

LEADING GRACE

WINTER, 2022-23

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IN THIS ISSUE

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

JODY DILLOW

FREE GRACE AND DECONSTRUCTION

THANI ABUHAMAD

UNDERSTANDING HEBREWS 10:26

GRANT HAWLEY

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH GROW
THROUGH CONVERSION?

LARRY MOYER

ARE YOU TRYING HARDER BUT
ENJOYING JESUS LESS?

ED UNDERWOOD



04

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
JEREMY VANCE

11

FREE GRACE AND DECONSTRUCTION
THANI ABUHAMAD

21

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH GROW
THROUGH CONVERSION?
LARRY MOYER

07

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?
JODY DILLOW

17

UNDERSTANDING HEBREWS 10:26
GRANT HAWLEY

25

ARE YOU TRYING HARDER BUT
ENJOYING JESUS LESS?
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UPCOMING EVENTS

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FGA REGIONAL CONFERENCE - FEB 24TH-26TH, STARKVILLE, MS
 GGWO EUROCON - MAR 14TH-18TH, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
 FGA REGIONAL CONFERENCE - APR 29TH, ALLENWOOD, NJ
 FGA REGIONAL CONFERENCE - MAY 26TH-28TH, PORTAGE, WI
 FGA REGIONAL CONFERENCES - JUNE 20TH-28TH GHANA
 FGA REGIONAL CONFERENCE - (DATE TBD) KENYA
 FGA REGIONAL CONFERENCE - (DATE TBD) SOUTH AFRICA

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

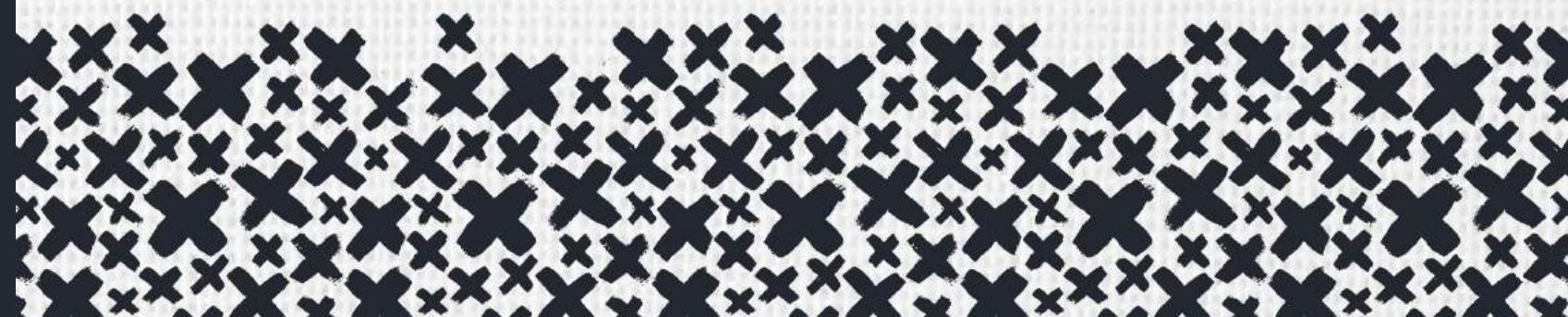
It has been over twenty-five years that I have been in full time ministry as a pastor. For some of you reading this letter you'll say, "I've got you beat. I've been in full time ministry longer." For others of you, you may think, "Wow, twenty-five years. That's a long time to be in full-time ministry." As I have been connected with different organizations through the years, some have been quite edifying (e.g., the Evangelical Homiletics Society), and others...not so much (the names of which will remain anonymous). Yet, as I think about it, I believe being connected to the Free Grace Alliance has been the most beneficial to my connecting with organizations and institutions that are far-reaching in their impact for the gospel. I can sincerely say, the Free Grace Alliance (and those in the Alliance) have been the most encouraging to me when I have gone through the highs and lows of ministry. And the Free Grace Alliance (and the people I have known through the Alliance) has been used by the Lord in my life and ministry more than anything else to truly equip me with the tools I've needed to have clarity around the gospel and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I can confidently say, "God has used the Free Grace Alliance in such profound ways in my life and ministry. I am truly grateful to Him for bringing me to be a part of it."

I share this mini testimony about the Free Grace Alliance because my own experience has been duplicated over and over again with those who are connected to this Alliance. I hope that has been your experience with this wonderful organization. Our mission is to connect, encourage, and equip the body of Christ to advance the grace message throughout the world. If you have not yet had a similar experience that I have had, or you haven't become a member of the Free Grace Alliance, I would love for you to consider becoming a member. Or the ministry you are involved with can become an institutional partner of this Alliance. Check out our website for details: freegracealliance.com. When you join, I know God will use the Free Grace Alliance to make an impact on your life and your ministry for the sake of His pure, original gospel. And through it, the Lord will help you grow in His grace.

Serving Christ with You – Joyfully,



Jeremy Vance,
President





IS YOUR MINISTRY AN FGA PARTNER?

JOIN A GROWING COMMUNITY

HELP GET THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD

DECLARE WHERE YOU STAND

ENJOY GREAT BENEFITS

INFO AT FREEGRACEALLIANCE.COM

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

BY JODY DILLOW

Stephen Covey has written a book which is the result of years of research in the success literature of the past two centuries. In addition, his insights have been gleaned from his twenty years of experience worldwide as a management consultant to numerous corporations. He is a recognized expert on principles of personal and organizational leadership development. His experience and studies have led him to the discovery that there are common denominators among all highly effective people, what he calls "seven habits." The second habit is "Begin with the end in mind." (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: 96)

Imagine yourself driving to the funeral of a loved one. As you get out of the car and enter the funeral parlor, you see numerous flowers, friends, and relatives. Gentle music is playing in the background. The sense of sorrow and grief permeates the air, and there are many tears. As you walk down the aisle to the front of the church to look into the casket, you gasp with surprise. When you look into the casket, you see yourself. All these people are here to honor you! This is your funeral, three years from today. These gathered friends and relatives are here to express their love and appreciation.

WHAT IMPACT HAVE YOU HAD?

Still stunned by what you see, you take your seat and wait for the services to begin. Glancing at the program, you note there are to be four speakers. The first is to be from your family both immediate and extended, representing children, brothers, and grandchildren, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. They have come from all over the country to be present at this event. The second speaker is your best friend. He is someone who can give a sense of who you are as a person. The third speaker is someone from your office. This person will, of course, have perspective on what kind of boss you were and what kind of employee you were. Finally, an elder from your church will be called on to share a few personal comments.

Now think about this scene! What would you like these speakers to say about you and your life? What kind of husband, father, employee, Christian would you like their words to reflect? What contributions and achievements would you like these people to remember? Look carefully at the people around you. What difference does it make to them that you lived or died? What impact have you had in their lives?

Covey counsels, take a few moments and jot down the thoughts that come to your mind. What are your answers to these questions? If you thought deeply about this scene, you discovered something about yourself that you may not have known before. You discovered some of your deep, fundamental values.

To "begin with the end in mind" is to begin today with the image, picture, and paradigm of the end of your life as the frame of reference or the criterion by which everything else in your life is examined. By doing this, each part of your life can be examined in the context of the whole according to what you have concluded is most important to you. By keeping the end in mind, you can clearly evaluate whether on any given day you have violated your deepest values. You can determine whether that day, that week, that month has or has not contributed toward the vision you have of life as a whole.

THE CROWN OF VICTORY

For those who live with the end in view, they will receive the Crown of Victory. Paul describes this high honor using athletic metaphors this way:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24).

To what do the crown, the prize, and the race refer in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27? The "race" occurred at the Isthmian games held every three years in honor of Poseidon, the god of the sea. The site was a spruce grove dedicated to him on the Isthmus of Corinth. Vast crowds attended these ancient Greek games. The Olympiad hosted fifty thousand at the Coliseum in Rome. That of Saurus held eighty thousand persons. A total of over 270 Roman amphitheaters are known. The prize at Corinth was a spruce wreath, the tree sacred to Poseidon. To participate in the games one had to be a freeborn Greek.



This starting gate for the foot race in the Isthmian games dates about 700 B. C. The grooves in the track were lines where string connecting to the starting gates was laid. They slid under small metal nails to release all the gates at precisely the same time.

Paul continues, Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control [Gr *egkrateuomai*] in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25).

The NIV translates *egkrateuomai* with the phrase "goes into strict training." The word pictures strong self-discipline. It is an appropriate word to use for the demanding process of "getting in shape" to participate in the games. The athletes were selected by local elimination trials, after which they submitted to rigorous training for ten months under professional trainers.

After their arrival for training they were examined by the officials, and they took an oath swearing to obey all the rules. If an athlete left the gymnasium once during the ten months of training, he was disqualified and could not participate in the games. His diet consisted of cheese, figs, and dried meats. No wine was

allowed. If he was caught violating the diet, he was disqualified. Every morning there were two trumpet calls. The first was the warning trumpet. When it blew, the athlete's personal trainer came and rubbed down the athlete with oil. The second trumpet was the signal to begin the daily workout in the exercise square called the "agony." As he exercised, there were "marshals" observing his effort. If he caught an athlete loafing just once during this entire ten months, he was disqualified. If an athlete missed one trumpet call the entire ten months, he was disqualified from the games. The athletes trained and competed naked, (*Ibid.* 2:214) regardless of the weather or temperature.

Now why did they do all this? First, they did it to obtain a spruce wreath on their head! Each winner bound a woolen cloth about his head, and the judges placed the wreath/crown on it. Then a herald announced the name and the city of the winner, a custom continued in the Olympiads of our day. This wreath was the only prize given at the games, yet it was the most eagerly contested distinction in Greece. (*Ibid.* 2:216)

However, there was more to it than that. After the victory celebration great honors were heaped on the athlete when he returned home.

These are the remains of an ancient "locker room" where the athletes at Pergamum trained in preparation for the games. Usually ten months were spent in training at this ancient gymnasium under very careful scrutiny of the referees



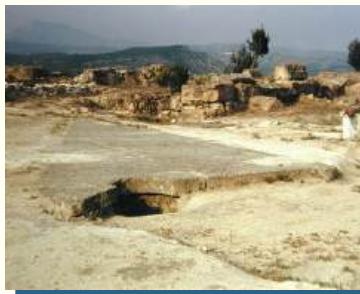
A breach in the city wall was cut. This was to signify that the protection of the wall was no longer needed now that an athlete of this stature had returned home. The winner was then placed on a chariot and led through the city in a festive procession. Many cities voted substantial sums of money to the victors. Some made them generals, and the crowd idolized them so openly that the Greek philosophers complained. Poets were hired by the victor and his parents to pen odes to his greatness. These odes were sung by a chorus of boys in the procession that welcomed him home. Sculptors were paid to capture the athlete in his most athletic pose. Some cities fed the athlete's children and wife at public expense for the rest of their lives. The children were allowed to enter the best academy in the ancient world, paid for by the city. The athlete was given a seat of honor on the city council and a box seat at the Isthmian games for the rest of his life. Last, but definitely not least, he was exempt from all income tax!

They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever (1 Corinthians 9:25, NIV).

Paul says that Christians also will receive a reward if they, like the athletes, are willing to sacrifice and live the life of discipleship, a life that similarly requires strong self-discipline. It is like entering "through the gates into the city" in Revelation 22:14.

To enter through the gates was to enter in the victory procession of the returning champion.

Paul continues: "Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly" (1 Corinthians 9:26).



The stadium sprint was the most popular event at the games. This race course, supposedly the length of one footprint of Hercules, was 192 meters or one-seventh of a mile. Only free men (no slaves) could participate. An athlete trained for ten months in his hometown and for one month at Isthmia.

The race to which he refers was the most popular contest at the games, the stadium sprint, usually about two hundred meters. Another race was a four-hundred-meter run and another went for about four kilometers. We have no knowledge of the records, but one ancient Greek writer avows that the athletes broad jumped over fifteen meters. This only proves that one cannot believe everything he reads!

For a runner to run "aimlessly" is to run without focusing on the goal. Paul says that our lives must always be "run" with a clear view of the final accounting we will all face. All decisions must be made in view of this coming event. A Christian who lacks this perspective or who ignores it is simply living life without purpose.

I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).



This victor's monument from the Isthmian games dates from the time of the apostle Paul. On it the names of the victors and their judges were inscribed.

Boxing was another popular sport at the games. The Greek boxers did not hit straight out from the shoulder as modern boxers do. They fought by swinging their arms in a kind of windmill fashion. Furthermore, the Romans introduced weighting their leather gloves with iron, lead, and metal studs. Terrible wounds were often inflicted. This naturally caused the boxers to adopt evasion as their chief strategy. The Christian life, however, must be lived aggressively, not avoiding danger but challenging it. Christians must not be beating the air, windmill fashion, but must use their fists in dead earnest, intending to make every blow count. In other words, the Christian is not to practice a life of evading his Christian responsibilities. He is to aggressively pursue them. He is to make every blow count for Christ. He is to live his life with purpose and intensity.

When Paul says, "I beat my body," he uses a Greek athletic term for what we would call a "knock-out." The word, *hypōpiazō*, literally means "to give a black eye by hitting." This was the decisive blow which won the fight, the "first blow under the eye." He means that as Christians we must defeat our bodies. We must exercise strong discipline. The self, the "I," must be dealt a knockout blow. The self is our real enemy, and that is what he means by "body." The real opponent is the self with its longings for convenience, its desire to be spared at all costs, its wishes and longings.

Though Paul does not give this crown a name, it is a crown awarded to those who have fought the battle with the flesh and through self-discipline have emerged victorious. They have dealt the "I" a "knock-out blow." It is a crown for those who have mastered the body.

How tragic it would be for one who has instructed others in the rules for obtaining the prize to find that, when the race was over, he should be disqualified for the prize for failing to keep the rules he himself taught. Paul himself was aware of that danger. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith," (2 Timothy 4:7, NASB)

As he looked back on his life he could say, "I did it" I completed what God wanted me to do. We too must be faithful to the end of life if we are to obtain the crown of victory.

In the book of Revelation, the twenty-four elders are pictured as casting their crowns to the feet of the Lamb:

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne (Revelation 4:9-10).

This verse reveals that a major purpose of the crowns is to be tokens of worship. Like the twenty-four elders, rewarded believers also will lay at His feet the very honors He gave them. This process is not a one-time event but occurs "whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to Him who sits on the throne." Throughout eternity these tokens of honor will be laid at Christ's feet in acts of worship. Each time the rewarded believer approaches the throne, he will remove his crown, lay it at the feet of Jesus, and worship. A central motivation for obtaining these crowns is to be found in the desire to have these tokens of worship.



After a vigorous workout the athletes at the gymnasium at Pergamum would take their "showers" in these wash basins.

**THE SELF,
THE "I," MUST
BE DEALT A
KNOCK OUT
BLOW.**

**THE LEADING
GRACE PODCAST
IS ON YOUR
FAVORITE
PODCAST
AGGREGATOR**





FREE GRACE &

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WHERE WERE YOU ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 11TH, 2016?

I remember feeling the chill of cement emanate through my pajama pants as I lay uncomfortably in the middle of an empty retention pond. My spirit was disquieted in the aftermath of three different suicide attempts that I chickened out of just hours before. Unable to parse my frantic and formless thoughts and feelings, I stared helplessly into the night sky waiting for answers.

A few months earlier, I had just finished producing a multi-thousand-dollar musical project; my debut album as an independent recording artist. I led over fifty people in all aspects of writing, rehearsing, recording, filming, etc. and it was the most involved six-month period of my life. Everything was a brilliant success up until the album came out. To this day, I have only sold two copies. The despair of this acute failure was compounded by the physical pain of an undiagnosed chronic illness and an emotionally devastating romantic heartbreak. Pornography, overeating, and isolation shielded me from the unbearable anguish that my life had become.

At that time, I was staunchly Free Grace (FG), and I had zero doubt regarding where I was going to be after “pulling the plug.” I had no hope for any healing, but I did have a sure-fire way to end my torment. I had an inadequate theology of the purpose of suffering, and I couldn’t ignore it anymore. In the early morning of that fateful night, I returned home confused and ashamed. The next six months were dedicated to solving the problem of my hole-filled system.

This is deconstruction. If you spend any time on the internet, you’re likely to encounter this term as well as many other related terms (exvangelical, unchurched, church hurt, purity culture, religious trauma, spiritual bypassing, spiritual abuse, etc.). You may have first heard about this idea through the stories of celebrity Christian figures like Rhett and Link, Joshua Harris, and the Gungors, but they don’t fully represent the prevalence and nature of this phenomenon in our society today.

It is neither simply asking questions nor experiencing emotional distress. It is both. (Harber, “Defining Deconstruction pt. 4 | Doubt and Doctrine”) You might know it better as a “crisis of faith.” Well, now we have a new word for it, and we must understand it properly to engage with those experiencing it. Unfortunately, Christians everywhere are failing in this regard.

So, it’s my thesis that the Free Grace movement can change the Christian landscape of the world by looking at deconstruction. What is it exactly? How does Free Grace help?

WHAT CAN WE DO?

THEORY

Firstly, let’s understand this concept by examining three things: 1) a clear definition of what this process entails, 2) an example of it occurring in the Bible, and 3) the most helpful type of response.

The term “spiritual deconstruction” is a relatively new one and is mostly a colloquial term—the academic literature has yet to catch up. Neither have many Christians truly understood it. It’s a convoluted and ambiguous idea that needs refinement. There are a few terms that some use synonymously with deconstruction, like deconversion, disaffiliation, and becoming a religious “none” but deconstruction remains the best word because, as I’ll soon illustrate, it doesn’t presume “leaving the faith” as the sole possible outcome.

The term was first coined by a former evangelical pastor to describe his own approach to “questioning certainty and accepted truth”—especially that of his religious upbringing (Hayward, *What is Deconstruction?*). The concept has since grown legs of its own so I’m going to suggest a different one than the one originally proposed.

Here’s my definition of deconstruction:

“A spiritual crisis in which one disassembles and scrutinizes the fundamental theological beliefs and logical frameworks of their upbringing with the possible outcomes of discarding, distorting, doctoring, or duplicating their faith.”

Some event instigates an emergency in someone’s spirit, and they hit a “fork in the road.” This experience has the potential of maturing or destroying one’s faith, depending on the choices made by three parties (more on that later). Let me break down the four possible outcomes of deconstruction:

The first two are the outcomes that most people think of.

1) **DISCARDING** one’s faith involves disassembling beliefs and leaving them there in a dismantled state or building something else out of other parts; practically, it looks like becoming a naturalist atheist or agnostic or adopting an entirely different religion. I call it “throwing the baby out with the bathwater.”

2) **DISTORTING** one’s faith is also detrimental in that one holds fast to the abstract principles of the Christian message (love, joy, peace, unity, etc.) but does so in a way that dispenses with a literal-grammatical-historical method and embraces new age, liberal, or progressive ideology.

The final two outcomes are ones that we rejoice in!

3) To **DOCTOR** one's faith is to deconstruct previously held beliefs, examine them while remaining committed to the evangelical hermeneutic, and rebuild a different perspective that aligns more with the truth than before. This is an example of adopting FG in place of a Reformed, Lordship, or Arminian framework. So, it's plausible that you, reader, have deconstructed (more on that later).

4) Finally, when I refer to **DUPLICATING** one's faith, I mean that one endures crisis and ends up returning to the same belief structure but with the newfound confidence that it's actually valid. It's not "Mom and Dad's theology" anymore; their knowledge of God and reality has become experiential instead of merely intellectual. Their convictions have become their own.

The Biblical precedent that best fits this process is the story of Job—stable faith meets destabilizing suffering and forty chapters of grief ensue. The whole narrative of this book can be summed up as Job (and his friends) having an insufficient understanding of who God is and how He functions that was challenged by serious suffering.

Also, just as Job's friends criticized him, we are at risk of judging those in tragedy the same way. When someone is struggling in their spirit it manifests in unpredictable behavior. In the dark night of the soul, we don't often look like the image of a "good Christian" that others often expect of us: we're confused, insecure, angry, contentious, etc. It's helpful to bear in mind that the progression of our faith is "non-linear," (Davis, *Breaking Evangelical*, 91). A birds-eye view of our spiritual journey may look much more like a squiggle than a straight line.

But there is hope that, with the right choices made along the way, deconstruction will lead to closeness with God.

Deconstruction is a spiritual crisis. God wants relationship with humanity—the entire meta-narrative of the Bible makes that clear (Gen 3; John 15; 2 Cor 5:18–19; etc.). And spiritual problems can't be fixed with tangible things, they require a relational solution. So, then, what is the thing that sustains and develops relationships? If "relationship" is the noun, what is the verb?

LOVE.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16a). As Jesus said in Matthew 22, everything boils down to "love God and love others" (vv. 37–40). This is our calling as we engage with our children, our friends, and our pastors as they deconstruct. And what is love but doing what is in someone's ultimate best interest? Love is the key.

Fear is the enemy. John enlightens us that love and fear cannot coexist (1 John 4:16–19). It's one or the other! Much like how we have a moment-by-moment choice whether to submit to the authority of the Spirit or to our old ways, we have a "dual control" option here, too (Radmacher, *What to Expect from the Holy Spirit*, 89). Every action in our relationships with deconstructors can either be led by love or by fear.

Another way of conceptualizing this duality is ministry and manipulation. Christian Psychologist Larry Crabb suggests that there exist only these two action categories in relationships. In attempts to "maneuver [ourselves] into a relationship with minimal emotional pain," we miss out on opportunities to help bring about the best-case scenario for those we love (*The Marriage Builder*, 65). Love yields ministry; fear yields manipulation.

FREE GRACE

Now the big question: how does being FG help? Instead of detailing specific beliefs that are helpful for those deviating from other systems, I'm going to tackle this from a different angle; the natural outflow of our theology is a uniquely powerful spiritual environment. Grace dispels fear in beautiful ways. For now, here are three significant ways that FG is more conducive to love than other systems in the theological marketplace.

Truth over Tradition

Very few of us were born into FG. By nature, we are a collective of those dissatisfied with the theological systems we had prior and earnestly sought a better solution. The ensuing ethos is inviting to those defecting from the traditional beliefs they inherited.

As proponents of the Protestant evangelical convictions, we have an allegiance to the truth which encourages us to use a logically cohesive hermeneutic to resolve difficult biblical and theological problems. We're serious about our faith, ask challenging questions, contend honestly with logic and reality, and can empathize with others doing the same.

FREE GRACE & DECONSTRUCTION

EMPATHETIC COMMUNITY

There's no need to wear the mask. What I mean by this is, because we aren't scared of what our sin might reveal about our position in Christ, we don't have to be fearful of our imperfect condition (Anderson, *Position and Condition*). We don't need to posture as though we have it all together. We can boldly parrot Paul in saying we are the least of those around us (1 Cor 15:9; Eph 3:8; 1 Tim 1:15)! Because of this and our secure assurance, we are free to be transparent with ourselves and others about what we do and think. I mean truly honest!

Many church environments have a doctrinal ecosystem hyper-emphasized by fear: constant focus on escape from eternal damnation, grave punishment in response to sin, lack of assurance, etc. Yet, one of the most repeated precepts in the Bible is "do not be afraid." Clearly, there's a disconnect—if our theology produces fear where the Bible says there should be none, then it's unsound. FG can be a force that swings the pendulum back to balance. Not neglecting to share the truth, we are aware that we are in a position to help make up for a lifetime of spiritual abuse and neglect through transparency, patience, and compassion.

TRUE ASSURANCE

Because we distinguish justification and sanctification, the resulting environment is one where the identity of a fellow believer is not in question no matter what they share—encouraging others to be genuine about their concerns earlier on in their journey before they become too imposing and implode. I wish I could convey to you just how detrimental it is for deconstructors to be ousted from Christ's hand on the basis of their performance. A common thread in many deconstructors' stories involves someone, somewhere along the timeline of their struggle, saying they weren't a real believer or that their doubts threatened their salvation. Ed Underwood put it well, "We think they will believe before they belong. Wrong." ("Establishing an Atmosphere of Grace in Community").

There's too much to say on this now, but it's worth noting that the psychological principle of attachment theory informs us that we, as humans, require a stable foundation to enable growth and maturity (Davis, 69). If there is no such security, development is either seriously stilted or altogether impossible. Such is also true about spirituality: if we have nothing solid to lean on in terms of our identity in Christ, especially when sin and/or doubt abound, panic is inevitable.

But all these benefits of our paradigm are worthless if its embodiment fails. Our walk must match our talk! The way we, as individual Christians demonstrate our theology will either empower or destroy our message.

HOW TO HELP

Recall when I mentioned three parties. When someone is deconstructing, the outcome of their crisis is determined by the decisions made by themselves, God, and those around them: deconstructor, principal, and guidance group(s). All three of these have influence! Just like in Job's trial, his internal predicament resolved through a combination of God's response, Elihu's faithful rebuke, and Job's personal reception of God's words. We know God will not fail in doing His part. The deconstructor's choices are out of our hands. The only capacity we actually have is our own actions.

This final section will highlight an important distinction between two approaches to deconstruction support and offer an original four-step method.

GUIDES, NOT GURUS

We have a binary decision in front of us: to be gurus or to be guides. The daily choice we make has a marked impact on the journey deconstructors undergo—it's going to be a rough ride no matter what, but we have the opportunity to smooth some of the turbulence or magnify it.

In Matthew 20:25–28, Jesus warned us that the world would be gurus and charged us, as believers, to be counter-cultural in being guides instead. Allow me to define these two terms as I'm using them:

- A guru is someone who, without compassion, dispenses advice from a superior position;
- A guide is one who, in humility, walks alongside another, ministering to them holistically.

A guru attempts to control; a guide knows he/she has influence. A guru is always superior; a guide can be a peer. A guru is destination-oriented, motivated to gain power, arrogant, and close-minded; a guide is journey-oriented, motivated to serve, and humble and patient. A guru expects; a guide hopes.

A deconstructor needs a guide.

No fixers needed! We're not helping by dictating what others should rebuild and not allowing them the autonomy to "work out their own salvation," (Philippians 2:12). As Free Gracers, the concept of free will is a necessary assumption for both A and B truths (Bing, Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship). God grants us choice! Let's imitate Him in doing the same. For the sake of those who need love, we need to perpetually kill fear as it attempts to convince us to clone our faith in others instead of letting them build their own. Christians and Church communities often fail in this regard. Neither are cynics needed: those who will encourage them to break down more and more but don't stick around to help build something back up. The culture fails in this regard.

FREE GRACE & DECONSTRUCTION

But we don't have to contribute to the failure. I bear good news: being guides is the true expression of our paradigm! From the FG outlook, we are all on a level playing field—no human is inherently better than another (or better off than another, in terms of salvific election) and we're all equally capable of responding to God and equally in need of His ministry of sanctification. Our theology enables us to “make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served,” (Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader*, 6). Let's neither prove our beliefs useless in an absence of loving works (Jas 2:17) nor disqualify ourselves by adhering fervently to our interpretative method and failing to bear its fruits (1 Cor 9:27).



THE WATT APPROACH

As guides for those in deconstruction, our aim should be to illuminate the situation and help do away with the darkness (Philippians 2:14–16). This technique uses the WATT acronym as a metaphor because we aim to be lights in the hands of those seeking to dispel darkness in their minds, hearts, and spirits. Our role is not to manipulate an outcome, but to help the one stumbling about navigate their way through difficulty. We're not perpetuating an illusion; we're revealing what is.

We are lights when we...

- 1) Welcome the distress;
- 2) Analyze the crisis;
- 3) Try, and keep trying; and
- 4) Trust with an open hand.

1) WELCOME THE DISTRESS

The first step is to recognize someone's grief and respond to it with acceptance and without fear. We can't prevent the crisis from happening once it's in motion, but we can definitely choose how to respond.

Validation is crucial. Despite any potential weaknesses or failures in someone's logic, the subsequent emotions they are incurring are real and reasonable and need to be addressed as such. Always validate emotions—then, after reassurance, can come logical discourse.

This goes both ways because you will often find yourself entering your own emergency when coming to the aid of someone else. What happens to lifeguards when they dive in to save someone? Not only do they have to tolerate the unsafe waters, but they have to withstand the panic of the one drowning: thrashing about, hitting them, and pulling them down. If the deconstructor is your child, your spouse, your parent, etc. fear will bombard your heart—don't be deceived. Don't run away in fear. Receive your distress in love.

2) ANALYZE THE CRISIS

Similarly to how anger is a secondary emotion, a spiritual crisis is a secondary one that is rooted in one or multiple primary causes: 1) intellectual (e.g., logical contradictions, cognitive dissonance, etc.), 2) emotional (e.g., unmourned grief, disenchantment, etc.), and/or 3) traumatic (e.g., spiritual, sexual, physical abuse, etc.). So, the second step in this approach is to determine the nature of their crisis so that a targeted support strategy can be employed.

Respond to logic logically; emotions emotionally; and trauma sensitively.

3) TRY, AND KEEP TRYING

The penultimate step is to remain vigilant. As you embark on being a guide, you're not likely to get it right in the beginning. Most of us aren't professional counselors or therapists but find ourselves in a position of having an influence on someone in trouble even so.

Perfectionism is the pest nephew of fear. It's one of the most insidious enemies to the transformative power of love. We are not God, and neither our discernment nor our love is yet complete. The truth is we can't do this perfectly, but we can do this. Perfectionism is the voice in our head convincing us we'll fail before having even started. By contrast, love is pressing forward anyway and getting up every time we fall; “the godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again...” (Proverbs 24:16a NLT).

Always remind yourself of the big picture, be open to adapting your approach, and keep showing up. Don't give up on the person you're ministering to and neither give up on yourself or God.

4) TRUST WITH AN OPEN HAND

Calling this the final step is a bit of a misnomer because, really, our reliance needs to be a moment-by-moment reality throughout the process. I first heard this phrase from Christian counselor, Garry Kiker (“The Open Hand Seminar”). The last step is to give control over to God. Bill Bright said, “successful witnessing is taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God,” (*The Christian and Witnessing*). The same could be said for being successful in any endeavor beyond evangelism, including supporting someone through deconstruction. As lights, we love like Christ loved, follow the Spirit's lead, and entrust the outcome to God.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, I wanted to share some parting thoughts to both inspire and aid you as you embark on being a light in your community. I challenge...

...FG individuals to be lights to those around you. There are family, friends, coworkers, and strangers all around you that need a guide to serve them as they toil through their crises. In the power of the Holy Spirit, be not anxious—lean on the benefits of our viewpoint to be love to others in a way that many Christians haven't been.

...FG church bodies to be counter-cultural. It's standard nowadays for churches to encourage others to “wear the mask.” Fight daily to take your masks off so that those seeking help can feel safe in removing theirs, for only what is in the light can be healed (Eph 5:8–14).

...the FG movement to take advantage of this amazing opportunity. Young and old people in our communities are experiencing real crises—God is giving us a place to step in and demonstrate His love for the world.

NOW HERE'S SOME ENCOURAGEMENT:

It's demanding to be in the trenches with someone in crisis. Be ready to regulate your own emotions as you interact with someone likely to be drowning in their own spiritual maelstrom. Hurt people hurt people. Understand your own fear, so that you can avoid hitting them. I implore you, don't do this alone. Be connected with others in prayer and counsel as you walk this arduous path. Reach out to me if you need some encouragement.

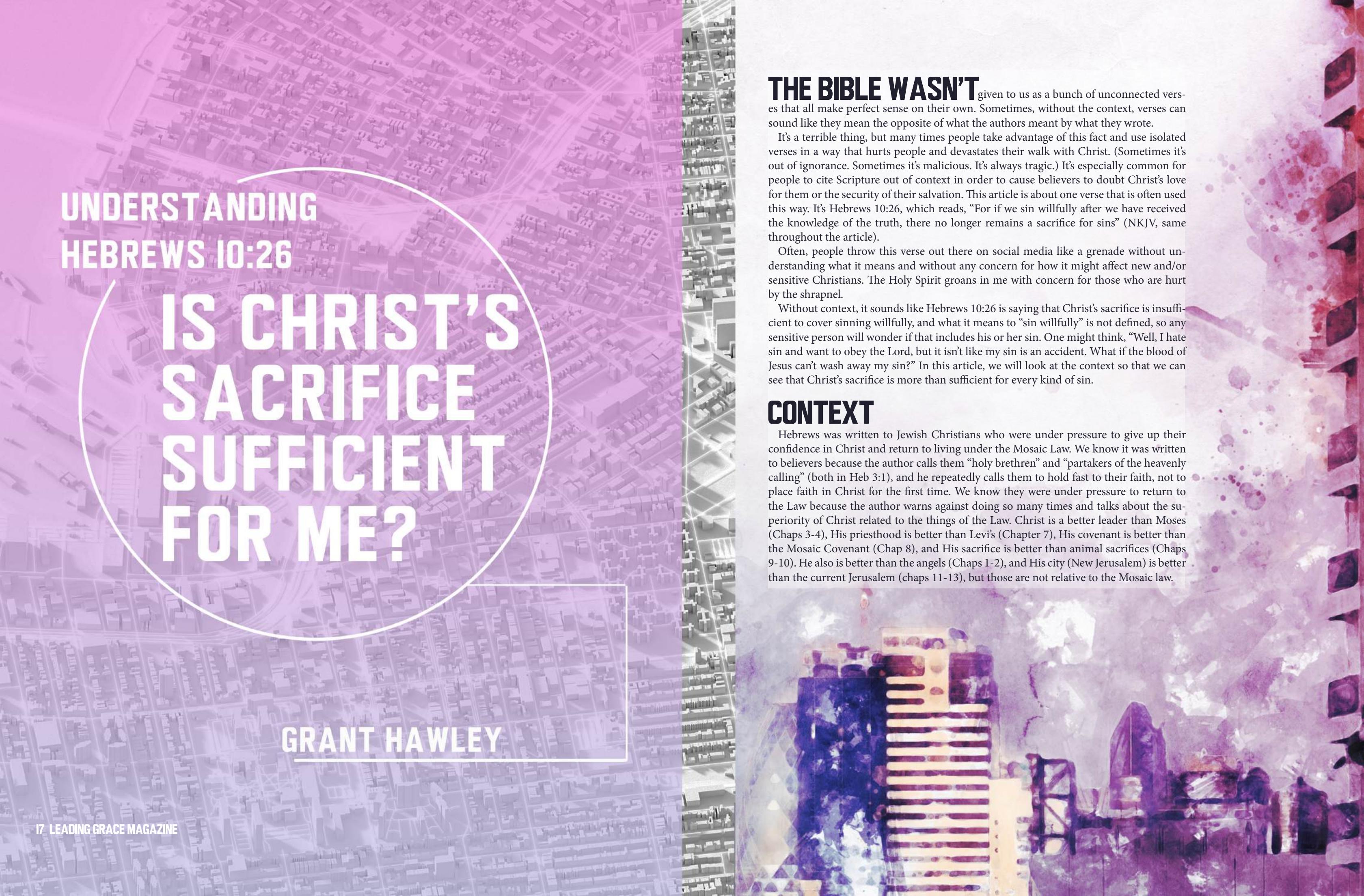
God is bigger than your failures—don't be frightened. God is with you and His Spirit is well capable of covering a multitude of human errors. Remember, fear is our number one enemy here—don't allow it to prevent you from enduring long enough to see God multiply your efforts into something beautiful. “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower [...] supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,” (II Corinthians 9:10).

It's not the end. Seeing the day-to-day reality can be so discouraging—God often takes months, years, or even decades to accomplish His work in our hearts. The Bible employs metaphors of sowing and reaping a lot—think about how long it takes to sow and cultivate a plant as opposed to reaping the harvest of an already-nurtured one. Consider that you may be on either side of that spectrum. Maybe you're a sower (doing grueling work day in and day out for a long time without seeing any discernible change) and maybe you're a reaper (supporting someone on the tail-end and seeing it all turn around like “that”). Be patient and trust God with an open hand.

Now go and light things up.

-THANI

FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT THANI@GOLDENAPPLES.ART
OR READ MORE ON HIS BLOG AT [HTTPS://GOLDENAPPLES.ART](https://GOLDENAPPLES.ART)



UNDERSTANDING HEBREWS 10:26

IS CHRIST'S SACRIFICE SUFFICIENT FOR ME?

GRANT HAWLEY

THE BIBLE WASN'T

given to us as a bunch of unconnected verses that all make perfect sense on their own. Sometimes, without the context, verses can sound like they mean the opposite of what the authors meant by what they wrote.

It's a terrible thing, but many times people take advantage of this fact and use isolated verses in a way that hurts people and devastates their walk with Christ. (Sometimes it's out of ignorance. Sometimes it's malicious. It's always tragic.) It's especially common for people to cite Scripture out of context in order to cause believers to doubt Christ's love for them or the security of their salvation. This article is about one verse that is often used this way. It's Hebrews 10:26, which reads, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (NKJV, same throughout the article).

Often, people throw this verse out there on social media like a grenade without understanding what it means and without any concern for how it might affect new and/or sensitive Christians. The Holy Spirit groans in me with concern for those who are hurt by the shrapnel.

Without context, it sounds like Hebrews 10:26 is saying that Christ's sacrifice is insufficient to cover sinning willfully, and what it means to "sin willfully" is not defined, so any sensitive person will wonder if that includes his or her sin. One might think, "Well, I hate sin and want to obey the Lord, but it isn't like my sin is an accident. What if the blood of Jesus can't wash away my sin?" In this article, we will look at the context so that we can see that Christ's sacrifice is more than sufficient for every kind of sin.

CONTEXT

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were under pressure to give up their confidence in Christ and return to living under the Mosaic Law. We know it was written to believers because the author calls them "holy brethren" and "partakers of the heavenly calling" (both in Heb 3:1), and he repeatedly calls them to hold fast to their faith, not to place faith in Christ for the first time. We know they were under pressure to return to the Law because the author warns against doing so many times and talks about the superiority of Christ related to the things of the Law. Christ is a better leader than Moses (Chaps 3-4), His priesthood is better than Levi's (Chapter 7), His covenant is better than the Mosaic Covenant (Chap 8), and His sacrifice is better than animal sacrifices (Chaps 9-10). He also is better than the angels (Chaps 1-2), and His city (New Jerusalem) is better than the current Jerusalem (chaps 11-13), but those are not relative to the Mosaic law.

Hebrews was written with two major practical goals in mind. The first purpose for the book is to encourage the readers to "hold fast the confidence [that we have in Christ] and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Heb 3:6), and the second is to call the readers to encourage one another toward that end (3:13-14). So, when Hebrews 10:26 is used to discourage believers and undercut their confidence in Christ, it undercuts everything that Holy Spirit inspired the book to accomplish.

Ironically, they are also committing the same kind of sin that the verse warns against.

The Author of Hebrews labors to communicate the sufficiency and once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice in contrast to the insufficient, repeated sacrifices of animals. In the discussion on Christ's better priesthood, the Author of Hebrews writes:

Also there were many priests [under the Mosaic Law], because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He [Jesus], because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. (Heb 7:23-28)

In this passage, we see that Christ is the Forever-Priest, and He doesn't need to keep repeating His sacrifice, because it was once-for-all. This has been a theme since the very beginning of the book, since Christ "by Himself purged our sins, [He] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). He is seated because His work is finished (cf. John 19:30).

But the priests under the Law had to keep working because their work was never finished:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. (Heb 10:1-4)

But Christ's sacrifice does take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) once for all, and the Author of Hebrews makes this clear:

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified [more accurately, "who have been sanctified"]. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR HEARTS, AND IN THEIR MINDS I WILL WRITE THEM," then He adds, "THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. (Heb 10:10-18)

The most important thing to note about the passage above is that when the author says, "there is no longer an offering for sin" he means that Christ doesn't need to continually offer Himself for sin because He did it right the first time.

WHAT DOES HEBREWS 10:26 MEAN?

So, what can it mean when the same kind of language is used a few verses later (v 26) as a solemn warning? He meant it as an encouragement in v 18 and a warning in v 26. What's the deal? The biggest key is understanding what sin he is warning against. The Author of Hebrews tells us in vv 28-29: Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

And later in v 35: "Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward."

The sin in view is to say, "Christ's sacrifice may not be enough, I need to add to it" by returning to animal sacrifices. This insults the spirit of Grace and calls Christ's blood "common" or, it could be translated, "profane."

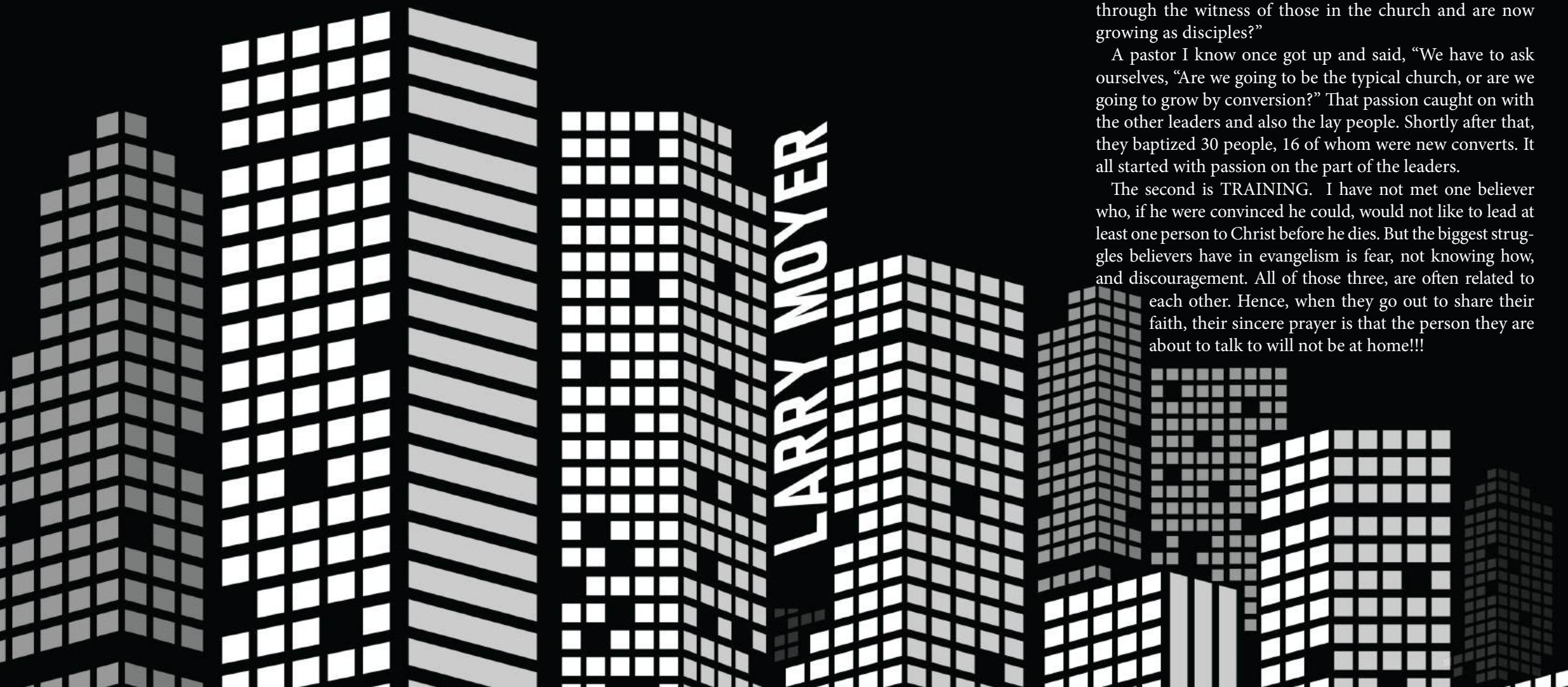
Another key to understanding what is happening here is that the author alludes to Numbers 15, in which it says that there is no sacrifice under the Mosaic law for willful sin.

What the author is saying is that if these believers cast away their confidence in Christ by running to the Law, the Law they would seek for refuge actually condemns that action and offers no sacrifice for it. In other words, the Law they would seek for protection condemns them to death and worse if they seek it after knowing the truth about what Christ did for them.

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 10:26 doesn't say Christ's sacrifice isn't sufficient for you (or anyone else). It says that animal sacrifices won't help if believers count Christ's blood as insufficient. We aren't often tempted to sacrifice animals today, but we can still learn from and apply this verse in a secondary way by thanking God for Christ and resting knowing that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all of our sins. Let's seek to live holy lives because the Lord who saved us is holy, not because we are afraid He isn't enough. He is more than we could ever need.

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH GROW THROUGH CONVERSION?



LARRY MOYER

I do not believe there is a Christian alive who does not want to see his church grow. But I also believe there is not a Christian alive whose heart is close to Christ who does not want to see the church grow by conversion not by the transfer of believers from one church to another. I remind church leaders and lay people everywhere I go that the Great Commission does not say, "Go and transfer disciples." It says, "Go and make disciples."

The question is, "What makes a church grow through conversion?" The answer is not nearly as difficult as we are inclined to make it. Leaders and lay people both share responsibility. But for a church to grow through conversion, four things have to be present.

First, there has to be PASSION and this has to first and foremost come from the leadership. People are not apt to do what leaders say nearly as quickly as they are apt to do what leaders do. For that reason, the leadership has to be leadership that talks to the lost, not about the lost. The leaders have to be examples (I Peter 5:3) and not just exhorters in evangelism. They have to be those who sincerely care where people spend their eternity.

That passion then becomes contagious because people follow their example. Soon you have a church in which the majority of the people are characterized as "friends of sinners." So when the end of the year comes, fewer people have an interest in asking, "How many more people do we have this year than last year?" Instead, the question that interests all is, "How many people have come to Christ through the witness of those in the church and are now growing as disciples?"

A pastor I know once got up and said, "We have to ask ourselves, "Are we going to be the typical church, or are we going to grow by conversion?" That passion caught on with the other leaders and also the lay people. Shortly after that, they baptized 30 people, 16 of whom were new converts. It all started with passion on the part of the leaders.

The second is TRAINING. I have not met one believer who, if he were convinced he could, would not like to lead at least one person to Christ before he dies. But the biggest struggles believers have in evangelism is fear, not knowing how, and discouragement. All of those three, are often related to each other. Hence, when they go out to share their faith, their sincere prayer is that the person they are about to talk to will not be at home!!!

There must be training if believers are to overcome those two struggles. Surveys have revealed that more believers want training in evangelism, than there are churches offering it to them. A church in Pennsylvania took a survey of their people and asked them the question, "Where would you like more training?" Number one response was evangelism.

I have even told church leaders that I would not encourage people to evangelize if they are not offering training. All you will do is frustrate the people. Because many of the people want to share their faith, they just do not know how to do so. I might add that the training offered needs to be Biblical, not teaching what is not in accordance with the Scripture, and needs to be easily mastered. It should also be training that is available 24/7. Some people want to be trained through a special seminar and others want to be trained at 3:00 am in their pajamas!

**MORE BELIEVERS
WANT TRAINING
IN EVANGELISM**

The third need is CONTACTS. You never have personal evangelism without personal contact. There is no way to reach the people we do not talk to. One cannot save the saved; he can only save the unsaved.

Therefore, we must have personal contact with lost people because contacts lead to conversations and conversations leads to conversions.

The fact is that the average believer knows many unbelievers. The problem is that they are doing very little with them. We have to avoid the temptation to get our hair cut by a Christian barber, our car fixed by a Christian mechanic, our house built by a Christian carpenter and eat at fast food places that only make a Christian hamburger!!!!

I encourage believers to sit down and make a list of all the unbelievers they know – grocery store personnel, mailmen, business acquaintances, college friend, relative, repairmen, medical personnel, etc. Then ask, "How can I develop my relationship with several of these with a view to presenting the gospel?"

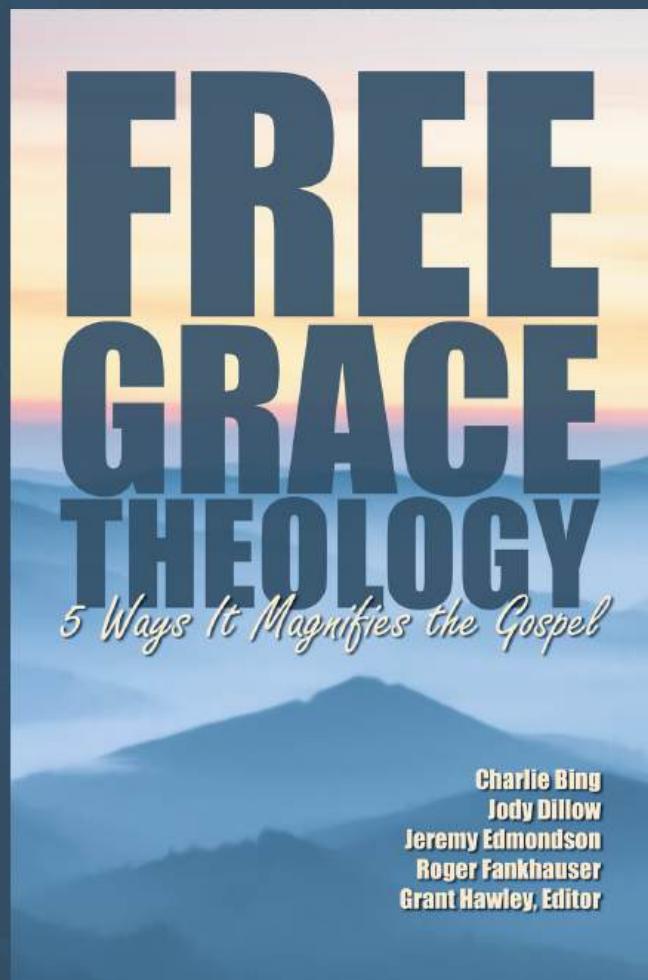
CONCLUSION

A person once said, "We need the genius to recognize the obvious." Growing a church through conversion is not as difficult as it might seem. It takes four things that should be rather obvious – passion, training, contacts, and follow through.

Want to see your church grown through conversion? Start on your knees. I know of no better prayer a leader or lay person can pray, than the simple prayer, "Lord, help our church grow through conversion and start with me." Your passion could inspire others, lead to training in evangelism, and see many develop contacts with the lost with whom they can share the gospel. The church becomes a "make a difference" church and it is obvious by the number of people coming to the Savior.



YOU CAN HAVE LARRY MOYER COME TO YOUR CHURCH TO TRAIN YOUR MEMBERS ON HOW TO DO EVANGELISM. THERE'S NO MINIMUM SIZE FOR THE CHURCH, AND NO SET HONORARIUM. MINISTRY AND CONTACT INFORMATION AT EVANTELL.ORG



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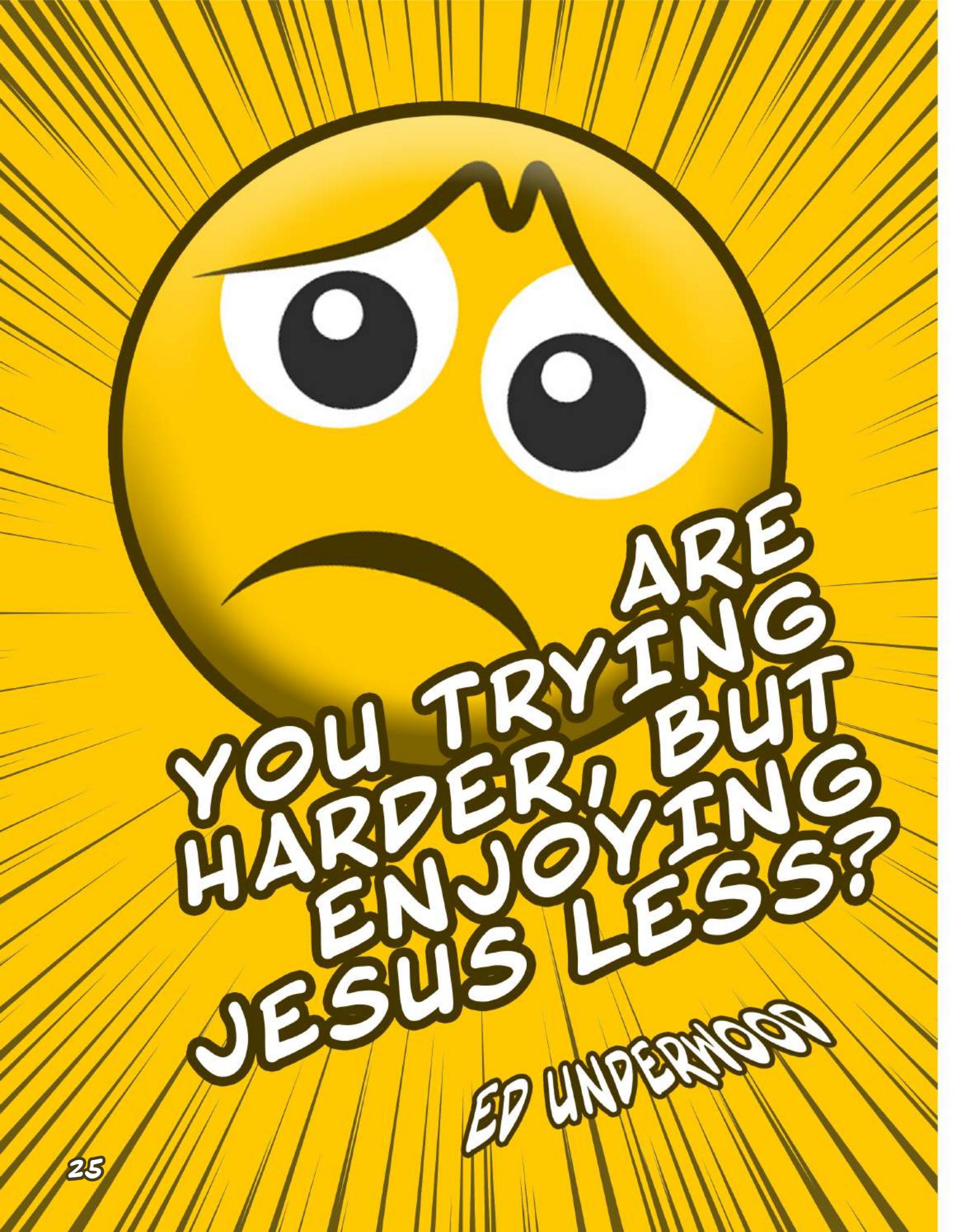
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WHO NEEDS THE GOSPEL?

Too many Christians are trying to live the Christian life without grace, without the power of the gospel. They're striving harder but enjoying Jesus less. There are two correlated religious confusions about the gospel that enslave Christians.

The first is the notion that the good news of the gospel is primarily for non-Christians. Many believers agree that we are saved from hell according to the gospel. But then they feel we must add to the gospel and "get to work" to live according to a variety of rules and expectations of a man-made, self-proclaimed religious culture to make it in the Christian life. This mistake fails to apply the glorious gospel truth—that we are totally made new in Christ—to our everyday life and the issues we face.

This leads to the captivating lie of insisting that we should live up to various definitions of what it means to be a "real Christian" or a "good Christian." This notion is likewise man-made and self-proclaimed, but for a more insidious reason: So that we can compare and compete with other Christians and feel better about our own shortcomings. This inaccuracy boomerangs and we feel compelled to redefine our own weaknesses and failures as "okay" hiding what we know to be true about ourselves as we point out the faults and shortcomings of others.

The Scriptures nowhere divide Christians into these performance and self-help categories. Those who have trusted in Christ through His gospel are just Christians, plain and simple. But failing to grasp the implications of the same gospel we believed when we became a Christian, leaves us striving to prove ourselves to be more acceptable to the God who has already fully accepted us in Christ. And it is this striving that ultimately leaves us as the only sub-class of Christians we never want to be: the carnal or flesh-dominated Christian.

THE GOSPEL IS FOR CHRISTIANS!

Paul warns us against these teachings in Colossians 2. He tells us the striving, legalistic culture's dirty little secret: Striving doesn't work (Colossians 2:23). It's only by trusting that the same gospel that saved us from the penalty of sin has also delivered us from the power of sin, and that we will be transformed only by the Spirit (Galatians 2:20).

If you're a Christian worn out by the enslaving religious lie that you need to learn how to be a 'good' Christian, Paul says, stop it! "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free," writes the apostle of grace. "Stand firm, then and do not let yourselves be burdened by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

There's a new life you can start living. You can break out of the prison of shame and failure. But you must believe that the gospel is not only for the day you trusted in Jesus, but the next day, and the next, and the next ... for the rest of your life. The gospel has the power to deliver us from sin. Not just its penalty, but also, its power.

It's a revolutionary concept. If you embrace it, I guarantee it will change your life. As you trust the Gospel more and more, you'll manifest more and more of the righteous life Jesus had in mind when He saved you from your sin. And it will all be by grace through faith.

If this sounds like news that is too good to be true, it may be that you've missed the dramatic contrast between the gospel and religion.

Question: Why do you think so many Christians are afraid of trusting what the gospel says about them and instead embrace some system of works righteousness to be accepted before God?

Ed Underwood is the Executive Officer and Lead Counselor of the Recentered Group. Learn more at RecenteredGroup.com



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