Jesus Believes It Is Possible!

by Greg Ogden, D.Min
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Taken from *The Essential Commandment: A Disciple’s Guide to Loving God and Others* by Greg Ogden

Would Jesus ask something of us that couldn’t be done?

At the center of all the biblical commands and at the very core of “everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20), Jesus declares that we are to love God with everything we’ve got and love our neighbors in the same way that we cherish ourselves.

Really? Is this possible?

The energy behind the writing of this curriculum comes from an insight that is quite frankly embarrassing. It is embarrassing because I should know better. At first, the insight doesn’t seem very dramatic. In fact, every time I have shared this personal “revelation” with others I have been sheepishly apologetic. But here is the amazing truth: Jesus actually thinks we can become like him. Jesus actually believes that it is possible for frail and deeply flawed human beings to focus our complete affection on God and others.

The key word here for me is possible. I had unconsciously given up the possibility of actually doing what Jesus commanded. No, I had never consciously thought or said, “Jesus, I think you’re an idealistic dreamer,” or “Jesus, you can only expect so much from flawed humanity.” I was not even aware that I had dismissed Jesus’ belief in me. But what had taken over my spirit in my attempt to be authentic was a focus on where I had fallen short of Jesus’ call. In my desire to make sure that I was not deceiving myself about my capacity for sin, I had given up the upside possibility that the character of Jesus could actually take over my life.

The Impossible Possibility

Because of this insight, I have come to realize that we need to hold two truths in dynamic tension. On the one hand, we need to be rigorously honest about our shortcomings. Part of what it means to live in the light of Christ is allowing him to shine that light in the hidden regions of our soul. Yet at the same time we need to hold to the compelling vision that this same light illuminates our path so that we can live into our potential of being God- and people-lovers. There is a Hasidic saying that advises us to go around with a piece of paper in each pocket, with one piece reading “I am dust and ashes,” and the other, “For me the world was created.” Yes, we are finite and broken people as well as (continued on page 10)
Are you celebrating your new life in Christ? Shouldn’t we be joyful as we live our lives conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ? In this issue we bring you several joyful and encouraging articles to challenge you, train you, and help you grow in Christ.

Greg Ogden challenges us to actually live up to what Jesus asked of us. He calls us to focus on two hard truths: that of our shortcomings and that of our God-given potential. This insight can bring new energy to our lives of discipleship, encouraging us “to become so aligned with Jesus’ heart that our automatic responses are simply in line with God’s heart.”

Our profile this month is of Eric Liddell, the famed Olympic runner portrayed in *Chariots of Fire*. Less well known, but in many ways more powerful, is his life as a missionary in China after the Olympics. Joel Woodruff’s article on Liddell’s life is a captivating example of the joys and challenges of following Jesus no matter what the cost.

In a challenge to today’s world of cynicism and doubt, Art Lindsley makes a strong case for the authenticity of the Gospels and shows how we can use his reasoning in conversations with our friends who have questions.

In “God’s Sari,” Jim Phillips, director of CSLI Annapolis, describes how God is weaving a beautiful human tapestry in Annapolis, touching the lives of the students at St. John’s and the U.S. Naval Academy, the Statehouse, and churches and businesses in the area. All this done by God through committed disciples of Christ using Jim’s “Aslan House” as a base of operations.

Less joyful, but no less important, Tom Tarrants begins a three-part series on “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” Starting with the devil, Tom approaches a subject that is somewhat out of favor today, but as Christians we are required to understand what the Bible teaches about Satan and his work to undermine God’s plans. Tom makes the case for Satan’s existence and dissects some of the approaches used by Satan throughout history to confuse us and keep us from leading fruitful lives.

We hope you find these articles interesting, meaningful, and useful. All Knowing & Doing articles are also available electronically on our website. Please share them with your friends!

Sincerely,

Kerry A. Knott
K.Knott@cslewisinstitute.org
With the 2012 London Olympic Games beginning this July, it seems appropriate to remember the life of Eric Liddell, an Olympic hero and disciple of Christ. He may be the best historic mentor and Christian sports star of the past century.

The Son of Missionaries to China

James and Mary Liddell were engaged to be married when they arrived in China from Scotland in 1898 to work with the London Missionary Society. Married in 1899 in Shanghai, they were assigned to Mongolia. Danger, however, loomed on the horizon; in June 1900, a group self-described as the Boxers stirred up hatred among the Chinese against all foreigners, especially the foreign missionaries who were persuading many Chinese to become Christian. The Boxer Rebellion forced the Liddells to flee to a safer region of China. The rebellion was eventually put down by foreign troops, but not before two hundred missionaries (men, women, and children) and more than thirty thousand Chinese Christians had been killed.

Out of this sacrificial and dangerous context, Mary Liddell gave birth to her second son on January 16, 1902. The boy was originally named Henry Eric Liddell, until a friend pointed out that his initials would be H.E.L. Steering clear of that potentially offensive nickname, James and Mary changed the name to Eric Henry Liddell.

Eric spent the first five years of his life living on a missionary compound in Siao-chang. He played with his older brother, Robert, wore Chinese clothes, and spoke Chinese and English. Life within the walls of the compound was safe and comfortable; the missionary children were sheltered from the hardships their parents encountered outside of the compound walls.

Bonnie Scotland and Boarding School

In 1907 Eric, age five, and his family made the long voyage back to Scotland for missionary furlough. Eric and Robert enjoyed the freedom of roaming and exploring the countryside, something they’d been unable to do in China. However, after a wonderful year together as a family, Eric’s parents enrolled the boys in London’s School for the Sons of Missionaries and returned to China. It would be seven long years before the boys saw their mom again and thirteen before they were reunited with their dad. The teachers and students of the boarding school would become their new family. Fortunately Eric had his older brother, Robert, as his best friend and protector. The two bonded loyally to each other for life.

The boarding school included a strict regimen of academics, character training, Christian teaching, not-so appetizing meals, some hazing, and, fortunately for the Liddells, a healthy dose of exercise and athletics. The English believed that sports taught boys the concepts of fair play, teamwork, and respect for authority.

In 1912 the school moved to a new location with a magnificent playing field and changed its name to Eltham College. As Eric entered the teen years, he discovered a love for math and science under the tutelage of Master D.H.
Victory over Circumstances

by Eric Liddell

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. (Isaiah 43:2)

God does not say that because you believe in Him, he will keep you from hardship and suffering. He says, if you trust him, he will strengthen you to meet all the experiences of life in a conquering spirit. You will have secret resources of power to call on when they are needed.

Life is full of hard experiences, bitter disappointments, unexpected losses, grim tragedies. How do Christians face these? Here are several thoughts that may be of help.

1. Evil does not come from God but comes through the sin, malice, callousness, passions, selfishness, and neglect of man. God is not responsible for these.

   There are also disasters, calamities and accidents which are the other side of the privilege and joy of living in such a world as this. If there were no spice of risk, there would be no zest of adventure.

2. Sometimes evil comes through the direct malice of man. It is easy to harbour feelings of hate, a desire to be God’s instrument of vengeance. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a hate like that. For hate desolates both the wronged and the wrongdoer. This work of punishment is not ours but God’s.

   It is a perilous position for any man to take up that he is the instrument of the judgement of God. God is working in the hearts of those who have wronged us as well as in our hearts. His mills are grinding out resistlessly the judgements of righteousness. Leave all to God. The justice of God is far more sure and unerring, for it is the justice of love, a love that will not let men go, but follows them still through all the mazes of their flight from it, till it brings them to redemption. It is this vision of God behind the scenes that calms the heart and takes away the restless heat of rancour and revenge. It is this that helps one to face all in a magnanimous spirit.

3. Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God’s plans, but God is not helpless among the ruins. Our broken lives are not lost or useless. God’s love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out his wonderful plan of love. ‘All things work together for good to them that love God.’ He is always master of the situation. There is infinite resourcefulness in the almighty love. Many a man has become great in spite of, as well as because of, disaster. This is the victory of God’s love, but it does not come to all. It comes to those who keep their faith clear, and their lives clean towards God. It comes to those who keep in touch with the divine love, are linked to the divine will, and look for chances of helping on the purposes they are sure God still has for them. ‘This is the victory that overcomes the world, [the world of disaster] even our faith.’

[Thoughts based on The Victory of God by James Reid.]


RECOMMENDED READING

The Disciplines of the Christian Life, Eric Liddell

This is a practical guide to helping Christians grow spiritually through a daily practice of prayer and Bible study, structured around key topics he believes are basic knowledge for any Christian.
Hindrances to Discipleship:

The Devil

by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, D.Min.

Director of Ministry, C.S. Lewis Institute

There are three major hindrances to following Jesus Christ: the world, the flesh, and the devil (Eph. 2:1–3). These hindrances hold us in blindness and bondage before we come to faith in Christ. After conversion, they interact with one another to create a challenging array of problems, internal and external, for every disciple. We will examine them individually, making observations along the way about how they work with one another to hinder our progress in the life of grace.

Every era has had its own blind spots, and ours is no exception. A notable example in our day is the denial of the existence of the devil.

Secularization, driven along by a naturalism that denies the existence of anything spiritual or metaphysical, has had a profound effect on Americans, whether they are believers or not. In 2002 Barna Research reported that “Six out of ten Americans (59%) reject the existence of Satan, indicating that the devil, or Satan, is merely a symbol of evil.” In 2009 Barna reported that 59 percent of professing Christians also rejected the existence of Satan. Only 26 percent strongly agreed that they believe Satan is real.

Unlike our ancestors, we hear few sermons today about “things unseen,” such as heaven, hell, angels, or demons, and most believers give little thought to the reality of spiritual battle that surrounds them. Church historian Richard Lovelace says, “A study of this subject throughout the history of Christian experience reveals that leaders in most other periods of the church’s history have found conflict with fallen angels to be a regular feature of their daily existence and have sought to cope with it in biblical terms.”

Commenting on this strange state of affairs, John Stott said,

"It is unfashionable nowadays in the church (even while satanism flourishes outside it), to believe either in a personal devil or personal demonic intelligences under his command. But there is no obvious reason why church fashion should be the director of theology, whereas the plain teaching of Jesus and his apostles (not to mention the church of the subsequent centuries) endorsed their malevolent existence.”

C.S. Lewis also commented on our tendency toward imbalance in this area. “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” Clearly, American society and the church have swung strongly to the first error.

No doubt the devil is very pleased with this development. Just as spy rings can be more effective when their existence is unknown, so the devil and his angels are more effective when people are unaware of their existence. As Lovelace notes, “Most of the devil’s advantage depends on the ability to move among human affairs undetected.”

A careful study of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, gives us valuable and much-needed insights (continued on page 22)
FELLOWS FEATURE

God’s “Sari”:

The Story of C.S. Lewis Institute – Annapolis

by Jim Phillips

Director, C.S. Lewis Institute, Annapolis, MD

Ravi Zacharias tells a story of the weaving of an Indian wedding garment known as a sari. He describes a process by which the saris are made by a father and son team. The father sits on a platform, while the son sits below, surrounded by spools of thread. At the command of his father, the son moves the shuttle back and forth through the loom. As the father leads and the son follows, eventually a beautiful design begins to appear. What is interesting to note is that the son worked below the father on the back side of the emerging design and had to wait to see the beauty of the end product. He had to trust completely in the father’s skill.

In many ways, the story of C.S. Lewis Institute – Annapolis resembles the production of a sari. I now see in retrospect, how God, our Father, has begun weaving a beautiful “sari” in Annapolis through the obedience of his children.

In July 2007 I attended Ravi Zacharias’s summer seminar in Oxford, England. There I met Tom Tarrants who was president of the C.S. Lewis Institute. Though my wife, Ann, and I lived in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, we also had a small house in Annapolis, Maryland. We visited there on special weekends when our son and daughter attended the U.S. Naval Academy. I also stayed in this home during the week, because it was closer to my office in Alexandria, Virginia. Discovering that our offices were only five miles apart, Tom and I decided to get together upon our return from Oxford. (Can you hear the Father saying, “Move the shuttle,” as the first threads are laid?)

After Tom and I got to know each other, he asked if I would be interested in starting an extension of the C.S. Lewis Institute in Annapolis. Tom knew a number of people in Maryland who wanted to participate in the Fellows Program but were unable to do so because of the distance. As you would expect, God had been at work in my life, “nudging” me to consider relocating from Pennsylvania to Annapolis. After prayer and some unusual confirming events, Ann and I grew confident that this was God’s leading. We put our house up for sale in the summer of 2009 during the worst downturn in the housing market in years. Our home sold in one week, and we moved into the Annapolis house. (“Move the shuttle again!”)

The first Annapolis Fellows class—of five men and five women—started in June 2009. They were followed by eleven men and women in 2010 and seventeen in 2011. Initially God blessed us with mentors, and then our first Year Two Fellows graduated and became mentors. Today our Fellows graduates are mentors, leaders of campus ministries, military officers, lay leaders, authors, and ministers. (“Move the shuttle!”)

Following the lead of CSLI DC, the Annapolis extension began a quarterly Pastors’ Fellowship to provide a forum for fellowship and nourishment. We discovered there was no competing venue for local pastors to gather and converse, so this forum was embraced, and CSLI Annapolis became known to the area churches. Today more than twenty pastors regularly participate in these fellowships. (“Move the shuttle!”)
Because we knew of professional men and women who wanted to experience the Fellows Program but did not have the ability to commit to the Fellows curriculum, we offered separate Men’s and Women’s Fellowships. Scheduled monthly meetings were facilitated by some of our Fellows Program authors and lecturers. Today we have approximately twelve men and twelve women participating in this pre-Fellows experience. (Another thread is placed in the fabric, “Move the shuttle!”)

Then came an epiphany, not the completed sari, just an “aha” moment. One morning in 2009, walking back home from a downtown coffee shop, I stopped in front of our home on Prince George Street. Standing there, it occurred to me: we were one block from the U.S. Naval Academy, one block from the Statehouse, one block from downtown Annapolis, and two blocks from St. John’s College. This little house, which we had bought years before with no intention of it being our permanent residence, was located at the center of the community, military, state government, and education. It was like the “grand conjunction” of Annapolis. This house is now the home of the C.S. Lewis Institute Annapolis, which Ann named the Aslan House.

As I considered the significance of this location, I questioned the mission God had given CSLI Annapolis to be at the “hub” of the Annapolis community. Why had God placed the CSLI in the center of this community? I did not have to ponder the question long before God gave me a Scripture. While reading Daws, a biography of Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, I noted that he believed that God had given him Isaiah 60:11 to be the motto for his home. I also felt the Spirit offering this passage as a governing promise over the Aslan House and CSLI Annapolis.

> Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations – their kings led in triumphal procession. (Isa. 60:11 NIV)

As I read this the Spirit communicated to me: “You are to keep the doors of this house (CSLI Annapolis) open, and I will bring through them ‘the wealth of the nations.’” That is, “I will bring men and women whom I plan to use mightily in my kingdom, and they will bless the nations.” (“Move the shuttle!”)

At this point, God had added many threads, and we had moved the shuttle to properly place them in the sari, but we had not yet gone “topside” to get a glimpse of the Father’s design. First, a few more threads.

About the time Isaiah 60:11 was given to me, two young men came to the door of the Aslan House. They were students at St. John’s College (SJC). They asked if Aslan House had anything to do with C.S. Lewis. That conversation was followed by their request to be discipled. One of our Fellows was already hosting a weekly fellowship of SJC women. The men wanted “equal opportunity.” So two of our Fellows discipled these two young men. Two became four, and four became six, then ten, and we now have a SJC Women’s Fellowship and a SJC (continued on page 29)
Can the Gospels Be Trusted?

by Arthur W. Lindsley, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute

C. S. Lewis argued that if the gospel is true (if Jesus was the Son of God come in flesh, if He lived a perfect life, performed miracles, died for our sins, was physically raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and reigns at present as the living Lord), it is of infinite importance. If it is not true, it is of no importance, except as a cultural phenomenon. But it cannot be of moderate importance. The events mentioned above either happened, or they did not. In other words, our faith is rooted in history. Paul Johnson says, “Christianity is essentially a historical religion. It bases its claims on the historical facts it asserts. If these are demolished it is nothing.”

So historical evidence is important for establishing the truth of the Gospels, as well as the rest of Scripture.

The Case for Scripture

In fact, a case for the authority of the Bible begins with historical evidence and convincingly ends with the total trustworthiness of Scripture. It goes like this:

Premise A: The Bible is at least a generally reliable document. You can establish this (as you would for any other historical document) by looking at the bibliographical test (textual reliability), the internal test (what it claims about its sources), and the external test (outsider verification, archeological evidence, etc.). There are many books about each of these tests. (Start with Josh McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Thomas Nelson, 1993.)

Premise B: Jesus is a messenger sent from God. Assuming that the Bible is at least generally reliable, you could then look at various lines of evidence pointing to Jesus as someone sent from God to speak truth to us. He is certainly more than that, but that’s all you need to establish for now. You would use such evidence from prophecy (332 prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament), miracles, and particularly His resurrection. Again, many books have been written on these topics. (Start with Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ, Zondervan, 1998.)

Premise C: Jesus teaches that the Bible is totally trustworthy. Again, assuming general reliability, you can show that Jesus teaches that the Bible is more than generally reliable; in fact, totally trustworthy or absolutely authoritative. In about two hundred passages in the Gospels Jesus teaches either explicitly or implicitly a very high view of the trustworthiness of the Old Testament. (See John Wenham, Christ and the Bible, Baker, 1994, or R.T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament, InterVarsity Press, 1971.) There are also numerous passages in which Jesus affirms the apostles’ authority and promises to send the Spirit to teach them everything they need to know for the future.

Conclusion: The Bible is totally trustworthy. The conclusion is as strong as the evidences mustered in the above premises.

The Reliability of the Gospels

I can’t in this short article provide a defense of questions about this approach or
provide all the evidences required. So I will focus on one aspect of the “internal” test: the reliability of the Gospels, particularly the charge (made by Rudolf Bultmann, the Jesus Seminar, and many liberal theologians) that the character of Jesus was largely invented by the early church. What can be said to such a charge? Here are just a few—of many—helpful arguments to show that the character of Jesus is real and not created by the early writers and their communities.

1. **Inventing the character of Jesus would involve a miracle.** Several quotations from nonbelieving authors make the point that it would take a Jesus to invent a Jesus.

   - Theodore Parker: “It takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? No one but a Jesus.”
   - Rousseau: “The Gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable that the inventor would be more astonishing than the hero.”
   - John Stuart Mill: “It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of His followers. Who among His disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the life and character revealed in the Gospels?”

2. **The importance of eyewitnesses.** When the Gospels were written, there were eyewitnesses still alive who could have corrected any mistakes by saying, “That didn’t happen,” or, “It didn’t happen that way.” The apostles were key eyewitnesses who had intimate acquaintance with what Jesus said and did. As the first generation passed away, the criteria of whether a story could be verified as coming from an eyewitness was crucial. (See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Eerdmans, 2006.) A radical criticism about the lack of eyewitnesses holds no ground; for it to have been correct, the disciples (and other eyewitnesses) must have been translated to heaven after the resurrection. (They were not.)

3. **According to tradition, all of the apostles, except for John, were killed as martyrs.** There are many cases of people willingly dying for that which they believe to be true (even though it is a lie). But it is inconceivable that so many men would violently die (becomes martyrs) for a story they knew to be a lie. Not only did most of the apostles die as martyrs; some were repeatedly imprisoned and tortured. Peter is said to have asked to be crucified upside down because he didn’t feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. James was stoned. Paul is said to have been beheaded in Rome. They all went to their deaths without reneging on their strong confession of the truth of the gospel.

Chuck Colson’s book *Loving God* includes a chapter titled “Watergate and the Resurrection.” At the time of the Nixon-administration Watergate scandal, a number of White House staff members, including Colson, were accused of obstruction of justice because they withheld knowledge of a crime (the Watergate burglary). John Dean (one of the staff) got immunity from prosecution for testifying before Congress. Colson says that other staff members were crawling over each other (continued on page 31)
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(continued from page 1)

those who have been redeemed to reflect the Redeemer. Jesus would not ask us to be and do something unless it was possible. We can become the bodily dwelling place of Jesus who lives his life out through us.

The vision that Jesus has placed before us comes in the form of his summary statement as to what our life agenda is to be. In response to one of the “teachers of the law” seeking to know which commandment was most important, Jesus responded with what we have come to call the Great Commandment: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30–31). He didn’t follow this up by saying, “I know I’m asking a lot, but do the best you can. I know you’ll never fully approximate this high and lofty goal, but it’s still worth striving for.” No, I added that part myself. In my spirit I washed out the possibility that this could actually be, saying, “I know the guy dwelling in this body all too well. Not a chance that this weak and feeble individual could ever approximate Jesus’ expectation.”

Yet something uplifting started to happen when my spirit began to rehearse a different message: “Jesus thinks this is possible.” I found a new energy released in me. A buoyancy of spirit beckoned me with the thought that I could live more deeply into the possibility of loving God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving my neighbor as myself. With Jesus, it is possible to “love your enemies, [and] do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27). It’s not just for that rare person who seems to have tapped into a pool of grace that the rest of us have not been able to find.

The Paradox

Herein lies the paradox of being a Christ-follower. We need to embrace what appear to be two competing truths about ourselves—our deeply corrupted spirits and our redemption through Christ—if we are to approximate what Jesus believes is our potential as Great Commandment people.

On the one hand, if we are not deeply in touch with our dark side, we will miss the incredible grace that claimed us while we were in full rebellion against God and into our own self-exaltation. Like the alcoholic in a twelve-step program who started down the road to redemption by saying, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol,” the believer has to acknowledge without qualification, “We admit we are powerless over sin.” Left to myself, I don’t love God or my neighbor; in fact, I hate God, who crowds my autonomy, and I don’t really care what happens to my neighbor, as long as I am taken care of. Only when we see the extent of how corrupt our spirit is through and through will we rejoice with Paul’s words, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4–5).

Without an awareness of our need for grace, we will simply turn the Great Commandment into a new law that we attempt to fulfill by our own effort. It’s true that this summary commandment of Jesus serves the dual purpose of the law. On the one hand, the apostle Paul tells us that the law was given to show us how far short we fall before the holiness of God (Romans 7:13). It serves its purpose by driving us to our knees. Just try keeping the command to love God and our neighbors in our own
strength. We would not survive our own thought life for the next ten minutes. So in our study of the Great Commandment, we want to avoid making Jesus’ commandment simply a higher-level law that leads only to enslavement rather than freedom.

On the other hand, we don’t want to miss what is implicit in this command. Jesus thinks that living this truth is possible. We walk carefully between the shoals of being in touch with our capacity for self-deception yet at the same time energized by the new capacity that God’s grace gives us to become the redeemed people in whom Christ dwells. Dallas Willard says it succinctly: “Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort.” The apostle Paul helps us with this tension. On the one hand he said of himself, “I am . . . the worst of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15–16); on the other hand he said that this awareness infused him with an energy and passion fueled by God’s grace that sent him across the known world. Here is how Paul brings these two truths together: “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9–10).

What is the relationship then between grace and law? Is the law nullified by grace? Do we not have to concern ourselves with the commandments this side of grace? To echo Paul, “Absolutely not!” (see Galatians 3:21). Dallas Willard states the connection between grace and law:

*The presence of the Spirit and of grace is not meant to set the law aside, but to enable conformity to it from an inwardly transformed personality. . . . Law comes with grace in the renewed soul. There is no such thing as grace without law. The law is the structure of the life of grace in the kingdom of God.*

Jesus’ command to love God with all we’ve got and to treat our neighbor with the same regard as we do ourselves is meant to bring us to the end of ourselves. When we hear this expectation we’re supposed to say, “There is no way in the world that in myself I will ever be able to live up to this standard.” This realization should cause us to cast ourselves unrestrainedly on the grace of God and repent of our sin-sick soul. Then we are flooded with the light of God’s accepting grace. Our heart of stone is massaged back to life as a heart of flesh that begins to beat within. We find within a new motivation and desire to want to become all that God hopes us to be. Because our inner affections are being transformed to love what God loves, we begin to understand that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. The law we hated now becomes the life we have always wanted.

**Transformation of the Will**

Dallas Willard was again the one who led me to this breakthrough. In his very helpful article “Spiritual Formation: What It Is, and How It Is Done,” he writes that to be fully formed in Christ is to come to that place where our natural impulses come to reflect the feelings, thinking and actions of Jesus himself. Since the will is the primary locus of this formation—the executive center of our being—Willard speaks of three dimensions or conditions of the will (he equates the will and the heart as we’ll see more
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fully later). He calls the first dimension of the will the impulsive will: it’s “directed or moved by or toward things that are simply attractive.” This is where a baby begins. Babies are simply drawn to what is enticing in their environment. Adults who don’t outgrow this impulse to simply do what is pleasing to them are driven by immediacy and enslaved by their own desires.

This appears to be the cultural norm. Robert Bellah and a team of fellow sociologists went in search of the distinguishing characteristics of Americans and then published the results in their classic work, *Habits of the Heart*. They found one quality that sets Americans apart from those of other cultures: freedom. But unfortunately it’s a rather skewed understanding of freedom; it’s the freedom from obligation. This view can be summarized in the following statement: “I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it, and no one better tell me otherwise.” Bellah makes the point that this view of freedom as radical independence does not provide the basis for any long-term covenantal relationships such as marriage or even a relationship with God.

Thankfully, Willard identifies a second dimension of the will. As a follower of Christ, he says, a person must adopt the practice of a reflective will, which involves beginning to set up a dialogical process where the good that God intends is examined over against our thinking, feeling and acting. In other words, with this type of will we regularly reflect on our life in light of God’s revealed truth. For example, almost every day I begin my time of prayer with the ancient spiritual practice of the examen. My simplified version of this prayer is to ask the Lord through his Spirit to take me back through the previous day in order to review what he would have me pay attention to. I call this “praying backwards.” My reflective questions are, “Lord, in what way were you present in the interactions and events of the day?” More specifically, “How were you at work? What did I miss? For what can I give thanks?” And then very specifically, “As a result of your life in me, how can I be formed to respond and act more like you?”

I both celebrate God’s presence and my being in concert with his purposes while also carefully making note of the missed opportunities, misspoken words and other missteps.

While reflection is good, we’re not to stop there. The reflective will moves us toward a deeper goal: what Willard calls the embodied will. It was while I was reading his insight into this dimension of the will that my “aha” came. Willard, echoing Jesus, says it is possible to become so aligned with Jesus’ heart that our automatic responses are simply in tune with God’s heart. This is how I apply this to myself: Suppose someone were to come to me and say something like, “I don’t get why you want to be a teacher and pastor. You show no evidence of having that gift. What were you thinking when you went into this profession?” Is it possible that the presence of Jesus could so engulf my inner and bodily reactions that my first response would be to want to do good to this person who was insulting me, and to want only the best for their life?

To be formed in Christ is to say, “Yes, it is possible. Yes, this is what I would want my inner world to become. I want to be so in tune with Jesus’ life in me that his embodied will becomes mine.”

My public convictions, then, are what I want you to think I believe, my private convictions are what I think I believe, but my core convictions are revealed by what I actually do.
Categories of Convictions

In other words, Jesus intends to get down to the very core of our makeup. Michael Novak provides another scheme that parallels Willard’s framework of the will. He divides conviction into three categories: public, private and core. John Ortberg picks up on these in his book, *Faith and Doubt.*

**Public beliefs.** Public beliefs are those convictions that we want other people to think we believe, even though we may not really believe them. For example, if my wife puts on a dress and asks, “Does this dress make me look like I have wide hips?” the correct answer is, “I didn’t even know you had hips.” We might express public beliefs in our business life too; for example, there may be politically correct words and phrases that we feel we need to say if we want to be a good company person, but inside we know we don’t believe them. Public figures are notorious for uttering public beliefs because they sound good.

The biblical illustration here is King Herod. After Jesus was born, some visitors from the East (whom we call “wise men”) told him about the one who was born King of the Jews. Herod told the wise men, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him” (Matthew 2:8). Did King Herod have any intent to worship this child? No, of course not. But it made for good public consumption because it would get him what he wanted.

**Private beliefs.** Private beliefs are those convictions that we want other people to think we believe, even though we may not really believe them. For example, on the night before Jesus was crucified, the apostle Peter stated his undying allegiance to Jesus.

When Jesus then told Peter that he would deny him before the cock crowed three times, Peter said, “Even if all fall away, I will not. . . . Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Mark 14:29, 31). When Peter said these words, was he sincere in that moment? Did he actually think he believed what he was saying? Yes, I think he did believe. Were these Peter’s true convictions? No. When the time came to stand up as a loyal follower of Jesus, he acted like he never knew Jesus.

We never truly know if we believe our convictions until they’re tested. We can assert in life or in death that our sure and certain hope is in Jesus Christ, and that nothing can move us off of that foundation. Then we might hear those frightening words, as I did, “You’ve got cancer!” Only then could I truly look inside myself to see if my sure and certain hope was in Jesus Christ in this life and beyond.

**Core beliefs.** Our core beliefs are the convictions that are revealed in our daily actions, based on what we actually do. These are the mental maps we follow. We will always act out of our core beliefs or convictions, and will never violate them. For example, we believe in gravity. We are not able to violate that belief, so we’ll always act with that knowledge in mind. Gravity is part of our mental map. If we want to stay safe, we won’t walk to the edge of a hundred-story building; if we want to take our life, we might do so. Our actions are always the result of our core purposes or convictions.

My public convictions, then, are what I want you to think I believe, my private convictions are what I think I believe, but my core convictions are revealed by what I...
Jesus Believes It Is Possible!

actually do. Where does Jesus target the transformation of our convictions? He intends to change us at our core beliefs, to establish his embedded will in us. His desire is to be so central and present to us and in us that our automatic responses as well as our intended desire are simply to have our hearts beat next to his.

I am suggesting that this means we live in what might appear at first to be a contradiction, but actually, it’s a liberating paradox. On the one hand we must come face to face with our flawed nature and have a sense of how much we must live in grace at all times. There is never a time when we outgrow the need for God’s undeserved embrace. As Paul says to his son in the faith, Timothy, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1). Whether it’s a case of something I’ve done or something I’ve failed to do, I need the covering of God’s mercy at all times.

Yet... God has chosen to put his truth in this clay pot (earthen vessel), which is “being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). God thinks enough of us to abide in us and then set off on his work of renovation. And Jesus commands us to love God and the ones for whom he laid down his life because he believes that we can actually do it.

The irony is that living into God’s possibility is only possible when we confess the impossibility. May the following prayer express the desires of our heart as we begin this journey:

Dear Father, we hear your call to love you with everything that we are and to love those whom you infinitely value. Are you asking us to do something that is not really possible? Part of us confesses that we are only weak creatures whose passion for you can only be described as tepid. We hear that you want us to engage our hearts, souls, minds and bodies in full devotion to you, but when we look at our lives we feel that we pale in comparison to your expectation. If we are going to be what you want us to be, we will need an infusion of love that is not our own. And yet, we so want to live into your belief in us. As we embark on this journey together, create a sense of anticipation in us that you will stretch our capacity beyond what we ever thought was imaginable so that we can live into your possibility for us. Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Jesus Believes It Is Possible!


Notes

4. John Ortberg, Faith and Doubt (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 42.
5. Humor is courtesy of John Ortberg from his teaching “Are You Making Better Christians or More Disciples?” delivered at the 2008 Reveal Conference, Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois. Available through Willow Creek Association resources at www.willowcreek.com/wca_index.asp.

God gives His gifts where He finds the vessel empty enough to receive them.

C.S. Lewis
Profile in Faith: Eric Liddell
(continued from page 3)

Burleigh, an enthusiastic chemistry teacher who happened to be a former track star. After playing the part of Dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland*, Eric was given the nickname "the Mouse," because it fit his shy and quiet personality.

But on the athletic field, Eric made some noise. Both Robert and Eric were soon recognized as the top athletes at Eltham. They led the rugby team, and in 1918, just before Robert’s graduation, Eric and Robert alternated taking first and second place in six of the nine track and field events on the Annual Sports Day.

Their secondary school years, however, were completed during the horrific backdrop of World War I. A number of their classmates paid the ultimate price on the battlefields of France. As a result, Eric’s headmaster ingrained in the boys the responsibility Christians have to “play the game” of life with integrity, courage, and conviction. Eric’s actions later in life showed clearly that he had taken this important message to heart.

University Rugby and Track Star

Upon graduation from Eltham College, Eric followed his older brother to Edinburgh University. Robert set his sights on becoming a missionary doctor. Eric planned to study math and science. He also looked forward to the return of the rest of his family to Scotland. They would all be together for the first time in thirteen years.

As Eric started his studies, he played rugby from time to time. When his classmates noticed his blazing speed, he was asked to compete in the University of Edinburgh Varsity Sports meet. A friend helped train him for the event. When Eric won the 100-yard dash and came in second, behind Scotland’s fastest in the 220-yard race, he was immediately selected to represent Edinburgh in the Scottish Intervarsity Sports competition.

Not only was his speed recognized, but a number of people commented on his odd running style. One man was heard to say, “Quite an ungainly action, that lad.” His friend replied, “Aye, but he beat Stewart once and almost again. Odd style or not, he’s fast!” Eventually coaches tried to change his running mechanics and competitors wondered how he managed to run so fast with such bad form. Later it would be reported in the British paper, *The Guardian*,

None of us will ever forget this man who was totally committed to putting God first, a man whose humble life combined muscular Christianity with radiant godliness.

He is remembered among lovers of athletics as probably the ugliest runner who ever won an Olympic championship. When he appeared in the heats of the 400m at Paris in 1924 his huge sprawling stride, his head thrown back and his arms clawing the air, moved the Americans and other sophisticated experts to ribald laughter.

But Harold Abrahams, who won the 100-meters gold medal in the Paris Olympics reasoned, “People may shout their heads off about his appalling style. Well, let them. He gets there.”

During the summer of 1921, Eric went on to win the 100- and 220-yard races at the Scottish Inter-University Games and many other races as well. He won so many gold and silver cups, plates, and other valuable prizes that his mom actually was worried that someone might try to rob their home. The *Glasgow Herald* wrote, “E.H. Liddell, Edinburgh University A.C., is going to be a British champion ere long, and he might even blossom into an Olympic hero . . . Liddell, as much because of his supreme grit
Profile in Faith: Eric Liddell

Eric Liddell, 400 meter Gold Medal winning race 1924 Paris Olympics

as because of his pace, is a great figure in modern athletics.  

In the fall of 1921, Eric and his brother Robert played rugby for Edinburgh University. While only five-foot-nine and 155 pounds, Eric’s speed and determination made him an instant rugby star at the wing position. He was selected to play on the Scottish national team in 1922. He and his former schoolboy partner, Leslie Gracie, made a powerful “Gracie-Liddell Wing” combination. Over the course of his short rugby career, Eric played for Scotland in seven games and was on the winning side six times. The greatest win was against Wales, which Scotland hadn’t beaten since 1870. That win helped make Eric Liddell a hero among the working class of Scotland who admired the toughness and skill required to be a world-class rugby player.

The Decision

Eric’s status as a Scottish national team rugby player and Scottish sprint champion gave him the platform that he would soon use to further the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the spring of 1923, one of Robert’s friends, D.P. Thomsen, was struggling to find a way to reach the working class men and miners of Scotland. Noticing the men’s passion for rugby, he thought to ask Eric if he would be willing to come to a meeting hall in Armadale and speak of his faith, though he knew that introverted Eric rarely talked openly about his Christian faith.

D.P. traveled to Edinburgh and went straight to the Liddells’ home. He was greeted by Robert; when asked if Eric would speak at an evangelistic meeting, Robert said, “I think you’d better ask him yourself.” A few minutes later, when Eric came in from a run, D.P. shared his vision. Would Eric address the men? Eric dropped his head for a time, reflected upon the question, and then replied, “All right—I’ll do it.” That response was to change the course of Eric’s life. In fact, the next morning, before he could second-guess himself, he received a letter from his sister sent from China weeks before; it ended with Isaiah 41:10, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” This confirmed his decision to use the platform of sports fame to share his faith openly. He would never look back and would proclaim his love for Jesus with enthusiasm and boldness in the days to come.

Liddell would write later about this moment of saying yes to D.P.’s request,

My whole life had been one of keeping out of public duties but the leading of Christ seemed now to be in the opposite direction and I shrank from going forward. At this time I finally decided to put it all on Christ—after all if He called me to do it, then He would have to supply the necessary power. In going forward the power was given me. Since then the consciousness of being an active member of the Kingdom of heaven has been very real.

In the next year, as Eric trained to qualify for the British Olympic team as a sprinter and finished his university degree, he also
began speaking nearly every weekend at evangelistic rallies and churches. The more time Eric gave to sharing his faith, the faster he seemed to run. At the British Olympic Trials, in July 1923, he set a new British record of 9.7 seconds at 100 yards and also won the 220-yard distance in 21.6 seconds. Thus he had qualified for the 100-meter and 220-meter events at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

The week after the Olympic trials, his fame grew at a quarter-mile race at Stoke-on-Trent. He was knocked down at the beginning of the race and managed to come from 30 yards behind the field to win the race in dramatic fashion. The Scotsman wrote,

_The circumstances in which Liddell won the event made it a performance bordering on the miraculous. Veterans, whose memories take them back 35 years, and in some cases even longer, in the history of athletics, were unanimous in the opinion that Liddell’s win in the quarter-mile was the greatest ever track performance that they had ever seen._

**Convictions Tested**

Three months before the Olympic Games, Eric received the schedule of his races, only to learn that the 100-meter qualifying round was on Sunday. One of Eric’s steadfast convictions was that Sunday was “the Lord’s day” and not a day for sports activity. He had never run on Sundays, and he wasn’t about to break his conviction even for the Olympics. So he told the British Olympic Committee simply, “I’m not running on a Sunday.” Suddenly the darling of the British team was called a “traitor” to his country for not competing in the 100 meters. Even members of parliament lambasted him for putting his selfish beliefs before duty to country. Yet Eric stood his ground. It was this decision to remain true to his convictions and to his God that was to really set Eric Liddell apart in the history of sports.

As _The Guardian_ reported, “Liddell has already decided that the race he has chiefly to run in the world is not on the cinder track.” And so on July 6, 1924, while fellow British athlete Harold Abrahams was on his way to Olympic gold in the 100 meters, Liddell was giving the Sunday sermon at the Scots Church in Paris.

Of course Eric was ready to compete in the 200 meters, and to ease the situation, the British Olympic Committee decided to offer Liddell entrance into a second event—the 400 meters. The first race for Liddell was the 200 meters. He won a bronze medal yet received little praise for this achievement.

The morning of the 400-meter semifinals and final, a note was passed to Eric from one of the British team masseurs. When Eric got to the dressing room of the stadium, he opened it and read, “It says in the Old Book, ‘Him that honours me, I will honour.’ Wishing you the best of success always.” That word of encouragement reminded Eric of God’s fidelity even in the midst of the storm.

Eric qualified for the final, which led to one of the most memorable Olympic feats ever. Liddell drew the outside lane for the final which is considered the worst lane since one can’t see one’s opponents at the start. He was running against the American Horatio Finch, who had just set the world record in the semifinals. As the runners were getting in position, Eric suddenly heard the sound of bagpipes as the king’s pipers began to play a Scottish tune, “The Campbells Are Coming.” Inspired by the music and the

_We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ, or we repel them from Christ. We are working for the great Kingdom of God._
Profile in Faith: Eric Liddell

encouragement of God’s Word, Eric burst into the lead at the sound of the gun, running the first 200 meters in 22.2 seconds. Many doubted that he could keep up that kind of pace. As Finch tried to narrow the gap down the homestretch, Liddell threw his head back, turned on the jets, and crossed the finish line at a world-record time of 47.6 seconds. He had won Olympic gold!

The Guardian would write,

The victory was most popular with the crowd. Liddell’s refusal to run in the preliminary heats of the 100 metres last Sunday because of religious scruples aroused considerable curiosity, which was heightened when it was learned that he will preach in the Scotch church on Sunday. The public here are not accustomed to the idea of a man in holy orders being an athlete, and his splendid win was loudly cheered.10

Later when asked how he could run the 400 meters with such intensity, he replied, “The first half I run as fast as I can, and the second half I run faster with God’s help.”

Liddell received a hero’s welcome upon returning to Scotland. All who had been so critical of him previously for not running in celebration. However, Eric was soon to make a surprise announcement. He had decided to follow in his parents’ footsteps and return to China the following year to serve in Christian missions.

In the months to follow, as he prepared for China, Eric kept up a demanding speaking schedule as he challenged young and old alike in down-to-earth terms to give their lives to Christ. He proclaimed, “In Jesus Christ you will find a leader worthy of all your devotion and mine. I looked for one I could admire and I found Christ.”11

Missionary to China

At twenty-three years of age, Eric had become a world-renowned athlete, fervent evangelist, and hero to many. And yet he knew that God was calling him to leave the comforts of Scotland and return to the land of his birth, China. In many ways, the second half of his life, as a missionary, teacher, evangelist, pastor, and disciple of Christ, was to be even more challenging and heroic. In 1925 he took the Trans-Siberian railroad from London to China. He entered a China in the midst of great turmoil as communists, warlords, and nationalists battled it out for control.

His first assignment took him to Tianjin, where he taught science, coached sports, and led Bible studies. He maintained his fitness, and in 1928, when the French and Japanese Olympic teams came to compete in the South Manchuria Games, Eric entered and won the 200- and 400-meter races in times faster than the gold medal times of the recent Olympic Games in Amsterdam. Perhaps his greatest exploit came after these games as he ran to catch a boat to get back home. The boat had eased away from the port, so, to get on board, Eric threw his bags onto the ship, then leaped what witnesses say was more than 15 feet across the water onto the deck of the boat.

The boat had eased away from the port, so, to get on board, Eric threw his bags onto the ship, then leaped what witnesses say was more than 15 feet across the water onto the deck of the boat.
Feet.” The article also mentioned that the world’s fastest quarter miler hadn’t been at the Amsterdam Olympics but instead was a missionary in China. From then on, Liddell was known by many as “The Flying Scotsman.”

On his first furlough in 1932, Liddell became an ordained minister. Sought after by many as a speaker, he challenged his countrymen by saying, “We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ, or we repel them from Christ. We are working for the great Kingdom of God.”

After returning to China, he married Florence Mackenzie, the daughter of Canadian missionaries, in 1934. He was captivated by her beauty and her devotion to Christ. After proposing to her, he waited four years to marry her while she went back to Canada to complete nursing school. She was ten years his younger, but like him she had a heart for China. Over the next seven years, the couple had three daughters, Patricia, Heather, and Maureen.

His work at the school continued to influence many young men for the cause of Christ. However, following the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, Eric, with the suggestion of his missionary agency, felt the call to become involved in more dangerous work as an evangelist alongside his brother, Robert, the medical doctor in Siaochang Province.

During the next three years, Eric risked life and limb, apart from his family, to share the good news of Christ in poor villages, ravaged by the effects of war. He slept on dirt floors, ate whatever the villagers were eating, and traveled by bike with an interpreter from town to town. On one occasion, he learned of a wounded Chinese soldier lying in a Buddhist temple twenty miles away. He rode his bike the distance, made a makeshift cart, and, with the help of a soldier who had barely escaped execution by the Japanese, got the injured man to a hospital. During this time the Chinese gave him the name that had been given to his father many years ago, Li Mu Shi, which meant “Pastor Liddell.”

As life became even more dangerous in China in 1941, Eric sent his pregnant wife and two children to Canada to live with his in-laws. Eric, however, felt called to continue his work as an evangelist.

Japanese Internment Camp

In 1943, just as Eric was beginning to feel that it was time for him to leave China to be with his family, the Japanese moved into his province and took over the mission station. He was sent, along with two thousand other men, women, and children of foreign descent, to the Weihsien Japanese internment camp. Liddell quickly became a leader in the camp and the favorite of the youth, who called him “Uncle Eric.” Despite his previous stance of not playing sports on Sunday, he initiated all kinds of activities and sports for the youth in the camp on Sundays as well as other days of the week to keep them out of trouble. He also taught science, math, and led Bible studies. After nearly two years in the camp, Eric’s health declined rapidly. He died on February 21, 1945. An autopsy revealed that he had died of a brain tumor.

It was discovered in 2008, when certain documents were released to the public, that Winston Churchill had negotiated his
release from the camp via a prisoner exchange. When learning of the deal, however, Liddell responded by sending a pregnant woman home in his place.

Langdon Gilkey, a young teacher in the camp, who later became an American theologian, said of Liddell,

“It is rare indeed that a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known. Often in an evening . . . I would see Eric bent over a chessboard or a model boat, or directing some sort of square dance—absorbed, warm, and interested, pouring all of himself into this effort to capture the minds and imaginations of these penned-up youths. . . . In camp he was in his middle forties, lithe and springy of step and, above all, overflowing with good humor and love of life. . . . The entire camp, especially its youth, was stunned for days, so great was the vacuum that Eric’s death had left.13

Eric Metcalf, a teenager in the camp, recalls Liddell giving him a pair of running shoes that had been repaired with string, to keep his feet warm in the winter. Metcalf goes on to say, “the best thing, however, Eric Liddell gave me was his baton of forgiveness. He taught me to love my enemies, the Japanese, and to pray for them.”14 After the war, Metcalf would return to Japan and serve there as a missionary for forty years.

David Mitchell, a child who survived the camp, wrote later, “None of us will ever forget this man who was totally committed to putting God first, a man whose humble life combined muscular Christianity with radiant godliness.”15

It took two months for word of Eric’s death to reach the West; when it did it’s said that all of Scotland mourning.

Liddell’s life was short, only forty-three years, and yet his legacy lives on. China lists Liddell as their first Olympic champion and honors him as one of seven hundred heroes of the liberation of China. The movie Chariots of Fire brought Eric’s story to another generation and won Best Picture at the Academy Awards in 1981. Over the years, thousands of people have been inspired not only by Eric’s athletic accomplishment, but also by his integrity, humble service, and faith in Jesus Christ.

Scotland wouldn’t see another gold medal until 1980, when Allan Wells won the 100
Eric Liddell and Tim Tebow – A comparison of two athletes of conviction

Eric Liddell and Tim Tebow have some amazing similarities. Consider the following description that could apply to either of them.

He was born in Asia to missionary parents. At a young age, his athletic prowess stood out from among his peers. He was named to the all-national team. He was criticized for his unorthodox and awkward mechanics or style on the sports field. He won the highest award in his sport. He often spoke about his faith in Jesus Christ before and after sports events. He was criticized for openly displaying his faith in Christ in the public arena. He was known for his humility and kindness towards others. He was known for loving children. He recovered from major setbacks only to prove the naysayers wrong. He was encouraged by Scripture verses before sporting events. He won nationally prominent athletic competitions as an underdog. He saw sports as a platform for sharing his faith in Christ. He was named the most popular athlete of his country. He saw sports as a game, relationships with God and others off of the field were of far more importance. God used him to point many towards Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Tim Tebow and Eric Liddell may be from different eras and nationalities, and of different physical stature, yet both of them devoted themselves to serving God with their athletic talents at a young age and to using their fame as a platform to tell others about Jesus Christ.

The primary difference in their stories is that Tim Tebow’s story is only just beginning. Eric Liddell went on to live another faithful twenty years devoted in service to His Lord after his athletic career was over.
Hindrances to Discipleship: The Devil
(continued from page 5)

about the devil, his schemes, and how to avoid being ensnared by him. And never has the need been greater. As J.I. Packer said concerning the devil and spiritual warfare, “The Christian’s life is not a bed of roses; it is a battlefield on which he has constantly to fight for his life. The first rule of success in war is know your enemy.” John Stott agreed and offered wise advice about knowing our enemy: “We need to rid our minds of the medieval caricature of Satan. Dispensing with the horns, the hooves and the tail, we are left with the biblical portrait of a spiritual being, highly intelligent, immensely powerful and utterly unscrupulous.”

When we turn to the biblical portrait, we learn that Satan (Hebrew: adversary) or the devil (Greek: slanderer) is the archenemy of God and the cruel and malicious adversary of those created in God’s image. Names like adversary, slanderer, tempter, deceiver, liar, murderer, accuser, and evil one are applied to him in the Bible, and these give a sense of his character. He is an evil, supernatural being, a fallen angel of such rank and power that even the archangel Michael, when disputing with him “did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 9). However, he is a created being, and is not eternal, self-existent, or equal to God in any respect. Thus he is not omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent. And he cannot read our thoughts and does not know the future. Rather, the devil is a creature subject to God’s sovereign restraint and can go no further than God permits (Job 1–2). He was decisively defeated by Jesus at the Cross, but he is still at large and is a dangerous foe until Christ’s second coming (Matt. 25:41).

How Satan became evil is not explained in the Bible, though there are hints that ambitious pride prompted his revolt against God (1 Tim. 3:6). His pride and arrogance are certainly evident in his temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1–5) and of Jesus (Luke 4:5–7). Some scholars have suggested that there might be poetic allusions to Satan’s fall in Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezekiel 28:11–19. These two passages depict the willfulness of the king of Babylon and the pride of the king of Tyre but seem to far transcend what properly can be said of them. This raises the interesting but unanswerable question of whether there is also a veiled reference to Satan energizing and working through them in the background. The passage is worth pondering.

Whatever the origin of Satan’s fall, it is clear that many other angels joined his rebellion (Rev. 12:7–9) and now form an organized hierarchy under his command (Eph. 6:10–12). They war against God and His people and seek to advance evil throughout the world, aiming for total control. The opening salvo in this war came when the devil, working through a serpent, deceived Eve and enticed her to disobey God, bringing about the fall of the human race (Gen. 3:1–7). This gave him great influence over fallen people and their societies. How much influence does he have in the world? When tempting Jesus,

The devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been
delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” (Luke 4:5–7)

Interestingly, Jesus did not dispute the devil’s claim to having significant authority over the kingdoms of this world (perhaps gained at the Fall).

Jesus spoke of Satan’s kingdom (Matt. 12:26) and referred to him as the “ruler of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). John the apostle says that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). And the apostle Paul refers to him as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). Although the devil does not have absolute control over the world, he and his angels do have considerable power to create harm in pursuit of their evil goals. He can cause a range of catastrophic events, including physical afflictions and even death (Job 1–2; Luke 13:16; Heb. 2:14). His demons are able to afflict and torment people in a variety of ways, many instances of which are recounted in the Gospels. (Of course, not all physical and mental afflictions come from the devil.)

From this and from what Scripture shows elsewhere, we can safely say that his goals are to reclaim or at least neutralize God’s people, to destroy the church, to overthrow the kingdom of God, to displace God as King of creation and to become the object of all worship. This helps explain much of the evil and suffering that rages on earth.

Lovelace explains that normally the destructive malice of satan against all humanity, and particularly against the church, is channeled through human agents and the systems and institutions they have built. Humanity in general is afflicted by the destroyer through the structures of injustice and oppression of which the flesh and the devil are joint architects, and Christians are murderously attacked by individuals and governments ultimately directed by Satan.11

We see evidence of this in the political realm from nearly the beginning of time. Evil spirits seek to influence governments, their leaders and world affairs to advance Satan’s purposes. A brief glimpse of this is found in Daniel 10:13–14, where the “prince of the kingdom of Persia,” an evil spirit of high rank and power, resisted one of God’s angels who was sent to Persia to answer Daniel’s prayer. He held the angel at bay for twenty-one days, until the archangel Michael arrived to assist him. After delivering his message to Daniel, the good angel took leave to “return to fight against the prince of Persia; and behold, when I go out, the prince of Greece will come” (Dan. 10:20).

Another example, this one in the New Testament, is Nero’s persecution of the church in AD 64–65. Peter, Paul, and many other believers in Rome were put to death, often in unimaginably cruel ways by this madman. Writing on the eve of that persecution, Peter seems to suggest that the devil was behind the gathering storm (1 Pet. 5:8–9). And in view of Nero's character and behavior, that seems very likely. In Smyrna a couple of decades later, we are told that the devil worked through the machinery of government to bring about the arrest and execution of God’s people in that city (Rev. 2:10). In recent times, examples abound of widespread demonic evil perpetrated through governments influenced by atheistic ideologies such as Marxism and Nazism, and through radical Islam.

Religion and its institutions are another of the devil’s prime targets for influence and
control. By inspiring and energizing false religions, the devil can deceive people and keep them away from the true God. The pagan religions of Canaan, for example, were demonically controlled (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37) and were a great snare to Israel for centuries. And in New Testament times, Paul says Greco-Roman pagan idolatry was also energized by demons (1 Cor. 10:18–22). But it is in the church itself that the devil seeks to make his greatest impact. Paul warns believers in Corinth about false apostles and workers, saying that “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light . . . his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14–15).

From the beginning of the church, the devil has used error, deception, division, sexual temptation, persecution, and many other schemes to undermine congregations. Social, cultural, and secular educational institutions are also prime targets. The world of ideas, the world of music and art in their various forms, popular culture, and the media are all arenas through which the evil one can subtly gain influence and disseminate anti-God ideas on a widespread basis with seeming credibility. For example, the ideas of Marx, Nietzsche and others like them have produced great evil and human suffering. The influence of existentialism on the youth culture of the 1960s is perhaps one example. Today’s postmodernism is another. Of course, this is not to say that all expressions of the world’s culture are demonic, only to say that they are vulnerable at points to exploitation by the devil. And undiscerning people can be brought under their influence.

The personal life is where everyone must be especially alert. In Ephesians Paul warns ordinary church members against the “schemes of the devil.” He says, “. . .we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph: 6:11–12). This language describes an organized hierarchy of evil spirits that is arrayed against individual believers, churches, and even institutions of society. Thus Paul exhorts the Ephesians to “take up the whole armor of God that you might be able to withstand in the evil day” (6:13).

Peter says much the same: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet. 5:8–9).

How does the devil seek to ensnare us? Deception and temptation to sin are his standard tools. His chief goal for anyone...
who has come to Christ is to recover them. As J.I. Packer says,

_Satan views him as an escaped prisoner and goes to war against him to try to recapture him. He tempts (i.e., tests) the Christian with malicious intent, hoping to find a weakness and betray him into a course of action that will ultimately lead him back into the prison out of which Christ brought him._

Specific approaches vary, but normally he tempts us to sin in our areas of weakness and at times of vulnerability. As one of the Puritans said, “The devil is a master fisherman; he baits his hook according to the appetite of the fish.” Packer observes that “he is always seeking to produce unbelief, pride, unreality, false hopes, confusion of mind and disobedience, as he did in Eden; if he cannot do this directly then he labors to do it indirectly, fostering unbalance and one-sidedness.” Examples in the Bible are illustrative. He ensnared Peter by means of fear (Luke 22:31–32). He filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira with lies (Acts 5:1–11). He captures many with sexual lust (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul warns married couples in Corinth who were devoting themselves to special prayer not to refrain from sex for too long, because “Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5). Pride is a common snare (1 Tim. 3:6). Anger is a special danger and must be dealt with promptly and properly when it arises (Eph. 4:26–27). And there are many others.

Looking at temptation more broadly, Lovelace says,

_Most commonly, temptation is directed toward larger ends: involving believers in whole ways of life or patterns of behavior which are subChristian, which will extinguish their spirituality and make them negative witnesses; or luring them into adopting outlooks which excuse or justify sin and which may almost totally obscure their faith._

Materialism, worldliness, and racism are obvious examples in American evangelicalism, and there are a number of others.

Each of us needs to be aware of specific sins that we are vulnerable to and work earnestly “by the Spirit . . . [to] put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). J.I. Packer gives a helpful explanation of what this means:

_How do we “by the Spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body”? Outward acts of sin come from inner sinful urges, so we must learn to starve these urges of what stimulates them (porn magazines, for instance, if the urge is lust; visits to smorgasbords if the urge is gluttony; gambling and lotteries if the urge is greed, and so on). And when the urge is upon us we must learn, as it were, to run to our Lord and cry for help, asking him to deepen our sense of his own holy presence and redeeming love, to give us the strength to say no to that which can only displease him. It is the Spirit who moves us to act in this way, who makes our sense of the holy love of Christ vivid, who imparts the strength for_
which we pray and who actually drains the life out of the sins we starve.15

Often we will need to flee from temptation when it confronts us (1 Tim. 6:11). But when that isn't possible, we must remind ourselves that we are not helpless victims who cannot resist sin, for as Paul tells us, we will encounter no temptation that is not common to man. And, “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

With unbelievers, Satan’s chief goal is to blind their minds and thus keep them from seeing “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). He uses all manner of schemes to entice them into sins and idolatries that will keep them under his influence and away from God. Thus, “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18). And should they ever hear the word of God, he immediately snatches it away from them (Matt.13:19).

What are our defenses against such an enemy? We must remind ourselves regularly that the devil was decisively defeated by Jesus at the Cross. Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). And by shedding His blood on the cross, Christ broke the devil’s power (John 12:27–31; Col. 2:13–15; Heb. 2:14–16), paid the penalty of our sins and opened the door of salvation to all who repent and trust in Him. This will enable us to rediscover our own liberation (Col. 2:13–15) and the authority Jesus has given us over the powers of darkness (Luke 10:17–19) and learn to exercise it rightly for our own good and the good of His church. This is crucial.

One day the devil and all who serve him will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:1–3). Until that day he and his minions fight on. Thus we must also daily remember that our life in this world is lived on a spiritual battlefield, and we must be sober and alert. We must live by faith, keeping our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus our King, not the devil. As E. Stanley Jones once said, “What has your attention has you.” If the devil cannot keep us blinded, he is happy to run us off a cliff through preoccupation with his activities and paranoid fear.

Another essential is a proper perspective on reality. God and the devil are not equally matched opponents, as in some types of cosmic dualism. God is infinitely more powerful than the devil, who is one of His creatures. When God is called the LORD of hosts in the Old Testament, it refers to His position as commander of heaven’s armies—armies of angels who do His bidding. They are the vast majority of angels, far more than fell with Satan. These unseen divine agents are active in the world, serving and defending God’s people (Heb. 1:14) and battling the devil and his angels.

At the battle of Jericho, for example, the commander of the LORD’s army of invisible angels appeared to Joshua on the eve of battle to encourage him and let him know that he was not alone (Josh. 5:13–15). Another instance is when Elisha and his servant were surrounded and besieged by the army of the king of Syria, who intended to kill them. When his servant reported this to Elisha, Elisha responded,

“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

Then Elisha prayed and said, “LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he

Finally, we must use all the means of grace God has provided for our growth in grace.
saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:16–17).

Or consider the exciting story of Peter in the New Testament. Herod had just executed James and had arrested Peter, intending to kill him as well. Peter was in prison being guarded by four squads of soldiers. But the church made earnest prayer for him, and God sent an angel to supernaturally deliver him from prison (Acts 12:1–11). God’s angels are on assignments throughout the world obeying God’s orders in the battle against Satan and his forces (Ps. 103:19–21). And they also watch over each of His children (Heb. 1:14).

Finally, we must use all the means of grace God has provided for our growth in grace. For those who have come to faith in Christ but have not yet been baptized, this means doing so as soon as possible. For every believer, it means being filled with the Holy Spirit daily (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16–25), for “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4), and it was in the power of the Spirit that Jesus overcame the devil (Luke 4:1). In the Spirit’s power, we must follow the example of the early church and be continually devoting ourselves to “the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). This is far more demanding than the halfhearted efforts most of us make. J.I. Packer elaborates on each of these:

Bible truth, preached and received through preaching, studied in the text, meditated on, applied to oneself, taken into the heart, laid up in the memory, taken as a guide for life; prayer, the regular exercise of communion and fellowship with God; worship with the Lord’s people, particularly at the Lord’s Supper but also in hearing the word proclaimed and joining in the prayers and vocal praise; and the informal fellowship and interchange of the Lord’s family as one stands by and ministers to another.16

Wholehearted commitment to Christ as Lord and obedience to known truth are essential responses to God’s grace to keep walking in the Spirit and on the path of His blessing and protection. A spiritual mentor, whether a pastor, elder, or mature believer, will be very helpful for periodic counsel (including discernment of any subtle schemes or attacks of the devil against us). And our commitment to fellowship should include a small accountability prayer group (two or three people). Last, but by no means least, we must understand and actually put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10–18) and keep it in place day by day.

Much more could be said on this subject, but these disciplines of grace will keep us under the protective canopy of God’s grace and keep us growing as disciples of Jesus. They will not exempt us from temptation or attack, but they will enable us to glorify God by standing firm when it comes.

In the next issue of Knowing & Doing, we will look more closely at the world and the flesh, two key allies through which the devil works against us and Christ’s kingdom.

If devils exist, their first aim is to give you an anaesthetic---to put you off your guard. Only if that fails, do you become aware of them.

C.S. Lewis
Notes

9. Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.
11. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 140.
14. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 137.

Recommended Reading

A few helpful resources on Satan and his schemes:

*Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, by Richard Lovelace, 133–144.
Richard Lovelace gives a history of spiritual renewals in light of biblical models. Isolating the elements of live orthodoxy, he proposes a comprehensive approach to renewal. Lovelace looks at such practical issues as renewal of the local congregation, the ways revivals go wrong, the evangelical thrust toward church unity, and Christian approaches to the arts and to social concern. A book for all concerned to revitalize the church.

The Christian church has a long tradition of systematic theology, that is, studying theology and doctrine organized around fairly standard categories such as the Word of God, redemption, and Jesus Christ.

*Spiritual Warfare*, by Timothy Warner.
This timely and important book provides Christians with the information and the ammunition they need to engage in spiritual warfare. The author shows from the Scriptures that God’s people can defeat the enemy because of the character of God, the certainty of His promises, our authority as His people, and most of all the victory Christ has already won.

*Arming for Spiritual Warfare*, by George Malone
In a warm and sensitive style, Mallone describes God’s weapons for warfare: inner healing, prayer, confession and repentance, righteousness, commitment to Christ, the unity of the body, and demonic deliverance.
Men’s Fellowship totaling more than thirty students who love Jesus and each other. It has not been the mission of CSLI to do campus ministry, at least not recently, but there was clearly a void at SJC, and CSLI Annapolis was asked to fill the gap. (“Move the shuttle!”)

More than twenty SJC students have graduated from these fellowships and are serving Jesus throughout the world as teachers, seminary students, speech writers, political staffers, poets, and military officers. They are “the wealth of the nations” wherever they are serving Christ.

At the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), there are numerous campus ministries led by gifted men and women. They are all under the guidance of the USNA chaplains. The chaplains have been friends of CSLI and have participated in pastors’ luncheons and coordinated with CSLI Annapolis to bring seminar speakers such as Amy and Frog Orr-Ewing, Ken Boa, and Michael Ramsden onto the USNA Yard to address the midshipmen. Some of the leaders of these midshipmen have become Fellows. (“Move the shuttle!”)

The “facilitators” of CSLI Annapolis, an informal board of advisers, include John Bishop, Jim Hiskey, and George Anderson. These men have been sought out by pastors, chaplains, mentors, and Fellows to provide personal mentoring, and those they mentor return to their sphere of influence and pass along to others what they have learned. (“Again!”)

Last year we hired a program and events coordinator (Amy Yearwood). Amy came to us after spending a year in the UK as a research assistant to Frog and Amy Orr-Ewing. Amy loves to coordinate events and “hang out” with college students while talking about Jesus. She is involved with both the SJC Fellowships and some of the USNA campus ministries. (“And again!”)

Again, at this juncture, we had threads of Fellows, Men’s and Women’s Fellowships, SJC Fellowships, pastors’ luncheons, USA chaplains, facilitators, mentors, employees, the Aslan House, and CSLI friends and supporters. We could trust and imagine that the Master Weaver was making something special, but we could not begin to appreciate his work fully until we were invited to go “top-side” to see his handiwork.

That invitation to see his work came for me last fall as I prepared an annual update for some of our financial supporters. After reviewing the threads of the CSLI sari, as I have done above, a graphic overview of what God was doing in Annapolis came to mind.

Follow the progression from the bottom to the top of the map: From the pastors, chaplains, Men’s and Women’s Fellowships, seminars, and the community at large we receive Fellows applicants. Our Fellows graduate and become mentors to new Fellows, or to SJC/USNA students. These students and our Fellows go out into the world, to live what they have learned through their association with CSLI Annapolis. Two of our Fellows have an opportunity to establish a CSLI in China and expect to have this in place in 2013. Two young people from China have come to Annapolis to participate in the next Fellows class.

Like Antioch, which became the training field for followers of Jesus to go out into the world and make disciples, Annapolis is raising...
up disciples to go and disciple the world. The young people graduating from our Fellows programs and SJC/USNA Fellowships are going into the world better equipped to articulate, defend, and live the gospel. Because of this, they are in fact becoming “the wealth of the nations.”

Had we sat down a few years back and tried to design such a plan, we would not have envisioned what God has done. We could not have sought out and selected the men and women God has brought through the doors of CSLI Annapolis. We could not have envisioned the advance of the kingdom that has been made on the campuses of these two universities in Annapolis. We could not have imagined the places and vocations our young people would have been called to. Even today, we hesitate to make plans at CSLI Annapolis lest we limit what God desires of and for us. What God has done through CSLI Annapolis these past few years can be attributed only to Him and Him alone. We are servants who are delighted to have been invited to participate in His work, His beautiful sari.

Notes


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If and when a horror turns up, you will then be given Grace to help you.

I don’t think one is usually given it in advance.

“Give us our daily bread” (not an annuity for life) applies to spiritual gifts too; the little daily support for the daily trial.

Life has to be taken day by day and hour by hour.

*C.S. Lewis*
to get similar immunity. Such a “conspiracy” of silence fell apart easily at the threat of a short prison term. (Colson got nine months.) These staffers were not threatened with torture or death. Colson points out how much more quickly a “conspiracy” to make up the stories about Jesus would fall apart under that more serious threat (torture and death).

4. The time for the creation of “mythical” material was too short. Jesus died about AD 30. The Gospel of Mark was written in the sixties if not in the fifties. Paul received his tradition (1 Cor. 15:3–5) in the midthirties and wrote some of his epistles in the early fifties. This timetable doesn’t allow for the creation of sagas, legends, and myths. The development of German folklore required centuries. Yet the message of the gospel exploded into life, fully grown at birth.

5. Failure to take into account the Jewish perspective on memory. Some critics imagine a free-flowing situation in the first century that allowed and even encouraged the easy invention of stories about Jesus. However, such a picture is totally contrary to the Middle Eastern and Jewish environment out of which these stories came. In his book Memory and Manuscript, Birger Gerhardsson thoroughly documents the importance of memorization for the Jewish mentality, especially the passing on of formal teaching.

The good Jewish student was not to lose a drop from the cistern of the master’s teaching. Right up to this day, the best Jewish student is the one who can recite the rabbinic tradition verbatim on issue after issue. (For a contemporary novel illustrating this phenomenon, read The Chosen, by Chaim Potok.) No one was encouraged to play fast and loose with the formal tradition. You were not allowed creative freedom. You were expected to recite word for word. You would be immediately corrected if a single word was wrong.

This careful, exact memorizing also applied to the more informal tradition involving things that were important to community life or stories about the foundation of the community. Feats of memory continue in the Middle East today. Kenneth Bailey lived in the Middle East for sixty years, for part of that time teaching at a university in Beirut. He points out that memory is still vital to Middle Eastern culture and community life. Even the illiterate peasant knows by heart thousands of lines of proverbs and poetry. For amusement a large number of participants sometimes sit in a circle. The game begins when the first person recites two lines of poetry. The next person has to use the last letter of the last line as the first letter for two other lines of poetry, and so on. Bailey has seen the game played many times, even by those who cannot read, with the challenge traveling several cycles around the circle (of ten to fifteen people) before anyone is stumped or misquotes. If you make even the smallest mistake, you are out, and everyone knows when you have made a mistake.

Some youth leaders tried to bring the American game of “telephone” to the Middle East, but it did not work. In this game a short message is given to the first person, who then whispers that message into the ear of the next person, and so on around the circle. The results are often funny, because the message comes out garbled at the other end. In the Middle East, however, the message came back exactly the same. The kids could not see the fun in the game, because they were trained to hear carefully and repeat exactly.
Can the Gospels Be Trusted?

Many Muslims are encouraged to memorize the Qur’an in Arabic. A translation or paraphrase will not do. It has to be an exact repetition. One of the terrorists from September 11, 2001, was said to have memorized the whole Qur’an. Biblical scholar Bruce Waltke said that he once met a man in Israel who had memorized the whole Old Testament in Hebrew. Waltke tested the man on his knowledge and considered his claim to be credible. But then Waltke was surprised to learn that the man was . . . an atheist.

Informal tradition or stories especially about the beginnings of a community are viewed with great respect and care. To illustrate this point Bailey mentioned a book written about a century ago on the founding of a Christian church in a Middle Eastern community. When he went to visit that community and asked about the founding of the church, the stories he heard matched those in the book, even down to the quotations. The remarkable accuracy was not because the people had read the book, but because the tradition had been passed along with scrupulous care. This mentality was true then (during Jesus’ day) as it is now.

If the formal tradition of a teacher is passed on verbatim and the informal stories, especially about the founding of community life, are passed on with extreme care, how do we account for the invention of fictional stories about a person named Jesus being touted as true, with no attendant protest, shock, and outrage? It might have happened in some other time or place, but not in Israel and the Middle East. Ken Bailey gave a lecture where he explored these themes of memory (then and now) as over against the critical theories. He closed the lecture by saying, “The Gospels are authentic.”

6. The utter uniqueness of Jesus’ teachings. Some critics accept as authentic only those sayings of Jesus that are unique and not paralleled in contemporary Judaism. In some ways, this is wrongheaded, making Jesus an eccentric with no roots in the tradition. However, if we, for the sake of argument, accept this criteria, it is amazing to note how much of the Gospels is unique.

For instance, Jesus often addressed God as “Father” or even “Abba,” a more familiar address used by children for their dad. The title Father is occasionally used of God in the Old Testament. But there is no Jewish parallel to addressing God as “Father” in prayer before, during, or after Jesus’ time. The first recorded instance of a Jew addressing God as Father in prayer (after Jesus) is in Italy in AD 974.

Another example is Jesus’ use of amen. In the Gospels every time we see “Truly, I say to you” or “Truly, truly I say to you” (or, in the King James, “verily” or “verily, verily”), the Greek text uses the Hebrew word amen. Now amen means “it is true, reliable, solid, or without dispute.” All Jews were required to say “amen” when they heard God being praised or thanked. In some churches today people shout “amen” to indicate their agreement with the preacher. It was used that way in Jesus’ day as a congregational response to a prayer or message.

However, note that Jesus precedes His words with an “amen.” Imagine your preacher standing up on Sunday morning
and saying, “amen,” or, “amen, amen” to preface the sermon. What would that mean? It would mean, “I am not waiting for you as noble Bereans to search the Scriptures and see if you agree with me (adding your amen). I am claiming absolute truthfulness and authority up front.” Scripture says that Jesus spoke “with authority” and not as the scribes. I think He spoke authoritatively, and one of the marks of His authority was pre-facing His words with “amen.” I’m sure this infuriated the scribes and Pharisees. He was not looking for their stamp of approval or endorsement of His message. With one exception, there is no recorded parallel to this use of “amen” to preface a sentence. (The exception is one letter in 700 BC.)

We might ask how Jesus was able to say the “amen” before He spoke. It was because He was the Amen. Revelation 3:14 calls Jesus the “Amen”—the faithful and true witness. He was able to speak the “amen” because He was the Amen—the One who is true, reliable, and solid.

7. The utter uniqueness of Jesus’ parables. There are stories, metaphors, and similes in rabbinic teaching. But there is no parallel to Jesus’ parables (stories about everyday life used to teach theological points) in the intertestamental period (400 BC–AD 30), during Jesus’ life, or immediately afterward. Yet there are some forty-one parables in the Gospels (depending on how you count them). Jesus also used His parables as a weapon to confront spiritually blind people to let them see themselves as if in a mirror (e.g., the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son).

We could also add other unique features of Jesus’ teaching (such as His characteristic forms of speech)—enough to say that we can accumulate a considerable amount of material by using the criteria of uniqueness.

**Conclusion**

In light of these and other arguments, the burden of proof is on those who maintain the inauthenticity of the Gospels rather than on those who maintain their authenticity. You can’t prove every specific of the Gospels this way, but there is such an avalanche of evidence that it becomes difficult to avoid being overwhelmed by the cumulative force of the argument for the trustworthiness of the Gospels.

This internal test seems to verify Luke’s claim (1:1–4) that his goal was to write truthfully about what had taken place in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

**Notes**


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All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the men of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

*2 Tim 3:16-17*
From the Book: *God’s Got Your Number*

By Ken Gaub

Evangelist Ken Gaub has written and published the following story:

Do you believe that God not only loves you, but knows where you are and what you’re doing every minute of the day? I certainly do after an amazing experience I had several years ago.

I was driving on I-75 near Dayton, Ohio, with my wife and children. We turned off the highway for a rest and refreshment stop. My wife Barbara and the children went into the restaurant, but I suddenly felt the need to stretch my legs, so I waved them on ahead and said I’d join them shortly. I bought a soft drink and walked on toward a Dairy Queen; feelings of self-pity were enshrouding my mind. Even though I loved the Lord and my ministry, I felt drained and burdened. My cup was empty.

Suddenly the impatient ringing of a telephone nearby jarred me out of my doldrums. It was coming from a phone booth at a service station on the corner. Was no one going to answer this phone? Traffic noise from the busy intersection must have drowned out the sound, because the service station attendant continued looking after his customers, oblivious to the incessant ringing.

Why didn’t someone answer that phone? The ringing continued. I began thinking it might be important, even some kind of emergency. Curiosity finally overcame my indifference. I walked over to the booth and picked up the phone. “Hello,” I said casually, as I took a long sip of my drink.

The operator said, “Long distance call for Ken Gaub.”

I almost choked on a piece of ice. My eyes must have widened considerably. Swallowing hard, I said, “You’re crazy!” Then, realizing I shouldn’t be speaking to the operator like that, I said, “This can’t be! I was walking down the road, not bothering anybody, the phone was ringing . . .”

“Is Ken Gaub there?” the operator interrupted. “I have a long distance call for him.”

It took a moment for me to gain control of my stammering from the surprise. I finally replied, “Yes, he is here.” Searching for a possible explanation, I wondered if I could possibly be on *Candid Camera* or a similar TV show. I looked for a hidden camera and tried to smooth my hair. Impatiently the operator repeated, “I have a long distance call for Ken Gaub, sir. Is he there?”

Still shaken and perplexed, I asked, “How in the world did you reach me here? I was just walking down the road, the pay phone started ringing, and I only answered it by chance. You can’t mean me!”

“Well,” the operator said with some firmness, “is Mr. Gaub there or isn’t he?”

“Yes, I am Ken Gaub,” I said, finally convinced by the tone of her voice that the call was a real one. Then I heard another voice say, “Yes, that’s him, operator. That’s Ken Gaub.”

I listened dumbfounded as the strange voice introduced herself. “I’m Millie, from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. You don’t know me, Mr. Gaub, but I’m desperate. Please help me.”

“What can I do for you?” I asked. She began weeping. Finally she regained control and continued. “I was about to commit suicide. I had just finished writing a note, and I began to pray and tell God I really didn’t want to do this. Then I suddenly remembered seeing you on television and thought

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Ken Gaub has been in ministry for more than fifty years and has traveled world-wide to bring a message of hope to people both in and outside of the church. He has spoken before diverse crowds in colleges, high schools, universities, the Pentagon, prisons, music festivals, state and county fairs, as well as some of the world’s largest churches. His mission is to help people find lives of peace and joy.

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In the legacy of C.S. Lewis, the Institute endeavors to develop disciples who can articulate, defend, and live faith in Christ through personal and public life.
if I could just talk to you, you could help me. I knew that was impossible because I didn’t know how to reach you. I didn’t even know anyone who could help me find you. Then some numbers came to my mind and I scribbled them down.”

At this point she began weeping again. I prayed silently for wisdom to help her.

She said, “I looked at the numbers, and thought how wonderful it would be if I had a miracle from God. Could He possibly have given me Ken Gaub’s phone number? I decided to try calling it. I can’t believe I’m talking to you! Are you in your office in California?”

I said, “I don’t have an office in California. My office is in Yakima, Washington.”

Surprised, she said, “Oh, really? Then where are you?”

I replied, “Don’t you know? You made the call.”

She said, “I don’t know where I’m calling to. I just dialed the number I wrote down on this paper.”

“Ma’am, you won’t believe this,” I answered, “but I’m in a phone booth in Dayton, Ohio.”

“Really!” she exclaimed. “Well, what are you doing there?”

I kidded her gently, “Well, I’m answering the phone. It was ringing as I walked by, so I answered it.”

Knowing this encounter could have been arranged only by God, I began to talk to her and counsel her. As she told me of her despair and frustration, the presence of the Holy Spirit flooded the phone booth and gave me words of wisdom beyond my own ability. In a matter of moments she prayed the sinner’s prayer and met the One who would lead her out of her situation and into a new life.

I walked away from that telephone booth with an electrifying sense of our Heavenly Father’s concern and love for each of His children. What were the astronomical odds of this happening without God? With all the millions of phones and innumerable combinations of numbers, only an all-knowing God could have caused Millie in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to call that number in that phone booth in that particular moment of time.

Forgetting my melancholy and now bursting with exhilaration, I headed back to my family, wondering if they would believe my story. I thought about not telling of this far-fetched encounter, but I couldn’t possibly keep it to myself.

“Barb!” I shouted. “You won’t believe this! God knows where we are!”

Heart & Mind Discipleship: Foundational Truths for Authentic Spiritual Growth is a ten-week small group discipleship program for new believers or for anyone who wants to deepen their understanding of faith in Christ and to focus on growing in Christ. This program was produced with support from Alpha USA and Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and with input from pastors from a variety of denominations. Heart and Mind Discipleship is ideal for churches that are looking to start a discipleship program or for home groups who want to go to the next level after taking an Alpha Course or another introductory course.

Heart and Mind Discipleship is taught by a variety of effective teachers and focuses on key themes each week. For each weekly theme, participants in a group will read a 2,000 word article in the workbook, complete a short bible study on the theme, and meet as a group to hear a 30 minute lecture on the topic. There are also suggested discussion questions for the group to consider after hearing the lecture.

The weekly themes covered are:

1) God’s Character & Personality (Stuart McAlpine, CSLI Senior Fellow and Pastor)
2) God’s Story of Redemption (Bill Kynes, CSLI Senior Fellow and Pastor)
3) Understanding Salvation (Randy Newman, Cru and CSLI Teaching Fellow)
4) God’s Plan for Our Growth (Joel Woodruff, Vice President of Discipleship and Outreach, CSLI)
5) The Cost of Discipleship (Tom Tarrants, CSLI Vice President of Ministry)
6a) Humility & Servanthood (Bill Kynes, CSLI Senior Fellow and Pastor, Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church, Annandale, VA)
6b) Loving God & Neighbor (Frog Orr-Ewing, Chaplain, Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics)
7) Authority of the Bible (Art Lindsley, Senior Fellow, CSLI)
8) The Practice of Prayer (Amy Orr-Ewing, Director of Programs for Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics)
9) The Mission of the Church (Joel Woodruff, Vice President of Discipleship and Outreach, CSLI)
10) Sharing the Good News (Gerard Long, Executive Director, Alpha USA)

This program will help each participant better understand their conversion and then understand how to grow in spiritual maturity and exercise their faith over the course of their lives.