

Critique

Helping Christians Develop Skill in Discernment

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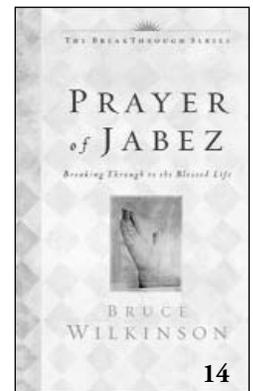
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Editor's Note



I received a precious email from the Swiss branch of L'Abri earlier this week. It seems that giving last month had been insufficient to meet the branch's budget. So the Workers set aside the week to pray, asking folk to sign up to pray at various times

throughout each day, and setting aside one day as a day for prayer and fasting. God was gracious, providing what was needed so that the week that began with a deficit ended up with bills and salaries paid in full. One of the Worker's children, on hearing how things turned out said that it was just like with Mrs. Schaeffer, meaning that God had supplied in answer to prayer just as he had in the early days of L'Abri. And so he had, and there was reason for praise. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good," they quoted in the email, "His mercy endures forever."

The email caught my attention for two reasons. I have great affection for L'Abri and pray for it regularly, and so was pleased to hear how God had answered our prayers. And since Ransom's finances have also been tight, the topic was much on my mind.

When we began Ransom, we determined that we would not engage in fund raising. In this we had been influenced by Dr. and Mrs. Schaeffer, wanting Ransom, as L'Abri has been, to be a quiet demonstration of the grace and existence of God. We would inform friends and supporters of Ransom's financial needs, but we would not ask for pledges nor hold PR events. Not because we think fund raising is somehow wrong, but because we believe that part of our calling is to trust God to meet Ransom's need through the generosity of his people, in answer to prayer. And since we began in 1982, God has been gracious and God's

people have been generous.

Still, the temptation to reduce grace to a formula seems almost irresistible. After all, grace is unpredictable, while formulas are easily managed. Besides, if modern science has taught us anything, it has hammered home the truth that life is a matter of cause and effect. Do this, and that happens. Do that, and something else happens. So, if you want this but not that, you know what to do, right?

And so I must confess I found myself reading the email from L'Abri and thinking, "That's what we didn't do: a day of prayer and fasting." As if we did that and voila—donations would flow in like so much manna underfoot.

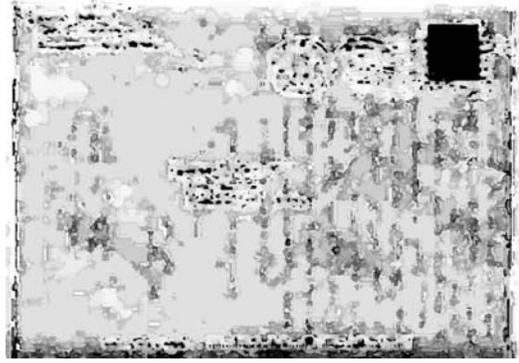
Of course a day of prayer and fasting may be wise, but not because it "works," like a coin in a candy machine magically producing a Snicker. It is grace that met L'Abri's need, and only grace can meet ours. We must seek to be faithful, but there is no formula, and the temptation to produce one must be resisted. The same is true in every other part of life: child rearing, achieving success in our work, witnessing, or whatever. We are called to walk by faith, not by formulas—and God's grace will never fit into our clever boxes. And when grace meets our need, the proper response is thankfulness, not an attempt to analyze what we did to merit it.

Truth be told, I prefer to be in charge rather than having to trust, to be in control rather than to walk by faith.

So, as we end another year of publishing *Critique*, we ask you to pray that we will be content to walk by faith. That we will resist the temptation to reduce grace to a formula. That God will meet Ransom's financial needs if he is pleased to have us continue. That either way we will be thankful. And that with you, we will delight in the assurance that our lack of control in this sad world is the perfect opportunity for the King to work in and through us, to his glory alone. ■

~Denis Haack

Dialogue



Loving non-Christians and abstinence education.

You are invited to take part in *Critique's* Dialogue. Address all correspondence to:

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or e-mail:
marsena@itis.com

Unfortunately, we are unable to respond personally to all correspondence received, but each one is greatly appreciated. We reserve the right to edit letters for length.

Thanks for your insights and efforts to present the Gospel of Christ in a refreshing way. I've enjoyed reading the articles and thoughts of fellow believers on their journey of faith. I thank Denis and Margie for their efforts to be honest and open as they discuss and discern the different happenings in our culture. I attended their "Bridging the Gap" conference at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis a couple weeks ago. Thanks, too, for not being afraid to encourage us to know something of the pop culture around us. It DOES make a difference in talking with those around me who do not attend church. We truly are living in Babylon, but we also, as the church, have dropped the ball big time in reaching those who are really searching for answers to spiritual questions, who have been crushed and who are badly hurting and wanting the church to love them for who they are, not what they can contribute.

Please continue to confront those issues and talk about those things that not a lot of other Christians seem willing or courageous enough to focus on. It gives me great hope and encouragement to read through *Critique* and know that I'm not alone in desiring to love people well by approaching them with open arms and a willing spirit to understand them FIRST, before I even mention anything of Jesus or my faith in Him.

Chris Watson
St. Louis, MO

An exchange:

Dear John,
Your provocative piece pointing out the flaws in abstinence education ["Scaring the Sex Out of You" #8-2001, pp. 4-5] might have raised some questions that are worth considering. Three come to mind. First, proponents of such courses often argue that research indicates the programs work. More specifical-

ly, I have heard the claim that teen pregnancy rates are lower in school districts that feature abstinence as part of the curriculum. What is the data, and what, if anything, does it suggest? Second, proponents argue that abstinence education should be seen as an effort by Christians to speak the truth in the public square without being sectarian. That they are arguing for chastity in terms that can be understood and accepted by their non-Christian audience, not in a way appropriate for a Sunday school class, where a more complete explanation could be given. What's wrong with giving part of the truth if our audience is not open to all the truth? And third, related to that, where does common grace or natural law fit into your analysis? Obviously, some non-Christians are virtuous and grow in virtue, becoming more patient, perhaps, or loving their enemies, even at cost. Could not some choose chastity, having heard the (incomplete) arguments against promiscuity taught in an abstinence program?

Denis Haack

Dear Denis,
You question my critique of abstinence education with three counter claims: it works; it communicates; it's truthful—as far as it goes. Your first question is the pragmatic critique: abstinence education gets results, so it should be used. This argument has immediate appeal to Americans, as our culture is heavily influenced by this kind of common sense pragmatism (see John Patrick Diggins' *The Promise of Pragmatism*). The problem with pragmatism is it fails to deal with the question of truth. In a broken world, merely to rely on what works rather than what ought to be is to accept some measure of brokenness as the standard. Abstinence education merely deals

continued on page 16

Christianity, Intolerance,

A few years ago Elizabeth Kristol did a brilliant little piece on tolerance in a pluralistic society. It was a disarming critique of the multiculturalism that has captured so many otherwise bright minds in America. She wrote,

...differences among people persist... It is a peculiar quirk of life that the fundamental similarities that exist among individuals say the least about us. We derive our sense of identity and pride not from putting on our pants one leg at a time but from our lifelong investments in particular worldviews, philosophies, and beliefs—and these are the qualities we hope others will respect and tolerate... True tolerance means looking differences squarely in the eye and admitting the appalling fact that when other people seem to differ from us, this is because they actually believe their view of the world to be true.

I think about Kristol's essay often, especially when I hear the charge leveled at Christians—and it seems increasingly to be leveled—that their religion is, by definition, divisive and intolerant, disturbing of the civil peace and prone to breed hatred. I do not say that Christians have done nothing to invite the charge, nor that it's a peculiarly modern one. The great American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his 1863 poem, "The Birds of Killingworth," caricatured, in the figure of a minister, intolerant Christians: sour to life, to love, and, generally, to other living things. As the poem ends, the unhappy preacher, "the instinct of whose nature was to kill," is walking down a country road lopping off bright flowers with his cane!

But it isn't just the malicious fringe that gets written off (as it should). In our time even orthodox Christians trying to be thoughtful and winsome seem to come in for it. The logic is, "He who disagrees must also despise." For instance, in the public discussion of hot issues like abortion and same-sex romance, merely to express the traditional Christian conviction that these things are morally wrong and socially destructive is, all too often, to find oneself called a hater and a loveless person. But I should like to leave these two nettles for another time, and tell a story that illustrates the power

The charge is often leveled at Christians that their religion is divisive and intolerant, and prone to breed hatred.

Christianity has to soften hatred rather than spawn it.

This is a true story about Pearl Harbor, timely in this 60th anniversary of the World War II bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by the Japanese on December 7, 1941.

2,403 American men and women died in the surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, and some 1,100 were wounded. 353 planes (in two waves) left the decks of six Japanese aircraft carriers in the pre-dawn hours of that Sunday morning, led by one flying ace, Lieutenant Commander Mitsuo Fuchida (he's represented by name in Bay's movie). Fuchida hated Americans. While looking down from his plane on the black smoke billowing from the listing battleships around 8 a.m. that morning, he realized that the attack was a success, and later recalled that at that moment "my heart was almost ablaze

with joy." At home, Fuchida became a national hero.

But Japan lost the war and when it was over, the Allies disbanded the Japanese army and navy and so Fuchida went into farming. He was called to testify at the war crimes trials that eventually took place in Tokyo, but thought it all so much hypocrisy: surely the Americans had committed atrocities upon their prisoners of war, too. In search of evidence to document this double standard, Fuchida ran into an old navy buddy who had been interned as a POW in the United States. Fuchida's friend reported rough

treatment but no atrocities; and he told of the strange kindness of an American teenager, Peggy Colby, who helped at the prison camp as a volunteer social worker. She served the Japanese prisoners with tireless

energy and graciousness. After three weeks of this, one of the prisoners finally asked her, "Why are you so kind to us?" She answered, "Because Japanese soldiers killed my parents." Her parents, Christian missionaries to Japan, had been beheaded by Japanese in the Philippines. At first, their 18 year old daughter was eaten up with hatred. But convinced that her parents had forgiven their captors before they died, Peggy could not keep feeding her hatred and eventually volunteered to serve the needs of Japanese prisoners of war.

When Fuchida heard this story he was dumbfounded. It made no sense to him, this forgiveness idea, because in his moral framework, as Fuchida later explained it, revenge was a virtue: it was proof of your loyalty to the offended party whose honor you had a duty to vindicate. Fuchida pondered where this great power to love might come from.

and Pearl Harbor

Then one day in October 1948, Fuchida took a pamphlet from an American handing them out on a street in Tokyo. It was the story of an American sergeant, Jacob DeShazer, one of the bombardiers in the famous Doolittle Raid, the daring attempt to bomb important military sites in Tokyo on April 18, 1942.

After hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor, DeShazer's hatred for the Japanese became white hot, and so he jumped at the opportunity to volunteer for a secret mission. But after completing the successful raid on Tokyo under Colonel Jimmy Doolittle, DeShazer and his crew had to bail out in occupied China. Captured and tortured by the Japanese, he spent more than three years in a POW camp, most of it in solitary confinement. There his hatred for the Japanese festered and grew.

But eventually DeShazer started thinking about why there was so much hatred in the world, and he found growing within himself a longing to read the Bible. One had been circulating among the prisoners and finally, in May 1944, a guard brought it to him. He could keep it for only three weeks, so he read and read. He was moved by the Bible's teaching about guilt and grace, and by the New Testament's insistence that the man, Jesus, was the very incarnation of God and the one true source of forgiveness and love. On June 8th, 1944, in the prison camp, DeShazer became a Christian. His hatred began to melt. He promised God that after the war he would return to Japan to share with his "enemies" the soul liberation and peace he had found.

All this Fuchida read in the pamphlet with deep interest. Here it was again, the Peggy Colby syndrome, the power to transform hatred into love, and Fuchida was drawn to it. And here it was, not in someone who could be written off as "soft" and naïve but in a hard-bitten soldier.

Fascinated by the moral turnabout of these two people, Fuchida bought a Japanese Bible and when he began to read it, it drew him into much meditation and thought. In September, 1949, he came to Luke 23, and for the first time in his life read the account of Jesus' crucifixion and his prayer to God on behalf of those who were murdering him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That cinched it for Fuchida; he had traced the power that changed Peggy Colby and Jake DeShazer back to its root, and he became convinced that it was all true. That day the lead Japanese pilot at Pearl Harbor prayed and gave his life to Jesus Christ. DeShazer was with him, as a friend and brother, the day he was baptized.

In certain quarters of Japan, Fuchida's conversion to Christianity aroused contempt, while in certain quarters here in the States it

Whoever knows Christ truly knows his supreme command is to love—not always to agree but always to love.

aroused either disgust or suspicion. Some of his countrymen accused him of selling out to the enemy, while some in this country continued to hate him for his role at Pearl Harbor or doubted the sincerity of his conversion. But Fuchida's conversion was real. He began to travel throughout Japan sharing his newfound faith. In 1952 he turned down the position of chief of staff in the new Japanese air force and in 1957 declined the honored position of Minister of Defense. For twenty-five years Fuchida crisscrossed Japan as well as the United States preaching Christ as the one hope for our fear-filled, violence-prone world. On his many speaking trips to America he was well-received and shown respect by top U.S. military officials. Fuchida was invited to Pearl Harbor in December 1966, for the observance of the 25th anniversary

of the attack. He visited the war memorial erected over the sunken USS Arizona where 900 American sailors still lie entombed. It was a sober moment for Fuchida; there he knelt and prayed to the God of Abraham. Four years later he wrote,

I would give anything to retract my actions of twenty-nine years ago at Pearl Harbor, but it is impossible. Instead, I now work at striking the death-blow to the basic hatred which infests the human heart and causes such tragedies. And that hatred cannot be uprooted without assistance from Jesus Christ.

Mitsuo Fuchida died of diabetes in Japan on May 30, 1976. He was 73 years old. The story of his changed life is worth knowing; and it's worth contemplating the next time you hear someone say that Christianity breeds hatred and intolerance in people—or the next time you see a professing Christian whacking off flowers with a stick, or carrying a sign that says, "God Hates Fags." Whoever knows Christ truly knows his supreme command is to love—not always to agree but always to love. ■

~Ron Lutjens

Reverend Ronald Lutjens is pastor of Old Orchard Presbyterian Church, Webster Grove, MO. Copyright © 2001 by Ron Lutjens.

Source:

1. *God's Samurai: Lead Pilot at Pearl Harbor* by Gordon Prange (Brassey's Publishing Company, 1990).

Learning to Love

I knew instantly that I had to read *Love Walked Among Us: Learning to Love Like Jesus*, by Paul E. Miller. “Learning to love like Jesus,” has become a painful thematic in my life. Painful, in that there have been many personal crises that have demonstrated how much I need to learn on this topic. Perhaps it is common that Type-A personalities spend much of their later years learning to shift their focus from projects to people, from giving orders to showing compassion. It’s a slow and halting process.

Growing up as I did within the Reformed faith, spirituality was too often measured by how much one knew. Catechisms, confessions of faith, and systematic theology were the measure of a man. Only later did I come to realize that the biblical bottom-line of spiritual maturity is always measured in relational terms. “Who ever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21). Correct doctrine, deep encounters with the Holy Spirit, faithful practice of the spiritual disciplines lead to one end: learning to love like Jesus. “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

Paul Miller, Director of seeJesus.net, is a frequent speaker at conferences and leads seminars on how to lead evangelistic Bible studies with friends and neighbors. His book examines how Jesus treated people he encountered. What unfolds is an embodied portrait of love in action. Passage after passage of the Gospels is gently opened up with masterful inductive analysis. Well-known stories about Jesus take on a fresh relational dynamic as Miller explains through Jesus’ eyes, emotions, and actions what it means to love someone. Jesus’ love becomes a tactile reality.

I am the headmaster of a school. The job is both highly political and relational. Daily interactions involve Board members, faculty, parents, and students.

Recently, I saw a parent in my office concerned about the excessive homework load. I addressed the problem with managerial efficiency, but failed to empathize with the trauma being felt by the family of the child burdened by homework. I looked past the person to the problem.

Not so Jesus. “Jesus looks at people.” “Love begins,” Miller explains, “with looking.” In analyzing the parable of the Good Samaritan, he writes, “The Samaritan sees a person. The priest and the Levite see a problem. They are too distracted, preoccupied, or agenda-driven to identify with him.” It’s true. We look away when the urban beggar walks past

Learning to love like Jesus has become a painful thematic in my life.

our car stopped at the traffic light. “We might have to pay if we look too closely and care too deeply.” Have you ever associated love with looking?

This book is not a Leo Buscaglia recipe for relational bliss or a Deborah Tannen checklist for effective communication. “Jesus’ life doesn’t give us a love formula,” Miller writes. “Religion and pop psychology often reduce love to specific behaviors, thus simplifying love so we don’t have to work at it. We like clarity. ‘Just tell me what to do.’ But Jesus deals with people as they are.” Miller paints a portrait of love illustrating how we are to treat our spouses, neighbors and enemies. Wisdom runs deep on every page.

“Love is not efficient...Look, feel, and then help...We don’t need to figure out what’s wrong with people, that’s God’s job. Our job is to try to understand...The better we think we are, the

less we can love...Compassion begins by looking at the other person. Reconciliation begins by looking at yourself.”

I finished this book very sobered. It has been a stated goal of mine to have engraved on my tombstone: HE FINALLY LEARNED TO LOVE. After getting a sense of how Jesus embodied love, I thought it might be more realistic to engrave the words: GOOD TRY. BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME. For here is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, emotionally drained and physically tired, and as he faces the betrayal by his friend, Judas, his arrest by the soldiers, Peter’s assault on the servant’s ear, Jesus performs what Miller calls a “ballet of love—protecting, defending, touching, healing, rebuking—one move rapidly following the other, while those around him are pretending, running, striking, betraying, and murdering.” It is truly a staggering display of love under pressure.

While this book will make one aware of how little we love like Jesus, it will not leave you feeling helpless. For God never commands what he does not also enable. For in the power of Jesus’ indwelling, we can learn to “walk as Jesus did.” ■

—John Seel

Copyright © 2001 by David John Seel, Jr., Ph.D. *David John Seel, Jr., Ph.D. is the Headmaster of Logos Academy, a Christ-centered classical college preparatory school in Dallas, Texas. He is a frequent speaker on contemporary culture and parenting. He is the author of Parenting Without Perfection: Being a Kingdom Influence in a Toxic World.*

Book reviewed:

Love Walked Among Us: Learning to Love Like Jesus by Paul E. Miller (CO Springs: NavPress; 2001).

Human Finitude

An excerpt from *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*.

My first objective in every class I teach is to help my students develop an appreciation for human finitude, for limits, for the ambiguity of the human situation—even for the inevitability of death. I grant you, it is difficult to communicate this perspective to eighteen- and twenty-year-old students, but in my view, this is the starting point both for the Christian faith and for any meaningful academic exploration. After all, if we are to hear the gospel, we must confess our finitude, our limitations, our shortcomings. And if we are to be serious scholars, we must confess that our understandings are inevitably flawed and incomplete. Indeed, we must confess that we could be wrong. If we begin at this point, with an affirmation of our common finitude, we then refuse to juxtapose Christian faith and the life of the mind as if they were diametrically opposite endeavors. Instead, we begin with the one conviction that Christian faith and serious academic exploration share in common: an affirmation of our limitations as human beings.

Some twenty-five years ago, Gerald Turner, who now serves as president of Southern Methodist University, was one of my colleagues on the faculty of Pepperdine University. One day Gerald said to me, “Hughes, it’s obvious to me that you have one objective in all your classes.” “What’s that?” I asked. Gerald looked me straight in the eye and said, half facetiously but also, I thought, half seriously, “You want to convince your students that they’re going to die.” I’ve thought about that comment many times over the years, and I’ve concluded that in many ways, Gerald was right. At the very least, I want my students to be acutely aware of their own limitations—and of *my* limitations. In that way, we know—I and they—

that we have much to learn, and we can begin our journey together.

Helping students come to terms with their finitude, however, is hardly a one-time affair. As human beings, we tend to forget our finitude, to lose sight of our frailties and our limitations in a sea of pretensions that we are something we are not. I remember well a conversation I once had with a UCLA student as we flew five miles above earth, each of us heading for destinations somewhere in Southern California. She asked me what I

At some point, most of us dry our tears and join the building committee and forget to repent because we want to deny our limits.

did for a living, and I told her I taught religion at Pepperdine. She followed with a series of very perceptive questions. She wanted to know about my presuppositions. I told her that I was convinced of my own limits and that it was important to me to share that perspective with my students. She squared her jaw and said in almost defiant tones, “I don’t like limits.” Of course, no one does. But to say we don’t like limits is to say that we don’t like being human.

This is why I have found so compelling a short story by Garrison Keillor that he calls simply, “Exiles.” There, Keillor tells about Larry Sorenson

who was saved twelve times in the Lutheran church, an all-time record. Between 1953 and 1961, he threw himself weeping and contrite on God’s throne of grace on twelve separate occa-

sions—and this in a Lutheran church that wasn’t evangelical... This is the Lutheran church, not a bunch of hillbillies—these are Scandinavians, and they repent in the same way that they sin: discreetly, tastefully, at the proper time, and bring a Jell-O salad for afterward. Larry Sorenson came forward weeping buckets and crumpled up at the communion rail, to the amazement of the minister, who had delivered a dry sermon about stewardship, and who now had to put his arm around this limp, soggy individual and pray with him and see if he had a ride home. *Twelve times...* Granted, we’re born in original sin and are worthless and vile, but twelve conversions is too many. God didn’t mean us to feel guilty all our lives. There comes a point when you should dry your tears and join the building committee and start grappling with the problems of the church furnace and the church roof and make church coffee and be of use, but Larry kept on repenting and repenting.

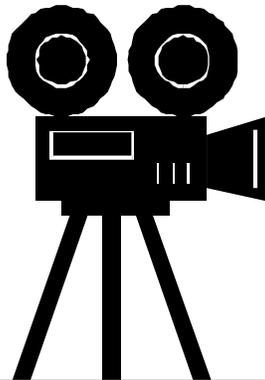
At some point in our lives, most of us dry our tears and join the building committee and forget to repent because we want to deny our limits. This is why, if we intend for our teaching to be rooted in a Christian frame of reference, we must remind ourselves and our students over and over again of the ambiguity of the human situation. ■

~Richard T. Hughes

Richard T. Hughes is Distinguished Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University. Copyright © 2001 by Richard T. Hughes

Source: *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* by Richard T. Hughes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

Death, Thou Shalt Die



A review of *Wit*

by Denis D. Haack

Vivian Bearing (played by Emma Thompson) is an English professor, a scholar specializing in the work of John Donne, the great 17th century preacher and poet. Dr. Bearing is in her forties, at the peak of her career, and as the film opens, is being told by her physician, Dr. Kelekian (Christopher Lloyd) that she has advanced ovarian cancer. Though there is little hope for recovery, he recommends an experimental treatment, eight grueling rounds of chemotherapy which, he assures her, will make a “significant contribution” to medical knowledge. She must be strong, he insists, since the side effects will be devastating. Strength of will in the pursuit of knowledge has been her life, Vivian assures him.

Based on the Pulitzer winning play by Margaret Edson, the screenplay for *Wit* (an HBO film, now on video) was written by Emma Thompson and Mike Nichols, who also directed it. Nichols has directed a number of strong films, including *Primary Colors* (1998), *Postcards from the Edge* (1990), and *The Graduate* (1967). Thompson is one of the most accomplished actresses at work today, perhaps best loved for her performance as Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), for which she also wrote the screenplay.

Though set in a hospital room, *Wit* is not primarily about medicine. Nor should it be seen as a commentary on the medical profession, though Dr. Kelekian and the resident overseeing her care, Jason, are depicted in sharply negative terms. Far

more interested in her cancer than in her, they exhibit a cold professionalism which is devoid of human compassion. Vivian’s treatment at their hands, however, is intended not as a criticism of medical professionals, but as a foil to force her to examine her own life, and the way she has treated her own students as a professor. Now, from her hospital bed, all she can do is remember and regret.

Wit is an intimate film, drawing us into conversation with Vivian. Much of the dialogue is addressed to us, as she looks directly into the camera—and thus, at us. She reflects on her life and suffering, and impending death, on a poem by John Donne, and so on things that matter most.

The work by Donne heard repeatedly throughout the film is “Holy Sonnet X,” one of his best loved and most profoundly Christian poems.

*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For, those whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor canst thou kill me...*

Vivian meditates on this poem, even on the punctuation. (Edson titled her stage play *W;t*—with a semicolon replacing the vowel—but you’ll have to see the film to find out why.) We listen as she seeks to understand how eternal life, not death, might be the final reality.

*One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.*

Grace enters Vivian’s life via two warm and caring women. The first is Susie (Audra McDonald), the nurse who cares

Film Credits

Starring:

Emma Thompson
(Vivian Bearing)
Christopher Lloyd
(Dr. Kelekian)
Eileen Atkins
(E.M. Ashford)
Audra McDonald
(Susie Monahan)
Jonathan M. Woodward
(Jason Posner)

Director:

Mike Nichols

Screenwriters:

Margaret Edson
Emma Thompson
Mike Nichols

Producers:

Cary Brokaw
Michael Haley
and others

Music:

Henryk Gorecki
Arvo Pärt
Shostakovich
Charles Ives

Cinematographer:

Seamus McGarvey

Costumes:

Ann Roth

99 minutes
Rated PG-13 for
some thematic
material.

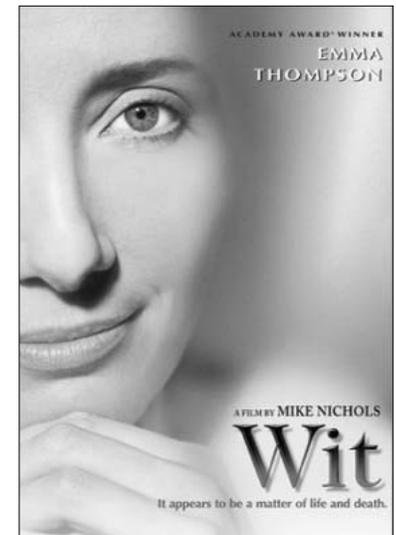
for her tenderly day by day, seeing her for who she is, a human being to be treated with dignity. The other is Vivian's former professor, E. M. Ashford (Eileen Atkins), who understands Donne's poem not just as literature, but as a truthful exposition of reality. As Vivian is dying, alone and in pain, Ashford stops by the hospital to visit her. Taking Vivian into her arms, she reads to her the children's book, *The Runaway Bunny*. "Look at that," she says gently. "A little allegory of the soul. No matter where it hides, God will find it. See, Vivian?"

"It's a very religious play," Edson says of her work. Funny and poignant, *Wit* draws to a stunning conclusion which I will not reveal here. There is brief nudity in the film, but appropriate to the medical setting, and is not erotic but sad.

"In the Holy Sonnets," we hear Dr. Bearing say, "Donne applied his capacious, agile wit to the larger aspect of the human experience: life, death and God. In his poems, metaphysical quandaries are addressed, but never resolved. Ingenuity, virtuosity, and a vigorous intellect that jousts with the most exalted concepts: these are the tools of wit." Tools which have sustained her throughout her distinguished but short career, but which turn out, in the end, to be insufficient in the face of death. ■

~Denis Haack

"Ingenuity, virtuosity, and a vigorous intellect that jousts with the most exalted concepts: these are the tools of wit."



For further reading:

"John Donne Meets The Runaway Bunny" a review of the stage play and interview with author Margaret Edson by Betty Carter in *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (September/October 1999) pp. 24-26 (www.booksandculture.com).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? What weaknesses in technique did you notice?
3. What is the message(s) of the film? What questions (or answers) does it raise concerning a) the nature of reality or what is really real; b) what's wrong with the world, and what's the solution; c) the significance of relationships and love; d) the significance and meaning of being human; e) the meaning of life and suffering; and f) what happens at death?
4. What is attractive? How is it made attractive? Where do you agree? Disagree? Why? In the areas in which we might disagree, how can we talk about and demonstrate the truth in a winsome and creative way in our pluralistic culture?
5. Most stories actually are improvisations on a few basic motifs or story-lines common to literature. What other films come to mind as you reflect on this movie? What novels or short stories? What Scriptures?
6. Discuss the use of John Donne's poem, "Death, be not proud," and *The Runaway Bunny* in the film. Find a copy of the poem and discuss it. Read aloud and discuss *The Runaway Bunny*. Were these texts used appropriately in *Wit*? Before hearing professor Ashford's comments on *The Runaway Bunny*, would you have understood it as a "little allegory of the soul?" Why or why not?
7. With whom did you identify in the film? Why? With whom were we meant to identify? Discuss each main character in the film and their significance to the story.
8. Might the film be a useful point of contact for discussion with non-Christians? How important is awareness of Donne's Christian faith to properly understanding his poem? How might a neo-pagan understand *Wit*? What plans should you make?
9. Might the film grant a window of insight into how a Christian might bear grace in a visit to someone who is about to die? In what way(s)?

What Does Winsome

Occasionally I am asked what Christians need to do to reach the post-modern generation with the gospel. My answer is that I am not particularly impressed with the available programs, and I don't believe ministry should be left to professionals. I have no formula for reaching the world, and believe none exists. I am confident, however, that God is at work, and that we can engage our post-Christian culture with discernment. And that we can incarnate the love of Christ with four simple things: learning to listen, being authentic, opening our lives and homes with warm hospitality, and giving the gift of unhurried time.

Simple things. They are also the most radical expression of Christian faithfulness possible in our postmodern world. And they are so rare in evangelical circles as to constitute a scandalous denial of the gospel.

In reality, of course, they only sound simple. Everything in our culture and churches leans against them. On the deepest level, however, they capture something of what is at the heart of our covenant calling before God. Best demonstrated by Jesus, they define something of what it means to be incarnational in a lost world. Or as John Perkins put it, "Jesus did not commute from heaven every day in a fiery chariot."

Consider listening

When was the last time someone really listened to you? I don't mean merely sat quietly waiting their turn to speak—but truly listening? Their body language and focus made you the center of their attention, demonstrating they cared about what you thought and felt. Their questions proved their interest in you, that

you were worth knowing. They listened actively, asking more questions to be sure they understood. They proved their willingness to enter your world, with all its brokenness, even if it cost them.

Can you think of a more meaningful expression of love? If you can't remember such a time, doesn't your heart ache for it? The question I'd like to pose here, however, is this: Do we listen this way to our non-Christian friends and neighbors?

We often think of witnessing primarily as proclamation: telling the gospel to someone and inviting a response to the

We can incarnate the love of Christ by learning to listen, being authentic, opening our lives and homes with warm hospitality, and giving the gift of unhurried time.

claims of Christ. And there is truth to that, since there is good news to tell. What must be remembered, however, is that proclamation always occurs within some sort of relationship. Even when I speak to a group—on a campus, perhaps, or at a lecture at a Borders Book Store—I must make human contact with my listeners. If I fail to tell the gospel in terms they can understand and find plausible, it is "proclamation" only in the sense that a public speaker is making noise before a crowd.

Jesus faithfully proclaimed the good news, but if we trace his ministry in the Gospels we find he listened as well as spoke. Which is a bit surprising, since if there was anyone who didn't need to ask questions to learn what his listeners thought, surely it was Jesus. His divinity allowed him to know what was on their minds before they opened their mouths. Occasionally he sim-

ply acted on this knowledge, amazing his audience with his insight into their hearts. Repeatedly, though, he asked questions, and in the ongoing conversation shaped his message to their ideas, doubts, and fears. His message never changed, but it also was never merely regurgitated.

The importance of listening, however, extends beyond our gaining information. Asking questions and listening changes us. More specifically, it affects our reading of the Scriptures.

To see what I mean by this, consider the preaching ministry of pastors and teachers within the church. I mention them here not to put them on the spot, but because their proclamation of the gospel is public enough to provide a ready illustration. "When we study the Bible," Timothy Keller says, "we only extract answers to the questions that we implicitly or explicitly have on our hearts as we read it."

Some pastors, for example, concentrate on theological books, and so their sermons tend to reflect the questions of interest to theologians. Ordinary Christians may find it interesting, but it is often far removed from the concerns of everyday life. "It is not really true that some sermons are too academic and thus lack application," Keller says. "Rather, the preacher is applying the text to the people's questions that he most understands—other academics." Other pastors, on the other hand, interact primarily with believers. Christians feel "fed" by their sermons, but hesitate to invite non-Christians. The sermons address their concerns, but not the concerns of unbelievers.

This applies to us as well. Our "people context," Keller says, will shape our reading of Scripture and our proclamation of the gospel. So we must learn to listen, and we can do that, Keller says, by varying our reading and by varying those with whom we talk.

Look Like? (Part Two)

Varying our reading is relatively easy—assuming we've planned our lives to include sufficient reading in the first place. We can make sure our reading includes work by thoughtful non-Christians who provide a window of insight into the hearts and minds of those who do not share our deepest convictions and values. At a retreat I was once asked what single magazine I found most helpful in understanding our pluralistic, postmodern culture. "*Rolling Stone*," I said. "It allows me to listen in as postmoderners discuss pop culture in light of the questions and issues that most concerns them." One participant commented that they "wouldn't allow such filth" into their home. Ignoring the fact that Jesus warns us not to identify evil in externals but rather in the heart, the point is not that everyone should subscribe to *Rolling Stone*, but that we each need to listen to those we are called to reach with the gospel. It is true that magazines produced by fallen people contain the sad traces of their fallenness, but who can claim exemption from that? "All our righteous acts," Isaiah says, "are like filthy rags" (64:6).

Entering another's world

Varying who we talk to is more difficult, and

certainly more threatening. At the least we should always have one non-Christian for whom we are praying by name, daily, asking not just that they come to Christ but that we be used in the process. As well, we should each find natural ways to interact meaningfully and regularly with unbelievers. It may involve joining a book discussion group, an investment club, or some other forum where friendships can be forged and where conversation flourishes. Such opportunities abound, though most of us are too busy to take advantage of them.

Listening can also take a more radical form. Students at the Francis Schaeffer Institute, for example, are given an assignment worthy of being emulated by all discerning Christians. They attend a meeting in the community where they will be in the minority and will find it easier to disagree than to agree. Perhaps it's a lecture sponsored by pro-abortion activists, or a talk on Buddhism or neo-pagan spirituality. The assignment is to listen, to demonstrate that we care enough to learn about the things they hold most dear. And when we do speak, to demonstrate that, contrary to popular opinion, evangelical Christians can be thoughtful and discerning and compassionate—even when outside our

comfort zone.

"Christians are frequently too quick to give answers," John Seel and Stephan Fisher write. "Unless we can identify with a modern seeker's sense of meaninglessness out of our own life experience or out of empathetic reflection, our answers to their deepest longings will seem trite and sentimental." The very thought of rendering the gospel trite and sentimental should be a great horror. Identifying with the seeker brings us back, once again, to the notion of Incarnation, of entering another person's world to bring them the gospel. And though Jesus did more than listen when he entered our world, we certainly dare not do less. Listening opens doors into hearts and minds and lives so our good news makes sense. Listening also changes us, just as the Incarnation forever changed the Second Person of the Trinity. We will read the Bible differently, attuned to a set of questions that are the heart's cry of our neighbors.

Listening is winsome because it is an expression of compassion. An entering into someone else's broken life, at the cost of sharing that brokenness. If our listening is mere silence masking our preparation for the next assault on their beliefs or values or lifestyle, our hypocrisy will be evident and the conversation soon terminated. Never was Christ accused of such duplicity. His listening was earnest and his questioning sincere. Sinners flocked to be with him and to hear him talk. Perhaps if we learn to listen we'll find them more ready to listen to us. But even if they don't, we'll know we have loved them as our Master loves us. ■
to be continued...

~Denis Haack

Sources: Perkins quoted in *Postmodern Youth Ministry* by Tony Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 2001) p. 70. "Preaching the Gospel in a Post-Modern World" by Timothy Keller, a course syllabus in the Doctor of Ministry program at Reformed Theological Seminary. "Radiohead's Kid A" by Seel and Fisher in *Critique* #9-2001 (pp. 14-15).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Tell about a time when someone really listened to you.
2. What are some of the barriers to listening? Are there particular barriers that exist for Christians listening to non-Christians? How should we respond to them?
3. To what extent does the doctrine of the Incarnation inform your definition of witness and Christian faithfulness? What are the implication of Incarnation in following Christ?
4. "Christians are frequently too quick to give answers. Unless we can identify with a modern seeker's sense of meaninglessness out of our own life experience or out of empathetic reflection, our answers to their deepest longings will seem trite and sentimental." Discuss.
5. Consider the notion that learning to listen includes varying our reading. How would you assess your reading over the last year? What should you plan for the next year?
6. Consider the notion that learning to listen involves varying whom we talk with. How would you assess your track record in this regard? What plans should you make?

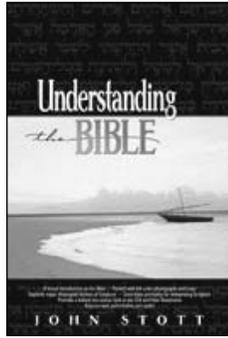
Study Help

SOARING into Survey

The basic steps of Bible study are Survey (getting an overview of the whole), Observation (seeing what the text says), Analysis (meditating on what the text means and relating it to the rest of Scripture), and Response (allowing its truth to order our life in a fallen world). SOAR are skills that can be learned and practiced, and as the story of Scripture molds our mind and imagination, we grow in discernment, the ability to chart a path through the myriad choices presented to us in our post-Christian pluralistic world.

Finding a mentor who will help us in this pilgrimage is wise. A mentor whose life reflects a deep and abiding love for God's word. One such mentor who has helped me immeasurably over the years—though from a distance since I've only known him through his books—is the Rev. John R. W. Stott. Faithful to the truth, generous and compassionate, Stott is a preacher whose simple expositions of Scripture reflect a depth of spiritual maturity. When a book is published with his name on the cover, I take notice.

The three books I recommend here are designed to help in the first step of Bible study: Survey. They help us grasp the overall picture—the lay of the land, so to speak—and cause us to see how the various parts of Scripture fit into a unified whole. The two by Stott are revisions of books published in the past and should be within easy reach of every serious student of Scripture. This is especially true today, when so many do not have Christian backgrounds and biblical illiteracy is so prevalent. The information contained in these books is precisely the



material which we must be prepared to pass on to the generation of believers we are called to mentor.

“In order to apprehend Jesus Christ in his fullness,” Dr. Stott writes in the Preface of *Understanding the Bible*, “it is essential to understand the setting within which God offers him to us.

God gave Christ to the world in a specific geographical, historical and theological context. More simply, he sent him to a particular place (Palestine), at a particular time (the climax of centuries of Jewish history) and

Since God has graciously revealed himself in Scripture, it only makes sense that we determine to meet him there.

within a particular framework of truth (progressively revealed and permanently recorded in the Bible). So the following chapters are concerned with the geography, history, theology, authority, and interpretation of the Bible. Their object is to present the setting within which God once revealed and now offers Christ, so that we may the better grasp for ourselves and share with others the glorious fullness of Jesus Christ himself.”

The Story of the Old Testament and *The Story of the New Testament* are parallel volumes, designed to give an overview of the two major sections of Scripture. The Bible consists of sixty-six books representing vastly different genres of literature by a large number of authors written over a

long span of centuries. That can be intimidating, and often is, especially for the believer who has yet to gain a working acquaintance with the narrative of Scripture. It is not uncommon to hear of people who begin reading in Genesis but then never read past Leviticus. Others keep at it, but never gain a sense of the whole and so treat the Bible as if it were merely a disparate collection of unrelated sayings and inspirational stories. Both problems must be avoided, and the books recommended here can help.

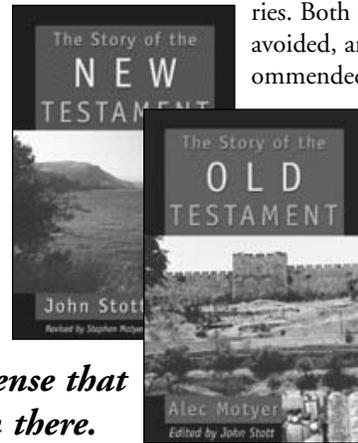
We can't be discerning as Christians unless we increasingly have our minds and hearts and imaginations steeped in the truth of the word of God. Since God has graciously chosen

to reveal himself in the Scriptures, it only makes sense that we determine to meet him there. The three books noted here will help us in that process, and are useful resources as we invite others to walk with us in our pilgrimage with Christ, the living Word. ■

~Denis Haack

Books recommended:

Understanding the Bible by John Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 1972, 1984, 2001) 164 pp. + index. *The Story of the Old Testament: Men with a Message* by Alec Motyer edited by John Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 2001) 190 pp. + index. *The Story of the New Testament: Men with a Message* by John Stott revised by Stephen Motyer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 1951, 1994, 2001) 164 pp. + index.



Learning from Jeremiah

The aha! of calling

One of the temptations I succumb to most easily is to take the calling of God for granted. Assuming I've begun to comprehend how God can use me, I can project how his plan will unfold over time. That doesn't seem too presumptuous, does it? Yet, God's grace in this broken world is always greater than I can possibly imagine, and his call is always a walk of faith.

This was part of my response as I mused recently on Jeremiah 24. I've been working my way through Jeremiah, and observed that this chapter, about half-way through the book, repeats some of the key terms that God spoke when he first called Jeremiah. Only this time there is a surprising twist.

In Jeremiah 1:10, God interrupts a young priest with a call to become a prophet. "See," God tells Jeremiah, "today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." Negative and positive: uproot and plant, tear down and build. God had warned his people that if they proved to be unfaithful he would uproot them from the land and send them into captivity. (See, for example, Leviticus 26:33 & Ezekial 39:23-24). Jeremiah prophesied at a time when the dreaded judgment occurred as the armies of Babylon destroyed the land, overthrowing the Israelites and carrying them into exile. When I studied Jeremiah 1, I had assumed the uprooted ones would be the exiles.

But then in Jeremiah 24, God surprises us by turning things on their head. The uprooting, he says, is not among the exiles but among those remaining in the land. There is a negative and a positive, but his perspective isn't what we expect. "I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the

Babylonians," God says. "I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them" (24:5-6). It is those not in exile that will face destruction (24:8-10). I had it backwards.

It's easy to do. Since I know something of my calling, I presume to know how his plan for me will unfold. But sometimes I get it backwards. I have been trying, for example, to write a book on discernment. I believe it is part of my calling, which has been affirmed by those who love me and hold me account-

Since I know something of my calling, I presume to know how his plan for me will unfold. But sometimes I get it backwards.

able. Yet, time to write has often been interrupted, most recently by people in our home. I've found the interruptions difficult.

When I wrote about this in a recent report to our Board, Bonnie Liefer responded. "i wish that you would not feel so bad about how much you did or did not get done," she wrote in her email—where, by the way, she never uses capitals. "hospitality is one of the most draining things anybody can do since you can't 'go home' after a day's work. it wears me out just thinking about it. the value of what you are doing is worth far more than what didn't get done so you should just trust God since He knew what you would get done anyway.

(maybe that is easy for me to say—but as a board member i am saying you should just chill about proposed deadlines since they are self imposed anyway.) i am eager to see you write—but your investment in mentoring is IRREPLACEABLE."

Then, I read this quote by Henri Nouwen: "You know...my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work."

We can know, by his grace, something of God's call in our life. But living it will always include surprises, because his call to us is finally not to some blueprint which we can fully comprehend, but to a walk by faith. But don't take my word for it—spend some time musing on Jeremiah 1 and 24. ■

~Denis Haack

Source: Nouwen in *Receiving the Day* by Dorothy Bass (San Francisco, CA; 2000) p. 40.

A Poem

10

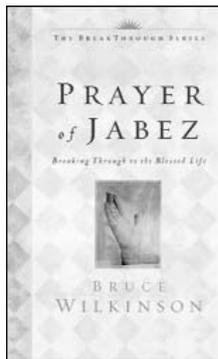
Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy'or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

~John Donne (1572-1631)

From *Holy Sonnets*

The One Millionth Review

I received a heartfelt gift from a very kind student recently. You guessed it, *The Prayer of Jabez*. I now had this year's second biggest story in my possession. I'm not sure I would have purchased it myself. I'm not sure I wouldn't have. But not wanting to miss too many cultural tidal waves, I investigatively thought, "might as well read it and see what all the fuss is about. Then I could provide the one millionth review of the book for *Critique*."



The first thing I noticed was how short it was. "Holy cow, only ninety-four pages. At least it won't take long," I reasoned. It didn't. My administrator's tired eyes were ecstatic. The second thing I noticed was how quick it read. This is a different issue than the length factor. It just flew by. I actually enjoyed reading the stories of "successful" answers to the now-famous

prayer of our previously obscure Old Testament Israelite. The last thing I noticed was how confused I was after I finished. "What was all the fuss about? Did I miss something? Was I supposed to pray the prayer at a certain point on page 62 to gain insight into the meaning of it all and expand my intellectual territory?" The whole experience seemed so harmless, so middle class, so evangelical: Find

Perhaps God allowed Wilkinson to discover the prayer thirty years ago, pray it each day, realize His "blessings," and write the book so that He could get our attention about His amazing desire to hear my petitions, pleas, and praises.

a new angle on a trusted practice, package it, market it, sell lots of it—say, seven million copies—and become famous.

The keen insight into the book and phenomena I hoped to experience and offer was more like a vapor trail, fuzzy and dissipating quickly. Just when I thought I had absolutely nothing to add to the torrent of comments, I realized

that something unexpected had happened since I read the book. As I've conversed with students and friends about *Jabez*, two things usually happen: First, someone makes a snide, sarcastic remark like, "Have you prayed the Jabez prayer today so that you're not 'left behind' when God showers His unclaimed blessings on His people? Ha Ha." Real clever, huh? Thank goodness I've said this only fourteen or

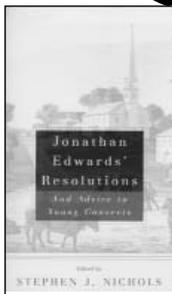
fifteen times. Second, and much more edifyingly important, we talk about prayer, and Jesus' prayer instruction, and Paul's

prayers, and Habakkuk's prayer, and God's faithfulness, and our dependence on God...and you get the idea.

Perhaps the point is that God allowed Bruce Wilkinson to discover the prayer thirty years ago, pray it each day, realize His "blessings," write the book, and move my gracious student to give it to me so He could get my attention (and

Briefly Noted: Wisdom from the Past

by Denis Haack



Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was a pastor, and perhaps the greatest American theologian who has yet lived. Though his prose may seem formal today, his mind and imagination were so formed by God's word that his words bear a careful reading. When he was twenty, he composed 70 resolutions which he used to help chart out the trajectory of his life before God. Later, during the Great Awakening, he wrote a letter to Deborah Hatheway, a young believer who asked his help in understanding the Christian life. Now both texts have been published in booklet form, and we recommend it to you. And to increase your interest:

"8. Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others...

"22. Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of." ■

Book recommended: *Jonathan Edwards' Resolutions & Advice to Young Converts* introduced and edited by Stephen Nichols (Phillipsburg, NJ; 2001) 36 pp.

of The Prayer of Jabez

yours) about His amazing desire to hear my petitions, pleas, and praises?? Maybe the irony is that Wilkinson is more right than he realizes about God's impossible (according to our reasoning) preference for intimacy with His children. Perhaps we who pride ourselves on our ability to sniff out every shallow attempt to harness some spiritual discipline for personal gain should critique, yes, but also allow the Lord to teach us through those we do not hold in highest theological esteem—hold on, I'm talking about Jabez.

Yes, the book's implied and overt understanding of God's blessing is too materialistic and temporally oriented. However, Wilkinson's probable mishandling of the prayer does not negate the Scripture's report that God "granted [Jabez'] request." Had Jabez earned God's favor with his prayer to escape the pain that his Hebrew name implied? After all, it wasn't his fault he received such an unfortunate, future-limiting name from his mother who bore him apparently in more pain than the Genesis 3 curse promised. Could he escape his inevitable lot by gaining God's attention and pardon through his exemplary prayers and honorable treatment of others? Was this some cosmic slip up on God's end of the covenantal agreement that someone could perform his way out of sin and not need His grace?

According to the context of 1 Chronicles 4, Jabez was a member of Judah's clan. The one that produced the Messiah. We don't know much about Jabez but we do know quite a bit more about his descendant. He came because none of his ancestors individually or collectively could possibly uphold the covenant between God and His people. He came because none of them could satisfy the requirement for an ultimate blood sacrifice that would atone for the sin of the people and restore the relationship between God and His creation. He came because, as always, God is the rescuer, keeper, and ful-

filler of the covenant of redemption.

God's gospel according to Moses in Deuteronomy puts it this way, "After you enter the promised land, you might say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands has produced this wealth, these fine houses, large flocks, and treasures for me.' But remember the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, led you through the desert, gave you manna, water, clothes that did not wear out, feet that did not swell, and the ability to produce any wealth. Remember the Lord and praise Him for He gave you the good land that He promised thus confirming His covenant." It was never about God's people; it was and is always about God. He is, as a colleague likes to say, always the hero.

Jabez was one in a long line of clay-footed descendants of the Master. One in the humble line of He who is King of kings and Lord of lords. He prayed a simple prayer that God heard and answered with His presence, blessing, and deliverance—just as He always does when it comes to working His perfect, good will toward His people. My advice is, don't spend too much time debating the merits of the secondhand account of Jabez' prayer. Read the primary source, and pray for God's glory to be manifested however He chooses. He always answers prayer rightly, even if we don't pray the "right" way, whatever that is. ■

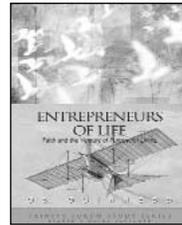
—Donald Guthrie

Donald Guthrie, Ed.D., is Vice President for Academics at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Copyright © 2001 by Donald Guthrie

Book reviewed:

The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life by Bruce H. Wilkinson (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers; 2000) 96 pp.

Briefly Noted

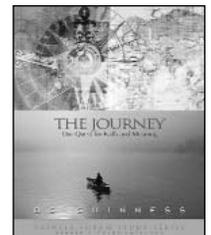


We have regularly called attention to the Trinity Forum Study Series, convinced that they will stimulate thoughtful discussion on issues that matter. The latest two additions to the series,

The Journey (addressing the yearning for meaning in life and death) and *Entrepreneurs of Life* (about how to find and fulfill one's central purpose in life) are no exception.

Containing readings from a wide variety of sources, both Christian and non-Christian, fiction and nonfiction, and a study guide, each volume is all you need to lead a discussion. And since they contain such rich material, they are also a helpful addition to the library of every thoughtful believer. *The Journey*, for example, includes readings from Nietzsche, Peter Berger, Plato, Pascal, C. S. Lewis, Darwin, Scripture, Camus, Chesterton, and Shirley MacLaine and many more.

We recommend them to you. ■



Books recommended: *The Journey: Our Quest for Faith and Meaning* (2001; 269 pp) and *Entrepreneurs of Life: Faith and the Venture of Purposeful Living* (2001; 254 pp.) Both by Os Guinness, edited by Ginger Koloszy, reader's guides by Karen Lee-Thorp (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress).

by Denis Haack

continued from page 3

with symptoms and not causes, forms of sexual contact rather than foundations of sexual morality. The reality of disease and medicine are prioritized as more important than the reality of humanness and morality. Not surprisingly, most teenagers do not place oral sex in the same moral category as intercourse. Lasting behavioral change among teenagers obviously demands something far more radical and controversial. Kids are desperate for the meaning behind the act. This necessitates discussing who we are as made in the image of God. Sexuality requires a study in theology, not just biology. Pragmatism doesn't work.

Whether sexual activity is actually reduced by this form of sexual education is hotly debated. Objective data is hard to come by. One is left with self-reported information collected by abstinence educators. This hardly meets the test of academic scrutiny.

Chastity without a moral context, particularly in our cultural context, is virtually a meaningless term. The self-reporting of teenagers themselves acknowledges this fact. If chastity were to mean something to a

non-Christian, it would have to be culturally celebrated and reinforced with the necessary strictures of social shame. Marriage would have to be "way cool" and not a problematic legal encumbrance. In reality, sexual activity outside of marriage is normative "adult" behavior in most circles, even among Christians. The part of the truth not told is the very part that makes the difference.

Finally, few non-Christians are sexual libertines. Prostitutes do not normally feel good about themselves or their chosen lifestyles. Nonbelievers have God's law written on their hearts. It is not sex most people are after, but intimacy. C.S. Lewis observes, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. We are far too easily pleased." These deeper desires shape one's beliefs and dictate one's behaviors. It's one's treasures that lead to one's promiscuity. This is a far deeper problem than merely knowing about traditional sexual morality or even affirming it. The rub is not in the knowing, but in the doing. Many nonbelievers will remain chaste. Many Christians will not. A traditional

family with traditional values with a compassionate father irrespective of Christian beliefs will keep many a young girl a virgin until marriage particularly if she lives with the fear of public or familial shame (see James Twitchell's *For Shame*). (Abortion statistics at Christian colleges, I'm told, are staggeringly high.) Sadly, however, on all fronts this is now the exception and not the rule. Isn't part of the problem that Christians continue to be more concerned about the physicality of sex rather than spirituality of the heart? Sex, in the end, is not the issue. The desire for intimacy and the pain of loneliness are the deeper causes. Half answers turn out to be whole lies.

We live in a world without boundaries. Our role models live lives of celebrated sensuality. Cliches about abstinence and fears about genital warts will not keep one from fantasizing about scantily clad Brittany Spears as she stands larger than life with her Pepsi in tow on the Times Square billboard. Sex, not chastity, holds the trump card in today's world. Abstinence education is, in the end, impotent.

John Seel

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1. To call attention to resources of interest to thinking Christians.
2. To model Christian discernment.
3. To stimulate believers to think biblically about all of life.

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