Jesus’ Loving Presence in the World—You!
by Chris Sicks
Associate Pastor of Mercy, Alexandria Presbyterian Church

(An excerpt from Tangible: Making God Known through Deeds of Mercy and Words of Truth by Chris Sicks. Used by permission of NavPress. ©2013)

On the night before He died, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). How can believers in Christ do even greater things than Jesus did?

The Greek word for “greater” is also used in Scripture to communicate the ideas “more” and “abundant.” Jesus wasn’t saying our ministry would be of greater value than His ministry. He was referring to the scope and extent of what He would do through us. Once His physical body left the earth, Jesus delegated His ministry to the body of Christ. This body—the church—quickly grew to include thousands and then millions of men and women and children.

Today, His Word is available in nearly three thousand languages, and there are over four hundred thousand missionaries around the world. Christ is doing more abundant work today, more widespread work, through His many brothers and sisters. The body of Christ is Jesus’ loving presence in every part of the world.

Mother Teresa understood this. The world saw a love in her that grabbed their attention, but she didn’t want people to focus on her. She always pointed to Christ as the Source of her love: “Jesus went about doing good. And we are trying to imitate him now because I believe that God loves the world through us. Just as he sent Jesus to be his love, his presence in the world, so today he is sending us.”

Whether God has placed you in the streets of Calcutta or the suburbs of Charlotte, you have opportunities to be His compassionate presence, to make His love tangible to hurting people.

What does tangible love look like? Think of it as incarnate words. If I merely tell a lonely widow, “Jesus loves you!” and “God is good!” my words are as two-dimensional as a bumper sticker. God’s love isn’t tangible until that lonely woman actually sees and feels love. There is a big difference between love as an idea and love in action.

If you are in a dark basement, the idea of light is no help at all. You need a flashlight. If your children are hungry, the idea that God cares won’t fill their bellies. Your family needs food. When God’s people provide food, hold your hand, pray with you, and give you hope, they can declare, “Jesus loves you!” with authenticity. But it requires the investment of our time, talent, and emotion. It requires our compassionate presence.

God Can Use You

I believe more and more that this is truly the central task of the Christian: to give the Lord the opportunity to exhibit his existence.
—Francis Schaeffer

(continued on page 12)
Standing in the Gap in Prayer

At our recent C.S. Lewis Institute fundraising banquet, I shared a story from nearly 20 years ago in which Billy Graham was asked prior to speaking to a crowd of thousands, “Who will be the next Billy Graham?” Dr. Graham’s response was to point to the crowd and say, “They will.” In other words, Dr. Graham believed, that just as in the days of the early church, today’s church wouldn’t grow because of world-class evangelists speaking to massive throngs of people. Instead, God’s kingdom would expand as hundreds and thousands of wholeheartedly committed disciples of Jesus shared the Gospel with their neighbors and stood in the gap between the culture and the church to invite them in to fellowship with the Lord. As the culture becomes more hostile to the church, the need for faithful followers of Jesus who can effectively articulate, defend and live their faith in personal and public life becomes all the more apparent. And by God’s grace, this is what the C.S. Lewis Institute hopes to do – help fellow disciples mature so that they can go out and make disciples within their own sphere of influence.

If we are going to accomplish this mission, however, it will not be done on our own strength or because of our great strategic plans. We need to be walking in tune to the song of the Holy Spirit and we must be dependent on Him. This only happens as we submit ourselves to the Lord in prayer both personally and corporately.

Here at the C.S. Lewis Institute offices, we have re-committed ourselves to morning prayer to pray for people that the Lord has placed within our ministry – Fellows, Mentors, City Directors, Staff, Churches, Pastors and Ministry Partners. We also pray for the Lord’s leading and for the various programs which we offer. We do our best to meet every Monday – Thursday from 9:05 am – 9:30 am and every Friday from 9:05 am – 10:00 am for corporate prayer. Each of us on staff also pray for the C.S. Lewis Institute in our personal devotions.

I invite you to join us in standing in the gap in prayer for the people and ministry of the Institute. Your prayers play an essential role in equipping the Institute to fulfill its unique role within the directives of the Great Commission.
Some may use the word _serendipity_ to describe things coming together in an unexpectedly joyful way. But not me or my friends in the Fellows Program. We call it a “God thing.” That’s how we’ve described our group for almost ten years.

We were the C.S. Lewis Institute’s mid-career women’s Fellows class of 2005. There was very little that we had in common except for our desire to grow deeper in our faith. Some of us were from rural backgrounds and some urban. We hailed from all over the country and one from foreign climes. Our faith backgrounds were also variously unique, and we weren’t even sure how or why we had been lucky enough to be selected for the Fellows Program—or what to expect. But those nerves and doubts were quickly put to rest.

I think of our first time together. We all sensed we had encountered something special and full of grace. Each new Fellows class starts with a weekend retreat. Ours was in the Virginia mountains, where we discovered the magnificence of God’s love. With vulnerable honesty we shared our faith journeys. Some had come to Christ as girls, others as adults. We all had experienced difficult seasons; we all had needed God’s forgiveness and grace. We laughed, cried, and prayed together. The foundational love and trust that emerged from those first hours have characterized the spirit of our group now for ten years.

In the first year, we felt challenged by the Institute’s curriculum. In retrospect, it is amazing that we read so many books. I particularly remember _Beginning Well_ by Gordon Smith. His call, to focus on spiritual transformation rather than conversion alone, set the course for our months (and now years) of faith-ful fellowship.

When the first year ended, we all “signed on” for Year Two. Even later, although all of us already juggled many other relationships and social commitments, we continued meeting monthly; we had seen the power of this “God thing” and were committed to continuing to pursue Him together. Taking our cues from the Fellows Program, we now create our own annual reading lists, discuss these provocative and inspiring books, and share meals together. How much richer, broader, deeper is our understanding because of this shared commitment to listen, learn, and grow!

Lest you think our fellowship is exclusively spiritual and academic, I’ll mention a few other memories of our time together, several of these being from our retreats to the Chesapeake Bay, a highpoint of our year. These weekends in the warm sun, with the rhythmic waves lapping along the rocks and good friends close by, are a refreshing balm. Away from the city, we walk, talk, laugh, and pray together, and of course we eat. One evening after blowing out the candles and savoring every rich, luscious, chocolaty bite of a cake, we quickly slipped from singing “Happy Birthday” into a lively group karaoke session. With Pandora at our fingertips, we let loose and belted out songs of the 70s.

As is natural, our group has evolved as we’ve sought God’s direction for our lives and grown in wisdom, contentment, and joy. We celebrated the marriage of one friend and her adoption of two children from Russia. For several years we supported another—packing many care packages and eagerly waiting for her latest news—as she served the Lord in Papua New Guinea. And we have met these changes and many other challenges with prayer. Knowing that the others are interceding for us and our loved ones binds us humbly and thankfully together before God.

What a great gift we’ve been given. Wanting to symbolize and share our decade of abundant joy, we turned to the

---

**Fully to Enjoy:**

_An Invitation to Our Abundant Table_

by Julianne Paunescu

_Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute - Washington, D.C._

_Somewhere_  

 FULLY TO ENJOY:  

_&_ 

An Invitation to Our Abundant Table 

by Julianne Paunescu  

_Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute - Washington, D.C._  

_Some may use the word _serendipity_ to describe things coming together in an unexpectedly joyful way. But not me or my friends in the Fellows Program. We call it a “God thing.” That’s how we’ve described our group for almost ten years._

We were the C.S. Lewis Institute’s mid-career women’s Fellows class of 2005. There was very little that we had in common except for our desire to grow deeper in our faith. Some of us were from rural backgrounds and some urban. We hailed from all over the country and one from foreign climes. Our faith backgrounds were also variously unique, and we weren’t even sure how or why we had been lucky enough to be selected for the Fellows Program—or what to expect. But those nerves and doubts were quickly put to rest.

I think of our first time together. We all sensed we had encountered something special and full of grace. Each new Fellows class starts with a weekend retreat. Ours was in the Virginia mountains, where we discovered the magnificence of God’s love. With vulnerable honesty we shared our faith journeys. Some had come to Christ as girls, others as adults. We all had experienced difficult seasons; we all had needed God’s forgiveness and grace. We laughed, cried, and prayed together. The foundational love and trust that emerged from those first hours have characterized the spirit of our group now for ten years.

In the first year, we felt challenged by the Institute’s curriculum. In retrospect, it is amazing that we read so many books. I particularly remember _Beginning Well_ by Gordon Smith. His call, to focus on spiritual transformation rather than conversion alone, set the course for our months (and now years) of faith-ful fellowship.

When the first year ended, we all “signed on” for Year Two. Even later, although all of us already juggled many other relationships and social commitments, we continued meeting monthly; we had seen the power of this “God thing” and were committed to continuing to pursue Him together. Taking our cues from the Fellows Program, we now create our own annual reading lists, discuss these provocative and inspiring books, and share meals together. How much richer, broader, deeper is our understanding because of this shared commitment to listen, learn, and grow!

Lest you think our fellowship is exclusively spiritual and academic, I’ll mention a few other memories of our time together, several of these being from our retreats to the Chesapeake Bay, a highpoint of our year. These weekends in the warm sun, with the rhythmic waves lapping along the rocks and good friends close by, are a refreshing balm. Away from the city, we walk, talk, laugh, and pray together, and of course we eat. One evening after blowing out the candles and savoring every rich, luscious, chocolaty bite of a cake, we quickly slipped from singing “Happy Birthday” into a lively group karaoke session. With Pandora at our fingertips, we let loose and belted out songs of the 70s.

As is natural, our group has evolved as we’ve sought God’s direction for our lives and grown in wisdom, contentment, and joy. We celebrated the marriage of one friend and her adoption of two children from Russia. For several years we supported another—packing many care packages and eagerly waiting for her latest news—as she served the Lord in Papua New Guinea. And we have met these changes and many other challenges with prayer. Knowing that the others are interceding for us and our loved ones binds us humbly and thankfully together before God.

What a great gift we’ve been given. Wanting to symbolize and share our decade of abundant joy, we turned to the

(continued on page 17)
Knowing & Doing | Summer 2015

How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?

by Bill Kynes, Ph.D.

C.S. Lewis Institute Senior Fellow, Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church

This article is a slightly adapted version of a chapter in Bill’s recently published book Seven Pressing Questions: Addressing Critical Challenges to Christian Faith (Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2015).

I just don’t get it. You Christians talk an awful lot about the love of God, and then you tell me that if I don’t believe in Jesus I will go to hell, a place of eternal torment? What kind of God are you talking about? He seems to be a moral monster. Why can’t you just stick to the message of Jesus, who accepted everybody—tax collectors and prostitutes—and who said, ‘Don’t judge, lest you be judged? What’s the deal?’

Why Believe in Hell?

The doctrine of hell—what are we to make of it? Even among Christians the subject of hell is a thorny one—and rightly so. It’s not something we should take lightly, or talk about too easily; this is serious stuff. Frankly, I wish I didn’t have to address this topic, a topic that can so quickly offend our moral sensibilities. So why do Christians insist on talking about hell? Why has the doctrine of the eternal punishment of those who stand before God apart from Christ been a part of the understanding of almost all Bible-believing Christians throughout church history? The simple answer is that Christians are bound by the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus’ Teaching on Hell

It is our Lord Jesus who, above all, forces us to affirm the dreadful truth that those who stand alone before God as sinners on the day of judgment will face condemnation into a state of eternal punishment called hell.

To the religious hypocrites, Jesus declared, “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?” (Matt. 23:33). Those rejected as subjects of the kingdom, Jesus said, “will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12).

Stressing the seriousness of sin, Jesus urged, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43; cf. Matt. 18:8). It’s a place where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,” He said (Mark 9:48). On that day of judgment, Jesus says that those who failed to respond to Him through His humble brothers “will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matt. 25:46).

Though it is often ridiculed as a primitive remnant of a medieval age, this doctrine of the eternal punishment of sinners is rooted firmly in the teaching of Jesus Himself. He spoke of hell more than He spoke of heaven. In fact, Jesus, who more than anyone reveals the love of God to the world, spoke more about hell than any other person in the Bible. As followers of Jesus Christ, we cannot be faithful to our Lord and not speak of this stark reality.

The Apostles’ Teaching on Hell

The apostolic witness of the New Testament echoes Jesus’ weighty words on this topic. Paul speaks of a time of “wrath and anger” awaiting those who reject the truth (Rom. 2:8). He declares that those who do not obey the gospel “will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9). Jude presents the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah “as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7).

Finally, the Book of Revelation speaks in these harrowing tones:

If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or
on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. (Rev. 14:9–11)

The Use of Figurative Language for Hell

Certainly, in speaking of hell the Bible uses figurative language. Jesus commonly used language referent to a place called Gehenna.3 Gehenna was the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where human sacrifice was once offered (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), which became the place where the city’s garbage was burned—a place where “the worms that eat them do not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48). Fire is an image depicting physical pain and suffering. It displays the sense of God’s righteous anger, His wrath, poured out against all who opposes His goodness.

Then Jesus also used the image of darkness, “outer darkness,” depicting hell as a banishment from God’s presence—a place of alienation from God, a place of utter loneliness. The foolish bridesmaids are shut outside the door (Matt. 25:10–12); the wicked servant is assigned a place with the hypocrites (Matt. 24:51); those improperly dressed for the wedding banquet are thrown outside into the darkness (Matt. 22:13).

In some of the most dreaded words of the Bible, Jesus says to some who assumed they would be welcomed by Him, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matt. 7:23). Nothing is left but loneliness and despair, for hell is a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” full of the hopeless remorse of self-condemnation. And then hell is spoken of as a place of death and destruction—a place devoid of the life-giving presence of God, and a place of ruin and corruption.

John in the Book of Revelation refers to the lake of fire as “the second death” (Rev. 20:14; 21:8; cf. 2:11; 20:6). Destruction is where the wide road leads (Matt. 7:13); it is what happens to the house built on sand (Luke 6:49); it is what is prepared for the objects of God’s wrath (Rom. 9:22); and it is the destiny of the enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:19). Like a car that is “totaled” in an accident, those in hell will continue to exist, but they will be destroyed, ruined, as human beings created in the image of God; they will no longer function as they were created to function.

Yes, this is figurative language, but these images were chosen to convey a certain reality. And it is a horrific reality—a reality of wrath, of alienation, of corruption. It is a reality that Jesus warns us about in the strongest possible terms, and it is a reality, I would add, that Jesus Himself gave His own life to save us from. As one writer on this subject has put it, “Jesus Christ is the person who is responsible for the doctrine of Eternal Perdition. He is the Being with whom all opponents of this theological tenet are in conflict.”4 So why are people so repulsed by this clear teaching of Jesus? I find that there are three underlying objections.

Objection 1: The Notion of Judgment Is Offensive

First, many people are offended simply by the basic notion of judgment. Why should people have to stand before God as their Judge? Why should there be a separation of the righteous and the wicked? Can’t...
Would you like to experience the fullness and blessing of life in Christ? Would you like your life to fulfill God's purposes for you in the world? If your answer is yes, keep reading.

Most believers are familiar with the great Bible truth that we are saved by grace through faith alone, not by our works (Eph. 2:8–9). Some are not so familiar with the Bible truth that God intends for us to grow in grace. We see this in many places, but it is especially clear when the apostle Peter urges his readers (and us) to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). By this, Peter means that we are to grow and mature in our understanding and experience of the grace we have received and also in our knowledge about and experience of Christ. This is the way we enter more fully into the abundant life Jesus gives us (John 10:10).

Unfortunately, many in the church receive God’s grace but for various reasons do not grow much in grace. As a result, they needlessly miss out on great blessings God wants to bestow on them and run the risk of not fulfilling God’s purposes for their lives.

How do baptized believers grow in grace? It would be nice if we matured automatically, but God calls us to actively pursue growth in grace. Jesus, for example, tells His disciples to, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Paul says to the Philippians, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13). Again, active engagement is required of us. This does not mean that through our own efforts we are the source of our own transformation, but it does mean that we have an important part to play in the process. Ultimately God is the source of our transformation, but He does it through a process that requires us to play a vital and indispensable role. In other words, God uses means—means of grace—to bring about our growth.

What are some of the means God uses to bring about our growth in grace? Although God can use various means at different times to help us grow, the primary and essential ones are listed in Acts 2:42. In this passage, we see how the Holy Spirit led the first church, composed of some three thousand newly converted baptized people, to grow in grace: “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The context indicates that these activities were not a form of liturgy, but practices adopted so widely by individual believers that they characterized the entire three thousand. These four activities, taken together, formed the foundation of personal and corporate life in the early church. They weren’t the only ones God used, but they were the essential ones.

The believers devoted themselves to these spiritually edifying and transformative practices. In the Greek text, the strong word translated devoted (proskartereo) means “hold fast to something, continue or persevere in something.” In other words, they persevered in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers—not just one or two of these activities, as we might today, but all four of them. And they discovered that these were the primary means by which God caused them to grow in His grace. This pattern has recurred in church history in times of renewal and revival, when the Spirit of God seeks to bring the church back to authentic spiritual vitality and discipleship.

Let’s look at these practices one by one to see what they are, what they involve, and how they can help us and our churches grow in grace today.
The Apostles’ Teaching

Originally, the apostles’ teaching referred to what the apostles preached and taught orally about Jesus. His words and deeds, especially His atoning death and resurrection, were the focal point of their teaching. This drew on parts of the Old Testament (the only Bible they had at the time) to explain Jesus’ identity, life, and ministry. Eventually their teachings were put into written form in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament. If we want to devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching today, we should focus first on Jesus as He is presented in the Gospels and further explained in the Epistles and the Old Testament.

What are some practical ways to do this? First, we should regularly attend a church where the Bible is honored as God’s Word written and is faithfully preached and taught. In addition, we should regularly, preferably daily, read the Bible. (There are many resources for this; The One Year Bible takes you through the Scriptures in a year. You can find a number of other Bible reading plans at YouVersion.com.) Reading the Bible will raise questions that require some study, so you’ll want to have at hand some basic reference tools, such as a good study Bible (ESV and NIV study Bibles are very good), Bible dictionary, concordance, and commentary. Bible study groups that focus on a particular theme can be helpful. Memorizing and meditating on key Bible verses is a valuable part of the transformation process, helping to integrate what we grasp with our intellects into the rest of our hearts (emotions, wills, desires).

The goal of devoting ourselves to the apostles’ teaching is not simply to gain information, as critically important as that is, but to know God, which is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3). Through the Scriptures, we learn of God’s character, His great deeds, His love for us, His will for us, His ways, His promises, and so much more. The Holy Spirit uses these truths as a major part of the process of transformation—of becoming conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

For this to happen, it is important to pray before we read or study the Bible and ask the Spirit to open our minds and hearts to understand the meaning of His Word and how it applies to our lives (Ps. 119:18). The Holy Spirit’s illumination is essential for us to rightly grasp and receive God’s word into our lives (Matt. 11:25–27; 1 Cor. 2:12–13). As we earnestly seek God in this manner, He will communicate with us in very personal ways. In addition to receiving the Spirit’s illumination, we must bring to the Scripture an essential attitude of heart: a settled intention to obey whatever God shows us to be His will. Failure to do this will lead to increasing self-deception (James 1:22–25). (continued on page 22)
Buddhism is popular among college students and educated skeptics today. I think there are a number of reasons for this. One is that the Buddha's search for truth and his willingness to forsake the world strike chords in young seekers who recognize the emptiness of materialism. It is also attractive to those who have been turned off to Christianity, for one reason or another, and want some sort of spiritual alternative.

Facts on the Ground

Let’s start with numbers and places. How many Buddhists are there, and where do they live?

Today there are about 400 million Buddhists, or 6 percent of the world’s population. Estimates of the number of Buddhists in the United States range from 1.5 to 2 million. Of those 75 to 80 percent are Asian.

Those who follow Theravada, which is the school of Buddhism closest to the teachings of Gotama Buddha, the founder, are located primarily in Southeast Asia: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand. The Mahayana school, which may have started later in China and became more popular, is prevalent in China and East Asia (Japan and Korea). The Mahayana school, which may have started later in China and East Asia (Japan and Korea). Zen Buddhism was started in Japan and has spread west, while Tibetan Buddhism is of course centered in that mountainous land bordering China but has become popular around the world because of the Dalai Lama’s attractive persona and teaching.

The Story of the Buddha

Siddhartha Gotama Buddha (ca. 448–368 BC) grew up in the lap of luxury.

He was the son of a king in the mountain fastnesses of what is now Nepal. Not unnaturally, he was indulged by his father. But Gotama’s environment went far beyond what we would imagine. Apparently in an attempt to keep his son fast bound to himself, Gotama’s father made sure the boy never saw suffering and deprivation, old age, disease, and death. It’s hard to imagine how Gotama could never have seen or known of death, but so the story goes.

At some point in Gotama’s twenties, reality broke through. On the first of several chariot rides, Gotama saw an old man. “Oh no!” he exclaimed. “Do you mean I will someday suffer like that?!”

Then on a second chariot ride, he saw a sick person obviously distressed by pain. This opened his eyes to the pervasiveness of suffering in the world. Gotama was sorely distressed.

A third chariot ride brought the sight of a corpse in a funeral procession. This too alarmed Gotama. “What? We don't live forever?!” The young man sunk into despair. Life seemed hopeless.

But then another sight some time later brought him hope. This time he saw a figure on the horizon walking in a saffron robe. It was probably a Hindu sannyasi, a holy man practicing asceticism and meditation in the quest of moksha (liberation from the cycle of reincarnation).

“Who is that?” he asked his driver.

“Oh, he’s seeking the way beyond life and death,” he was told—meaning that this Hindu seeker was trying to reach the state where he would not be reborn into another life in this world, but be joined with Brahma, the impersonal Absolute. But for Gotama, this meant there might be a way to avoid the suffering of life and death.

By this time in his life, Gotama was married and had a son. But the Four Sights (of age, disease, death, and the way beyond death) made him reconsider his direction in life. At the age of twenty-nine, he decided he would follow the way of the sannyasi he had seen. Gotama left
his wife and son and set off into the wilderness. Some explanation is needed here: this was a religious tradition back then, and he left his wife and son in the care of his larger family. They probably believed this would give them good karma (lit., “deeds” which would help produce a better reincarnation). But we are also told that his wife was angry with him for leaving them. This departure is called the Great Renunciation.

Gotama made drastic changes, following what the Hindu traditions were telling him then—practice asceticism and meditate until you are enlightened. He embraced this new life so radically that he was reduced to skin and bones. We’re told that when he put his hand on his stomach, he could feel his backbone.

But it didn’t work. Enlightenment never came.

So Gotama decided he would take the bull by the horns, as it were, and demand results. He would sit under a tree (later it became known as the Bodhi or enlightenment tree) until revelation came.

He sat all day and evening and night until . . . finally enlightenment came. During the early morning hours, he was given revelation after revelation after revelation. He saw all the truths of reality, which he would teach for the next fifty-odd years until his death from food poisoning. He had come to be free of all desire and so achieved, after this one night, nirvana (lit., the “blowing out” of desire).

The Buddha’s Teachings

That night the Buddha saw what Buddhists have ever-since called Four Noble Truths. The first is that all is suffering. This doesn’t mean that every minute of the day we feel bad. Christians can understand its meaning: that at the deepest level all of life is dissatisfactory. Even when we’re having fun and being successful, we know deep inside that there is something missing—if we haven’t found spiritual Reality.

The second Noble Truth is that the cause of suffering is desire. The Buddha (now we can use this title, for it means “the enlightened one”) said there are three desires humans feel: desire for sensual pleasure; desire for becoming someone recognized and esteemed; and desire for nonbecoming or suicide. He recognized that most of us do not feel the third desire most of the time.

The Buddha said there is a reason we are filled with these desires: our ignorance. Hindus also see ignorance as our central problem. But while Hindus feel we are ignorant of Brahma or a personal god, Gotama Buddha said we are ignorant of the Three Characteristics of Existence.

The first is impermanence. This means that nothing ever remains the same—even Brahma, which was the philosophical Hindu idea of ultimate reality. Hindus said this is the only unchanging reality. The Buddha rejected this. He said nothing is permanent, everything is constantly changing. This also meant there is no unchanging substance behind and within anything in the cosmos, so nothing has independent existence.

Christians can agree with this in part, for they say that nothing exists apart from God. There is nothing that exists on its own. But the Buddha rejected the idea of a Creator God who is responsible for all things. He said there are gods, but that these are not

(continued on page 25)
Have you ever driven a car with a stick shift? If so, you know that stepping on the clutch is absolutely crucial before shifting gears. If you forget that prerequisite, you’ll hear grinding noises that could cost you lots of money.

(I do realize this illustration sounds alien to some. You may have no idea what a “stick shift” is. How about this illustration instead: When it comes to performing a specific function on a computer, you need to press the “shift” key before pushing the F4 key. If you don’t, the F4 key performs a completely different function. That’s similar to what I mean. But the stepping-on-the-clutch-before-shifting-gears illustration has more drama to it.)

My point is that some actions require a preliminary step, without which you can’t accomplish your goal. In our day and age, when people have negative notions about religion, we may need to pave the way for gospel conversations before asking them where they’ll spend eternity or whether they know God personally or how they deal with their “sin problem.”

After Jesus asked a woman at a well for some water and conversed about why He would do such a culturally unusual thing, He then spoke about “living water” that springs “up to eternal life.” This dialogue paved the way for the good news that He was the Messiah and all that that entailed—such as some convicting insights about her moral failures and theological correction of her views about worship (see John 4:1–26).

Sometimes we need to pave the way for the gospel with words that prepare people to overcome prejudices, listen carefully, and hear accurately. Sometimes we need to step on the clutch before shifting gears. I can think of at least three different kinds of “clutches” we might want to use to pave the way for evangelistic dialogues with people we know and care about.

The Clutch of Permission

I know some people who need lead time before discussing heavy issues. They’re actually interested but probably won’t handle it well if someone just switches from light chatting about the weather to serious issues of eternity. And they’d appreciate being asked for an “okay” before making that dramatic leap.

I think there is wisdom in asking for permission before beginning the conversation. In some ways, it shows respect for the person and esteem for the topic. A permission question can sound something like this: “I wonder if you’d ever be up for talking about spiritual things. We’ve talked about a lot of other things. Would it be okay if we chatted about faith sometime?” In addition to showing people you don’t just want to force your agenda on them, it also shows you respect them, their time, and sensitivities.

The permission question also gives people time to think about what they really do believe. Between the time of asking for permission and actually having the faith conversation, some people open up to ideas they might just reject on the spot if they feel backed into a corner.

The Clutch of Tone

Let’s face it. Some people have strong feelings about faith, and they’re not always pleasant ones. A lot of our friends have had bad experiences in church, have read horror stories about abusive clergy, or think Christians are a bunch of “hypocrites.” On top of this, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and thus people “love darkness.” (see Rom. 3:23 and John 3:19).

We shouldn’t be surprised if the topic of faith elicits anger or other negative emotions. Some like to attack us with sarcasm or embarrass us at
family gatherings or send scorching emails. Responding in kind makes things worse and shows us to be foolish just like them (Prov. 26:4).

One way to lower the temperature in the room or the blood pressure in their veins (and yours!) is to quietly acknowledge the tone of the conversation. I’ve sometimes said something like “I think I’ve struck a nerve, haven’t I?” or “Maybe this isn’t the best time or place for this conversation” or “I feel uncomfortable about how this is going.” Their response could direct you to move forward in a cooler atmosphere. Until you “step on the clutch” of setting a better tone, your evangelistic presentation may not yield the best response.

The Clutch of Common Ground

An increasing number of non-Christians consider our Christian faith implausible or just plain crazy. They view us as homophobic, intolerant, narrow-minded bigots, and apologetic arguments or archaeological evidence may not help. However, we can pave the way for their consideration by finding things we do have in common about the world of ideas or the arena of faith.

For example, when accused of being narrow minded, we could suggest that everyone says no to some ideas or beliefs. We’re all “narrow” about some things. If need be, we can point to extremes that most people reject. Philosophers like to use the example of “torturing babies” as something we can all be “intolerant” of. Once we find common ground with people, we can then pursue discussions of where those limiting ideas come from. Eventually we can posit the notion that we Christians get our views from God who has revealed them to us in the Bible.

Sometimes we should follow the apostle Paul’s example when he preached to secular skeptics on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16–34). He quoted their poets to make the points he wanted to establish. Once they started shaking their heads affirmatively, he showed how their ideas, expressed by their poets, aligned with truth in God’s Word.

This may not go as smoothly as we’d like. But I have found that stepping on the clutch of finding common ground can help a great deal. If we fail to do so, we may prompt noises even louder than grinding gears in cars with stick shifts. The gospel resonates with some things all people should know. They may have “suppressed the truth in unrighteousness” (see Rom. 1:18), but God can raise the dead. He did so for all who believe (see Eph. 2:1), and He can do so for the people He brings our way.
Jesus’ Loving Presence in the World—You!
(continued from page 1)

Jacqueline is a senior who joined our church after the deacons bought a bus so we could invite to worship the residents of two senior residences across town. Jacqueline is full of energy, spunk, and passion for the Lord. She has some health problems, of course. What eighty-three-year-old doesn’t? A month after she had a hip replacement, the changing seasons hit her with a lung infection. I went to see her in the hospital. As we sat and talked, the other patient in the room, a young woman named Rosita, cried out softly every minute or so, in pain.

“It was really irritating the first night,” Jacqueline told me. “But then I got up at three a.m. and spoke to her. I touched her face and prayed for her. Then she quieted down.”

One of the nurses had come in while Jacqueline was praying for Rosita. She told Jacqueline, “Maybe that’s why you got a lung infection. So you could be in this room, for her.” After that, Jacqueline was no longer annoyed by Rosita’s nighttime moans and groans. She realized she was there for a purpose.

The day after my visit, Jacqueline called to say her lung infection looked like pneumonia, so they were keeping her for several more days. She had also learned Rosita was supposed to be on another floor. “But they don’t have space for her down there,” Jacqueline told me. “Where?” I asked. “The end-of-life floor. That’s where she’s supposed to be. I don’t know what to do, Little Brother.” That’s what Jacqueline calls me. I like it.

I didn’t know sickle cell was a fatal disease—that it could take a twenty-four-year-old woman with a six-year-old son. Jacqueline was surprised too. “What do I say to her? I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

I told Jacqueline, “Jesus’ body is in heaven now. He is using your hands to love Rosita. So just spend time with her. Tell her about Him, and let Him use you to comfort her.”

The next day, I went back to the hospital. Jacqueline held Rosita’s hand while I read Psalm 18. We talked about how encouraging it is that our cries for mercy reach God’s ears—that God is never too busy to listen and respond to calls for help. We talked about heaven, and Christ, and salvation. And then Rosita smiled as she prayed to receive Christ. It was all God’s work. He put Jacqueline in that room and brought me to visit. He worked in the heart of a dying young woman to help her see her sin and need for a Savior. God alone saved her soul. But He let Jacqueline and me be a part of His work (see 1 Corinthians 3:5–9).

Yes, You

Jacqueline was nervous about moving into Rosita’s life. I’m sure many of you can relate. Perhaps you feel God can’t use you in significant ways. Maybe you feel untrained or too ordinary to make a difference in someone’s life. If you are God’s child, however, you are an instrument He can use for His purposes (see 1 Corinthians 1:26–31).
Do you remember how God used a little slave girl in the household of Naaman the leper? Naaman was a rich, arrogant Syrian general. He had few concrete needs in his life—until he got leprosy. (Read his story in 2 Kings 5.) That tangible need opened the door of Naaman's heart so he could learn some intangible things about himself.

God’s renovation of Naaman’s life began with an Israeli girl, a slave taken in battle. She told Naaman’s wife about a prophet in Israel named Elisha who could heal him. Naaman’s first lesson in humility was to listen to the most unlikely teacher of all, a young slave girl. She was a messenger of hope to a man broken inside and out.

As bad as his leprosy was, Naaman’s sin problem was worse. God used leprosy to expose Naaman’s true problem—a proud, rebellious heart that needed cleansing. *Naaman’s heart was as numb as his hands.* Without his leprosy, Naaman would never have traveled to Israel, obeyed Elisha’s instructions to jump in the river, or listened to the little slave girl who told him where healing could be found.

Naaman was powerful and rich. The girl was powerless and penniless. He was a general with great freedom. She was a slave with no freedom. The girl had little of her own to offer Naaman. How about you? Do you know the Source of true help for the hurting?

At a time when Israel had abandoned the worship of Yahweh and chased after foreign gods, this slave girl retained her faith. At a time when Israel had failed to be “a light for the nations” (Isaiah 49:6), this young girl became a light of hope in Damascus. It wasn’t her light. She simply reflected the light of God’s truth in a dark place so that Naaman could see.

Are you outnumbered by nonbelievers in your neighborhood, school, family, or workplace? Remember that as a member of God’s household, you are His instrument. You are not alone. Wherever you are now, know that you don’t have to be a big shot or have all the answers to the problems of those around you. That Israeli girl did not know how to cure leprosy, but she knew where to point Naaman. As God’s child, she was tapped into the Source of all healing and hope, and that made her useful to God right where she was. Where will God use you?

### Open Your Eyes and Your Heart

God is calling some of His children to move overseas to bring healing and hope to the slums and dark places of the world. Many of us, however, are called to remain right where we are. Perhaps you are living in a nice community in the suburbs. It’s not wrong to live there. But it is wrong to let your comfortable life insulate you from the needs of people around you.

Next Saturday before you take your children to soccer practice or the playground, why not ask God how He could use you there?

### Material comfort and earthly success can be like Bubble
Wrap, protecting people from the hard reality of their
situation: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”. (Revelation 3:17)

Maybe you are a student or work in an office somewhere. What if you prayed for the people you see every week and asked the Lord to open doors into their lives? I guarantee some of them are struggling with something right now. You carry the light of the world with you (see Matthew 5:14–16)! Don’t smother it, because there are needy people everywhere, even if they don’t appear to have needs. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes:

*We live in a time and place where, over and over, when confronted with something unpleasant we pursue not coping but overcoming. Often we succeed. Most of humanity has not enjoyed and does not enjoy such luxury. Death shatters our illusion that we can make do without coping. When we have overcome absence with phone calls, winglessness with airplanes, summer heat with air-conditioning—when we have overcome all these and more besides, then there will abide two things with which we must cope: the evil in our hearts and death.*

---

2 Kings 5, Isaiah 49:6, Matthew 5:14–16, Revelation 3:17
Jesus’ Loving Presence in the World—You!

Today, Christianity is growing dramatically among the world’s poorest people. They know their need. The wealthy, on the other hand, often fail to see how Jesus is relevant to their lives. That’s the point Jesus makes in Mark 10:25: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Did Jesus mean the door of heaven is closed to the rich? Of course not. The rich are just better cushioned from reality; they don’t know how needy they truly are. Do you know anyone like that?

In His mercy, God sometimes creates a vacuum of need in otherwise comfortable lives. In that vacuum, many become desperate enough to shed their pride and seek a Savior. That’s what happened to Naaman, who was cushioned from the reality of the world and the sin in his heart. But when that proud, successful man ran out of options, his hopelessness drove him into the arms of God.

I think the materially comfortable—the Namaans of today—could actually be another unreached people group, right under our noses. They drive expensive cars, wear nice clothes, and appear to be happy. But many are miserable. Driving home in a BMW or Suburban doesn’t make it easier to face a crumbling marriage. Living in a big house doesn’t help your teenager get off drugs. A large bank account is little comfort when Alzheimer’s slowly steals your spouse from you.

Material comfort and earthly success can be like Bubble Wrap, protecting people from the hard reality of their situation: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). To remove the obstacles of wealth and prosperity, God sometimes allows problems to creep into the lives of comfortable people. Those problems make them hungry for help and for answers. So open your eyes and your heart, and let God use you to serve those hungry souls the Bread of Life.

It’s Okay to Feel Helpless

Maybe you are unconvinced that you, right where you are today, can be used by God to reveal His mercy and truth. If so, let me show you something else: the way Jesus trained His unqualified disciples to do ministry. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand appears in all four gospels, so you have probably heard the story. But did you notice that Jesus gave the disciples an impossible command and then showed them how to obey it?

Before we look at that command, let me remind you of the clear connection that Jesus made between spiritual and material needs. This is a word and deed event. In Mark’s account we learn that Jesus had compassion on the crowd, not because they forgot their lunch, but “because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (6:34).

It was their need for a shepherd, for Him, that aroused His compassion. The miracle was a teaching tool for both the crowd and the disciples. Jesus taught the crowd that He was a shepherd worth following, because He could meet their needs. Not merely the needs of their bellies, but of their souls. By feeding so many with so little, Jesus revealed Himself as the same God who fed His people in the wilderness years before and was now with them once again. (See Exodus 16:1–36; Numbers 11:1–9.)

But He wouldn’t be with them for long. Jesus knew He would soon leave His ministry in the hands of eleven men who didn’t seem to have it all together. He had to teach the disciples how to minister to the needy and the lost. They had to know how to feed His sheep in the coming days, when He wouldn’t be with them physically.

The first thing they had to know was that they couldn’t do it alone. When Jesus told the apostles, “You give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37), He knew it was impossible for them to do it. Jesus wanted the disciples to feel the helplessness of staring thousands of hungry people in the face and not having enough food to feed them. Don’t we feel the same sense of
helplessness as we look at the overwhelming needs of the world today?

Here’s my point: Feelings of helplessness should not be obstacles to ministry, but reasons to cling to Christ. Just as need drives unbelievers like Naaman into the arms of God, our helplessness keeps us coming back to Him as we do His ministry, as Spurgeon said:

It is a good thing for us to know how very poor we are, and how far from being able to meet the wants of the people around us. It is for our good to be made to confess this in so many words to our Lord. Truly, he who writes this comment has often felt as if he had neither loaf nor fish, and yet for some forty years and more he has been a full-handed waiter at the King’s great banquets.

Jesus’ next lesson was to deploy the disciples as waiters to distribute the food. He didn’t lay out a buffet for the people. He could have simply snapped His fingers, made a huge table, and asked everyone to file through. Instead, He offered thanks to His Father and gave the bread and fish “to the disciples to set before the people” (Mark 6:41).

It’s fascinating to me that Jesus did not explain things to the disciples first. He could have said, “All right, look. I know there’s only a little bread and fish. But as you hand it out, I’m going to make it regenerate. There’ll be plenty, so don’t worry.” Why didn’t He explain the plan?

I think Jesus wanted the disciples to trust and rely on Him to do the impossible (which is just what you need to do when you move into the lives of hurting people around you). As the disciples walked around like waiters, trusting Jesus that somehow there would be food enough for all, they experienced the miracle firsthand. They saw the bread multiply in their hands, they saw the empty bellies fill up, and their faith in Jesus grew. They learned they could do impossible things when Jesus was with them.

When the disciples had counted to seven (five loaves of bread plus two fish), they felt helpless. They knew they could never feed the crowd with those seven items. But Jesus was teaching kingdom of God algebra to His disciples. In the regular world, $5 + 2 = 7$. But in the kingdom, where $x$ equals Christ, $5 + 2 + x = 5,000$.

Through this miracle, the disciples learned to count to eight: five loaves of bread plus two fish plus Jesus.

If you are trying to do something that seems impossible and you feel frustrated or hopeless, perhaps you are relying on yourself and earthly resources. Learn to count to eight. Take whatever resources you have, then ask Jesus to use them however He wants. If He has called you to do something difficult, you can be sure He will provide all that you need to do it.

**Summary**

Are you available to be used by Jesus? Maybe you are afraid of what you might lose—friendship, time, security, the respect of others. Yet there are people around you right now with wounds and hurts God can address through
Jesus’ Loving Presence in the World—You!

You. Some are lost souls whom God can save when they hear the gospel.

Some people, like Naaman, are good at hiding their needs behind nice clothes and comfortable lives. Pay attention at school, at work, at the pool, and in the neighborhood. You could be a messenger to hurting people there. Get close enough to folks to find out where they hurt, and be their friend. Tell them about the only Source of real healing for bodies and souls.

No one is too far outside God’s household to be invited inside. And all His children are equipped to make that invitation. When God’s children pour out love and compassion into the lives of hurting and broken people, we declare, “Yes! There is a God! Despite all the data to the contrary in this broken world, there really is a Rescuer in heaven, and He cares about your suffering, your sadness, and your soul.”

Notes

1. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

[One looking at] Christian activities which are, in a sense, directed toward this present world . . . would find that this same religion has always been healing the sick and caring for the poor . . .

C.S. Lewis

Recommended Reading

Chris Sicks, Tangible: Making God Known Through Deeds of Mercy and Words of Truth (NavPress 2013)

In today’s Church there seems to be two well-intentioned groups. “Deed” people feed the hungry and help the poor while “Word” people proclaim the Gospel and engage in apologetics. The two often seem to compete with one another, but God always intended them to be partners. Sacrificial love can grab the attention of those we serve, opening their ears and minds to the words we share.

In Tangible, author and pastor Chris Sicks explains how God’s people can effectively introduce hurting people to God through intentional acts of kindness. This book does more than discuss these good ideas—it’s full of ways to make God known to the needy in your community today.
language of food and fellowship, putting together and publishing a cookbook titled *Fully to Enjoy: An Invitation to Our Abundant Table*. What better way to invite people along on our journey while nourishing them in both body and spirit? This book is also our humble attempt to thank the C.S. Lewis Institute for the many blessings it has given us.

. . .the sun looks down on nothing half so good as a household laughing together over a meal.

*C.S. Lewis*

---

**RECOMMENDED READING**

*C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows, Fully to Enjoy: An Invitation to Our Abundant Table* (C.S. Lewis Institute 2014)

*Fully to Enjoy* is a cookbook celebrating 10 years of faith, food, and fun. Authored by C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows, it features over 250 tried-and-true recipes, plus cooking and hospitality tips, personal vignettes and favorite passages to nourish both body and soul. All proceeds will benefit the C.S. Lewis Institute. You may also consider gifting the cookbook to a friend or family member!

What happens when you bring 11 women with a shared commitment to spiritual growth and a passion for good food around the table? The answer is much laughter, rich conversations and an abundance of goodness and grace. With recipes ranging from sophisticated to simple and traditional to trendy, this collection of favorites has something for every cook.
God just accept everybody? Isn’t that what love requires?

Here I think we encounter a basic misunderstanding of who God is and what His being God entails. For the Bible declares that God is not only loving; He is also good—absolutely holy and good. And a God who is good must not only love, He must also hate; He must hate that which is evil—that which is contrary to His goodness.

God created this world to display His own glory and goodness—and isn’t it right that He should hate all that would destroy that creation? Shouldn’t God hate the sexual abuse of children? Shouldn’t God hate the terrorist bombs that kill hundreds of innocent people? Shouldn’t God hate the wickedness that lurks in the depths of the human heart? If He didn’t, He could hardly be called good. In fact, if God didn’t hate those things, and if that hatred was not ultimately manifest in His judgment of those things, then would it really make sense even to talk about good and evil in any objective and ultimate sense at all?

The Necessity of Judgment

The judgment of God is necessary for the existence of a real moral order in the universe. It provides the ultimate sanction that underlies all moral demands, without which law breakers would go unpunished.

In contrast to the moral relativism of our age, the judgment of God provides the absolute objective standard to which all other moral judgments must conform. We may object to the idea of some final judgment, but, far from degrading us, God’s judgment actually gives great dignity to our lives. God doesn’t judge dogs. Unlike the way he treats all other earthly creatures, God treats us as responsible moral agents, conferring value to our choices by bringing them before His bar of judgment. If we are not held accountable for our actions, why not eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die? But because we will be judged by God, our choices have eternal consequences. They matter.

Finally, the judgment of God is necessary if divine goodness is to be victorious over evil. Because God will judge the world, His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven; justice will prevail; and the good will be seen to be good, finally and fully, by all. A world without the judgment of God is a world that ultimately lacks any ultimate meaning.

I think most people get this basic idea. When you pin them down, they recognize that there ought to be some difference in the ultimate fate of Adolph Hitler and that of, say, Mother Teresa. “Yea, maybe there should be a judgment,” they might say, “but it should be reserved for the really bad people out there—the terrorists, the murderers, those who abuse children. That’s who belongs in hell. Why don’t Christians see it that way?”

Objection 2:
The Basis of the Verdict Is Unfair

The notion of judgment in Christianity may be understandable, but it’s the basis of the verdict that many object to. What does Jesus have to do with it? And here we encounter what Bill Hybels calls the Aunt Edna objection: Aunt Edna is the quintessential nice person—she pays her taxes, bakes cookies for the grandkids, and is kind to stray cats. But she’s just not into the God thing. Does she deserve to go to hell?

In fact, any number of times and in various ways, God revealed Himself to Aunt Edna—whether through hearing the stories of Christmas and Easter, through the experience of awe seeing a radiant sunset or a majestic mountain range, or through the whisper of her own conscience. But each time Aunt Edna turned away from that whisper of God calling her to acknowledge Him, to thank Him, to worship Him. Each time she said no to God. “I will not allow You to be God in my life. I will rule my own life,” she said. Aunt Edna just wants God to leave her alone, and being left alone by God is what the Bible calls “hell.”
What Can Be Worse than Deicide?

You could say Aunt Edna has wished that God didn’t exist—not the real God, the God who necessarily deserves our supreme love and obedience and worship. In a sense, as far as her life goes, she’s shut Him out; she’s killed Him. We might even say that Aunt Edna has committed “deicide”—the murder of God.

Let’s be very clear about the basis of the verdict on the day of judgment. Aunt Edna would not be condemned by God for not believing in Jesus. She would be condemned for rejecting God. This is the tragedy of the human condition; we want to be our own god. And the wonder of it is, God allows us to do that. You could say that hell is simply the final and ultimate result of that process. As C.S. Lewis put it: sin is a human being saying to God throughout life, “Go away and leave me alone.” Hell is God’s answer, “You may have your wish.”

In that sense, hell is the ultimate testament to human freedom.

Not that people choose to go to hell; they simply choose the road that leads them there—that wide road that leads to destruction. And little by little their hearts become hardened to the love of God and their ears become deaf to the voice of God, and they refuse to humble themselves before the grace of God. In the end, they refuse to receive the rescue that is found in the gospel of God.

C.S. Lewis points to the fact that when people choose the road to hell in this life, they begin to take on the qualities that will be confirmed, intensified, and made permanent when they reach their destination. “It is not a question of God ‘sending us’ to hell,” Lewis says. “In each of us there is something growing, which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud.” Hell may be understood as a culmination of the effects of sin and the confirmation of God’s opposition to it. It is both the inexorable result of human choice and the active and deliberate judgment of God. There can be no fairer verdict than that.

Objection 3: The Punishment Is Grossly Excessive

The verdict may be fair, but is the punishment really just—this everlasting condemnation? Isn’t what the Bible describes rather excessive? To “be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched”—shouldn’t that be considered “cruel and unusual”?

First, I would say it does seem a bit presumptuous on our part to prescribe to God just how He ought to execute His justice. Reverence alone ought to engender some reticence to make such judgments. But still, we might well ask, how can our finite and temporal sin merit an eternal consequence? Could it be because the One we sin against is of infinite and immeasurable holiness and goodness?

The Rebellion Persists

But why does it have to go on forever? Wouldn’t a thousand years be enough? But that’s a misunderstanding of what hell is about. Hell is not full of people with humble and repentant hearts who long to worship God in heaven. Consider what we find in the Book of Revelation. There the wrath of God is being poured out on humanity, and we read, “People gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done” (Rev. 16:10–11).

That’s what hell is like: in hell the sinner’s hardened heart will become harder still. Just as in heaven, where the transforming power of the gospel culminates in hearts that never again desire to choose evil, in hell, the corrupting power of sin culminates in hearts that never again desire to do good or to worship the God of all goodness. Hell goes on forever because sinners never stop sinning. The rebellion against God’s righteous rule never ceases.
But doesn’t the continued existence of hell detract from the ultimate victory of God? How can people rejoice in God’s presence in that heavenly city described in Revelation 22, knowing that outside that city are the wicked (Rev. 22:15)—suffering, it says, in “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Rev. 21:8)? On the one hand, the prospect of anyone suffering the agonies of hell ought to terrify us. Jesus warned of it in the strongest possible terms. And He was grieved as He thought of the fate of many in the coming judgment. He wept over the city of Jerusalem, which seemed dead set against Him. As we read in Ezekiel 33:11, the Lord takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.” And in 1 Timothy 2:4—the Lord “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” And the apostle Paul grieved as he thought of the possible fate of his own countrymen who rejected the gospel of God’s grace: “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom. 9:2–4). It is that anguish of heart that ought to move us, as it did Paul, to pray and to work so that those without Christ may know of Him and turn to Him and find rescue from the awful captivity of sin in their lives.

But at the same time, I refuse to believe that my own horror at the thought of God’s eternal wrath being poured out on sinners somehow means that there can be no heaven if there is a hell. It seems to me that the coexistence of heaven and hell is not a problem for God. Why is that? How could hell possibly fit into the grand purpose and design of God for His universe?

### Why Should There Be a Hell?

Here we come up against one of the great mysteries of our faith. Why any creature God created should ever turn away from Him is the great conundrum of the cosmos. And the Bible gives us no answer to that question, perhaps because in the good world God created evil is ultimately irrational and therefore inexplicable. I can’t say why God couldn’t have made a world in which He knew every person would live in perfect faith and obedience before Him. Therefore, I can’t say why there is a hell. But I can suggest what hell does—that is, what it tells us about God.

### Hell Demonstrates God’s Holiness

Three things come to mind: First, hell demonstrates God’s holiness. However we conceive of the love of God, we must recognize that it is always a holy love. It’s only our meager understanding of the utter purity of God’s holiness, and of His absolute abhorrence of all evil, that makes it difficult for us to conceive of the appropriateness of hell as God’s response to it. Our thoughts of God are too shallow, too tame, and domesticated. We have made God too much in our own image, rather than allowing Him to shape our thinking.

Consequently, we don’t understand the sinfulness of sin. Instead of thinking, “Sin is not so bad; how extreme of God to punish it in hell,” we should think, “What must sin be like, if it results in sinners justly going to hell?” Hell shows us just how holy God is—such is His revulsion of our sin.

### Hell Vindicates God’s Justice

Second, we can say that hell vindicates God’s justice. The existence of hell testifies forever that in God’s universe, righteousness rules. Let there be no mistake; evil will get its due. When God says the wages of sin is death, He means it. When God punishes sin, He will be seen to be just in all His ways. God will be glorified even in the display of His wrath.”
Hell Magnifies God’s Grace

And finally, and perhaps paradoxically, the existence of hell magnifies God’s grace. If I came up to you and said, “I just paid your bill,” you’d be grateful, I’m sure. But the degree of your gratitude would rise dramatically if you discovered that it wasn’t your bill for lunch that I paid, but it was the entire principal of your house mortgage! In a sense, this is what hell says to us. It is the measure of God’s grace; this is the length He went to save us. Hell is the bill He has paid.

When Jesus died on the cross, when He cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46), He was experiencing something of the God-forsakenness of hell itself for sinners. This is what He endured on your behalf. Consider this sinless man, who was Himself God—one who lived in a perfect relationship of faith and love with His Father in heaven. That separation from His Father on the cross, that loss of relationship—bearing the wrath that our sin deserves—that was far greater than any suffering we could imagine. But such is the love of God for us; it is as deep as the depths of hell itself.

If you say, “The God I believe in would never send anyone to hell,” then you will never know the true depth of the love of the God who reveals Himself in the Bible—the God of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the God who in love bore hell itself for us. His is not a sentimental love, but a holy love—a love described by Isaac Watts as being “so amazing, so divine,” that it “demands my soul, my life, my all.”

A Different Question

How could a loving God send people to hell? That’s a question we will all wrestle with to some extent. But the question we should ask is this: how could a holy God allow me into His heaven? That’s the question that points us to the grace of God in the cross of Christ. In Jesus Christ, God rescues us from that broad road that leads to destruction—eternal destruction, and in Him God puts us on that narrow path that leads to life—eternal life.

Notes:

1. Various terms are used in the Bible to convey this reality with slightly different shades of meaning—e.g., Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, the lake of fire, and the Abyss.
5. The following illustration comes from a sermon preached by John Ortberg in which he attributed the illustration to Hybels: “Would a Loving God Send People to Hell?” (preached at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, CA, April 3, 2005).
6. “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it.” The Great Divorce (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 72.
8. C.S. Lewis refers to this as “The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power; that Hell should be able to veto Heaven.” (Great Divorce, 120).

A man can’t be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.

C.S. Lewis
Fellowship

The second means of grace is fellowship, a translation of the Greek word koinonia, meaning “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.” In this context, koinonia means active participation in the community of believers through sharing of one’s life and resources. True koinonia develops Christ-centered friendships that lead to sharing one another’s joys and sorrows, bearing one another’s burdens, and generally supporting one another spiritually, emotionally and materially in the ups and downs of life. The material aspect of sharing is seen in Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32. These texts highlight the voluntary sharing of material possessions among believers to meet personal needs. However, such radical generosity is just one expression of their common faith and love in Jesus and the corporate life it produces. The small house churches of the early Christians provided a congenial environment for such relational growth.

Devoting ourselves to fellowship/koinonia is far more than casual conversation over coffee and donuts between church services. It begins with developing authentic relationships with other believers in our church or circle of friends. This requires a willingness to open our lives to them and to become involved in their lives as well. Intentionality and time are necessary for such relationships to grow deep and strong, and this requires a commitment. As in the early church, the best way to develop koinonia is through small groups that meet in homes. In today’s busy culture, some people are finding groups of three or four of the same sex to be easiest—to attend consistently and to share at greater depth.

A good action step? Ask God to lead you to a few people with whom you can develop close and lasting Christ-centered friendships; make a list of whoever comes to mind and explore the possibilities with them. Needless to say, you must make a definite commitment of time to develop such relationships. The rewards of these friendships far exceed the time and effort required, for we learn how to love and serve others and allow them to love and serve us, and in the process we discover that God meets us and ministers to us through one another.

The Breaking of Bread

The breaking of bread is the third means of grace in this verse. The basic meaning of the phrase is to eat a meal. For Jews (who made up the earliest church) a meal began with breaking a loaf of bread and giving thanks. But in this context, the phrase means more. It appears to be a reference to Communion, or the Lord’s Supper, which was originally part of a larger meal shared when the early church assembled each week (Acts 20:7). The breaking of bread was a highlight in the worship life of the believing community, a time of unity in celebrating the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus and His impending return. At some point, the Communion was separated from the community meal and became part of the Sunday worship liturgy.

Today there is a range of understanding and practice regarding the Lord’s Supper. Roman Catholics celebrate it weekly or even daily; Anglicans and various Protestant denominations range from weekly to quarterly. It seems the earliest Christians celebrated it as part of their weekly gathering for worship. Opinions vary about whether the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ (Roman Catholics) or remind us of Christ’s death and resurrection (Baptists and many other Protestants). Whatever the exact significance, Paul’s sober warning to the Corinthian church indicates that God takes Communion seriously indeed, and so should we. It is far more than consuming a bit of bread and wine. In Corinth, failure to participate in the Lord’s Supper with the proper attitude of heart and mind brought God’s judgment on the offending parties (1 Cor.11:17–34). For this reason, Protestants and Catholics have long en-
couraged people to prepare their hearts before receiving Communion.

Preparation of heart, which is best done before the Communion service, involves looking back in sober remembrance and sustained reflection on the sacrificial love of Jesus for us, demonstrated through His atoning death. It also involves looking back over our lives in light of this and asking God to search our hearts and show us any unconfessed or unrepented sins or broken relationships that we need to reconcile.

Over the centuries, both Protestants and Catholics have testified to having intimate encounters with Christ in the Lord’s Supper, and we should be open to this. Those who receive the Lord’s Supper rightly and regularly find it a means of deepening their love and gratitude to Jesus for His amazing grace and love.

Prayer

The fourth means of grace is prayer. The Greek text says, the prayers, suggesting that at this early period, when the newly converted disciples were still gathering in the Temple precincts, they were also praying some of the traditional Jewish prayers. But Jesus had taught them what we call the Lord’s Prayer, and no doubt they were using it, as well as free, extemporaneous prayers. Prayer was a major part of the life of the church in Acts and was connected with extraordinary answers (Acts 4:23–31; 12:1–17).

Prayer is something we must learn. The way we learn to pray is by praying. Reading books on prayer can be helpful, but this is not a substitute for the action itself. Fortunately Jesus gave us a pattern to guide our praying and help us mature in prayer. It is usually called the Lord’s Prayer, but it should be called the Disciples’ Prayer, because it was given to the disciples as a pattern, a guide, a framework for their prayer lives (Matt. 6:9–13). It seems very simple at first, but it contains six petitions that cover the main areas on which our prayer should focus. The more we ponder each of these, the more we discover the comprehensive scope of this prayer. Over the centuries, this prayer has been the primary resource for learning to pray, followed by the Psalms.

If we are devoting ourselves to the Scriptures, we will discover many promises from God. And if we are living in true fellowship/koinonia, we will have much to pray about. Praying with others is an important element of prayer. A prayer partner or a triplet or quad is a great way not only to grow in prayer, but also to develop deeper koinonia. As we learn how to pray rightly and see God answer our prayers, we will grow in our gratitude, trust, and intimacy with Him and faith in His Word.

Summary

You may have noticed that these four means of grace seem to be interconnected. In fact, they are deeply connected because the Holy Spirit energizes and integrates them in ways that help transform us. When we, like the first church, devote ourselves to all four, the Spirit uses each to intensify the others in a divine synergy that propels us forward in grace. On the other hand, when one or two are
Are You Growing in Grace?

neglected or sluggish, our spiritual vitality is greatly diminished. How is it with you? Are you devoted to all four of these essential means of grace? If not, ask God to help you, then take whatever action is necessary. As you use God’s appointed means of grace consistently and with perseverance, trusting the Holy Spirit to work through them, your relationship with Christ will deepen and increase in strength, vitality, fruitfulness, and joy.

Notes:
1. Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.
3. Ibid., 438.

Prayer is either a sheer illusion or a personal contact between embryonic, incomplete persons (ourselves) and the utterly concrete Person. Prayer, in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine. In it God shows Himself to us. That He answers prayers is a corollary—not necessarily the most important one—from that revelation. What He does is learned from what He is.

*C.S. Lewis*

**RECOMMENDED READING**


Drawn from a rich heritage, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* will guide you through a carefully selected array of disciplines. By illustrating why the disciplines are important, showing how each one will help you grow in godliness, and offering practical suggestions for cultivating them, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* will provide you with a refreshing opportunity to become more like Christ and grow in character and maturity. Now updated and revised to equip a new generation of readers, this anniversary edition features in-depth discussions on each of the key disciplines.

This guide draws from the rich heritage left us by the early church fathers, the Puritan writers, and Jesus Himself to lead group members or individuals through a carefully selected array of disciplines, including Scripture reading, meditation and application, prayer, worship, evangelism, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, and journaling.
creators and certainly not redeemers, and that they need to attain the same enlightenment as us humans. So, for all practical purposes, the Buddha was an agnostic. He said he didn’t know if there was a supreme god, which is what agnostic means—“I do not know.” In any event, he did not believe in a God who created the world and now controls it. And he looked not to a god but to his own self for any sort of “salvation.”

The second Characteristic of Existence is suffering, which we have already seen is the first Noble Truth. The third is that there is no self. This follows from the first Characteristic, that everything is impermanent. Let me try to explain.

If there is nothing permanent in Jane, let’s say, then there can’t be anything that remains the same from year to year, month to month, or even moment to moment. Can that be? Well, we know that our atoms and cells are constantly changing, so at the level of the body, that must be true; there is nothing permanent.

What about Jane’s mind? Her thoughts are constantly changing, especially as she experiences new things, which she does during her waking hours and when she is dreaming. If her experiences are constantly giving her new perspectives, how can her mind remain the same? You say her basic attitudes are the same? But how can they be? If her perspective is constantly changing (even if minutely) because of her new experiences, then even her attitudes change with an ever-changing perspective. They may not change much, but they change nevertheless.

If Jane’s mind and body are constantly changing, we’d have to say the same about her emotions and will. As life brings new things, good and bad, her feelings go up and down. And her desires, expressed by her will, must also change apace.

If Jane’s mind, body, feelings, and will continually change, then there can’t be anything about her that remains the same. And what is the self but the combination of mind, body, feelings, and will? Therefore Buddhists say Jane has no self—at least one that remains the same across time.

By the way, the Buddha said that as long as we think we have a permanent self, we will be all the more attached to this self and unable to give up desire—which keeps us suffering and stuck in samsara, the endless cycle of reincarnation. So knowing that we have no permanent self is part of our liberation. It helps us get rid of desire, which in turn helps us attain nirvana (more on that in a bit).

Let’s take stock of what we have learned so far about the Buddha’s teaching. All is suffering (the first Noble Truth), the cause of suffering is desire (the second Noble Truth), which comes from ignorance of the Three Characteristics. Now we must go on to the third Noble Truth: the way to be rid of suffering is to be rid of desire. The eventual “blowing out” of desire is nirvana, which is a state of cessation of suffering that can be experienced at one level in this life and at another level after death.

The nirvana in this life is called “nirvana with remainder,” and that in the next is “nirvana without remainder.” The “remainder” refers to karma, which are deeds that keep us in this cycle of reincarnation (samsara). Nirvana in the next life, without remainder, is nothing like anything we can imagine. In fact, the Buddha taught that in nirvana there are no desires, thoughts, or beings. So we have to say that nirvana is the end of human existence as we know it. Perhaps it is like that drop of water that hits the surface of the ocean and in a matter of milliseconds no longer exists as an individual drop. Its contents have dispersed and merged with
A Thumbnail Sketch of Buddhism for Christians

the ocean. The “I” is no longer a being (of course it never was a self anyway!), but that’s not the important thing for the Buddha. The important thing is that suffering is over, which is the goal of the Buddha’s teaching.

The fourth Noble Truth is this: The way to be rid of desire is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path. The first step on that path is right understanding. This means proper understanding of the Buddha’s teachings, such as the four Noble Truths and three Characteristics of Existence. Don’t believe anyone who says something like the following: “In Buddhism (as opposed to Christianity) it doesn’t matter what you believe, all that matters is what you do.” You can see from this first step on the Noble Eightfold Path that it matters very much what you believe. If you do not believe what the Buddha taught about suffering and the self, for example, you will not make it past square one in Buddhism.

The second step is right thinking, which involves thinking about truth (the Buddha’s teachings again) and not how to build up your own self, for that just increases desire. The third step is right speech, which means no lying or slander or gossip. Right action (the fourth step) means following the Five Precepts: no killing, stealing, sexual sin, lying, or alcohol. Let me explain some of those.

No killing means just that—the taking of life, even animal life, is forbidden. So consistent Buddhists are vegetarians and pacifists. That does not mean that Buddhists never eat meat or fight in war, any more than that Christians have always forgiven their enemies. But those are the ideals.

Sexual sin means sin outside of marriage for laity, and any sex at all for Buddhist monks and nuns. Notice, by the way, that Buddhist ethics are very similar to Christian moral rules. The same is true for the other major religions. Christians differ on application and interpretation, but the same basic principles—actually, those of the Ten Commandments—are taught by all the major religions. As C.S. Lewis once said, if you went to the British Museum (which is a library) to research the moral teachings of the great civilizations, you’d get bored after three days, for they all say nearly the same things. He pointed this out in “Illustrations of the Tao,” the appendix to his book The Abolition of Man.

“Right action” (the fourth step on the Noble Path) also includes the four Unlimited Virtues (friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and even-mindedness). The last virtue means remaining even-keeled even in times of suffering and joy. This, Buddhists say, is possible only after meditation.

The fifth step is right livelihood. That means some occupations are obviously forbidden to the faithful Buddhist: arms sales, butchering animals, producing intoxicants.

The last three steps (right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration) all have to do with meditation, which is the Buddhist way par excellence to spiritual advancement.

The Buddhist School Closest to the Root: Theravada

There are four main schools of Buddhism—Theravada, Mahayana, Zen, and Tibetan. Here and below we will discuss the first two, which are the largest.

Theravada, which is Pali for the “Way of the Elders,” took most of its present shape by the second century BC, about two centuries after the death of the Buddha. Of the four schools just mentioned, it is probably closest to what historians think Gotama actually taught.
Its chief goal is liberation from samsara in nirvana, which, as we saw earlier, is the end of consciousness and individuality. The Theravada school regards the gods as real but unhelpful in the human search to end suffering. It says the human self is unreal and lives many lives in many heavens and hells before it reaches nirvana; most of us are not spiritual enough to have attained nirvana before the end of one life. It says the world is not a thing but a process, with no beginning or end. Remember here the Buddha’s teaching that nothing is permanent and standing on its own. So too for the world.

According to Theravada, the basic human problem is suffering in samsara because of ignorance of the Buddha’s teachings. That ignorance creates desire, which in turn is responsible for our suffering. The resolution to our problem(s) is to accept what the Buddha taught and practice his virtues and precepts.

Some have asked how this can be a religion. For it doesn’t have the earmarks of what most of us think of when we hear the word religion. There is no worship, for there is no God who made us or the world or will save us. Neither are there prayer or praise, forgiveness or heaven. Judgment and a final hell are missing. The Buddha was always silent about the future life, except to say what it is not—a place of beings, consciousness or desire.

But in another sense it is a religion. It is a complete way of thinking and practice that answers (or at least struggles with) the most important questions in life: Who or what are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? How should we live our lives?

In this sense, of course, even atheism is a religion, for it too answers these questions.

This may seem odd to you, to call atheism and this kind of Buddhism “religions” when they don’t purport a belief in God. But it does help explain how Theravada (and other kinds of) Buddhists can feel religious and look toward reality with reverence without believing in a personal god.

**Mahayana: The Largest and Most Popular School**

The first Mahayana (Sanskrit for “Great Vehicle,” which suggests it carries many more than its rival Theravada) sutras (scriptures) were written between the first and eighth centuries AD. In them one can see distinct departures from Theravada positions. Here are the most important differences:

1. **Universalism.** Whereas in Theravada male monks have been the only ones considered spiritual enough to attain nirvana, Mahayana promises the possibility of liberation for everyone.
2. **Fast and easy.** In Theravada liberation takes many lives (in samsara, the reincarnation process), but Mahayana promises liberation after only one life. And it doesn’t take lengthy, rigorous meditation; in some Mahayana schools,

   *The Buddha was always silent about the future life, except to say what it is not—a place of beings, consciousness or desire.*

   if you simply look with sincere faith one time during your life to the Buddha, you will escape samsara after death. It’s no wonder Mahayana is the largest and most popular segment of Buddhism.

3. **Buddha as god.** While Theravada teaches that the Buddha was just a man, Mahayana talks about the divine Buddha, and de-emphasizes the historical Gotama.
4. **Many Buddhas.** Theravada focuses on the one Buddha in history, Gotama. But Mahayanaists speak of an infinite number of Buddhas. And Mahayana teachers also say each one of us has a latent Buddha nature, so that we are all unrealized Buddhas.
5. **Grace.** The Mahayana ideal figure is the bodhisattva (Sanskrit for “a being for enlightenment”) who was on his way to Buddhahood but stopped to help those still ignorant and suffering in samsara. The bodhisattva is said to have one foot in our world and one in nirvana. He keeps the one foot here so that he can impart grace to those who need it. The most important bodhisattva is Amitabha (in Japan, Amida), who in the distant past said he would bring to his Pure Land all who called on his name in faith. He forgives their sins because of their faith and saves them from more lives in samsara. Strictly
A Thumbnail Sketch of Buddhism for Christians

speaking, however, these bodhisattvas are already Buddhas.

6. Levels of truth. Mahayana Buddhists talk about levels of reality and truth. The earthly Buddha, Gotama, is at the lowest level. Above that are the paradisal heavens that are full of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Each one of the latter is a bodily form of what they call “absolute Buddha nature.” Then at the highest level is the ultimate nature of reality, which is nirvana. This is nondual, which means that there are no distinctions in it. All is one. Nothing separates anything from anything else. There are no individuals here. What we think of as the human self is lost in the ocean of the ultimate Oneness, like the drop of water that hits the surface of the ocean.

Christian Analysis

I think you can see that Jesus and the Buddha were very different. The most important difference is that the Buddha did not believe in a God as we know it (he was agnostic on that) and certainly didn’t know the triune God. Later Mahayana traditions came to believe in deities known as Buddhas and bodhisattvas, but Gotama Buddha said that he was no more than a man, and that there is no Creator or divine being who can help us achieve our spiritual goals. This is why Sakyamuni, as the original Buddha is known by many Buddhists, said that we are to be lamps unto ourselves. In contrast, Jesus said that He was the light of the world.

We Christians say that we are not on our own, as the Buddha suggested, but can ask for the grace of Jesus to do for us what we cannot do. While Jesus emphasized moral corruption as the heart of the basic human problem (Mark 7:20–23), the Buddha said desire—for gratification of one’s senses and one’s ego—is the root of all suffering. With love one can become a bodhisattva, but only knowledge enables one to become a Buddha. Perhaps as a result, Buddhist and Christian portrayals of the spiritual ideal are curiously different: Buddhists look to a smiling Buddha seated on a lotus blossom, while Christians worship a suffering Jesus nailed to a cross. The Buddha taught his followers to escape suffering, while Jesus showed a way to conquer suffering by embracing it.

Although Buddhist and Christian ethics agree on important principles (that stealing, lying, the killing of innocent life, and sexual misconduct are wrong, and that compassion and sympathy are imperative), they differ on the relationship of ethics to ultimate reality. For Gotama Buddha and Theravadins the ethical life is a provisional raft that takes us to the other shore of nirvana, where it can then be discarded. For in nirvana differences between good and evil no longer exist. But for Christians, the distinction between right and wrong is part of the fabric of reality and will persist into eternity.

Ethical differences extend to relations between the sexes. In early Buddhism particularly you find the idea that you can become a Buddha only if you’re reborn in the form of a man. Not until much later did Mahayanists accept female bodhisattvas. Buddhist monasteries today dominate Theravadin life; most orders for nuns disappeared centuries ago. While Christian history contains plenty of sexism, Jesus Himself never demonized women or sexuality. When compared to the rigid structure of Buddhist monasticism, which is at the heart of Theravada, Jesus’ circle of disciples appears casual and free.

Buddhists and Christians look at ethics differently in large part because they regard history in radically different ways.
Buddhists read in the *Dhammapada* that “there is no misery like physical existence” (15.6). Earthly existence is necessarily a vale of tears, because as long as one remains in the endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth (samsara), suffering is inevitable because of the desire that life in this world produces. We’re told we can escape suffering only by escaping this wearisome cycle of rebirth. So we have to break ties to this world and its routines, particularly family life and sexuality.

Jesus, however, never spoke harsh words about sexual intercourse. He announced a salvation that comes not by renouncing life in the world but by trust that is lived out in loving commitment amid the everyday routines of worldly life. According to Him, marriage is not an impediment to spirituality but the ordinary realm in which salvation is lived out. Abstention from family and sexuality is an option, but not a higher path for the spiritual elite.

At the same time I should say that this contrast should not be drawn too sharply. Christian monasticism has at times been just as world denying as its Buddhist counterpart. Beginning with the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7), there have been many Christians who have concluded that they could find God best apart from family and sexuality. And while monasticism has been more integral to Theravada than Christianity, Jesus Himself chose not to marry or regard family as the center of the spiritual life (Matt. 10:37; 12:49–50), and the vast majority of Buddhists enjoy the fullness of married life and participation in the secular world.

There’s one final difference, and one of the most important: hope. If you are following the teachings of the original Buddha—Siddhartha Gotama—you have little or no hope for life after death. Sure, you can hope for nirvana, but this is a realm in which “you” are no longer a “you.” There is no individual self there in which to enjoy freedom from suffering.

Jesus, however, gives us the promise of eternal life as an individual self but joined to Him and the Father and the Spirit, in fellowship with the millions and perhaps billions of other saints—not only family and friends but the saints throughout history. And that fellowship, with joy and learning, will continue through all eternity.

The contrast is more than enormous.

---

The point of the metaphor “full speed astern” is that when you do this you change a ship’s direction, and don’t try to turn the ship into a railway engine. I was distinguishing the Christian view that all the Affections have to be redirected from the egocentric to the theocentric, from Stoicism or Buddhism in [which] they have to be annihilated.

*C.S. Lewis*

---

**RECOMMENDED READING**

Ravi Zacharias, *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha* (Multnomah Books 2010)

Eavesdrop on an imaginary conversation between Jesus and another great thinker whose quest for life’s meaning has influenced millions---Gautama Buddha!
How To Speak To Your Buddhist Neighbor

by Callom Harkrader

OCCA Fellow, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries

You might say that Buddhism is packaged in numerous forms. Even in casual conversations, one can identify a plethora of New Age beliefs and self-help rooted in Buddhism, as well as the classic representations. So how do we share Jesus with people steeped in Buddhist beliefs?

1. Build bridges.
There are many things to affirm in your neighbors’ Buddhist religion: the recognition of suffering, the honorable lifestyle of the eightfold path, the desire for something more than this finite world, and the appreciation they hold for spirituality in the little, everyday things. Praise the praiseworthy! Build friendship.

2. Ask and listen.
“What was the thought process that led you to this belief?” “What is attractive to you about Buddhism?” These questions, if asked kindly and sincerely, can help you get to know the person individually, friend to friend. They can also give you insight for a more personalized presentation of Jesus.

3. Highlight the differences.
Buddha claims there is no self. We are all one. The Trinity shows a beautiful way of having unity while treasuring individual diversity.

Buddhism claims the solution to suffering is abandoning desire. Christ says suffering is objectively wrong and offers both mercy for our complicity and righting of the wrong.

How does one stop the desire to be rid of desire? Is it wrong to desire our loved ones’ safety? Or do our desires point to our need for the Satisfier of our souls?

The Noble Eightfold Path and other tools in Buddhism are inadequate to free people. God’s grace offers rescue and empowerment from the Holy Spirit. Real freedom!

4. Keep calm and pray on.
I can become very frustrated when a friend hears the gospel and says, “That’s nice,” or simply blends it into their own contradicting worldview. “It’s all one, right?”

Do not lose hope or patience! The gospel is beautiful; the gospel is powerful; and the gospel is true. Do not stop praying for them. I’ve seen God break into the lives of Buddhist friends in very unexpected ways.

Callom Harkrader is an OCCA Fellow with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM). He earned a degree in Psychology from Lynchburg College, double minoring in History and Theater, before graduating from the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. Prior to joining RZIM, Callom worked as the Development Worker for The Mark Drama, a drama of Mark’s gospel produced around the world, and also has spent significant time doing mission work in Romania and Uganda as well as serving as president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Lynchburg College. He loves engaging with audiences of all ages and beliefs on the big questions of life and topics relating to Christianity and culture. In his free time, Callom is passionate about reading fiction, acting, sports and walking in the woods.
I heard in Addison’s Walk a bird sing clear:
This year the summer will come true.
This year. This year.
This year time’s nature will no more
defeat you.
Nor all the promised moments in their passing cheat you.
This time they will not lead you round and back
To Autumn, one year older, by the well worn track.

C.S. Lewis
– What the Bird Said Early in the Year

More than an intellectual ode to spring, CS Lewis’s poem contrasts the temporal with the eternal. Addison’s Walk is a mile long path through the grounds at Magdalen College, Oxford, where Lewis had a midnight conversation with friends, J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. A plaque with the entire poem stands as a monument on the property. This conversation centered on the truth of Christianity (Christianity as the true myth) and was instrumental in Lewis’ conversion.

As Christians, it is important that we distinguish the temporal from the eternal. Our earthly bodies decay and break down, and we eventually lose our race with time. In eternity, in the presence of the Lord, time and nature lose their grip. All our unfulfilled “promised moments” that left us disappointed will be forgotten and swallowed up in the singular splendor of the Lord’s glory.
CSLI DESSERT AND THEATER PRESENTATION OF:

“The Most Reluctant Convert”

PERFORMED BY Max McLean

(other theatrical works include: “The Screwtape Letters,” “The Great Divorce”)

Follow C.S. Lewis’s spiritual journey from atheism to Christianity through a wide collection of his books, including Surprised by Joy, Collected Letters, The Problem of Pain, Mere Christianity, God in the Dock, Miracles, Letters to Malcolm and The Weight of Glory.

Date: Friday, September 25, 2016
7:30 – 9:00 pm
Place: McLean Presbyterian Church

CONSIDER THESE RESOURCES FOR YOUR FALL SMALL GROUP STUDIES.

Heart and Mind Discipleship is 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.

Conversational Apologetics is Practicing the Art of Sharing Your Faith with Others - A 10-week program combining knowledge and hands-on practice in the art of conversational apologetics and evangelism.

The C.S. Lewis Institute’s Conversational Apologetics 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.

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.

KNOWING & DOING is published by the C.S. Lewis Institute and is available upon request. A suggested annual contribution of $50 or more is requested to provide for its production and publication. Permission is granted to copy for personal and church use; all other uses by request.