

PERSPECTIVE

AUGUST 2018



**AT THE
BOTTOM OF
A WELL**

*Why should
you believe?*

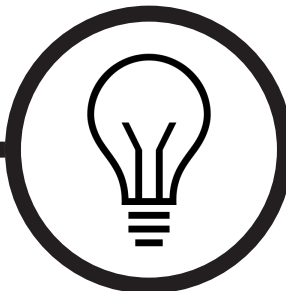
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“At the Bottom of a Well”: Why Should You Believe?

Henry David Thoreau famously observed how the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. The late theologian Carl F. H. Henry took it a step further when he argued most people don't really know where they are or where they are going. It's as if they "cower at the bottom of a well run dry."ⁱ

Imagine what it would be like to sit at the bottom of a dry well. There is no water to quench your thirst and no light to help you see. You can't explain where you are, and unless someone reaches in to save you, you've no hope of escape. This is the condition of most people today, though they'd never admit it.

This is what life is like without faith in the triune God of the Bible.

Sure, many people will *claim* meaning for their lives. Yes, quite a few will *assert* that they are content. They'll even *argue* that their life has purpose: to do good to others, to leave a legacy for the next generation, or to generally make the world a better place. When pressed, however, they are at a loss to explain *why* they should do good. They can't prove their vision for a "better" world is any better than someone else's vision. They are, as Henry argued, at the bottom of a well. They need help.

As Christians, we have both the light to show them the way (God's Word) and the rope to pull them out (God's Spirit). The Message we have is their only hope; nonetheless, we are often slow to speak.

WHY ARE WE SLOW TO SPEAK?

It can be easier to speak of Jesus in Middle Eastern countries where a belief in God is nearly universal. I've spent some time in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates—both Muslim-majority countries—where conversations about God's ways in the world flow easily. People are excited to talk about religious differences. Theological discussions are fairly normal.

In most of America, it's not like that. Unbelievers here are skeptical of anything that seems supernatural. If they do believe in "God," it's usually little more than a bland confidence that some Being is doing something good they can't quite understand. And so, like a batter with his eye glued to the pitch, they focus on what can be tried and

tested and measured in a lab. God may be their hope, but science is their king.

And this is why many believers have a hard time speaking boldly about the risen Christ. We aren't experts in science. We know we believe, but we aren't sure *why* we believe. Our faith may seem too simple or flimsy to withstand a heated conversation about the creation of the earth or the origin of evil. And so, we put away our light and resign ourselves to watching our neighbors languish in the bottom of a well.

It doesn't have to be this way. The fact of the matter is everyone has faith in something he cannot prove. We all come to the table of life with certain assumptions, certain presuppositions we rely on to make sense of life. When a Christian becomes convinced his presuppositions are superior—the most plausible—he will speak more freely, naturally, and joyfully about what matters most to him; the gospel of Jesus Christ.

EVERYBODY HAS PRESUPPOSITIONS

Everybody has presuppositions. Life would be pretty hard to live without them! I'm pretty sure the sun is going to rise tomorrow (yes, I know, it doesn't technically rise, but you know what I mean). However, can I *prove* the sun will rise tomorrow? Can I be *sure* that something cataclysmic won't happen while I'm in bed to change the course of history? No, of course I can't prove it. But I'm so certain the sun will rise I'm willing to stake my life on it.

Let me get a little more technical for a moment. We are all grateful for scientists who find the breakthroughs that make our lives easier. I love the fact that I can type out this article on a tiny computer that just a few decades ago would have filled a whole room. Science is amazing! But science, as Henry noted, "must routinely take for granted what it cannot prove."ⁱⁱ For example, researchers can't prove we live in an intelligible universe, a universe that will respond consistently to the batteries of tests they impose on it. They *assume* certain laws of nature—laws they say they are certain of—and they act accordingly.

And, for the most part, we can say their assumptions are reasonable. Just as it is reasonable for me to assume the sun is going to rise in the morning, it is reasonable for them to assume electrons will move a certain way under certain conditions without being able to actually *see* an electron. That's right, they can't see electrons but that doesn't make electrons any less real.

WE CAN'T SEE GOD BUT WE KNOW HE EXISTS

A Christian is on solid ground when he asserts, without any proof, that God exists. In other words, a Christian may not be able to see God, but that doesn't make him any less real.

Consider for a moment the way the biblical authors talk about God. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In the beginning, before there was *any-thing* there was God. Before there were elephants, there was God. Before there was water, there was God. Before there was time, you got it, God was. God was and is and always will be. It's no coincidence the Bible begins with the bold assertion of God's existence. He is the one thing in all of life that requires no explanation.

This is why there is no such thing as an atheist. Of course, many people claim to be atheists but, I would argue that deep down in their soul they aren't convinced of their own faithlessness. Everyone, Henry argues, "knows instinctively and intuitively that God does in fact exist."ⁱⁱⁱ The sixteenth-century Swiss theologian, John Calvin, put it beautifully, "God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty."^{iv}

There are certainly lots of good reasons to believe in God. Theists throughout the ages have suggested tons of arguments that make it *highly probable* God exists. In fact, these arguments are so good that skeptics have gone to great lengths to postulate theories that help them explain a universe without God.

The fine-tuning hypothesis includes the argument that the earth is so perfectly situated around the sun that were it to be moved slightly in any other direction it could not sustain life. The odds of this are extraordinary. In order to decrease these odds, skeptics propose another theory: the existence of trillions of universes. This multi-verse theory has no scientific evidence to support it, but for some, it conveniently increases the odds of there being at least one universe with a single planet that can sustain life as we know it.

Multiverse theory aside, the fine-tuning hypothesis makes the existence of an Intelligent Designer seem very likely. Nonetheless, we can do better than settle with the high probability that there is a God. It is intellectually credible to presuppose God's existence. We can, like Paul, assert with certainty: "The God who made the world and everything in it" is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts

17:24). We can agree with Paul who said God made himself plain to all humanity (Romans 1:19).

And this isn't blind faith! There is simply no better explanation for the order of the universe, the agreement about what is good, the existence of love, and the hunger for purpose than the existence of God. C. S. Lewis famously suggested, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." Again, it's not blind faith to assert God *is*, it's the best explanation of who we are and why we were made.

BORROWING FROM A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

What's truly remarkable in our modern and increasingly post-Christian era is how many people reject the truths of the Bible and yet live as if they are true. Writing thirty years ago, Henry said, "the younger generation today scarcely realizes the staggering debt that Western thought owes to the Biblical heritage."^v It remains true today.

Most of our non-Christian neighbors rely on ideas they cannot justify. They agree all human life is sacred. Sure, they may hold strongly to the belief that an embryo is not a human but, generally speaking, they advocate for the good of all they consider human. They believe history is linear; it is moving in a certain direction. There is a start and a finish. A linear view of history may not be universally accepted, but my simple point is that this is a Judeo-Christian idea accepted (with no proof) by most of our non-Christian neighbors. Perhaps most importantly and with few exceptions, they agree the universe has a purpose. They may not know what that purpose is, but they are absolutely convinced there is meaning to life, and some will even devote themselves to finding out what this meaning is.

In his book, *Making Sense of God*, pastor and author Tim Keller points out that there is an unstoppable desire in our hearts to find meaning. And even if we refuse to find meaning in the God of the Bible, most everyone strives to make meaning for themselves. They'll find something to live for, even if it's for their own satisfaction. And here's why: a meaningless life is uglier than anything. Keller puts it well:

If this life is all there is, and there is no God or life beyond this material world, then it will not ultimately matter whether you are a genocidal maniac or an altruist; it won't matter whether you fight for hunger in Africa or are incredibly cruel and

greedy and starving for power. In the end, what you do will make no difference whatsoever.^{vi}

Occasionally you may run into someone who feels this way. But the remarkable thing, as Henry points out, is most people don't! In other words, most people borrow from the storyline of the Bible to infuse meaning into their existence. They fully believe (again, without any proof) that there is a purpose to life. And try as they might to distance themselves from the Bible, skeptics of God will fight tooth and nail to cling to what we can only describe as a *biblical ethic*. Unbelievers retain, as Henry argued, "an agenda of social concerns involving universal justice, human rights, ecological matters, and compassion for the poor and weak."^{vii}

In short, even as they condemn Christianity as unjust, many of our unbelieving neighbors fight for justice from the midst of their waterless well. They drink deeply from the fountain of Christian faith while dismissing the God from whom faith comes.

WHY BELIEVE?

Why believe in the God of the Bible? You might just as well ask why we breathe the air around us. What else can we do?

The apostle Peter happened to be with Jesus when a number of disciples abandoned their faith. Jesus's claims about himself seemed unreasonable to them. They wanted a Messiah who healed the sick and fed the hungry, but they weren't too keen on Jesus calling himself the bread of heaven whom they must eat if they wanted to live (John 6:58).

Peter didn't understand Jesus' words either; but he knew Jesus, and he trusted him, and when Jesus asked if he, too, would leave, Peter asked, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68). I don't suppose Peter could *prove* to the men and women running away that Jesus was the Messiah. Time would show that Peter struggled to believe it himself. At that moment, Peter had no better explanation for life than Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, he refused to budge.

2,000 years later, not much has changed for the Christian. Sure, we can marshal arguments that make a strong case for the existence of God and the reliability and authority of the 66 books of the Bible. We can and should lay out arguments for the historical reliability of the four gospels and the credibility of Jesus' bodily

resurrection. We can even propose that there is no more beautiful narrative than that of Jesus taking on flesh, dwelling among us, living a perfect life, dying as our substitute, and rising to return again as the Judge of all. There are 1,001 wonderful reasons to believe the gospel even if we can't prove it.^{viii}

But it's also worth asking, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" What other presupposition is as compelling as the fact that there is a God and he has spoken in his Word? It's because of God and his gospel that the Christian lives not at the bottom of the well but at the top of a mountain gazing from afar at the new heavens and the new earth. It's because of the truth revealed in Scripture that the believer walks in the light, always sure of where he is going even when the path bends. It's because God *is* even when unseen that the believer continues to love in a world filled with hate.

By all means, speak up to your neighbors stuck at the bottom of the well. Point out all the things they believe without being able to prove and make your case that faith in the God of Scripture isn't blind, it's reasonable; more reasonable, in fact, than faith in anything else.

– Aaron Menikoff

ⁱCarl F. H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief: The Rutherford Lectures* (Crossway, 1990), 17. The thrust of this essay is basically a summary of Henry's terrific book.

ⁱⁱ*Ibid.*, 43.

ⁱⁱⁱ*Ibid.*, 58.

^{iv}John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.iii.1.

^v*Toward a Recovery*, 17.

^{vi}Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (Viking, 2016), 66.

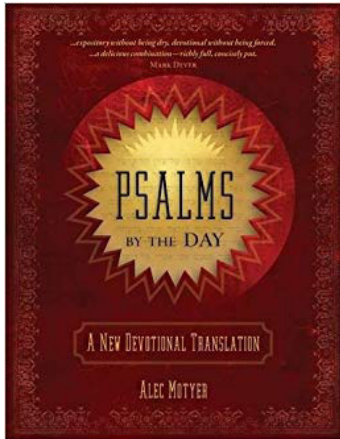
^{vii}*Toward a Recovery*, 24.

^{viii}For a helpful introduction to apologetics see, Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction to Christian Witness* (Zondervan, 2018).

Psalms by the Day

Written by Alec Motyer

Bookstall Price: \$26



In *Psalms by the Day – A New Devotional Translation* Alec Motyer encourages readers to study Psalms in a more methodical way. This objective reminds the Christian of our need to take time to read, meditate, and pray the Psalms. There is great satisfaction in taking time to dig deep into God’s Word when we comprehend the meaning of the words. Motyer expresses his aim in the introduction as he helps the reader discover what each psalm means, and does *not* tell the reader what it means.

This is a great book which persuasively challenges your thinking and understanding the Psalms with a biblical view. Our tendency may be to read Psalms with ourselves as the subject. Motyer’s clear purpose is for every reader to apply the Psalms to their heart and be transformed by the grace of the gospel proclaimed. I appreciated the clear goal expressed on the very first page: “A working translation with analysis and explanatory notes...and a ‘Pause for Thought’ application.” Motyer successfully fulfills this working aim and motivates the reader to slowly study and pray the Psalms with the impact of Christ-centered application. This perspective is a reminder to us of how Jesus taught, using the Psalms in the Gospels.

Psalms by the Day is a book for every Christian who desires a distinctively different devotional book. A devotional not labeled by dates on a calendar, but by Psalms intentionally numbered. The reader can then slowly digest and dig deep at their own pace. This book is an encouragement to the Christian to ponder, reflect, and pray the Psalms with a greater understanding of God’s big picture of the Bible. *Psalms By the Day – A New Devotional Translation* is an extraordinary devotional and an excellent resource in teaching. Most of all, you will find Motyer’s method of studying Psalms a joy, which encourages a spiritual hunger to grow in the praise of God in personal prayer time. It is a rich treasure of a devotional book!

– RECOMMENDED BY MARY ANNE KNOWLES

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Like all prayer, worship involves talking to God. Psalm 8 is not sitting in the silent contemplation of wordless adoration; it is telling God about God.”
– Psalm 8–10, p.32

2

“The ultimate glory (86:9) is largely his business (Ph.2:9-11), but ‘I will glorify’(86:12) places the responsibility firmly on me – and you. It is a by-product of learning his truth (86:11a), walking in his way(11b), single-mindedly reverencing his name (11c)and all in response to his undying love and salvation(13).”
– Psalm 86, p.242

3

“They are strongholds to be won, for in Psalm 139 we can easily test ourselves: would we dare to pray the prayer, and make the affirmations of verses 19-22? Do we not rather find such confrontation distasteful? We don’t hate sin like that, do we, or regard with horror the blemishes which sin and sinners scar the fair world Yahweh has given us?”
– Psalm 139, p.400

The Gospel Comes with a House Key

Written by Rosaria Butterfield

Bookstall Price: \$18

This book review was originally published on 9Marks.org in July 2018.

Raw. Unvarnished. Personal. Real. These are some of the words which scrolled through my head as I put down Butterfield's book.

Truth be told, I wasn't sure I wanted to finish. By chapter two, her story had overwhelmed me, and I was afraid it would discourage other brothers and sisters. Rosaria Butterfield is an extraordinary person with unusual gifts and a granite determination to open up her home to strangers. Most people I know are uncomfortable with this kind of transparency. The hospitality she described seemed, well, more "radical" than "ordinary." It didn't help that she said her home looks like a Christian commune (34).

However, I'd read both of her previous books, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* and *Openness Unhindered*, and I'd heard her speak in person once. I wanted to hear what she had to say now. So I kept reading, and I soon realized *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* is not a blueprint for *how* to be hospitable; it's simply a window into the life of a pastor and his wife trying to make a difference for Christ—not just on Sunday, but every day.

WHAT IS HOSPITALITY?

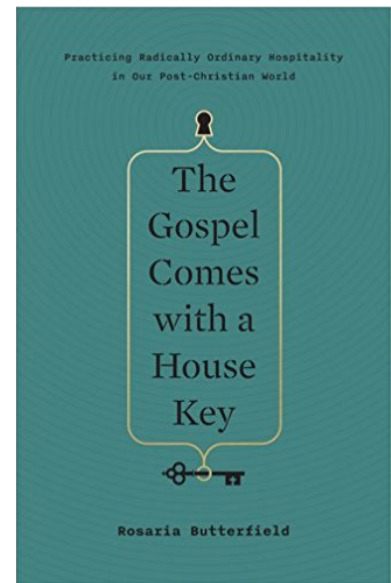
Butterfield defines hospitality as "using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God" (31). It requires a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture, covenant membership in a local church, and a willingness to let other people see the dirty laundry on your kitchen floor. Seriously. Regardless of how intimidated we may be to open up our home, budget, and schedule to strangers, we must. "Start somewhere, start today," she implores (62).

This isn't a book about Rosaria Butterfield. It's about the *Butterfields*, a spirited family led by her husband, pastor Kent. When a reclusive neighbor is sent to jail for turning his home into a meth lab, it's Kent who gathers Christian and non-Christian friends in his front yard and exhorts them to love their neighbor. And one Sunday, when snow closed local churches, the Butterfields invited their neighbors for a service. Kent preached in his living room. "He is not one man in the pulpit and another man in his home. As I watch him open the Bible," she remembers, "I am grateful that God allowed me to marry this man" (192). Hospitality is not women's work. Butterfield makes this clear. It's a qualification every elder must meet (37).

A BOOK ABOUT EVANGELISM

The Gospel Comes with a House Key is a book about evangelism. In a country where the social benefits of conversion decline each day, our neighbors need a compelling reason to put their faith in Christ. This reason is found in the homes of Christians on cul-de-sacs and in apartment buildings everywhere—if only they'd let people in. "Our post-Christian neighbors need to hear and see and taste and feel authentic Christianity, hospitality spreading from every Christian home that includes neighbors in prayer, food, friendship, childcare, dog walking, and all the daily matters upon which friendships are built" (95).

Long story short, non-Christians unlikely to walk under a steeple may very well walk over your threshold, if only you'd invite them inside.



A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

More than anything, Butterfield has written a personal testimony. She has witnessed the presence and the absence of hospitality. She writes of her first encounter with Christians who asked her inside, welcomed her questions and doubts, and purposefully didn't invite her to church or even share the gospel. They gave her space to learn and inquire. They blessed her with hospitality.

But she records seasons *without* hospitality, too; dark moments as a child when the horror and wickedness she witnessed made her wonder if God exists, and if he cares. But she knew no neighbors who cared. She asks a past that cannot respond, "Did I have Christian neighbors? . . . Neighbors who know? Neighbors who could have helped my family?" (68)

Butterfield writes with passion because she has known loneliness in the church as well. As a pastor, I feel a sense of relief when the benediction is offered and the service come to an end. But for many, Butterfield reminds us, this is the hardest moment of the day. Far too many members of our churches get a queasy feeling in the pit of their stomach when the benediction comes because, in a few minutes, they are going to be alone. It shouldn't be that way, Butterfield insists, among God's people. At the benediction the battle begins:

My favorite day of the week is the Lord's Day, and I want to share that day with others. Kent and I must open our home after worship to anyone who will come. We must. We remember what it is like to be a new Christian, to be single, to have secrets that get you alone and torment you, and to have no place to go after worship, the odd tearing apart of the body of Christ as each retreats to her own corner or clique while the benediction still rings in the air. (111)

Again, when I finished chapter two, I wanted to stop reading. I feared she was going to make me feel guilty for not leading my household and my church to keep up with the daunting schedule of an extraordinary woman committed to opening her home to others. But by the end, after having cried over more than one story of hospitality's power (which is really the power of the gospel at work in people willing to open their lives), I realized she isn't demanding we do it the Butterfield way. She's just pleading with elders to be elders and the church to be the church.

Butterfield asks us to consider simplifying our lives to make room for people who need to talk, even if they don't know it yet: "There are of course, other ways you can use your days, your time, your money, and your home," she says. "But opening up your front door and greeting neighbors with soup, bread, and the words of Jesus are the most important" (197).

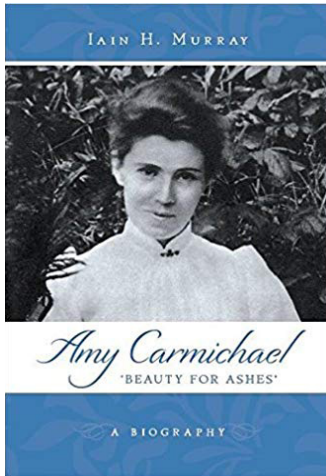
I've been helped by other books on hospitality including *The Art of Neighboring* and *The Simplest Way to Change the World*. Both are good, but neither is as gritty as *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*. Together, these books make a welcome plea for Christians to bring the gospel home.

— RECOMMENDED BY AARON MENIKOFF

Amy Carmichael “Beauty For Ashes”

Written by Iain H. Murray

Bookstall Price: \$13



Many have heard of Amy Carmichael being on the mission field, but few probably know of her strong commitment to the call on her life despite many obstacles. After reading *Amy Carmichael “Beauty For Ashes,”* I have come to appreciate her love for the Lord and his calling on her life to humbly serve the people of India while sharing the gospel.

Amy Carmichael was born in 1867 in Ireland to devout parents. She went to a Methodist boarding school for girls but because of family financial difficulties had to drop out. Her father died when she was 18.

Amy attended the Keswick Conventions, which led her to work with the poor in Belfast. There she met Robert Wilson who gave her a knowledge of overseas missions. In 1893, with Wilson’s help, began to do mission work in Japan. She was there 15 months, when Wilson had a stroke. Amy returned home but not for long. In 1895, Wilson helped her respond to an opening with the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society in India. “On October 11, 1895, she left Britain at the age of 27, never to return.”

In 1901, Amy established an orphanage in Dohnavur, India, which educated and housed girls rescued from prostitution in the Hindu temples. She affectionately became known as “Ammāi” which is “mother” in the Tamil language which she learned. Amy’s mother, Catherine, arrived at Dohnavur in 1904 and saw how Amy loved the girls. Catherine noted, “Since we came here a month ago I can truthfully say (Amy) has scarcely had leisure even to eat. She is mother, doctor, and nurse, day and night.” In 1913, Queen Mary helped fund a hospital and Dohnavur was serving over 100 girls and a home for young boys.

In 1931, Amy fell and broke her leg. The fall also dislocated her ankle and twisted her spine. This injury was painful and affected her mobility for the next 20 years. She humbly served the Lord through her ministry to the people of India for 56 years despite her health problems. Amy died in 1951 at the age of 83 in India.

Amy’s legacy lives on, however. The orphanage in Dohnavur is still in operation. Amy was also prolific writer and is credited with more than 35 books with many on missions and suffering, which have encouraged countless Christians over the years. Truly she was a humble servant to the Lord all of her days.

– RECOMMENDED BY PAM REIMANN

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Amy saw love as the foremost Christian grace and as foundational to Christian living and witness.”

– *From Belfast to India*, p.13

2

“In 1927 what had been formally known as the Dohnavur Nurseries was formed on a legal basis as the Dohnavur Fellowship. The stated aim was: to save children in moral danger; to train them to serve others; to succour the desolate and the suffering; to do anything that may be shown to be the will of our Heavenly Father, in order to make His love known, especially to the people of India.”

– *Hard Days and Golden Years*, p.88

3

“You must never ask God why? To will what God wills brings peace.”

– *The 1930’s and 1940’s*, p.102

NEW MEMBERS



Steve & Joy Arnold



Jake Chandler



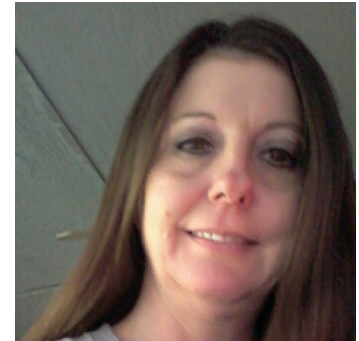
Stephanie & Juan
Chaur (Elyse)



Evelyn Hernandez



Raquel Hernandez



Ronda Overstreet



Greg Thompson



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH