



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

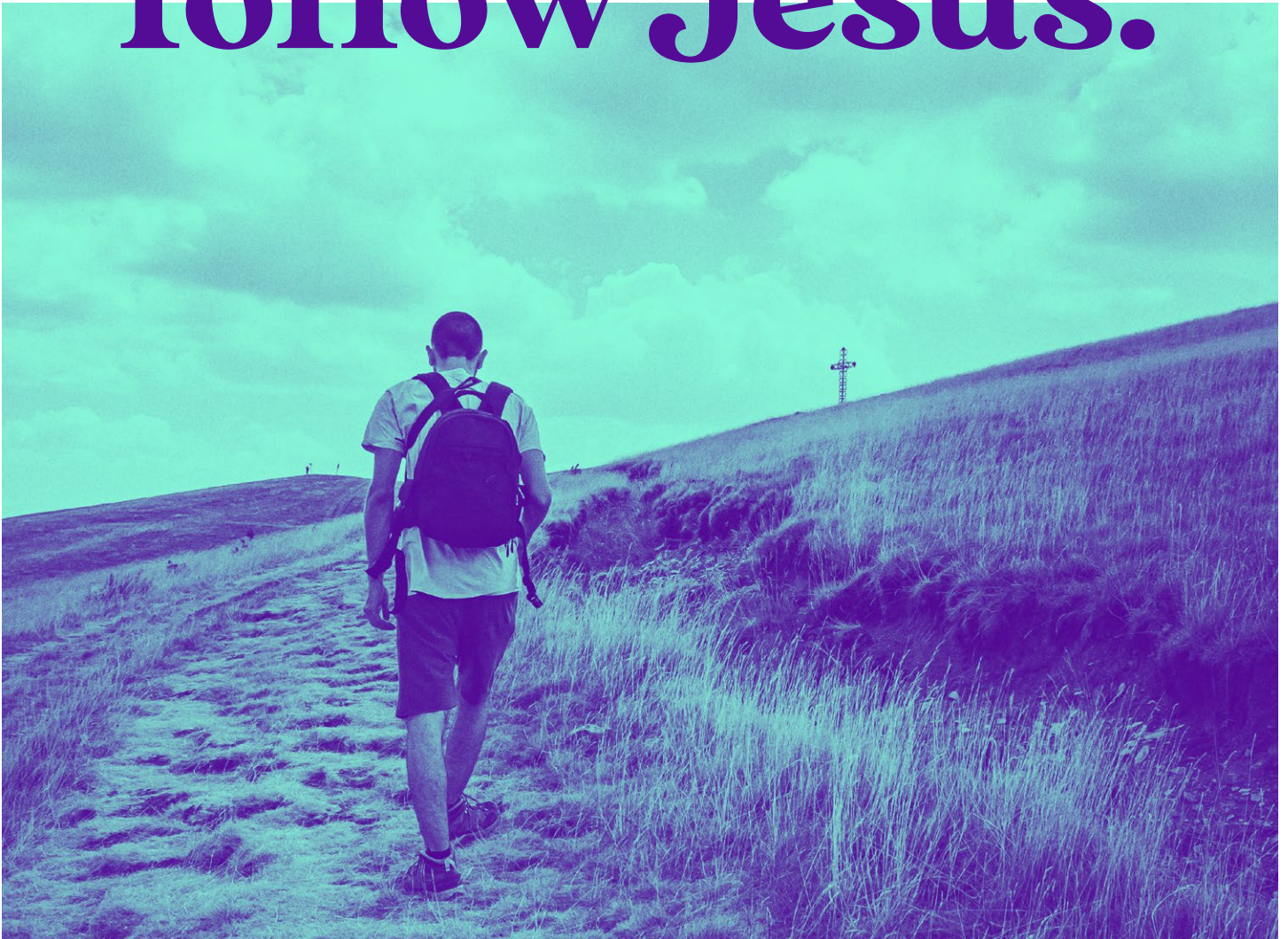
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THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2021

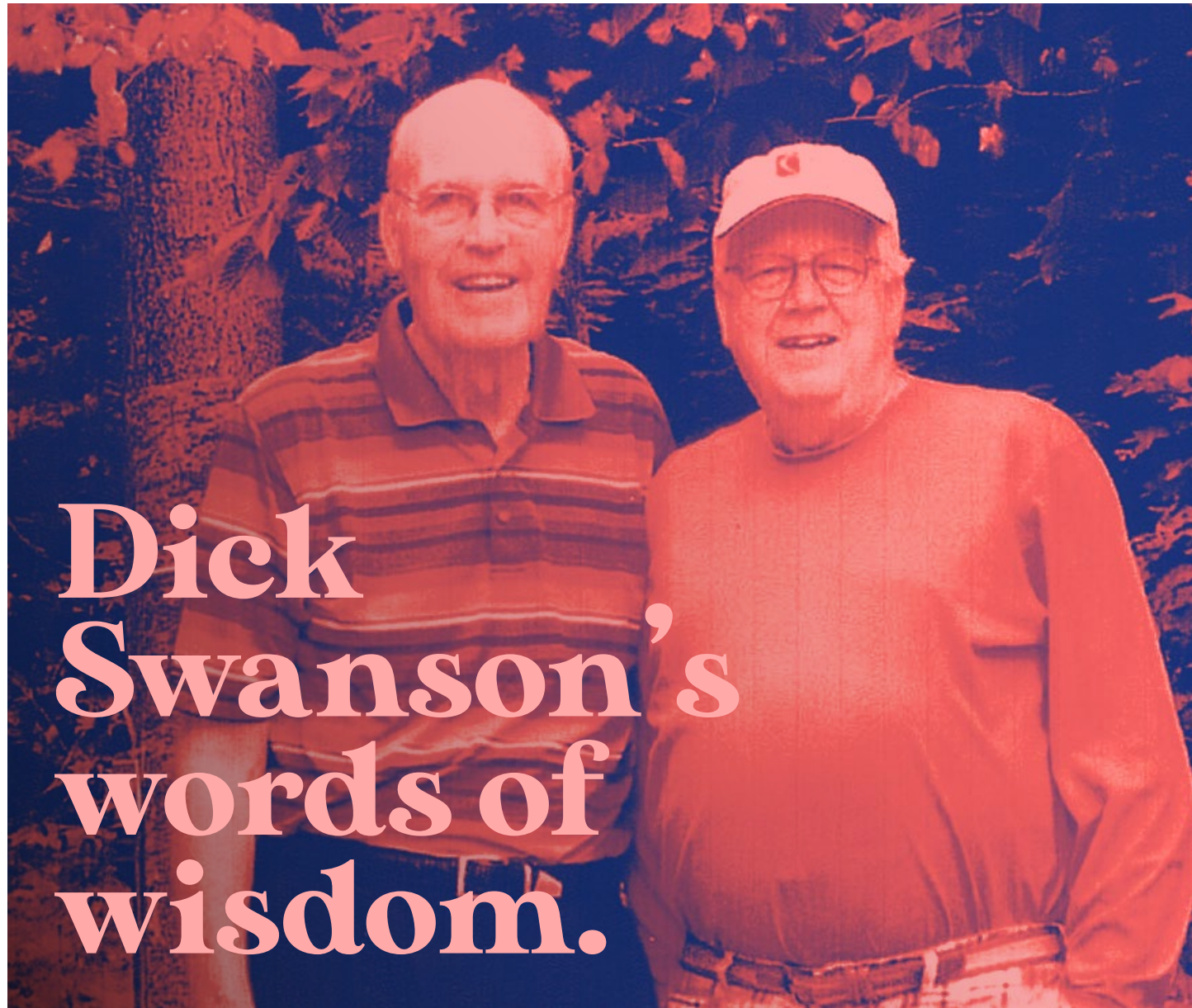
WHAT IT MEANS TO

follow Jesus.



LENTEN EDITION





Dick Swanson's words of wisdom.

By Nate Devlin

“ You should get down on your knees and thank God for all the opportunities He has given you.”

Dick Swanson was baptized in 1933 at Beverly Heights Church when he was just eight days old. Dick used to relish how he held the record for longest membership at the church. Dick set the record at 85 years, when he passed on March 14, 2018.

Over the years, Dick served our church in many ways. He was a Deacon and taught Junior High Sunday school for over 20 years. But more than anything I discovered that Dick was a tremendous support and encouragement to the pastors here at Beverly Heights. —>

I enjoyed such support from him personally, when I served as associate pastor, but I delighted to observe his support as it was demonstrated lovingly through Dick's friendship with my predecessor, Rick Wolling.

Rick used to share with me how much he enjoyed meeting with Dick over breakfast.

Dick was an encourager, and he never missed an opportunity to encourage his pastor. Dick was never Pollyannaish in his encouragement.

He was well aware of the difficulties in ministry and he was not opposed to offering critiques. But when he did, he always shared them gently, at the end of the meal, with thoughts on an index card that he passed across the table as he grabbed the check.

Like Emily Dickinson, he knew how to "tell it slant," so that the truth could do its work gradually.

In challenging times, Dick encouraged fidelity to the ministry and a resolve to endure the hardships with the perseverance of Christ.

In fact, he became famous for offering a particular phrase in the midst of challenge, one that he shared often with Rick, and that Rick shared often with his staff.

When difficulties loomed and challenging circumstances called for strong leadership, Dick would say to Rick: "You should get down on your knees and thank God for all the opportunities He has given you."

Dick was an encourager. He never saw challenges. He only saw opportunities, and he invited others to see them too.

This March will mark three years since Dick died and one year since Covid-19 was introduced to the world's lexicon. The past year has not been easy, as this virus has affected almost everything we do.

But amid the trials this time has brought with it, I have also heard, over and over again in my mind, Dick Swanson's words of encouragement, to look for the opportunities.

So, in the spirit of our dear friend Dick Swanson, I want to share with you some reflections about the opportunities I have discerned that have come as a result of life under Covid this past year.

Covid has provided us with the opportunity to exercise courage.

I keep coming back to courage, not only because it is needed right now, but because it is fundamental.

Courage is considered one of the *cardinal* virtues of antiquity and Christian theology. Cardinal comes from the Latin word *cardo* meaning "hinge."

All of life – and certainly a life well lived – hinges on the embrace and exercise of such virtue.

Not only does courage make life livable, but it actually opens the door for all the other virtues and for a life of beauty and distinction. This past year has offered us the opportunity to get reacquainted with the biblical mandate – which is part of our closing benediction for each service – "to be of good courage."

Covid has provided us with the opportunity to exercise wisdom.

To exercise wisdom, we must first discern the truth and the authority behind truth claims.

The competition between authority and truth claims is nothing new, but for many of us, such truth claims and appeals to authority have largely remained an abstraction.

But now, they impact our everyday lives, from how our kids are educated, to the way we shop for groceries, to the way we worship. Such claims can no longer be ignored. We absolutely must exercise wisdom.

We have the opportunity to discern that which is right, good and true according to the Word of God, in a way we have not had before.

Covid has provided us with an opportunity for growth.

Growth typically happens in one of two ways: through investment and through pruning. Both are biblical principles.

Pruning is never easy. It is painful and requires change, and always presents itself, at first, in the form of loss.

A few years ago, my neighbor had his magnolia tree pruned. At first, it looked like he had killed it. But after two seasons, the tree bloomed more flowers than it ever had before. Such growth would not have been possible without pruning.

Growth also happens through investment. As any investor will tell you, "Buy low, sell high." Things are low right now, but that actually positions us with an opportunity to invest.

God is calling us to invest in the gospel and advance His Kingdom. It is an opportunity we must magnify and glorify.

I miss Dick Swanson. I miss our weekly Sunday conversations.

While I miss seeing him in worship, he has remained close. Especially in this year when I've been reminded to get down on my knees and thank God for the opportunities He has given to us.



A heritage of faith.

By Peter Chace

“To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?” – Cicero (46 BC)

I never cared much for history as a kid. To my overactive mind, it seemed little more than a boring collection of facts about people who wore funny clothes. —>

I was, as Cicero defined rather well, a child in every way. In regards to history, I lacked an imagination and cared little for the lessons she had to teach me.

Over time, however, I have come to learn that knowing history is not only a part of what helps us mature, but also an important part of Christian discipleship.

The first time God reveals Himself to Moses, He commands His people to remember His name as part of their heritage.

“Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.’ ” (Exodus 3.14-15)

Over the past year in seminary, I have grown to love studying the history of the Church. I am humbled by the stories of the saints of centuries past, and count myself among those who stand upon the shoulders of giants as I gaze heavenward to my Savior. I am discovering that I belong to a rich heritage of faith.

At the time of writing this reflection, Sarah and I are expecting the birth of our fifth child any day. The room is prepared, the bassinet stands at the ready, and we eagerly anticipate the day we bring our daughter home.

Between a barrage of winter weather advisories and Covid, we currently find no shortage of opportunities to exercise faith in the midst of our expected delivery window. It is precisely this reality that draws my mind back to the story of Perpetua.

Arrested and imprisoned at 22 years old because of her Christian faith, she is thrown into the dungeon of Carthage and condemned to die in the arena as a spectacle for the crowds.

Still nursing her infant son, Perpetua experiences tremendous anxiety for his safety and her responsibility as his mother. On top of this, her father pleads with her to give up her confession of faith in Jesus, so her infant son might grow up knowing his mother. She replies:

“Do you see this vessel lying here to be a little pitcher, or something else?”

And he said, “I see it to be so.”

And Perpetua replied to him, “Can it be called by any other name than what it is?”

And her father said, “No.”

“Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian.”

It seems in 203 AD, Perpetua was not short on opportunities to exercise her faith.

Entrusting the care of her son to her mother, she is given a final chance to save her life by offering a sacrifice to the emperor. Perpetua doesn’t refuse in kind, but simply states, “I am a Christian.”

For this statement, she is sent to the wild beasts.

As she enters the arena, the soldiers inform her she must wear the dress of those consecrated to the Roman goddess of agriculture.

She again replies with clarity: “We have come thus far of our own accord, for this reason, that our liberty might not be restrained. For this reason, we have yielded our minds, that we might not do any such thing as this.”

Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian.

Astounded at her resolve, the soldiers yield to her insistence and Perpetua enters the arena dressed not in robes of the goddess of Rome but in the faith of Christ. She sings the psalms as the beasts are released upon her, and maintains her composure as she is tossed about like a rag doll.

The soldiers are eventually called in to finish what the beasts could not, and it is Perpetua who comforts and steadies the wavering hand of the young gladiator who hesitates to slay her.

Her final words to her fellow believers have inspired generations of Christians: “Stand fast in the faith, and love one another, all of you, and be not offended at my sufferings.”

Perpetua stands as a courageous example of Christian fidelity, prepared to stand boldly upon one of the most offensive statements the world has ever known, “I am a Christian.”

I am ever grateful for the example of this young mother whose courage inspires me to be a better father and more faithful disciple of Christ.

We do indeed belong to a rich heritage of faith.

Sarah Chace gave birth to a daughter on Feb. 24, their fifth child. Lillian Marie Chace weighed in at 9 lbs., 13 oz. Baby and mom are doing well (there were no immediate reports on Peter’s condition).



Want to follow Jesus? Submit to His Authority.

By Rick Wolling

“What in the world is going on here? Is anyone in charge?”

It's a question which cannot help but be asked witnessing recent chaotic events in our nation. Whether it's the uncontrollable riots of this past summer, the often conflicting "guidance" from those in the political/medical/scientific community dealing with Covid, or the recent storming of the United States Capitol, respect for authority seems under siege lately. →

What causes these things to happen?

In a recent discussion which touched on these and other seemingly out-of-control events, the opinion was proffered that we are witnessing the dissolution of authority. I agree.

While disrespect for authority certainly has many antecedents in modern times, I think its dissolution predates the modern era by millennia.

The problem goes all the way back to Eden when the serpent said to Eve: "Did God say ...?"

That was the beginning of the end of authority, of God's authority, at least in the mind of our parents in the flesh, Adam and Eve.

The devil, who defied his Creator by attempting to establish himself as his own authority, successfully cast doubt into the mind of Eve as to the rightful authority of God to establish the parameters of behavior by His human creatures in the Garden.

What is authority?

The key is found in the word itself – "author."

Authority is the rightful influence and power of one who is an author. In Romans, the Apostle Paul likens God's authority to the influence and power (and right!) of the potter to fashion the clay as he wishes.

God is the heavenly potter and we are the clay. In fact, God not only fashions the clay, He creates it out of nothing. He is Author of both the clay and the pot. Therefore, He has authority over its size, shape and function.

Further, since God is the Creator of all there is, and "without Him was not made anything that was made," He is the Source of all authority.

He has authority over all men and women, all nations, all institutions, everything! So, without Him there is no authentic (there's the author again) authority. One might say that all authority is "intrinsic" to God. It is part of His very nature as Author and Creator and reflects the righteousness of His character.

Therefore – and this is important – without God, there is no authority.

And, by extension, where there is no authority, there is chaos.

Again, the Apostle Paul is instructive here. In Romans chapter 1, Paul says as much when in verses 18-32 he writes that men and women have refused to recognize God's existence, power and majesty and have refused to worship Him or give Him thanks. The

result looks very much like the chaos we witness today.

A world without God and without His authority results in people thinking crazy thoughts, doing crazy things, and endorsing or encouraging crazy thoughts and actions in others.

Is there any better description of our world today than this one?

One day, when God's kingdom is consummated at Jesus' second coming, all Who know and love God through Jesus Christ will enjoy eternal life in the new heavens and earth under God's glorious authority.

Until then, God has granted specific and limited authority to men and women as His vice regents on earth. "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Romans 13.1). At the very least He has granted authority to governmental leaders, to parents, and to pastors and elders in the church.

They must rule and lead as representatives of God Himself. To the extent that they fail to do so, their leadership is inauthentic. Their authority has no basis in truth.

There's an important corollary to this truth on authority for followers of Jesus Christ. Christians must submit to the authority of their governmental leaders, to the authority of their parents and to the authority of their pastors and elders.

Those who have received this delegated authority must exercise it with reverence and awe.

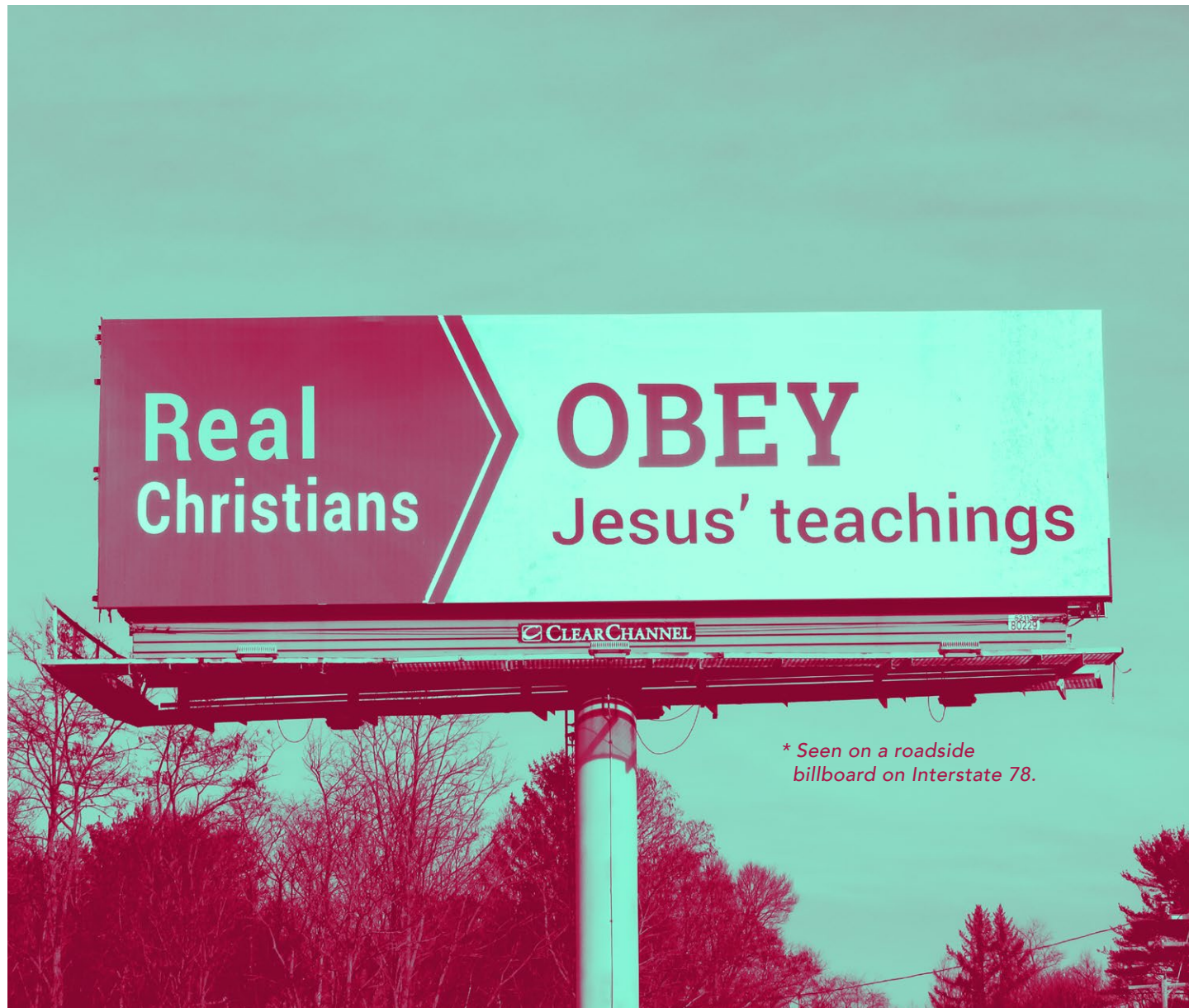
Failure to do so is a rejection of God's authority and of God Himself, as Paul makes clear in his letter to the Romans (13.2): "Therefore he who resists authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

Men and women have rejected God. They live godless lives of radical, self-autonomy. They are a law unto themselves, failing to submit to the authority of God and to the authority of those designated by Him to rule and to lead. Therefore, we live in a world of chaos.

The answer to this dilemma is of course multifaceted but at its core is the need for God. It is a yielding to God's rightful and sovereign authority over us as our Creator and Lord.

How will that ever happen in this world?

It will begin when those who are followers of Jesus Christ, to Whom all authority has been given by the Father, submit to His lordship over our lives and over our church.



* Seen on a roadside billboard on Interstate 78.

By Louise O'Boyle

As a member of the Adult Christian Education committee, I have seen firsthand the year-long process that went into planning the recent Sunday school class, *Fractured: Modern Confusion on Biblical Authority*.

The idea for this class and its structure originated with Bob Thomson. As its steward, he weathered the many complications of Covid, and preparation for the class was, at times, "fractured."

While Bob and the presenters may have found the changes frustrating, for me, as a recipient of the information presented, I found the final product well worth their effort. It was the perfect time in my schedule to consider the truths this class presented. →

The class was based on an article by Christian apologist, author and radio talk-show host Greg Koukl entitled, "Faithfulness Is Not Theologically Confusing."

The first class, taught by Pastor Emeritus Rick Wolling, introduced the topics of concern in the culture needing attention of the church. They were: salvation, abortion, marriage and the family, sexual practice and gender identity.

Rick presented Mr. Koukl's thesis, that we Christians have embraced our culture's secular ideas which conflict with what the Bible teaches. He said we are not always well informed about what the Bible says on these subjects and so, we don't understand the importance of following God's words. Some have seemingly decided to accept modern societal customs without comment.

Rick had my attention. He said we are *disarmed*, because we don't know what the Bible says. We are not answering the culture to advocate for Jesus' views. We are also *unarmed*, as we are ill-equipped, without intimate knowledge of scripture, to give our defense.

Moreover, we choose the unobstructed path and seemingly go along with what is easiest. I, for one, do not wish to be seen as judgmental. I am already perceived that way just by being a follower of Christ!

What was immediately evident to me is that we Christians are pretty good at understanding God's love. Where it gets sticky is that we may not honestly consider the cost of this amazing love. Luke 14.27 reminds us of the great cost of discipleship when Jesus says: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

Yet, while I may understand the cost, I am a lightweight when it comes to conveying God's unpopular truth into the world.

I know I'm timid about speaking up for God in certain situations. Aren't members of my family entitled to their own beliefs? Some of my friends? Even friends at church? I'm truly uncomfortable to push God's truth when confronted with abortion, children living together and sexual gender issues.

I am afraid of the cost my words may incur for me – knowing that certain words may end relationships entirely.

But as Tim and Kathy Keller write in the *The Songs of Jesus*: "Fears serve an important purpose, they show us where we have really located our heart's treasure." By following the pathway of fear back to my heart, I can discover the things I love more than God. (This is soul ripping.)

Psalm 25.4-5 speaks to this very subject: "Show me your ways Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."

I am committed to memorizing this passage to remind me that my

only hope is found in Jesus. My safety is only through Him. What others think of me cannot be what determines how I allow God to use His words in my mouth.

Rick made plain that if I am a follower of Jesus, a response is required. God is our authority and if we follow Him, we will follow his rules without exception. Period.

What is happening in our world is spiritual warfare and even if we are not looking for a fight, the conflict is coming for us! Preparation is imperative.

We must be armed with God's truth. His word. He will be Lord over all. His is the victory, but as His followers we must affirm His lordship and His truth. And in doing that, His authority.

How? First, we must be armed with scripture. We must know what He says.

We must pray – for His Holy Spirit and His power. We must have pure hearts and be kind. We must be courageous. I must pray regularly for courage!

In the next four classes, a host of speakers presented information that revealed God's doctrine concerning each of the various

topics. Each specifically used scripture to explain what God has said in His word. I recommend you listen to the classes and/or read through the handouts.

The last week was taught by Scott Thomson. He taught on the subject of Sex/Gender Roles/Gender Identity. He began by focusing on

Creation. His point was that "EVERYTHING about sexual morality comes back to this [Creation]."

What we believe about the issues of abortion, marriage and family, sexual practice and gender identity is based on our belief in what the Bible says about Creation. Simple. Binary.

I believe that God designed the world. He makes the rules. I don't. And when I acknowledge His creation, it seems clear I will also follow His teachings.

He died for me to fulfill the law. He did not avoid this sacrifice even though He is God. Likewise, as a disciple of Jesus, I must take up His cross and follow Him.

With God's help, I will.

Audio and video of each class in the "Fractured" series may be accessed here:

https://beverlyheights.org/resources/sermons-classes/#series-sort_fractured

Greg Koukl's article, "Faithfulness Is Not Theologically Confusing," can be accessed at this address:

<https://www.str.org/w/faithfulness-is-not-theologically-complicated-1>

He makes the rules. I don't.



The Hebrides revival.

By Bob Jamison

Peggy and Christine Smith had seen better days. Perhaps “seen” is not the right word, because Peggy, age 84, was blind, and her sister, 82, was so crippled with arthritis that she was practically house-bound and could seldom even get to church.

They were shut-ins like many of us in this day of Covid. But they had a pervading sense of Isaiah 59.1: “Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save.”

These two women knew both the desperate state of affairs on their island of Lewis, one of the Hebrides Islands off the coast of Scotland, and the power of God to redeem. By 1949, churches were neglected. Those who attended were stern and legalistic while young people preferred bars, dancing and gambling. —>

Nevertheless, Peggy and Christine kept in touch with a small group of fierce prayer warriors on their island. Peggy believed God told her they should invite Scottish evangelist Duncan Campbell – who could speak the Gaelic language primarily still spoken on their island – to come and preach.

Mr. Campbell turned down the invitation, pleading a schedule conflict.

“That’s what man says,” Peggy replied. But she insisted he would “be here within the fortnight,” and that they should begin inviting people to come hear him speak.

Her prayers would be realized, miraculously.

As Duncan Campbell sat waiting to be introduced in the all-star lineup of preachers at the Keswick Convention, the most prestigious annual assembly in Great Britain, he was gripped with an urgency to leave – to leave now – and go to the Hebrides Islands, where he knew no one.

Convinced he was being prompted by the Holy Spirit, he turned to the moderator who was introducing him and said, “You will have to excuse me. God has another appointment for me.” He got up and walked away.

Mr. Campbell got off the boat on the island of Lewis at 4 p.m., exactly 10 days after Peggy had declared he would arrive within a fortnight (two weeks). There he met a mailman who said, “We knew you would come. You have just enough time for high tea before the meeting.”

“What meeting?” he replied.

“The announcements are all up. It starts tonight. Talk about God.”

The little church was full, but the meeting was unexceptional.

Mr. Campbell went to the back of the church to shake the hands of parishioners and looked out the door to see the yard packed with people!

The Spirit of God had drawn them to the church. Many had walked miles to the church, and others had taken buses, they said, not knowing the reason they felt compelled to come. Some had seen the flyers posted all over the island and had intended to ignore them, but they could not. They stayed until 4 in the morning, and the place was saturated with God’s presence.

Some lay on the floor, face down, repenting of their waywardness. Others eagerly reconciled with God and with their neighbors. Many received Christ as their Savior.

In the days to come, it was common to drive along country lanes and see people face down on the berm weeping over their sin.

Young people abandoned trivial pursuits to seek God. There was a light on in every home, it seemed, as people read the Scriptures until all hours, and, as one witness put it, “no one seemed to think of sleep.”

Prayer meetings and evangelistic gatherings lasted until 3 a.m., and people left home at 6 a.m. to go to work with more energy than they had felt the day before.

People crowded a police station for no reason anyone could discern except the police chief was a believer, and cried out for someone to pray with them. A pastor who subsequently arrived at the station described the scene:

“I saw a sight I never thought was possible. Something I shall never forget. Under the starlit sky, men and women were kneeling everywhere, by the roadside, outside the cottages, even behind the peat stacks, crying for God to have mercy upon them.”

Duncan Campbell had planned to visit the Hebrides Islands for two weeks but instead stayed two years.

Before the revival, the islands had one of the highest drinking rates in all of Britain, and “bothans,” or illegal drinking places, flourished. After the revival, one reprobate moaned, “The drink trade on the Island is ruined.”

Many young converts felt called to vocational ministry and mission work. Prayer gatherings multiplied, often meeting in barns because the churches were full, to pray for those not yet saved. Some prayer meetings took place in people’s cottages, and dinner plates rattled when they prayed, though villagers outside the house

reported no earthquake.

It is estimated that over 90% of the inhabitants of the islands found Jesus Christ within the next two years.

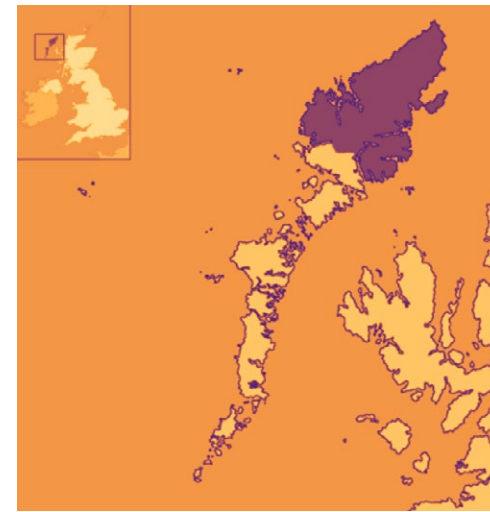
Why do God’s people today seem so impotent?

Why does God not move on the scale that we saw in the Hebrides Islands or in the days of Elijah?

Is He waiting to see faithfulness from His people?

Is it possible God might use a crisis now to remind us of our need for him?

Bob Jamison is president and founder of Adam’s Quest (bob@adamsquest.org). A long-time friend of this congregation, he will teach an ACE class here starting April 11, “The Promises of God.”



BETWEEN | SUNDAYS

BY RICK WOLLING

Who has real authority? The author of it all.



I had to google it to learn that an “influencer” is someone who has the power to affect the purchasing decisions, point of view or, really, any behavior of others based of one’s authority, knowledge, position or relationship.

Vice President Kamala Harris’ niece, Meena Harris, has recently been identified as a prominent “social media influencer.” She has thousands of people who follow her because of her “expertise” in lifestyle and fashion matters as well as for her support of numerous social causes like Planned Parenthood.

Her influence is due to personal celebrity and connection with her “Auntie,” the vice president. She is part of a new technology power elite flexing real muscle over the views and actions of thousands of devoted adherents in the realms of sports, fitness, music, food and fashion.

Though media influencing is new to some, the possession of authority over our behaviors and perspectives is not. It is undisputed that authority has always been located with those who possess prestige, position, wealth, power and an ability to garner attention while communicating with the masses.

When the Christian considers authority, Jesus’ words immediately come to mind: “All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Matthew 28.18).

Authority is worth considering during the season of Lent. Who has the authority to influence our decisions and behavior? Who has the prestige, position and power to make demands worthy of our obedience?

It is the eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The authority of Jesus is founded upon His position as Creator God and it permeates all His teaching as the incarnate Word of God.

His divine authority is demonstrated in His self-giving love, whereby He sacrificed heavenly glory and divine prerogative while laying down His life in a substitutionary death to purchase our forgiveness and hope.

In Jesus, the people of His day recognized an authority that they had never before seen in their rabbis, scribes and Pharisees.

And so, they yielded to His authority. They listened to Him, they followed Him, and they bet their lives on what He taught, what He promised, and what He did for them.

So did the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to take regard for his servant who was ill. He

had heard the words of Jesus. His power to heal was renowned.

He, therefore, bet his life on Jesus’ power, love and authority to heal the servant whom he loved. The centurion discouraged Jesus from coming to His home in favor of Jesus simply speaking a healing word and therein lies a Lenten lesson on how to respond to Jesus’ authority. He bowed in humility and faith the likes of which could not be found in all of Israel.

This Lenten season the authority of the state mandates the wearing of masks and social distancing. The authority of the school board determines when our children will return to the classroom. And the authority of the church places limits on when and how we will worship and study God’s word.

Though some of these constraints are exasperating, we nevertheless yield to them because we submit to the authority of those establishing them.

Recognizing that the ultimate authority in life is found in Jesus alone, and making whatever personal sacrifices accord with conformity to His word, is the ultimate Lenten blessing. It is a blessing worthy of pursuit by all believers.

Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights.