

# PERSPECTIVE

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EVANGELISM  
MATTERS

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## Evangelism Matters

Twenty-five years ago this month I went to see the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*—it's a story about a man with a long nose who fell in love with a beautiful woman. The play was part of an assignment given by my high-school English teacher, Mr. Pease. I decided to invite Brenda, a girl in my class, to go the play with me. For some reason there was no one sitting close to us and we were far from the performance. This gave us the freedom to talk. On that night, in 1990, I discovered Brenda was a Christian.

In the South it can sometimes feel like everyone is a Christian—or at least they claim to be! But I grew up in Oregon, in a non-Christian home, and Brenda was the first Christian I'd ever known. I couldn't believe it. Everything I'd learned about Christianity I'd learned from watching television, which means I thought Christians were the dumbest creatures on the planet—they believed crazy things like Adam & Eve, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the resurrection of Jesus. But Brenda was the smartest girl in my high school, and when she told me she was a Christian, I didn't know what to make of her.

We started talking and Brenda shared with me the Good News of Christianity. For the next few minutes she evangelized me. I don't remember what she said exactly, but it made me ask her one question, "Brenda, do you think I'm going to hell?" It was one thing for her to talk about what the gospel meant to her, but she was saying some things that made me think she thought the gospel should matter to me. I'll never forget her response to my question: "Aaron, if that's what you believe and that's how you live your life, then yes, I think you're going to hell."

That's all I remember about that night. For the first time in my life I was convinced I needed to take Christianity seriously. Looking back, I believe the Holy Spirit was at work beginning to convict me of my sin and opening the eyes of my heart to see my need for a Savior. Today, I'm so thankful to know the Holy Spirit was at work in my life through the words of a person who loved me enough to share the gospel. May we all be so loving and so bold that we'd happily shake up somebody's life by telling him or her about Jesus Christ.

In this article I want to share with you some very simple, biblical thoughts about evangelism. These are lessons that must become second nature to us if we are going to

be the evangelists God would have us be. I can't share with you all you need to know about evangelism in a short article like this, but I pray that what I do share encourages you to be a faithful evangelist. With that in mind, here are seven imperatives that every evangelist can embrace.

### First, know the gospel.

The gospel is a defined message centered on the cross. The gospel is not about being a better person. It's not about building a better world. The gospel is about a Savior who entered a fallen world to die for sinners like you and me.

Do you ever have trouble remembering a password you haven't used for a while? It happens to me all the time. If I'm not using it regularly I forget it. Some of us can be like that with the gospel. We know we should share it, but it's been so long that we've forgotten exactly what the gospel is. We don't remember exactly what needs to be shared.

We need to talk about the cross. Take a look at one of the clearest explanations of the gospel, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

<sup>1</sup>Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup>and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

This is a helpful passage for a number of reasons. We learn that we need to be reminded of the gospel (v. 1). We see we are to stand in the gospel (v.1)—because it's possible to believe in vain (v.2). We observe the gospel is from God—Paul himself received it (v. 3). Finally, Paul explains how the cross is the heart of the gospel—Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (v. 4).

We live in a world that is increasingly illiterate when it comes to the Bible. Our neighbors may have very different views on God and sin and salvation. Before you can explain the cross on which the sinless Savior died, you have to make sure they understand who God is,

what sin is, and what sin deserves. It's never been more important to define our terms. When I share the gospel I typically use as my template a presentation called 2 Ways 2 Live produced by Matthias Media, an Australian ministry. It goes something like this:

God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world. He made us to be rulers of the world under him.

But we all reject God the ruler by trying to live life our own way without him. In doing so, we fail to rule ourselves, society, or the world rightly.

God won't let us rebel forever. The punishment for rebellion is death and judgment.

Because of his love, God sent his Son into the world, the man Christ Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life, yet by dying in our place, he took our punishment and brought forgiveness.

God raised Jesus to life again to be ruler of the World. Jesus has conquered death and now brings new life.

There are only 2 ways 2 live: Our way: rejecting God the ruler and trying to live life your own way (result: everlasting punishment), or God's way: submitting to Jesus as King and trusting in his death and resurrection (result: everlasting life).

It makes me sad, and a little angry, when someone tries to evangelize but won't share the gospel. Not too long ago I was at a church-sponsored soccer game. Midway through the game a staff member came to address the parents in attendance. He had a captive audience, a group of parents and guests on church grounds, thankful for the soccer program, and quite willing to devote a few moments to whatever this person had to say. But the staff member never spoke about the gospel. He talked about the importance of being involved in your kids' lives. He recounted about the value of sports. He said something about God. But never, not once, not even close, did he share the gospel. A non-Christian hearing his words might very well have walked away thinking like

a Pharisee, "I must be a pretty good person, I go to my boy's soccer game!"

Maybe this staff member didn't intend to share the gospel, maybe he didn't know the gospel. I'm not sure. But I do know that before we can be effective evangelists, we must know the gospel ourselves.

### **Second, trust the gospel.**

We have many good reasons to believe that God will use a simple presentation of the gospel to save sinners and build the church. Consider Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." This "word of Christ" is the gospel that Paul said in Romans 1:16 "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." In 1 Corinthians 2:2, when Paul said to the church, "I decided

to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified," he expressed a confidence in the gospel to save sinners and to build the church of the living God. We need similar confidence in the good news. The gospel is powerful enough to cut through the hardest heart.

Many Christians are tempted to doubt the power of the gospel to save. This manifests itself in a number of different ways. It's possible, for example, to be so convinced of the importance of apologetics that you lose confidence in the power of the gospel to break down resistance. Please don't misunderstand me: I think it is valuable to fill your evangelistic tool belt with explanations as to why it's reasonable to believe there is a God, the tomb was empty, the Scriptures are reliable, and so on. Apologetics is a wonderful discipline. But no one was ever argued into the kingdom of God. You were saved because you heard the Word of Christ, the gospel.

Let me give another example of what it looks like not to trust the gospel. A few years ago I was talking to an assistant pastor at another church who had been asked to deliver an evangelistic message around Christmas time. He told the pastor what he planned to say and the pastor made it very clear he didn't want the cross of Christ mentioned. When the assistant asked why, the pastor said he was concerned some visitors would be offended and might not come back.

The pastor was right. When the gospel is accurately shared people will be offended. But that doesn't mean we

shy away from preaching the gospel. Paul promised: “The time is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Timothy 4:3). Many people will not put up with the gospel. When they hear it, they will run. That’s true. But should our response be to water down the gospel—to present a message of good-will-to-all-people that can save no one? Of course not! Let’s trust the gospel.

### Third, pray for gospel fruit.

A few years ago I read through the New Testament paying special attention to how Paul prayed. I discovered that Paul often prayed about evangelism. He didn’t ask for healing, or strength, or money—he asked for gospel fruit:

2 Corinthians 1:11 – *“You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”* He is asking them to pray that many will be converted and give thanks to God.

Ephesians 6:19 – Paul asks them to pray God would give him words to *“boldly . . . proclaim the mystery of the gospel.”*

Colossians 4:3-4 – Paul asks them to pray God would open *“a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.”*

2 Thessalonians 3:1 – Paul asks them to pray, *“that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored”* by the conversion of many.

The church father, Augustine, pastored in North Africa in the fourth century. He was a powerful man of God who helped the church understand the doctrine of the Trinity and the grace of God. Augustine may be one of the most famous Christians who ever lived. But few people know about his mother, Monica. For thirty years Monica prayed for her son. Like the persistent widow of Luke 18, she prayed. Finally, the Lord answered that prayer.

Charles Spurgeon is known as the prince of preachers. The nineteenth-century pastor and evangelist spoke to enormous crowds and had a global ministry long before the Internet. He gave the credit to his mom, “There was a boy once—a very sinful child—who hearkened not to the counsel of his parents. But his mother prayed for

him, and now he stands to preach to this congregation every Sabbath.”

How many of you are reading this because of the prayers of your parents? How many of you are praying for gospel fruit?

### Fourth, turn conversations toward the gospel.

This requires great boldness and such boldness is a rare commodity in the church today. Somehow we think we should just naturally be bold. But that’s ridiculous. We are natural-born-sinners. And even though we’ve been born again, indwelling sin remains. This is why Paul asked the Ephesians to pray that he would be bold enough to preach the gospel. If the greatest missionary who ever lived needed prayers to boldly turn conversations toward the gospel, so do we.

The greatest evangelist I know is a man by the name of Mack Stiles. He wrote a book called *Marks of the Messenger*. In it he says many of us struggle with fear of man. We care so much about what other people think of us that we never turn conversations to Christ. Mack writes, “We become people pleasers and so tell people what they want to hear. We shift blame and convince ourselves people won’t listen. We tell ourselves that evangelism is too offensive.”<sup>i</sup> Mack’s right. We come up with tons and tons of reasons not to tell people of Jesus and we live our lives with a sense of guilt and shame wondering if we are ashamed of the gospel.

I’m not naturally bold at all. I need people to pray for me to be bolder. So do you! But something that I’ve found really helpful in turning conversations to the gospel is asking people questions. A question is one of the least threatening ways to build bridges that lead to evangelistic conversations.

A few years ago I was on an airplane between Cairo and Dubai. I was visiting some missionary friends in the Middle East. I will never forget this particular flight because I sat between a Muslim and a Hindu. It took a while for me to convince the Muslim that I wasn’t a spy with the CIA. But after I did, I asked my neighbors a question, “What’s the biggest problem in the world today?” My new Muslim friend said, “The biggest problem in the world is war.” My Hindu friend said, “The biggest problem is poverty.” Their answers allowed me the opportunity to say, “I don’t think that’s true at all; the biggest problem in the world is sin. The biggest problem in the world is not what’s happening *around us*:

fighting in the Middle East or famine in the Sudan—the biggest problem is what's happening *in us*: rebellion against the God in whose image we've been made. And once I'd unpacked sin I had the opportunity to finish sharing the gospel by talking about the cross.

Sometimes I'll simply ask people, "What is the gospel?" It's amazing the answers you'll get if you ask that question. And if the answer is wrong—and, sadly, it usually is—you'll have an opportunity to present the gospel in its fullness.

#### **Fifth, surround yourself with people who love the gospel.**

After the gospel itself, the church is the greatest tool God has given us for the furthering of the Great Commission. If you want to be a bad evangelist, be a lone-ranger Christian. But if you want to be a good evangelist, immerse yourself in a congregation of Christians who love the gospel. Let me show you why.

The church shows the world the power of the gospel. In John 13:35 Jesus told his disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." When we spend time together as brothers or sisters in Christ and as members of a local church, we show the world how much Jesus has changed us. People see the gospel at work in our lives when we bring a meal to a struggling family, meet the bills of a single mom, forgive a cantankerous brother, or provide a widow a ride to church. This is how we love one another. And by watching us, they learn something of the God who saved us.

But that's not all, when you spend time with people who love the gospel, you are encouraged to live out the gospel—and this includes sharing your faith. A couple weeks ago, I met with a few teachers at church to talk about some of our classes. One of the brothers said he had to leave early. I asked what he was doing, and he said he had to go and meet a friend of his to talk about Christianity. We've actually prayed for his friend on Sunday nights during our prayer service. But here he was, at 9pm, off to spend more time with the hope of planting still more gospel seeds in this unbeliever's life. When you are around people like this who love the gospel and are sharing it, you'll naturally be more excited about the gospel, too.

#### **Sixth, spend time with people who don't love the gospel.**

It's tempting to think of evangelism as a program or event. "Evangelism" they say, "takes place at the Christmas concert or the Good Friday outreach service"—two evangelistic events we host at our church every year. And certainly evangelism does take place at these events. It may be very wise for churches to host outreach events that may attract religiously-minded non-Christians in the area. But what about all the people who would never darken the door of a church? There is only one way to reach them—we need to spend time with them.

Jesus was very intentional about spending time with people who wanted nothing to do with the synagogue. Consider Levi, the tax collector. He would have been an outcast among his Jewish brothers for cozying up to Rome, collecting taxes from the Jews, and skimming a portion off-the-top for himself. Yet, Jesus was not taken aback. He sees Levi sitting at the tax booth and simply says, "Follow me." Levi did follow Jesus. In fact, we are told in Luke 18 that "Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them." And that's where Jesus was, enjoying a meal with tax collectors and sinners. There is a lesson here for us.

Maybe you've heard the name Rosaria Butterfield. A few years ago she was a feminist, lesbian English professor at Syracuse University. Now she's a pastor's wife. In her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, Butterfield describes how she became a Christian. Of course it was the gospel. She found the message of the Bible irresistible. But this didn't happen overnight. It was only after she spent hours and hours in the home of Christians that the Lord softened her heart. She describes how the Lord used the warmth and hospitality of Christians to slowly but surely woo her to Christ.

Whenever an old friend of mine is asked the question, "How are things going?" he always answers, "Life is full." This is true. Life is full, isn't it? We have work and sports, grandkids and vacations. Life is full. But if our lives are too full for our non-Christian neighbors, we will never be faithful evangelists. It's easier to devote a Saturday morning to handing out tracts on the street corner than it is to devote untold hours developing a relationship with your unbelieving workmate or neighbor.

## **Seventh, remember why we share the gospel.**

Most of us know the importance of evangelism, we are convinced that a person's eternal future is at stake, and yet we make excuses to keep silent. We ignore Jesus' command and we take the light of the gospel that we've received and place it "under a basket."

But it doesn't have to be this way!

One of my heroes is the eighteenth-century British pastor, Benjamin Francis. He pastored a small church in the country his whole life. They couldn't afford to support him, so he farmed and raised pigs to provide for his family. Francis lost his first wife and three children. Eventually he remarried and had ten more children—but seven of them died. Francis' life was full: raising children, burying children, farming, and attending to his church. Humanly speaking, Francis must have been sorely tempted to hide his gospel light under a basket. But he refused. In the midst of a trying life, he devoted himself to sharing the gospel. He spent his down time going into the unreached parts of the country and preaching the Word wherever he could—hundreds of times each year. Francis never led a large church. By the time of his death it numbered 252 members. But over the course of his life he baptized nearly 450 people who had been converted under his ministry.<sup>ii</sup>

We might ask ourselves how he did it. Why was Francis so faithful to evangelize? Why did he persevere in gospel ministry? Is it because he loved the lost? Of course. Is it because he saw evangelism as a command, a duty? Absolutely. But here's the real reason we persevere in evangelism even when our lives are full, even when we feel ill-equipped, even when we don't see fruit. We share the gospel because of our love for Christ. This is how Benjamin Francis put it:

Place then your entire confidence in Christ  
for the whole of salvation: Let the  
declarations and promises of the gospel be  
your only warrant for believing in him . . . Let  
not your sweetest experiences, which are at  
best shallow cisterns, but Christ alone be the  
source of your comfort, and constantly live  
upon that inexhaustible fountain.<sup>iii</sup>

Guilt is a horrible motivation for evangelism. If you see sharing the gospel as something you merely have to do or as something your pastor expects you to do, you will fail. But if your "entire confidence [is] in Christ for the whole

of [your] salvation," if "Christ alone . . . [is] the source of your comfort," then sharing the gospel will be as natural as drinking water on a hot day.

I'm convinced that in 1995 a young woman shared the gospel with me because she truly loved the Lord Jesus. My prayer is that each of us, every day, would do the same.

~Aaron Menikoff

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<sup>i</sup> Mack Stiles, *Marks of the Messenger* (IVP, 2010), 83-84.

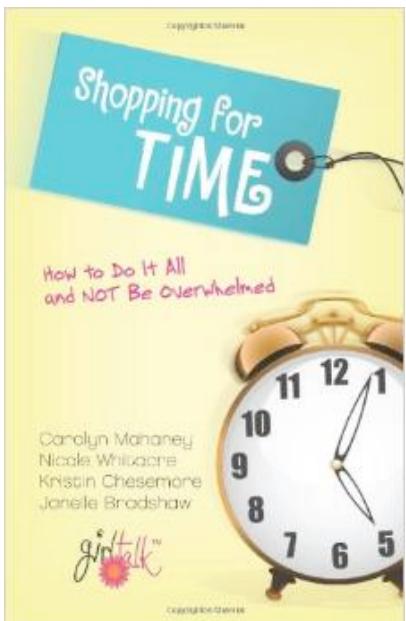
<sup>ii</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, *Ardent Love to Jesus*, 26-7.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

## ***Shopping for Time: How to Do It All and Not Be Overwhelmed***

Written by Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre

Bookstall Price \$13



I have recently been in the market for a new refrigerator and as anyone who has made such a purchase knows, much research, time and planning are involved in such an endeavor. I have spent countless hours in different appliance stores as well as in front of the computer reading and rereading the reviews of all the products. I want to know that when I finally do purchase the refrigerator, it will serve my family well. The authors of *Shopping for Time* understand this. Yet they also appreciate that we tend to not be as careful in how we use our time.

"While we constantly – almost unconsciously – plan, evaluate, strategize, and make wise choices when shopping, we often neglect to do so with the most important matters of our lives. We wouldn't dream of going to the grocery store without a shopping list... but we throw away our time as if we had an endless supply." (pg. 17)

They state that our lack of thoughtfulness in the use of our time leads to feelings of guilt, anxiety and uncertainty that we are truly doing the will of God. This leads to a life that feels overwhelming yet lacks fruitfulness. But we can live a life worthy of the calling to which we are called (Ephesians 4:1) by becoming shoppers of time. As it says in Ephesians 5:15-16, we must "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."

*Shopping For Time* is a short and light read with potentially life-changing implications. Whether or not you can relate to the ongoing shopping metaphor, the principles laid out in this book about how to be a better steward of our God-given time can apply to all. It's directed toward women but men would also be encouraged by reading it. The book is grounded in Scripture, filled with practical tools to steward one's time better in light of the gospel.

– RECOMMENDED BY DEANA MENIKOFF

Excerpts from  
the Book

**1**

"We are often more passive and receptive than we are intentional and purposeful in our relationships. We may allow people to drift in and out of our lives. We don't usually pause to consider why we pursue a certain friendship or neglect another. Emotions and feelings often dictate the way we go about relationships."

– Consider People: Evaluating Relationships  
Carefully, p. 69

**2**

"The key to becoming a successful shopper of time is to make our first priority that of seeking God through his Word and prayer. No extra hour of sleep, no 'urgent' task we must complete, no service we can do for others is half as good a bargain as this one."

– Sit Still: Sitting at Jesus' Feet, p. 41

**3**

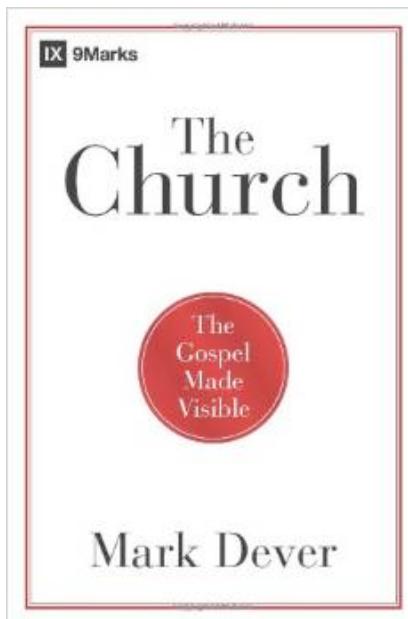
"In the end, our highest goal each day is not flawless execution of our plans or increased productivity. It's our relationship with God, walking in dependence upon him throughout the day. We should not be more consumed with the completion of our to-do list than pleasing and glorifying the Savior."

– Conclusion, p. 90

## The Church: The Gospel Made Visible

Written by Mark Dever

Bookstall Price \$13



What is the church? Or more importantly, who is the church? What should she believe? How should she be structured? Who should be her leaders? What is she called to do? The answers to these questions, along with a number of others, form what Christians for centuries have called ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church. Mark Dever has spent much of his life and ministry thinking, teaching and writing on this essential doctrine and laboring to make his work accessible to pastors and laymen alike. *The Church*, as its title suggests, is

intended by Dever to serve as a popular-level primer on the doctrine of the church. As he explains, the book is “especially for Baptists but also, in as far as the arguments are convincing, for all those who see Scripture alone to be the sufficient authority for the doctrine and life of the local church” (p. xii). This theme of Scripture alone runs throughout the book as Dever argues from Scripture that a biblically faithful church is a Protestant, gathered, congregational, baptistic church (p. 127-28).

For many, the doctrine of the church may seem like something that only pastors and academics should be concerned with. But, the reality is that every member of the church, whether they realize it or not, has developed their own doctrine of the church. Every Christian has answers to the questions posed at the top of this page. That being the case, we should all labor to make sure that our own doctrine of the church aligns with the doctrine presented in the Bible. *The Church* offers a great starting point for those seeking to ensure they have a biblical doctrine of the church.

— RECOMMENDED BY DUSTIN BUTTS

Excerpts from  
the Book

**1**

“Right teaching about the gospel . . . centers the church on Christ’s work of atonement and not only on his teaching or life example. The true church is cruciform, not necessarily in its architecture but in its teaching.”

— The Marks of the Church, p. 26

**2**

“The church itself is a means of grace not because it grants salvation apart from faith but because it is the God-ordained means his Spirit uses to proclaim the saving gospel, to illustrate the gospel, and to confirm the gospel. The church is the conduit through which the benefits of Christ’s death normally come.”

— The Purpose of the Church, p. 74

**3**

“The center and source of the congregation’s life is the Word of God. God’s promises to his people in Scripture create and sustain his people. Therefore the congregation is responsible to ensure, as much as lies within its power, that the Word of God is preached at its regular meetings.”

— A Protestant Church: Putting Together the Marks of the Church, p. 128



Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

— *Psalm 139:4-5*

In v.4, David continues to teach us that God is all-knowing, as he did in vv.1-3. Consider the intimacy and depth of God's personal knowledge of us. You know my thoughts by hearing what I say. The Lord knows them before I even speak a word of them. The Lord Jesus himself proved he had such knowledge. When he pronounced the paralytic's sins to be forgiven, Mark records that "some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts...‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts?’" (Mk. 2:5-8)?

Beloved, James instructs us to watch our speech (Jam. 3:1-12). But let v.4 govern the thoughts that form the words we speak. Just as a child dare not speak a foul word in the presence of his earthly father, so may we not think unholy thoughts in the all-knowing presence of our heavenly Father.

In v.5, David says, "You hem me in, behind and before..." The Lord's presence completely surrounds us. There is no escaping it. God is omniscient and omnipresent.

Furthermore, his presence is so close and intimate, David says God lays his "hand upon me." The biblical writers mention the "hand of God" figuratively over 1,200 times to refer to his sovereign power and authority over creation and people, especially in redemption, be it in saving his people or judging his enemies. Thus, when David says "You hem me in...and lay your hand upon me," he means that we are always in God's presence and under God's sovereign authority.

This truth requires faith to believe if we're going to experience any comfort from it, especially when life seems out of control. Maybe you have been blindsided by some situation this week – doctor's diagnosis, relational turmoil, death of a loved one, company buyout, possible career change, etc. Do you feel anxious about the unknown future because of your unexpected circumstance? Remember (as the biblical writers mean by that word – recall; bring to mind; meditate on) that your life is under the sovereign care, guidance, and authority of your heavenly Father. If you are in Christ, the hand laying upon you will not destroy you but uphold you. It is a powerful hand to lead.

— BRAD THAYER

Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit [www.theversesproject.com](http://www.theversesproject.com).

