

LOVE BELIEVES
ALL THINGS

TRUST GOD'S WILL

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KYLE EDWARD HESTER



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INTRODUCTION

*Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,
endureth all things. 1 Corinthians 13:7*

I was telling my adult Sunday school class about how I met Jesus shortly before Christmas 1971 at a Christian halfway house in Victoria, Texas. Months prior to that, during Labor Day weekend at a rock festival in Satsop, Washington, I saw a terribly violent scene that really shook me up. As I spoke, Grandma Schoonmaker's eyes began tearing up. She said she was living in Aberdeen at the time, just up the road from Satsop. She and her church were praying for all of us young lost souls at the festival. We both instantly felt like their prayers were answered. Her prayers helped save my soul.

A hundred thousand people or more were crowded at Satsop. I was tripped out on LSD for a couple days and nights with no sleep, watching the rock and roll. A "Jesus rock band" opened the day with songs and preaching onstage Sunday morning at ten o'clock. It didn't matter to me, but some rude crude dudes down front jeered so loudly that the microphones picked up their profanity. One band

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member spoke about Jesus and got drowned out, so another band member tried. I thought the Christians had a right to be heard. I understood nothing of what they said except that they were for Jesus, and I was good with this—not that I was listening. By the time the mob booed them off the stage, I was disenchanted with my crowd.

Just after twelve noon a folk singer came on. Someone drove an old flatbed truck carelessly in front of the stage while the folk singer was playing. When the announcer went up, he said the truck, which contained watermelons to sell from local fields, had just disrupted the music. It had. Simply impromptu, he suggested we boycott the truck. The next thing we knew, a gang rushed the truck and began stealing the watermelons. Two farm boys punched and threw the thieves off as fast as they could. A whole watermelon broke over the head of a guy climbing up the side, and he fell off. I sat back down where I was. I didn't want to see it.

A great yell arose from the crowd. I stood back up to see. The truck was being driven straight into the crowded field and was headed our way. There was no doubt that these guys had panicked. One guy was driving toward the gate as fast as he could, while the other guy hung on to the back of the cab for dear life. I was shocked, and I was afraid some people had been run over. Angry guys were throwing rocks at them, breaking out the glass. One young man got on the running board and punched the driver in the face. The old truck was ugly enough too. The crowd parted and the truck went right past us.

After that it turned into a bad trip for me. Nobody around was fit to talk to. No one could handle it. The whole bunch of us were totally stoned and freaked out. That was the last time I took psychedelic drugs. But you know what else? You and I may not know who has been praying for us and how well God has answered their prayers.

A couple years later I worked at a gas station for a scary, tough boss named Jesse. The guy was big, hard-looking, and it seemed like

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he hated me—probably because I had bumper stickers for Jesus glued on all sides of my car. For months he let me know in certain ways that he wanted me out of there. For instance, he was hosing down the driveway once when I asked him for the hose to cool a boiling radiator; he just dropped it on the pavement in front of my feet. I picked it up and kept working.

He would chew me out for little things, and then say that if I didn't like it, he would get my last pay from the cash register. As if it didn't matter to me, I told him, "No thanks. I need the job." I'm not exaggerating—he would have killed me.

One morning when I got there, his car was parked, but he was not in the station office. Dark and early, the place was empty. He was asleep in the front seat of his car, drunk. I woke him up, but he was very hung-over. He said he had driven around all night with his loaded revolver, looking to kill a man if he found him.

Prayer pays. I was shopping and saw some big fat loaves of golden bread sliced an inch thick. When I spotted the bread, I thought of all the meat and fixings I could pile on to do it right. I was just thinking of my appetite, nothing else.

The next day, when business was slow, the boss and I were sitting on the stools in the office saying absolutely nothing, looking out the front windows. We often said nothing for a long time. I pulled out this big, gorgeous, mouthwatering sandwich with the thick bread. Jesse's eyes locked onto it. He had to ask, "Where's mine?" I hadn't thought about it. Since I didn't live far from work, I suggested I run home and get him one. He liked that idea.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach. We were buddies after that. More sandwiches were passed in the days following. Amazing how that works. Soon after, he made me the night manager.

Some months later when I went to quit, it wasn't easy. I gave my notice. Jesse hired someone else and was training him, but one

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evening he talked me into staying. That meant that in order to keep me, he had to fire the other man.

Eventually I did move on. When I returned the following year on vacation, I found Jesse still there. He was excited to tell me that he had a new baby at home, his marriage was better, and his diet, drinking, and health had all improved. He had lost a lot of weight. He was glad to see me because my friendship had touched his life. I don't know, but maybe Jesse became a Christian too. All I've got is a photograph.

Let God's love be our focus. The harsh warnings in the Bible are good and true. We know the dangers in life; they are sometimes small and sometimes big. The aftereffects of sin are devastating. In other words, we get in trouble. Human nature denies the obvious. Every bit weightier than the question is the answer. We have it in Jesus Christ: faith.

A couple young women sat down with me once and let me explain my faith. It isn't every day you get to let your line out while two listeners allow you to finish your presentation. People were more open in those days. I said it as best as I could. Then one of the ladies, smiling on her way out, said, "I hope you find what you are looking for." It was a cliché back then. That's right. She couldn't begin to allow that I had seen the light and I was happy in Jesus. She wasn't able to see the way God had accepted my faith. I have even talked to believers who are this oblivious to the message of God's grace.

We were all young and struggling bit by bit to catch the good life. Hearts searching for truth and who are new in the faith fumble with complex ideas. Jesus said we we'll suffer a lot of senseless contradictions from beginning to end. That hurts His Church. Capable theologians wrestle with honest problems of interpretation, doctrines, and denominational rivalries. Christianity is many times patchy.

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Outsiders come in to disrupt the effort. They subvert and misuse words to their own advantage. Cults grow with claims that are only a semblance of biblical truth. Christians take the blast of too much resistance. Repentant believers coming from a life of sin and ungodly habits will learn the truth in stages.

Christ gives us the Bible for guidance. With all the buzzwords and preferred verses, it's too bad that Christians live in stubborn disobedience. Where are we going? We ought to study the Scriptures to see how to act.

We stress and strain to hold our heads up. Losing sight leads to doubt. Do you know how good life gets? Be sure in your heart and see the Holy Spirit's power in your hands. We can't hold on to God by our own strength. Isn't it obvious? We aren't saved by what we do, nor do we deserve to be. Our hearts must be "*knit together in love*" (Colossians 2:2); to gain more assurance of faith. How can we grow unless it's by faith? Don't lean on circumstantial evidence, but lean fully on God.

The victory is in the totality of our Savior's sacrifice. Your acceptance of Jesus and His acceptance of you testifies of His truth. This protects you from dark forces and other influences. You get the aptitude for gratitude and begin to serve Jesus.

Be the responsible help that someone else needs. Christians fail in fellowship if they are still trying to get their own needs met. If we all are weak and ineffective, from where will the growth come? Take the meat of God's Word and put it alongside a dependence on Jesus Himself. If one member suffers, we all suffer. If we all stay weak, the one member continues to suffer. Life changes when disciples of the Lord join together for the better and give support.

Too often, Christians see needy people and think, *Get them out of here!* Imagine if everyone joined in. Wouldn't it go over better if

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we had more help? People help in their own way, but perfect love has come in the name of Jesus Christ.

We remain here for one another and to reach the unbelievers. God doesn't just take us home in a heartbeat, but He leaves us here to serve. Eternal life in Jesus Christ is true. Death will come and we will go to Heaven, but we have work to do until then. Yes, Christians should love one another fervently, if for no other reason than that our love wins the lost. We should all be bubbling over with this idea. How few of us who are saved pass through such a breaking point as to be changed and converted from old desires? We should get to work. Jesus' love is compelling. Delayed adolescent believers do less and don't take their responsibility seriously. Our job is to spread the Word.

Suppose you and your friends were going on vacation together; you'd get excited as the trip approaches. You'd boost each other's excitement.

In the Old Testament, twelve men—Joshua, Caleb, and ten others—went into Canaan as spies. The ten said it was too dangerous to try to defeat the Canaanites. Because they doubted God, the people of Israel wandered in the desert forty years; then they took the Promised Land most victoriously. Joshua and Caleb were the only two men alive from the original population. The chances of that happening were next to nothing—zero odds or nil. Not even Moses crossed over the Jordan.

Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one went back to thank Him. Is one out of ten average? You get an A for being in the top 10 percent of the class, for missing one in ten questions, or you get a B if you're above 80 percent. This isn't going to help the others. Anything less is not best.

Jesus said to go the extra mile. Suppose we open a hamburger stand. We put it on a busy street with lots of cars racing by, but the

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business doesn't go. I say to put a sign out front that says, "Two for the price of one this week." Think it's a bad idea? We're already losing money. My thought is that if customers come in for our hamburger once, just one time, they're more apt to return. We have a burger they want, and they don't know it yet. Do you agree? If you've come in, you are more likely to stop again. This is why Jesus taught generosity. Hunger makes them aware of what they're missing. We fill an unknown need.

For example, our witness, a generous attitude toward others, wins souls more often than shunning people. We operate in weakness, at a loss, and go broke. We urgently pray to win souls, save sinners from sin, and keep them from going to Hell. I would die to reach one more. They simply haven't reached this decision or figured out how to turn around. Holding the line on sin doesn't always mean you push people away.

Let me tell it another way. We run a place that sells fast food, but the customers are slow. We are losing money. Should we raise the prices just to pay the bills? I've eaten in joints where I thought they did just that. I don't go back. A bit of business sense and insight lowers prices to drive up the profit. But of course, you have to start with quality you believe in. Value is what they want to pay for.

I may run souls off by expecting my stern corrections to bring repentance. It's good to tolerate an unbeliever to allow adequate time for patience, (1 Corinthians 5:9–10). Do I attack or attract? It's a judgment call.

We had a new man in church for a while who was a little rough. The first time he and I met was in my adult Sunday school class. He was starved. I was teaching about how faith, love, hope, and patience all work together. I remember. He was very enthusiastic about it. He had been in serious sin, and he regretted it.

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My new friend was soon baptized. He was painting the church with us one day when he and another friend clashed. It was nearly a fistfight. My old friend told me on Sunday to forget this new guy. I asked, "How can I have enough time to disciple and help him out if you run him off?" That had just happened. He never came back.

Don't lower your standards, but raise them and lower your expectations. A fake "put on" does show. Be willing. A heartfelt concern shows. We can do better.

Salvation is not conditional on purity, but is very much the other way around. Jesus gives righteousness to us. Young little David slew the giant Goliath. Grasp God's grace first to conquer sin and let bad habits go. Give the victory to God.

Christians can move ahead with hope. Good things happen. Things turn out right. So look out. It's up to each of us to watch and profit from how Jesus operated. If we approach life like this, we begin to live with people honestly and generously. Your prayers are being heard. First, cling to love alone. Love believes all things.

To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life. Romans 2:7

Email address: kyleedwardhester@gmail.com

CHAPTER 1

THE SOWER AND HIS SEED

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Luke 8:5–8

We all have ears, but Jesus speaks to our hearts in this parable. Don't we all have hearts? People fall by the wayside, and in their predicament they cry out to us. If we speak to them in the name of Jesus, do they hear us? God knows that even as Christians there are people to whom we choose to talk, and others whom we choose to pass by. The downtrodden get picked off by the devil, and do we care? The hardhearted listen a bit and believe our message, yet we cannot be sure they actually get saved because far too often trouble hits and they fall away. Pity them if their faith caves.

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The value of what we give is more important than what we ask people to give up. Does our love stand, or are we disturbed by people and destroyed with anxiety? Isn't it the right time now for us, you and me, to hear Jesus and seek the lost? "*To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*" Hebrews 4:7. Listen! The ones who get saved are the ones who hear; they believe and bear good fruit.

Soon after my salvation I rode my bicycle over to a little Bible bookstore and bought my first pocket red-letter New Testament with Psalms. Nobody told me to do this. It was a nice day, so I just did it. I don't remember why. I rode to the park where my friend Charlie was working in the refreshment stand. She was the one who had led me to receive Jesus. I showed her what I had. I could not have been more proud of my little Bible if it had been a brand-new car. I read it everywhere I went after that.

I came to the parable of the Sower and the seed. It stunned me. Nothing jarred me quite like this. It was not that I understood everything I was reading, but a dreadful panic struck me. It froze me and made me doubt my soul. I asked myself, *Which kind of seed am I? Is my Christianity another phase of mine? Could my interest in Jesus pass and move on like other fads in my life?* The words of Jesus rang true. When this parable cropped up, it was positively frightening to me. It was an immense blow to me.

After reading the parable, I wondered if my willpower could prove dependable. This was two months after I had entered the Omni House drug-abuse program in Texas, where I had personally met Jesus. I was shaking off the harsh effects of several years in the psychedelic drug craze. I was shocked by the obvious seriousness of Jesus' parable. If I was a bad seed, I would wind up in Hell! Was Christianity just another trend? It was all new to me.

The hippie drug years had caught me just as I finished high school in 1969. It seemed like LSD was a great discovery, a solution

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to all things. But I can tell you exactly where I was when I came to this page in my Bible. After receiving Jesus in December of 1971, I returned to Seattle in May to win my friends to Jesus. Instead of me drawing them out of sin, they talked me into smoking marijuana the first evening back. I got stoned the next twelve days. I ran for my life and left Seattle. After that, I quit dope for good.

My dog, Roo, and I hitchhiked on I-90 and headed east as far as New York. Can you guess how shook I was in mid-Montana when I read the parable of the Sower? Could the spiritual life I had found have faded that fast? Jesus' Holy Spirit whispered to me. He said the way this parable hit me so hard indicated that I got the point and truly felt its weight. My qualms were with myself and not with the Bible. Anyone who receives the Word of the Lord is like fertile ground that bears good fruit, and this is a true Christian. Any person who fails to hear is lost. I had reacted strongly to this charge for the one reason that I was born again. Would an unsaved person be this affected? The Spirit of Jesus reassured me that I was His.

This parable gave me tremendous encouragement. The Word of God blessed me right from the time I received Jesus. All Christians will have the anointing of God: "*and ye need not that any man teach you*" 1 John 2:27. We know what's right when God's love is the rule. "*But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another*" 1 Thessalonians 4:9. God was first. He then surrounded me with good supportive fellowship.

Christianity is said to be narrow. We believe that the Bible is uniquely true. Current world culture allows every whim as long as people aren't dogmatic. Worldly wisdom tells us that it doesn't matter if the rules change as long as everybody goes along. Modern social conventions are capricious, subject simply to the consent of those who use them. Since rules and rulers have frequently failed,

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we should question authority. Indeed, societal breakdown helps to establish new assumptions. Truth and error then continue to be shaped. Such passing logic assumes reality is fluid.

Unsolved arguments rotate within the bumpy history of Christianity, regrettably. Today's Christians must once again advance the premise that God has revealed the only reliable record in our cherished Scriptures. Be ready to defend the inerrancy of the Bible. God's Word has the truth of our origin, and we must keep faith in the future.

Jesus commands us to give witness of His salvation everywhere. Do you know a few Christians who have become disgruntled and impatient? They want to quit and throw in the towel. What philosophy is that? We all form an approach to our beliefs. Do you tell people you meet that you are a Christian? If I believe in Jesus, then should I start down the street going to every door until I find one person who will be saved. I may have to go a long way before a poor soul allows me into their home to lead them in the sinner's prayer. Some believers have printed their own account on paper to hand out. I don't go down the street to every door or stand on street corners preaching. And they were astonished at His doctrine; for His Word was with power. Luke 4:32

I think that I'm following the plan God has set for my life. You may be focusing on those who are lost, or only the ones you think are most ready to believe so as not to waste time. Are you of the opinion that some people should not be handed the gospel? The Lord allows thorny hard to convince people in our lives and some are admittedly impossible. To advance God's mission in the best possible way, we must desperately pray for the faith to love them, every single one of them.

Mysteries of the Kingdom

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Luke 8:10

You might get a better handle on the entire Bible if you master this verse. Mysteries are secrets that were formerly unknown or unheard of and that no one could guess. With the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, there is now this clarification. We can learn. You have to be a believer in the Holy Spirit of God to understand.

Jesus taught the meaning of His parables to His disciples. He said He wouldn't teach the crowds as plainly. What did He mean by that? Jesus purposely said He would not tell the explanation clearly so that the people "might not see, and . . . not understand." And we would have thought He wanted everybody to know.

When I was a kid in school, the teachers said that if we couldn't spell a word, we should look it up in the dictionary. I didn't do the best in school, but how, I still ask, am I going to find a word in the dictionary if I don't know how to spell it? The teachers often repeated the axiom, "Learn to use your dictionary!" Honestly, I always wondered what they meant. Where do I go to learn the dictionary? I must've missed that day.

After I got out of school, I noticed that all the signs said, "Help wanted. Experience required." How was I ever going to get my first job? Everyone had it figured out but me.

Jesus explained the parables to His inner circle. Do you think God only speaks to those He chooses and keeps the rest in the dark? When Jesus declared the dichotomy that some would receive His

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teaching and some would not, He recognized the way this split already existed.

I came to faith by the eager kindness of wonderful Christians. I was there with all the appearance of my rebellious generation. Generous friends and strangers had the liberty to share their faith with me. Was I saved by faith or by fate? One of the things we believe as Christians is to share the conviction of our hearts. It's a pattern. I was saved by someone else's faith to simply believe in me. They prayed for me and inspired me. This is God's plan. I was given *faith* by their *love*!

Disciples get the Word of God and teach others. Here is the story of the Sower: "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). After I met Jesus, I learned how to see the needs of others and be quick. I hoped they heard me and I prayed they would respond. It was like the old expression, "Tomorrow may be too late!"

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God to everyone, but not everyone got it. Directly before this parable, Luke wrote, "*He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God*" Luke 8:1. God is holding some things back still. Maybe it's because His plan is unfolding. We get it all with graduating wisdom.

The ways of the Lord are much higher than our ways. Why did Jesus preach parables that people didn't understand? He revealed truth at the proper time. I'm not going against God, but I pray that the Holy Spirit makes Jesus better known, and I want Him to enlighten all believers especially.

The people were aware that there was a prophet in Israel. When Jesus walked the land, the people went out to hear Him. Many believed. Jesus loved all, but He was afraid that His teaching made them more accountable and His presence made them more

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responsible than before. He knew when He told things to them they would be judged extra severely for refusing Him. He said, “*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more*” Luke 12:48. Would Jesus be doing them a favor by not saying much? It was a mercy not to clue people in. Jesus always left room for faith, so He never eliminated all doubt.

When we are given more, we are required to act on it. Jesus kept the full truth back because His time to die had not yet come. Then when His suffering and resurrection were accomplished, everybody in the world could be informed.

Jesus was Jewish. Up to this point in time, God had given His testimony primarily to Israel. “*He came unto his own, and his own received him not*” John 1:11. In the two millennia since, the whole world is obligated to hear and believe. God “*now commandeth all men every where to repent*” Acts 17:30. The revelation of God’s plan did not come by prophets only, but it also came by Jesus Christ Himself. Nowhere in the expanse of our universe has there ever been a change like the difference Jesus made. He opens human hearts; nothing again will compare anywhere else in eternity.

God looks for real faith. Israel was “*uncircumcised in heart and ears*” (Acts 7:51). They didn’t see or hear God. “*Behold their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken; behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it*” (Jeremiah 6:10).

Jesus brought a *new* covenant, showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Salvation doesn’t come to us because of the good we do. Israel missed their call entirely: “*He cried, He that has ears to hear, let him hear*” (Luke 8:8). If they had no ears, Jesus would’ve healed them. The Apostle Paul said that faith is “inward,” and that “*circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*” (Romans 2:29). He then

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said, “*For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel*” (Romans 9:6). Paul learned it all over again like he had never heard it before. Let’s emphasize the *new* thought.

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. Galatians 4:4

If one does not get the proper sense of this and related passages it can lead to much misinterpretation. It is very important to note that Jesus came under the Old Law. To understand the Bible, keep in mind what blessings God let slip away from Israel that then went to the rest of us. You and I must catch the importance. It’s not typical to say it today. Israel had the written Word of God before anyone else (Romans 3:1–2). They had Jesus first (Acts 3:26). The Word went out from there.

Since the time of Jesus Christ, people everywhere in the world have encountered the truth and are without excuse. You and I know that God considers every person on earth accountable for their sin, and every nation is judged. We can no longer hide from such compelling thoughts. This tells the correct attitude to live by for serious Christians. There’s a good reason to witness. We take a big, solemn responsibility to ourselves for lost sinners. You want to help the greater work of the Church. God has deemed the redeemed to be this light in the darkness. Bible-believing Christians hold faith dear, so we want our love clear.

The Mystery of Faith

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Luke 8:11

The Word is out. God gives His love to the whole world. Whosoever believes will not die, but will receive eternal life. Who

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misses this call? God doesn't miss anyone who calls on Him. We must sow the word of *faith* with the *love* of God.

Like I said, the first time I read this parable I was stunned. Some people get it and some don't. I had to learn what it meant. Which one was I? Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The seed is planted. This is the *mystery of faith*. How will it grow? Nobody really wants to pass up Heaven.

This passage is initially a salvation parable, but it carries a lesson on maturity. Consequently, another question fits in the mix also. Why do some Christians get it while others, it seems, don't? Some of us fall while other Christians grow. Let me answer this question with a question. Why does God call some to be Bible teachers if it is not for these teachers to make an impact? You and I must not be stagnant in our lives. Have we no sympathy? A teacher, by definition, cannot be quiet.

The Word is out. Nothing has been more published than the Bible. The good news of Jesus Christ is no longer a mystery, but a ministry. It's no longer the Law of Moses, but the Law of Christ. His way is love. Why fail to make that point stick? Keep moving.

We have a long way to go. On one hand, the population is growing faster than we can keep up with; on the other hand, high-tech communication, information, and mass media offer the brightest time ever in history. We instantly reach every place. Whatever stripe or schooling, each passing day we are closer to the day.

People are coming to Jesus in record numbers these days. On our watch, the demand for good pastors and teachers is being outstripped. Out in the open to worldly elements and without the best guidance, new Christians and false believers become tangled in a big snarl of danger. We constantly fight our old carnal nature. Satan fights us too. Those who follow righteousness will flee the temptations and shun the pleasures of this old world to gain for

themselves and for others all the riches of God's glorious Heaven. Our grounding must be in the Bible, which is absolutely the *Word of God*.

Jesus is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), so you and I are not free to go just any way we want. A cornerstone in a building is the first piece of the foundation upon which all else rests; it is a reference point where every measure starts. The city of Seattle has a cornerstone in an old building downtown, at First and Yesler. It is the cornerstone for that building and, in a way, for the entire city. Two other points in the city core, higher up on Yesler Street and over on Denny Way, make a triangulation for the engineering department to assess and plan the grid with altitudes, angles, and distances. We who set our sights on Jesus must in turn give a true reading for others to follow. We aren't free to believe whatever we think!

The house my wife and I live in has a plat, a plot, filed with the city. Archives show dimensions of this property with the exact measurements of the house, where it sits on the land, distance from each edge of the property line to the foundation, and the elevation of the house in relation to the street. All this is recorded for a reference in building plans, for future additions, and for hooking up the water, sewer, phone, and electricity running from the alley and street. Every street in the area is mapped with plans that show the relation of roads and homes. The city notes slopes on every hill and counts manholes and light poles all the way back to the cornerstone at First Avenue and Yesler Way.

City records detail what is below ground, especially with downtown skyscrapers, where hundreds of heavy anchor cables run deep into the ground and each one threads among endless underground wiring, pipes, and tunnels—all crowded between tall buildings. City engineers can accurately trace the history of every lot back to the time the department began. Hazards must be predicted in any

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future development. Jesus is our cornerstone. The Bible is our sure foundation on which the Church sits secure.

Spreading the Word of God has taken centuries of constant effort and countless servants to bring us to where we are today. Our understanding has to relate back to the beginning. It also has to apply to the goal of our future. We must apply the truth to our lives, or God will apply it to us. If you judge yourself, God will not have to condemn you.

What is *the mystery of the faith*? Do you know? This phrase is packed. “*Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*” 1 Timothy 3:9. Partly told before, the mystery is now open; it’s the plan of salvation. How does the seed sprout? It has to do with us and our consciences. More so, it’s New Testament love.

Jesus Christ went to Calvary to give us salvation. Foolish questions should be avoided such as, “Where did God come from?” He sits on the throne above all, the revelation of which has gone out to the world. Which came first—the chicken or the egg? Someone cared enough to tell you, and you believed.

We are holding the mystery of faith like a vase holds brightly colored flowers. Are we holding its brilliance, or are we hiding it where none can see it? The truth has a power of its own. It is no longer a mystery. We have a living hope. Does our attitude reflect that we care to give the love of Jesus? We would not want to live in a way that darkens our consciences or weakens this work.

The conception of a baby is a fantastic mystery. We cannot explain how so much is encoded and loaded in the very first instant of a human being’s life. A zygote contains the characteristics, propensities, and personality that will be seen throughout its days. The genetic code even determines longevity if by “chance” he or she is able to escape the dangers and make it that far. Somehow the little fertilized egg knows how to get from the ovary to the womb.

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This simplest set of cells, an “organism” by definition, has become a new separate self-sustaining life.

One of the smallest babies on record weighed less than two-thirds of a pound at birth, yet survived and developed normally. She entered high school on time. She was an honor student and a musician and she loved to rollerblade. It is amazing that from the moment her life began, before her mom and dad were told, the different facets of her physical, intellectual, and emotional being were already built in.

What a strange thing it is that so many intelligent, educated people think life’s origin is best explained from an evolutionary scientific point of view. How generic! How does the process work unless an intelligent Creator put design into every single element? I like the Bible’s version. Darwinism is an utter leap of faith. I don’t want to revert to such theory. Someone has said, “None of us is related to a zucchini plant.”

The beginning of life is a mystery. Do you remember being born? Somehow we just wake up and here we are. Do you remember the second you woke up this morning? Nor did this planet record the origin of our species; it did not have a clue. Ancient history and consciousness didn’t just begin with accidental awareness. God kept it secret. And you won’t remember falling asleep tonight either. Death and the end of life are mysterious. What happens next after death appears empty, but it’s not so with *the mystery of the faith*. And it’s not hard to figure people pay for their sins when this is all over.

While two of us were standing at a hamburger stand one afternoon waiting for our order, I was talking to the teenage girl behind the counter. She happened to be the daughter of a friend. I asked her if she knew the high school girl who had just been killed the week before in a car accident. She said she did.

The other girl behind the counter told me she had two friends who were killed in another car accident. I asked her if it made her

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think. She said it had been a big shock to her. I talked to this second girl about death, asking her what she thought. How many young people fail to make it to adulthood? I brought up various recent news stories reporting the deaths of young people and other tragic accounts. I told her that we all need to think and be careful and use common sense.

Then I asked her this question: “If you die tonight, do you know where you will be tomorrow morning?”

“I would be in Heaven,” she said.

I asked her, “How would you get there?”

Here comes the interesting part. Without hesitating, she kind of shrugged her shoulders and said, “They’d come and take me.”

“Who would come and take you?” I asked.

“I don’t know.” She didn’t have an answer.

“Would it be angels?”

“Yeah, it’d be angels.” She seemed a little relieved with that suggestion.

“Angels would take you up?” I asked. “How do you know about this?”

Her answer was a fabulous clincher: “Oh, something my grandmother said—and *Star Trek*.”

Honest—that is exactly what she said.

Then I told her that my friend and I were Christians, I explained briefly that Jesus was our Savior, and I told her what we believe about the way to Heaven.

People around Seattle don’t seem to know the Bible. While waiting at the airport for my daughter to return from Hawaii on an overdue flight, I was sitting with a stranger who was waiting for his wife coming from the east. We talked mostly about our children and how well they were doing. He was proud of his. Most of them

were grown up. We agreed on the importance of parenting and of the future ambitions of the coming generation.

Then I asked him what hopes his children had for eternity. He didn't know what I meant. I said, "If one of your kids died tonight, where would they be in the morning?"

"I don't know," he said.

"You have done all you can to see that they have the best upbringing and you are concerned for their lives, but have you prepared them for life after death?" I told him a few stories about the deaths of young people in the news, dear lives cut short.

"Well, I don't like to think about that," he said.

"You buy insurance, don't you?" I suggested. "You insure your car, your health, your house, and your life. You had to think about doing that." I wasn't just asking him if he was afraid to die, like we so often do when we buttonhole people. The question I posed pointed to his children. I asked him again, "What if you suddenly lost one of your loved ones and then had to face this question?"

I asked this man if he had any church in his background. He had no familiarity with matters of faith. I suggested that he consider Jesus and the claims of Christianity. He received it very well, and I trust God's Spirit to water the seed sown.

One day while at work I was talking on the phone to a businessman, someone I have known for years. We were catching up on news about family and current times. Next we were discussing new technologies. It led us to the subject of passenger-jet crashes, which is when my friend blurted out, "It doesn't matter; we are all going sometime."

"It's true," I agreed. "Everybody who goes up in a jet comes down one way or another." So I asked him the loaded question: "If your plane crashed into the ground, where would you be then?"

"Well, I wouldn't be anywhere."

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“No,” I crassly said. “I mean if your plane crashed with you on board, where would you go next?”

“Oh,” he said. “I would go to another planet.”

That’s really what he said! So I asked him, “And how would you get there?”

“I don’t believe in all that religious stuff; they’re all the same. Christianity, whatever. If Heaven was real, people would be lining up to go there.”

He already knew that I was a Christian. “They are lining up at my church,” I told him.

He said he’s going to another planet. Can you beat that? He doesn’t even know how he’s getting there. If there was a way to get to another planet, wouldn’t everyone want to go? Actually, he was quick to recognize the seed I was trying to plant.

A little gal named Marty from the county water department regularly comes by where I work. We always chat and kid each other because she is cute and fun and, if I may say so, a bit of a ding-a-ling. She knows it. It’s her ruse.

Marty grew up in California. She was a true product of the sixties’ hippie days. She probably attended too many parties. She has sort of outgrown that now, lives a natural lifestyle, and has a grown daughter like I do. I love to talk with Marty.

One day she was there chatting, so I asked her about the dry season we were having and how the water supply was doing. I thought she might have an inside story from the water department. Instead, she began to eagerly tell me all about our endangered planet and the pending destruction of the environment. Then she went on about the afterlife and how she will be coming back in another body to see it all when it is better. She’s serious. It was just like her—an environmentalist quasi-Buddhist or Hindu.

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“What happens,” I asked, “if the earth is scorched over time and you have no life-sustaining place to come back to in your next incarnation?”

Her eyes got wide and she looked straight back at me in empty surprise. “I don’t know,” she said.

I said, “I suppose you will have to wait longer in limbo.”

“That’s it! That’s right!” she blurted out. “You wait.”

“Well,” I repeated, “if the earth becomes uninhabitable and there are fewer people on earth in the future, there won’t be enough bodies for all the people who are coming back to life.”

“Yeah—you will have to wait.”

I continued. “Makes me wonder, with all the constant population growth we have—there are billions today, seven billion maybe—where did all the souls come from that are here now? There didn’t used to be so many people, ever, and now they are all put here together at one time. Where did they all come from?”

“I don’t know.” Marty’s mind was swimming now. It was easy to see the panic all at once on her face. She was getting real, real worried—weird, really.

“What do people say where you go? What do you call it? Where do you gather?”

“Oh! I don’t go to any of those organized things; there is no place I go for it.”

So I asked, “Where do you get all these ideas to think what you do?” I tried to come across as sympathetic, but I was chuckling at the same time. She and I always enjoy each other. I was getting a real big kick out of her this time.

“I just think this all up,” she said. “It’s just in me.”

Then I threw her another pitch. “Maybe it used to be that there were more animals and fewer people, so now more of us have advanced to become people.”

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“That’s it!” She was very relieved to have a plausible explanation. It was all done in fun and she is sweet, but Marty seems very lost. I mentioned that I was a Christian and said Jesus gives us the hope of a direct resurrection to Heaven. Honest, she asked me no questions.

You and I also were sinful at one time, yet we received salvation. Do we want to do something for the lost? You can see they want help, but they’ve been tricked. Unbelief is ingrained in all of us. Can they be saved? Pray for Jesus to stop all sin.

I believe that love can be strong enough to defeat the long-held myths that delude troubled souls. The devil cheats those by the wayside. Can people run so far that the Lord God can never again find them? I believe our faith can grow stronger—strong enough to give faith to other people. Jesus certainly wins difficult hearts and saves their souls from Hell.

Lest They Should Believe

Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. Luke 8:12

People often see there is a devil before they admit there’s a Savior. That’s how it went for me. We shouldn’t underestimate the evil in the devil. He jumps wayward souls to take the Word right out of their hearts. He prevents their faith from growing. We should appreciate our fellow human beings and not write them off too fast. God’s Word never returns to Him void. There’s a purpose here in this life.

They play hardball in the big leagues, yet the better athletes win by keeping cool. Allow your friends and relatives more time to see how counterproductive and costly their behavior is. Believers can be patient with disagreements. When you are convinced in your faith and confident of it, you’ll stay fair in love.

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We win many with gentleness, some with firmness, and even a few by harshness. Do we dare say how plainly trapped and troubled everybody is? Yes, I love to spring them from the trap of Satan. Count on the hope you have; our love can get to be powerful.

Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:25–26 NIV.

Grab hold of the truth of the Bible; it will take over your life. Randy California was the lead guitarist in the sixties' San Francisco acid-rock band Spirit. He later met a tragic end in Hawaii. His son was caught in the riptide and the boy had to be rescued. As a dad would, Randy jumped into the ocean to save his child. He pushed his son to safety, but the strong current took the life of this heroic father. That is how real our hearts must be and how quick our reactions should be in going after desperately lost people.

You know people who are lost. Some carry a lot of animosity. Do we confront them openly? Many people blame Christians for everything that's wrong, like it's God's fault. Where did they jump over the fence? I've pointed out to a few unbelieving friends that their resentment is unwarranted. Ecology and the environment is a big hot-button sticking point. This is their issue. As offhanded right and wrong they may be, we need to be honest to make ourselves heard. We were all lost at one time.

It had always appeared to me that adults looked too serious, and now I see why. Have you known people in their forties who have died of natural causes? As my life lengthened to middle age, I sadly lost dear family and friends. I knew some who died in their twenties and thirties. That caught my attention. People in their prime die in

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car accidents or of major health problems like diabetes, heart attacks, and strokes. This has been very sobering. Young people have been sheltered. They have not yet met grief and sadness.

Life should be fun, not devastating, when you are young. Responsibility and caution are also wanted in good order to make us prepare for a secure future. The odd thing is that more people make a decision for Jesus earlier in life, while the hearts of many others grow harder with age.

Jesus told another parable about a man who planted a vineyard (Luke 20:9–18). The man fixed it up and leased it so he could go away to a far country. When the season was over, he sent a servant back to his vineyard, expecting to collect a profit. The wicked tenants caught the servant, beat him, and ran him off. The owner sent another. They stoned him, wounded him in the head, and he was shamefully treated. They ran him off. If that wasn't enough, the landlord sent yet another servant to collect rent. They killed him too (Matthew 21:38–39). Many more were sent and they were all beaten or killed as well.

The owner then sent his own son, whom he loved. He thought the tenants had to respect him, but they killed the one who was the heir, thinking they could keep the land. Jesus said the lord of the vineyard would kill these murderers and “*give the vineyard to others,*” a prophetic foretelling of the time of the Christian church age, the age of grace, which was about to come upon the whole world.

The Pharisees must've known what Jesus was saying, and they saw Him as a threat. Jesus knew exactly what He was saying. He furnished them with this old quote: “*The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner*” (Mark 12:10; Psalm 118:22). The leaders of Israel had beaten and killed prophets for centuries, and they were now going to kill Jesus, even though Jesus was revealing this new covenant from God.

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Jesus knew this was not a pretty world. Can you see how difficult it must have been for Him to travel around and preach to cold hearts? He knew the eager crowds who came to hear and receive Him would turn and reject Him. Jesus said in Luke 8:12, “*Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe.*” Our Savior came to defeat Satan so you and I can never be taken captive again.

Jesus visited His hometown of Nazareth to speak, and they tried to kill Him there. What did He say that infuriated them? These were people who knew Him as He was growing up. He wanted to bless and help them because He loved them. Jesus was disappointed, able to do only a few miracles for them.

Imagine the townspeople. Their hardness was like kryptonite on Superman. “*And he marveled because of their unbelief.*” What did He do next? “*He went round about the villages, teaching*” (Mark 6:6). Jesus continued to teach the Word. In the passage after this, Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. Jesus began to double His effort. Let’s not get set back in our efforts, but let’s pick up our feet and move forward.

Many people around us today see Christians as just a bunch of dirty hypocrites who brag one day and sin the next. To them we are a lot of dependent personalities and spineless ninnyes. They view Christianity as just a religious rubber crutch. Suppose only one such naysayer is right; would that make us all wrong? If we start down that road and entertain such notions, we will have the heart of salvation stolen from us.

Be optimistic. If our faith is make-believe and we all are liars, what does that make God? It makes Him right, because He does say we *are* sinners. The earth is full of sinners. Does that make God less righteous? We believe in God.

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We are too often up and down. God would say we shouldn't get so dispirited as to ask, "What's the use?" Not all Christians experience steady upward spiritual growth. Some real Christians sprout up and fade away, yet come back again later to maturity. The unbelievers give up. Your concerns are genuine. Do not let the downfall of others shake your faith. Keep praying.

Jesus came to save us. It was a struggle for Him. In the parable of the Sower and the seed, is He the Sower? Jesus spoke here from His heart, telling us of His personal distress. Jesus has described His own life here. He described His ministry and, unfortunately, the fact of our denial of anything whatsoever about an ideal kingdom of God.

The Fear of Punishment

They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. Luke 8:13

There are many weak souls who are not living life in Christ, but are living life in crisis. People work themselves up about Jesus for a while, getting all excited about renewal, "*and in time of temptation fall away.*" A lot of unsuspecting people are left only assuming they are Christians. They take God for granted. Sadly, they fail the test of time.

My friend Marty was truly stunned to visualize herself in limbo after death, unable to return to earth if it becomes a lifeless, uninhabitable, environmental bio-wasteland. The first time I read through this parable of the Sower, especially Luke 8:13, I was rocked. It was scary to feel so lost. Those who "have no root" try hard for a while, but then they fall away as they get tempted. They certainly do leave, "*for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us*" (1 John 2:19). That is sad!

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Our desire for a good life will ward off the challenging temptations. A good conscience resists sin. The fear of punishment alone never saves us from sin. Fear can only warn us. We might know the difference between right and wrong, but faith knows to act wisely.

Here is what fear does. Envision a tightrope stretched over a height in a circus tent. You are up there walking out on that rope. To look down is suicide because the pull of gravity will come up from the floor and all at once grab your feet. You must look directly forward, keeping your chin up and your eyes focused on the goal. It is much easier to walk a straight line in the safety of your living room where there is no height, but it is much harder to accomplish this while suspended in the air with a crowd in suspense below. As real as it gets, fear is not going to keep us from falling, but it will cause us to stumble (Romans 7:8–11). We are vexed with sin. We are strained in temptation and overwhelmed by instruction. “*For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil*” (Romans 13:3). The Christian life is not governed by the fear of God as much as by His love.

Keep your eyes fixed to the end, because the Lord does not want us to look back unless it is to see how much He has done for us. Can we thank God enough? Pursue a full blessing, knowing that God will not deny devotion. How can so many hearts be as hard as rock? God tests the cold soul who has refused His Spirit. Jesus will lift up those who follow Him. Strive for the prize and encourage the fainthearted. Counsel them to fight through their irrational limitations. We must ignore all distraction. In anything you name, there are the hang-on type and the truly dedicated.

The student is not the teacher, but a few students truly are lifelong learners, and they continue in life as teachers. Worst of all are the boring burned-out teachers, as you know if you’ve been in a classroom with one.

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God's promise of greater blessings and rewards brings us toward conformity. People need good examples a lot more than they need to be pounded on. How do we instill faith in the heart of the unfaithful or penetrate the impenitent? This gnawing question has haunted me. If people want to give their hearts to God, how do we show them the way? Everyone has opposing forces outside pulling the other way. We each have confusion and temptation within. Can we predict or control what's holding others back? Your honest compassion is the best answer for them.

Be strong in faith, swift to forgive, and adept at endearing yourself to the lost. It is human nature to want others to suffer for their sins. The grudge we hold against them is a taut knot in our hearts. Maybe we turn our anger toward God. Where, then, is our lasting hope? "*Be ye kind*" Ephesians 4:31–32. Your new nature speaks volumes.

Nearly everyone believes in their own righteousness. It is a regrettable thing, but if people have any notion at all about religion, they suppose self-effort and good life wins reward. Fewer people have heard the simplicity of the gospel. We have a long way to go in this world—further than we think—to tell the good news of Jesus Christ. A lot of people assume what they've heard the most, a poor effort and a bad life will be paid back. Ask a few people around you and see what they know of God's grace and hope.

More than once people have answered "Yes" after I have asked them if they were going to Heaven, but then when I asked them how they knew that, they said something like, "I'm a nice guy." It is good to be nice. Niceness is a virtue. But perhaps it's an American idea that just by being nice, everyone gets into Heaven. Where did we get that from? I want everybody to be nice, but it doesn't buy time in eternity. Pleasant people can be like nice rocks and "*receive the word with joy; and these have no root*" Luke 8:13. That's hard.

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Unbelieving people can have principled thinking and ugly attitudes. Let's not be naïve. The disgust and violence are all around. Each of us has an indebted responsibility to society. We pass ourselves off as good or bad. People shovel blame and add less than is their duty. Are you hurting or helping? These powerfully destructive forces run rampant in humanity. It's impossible to escape, but God's love is totally possible and available every day. Our goal is to instill Christian love in whomever we can so their faith simply won't fail. "*For with God nothing shall be impossible*" (Luke 1:37).

The truth of Jesus Christ is being preached to the lost. It's painfully frustrating to think that some people fake conversion. Their rejection hurts. It hurts to think we are bringing someone to salvation when their actions are really a sham. You cannot tell about people, though; maybe they will make a commitment later.

A few people give Christianity a look, seeking answers and going through the motions, only to go with the flow back to sin. The love of money, the pleasures of entertainment, and even the security of family are all powerfully appealing. In today's convoluted world it takes the faith of a martyr to love righteousness.

I remember walking through downtown Seattle with a friend before I was saved. An enthusiastic young man was standing on a corner passing out gospel tracts. I was open, but my friend was scornful. She knew this guy. She said he was big on Jesus half the time, but would revert back to his old ways the other half of the time. For that reason, she was unimpressed by his witness. He interested me though. I wasn't thinking *if* I became a Christian, but *when* I became a Christian I would not be so on and off. This guy didn't have his act together, but I always remember him for the way he was able to get back on the street for Jesus. I pray about where we are today. You worry for the future and we know what's needed now!

That Which Fell

And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. Luke 8:14

If anything, people take only a little of the truth in God's Scripture. Jesus told the Sower and the seed "*which fell among thorns.*" The thorns, He said, represent the "*cares and riches and pleasures of this life.*" So many people "*draw back unto perdition*" (Hebrews 10:39) and surrender to "*the pleasures of sin*" (Hebrews 11:25). Christians don't belong in that group but we do slip.

My thoughts begin to spin as I recount stories of friends over the years. In my first months at Omni House recovering from the drugs, I saw people quit their past and then go directly back to it, worse than before. It scared me. What worried me more was my own roaming spirit—and I still feel it today.

True Christians can be influenced by old friends. We hang on to bad habits. New converts keep on finding pleasures in old places. One of the best guys to me at Omni House was Larry. He was one of several staff members who stuck close to me as I went through my first critical months of recovery.

Somebody asked me one day if the effects of the drugs ever resurfaced, if I'd ever had a flashback. Before I could answer, Larry said, "He's on one big flashback all the time!" It was a very mixed-up time for me.

Larry and others stayed on my case day after day. I'll always remember it. They saved my life. Larry pushed me to get serious and asked me to pledge to stay off drugs.

"I can't promise you," I told him. "I don't want to go back to drugs, but promises are made to be broken."

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“You don’t have to promise us,” Larry said. “We will promise you that you won’t go back.” That was some tall Texan Christian talk, and I took him at his word.

Our staff would speak at community meetings. One time I was asked if I had ever had a bad trip on LSD. When I got finished telling about my one horrendous huge bad trip, my friends escorted me away. I was shaking and weak in the knees.

In over forty-five years since, I have never again seen the total group effort made to surround me, support me, and single me out. That is what it took for me. I suppose God knew ahead of time to put me in a super situation with a whole lot of new loving friends. Something very special happened with them.

After I had been at Omni House for several months, Larry moved out to take a job in another town. I soon heard that he had drifted away from his faith and no longer believed at all. He had renounced his faith. By that time my faith was growing marvelously.

About a year later I saw Larry at a wedding. At the reception I got a chance to talk to him about what I had heard. “Is it true?” I asked. “Have you given up on Jesus?”

“It’s true,” he said.

“Then you don’t consider yourself a Christian anymore?” I was asking him that in front of other people at the table.

He admitted it. “No, I’m not a Christian anymore.”

“Larry, one time you told me, ‘once saved, always saved.’ Do you remember telling me that?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think about it now?” I asked.

“I don’t believe it anymore.”

I said to him, “I just wanted to hear it from you—because I have heard what other people have said about you.”

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We spent the evening talking. Larry appreciated my approaching him on that. He even prayed with me. I visited him later in Corpus Christi where he lived. He wasn't quick to get back to where he should have been spiritually. Unfortunately, he and I did not keep up the communication, and it has been decades since we've talked. Larry meant a lot to me since he was one of the people who saved my life.

Seeing other young people come and go in those days made me think about what kind of Christian I wanted to be. How could you worship Jesus and then turn on Him? Backsliding and sinning Christians have remained an issue with me.

I expect Christians to land on their feet running while sinners self-destruct, but often it's the other way around; sinners repent for their health's sake, and too many truly saved souls fall.

People claim to believe in themselves. They have a stronger desire for their own success. They think about what they can gain and all they can keep. They don't care much for the things of the Lord.

Few of the so-called "strong Christians" stick around long, if they're going to fall away. It isn't that they have no faith, but their problem is that they have dead faith. Remember, "*faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone*" (James 2:17). There are also those so-called "doubting Christians" who do stick around like tares or weeds among the wheat, and we should be careful. They are only looking out for themselves.

There are many who see and "*when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares*" (Luke 8:14), and these are not the cares of others. These are people who compete in this world, envious and angry. The luxuries that people chase have grown into big industries.

Some people decide they don't want to be Christians. What happens to a person who knowingly understands the truth of Jesus and refuses to receive His Holy Spirit? You might expect that

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something terrible happens to people who are conscious of the truth just long enough to taste the hope of Heaven and they know what Jesus gained for them on the cross, and yet they continue to rebel. They have the “*knowledge of the truth*” (Hebrews 10:26–31), but haven’t taken the truth to heart. There is a difference.

Anyone who understands the gospel well enough but refuses God’s gift of eternal life as described in the New Testament has denied all things. They face the furious vengeance of the judgment (Hebrews 12:25–29). Their punishment is going to be worse.

Jesus told a story of a man who found a great treasure in a field (Matthew 13:44). That man hurriedly sold everything he had to buy the field. Jesus desires the believer’s heart to be such that he spends a full life with the most fantastic hope of coming into God’s kingdom. If not, you get nothing. Jesus said as a matter of fact to flat give up every other ambition. It is great gain to seek the Lord and His love.

Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. Luke 8:39

Jesus took a big departure from the religious order of the day when he put God’s ministry in the hands of ordinary people, like the man out of whom He cast demons, as seen in the verse above. Not only did Jesus call working-class men to be His Apostles, but He calls all His followers to give all their heart to spread the news.

Jesus didn’t come in the order of the Levitical priesthood, nor was He brought up as a Pharisee. He was not royalty, other than He was in the family line of King David. His kingdom is not of this world. Jesus was a carpenter’s son. The religious leaders did not recognize His ministry, did not give Him their approval, and failed to see that He was their Messiah. Jesus trusted His work to the ordinary folks He met.

The Sower and His Seed

Jesus was born a common man. The Pharisees judged people. Here came Jesus—the Lord, God, and Judge. The parable of the Sower surely drew a good pattern and set a new standard by which people would be rated. Jesus taught more reliably than could be allowed by their religious order—He had so much more than what would be tolerated.

In essence, the authorities failed with their never-ending requirements. Their regulations paled in contrast to the accuracy of Jesus' allegorical depictions of behavior. The conduct of these rulers in their contemporary and temporary theocracy put up a dark backdrop to Jesus' righteous wisdom.

Our Lord offered His life even before Christianity was formed. He opened a total change. He gave His all in advance of our time. We can't trust in our own ways. We don't rest on our laurels. We rest squarely on the finished work of Christ.

In their time, the Pharisees held themselves in dominion over the people, condemning them instead of interceding for them. It became that way all over again centuries later in the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church thought to determine a person's relationship to God. The clergy claimed to be the sole keepers of Holy Writ. The Bible was kept in Latin for the exclusive benefit of consecrated, educated superiors, and it was "protected" from lesser, or lower, quizzical readers.

Class distinction was accepted for centuries for practical reasons. The tortured interpretations of church doctrine held precedence over the Holy Scriptures. Official Church doctrine went beyond the true meaning of the Bible.

Over the centuries there's been clergy who doubted the Bible's inerrancy. They kept it so they could use it for themselves, bending it to their own advantage. The Reformation began when men like John Wycliffe arrived. Wycliffe was born in about 1330. He later

attended Oxford. He identified the great notion that every Christian being filled with the Holy Spirit of God is able to grapple with the truths of the Bible. He said we have as much right to speak as do church cardinals and popes. By John Wycliffe's time many in the hierarchy had come under criticism and disrepute.

Wycliffe didn't tolerate at all the corrupting of the truth of Jesus Christ. He felt that the practice of faith, virtue, and a good conscience, gave anyone the ability to interpret Scripture. Sinners, heretics, and infidels may study theology, he said, but they do not gain in any way the wisdom of it. The institution of the church not only ruled over its citizenry, but wanted to judge their eternal souls. Meanwhile, John Wycliffe worked to bring the Bible into the world of ordinary folk. He worked for all believers to live in love.

We have the sacred Scriptures in our hands today because of the changed lives and steady efforts of believers. Faithful Christians have kept the account right. We can assess a correct response to God with stories like the demon-possessed man whom Jesus freed. This man told everyone his story. God, the almighty Sovereign, places a big responsibility on one and all. See how faith and gratitude work. It's a lot to understand. A crisis of the soul brings this clarity. Time tests the truth. Wisdom requires higher learning, but not necessarily higher education. The good news is that the New Testament clearly gives us more to see in Jesus.

The Good Ground

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Luke 8:15

God brings fruit from an honest and good heart that has patience. Jesus throws a hard-to-hit curveball right over home plate

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with just this one word—patience. Unless you have it, you will not bear fruit. Is a person a Christian if the fruit of the Spirit does not come right away? Life takes time. Every one of us must yield an increase of the fruit, giving true proof with a good heart. How? Right now? Jesus brings fruit. Patience means perseverance over time. It is everything to triumph in life.

The first time someone witnessed to me was in November 1969. He was a young man like me, and we were working together in the steel mill here in West Seattle. He started talking while we worked, telling me about the gospel and warning me about Hell to come. I invited him to come home with me after work so we could talk some more. He was at my apartment on Delridge Way for an hour or two. I had not been the least bit interested in anything spiritual and had never considered an afterlife or invisible spiritual dimension, but only the physical and tangible, the here and now. We simply agreed a lot on decency and morality. I never worked with this guy again and never even saw him again. He would not know that I found Jesus two years later, in part because of his zeal to share his faith.

This little seed began to grow below the surface in the following months. For instance, there was the evening I was walking up the street from my apartment. It was a party apartment my friend Vern and I had. My brother was back from Vietnam and was out of the army. We partied continually for a couple months. We stayed high on dope and drugs all over the city all the time. I got in real bad shape.

I stepped out the door one evening by myself. I hadn't gone far up the sidewalk when I looked up and saw a cross overhead on the roof above the doorway of an old church. I had never noticed it before, even though this was only half a block away from my apartment. Churches and crosses never grabbed my attention, so I don't know why it stood out that night. I didn't even know there was a church on my block. Suddenly it was there. Why is that? I certainly understood

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it better two years later after Jesus moved into my heart. These were necessary parts of my story and how I came to be saved.

For decades after that I drove by that old church building without stopping to tell them how their cross affected me that night. Forty-eight-and-a-half years later, I drove by on a Saturday about noon. Balloons and a sign that said “Free Barbeque” stood in front of the church. My friend Leta and I were on our way to take care of some business. After that we were looking for lunch. The free barbeque sounded cheaper than what we had in mind, so we went back over there. I had hardly closed my car door when I saw Leta out on the walkway hugging a big smiling guy who had his arms around her. I was thinking that they got acquainted pretty fast, but they actually already knew each other. This was really special to her. She was a new Christian, baptized in our church last year, and he was right there now reinforcing her faith. Out of this whole wide city, the Lord landed us here at this time, and Leta knew this man.

Leo is a leader in that church. I had a chance to tell him about the night I saw that old cross. He was nine years old back then, and he is still with it, inviting everyone to stop by for a barbeque. They have a barbeque at the church every other week. Leo and others were glad to hear my story, and I wanted to thank them and see if they were still holding out the gospel. You and I just might not know everything that is going on around us.

One day toward the end of 1973 I became friends with Ron and Jean, who were having a garage sale in San Antonio. We had a great discussion about prophecies in the Bible because it was just after the Yom Kippur War in Israel. I went back to the garage sale the next day. Having just moved into town, I bought more stuff and invited Ron and Jean to church. They came.

Ron was just out of the army with a new career. After Ron and Jean had attended church for a few months, the pastor’s message got

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to Jean. Ron and Jean were talking in the car on the way home when Jean realized she was not a Christian, so they prayed for salvation. They were faithful in church, always bringing their little boy too. They were a real nice family.

After a few years in youth ministries, they gave themselves to full-time service. Ron saw how he needed to give up his worldly values. He let go to live for Jesus. I was happy to see their faith before, but now I rejoiced even more to think about the blessing they would be to others. They both surrendered their hearts to God and dedicated their lives for His service and glory. This story is about the things God is looking for in our hearts and lives.

The faith of believers can win doubtful souls. Rather than think of the many worrisome thoughts spreading around today, we can ignore the discouragement of a cynical world. We can have confidence and patience to believe that the Lord's work is growing bigger than ever.

A few years ago at work, out of the blue I had a smiley face pop up on my computer screen with a little blurb that asked, "Is this the Kyle Hester who knows Ron and Jean?" Over thirty years had passed since we had talked. Last I heard they were moving back to Oklahoma to attend Bible school. Now they have more kids than I knew and they are all grown up. Ron says that after working with youth and summer camps, he then successfully pastored a church for decades. Ron and Jean are very happy. Ron said something to me about our friendship that was very neat and was in reference to his ministry. He said, "Kyle, when you get to Heaven you will see how much fruit you have in your life—more than you know." God has blessed them over and over with multiplied years of ministry for the kingdom of God.

With patience, we run through life to the finish. It's somehow easy to complain and to find fault and make excuses rather than

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watch good things happen. Complaining gets us down. The truth endures. Entire Christian churches taxi around the runway to see which way the wind is blowing without ever actually taking off. We're not going to stop all the bad days and all the wrong ways. We try to avoid anything that may be upsetting. Really, let's get on with life and never mind the drawbacks.

Temptations are not always the old familiar sins. You may be moral but have too many material possessions or might be living without them. When others get more things than you or when they have more success or go more places, don't be disheartened. Don't be distracted when the bargains and sales pull you. Why stress if desires tempt you? You may have bad health or bad luck. Apply patience. And don't watch too much TV. Relax another way. Wait on the Lord.

In another place in the Bible, Jesus told a parable about an unclean spirit that was cast out (Matthew 12:43–45). When the spirit returned, the "house" was still empty, so he went and brought seven other spirits, each one more wicked, and made the state of that man far worse than at first. It should be clear to the defenders of the faith that the mere absence of sin does not indicate the presence of righteousness. Nor is one's goodness representative of God's will. Each of us needs to have God's call from above.

Coveting riches breeds impatience and leads to downfall. We could be sinning just by wishing. Are you thinking about stealing? Make-believe fantasies are misleading and pretending is dishonest as well. We are wrong to compare ourselves with others, wanting to have what they have, expecting that more could be enough. Try to redirect the tendencies other people have and turn them away from sin. Renew hearts in faith along with love.

I asked a young Middle Eastern woman who was working as a cashier if she knew where she would be after this life is over. She said that if her good works outweighed her bad works, she would

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go to Heaven, but if her bad deeds outweighed her good, she would go to Hell. (That must be a nervous way to live.) I explained to her how the way of Jesus Christ can get her into Heaven for free, and I asked if she had heard this before. She said she had heard this through her Christian friends. See, she has heard it. Be patient and know that God is at work. He is doing better than we might guess. Don't leave yourself out.

It will take a great deal of patience and persistence in some churches to effectively motivate the members to venture beyond their safe haven of the sanctuary. The attendance is stable, the leadership is solid, and the pastor is preaching. Don't change the formula. Sinners are not apt to come through those doors. Yes, God wants us in church, but He also wants to take us out of church and into the world. People are hopeless without Jesus.

The story of the Sower and the seed is personal. It glimpses the grief of Jesus. His mother and brothers were there every time the parable is told in the three Synoptic Gospels. The secret of Jesus' heart is bared. His words often fell on deaf ears. Did Jesus teach them to sow on good ground only? Jesus called out to everyone everywhere.

Righteousness and sin are incompatible and irreconcilable. Man's free will and God's sovereignty are two parallel lines that don't intersect. We point in opposite directions. God doesn't bend, and neither do we. In all eternity there is just this one exception, with the greatest love: God gave us His Son. The lines were bent. The rules were changed.

The item left in the balance is our unbelief. The Sower scattered seed over good ground and bad. Unlike what Jesus described, wouldn't a good farmer be careful with his precious seed? The first thing a farmer does is prepare the field. He clears the other vegetation and the rocks. Then he plows long straight rows in the soil. He doesn't throw any of his seed in the road. What was Jesus talking

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about here and who was He thinking of? Was He speaking of Israel or possibly of the Gentile church coming shortly? Jesus was referring to Himself and His ministry.

Given a finite time, Jesus felt urgent about reaching people. He was keenly aware that most people would be lost in the end. Some of His seed fell on the listening ears of Gentiles who had the right response, and Jesus was surprised at this. He is reaching out to unlikely people in this parable, to us—the unlucky and the unlikable. We are now expected to reach those who haven't yet believed. They have no root, and we who have repented must *love* with our *faith* even those who bear no fruit.

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. Mark 4:26–27

Our faith does not have to have the know-how, but must only have patience with God. Who can know what God is accomplishing over time? Real Christians who believe in the Supreme Being believe just as much in the “Supreme doing.”

A tree broadcasts seed far and wide, but few seeds take root and grow. Of these few little trees, few grow to be big. True to life, nature illustrates Jesus' approach.

One reason to love trees is to imagine the odds. They stand in place. They come from a little seed, in a variety of ways, and from who knows how far. They find a fertile spot to grow and weather the elements and outlive humans by centuries.

I marvel at trees in town left standing in the city's industrial areas. A few trees hold on next to a gravel parking lot or behind an old warehouse and escape attention. A few seedlings will bed beside old sooty factories. Give them credit for finding a home along the streets and fences. Admire them for enduring the neglect. They bravely

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stand out, as they have not yet been spotted and thinned out. They ignore the threat of progress when the ax of new construction will fell them someday.

It would be a bigger fluke yet if one of these stray city trees would cast a seed far away somewhere, someplace where the little one roots and lasts. Even a planted tree on the parking strip of a residential area has a slim chance of yielding just one new seedling with a future. There is going to be a future. With forest trees, most saplings do not usually survive to grow into tall long-living trees due to birds, squirrels, unfavorable microclimates, and hostile terrain. Trees are designed by God to produce innumerable seeds in order to overcome every natural hazard and to loyally maintain their species. If Jesus thought it right to spread His message far and wide, then we must see His example. Stay rooted in His cause and please don't give up; see what sprouts.

Jesus lifted up those who were weak in faith. He encouraged the timid and even helped the sinner. Jesus sought the odd people and those most overlooked. How do we bear fruit? It takes faith to believe all things.

It's not like we believe everything people tell us. Don't be gullible. There are millions of crazy ideas out there and plenty of dangerous deals. We, however, want to believe everything God says and take it the way He means it.

We want God to give us everything we can think of. Is He going to solve all problems? That might not be good for you and me. God loves us. Why doesn't He give us all we ask, take away what is undesirable, and remove people we don't like? He sees it the other way around. God wants us to do as He says.

We are not getting it. What did He make us for? Never underestimate what God is doing in Jesus, our Creator and Savior. Maybe you are still asking yourself if such a real change has happened. Consider

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what love we've received from Him. He calls us His children. We are nothing less. We are His. What does this mean? In His infinite love, our inheritance in Heaven is more awesome than anyone on earth imagines; it is an enormous surprise. This big thought ought to do something for us right away.

If we can help get this hope fully established in the Christian mind and make it stick now, we will see more amazing things. It takes so long to surrender. God wants to show His favor. Friends can be aware of this and yet rebuff His kindness. Hell is terribly uninviting. We have enough warning—and life is too short.

God's will for us is to be dedicated to *love* in *faith*. Take the Word of Jesus Christ to the ends of the world (Luke 24:45–47); this is the New Testament. A couple years before I became a Christian, a young long-haired guy was witnessing on the street. He told me about a man who had left his job to serve Jesus and who had given away his money. I told him it would have been better to have kept the job and money and to live to help God in the long run.

Sinners shun the way of Jesus. They feel little guilt or remorse. See how low in spirit all of us are. Be tolerant. Any poor soul can pray. Shame and tension are put aside in Christ. The Holy Spirit gives believers reassurance, and love rests on faith.

One day a bird got into our church. It frantically flew around in the rafters for a long time, darting about trying to find a way out. The tiny bird got tired and rested on a pew. It looked up, saw an open window, and flew out. We don't want to reach for everything we see. Learn what God has. Our changes will lead toward better chances. Believers remain rooted in *faith* and bear fruit in *love*, and this only comes by patience.

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. Luke 8:16

Parable of the Fig Tree

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Luke 13:6–9 NIV