who will not receive a hundredfold. . . (Mk 10:29)

The name and message of Jesus, or Jesus himself, are thus equated with the kingdom of God. Christians are to wait for the Son of Man and Lord **as** for the kingdom of God itself (see Mt 25:1; Lk 12:35f). Jesus understood that he was the eschatological agent of the kingdom.

The Radical Demand of the Kingdom

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent** and believe in the gospel. (Mk 1:15 RSV)

Jesus is saying that the new situation demands a certain action. He is saying something like this: The house **is** on fire: **jump** through the window. The first sentence contains a verb (is) in the **indicative** mood which describes the situation; the second sentence contains a verb (jump) in the **imperative** mood which calls for action. In the simple message of Jesus, "the

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kingdom of God is at hand" describes the **situation**, and "repent" describes the appropriate **action** to be taken. The imperative, "repent," is indissolubly bound up with the indicative, "the kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus' new call for repentance grows out of his distinctive eschatology — the kingdom of God is dawning.

According to Jesus, the kingdom of God demands a radical conversion, a definitive turning from evil, and a resolute turning to God in total obedience. The new situation demands a new way of life. Jesus' call is an "either/or" call, not a case of "both God and something else." His words are simple and clear, "No one can serve two masters; for **either** he will hate the one and love the other, **or** he will be devoted to the one and despise

the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt. 6:24). The commitment Jesus demands may involve forsaking one's home (Lk 9:58). The demand of the kingdom must take supremacy over normal human obligations (Lk 9:60). It may involve the rupture of the closest family relationships (Lk 9:61). He who loves father or mother more than he loves¹ Jesus is not worthy of the kingdom (Mt 10:34-39). In one breathtaking sentence, Jesus goes even further. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own . . . **life**, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26).

While Jesus used the most alluring and exciting symbols such as new wine, banquets, feasts, harvesttime, hidden treasures, pearls of great price, etc., he did not fail to remind his followers that identifying with him and the kingdom of God could bring suffering and death. On the way to Caesarea Philippi, he spoke to the multitude and to his disciples. He used the shuddering image of a "cross" to convey something of the cost of Christian discipleship (Mk 8:34). In Jesus' day, those carrying crosses were on their way to execution.

But the repentance and suffering demanded by the kingdom of God would not be a cheerless experience. Speaking to his disciples, Jesus said:

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets." (Lk 6:22,23)

On another occasion he said, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

Finally

In the last paragraph of his book **The Sayings of Jesus** T.W. Manson summarizes the good news of the kingdom. He writes:

The essence of the Gospel is that Jesus — His life and death and victory over death, His ministry, His teaching — Jesus is the divine act, the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose, the incarnation of the Kingdom of God. The ministry of Jesus is no mere prelude to the coming of the Kingdom, nor even a preparation for it: it **is** the Kingdom at work in the world. (T.W. Manson, **The Sayings of Jesus**, p. 345)

The central theme in the teachings of Jesus must be the central theme in the teachings of his disciples and messengers today. Great tragedies of church history have occurred in those periods when Jesus' theme of the kingdom of God was made secondary or was forgotten entirely. Whenever Christian teaching has been a divisive force in the body of Christ, it has been a long way from the teaching of the kingdom of God.

In this world with 750 million starving people, with two super powers locked into an insane, suicidal nuclear arms race, what could be more needed than a greater realization on earth of the kingdom of God? We must endeavor to have his will done on earth as it is in heaven. It's time to proclaim the simple message of Jesus! □

Answers:

- | | |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. Darwin | — Evolution |
| 2. Marx | — Communism |
| 3. Freud | — Psychoanalysis |
| 4. Einstein | — Theory of relativity |
| 5. Paul | — Righteousness of God |
| 6. Jesus | — The kingdom of God |

About Blossoms and Heartstrings

On April 11, 1962, I learned the meaning of a verse by Edward R. Sill which expresses one of life's hardest realities. That day I left South Africa to come to the good ole U.S. of A. (What a wonderful place this is.) My brother Jackie saw me off at the train station. I could not afford to fly by jet from Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg. Fortunately, however, I had discovered a shoestring, no-meals, prop-plane flight to London that departed from a neighboring country. Thus, the first leg of my journey was by train.

When departure time came we repeated good-byes and interspersed them with rather obvious advice and tried to control our fears. The groaning of the coach as it moved into the night was drowned out by the terrible groaning uttering within. For several hours the train steamed and howled across the African veldt until I fell asleep.

At about midnight there was a sudden noise in the coach. The train had stopped. I heard my name called. Then above the complaints of my fellow passengers I distinguished the voice of Jackie. He'd been following the train in his little car waiting for it to halt. We had less than a minute together.

"You're crazy, pal. Why are you here?" I asked.

"I've come for one last look," he replied, kissed me and jumped off.

It was then I knew what my plans were doing. By experience I understood the tough meaning of a verse memorized in childhood:

"These clumsy feet, still in the mire,
go crushing blossoms without end;

These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
among the heartstrings of a friend."

One of the most trying facts of life is the truth that we inevitably hurt each other with our good intentions, and our noblest aspirations. Sometimes with eyes closed, but more often with eyes half open we wreak havoc on the feelings, plans and hopes of people we hold as friends.

Once again I am painfully aware of my clumsy boots and hard, well-meaning hands. I walk on blossoms, rip at heartstrings — but don't quite know what else to do. This month our family makes the return trip to South Africa. Jackie is still there. That helps. Our friends are still here. That hurts. We go so that I may finish my doctoral dissertation and to take a little "R & R" (rest and recreation), away from the battlefield. I worry that our departure will hurt GNU.

Permit me to share a concern with you. As I do so, bear in mind that it probably reflects no more than the neurosis of a worried mother hen. Some will, no doubt, construe my leaving as a vote of no-confidence in GNU, as a relinquishing of the cause of truth it stands for, as a denial of the respect and regard I have for my colleagues in this ministry. To those who conjecture thus I would simply say, sorry, but you're dead wrong.

There is never any shame in the gospel. Therefore, my support will continue. I hope you will continue to hear my drawl on cassette and read my ruminations in the magazine every once in a while. GNU is a positive ministry worthy of my support, and yours as well.

But now back to the poem. Are matters really that hopeless? Is there really nothing we can do about the crushed blossoms and the rummaged heartstrings? Yes, there is. We can commit ourselves to the sovereignty of our kind Father. He can undo our knots as easily as a father disentangles the shoelaces of his little child. All things do work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose. Then we must accept life. We must have the courage to grow more flowers. We must have the courage to dangle those heartstrings.

— Smuts van Rooyen



—thank you—

If you don't have at least a little tear in the corner of your eye after reading Smuts' letter, you're made of tougher stuff than I am. Who else could say good-bye so poetically, so sincerely, so beautifully? We have all grown to love Smuts and his family, and saying good-bye surely is like trampling on Springtime's verdant growth.

I know that I write not only on behalf of the whole staff at GNU, but also thousands of subscribers, when I confess that we have been richly blessed by the ministry and friendship of Pastor van Rooyen. His sermons have never failed to challenge our stagnant thinking, to speak to the issues our hearts tell us are urgent, and to make Jesus Christ attractive and real.

Smuts always insisted that preachers should not only give the "specifications" of their theology, but also the "benefits." Smuts did just that — and changed our lives because of it.

Words seem so shallow, so thin, when we come to moments of great intensity. If there were some greater way to say thank you we would use it. If there were some warmer way to say farewell, we would use it. So with these few fragile words we hug you good-bye and wish you every happiness as you set up home in South Africa. Tennyson's words of his beloved friend, Arthur Henry Hallam express the feelings of many: "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

— Calvin Edwards

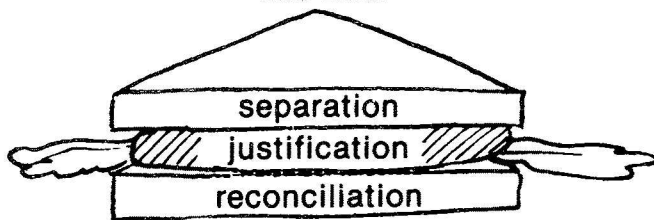


HOW TO ARRIVE BEFORE YOU LEAVE Rom. 3:24

PART TWO — THE SALVATION SANDWICH

Gillian Ford

The book of Romans is like a map with instructions on how to get to heaven and the landmark text is found in Romans 3:24 — “they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” If that’s a bit hard for you to chew on, let’s look closer at the sandwich. It looks like this:



We’ve talked about separation before. We’ve said how awful it is to be apart from someone you love, and all alone. It was the hardest thing in the world for God to work out a way to save men after Adam and Eve sinned and separated themselves, and us, from God.

God hated separation, and wanted reconciliation, the other half of the sandwich. Don’t be afraid of these big words. They only need to be explained and they are easy to understand. Reconciliation is a hard word to spell but it just means “make up.” You’ve probably seen your parents have an argument and then later they make up and kiss each other. Some parents think it’s worth a good argument just to have the pleasure of making up. Sometimes mother gets the kiss and father gets the make-up.

But God’s problem was much harder. To go from separation to reconciliation, he had to find a sandwich filling — something to bond the two together. That’s where justification came in, another of those hard words. Justification is saying someone is innocent. That’s pretty difficult when they aren’t, and the trouble is we are all guilty.

2 King David had a similar problem. He had a son called Absalom. Absalom was naughty a lot of the time, but David loved him dearly. A king in those days was also a judge. It meant that he had to punish evil wherever he found it. Most of the time this wasn't hard, but when Absalom went wrong it was very hard for David to judge him because he was his son. Yet Absalom had killed his brother and should have been punished.

The judge inside King David knew it, but the father inside King David hated to punish the son he loved. The father won over the judge and Absalom was not chastised. After that, Absalom did not show any sorrow for his evil deed and he tried to take the kingdom from his father. That was a very serious thing to do. It was called treason, and then, as now, in some countries, the punishment for treason was death. It caused great confusion among the people and broke David's heart. But Absalom didn't care about his father's heart. He didn't love David. He only loved himself. "My dad is soft," he thought to himself. "He won't punish me." I can do what I like and get away with it."

Perhaps if David had punished Absalom earlier, he would never have been a traitor. But as it was, David's men caught Absalom and took his life. David hadn't wanted that. How he cried when he found out. "Oh, my son, my son Absalom, would to God that I

had died for thee." But David couldn't die for Absalom. It was very hard for David to be both judge and father, to be both just and loving. He never did work it out.

God's problem was very similar, but he found an answer. He had rebel children — you and me. He was a king, a judge, and a father. He had to punish our sins and be a just judge, but he loved us and didn't want us to die.

He saw us separated from him by our sins. He wanted to-reconcile us, to make up with us. Yet we were guilty. We had broken his law and deserved to die. What could he do? Right back then when the earth was made, he talked it over with Jesus. Together they made a plan for they were part of each other.

"Father," said Jesus, "I will take their place. I will go to earth and live the life of obedience that Adam failed to live. I will succeed where Adam failed. Instead of looking at their sinful lives, you can look at my perfect life. And besides that, I will die for them. I will die their death and you will count it as though they had died."

You could call it a heavenly swap. Jesus took our place and we take his. If you will trust in Jesus to take away your sins, God will say that you are not guilty. He can do this only because Jesus has paid the price of your sins on your behalf. He looks at Jesus, not at us, and puts our sins on his account.

THE ADVENTURES OF BENJAMIN-

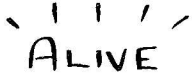




By B.C.M.



THANKSGIVING ALPHABET

Each two lines rhyme. Fill in the blanks.
Answers on back page of children's section.

3

A	is for	 ALIVE	we're glad we're not dead
B	is for	 BIBLE	for blessings we've _ _ _ _
C	is for		Jesus died there for _ _
D	is for	DADDY	who gives us a fuss
E	is for	 EYES	I can see as I write
F	is for	FOOD	I enjoy every _ _ _ _
G	is for	GARDEN	where we love to play
H	is for	HORSES	who love to eat _ _ _
I	is for	MYSELF	without whom I wouldn't be
J	is for	JESUS	who really loves _ _
K	is for	 KITTENS	so cuddly and warm
L	is for	LOVE	which softens each _ _ _ _
M	is for	MOMMY	whose love is so deep
N	is for	NIGHT	which brings me my _ _ _ _
O	is for	 ONION	makes lots of things tasty
P	is for	PRAYERS	mine are often too _ _ _ _
Q	is for	 QUESTIONS ??	which we kids ask all _ _ _



THANKSGIVING ALPHABET

4

R

is for

REST

for which Mom has to pray

S

is for



don't be grumpy or mean

T

is for



which I have to keep _ _ _ _ _

U

is for



to keep off the wet

V

is for

VEGETABLES

which we'd like to forget

W

is for

WATER

without it we can't live

X

is for

XMAS

when we learn how to _ _ _ _

Y

is for



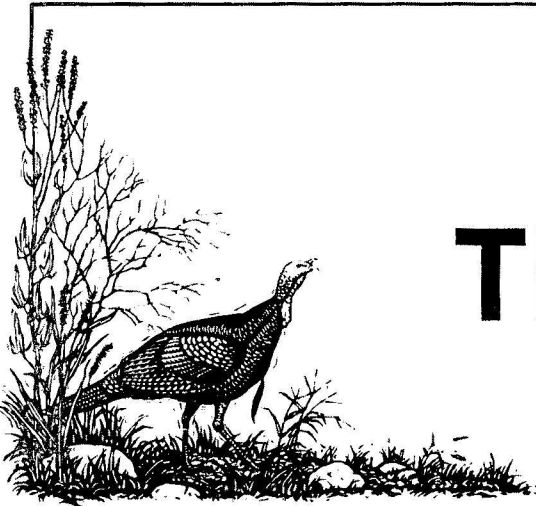
without you I'd be alone

Z

is for

ZIPPER

so I can dress on my _ _ _



Happy Thanksgiving!

Good News for Kids is dedicated to promoting the message and spirit of the gospel for children.

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Editor: Gillian Ford
Assistant Editor: Smuts van Rooyen

ANSWERS TO THANKSGIVING ALPHABET

B = read

C = us

F = bite, or mite

H = hay

J = me

L = storm

N = sleep

P = hasty

Q = day

T = clean

X = give

Z = own

Centering Your Life

Brad McIntyre

I remember the day I abruptly left home on my motorcycle with high hopes of becoming a famous songwriter in Nashville, Tennessee. I was twenty years old, bored with my job, and tired of my home town. There I was with my guitar, a small duffel bag, and a head full of dreams, driving down the road to "Music City, USA." Success was just around the corner.

But dreams are often deceptive because they are not always related to reality. Once in Nashville I was forced to face some hard facts: Who do I know here? Where will I live and work? How do I begin to make contacts? As time passed I thought of my family, my girl friend, my own life. The idle hours compounded my confusion and loneliness. Is this what I really want? It soon became obvious to me that in a moment of frustration I had acted on impulse. This trip to Nashville was another inspired folly of mine "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." What would it take to get my life in order?

In the end despair brought insight. I realized my greatest need was not a hit song but a "determining center," that is, a consistent reference point to give purpose and direction to my life. Music had become a vehicle expressing my inner emptiness. It was futile to expect that it could resolve that emptiness. No, music could not function as the center of my life. It could only express whether or not I had a center. After three days I left Nashville as abruptly as I had left home.

The Need for a Determining Center

Imagine the confusion and dissonance of a symphony orchestra in which each musician plays only what he or she feels like playing without regard to harmony, tempo, pitch, or theme. Such is the situation when life lacks a determining center. There is potential. Possibilities appear. Yet desires are in disarray. Disruptive drives pull a person in several directions at once. Conflicting passions compete for their fair share of one's energy while offering only temporary, superficial contentment. There is no organizing force, no reference point, to bring unity to life.

Without a determining center our daily battles also seem absurd for we fail to see where they fit into the overall war plan. Life appears to be a puzzling maze without any discernible pattern. Despite our hustle and bustle our activities are intense yet uncoordinated.

The Bible supports this analysis of the human predicament. It portrays us as off center: we are not what we essentially were created to be, we have departed from the original plan, we have lost our determining center. Playing in the background of our daily existence is the theme "Paradise Lost." For each of us there is a squandered past we cannot erase and



"Faith is the abandonment of man's own security and the readiness to find security in the unseen beyond, in God." — Rudolf Bultmann

consequently, an uncertain future we fear to face. Furthermore, the regrets of a changeless yesterday and the fear of an impending tomorrow intersect in the anxiety of today. **Today** we are caught in the cross fire of what God intended us to be and what we are. **Today** we experience the frustration of being cut off from God to whom we belong. We are off center because we are no longer God-centered. Like a ship with neither rudder nor compass we drift aimlessly on the sea of life pretending not to be lost yet unable to return to our original port.

Perhaps the most graphic description of our fallenness is found in Romans 1:18-32. Paul says God's wrath is being directed toward the godlessness and wickedness of this world. God has revealed his character, power, and divine nature, yet he has been snubbed — jilted, as it were, in favor of "images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (v 23). According to Paul, a "great exchange" has taken place. Humankind has exchanged the glory of God for idols, the truth of God for a lie, natural relations for unnatural, and the knowledge of God for a depraved mind. If there were such a thing as a spiritual New York Stock Exchange we would all be bankrupt! We have indeed made many bad trades.

Paul's climactic summary of life without a determining center is found in verse 25, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, **and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.**" The off centered life is nothing more than crass creature-worship. It is the centering of our affections on self rather than on God. Our will preempts God's will as we try to manipulate reality to serve our own purposes without reference to God's purposes. With God dethroned self is king.

Brad McIntyre has a MA in Religion from Andrews University and is presently studying for a Master of Divinity at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois. He has written and recorded several Christian songs.

Ironically, however, the self-centered life leads ultimately to self-destruction. This existential "backfire" is described by Jesus in his famous words, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it" (Lk 9:24). Jesus is referring to our desire to control our destiny apart from God; to wrap up reality in a nice manageable box and be master of circumstances without annoying intrusions from our Creator. But it won't work. In the very moment we assert our independence and grasp at the life we so desperately crave it slips through our fingers. Self is a fickle center promising the moon but delivering green cheese. As Tillich says, "The attempt of the finite self to be the center of everything gradually has the effect of its ceasing to be the center of anything" (**Systematic Theology**, vol. 2, p. 62).

Why is this so? Why is the self-centered life actually self-destructive? Perhaps the simplest answer is the most profound: we were not created to live self-centered lives. God has ordained the universe to operate on the principle of self-sacrificing love. To give is more blessed than to receive because that is what God is like and we have been made in his image — made for love. Jesus shows us a God who lives to give and dies in giving. Calvary reveals the nature of God's lordship as self-giving love. The ministry of Christ mirrors the character of God who comes to us not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. God has designed us for this type of loving service and has decreed that lasting contentment is found in giving, not taking.

If there were such a thing as a spiritual New York Stock Exchange we would all be bankrupt! We have indeed made many bad trades.

Another way to view this is to realize that God has created us with more than an inner dimension. Human existence must also have a vertical dimension (God) and a horizontal dimension (Neighbor). Jesus summarized the two great commandments of life as, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39).

Ideally, life is to be lived in intimate relation to God and neighbor. The self-centered person lacks this outward focus and views all relationships (whether with God or neighbor) from a "what's in this for me?" perspective. The goal of life is changed from service to self-gratification. There is obedience to unlimited desires spent in the service of self. And these desires run contrary to each other so that the person is fragmented. In an attempt to restore inner unity one tries to draw all of one's world into oneself and give nothing costly in return. Power, control, domination characterize the life. Because the focus of the heart, mind, and will has shifted inward, because the outgoing tributaries of love and affection are stopped up, and because life is viewed as a process of taking, grasping, and possessing, self-centeredness rots the timbers of our existence until we eventually collapse into a heap of fragmented pieces, disconnected from

God, neighbor, and self. Thus, the self-centered life is actually an off-centered life resulting in ultimate self-loss.

Finding a Determining Center

Someone once compared love to a butterfly: the harder one tries to catch it the more it eludes one; but if one sits still it eventually lands within reach. The discovery of our determining center is similar to the discovery of true love. We find love when we allow ourselves to be loved. We find our determining center when we drop our defenses, cease our attempts to control reality, and allow ourselves to be open to God. It is not a passive giving up on our part, but a courageous self-abandonment to another Master who promises never to abandon us.

Self-abandonment is the central idea behind Jesus' words, "Whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Lk 9:24). This verse could be paraphrased, "Whoever abandons his life to my Lordship will possess true life." We must release our chokehold on destiny and abandon ourselves to the future of God.

The Psalmist wrote, "My times are in thy hand... save me in thy steadfast love!" (Ps 31:15-16). This is the language of self-abandonment. He commits his situation to God and trusts in God's loving care to rescue him from destruction. His focus is God-ward since he has already acknowledged his helplessness (vv 9-13). From this we understand that self-abandonment means casting ourselves on the mercy and goodness of God and trusting him for the wholeness we cannot achieve by our own efforts.

Another biblical example of self-abandonment is Abraham, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (Heb 11:8). Abraham accepted God's plan for his life. He did not have answers to all his questions, but God was his determining center and that was good enough for him. As the song says, "I don't know about tomorrow, but I know who holds my hand."

When Jesus called, "Follow me," Luke says the disciples "left everything and followed him" (Lk 5:11). At a later time Jesus announced, "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:33). The call to discipleship is thus a call for self-abandonment. To give up "everything" for Jesus is to abandon our plans, dreams, talents, interests, and affections to him to be used or scrapped according to God's will. We must reach the point where our security does not reside in the things we possess but in the One who possesses us.

In summary, courageous self-abandonment to God is the only way to regain our determining center and bring unity to our fragmented lives. The back alleys and exquisite mansions of the world (and everything in between) are inhabited by individuals who know this but never act on it. Perhaps they feel the risks of self-abandonment are too great. Perhaps the love of self is too strong. Nevertheless, self-abandonment to God remains the primary condition for repossessing our determining center. But we must remember that self-abandonment is not a path we travel to reach God. It is an opening up of ourselves to the God who has blazed a path to us and who now stands at the door of our heart, knocking persistently, lovingly. □

Q. What does it mean to repent? This seems to be stressed in the teachings of Jesus and John the Baptist, but I hardly hear it mentioned today.

A. You're right. Repentance was very important to John the Baptist, and to Jesus.

Matthew's account of John the Baptist's ministry commences with the word "Repent." The idea is very prominent in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke as they describe the work of the Baptist in preparing for the coming Messiah (see Mt 2:3, 8, 1; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3, 8). While John's work was largely one of conviction and exhortation — one might say, a work of raising persons' religious sensibilities in readiness for the teachings of Jesus — it was not devoid of the gospel. Recollecting some decades after the Baptist's teaching, Luke could write that John "preached the good news" (Lk 3:18).

And we should not think that this was just the austere message of an ascetic preacher. He was preparing the way for Jesus, and this message aided precisely this task. The stress of John on repentance was closely associated with confession, baptism and forgiveness. All these elements were prominent in the teachings of Jesus.

While explicitly linking the initiation of Jesus' ministry to that of the Baptist, Mark used terminology to describe the Messiah's teaching identical to that he used about John. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15, see also v 4). The evangelists definitely saw a continuity between the teaching of John, including his stress on repentance, and that of Jesus.

Jesus could sum up his whole mission as a calling of sinners to repentance (Lk 5:32). On one occasion he stated emphatically that those who did not repent would perish (Lk 13:1-5). When he sent out the twelve disciples to preach, Mark recorded that their

message was one of repentance (Mk 6:12). Paul in Athens declared that God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Repentance was crucial to the preaching of the early church — because it was crucial in the teachings of Jesus.

But what is repentance? It translates a Greek word which basically means to turn around, to undergo a reversal, to think differently about something. Repentance means to change attitudes about God. It means dropping our defences and letting God approach us in his graciousness. It means to be humbled, to surrender, to fall into the arms of God. For the Baptist's audience it meant rather concrete social actions — a turning from a selfish, worldly mode of living to one characterized by the generosity of God (Lk 3:1-20).

Is repentance then a condition that we must fulfill which makes us eligible to receive forgiveness and acceptance with God? It would seem not. For Jesus and the apostles, repentance represented the route, the way of acceptance, but not its precondition. Rather than saying, "This is what you must do. . . ." it seems to me that Jesus was saying, "This is the way it happens. . . ."

When people hear the good news, they will repent. As a lost child moves toward his distant mother, so the lost individual, having caught a glimpse of his Savior, moves toward him. To move thus is to repent. It is to turn from self-reliance to a God-centered life.

I cannot help but feel that we are a little impoverished for not being confronted so frequently with the message of repentance. We all wander from home at times and that old-time evangelical call for repentance and reconsecration to God needs to ring constantly in our ears. After all, repentance is en route to believing the good news (Mk 1:15).
— Calvin Edwards

Q. I feel overwhelmed. I find my beliefs challenged and some of my convictions are proving to be wrong. What should I do?

A. Every thinking person experiences some of what you describe. So take courage. Here are some guidelines to help.

Decide that the Scriptures alone will be your rule for judging right from wrong. They are plain enough. Your perplexity can never be cleared up as long as anything else is also a criterion. Stand by the Bible. No other source determines what is truth. Commit yourself to the Word. It alone is the judge.

Accept the validity of your **own** evaluations for yourself. Make up your mind on the evidence as **you** see it. You may not be right but no one else can think for you or make up your mind for you. Do not let the weaknesses of the mind (which we all have) prevent you from taking your stand. Only you can think for you. You are stuck with yourself. Exercise courage in spite of your intellectual fears. Avoid double-mindedness like the plague.

Remain open (but not wishy-washy) after you have made a decision. Keep reading, questioning, praying, searching. In doing so don't let opposing opinions throw you. The mind does not need 100% truth to make a decision. It needs only 51% truth. It is the **weight** of evidence that counts. If you wait until everything is totally clear before making up your mind, you will always be undecided. 51% is enough.

Sometimes life gives us the choice not between right and wrong, but between wrong and not-so-wrong. That's tough to handle. So be practical. Do what is spiritually best for you. Do not make decisions that spiritually impoverish you.

Remember that Jesus covers your unrighteousness and also your lack of wisdom. What a friend!

— Smuts van Rooyen

What's Going On?

From time to time we are asked, "What has GNU been doing lately?" As for myself, I have not done too much except work about 15 hours per day at the office. Keeping up with our printing and mailing schedule alone is almost a full-time job. Yesterday I ordered over 60,000 envelopes — enough to last till mid-January.

But more important is the actual preaching and teaching ministry of our full-time pastoral staff. Beyond research and writing for magazine articles and public presentations, GNU ministers have taken meetings during the last month or so in places such as Bishop, Fresno, Kingsburg, Auburn, St. Helena, and Monterey, CA; Anchorage, AK; and Bozeman, MT.

Earlier in the year overseas trips were made to Australia, South Africa and Europe.

In most cases persons in these places have given generously of their resources to meet the travel expenses involved. This means that large sections of the GNU budget are not consumed with overhead costs. We are very grateful for this sacrifice on the part of those to whom we minister.

In the future meetings are scheduled for Walla Walla and Seattle, WA; Berrien Springs, MI; and Toronto, Canada.

In coming months GNU will probably focus more on ministry via radio and print with a few major seminars each year. One way or another we continue to proclaim God's wonderful word of grace.

Share God's Word

Good News Unlimited is committed to trying to make the word of God relevant and meaningful in our contemporary world. We do this through a variety of media — particularly radio, magazines, seminars, and cassette messages.

Of course we are always anxious to discover new persons who will benefit from our ministry. And for this purpose we look to you who already participate in our programs and share with us a love for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have friends within the listening area of the stations listed in the radio log, please invite them to tune in. Word of mouth is an excellent way to advertise.

Also, if you know persons whom you believe would enjoy our monthly magazine, why not share a copy with them, or ask us to send a sample copy — or instruct us to just go ahead and add them to our permanent list.

Did You Know?

Did you know that we get virtually no negative mail? We publish almost 100% of the critical mail we receive. If you have a constructive criticism, please let us know. We value your input.

We get almost no requests for deletions from our mailing list. Perhaps this is because subscriptions are free and persons who receive **Good News Unlimited** but do not want it, simply throw it away! But it is encouraging to know that almost all of the names we delete are because the mail is undeliverable due to address changes or inaccuracies.

Toronto, Canada Seminar

Dr. Desmond Ford will join with Dr. Paul Porter for a seminar in Toronto, Canada on the weekend of November 25 & 26. Paul Porter is the popular pastor of a local congregation in the Toronto area.

The theme of the meeting will be the second coming of Christ. This program is sponsored by the Canadian office of Good News Unlimited.

Daily Program Goes Ahead

Considerable research has convinced us conclusively that to be effective in the use of radio, GNU must move to a daily format. With this in view we built a small sound room into our new office and purchased equipment for recording, editing and production.

One of the attractive aspects of a daily program is that it generally pays its own way within a year of broadcasting in a particular area. This means that the financial drain on our sponsors is lessened and new cities can constantly be entered with the gospel message.

Earlier this year Smuts van Rooyen agreed to become the speaker for this new quarter-hour program. In the past months preparations have been underway for the production of this program. The equipment has been set up and tested. Stan Bisel has been hired as our technician. We have initiated extensive contacts with professionals in the religious broadcasting industry.

As you have noticed on page 6, Smuts is leaving to return to South Africa. We are disappointed, but as Smuts himself said, life goes on and we must learn to live with our circumstances.

Being totally convinced that we can best serve God and effectively proclaim his kingdom through a shorter, daily radio program, GNU hopes to proceed as soon as possible with the new program. Dr. Desmond Ford will be the speaker.

Later this month GNU will be having a two-day planning session with the agency that produces and markets the radio programs of Charles Swindoll and Dr. James Dobson. As we go ahead with this important project we plan to approach it in a very strategic and highly professional manner. We need your prayers and support as this new ministry is designed and implemented.

In Australia & New Zealand

MINISTER APPOINTED

Good News Unlimited is pleased to announce that Pastor Ron Allen has been appointed to head up its work in Australia and New Zealand. It is anticipated that he will take up his new responsibilities some time in January.

Pastor Allen comes to Good News with a background in evangelism and pastoral work, and the reputation of being a deep Bible student.



His first field of labour was Queensland where he served as an evangelist for some years. He then went into pastoral/evangelistic ministry in the U.S.A. Most recently he has been working in north New South Wales.

Ron and Carmen Allen have two children — Andrew 8, and Jean 6 — and it is planned that the family will locate somewhere in the Sydney area.

Early in the new year (possibly February/March) Doctor Ford and Calvin Edwards will come to Australia for a two-week, three-week-end itinerary at which time they will introduce Pastor Allen to GNU supporters in as many centres as possible.

Ron is keen to meet with all who are interested in the work of GNU just as soon as he can, and one of his first plans is to travel widely throughout both Australia and New Zealand to do this. To enable him to plan such an itinerary, he would appreciate hearing from all who would like to have him visit with them.

In the past, GNU seminars and meetings have been held only in the major cities, due to the limitations of time. Now there will be opportunity for much smaller groups to have the benefit of this ministry. If he can possibly fit in to do so, Ron wants to visit where there might be even just one isolated family or individual feeling the need of fellowship. So please do put pen to paper and invite him to your area. At the present time letters should be addressed to Pastor R. Allen, P.O. Box 65, Chadstone, Victoria, 3148.

We are delighted Ron is joining the GNU Staff and are certain he will become loved and respected as he ministers in this field.

NZ Report

The full series of the 64 Dr. Desmond Ford Radio tapes begun by Radio Rhema in June 1982, finished in August this year. As the new series were not ready by then, Rhema kindly repeated the first 12 messages in anticipation of receiving them within that period. Unfortunately they are still not ready (due to pressure of work at GNU HQ) so they have had to schedule another speaker in that time slot, and will review the situation at the end of the next three months.

I wonder if any of the regular listeners who will be disappointed at not being able to hear Dr. Ford on Friday night, have ever written to Radio Rhema and expressed their appreciation of his messages and the splendid service that the Station provides?

With the purchase of a fast Tape Copier, made possible by a generous donation of one of the GNU committee members, all tape copying is now done in NZ off the originals sent to us from the States. This has meant a great saving in costs for us in NZ, and although adding a little extra work, has made the operation more efficient.

During the year seven Local Agents were appointed throughout NZ, and these men and women have been quietly active in promoting the Gospel and lending out the radio tapes.

Many Christian folk write to us and express their appreciation of the help they get from the messages of Dr. Ford.

We would like to extend to all our listeners and faithful supporters in NZ, God's richest blessings and our best wishes from your Good News Committee in Christchurch.

Brian Murphy

October Donation

Thank you to the anonymous donor who sent us \$19 in October.

Entire Range of the Gospel

Sirs:

My wife, my children and I are compulsive listeners to your religious broadcast at 9:00 a.m. on Radio WWDJ, Hackensack, New Jersey.

Our introduction to your honest theological repository awakened and spurred our concern about aspects of the cross.

Since our introduction, we have found that you speak inductively on the entire range of the gospel and the important facts concerning the need for the gospel.

As a family we were raised on the theology of Anglicanism and its concepts which even today we respect, but we will not be ignorant of other ideas. I am requesting the tapes announced on your program "From Pentecost to the Cross." We shall be extremely grateful to receive them. You may notify us of the cost.

Empson A. Coard
Brooklyn, New York

The Supreme Guru

Sirs:

Many, many thanks for your prompt reply and the materials you supplied so generously.

The messages are very precious and helpful. They come to us as water of life flowing from the enthroned Christ. I will read them again and again and will pass them on to interested persons. I praise the Lord for using you to meet a deep need among his sheep, and pray that he will make available Chinese translations of GNU publications for Chinese churches.

As I have discovered the glory of the gospel through GNU, I am very eager to learn more of it and will consume any literature that you can send.

At present I am unable to buy your

tapes and so I would greatly appreciate receiving more of the transcriptions of the radio and tape messages if they're freely available. I would also welcome any old, unwanted copies of gospel literature should any brethren wish to donate it. The Word is so precious that our hunger for it will be correspondingly great. Please send as many as you can and please introduce other gospel-centered journals (with their addresses).

Before I came to know the gospel, I was searching for God through Yogic meditation and worshipping an Indian guru, without any significant result. But the mercy of Christ finally led me to the chief cornerstone which I had spurned. In his light I saw that Jesus Christ alone is the Supreme Guru who gives liberation to souls bound by sin and the powers of evil.

Now I am glad to have been chosen by my gracious Lord and rejoice in his provision of spiritual theological education through GNU. He is using your written words as well as your splendid example to encourage me to serve him in the gospel ministry. I am considering his call to full-time ministry. Please pray about this. I would be glad to be informed of a seminary in Australia.

May Christ be with you still as you are led to serve him.

Phang Wee Min
Malaysia

Sure of Salvation

Sirs:

I am a Christian who has just recently discovered Christ and what he did for us. Although I had been a church member on and off through the years, I never realized the simplicity of the gospel. It seems to have been well-hidden.

This saddens me, because I know there are thousands of others going through

what I had been going through for years — the awful, horrible feeling of not knowing what salvation is and never really being sure. You're always in the pits of despair, working harder and harder, yet sinking with each step.

My father, whom I hadn't had contact with for years renewed our relationship and shared with me what the gospel truly is. Christ released me from a bondage that is worse than any physical pain a human could endure. To follow Christ out of love and be released from "working for salvation" is a freedom that can only be expressed in wanting other people to know Christ, a loving, caring God. For the first time in my life I really want to know Christ. I'm not afraid of him anymore.

Your magazine is wonderful and I would appreciate a subscription. It gives me food for thought and encouragement along with the intellectual study I enjoy. Thank you very much.

Kathy Glaser
Puyallup, Wyoming.

Excellent Tract

Sirs:

I want to express my appreciation for your magazine. The last three issues have been particularly good. Most of all I appreciated Smuts van Rooyen's article "Free and Not So Easy — But Still Free". This would make an excellent tract to add to your series.

The Book Reviews and the Questions and Answers are always very interesting.

Thank you for your ministry, and please come and visit us again soon. I am sure many here in Australia look forward with keen anticipation to your next Seminar. God bless and be with you all.

Mitcham, Vic.

Good News Unlimited

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