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Menbuilders

MAGAZINE

WHAT MAKES A REAL MAN? || RUDY'S STORY || THE ANSWER TO POVERTY



Menbuilders The purpose of *Menbuilders* magazine is to advance the kingdom of God by building Godly men on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

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ROB MCLEOD

WHAT MAKES A REAL MAN?

“**W**hat makes a real man?” has always been a loaded question to address, in any culture and generation. Scripture clearly describes the high and noble calling for men within their families, marriages, workplace and church life. Sadly, in our present culture, the fundamental question of “What makes a man?” involves tackling subject matter that was barely imaginable even one generation ago. The notion of what constitutes a man has been blurred to such an extent that even physiological differences between men and women are simply being ignored in this process of re-defining gender. Current thinking among ‘experts’ is that gender is fluid and that one can subjectively ‘identify’ according to their inner desires and feelings. This vein of teaching says that one’s gender identification does not have to align with one’s biological sex at birth. Thankfully, the shifting sands of popular opinion can be compared and contrasted with that of unchanging truth contained in Scripture.

First of all, the Bible clearly teaches that there are only two genders, male and female. Biological sex and gender are not mutually exclusive categories. Nowhere does Scripture provide any endorsement of ‘gender fluidity’ or multiple categories

of gender identification. Each person's gender directly corresponds to their biological design. An honest reading of Scripture clearly evidences this. Consider Genesis 5:1-2: "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created." Jesus reiterates much of this in Mark 10:6-8: "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Scripture also claims that its teachings are unchangeable. Hebrews 13:8-9 says that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines [teachings]." The confusion in our culture regarding gender does not originate from the Lord since "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." (See 1 Corinthians 14:33.) Our present culture has relegated the authority of Scripture into so far of a back seat that answers to basic (really, trivial) questions have been completely redefined. Under the now far reaching scope of 'gender conversion laws' in Canada it is potentially a criminal act to merely tell people that certain sexual desires contrary to Scripture are indeed sinful. An article such as this one could easily be within the crosshairs of anti-biblical censorship.

Despite the preceding (and potentially inflammatory) paragraphs we haven't even scratched the surface regarding the high biblical calling for men. We will keep things 'simple' and use Scripture as our guide.

The Lord's call for every man is incredibly high and full of eternal purpose. But let's be honest. Our role as image bearers of Jesus Christ has been largely usurped. In the creation account of Genesis the LORD placed Adam in the Garden of Eden with the express purpose of guarding it and overseeing it. Genesis 2:15 says "Then the LORD God took the man [Adam] and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it." If you are familiar with the biblical account it was not a long time before Adam relinquished his God-given role by disregarding God's instruction to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since then it has been Satan's desire, from generation to generation, to usurp and demean the role of men today.

Below are some highlights from Scripture regarding man's life purpose. In this article we will only briefly consider each of these:

- (i) We are to find life from the Word and to put away childish things that starve our souls.**
- (ii) We are to have our ultimate satisfaction and identity from Jesus Christ.**
- (iii) If married, we are to love our wives as Jesus Christ loves His church.**
- (iv) We are to be the primary example to our children.**
- (v) We are to actively participate in strengthening the spiritual quality of our local church.**
- (vi) We are to be 'salt and light' in the workplace.**

(i) We are to find our life from the Word:

Just like we need physical food in order to get through the physical demands of our day so we need spiritual food to fight the larger battles of life. We cannot successfully meet any other life demands without properly providing the 'spiritual calories' for our 'inner man', our spirit. John 1:1 describes Jesus as the Word. Since Jesus is alive, He is truly the living Word! John 6:57-58 says, "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." Jesus is not saying that we literally need to eat His physical body. He explains in John 6:63 that the **words** that He speaks are the food we need to grow: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." So, spending time with Jesus involves prioritizing time spent in the Scripture. The Scripture comes alive and feeds us as the Holy Spirit convicts us and illuminates the Word in our heart. Not surprisingly the worldly competition is fierce in alluring us to waste this time elsewhere. It is incredibly

tempting at times to prioritize online searches for the latest sports score or news headline. However, to thrive we must first feed our spirit. Jeremiah 15:16 says, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD of hosts.”

(ii) Our satisfaction and identity must come from Jesus Christ:

Since society loudly applauds men for their work accomplishments, physical acumen and intellect most men end up placing high priority on flourishing in these areas. In contrast, Scripture prioritizes an intimate walk with the Lord. “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, NASB.) So if we are to glory in anything, it is to glory in the fact that by the Lord’s mercy we are growing into Him! Consider also Psalm 147:10-11: “He [God] does not delight in the strength of the horse; he takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy.” What a contrast to what the culture teaches us.

(iii) If married, we are to love our wives as Jesus Christ loves His church:

Consider Ephesians 5:25-26, 28-29: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word... So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” What a lofty calling! We are to love our wives as we love ourselves! This is impossible to accomplish without the Lord. On multiple occasions I have despaired within myself as I have seen my shortcomings in this area. It is definitely unattainable without the Lord’s supply. We cannot look to ourselves to accomplish this in our own strength. Notice the role of the ‘word’ here in Ephesians 5. We are first to build up our wives by the

living Word. This points us back to our need for being in the Word ourselves. If we see our wife struggling could it be that we are not living out the truth of the Word to her? Elsewhere Scripture says that “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends (John 15:13).” As I put the true needs of my wife above my own I will see her flourish. How many marriages amongst believers have been ruined by a man’s selfishness? At many times in my marriage I have been convicted of simply carrying out my own agenda for the day without considering the needs of my spouse. Marriage is not intended simply to meet my needs for companionship, sex and a helper within the home. Our marriage is to reflect the love that Christ has for His own body, which is the church (see Ephesians 5:29-30). Understanding the care that the Lord has for us as believers enables us to exemplify this within our marriage.

How does all of this apply to me if I am single? For starters, it is best to ground ourselves in Christ long before marriage. Any man can strengthen the possibility of a future marriage by walking in obedience to Christ while single. A man can love his future wife by building himself up, prior to marriage, in the Word. As a single man, we are also to guard our eyes just as much as a married man. A verse that convicted me while still unmarried is found in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Use this verse as a spiritual litmus test for assessing the content that you are placing in front of your eyes and dwelling upon within your heart. It is amazing how much ‘information’ in our life does not satisfy the standard described in Philippians 4:8.

(iv) We are to be the primary example to our children:

Ephesians 6:4 says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Nowhere in Scripture is someone else given the primary responsibility to raise our children. Raising children is a joyful yet sobering life-long stewardship. Psalm 127:3 says, “Behold, children are a heritage [gift] from the Lord, the fruit of the

womb is a reward.” Also, Malachi 2:15 declares that “He [God] seeks godly offspring.” Contrary to what much of our culture believes, children are not a mistake or an impediment to a good life. Yes, raising children for the Lord requires long term commitment and a deep spiritual vision. Raising children for the Lord does not come without a cost to our own self-centered plans. However, since children are eternal beings their impact for the Kingdom of God can have eternal consequences! Children are worth infinitely more than the temporal happiness that fleshly pleasures may give you. In our self-prioritizing culture it should come as no surprise that children are frequently depicted as financial and time burdens. The rampant sin of abortion is one tactic of Satan to attempt to destroy the possibility of children living for their Creator.

As a father I am continually amazed by the number of ‘voices’ out there clamouring to teach our children in the world’s ways. Whether it is news media, social media, the entertainment industry or our own secular school system there are many sources of ungodly information that desire to grab hold of the minds and hearts of our children. Even more importantly than being a financial provider for the household, a dad is supposed to be the spiritual head and spiritual protector within the home. Our homes need to be safe zones from the ways of the world. Living in the age of the internet and wireless media, every home is easily accessible to the world without proper oversight. Beyond that, our speech, hobbies and the things that we run to for fulfillment as fathers are also readily apparent to our children as they grow older. Is our walk pointing them to find fulfillment in Jesus or are we pointing them to be satisfied in the temporary pleasures of the world and culture? Children are quick to discern any hypocrisy and distraction within us. By the Lord’s grace, we can live a life that points our children to the Lord.

(v) We are to actively participate in strengthening the spiritual quality of our local church:

Before I lay any responsibility upon the shoulders of men for their local church, I first must point out that, by and large, the typical church life in North America does not follow the Scriptural model. The scope of this article cannot begin to address all that is meant by the preceding statement but let me summarize the current state of things just a little. When we hear

the word ‘church’ today, sadly most people think of only a building. Much time, effort and cost is given to build elaborate and costly ‘churches’ that are used for only a fraction of the hours that exist in a given week. The success of a local church is often gauged by the curb appeal that the building generates. Furthermore, most churches today are run by a confident and Type A ‘senior pastor’ under a model that mostly mirrors a business. In medium to large churches, a senior pastor typically has paid helpers (be it an assistant pastor or two, a youth pastor, a worship pastor, etc). Effectively the church life is run by paid staff and most of the church ‘members’ typically show up only for a brief Sunday morning service to hear the senior pastor exercise his spiritual gift of teaching or preaching. In such meetings the rest of the body does not get to function in their gifts, they merely go home after the service. If the members are asked to function in any capacity on a Sunday morning it is typically to give money in order to support the substantial costs of this hybrid church / business model. This is not the highest model for the church life.

The typical North American church model effectively renders the male useless and unneeded (aside from sitting in a chair and giving money). The Scriptural pattern is for a plurality of spiritually mature elders to provide Godly teaching and discipleship to equip the next generation of believers (see 2 Timothy 2:2 and Ephesians 4:11-14 for starters). There is no room for ‘mini popes’ or for larger-than-life individuals to run their personal ‘ministry’ out of ego or show. All men who desire more of the Lord must be able to spiritually function within the parameters of a properly conducted church life. Seek the Lord as to where you may function. Ask your church leadership where they envision you serving according to your gifting. Mature church leaders will not be threatened by such requests but rather highly encouraged! There are many ways that the brothers in a local church can properly function. This can be accomplished by having various men speak over the course of the year rather than having every Sunday message coming from one individual. Perhaps you can also function in a small group setting, in outreach in the community, meeting one on one with others, etc. The options are many. Again, be in prayer and be in fellowship with church leadership concerning how you can be properly invested in the church life.



Our church family lasts for eternity! It is wise to begin living in this reality even now.

(vi) We are to be 'salt and light' in the workplace:


Let me begin by saying that it is no more noble to be in 'full time Christian ministry' than it is to be working in the secular workplace. In fact, your workplace is a full time ministry. The key is to be where the Lord desires to plant you! Too many men have felt condemned in their minds because they are supposedly not doing the 'Lord's work' while working in the marketplace. Many men in the pages of Scripture (think of Daniel and Joseph) have been highly used of the Lord in very secular occupations. Even John the Baptist, when talking to Roman soldiers, did not tell them to quit the

Roman army. Rather John told them "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." (See Luke 3:14.) Wow, no one would deny that the Roman army could use a godly witness!

Other than your own family, your workplace will likely be your most important mission field. In fact you may be the only believer on your shift or in your entire workplace. What an opportunity! Matthew 5:13 says, "You are the salt of the earth" and Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Simply by having the job that you do, you will have opportunities for the gospel that your pastor will never have! These opportunities are not to be lost or minimized; rather, they are a precious gift from the Lord. **M**

HOW GOD SAVED & DELIVERED ME

RUDY'S STORY

A photograph of a lighthouse on a rocky island. The lighthouse is a tall, cylindrical tower with a dark base and a white upper section, topped with a lantern room. It sits on a low, dark stone wall. The background shows a turbulent sea with white-capped waves crashing against the shore under a blue sky. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

My name is Rudy, and I'm 39 years old. I've lived in the north end of Winnipeg for almost my whole life. My family consisted of my mom, dad and one sister. We were somewhat religious, with a nominal upbringing in the Roman Catholic faith. However, Catholicism was something that I never really embraced or even wanted to follow. I walked away from it as soon as I could, albeit sometimes honoring my parents during certain holidays, at which time I would attend with them. I was a fairly reserved person growing up and had a hard time fitting in with the crowd. I didn't find it easy to form relationships or to be accepted as 'cool' so I eventually found an escape through drugs. This brought me the attention I wanted and opened me up in a new way. My life increasingly revolved around drugs. I would scheme, plan and steal to get them, so I could use them in secret or with friends. I finally felt like a somebody.

Beginning at a young age I had dark thoughts about death and what would come after it. I even made plans to find out. I thought I would wait until I was eighteen, so in high school I tried to hide my darkness and depression. I thought I did a pretty good job of it with the 'help' of the drugs that I used almost every day. When seriously considering suicide to end it all my grandfather died. It was the first time that I knowingly experienced death and what comes with it. My grandfather was gone and it really rocked my world. It snapped me out of my desperation for a little while. I truly thought and felt that this was God preserving me by showing me what heartache I was willing to selfishly bring upon my family. However, I carried on with the drugs and partying to numb myself in attempt to just keep going. I sort of convinced myself to wait and see what would happen in this seemingly pointless life that I was living. I still had no purpose and all the while

Around this time, I got the opportunity to take a once in a lifetime trip to Brazil to visit my cousin at her beach bar. Little did I know that on this trip I would meet, and fall in love with, my future wife, Mayrla. It was something I thought would never be possible but it felt like a match made in heaven. As soon as we could we got married in Winnipeg and a couple of years later we were expecting. Everything was going great, I felt like I had my life on track. However, my wife, who grew up with a Baptist church background, was feeling like a part of her was missing. She had 'mentioned God' a few times to me but it was something that I did not want to get involved

When my wife was having some health issues and we were pregnant with our second child I experienced the church body caring for us in a way I never thought possible. It was a love I never could have imagined. It was the love of Christ! He was in them and working through them! With my wife, I slowly joined a Bible study and thought I could 'fake it until I made it.' There were things that I was holding on to loosely now but regardless I was still holding on and hesitant to let go of them. I still had nagging


questions such as: "What about aliens and that UFO I thought I saw?", "How can the fairy tale stories of the Bible be true and believable?" Ultimately I set these questions aside and reoriented my focus. I put my focus on the Lord and waited on Him to reveal the truth to me. After some time I considered myself to be on some sort of level playing field with the other believers but there was still a key element missing and I didn't fully understand what that was. While experiencing a little health scare I attended a men's meeting at the church. I ended up spilling the beans and pouring out my heart (God truly had been working on me) to these men. I told them what I was feeling. I was scared of dying but I thought I was all good with God because of a spiritual experience I had by myself when I was younger. I thought the experience was valid and put me in God's favor. I thought it was all good between me and Him. But I was relying only on a 'hope so.' I was wrong. I had created a God in my mind that would suit my needs. That same evening a dear brother in the Lord asked me if I had ever truly accepted the Lord as my Saviour and been 'born again.' To this question I responded "No." At this moment I finally saw my true condition as a sinner! I was under God's wrath and in danger of being condemned forever. By the grace of God, that evening I repented of my sin and prayed with my new-found brothers in the Lord to accept Christ. I gave Him complete control over my life.

After coming to the Lord I experienced great changes in my life, especially with respect to the things I desired. Things I once cherished became worthless to me. I began to see things that I had collected over the years to be very dark and even demonic. The Lord used these strong emotions towards certain possessions to open my eyes. He gradually brought many things to my attention that I needed to do away with. If I would hold onto them they would only do me harm. I had to let go of my old self.

A desire to see the lost coming to the Lord has been a real motivation for me. To share the 'good news' is also a command from the Lord Jesus. With five children now, my wife and I frequently pray that they will all come to know the Lord. When seeing strangers I can only wonder who is forgiven and who is unforgiven. How are we to know? Jesus commanded

us to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." If we are not in Christ and born again we are under God's wrath and judgment. By trusting in Jesus as our Saviour, rather than ourselves, and turning from our sins God can bring us from death to life. If we are willing to change He can produce a marvelous work in us.

Shortly after being baptized, my new walk with the Lord was about to take a difficult path. My wife was now 38 weeks pregnant. At a routine checkup we discovered that our baby was stillborn. The only thing that we could think of was that the Lord is in control of everything and He would be faithful to carry us through this trial. Both my wife and I came under spiritual attack during this experience. However, we relied on the fact that He had brought us so far already and we would maintain that trust in Him to carry us even further. It would have been far too easy to just fly off the rails because of the pain we felt from our loss. From the world's point of view this would have been normal. Slips and falls do happen from time to time. I am sinless in the Lord and He is helping me to sin less. I am human and fallible and I've made many mistakes even after coming to know Christ. Thankfully we have a Saviour who can sympathize with us and has been tempted in all ways known to man. He knows our struggles and always gives us a way of escape. We have His grace and it has helped me deal with the fact that I'm not perfect but am still being perfected in Him. My brothers and sisters in Christ that we have inherited have helped us deal with our wounds. The love of Christ is powerful and it has flowed through those who surrounded us as we were healing from the death of our child.

In summary, I have experienced a life of running through darkness while carrying my addictions, fears, other burdens and my sins bearing down on me. Along with brokenness in my life, the sincere desire to change and understand what this life is for has helped lead me to the Lord. He was my true and only need! His cross of salvation and the payment of my sin debt have set me free to serve Him in His kingdom. John 5:24 says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." 

GREG STETSKI

The Effectiveness of Intimidation

"We were dealing with another pro-life campaign, where there had been vandalism to our billboard. Irrespective of the messaging, we reserve the right to decline any advertiser based on a number of factors, one of those being public outcry."

And so ended the attempt of my wife and I to sponsor a billboard asking prospective mothers to allow their babies to live. In all honesty, I was stunned by the advertising agency's refusal to produce my pro-life billboard.

My response, sent by email, was the following: *"I now understand the effectiveness of the approach of intimidation and threats. Through this scheme, one group of citizens has effectively silenced another group of citizens. Innocent companies are caught by this intimidation, and are forced to give up simple business contracts. Free speech has been effectively attacked and cancelled.*

Many years ago, I gave up a professional engineering career to move into the inner city of Winnipeg and help the poor. I know what it is like for people to have no voice, no protector, no help, and no one to care. But it was a joy to be there helping the poor until my retirement.

But my heart has now been captured by those people who cannot speak even one word on their own behalf, those babies in the womb. I will admit that I sometimes cry as I go to sleep, as these defenseless little ones cannot even beg for their lives, and can only give silent screams as their lives end. And anyone who attempts to speak for them is vilified, condemned and silenced themselves."

My wife and I were able to sponsor this same billboard ten years ago without any problem! What is going on??

The battle for truth is raging, and the enemy does not give up!

Our charity, *Bible for Children*, has also experienced this battle first hand:

We were distributing Bible stories to home printers around North America through the largest printer manufacturer in the world, at their request. The plan was to expand this program to other languages and other countries. The European branch of the company objected. Suddenly everything stopped.

We were preparing Bible stories for a major literary company that was established by top world figures to convert English publications into many third world languages. We submitted many Spanish Bible stories, and it suddenly stopped.

We were publishing Bible stories in the largest English language newspaper in the world, the *India Times*. It was very interesting to see our Bible stories up next to articles on Krishna and Indian religions. Suddenly it stopped.

In every case, someone who was supportive or at least open to Bible stories had started working with us, and then someone higher up in either administration or ownership ended it.

More than thirty years ago we experienced similar pushback from cable TV systems with *Genesis StoryTime*, our TV channel of children's storybooks. Ten percent of the stories were Bible stories. We were told by one top executive of a major US cable company that they would put us on all of their cable



Greg Stetski paid for this *controversial* pro-life image and message to be placed on a high-traffic billboard in Winnipeg, MB.

systems if we would remove the Bible stories. We refused. We were able to operate this cable channel for 14 years, but had to stop after constant opposition.

We expect this will only get worse, so what are we as Christians to do?

We live in a pagan society, where God commands us to be "in the world, but not of it." We must love God, not the world. We must love our neighbors, but not become like them. We must fill our minds with the Word of God, not with the media of this world. (A radical suggestion – throw out the TV!)


Our homes should be places where our children are protected from the world. We should let only godly influences enter our homes: Christian reading material, Christian radio and music, Christian videos. The media of the world is a powerful tool of our enemy. And it has become increasingly difficult in this age of computers and smart phones to stop the flow of the destroying influences. Our most powerful weapon against the world is to make the Bible the centre of our homes, gathering the family daily around God's Word.

And we need our brothers and sisters – we need the Church! We have come under attack the last few years, especially due to the pandemic. A difference of opinion has sharply divided us, but we must come together. The only way is to truly love one another, with love overwhelming our disagreements.

Let us look at communist countries today to see what we may face tomorrow. The state controls the actions and movements of its people. The state forces all citizens to obey its will. The state takes control of children away from their parents. The state especially attacks the churches, pushing them out of the public sphere, and driving them underground. The state even attempts to control the very minds of everyone, telling them what they can think!

But we can look at our brothers and sisters in those countries, and see that through all their suffering, our God is faithful.

Each of us must seek the Lord in our own situation, and walk as He directs us. Jesus has led the way, through the cross, and we must follow.

Oh, and about that billboard. Ten years ago, we wanted it to speak on behalf of those dear babies still in the womb, who cannot speak for themselves. We proposed the words, "Mommy, I love you. Please let me live." That was too 'radical' even ten years ago. It somehow went against their 'advertising standards.' We finally agreed to approach it from the perspective of a baby who had survived and been born. But they still would not allow us to use the word, "Mommy." The final, 'acceptable' version of the billboard had a picture of a baby in the arms of its mother, with the words, "Thank you for letting me live, I love you." 



DAVE LOUDEN



THE ANSWER TO *Poverty*

For several decades I have struggled to understand and apply the call of Scripture in regards to caring for the poor. In that time I have heard a wide variety of reasons for and against helping the poor. All opinions aside, it is clear from the Bible that believers are called to share and to meet the physical and spiritual needs of their neighbours. If we are to be honest, we struggle to truly own who is our 'neighbour.'

Various passages of Scripture have brought clarity to me on this subject. As I studied, I discovered there was one condition, if met, that would eliminate poverty. This condition is that one must carefully obey the voice of the Lord.

In Deuteronomy 15 we find the Lord instructing Moses how to care for the poor, implying that there will likely always be poor ones around us. People fall into poverty for a variety of reasons. From time to time people fall into need due to difficult economic times, sickness, famine, war, death of a spouse or caregiver, or personal disobedience to God's ways.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs."

Scripture also admonishes people to work. Through good, honest work, people will then have their own needs met and also have the capacity to assist those who lack. On this subject, very strong words come from Scripture:

2 Thessalonians 3:10 "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

Ephesians 4:28 "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

Christ's compassion moves us to care for people. The challenge is to provide a *hand up* rather than a perpetual *hand out*. This requires an accurate assessment to understand possible physical and psychological limitations of people. Gainful employment, where at all possible, provides a sense of self-worth and personal fulfillment.

God's Design

God's design is for man to work. This was the biblical norm before and after the fall of man into sin. To ignore this fact is to rebel against God's ways.

Genesis 2:15 "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it."

Genesis 3:17-19 "Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have

eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.'"

Five Characteristics of Good Works

If we are going to properly carry out the good works that God has prepared for us we need to follow the only approach – the biblical approach. The Scripture reveals various causes for people being impoverished. For us to truly help these people we need to perform a *diagnosis* of the causes underlying their situation. We need to provide the *correct* help.

To be effective in our stewardship, I will provide five criteria to assist us in properly diagnosing the needs of others. This will take some time on our part. As well, we will need to have true love for the person (or people) God has placed in our 'path.' Don't just look for a quick fix so that you can get on with your life. Such opportunities will provide you with additional occasions to die to yourself. We must minister from a true heart of compassion.

Let's now consider the following five guiding characteristics in meeting urgent needs:

(I) Our service is to be in *proportion* to our ability to give

In 2 Corinthians 8 the apostle Paul outlines some instructions to the Corinthian church in regards to giving to the needs of poor believers back in Jerusalem. There were no set amounts or percentages given by Paul here. From Paul's teaching we can infer that if one has much, he may be led to give much; if one has little, he can only give little. Additionally, giving should be done willingly, not by compulsion.

2 Corinthians 8:12-14 "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased, and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack..."

(II) Our service is to be *personal* and should exhibit genuine compassion

1 John 3:17 "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

James 2:15-16 "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"

Luke 10:33 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he [i.e., the injured man] was. And when he [i.e., the Samaritan] saw him, he had compassion."

Compassion is God's heart in the situation. If God is compassionate for the situation He will provide us with discernment as to how to help. We simply need to be *willing*. Our part may be to meet an immediate need or to provide longer term assistance. The latter situation will sometimes necessitate getting other believers involved so as to share the load (more to be said on this later).

The bottom line is that we must sense the Lord's heart in order to have His compassion direct us. If we harden our heart we will miss the assignment. We will then not hear "Well done" from the Lord concerning this opportunity to minister.

(III) Our service is to be *periodic*

The church in Philippi sent gifts "once and again" to meet the apostle Paul's needs. These gifts were not perpetual.

Philippians 4:16-18 "For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I see the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God."

We must be discerning whether or not a need is perpetual (also, see points (IV) and (V) below). It is unwise to prolong giving to a need if it merely serves to create an attitude of entitlement or expectation in the recipient(s).

(IV) Our service is to be *provisional*

Certain situations will require conditions that must be in place in order to properly administer the provision

of goods or finances. Help should not be provided to lazy, or spiritually dreamy people who are actually "disorderly" according to Scripture. To not work, when one is able, is to be disorderly.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

(V) Our service is to be *perpetual*

1 Timothy 5:4 "But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God."

1 Timothy 5:8 "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Whenever possible, the perpetually poor (think elderly widows or orphans) should be taken care of by extended family members, especially by those that are believers (see 1 Timothy 5:3-16). In large measure we have abandoned this biblical pattern and have simply opted for institutional care. Only under specific conditions should the local church become perpetually supportive of such individuals. For example, when considering the support of widows, Paul instructed Timothy that the local church should not support healthy widows under the age of 60. Also, preference should be given to aged widows that have exhibited a life of faithful service to the Lord. This was done in order to reduce entitlement or the fostering of dependency.


The real poor are those who have no reliable source or ability to care for themselves. Perpetual care should

be for those who, due to illness or infirmity, find it impossible to work and have no reasonable cure apart from God's miraculous healing. (Please read 2 Samuel 9 which records King David perpetually caring for a lame relative of King Saul.) For such people, we must not opt out of the sacrificial approach. We should not wish for our lives to be unencumbered from such situations.

Recap

We need to properly (i.e., biblically) diagnose the true needs of others and understand why their needs have arisen. Looking at need and poverty from a biblical point of view enables us to discern God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Scripture reveals that there are reasons for the circumstances we find ourselves in. Our culture erroneously thinks that throwing more

and more money at the problem will be the solution. We must come to realize two things: first, society has embarked on a course which is unsustainable; second, even though we may ignore God, He is still holding us accountable to His ways.

We must cry out to the Lord, repent, and embrace His basic principles for life. Then He will answer, forgive our sin, and heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14). We must be much more proactive in pointing people to their responsibility to work, to provide for their own, and to be ready to be used by the Lord to meet the legitimate needs of others. In doing so, believers will bring glory to God. Our humble response will demonstrate God's kingdom life to the world. People will see that we are accomplishing the good works He has prepared for us. 

HIS OWN Medicine

The following teaching on the life of Jacob is an abbreviated version of *His Own Medicine*, by Watchman Nee. The full article may be accessed online at sermonindex.net

When we look at Jacob the man (as recorded in Genesis chapters 25-50), we discover how strikingly his history is like our own. Before God has begun to deal with us we are inclined to take a rather superior attitude to Jacob, and judge him as self-willed and irresponsible. But when we begin to recognize the flesh in ourselves and our own weakness and sinfulness and self-will, then it is that we see Jacob in ourselves. And when we come to the last seventeen years of his life, and watch his whole words and demeanour, we must praise God's grace in the man. It is hard to find any in the Old Testament with an end like his. It can move us to tears to see how wondrously God has worked in him and how grace has led him to a place of usefulness. A seemingly hopeless man has been made into a most useful vessel for God's purpose.

Yet the whole fruitfulness in Jacob was the result of God's discipline of him. God touched his natural strength, and as a result he became in due course a vessel unto honour. It is as the Spirit disciplines us that He works Christ into us; they are not two separate works. The life of Christ is wrought into the character of the disciple, and fruit is born naturally, spontaneously. So, we have much to learn from Jacob.

We can recognize four stages in Jacob's life. First, the man Jacob as he was (Genesis 25-27). Secondly,

his testing and discipline through circumstances (Genesis 28-31). Thirdly, the dislocation of his natural life (Genesis 32-36). Fourthly, the 'peaceable fruit' (Genesis 37-50).

We begin by looking at the character of Jacob the man. By natural instinct Jacob was a fighter from birth (Genesis 25:22-26). How different he was from Isaac! Isaac did nothing; he accepted and received everything. Jacob from beginning to end is a schemer, clever, wily, confident that he can do anything. How is God going to bring such a man to the place of being a vessel for His purpose?

We cannot give a rational answer to that question. Only the grace of God can account for his choice of this one. "For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls, it was said to her [Rebekah], 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'" (Romans 9:11-13). The election of God is the only explanation; there is no other. God wanted to choose a man. We must believe in the choice of God. If He has begun a good work in us He will not leave it half done.

It was the will of God that Jacob should rule. Jacob discovered that. He learned of God's plan and recognized its true importance, and that it involved him

There is nothing accidental in the life of the believer. We may not welcome the discipline, but it is designed in the end to make us partakers of His holiness.

and not his brother. He saw God's election and God's purpose, but he wanted to make sure of it himself. So in their youth, when Esau returned one day from hunting, Jacob bargained with him for his birthright. "Let me be the elder, and you shall be the younger," he declared (Genesis 25:29-34). He used his own wits to get what God had fully intended to give him.

Then in Genesis 27 Jacob cheated his father (Isaac) in order to secure his father's blessing. We can, of course, see Jacob's 'problem.' Isaac had sent Esau to hunt, with a view to giving him his blessing. If that happened, and Esau received the blessing of the first-born, then what about God's promise? Jacob had seen the design behind that promise, and so he saw the danger too. He must somehow contrive that God's will should be done. From his point of view he was quite right, but this was the reasoning of the natural man. Each thing Jacob did, we find, was designed to accomplish God's will. Jacob showed, however, that he could not wait for God's time and look to God to do it but must himself devise measures to bring about what it appeared as though God could not do.

Our natural man uses human strength and ingenuity to accomplish the will of God. If God's throne seems in danger of falling, out goes our hand to steady it. "Something must be done!" we exclaim. That is Jacob, the able, scheming, clever, natural man. But the result of his efforts was only that Esau felt himself cheated and determined to kill Jacob, and Jacob had to leave home.

Through discipline God gave him the blessing he had cheated to obtain. Already at Bethel, before he had even left the land, his life of discipline began (Genesis 28:10-22). God spoke to him in a dream. He could not speak to Jacob directly while he was trusting in his own plans.

But now look what God says to Jacob! "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east, to the north and south; and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:13-14). It would not surprise us if God had said these words at the end of Jacob's life, but here they are at the very outset! The whole blessing is presented to him, even while he is still his natural, contriving, crafty self. How is this possible? Surely only because God knew Himself. He had great confidence in what He Himself





would do. He knew that this Jacob, so committed to Him, could not escape His hands, and sooner or later would become His vessel unto honour.

Twenty-one years later when Jacob came back to Bethel, he was a different man, and God knew this would be so. What is not accomplished in ten years, will be in twenty. At the end of that time, God is still holy. He has not forgotten, and He never approved of Jacob's action. Jacob was foolish but God had His plans.

From Bethel onward Jacob was in God's hand, and twenty years of discipline wrought the change in him. But here, at the outset of the journey, he as yet did not know the meaning of the promise. From Genesis 28:16-17 it seems that, on waking, Jacob had forgotten what God had said, and was only afraid because he had slept at the gate of heaven. The promise was secondary. He was afraid of God. Then Jacob spoke to God (verses 20-22): "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to you.'" What a contrast this is to God's unqualified words to him. Jacob says, "If...if...if...then." We see here what Jacob's desires were, namely, food and clothing. He had lost sight of God's purpose. But surely here we can already detect God's discipline. For he was young, the beloved of his mother; and now he was alone, knowing nothing of his future. Even in this situation his chastening had begun. He wanted food and clothing, and to return to his home! "And of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Genesis 28:22). That is Jacob! If you give me all this, then I will give you a tenth! He wanted to do business, even with God. Everything for him was on a commercial basis.

Yet this was also Bethel. Although Jacob could not rise to God's promise, yet from that time, to Jacob He was the God of Bethel. A great impression was made on Jacob there.

Now Jacob comes to Haran, and in Genesis 29:9-11 we read how Rachel was the first one of his relatives to


meet him. Again we see God's discipline at work, for the first thing he did was to weep. She awoke in him memories of his past, and of the way he had come. Before he left home he had been hard; there had been plenty of ways of keeping himself from tears. It is those who have no way out of their situation who weep. Jacob's course had led him from riches to poverty. Again God had touched and chastened him.

But there was still more to come. Jacob served his relative Laban seven years for the hand of his daughter Rachel, his first love, and then Laban cheated him! He gave him Leah instead. It is always very bitter to take your own medicine! So Jacob served another seven years, fourteen in all, for Laban's two daughters. He went out to keep the sheep, and Laban changed his wages ten times. Thus Jacob was put through the fires of discipline, tested and tried, but with the hand of God always upon him. For God had promised to bring him back home.

Jacob acknowledged the hand of God. Though through all the years he had not mentioned God's name, yet at last, with the birth of Joseph, he thought of home and sought to return (Genesis 30:25). But now he could not get away! He was in fact compelled to stay on with such a man as Laban for twenty long years.

What God's hand does is right. Circumstances are His appointment for our good. They are calculated to undermine and weaken the especially strong points of our nature. It may not take Him as much as twenty years to do this, or it may take longer. Yet God knows what He is doing. We see this clearly at the end of Jacob's life. Earlier he had inspired little affection in anyone, for everyone had to serve his ends; yet at the last he became gentle and lovable.

There is nothing accidental in the life of the believer. We may not welcome the discipline, but it is designed in the end to make us partakers of His holiness.

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7). 

Watchman Nee (1903-1972) was a Chinese believer whose burden for a genuine local church life permeated his preaching ministry and writings. He is perhaps best known for the book, *The Normal Christian Life*, but also has had many other of his messages put into print by believers. Upon the rise of the Chinese Communist Party in the late 1940's and early 1950's, persecution against Christians in China increased rapidly. In 1956, Watchman Nee was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He was never released. He entered the presence of the Lord, while still a prisoner, on May 30, 1972.

ROB MCLEOD



FATHERLESS

The Lord designed fathers to be the primary spiritual leader, financial provider and protector within the family unit. When husbands and fathers shirk their responsibilities in these areas the consequences are catastrophic and the effects are

most readily observed in the children. As George Barna writes, "Our children will define the future, which makes them our most significant and enduring legacy. After all, God never told us to take over the world through force or intelligence. He simply

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble... JAMES 1:27

told us to have children and then raise them to honor God in all they do. Therefore, you might logically conclude that bearing and raising children is not only our most enduring legacy but also one of our greatest personal responsibilities."¹

Below are some eye opening statistics that demonstrate just some of the consequences that impact children when their father neglects his calling or is absent from the home altogether. Although the majority of statistics below arise from studies conducted within the United States, similar consequences of fatherlessness have been observed across the globe.

The website www.fathers.com reports the following:

In the United States, an estimated 24.7 million children (33%) live apart from their biological father.² 57.6% of black children, 31.2% of Hispanic children, and 20.7% of white children are living absent their biological fathers.³ The number of children with a father in prison increased from 881,500 in 1991 to more than 1.5 million in 2007, a 77% increase. During that time, the number of children with a mother in prison increased by 131 percent, from 63,900 to 147,400.⁴

Both 'left' and 'right wing' media and policy proponents are frequently on record, espousing the need for stable and committed fathers within the home. For example, www.americafirstpolicy.com states:

"It is no surprise that 90% of all homeless and runaway children, 63% of teen suicides, and 85% of children and teens with behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes... Similarly, fatherless families are 25% more likely to raise children in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Children without fathers are also 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances... of all the youths in state-operated institutions, roughly 70% come from fatherless homes, and 85% of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes. On the whole, fatherless kids are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated and 11 times more likely to

exhibit violent behavior than children from two-parent households."⁵

Similarly, in a 2018 article entitled "The Consequences of Growing up without a Father", *The Walrus*, an independent Canadian magazine and hardly a proponent of Christian teaching, concludes that "A growing lack of male role models in families has left young men vulnerable." Furthermore they said: "The challenges posed by fatherlessness are growing across the West. Divorce rates and single-parent households have been on the rise for decades in Europe and North America. The United States is the clearest example of this change, with up to 50 percent of first marriages ending in divorce and subsequent marriages failing at an even higher rate. Statistics Canada reports that 12.8 percent of Canadian children live in fatherless households. In the United Kingdom, more than one-fifth of families with dependent children are without fathers in the home. Behind all the statistics about fatherless homes are increasing numbers of young men experiencing the gift and curse of choosing who shows them how to be men. That means we have more unpredictability about and less control over the direction our boys will take as they grow into men, and we face a greater likelihood that they'll stray from the reach of mainstream morals."⁶

Given the preceding discussion it is no surprise that Scripture frequently admonishes fathers to fulfill their responsibility. Here is a sampling:

Deuteronomy 4:9 "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren."

Ephesians 6:4 "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

Proverbs 29:15 "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."


1 Timothy 5:8 "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

We must not forget that the Lord has a special regard for the fatherless and unprotected child. As a result, the church should too. It is not right for fathers to simply pat themselves on their backs for the good job that they may be doing at home. The Lord may provide us with opportunities to positively influence children that are not our own. We should not be resistant to the possibility of 'standing in the gap' for those children with either deceased or absentee fathers. The following Scripture describes the Lord's heart for the fatherless child:

Psalms 68:5-6 "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

Psalms 82:3 "Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy."

Proverbs 23:10-11 "Do not remove the ancient landmark, nor enter the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is mighty; He will plead their cause against you."

James 1:27 "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble..." 

¹ Barna, George. "Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children should be Your Church's #1 Priority" (2003), 18.

² <https://fathers.com/the-extent-of-fatherlessness/> [accessed online April 10, 2023, and cites the primary source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, "Living Arrangements of Children under 18 Years/1 and Marital Status of Parents by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin/2 and Selected Characteristics of the Child for all Children 2010." Table C3. Internet Release Date November, 2010.]

³ <https://fathers.com/the-extent-of-fatherlessness/> [accessed online April 10, 2023, and cites the primary source: Family Structure and Children's Living Arrangements 2012. Current Population Report. U.S. Census Bureau July 1, 2012.]

⁴ <https://fathers.com/trends-in-fathering/> [accessed online April 10, 2023, and cites the primary source: Lauren Glaze and Laura Maruschak, Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008.)]

⁵ <https://americafirstpolicy.com/latest/20220215-fatherlessness-and-its-effects-on-american-society> [accessed online April 10, 2023]

⁶ <https://thewalrus.ca/the-consequences-of-growing-up-without-a-father/> [accessed online April 6, 2023]



The Lost GOSPELS *Don't Belong in the* BIBLE

One argument used by critics to try to discredit God's Word is by asserting that the Bible was developed via a power struggle. Namely, that what's included in the Bible – and conversely what was excluded – was determined by a handful of men who happened to wield political power at just the right moment in time. Novels like *The Da Vinci Code* popularize this idea, though the claim is as false as most of the “facts” in Dan Brown's fictional tale.

As we have clearly demonstrated in earlier blog posts in this series*, the formation of the Bible was the result of exacting scrutiny by many people over many years. The Council of Nicea (AD 325), for example, did not determine which books should be in the New Testament. Neither did the Roman emperor Constantine. The 39 books of the Old Testament form the Bible of Judaism; the Christian Bible adds the additional 27 books of the New Testament. This complete list of books was found “acceptable” because the Church deemed them to be divinely inspired books of truth.

*This article is used with permission from Josh McDowell Ministry and as of May 17, 2023 is accessible online at <https://www.josh.org/lost-gospels-dont-belong-bible/>.

As new manuscripts come to light – including the lost gospels – some scholars wish to ignore the exacting standards demanded by the New Testament canon. You’ve likely heard the media promote their arguments for including these lost gospels in the Bible, which they assert is “truth” that “enhances” our knowledge of Jesus. (Are they Bible scholars? No.)

Let’s look at just four of these lost gospels, to help you see why they don’t belong in God’s Word – and why the Bible can be viewed as a historically accurate document, in large part because it has been so carefully vetted.

STRINGENT GUIDELINES MATTER

As books of the New Testament were selected for inclusion, a critical question was asked: *Was a book written by an apostle or associate of an apostle of Jesus? Was it written near the time Christ lived and died?* Archaeological evidence continues to validate the Bible Gospels, specific to details about persons, places, and timing. Eyewitnesses could have been called forth at the time of their writing to agree with or discredit the text. Can the “lost gospels” claim the same? No.

The reasons given for rejecting these and other “lost gospels” are compelling. The main criticisms of these gospels and their authors are: the Jesus they

depict is not recognizable as the Jesus known in the Bible Gospels; they skew God’s nature; they contain errors on important Christian basics like sin, holiness, ethics, and redemption; and they can’t be proven to have origins among Jesus’ earliest followers. The date of a manuscript is also key to determining the authenticity of writings outside the canon. Most weren’t written until the 2nd century and beyond. Also, these “lost gospels” have Gnostic overtones. Gnosticism, which seriously threatened the early church, was dedicated to searching for “enlightenment” from secret and hidden wisdom among Christ’s teachings. Gnostics view Jesus only as a “teacher of wisdom,” not as “Savior.”

Says historian Philip Jenkins, “Far from being the alternative voices of Jesus’ first followers, most of the lost gospels should rather be seen as the writings of much later dissidents who broke away from an already established orthodox church.”

Let’s look at each gospel further.

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

In 1945 a collection of codices (book form of scrolls) written in the Coptic language was discovered in Egypt. The Gospel of Thomas was among them. Scholars soon realized that three fragments of it in Greek had already been discovered in Egypt in the 1890s, with the earliest fragment dated at around AD 200.

One group of scholars, known as the Jesus Seminar, communally believe the Gospel of Thomas to be

Christian literature to discover the actual words and deeds of Jesus.

Yet this group of scholars had a bias against traditional Christianity: they viewed Jesus to be a mortal man (not God), who did not perform the miracles listed in the Bible, nor resurrect as Savior of the world. Nor did they view the Holy Spirit as having inspired the writing of biblical Scripture. So as they color-coded the words of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke,

The gospel is a collection of 114 sayings, mostly attributed to Jesus. However, this Jesus is very different from the Jesus we know from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Unlike the biblical Gospels, there is no narrative or discussion of Christ’s death and resurrection. Rather, the Jesus of the Gospel of Thomas provides secret truths only to those who are qualified to learn them.

superior to the biblical Gospels. Formed in the 1980s, these scholars stated their goal as the examination of the biblical Gospels and other early

and John – using red to indicate words they think Jesus most likely said, pink for words they think Jesus possibly said, grey for words they believe are close to

what Jesus probably said, and black for words they believe Jesus did not say – more text was deemed black than the other three colors combined; these scholars coded almost the entire gospel of John black! But they deemed the Gospel of Thomas to be mostly red or pink, thus making it, in their minds, more truthful than John's Gospel. In effect, the scholars of the Jesus Seminar were saying that they deemed themselves able to see Jesus more clearly than the early Gospel writers *who actually had an intimate knowledge of Jesus*. Now that's arrogant!

Vetted, historical evidence strongly suggests that Matthew and John personally accompanied Jesus, that Luke's text included information from eyewitnesses and meticulous research, and that Mark ministered with Peter. And John's Gospel includes numerous detailed references that have been corroborated by archeological discoveries. Christ's teachings were passed along by word of mouth over a period of

decades, in keeping with the oral tradition. But we have to remember this was an honored tradition of careful digestion and memory. Few of us today could memorize even a small portion of what these men were able to commit to memory. (Entire books of the Bible!)

Writes Craig L. Blomberg, of the *Christian Research Institute*, "In that process of oral tradition, [Christ's words] were paraphrased, abbreviated, combined together in small collections, applied to a wide variety of situations in the early church, and ultimately put in the form in which we now find them by the writers of the Gospels themselves. *However, we believe that all of this took place under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, and through His inspiration the writers accurately reported exactly what He wanted them to represent of the life and teachings of Jesus.*"

We can trust the biblical Gospels. The Gospel of Thomas? No.

THE GOSPEL OF PETER

In the winter of 1886-1887, fragments of a gospel were found in a tomb in Egypt, in a codex. In the 1970s and 80s more fragments were published, believed possibly to be portions of the Gospel of Peter, which may have been written in the latter half of the second century. Though attributed to the disciple Peter, scholars do not believe he was the author, in part because of the dating of the text.

The text also exonerates Pontius Pilate of all responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion, and implies that Jesus neither suffered pain nor died. This sounds like Docetism, an early Christian doctrine that asserted

This gospel includes other text that is contradictory to the Bible Gospels. An example:

[20] And at the same hour the veil of the Jerusalem sanctuary was torn into two. [21] And they drew out the nails from the hands of the Lord and placed him on the earth; and all the earth was shaken, and a great fear came about. [22] Then the sun shone, and it was found to be the ninth hour. [23] And the Jews rejoiced and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it, since he was one who had seen the many good things he did. [24] And having taken the Lord, he washed and tied him with a linen cloth and brought him into

The Gospel of Peter contains many similarities with the New Testament Gospels, including Jesus' trial, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. But it also contains fanciful elements – such as giant angels escorting an even larger Jesus from the tomb, followed by a cross that speaks.

that Christ appeared after His resurrection not in human form, but in a spirit body. Docetism became an important doctrinal position of Gnosticism, which we mentioned earlier. This view robs the crucifixion of its power. If God was only "play acting," then His gift to us was simply smoke and mirrors.

his own sepulcher, called the Garden of Joseph. [25] Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, having come to know how much wrong they had done themselves, began to beat themselves and say: 'Woe to our sins. The judgment has approached and the end of Jerusalem.' [26] But I with the companions was sorrowful; and having been wounded in spirit, we

were in hiding, for we were sought after by them as wrongdoers and as wishing to set fire to the sanctuary. [27] In addition to all these things we were fasting;

and we were sitting mourning and weeping night and day until the Sabbath.

Historical Errors and Embellishments in the gospel, as listed by apologist Ryan Turner:

- Seven seals are used to seal the tomb of Jesus.
- A crowd from Jerusalem comes to see the sealed tomb of Jesus.
- The Jewish leaders camp out at the tomb of Jesus overnight.
- The Jewish leaders fear the harm of the Jewish people. This does not describe the historical situation of the Jews before the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 A.D.
- The Resurrection story actually describes how Jesus exited the tomb with two giant angels, a super-sized Jesus, and a talking cross.

In general, scholars do not use the Gospel of Peter for serious research on Jesus.

THE GOSPEL OF MARY

A fragment of the Gospel of Mary – which tells the story of Mary Magdalene recalling to the disciples teachings Jesus had given to her privately – was discovered in the late nineteenth century; another two Greek fragments surfaced in the 20th century. No complete copy of the Gospel of Mary exists, and

though its gnostic view is characteristic of the later 2nd or early 3rd century.

Modern writings, including the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, speculate that Jesus and Mary were lovers. This idea is fueled in part by the Gospel of Mary, which says that Mary was “much loved by the Savior, as no

The fragments suggest that Mary shares her teachings from Jesus with Andrew and Peter, who both find what she says to be highly skeptical. Namely, Mary’s gospel rejects Jesus’ suffering and death as the path to eternal life, exposes the erroneous view that Mary was a prostitute, legitimizes women’s leadership, offers a utopian vision of spiritual perfection, and asks readers to rethink the basis for church authority.

the three overlapping fragments comprise at most half of the gospel. Scholars don’t generally believe Mary wrote the text, nor can they agree on its date,

other woman,” though it doesn’t actually say they were married. In no other early Christian sources is there any reference to Jesus being married or having a wife.

THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS

This “lost gospel,” a 3rd-century Gnostic text translated by the National Geographic Society over five years, was discovered in Egypt in the 1970s. In this secret account, written by an unknown source, Jesus has conversations with Judas, who is depicted not as His betrayer, but as His most trusted disciple. In the text, Jesus tells Judas, “Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it, but you will grieve a

great deal. For someone else will replace you, in order that the twelve may again come to completion with their god.”

Judas is “enlightened” via revelation, as Jesus tells him that he will be exalted over all the other disciples if he betrays Jesus. Why? Because in doing so he will help Jesus be freed from the confines of His earthly body. The “Judas kiss” then, in this text, is not a betrayal, but an act of loyalty toward Jesus. Scholars who

view this account as plausible, therefore, see Judas' actions as heroic. Umm...not.

April D. DeConick, a professor of biblical studies at Rice University, says the positive spin the National Geographic Society puts on the document isn't even supported by the documents itself.

Writes DeConick in a *New York Times* article, "So what does the *Gospel of Judas* really say? It says that Judas is a specific demon called the "Thirteenth." In certain Gnostic traditions, this is the given name of the king of demons – an entity known as Ialdabaoth who lives in the 13th realm above the earth. Judas is his human alter ego, his undercover agent in the world. These Gnostics equated Ialdabaoth with the Hebrew Yahweh, whom they saw as a jealous and wrathful deity and an opponent of the supreme God whom Jesus came to earth to reveal."

She adds, "Admittedly, the society had a tough task: restoring an old gospel that was lying in a box of its own crumbs. It had been looted from an Egyptian

tomb in the 1970s and languished on the underground antiquities market for decades, even spending time in someone's freezer. So it is truly incredible that the society could resurrect any part of it, let alone piece together about 85 percent of it. That said, I think the big problem is that National Geographic wanted an exclusive. So it required its scholars to sign nondisclosure statements, to not discuss the text with other experts before publication. The best scholarship is done when life-sized photos of each page of a new manuscript are published before a translation, allowing experts worldwide to share information as they independently work through the text."


Prior to the discovery of this text, the only reference to this gospel was in the writings of Irenaeus, a Christian who lived in the 2nd century. Irenaeus basically wrote that the *Gospel of Judas* was the "invented history" of a long line of heretics and rebels against God.

THE LOST GOSPELS LACK THE TRUTH OF JESUS

Based on the above descriptions of these "lost gospels," do you think they support biblical Scripture – or in any way enhance or further our knowledge of who Jesus is and what He came to earth to do?

Scholars with a Gnostic view would have us believe that Jesus was simply a "revealer of wisdom and knowledge," who can lead us to an "inner knowing." Clearly, this Gnostic slant is why these lost gospels have not been included in the Bible. As the four Gospels of the Bible clearly tell us, Jesus was not interested in "secret" messages that only an "enlightened" few were able to comprehend. He wanted His message of forgiveness and grace and acceptance spread far and wide, to any who would hear and

listen and accept its truth. Modern scholars can't change that.

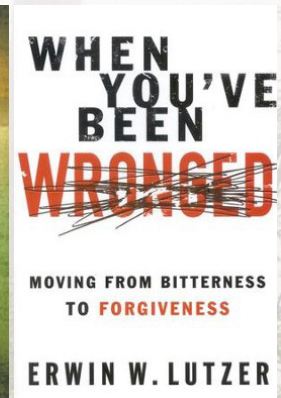
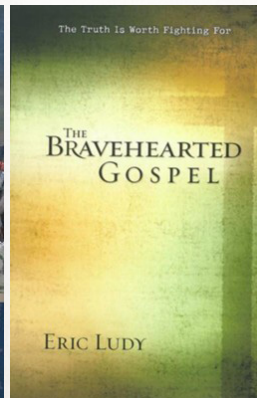
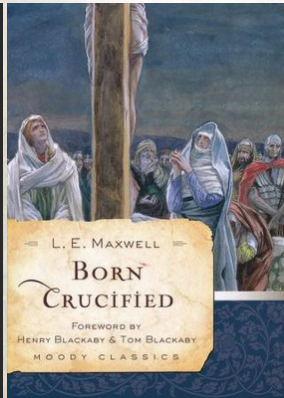
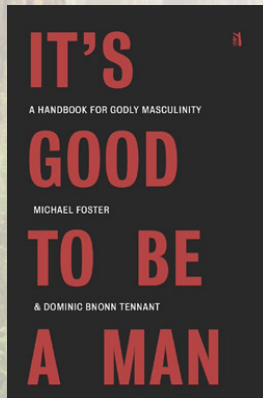
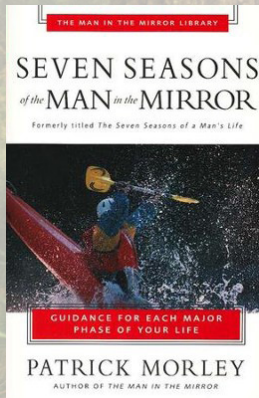
This blog post highlights Josh and Sean McDowell's recently revised apologetics classic, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. We are certain this fully updated and expanded resource will be an effective evangelism tool for you, and strengthen your faith by answering the toughest questions tossed to you by skeptics. Know what you know, because it's true. But share this truth with LOVE! 

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