John Chrysostom was one of the greatest preachers who ever lived. Rightly called Chrysostomos, “gold-enmouth,” he lived from 344-407 AD. He had enormous influence in his own day, both among the ordinary people and among the nobility. Since then he has been universally recognized as a saint and doctor of the church. If we are to understand the man and his impact, we must begin by looking at the world into which he was born.

The Background
John was born in the middle of the fourth century AD, a critical time of change in the Roman Empire. By the time of his death in 407, he had lived through almost the entire period during which the ancient world was irrevo-cably changed. When he was born, Christianity had indeed become a major religion of the empire, but it was by no means dominant. It competed with the old pagan faiths, the imperial cult, and Judaism, all of which were flourishing. Even where Christianity was strong, it was divided.

In the secular world the empire was by now irrevocably split between West and East. Initially each had its own emperor and sphere of influence. Constantine had started to build the new capital of Con-stantinople in 326 and took up permanent residence there. He was tolerant of differ-ent religions and very favorable to Chris-tianity, which now rapidly exchanged the age of persecution for the age of political dependence on the state—probably in the long run more dangerous.

As a result, the Episcopal see of Con-stantinople rose rapidly in prestige and was declared in the Second Ecumenical Council of 381 to be second only to Rome. Consequently it became an enviable prize for ambitious clerics. A new aristocracy

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In poll after poll, researchers such as George Gallup and George Barna tell us that the lives of those who identify themselves as Christians differ little from those of non-believers. How have we come to such a place?

In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott helps us understand some of the roots of this phenomenon. “The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers—the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ’s warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called ‘nominal Christianity.’ In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their conveniences. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.”

John Stott is right. Much of what is called Christianity in America is nominal. And even worse, much of what is authentic is quite shallow. Yes, there are exceptions, but they are few in comparison to the nominal and the shallow.

What are we to do? Put God first in our lives and fully surrender all that we are and all that we have to him. Then make a firm commitment to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” and begin to take in and obey the life-giving truths of Holy Scripture with the Holy Spirit’s help. We will also need to find a few others who share this commitment and will walk with us. Together, we will be able to help yet others do the same. And purposeful, vibrant, fruitful living will become our daily experience.

At the heart of the C.S. Lewis Institute is a commitment to Jesus and his church. Our programs and resources are designed to help believers become strong, fruitful disciples who impact their families, churches, communities, and workplaces. If this is what you desire, we would be happy to help you.
It is one of the hallmarks of evangelicalism that Christians are encouraged to give their personal testimony of how they individually came to Christ. But one milestone in my personal faith journey was of a more communal nature—the discovery of the way in which Christian community not only molds and grows our personal faith, but also our public and professional expression of that faith.

Growing up in an evangelical home, I was blessed from an early age to have been taught about God’s love, the reality of sin, the necessity for redemption, and the grace of salvation. The centrality of a personal relationship with God was both emphasized and modeled, and the fact that one’s faith should be clearly evident by one’s actions was stressed.

However, the churches and Bible studies we attended made no mention of the more public aspects of one’s faith. “Living out one’s faith” generally meant sharing it. Divorced from the discussion were questions of justice, politics, and the public sphere in general.

This tendency was even more pronounced in the campus ministry I joined as a college freshman. There, the focus on evangelism crowded out other aspects of discipleship, and there was a marked disinterest in pursuits outside of the “sacred” (defined then as the work of full-time Christian ministry). In fact, members of this organization were taught explicitly that “kingdom work” (defined as serving in the ministry or on the mission field) was God’s first choice for his followers; those who ignored that call could potentially redeem their less-than-ideal choice by using their office as a platform for evangelism and as a means of supporting those who had gone into full-time ministry. The idea that Christians could be called to, and fulfill God’s plan for their life, outside of “ministry” (narrowly defined) was more likely to be dismissed than discussed.

Slowly, this view is changing. Most churches and parachurch organizations have begun to rethink ideas of vocation and calling. In addition, many churches have increasingly paid attention to the role of community in developing one’s Christian walk. But for me, my biggest object lesson in how a small, deliberate community can help one realize and fulfill one’s vocation and calling, and cultivate a Christian worldview within that calling, came not through any ministry or church, but through friendships forged while working in the U.S. Senate.

Around a dozen years ago, I left the small think tank I was working at to join a fairly new Senator as his policy director. This Senator had wanted to shift many of his policy priorities from focusing on economics to developing a “cultural agenda,” and asked me to take the lead. It was an exciting assignment for a twenty-something, but also very obvious that little could be achieved without partnerships and allies, especially for someone so green in the field.

I soon became part of a small, loose organization called “Faith and Law,” started as a ministry of the C.S. Lewis Institute in 1987, which met regularly to hear speakers talk about living the Christian life in the

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The Journey of a Great Soul
Glimpses into the Spiritual Formation of Jonathan Edwards

I had a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul from my childhood; but had two more remarkable seasons of awakening, before I met with that change by which I was brought to those new dispositions, and that new sense of things, that I have since had. The first time was when I was a boy, some years before I went to college, at a time of remarkable awakening in my father's congregation. I was then very much affected for many months, and concerned about the things of religion, and my soul's salvation; and was abundant in duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys; and used to meet with them to pray together. I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion. My mind was much engaged in it, and had much righteous pleasure; and it was my delight to abound in religious duties. I with some of my schoolmates joined together, and built a booth in a swamp, in a very retired spot, for a place of prayer. And besides, I had particular secret places of my own in the woods, where I used to retire by myself; and was from time to time much affected. My affections seemed to be lively and easily moved, and I seemed to be in my element when engaged in religious duties. And I am ready to think, many are deceived with such affections, and such a kind of delight as I then had in religion, and mistake it for grace.

But in process of time, my convictions and affections wore off; and I entirely lost all those affections and delights and left off secret prayer, at least as to any constant performance of it; and returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in the ways of sin. Indeed I was at times very uneasy, especially towards the latter part of my time at college; when it pleased God, to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell. And yet, it was not long after my recovery, before I fell again into my old ways of sin.

As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before.
whether such miserable seeking ever succeeded. I was indeed brought to seek salvation in a manner that I never was before; I felt a spirit to part with all things in the world, for an interest in Christ. My concern continued and prevailed, with many exercising thoughts and inward struggles …

The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, I Tim. 1:17. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen. As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him for ever! I kept saying, and as it were singing over these words of scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him, and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was any thing spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.

From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him…

Not long after I first began to experience these things, I gave an account to my father of some things that had passed in my mind. I was pretty much affected by the discourse we had together; and when the discourse was ended, I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father’s pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looking up on the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together; it was a sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness.

After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of every thing was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon for continuance; and in the day, spent much

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On Sept 26, 2008, J.I. Packer took time to sit down and answer questions from C.S. Lewis Fellows and from pastors in the Washington, D.C., area. The following is an excerpt from that session. Audio of the full interview can be found on our web site at www.cslewisinstitute.org.

Question: Would you be willing to share about your own time alone with God and the materials that you use devotionally?

I don’t think I’ve got anything out of the ordinary to share. Like other Christians, I try to get up in the morning early enough to start the day with God and the Bible—shall I say, with God through the Bible. I’ve been telling people for years that every Christian worth his salt ought to read the Bible from cover to cover every year. And I do that myself by using the One-Year Bible that Tyndale House publishes. I don’t know whether you know it—it gives you every day a hunk of the Old Testament, a passage from the New Testament, a Psalm or part of a Psalm, and something from the Proverbs. And you do get through the whole Bible and the Psalter twice in the course of a year.

The version that is used is the one that Tyndale House markets, The New Living Bible. I don’t know whether you know it—it gives you every day a hunk of the Old Testament, a passage from the New Testament, a Psalm or part of a Psalm, and something from the Proverbs. And you do get through the whole Bible and the Psalter twice in the course of a year.

The version that is used is the one that Tyndale House markets, The New Living Bible. Now it’s a scholarly update, in that sense, a revised version of The Living Bible that Kenneth Taylor produced a generation back. Kenneth Taylor paraphrased—I think it was the NIV—for his children. He wasn’t a scholar, he was a communicator, and that’s where the text of the Living Bible came from—very vivid, very lively, but sometimes inaccurate. And what you have in the New Living is the language of the Living Bible retained with all its vividness, indeed with increased vividness in many places. It’s still a paraphrase—but it’s a scholarly paraphrase. It’s not a word-for-word translation, but semantically it is very accurate. That is, sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph, the New Living Translation captures the range of meaning that’s being expressed. So that if you ask the question, “Is this paraphrase expressing as much as the writer was expressing?” The answer is again and again, yes. If you ask, “Is it expressing less than the writer was expressing or was concerned to express or more than he was concerned to express,” the answer in each case is no, it is semantically accurate—the range of meaning is well covered.

Now I’m not a salesman for the New Living translation, because I was the general editor for a quite different translation that is an update of the Revised Standard Version, published now under the title, The English Standard Version—published also in Wheaton but by a different firm, Crossway. Incidentally, next month, a study Bible using the ESV as text is going to be published, and I’ve had a hand in that also. I will express the view that it sets a new standard in study Bibles altogether. If I had to recommend a Bible for academic use, I would say the English Standard Version, which has all the strengths of the old RSV and a lot of the wording of the old RSV, but it has none of the weaknesses and limitations which the
old RSV had—at least not so in my estimate. That’s the one to go for.

But nonetheless, I can appreciate a semantically skillful paraphrase version. I can enjoy its vividness. I can be stimulated by that vividness and in my daily reading of scripture; I use the One-Year Bible and am so stimulated. You’ll find that there are any number of remarkable aptnesses in the way that the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs passages fit together. It’s a lovely tool for devotional use.

Well, I read the Bible, and as I read it, I ask questions in order to get my thoughts into shape. I think when one reads the Bible, one ought always to be asking questions and my questions are basically three:

1. What does this show me about God?
2. What does this teach me about life?
3. What direction does this give me for my life today?

And you need to go through questions one and two before you’re qualified really to answer question three. Otherwise you’ll answer three on the basis of impressionism, and you will in the outcome miss a great deal of what each passage has to say to you.

I expect you’ve proved this in experience. What does it tell you about God, what does it tell you about life and its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows, with its temptations and its baffles and its responsibilities, and so on and so forth. There is a lot of thinking to do, but it’s fruitful thinking. Whether I do it well, of course, is another question, but this is what I try to do.

Then it comes round in due course that it’s breakfast time and on with the day’s work. I try during the day to remember whom I belong to and whom I’m serving. I do try to cultivate, to practice what they call “arrow prayers,” where you’re constantly making remarks or offering questions or reactions or praises to God as you go along. It’s called in some circles “the practice of the presence of God.” I’m not very good at it, but I try to do it, and it does become more and more of a habit the more you try. So that I’m attempting, you see, to live consciously in God’s presence as the day goes on.

In relationships I try to remember that I must behave godly, and I try to control my tongue and my temper and sometimes my impatience. And certainly when I’m in any sort of relation to another human being, I try to focus my interest on that human being and ask myself, “Do I have any ministry to this human being?” The answer may be yes, the answer may be no, but at least one tries to act friendly and respectful and affirmative and warm in all these relationships.

I have to fight my natural tendencies to shy withdrawal—that’s the error in my make-up, and I have to counter it—well, I try to counter it. None of us ought to allow ourselves to fall victims to our own temperaments, so it’s rather important that at some stage we should do an inventory of our temperaments and discover what our natural inclinations are and discern where there are weaknesses and where there are changes that could be made with advantage.

And then eventually comes bedtime, but by bedtime I am personally bushed. So I don’t attempt to do any serious praying at night—I wish God goodnight and off to sleep. Well that’s me; I have to do all my serious praying in the morning. There are evening people, of course, same as there are morning people. Usually there’s one of each in every marriage relationship—one is an owl the other is a lark—you’ve heard all that and you’ve observed that it is true. It’s not surprising, it should be true—opposites attract, didn’t you know that? Oh, yes—but that’s not what I’m being asked about, so I won’t say anymore about it.

But seriously, find out when you are “firing on all cylinders” mentally, and give God that good time rather than waiting until you’re half-asleep already before you start trying to talk to him seriously about anything.
Jesus taught that obedience and answered prayer are related: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7, NASB). “Abiding in Christ” is sometimes explained in esoteric terms. But abiding is not mystical. It’s primarily volitional: a matter of morality and ethics. Abiding is explained in 1 John 3:24: “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him” (NASB). Hence, the Apostle says: “we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” (1 John 3:21-22). 1

Anyone observing a spoiled child understands that a truly loving Father is not likely to encourage disobedience in His children by answering prayer—as if He felt, “My commandments aren’t all that important anyway. It really doesn’t matter whether you take Me seriously.” Because He knows what is best for them, God may often say, “No,” to the plea of the selfish and rebellious. But what exactly is the relationship between obedient Christian behavior and our Heavenly Father’s positive response to our prayers? Specifically, why does scripture say we receive because we obey?

An idea appealing to many is that prayer operates in such a way that one pays or qualifies for answers with a currency called good deeds. Such a “this-for-that” arrangement makes God, prayer, and obedience into a mechanism—a “system” that can be operated (read: manipulated) by the petitioner. God becomes a divine vending machine, into which we must place so many units of obedience before pulling the lever (through prayer) that causes answers to drop into our hands. This conception of prayer is both widespread and wrong. God’s creatures can never place Him under obligation. Paul, quoting Job, asks: “Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?” (Romans 11:35, NASB). The clay simply cannot control the hand of the Potter who “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11). 1 John 5:14 takes us to the bottom line: “If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

Contrary to much popular Christian writing, teaching and thinking: Prayer is not the way we get God to give us what we want. 2 Prayer is a means God uses to give us what He knows we need. The passion of Christians who want to be more effective in prayer must therefore be learning how to pray according to God’s will.

The Relationship Between Obedience and Praying According to God’s Will

One of the least known insights about Christian prayer is the relationship God established between His children’s obedience and His answers to their prayers. The link between obedience and answered prayer is explained by the Lord Jesus in John 14:16.

The living heart of it is found in 14:21, 22:

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (NIV)
Obedience to Jesus’ commandments facilitates fellowship with our Savior and God the Father (cf. Revelation 3:20). In the hearts of obedient believers, Jesus and the Father make their “home” through the Holy Spirit: “This is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:24, NIV). In the believer who is not “grieving” Him through disobedience, the Spirit works to “show” (or “disclose,” NASB) Jesus. Our Lord used several other verbs to refer to this activity: the Spirit will “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:26); “bear witness about me” (15:26); and “guide you into all the truth” (16:13). That this refers to growth in our understanding of the Father, as well as Jesus, is clear from 16:14-15:

He [the Spirit] will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (NIV)

In other words: our obedience is a concrete expression of love which pleases God and creates in us an environment where the Spirit works to encourage growth in the quality of our fellowship with, and depth of understanding of, the Lord Jesus and His Father. As we come to know them better, we also grow in comprehending how God thinks about the issues of life. It becomes increasingly more natural to see the world through God’s eyes. As we live according to God’s will, we learn to think about and see existence in terms of God’s will, and this enables us to pray according to His will more frequently.

We are positively conditioned, as we express love to God by obeying His commands in Scripture, to internalize biblical thinking and behavior principles that please God and are best for us. Over time, the Spirit develops our facility to make God-honoring decisions in situations the Bible does not directly address. Similar conditioning takes place as parents instill moral values in children. According to Proverbs 22:6, parents who love their children will train them in the way they should go—that is, educate and discipline them to think biblically about right and wrong—so that when they are mature, they are able to make decisions that please God. The Prayer-Obedience relationship can be sketched as in the diagram on this page. (A detailed diagram appears at the end of the article.)

At this point, several comments are necessary: First, this cycle interacts with other aspects of your Christian experience. There are a number of spiritual processes going on in each of us. These often interact (positively and negatively) with those of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Second, the prayer-obedience relationship describes a way of life, not a system one “works” to get things from God. Third, you must think about this process in a personal, not a mechanical context. God is Abba, whom we love, not an appliance we use. Fourth, so-called “prayer warriors” are usually formed over many years. Developing the mind of Christ—thinking (and praying) His thoughts after Him—takes time as well as discipline. Fifth, the process will go on your entire life. You will never reach a threshold after which all your prayers are answered as you wish. The godliest Christian mind will not attain omniscience. Sixth,
Martyn Lloyd-Jones (a Welsh preacher) maintained that almost all our problems come down to an ignorance of God. If we knew who God really is, that awareness would have a deep impact on our lives. Let us consider a specific example: God’s “omniscience.” Is the teaching that God is all-knowing merely a matter of intellectual interest, or does it have profound practical implications? What are the practical benefits of meditating on the nature of God’s knowledge? Do we really want God to know us?

God’s exhaustive and constant knowledge of us could be regarded as either a threat or a comfort to us, depending on how you look at it. I once walked into an Egyptian restaurant and everyone there looked up and stared as if to say, “What are you doing here?” It wasn’t a comfortable feeling. I’ve heard that one of the greatest fears people have is of public speaking. Other people are staring at you and making judgments about how you look and everything you say and do. Jean Paul Sartre, the atheist existentialist philosopher, in his play, No Exit, portrays hell as a room where you must live in the presence of other people, unable to sleep or even close your eyes. You are always under their gaze—exposed or reduced to an object. Towards the end of the play, Sartre concludes, “Hell is other people.” In another place, Sartre said that if God were always watching through the cosmic keyhole, then Sartre couldn’t be free. God’s gaze can be a threat if you don’t want to be seen.

On the other hand, there are times when we want to be seen. My boys want me to come to their soccer matches so I can see them play. They want me to see them when they are in a play. When they are afraid, they want their mother or me to be present with them. There are times when it feels good to be with a friend, to not be alone.

God is always watching. He knows everything about you. He knows who you really are. He knows your secrets. God does not ignore details. Even a sparrow does not fall to the ground without the Father’s knowledge and permission (Matt. 10:29). God even knows the number of hairs on your head (Matt. 10:30). Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.”

Psalm 139 is a classic psalm that contemplates God’s knowledge and presence. David knows that God has searched him and known him (vs. 1). God knows “when I sit down and when I rise up” (vs. 2). He knows “my path and my lying down (vs. 3). God knows my thoughts before I do, “even before there is a word on my tongue… Thou dost know it all” (vs. 4). He knows the meaning of what I say even when I am not aware of the various motives behind my words. The Lord is behind me and in front of me (and on both sides as well) (vs. 5).

The next verses are particularly poignant for me. I went to high school in Australia—Carey Baptist Grammar School. We had a regular chapel time. One of the unique institutions there (I have never seen it anywhere else) was a talking choir. They would read scripture verses with the same intonation. One of their favorite passages was Psalm 139. They used to say these verses in a lilting fashion that is unforgettable to me. “Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol,
Thou art there! If I take the wings of the
dawn and dwell in the uttermost parts of
the sea, even there Thy hand shall lead me,
and Thy right hand shall hold me” (vs. 7-10).
Our talking choir read this passage in a light,
breezy fashion, particularly emphasizing the
“wings of dawn.” However, I wonder if there
was any ambivalence in David’s thoughts.
After all, there was no escape from the pres-
ence of God. If I were to travel at the speed of
light (“wings of dawn”) I couldn’t get away
from Him even if I wanted to do so.

Thieves often like the cover of darkness.
That’s why lights in a parking lot or auto-
matic lights around houses are seen as a
deterrent. Perhaps we might be so foolish
as to think that we could hide from God in
the darkness. David considers this option:

If I say, “Let only darkness cover me
and the light about me be night, even
the darkness is not dark to Thee and the
night is as bright as the day; for darkness
is as light with Thee” (vs. 11-12).

At the end of the Psalm, David prays
a classic prayer, “Search me, O God, and
know my heart! Try me and know my
thoughts; and see if there be any wicked
way in me and lead me in the everlasting
way” (vs. 23-24). Why does David ask for
God to “search me” (vs. 23) when he knows
that God has already searched him (vs. 1)?
I suppose it is because David wants to em-
brace and accept God’s knowledge of Him
rather than to attempt (however futilely)
to escape from Him. It is also because he
wants to know what God knows. He asks
God to “try” him, put him to the test, and
let David see what God sees. He wants to
see his own sinfulness (“wicked way”). One
Puritan writer said that David did a lot of
courageous things. He fought a lion and a
bear. He fought Goliath with a sling shot.
But, the most courageous thing David ever
did was to pray this prayer. He was asking
God to let him undergo trials so that his sin-

fulness would come to the surface, and that
he might know what God already knows
about him. How could he be so bold as to
pray that prayer? Probably it was because
He trusted in God’s mercy and compassion
and that he believed that God intended to
lead him in the “everlasting way” (vs. 24).

But what are further practical implica-
tions of meditating on God’s knowledge?
First, as we consider the vastness of God’s
knowledge, it should lead us to praise Him.
David says, “How precious also are Thy
thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum
of them” (Ps. 139:17). Similarly, the apostle
Paul bursts into praise as he considers God’s
acts in history (Rom. 9-11 especially):

Oh the depth of the riches both of the
wisdom and knowledge of God! How un-
searchable are His judgments and unfath-
omable His ways! For who has known the
mind of the Lord, or who has become His
counselor?… For from Him and through
Him and to Him are all things. To Him be
the glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

Second, knowledge of this truth should also
be a help in temptation and a motivation to hol-

i-

ness. We should be ashamed to sin in God’s
presence. One of the things that made Da-
vid’s sin so awful to him was that the adul-
tery and consequent killing of Uriah was
done “in Thy sight” (Ps. 51:4). People are
kept from sin because someone they respect
is watching. Would you do the worst thing
you have ever done in front of your parents
or your children? We are ashamed to let
others know our sins, yet are often indif-
ferent about what God may think of us—
as if He is not watching. In ancient times,
Linnaeus wrote over the door of his library,
INNOCUE VIVITE NUMEN ADEST—Live
Innocently, God is Present.

Third, God not only sees our sins but also the
right intentions of our heart. It is easy for us to
give the best of all possible motives to our-
selves and attribute to others the worst of
(continued on page 26)
arose, promoted by Constantine and his successors, and became the senatorial class in the East. Increasingly monks and pagans flooded into Constantinople and stayed there to court imperial favor.

Meanwhile places like Antioch and Constantinople remained great Hellenic cities, and life continued much as it had during the earlier empire with careers for the upwardly mobile in the civil service and public office, the use of rhetoric as a major educational tool, and the vast popularity of the circus and theater, while Christianity was nominal for many people. Much of civil life had remained unchanged since pagan days, and much of the Christianity was paper thin. Such was the world into which young John Chrysostom was born, a world in some ways strikingly like our own.

**John’s Career**

We need at least an outline understanding of John’s career if we are to understand the power and impact of his preaching. He was born in Antioch to a fairly wealthy family where his father was a high-ranking military officer who died when John was young, and a mother who was probably a Christian but was certainly well connected. She did not marry again after being widowed at the age of 20, but took great care over John’s education. We know little of the early years, but thereafter there were two major influences in his education which bore great fruit afterwards.

In his late teens he became a star pupil under the pagan rhetorical teacher Libanius, who later on his deathbed declared that John would have been his successor “if the Christians had not stolen him from us.” Indeed it must have seemed like that when John turned his back on a civil career and indeed on the Hellenic culture in which he excelled, got baptized at the age of 18, and for three years worked for Meletius, one of the three bishops laying claim to Antioch.

During this period he experienced the other formative teacher of his youth, Diodorus, who ran the famous Antioch School of Theology. Whereas the Alexandrian School, from Origen onwards had delighted in fanciful and allegorical interpretation of the Bible, the Antiochenes concentrated on the plain literal and historical meaning of scripture. This became John’s chosen method in his future preaching career.

Perhaps after his mother’s death, John became for some time a hermit in a mountain cave near Antioch. His self-discipline was awesome. However, he gave up the life of a hermit after two years and returned to the city where he was soon made deacon, then in about 386 presbyter, and began his life of public ministry—the next twelve years saw him based in the cathedral at Antioch as its leading preacher. Those twelve years of preaching and pastoring the Christians in Antioch were the happiest period of his life, brought him enormous influence among the citizens, and led to the conversion of a great many pagans.

In November 397 John’s life underwent an abrupt change. He was actually kidnapped and taken off to Constantinople to be their bishop. The secrecy of the operation was due to the fear of the authorities that the Antiochenes might cause much trouble if their presbyter was parted from them in
“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists… if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world… I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country which I shall not find till after death… I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.”

C.S. Lewis

the normal way—they were devoted to him. So all of a sudden, the powerless little priest of Antioch became the leading bishop of the East, whose job was to give leadership in the capital and preach before the emperor and court.

Needless to say he applied himself to this unexpected and unwanted ministry with vigor—too much vigor for the lazy and dissolute local clergy, who found him a stern reformer and disciplinarian. They had been used to extravagant meals offered by his predecessor, but John did little entertaining and when he did it was very simple—as befitted an ex-monk. Such simplicity made him very unpopular with the clergy. Those five years in which he was bishop in Constantinople were not the happiest of his life. He got heavily involved with political events, tried to settle affairs in the diocese of Ephesus (in which he probably had no right to interfere), and fell foul of the crooked Bishop of Alexandria, who had always wanted Constantinople for his own candidate, not John. John handled this fraught relationship badly and before long found that his enemies at court managed to get him exiled. But only for a day or so. Opposition from ecclesiastical and political circles continued, and so did his political ineptitude and tactlessness. He fell out with the Empress Eudoxia. And soon after, the weak emperor Arcadius was persuaded to banish him for the final time. Chrysostom gathered his clergy for prayer in the cathedral and then went calmly into exile under military escort. He was moved to a town in Armenia, and then to an even more remote one at indecent haste although he was very ill, and he died en route. His last words were “Glory be to God for everything. Amen.”

Goldenmouth

We turn now to John the preacher. We are fortunate to have over 900 of his sermons, and the best ones are expositions of scripture. I believe there were four major elements which made him into such a great preacher. One was the oratorical training he had received under Libanius years earlier. One was the oratorical training he had received under Libanius years earlier. One was his profound study in the Antiochene tradition of expounding scripture (continued on page 14)
by the plain sense of the text, which he
learned from Diodorus. One was his pas-
tionate commitment to feeding people with
the Word of God. And finally, he was fear-
less in applying scripture with enormous
precision to the needs and, more especially,
the sins of his hearers.

You will have noticed the warning about hell.
Unlike the majority of modern preachers,
Chrysostom did not shrink from bringing
the reality of heaven and hell before his hearers.

First and foremost, John was an expound-
er of the biblical text. For instance, in his
Homily on Ephesians he quotes “you were
called in one hope” and continues:

God has called you for the same purpose.
He allots no more to one person than
another. He has given everyone the gift of
immortality, everyone undying glory, ev-
everyone brother or sisterhood, he has made
everyone his heir. . . . Seeing you possess
so much equality in spiritual matters, on
what grounds then do you feel proud? Is
it because one person is rich and another
is powerful? Wouldn’t that be ridiculous?
Tell me, if the emperor happened to take
ten individuals and dress them all in
purple and sit them on the imperial throne
and give all of them the same honor—
which of them then would dare to disdain
the other, on the grounds that they were
richer or had greater prestige? None!

John was also a hard-hitting preacher. Remem-
ber that he is operating in two of
the most modern cities we could imagine—
with poverty, exploitation, immorality, po-
litical intrigue, and ostentatious wealth all
around him, and a lukewarm church, very
like our own, which needs the powerful ap-
lication of God’s standards to be brought
home with vivid imagery and pointed ap-
lication. With that in mind, see how he
turns on the rich women in the congrega-
tion, wealthy, wanton, and careless of the
needs of the poor.

What could be sillier than the rich? Don’t
you see how great wealth makes
people mad? How it inflames them?
What about the women—I am
embarrassed, but have to say it—
who use silver chamber pots? Those
of you who make them should be
ashamed. Christ is starving, and you’re
indulging like that? How stupid you
are! Then do you persist in asking why
there are robbers, why there are murder-
ers, why there are evils, when the devil
sweeps you off your feet in this way? Pos-
sessing silver plates is not even in accord
with a philosophical spirit, but is total
wantonness. Making unclean vessels
from silver too is not just wantonness, it
is the height of folly. Yes, wealth makes
people mad. Here is a man made in the
image of God dying of cold, while you
are equipping yourself with such things.
What arrogance! What more would a mad
person do? Do you so revere excrement
that you would receive it in silver?

What’s this softness, this indulgence,
this insolence (it isn’t indulgence but
insolence). What’s this madness? There
are so many beggars standing around
the church and the church has so many
children so rich, it can’t come to the aid
of a single beggar. One is hungry, the
other drunk; one relieves herself in silver,
the other doesn’t even have bread. Let
us readily and patiently avoid all these
defects, so that we may live to the glory
of God, and be freed from punishment
in the hereafter, and may attain the
blessings promised to those who love him, through the grace and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power, and honor for ever and ever Amen.

You will have noticed the warning about hell. Unlike the majority of modern preachers, Chrysostom did not shrink from bringing the reality of heaven and hell before his hearers.

Of course, John got enormous credit for his preaching. How did he handle praise and congratulation? He refers to one of his orations when he was overwhelmed with praise. He says, “Great applause ensued, the theater became fervent, the assembly was inflamed. As for myself, I was delighted, not because I was the one being praised but because my Master was being glorified; that applause and praise showed the love that you have in your hearts for God.” What a superbly mature way to handle congratulation.

Not every preacher is a pastor. Not every preacher cares about the family and about the poor. But this was a prominent side of John’s preaching during the Antioch years, and it drew the population to him with deep affection. In his early days of preaching he was scathing about marriage—he had seen too many bad ones. “Incessant quarrelling, mutual hatred, such are the pleasures of marriage! If such is the condition of husbands and wives it is well not to marry.” All that changed as he matured. He sees bubbling hormones as the main spur towards marriage, and therefore encourages young men to marry early. He was passionately against divorce, which was common even in Christian circles in Antioch. But his chief concern was to stress the equality of husband and wife, something that appeals very much to our generation but sounded very strange to his. Time and again he repeats that the infidelity of men is just as bad as that of women—and that was saying something very radical in the city of pleasure which Antioch had become.

John had a profound concern for healthy Christian family life. Needless to say, he taught continuously on the need for Bible reading and prayer in Christian families. It seems that this was all rather novel in his day, and so we find him preaching very simply and directly from the scriptures and expecting the father of the family to go through it again in family prayers. Prayer should be pure in intention and from the heart. It should be frequent, and be matched by good deeds.

If the family became one of the passions of this preaching pastor, the poor became another. Leading clerics often concentrated their attentions on the rich. But not John. As we have seen, he reserved his strongest invective for the rich. Judging from one of his homilies, the very rich and the very poor each represented a tenth of the population of the city. He loved to extol the virtues of the humble folk, the shoemakers, smiths, and artisans of all kinds. Chrysostom was greatly influenced by Acts 2, where the church is marked by equality, unity, and generosity. He longs to see in his day some counterpart to the first Christians who

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“were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

But we must not pretend that John was faultless as a man or as a preacher. He seems to have been strongly anti-Semitic, and the odious stream of anti-Semitism which has disfigured some of Christian history owes not a little to his violent invective. We must put this in context, of course. It appears that in Antioch, where there was a large Jewish population, lax members of his congregation were in the habit of going to Jewish festivals and fasts, conducting business in synagogue meetings—and in pagan temples for that matter. And John, always jealous for the purity of Christian commitment, was passionately against this practice. Even so, we can only bow our heads in shame that a Christian preacher of such distinction and saintliness should have fueled the anti-Semitism which, of course, found its climax in the concentration camps of Hitler’s Germany.

But it would be unfair to leave it there. John had a huge heart of compassion towards lost people, and this showed up very clearly in his first year as a bishop in Constantinople. He had urgent matters on hand—reform of the clergy, organization of church charitable organizations, building hospitals, and relationships with the imperial household. Yet he gave himself to the evangelization of the surrounding country districts and in particular the Goths. He sent missionaries as far as the Black Sea, where there was a large colony of Goths. Not only were many of these wild people brought to Christ, but he was able to found the elements of a national clergy among them.

What a man! Frail in body but mighty in spirit. Of course he had his faults. He was impetuous. He did not know how to govern men—only how to direct souls. He did not know the meaning of the word tact. He was naïve to an extreme in affairs of state. He was direct to the point of rudeness, but under it all beat a compassionate, generous heart. This man loved the poor and was loved by them in return. He was amazingly energetic and enterprising, incorruptible and fearless. His lifestyle was simple, his worship assiduous, his morals pure. Significantly, the Eastern and Western Churches combine in naming him a saint.

As a preacher he was one of the greatest who has ever lived. He broke with the allegorical methods popular in Alexandria and expounded the plain sense of scripture with due respect for its historical context. This was perhaps his greatest achievement. He knew men were spiritually hungry, and he knew the Bible was the Word of God with which they needed to be fed. “I cannot let a day pass without feeding you with the treasures of the scriptures,” he said. His preaching was bold and utterly fearless. He applied the scriptures with great accuracy to the needs he perceived among his congregation. He was a skilled orator and yet mostly spoke very simply. He was not interested in philosophical or theological niceties, but in seeking to conform the lifestyles of his parishioners to the life of Christ. So there was a lot of moral application in his preaching, a lot of vivid imagery, a lot of broken sentences as he spoke impromptu and directly into the situation before him. He was like one of the Old Testament prophets in New Testament dress. In a word, he wanted to use his great gift of preaching to see a revival of the loving Christianity of the first century in fourth century Antioch and Constantinople. Thank God for Goldenmouth, his powerful preaching and his godly example.
Clapham in the Congress

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legislative arena. Soon after, a smaller subset of that group began meeting regularly (and often spontaneously) to discuss articles and ideas, and to pray. What started as an informal reading group blossomed into something more active and strategic, as several of us began to work together quite deliberately on various culture-changing initiatives.

Our group started reading about William Wilberforce, and was excited by his determination to achieve the “two great objects” he believed God had placed before him: the abolition of the slave trade and the “reformation of manners” (or morals). We passed along short biographies of Wilberforce to our bosses, who also were inspired by his example. Around the same time, the popularity of Wilberforce suddenly exploded—books, reading guides, suddenly proliferated. For many in the legislative arena, Wilberforce became a patron saint of sorts—a real-life model of how one can fully live out their primary calling (to God) through their secondary, professional callings.

As we studied Wilberforce, it became clear that his work was not only animated by his deep faith, but was sustained and furthered by like-minded friends who worked alongside each other in complementary ways. In Parliament, his attempts to abolish the slave trade bonded him with a few allies who collectively (and rather derisively) became known as “the saints;” but beyond that, a larger group of friends started living in the area known as Clapham so they could more easily get together to brainstorm, plan, and simply spend time together. This group later became known as the “Clapham sect.”

The discussions, debates, ideas, strategies, and work that came out of this group of friends were astonishing. At one point, Wilberforce alone was involved in almost 70 different reforms and philanthropic initiatives; the work of the Clapham sect cast an even larger shadow. Together, they passed new laws—and just as importantly, helped change cultural norms concerning—child labor, poverty relief, debt reform, public drunkenness, the prevention of cruelty to animals, crime, and political corruption. Over the course of forty years, Wilberforce and his Clapham friends achieved both of their great objects—the full-scale abolition of the slave trade, and an astonishing, and historically unprecedented, transformation of English society and culture.

The work of the Clapham sect captured the imagination of our reading group ten

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years ago, and we spent time deliberately thinking together of how our friendship, shared faith commitment, and common work could be used to the fullest.

Several initiatives grew out of this small community. One member of the group worked for a Senator who was part of the Senate Leadership, and we formed a “leadership working group” on “compassion and culture” that gave us a means of extending work into ways and means of cultural change. We invited thinkers and scholars to meet and confer with us on ways of discouraging violent, debased entertainment, decreasing the demand for abortion, framing the debate on the importance of faith-based charities, etc. The bonds formed as part of this group helped forge relationships between our bosses, who began to work together on such bills as the Partial Birth Abortion Ban, the Charitable Choice Act, etc. We also sought and received support to host a “Great Objects” retreat where we could set aside an entire weekend to think together strategically how best to work towards cultural change, and to translate our “knowing” into doing.

At one point, several of us flew to Hollywood to meet privately with several film producers to ask and encourage them to consider the power of their craft and make movies with transcendent themes. At one of those meetings, a young producer was present who later credited that discussion with encouraging him to make the award-winning movie Bella.

Since that time, most members of our reading group left Capitol Hill, and have spread out across different government offices, private firms, marketing organizations, and non-profits. The influence of that community still pervades many of the activities we engage in, and for me, at least, shapes my thinking and approach. Not surprisingly, one member (and leader) of the reading group, when founding his own non-profit, named it “The Clapham Group.”

Wilberforce’s life is a testament to the fact that one person living a life of radical obedience can change the world—but cannot do it alone. Without Wilberforce, the slave trade would not have been abolished when it was. But without the Clapham group, Wilberforce would have lacked the encouragement, moral and financial support, and intellectual firepower and backing necessary for the task. The Clapham group not only helped Wilberforce realize his calling, but stay faithful to it for decades, and achieve it.

In much the same way, our friends and community are essential to enabling us to achieve the call and claims placed on our life. It may be one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life that God equips and strengthens us largely through others—so that we can do great things in Him, but often only with the help of friends, family, and the fabric of community. It is both humbling and exciting to realize that much of what we are called (even commanded) to do, we cannot do alone.

The work of the C.S. Lewis Institute deliberately seeks to cultivate such communities of believers, on Capitol Hill and elsewhere, to encourage and challenge each other to more fully live out their faith in the context of their work, and indeed all of life. For me, my understanding of vocation has been immeasurably enriched by a community of Christians working in concert and in response to God’s calling.
time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things; in the mean time, singing forth, with a low voice my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer…

I felt then great satisfaction, as to my good state; but that did not content me. I had vehement longings of soul after God and Christ, and after more holiness, wherewith my heart seemed to be full, and ready to break; which often brought to my mind the words of the Psalmist, Psal. 119:28. My soul breaketh for the longing it hath. I often felt a mourning and lamenting in my heart, that I had not turned to God sooner, that I might have had more time to grow in grace. My mind was greatly fixed on divine things; almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner, at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent. The delights which I now felt in the things of religion, were of an exceeding different kind from those before mentioned, that I had when a boy; and what I then had no more notion of, than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colors.

The delights which I now felt in the things of religion, were of an exceeding different kind from those before mentioned, that I had when a boy; and what I then had no more notion of, than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colors.

My sense of divine things seemed gradually to increase, until I went to preach at New York, which was about a year and a half after they began; and while I was there, I felt them, very sensibly, in a much higher degree than I had done before. My longings after God and holiness, were much increased. Pure and humble, holy and heav-
The Journey of a Great Soul
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my heart. However, I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness, and conformity to Christ.

The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness; to be with God, and to spend my eternity in divine love, and holy communion with Christ. My mind was very much taken up with contemplations on heaven, and the enjoyments there; and living there in perfect holiness, humility and love: And it used at that time to appear a great part of the happiness of heaven, that there the saints could express their love to Christ. It appeared to me a great clog and burden, that what I felt within, I could not express as I desired. The inward ardor of my soul, seemed to be hindered and pent up, and could not freely flame out as it would.

It appeared to me a great clog and burden, that what I felt within, I could not express as I desired. The inward ardor of my soul, seemed to be hindered and pent up, and could not freely flame out as it would.

While at New York, I was sometimes much affected with reflections of my past life, considering how late it was before I began to be truly religious; and how wickedly I had lived till then; and once so as to weep abundantly, and for a considerable time together.

On January 12, 1723, I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down; giving up myself, and all that I had to God; to be for the future, in no respect, my own; to act as one that had no right to himself, in any respect. And solemnly vowed, to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else, as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were; and his law for the constant rule of my obedience: engaging to fight, with all my might, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, to the end of my life. But I have reason to be infinitely humbled, when I consider, how much I have failed, of answering my obligation....

Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and
sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ... which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.

I have many times had a sense of the glory of the third person in the Trinity, in his office of Sanctifier; in his holy operations, communicating divine light and life to the soul. God, in the communications of his Holy Spirit, has appeared as an infinite fountain of divine glory and sweetness; being full, and sufficient to fill and satisfy the soul; pouring forth itself in sweet communications; like the sun in its glory, sweetly and pleasantly diffusing light and life. And I have sometimes had an affecting sense of the excellency of the word of God, as a word of life; as the light of life; a sweet, excellent giving word; accompanied with a thirsting after that word, that it might dwell richly in my heart.

Often, since I lived in this town, I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together; so that I have often been forced to shut myself up. I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness, and the badness of my heart, than ever I had before my conversion.

I have greatly longed of late, for a broken heart, and to lie low before God; and, when I ask for humility, I cannot bear the thoughts of being no more humble than other Christians. It seems to me, that though their degrees of humility may be suitable for them, yet it would be a vile exaltation in me, not to be the lowest in humility of all mankind. Others speak of their longing to be “humbled to the dust;” that may be a proper expression for them, but I always think of myself, that I ought, and it is an expression that has long been natural for me to use in prayer, “to lie infinitely low before God.” And it is affecting to think, how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, of the bottomless, infinite depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit, left in my heart.

I have a much greater sense of my universal, exceeding dependence on God’s grace and strength, and mere good pleasure, of late, than I used formerly to have; and have experienced more of an abhorrence of my own righteousness.

I have a much greater sense of my universal, exceeding dependence on God’s grace and strength, and mere good pleasure, of late, than I used formerly to have; and have experienced more of an abhorrence of my own righteousness. The very thought of any joy arising in me, on any consideration of my own amiableness, performances, or experiences, or any goodness of heart or life, is nauseous and
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detestable to me. And yet I am greatly afflicted with a proud and righteous spirit, much more sensibly than I used to be formerly. I see that serpent rising and putting forth its head continually, every where, all around me.

Though it seems to me, that, in some respects, I was a far better Christian, for two or three years after my first conversion, than I am now; and lived in a more constant delight and pleasure; yet, of late years, I have had a more full and constant sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, and a delight in that sovereignty; and have had more of a sense of the glory of Christ, as a Mediator revealed in the gospel.

Questions & Answers on C.S. Lewis

In this new section of Knowing and Doing, Dr. Art Lindsley will explore some interesting questions about C.S. Lewis’s life or writings, as well as addressing some of the more substantial criticisms of Lewis from various people.

Q: Was Susan excluded from Narnia in The Last Battle because she loved lipstick?

A: Contrary to some editorials, Susan is not excluded from Narnia because she likes “nylons and lipstick” but because she has chosen to exclude herself by referring to Narnia as “those funny games we used to play when we were children.” Lewis wrote a letter in answer to a child who asked about Susan’s absence:
The books don’t tell us what happened to Susan. She is left alive in this world at the end, having by then turned into a rather silly, conceited young woman. But there is plenty of time for her to mend and perhaps she will get to Aslan’s country in the end—in her own way. I think that whatever she had seen in Narnia she could (if she was the sort that wanted to) persuade herself, as she grew up, that it was “all nonsense.”

So, Susan excludes herself from Narnia and the option is still open for her inclusion at a later time.

Q: What is the background to the wardrobe in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe?

A: One of Lewis’s cousins recalled the wardrobe in “Jack’s” (C.S. Lewis’ nickname) Belfast home. She remembered the children climbing into the wardrobe in the dark to listen to Jack’s adventure stories. This same wardrobe was moved to C.S. Lewis’s home at Oxford and now resides in the Wade Center at Wheaton College. When Lewis sent a draft of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe to friend and fellow Inkling Owen Barfield, Barfield’s wife, Maud, was concerned that kids might lock themselves into wardrobes. So Lewis gave five warnings in the book to prevent this predicament from happening. Another interesting note is that after the story was published, a little boy in Oxford took an axe and chopped a hole in the back of his family’s wardrobe, trying to find Narnia.
your progress may differ significantly in comparison with other believers: suffering and persecution seem to accelerate the process. Keeping these realities in mind, you can reasonably expect the Holy Spirit’s work through your obedience to God’s Word to increase your prayer effectiveness as you mature in Christ.

In a brief essay entitled, “Petitionary Prayer: A Problem Without an Answer,” C.S. Lewis claimed the New Testament describes two types of prayer—which cannot be reconciled: (A) a form which submits to the will of God (“Thy will be done”); and (B) a form which asks, on the ground of the petitioner’s unwavering faith, whatever the petitioner wills. He sees the A-pattern as submissive and doubtful and the B-pattern as assertive and confident. The former Lewis associates with “the very weakest,” and the latter with those who seek miracles. He concludes the essay with: “I come to you, reverend Fathers, for guidance. How am I to pray this very night?” It seems to me, Lewis’ struggle is grounded in an apparent conflict between 1 John 5:14, “if we ask anything according to his will he hears us,” and 3:22, “whatever we ask we receive from him,” because such a believer has been trained by sustained reflection on, and the obedient pursuit of, God’s will, to comprehend life from God’s perspective. (Hungering and thirsting after righteousness leads to the sort of purity in thinking, motive, and behavior that enables a believer to see God and His world rightly—in ways consistent with spiritual reality.) The word “righteous” in James 5:16 does not imply unique spiritual clout. “Righteous” is an adjective describing one whose head, heart, and behavior are fully committed to God. Such persons often pray in tune with His will. The Bible regards “powerful” prayer as a natural spiritual consequence of “delighting” in God’s will in all of life.

Conclusion: Let Scripture Shape Your Mind, Life, and Prayers
God has not left it all up to you. Our Heavenly Father is gracious beyond measure. Through the intercession of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and other believers, He provides what we need—even when we pray in error or ignorance of His will. So whether you’re a recent convert to Christ, or have known Him for years, there is much to anticipate as you grow spiritually. And if you wish—as we all do—to become personally “powerful
and effective” in prayer, to more frequently experience the joy of having our Lord give you the “desires of your heart,” then you must become committed to reading, memorizing, meditating on, and obeying the written will of God in the Bible. There are no short cuts, no seminars, no amazing prayer-power techniques, nor any “secrets” which bypass this reality. The path to spiritual maturity—to answered prayer—is the way of obedience.

The emphasis above on obedience points to several uncomfortable conclusions: (1) Prayer is not a labor-saving device. God acts in response to prayer when the situation is beyond solution by those who are praying: God acts when He perceives help is actually needed. God will not do for us, in answer to prayer, what He has equipped His children to do for themselves. There is a time to pray and there is a time to act. (2) We are unlikely to pray better than our commitment to obey. There is no shortcut to effective prayer that bypasses basic Christian discipleship. (3) Those who want to be more effective in prayer must think very hard about the implications of Luke 6:46: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” Unless we respond to this verse before we pray, we may well receive it as the answer to our petitions.

The underlying spiritual principle is found in John 9:31: “We know that God does not hear sinners [because they neither respect, understand, nor pray according to His will]; but if any one is God-fearing, and does His will [who has been trained through their reverent obedience to understand God’s will and pray according to it]; He hears him” (NASB). The same truth is found in Romans 12:1-2: pleasing God in how we live is directly linked to the Spirit’s renewal of our minds, which, in turn, is essential to accurate perception of God’s will.5

Make a commitment to live more like Jesus, and God will teach you to pray more like Jesus. Our Savior said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me” (John 11:41-42). He had such effectiveness in prayer because in His humanity, He was totally committed to obedience: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34; cf. Hebrews 10:7), and “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). Through the prayer-obedience relationship, the Spirit of Christ will increase your understanding of the mind of Christ: He will help you learn to pray more frequently as Jesus always did: according to the will of our Father who is in Heaven.

Notes

2. Prayer promises using words like, “whatever you ask” or “anything you ask,” are either found in, or logically linked to, biblical contexts from which they cannot be removed. These contexts are invariably detailed statements of the moral and ethical characteristics describing an obedient disciple of Christ. The “ask, seek, knock” prayer promises of Matthew 7:7-11, for example, are made to those disciples of Jesus who “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” who both “teach and obey God’s commandments,” who see God as their “Treasure in heaven” and who serve Him as “Master” in every aspect of their lives. The petition: “we want you to do for us whatever we ask” (Mark 10:35), is an expression of selfishness and ignorance.


4. The goal of Christian prayer is the glorification of God through Christ (John 14:14) in the accomplishment of His will and growth in our understanding of and relationship with God (James 4:8).

5. The NIV translators rightly make it clear the last clause of Romans 12:2, “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will,” is the result or consequence of the actions directed in 12:1-2. See on this: James H. Moulton and Nigel Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 143.

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**The real problem is not why some pious, humble, believing people suffer, but why some do not.**

C.S. Lewis
all possible motives. When people misjudge us, it is a comfort to know that God knows the true state of affairs. When American Puritan Jonathan Edwards was removed from his church, he preached a farewell sermon. He said that God knows the truth, and that they all would meet in the future before God’s judgment, where every untruth will be revealed. Edwards placed his trust in God’s knowledge when slandered.

Fourth, God’s knowledge ought to lead to our humility. After all, what is our knowledge compared to God’s? Steven Charnock says in his book, The Existence and Attributes of God, “We have infinitely more ignorance than knowledge.” No matter how much you know now, there are vast amounts that you do not know.

Fifth, beware of attempting to usurp God’s omniscience. We can be overly curious about the things of God. When someone asked Augustine what God was doing before He created the heavens and earth, he replied, “He was in Himself.” When another asked him the same question, he answered, “He was building hell for such idle, presumptuous, fluttering and inquisitive spirits as you.” Remember also, that the root temptation of Satan in the garden was not only to deity (“You shall be as gods,” Gen. 3:5) but to knowledge. Satan said to Eve that if she ate of the tree, she would “be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:15). Let us by all means seek knowledge, but not into God’s secret counsels. Astrologers, palm readers, and fortune tellers attempt to know and control the future, usurping God’s knowledge and lordship.

Sixth, God really knows and He can really be known. God’s character and knowledge provide the philosophical basis for our knowledge. God is not contradictory, and His universe is knowable. Without this truth we could not trust our reason and science. There is much that is mysterious about God, but there is not contradiction in Him. He cannot be holy and not holy, good and not good, just and not just, and so on.

There is much more that could be said about the implications and practical benefits of God’s knowledge, but this perhaps will stir us to consider more connections between God’s omniscience and our own personal and public lives, and thus lead us to a deeper knowledge of God and ourselves.

Modern Unreality

we get as much of what we want as the next person does. We cherish a sense of cosmic unfairness whenever one person suffers as others do not—especially if that person is ourself. Sacrifice for the good of others—parents for children, husbands and wives for each other, business managers for their employees and shareholders, political leaders for the community they claim to serve—is almost unheard of nowadays. Society has largely become a jungle in which we are all out hunting for pleasure, profit, and power, and are happy to shoot others if that is the way to get what we want.

Meantime, as compared with all Christians of up to about a generation ago, we have shockingly little sense of the reality, pervasiveness, shame, and guilt of sin. We cherish shockingly strong illusions about having a right to expect from God health, wealth, ease, excitement, and sexual gratification. We are shockingly unaware that suffering Christianly is an integral aspect of biblical holiness, and a regular part of business as usual for the believer.

When I seek sanity about suffering, I am heavily handicapped by these cultural cross-currents. They infect the air I breathe, and work in my spiritual system as a potent low-level poison. They are certainly part of the reason why I find it so hard to control my thoughts and feelings, and experience so much childish fury, when minor discomforts and wrist-slappings come my way.
THOUGHTS TO PONDER  
Modern Unreality About Suffering
by J.I. Packer


Christian endurance, as we have seen, means living lovingly, joyfully, peacefully, and patiently under conditions that we wish were different. There is an umbrella-word that we use to cover the countless variety of situations that have this character, namely the word *suffering.* Suffering is in the mind of the sufferer, and may conveniently be defined as getting what you do not want while wanting what you do not get. This definition covers all forms of loss, hurt, pain, grief, and weakness—all experiences of rejection, injustice, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, and being the butt of others’ hatred, ridicule, cruelty, callousness, anger, and ill-treatment—plus all exposure to foul, sickening, and nightmarish things that make you want to scream, run, or even die. Suffering in some shape or form is everyone’s lot from earliest days, though some know far more of it than others. I shall try to be explicit now about how suffering and holiness relate to each other.

How much credibility can at this point attach to the words of one who has lived so comfortable and straightforward a life, with such good health and so many good friends, as I have, I do not know. Suffering is one of the many things I feel I know very little about. But here anyway are the truths to which I hope to hold, with God’s help, through whatever sufferings—trivial discomforts or major distresses—my “golden years,” as old age is now called, may bring me. They are the truths about suffering that every Christian needs, and none of us dare forget.

First, I remind myself that ours is not a good time for any sort of realism about suffering—indeed, any sort of realism about God, about Christianity, about virtue, about relationships, about death and dying, or about anything else except matters of technology. In our Western world fantastic technical skills are wedded to an extreme emotional childishness and immaturity, which bogs us all down deeper in sin’s legacy of self-centeredness, self-absorption, and self-pity than any generation has ever sunk since Christianity entered the world.

Moreover, this is a post-Christian age intellectually, in which little sense of God’s greatness and holiness remains, while unworthy fancies concerning him abound. We think of him as everyone’s heavenly grandfather, there to lavish gifts upon us and enjoy us the way we are. In the absence of any sense of the sinfulness of our sins, we expect VIP treatment from him all the time. It is our everyday habit to manipulate the idea of equality or fairness to ensure that

(continued on page 26)
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