

Moments of Revelation

The bones of this article were written for my now defunct blog over ten years ago (January 2008.) A version of it was published by an online magazine called [The Brink](#) some time back as well. I keep coming back to it though. When I wrote it, I was only 30 years old. I had been married for less than ten years. I had two boys. I was less than two years into my job as a Disability Claims Examiner for the State of Tennessee.

Things have changed in the intervening ten years. I am 18 years into marriage with an amazing woman. I have three boys now – ages fifteen, fourteen, and nine. I'm a man. I'm 40! I have been at my Disability job for over 12 years. And I keep coming back to those things I wrote a decade ago. It is a simple story and one that has repeated itself in my life more times than I can recall.

I was driving home from work one afternoon. The traffic was bad – as usual – though in retrospect, it was nothing compared to our current traffic problems in Nashville. The heater in my car was nearly dead, and needless to say, it was cold. Not surprisingly, I had a headache as well. I wouldn't describe my mood as good. It wasn't a horrible day – I wasn't angry or bitter or anything like that. In as simple terms as I can put it, I just wasn't "feeling" that Tuesday afternoon. Does that make sense? There are days where it is better for everyone to just turn the page and get to the next one. That was my reality that cold, January afternoon. I was ready to move on to Wednesday.

That all changed, though, while I was driving home. When I first wrote this article (or blog post), I had a catchy name for what happened to me. At least, I thought it was catchy, but as it didn't actually catch on, it was probably not nearly as catchy as I hoped. I had a "Moment of Revelation." I was 30

and full of vim and vigor so you have to grant me some grace in thinking that “Moment of Revelation” was going to revolutionize the world.

What exactly was my “Moment of Revelation?” God didn’t audibly speak to me. I didn’t get a vision from heaven. What did happen was that I caught a glimpse of something beyond me and my immediate circumstances. Scripture tells us that God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; I am sure there are many different ways that verse can be interpreted or explained, but I am not going to exegete the passage. I know what that verse says to me; God has made everything beautiful in its time and he created humanity with an innate ability to appreciate truth and beauty. He did this so that we could and would recognize the Originator of that Truth and Beauty.

That gets me back to my “Moment of Revelation.” I wasn’t thinking about anything in particular while I was driving, so I wasn’t exactly searching for anything beautiful, but beauty found me anyway. I had the radio on one of those “We play whatever we want” stations. (Jack FM if you want me to be specific.) The volume was low because the song that had been playing was terrible. Due to the low volume, I missed the first couple of notes of the next song, U2’s glorious *With or Without You*. Once I realized what song was on, I turned up the volume to a comfortably deafening level. (“Comfortably deafening” might seem contradictory, but if you are a big music fan, I think you know exactly what I mean.) I don’t have the ability to describe the rush of emotions that hit me. I forgot I was cold. I forgot my headache. I forgot the crappy day I had at work. I forgot about the bumper-to-bumper traffic. I simply allowed the song to “minister” to me. I know that sounds preposterous and touchy-feely, but it happened.

My entire outlook for the day changed. That one song at that specific time was exactly what I needed. Before anyone chimes in about the song itself, I’ll make a few things clear: I

didn't/don't base my theology on this song, even though it probably captures the typical Christian experience better than just about any song on Christian radio any given year. I don't have to agree with everything an artist is expressing. I just need to be ready to catch a quick glimpse of the eternity that the artist may or may not have even intended.

I experienced this the first time I saw Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf the Grey hug on the big screen in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. I was hit over the head with it when Stephen Lawhead, in his magnificent *Pendragon Cycle*, wrote about Merlin holding a wounded Arthur in his arms as their small boat sails to Avalon. Every time I hear *The River Will Flow* by Whiteheart, my soul smiles. I think God smiles too. These "Moments of Revelation" are everywhere; we just have to be ready to receive them. Mind you, they are not just in the arts. It could be a sunset. Laughing with a friend. Spending time with your family. I could go on for pages about the ways my kids help me experience it. My point is that we need to cultivate an appreciation for these moments that God gives us. There is a fundamental reason we have this ability; it points our eyes to our Creator. If we truly appreciate the beauty and truth we find in our lives, it will only nurture our love and devotion to the Source of that beauty and truth.

I look for these moments often though probably not as often as I should. I have even written about a few of these moments already for REO. ([Here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).) If your day, or week, is not really doing it for you, keep your eyes open. Maybe God has a moment prepared for you. Don't miss it because you are too busy stuck in your present circumstances.

Can you relate? Do you have these moments? We would love for you to tell us about them in the comment section below.

Coming to You

Sometimes when I think about the immensity of the universe I am both overwhelmed and humbled. This line of thinking also leads to a fuller joy, security, and boldness.

Consider the huge and complex dance:

The universe is so incredibly big many scientists believe it doesn't even have an end. Our small, finite minds have a problem comprehending that. It is really hard to register the endlessness of anything. That is one reason, it is so hard to really fathom the enormity of what we know or guess is out there.

Space and spatial bodies are so large the measurement of light-years is used. A light-year is the distance light travels in one year. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second. One year's worth of those seconds comes to almost 6 trillion miles. Well, the average galaxy is about 1,500 to 300,000 light-years. That's huge!

There are hundreds of billions of galaxies in this universe. Each of these galaxies contains hundreds of billions of stars. In addition, they contain lots of other bodies and substances. We live in the Milky Way galaxy, which is a spiral galaxy. That means it has several arms coming out from a hub and it looks like it is spiraling like a whirlpool. It is about 100,000 light years in diameter.

We live relatively close to the edge of this whirlpool in a minor arm called the Orion Spur in the Solar System. Our Solar System lies on the outskirts of this arm. For the size of the galaxy, our Solar System seems really small. Scientists estimate the Solar System is between 7,348,981,944 and

9,320,567,882 miles in diameter. Within this expanse are a number of familiar bodies: the Sun, the planets, moons, comets, asteroids, and meteoroids.

One of these eight planets is Earth—our Earth. As far as we know, it is the only place in the universe that sustains life. At this point in time, there are about 7.6 billion people inhabiting the earth. These 7.6 billion people are spread throughout 195 countries on 7 continents. Zoom to your continent. Zoom to your country. Zoom to your city. Zoom to your street. Zoom into your house, dorm, apartment, igloo, whatever. We have come to you.

This is a very, very, very brief description of the universe. All of this grandeur of the heavens and the earth came to us from God Himself. God was the creator of it all (Genesis 1:1)!

Yes, we are a teeny-tiny part of it all. In essence, each one of us is a speck on a speck (the world) on a speck (the Solar system) on a speck (the Milky Way galaxy) on a speck (that's right, the endless universe is a speck in the mind of God). We are less than nothing, but the sovereign God who is the omnipotent Creator of the universe, the divine choreographer of this great complexity yearns to have a personal, intimate relationship with you. You! He is the endlessness beyond the endlessness who cared for you before you were born, who cares about every aspect of your present life, and who wants to be forever with you after death.

Did I mention this is the God of the universe? That part needs all the emphasis in, well, the universe. Sometimes it seems we forget that part. We are mere specks and know so little. As mere, selfish specks we do not even deserve His attention. For some reason He gives it. For some reason, He cares for our lives—both this and the next. How is this not a reason for a greater joy and boldness? The God behind the endlessness is at work in you!

*A version of this article was originally published at [The Brink Online](#).

The Invisibles: Bible Characters Christians Never Discuss, But Should

One of the most popular articles in the history of REO is our "[Top Ten Favorite Bible Characters](#)". On that list, you find some of the most amazing humans that ever lived and we are blessed to get to read about them in our Bibles.

But that list was quite predictable, on purpose. The most well known Bible characters are so for a reason. They did incredible things and lived exemplary lives. Today, however, I want to go beyond the obvious and talk about a few Bible characters that deserve accolades but almost never get them. These people also did incredible things but because they weren't as prominent as Moses or Paul, they rarely get taught about in Bible studies or discussed among the great people of the faith.

Today I want to give them their due. Here are a few people in the Bible that rarely get discussed but deserve full sermons dedicated to them.

Bezalel and Oholiab

Listen to what Exodus says about these men:

Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills...

Now let me pause here and wonder if a person doesn't know the rest of the chapter, what kind of call would you think Bezalel had on his life? I mean, he is filled with the Spirit and wisdom and understanding. Is he a priest? A Levite? A prophet?

None of the above. Here is what he and his chosen assistant Oholiab were filled with the Spirit and with wisdom to do...

-to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts. And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers."

They were filled with the Spirit and wisdom to work with their hands! Christians need to understand and teach the biblical significance of men and women laity who do blue collar jobs (and any non-pastoring jobs). In the Old Testament, they were spiritually qualified by God to the highest level, using phrases we'd use for the most significant spiritual offices. And since the New Testament teaches the priesthood of all believers, I'd say all Christian accountants, janitors, teachers, and electricians are today as well.

We need to teach jobs as ministries. These men help us do that.

Onesiphorus

I owe Tim Campbell the credit for teaching about this man to a chapel full of students at Welch College 20 years ago. Other than a greeting in 2nd Timothy, the extent of what Paul writes about Onesiphorus can be found in two verses in 1 Timothy:

“May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.”

What a short, but significant tribute! Not everyone gets to be Paul, but to be the person that loves and encourages Paul like this? That’s someone worth teaching Christians about. May we all be the kind of person who refreshes others, who isn’t ashamed of them even when they are rejected by others, and who seeks them out. I long for that kind of testimony.

Asaph and the Sons of Korah

It is important to note that just because a Psalm is “of” someone, it does not mean that the person or group wrote it. It could be dedicated to that person or something similar. Yet I think it is very likely that Asaph and the sons of Korah wrote the psalms that bear their names in our Bibles.

Considering how deeply music speaks to our souls, confirmed by God by inspiring our biggest Bible book to be a hymnbook, we should know who wrote the greatest songs of the faith that Israel praised God with. Between Asaph and the sons of Korah you find many of the Psalms that have inspired some of the great modern Christian worship songs, like Psalm 42 (“As The Deer”) and Psalm 84 (“Better Is One Day In Your Courts”) and even the less well known but profoundly lyrical Psalm 73, which is found by that name in [Indelible Grace Music](#). I give a shout out to Dr. Matthew McAfee for introducing that song to

my church years ago. Few Bible passages wrestle with the unfairness of the world and the justice of God as this one does. What a privilege to sing it.

But even more important to me, Asaph and the sons of Korah penned several heart-wrenching lament psalms, like Psalms 44, 80 and 88. Psalm 80 contains the refrain, "O Lord God of hosts, cause your face to shine on us, that we may be saved" three times, which [Michael W. Smith turned into a modern hymn as well](#). As far as I know, Psalm 88 has not been turned into a popular modern song, but perhaps that is because it is one of the few psalms that doesn't end on an up note but remains in the darkness. For that reason, it may be my favorite psalm of all.

Both Asaph and the sons of Korah played a huge part not only in writing but leading Israel in musical worship (1 Chronicles 15, 2 Chronicles 20). These are men who should be known.

Micaiah

No, not Malachi or Micah. Micaiah, a prophet so unknown that my computer is giving me the red squiggly line under his name right now. He prophesied during the time of King Ahab and what a thankless, demeaning job that must have been. We get a taste of what his life was like in 1 Kings 22 (and its parallel, 2 Chronicles 18) when Ahab calls him in to advise him about going to war with Ramoth Gilead. It is obvious that Micaiah never prophesies anything good for Ahab because the wicked king says so plainly. It appears that this is the case because Micaiah intends only to speak the truth. And this obviously happens over and over and this has to weigh on his psyche.

It's possible we even get a bit of sarcasm here from the noble prophet because at first he tells Ahab to go to war and Ahab knows he's not being serious. But Micaiah then speaks the

harsh predictive reality to him and instead of receiving thanks for the warning, he ends up with a smack to the face. A mere four chapters after Elijah calls down fire from Heaven, another similar prophet is taking inglorious shots to the face in a rather mundane existence. For this, he deserves our respect.

Zelophehad's Daughters

Because the cultures of the Bible were so demeaning to women by our modern standards, we very much need to preach stories like these women standing up to Moses on behalf of giving them their father's inheritance. Zelophehad was a righteous man but had no son. So they boldly stood before one of the most significant leaders in the history of the world and asked for justice. And God took their side. There was no doubt about that because he spoke directly in the passage to affirm their position.

Justice gets thrown around so much in American Christian vernacular I hope we don't miss what it really is. It has been and always will be doing right by those who are denied things they deserve. That is the heart of these few verses in Numbers. So here's to Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah—women of great character that we should honor.

So, at least for today, that is my list. What are some under-appreciated Bible characters you wish we talked more about?

How are Good Works and Salvation Connected?

People love the idea of earning stuff. There are trophies awarded in sports for winning a competition. Money earned by doing some sort of work. Students get a good grade for doing well on a test. The list goes on and on. Most of the time earning what you get is not wrong at all. In fact, much of the time it is good, right, and biblically-based. However, the mindset of needing to earn rewards explains why it is so hard to accept how salvation really works.

What All Christians Need to Accept

As indicated, we didn't and don't earn Salvation. That's a very good thing because it would be impossible for any human to actually do so. It is equally true, however, that now that we have been saved, we should be compelled to do good works for the person and cause of Jesus. Scripture tells us that a faith that does not result in good works is dead (James 2:14-26).

Accepting What You've Already Accepted

Sometimes this is a truth that is hard to really accept even for those of us who have already supposedly accepted it. Sometimes, if we are not careful, we who have known this truth for years can drift into backward ways of unbiblical thinking. Biblical Christian thought goes against the natural way most of society thinks today in so many ones. This idea that we don't have to and can't earn this really good thing, this

salvation, is just one of those things. Like so many other Christian counter-cultural thoughts, we will likely be struggling with this issue for the rest of our Christian lives.

Accepting the counter-cultural teaching of Scripture is something I have had trouble with in the past. Not just this particular truth, but many other biblical truths as well. If we are not careful and alert, unbiblical “spiritual” practices and ideas can become a lazy habit. For myself, sometimes along the road of the Christian life, while I thought I had fully accepted a truth, the Holy Spirit will lead me to take a long look at myself and show me that, no I hadn’t actually and fully accepted it yet, just some of it and that that some of it needed to be revitalized and more fully rounded. This kind of spiritual growth is what happens on the lifelong climb of sanctification.

The Short Story of Salvation

The whole need for human salvation in the first place started in the Garden of Eden. There was one particular tree there known as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree was exactly what its name implies. It embodied our free will to choose good or evil, to either willfully obey God or to willfully disobey Him. Adam and Eve, the first couple, chose evil, sin, disobedience of God’s one rule. Therefore, through them all humanity from that day forward was sentenced to death, eternal death.

The entirety of the rest of the Old Testament is God’s path toward the redemption of mankind through Jesus in the New Testament. We’re talking His own beloved Son here – His only Son. God the Father sent His only Son to die for a people who spat in His face and deserved exactly what they got. He did this so that we could be reunified with Him and have access to everlasting life (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9). Doing what

God did would be an unthinkable, mind-boggling sacrifice for any parent—and this was our Creator!

After he arose from the dead, Jesus went to heaven to intercede on our behalf before the Father. For our benefit, he left the Holy Spirit to guide His believers to the end. We did not deserve access to the Holy Spirit; He was freely given (Titus 3:4-5).

Yes, acceptance of this sacrifice of God's Son Jesus was and still is the **only** way for us to begin on that Holy Spirit-led path. As Romans 3:23 points out, all of us have sinned and therefore fall short of the glory of God. Because of this, we are completely unworthy to stand in the presence of God. Accepting the sacrifice of Jesus cleanses our sin and makes us able to stand in His presence. It is then that the Holy Spirit leads us up the road of salvation. It will prove to be an up and down road for us, with lots of hills and valleys, but thankfully His work on our behalf does not depend on our constant spiritual highs. His infinite love and grace have got our back.

The Final Answer

Going back to that first question about the connection between good works and salvation, While the two are definitely connected, it's not like one might first assume. Salvation is nothing any human will ever earn by doing good. It was given to us. We were freely given the gift of salvation through the death of Jesus (Romans 6:23). With an authentic salvation experience, we are now bound for heaven, on the road of sanctification with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the end of final glorification in the eternal presence of God. And how does that authentic salvation experience work? It is by fully confessing complete and lifelong acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior in you're heart and through your mouth (Romans 10:8-9). That is how salvation comes about. Now we do our good

works not to earn salvation, more salvation, or continued salvation, but because Christ saved us, because He commanded us to do so, because we love, honor, and praise Him for everything He has done for us and for humanity. Now we do so for the rewards awaiting us after this life with Jesus in eternity.

Now we obey His words and do our good works because He is truly our Lord today and forever (Luke 6:46).

Being Generous By Spending Money On Yourself

The Bible speaks abundantly about money and is pretty straightforward: Work hard. Be generous. Save money. Don't be materialistic. Be content. Do not spend money selfishly.

Let me be clear that I get that. Let me be equally clear that part of the reason ramblingeveryon.com exists is to use writing as a way to encourage people to dig deeper beyond the obvious. To push back against thinking boxes. To eviscerate platitudes and cliches. Jesus often blows my mind about how to live and I want to share that with others.

With that in mind, I want to rethink the exact applications of the biblical principles mentioned above. Working hard is non-negotiable, though that can look very different for different people. But on the issues of saving money, being generous and being selfish, it is my contention that we can (and perhaps sometimes should) live these things out in ways that are counterintuitive and countercultural.

What I mean is this: What if there are times it is really the

more selfless thing to spend money instead of saving it? When generosity is spending money on ourselves? What if the more noble thing is to spend more on an item instead of finding it cheaper? What if concepts like minimalism, while entirely appropriate for some, isn't necessarily the best approach for all?

The biggest application I think of when it comes to this are simple and are often mentioned as a way to be a good neighbor: buy local and support small businesses. I hear this advice frequently, but I do not think we discuss enough in the framework of Christianity.



[Click here](#) for a deeper dive into giving and generosity.

Anyone who knows me well knows I am frugal. I saved up as much money as I could before I got married so that I could have a huge safety net to provide for my wife. This causes my wife to be concerned when she wants to buy something one of her friends is selling via their personal small business on Facebook. She thinks I will get mad about it. Yet very quickly into our marriage, I began realizing how selfless it can be to support our friends who really are working hard and using their gifts to provide a quality product or service. Therefore, quite often when my wife asks my opinion (Note: NOT my permission) on buying something from a friend on Facebook, I enthusiastically tell her I hope she does.

Same for where we shop and eat in Bel-Cragin, Chicago where we live. We can (and do) shop at huge nationally known stores that allow us to save money. But we could also spend a little more shopping at a place that someone in the neighborhood owns. If I can buy a book from Amazon for \$5 or buy it for \$7 from a local bookshop, my initial reaction always is, "Go for the bargain. It's the wise move financially." But who probably needs it more? Same for eating. If it comes down to buying a meal for \$6 at McDonald's or a similar quality meal for \$8 from Endi's at Diversey and Central, whose owner I see all the time, is it always worth it to save the \$2?

My wife and I have a child coming in February. You better believe we are thinking about money and how to provide for the child. But thanks to the grace of God, we are not in a position where we have to count pennies or truly worry about whether we will be able to make it. I have a ton to learn about parenting, yet right now I have learned from the wisdom of others (including my parents) that I want to teach my children from birth that they do not really need everything our culture says they do. I hope they learn that we will be generous by giving money to church, missionaries and social justice causes, but also to people who have earned it through selling goods and services.



REO's look at managing your money wisely.

Additionally, I have learned in my marriage that spending money on things like vacations and date nights isn't about

living a certain lifestyle or materialism as much as it is about creating memories and a bond in my marriage that is invaluable. So when I look up tickets to *Wicked* and see prices that would cause pre-marriage Gowdy to shriek in horror, I remember that it is an investment in my wife and my marriage. While I obviously love going to the beach and enjoy every second of it, spending the money to do it doesn't have to be selfish. My wife loves it as well and the time away matters to us.

Jesus helps me to crystallize this is the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16. That is one odd passage if you read it on its face. The manager is in trouble and cuts deals with people who are in debt. And the rich man commends him. Trying to figure out how to apply that today is a challenge. Yet something Jesus draws out of this, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself." The reason, I think, is because we need to understand how desperately we need other people. We need community. The manager was in a desperate situation and the only way out was to be shrewd with his money. In the same way, I can use my money on others to communicate to them that I need them. I take a guy from my church out to lunch and I pay. He gets blessed with a lunch but we both get blessed with the friendship. We think we are helping others when we spend money on them, but they are actually doing us a relational favor by being helped. Only the Bible could be that counterintuitive and countercultural.

A couple of disclaimers I feel are important. First, I realize some people do not have excess or for other good reasons need to be saving money, even the \$2 for the burger. My intention in writing this is to challenge traditional thinking, not to present my thinking as absolute truth for everyone. If a person or couple is going in debt from their spending, then a change sounds prudent. In those cases, people may need to be creative in finding inexpensive ways to support local business or their marriage. (Being creative is something we all can

stand more of anyway.)

Also, I want to be clear that I am not writing this from a place of success. These are things I need to practice much, much better. I am an Amazon addict. And even though you can buy from individuals on Amazon, I find myself wanting the new things with free shipping. This kind of thinking isn't easy for me. And it is my hope that by writing about it, I will bring myself accountability.

To me, the worst thing you can do biblically with money is to hoard it. I don't think, however, we were created to just pay bills and give it away either. We also should spend money on ourselves in a way that benefits others, so that we are completely aware of how badly we need relationships and community. That's just one of many ways Jesus has blown my mind about how to live.

Heaven is Home

I've lived a fairly long life – 68 years now. To most people I'm "old," and I'm fond of saying when asked how I'm doing "pretty good for an old man." However, that falls flat when I'm with our seniors at church, or at a luncheon with other pastors and retired pastors, and there are many who are 5, 10, 15, or 20 years older than me.

But the longer I live, the more I remember: "I'm not home yet." Especially in these days of so much turmoil, socially, politically, morally, and even religiously, life is hard to bear some days. The shooting last year at the Texas church brought that home once again. I have cried looking at pictures of the children shot down deliberately in cold blood by a man filled with evil.

The political division, the "me first" mentality, self-identifying, sexual exploitation of children, world hunger, rampant racism, abortion – not only accepted but glorified by so many – cause a heaviness and a sorrow that will never be gone here on earth. We're reminded that:

1. Perfect healing will not take place in this life, but in the world to come.

2. Perfect justice will not take place in this life, but in the world to come.

This means, of course, that we will suffer angst, pain, anxiety, and grief all throughout our lives. Though Jesus is King, though His peace is real, His grace is sufficient, and His power available, things will never be perfect down here.

Some people are recognized for their greatness in this life, while God honors others in the life to come. Henry C. Morrison was a faithful missionary who served the Lord in Africa for over 40 years. He recalls that emotional day when he and his wife boarded a ship on their way back to the United States. His mind flooded with memories of the wonderful experiences they had enjoyed on the mission field. He began wondering what it would be like to return to his Midwestern hometown – will anyone there still remember us? Aboard that same ship, that day with Henry and his wife was the former President of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt. He was returning from a big game hunting trip in Africa. When the ship pulled into the New York harbor, there were thousands of people there to greet

him. The crowds cheered and the bands played. There were signs, banners, and billboards everywhere saying, "Welcome Home!"

As the dear missionary and his wife left the ship, they saw that no one had come to welcome them back home. With a heavy heart, Henry Morrison went to his hotel room and told his wife, "Honey, for 40 years we poured our lives into ministry and service. And yet we come back to America and not a single soul comes to welcome us home!"

His wife came and sat down next to her husband. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said to him, "Henry, you have forgotten something. You're not home yet!"

Do you ever feel like the things you do for Christ are overlooked? Maybe you spend long hours working with children each day, or you work a mundane office job. Never forget that this world is not your home. Serve your Savior faithfully each day, and He will reward you for your labors – just keep in mind, you're not home yet.

Earthly crowns are dross to him who looks for a Heavenly one.

– Jane Porter[1. Excerpt from a devotional by Dr. James A. Scudder.]

Here's just a little of what awaits us!

The Absence of all that's bad (Revelation 21)

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." There isn't a more comforting verse in all of Scripture!

The Presence of all that's good

There's a joke about two guys who speculate whether there will

be baseball played in Heaven. One says "I'll pray and ask God tonight since you want to know so badly." The next day, he tells his friend. "Well, I prayed about whether there would be baseball in Heaven, and God answered me. I've got good news and bad news." "Tell me," says his friend. "The good news is that, yes, there will be baseball in Heaven. The bad news is that you're the starting pitcher tomorrow!"

The Glory of God in Jesus (Revelation 22:3b-5)

His servants will serve Him. We will see His face, shine in His glory, and sit with Him as Kings.

Eternal

"And they will reign forever and ever" with Him.

Home

"In my Father's house are many dwelling places (mansions)...I am going away to prepare a place for you." John 14:2 CBS

Building 429 sang "This Is Not Where I Belong"

*...all I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong*

*So when the walls come falling down on me
And when I'm lost in the current
Of a raging sea
I have this blessed assurance, holding me*

*All I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong*

B.J. Thomas wrote the song "Home Where I Belong"

*They say that heaven's pretty,
And living here is too.
But if they said that I would have to choose between the two.*

*I'd go home,
Going home,
Where I belong.
While I'm here I'll serve him gladly,
And sing him all my songs.*

*I'm here,
But not for long.
And when I'm feeling lonely,
And when I'm feeling blue.
It's such a joy to know that I am only passing through.*

*I'm headed home,
Going home,
Where I belong.
And one day I'll be sleeping,
When death knocks on my door.
And I'll awake and find that I'm not homesick anymore.*

*I'll be home,
Going home,
Where I belong.*

To conclude, I've asked my son Phillip to write a little something about C.S. Lewis' description of Narnia's version of Heaven in "The Last Battle."



I am hard pressed to find a better depiction of Heaven in any work of fiction than what C.S. Lewis wrote in the final book of "The Chronicles of Narnia." The last few chapters of "The Last Battle" are full-to-bursting with the beauty, grandeur, and awesomeness that awaits those who believe. Food tastes better. The world is familiar yet deeper, richer, and better in every way imaginable. There are sweet moments of reunion with those who have gone before, as seen when King Tirian is reunited with his father. Yet nothing captures that pull we feel when we think of our heavenly home, that sense of longing – better than these words by one of the characters in those final pages: "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now." Heaven is the place we "have been looking for" all our lives. Heaven is home, our "real country." Heaven is where we belong. What an amazing hope we have as believers!

**This life is just the preface. The real story starts
when we're home!**

Five Facts About Arminius the Man, and Not the Theology Debate

Jacobus Arminius was born either in 1559 or 1560 in Oudewater, Holland and died about 50 years later. During that half a century he lived a fascinating life in a lot of ways, yet it seems the only thing many people associate him with centuries after his death is a systematic theology argument. The 16th and 17th centuries were a time of significant theological and denominational divisions in Christianity and Arminius's teachings were so impactful that he gathered a fierce, loyal following in his day. And people continue to adhere to and teach them in our day.

I have written about Arminianism many times for this site and you can see those articles below. Today, though, I want to remind everyone who reads REO that Arminius was a human soul, not a mere set of beliefs. I'm sure he experienced pain and disappointment. I'm sure he experienced joy. I'm sure he felt compassion for people. His sermons on Romans 7 and Romans 9 have been well known from his time until ours. But by comparison very little is known about his character and personality.

So today I submit five things about Arminius the man, that have little to nothing to do with his teachings on Christian salvation:

1. After the bubonic plague invaded Amsterdam in 1601 and claimed 20,000 victims, Arminius took water into homes of the sick that no one else would enter[1. Robert Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 8].

I believe the willingness of a Christian to get their hands dirty serving people who are in desperate need is a significant mark of a disciple of Christ. Arminius, at least at this time in his life, was this kind of disciple. I find this convicting.

2. His father died when he was an infant. When he was about 15 and a newly registered student at Marburg University in Germany, his mother and brothers were all killed when Spaniards burned his hometown[2. Gerald McCulloh, *Man's Faith and Freedom; the Theological Influence of Jacobus Arminius*, 12].

Growing up fatherless (in a strict sense, note that he did have male mentors as Theodorus Aemilius and Rudolph Snellius) and losing all of his immediate family when he was a teenager had to be a tough blow. But he did not let it derail his education and got a degree from the University of Leiden.

3. He strongly complimented and encouraged people to read John Calvin's commentaries[3. Mark A. Ellis, Introduction to *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, vii.].

Arminius was a mere five years old when Calvin died, so the two men were not true contemporaries. In fact, Arminius's

chief theological rival was Fransiscus Gomarus, a Calvinist and fellow faculty member when Arminius went back to teach at Leiden. It was Gomarus who opposed Arminius's teachings and not the other way around. My understanding, especially noted in the bolded statement above, is that Arminius was not a vicious debater and respected those whose interpretations differed from his. But anyone who teaches the Bible stands to receive opposition. Arminius often did throughout his life.

It was Arminius's followers after his death who facilitated a bigger divide between the teachings of Calvin and Arminius, notably in their publications the year after he died and later in 1621. It is a divide that exists to this day. I do not necessarily fault them for staking claim to key theological ground; my point is that Arminius was not a fire-breathing, Calvin-bashing preacher. He wrote in 1607:

"I encourage the reading of the commentaries of Calvin, which I extol with the greatest praise...For I say that he is incomparable in the interpretation of Scripture, and his comments are better than anything which the Fathers give us."[4. Jacobus Arminius to Sebastian Egbert, 3 May, 1607, Christiaan Hartsocker and Philippus van Limborch, eds., 236-37; cited by Ellis, vii.]

4. He had a wife and nine children, though very little is written about them[5. Kasper Brant, *The Life of James Arminius*, 38, 299.].

His wife's name was Lijsbet Reael, who was from an affluent Amsterdam family, and they were married in 1590. He lost two children in infancy but eventually were blessed with seven sons and two daughters by the early 1600s. Beyond this, very little is mentioned about his family in the works I have read. I find it humanizing, however, that this man who taught things so significant that people bear his name on their theological

system over 400 years after his death, dealt with the trivial, menial, daily aspects of marriage and parenting. And with the horrifying tragedy of losing children to death.

5. He drew big crowds whenever he preached[6. Donald M. Lake, *Jacobus Arminius' Contribution to a Theology of Grace*, Grace Unlimited, ed. Charles H. Pinnock, 226; cited by Picirilli, 6].

Arminius was a pastor, preacher and a professor. My experience tells me it is hard to be exceptional at all three. Yet by all accounts, it appears he was. The time and culture he lived in were different than mine, but I wonder if it wasn't as prevalent back then that educated young pastors often preached from ivory towers where common parishioners either could not understand or were turned off by it. Either way, it is encouraging to me that Arminius knew how to preach well enough to reach a lot of people. Preaching should neither be boring or prudish.

Perhaps one day I will do a similar list for John Calvin. In the meantime, I encourage us all to see people as people and not merely as a set of beliefs or opinions, though those can matter. Our humanity demands treating other people like humans. Just as Arminius did.

The Biblical Truth of Rejection in Evangelism and Failure in Discipleship

I would guess that most Orthodox Christians that I know can tell you that there is at least something wrong with how preachers like Joel Osteen present the Bible.

There may be a range of opinions on how heretical he is or isn't but most would have the wisdom to realize that there isn't much if any content on God's judgment or suffering. And not that I think just anyone can avoid these topics and still build a huge church, I have no doubt that people often have ears that want to hear only good news. And in spite of the success of what can accurately be labeled a "health, wealth and prosperity Gospel," most true Christians I know see through the facade.

Yet I submit that even within genuine Christianity, where pastors and preachers deal with divine judgment, suffering and a whole host of other unpleasant topics in the counsel of God, there are topics we too often avoid.

One of them (or in reality two that are closely linked) is the rejection the church should often face when preaching Jesus, either immediately or eventually.

This is not a rare theology in our Bible. Jesus himself said the way to Heaven is narrow and the way to Hell is broad. Isaiah defined Christ as "despised and rejected by men". And there is even a story in John 6 where Jesus preached a hard truth about how dedicated his followers had to be to him and John records that, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

Reality bears this out. As recently as 2015, Pew had 31% of

the world claiming Christianity[1.www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe]. And seeing as how undoubtedly that number includes cults, those who believe in works salvation and those who merely attend church without any real life transformation from the Gospel, we can be assured that far less than 31% of the world is following Jesus. Jesus testified this by saying that many who claim him are not his followers (Matthew 7:21-23), It is for this reason that I use qualifiers like “true,” “genuine” and “orthodox” when describing actual disciples of Jesus Christ.

Another thing that makes the number of true Christians hard to know is that one of Jesus’s parables states that there are four responses to the Gospel. One is flat out rejection. The last is acceptance and a fruitful life. But the middle two present more nuance and more difficulties in the topic of evangelism and discipleship. Without getting too sidetracked by the interpretation of the middle two types of seed, I think it is fair to say that there are many people who accept the message of Christ for a short time but do not finish. The fact that neither of the middle two groups is fruitful leads me to believe they are not genuinely saved.

This coincides with several verses that teach, or least strongly imply, that a person is not saved until they have lived faithfully until the end of their life. Consider:

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22).

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:14).

If we endure, we will also reign with him (1 Timothy 2:12).

It also not my intention to turn this article into an Arminianism vs. Calvinism debate but it is hard for me to miss the truth of what Jesus, Paul, the author of Hebrews and John all seem to agree on. This also supports the translation of present continuous in some verbs of belief, as Picirilli explains about John 3:16 and 3:36, etc. The whoever "is believing" is saved. Because the person can cease to believe at some point. The parable of the sower seems to confirm this.

But more than an area of theology this troubles me in practice. I suppose it is easy for me to say this as a pastor of a non-mega church, but I experience rejection in evangelism and failure in discipleship all the time. I've talked, witnessed and preached to countless people who never made a decision for Christ. And beyond this, there are two facts keeping me up at night from my 16-year ministry in Chicago: probably 90% of the teenagers that were being disciplined when I was the youth pastor of my church are not actively being disciplined today and the majority of people I've baptized (adults and teenagers alike) are not actively being disciplined in a church today.

I have zero doubt that some of this is on me. I have faults and I have ignorance in the areas of witnessing and making disciples. But the Bible verses mentioned above make me realize that some of it is just the reality of how people respond to God, and not to me. Part of my goal in writing this is to get it out there for people who may feel similar. I would imagine just about every Christian who values evangelism and discipleship (which should be every Christian) gets this to some level. Even the megachurch workers and those who share

the Gospel with hundreds of people each year. It just seems to me the books and blog posts and sermons and resources on these topics, even in conservative Christianity, focus primarily on success. Here is what to do to be successful. Failure or rejection may be acknowledged, but often only in passing. I feel that the New Testament gives it a thorough treatment.

Quite often in my life, because I'm sure God directs it this way so that he gets the glory, I feel like my experience and knowledge are so flimsy. I mean that sincerely, even as someone who writes for a website. So when I feel like I don't know enough from my experiences to write to help people, all I know to do is interpret the Bible. That is how it should be regardless, but often it isn't. So today, after years of frustration and failure in the two pillars of how the message of Jesus Christ impacts the world—evangelism and discipleship—I only offer a theology that is far more important than my experience.

If you feel the same or if you feel completely different, we welcome feedback below.

“To Know God Aright”: Puritans and the Gift of Education III

Part 3: Puritan Education in New England

Historian Richard Greaves called the Puritan dream of “a universally enlightened society” a “heritage” left to future

generations.[\[i\]](#) This idea of universal literacy was slow to develop in England and Europe, but had its most immediate fruits in the Puritan colonies of New England. It was in the New England colonies in the 17th century that Puritan ideas were given the freedom to shape a society like never before. While Puritan ideals certainly impacted societal moral standards and church life, it could be argued that they had their greatest impact on education and literacy in the colonies.

Puritan New England had remarkably high literacy.

Perhaps calling Puritan New England a “universally enlightened society” is an overstatement. However, when one compares the literacy rates of colonial New England to old England and Virginia, the differences are striking. Historians that have quantitatively researched literacy rates in England, New England, and Virginia have shown this difference. By the time of the American Revolution, New England boasted a male literacy rate of about 85 percent and of nearly 100 percent in the city of Boston.[\[ii\]](#) While female literacy was considerably lower (about 60 percent), these numbers are still remarkable when compared to England and Virginia.[\[iii\]](#) In England and Virginia male literacy was still at 60 percent by 1790 and female literacy much lower.[\[iv\]](#) With nearly every man and the majority of women being able to read, Puritan New England achieved something no other society had ever found possible.

How did the New England Puritans achieve a literate society? A partial answer to this question is that they did it through legislation. As early as 1642, Massachusetts passed a law calling for parents to educate their children. More famously, in 1647, the colony famously passed what became known as the “Old Deluder Satan Act.” This law called for all towns and communities of at least 50 people to establish schools and provide teachers for those schools so that Satan would not be able to “keep men from knowledge of the Scriptures.”[\[v\]](#) Again,

one sees the theological purpose behind Puritan education. In the Puritan view, literacy and knowledge of the Bible and theology were foundational to Christian living. Unlike in England where this knowledge was limited to a literate faction, New England established it for all.

Puritans prioritized education for all levels.

It follows, therefore, that education began young and in the home. While schools were established according to the law, good Puritan families did not wait for the school to educate their children. Children needed to learn to read the Scripture, to know God's word. In Puritan New England, families sought to teach their children to read and write and to memorize their catechism as early as possible (usually five or six). There was a sense of urgency embraced by the Puritan community in New England. Early death was a regular occurrence. Children, because of original sin, were sinners by nature. They must learn to read and learn of God as young as possible. As Cotton Mather said when asked when children should learn to read, "BETIMES! BETIMES! Let the Children have the Early Knowledge of the Holy Scripture." [\[vi\]](#)

Sometimes historical dates seem like arbitrary numbers malevolent teachers force their ~~victims~~ students to memorize. In this case, dates tell the story. In 1620, the first group of Puritans arrived in New England aboard the famous Mayflower. In 1630, Puritan immigrants from England founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1636, the theocratic government of Massachusetts founded Harvard College to train its ministers, doctors, and lawyers. Within 16 years of any settlement and with 6 years of founding Massachusetts, the Puritans had erected an institution of higher learning. While they were still taming the wilderness and erecting their modest homes, education—specifically religious education—was a priority. This is perhaps even more remarkable when compared to the foundation of the College of William and Mary in

Virginia. Founded in 1693, William and Mary was established 86 years after the first settlers arrived in Jamestown colony.

The New England Primer gives us insight into the Puritan classroom.

As they established community grammar schools and Harvard College, New England Puritans began to publish educational curricula that better fit their perspective. The most popular of these materials was the *New England Primer*. First published around 1687, the *Primer* was the chief tool used in the American colonies for students to learn the alphabet.

The *Primer* used pictures and poetic couplets to teach both the alphabet and biblical lessons. It begins, "In Adam's fall, We sinned all" and continues to teach about biblical figures such as Job, Peter, Esther, and David, as well as lessons about cats, dogs, eagles, lions, and the King. [\[vii\]](#) This section is followed by a series of statements that every child was to commit to memory. After twelve sentences on the child's duty, the *Primer* adds another "Alphabet Lesson for Youth," this time using Scripture verses to illustrate every letter of the alphabet. [\[viii\]](#) Some editions of the *Primer* conclude with the Story of John Roger, a Marian martyr and example of Christian virtue.

The *New England Primer* may show the overwhelming importance of theological instruction in the education of youth, but Puritan education in New England was by no means limited to the study of Scripture. Rather than limiting themselves, New England Puritans, much like Milton and other English Puritans, saw biblical instruction as the foundation of a good education. Education in New England, especially the higher education offered by Harvard College, was very receptive to experimental science. [\[ix\]](#)

Puritan Education was broad in content but strict in

discipline.

New England Puritans were also known to be students of ancient languages, pagan literature, and philosophy. They placed a high importance on reason and on logical thought. While this emphasis is a product of Renaissance humanism, it was also theologically guided. One scholar notes, "New England humanism had a moral and a theological purpose: men studied the ancient classics in order to become familiar with the ancient tongues, and men needed a knowledge of the ancient tongues in order to interpret the ancient text of the Scriptures."[\[x\]](#) While they held the classics in high esteem, they saw that the purpose of education was not just to gain knowledge, but mostly to gain knowledge of God. It is clear that English Puritan educational theorists, like Milton, had a profound impact on Puritan society in New England.

It is certainly well established that discipline in Puritan education was strict and corporal. The *New England Primer* even says: "An idol fool, is whipped at school."[\[xi\]](#) Cotton Mather's famous dictum to parents "Better whipt than dam'd" is often seen as the essence of Puritan education.[\[xii\]](#) As we have seen, this is clearly not the whole story. In his extensive study of Puritan families and their education, Historian Edmond Morgan concluded: "Puritan education was intelligently planned, and the relationship between parent and child that it envisaged was not one of harshness and severity but of tenderness and sympathy."[\[xiii\]](#)

The Puritans desired a society of lay intellectualism, a society where everyday people could read and think not necessarily for themselves, but the way God intended them to think. In New England, they built that society. They read more than any society that preceded them. More of them read than in the majority of countries to this day. They read the Bible, but not only the Bible. They read Homer and Plato, and their own authors like Milton and Bunyan. They studied both the supernatural deity that they believed gave them salvation, as

well as the natural world He had made. Their philosophy of education was broad, not rigid and narrow like many believe. While it was broad, it was also focused. It had a unifying theme, a core value, and a purpose behind it—the knowledge of God.

Read Part [One](#) and [Two](#) by clicking the links.

[\[i\]](#) Richard L. Greaves, *The Puritan Revolution and Educational Thought: Background for Reform* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 146.

[\[ii\]](#) David D. Hall, "Education and the Social Order in Colonial America." *Reviews in American History* 3 (1975): 179; Gloria Main, "An Inquiry into When and Why Women Learned to Write in Colonial New England" in *Journal of Social History* 24 (1991): 585.

[\[iii\]](#) Main, 581.

[\[iv\]](#) Hall, 179.

[\[v\]](#) Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1985* (New York: Longman, 1986), 3.

[\[vi\]](#) Quoted in Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth Century New England*, 2nd edition (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 96.

[\[vii\]](#) *The New England Primer* in Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, eds. *The Literatures of Colonial America: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 294.

[\[viii\]](#) *Ibid.*, 295.

[\[ix\]](#) Raymond Stearns, “Assessing the New England Mind,” *Church History* 10 (1941): 257.

[\[x\]](#) *Ibid.*, 258.

[\[xi\]](#) *New England Primer*, 294.

[\[xii\]](#) Quoted in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 103.

[\[xiii\]](#) *Ibid.*, 108.

“My Times are in Thy Hands”

When did this phrase from Psalm 31:15 from the King James Version first cross my mind and eventually stick there? Was it as a child in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School? Or as a teen in Sunday School or youth group, or hearing a message from my pastor? Or later when I started making it a practice to read through the Bible yearly? I honestly can't recall when this phrase stuck, but somewhere along the way, it did.

The Psalm itself is powerful, from its opening stanza “In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness,” as the writer launches his appeal to the Lord for salvation, deliverance, and rescue. I learned early on that verse 5 was taken on the lips and echoed from the heart of our Lord Jesus as He yielded His spirit to His Father while dying on the cross (Luke 23:46) – the last of the seven final words of our Lord on the cross.

The Psalm is most instructive; trusting in the Lord in the midst of trials, of opposition, of sorrow, and affirming over and over that He will help and deliver. The Beacon Bible Commentary says Psalm 31 is “a striking alternation of lament and praise.”[1. Beacon Bible Commentary] We would all benefit

by learning this Psalm, making it our very own, internalizing its principles and, indeed, its very words, climaxing with the powerful exhortation of verse 24 “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.”

Right in the middle is verse 15 “my times are in your hands.” Some versions render this “my future.” Other versions translate “fate,” “life-stages,” “destiny.” I sense that the idea is that all of our life is in his hands, his care, concern, and keeping. Wow! He was with me in the past. He is with me today (and moment by moment). He will be with me always. The CSB translates “The course of my life is in your power; rescue me from the power of my enemies and from my persecutors.”[2. Holman Christian Standard Bible] The “course of my life,” my whole life, from beginning to end, is under His control. What assurance that gives! His power is greater than any other power!

Robert Browning’s beautiful poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra” includes the key line from verse 15:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life for which the first was made.

Our times are in his hand

Who saith, “A whole I planned.

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!”[3.

Robert Browning – “Rabbi Ben Ezra”]

Because of our trust in a Sovereign God, we can have hope even when we fail (and we so often do!). He forgives, He renews, He gives fresh grace, and new beginnings – things we all need.

I will go on, my past I leave behind me

I gladly take his mercy and his love.

He is joy and he is peace, He is strength and sweet release;

I know He is, and I am His, I will go on. [4. William J. and

Gloria Gaither "I Will Go On"]