Waiting on the Lord While Unemployed

by Doug Greenwold
C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow, Senior Teaching Fellow,
Preserving Bible Times

The Doer’s Lists

It seems as if I’ve always been a doer. Getting things done, reaching goals, and achieving results is a very real part of my wiring diagram. That “performance” paradigm caused me to always maintain four lists: office, home, hobbies, and church.

One day a significant change came to one of my lists. It was August 22, 1989. At 11:00 a.m. the president of our company walked into my office and quickly closed the door (always an ominous sign!). He matter-of-factly explained to me that not only was business soft (which I knew) but that the sudden loss of a significant government defense contract meant that the company had to make major cutbacks. “Nothing personal,” he said, “but we can no longer afford a director of corporate development.”

The Challenge

With unexpected time freed up, our family decided to take a week to visit family and friends in Grand Rapids, Michigan. On the way we stopped by to see longtime friends in Ann Arbor and East Lansing.

In Ann Arbor my first spiritual mentor, Bill, suggested that we get up early the next morning to pray over my new situation. Bill started that time by asking, “Tell me what you’re thinking.” I launched into a soliloquy of possibilities. When my monologue was over, I asked Bill for his reactions. His response surprised me.

Bill observed that he had been around businessmen for thirty years. To him they all seemed to be cut from the same cloth; wired to be doers preferring to function with plates overflowing with commitments and demands. Take one plate away, he observed, and they would quickly try to find a new plate and fill it up as fast as possible.

“The Doer,” he went on to observe, “if I could desire one thing for you right now, it would be this, take sixty days and do nothing but sit at the feet of Jesus.” Bill’s observations caught me by surprise. I couldn’t argue with it. But I wasn’t convinced.

The Challenge Echo

Arriving in East Lansing the next day was “instant replay.” Shortly after arriving, Mark, a longtime brother in Christ, said, “Tell me what you’ve been thinking.” I responded by repeating my Ann Arbor monologue, to which Mark observed, “Doug, if I could push the...” (continued on page 12)
Dear Friends,

As you start your fall reading, this issue of Knowing & Doing provides you a variety of challenging articles to grow in your understanding of faith as well as practical advice to live each day as a disciple of Jesus.

Tom Tarrants, our vice president of ministry, explores how we are called to “Love God and Love Our Neighbor.” This greatest commandment is the foundation of our spiritual growth.

Bill Kynes, a C.S. Lewis Institute Senior Fellow and pastor of Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church, describes in compelling terms how growing as a disciple requires working in community—being part of a team—as we learn to emulate others who are growing alongside us on this journey.

Four C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows share how God is shaping and preparing them to live more powerful lives as disciples. Doug Greenwold shares how his time without a job became a unique window for him to seek the Lord and sit at the feet of Jesus. Alexandria H. found that God had an entirely new calling for her as He gradually pulled her away from a cushy, simple life and is leading her to an entirely new adventure, teaching in Asia. Fred Clark shows how participating in the Urban Plunge as part of the Fellows Program gave him a new vision for helping the poor living within just a few miles of home. And Rob Shepherd tells, in an interview, how he is more equipped to live out his faith through his job as an airline pilot.

The common thread through the four articles is how the program has encouraged and equipped them to make a difference in sharing their faith, loving their neighbor, and having a closer relationship with God. There are hundreds of similar stories among the Fellows, and we are thrilled that God is raising up these leaders to bring light into the darkness around them.

What is God calling you to do? Perhaps this fall could be a time of deep reflection and talking with God. Are you being pulled into a midlife correction? Are you being called to “finish well”? Perhaps a greater focus is needed in being a disciple in your career or taking steps to reach those who live in your neighborhood. “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” (Isa. 55:6 ESV).

May God bless you as you seek to love Him more and learn His ways.

Sincerely,

Kerry A. Knott | K.Knott@cslewisinstitute.org
C^ommitted^, adj. Feeling dedication and loyalty to a cause, activity, or job; wholeheartedly dedicated.

C^hristian^, noun. A person who has received Christian baptism or is a believer in Jesus Christ and his testimony.

In July I will be moving to Southeast Asia to teach for two years as a member of a partnering organization with the C.S. Lewis Institute (CSLI). (This article is intentionally not naming the organization.) I was first introduced to this group in October of last year, when I had been a Year One Fellow in the C.S. Lewis Institute–Annapolis Fellows Program for a mere four months.

This partnering organization has existed for more than thirty years, sending faithful Christian educators and teachers into places like China, Mongolia, and Southeast Asia to teach in university and secondary settings. It focuses on excellence in teaching, learning the host language and culture, intentionality in building relationships in and out of the classroom, and walking the walk together in community. They offer a variety of programs for people in various situations: current college students, recent graduates, and working professionals. The program I am a part of is geared toward working professionals and requires a minimum two-year commitment. During the application process to become a teacher in Asia, I did not think much about how my work as a Fellow would impact or inform my future work with them. Now, at the end of Year One, I understand that everything I’ve done with CSLI has direct bearing on what lies ahead.

This partnering organization requires two things of all applicants. The first requirement was easy for me to document. I needed a bachelor of science or bachelor of arts in any field of study. I graduated from St. John’s College with a BA in liberal arts back in 2010, and I have the diploma to prove it. However, as I walked through the admissions process for the program (and a long and arduous process it was!) last November, I was asked all sorts of probing personal questions about my

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Whether we realize it or not, we all have certain priorities in life. Some things are more important to us than others. And those that are the most important shape our lives in significant ways. This is as true for the day laborer as it is for the corporate executive. Have you ever examined your life with a view toward understanding your priorities? For better or worse, our priorities are slowly turning us into a certain kind of person and shaping our destinies.

Starting our exploration of priorities with what God says they should be can provide a framework or perspective from which to discern what our priorities really are. Fortunately the Bible is quite clear about this. Jesus says the first and greatest of God’s commandments is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, italics added). The passage from the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4–5) is a foundational command for our relationship with God. The repetition of all and its application to the various aspects of our nature means that we are to love God with all that we are, with every part of our being: intellect, emotion, will, and desire. We are to become God-centered people; He is to be first in our lives, above everyone and everything, without exception. From this all other priorities will find their place.

Loving God

Loving God wholeheartedly lies at the heart of spiritual health, and the more we love Him the healthier we are. Echoing the spiritual giants throughout history, C.S. Lewis says, “Every Christian would agree that a man’s spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God.” Do you agree? Is wholehearted love for God the highest priority in your life?

To rightly answer this question, we must begin with a basic understanding of what the Bible means by the word God. This is necessary because our view of God has such profound personal implications. As A.W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Discerning the biblical view of God is also important because many Americans who say they believe in God use the word to mean something other than the God of the Bible. And even those who do mean the God of the Bible sometimes have distorted ideas and images of Him that hinder their ability to love Him wholeheartedly.

In the Bible, the word God describes an invisible and eternal spiritual being who is immense and infinitely powerful, wise, knowing, and good. He is holy, morally pure, loving, gracious, merciful, patient, and forgiving. He created and sustains all things, seen and unseen, and will one day judge all mankind. Much more could be said, but this brief description helps us distinguish the God of the Bible from other gods. Is this what comes into your mind when you think about God? I hope so, because this is the God whom Jesus says we are to love wholeheartedly.

How do we love this God? We must first come to know Him personally, for it is impossible to love someone you do not know.
Coming to know God involves gaining true and accurate knowledge about Him. Although God has shown us something of His eternal power and divine nature in creation (Rom. 1:20), it is preeminently in the Scriptures that He has given us true, accurate, and detailed knowledge about Himself and His ways. This propositional knowledge about God is a necessary and indispensable foundation for knowing Him, but it is not sufficient by itself. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must go on to meet God personally and know Him in a relational way. This happens as we come to believe what we have learned about Him and entrust ourselves to Him. God has given the clearest revelation of Himself to us in Jesus, who said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Paul described Jesus as “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). We come to know the invisible God through His Son, Jesus. More specifically, we must respond to Jesus’ call to “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). As we respond to His call with faith in Him personally and His atoning sacrifice on the cross, we come to know God and Christ in a saving and relational way.

Once we come to know God, we experience a fundamental inner change that enables and inspires us to love God. This profound change is produced by the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell within us and produces a new life (John 3:5–8) and a growing love for God and others (Rom. 5:5). Whereas we were once dead to God, we are now alive to Him. Whereas we were formerly God’s enemy, now we are His friend. This radical change gives us a new outlook along with new desires and life-transforming power.

However, this spiritual “new birth” is just the beginning. After our conversion, we are in a state of infancy; we need proper care and feeding to grow in our new relationship with God. The spiritual nurture that helps us mature comes to us, as it did to the first believers, in a community of other believers who are devoted to four things: “to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The combination of these four elements creates a sort of “spiritual incubator” for growing in the knowledge and love of God and of Jesus. Belonging to such a community is vital, and devoting ourselves to all four means of grace is essential for growing to spiritual maturity. Each one is necessary, and none can be neglected without significant loss.

But being in the incubator doesn’t guarantee that we will grow in love for God. A vital but often overlooked aspect of our spiritual growth is how we respond to what we learn about God, especially in Scripture. As we devote ourselves to reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on what the Bible teaches about God’s nature, character, works, and will, we become aware of personal changes.
Urban Plunge Reflections: What about the Poor in Our Own Backyard?

by Fred J. Clark
C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow

God Lays a Foundation for Serving the Poor

During the summer of 2009, my wife and I accompanied some two hundred high school students and chaperones on an annual McLean Bible Church mission trip to the Dominican Republic.

One day I worked with a construction team making small repairs and improvements at an orphanage. After completing that project, we were taken unexpectedly to the community of Quisqueya to perform a surprise “makeover” of a two-bedroom apartment, the home of a local Dominican school teacher, Mirqueya Guzman, which she had transformed into a day-care center that served more than fifty children. Mirqueya had opened her doors eight years earlier, moved by the needs of the impoverished children of broken homes—with parents beholden to drugs or prostitution or voodoo. When children were not in school, she welcomed them.

We spent the day repainting walls, replacing aged kitchen appliances and cabinets, repairing lights and electrical wiring. We provided shoes, school supplies, and snacks for the children. When a surprised Mirqueya returned from her outing, she fell on her knees and wept. I will never forget her parting words of gratitude: “What a great God we serve that you would fly across an ocean to help people you do not know to benefit children you will never see again.”

Similar Needs in My Own Backyard

My experiences in the Dominican Republic remind me of the gratification that can come from serving the poor in the developing world. But my readings and reflections in the C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows Program have led me to see that there are materially and spiritually needy people in my own community who need a helping hand as well.

This was driven home to me during the morning of my Urban Plunge experience. The Center for Student Missions (CSM) team with which the C.S. Lewis Institute partnered sent my Fellows team out in the morning to the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, DC, to volunteer at the Children of Mine Youth Center.

We were greeted by the director, Hannah Hawkins, whose young husband was murdered in 1970, leaving her with five children to raise. Rather than surrendering to grief and rage, she promised God that if He would give her the strength to survive this challenge, she would serve those less fortunate than herself. More than ten years later, she founded the Children of Mine Youth Center in her home. There, like Mirqueya Guzman in the Caribbean, Mrs. Hawkins invested her own money to provide hot meals, clothing, tutoring, and other assistance for children in her neighborhood.

Mrs. Hawkins and Children of Mine are still going strong. Many of the students are latch-key children. Many live with caretakers debilitated by chronic substance abuse or who are overwhelmed by the need to raise children on an income that cannot pro-
vide adequate shelter, food, and clothing. These children often fend for themselves. Mrs. Hawkins had a vision to prevent these at-risk children from becoming children in crisis: in faith, providing love, security, education, and effective communication.

Here within ten miles of my suburban home in Arlington, Virginia, was a day-care center extending services similar to those offered by Mirqueya Guzman 1,470 miles away in the Dominican Republic. This experience challenged my romanticized notion of overseas missions, one that had given me license to compartmentalize any call to “serve the poor” to those who may live beyond our country’s borders. This is consistent with the need for local service suggested by my Fellows mentor and commanded by Christ—to love my neighbor without regard to the proximity of my neighbor.

Homeless by Choice—but Does It Matter?

As another aspect of our Urban Plunge, my team of six was assigned by our CSM hosts to go to the park at Franklin Square in downtown DC to engage with homeless people over lunch. Each of us had been given six dollars by our CSM hosts: four dollars for transportation (round-trip bus fare), and two dollars to pool to provide lunch for ourselves and one or more homeless person(s).

We were encouraged to be creative in how we obtained lunch for seven or more for only twelve dollars. We were creative by walking the two miles to Franklin Square. This saved us two dollars each and doubled our available lunch funds. Before setting out, we debated the moral implications of diverting our travel money. Was this cheating, skirting the challenge of finding a meal with only two dollars each?

In the end, majority opinion prevailed and we walked, also influenced by the beautiful weather. (Our consciences were salved when we later learned that homeless people walk practically everywhere, especially in good weather; money being scarcer than time for them.)

At Franklin Square two of us headed to a nearby Domino’s Pizza to see how much lunch they could get for twenty-four dollars. The remaining four of us split into pairs to wander through the park and identify a likely homeless person or two with whom we might have lunch and try to engage in a civil, informative conversation. Picking out a promising luncheon partner was not easy for me, in no small measure because of the gulf between my experience and that of those on the park benches. Many looked as if the last thing on their mind was

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Discipleship Is a Team Sport:
It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple

by Bill Kynes
C.S. Lewis Institute Senior Teaching Fellow; Pastor; Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church, Annandale, Virginia

I have great respect for golfers and tennis players, but my experience with athletics has centered on team sports. As part of a team, you understand that your success can be realized only as you fit into a larger whole. The skills and abilities of each team member must complement and even foster the skills of others so that together you achieve what no one member ever could alone. Further, your own training is enhanced by the encouragement of the team, as together you endure the physical and psychological rigors and discipline of working toward a common goal. In this light I contend that Christian discipleship must be seen as a team sport.

I ground this contention, first, in the fundamental mandate given by our Lord—the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every thing I have commanded you.”¹ A disciple of Jesus is one who follows Him in faith in a relationship that creates solidarity with the Master. This relationship is visibly expressed in baptism—that outward expression of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection (see Rom. 6:3–5). But our “vertical” union with Christ also has important “horizontal” implications.

We each come alone to Christ, but in coming to Christ we do not remain alone; we are simultaneously constituted into the corporate body of believers. If in union with Christ, God becomes our Father, then all other believers similarly united to Christ become our brothers and sisters. And if, by virtue of our union with Christ, we are a part of His body, then we are fellow members of that body with every other person who is also in communion with Christ (see 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 12:27). The gospel cannot be separated from the church and becoming a disciple necessarily entails inclusion into this new social reality.

Discipleship must include our loving fellowship with other believers simply because that is a primary goal of the discipleship process. The Great Commission not only calls for baptism, it also demands teaching believers to obey Jesus as Lord—the One in whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:18). Jesus wants us to become like Him—to share His heart and life—and to become like Christ is to love His family: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). You can’t be a disciple if you don’t love other disciples.

But the loving community of the church is not only a goal of discipleship, it is also its means. The apostle Paul speaks of the church as “a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21). We are like “living stones” (1 Pet. 2:5), “being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). The Spirit unites us as one body, and our social distinctions (and even the distinction between Jew and Gentile) no longer divide us (1 Cor. 12:13). But that same Spirit also distributes various gifts which that equip and empower believers to serve one another in the body of Christ and so build up one another in the faith. This is a wonderful body, a body full of variety, with
people of all sorts, differing in their interests and skills and gifts, but each playing a vital part in the well-being of the whole.

This suggests that though one-on-one discipling can be extremely important and helpful (just as individual coaching can greatly enhance the performance of a team player), it is not enough, because no one person has all the gifts that are needed to enable us to grow to full maturity in Christ. The body needs ears and eyes and hands and feet if it is to function properly, and no one part of the body can claim that it doesn’t need the others (1 Cor. 12:21).

The corporate character of discipleship is particularly emphasized in Paul’s instructions in Ephesians. He begins the second half of his letter, in which he focuses on living “a life worthy of the calling you have received” (4:1), by referring to the gifts Christ has given His church. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers are to build up the body of Christ “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). Again, the body imagery is central. We are to “grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (4:15–16). We are each a part of a living whole.

The Christian life may be compared to a journey, but it’s not a solo race. It’s much more like a mountain-climbing expedition in which we are roped together. We lift each other up and catch one another when we fall, and success comes only when we all reach the summit. A mature disciple of Jesus must have a concern for the well-being of others as they travel together, for we need one another.

C.S. Lewis said it well:

[Christ] works on us in all sorts of ways . . .
But above all, He works on us through each other.

Men are mirrors, or “carriers” of Christ to other men . . . That is why the Church, the whole body of Christians showing Him to one another, is so important.2 (continued on page 30)
Tell us how and when you came to Christ.

I did not attend church with any regularity during my childhood and only occasionally during my early college years. My wife’s strong faith and weekly attendance changed my perspective on the community of faith. We started going to church together toward the end of our college experience, which really encouraged me to seek Christ. He found me shortly thereafter, while I was in pilot training with the Air Force. I would describe the moment as very Wesleyan: “I felt my heart strangely warmed” one day during the worship service and was led to profess my faith during the altar call.

How did the C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows Program equip you to become a more mature and effective disciple of Christ?

Although I understood my justification when I came to faith, my conscience had been badly seared and my sanctification journey was rocky for many years. The Fellows Program has helped me to walk by the Spirit by giving me the intellectual background I needed to appreciate my faith and a deeper understanding of the relational nature of our triune God as a model for our lives in community. I am still far from the finish line, but I know that God will continue to work in my life to bring it to His perfect completion (Phil. 1:6).

Give an example of how the Fellows Program helped you as a follower of Jesus?

Although I tried to live as a “good” person for many years, I still found myself living in the flesh by relying on my own strength to fight the spiritual battles in life. My Fellows studies have shown the absolute absurdity of such an attempt, and I have begun to surrender more of my life to Christ with the help of my small group, my mentors, and my Fellows class members. I still struggle with complete surrender and continue to rely on the Spirit to convict and empower me whenever I don’t sacrifice for Christ’s sake (Matt. 16:25).

How has your experience with the Institute influenced your approach to sharing the gospel message with others?

Several members of my immediate family are growing in their walk with Christ, and my enhanced understanding of Scripture and God’s call on our lives has made it easier for me to effectively encourage their spiritual growth. I’ve also felt the Holy Spirit speaking through me in some of these conversations; I feel this comes directly from my increased sensitivity to His presence because of the Fellows experience.

How did the Fellows Program help you integrate your faith and your
professional life? Your family life?

One theme of the Fellows Program that most resonates with me is that it is not supposed to be an end in itself; rather, it is “unto something” in my life. I decided early on that I needed to take my walk with Christ into the cockpit with me in my capacity as a captain at a major airline. The airline industry is not well known for its Puritanical attitudes and behaviors, so it seems like fertile ground for a positive Christian witness. I believe my Fellows studies have allowed me to enter the fray “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17).

Similarly, the Spirit has used my time in the Fellows Program to convict me with regard to my duties as the spiritual head of my household and to better prepare me to accept those responsibilities—and the inevitable warfare that comes with them.

What would you tell a friend or work colleague about the Fellows Program?

I first learned about the Institute and Fellows Program through a coworker, and I am grateful for his proactivity. I have discussed my experience with several people and have to restrain myself from raving about it! I talk about how I have been challenged, convicted, and encouraged along the way, and my bottom line is this: I have been transformed. I firmly believe that all disciples, from newly reborn to those who have long walked with Christ, can benefit from the program and can carry their growth into the world to make it better while we wait for the day of the Lord.

In Thanksgiving to Jesus for the Life of Dr. Chris Mitchell

It was with great sadness that we learned of the sudden death of C.S. Lewis Institute Senior Teaching Fellow, Dr. Christopher Mitchell, on July 10, 2014. Chris was a dear brother in Christ and one of the leading C.S. Lewis scholars in the world. He served for 19 years as the director of the Marion E. Wade Center of Wheaton College, an “Inklings” study center that houses many of the original manuscripts and letters of Lewis, Tolkien, Sayers and others. Just a year ago, Chris had moved with his wife, Julie, to serve as a professor at Biola University in the Torrey Honors Institute.

Chris believed strongly in the mission of the C.S. Lewis Institute and supported it through his articles in Knowing and Doing, by teaching at several week-long Institute retreats, and by presenting a series of lectures on C.S. Lewis’s book, Mere Christianity. Chris was often our go-to person when we had a question about Lewis’s life and writings. Chris was a brilliant scholar and yet his humility, warmth and gentleness of spirit endeared him to students, professors and friends alike. In one of his last articles written for Knowing and Doing, Chris talked about authentic discipleship as being “robust in its awareness of its costliness in its temporal aspect and gloriously robust in its awareness of its ultimate fulfillment in the eternal state.” Chris was an authentic disciple of Jesus. He took to heart and lived life to the full as described in the last paragraph of Mere Christianity.

“Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.”
Waiting on the Lord While Unemployed
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buttons for you right now, I would love to have you spend the next two months just sitting at the foot of the Cross.”

Hearing the same desire twice within twenty-four hours forced me to accept this as coming from the Lord. But there was a slight problem. I had no idea what it meant to “just be before the Lord”! What was my task? More important, what was the goal? And what would I do?

I knew I couldn’t duck this sixty-days-before-the-Lord challenge; the leading from the Spirit was too clear. But how would it be perceived by others? I had been given four months of severance pay. Could I take half of that time and literally do “nothing”? Would my wife think I had lost my marbles? Would my friends and neighbors think I was being irresponsible? Would anyone at church even understand? More fundamentally, could I even do it?

A few weeks later, I was at an evening church service. It started with a trio of praise choruses. Unbeknownst to me, the third one, “This One Thing Is Needful,” was going to speak to me. What did the prayer express as most needful? “That I sit at your feet and pour out my love.”

There was the challenge again, this time in song. But it was what you do when you sit at the Master’s feet that hit me hardest! “Pour out my love”? How do you do that? I can imagine how a woman might respond, the nature of the man-woman relationship being what it is. But a man “pouring out his love” to the Father and His Son—this might require significant breaking of new ground!

Can’t Get Away from Doing Something!

At least now the objective was clear. But I still wasn’t sure how to go about

the process. Mark suggested using a workbook called Space for God that was subtitled Study and Practice of Spirituality and Prayer. That did seem like what I needed! Mark said the workbook was the culmination of the author having spent a year’s sabbatical with Henri Nouwen at Yale studying a Reformed perspective on meditation and contemplation. So I ordered a copy. One week later it arrived. At least now I had something to do!

The thesis of Space for God is self-evident. Many of us are so busy “doing,” becoming so preoccupied with the externals of our lives, that we neglect the interior. So absorbed with frenetic activity that we end
up coasting through life with an “empty tank,” while deluding ourselves that we are mostly full. And the one thing that is absolutely “needful” becomes the one thing that we (almost) never do—sitting at the feet of the Father and pouring out our love.

Creating New Space

Having no prior concept of what one does when sitting “at the foot of the Cross,” I started with what I knew. I set aside several hours a day to read and study the Scriptures, as well as ponder spiritual and devotional books. After a couple of hours of meditating on the Scriptures, I would spend time in Space for God, taking a leisurely stroll through each of the pages exploring what meditating on God’s Word and contemplating the Lord meant. I discovered it takes time for transformational truth apprehended by the mind to travel fifteen inches south to where it can (start to) marinate the heart.

Since the book contained many marvelous quotations from numerous classic devotional sources, I began to “follow the footnotes.” This led to reading other devotional classics, discovering the Desert Fathers, the Russian Orthodox mystics, re-visiting the Reformers, etc. Basically I tried to emulate “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him” (Ps. 37:7).

At first, setting aside that much time each day was not easy. My mind often wandered and “being still” was hard—at times seemingly impossible. But having at least gotten underway, I found the iceberg of habitual “doing” beginning to melt and the essential spiritual truths of “being” slowly beginning to sink in. The steady stream of “2 x 4s” filled with ideas and truth that hit me over the head prompted me to document the many meaningful quotes I was encountering.

The Unemployment Journal

The urge to write was the catalyst to begin a new unemployment journal. Before long I not only felt the desire to journal but also the urge to create reflections, essays, poems, and prayer meditations. These became opportunities to respond to God in written worship. They served as a reminder of what was being revealed to me and allowed me to chronicle the spiritual discoveries that accompanied the ups and downs of the unemployment journey as well as the stops and starts of the job-search process. Little did I appreciate the role this journaling and writing would later play during future periods of unemployment. Here are some journal vignettes on Remembering, Belonging, Beloved, and Dealing with Discouragement from that “sabbatical” experience:

From “Remembering”

As part of trying to “be before the Lord,” I devoted hours each day to reading and pondering Scripture. One day I realized that a recurring central theme throughout the sweep of the Old Testament was “remember Me” (e.g., Exod. 13:3; Deut. 7:18, 8:2; 1 Chron. 16:12, 15; Pss. 77:11–12, 78:35, 137:6, 143:5–6). The Lord seems to be saying
remember who I am, what I care about, and what I do (and have done) because of who I am. Unemployment offers much more time to look through the rearview mirror of your life to recount and remember the faithfulness of God. So I wrote:

*Strong faith is built on constantly remembering both God’s nature and His deeds. Those revealed truths are crucial, for without faith rooted in retrospective fact, there is no prospective hope. Consequently, we need to become ever better historians of our own lives so as to see God continually at work within us and around us. As contemporary Israelites, we need to repeatedly recount how God has delivered, redeemed, sustained, and cared for us in the past Egyptians, Red Seas, and deserts of our lives.* —Always remember never to forget Him.

After weeks of doing my best to be before the Lord, I came to realize yet again that God is indeed sovereign over all things, including my present situation; that He deeply cares about me, I truly am His Beloved; and His ways (and timing) are not my ways. Those realizations manifested themselves in various ways at different times and began to change my perspective. Am I just unfortunate with my sudden job loss, or have I been truly blessed with a special sabbatical experience with the Lord? I embraced the latter!

From “Belonging”

*It doesn’t take long to discover that being unemployed quickly changes the (perceived) nature of many of your relationships. It quickly becomes evident that where once you “belonged,” now you don’t. Suddenly there is no office to go to where someone is “expecting” you. How quickly your old department and work place seems more like a foreign land than a “home.” You go to a neighborhood function where most people talk about their jobs and careers, and you feel like a conversational misfit. Suddenly, it seems as if there are a myriad of ways that all deliver the same unsettling message—you just don’t “belong” like you used to. There is a very real sense in which self-esteem, feelings of rejection, and unworthiness accompany that realization. As a result, you can easily and profoundly feel very different and very much alone. The need to “belong” is deeply impregnated in every human soul. Roots, family, and friends (and the desire for) are all indicators of our need to “belong.” But there is another level of “belonging” that no person or organization can ever fill. One of the positive out-*
comes of the unemployment experience (that is, if you are open to “seeing” it that way) is the opportunity to profoundly realize at our deepest levels of consciousness that “I belong to God” (Rom. 14:7–8). That ultimately we belong to a Person, not an organization. That we have a permanent “home” apart from any workplace, and that nothing can change that relationship one iota, certainly not unemployment.

That realization rekindled a renewed awareness that, not only did I, as a follower of Jesus Christ, belong to someone else, but I belonged to my heavenly Father, who also happened to be the sovereign Lord of all creation. And not only did I “belong,” but I am “known,” totally and completely, by my Father (Ps. 139:2–4).

In the midst of being unemployed, my mind began to be inspired anew, my heart began to again beat more intensely, and my soul began to stir again with joy.

From “Beloved beyond Belief”

At first blush, it strikes us as so implausible that we, as children of the King, are loved with the same perfect love that the Father has for His own Son. That we are His beloved and the apple of His eye (Ps. 17:8). It is a huge thought, maybe the most important thought of all. It is a thought that can never be revisited enough. C.S. Lewis underscores this point when he observed that the most important thing about a person is their understanding of how God sees them. Everything about a person’s life is shaped by that perception.

In taking a moment to ponder God’s perfect nature, it should dawn on us that this incredible reality has to be true! God’s perfection does not allow for degrees of love. The only issue is whether you are a child of His or not.

And if you are His adopted child through Jesus Christ, then you are loved with all the fullness of His love. In Him there is no second-class love, no leftover love, or no occasional love permissible in God’s perfected nature. Think about that again! God’s extravagant love for me is no less than that which Jesus experiences. And God our Father, always the great Initiator, is constantly desirous of showing and expressing the reality of that love to me — in my heart, mind, and soul. That reality is foundational to any period of life, but especially when unemployed!

After eight months of this wonderful sabbatical with the Lord, I was offered a marketing position with a life science company.

From “Dealing with Discouragement”

Discouragement is very real and frequent during the job-search process. Like loneliness and anxiety, discouragement can suddenly arrive on the scene day or night, in quiet or active moments, and often when you least expect it. Sometimes it’s understandable when it arrives. Other times it seems unrelated to where “you’re at” mentally and emotionally. Sometimes it’s like a gnawing feeling at the fringes of your consciousness; other times it can seem more like an ever-present cloud of gloom. One thing is certain; discouragement is definitely not something you deal with once and for all during the job-search journey. It was this “diverse” nature of discouragement that caused frequent journal entries, such as the following:

It may seem contradictory, but discouragement can be used by God for our benefit! It is one way He gets our attention. Discouragement can also be one of the ways God uses to protect us from heading in a direction that is
Waiting on the Lord While Unemployed

not in our best interest. In Hosea 2 God says to the nation of Israel that He will “block her path” and “wall her in so that she cannot find her way” (v. 6) when she starts to “chase” (v. 7) the wrong things in life. The psalmist expresses the same idea in 139:5, “You hem me in behind and before.” Discouragement can be used by God to “hem” and “wall” us in for our own best interests.

Discouragement can also be used by God to get us moving again, albeit in another direction. It can be the first stage of new growth “which yields its fruit in season” (Ps. 1:3). An old friend repeatedly says that “there are ditches on both sides of every road.” We are people who so easily lose our sense of balance in life, constantly careening toward a ditch on one side or another! And when we are veering too close to a ditch in some aspect of our life, God can steer (restore) us back to life in the “balanced” middle by using discouragement to lead us back (to Himself). Seeing beneficial outcomes of discouragement in this way can free us up to “appreciate” the positive side of discouragement as we are reminded again of our need to look to Him for guidance, that is, “Lord, what are You trying to tell me?”

Back to Work

After eight months of this wonderful sabbatical with the Lord, I was offered a marketing position with a life science company. It was a bittersweet moment as I knew a very special time was ending. However, three years later I was suddenly unemployed again and one of my first thoughts was “is this déjà vu all over again?” A few days later, I woke up with this thought on my pillow: Spend more time with Me and write up the eight-month experience you had three years ago. So that is what I set out to do.

The Manuscript!

This time the sabbatical was seven months in duration. That allowed me to develop a manuscript with six chapters chronicling my first unemployment sabbatical experience, polish up those prayer meditations (Contentment, Brokenness, Anxiety, Competition and the Kingdom, Solitude and Silence) and the reflections I had drafted on aspects of the unemployment and job-search process (Joseph’s Career Ladder; Reacting Negatively to Networking; Dryness, Distance, and Waiting), and assemble the book. I also reviewed my Unemployment Journal and the books I had read for appropriate quotes and thoughts that spoke to me during that time, “gems” I wanted to share with others.

Eventually I was able to sit down with the editor-in-chief of one of the largest Christian publishers and review the manuscript with him. After politely listening to what I had assembled, he gently informed me that the majority of Christian books are bought by women over 50 years of age, and no newly unemployed man is ever going to accept that kind of book as a “gift” from his wife. Thus, zero market potential! That was fine with me. I was obedient to the Call. Then it occurred to me, maybe there is a “remnant” out there (good biblical concept) who might benefit from this material.

So I created ten photo copies of that manuscript, titled Waiting on the Lord: Spiritual and Emotional Reflections on Unemployment and the Job-Search Process, and offered it as...
part of my lending library whenever I heard about someone being newly unemployed. Over the past twenty years, those manuscripts have been circulated to hundreds of unemployed people. And now I have the chance to share some of that experience with you.

**Lasting Lesson**

In this journey of faith, the way you perceive things—perspective—is crucial. Furthermore, the kind of glasses you wear will influence how your eyes choose to “see” things—as an unfortunate outcome (job loss, sudden illness) or an opportunity for a rich and sweet sabbatical time with the Lord. Will it be a time for panic or an opportunity to rediscover Shalom (Peace)? Is it a disappointing delay or a pause that refreshes? It is, after all, how you choose to view and experience the realities of life that matters. Not limited with the eyes of your mind (factually I know I am His beloved), but engaging the eyes of your heart (I’ve experienced the intimate reality of His love), because the eyes of faith are often the eyes of the heart. And for that to happen, the psalmist (37:7) prescribes “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him” no matter in which of life’s unexpected circumstances you suddenly find yourself.

Shalom, Shalom.

**Notes:**

2. Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

I am sure that God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise.

*C.S. Lewis*

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**RECOMMENDED READING**

*The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence
Publisher: Whitaker House; New Abridged edition (June 1, 1982)

Brother Lawrence was a man of humble beginnings who discovered the greatest secret of living in the Kingdom of God here on earth. It is the art of “practicing the presence of God in one single act that does not end.” He often stated that it is God who paints Himself in the depths of our soul. We must merely open our hearts to receive Him and His loving presence. For nearly 300 years this unparalleled classic has given both blessing and instruction to those who can be content with nothing less than knowing God in all His majesty and feeling His loving presence throughout each simple day.
behavior, relationships, beliefs, skills, assets, and defects, both past and present. This was, I gather, necessary to assess my eligibility for the second requirement of their teachers: committed Christian.

Why the emphasis on “committed”? Why not simply require all applicants to be Christian? The title Christian ought to imply commitment. Denying oneself and picking up one’s cross to follow Him requires nothing less than dedication and loyalty. Unfortunately though, there are many places where this is not the case, where being a Christian is a social pleasantry, relegated to Sundays, where we do for God that He might do for us, critique the service based on entertainment value, and volunteer to help out of a sense of social responsibility, not recognizing the sin so inherent in this attitude. And though this paints an extreme portrait, we all fall short on our commitment to Christ at some point. There comes a time when we say, “But haven’t I done enough?” or when our feelings get hurt because we don’t believe God is treating us fairly, losing sight of the big picture where God has already taken care of all our needs, including the biggest one.

Commitment implies a willingness to press forward in spite of the trials and tribulations of life. And, perhaps even more condemning, commitment implies a willingness to press forward in spite of all blessings. Comfort can be the enemy of the committed Christian, and our comfort is precisely what the Fellows Program invites us to examine.

When I began as a Year One Fellow last June, I had a boyfriend, a cat, the most beautiful apartment in Annapolis, and a good job with a decent salary and excellent benefits. My life was the essence of comfort, and yet my heart was not satisfied. I gave back to the community, spent time volunteering in a correctional facility, volunteered on Sundays, and mentored a few younger girls, but my heart was still seeking something that no amount of good deeds would be able to provide. I wanted a deeper relationship with God. I just didn’t know what that would look like, or how to make it happen. I applied for the Fellows Program at the continued encouragement of several friends who had previously participated in both Year One and Year Two. Though I had been aware of the program for a few years, when the application became available...
online last March, I applied immediately and was accepted into the program with a group of nineteen others from Annapolis and the surrounding area (and a couple of people living as far away as Delaware and New Jersey!).

The summer set the stage for what was to come—by throwing me into some of the heaviest reading, quantitatively speaking, of the entire program. My priorities had to shift to make room for the homework that was being assigned to me. Each month we studied a different topic. As I examined the fatherhood of God and God’s grace, my spirit became refreshed and filled. Though the program can be demanding (particularly in those first few months), I tackled the assignments with hunger and with joy. I desired to understand more of this God whom I professed to serve. And as I began to understand the Spirit better, and to see my right relationship to the Father more clearly, my love for the Son grew. Loving Him more, I sought to follow Him more intentionally, that I might not be swayed in my path by the distractions of a comfortable life.

It wasn’t just comfort with my possessions and surroundings that needed to be scrutinized. I had to examine some of the beliefs and attitudes that drove my outlook and actions in life. My desire for privacy was challenged. I am not a secretive person, but I was raised by atheists. I had learned from experience that topics like religion did not make for polite conversation. Although you still won’t find me on a street corner hollering about the next life—the hereafter—I now make a point to pay closer attention to the underlying assumptions inherent in the worldview espoused by those around me. I am more comfortable pressing on in a conversation, whereas before I might have let it drift to a less polarizing topic. I am not afraid to ask a question or two, and I’m not even afraid to answer a few myself. Studying the material in the Fellows Program has trained me with both the facts and figures and the attitudes and approaches I can use in everyday conversation.

This year I had my first prolonged experiences with many Christian disciplines: fasting, financial giving, generous living, daily prayer, meditation on the Word, cultivating silence and solitude. I identified my greatest gift of the Spirit (faith) and my weakest (generosity). Through fellowship with my small group, my mentor, and the cohort of Annapolis Fellows as a whole, I was able to see many gifts in practice. Charity, generosity, humility—I have seen these gifts lived out, and my own desire and ability to practice them myself has increased. The best testimony I have to offer is the way in which I live, not anything I say. I knew how to live, but because of their singular focus on following Christ, CSLI showed me how to live better.

My year as a Fellow is drawing to a close, and I no longer have the boyfriend, the cat, or the beautiful apartment, and I am preparing to leave the cushy job to move into the unknown. And yet I am not afraid. My studies, along with the practice of discipline this year, have increased my confidence in the only One who truly matters, both in what He has already done, and what He has promised for the future. In this confidence, I walk without fear in obedience, and it is in obedience that my heart swells with love for Him.

I have found what I was seeking so urgently last year, and though my path is tak-
ing me halfway across the planet, mine is only one of many stories of lives that have been changed by CSLI. My story as a Fellow is a radical one, but no more than any others. I do not believe you can fully participate as a Fellow and not be changed. The C.S. Lewis Institute is fundamentally based around bringing working professionals into a deeper relationship with Christ, that they might love Him more deeply and share His love with others. And anytime we, as seekers, encounter our Lord, we must walk away transformed. Whatever challenges arise over the course of the next two years, I believe this year of work with CSLI has solidified the groundwork that was already laid for me two thousand years ago on a tree on a hill. As I walk forward, I am confident in only One, and He is enough to give me the strength and the courage to follow Him, wherever He goes, and to encourage others to join me, wherever they may be. 

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

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**RECOMMENDED READING**

*Today’s Tentmakers: Self-support: An Alternative Model for Worldwide Witness*  
by J. Christy Wilson, Jr., Publisher: Wipf & Stock Pub (February 25, 2002)

One million American Christians live and work abroad. They are not missionaries. These people are students, administrators, engineers, teachers, and doctors in other countries. They could be called “tentmakers”. Just as the Apostle Paul used his vocation, tentmaking, to finance his witness to the churches, so today’s tentmakers support themselves with their own hands and minds, shining the light of Christ around them. “We err,” suggests author J.Christy Wilson, Jr., “when we assign personal evangelism at home to the lay Christian but missions work abroad only to the specialist.” Tentmaking is available to everyone.

*Today’s Tentmakers* is a handbook which is of value not only to the prospective tentmaker, but also to the Christian planning to travel overseas. You’ll discover here information about foreign travel and employment, support organizations, language training, moving, cultural adjustment, and politics. Whether you are a student or teacher, housewife or doctor, *Today’s Tentmakers* is an opportunity of adventure and service in God’s work.
Loving God and Neighbor
(continued from page 5)

we need to make. We are confronted with an unavoidable decision: will we obey or disobey His Word? Will we change or refuse to change?

Disobedience interrupts our fellowship with God and can stall or even seriously derail our spiritual growth until we repent and obey. Some people have made shipwrecks of their lives by persistently refusing to obey God’s Word.

But as we obey God, we grow stronger. Our knowledge and love for Him increases, along with our joy. Some people fear that obeying God will lead them into legalism. But this is misguided. Obedience is fundamental to our life with God, not as a way to earn salvation or make points with God, but as the natural way to express our love for Him. As the apostle John said, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Obedience that flows from love is the key, and that is why it is not burdensome. However, if we are obeying out of a “servile fear and dread” of God and trying to be saved or stay saved through works of obedience, it will lead us into either the pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisees or the despair of those who can never be sure that they have done enough to satisfy God (like the young Martin Luther).

It is important that we remember that God’s commands are an expression of holy love, given for our good and His glory. They are the instructions of a loving father to his little children. And our obedience expresses our grateful love and brings Him pleasure. Jesus, God in human form, makes it crystal clear: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15), and “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest (i.e., show or disclose) myself to him” (John 14:21). Jesus is saying that obedience is the fruit of grace and love. Indeed, obedience is the acid-test of our love. He is also saying that obedience brings blessings in our lives, the greatest of which is a deeper experiential knowledge of Christ. As John Stott puts it, “The test of love is obedience and the reward of love is the self-manifestation of Christ.”

Loving Our Neighbor

To the first and greatest commandment, Jesus added a second, which is inseparable from it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). It takes but little reflection to realize that, like the first, this is a very challenging command. People have often noted that loving God is a lot easier than loving one’s neighbor. And most of us know at least one person who proves the observation true. But that does not excuse us from seeking to love our neighbor, not matter how difficult he or she may be, for obedience to this command is a concrete manifestation of our love for God.

What does it mean to love our neighbors? Again we need to clarify our terms, this time, the word love. Because it is often used in contemporary English to denote
Loving God and Neighbor

sentiment, we can easily assume that “love” for a neighbor is encompasses warm and positive feelings. But this is an error that can actually hinder us from loving our neighbor. The fact is that we do not have such feelings toward everyone and cannot manufacture them at will. If loving our neighbor required this, we would be in a hopeless impossible situation and tempted to give up our faith.

The good news is that our English word love stands in for the Greek word agape. And agape is not a word that denotes feeling or sentiment. Rather, it focuses on the will. So the fundamental nature of the command to love our neighbor is a matter of will, not feeling. Jesus was a realist who knew that we cannot command our feelings to be warm when they are cold or positive when they are negative. But we can exercise our will to act in another person’s best interest no matter how we happen to feel about that person.

This understanding underlies Jesus’ simple and practical instructions for loving others: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). Have you ever wondered how to love someone as God commands? This is your answer. Consider the circumstances of the person before you and treat that person the way you would want to be treated if you were in that person’s shoes. To act in that person’s best interests, regardless of what you feel or don’t feel, is to love as Jesus intends. When we treat others in this way, what normally happens is that our feelings toward them begin to change and come increasingly in line with and support our will; that is, we begin to feel more loving toward them.

Loving others can be easy or hard. It may not be a great challenge to love a friend or family member if the sacrifice is not great. But loving one’s neighbor cannot be limited to what is easy or convenient. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes it clear that a neighbor is anyone in our path who needs our help, whether helping is easy or not, convenient or not (Luke 10:29–37). Indeed, rendering such help can sometimes be dangerous and financially costly (10:34–35).

When our neighbor is a fellow disciple in the family of God, the standard rises to a higher level. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus said to His followers, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). He went on to clarify the implications of this love: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Far from an abstract concept or a momentary sentiment, this moves us to a concrete, practical love. This kind of love shaped the understanding and practice of Jesus’ disciples and the early church, where, “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them . . . and it was distributed to each as any had need” (Acts 4:34–35). And decades later we find the apostle John saying,

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16–18)
At a minimum, this means that we are to be alert to the material needs of our brothers and sisters and show our love by helping them financially as we are able.

When our neighbor is an enemy, we face perhaps the most difficult test of love. Jesus boldly calls His followers to love their enemies:

_I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect._ (Matt. 5:44–47)

In this passage, Jesus calls us to pursue a perfect (i.e., mature) love, to love in the way our heavenly Father loves.

For many of us, this command is profoundly disturbing. In fact, the more clearly we understand what it really means to love God and neighbor, the more we realize just how impossible it is, at least in our own strength. At this point, we may be tempted to see the command to love as impossible idealism. But it is not impossible idealism. Jesus is serious; He intends us to pursue love as our first priority in life and to become filled with love. And it is possible to love as He commands—not with absolute perfection, but certainly with increasing maturity and fullness. Astonishing growth is possible if we will earnestly seek it.

How do we seek it? Clearly, love for God is not something of our own making, for we are by nature God’s enemies (Rom. 8:7). If loving God and others were dependent on us alone, it would be hopeless, impossible idealism. But once we believe the gospel and trust Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, bringing new life (John 3:6) and pouring God’s love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). This evokes and enables our love for God. As John says, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Our love for God is an answering love, a love that is awakened by His prior love for us, made real to us by the Holy Spirit. Assurance of God’s fatherly love for us is the root of our love for Him. And the more we meditate on and embrace His love for us, especially at the cross, the more our love for Him and others grows.

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of love in our lives, and He is charged with making us into people of love. For this love to grow, we must daily seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). And likewise we must seek to avoid grieving or quenching the Spirit in what we think, desire, say, and do. As we live in the Spirit, the Spirit will produce deep and powerful changes within us: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22). These changes begin when the Spirit enters our lives. Then we mature...
The rule for us all is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

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over time, growing faster or slower depending on our spiritual environment and how we respond to God. As mentioned earlier, we need to be in a community devoted to Scripture, fellowship, worship, and prayer. We also need a hunger for God and a wholehearted commitment to Him (Rom. 12:1–2); we must respond to Him in faith and obedience. These are essential for healthy spiritual growth and maturing love.

A Final Point

One final point. Even when we are making our best effort to live in the Spirit and to love God and others, we are not immune to sin. We are always faced with the choice of yielding to the Spirit or to the flesh. Whether it is a long-standing, deeply ingrained pattern of sin or a flaw in temperament or something else, we are vulnerable to temptation. And sometimes we yield to the flesh and commit sin. When we do, we must remind ourselves that we are children of a gracious and loving Father who promises to forgive and restore us when we repent, confess our sins, and return to Him. He is “good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon [Him]” (Ps. 86:5).

This brings us back to where we started. “For better or worse, our priorities are slowly turning us into a certain kind of person and shaping our destinies.” Jesus says that loving God wholeheartedly and loving our neighbors as ourselves are to be the two highest priorities of life. If you pursue these priorities with the Spirit’s help, you will be steadily transformed into a person of love who glorifies God and experiences the greatest fulfillment possible in this life. The choice is yours.

Notes

1. Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

RECOMMENDED READING

The God Who Loves You: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling by Peter Kreeft, Publisher: Ignatius Press (December 1, 2004)

God’s love is the subject of Peter Kreeft’s imaginative and thoughtful book (a revised and updated version of his book Knowing the Truth of God’s Love).
Urban Plunge Reflections  
(continued from page 7)

Having lost a job and become disillusioned with the “rat race” of daily life at home in Pennsylvania, they each, separately, decided to try life on the streets.

Both had moved to Washington after researching which urban areas offered the most generous public and charitable support for the homeless. Washington won. They met each other at a homeless shelter, and both recognized that the other was “polite,” not angry or paranoid, as apparently many of the homeless are. They struck up a friendship and often hang out together and watch each other’s backs.

By God’s grace we had been led to two apparently sane, thoughtful homeless people with whom we could have lunch and explore a list of questions suggested by CSM. I must admit that I felt a little guilty. This was too easy. In retrospect, I like to believe that God led us to these two “Gentlemen of Franklin Park” (GFP).

As our teammates returned with several Domino’s pizzas to share with our guests, we dove into conversation with the GFP. In the course of our conversation, here are several of the things we learned:

**There Is Plenty of Food for the Homeless.** “The pizza you brought is attractive to folks here because it is warm food. Although today, being a Saturday and late afternoon (about 2:00 pm), most folks are already satiated. Many go to local shelters for a free meal. Many avail themselves of the charity of food offered here in the park.

Lots of Christian groups come through the park distributing food, especially on the weekends.

“I appreciate the pizza, but am really not hungry. If you really want to provide a service, bring hot food during the week. We went to the shelter and got food elsewhere for lunch, including a large sandwich, soup, several apples, cookies, granola bars. I am stuffed (while holding out the pizza box to offer slices to other, obviously less coherent, homeless folks ambling over). Also, the food is more appreciated at the end of the month, after folks have run through whatever government benefits they may have received for the month” (e.g., Social Security, Food Stamps).

**People Are Generally Charitable:** “I am always impressed and reassured by how caring and generous most people are. On those occasions when I have no money and am really hungry, I will go stand outside the nearby Domino’s (or whatever sounds good to eat) at lunchtime. I tell entering patrons that I am hungry and ask them if they would be so kind as to get me something to eat. It generally does not take more than thirty minutes until someone buys me a meal. Sometimes they just hand me a pizza on the way out. Even better, often they ask beforehand what I would like, and buy me whatever I ask for.”

**Only Sleep Outside:** The GFP only sleep out of doors. “We learned early not to sleep in the shelters. One will likely get lice or bed bugs or something there. We sleep in parks mostly. People generally leave us alone. Once in a while—rarely—police will wake you up and ask you to move along. The worst I have ever been treated was when I slept on the steps of a church. In the early morning they brusquely kicked me and insisted that I get out of their doorway. A little ironic and disappointing.”

**What Happens in Winter?:** When we asked how they fare in the winter, the GFP said that they were relative newcomers to
Urban Plunge Reflections

homelessness, having begun in the summer of 2013. As we visited with them on a pleasant weekend in early November, they did not know what winter might bring. They suggested that we come find them in February and ask. (Embarrassingly, I admit that I have not done so.)

**Homeless by Choice:** “We are homeless by choice. But then really almost everyone you see here is homeless by choice. Surely, some of them made the decision to live on the street while their decision making was impaired by alcohol or drugs or mental illness. But there are plenty of shelters and places to live if one does not want to live on the street.”

**The Homeless Are Connected Electronically and Financially:** “Almost everyone you see here has an e-mail account (e.g., through Gmail). They access their accounts at the public library, which provides very good Internet access through an impressive array of publicly available computers. Those with friends, families, and the desire to stay connected do so through e-mail, Facebook, etc. The homeless also have bank accounts into which any government benefits can be directly deposited. Many have SNAP (Food Stamp) electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards onto which their benefits are automatically uploaded at the first of each month.” Apparently there are outlets that illegally redeem the funds on the cards, returning 50 to 85 cents on the dollar (cash) to the card holders.

**For Inquiring Minds There Is Plenty to Do:** The GFP spend much of their days at the public library, where the staff knows them and accommodates their needs. They both claimed to be Christians. One of them had read through long lists of philosophical and religious writings (including Eastern religions) and was plowing his way through the classics and “great books.” The GFP were well informed regarding the news and political events of the day. Interestingly, one expressed strong opinions about the federal government wasting resources on military and low-priority spending, instead of providing more for human needs.

**Holding Lightly to Possessions:** The physical limitations presented by physically carrying all of one’s possessions, frequent theft, and the lack of laundry service have taught the GFP to hold lightly to their worldly possessions. One of them commented that this is a spiritual virtue that was being strengthened by their homeless experience. It does not mean that they enjoy having their hat stolen while they sleep or having to exchange their dirty clothing for clean, “new” second-hand clothes. But they have learned by experience not to invest too much emotional energy in tightly holding their possessions.

**Laundry Service Is Lacking:** When we asked what services were most lacking for the homeless, the GFP agreed: available affordable laundry service. Generally the homeless have access to clothing through charitable donations. Because the homeless have nowhere to store their clothing and other possessions, they are limited to owning whatever they can carry on their backs (or, for some, in a shopping cart). With limited access to laundry services but relatively free access to clothing donations, this means that it is often easier to discard dirty clothing in exchange for “new” clothing than to clean the clothes they already own. The GFP seemed philosophical about this predicament, although a little wistful about having to part with clothes they re-
ally liked only because they were dirty. The GFP told us of at least one charity that provides laundry service, but it is a drop in the ocean compared to the need. If one were interested in providing a needed service for the homeless in DC, laundry service would be one avenue to explore.

Practical Tips for Helping the Homeless

In addition to providing hot meals or laundry service, here are a few practical tips suggested by the GFP:

Instead of giving out bags filled with toiletries, offer the opportunity to choose from an array of necessities. When well-meaning people (like C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows) hand out bags filled with various toiletries, the homeless will often keep the few items that meet their immediate need and throw the rest away. This behavior is driven in part by their limited ability to carry inventory with them and in part by the resources already in their backpacks or easily obtainable at local shelters or charities. And toiletries like shampoo are relatively heavy.

Clean undergarments greatly appreciated. See and contemplate “Laundry Service Is Lacking,” above.

Men would appreciate razors. Razors for shaving are relatively expensive and temporary (they wear out quickly). It is the one thing we did not have with us that almost every male asked for: “Do you have any razors?”

“Marshmallow Nirvana”: Toward the end of conversation, we asked the GFP how they would sum up their homeless experience thus far. After reflecting briefly, one said “marshmallow nirvana.” He explained that they have plenty of free food, sleep under the stars, have access to shelter when they need it, read and relax all day. They agreed that being homeless turned out to be much easier and more pleasant than they had expected it to be. But it is not so for the majority of the homeless population.

Consider Serving the Homeless by Being Homeless: The GFP challenged us, as Christians, to consider becoming homeless ourselves as a way to serve the homeless. They noted the many homeless people who have great needs, especially those who do not know Christ, or are suffering from addiction or mental illness. What better way to minister to them, and to intimately learn about their challenges, than to voluntarily live among them? (I see the logic in their point. Though I do not personally feel called to do this, John Christopher Frame chronicled his experience in his book Homeless at Harvard: Finding Faith and Friendship on the Streets of Harvard Square [Zondervan, 2013]).

Conclusion and Takeaways

I found the Urban Plunge to be a valuable part of the C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows Program experience. With so much of the program focused on reading, prayer, and interaction within cohorts, the experiential nature of the Plunge is an important enhancement to the Fellows’ understanding of service and why it is needed.

My personal takeaways from the Plunge include the following:

1. Serve the Poor Where I Am. Now.

To the extent that I feel called to serve the poor, I should do so here and now, close to home. I confess to having a romantic notion
of serving the poor overseas in short- or medium-term missions. But even if I feel a call to serve the poor overseas (or expect that I may hear such a call in the future), this is not a reason (an excuse?) to forgo serving the poor, the sick, widows, orphans, or those in prison here and now (as Jesus calls us to do).


Jesus Christ was wise that when He sent out the seventy-two to prepare the way for Him, He sent them out in pairs (Luke 10:1–20). This wisdom was confirmed for me in my Plunge experience when we were likewise sent out to serve in teams. Working with a team allowed us to leverage the various gifts of all to accomplish the slightly uncomfortable task of engaging with strangers. The team also provided the encouragement, comfort, and accountability that come in working together. This is a good lesson that I will try to implement in ministry and in my professional and personal life.

3. Need I Discriminate among the Poor Whom I Serve to Separate the Truly Needy from the Truly Lazy?

The notion that many are “homeless by choice” was thought provoking me. Should it make any difference to me if they are homeless by choice? Throughout the Bible, Christians are commanded to serve the poor, widows and orphans; to visit those who are in prison; and help the sick (e.g., Ezek. 16:49; Isa. 1:17; Exod. 22:22–24; Matt. 25:31–40). Without doing a great deal of research, I do not recall Jesus laying out a precondition that we should serve only to the extent that people are in need as a result of forces beyond their control. Even if some people find themselves in need due to their own personal choices, they are still in need—that Jesus calls us as Christians to alleviate.

The book of James seems to instruct that, at least in within the walls of the church, we are not to discriminate between rich and poor, at James 2:1–5 (NIV):

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

At the same time, the apostle Paul touches on the issue of the “lazy needy” in 2 Thessalonians 3:10–15 (The Message):

Don’t you remember the rule we had when we lived with you? “If you don’t work, you don’t eat.” And now we’re getting reports that a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings are taking advantage of you. This must not be tolerated. We command them to get to work immediately—no excuses, no arguments—and earn their own keep. Friends, don’t slack off in doing your duty.

If anyone refuses to obey our clear command written in this letter, don’t let him get by with it. Point out such a person and refuse
to subsidize his freeloading. Maybe then he’ll think twice. But don’t treat him as an enemy. Sit him down and talk about the problem as someone who cares.

There is a good deal of sorting out to do here, especially within the context of the contributions by and the treatment of worshipers in the local church. But it does not appear to me that this pending inquiry should hold me back from obedience to Jesus’ call to serve the poor, the homeless, or the needy. In his very convicting book Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger, Ron Sider touches upon this issue of the “lazy needy” when he observes that “God does not overlook the sin of those who are poor due to sloth or alcoholism. God punishes such sinners.”

However, given Jesus’ discussion of this topic and its direct relevance to my reception before the throne of heaven (Matt. 25:31–43, quoted below), it appears to me that the best course is to err on the side of being overly generous and compassionate, while balancing this against the need to be a faithful steward. To take the opposite path is to fall victim to the temptation to judge whom among the poor may be in that condition due to their own sin.

Surely, I am likewise guilty of much sin. I do not find myself among the materially poor in large measure due to God’s grace, undeserved as it is.

For Reflection: Matthew 25:31–43 (NIV)

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

Notes


Giving to the poor—is an essential part of Christian morality . . . I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give.

C.S. Lewis
Discipleship Is a Team Sport  
(continued from page 9)

There is more to Christ than any one of us can communicate to others. Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp explain:

When we are in meaningful relationships with one another, we each bring a unique perspective and experience to our knowledge of Christ’s love. One person has been rescued from a menacing addition. Another has been brought through deep suffering. Still another has been sustained by God’s grace in a difficult marriage. The list goes on. When we gather to share our stories, we see a different aspect of the diamond that is the love of Christ.3

Christian discipleship can certainly be fostered in one-to-one relationships, but for maximum benefit it needs a larger community. The church family, like our biological family, is to provide that nurturing environment in which our shared values shape us and we experience loving discipline and instruction. Through the corporate practice of worship, including expositional preaching and participation in the Lord’s Supper, we experience something together that we could not alone. There is a special way in which it is “together with all the Lord’s holy people” that we are able to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Eph. 3:18).

A disciple can be described as “learner,” but the kind of learning in discipleship goes well beyond intellectual knowledge or truth. Disciples of Christ learn a way of life that flows from a personal knowledge of their Master, a form of learning more like an apprenticeship. The Christian life must be seen as well as taught (Phil. 4:9). Imitation is an integral part of growing in Christ (1 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17; 1 Pet. 5:3). The church provides models to emulate, and through the years I have appreciated how the church has provided a variety of people who have modeled different strengths; one is an encouragement in evangelism, another in prayer, and still another in generosity. No one person can present the fullness of Christ.

The church also provides opportunities to exercise one’s faith in relating to others. The biblical call to unity in the body of Christ, with humility and patience and forbearance, requires a growth in godliness that Lone Ranger–Christians would not know. We all need the structure of spiritual authority that a church provides, and the church provides the sphere in which to live out the gospel in relationship with other believers. I always get excited to see young believers get connected to those who are more mature in the faith; they get their first taste of “body life”—which is nothing less than Christ, by the Spirit, manifesting Himself in the lives of His people. They come alive!

John Wesley was right: “There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian.” Discipleship is a team sport! Engage in personal discipling ministry with all your heart, but always remember: It takes a church to make a disciple.

Notes
1. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.
The Christian life defends the single personality from the collective, not by isolating him but by giving him the status of an organ in the mystical body.

_C.S. Lewis_

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**RECOMMENDED READING**

_In sourcing: Bringing Discipleship Back to the Local Church_ by Randy Pope with Kitti Murray
(Leadership Network Innovation Series)
Publisher: Zondervan (February 17, 2013)

Too many of today’s pastors and leaders mistakenly think that thriving programs, lively worship services, and relevant preaching are adequate for developing people into the spiritual dynamos God desires. In many churches, the primary objective of the church—discipleship of people into mature followers of Jesus—has been “outsourced” to programs and large-scale efforts to train and teach. But is that happening? Are people growing in spiritual depth and missional determination?

Twenty-five years ago, the leaders of Randy Pope’s rapidly growing church took serious stock of their own spiritual development and realized all of them had benefitted from a personal discipleship relationship that had helped them grow in their faith and discover where God was calling them to service. As a church, they decided to make personal discipleship their do-or-die aim: applying one person’s real life to another’s to accomplish something far bigger than that single life. Perimeter calls their approach “life-on-life missional discipleship” and _Insourcing_ tells their story.
Bringing the Gospel Home
RANDY NEWMAN
(BASED ON HIS BOOK BRINGING THE GOSPEL HOME: SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS)
Friday night, September 26, 7-9:30pm McLean Presbyterian Church
Saturday morning, September 27, 9-11:30am Leesburg Community Church

Resources for Your Small Groups

Conversational Apologetics Course
This course takes some of the best practices in apologetics and evangelism and makes them accessible to believers seeking to live out their faith in everyday life.

See our website to visit our website at http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Resource_Center for additional resources

Heart & Mind Discipleship 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.

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.

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