

city lights

ESTABLISHED IN 1994 ~ MAIN STREET CHURCH IN BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH ~ NO. ONE ONLINE EDITION ~ FALL 2015



“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”
—Matthew 5:16

This issue of Main Street's *City Lights* is the first online edition since its inception in 1994 as *The Fellowship*.

Fall 2015

Theme: Gratitude

Psalm 138:3

*"On the day I called, You answered me;
You made me bold with strength in my soul."*

Cover

"San Francisco by Night"
Photo: Josh Felix, 2015

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City Lights, the bi-annual online devotional journal of Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah, is dedicated to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:14-16 who called us to let our lights "shine before men in such a way that they may see and glorify our Father who is in heaven."

Our words and creative expressions, besides glorifying God, should also encourage our readers. Therefore, all contributions must reveal our Christ-like love to all men, be biblically based, and focused on a stated theme for each issue.

City Lights ministers within the Statement of Faith and is an extension of the Core Values of Main Street Church (<http://www.msccb.org/statfaith.htm>).

To receive a copy of our Writer's Guidelines, send an email request. As the editor of *City Lights*, I reserve the right to suggest changes or to disallow publication altogether.

The theme for our Spring 2016 issue is:

Journey

Deuteronomy 2:7: *"For the Lord your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing."*

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"We should begin each day with a desire to listen like one being taught. . . God's profound and most powerful thoughts are revealed to those who want them and who share them with others."

-David Roper, *Seeing Through*



That's Why I Love Jesus

By Jim Catlin

Jesus appreciated "straight shooters"; people who spoke their mind with such shattering frankness that they often offended others. Jesus demonstrated that, at times, tactful reserve could lessen the traction of his messages so he was known to shoot pretty straight too.

Enter Nathanael who, early in John's Gospel, replied to Philip's declaration of having found the Messiah, with this, "*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*"

It was not meant to be offensive. He just voiced the same objection that the Pharisees held. The Messiah, the King of Kings, would certainly not hail from a backwater village in Galilee (John 7:41,52), would he?

So Jesus' first encounter with Nathanael was congratulatory! Jesus said to him, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!*"

Now don't misread this as being facetious. This was a genuine complement! Jesus was praising him for laying it out there. He as much had said, "I've got a problem with You being the Messiah."

So instead of condemning him, Jesus accommodated him by offering a factual tidbit that proved His omniscience. Nathanael was instantly wowed and in "straight shooter" style, he blurted out, "*You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.*"

And that should've been the end of it. Nathanael was swayed to become the fifth follower of Jesus, and onward the band would go to collect seven more.

But the following stop on the tour was designed by Jesus to go one step further with his newest follower.

They next found themselves in an unremarkable, little village very near Nazareth. There was a wedding in progress that had run out of wine and, as a result, sat perched on the edge of social calamity. We know that Jesus came to the rescue, miraculously transforming water into the finest of wine.

But the miracle must have had special significance to Nathanael.

This village was his village. Cana was Nathanael's own "backwater." And while this miracle had a deliberately "low profile," I have to believe it was partially tailored for Nathanael.

He had publicly challenged Nazareth as being below the dignity of the King of Israel, and yet here He was, the Holy One of Israel, visiting his own unworthy home. His own "backwater." And dealing with silly wedding problems no less.

But at his lowly, undignified Cana I think that he realized that the intentional path of Israel's King was charted to include humble beginnings and humble ends with many humble stops along the way. Because those whom the King sought to join Him were to be found in these humble places. In backwaters like Cana. People like Nathanael.

So yes. The Messiah came from no village of any repute but, then again, neither had Nathanael since they were, well, neighbors! And Jesus knew it. But he wanted him anyway.

It's as though Jesus was saying to Nathanael, "If you're okay with me coming from no-where, then I'm okay with you coming from no-where too."

That's why I love Jesus.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

—Matthew 22:37-39



The Mission Team

L-R Sharmila, Marcus, Brian, Karen, Madeleine, Anais, Cooper, Tyler, Russ, & Bob

“Nothing could make me happier than getting reports that my children continue diligently in the way of Truth!”

Ill John 3:4
The Message

Gratitude For Week Of Hope Support

By Madeleine Felix

In July of 2015, six teens between the ages of 12 and 16 from our church went on a life-changing trip to Fort Collins, Colorado for Week Of Hope. All of this was possible thanks to you, the congregation of Main Street Church.

Coming back from our trip, we had the Mountain Top Experience, having that spark of wanting to continuously help and serve in the name of the Lord.

We'd like to thank you for praying, supporting, and funding us. Without your tremendous help, going to Week Of Hope wouldn't have been achievable.

On our mission trip, we saw God work through us all, and tremendous spiritual growth took place. In that week, God used us for His service, the way it should always be.



Front: Cooper; Behind: L-R Madeleine, Anais, Brian, Marcus, & Tyler

In July of 2016, we are hoping to go on another Week Of Hope mission trip to San Diego, California. We are excited to see how God will use us to serve in that area, as well as seeing how He will continue to unite us as friends.

Thank you again for all your help.

*“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;
and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only,
but also for those of the whole world.” –I John 2:1-2*

**Before the Throne
of God Above**

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea:
A great High Priest, whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands,
My name is written on His heart;
I know that while in heav'n He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see Him there
Who made an end to all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God the just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there, the Risen Lamb
My perfect, spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM,
The King of glory and of grace!
One with Himself I cannot die
My soul is purchased by His blood
My life is hid with Christ on high,
With Christ, my Savior and my God
With Christ, my Savior and my God

–Charitie Bancroft, 1863, Ireland

Originally titled, “The Advocate,”
the words are in the Public Domain

How does His answer come?

by Dorothy Catlin

When we call out to the Lord, how does his answer come? Often through the voice of a friend, perhaps even one who is unaware of our desperate need for the balm of His voice.

The scripture urges us, *“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:16).

As the living expression of Christ’s word is fully at home in us, it will overflow in encouragement poured out into the lives of others. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells us; He prompts and whispers constantly, bringing freshly to mind the Scripture we have read or meditated upon, directing us to speak.

Sometimes we are the friend who brings precisely the right word at the right time; sometimes we are the ones who receive that word. I want to be that friend—the one in whom the Living Word dwells so richly that the Spirit may speak His life-giving message even when I’m clueless as to the needs of another.

One morning a few weeks ago, I awoke singing, *“I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord! No tender voice like Thine can peace afford. I need Thee, O I need Thee! Every hour I need Thee. O bless me now, my Savior; I come to Thee.”*

With coffee in hand and thoughts coming quickly, I opened my journal and began to write: “How I need You, Lord! Only you can bind up the broken-hearted ones; only you can soothe the anguish... we listen to their stories as our own hearts break; we wipe away tears and pray with them, but only You, Lord Jesus, can meet that profound need for moment-by-moment healing and release from bondage...Lord Jesus, come rescue...”

The sound of an incoming text message intruded. Tempted to ignore it, I glanced at the screen and couldn’t neglect this precious friend, so new in her walk with Christ. Her question began “Is the hymn ‘I Need Thee Every Hour’ a Christian hymn or (from some other source)?”

My astonishment gave way to laughter as I realized that the Holy Spirit had called my attention to this old

hymn at precisely the same moment He was prompting her to ask about it. My heart had been prepared and softened, reminded afresh of my own profound need in every moment for the presence and saving grace of Jesus, especially as I minister in His name. We were both deeply encouraged by the truth expressed in this old hymn, and our mutual love for it. Many weeks later, I’m still *“singing with thankfulness in my heart to God”* for the lovely, life-giving connection the Spirit had made that morning.

But as wonderful as it is to be the bearer of such encouragement, it’s even more wondrous to be the recipient. On a day when I was laid low, profoundly wounded by the words of a friend, someone came to my door. Wrestling with painful questions, struggling to find words for the response I knew must be given, it would have been easy to pretend I wasn’t home. But for some reason I answered the unexpected knock. As I opened the door, a friend thrust something into my hands, saying simply, “I saw this and thought you’d like it!” There, deeply imprinted on her gift, I read *“How good is a timely word, spoken in due season”* (Proverbs 15:23).

I dissolved into tears before my baffled friend as I received the healing grace and power of the right word at just the right time. The Lord had heard my cry, and He would answer! It’s been over a year since that day, but I still ponder the specific timing and nature of that gift. It rests in a place where I see it daily; the sight of it fills me with praise and thanksgiving as I remember the sweet obedience of my friend to the Spirit’s nudge, and how she brought such balm to my aching heart.

As members of the body of Christ we are intimately connected by his Holy Spirit. According to Ephesians 4:16, we are *“being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part,”* which *“causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”* As we hold fast to Christ who is our head, we are nourished to grow *“with a growth which is from God”* (Colossians 2:19). May His life-giving breath flow freely within us, nourishing growth in one another, and overflowing in joyful giving of thanks!



Retreat Rehearsal

by Diane Kulkarni

Vicki, Jamie, Joan and I had received a request to read our stories on the last night of the annual Bind Us Together retreat in Albion, Idaho last May. That afternoon we planned to read to each other first, to listen and receive a response from the others. We wanted pointers and a decision about who would go first.

Sitting down in our circle of lawn chairs, we were aware of each others' mutual shyness, fear, nerves...well, to be honest, utter terror. The "elephant in the room" called The Unknown had followed us outside and sat next to us on the grass so we wouldn't forget.

We must have been obvious out there in the center of the lawn, some distance from the retreat center, but we had a good reason. We weren't ready for anyone to overhear. Ours was a transparency rehearsal inspired by purpose, but the outcome? Anyone's guess.

What we knew at that moment was, we were safe together, and it was way past time to speak our stories out loud. And so we began. As each read, we saw brilliant connections with the weekend's theme: our identity in Christ. After everyone had read, we traded insights on how different yet strangely similar our journeys had been: there was Someone at work transforming us.

I was reminded of *HGTV's* program, "Property Brothers," featuring twin brothers, Jonathan and Drew Scott. This is one of my favorite before-and-after programs. Drew buys a fixer-upper, usually a real dump, for the clients who can't afford anything near the million dollar property they so desire. But they take a chance and decide on a computer design that Jonathan has created, unsure but hopeful for his promised renovation. When he knows the budget for the renovation and the timeframe for completion, he orders the supplies. Next his team begins demolition for the open-concept floor plan everyone loves.

Once the structure is naked to his sight, he often finds damage due to the age of the house, neglect or abuse of the previous owners, or an invasion of rodents or

termites. However, he never leaves a place in that state, but brings everything up to code. Day by day, his team transforms the dwelling and adds a stylish, inviting decor so that when the owners walk through the front door, all they can express is sheer disbelief and joy.

Together, the four of us were discovering that the Supreme Property Master and Sovereign Designer had long been at work in us for the moment to which we were called to speak. He had been silently demolishing the many walls that created dark, narrow hallways and cramped rooms where we had been isolated and alone. Instead, He added walls of windows to flood the structure with light, and hung solid oak doors to provide



an inner place of refuge. Moving from room to room, we found one surprise after another and couldn't help but proclaim our praise.

When at last we descended the stairs from our deck to the shaded patio near a flowing stream, we found a lovely table set with cool drinks and sandwiches, which He'd prepared for us. The five of us sat together around the table

and listened spellbound as He described the plans He has for our completed metamorphosis.

Then He handed us each a gift wrapped in gold brocade, tied with a wide silver ribbon with our names inscribed in His handwriting. Inside, we found a crystal chest filled with His treasure and encouragement to share, along with a framed photograph of ourselves to place on the mantle. He'd label our gifts, *Knit Together in Love*. Each of our faces beamed with this rare glimpse of the work of *God's mystery, Christ Himself* (Col. 2:2-3).

Just as the dinner hour drew women back into the dinner hall, we stood up refreshed and confident that our Designer would be with us when we stood up to share.

On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul. Psalm 138:3



The Broken Chain

By Jamie Stieg, Guest Writer

May, 2015 presentation for the Women's Retreat in Albion, Idaho

For me, this weekend is more than just being the Retreat Emcee. It is about being vulnerable to one of my biggest weaknesses, facing my greatest fear, and then being called to trust the One who is Faithful.

When I say I have a fear of public speaking and reading out loud. It is not just butterflies and clammy palms. It is a debilitating physical reaction. The thought of speaking before an audience literally takes my breath and voice away. This has been ongoing battle, dating back at least 20-30 years, and is one I have refused to fight.

Last January, I was reading a book and came across a chapter that mentioned spiritual bondage. It was in that moment that I realized I had been held captive to my own fear.

I am not an artistic person, but God gave me a visual of a dog on a stake in the middle of a field, being held there by a large chain. I knew that I was the dog. So I began to research what spiritual bondage was and what it looked like. I Googled, read the Bible, and talked with my trusted Christian friends.

I began to pray about breaking free, repeating out loud the promises and truths in the Word of God:

- I am an Heir of Christ—Romans 8:17
- In Him, I am no longer bound to the things of this world—II Cor. 5:17
- The enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy; Jesus came to give me life and freedom in Him—John 10:10
- Jesus didn't come to give me a spirit of fear, but of courage, love, and a sound mind—II Timothy 1:7

Claiming the promises set forth in God's Word is where He led me, and I was beginning to feel His release. After a few weeks, I had another visual of this same dog, in the same field, with the same chain. Only this time, the chain had been cut. However, the dog wouldn't move any further than what the old chain used to allow. I needed to test my new freedom.

So, I shared this bit of information with my Bible study leader, Dorothy, and told her how afraid I had

been to even read a passage out loud in our study. She then provided me with several opportunities to read ONE verse out loud. I DID IT!

But I was still fearful of stepping too far outside of the old chain. I wanted to, but I was just too unsure of the outcome.

Not long after this, Patti, the retreat director, called and asked me if I would be the Emcee for this year's Women's Retreat. I was stunned and felt that gripping, paralyzing fear rising up in me again.

My first response to her was, "Oh that sounds lovely. I will give prayerful thought to that." But my mind was screaming, *hell NO, you can't do that!* I tried to explain to her that although I have a little fear of speaking in public, I would pray about it.

I fervently continued to proclaim my Freedom in Christ. Not even a few days later, Diane called me and asked if I would be willing to lead the Tuesday morning study while she was on vacation over the summer. Again, I thought, *Really God? I am barely reading one-liners in our Exodus Bible study! I am still so afraid!*

Proclaim. . . .Proclaim. . . .Proclaim!

A week or so later, Dorothy asked if I would be willing to share this story on overcoming with the women at the retreat! Then, I knew after three very distinct and separate instances that God was not going to let me continue to say "NO!" I knew I would have to test that chain to know for certain that I was truly free.

So, up until this moment, I have been praying. *Please God. Please be here. Please meet me at the microphone—I am so afraid YOU will not show up. Because You know Lord, my faith will be shaken to the very core if what I am thinking and feeling in my soul is not from You.*

And God's Spirit touched my spirit and I felt Him say "Jamie, I am already there waiting for YOU!"

Needles to say, the chain has been broken and no longer binds because I have been SET FREE. Even if I still drag around a few links for awhile, I totally trust the Lord to dispose them.

Sample Meditation

Dwell

to meditate on, remain, inhabit, abide, lodge, indwell

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me." John 15:4

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

Psalm 91:1

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him... Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you."

Colossians 1:9; 3:16

**whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is
excellence, and if anything worthy of praise...
right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is of good repute, if there is any**

DWELL

on these things

Philippians 4:8

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

John 14:23

"... that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity... Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am."

John 17:22-24

God, who gives life to all things... is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

I Timothy 6:13, 16

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth."

John 14:16-17

"... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. . . ."

Ephesians 3:16-17

"Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage." Psalm 84:4-5

MY LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER CHRIST

by Joan Ott

May, 2015 presentation for the Women's Retreat

This past February my husband and I had the privilege of taking a trip to Israel. We were able to see many ancient ruins. There were civilizations that existed thousands of years B. C., which of course means Before Christ.

As I've thought about this, I realized that Christ was so significant that His birth created the historic timeline, B.C. I came to the conclusion that we, as believers, should also have a Before and After date on our own personal timelines.

BEFORE

I thought my life in Mormonism before Christ was pretty good overall. I was a contented wife and mother of four, very active in church callings, and running on the proverbial treadmill, which was expected of every active member.

But I was always plagued with feelings of stress, worry, and fear. Was I a good-enough wife and mother? Did I excel at anything? I had no peace of mind that I would ever "measure up" to what was expected. Because of these inner feelings of self-doubt, I was always very shy and few people knew me very well.

When my husband initially began to question some of the church doctrines, I was very fearful about this and encouraged him to stay silent. After time and much patience on his part, I began my own questioning. I realized many things were wrong, but I had no idea what was right. And for several years, I didn't even care.

When we moved from Cedar City to North Ogden, I enjoyed staying home from church on Sundays. It was such a big relief. Even though I quit attending a church, I had one thread that linked me to God: I always prayed. After a few years, however, I realized something was missing, and I needed to know more than what was wrong—I had to find out what was right.

In the summer of 2007, with the help of one of my sons, I found a small church in Brigham City and started attending. This was quite a feat in itself, because I

literally had never gone anywhere by myself, let alone a new church! Because I was so shy, I arrived a little late, sat by myself, and then left during the closing song. This way I wasn't required to talk to anyone. Deep inside I was lonely, and fear ruled my heart.

AFTER

In time, I learned that the God I had known in Mormonism was not the true God of the Bible. My idea of God was small! I learned the True And Living God was uncreated. He created everything in this beautiful world, the heavens and the planets, and He also created me.

He knew me! He even loves me enough that He has numbered the hairs on my head! I didn't know Him when I prayed all those years, BUT HE KNEW ME! Still, being good enough remained a worry. I still felt unworthy.

I can't remember the date it occurred, because my born again experience came slowly and over time. I felt unsure and worried that I hadn't "done this right." So I would pray the Sinner's Prayer to be saved several times. Finally, not knowing if I was really saved nagged at me so much, that I e-mailed my pastor, Jim. (It wasn't an option to actually talk to him; I didn't dare).

He explained that born again experiences differ, and there's no "right way" to do it. One just needs to accept Christ's gift of grace! He encouraged me to read 1 John. I was eager, so I opened my Bible and began reading John. I had read this book before, but I was excited to read it again.

One evening I happened to look down at Jim's e-mail and realized there was a "1" in front of John—1 John. So I was curious and looked closer at my Bible. Indeed there is a 1 John. Reading that book was transformative, because John wrote that we can actually know, without a doubt, that we have been saved! What comfort I took in this!

I also learned that the Holy Spirit is *in* me; not *with* me. What a difference one preposition makes! Having the Holy Spirit with me left doubt, because if I wasn't worthy, He would leave. According to the Bible, that idea is totally false. In Him, we are the Temple of God, and He will never leave or forsake us!

I have learned that I can trust the Bible, the true Word of God. I'd heard that the Bible is God's love letter to us. The truth of the Bible was also very evident while touring Israel.



We visited the ancient city of Jericho after reading the biblical account, and then with our own eyes we saw the remains of the city wall which fell! There were burned jars of grain and an apparent burn level. The archeological remains proved the Bible to me!

I also learned that when Christ died, He said "*It is finished.*" Christ isn't a cruel joker who would come to this earth and die for us and then leave us alone to fend for ourselves! The gospel spread to all the corners of the earth. There was no need to restore it as the Mormon Church claims. It's been here ever since Christ.

Another thing I learned is that God doesn't love me less because I'm a woman. My prayers reach heaven just as easily as a man's, and we don't need special priesthood power, because Christ is the final High Priest.

When I attended my first retreat, I witnessed women blessing and passing Communion. This totally amazed me and changed my life forever.

Sometimes I still battle shyness and fear, but I realize now that when I worry about myself, my heart is in the wrong place. Although I don't have confidence in myself, I have confidence in my God who sometimes uses a shy, small-town woman to help someone else.

Over time, I learned that true freedom comes through surrender to my Lord and Savior. When I truly gave myself to Christ, I found my life and love Him with all my heart. He is everything to me now.

"Our spiritual life is God's affair, because. . .it is really produced by His steady attention, and our humble and self-forgetful response to it. It consists in being drawn, at His pace and in His way, to the place where He wants us to be; not the place we fancied ourselves." –Evelyn Underhill

Editor's Note: *In this our first online edition, City Lights begins a new series on the spiritual discipline of engaging with Scripture in writing. The following article was written for Biblegateway.com by Dr. Phil Collins, Executive Director (Director of Training and Content Development) at Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement in Upland, Indiana.*

Hand Copying Scripture

Hand copying Scripture is simply writing out word-for-word passages of Scripture by hand. Why would anybody do this when most people own many copies of the Bible and can easily access it digitally? The purpose of hand copying Scripture is not to have another copy of the Bible. Remember, the goal of Scripture engagement is to meet God in his Word.

Writing the Bible out by hand offers us the unique opportunity to participate in an activity that forces us to slow down the process of reading and encourages a more reflective engagement with God's Word. It gives us more time to think about what is written and to dwell on the meaning and implications of a passage.

Hand copying is a focusing activity. Too often we read quickly and forget what we've read within a few minutes. Hand copying helps combat quick, surface level reading.

Copying is also an aid to memory. Most people would agree that writing information down helps the mind to recall that information later. Hand copying Scripture can be a great help when memorizing passages of the Bible.

Hand copying the Bible also helps us to perceive details in a passage that might have been overlooked. As our hands write down words and phrases multiple times (often a sign of emphasis in the Bible) attention will be drawn to those words and phrases as being important, which helps us comprehend the passage.

It might be inspiring to remember that for 1000s of years God's people had scribes whose job it was to pass on God's Word by making written copies (we owe this long line of people a great spiritual debt). In the Old Testament, scribes such as Ezra were revered for their knowledge of Scripture developed through copying the Scripture. Throughout church history, monks have been the people who have transcribed the Bible, devoting their lives to studying and living out God's Word.

As we hand copy the Bible we mirror the practices of these scribes and monks and can gain the same spiritual benefits that others have gained.

There is an interesting passage in the Bible that commands the kings of Israel to personally make their own hand copy of the Bible (a king could have easily had someone else make him a copy). In Deuteronomy 17:18-20 God commands that:



When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

God knew that the people of Israel would one day demand for themselves a king. Therefore, far in advance, he planned a spiritual discipline that would be required of these kings to keep them devoted to God, his Word, and his people. God mandated that each king was to make his own handwritten copy of the law, to keep it with him at all times, and to read it all of his life. The king was to do this so that he would learn to honor God, follow the words of the Bible, stay humble and follow God's commands. God promised that if the king did these things, he and his descendants would prosper.

God's establishment of the practice of hand copying Scripture for kings should be a testament to its value and effectiveness, and a challenge for any Christian!

© Phil Collins, Ph.D., 2014. This material was created in partnership with the Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement.

The Rose Window, Denver University Photo by Diane Kulkarni

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! – Romans 11:33*

“There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still.” –Corrie Ten Boom

Let's Start at the Very Beginning...

by Vicki Andersen, Guest Writer

Many people, Christians and Mormons alike, have asked how I came to leave the LDS faith that I'd clung to with such tenacity. Of course, when my Mormon friends ask, their shock and grief is evident in the question, while the Christians ask with voices ringing with joy and excitement.

Same question, same answer, different perspective and response.

The day I was plucked from Mormonism began like any other Saturday: chores, errands, visit with friends. I wasn't questioning church doctrine nor did I have any doubts about its truthfulness. In fact, my only question was the one I addressed to God repeatedly. “What would You have me do with my life?”

I'd prayed that prayer numerous times throughout my life, but was fervently asking for specific direction now that I no longer had a husband or children in the home to care for.

The prayer went something like this. “Heavenly Father, for years I've been doing everything I know to do and still feel empty. What am I missing? I listen to talks from General Conference every morning as I get ready for work, and read the *Book of Mormon* (almost) every night. I attend church and take the Sacrament regularly. I attend the temple a few times a month, magnify my church callings, do my visiting teaching, fast at least once a month, pay a full tithing and a generous fast offering, and serve others.”

After reciting this catalogue of my “good works,” I gave Him a list of my possible options, lest He needed help coming up with ideas: temple worker, service missionary, genealogical researcher. Then I uttered these fateful words with all the fervency I could muster:



Near the Edge. Photo by Diane Kulkarni

“Do with me as You will, Father! I don't care what it is! Just tell me and I'll do it! My life is of no value to me. Take it! Use it or end it. It makes no difference to me. Tell me!”

The soft impression came, “Follow me.”

What?! Isn't that what I've been doing my entire life? I'd been baptized, temple endowed, married in the temple to a returned missionary, raised my children in the church, held multiple church callings, and followed the prophet every step of the way. Didn't all of those actions and covenants prove I was following Him?

Again the impression came, “Follow ME.” I hung my head in frustration and cried. I didn't understand what He was saying.

Then on that significant Saturday, I went to a friend's house for a haircut. After we chatted for a time and caught up on the family news, she quietly shared with me that her belief in the truthfulness of the LDS religion had changed.

I was flabbergasted! How could this be? She was every bit the stalwart lifetime member with unwavering faith as I was! Stunned speechless, I listened to her story. She showed me the “Mormon Essays” on the church's official website.

A firehouse of information assaulted my heart and mind. We talked for hours. And everything I “knew” to be true, came crashing down.

An analogy I've heard over and over by members who have left the Mormon Church is that of having "the shelf" break: a metaphoric shelf that holds the unresolvable conflicts or unanswerable questions over the course of several years finally collapses under its own weight.

But the metaphor that comes to *my* mind is that of a house built on solid ground imploding around me. I had a foundation of Jesus Christ, and a sturdy home built of the finest Mormon timber available. It was solid, well-crafted, and had weathered the storms of abuse, illness, divorce, and other adversities of life. I had dwelled safely within those walls of Mormon doctrine for over fifty years and had no intention of remodeling or moving out.

But as I sat talking with my friend, it was as if my eyes were opened to the termite infestation that had been silently taking place over the years. Hidden away from view, they were devouring the very core of the whole structure. In one afternoon, the walls came tumbling down. And I would never be the same.

Then the impression came: "Now will you follow ME?"

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." –John 8:12

"I was going to start writing my story— because writing helped me process my experiences, and because crafting a narrative out of my losses was a way of redeeming the pain."

– Sarah Theberge, *The Invisible Girls*

Q: Why should I write my "God Story"?

A: Writing provides you with:

- new insights about how God has been *with* you and *for* you throughout your life. You will marvel at how all of your experiences have worked together for your good, because He is faithful to His Word. Your blessings and your sufferings take on new meaning as you rejoice instead of grumble and complain.
- a clear statement of God's grace in your life, which is your spiritual legacy to pass on to family, friends, your church family, and those whom God brings into your life.
- a ministry of love to God as you publicly acknowledge His faithfulness with a grateful heart.



Spring Proclamation Photo by Diane Kulkarni

- a way of responding to Jesus' question: "*Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?*"

–Luke 17:17-18

"Beginnings are very hard to trace. A thought that seems to stray into our minds like a lost puppy may actually be a nudge from God's Spirit. A cry that rises from deep within and finds articulation in our minds can be the beginning of a path that will take a lifetime to follow."

–Malcolm Smith, *How I Learned to Meditate*



City Lights *Welcomes Your Story*

In her memoir, *Evidence Not Seen: A Woman's Miraculous Faith in the Jungles of World War II*, Darlene Deibler Rose offers important insight into how God meets us in times of need.

She says, "I was to discover that when I took my eyes off the circumstances that were overwhelming me, over which I had no control, and looked up, my Lord was there, standing on the parapet of heaven looking down. Deep in my heart He whispered, 'I'm here. Even when

you don't see Me, I'm here. Never for a moment are you out of My sight.'"

Diebler Rose and many others who have written from a place of pain and loss learned how to praise God for His sustaining love. They have inspired me to write my own "God Story" and to provide a way for others to share theirs.

City Lights is designed to be a showcase of God's grace in the lives of believers for the encouragement of others. We invite you to consider contributing an example of how God has saved you, changed you, blessed you, surprised you, comforted you, or empowered you.

To get started with your testimony, simply answer the following questions with as many details as you want to share. Then contact me, Diane, at 723-8486. Your story is a precious gift to share!

Editor's Note: Please include concrete examples and pertinent biblical passages wherever you can.

- What was your life like before you were saved? What things were most important to you? What attitudes or behavior characterized your life?
- How did you become aware that you needed Jesus? How did you first hear about the possibility of salvation? Who did God use to help you?
- Why did you make the decision to accept Christ as Savior and Lord? Describe the event and your thoughts at the time, reactions, fears, hopes, etc.
- What difference did belonging to Christ make back then and how has He changed the specific areas you mentioned in the "before" section?

From Disparate Threads

By Ravi Zacharias – Guest Writer

Posted on “Slice of Infinity” –13 August 2015
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(<http://rzim.org/a-slice-of-infinity/from-disparate-threads-3>)

Some years ago, I was visiting a place known for making the best wedding saris in the world. They were the producers of saris rich in gold and silver threads, resplendent with an array of colors. With such intricacy of product, I expected to see some elaborate system of machines that would boggle the mind in production. But this image could not have been farther from the real scene.

Each sari was made individually by a father and son team. The father sat above the son on a platform, surrounded by several spools of thread that he would gather into his fingers. The son had only one task. At a nod from his father, he would move the shuttle from one side to the other and back again. This would then be repeated for hundreds of hours, until a magnificent pattern began to emerge.

The son certainly had the easier task. He was only to move at the father’s nod. But making use of these efforts, the father was working to an intricate end. All along, he had the design in his mind and was bringing the right threads together.

The more I reflect on my own life and study the lives of others, I am fascinated to see the design God has for each one of us individually, if we would only respond. All through our days, little reminders show the threads that God has woven into our lives.

Allow me to share a story from my own experience. As one searching for meaning in the throes of a turbulent adolescence, I found myself on a hospital bed from an attempted suicide. It was there that I was read the 14th chapter of John’s Gospel. My attention was fully captured by the part where Jesus says to his disciples: *“Because I live, you shall live also”* (John 14:19). I turned my life over to Christ that day, committing my pains, struggles, and pursuits to his able hands.

Almost thirty years to the day after this decision, my wife and I were visiting India and decided to visit my grandmother’s grave. With the help of a gardener, we walked through the accumulated weeds and rubble until we found the stone marking her grave. With his bucket of water and a small brush, the gardener cleared off the years of caked-on dirt. To our utter surprise, under her name, a verse gradually appeared. My wife clasped my hand and said, “Look at the verse!” It read: *“Because I live, you shall live also.”*

A purposeful design emerges when the Father weaves a pattern from what to us may often seem disparate threads. Even today, if you will stop and attend to it, you will see that God is seeking to weave a beautiful tapestry in your life.



Silk and Gold Wedding Sari Photo: Diane Kulkarni, 1976

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

It is Well

By Lindsay Harline – Women’s Bible Study Member

Positive. What joy! What elation! A new life has begun, and yet trepidation and anxiousness.

Lord I need You, oh I need You, every hour I need You.

Our first visit. “Hmmm, no heartbeat,” the doctor says. “Well no worries, we put you about six weeks we may just be a bit early. Come back in two weeks.”

Lord I need You, oh I need You, every hour I need You.

Second visit. Again no heartbeat. “Hmmm, I am a bit worried.” The doctor says. “Maybe I miscalculated?” I say. “Yes that must be it, come back next week.”

Lord I need You, oh I need You, every hour I need You.

Third visit. Still no heartbeat. Confusion, puzzlement. “Let’s schedule an ultrasound and see what is going on.”

Lord I need You, oh I need You, every hour I need You.

Later that day after the ultrasound, we were about to go see the doctor to find out what was happening. Right before we get out of the car, a song by Casting Crowns plays on the radio.

*. . . I will praise You in this storm,
and I will lift my hands.
You are who You are,
no matter where I am.*

“I am sorry,” the doctor says. Tears start to flow, a sob escapes my lips. I am inconsolable. My husband wraps his arms around me and holds me close to his side, not knowing what to say.

I walk in a fog for awhile, not knowing what to do anymore. We wanted this baby, why would she be taken from us? Why would we never be given the chance to meet her? Then suddenly a song and a thought came to my mind. There are few moments that have stayed with me, but this one will forever be etched upon my memory.

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say.
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

I heard God whisper to me. “If he suffered so much, and yet still trusted in Me, hoped in Me, why can’t you?”

It was like a lightbulb went off in my head! Why **couldn’t** I trust Him in this? I trust Him in small things, I can trust Him with this loss. I can trust His timing and His plans for us.

What a sense of peace and joy came over me at that moment! I felt the loving arms of God wrapping around me and comforting me. He still comforts me when I think of what could have been. I trust in His endless grace to see my sweet child again.



Blessed Be! Photo: Marsha McLaren, 2015

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:1-3).

The Story Behind the Hymn, *It is Well with My Soul*

Composer Horatio Spafford
Used with permission –*Sharefaith.com*

Horatio Spafford (1828-1888) was a wealthy Chicago lawyer with a thriving legal practice, a beautiful home, a wife, four daughters and a son. He was also a devout Christian and faithful student of the Scriptures. His circle of friends included Dwight L. Moody, Ira Sankey and various other well-known Christians of the day.

At the very height of his financial and professional success, Horatio and his wife Anna suffered the tragic loss of their young son. Shortly thereafter on October 8, 1871, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed almost every real estate investment that Spafford had.

In 1873, Spafford scheduled a boat trip to Europe in order to give his wife and daughters a much needed vacation and time to recover from the tragedy. He also went to join Moody and Sankey on an evangelistic campaign in England. Spafford sent his wife and daughters ahead of him while he remained in Chicago to take care of some unexpected last minute business. Several days later he received notice that his family's ship had encountered a collision. All four of his daughters drowned; only his wife had survived.

With a heavy heart, Spafford boarded a boat that would take him to his grieving Anna in England. It was on this trip that he penned those now famous words, *When sorrow like sea billows roll; it is well, it is well with my soul.*

Philip Bliss (1838-1876), composer of many songs including Hold the Fort, Let the Lower Lights be Burning, and Jesus Loves Even Me, was so impressed with Spafford's life and the words of his hymn that he composed a beautiful piece of music to accompany the lyrics. The song was published by Bliss and Sankey, in 1876.

For more than a century, the tragic story of one man has given hope to countless thousands who have lifted their voices to sing, *It Is Well With My Soul.*

<http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Music/hymns-the-songs-and-the-stories/it-is-well-with-my-soul-the-song-and-the-story.html>

"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, yes, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Isaiah 41:10



Summer Glory Photo: Marsha McLaren, 2015

"I just want to tell You if that's what You have planned for me, if I am meant to be an obscure flower in the corner of the expansive garden, I will live there and I will love You and I will bloom just for You -- only, always, ever."

-Lisa Thebarge

St Michael's Victory over the Devil –Coventry, England
Photo: Diane Kulkarni, 2012



I was in an engineering class the first time I watched the tragic explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger. Even though I wasn't alive when it happened, I caught a glimpse of the horror thousands must have felt as the events unfolded. And, the first question everyone wanted to know was, "What happened?"

After months of investigation, here's what the Rogers Commission (the group commissioned to investigate the explosion) discovered: an o-ring seal in the right solid rocket booster failed at take-off. I won't

Does it bother anyone that the primary method of bringing people to Jesus has been to scare them away from hell? That's fear language, the antithesis of God.

Look at what John says: "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love*" (1 John 4:18)

The church is scared to make decisions out of fear. Christians are hesitant to step into dangerous situations out of fear. The catalyst for our obedience

9 "CHURCH-APPROVED" SINS THAT PLAGUE YOUR LIFE

Used with permission by Frank Powell

bore you with the details, but an o-ring is a small device relative to the size of a space shuttle. Very small. It wasn't something huge, like a puncture in the rocket booster or a hole in the cabin, that caused this disaster. It was a small, seemingly insignificant, o-ring failure.

I think there's a lesson here for the church. What if the big sins, you know the ones you try hardest to avoid, aren't the greatest threat to your joy and the church's mission? Maybe it's the sins lying underneath, the ones considered normal or acceptable, the ones going undetected, that are affecting the church the most. I want to address nine of these sins.

1.) FEAR

The phrases "do not fear" and "do not be afraid" appear 365 times in the Bible. Ironic? I think not. And here's what I think the church misses about fear. Let me pose this as a question. What is the opposite of fear? Courage? Bravery? William Wallace? Wrong. Wrong. And right, but you're ruining my point.

The opposite of fear is...LOVE. Add to this the reality that God is love. So, according to the Transitive property of mathematics, the opposite of fear is...God. If you're a child of God, the one sin that shouldn't plague you is...fear. Yet, Christians are the most fearful people on earth. Even our salvation is rooted in fear.

is fear. Where's the love? Several weeks ago, I decided to remove the words "fear, scared, and terrified" from my vocabulary. Maybe you should do the same. It could change how you see the world. And God.

2.) APATHY

Apathy's best friends are passivity and entitlement. Together, they're a vicious threesome. There's nothing mediocre or normal about God. His power is beyond comprehension. His beauty is beyond description. His love is beyond measure. The same God who created the universe and formed stars desires a relationship with you.

Yet, the attitude is often, "Okay, God loves me. That's great. What's for lunch?" No. You don't get it, bro. God loves you. And you're content with, "That's great." What?!

Our apathetic approach to God explains a lot about why people in America aren't lining up to become Christians. I mean, think about it. How many Christians have you met that left you thinking, "Wow, I want to be like them?"

But this should be the norm, right? Am I way off here? Shouldn't you be so transformed by God that people want to ask about your life, even if they hate God?

In Scripture, when men and women truly experience God, everything changes. Everything. So, that begs the question, "Have you experienced God?"

3.) GLUTTONY

In my younger days, I would literally eat myself sick. I mean, if I ordered food, I ate all of it. Period. Naturally, this presented a problem when I ate buffets. Looking back, I see that my attitude was gluttonous. And the gluttony wasn't that I ate myself sick. It was that I used a gift God gave me on myself...in excess.

Gluttony is primarily about the heart. It's a craving for excess. Gluttony says, "Those voids God is supposed to fill...don't worry about that. I will fill them." Gluttony happens when you lose your awe of God. You see, as long as your eyes are fixed on Jesus, your heart's desire is for Him.

Is the world not desperate for this message? As we gorge our stomachs with food and flood our houses with trinkets, our discontent only increases. Where are the Jesus followers who will fix their eyes completely on Him, throwing away anything that treads the line between want and need?

Where are the Christians who will feast in excess on God?

4.) WORRY

The great philosopher Van Wilder once said, "Worrying is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere." That's right. But Van Wilder isn't the only one who talked about worry. Jesus said you shouldn't worry about anything (Matt. 6:25-34). But Jesus wasn't serious was He? I mean, really Jesus? Anything?

He was serious. You see, worrying is symptomatic of a larger issue...lack of faith. And for followers of Jesus whose primary mission is to show the glory and nature of God to the world, worrying is a problem.

Recently, I asked a good friend why worry plagues the church, and he said something profound, "My greatest concern is that we don't want to need God. We're Americans. We're independent." That's hard-hitting stuff right there. Americans will do anything to maintain the illusion of control and responsibility, so no wonder worry plagues us.

Worry is the by-product of bearing a weight only God can bear.

Do you see the irony here? The more independence you desire, the more worry you will experience. So, why not give everything to God and let His peace reign over your life?

5.) FLATTERY

I erased this like five times, but God kept telling me to put it back. So, I did. With hesitancy. I love You, God.

I like performing. I always have. And while there's nothing wrong with the spotlight, there's a lot wrong with making yourself the center of it. If your identity is tied to man's praise, you'll be eternally discontent. People are fickle. They're here today and gone tomorrow. They're for you one day, against you the next. They love you when you agree with them, dislike you when you don't.

Yet, we love human praise, at least I do. Exhibit A: Instagram, SnapChat, and Facebook. While I love social media, they're also platforms that perpetuate flattery. You post pictures about your life hoping the world will "like" it. Who cares if it's not the real you? You need the approval. So, even if you need 30 minutes to find that perfect selfie, it's worth the time.

Jesus, however, didn't need the praise and glory of men. He didn't care what they thought. His only concern was doing the will of God. This attitude is what the world is desperate to see.

Let's be honest, it's hard to point people to Jesus if you need their approval. And when you need the approval of others, your life will have more ups and downs than the Goliath at Six Flags in Atlanta. I rode that beast. I know.

6.) COMFORT

Comfort might be the patriarch of the "church approved" sins family. When the church becomes comfortable, Christianity starts to die. Christians must be extremely intentional with their thoughts and actions to avoid comfort. If not, you become resistant to change. You start making secondary issues primary. You begin to see the mission as catering to insiders rather than reaching outsiders.

And here's the thing about the sin of comfort. Once it shows up, it's extremely difficult to remove. When you challenge comfort, people don't just get angry. They get fightin' mad. Comfort will even tell you to crucify an innocent man.

The church can't be missional and comfortable at the same time. It's time to make a decision.

7.) CONSUMERISM

I grew up watching *Sesame Street*. My favorite character?... Cookie Monster. I felt like we were the same person. And what I mean is we both loved cookies. I would often go

around the house saying, “Gimme da cookies.” It never worked.

Many Christians are like Cookie Monster. Their mantra is, “Gimme more...well anything. Just give me more. More. More. More.” The essence of this sin is a false understanding of God, that God is a taker. But nothing could be further from the truth. God is a giver. He’s *the* Giver. And, as a man or woman created in His image, you should be a giver.

So, what are you creating? What are you giving back to the world? What are giving back to others?

8.) PATRIOTISM

Cue the nasty e-mails. Maybe it’s just me, but I can’t picture Jesus waving an American flag while showing off his “I love ‘Merica” tattoo. Jesus wasn’t against the government. In fact, if you’re a Jesus follower, the Bible calls you to pray for your nation and for your leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

But Jesus was very clear about how God’s name would become famous throughout the world...the church. Not the government. Not a nation. The church. When your allegiance is torn between your country and your God, American ideals begin to shape your faith more than God. And you transpose American values onto God, believing God would be an American and think like an American.

Celebrate American values. That’s great. But, at the end of the day, your citizenship is not with America. It’s in heaven.

9.) LYING

If gluttony is the elephant in the room everyone sees, but no one talks about, lying is the elephant in the room no one sees. Lying is so socially acceptable, even in Christian circles, that it often goes undetected. We’re desensitized to it. And here’s why this is dangerous for Christians.

There’s a rarely-discussed passage in Matthew 5:33-37 where Jesus confronts the Pharisees about oaths. Most Americans only hear the word oath when a celebrity lies in court (under oath). But Jesus isn’t talking about oaths in this passage. He’s talking about INTEGRITY.

Here’s what Jesus is saying: You should live with such high integrity that your word doesn’t need attachments to make it legitimate. So, typical phrases like, “I promise,” “I swear,” and “I put it on my mom’s grave” should never come from your mouth.

“Frank, c’mon on man. Are you interpreting that correctly? Say you promise.” These words are a kick in the pants, right? If you’re like me, you say things all the time and

never follow through. You lie to make yourself sound better. You lie to stay out of trouble. You lie to get ahead. Sometimes you lie just to lie.

Jesus says there’s no place for that if you’re a Christian. Your word matters. If you say something, God expects you to do it. It’s better to tell the truth and lose your job than lie and keep it.

How serious is this? Jesus says anything more than our word is from the evil one, Satan. That’s real.

Frank Powell is a college/young adult pastor in Jackson, TN. Frank is married to an amazing woman and has two awesome boys. He is also in the process of adopting a child from Ethiopia. In his free time, Frank loves to drink coffee, play golf, and watch college football. You can follow Frank on Twitter and Facebook. You can also find more content from him at <http://frankpowell.me>.

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