

Book of Acts: An Encouragement to Israelis

We are heading into a special period of growth and multiplication. In Israel, the rains have been abundant (see Hos. 6:3); the almond flowers have blossomed (see Jer. 1:11); this is an “acceptable year of favor” (see Is. 61:2).

The book of Acts documents the growth in numbers of the early disciples. It started at the Holy Spirit outpouring in Jerusalem.

- **Acts 2:41 – About 3,000 souls were added.** It continued in the first community of faith there.
- **Acts 2:47 – The Lord added daily those who were being saved.** In the wake of healing miracles and religious persecution, more were added.
- **Acts 4:4 – Many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of men came to about 5,000.** After the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, the numbers increased even more.
- **Acts 5:14 – Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.** The number increased among Greek-speaking Jews as well.
- **Acts 6:1 – In those days the number of the disciples was multiplying.** With new administrative and financial order, the numbers grew even more, including ultra-Orthodox religious Jews in the Temple.
- **Acts 6:7 – The number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.** The revival spread northward to Samaria.
- **Acts 8:14 – Samaria received the word of God.** It reached national proportions after Saul (Paul) came to faith.
- **Acts 9:31 – The church in all Judea, Galilee and Samaria ... grew in number.** Greater Tel Aviv today includes Jaffa, Lod and Sharon. It contains the largest number of Jewish

people living in one place at any time in history. This entire area turned to the Lord 2,000 years ago. (Notice the word “all.”)

- **Acts 9:35 – All the inhabitants of Lydda (Lod) and Sharon turned to the Lord.**
- **Acts 9:42 – This was made known in all Joppa (Jaffa) and many believed.** Hallelujah! All Tel Aviv (Jaffa, Lod and Sharon) had a revival. From there it spread into Europe, Asia and Africa. The growth continued in Antioch (see Acts 13:44), Iconium (14:1), Lystra (16:2), Thessalonica (17:1), Berea (17:10), Athens (17:15), all of Asia Minor (19:10), Ephesus (19:17), myriads in Jerusalem (21:17), Malta (28:9) and Rome (28:30).

May these verses from Acts about growth in numbers encourage you! All Israel will be saved (see Rom. 11:26); all Tel Aviv will be saved (see Acts 9:35). If it happened then, it can happen now. If it happened in Israel, it can happen in your nation.

Don't Allow Narcissism to Creep Into Your Prayers

When you accept Christ into your life, you slowly come to realize that forces are now at work beyond your control.

There is a mixed emotion of fear (of losing control), relief (that your problems are now in God's hands) and curiosity (at how things will play out) that can create a hyper-introspection beyond anything we have experienced before, but could it lead to an unhealthy level of introspection and self-absorption? I've noticed creeping into many Christian's lives (including mine) a level of narcissism about prayer and God's

works that has raised a few flags.

This came to my attention partly by way of my agnostic friends. Every so often one of them asks me to say a prayer for a relative who is sick. It takes a lot for them to ask this and the request is usually serious, and for some reason they think I alone have God's phone number.

I feel mixed emotions when I receive these requests. I'm sad at their pain but joyful at the same time that a piece of their armor has rusted and fallen off. When I contrast these requests with Christian prayer requests that I receive regularly it drives the point home about how self-centered we, in the Christian community, can sometimes become.

For the record, most of the Christian prayer requests I receive are serious, but I have noticed a surge in "My" prayers. Please pray for "My" health, "My" job, "My" finances and so on. I also receive specific requests such as, My wrist is swollen; Pray that my move goes smooth; Please pray—I pulled my hamstring and may not be able to play soccer, and more. There is nothing wrong with this type of prayer. The Bible says to cast all your troubles upon the Lord (Ps. 55:22, 1 Pet. 5:7), but my question is, how are we defining what we consider "troubles?"

Could we one day be entertaining prayer requests that ask for Susie's haircut and highlights to come out perfectly, as only God can do them? Or to pray that Jenny loses these last five pounds so she can fit into her bikini before leaving on vacation? Or that the Red Sox beat the Yankees? Or that Tom Brady's ACL surgery goes well so he can take the Patriots to the Super Bowl next year? (Sorry, I'm from Boston). You get the picture.

Let me put it another way—we can assume that no one prays 24 hours a day; therefore, it is safe to conclude that everyone prays for a finite amount of time each day. If this is true,

then how much of this limited time should be focused on us and how much on others? Obviously this is a rhetorical question, as there is no mathematically correct answer.

Part of this problem is the self-absorption and narcissism of our society creeping into our lives, coupled with the fact that our country is so bountiful. Yes, even in this downturned economy most of us have more than we could ever hope for, compared with our brothers and sisters living in other countries.

The only conclusion I reached is, every so often break your prayers down. Pick a random status quo day. Observe how much time you spend thanking God, how much time you spend on personal requests and how much time you spend on broader requests that don't immediately affect you—things like poverty, disease, war or wisdom for our government officials.

I think this exercise can reveal much about where our hearts are—and where they are heading. I know my results were a tough pill to swallow.

Fitness Experts Separate Folklore From Fact

Can crunches create six-pack abdominal muscles? Do weight-lifting women risk bulging biceps? Is stretching always a good idea?

Experts say disentangling folklore from fact is not easy in fitness, where misconceptions are as pervasive as push-ups and as stubborn as love handles.

Jennifer Burke, a fitness manager at a Crunch gym in West Hollywood, California, said many women still worry that weight training will create big and bulky muscles.

“Women say ‘I don’t want to get bulky,’ but unless you take in extra calories or testosterone supplements, that’s just not going to happen,” said Burke, who eases reluctant clients into resistance training gently, with body-weight exercises.

“When they see their bodies getting long lean muscles, getting toned, they trust you a little more and you can start adding in dumbbells and machines,” Burke said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults engage in muscle-strengthening activities that work all major muscle groups – legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms – two or more days a week.

“A lot of people think if they want to lose a lot of weight they should do cardio, but the best thing is to add in resistance training as well,” Burke said. “You’ll get bigger, faster results because you’re working on lean muscle tissue which burns more calories in the long run.”

While it’s true that muscle weighs more than fat, it’s also more compact.

“Five pounds (2.3 kilograms) of muscle is the size of your fist. Five pounds of fat is the size of your forearm” she said.

Burke added that another misconception is that lower-intensity exercise such as the fat-burning setting on most cardio machines is better for burning calories.

“That’s absolutely not true,” said Burke. “If you increase the intensity you’ll burn more calories.”

The CDC’s rule of thumb is that one minute of vigorous-

intensity activity is about the same as two minutes of moderate-intensity activity.

Too Much or Not Enough

Stephanie Huckabee, a South Carolina-based fitness instructor, said people who believe it is necessary to exercise every day are setting themselves up for failure.

"I tell my clients to expect days when they don't exercise," said Huckabee. "That's just being realistic."

Another fiction, Huckabee said, is that you can move fat away from a problem area.

"When I wanted to reduce my stomach, I had to do an all-over conditioning program to get that fat tissue to shrink," she said. "Cardio will burn the fat over all. After that, you can work on sculpting an area with resistance training."

Burke said one of the biggest fitness myths is that crunches can banish belly fat.

"You build your six-pack in the kitchen," she said, while noting that no one will see even the most developed abdominals if they're hiding under a layer of fat.

Moira Merrithew, co-founder of Merrithew Health & Fitness, said one of the most common misconceptions is that it's always good to stretch before a game of football or a run.

"For some athletes probably the worst thing they can do is stretch before they run," said Merrithew, who is based in Toronto, Canada.

"There's simply no hard and fast rule," said Merrithew, a former dancer. "Pilates is good for dancers before they go out, because it mobilizes the joints. There are so many effects that stretching can and cannot have. There are limits to really pushing that stretch."

And even the most dedicated couch potato cannot turn muscle to fat, according to Carol Torgan, a consultant exercise physiologist with the American College of Sports Medicine.

“Muscles and fat are two different types of cells. It would be like turning apples into oranges,” she said.

More troubling is the fallacy that one can never drink too much water.

“It can result in a condition known as hyponatremia, in which there is an imbalance of water to salt,” Torgan said. “This is also known as water intoxication or over-hydration, and can be extremely serious.”

Chaim Goldberg: Israel, We Have a Problem

Believe it or not, I learned one of the greatest lessons of my life from the movie *Apollo 13*. We all know the story; three astronauts in space; something goes horribly wrong. The world holds its breath for days, wondering if they'll ever make it back to earth.

The most powerful moment for me is when the three, while up in space, realize that something bad has happened. They instantly begin pointing fingers of blame at one another. Things begin to get very heated. That's when astronaut Jim Lovell stepped in:

“All right, we're not doing this, gentlemen. We are *not* going to do this. We're not going to go bouncing off the walls for 10 minutes, 'cause we're just going to end up back here with

the same problems!"

A few simple words, but it's an incredibly powerful concept, if you really stop and think about it.

All Wars Eventually End

Extend this idea to concept of war. Someone gets mad at someone and they decide they can't handle it diplomatically, so they start fighting with one another. The fighting rages on and on and on until eventually, maybe after days, maybe after weeks, maybe after years, the war ends. And what do the two sides end up doing? Handling it diplomatically, of course.

The question is never, "will the war end?" The question is always "when will the war end."

Will the Japanese surrender before we drop the bomb on them, or after?

Will Saddam Hussein go peacefully or will we have to drag him out of a spider hole?

Will Osama bin Laden give himself up, or will we have to hunt him down in Pakistan?

All wars eventually end. It's one of the few sure things in life. And yet people (usually people deluded by power) never seem to learn this lesson. They prefer to bounce off the walls, forgetting that eventually they're going to have to come back to the same place, and figure out a real solution.

Propaganda

This week was an especially annoying and frustrating week in the long history of the conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.

Where to begin?

Shall we start with the Palestinian terrorists sitting in Israeli prisons who decided to go on hunger strikes? An

effort, I suppose, to try to gain the world's sympathies.

Or perhaps with the people of the West Bank who began rioting in the streets, for exactly what reason I'm not sure. Perhaps it was, as they claimed, to show solidarity with their terrorist brothers in Israeli prisons. Or more likely, it was just a show in advance of President Obama's visit to the region. Like kids who act up just before daddy comes home from being away ... a childish tactic to get daddy's attention.

Or perhaps with the terrorist in Gaza who broke the ceasefire with Israel, this week, by firing a terror rocket into Israel. By God's grace it landed on an empty road in Ashkelon. No one was injured.

Or perhaps it was Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, speaking in Vienna at a U.N. summit on tolerance, who called Zionism a "crime against humanity."

Or perhaps it was the leaders of Iran, who met with representatives from the "six world powers" in Kazakhstan over the Iranian nuclear program. Another brilliant stalling tactic by the Iranians, pretending to be interested in resolving the issue peacefully, while simultaneously new satellite photos came out showing a heavy-water factory in operation at an Iranian nuclear plant, indicating the production of plutonium, which is an alternative to uranium used to build nuclear bombs.

And on, and on and on and on ... you get the point.

Pessimism

Yes, it's easy to be pessimistic in this part of the world. Were I not a believer in Yeshua, I honestly don't know how I'd survive, mentally or spiritually. Had I not read the Bible, and therefore got a sneak peek at how this all will end, I'd be consumed with despair.

The bottom line is, people will continue to sin, continue to

hate, continue to make war ... until they're finally ready to stop. They will do it until they finally realize what Jim Lovell said, that there's no point to going round and round, when we're just going to end up in the same place, having to find a solution to the problem.

The late King Hussein of Jordan and the late President of Egypt Anwar Sadat are perfect examples of this. Both had made war against Israel numerous times; until one day they were both ready to stop. One day they both realized that war was fruitless and pointless and that peace was the better path.

Since those two historic peace agreements, Israel has stood waiting for more peace partners. Our hands have always been out-stretched. We've never said 'no' to a sincere offer for peace.

When the Jordanians were ready, we gladly said 'yes.' When the Egyptians were ready, we gladly said 'yes.' And so we wait—for the Palestinians, for the Iranians, for the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists, for the Saudis, the Lebanese, and so on and so on. We wait.

Yes, this was a frustrating week for those of us who are tired of war, tired of childish games, tired of propaganda.

But yet, we hope, we persevere. What other choice do we have?

Chaim Goldberg *is the director of media of Maoz Israel.*

Patrick Morley: Is

Christianity For You?

What would you guess will be the one question most on the minds of church visitors this Easter, Christmas, or for that matter, on any Sunday? My guess is they will want to know, "Is Christianity for me?"

So I've written a book to give voice to the honest doubts and questions many people have about the Christian faith. The approach is, "Don't take my word for it. Here's the evidence. Decide for yourself."

Let me introduce you to three excerpts from this new book...

The Purpose of This Book (from Chapter 1)

One of my seminary professors told a story about a man out for a hike on a cold, winter day. He came to a river that appeared to be frozen over. But since he was unfamiliar with the area, he didn't know how thick the ice was. Naturally, he was afraid that if he walked out he might fall through. So he got down on his stomach and slowly began to inch his way out onto the ice.

When he had crawled near the middle of the river, the air began to tremble as he heard a rumbling sound draw closer and closer. Suddenly a wagon with four horses at a full gallop shot over the crest of the riverbank, thundered across the river, and then disappeared over the ridge on the other side. You can imagine how foolish he felt.

It's difficult to trust something we don't know much about, isn't it? The man lying on the ice had difficulty trusting the ice because he didn't know much about the river.

But it isn't odd he felt that way. What would have been odd is if he had walked up to an unfamiliar frozen river and confidently stepped out on it.

Frankly, a lot of people feel this same lack of confidence

about what they believe—and they don't like it one bit. You may be one of them. But at the same time, a lot of genuine, sincere people have honest doubts and questions about Christianity.

The purpose of this book is to help you answer the questions, "Is Christianity for me?" and "Can I examine Christianity rationally and determine whether it is a belief system that is true?" I believe the answer to both of these questions is "Yes."

You will find nothing new or novel in these pages. Everything I'll say comes directly out of the tradition of classic, historic, orthodox Christianity. It is intended to give you the feeling of a solid mass across which you can safely walk—not thin ice.

How to Become a Christian (from Chapter 9)

Would you like to become a Christian? Or if you have previously received Jesus but, for whatever reasons, have not been walking with Him, would you like to reaffirm your faith?

If so, how can you do that?

It's As Simple As a Story

Becoming a Christian is about making a change, but it's not a change that takes place by someone like me telling you how you should live. Likewise, it's not a change you can make by "willing" yourself to be "good." We've all tried that and failed, haven't we?

Instead, becoming a Christian is about understanding and embracing the story of Jesus—who He is, why He came, and what it means to believe in Him. Noted theologian J. Gresham Machen put it this way:

"The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by

exhortation, but by the narration of an event.

It is no wonder that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher?

But the strange thing is that it works. ...Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds; the lives of men are transformed by a piece of news."

Dealing with Regrets, Doubts, and Uncertainty

"But I have regrets, feel unworthy and still have doubts," you say. That's okay. You don't need to pretend you don't have doubts. Doubts are normal. There was a man in the Bible who said to Jesus, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24, NLT). And Jesus did help him. Faith need not be big to get started. It can be small, like a mustard seed. It will grow over time. Cru founder, Bill Bright, often said, "Faith is like a muscle. The more you use it, the bigger it gets."

You might say, "But I did give Christianity a try and it didn't take." Often, people try to follow a God of their own design. But you can't put conditions on God, such as, "I'll believe if you save my marriage." Nor can you expect something in return, such as, "I will believe if God will bless me financially." And you can't give God less than first place, such as, "I will make time for God as soon as I build my career." These are not examples of "giving Christianity a try and it not taking." These are examples of trying something else. Professor and author Ron Nash said, "I have no problem if people want to make up a new religion. I just wish they wouldn't call it Christianity." Christianity can't be what you want it to be; it has to be what it is.

"I did try, and it was too hard." You may have been told, "Just pray this prayer and God will bless you." God *will* bless

you, but whoever told you that left out hard things like repentance, good deeds, and even suffering. The apostle Paul said, "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds" (see Acts 26:20). The apostle Peter noted, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:12-13). As English writer G. K. Chesterton said, "Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried."

"It's too late for me. I had my chance." It's never too late. God loves you very much. No matter what you've done, you can be forgiven. Jesus told a parable about this in Matthew 20. A man hired people throughout the day to work in his field. At the end of the day, those who only worked a short time were paid the same as those who had worked all day. The reward is the same for all who decide to follow Christ, no matter how late you start following Him.

Giving Christianity a Try

Would it make sense for your daughter to say, "I could never ride a bike," when she had never given it a try?

Or, suppose a boy at a school party wanted to ask a girl to dance. But he didn't ask because he thought, *She would never want to dance with me.* Would it be right for him to now dislike her for not doing what he never asked?

Or, if a doctor prescribed a medicine for your illness and you didn't take it, would be fair to say, "That medicine doesn't work"?

Or, should someone who refuses to ask for directions be irritated with the mapmaker when they arrive at the wrong destination?

It just doesn't make sense to reject something you've never tried. In the same way it wouldn't be fair to reject Christianity because you never tried it.

So are you ready to give it a try?

Note: This article contains excerpts from Pat's new book, Is Christianity For You? Give visitors to your church a copy this Easter—available in cases for less than one dollar each. Download a free review copy at .

Pat Morley is the Founder and CEO of Man in the Mirror. After building one of Florida's 100 largest privately held companies, in 1991, he founded Man in the Mirror, a non-profit organization to help men find meaning and purpose in life. Dr. Morley is the bestselling author of The Man in the Mirror, No Man Left Behind, Dad in the Mirror, and A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines.

Program Increases Contraceptive Use For At-Risk Teens

Long after completing an 18-month program designed to teach about contraception and healthy relationships, teenage girls at high risk for unwanted pregnancy were using contraceptives more often and maintaining other safer sexual practices, according to a new study.

Researchers in Minnesota tested an approach to preventing teen pregnancies that is based on providing access to birth control methods and information as well as building girls' sense of

connectedness to family and society.

“Our study shows that when we invest in young people through ongoing one-on-one relationships, through opportunities to lead and access to sexual health services, we really support the next generation of citizens,” said Renee Sieving, the study’s lead author from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 31 out of every 1,000 teenage girls between 15 and 19 years old gave birth to a baby in 2011.

That is a record low, but still the highest teen pregnancy rate in the developed world, Sieving and her colleagues point out in the journal JAMA Pediatrics. They add that black and Hispanic teens bear most of the burden of these teen pregnancies.

For the new study, Sieving’s team recruited 253 sexually active girls between 13 and 17 years old from clinics in St. Paul and Minneapolis, to be randomly placed in one of two groups.

All would get standard care at the clinic, but half would also be enrolled in the researchers’ “Prime Time” youth development program.

At the study’s outset, just over half of all the girls in both groups (around 56 percent) were using condoms on more than half of the occasions that they had sex. More than 40 percent said they used condoms less than half of the time.

Girls in each group were also on some other type of birth control for two of the past six months.

One group of 127 girls did not receive any special attention – other than the clinic’s standard care and guidance. The other 126 girls were assigned to the new program.

Prime Time assigned each girl participating in that program a case manager who taught about healthy relationships, contraceptive use and how to become more involved with school and family.

The Prime Time teens also went through training to become leaders and teachers who could educate others about what they were learning.

The program took 18 months to complete, and the teens were then asked about their behaviors six months after the program's end.

The researchers found that the girls who did not go through the program ended up using a condom during sex less consistently than they had two years earlier.

Girls who went through the program, however, ended up doing about 50 percent better at using a condom every time they had sex than at the beginning of the study.

The use of other contraceptives also increased in both groups, but more in the group who went through the Prime Time program.

The girls who went through the program were also more likely to say they were close with their family, and were more confident in turning down unwanted sex. In addition, the Prime Time teens were also more likely to go to college or technical school, according to Sieving.

"The kids we're working with are oftentimes struggling in school – the kid in the back of the room you don't often hear from, and we give them tools," Sieving said.

"You watch them move from 'I don't really have anything that's of any use to anybody,' to 'Wow, I have stuff to contribute!' So it's really cool to see that shift in how they see in themselves," she added.

Amy Bleakley, who studies teen sexual behavior and

reproductive health at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, said the results are promising.

“I think that investment in youth development programs such as this could yield positive results for high-risk adolescent girls,” said Bleakley, who was not involved with the new study.

Sieving told Reuters Health that compared to the approximately \$10.9 billion teen pregnancy cost U.S. taxpayers in 2008, investing in this type of program also makes financial sense. The Prime Time program costs about \$2,800 per teen, she said.

“I just think when you invest in ways that help kids to thrive, it’s good for our next generation and there is some cost saving involved,” she added.

Ron Cantor: Stop Hagglⁱng on Hagel

How many people are capable of being Secretary of Defense in the United States? I mean, I am clearly not ... and probably you’re not.

But it seems reasonable to me that there are perhaps at least 100, give or take a few, men who are equipped to govern this agency.

So why in the world does the supposedly pro-Israel president pick Chuck Hagel—someone who has gone on record criticizing our closest and maybe only ally in the Middle East—Israel?

Last week the *Washington Free Beacon* reported on the synopsis of a speech that Hagel gave in 2007 by a close supporter. The

report, written by Hagel supporter and political consultant George Ajjan, claimed Hagel had described the U.S. Department of State as an extension of the Israeli government.

Hagel says he doesn't remember making those remarks, which might as well be an admission. The fact that he can't recall at least reveals how he thinks.

Imagine if someone had confronted him: "Senator, in 2007, it was revealed that you encouraged men to wear women's clothing." Do you think he would say, "I don't recall?" No, he would outright reject it because it is not something he believes (I don't think ...) or would say.

However, according to the words of someone who does remember another speech at Rutgers University, the senator is quite hostile towards Israel. Kenneth Wagner sent this email in April of 2010:

"I am sitting in a lecture by Chuck Hagel at Rutgers," Wagner wrote in the email. "He basically said that Israel has violated every UN resolution since 1967, that Israel has violated its agreements with the quartet, that-it was risking becoming an apartheid state if it didn't allow the Palestinians to form a state. He said that the settlements were getting close to the point where a contiguous Palestinian state would be impossible.

"He said that he (thought) that Netanyahu was a radical and that even (former Israeli foreign minister Tzipi) Livni, who was hard-nosed thought he was too radical and so wouldn't join in a coalition (government) with him. ... He said that Hamas has to be brought into any peace negotiation," Wagner wrote.

But rather than admit they made a mistake, the White House is pushing for a Hagel vote because "we have the votes," believing that they have the 51 votes needed. But why would they want him? It was already revealed that he once said:

“The political reality is that... the Jewish lobby intimidates a lot of people up here. ... I’ve always argued against some of the dumb things they do, because I don’t think it’s in the interest of Israel. ... I’m not an Israeli senator. I’m a United States senator. I support Israel, but my first interest is, I take an oath of office to the Constitution of the United States, not to a president, not to a party, not to Israel.”

Come on President Obama, swallow your pride and choose one of the dozens of other qualified candidates who is not hostile against one of our best friends.

The White House is not budging:

WH Source: No more deal making needed on **#Hagel**. “We have the votes for cloture. Happy for others to join but Hagel will be confirmed”

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah’s Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic Ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Ron also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish Roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, Identity Theft, will be released on April 16th. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

For the original article, visit .

Kenny Luck: God Simply Takes Us

Part I Part II

This is the third in a series called "One Life," where Kenny Luck discusses the urgency that comes from having only one life to live. It provides insight on how God teaches us to live life better and to number our days by living spiritually not carnally. We will explore three ways God teaches us how to live this one life with better priorities. This article talks about a third way that God teaches us to live better lives—He just takes us.

Parable of the Rich Fool

Jesus splendidly illustrated this spiritual truth in the parable of the rich fool, which is found in Luke 12:15-21. Jesus talks about this rich man who is going through life sort of casually, unconcerned about what's really important in life, and only thinking only about himself. He's really committed himself to the purpose of self-preservation. You know, of taking care of number one, amassing stuff, making life predictable, presuming that he has tomorrow.

In Luke, Jesus says: "Beware! Guard against every kinds of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."

Then Jesus told them this parable.

"A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He thought to himself, 'What should I do? I have no place to store my crops,' Then he said, 'I know. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, 'My friend, you have enough stored away for many years. Now take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.'"

"But God said to him, 'You fool. This very night you will die. Then who will get what you worked for?'"

You know, one of the things that happened to me on the 7th floor of the Western Medical Center's cancer unit was that my definition of "rich" got redefined. It was counter-intuitive, but that is so often how God is. Ironically, in that hospital

there was such physical trauma and physical poverty and physical pain, but there was relational richness and spiritual richness.

Can I ask you a question? What's "rich" for you? If you swallow what the world's selling; "rich" is stuff. It's having the accessories. It's being comfortable. It's taking vacations. It's accumulation. It's having a thick 529 plan for your kid's college fund. And look, just understand this – none of that is bad – but if that's what you're living for, then it's wrong.

Be Ready for the Lord's Coming

In Luke 12, we see His admonition to get our spiritual house in order and to be ready because the master can come calling anytime. In verse 35, Jesus is talking to His guys, and He says: "Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet. Then you who are ready and waiting for his return will be rewarded. I tell you the truth, he himself will serve, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat. He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn."

Jesus continues the story:

"Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a thief was coming, he would not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, because the Son of Man will come when you least expect Him."

And that's what we're talking about today. When you have foresight about something, it should give you the insight to get ready in light of the truth that you know is coming.

In the Bible, the "house" Jesus is referring to is your life. It's a parable for your life. Do you know that your purpose could be stolen away if you give it to the wrong stuff? You need to have a sense of stewardship towards this one life that you have, because the Son of Man will come at any hour. So my

encouragement to you is this: to see life more eternally, see relationships more valuably.

See time more meaningfully. Start your day thanking God for 10 things. Say what you need to say ... and say it NOW.

Kenny Luck is the founder of Every Man Ministries and the men's pastor at Saddleback Church. His 20th book—**SLEEPING GIANT: No Movement of God without Men of God**—is the proven blueprint for men's ministries, and was recently released through B&H Publishing. Watch and read more of Kenny's teaching here at .

Follow Every Man Ministries now on Facebook, Twitter (@everymm,) and YouTube.

The Lost Medallion

(MeThinx Entertainment)

The action-adventure genre doesn't normally fall under the category of family-friendly entertainment—and it certainly isn't often associated with biblical morals. But MeThinx Entertainment's *The Lost Medallion: The Adventures of Billy Stone*, scheduled for release this month, is both.

The movie, based on a series of novels by Bill Muir, features life lessons for children that parents can rally behind: teamwork, the triumph of good over evil and the importance of each person to God. The film also contains minimal violence.

Alex Kendrick, associate pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., and co-creator of the Christian films *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof* and *Courageous*, plays Daniel, who stops to make a donation at a foster home where he grew up and is

convinced to forego a playoff baseball game to tell the resident children a story.

Off the cuff, Daniel intrigues the children with the tale of Billy and Allie (played by Billy Unger and Sammi Hanratty), a pair of teens who recover a long-lost medallion that takes them back in time. In their travels, the two hook up with an arrogant young king and his friend, as well as a wise old man, and are caught up in an effort to save the king's island people from an evil warlord.

Kendrick urges parents to take their children to see the film—if not for the entertainment, then for the biblical message it conveys.

“Our kids’ hearts are under attack from the deception of ‘destructive lies’ found in media and our culture and the words of ‘mean kids,’” Kendrick says. “This is a film that every family should see ... twice.”

Revive Israel: God Makes All Things Possible

Our faith in God is more than a philosophy; it is a way of life. Our biblical world-view gives us a confident and optimistic attitude despite ever-worsening conditions around us.

*“All things work together for good to those who love God.”
(Rom. 8:28).*

One of the daughters of a family in our congregation who had left the faith became upset by the rocket attacks (in

November) and turned her life back to the Lord. Even the difficulties in the Middle East are part of a long, patient process from God to soften the hearts of our people and to create faith and moral courage within us.

"Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father." (Eph. 5:20)

"Give thanks in all things." (1 Thess. 5:18)

Giving thanks involves opening our mouths to say something. In Hebrew it is the same root as *confess* or *declare*. We give thanks to the Lord for He is good (Psalm 136:1-3).

This involves our prayers. If we pray and believe that we receive (Mark 11:23), then we give thanks while we pray. If we pray without giving thanks, then we are praying without believing that we receive. That kind of prayer may just be an exercise of worry and anxiety, which doesn't do any good, and may even make the situation worse.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God." (Phil. 4:6)

By faith, we can obey God, being confident that He rewards those who diligently seek to do His will (Hebrews 11:6). Thus we can do anything with a positive attitude.

"Do all things without complaining and arguing." (Phil. 2:14)

We read this verse aloud in one of our staff meetings, and joked that it sounded like a Gentile Christian insertion in the text. It seems that part of our Jewish culture is to complain and argue about everything—it's like our "national sport." Is it possible to do things without complaining!?—without arguing!? Yes, we can, by faith.

"Everything you do, do it with all your heart, for the Lord's sake and not for the sake of men." (Col. 3:23)

By faith in Yeshua and the power of His crucifixion and resurrection, we can do all things with enthusiasm and energy. Even when the situation is horrible and totally against our will, as it was for Yeshua at Gethsemane, we can pray that not our will be done, but His. Then His will becomes our will, and we can do it with all our inner strength and focus.

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