

LEADING GRACE

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A word from the president

What I have found so fascinating is that the discussion of eternal security can be reduced to theological and exegetical proofs, while somehow ignoring the personal application of security—assurance. Understanding the difference between the eternal security of all who believe in Christ and the personal assurance of individual believers is, in my opinion, crucially necessary.

Why? Because it's only through assurance that believers can live in the comfort that their identity and destiny in Christ are absolutely secure.

The Truth: Being secure in the grace of God and knowing you are secure in the grace of God are not the same.

Eternal security is a fact due to God's faithfulness whether the believer realizes it or not. Eternal security rests on a proper concept of what God actually does when He saves a soul. He loves unconditionally (John 13:1), purposes to keep His people in spite of everything (John 10:28-30), listens to His Son who lives forever to make intercession for us to keep us saved (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1), His Spirit places us in the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) and seals us until the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30), and His Word guarantees that nothing can separate us from Christ (Romans 8:28-39).

Assurance is the realization that one possesses eternal life. It is the personal confidence that right relations exist between one's self and God. It is based on two issues. First and foremost, assurance is based on the unconditional promises of the Word of God (1 John 5:13; 2 Timothy 1:12; John 6:37, 47; Ephesians 2:8-9). Second, evidences of new life in our life give us secondary confirmatory value—the Spirit's witness that we are God's child (Romans 8:16), and a growing love for other Christians (1 John 3:14). Generally, the evidences of sanctification salvation (good works, change in attitude, new motive for living, love for Christ) can be extremely encouraging personally and to all who are watching our lives. But, they are the least reliable source of assurance because of the existence of carnal believers (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) and the possibility of deceptive good works in tares and other unbelievers.

The Issue: Lack of assurance will stunt the growth of believers (1 John 5:11-13). Giving assurance to those who are not Christians will give them false comfort and false confidence in themselves and their works rather than the Savior they need.

In my over forty years of pastoral ministry, I found joy in assuring hundreds of believers that they are secure in Christ and then watching them live set free from the fear of either losing their salvation or wondering if they ever received it in the first place.

Ed Underwood

Ed Underwood

YOU ASKED, WE ANSWER.

A reader asks, is there a difference between safety and security?

In C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Susan and Lucy ask if Aslan is safe, and Mr. Beaver's reply is, "Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." Think about how many times you have been told "be safe," to stay safe and be wary of risk. But as with Aslan, following Jesus, our King, comes with risk, not always safety. However, by believing in Jesus, we gain everything and can now rest in security. Right now, you might be saying, "Hold on a minute...You said following Jesus is risky or not always safe, but then said by believing in Jesus you are secure. These are opposites, are they not?" Not at all. Let me explain.

By Believing. When we believe in Jesus' death on our behalf and His resurrection, we gain so many things, such as everlasting life, forgiveness of all sin, a promise of a new body, and a new home. In Ephesians, Paul tells the church that the Holy Spirit dwells in each believer as a pledge or guarantee of our salvation. Believers are "sealed in Him" (Eph. 1:13-14) and can rest secure knowing that God will keep them forever (Rom. 5:10). And not only keep them, but bestow many great things upon those "in Him." We can rest in the surety of such promises because of God's character and faithfulness. Our fate of eternal life and peace with God is secured.

By Following. Jesus said in some of His last words to His disciples, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The disciples and believers after Jesus' death suffered much persecution from the Roman leaders. Some believers during this time were prone to walking by sight and not by faith. Some did not rest in His work alone, and others chose not to admit they were Jesus' followers to bypass persecution (i.e., the letter to the Hebrews or Jewish believers). There will be persecution for those who follow Jesus, but the great encouragement, as Jesus says, is that we take heart or be encouraged because Jesus has "overcome the world" and has won the victory! The believer can have peace even through the trials of life.

The early church teachers challenge us to not bank on our earthly safety but to rest secure in our sure salvation and new identity in Christ as we follow in Christ's footsteps. We are to walk by faith and take risks by setting our minds on the eternal, glorifying Jesus through our weaknesses, and growing evermore in Christ's likeness through our trials. We are to be



eternally minded, make Christ visibly seen, and continually prove our character.

Eternally minded. Addressing the church of Corinth, Paul says, "We do not lose heart" (2 Cor. 4:1). He goes on to say, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:8-10). The persecution these following believers received was great. Paul felt encouraged, and encouraged other believers to be "of good courage" and to prefer being absent from the body (physically dying) which includes being home with the Lord (eternally living) (2 Cor. 5:6-8). Paul encourages believers to take risks in following Jesus, to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7) and rest in the security of an eternal future.

Visibly seen. Paul's sentiment of "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10) is reiterated when he says, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Through our weakness, Jesus' life is revealed. Through our humility in persecution and trials, the world sees Christ, our life. Through our inadequacy and deficiency, He becomes our strength, and His power is made visible to all.

Continually proved. James presents us with another angle in which to view our suffering. He writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4). In fact, Paul tells believers to "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4). Some translations say not just character but proven character. One of the best biblical examples of this is seen in the life of Job. He knew and believed in this truth. When speaking to Eliphaz about God's justice in judgment, Job replies, "But He knows the way I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Our tribulations bring us closer to Christ's likeness.

As believers, God asks more from us than just not sinning. He asks us to walk by faith, taking risks to further the reach of the gospel that all may hear, see, and feel the love of Christ. Aslan dies in Edmund's place, giving his own life so that Edmund could live and demonstrates to the two sons of Adam and two daughters of Eve his goodness and love. With unwavering faith in Aslan's goodness, the four children are guided and empowered to fight the formidable White Witch. Together, they embark on a daring mission to break Narnia free from the clutches of dark magic that plunged it into an eternal winter and thus fulfill the prophecy of their rightful rule over all of

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Narnia. This battle was not safe and at times showed them their weakness, but they were provided with gifts of power to win the battle; weapons of strength, health, and help to fight the good fight. God is good and full of love. We can rest secure in our salvation. This security is the catalyst of our eternal mindset; propelling us to seek and save the lost and to fight the evil powers of darkness, Satan and his kingdom. Jesus, our Savior, guides and empowers us to live out this mission that we too will one day rule and reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

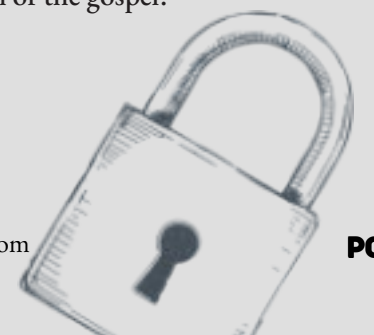
But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:57-58)

Think on it.

Do you believe in your security in Christ? What would it take for you to rest secure?

Do you take joy in your weakness? Do you only choose to work out of your strengths? Do you strive to play it safe? Do you choose to be influenced or interact with only those who appear strong? What risks might God be asking you to take to further the reach of the gospel?

– The Editors



The Myth of the “Real Christian”

By Joe Duke



For centuries people have tried to identify the signs of a real Christian. How do we know if a person is truly born again? What do we look for in the lives of supposed Christ followers that would indicate a genuine faith? Some insist that in surveying the smorgasbord of evidence, we would find baptism, church attendance, love for others, Bible reading, and prayer. Real Christians do those things and more, they say, and abstain from a bunch of other bad stuff.

One website insists that among other things, real Christians “walk in righteousness,” “are totally dependent on Christ,” and “persevere until the end.” Still others declare that real Christians have conquered sin and are victorious over sinful thoughts and habits.

But it’s that phrase, real Christian, that I find troubling, at least in the way it’s typically used. Sentences that begin with, “A real Christian would never...” or “A real Christian always...” cause me to brace myself for what will follow. How will the person

complete that sentence that begins with the words, “A real Christian...”?

One says, “A real Christian would never listen to that music.” Or “A real Christian is always joyful.” Another says, “A real Christian never drinks alcohol.” Or “A real Christian is vegan.” Still another might say, “A real Christian doesn’t get depressed.” Or “A real Christian will never tell a lie.” Or how about, “A real Christian would never shop at Target.” Or “A real Christian feels comfortable in Target at least once a week.” And among my recent favorites are, “A real Christian would never vote Democrat,” or “A real Christian would never vote Republican.” Ugh.

People using the phrase, a real Christian, might as well be saying, I double-dog dare you. Rather than relying on the content of a cogent argument, they default to simplistic fighting words—a real Christian. Using the phrase, a real Christian, is a kind of mic drop designed to leave anyone holding an opposing view in stunned

silence. End of discussion.

But the way most people use the words, a real Christian, is fundamentally flawed. In current vernacular, that phrase is almost always tied to behavior. Real Christians do or don’t do certain things. This reliance on behavior violates the very definition of Christian salvation. A Christian is not one who behaves himself or herself into salvation or proof of conversion. We’re saved “not by works of righteousness which we have done,” but by God’s mercy (Tit. 3:5).

A Christian is simply one who, at a point in time, has believed in Jesus as the Savior who died for them, resulting in imputed righteousness and eternal life. This moment of belief may have occurred as a child at a Christian camp or as a middle-aged person in a home Bible study. Regardless, a Christian is one whose behavior has not played a part nor is currently playing a part in securing salvation and eternal life.

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our security in Christ so important?

Imagine the daughter who desires closeness with her father, but doubts she is truly his child. She daily asks, “What do I have to do to prove I’m your daughter?” The one who attempts discipleship upon a foundation of doubt is that child. It leads to the misguided notion that one must purchase God’s love through performance. This foundation results in failure in the faith or legalistic superiority. Neither is the abundant life Christ came to give nor the intimate relationship He offers. Discipleship without assurance breeds unstable disciples who are at risk of abandoning the faith or spreading Pharisaism. Security makes all the difference.

Lucas Kitchen
Free Grace International

Four steps for putting eternal security into practice:

1. Sound hermeneutics applied to exegesis leads to recognition of Biblical distinctions.
2. One important Biblical distinction is that position and practice are not the same thing.
3. Recognizing that our position is resolved—that believers have eternal life—draws us to conclude that we are eternally secure in our position in Christ.
4. Certainty of our security in Christ motivates and empowers us to walk in such a way that our practice aligns with our position.

Hermeneutics matters.

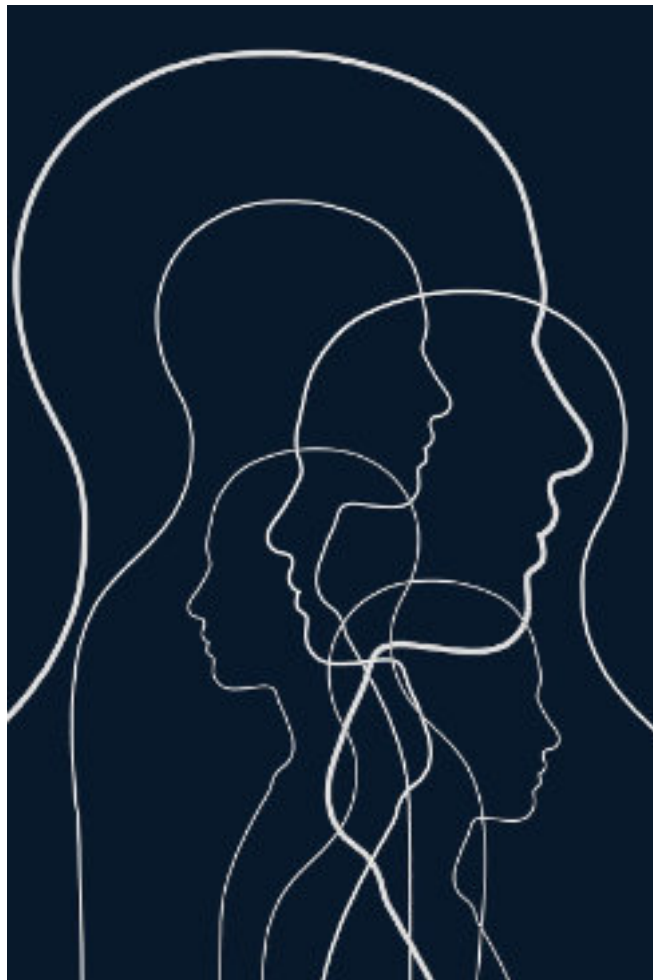
Biblical distinctions matter.

How we steward the position God gives us matters.

Christopher Cone, ThD, PhD, PhD
Agathon University

When our eternal destiny is settled, we can serve Christ with confidence, knowing we labor from acceptance, not for it.

Bob Nyberg



Assurance of salvation will always be out of reach when we add arbitrary requirements of conduct to authenticate the real christian.

What's more, let's just be honest, a Christian can look like a non-Christian and a non-Christian can look like a Christian! As we all know, outward appearances can be deceiving. While behavior is important, using it as a requirement or mark of salvation results in dismantling the offer of the gospel of grace. Grace shows up precisely because we'd never be good enough to earn or deserve our salvation.

A conversation like this one usually prompts me to ask a simple question of people: How bad can a Christian be? The biblical answer is of course, very bad. A Christian is capable of any sin. The record of the Bible reminds us that those who enjoy a relationship with God can also disobey Him. God's children can steal, lie, gossip, rage in anger, be envious, commit adultery, and even murder. Should they? Heavens no! Can they? Absolutely.

To shoehorn good works into the definition of a real Christian is to subvert the grace of God and render assurance of our salvation virtually impossible. Many people cherry pick from their own list of Christian behaviors, perhaps even personal preferences, and insist that those behaviors are required to prove one has

received this free salvation. But wait, it's free. "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). And that free gift of salvation doesn't require a behavioral contribution from us. It's without cost. Salvation is "the gift of God, not of works" (Eph. 2:8-9). A gift requiring payment from the recipient is no longer a gift. Insisting on good works in order to legitimize salvation is a form of payment. And charging for that gift is a bait and switch.

Furthermore, it's not up to us to determine if someone is a real Christian. Only God knows for sure. But we would hope that the individual in question would know the amazing assurance of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. Assurance of our salvation doesn't have to be a guessing game. We can know whether or not we have believed in Jesus. It's not that complicated. But assurance of salvation will always be out of reach when we add arbitrary requirements of conduct to authenticate the real Christians.

But shouldn't every Christian seek to live for God and thereby experience a change in behavior? Of course. We are to be diligent in seeking to grow with the help of the

Holy Spirit. But the presence of biblical commands urging us to grow and mature in the faith implies that we may not. If growth is automatic, then why does God tell us to grow?

Will every Christian follow Christ in wholehearted devotion? Nope. Of course not. Some Christians displease God in thought, word, or deed. I've been guilty, and you have too. Some Christians grieve and quench the Spirit. Some Christians fail to invest their lives in ways that bring God glory. They are still Christians, but their failure to faithfully build their lives on the foundation of Christ means they will appear empty handed before Him but still be with Him forever (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

The bar for becoming a Christian is low: Believe that Jesus died for you and offers you forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The bar for living as a Christian is high: Pay the price of following Jesus as His disciple. Confuse becoming a Christian with living as one and that's when you'll add all kinds of extra requirements to becoming a Christian. Faith in Jesus will cease to be enough for salvation. The costly price of following

Jesus—living as a Christian—will now usurp the offer of the free gift of salvation—becoming a Christian. In other words, fail to distinguish salvation and discipleship, and most certainly you'll embrace the myth of the "real Christian."



Joe Duke is the Founder and Executive Director of GraceWorks International and the Co-founder and Pastor Emeritus of LifePoint Church where he served as Pastor for over 35 years. Joe is a graduate of Asbury College (University) and Dallas Theological Seminary (ThM). He is a writer and speaker who is obsessed with helping people grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Joe's book, *Reflections: Words to Inspire, Challenge, and Encourage You* is available on Amazon.

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our security in Christ so important?

The security of the believer declares that salvation doesn't rest on your performance, but on God's decision to save you by grace, not by works. As Paul wrote, "And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6). A forfeitable salvation would depend on your faithfulness, nullifying grace. That's bad news. Here's the good news: your security doesn't depend on your gripping Him, but on His hold on you. Having embraced you in His death and resurrection, He promises never to let you go.

Shawn Lazar
Free Grace International

I have preached over 1,000 sermons, sat with the dying, and played an unknown number of youth group games. I still consistently feel like an impastor and not a pastor. I don't pray enough, visit enough, reach out enough, or do whatever the real pastors do. Thankfully, I sit in a long line of servants of the Lord from Moses to me who find our strength in the security of our Savior and not the results of our service. If you feel like you don't measure up, join the group. Let's be those who rest in Christ and not in our success.

Shawn Willson
Grace Community Bible Church

In John 10:27b-28 our Lord Jesus says this about all who believe in Him: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." That is a double-fisted security! Yet it actually gets better?! In Ephesians 1:13-14 and 4:30 we learn believers have been sealed in our connection with Christ. This sealing has to do with our identity in Christ and our security in Him.

The Bottom Line: All believers in Christ have a triple layer of security involving all three members of the Trinity! First, we are in our Savior's hand. Second, and on top of that, we are covered by God the Father's hand. Third, we have been "spiritually super-glued" as it were into our eternally secure connection with the Triune God!

Dr. Brad McCoy
Adjunct Professor at Grace School of Theology



Building an Ethos of Security

By Jeremy Vance

Every Labor Day weekend I celebrate another year that I have been in full-time ministry as the senior pastor at Faith Church in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Manitowoc is a community of about thirty-five thousand people. This year marks nineteen. However, I have been a senior pastor for thirty-one total years (wow, I am old). My wife and I love our church family and we love this town.

While these nineteen years have been filled with incredible blessings of seeing people put their faith in Jesus as their Savior and lives being transformed by

Him, they've also come with their share of challenges.

From the very beginning, attacks (which at their core are spiritual) ensued against trying to build a healthy culture where people in our church family could thrive in their relationship with the Lord and with each other (Matthew 22:36-40). There were strong disagreements with the style of worship that would be best. There was no alignment in the essential doctrines and teachings among the leaders. Even the philosophy of ministry was not united, which led to a group who tried to get me fired. This is a small sampling of all that happened before COVID, which every church in the world struggled through. And the spiritual battles continue.

So, how do we, or any church, work at creating and keeping a culture where those in our church family feel safe and secure enough to grow in their faith among other brothers and sisters in Christ. I agree with Larry Crabb in his classic book, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and are Forever Changed*, when he writes, "A central task of community is to create a place that is safe enough for the walls to be torn down, safe enough for each of us to own and reveal our brokenness. Only then can the power of connecting do its job. Only then can the community be used by God to restore our souls."

Allow me to offer five components to build into the culture of our churches that will go a long way in establishing healthy, safe environments to move the people in our churches toward becoming complete in Christ (Colossians 1:28) as we seek to live out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).

First, I have often said, "The number one job of a leader is to set the right tone." It is so important to keep a finger on the pulse of how things feel and how we are affecting the tone in the places we lead. The book, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, was very formative in my thinking about this. They write,

Quite simply, in any human group the leader has maximal power to sway everyone's emotions. If people's emotions are pushed toward the range of enthusiasm, performance can soar; If people are driven toward rancor and anxiety, they will be thrown off stride... When leaders drive emotions positively...they bring out everyone's best. We call this effect resonance. When they drive emotions negatively...leaders spawn dissonance, undermining the emotional foundations that let people shine.

Whether an organization withers or flourishes depends to a remarkable extent on the leaders' effectiveness in this primal emotional dimension.

Let's call this first component to establish healthy, safe churches Sincere Positivity. People can see right through insincerity. If we are going to be promoting resonance, we need to count our blessings, rejoice always (even when times are hard), pray without ceasing, and be in tune with our own emotions.

The second component to establish healthy, safe churches is Unified Theology. Ephesians 4:11-16 instructs us to invest our energy in developing "the unity of the faith" (v.13). To accomplish this, at a teaching and leadership level it is imperative that we promote a unified theology. If I am teaching that a person is eternally secure and can have assurance of their salvation (as free-grace theology articulates) and another leader is contradicting me, it affects people in the church in a negative way. They will feel unsure of what to believe or who to have an allegiance to as a teacher.

The third of the five components needed for a healthy, safe church is Consistent Camaraderie. The leaders of the church (elders, staff, ministry leaders) must support and protect each other. This culture starts with the senior or lead pastor. I use what I call the "Group / One-On-One" practice. I want to be consistent in meeting with the group (like our weekly staff meetings and our twice a month elder meetings), but I insist that I meet with each staff person and elder one-on-one. If time goes by and we haven't been meeting regularly, because people are gone on vacations or off to conferences, that feeling of being emotionally disconnected as leaders begins to happen. When we meet one-on-one it is to talk logistics or vision or strategy, but it is also to talk about how they are doing in their souls, in their families, and in their emotions. And I want them to check in on me as well. This intentionality to invest in consistent camaraderie builds a caring culture throughout the whole church.

The fourth component goes deeper, adding to the third. What we need for a healthy church is Humble Vulnerability. I have observed that in most churches the buzz words are authenticity and integrity. Those are so important, yet they don't go far enough. With authenticity and integrity we control how much we let others into our lives. We show others whatever we want them to see, but we hide what we don't want them to see. Humble vulnerability lets others control how much they get into our lives. Others are invited to tell us what they see in our life. Humble vulnerability asks others to hold up a "mirror" to show us our blind spots, our flaws, our ways in which they experience us. It's where we say to each other, "I trust you are helping me see things in me that I may not see, or I refuse to look at or talk about because you love me and want my best." To promote

What we need for a healthy church is humble vulnerability.



humble vulnerability, we must prayerfully build trust with each other. I think this is the kind of depth of love Jesus spoke about when He said the world would know we are disciples of his if we love one another (John 13:35).

The fifth and final component to promote security and health in our churches is Gentle Tenacity. It's having perseverance no matter what obstacles or challenges we may face. Given the concept of the church being a family (i.e., brothers and sisters in Christ), as a leader we must not walk away from people; especially when times are tough. Leaders need thick skin and a soft heart. That is why I added the word "gentle." It gets back to tone, and it reminds us that we are servants that are coming alongside others for each other's very best. The heart of a gentle servant is the heart of Jesus (cf. Matthew 11:29).

Staying in ministry is not for the faint-hearted. It is hard to lead and teach and shepherd. Yet, I echo the words of the apostle John when he was thinking about the people he had the privilege to help grow in their relationship with Jesus, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). What is better or more meaningful in all of life and eternity? I cannot think of anything.



Jeremy Vance is the senior pastor of Faith Church in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Pastor Jeremy received his B.A. in religion at Northwestern College in Iowa, and went on to earn his M.Div. from Phoenix Seminary. He previously served as president of the Free Grace Alliance.

SHORT-TAKES

Why is our security in Christ so important?

I spent many years, after believing in Jesus at age 12, questioning my salvation. I was not disciplined, and those who offered to help me grow in my faith focused on the things a Christian must do and not do. Daily disciplines that we would all agree are important, like prayer, Bible Study, church attendance, etc, were presented as "must do" to prove you are saved. My focus became trying to accomplish a long "to do" list which was impossible to complete to the standard of others. I walked away for a number of years, because I failed the "test." Finally, I discovered grace. I learned that I was eternally saved the moment I believed in Jesus. The Holy Spirit took up residence in me for the process of Sanctification, which will take the rest of my life to complete. But in the meantime, Jesus has assured me that no one can snatch me out of His hand. Amazing Grace!

Carmen Pate

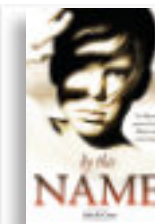
Author, speaker, and FGA Board Member

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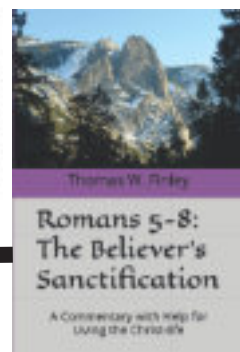
In each issue we feature books published by FGA member authors, friends of grace, and others that would be of interest to our community. The QR code is our affiliate link to the book on Amazon (help support FGA by using the link).

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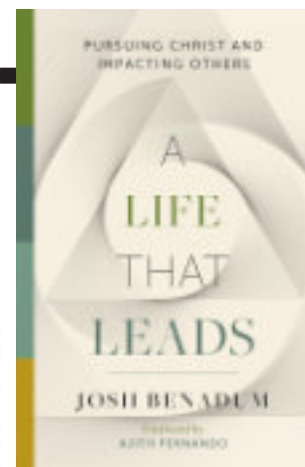


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A book that dismantles the myth that leadership is about credentials, and shows instead how it is rooted in Christlike character and a willingness to serve. \$9.99 Paperback & Kindle

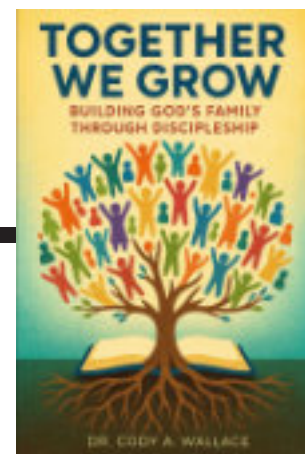


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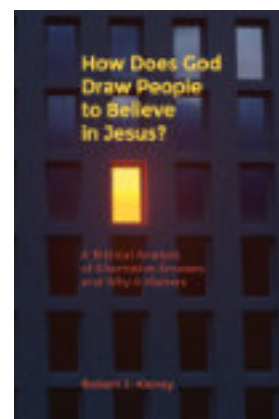
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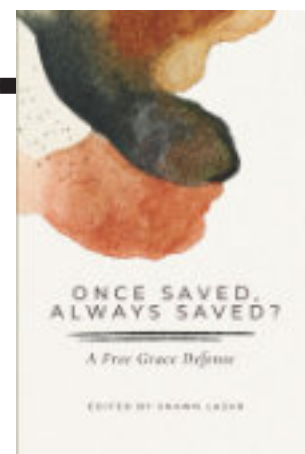
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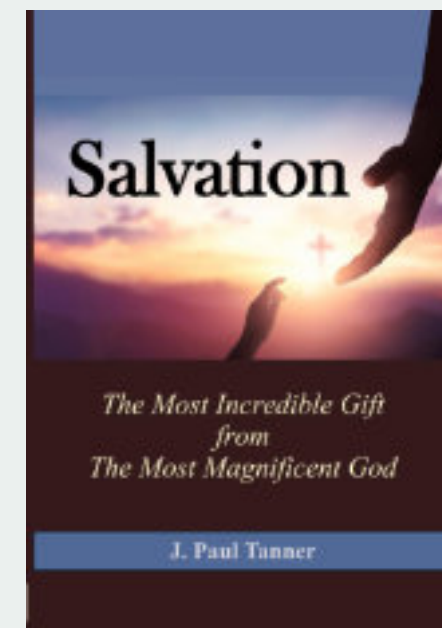
Although God's gift of salvation is free, there are a number of related issues that need clarification. How does Christ's death on a cross make salvation possible for us today? What exactly does it mean to believe? Do I also need to have works or live a good life? What is repentance? How does regeneration relate to justification? Is water baptism required? Are some people predestined to believe? Is salvation—once obtained—forever, or can it be lost? Does the Bible promise rewards for those Christians who live faithfully for Christ?

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Dr. J. Paul Tanner (Th.M., Dallas Seminary; Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin) is the Vice President and Academic Dean of the Arab Center for Biblical Studies. He has taught five seminaries around the world, including serving as a professor of Hebrew and Old Testament studies at the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary. Dr. Tanner is also the author of the full-length commentary on the book of Daniel for the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary series.

Flip the Switch

By Carri Mikkelsen

Many of us are familiar with home security systems. These systems are designed to alarm us when someone is breaking in to steal from us. This invasion is from an intruder, a burglar, a thief—a sinner. But are we not all sinners? Do we not all fall short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23)?

Robbers

Believers who are “in Christ” possess the hope of glory, which is Christ within us (Col. 1:27). Consequently, we are “in Christ,” and Christ is within us. God has also bestowed upon us a new identity— “saint.” Nevertheless, we still live with our sinful nature, eagerly anticipating the “redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23) or our ultimate glorification with Christ when we will “be like Him” (1 John 3:2). We are adopted children of God (Rom. 8:15), yet we still choose to sin at times. When we are honest, we can acknowledge our sin without resorting to self-justification (1 John 1:8). By running away from God and living independently of Him, we rob ourselves of the joy and peace that come from His presence.

Thieving Paths

There are two sin paths we inevitably choose: seeking worldly pleasures and distractions, or embracing a self-righteous life, convinced of our own goodness. Both paths lead us away from God. The first path substitutes genuine joy with fleeting earthly happiness, displayed in vices like drugs, sex, alcohol, and excessive partying. The second path replaces true peace with the pursuit of self-righteousness, believing we are good or can attain goodness.

the prodigal child. The Prodigal Son embodies the first path of reckless living, squandering his inheritance on worldly pleasures. When life’s trials struck, he found himself destitute, with no money left to sustain himself (Luke 15:11-14). The answer to his predicament was to run back to his father, who embraced him with open arms.

the school of law. Paul’s experience in Romans 7 illustrates the human struggle to achieve righteousness by following the law or a set of rules. The Law was never attainable as seen through the nation of Israel’s example. The purpose of the Law was to show that we cannot obtain righteousness apart from God. Paul found the answer to his quandary over sin. He says,

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24-25). Paul’s plea for deliverance is found in Christ Jesus. He placed his faith in Jesus to enable him to overcome sin.

Loving Correction

At times, we mistakenly believe that God has set an alarm and that when we sin, He no longer sees us as children but as intruders. We may imagine the alarm sounding and God shouting, “Stop thief! Sinner! You will be punished!” However, this is not who God is. He is a loving Father who does not disown or punish His children. Instead, He Himself paid for our sin, gave us a new identity, bestowed His righteousness upon us, and lovingly disciplines us. In our culture today, we interchange the words punishment and discipline, but there is a distinction:

punishment. Both “punitive” and “punishment” come from the Latin root word punire, “to inflict a penalty on.” When thinking of punishment, it is not always corrective but more of a consequence of payment. Contrary to popular belief, God does not inflict punishment on humanity. He sent Jesus into the world to take our punishment. He took our place. He became our substitute. Isaiah proclaims, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Peter echoes this sentiment stating, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus willingly took upon Himself our sins, and those who believe in Him as the Savior of their soul are healed and no longer under God’s wrath. Jesus’ punishment served as our atonement.

discipline. On the other hand, the Latin root word for

At times, we mistakenly believe that God has set an alarm and that when we sin, He no longer sees us as children but as intruders.

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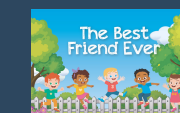
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“discipline” is disciplina “instruction, learning, knowledge, or training.” Think “disciple”. Think Hebrews 12, where the author tells us that God disciplines out of love for us, that we might “share in His holiness” and “yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:10-11).

Ask yourself: Do I punish my children to make them pay for an offense or do I lovingly train them to live rightly?

False Security

In the classic Christmas film Home Alone, the young boy of eight creates the illusion of a big Christmas party inside his house by playing loud music and creating human silhouettes out of mannequins and cardboard cutouts to deter the burglars from coming inside. In our homes, we also can create a false sense of security by using a gambit of behavior-controlling devices. The following devices may give the outward look of home security and behavioral perfection but do not address the inner workings of the heart.

guilt. A form of emotional manipulation used to control a child’s behavior by making them feel bad about their actions.

shame. Emotional manipulation used to make a child feel embarrassed, humiliated, or unworthy due to the child’s mistakes or poor behavior.

withdrawal. A parent’s use of withholding love and affection from a child to manipulate a child’s behavior or punish bad behavior.

Ask yourself: Do I use behavior-controlling devices to create an outward look of peace in the home, or do I address my child’s heart to produce the peaceful fruit of righteous living?

Flip the Switch

So, some may set their home security alarm systems to be alerted of sin or to create false security, but what if instead we choose to create a secure home by flipping the switch and keeping the porch light on? Since we all fall into sin, a secure home creates a safe place for failure where children are allowed to fail and then learn and grow from these failings without guilt and shame. A secure home keeps the porch light on, welcoming admitted failings and freely giving love.

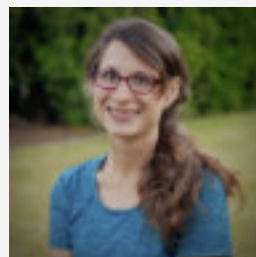
Security Truths for Our Children

debt fully paid. Jesus paid the debt of sin, guilt, and shame. You no longer need to constantly feel the weight of your failings and mistakes if you believe in Jesus. Confess your sins and thank God for His provision of righteousness. He welcomes His children to come back home.

new identity + Christ’s righteousness. When you believed in Jesus’ death as a means of forgiveness and freedom from sin, and in His resurrected life as a promise of eternal life, God bestowed upon you a new identity, “Saint.” Through Christ’s righteousness, He sees you. You are fully accepted by God.

correction. Just as God loves and corrects you, parents correct and train you. You don’t need to pay for your mistakes and failures, because Jesus paid for it all. However, sometimes discipline is necessary to help you learn and grow.

sin. We all sin, but Jesus died that we might be free from the penalty and power of sin, and one day we have the promise that we will be free from the very presence of sin in our lives. You will have a new, perfected, and immortal body.



Carri Mikkelsen is a graduate of Ethnos360 Bible Institute (1999), and received a B.S. in Anthropology at Oregon State University (2007) and Masters in Biblical Counseling from Calvary University (2022). She counsels, shepherds, disciples, and writes.

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that neither death nor
life, neither angels nor
demons, neither the
present nor the future,
nor any powers,
neither height nor
depth, nor anything
else in all creation, will
be able to separate us
from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus
our Lord.”

Romans 8:38-39



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Assurance for the Animist and Ambassador Alike

By Dan Falls

As he reached for the stone, he could almost hear the voices of his parents in his head. Why did he always have to do his own thing and defy the spirit world? They had hammered it into his mind that what we say and do, and even how we say and do those things, will bring either good or evil into our lives. He knew perfectly well that throwing the rock into the stream could anger the spirits, but he did it anyway. After all, who doesn't like to throw rocks into water? He found the 'kerplunk' oddly satisfying and continued his hike through the mountainous terrain. Within days he was gravely ill. His parents pleaded with him as to why he had angered the spirits so? Why did he always have to do things his own way? Fortunately, they had a plan. They sacrificed a chicken and offered it to him to eat. Lo and behold, he improved almost immediately. His works had appeased the spirit world and further confirmed his belief that our lives are at the mercy of the supernatural. For much of the world, this is just how life is. There is extraordinarily little security at any level, in any area of life. The only assurance that billions of people have is based on their ability to say and do the right things, at the right time, and in the right way. These people have no rest, no security, and absolutely no assurance apart from their own ability to impress and appease. Under a veneer of religion, animists around the world can't count on anything in life; they live at the mercy of a world that they cannot see.

Fortunately, soon after these events, the man in this story met an outsider who moved into his village. Within a few years the outsider learned his language and culture and began sharing the story of the creator who made a perfect world and filled it with life. The story which clearly described mankind's disobedience and resulting death also repeatedly showed that man is unable to save himself. This Creator could not be bought, impressed, or manipulated! In order to pay the penalty of the sins of all mankind, He sent His Son Jesus to die. The greatest words of rest and peace to the animistic mind are "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life" (John 5:24, NLT). God's Word offers assurance that is no longer inextricably linked to man's ability to do the right things or say the right words. What a gift!

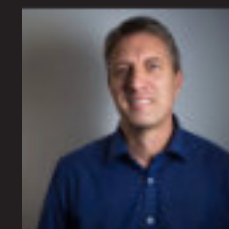
God gave the privilege to me and my wife to live with a people group much like the one described above. As outsiders we too began the arduous process of learning language and culture. Every six months a team of consultants flew into our village. They served us by helping us identify where we were doing well and where we needed to improve. Considering the myriad of areas of ministry where we needed help, it threw me off balance when during their first visit with us in the

village, they wanted to spend a few days considering our clarity in the Gospel. Why start there? We had trained for years for this ministry. We had been through bible college, and yet there we were discussing the Gospel. In the decades since, we have been serving the unreached language groups on earth through those who seek to take the Message of Life to them. I am fully convinced that apart from a clear gospel and the recognition that assurance of salvation comes only from the Word of God, the health and growth of a believer and local church will suffer. If a child cannot rest, they cannot grow. Any believer who is looking to words, deeds, or accomplishments to find assurance will find their friendship with God strained and their heart unstable.

While this truth is important for every believer, it impacts the cross-cultural worker in unique ways. In embarking on the path of sharing the gospel with the unreached, we find conflicting realities. Some praise our desire to go to the ends of the earth. They admire the dedication of those willing to sacrifice. Yet all the while, like everyone else, we live out ministry with the nagging recognition that we are not the spiritual giant that people may think we are. Deep down we know that we are undeserving of the pedestal that some may place us on. At the same time, many are resistant to the idea of taking the Gospel to distant cultures. Nothing more than a continuation of old colonial ways. The mockery, the doubt and even small things like homesickness raise questions about whether what we are doing makes any sense. Added to this is the fact that friendship-building across languages and cultures confronts us daily with our own shortcomings. Whether we admit it or not, regardless of how skilled we are, cross-cultural relationships bring us face to face with failure at every turn. We realize the sad truth that just because we moved overseas and learned another language or two, we

remain the same sinner with the same struggles. The fruit inspector must come to terms with the fact that assurance cannot be found in serving God. Sadly, many just try harder. Everything that we have tried to derive some assurance, some acceptance from, is pulled out from under our feet. Gifted or not, there remains a tension deep down that exposes the fact that we are attempting to find security and assurance from things that are unstable to the core.

How can I know that God loves me and accepts me? How can I find assurance that I am saved, safe and secure, forever? There is one way and that is by considering and believing what God says to assure us. 1 John 5:13 says "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life" (NLT). The message that we share across languages and cultures must be true to God's Word. It will either provide assurance, or it will provide some hope with continued unrest. They say that "what is in the well comes up in the bucket." The assurance, or lack thereof, that the messenger has become convinced of will be reproduced in the hearts and minds of those who listen to their message. Only a clear and pure gospel of God's grace will offer freedom and assurance to those who are living a life of constant striving.



Dan Falls
Trainer with Ethnos360



WHO WE ARE

We are a missional community. We are a group of believers, churches, and ministries united by a covenant that affirms a clear and simple gospel message. We believe that our salvation, our mission, and our unity are found in the gospel of grace. We work to connect, encourage, and equip believers with the grace message so that we can all accomplish the mission given to all of us by the Lord Jesus Christ: to testify of the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24).

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Justification is the act of God to declare us righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ alone.

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Over the last few months, the Free Grace Alliance has been on the ground in Peru, the Philippines, and across the United States — meeting with pastors, connecting with church leaders, and teaching the gospel of God's grace. The work looks different everywhere we go, but the message doesn't change: our security is in the finished work of Christ, not in ourselves.

In Peru, we partnered with missionaries already in-country to teach and build connections across a growing network of grace-aligned churches. The doors that opened were strategic — and the hunger for clear teaching on grace among Latin American leaders was obvious.

In the Philippines, the response blew us away. Two conferences in two weeks. Nearly 150 pastors and ministry leaders. And here's what's exciting — Filipino believers aren't just learning, they're organizing. They're forming their own Free Grace groups, developing national leadership, and asking how they can partner

with us. There's a growing demand for Tagalog-language resources, and the pool of qualified national leaders is growing.

Here's what the global church keeps proving: the message of grace isn't an American export. It resonates in Manila and Lima for the same reason it resonates here — because it's anchored in the promise of Christ, that whosoever believes has everlasting life. That's as true in Tagalog as it is in English.

This fall's Grace Around the World conference is built to celebrate what God is doing — and to plan for what's next. We would love for you to join us. And here's my challenge: if this Christ-centered message of grace matters to you, invest in it. Partner with FGA.

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Editors: Jeremy & Carri Mikkelsen

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