

## “The Peace that Transcends Mere Human Understanding”

Ralph Blair’s Keynote for EC’s 2023 ConnEction

Twenty centuries ago, the Apostle Paul mentored early Christians in the Greek city of Philippi, giving them *pragmatically spiritual support that we all still need today*. He warned that, as Christians, *we’ll be persecuted*. Still, as he tells us all: *“Don’t be anxious about anything! But, in all things, by grateful prayer, talk with God about whatever it is that you fear, and His Peace that transcends mere human understanding, will free you from your fear and will fortify your minds and your hearts in fellowship with Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6-7)

Note that he counseled them to appeal to God *with gratitude, confident in His trustworthiness*, that they’d already known in *experienced fellowship in Christ*. Unlike an *impatiently barked, “Quit your bellyaching!”* or a *baseless, “Cheer up!”*, Paul gave them the *best reason for counting on achieving their goal by prayer*, on the *basis of gratitude that they’d already experienced in God’s most gracious relationship with them, in Christ, their loving Savior*.

*Our awareness that God is fully aware of all of our challenges and is with us in their very midst, has profound consequences for our getting through them all. In our God-centered awareness, we know we don’t struggle all on our own. How true this was for them, then! How true this is for us, now!*

*Yet, in self-centered, narrow-minded thoughts, we do set ourselves up for upsetting ourselves into irrationally-rooted notions, emotions and actions. From fallen humanity’s hopelessly fearful fantasies of danger, we tend to drive us into much more than fret. Beyond the fear of anti-Christian hatred, what we tell ourselves, can also set us up into pining, delusions, jealousy, envy, resentment, hostility, frustration, depression, disappointment, regret, discouragement, frustration, loneliness, et al., ad infinitum. It’s all, so very sadly, so typical, for all of us in all of our self-centeredly fallen humanity.*

Our anxiety, disappointment and anger are all *based in simple-mindedly forecasting “dangers” of things to come and simple-mindedly imagining “advantageous stuff” that we’ve supposedly missed getting, on the fantasy roads we never traveled, but crave we’d traveled, for all of that stuff we so covet, but never got. In distorted notions of what all we “missed out on”, on untraveled roads and in otherwise scenarios, what we actually did miss, are all of the inevitable disappointments, if we’d travelled unknown, still fantasy, roads. “If only” is always a killer. What illogical loads of litter we can all so habitually carry around on our aching backs as we neglect to share Christ’s*

Yoke as His yokefellow, right there at His reassuringly trustworthy side, throughout all of *this* life's journey *Home, together with Him!* (Matt 11:29f)

*Projected nightmares of unknowable futures and daydreams of otherwise pasts* get us all bent-out-of-shape, bound-up into out-of-bounds *fictions* that know no bounds. Thus, *distracted*, we fail to *think things through, honestly and rationally*, failing to *challenge*, thus, failing to *change* our *error-soaked guesses* that lead us into messes of terror and endless "*if-only*" regrets of *erroneous scenarios* and *stupid delusions* over our "past" and our "future".

Not only do we need to *identify, challenge and change* all of our *irrational* thoughts, we need to see *all of our own circumstances* in their *widest of all contexts*. We need to see that our *Complete Context is with God Himself*. He is, *Himself*, Love. He is The One Who *absolutely knows us*, as nobody knows us, and *that* includes how little *we, ourselves, truly know us*. God so *truly loves us*, and He sees *us* through His Own Son's *sacrificial death* for our sins, giving *us* eternal forgiveness. And, He sees *us* in His Son's rising from death for *our restoration* in *our coming resurrection, forever, in Christ*.

Some try to *control* their lives through *pessimism*, and *it sets them up* for constant *disgruntlement*, grumbling and greed -- but, *never for gratitude*. Others try to *control* their lives through *optimism*, and *it sets them up* for constant *disappointment*, grumbling and greed -- but, *never for gratitude*.

Yet, as *Christian realists*, with *our faith in God*, we're *ready for anything*, in *realistic reliance* on God's Sovereignty and on His Redeeming Love in Christ. We can then be *resilient and faithfully ready* for the *fullest reality* of *God's Providence by His gracious guidance and ultimate consequences*, *no matter* what may be *here* in the *meantime*, in this *mean-spirited, fallen old world* that we're passing through, for *now*. As a *Christian realist*, one can be *faithfully resilient*, at *peace*, no matter *whatever* transpires, because *whatever* it may be, it's all in God's Own Gracious Hands and leads on to God's Gracious Presence *with us, forever*. There's *never a need for worry!*

We *truly* need to *count on* God's *attentive Presence*, by *gratefully keeping in touch with Him by prayer*. He's *always there, ready to hear us, ready to answer us*. He *knows* what our problems *truly* are, and He *wants us*, too, to know what they *truly* are. It's still so true: "Those who *look to the Lord* shall *renew* their strength; they shall *mount up* with wings like eagles; they shall *run* and *not* be *weary*; they shall *walk* and *not* *faint*." (Isaiah 40:31)

It's also still true that, unless *we look* to God for guidance, we *won't be open* to what we *need to hear and learn* from Him. It's God's *willingness for us to seek His Will*, that *enables us, in fact, to seek His Will*. His Will is so very far *better* for us than anything we, in *our own cramped corners* in *circumstances of self-centered, self-isolation* can ever really *truly imagine*.

Given that God's Grace and Peace has been so *readily* and so *regularly* rejected by our *fallen* race, it's no wonder that many *contradictory systems for self-righteousness* have been concocted in panic, through all the ages.

Humanity's stupid attempts to replace God with ourselves *began* in God's beautifully-gifted Garden of Eden, where our ancient ancestors turned their backs on God, and spun their own flimsy fig-leaf theory as their shameful "cover-up" for rebelling against their generous Creator. They *chose* to be *ungrateful ignoramuses*, as *we all*, so readily, do. Thus, they utterly failed at hiding their guilt from even *themselves*, as they bound themselves into their fatally self-serving solutions of puffed-up *self-importance* and *suicidal disdain* for God and God's Love. Such, is the *antiquity of human iniquity*.

Do you notice the *two common denominators in humanity's sinful mess*? They're *ingratitude* and *greed*, from *our beginning*. They're *our original sin*. They're *our thankless* response to God's *gracious gifts*. *Ingratitude always leads to greed for ingratitude is oblivious to gifts already received, holding itself hostage to its irrational imagination!* Wherever there's *true gratitude*, there's *no felt need for greed*; wherever there's *greed* there's *no gratitude*. *Ingratitude so selfishly refuses to be grateful*, so, it holds itself hostage to *delusions, grievances, and grudges* for a world *without God*, a world where we are "*gods*". But a world *without God* is a total *fiction that's failed*; it's a *rationalization* that holds *fallen* humanity hostage to *sin*. *Ingratitude* leads to *greed*, as *true gratitude*, is, in its essence, *already grateful*, so it *doesn't stray away into greed*, since all of its *basic needs* are well known to be *well met, already, thankfully fulfilled*, in and by *God's Very Own Generous Love*.

Still, underneath all of our naïve, yet evil, *thanklessness*, at *being created in God's Image at the peak of His creation, without anything we brought by ourselves*, there was our *irrational self-idolatry* and our *unbearably blind gluttony* that could never be gratified, *as such*, for anyone's *truly true, good*.

We tried to *counterfeit* what God had lovingly created for our benefit. In *self-centered* attempts to "improve" on God's design, lovingly created in *His Image* for *our very best* lives with each other, with Him, we so *foolishly, so selfishly, defied* God and *tried* to "deify" us. Our *sin* was so *stupidly*, our *spiritual suicide*, as *sin and stupidity* are *soulmates*. And, *we all* are their *illegitimate offspring*. *Originally made in God's Image for our very best life with Him, we're self-spoiled brats, self-soiled by our own stupid sinfulness*.

Ever since Eden, we're *all* still so very tempted to *repeat* those sins of our ancient ancestors, *by our very own ingratitude and greed*. Thus, we've all experienced a *gnawing sense of emptiness* throughout all of history, and on into *our very own* lifetime, these days, given the fact that, *we're all led*

by *our own stupid fantasies* instead of *by God's sacred facts*. Humanity so *readily* turns our *self-righteous* backs on our Creator, the Giver of All Good. And *that* leads us into *lives of estranged self-centeredness* in *irrationally deadly fantasies* down to today, even to *this very hour*, into *all of our most relevant*, yet *irreverently rejected*, meeting of *our very truest, basic* needs.

So, we can see for ourselves that, that 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Covet", was no *mere afterthought* for simply, superficially, rounding up the number of Commandments to a *neat 10*. It's a *crucial summation* and *necessary reminder* of the *origin* of *all of our temptations to sin* that led, and still lead, to the *deadliest* of deaths, in our *self-centered ingratitude*, thus, to our *chronic greed*. *That's what all of our unfulfilled coveting is all about*.

This can all be discussed in *religious* terms *and* in *psychological* terms. Biblically, theologically, Christians have various understandings of Genesis and its account of The Fall, but *all accounts agree* it's about our *humanity's attempts* to have it *all go our way*, regardless of *God's Way of Wisdom and Love*. We try to cope with our sinful failures and guilt by *making up flimsy excuses for ourselves* and by *blaming others*, and even by *blaming God*. But *self-righteousness can't succeed* by so *ravenously sucking on itself!*

In *stubbornly clinging to our own "self-righteousness"*, we turn our backs on *True Righteousness*. *No self-righteousness works!* It's *never worked!* It'll *never work!* It *can't work!* Get *woke, for real!* Wake *up!* Repent! We must be *truly*, thus, *eternally, redeemed*, by God's gracious Love in Christ's *substitutionary atonement* for *all of our very own filthy, terminally deadly, unrighteous self-righteousness*. *This is The Answer to our basic problem*.

*Psychological* terms describe and address *symptoms of ingratitude and greed* in our *gnawing awareness* of our *not measuring up* in our God-gifted lives. Some of this is seen in, e.g., narcissistic personality disorder with its characteristic symptoms of *exaggeratedly self-centered posturing of its own importance along with low self-esteem and lack of empathy*. But *all of our everyday* sense that there's *really something so very wrong with us*, points ultimately, to *what's so very wrong with us all*. We conjure up our *attention-seeking entitlement schemes* to try to *cope with*, and *escape from*, our daily *anxieties* in paranoia, jealousy, coveting, and abandonment bodings that always stir up our sense of *inferiority*, not to mention our very much deeper awareness of *our sins* against God and against one another.

I imagine, though, that, most clinicians would likely *never ever think of Paul's* wisely urging a turning to our Creator's loving Presence in *prayer*, as *the truly effective response* to symptoms of *distractingly low self-esteem*.

Thankfully, *valid testimonies* give *real evidence* of *prayer's true power* in communion with God, converting *irrationality* into *faith in God's Reality* for *our redemption by our Heavenly Father, Christ Jesus and God's Holy Spirit*.

Moreover, *psychiatric treatments* for problems of *low self-esteem* can get *too dependent* on "quick fix" *prescription drugs* that *fail to really challenge irrational cognitions*. So, there's a *failure* to get to the *underlying root* of the problem. If unable to *afford* psychiatric treatment, the troubled get *hooked* on *dope* that's always available from other dopes in the streets. *And that's* where a "fix" that *fixes nothing*, is already "the-fix-that's-in", *i.e.*, it's *rigged*.

Whether *professionally prescribed* or *peddled by street pushers*, *no drug*, including allegedly "spiritual" drugs, *e.g.*, LSD or "acid" and *psychedelics* of New Age "hippies", *points to God's Truth*. The *crack* craze was followed by *meth* and "ecstasy", foolishly so-called, but *none* of it *matched* the addicts' *fantasies*, let alone, solved *their deepest needs underneath their miseries*.

Today, tons of fentanyl, 50 times more addictive than heroin, are pushed across our insanely open southern border by Mexican drug cartels. But, as *powerful* as it is, its *sought-for effect* lasts *less than an hour*, before addicts need more "Freddy" to escape the effects of *withdrawal*. "Freddy's fix" *fixes nothing*, so addicts' *fundamental problems* turn into multiple ODs, day in and day out, and throughout each and every night. In urban centers, *open-air drug markets'* Xylazine, "tranq", "enhances" heroin, cocaine and fentanyl for those locations' catered, but slumped-over, and soon expiring, addicts.

Sadly, "harm-reduction advocates" push *politically correct* "social justice and bodily autonomy" *excuses* that, all addicts *have a "right" to ingest what they like*, for it's *their choice* and it *shouldn't* be *interfered* with or *negatively judged*. The NYC Health Department's woke posters even *pamper* addicts: "Don't be ashamed you are using. *Be empowered* you are using *safely*." Safely? Last year, America had yet another *record number of overdose deaths from fentanyl* and research finds that we're heading to *outnumber that number this year*. While *rationalizations* of addicts and their reckless enablers *aren't* passing away, the *addicts, themselves*, are passing away, with no signs of anything changing for anybody's really true good.

Legal weed in the Big Apple is, reportedly, turning more employees into zombies of incompetence. It's said, we're "a pot-pickled city." It *can get far worse*. Studies are finding that smoking weed can lead to *schizophrenia*.

A recent "health" craze for *self-indulgence* for more *financially privileged complainers* turns to a *horse tranquilizer* that gets injected during "ketamine journeys" for *hallucinations* (intended *and unintended*) with guided music *and* tub-soaking *and* facials *and* hemp-infused massages. But all this thin-skinned, skin-deep, and skin-pricked *coddling* for *self-catering*, reinforces

*much deeper problems and solves absolutely nothing. Mis-prescribed solutions for mis-diagnosed problems are bound to get one “tripped up” on one’s very first step on one’s very first “trip” into the delusional lands with “wonk”. Trips last less than an hour, but the seekers are all still stuck.*

*For all who can’t afford such “luxuries”, there’s ready access to the self-injected street drugs on so many street corners in any big city. But, on that day or that night, it might be that addict’s last “fix”, even if that’s not what he or she intended. Such unintended side effects are common in irrationality. Only in, and by, God’s Way, are unexpected “side effects” causes for true gratitude, true satisfaction and eternal joy that truly meets all one’s needs.*

*But the self-centered fail to look to The Triune God for help, as they’re so busily hatching their own “higher powers” in their own self-inflated trinities of “Me, Myself and I”, while others focus on the “Me” part, piously repeating it thrice, as “Me, Me, Me”. Since it’s all of their own contrivance, they can’t count on either version, so, they’re all still “stuck” in themselves, and that’s no comfort at all. Yet God’s Own graciously reliable clues all remain viable and available. Their dissatisfaction, itself, is a useful clue. Contrived “self-affirmation” is impossible for any contriver to buy into, since it’s based in that contriver’s own brain’s disturbingly, still defensive, mess of “myself”.*

*One always sees what one’s trying to cover up, else why keep on trying to cover it up! It’s why this task is always so troubling to self-assigned task masters, who keep fearing exposure of what they’re trying to mask, but can’t, as it’s still seen by the masker who tries, so desperately, frustratingly, to mask it from others, but this very effort at “masking”, rips off that mask in the masked-one’s false face, and this false witness is left there stark naked.*

*Extrapolating from one’s own sense of “me”, one assumes that others are aware of my insecure version of “me”. But such egotism makes no sense. Sitting in solitary confinement in one’s incarceration “cell” of a brain, while insecurely surrounded by one’s own ego-centrally interpreted brain cells’ contents of “me”, leads to misleading meanings of one’s own sense of self and all others. Each one’s “self” is an existential mess in one’s own mind, but it’s always self-defensively postured for public viewing.*

*So, in all of this farce, one’s very own “me” stays stuck as one’s very own troublingly experienced “me” in one’s very own brain cells, as one so very foolishly assumes all others can peek in on my “me” as I see my “me” in my own brain cells. What total nonsense! No one’s “me” is in another’s brain cells! No one sees another’s brain’s “me” inside one’s own brain cells!*

*Besides, others are far too troublingly preoccupied, sitting alone in their own brain’s cell of isolation, with their own versions of self and all others. If*

*others think their version of “you” is better in some way, than their version of self, they’ll try to fabricate “faults” about “you”, in self-defense. But this won’t do for them, since they’re so well aware that their “fault finding” is their own attempt to cover-up what’s in their own brain cells that they can’t hide from themselves, so they’re still stuck in their own sense of inferiority. Thus, they keep tripping over their own sense of self, as inferior to their sense of another. Nothing is gained by them, for all on their own, they can’t buy the lie they’ve defensively-fabricated about their troubling version of you, nor can they get rid of their experientially troubling version of self, try as they do, through every single day of their self-centeredly insecure life.*

*It’s all so symptomatic of our fallen humanity’s sin from the start: “It’s never my fault, it’s always the fault of somebody else!” That ancient alibi defeats itself, for the first to know it’s an alibi, is the alibi’s asinine author.*

*Aware that, what’s in our brain cells, and what’s in all others’ brain cells, is each brain’s own self-centered versions and perversions, can free us from reinforcing our own isolating sense of inferiority in contrast to our projected sense of another’s superiority. All this irrational contrasting is foolishly self-inflicted fiction that a rational analysis and some frankly honest and grateful thanksgiving for God’s Grace and God’s Peace, can clear up for our getting on with our truly worthy assignments for our gifted, yet limited, lifetime here, for our own understanding for our earthly pilgrimage in gratitude to God. He knows us, and He loves us, far more deeply than we can possibly know or even imagine.*

*Still, sadly, many aim no higher, for a “higher power”, than a pop star or a politician. Such idol worship is done for approval from their own comrades or to avoid disapproval from their own comrades. So, in all of it, there’s a fruitless search for approval and unaddressed issues over one’s sense of insecurity, that needs to be so honestly addressed, and truly resolved at a far, far Deeper level, and with a far, far Higher Authority in our perspective.*

*And remember, if we get “compliments”, these can be but the bait of one who’s fishing for a compliment in return -- so, the focus might be on the one who initiates the exchange. A compliment in return, may complement this exchange, yet all self-doubts remain. We’re all so truly in need of so much deeper assurance. We’re all in need of God’s blessed assurance in Jesus.*

*Only God gives us unconditional Love with no fleshly, selfishly-motivated quid pro quo, for God is Love, Himself, and, in His Incarnate Son, He went to a cruel crucifixion for our salvation from all of our sin and all of its deadly*

consequences. *Divine Affirmation* is what all need to know and receive, in the Greatest Love ever given -- God's Self-sacrificing Love in Christ Jesus.

But that's what increasing numbers of people in our increasingly secular society are trending, more and more, to ignore, or, not even to know about. Thus, they're still *stubbornly ignorant* and *hopelessly depressed*, and it's all missed by them, as "meaningless", in all of their panicked defensiveness.

In irrationally seeking *affirmation*, worrywarts uncomfortably put their own pretended self, on "center stage", yet, *inside their* brains, their versions of self are experienced as "not enough", so they very irrationally assume, that, that's how others see them, too. Well, of course, none of us is as we were created to be, for, all on our own, we've rejected who we were meant and made to be.

Still, our own versions of us exist in our brain's cells, not in others' brain cells. In some ways, that can be comforting; but in other ways, it can also be disappointing. Whatever one thinks of one's self, is always in solitary confinement away from all others, who, also, are in the same sort of solitary confinement within their own brain's sense of self. We don't see others as they see themselves and none see us as we see ourselves.

God, alone, sees what's inside each one's brain's cells, and He is lovingly willing and able to bring each one, so lovingly created in His Image, yet fallen, back into His purpose for each person's fullest human fulfillment in that blessedly gifted Image of God. God is the One and Only, that truly knows all about our own versions of ourselves and His Own Intension for our very best. He created us in His Image and, in spite of our rejection of Him, He came into this world in Jesus, to live a sinless life on our behalf, to take all of our sins onto Himself, to pay the penalty for all our sins, so that we might finally be reunited with Him for our eternal life with Him, in Christ.

Each one's self-centered diagnosis can be inaccurate, but each one's underlying awareness that there's something so very wrong with me, is authentic, i.e., in biblical terminology, I'm a fallen creation of God and I need to be redeemed. Redemption is found only through God's Love, by Jesus' sinless life, in our stead, in his death on the cross, in our stead, and in his resurrection, in our stead, for our eternal restoration to Life Eternal.

Without this Good News, while trying to cope all on our own with all the disturbing evidence that something's so terribly wrong with me, some turn to pessimism and wind up in constant disgruntlement, while others try to be optimistic and wind up in constant disappointment. It's only as a realist that one is ready for Reality in a grateful reception of God's gift of Regeneration.



It's only *in communication with God* on one's concerns over one's sense of oneself, that one can, in one's own mind and heart, be *assured* of being *truly known, deeper than one intended to be known, and so very far more deeply loved*, than one, in *this world*, can ever *know* or can even *imagine*.

Keeping this *biblical perspective* in mind and heart, defends us from our *misunderstanding* what in *this world* is going on in both our *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* lives, and what in *this universe and in all behind it and beyond it*, is going on *in all of God's Omniscient and Eternal Love* for us all.

Ever since Eden, humanity has been plagued by *me against you and us against them*, but *actually*, it's, *all of us*, against *God*, and His Will for us all.

We *covet* what we *imagine* others *have*, that we *don't have*. Thus, we *mislead* us into *coveting* what we *erroneously* think *they have*. But *they don't have* the *unmixed bag they sought*; they *have* a *mixed-bag* that they *caught*. They *don't have* what we *covet* of *theirs*, for, *what we covet* is *our own unmixed-bag fantasy* that's *unavailable* to *anybody* in this fallen world.

*Coveting them, then detesting them*, we miss what they also *missed, i.e.*, a *coveted daydream* of what *they'd wanted, via fantasy*, but now, also *via fantasy*, think *they missed-out on getting*. We do it, too. What we *wish for, isn't* what we *get*. But what we more basically *miss getting* is *the fact* that, all *wishful-thinking* ignores *reality*, it's *irrational* and, thus, *it sets us up for disappointment, even depression*, over "what" we *didn't get*, thus, *resent not getting* -- our own fiction's *fantasy*. Do we, yet, not *get even our own mistakenly wishful* thinking? What we *wish for* in this fallen old world is an *unmixed bag*; what we *get* in this fallen old world is a *mixed-bag*. *Get it?* It's hard to "*get it*", given *this fallen old world*. But it's worth getting *this*, for it can soften, even eliminate, *disappointment* that's *inherent in all fantasies*.

Still, by God's Will in God's Love in Christ, we finally and eternally, will be with Him in a *completely unmixed life* of God's Love as He intended for us. Alas, *thank God, God is God*, and without God, *nothing at all would ever have been, not even our ungratefully disgruntled whining in foolishly deadly rejection of God's goodwill for us all*. But God came by, to lovingly sacrifice Himself, to *undo all of our own evil*, and *save us from us*, created and then redeemed in His Image, for our Eternal Life with Him. *The only unmixed life is Eternal Life in God's Nearest Presence Forever*.

Meanwhile, we don't know *what in the heck* we're all talking about *to ourselves*, in all our *egotism in arrogance* and *avarice* at the root of all our clamoring for the *fantasied "fabulous"*, but *factually fictional*. Yet, this all exposes the *root* of our humanity's *original sin* -- to so very *foolishly* try to

*replace God with us, and so foolishly try to replace God's world with our world's way, and so foolishly try to replace all others with our own versions of what they should be -- for us. But, even if one could displace God and God's Way and all others, with one's own self-centered, thus lonely, self-isolating "me, me, me", wouldn't one be in the epitome of a pit of lonely isolation, a cell of one's very own making in selfish ignorance and stupid misjudgment, with no exit? It's time to cancel fantasyland's credit card.*

*Paul pointed to God's Peace as The True Good for all. Sadly, it's been repeatedly rejected by stubborn humanity's virtue-signaling of our own self-approval, as we've nervously joined forces to cast aspersion on each other, to try to believe, against all evidence to the contrary, that, we're superior to all of "them", "the others". But none of this irrational defensiveness works, since, of course, it can't work! It's all based in "solutions" that we ourselves can't really believe, for we, the instigators of our own lies, see right through them. All of it's the opposite of God's gifted Peace to which Paul points us.*

*Now, let's not misunderstand Paul's wise advice about our fears or any other feelings. He's not commanding us to never feel fear, since fear and all other feelings are automatic emotional results from whatever we think, what we're telling ourselves and what we're buying into. It's expectation of oncoming danger that sets us up for our feelings of fear. Our thoughts do govern our feelings. So, we can get rid of troubling feelings by identifying what we're thinking, rationally challenge that interpretation, and change our minds by bringing our thoughts into line with the knowable facts, rational thinking and with what accords with a truly closer relationship with our Self-sacrificing and risen Savior and our Heavenly Father's Loving Presence in His Holy Spirit.*

*In cases of fear, for instance, Paul isn't suggesting some silly whistling in the dark. Instead of a "shortcut", that would be a dead-end. But in God's Love, we're invited into the brighter light of mindful gratitude, open to God's eternally reliable, compassionately corrective replies to all of what we might worry about if we continued to squat inside our blurred self-centeredness.*

*Open to His Loving Focus as our focus, we get to live with Him, in our daily lives with others, as pilgrims, assuredly and comfortably yoked with Christ, on our Way to our Heavenly Home, with Him, forever. (Matt 11:29)*

*What comforting reassurance Paul's appeal truly is! Realistically faithful commitment to Christ provides our well-founded emotional life, leading into consequences beyond expectation, following truest spiritual assumptions in faith and cognitions with their accompanying, comforting emotions, into our*

*continuingly faithful, obedient sojourn in joy and fruitful living by our daily Faith in God, our Father, Christ, our Savior, and the Holy Spirit's Presence!*

Well, some of us in EC were among the first members of The City Church of New York City. We well recall our beloved founding pastor, R. Maurice Boyd, as he, in echoing Paul's reassurance, faithfully reassured us, in his own rhythmic Irish brogue: "Don't be afraid. You are God's child in your Father's world. He will uphold you with His power and keep you safe in His love. He will whisper in the deep night that all is well. He will bring you at last to the Land of Promise, to the Country of the Great King." He'd follow this reassurance with a prayer: "Savior Christ: Thou hast taught us that on our life's voyage, we need not be afraid, for all seas are the seas of God, and if we sink, we sink but deeper into Him. Today, let us feel Thy winds and lift our sails and steer forth on a New Morning, with courage and hope renewed, caroling free, singing our songs of God."

The 20th-Century's "Dean of Black Preachers", Gardner C. Taylor, who we, in EC also knew and loved from *his own* participation at City Church, reflected Paul's counsel when he advised in his turn: "Be confident that God will accept whatever we lift up before Him, and He will make it serve His purpose and our good." *All is always up to Our Father in Heaven, the One True Father.* In praying the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, we ask for our Father's reign *to come on earth, as it is in Heaven.* We ask for *basic* daily needs, for forgiveness as we've forgiven others, and that, we be led away from all of our own evil temptations. (Matt 6:9-13)

EC's dear friend and one of EC's earliest keynoters, Rosalind Rinker, had been a missionary to China and, later, she was on IVCF staff. Best known for her helpful insights on *prayer*, she called prayer, "a dialogue between two persons who love each other". With this comforting awareness, she taught that: "Prayer's function is to set God at the center of our attention."

Then, we *experience* that our isolating, obsessive worrying, as such, *gets set aside*, for we're now *focusing on our relationship with God, within God's Sovereign Love.* Our prayer life is our *personally experiential* reminder of *God's Presence*, though He's *unseen*. As the writer to Hebrews said, with reference to Moses' *faith*, "he endured others' hostility without fear, *while keeping his eyes on the One Who is invisible.*" (Heb 11:27) We see so very much clearer *by faith in God* than we ever do see *by our eyesight* alone.

In 2006, the Centenary of Rosalind Rinker's birth, and four years after her Homegoing, *Christianity Today* honored Ros for her *Prayer: Conversing*

*with God.* CT called it, “the most influential book with evangelicals over the past fifty years.”

Facing papistical *persecution*, and very possibly, *execution*, for leading his *biblically-based* Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther is said to have *displaced his anxiety with his confidence in God*, as he advised all of his Protestants to do. Whimsically, yet, *wholeheartedly*, and in *serious faith*, Luther then remarked: “Pray, and let God worry.” Indeed, if *our* worry is in the Mighty Mind and Loving Heart of God, what’s there for *us* to *worry about*?

Still, from all of our own internal experiences and from our observing the experiences of those around us, we’re all familiar with *emotions of anxiety*. They’re *not pleasant* feelings! But they’re *subject to a fuller context in our closer relationship with God*, our Loving Creator and Redeemer. So, these difficulties don’t need to *last*, since, *as soon as we reset our sights on God*, we see so much more clearly that we’re *already in His Sight*. What could be of more *reassuring comfort* than our *given awareness* of God’s *abiding awareness and love for us*, in all of our necessarily deepest needs for Him?

Well, if you’ve been in psychotherapy with me, or read what I’ve written on *anxiety* (e.g., at EC’s website) you know, as I’ve said for decades, and as I’m repeating the facts here, that *underneath* all of our own *anxieties* are danger-drenched *thoughts, beliefs, and forecasts that scare us into anxiety*.

No one fears the *past*, except what’s feared as *bad consequences from our past, in our future*. Even in that, what’s *feared* is again, an *imaginary future*. What we *tell* ourselves about *that future*, *scares us*, even as we well know, we’re *no good at fortune telling* -- otherwise, we’d all be very wealthy investors instead of stupid guessers. So, we really *do know* that we really *don’t know* the future, *except that, God, our Lord and Savior, will still be with us in that future*. So, why are we frightening ourselves by buying into notions that we, somehow, “know” about a *fearful future* on the *bases* of our *fantasies*? We do it, in spite of knowing better, since, in troubled lives, we tend to frighten ourselves into *so foolishly grasping at straws*.

Instead, how about grasping onto the assuringly steady Hand of God, by *faith* in Him, for His Providence, Love, Forgiveness, and Peace that we all need in our daily *faith* life *now*, before it will all be our *experience* in ways we’ve not yet known, in God’s Most Graciously Everlasting Peace.

That’s what was so comforting to Paul when he wrote, with insight, to the Christians in Corinth: “For *now*, we see only a *reflection* as in a mirror; *then*, we shall see *face to face*. *Now*, I know *in part*, *then* I shall know *fully*, even

as I am *fully* known.” (1 Cor 13:12). In Paul’s day, mirrors weren’t as *clear* as mirrors today, but even *now*, mirrors get it all *backwards*. So, whether then or now, *behind all mirrors, God’s Plans are unfolding in His Time and Truth.*

Paul’s pointing to *peace* was *God’s Peace*, not a *pretended peace*, of *our devising*. It’s *not* Norman Vincent Peale’s *boast* for “Positive Thinking” *nor* some sort of *spin* on Robert Schuller’s “Possibility Thinking” *nor faith* in that multimillionaire Joel Osteen’s “prosperity gospel”. Even a *Unitarian*, Adlai Stevenson, Democrats’ Presidential candidate who *lost* in Ike’s ‘52 and ‘56 sweeping victories, quipped, “I find the Apostle Paul *appealing*, but Peale *appalling*”. Still, as a *Unitarian*, Adlai ignored *Paul’s profoundly Trinitarian Truth*: “*God was in Christ*, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting *our sins against us.*” (2 Cor 5:19)

Did Adlai lose his two races to Ike by *spurning* Peale’s “positive thinking”? Probably, *not*. Did Trump lose his 2021 race by *strutting* Peale’s “positive thinking”? Perhaps, so. He and his family were fed Peale’s *pitch* of *self-centricity* for years in *their* pew at Peale’s liberal Marble Collegiate Church.

Instead of *self-obsessing* in *allegedly* “positive thinking” or in an *alleged* “power of *possibility* thinking” or in pangs for lots of *financial* “security” from “prosperity gospels” belched-up from churning stomachs into greed for *stuff* that’s *never enough*, Paul wisely counsels us all to talk about all of our very own *anxieties* and *whatever else* with God, our Loving Creator, our Savior and our Lord, *then, receive* God’s most significant responses from His Own Eternal Wisdom and Eternal Love. God, of course, *already knows* all of our needs, but *our praying* does, indeed, *reinforce our awareness* that *God is here with us*, and *we’re in His Sight and so comforted by His Own Loving Presence!*

Paul alludes to an unspecified *hardship* that he says *he* “was *given* in order to keep me from becoming conceited.” He called it, his “thorn in the flesh”. (2 Cor 12:7-9) We don’t know *what* it was. Paul *knew it*, quite well. There may be something or other in each one of *our* lives that’s particularly *difficult*. We, too, can count on God to be Present with us in *whatever it is*.

Paul knew, too, that, the more we *boast of self*, the more we *mislead* and *scare* ourselves, since we see straight through all of our own silly swagger. But, in Paul’s recalling God’s revelation and in his continually turning to God, he *knew* that *weaknesses* turn into *strengths* by our *trusting* in God’s Most Powerful Providence and God’s Everlasting Love, even though Paul had not always done so. Indeed, as we know, he’d *opposed* the Gospel and Christians, until he *accepted* the Gospel and *preached its Good News*.

Before Paul's conversion to Christ, and along with fellow Jews of his day, he'd *zealously bent himself against* Jesus and *against all* Jesus' followers. Then, so very suddenly, The Ascended Christ Jesus, Himself, *interrupted this religiously headstrong* Paul, right there in his own hostile tracks, on his *self-righteous* trek to Damascus to persecute still more of Jesus' followers, -- even in spite of Paul's having studied under the wise Gamaliel's tutelage against *naïve, simple-minded know-it-alls*, as Paul was so acting-out, on his own allegedly "sanctimonious mission" to *persecute more Christians*.

Well, Paul was about to learn *Who his Target truly* was. (Acts 9) On his way into Damascus to do more of his dirty deeds against the Christians, he *suddenly heard* a Loud Voice calling to *him from High Above!* He, then and there, fell down to the ground, *blinded* and *disoriented* in all his *dreadful anxiety*, mixed with his *absolute Awe*. *Whose Voice, is this Voice??*

*This* was The Voice of the One that Paul was so very ruthlessly bent on preventing folks from *receiving, knowing* and *following*. This was *The Very Voice of Christ, Himself*, informing Paul that *his despised Target* was *not* Christ's followers, but *Christ, The Messiah, Himself, Risen, Ascended Son of The Living God!* *This is The One* they worshipped, *The One*, Paul would now, in spite of his *willed blindness*, as his *unwilling eyes* were *opening*, he himself, would *worship, willingly, realistically* and *rightly!* (Acts 9) In the aftermath of this blindsided Encounter, Paul began to *understand clearly* and to *know* Christ so *truly* and to *testify* for *God Incarnate, Resurrected, Ascended, and Coming Again*, for the rest of his life *here* on earth.

For this dedication to Christ, Paul, himself, would be persecuted by *other anti-Christian* religionists, and, at last he'd be *martyred* by pagan Roman authorities, but not before he'd already written his testimonies *for Christ* in his letters to Christian assemblies. And, these letters, preserved in the New Testament and translated into the languages of people all around the world, have been true blessings to so many millions of souls ever since.

Jesus had comforted his earliest disciples as they were targeted by fellow Jews who rejected Him and his disciples, as He's comforted all Christians who've suffered persecution from *alleged* "Christians", Jews, Islamists, Hindus, Nazis, Marxists, indigenous pagan tribes, *et al*, throughout these twenty centuries, down to today's *self-righteously anti-Christian secularists*, the "politically-correct" *modernist* and *postmodernist clergy* in the "mainline" churches and by all who claim to be "woke", though they all *missed*, "The Great Awakening" with all of its *awakening blessings* of God's Truly Good News. Sadly, the *politically correct* "woke" settle for a *pointlessly bad joke*.

We recall Jesus' disciple, John, passing on to us, Jesus' *encouragement*, assuring all of *them and us*, as recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of his Gospel: "Jesus said, '*Don't let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's House, are many dwellings; if this were not so, would I have told you I'm going there to prepare a place for you? As I'm going there to prepare a place for you, I'll come back, to take you to be there, with Me, so that you may be where I Am. You know the way to where I'm going.*' Thomas interrupted, 'Lord, we *don't* know *where* you're going, so *how* can we know the *way*?' Jesus replied, '*I Am, The Way, The Truth and The Life. No one comes to The Father except through Me. If you truly know Me, you'll also know My Father. From now on, you do know Him; for you have seen Him.*'

Philip asked: 'Lord, *show us The Father, and that will be enough for us.*'

Jesus answered him: 'Don't you *know Me, Philip? Even after I've been with you for such a long while? Anyone who has seen Me, has seen The Father. So, how can you ask, 'Show us The Father'? Don't you believe that I Am in The Father and The Father is in Me? The words I say to you, I don't speak on my own authority. It's The Father, living in Me Who's doing His work. Believe Me when I say, I Am in The Father and The Father is in Me; or, at least, see the evidence in My works, themselves. Very truly I'm telling you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I've been doing, and will do even greater things than these, for I Am going to The Father. And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in The Son. If you ask for anything, by My authority, I will do it.'*" (John 14)

*Human anxiety* is as ancient as the *fearful guilt* that was *felt after the first sinful loss of innocence*, when the first folks who were so lovingly made in God's image, so *very deliberately disobeyed* their loving Creator in Eden, *those many thousands of years ago*, though we don't know exactly *when* it was that *God created our very own ancestors in His Image*, as His earth evolved under His design and in His loving purpose for humanity's prime placement in and over all of the rest of creation for its benefit and ours.

As Christ urged his followers to *do*, some 2,000 years ago, *we're called to do today*. We're *privileged* to ask, in *His Name, i.e., by His Authority*, to be *forgiven* for *our* sins and to be *helped* to do whatever, by *His Wise Will*, is right and glorifies The Father, in The Son, knowing that this will be done for us, according to God's Truth and Love. *Our part* is to *ask, by faith*, out of our *need* and out of our trust in Him, while *His part*, is to *answer* out of His Omniscience and Good Will and Good Purpose for our truest Peace.

Through these 2,000 years of Christian history, our fellow Christians have faced various challenges in life, according to God's Love and Eternal Truth, and we, too, *now* get to face *our* challenges *today*, according to God's Love and Eternal Truth. And, of course, God is *here, with us*, too, through it all.

To the Thessalonian Christians of *his* day, Paul counseled, most wisely: "*Pray without ceasing.*" (I Thess 5:17) That's *praying, as a habit of being*, that can *keep us always so thankfully mindful* of God's *Peace*, counting on God's *Presence* to be *with us*, through whatever it is that we're called to go through and attend to, in our daily awareness of Him and His Eternal Love and Eternal Truth, that's *always so available and accessible* for our lives' truest encouragement. *Praying without ceasing is an intrinsic privilege* in our daily lives as yokefellows alongside Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

Well, Joseph Scriven was a faithfully compassionate Christian in Dublin, Ireland. He migrated to Canada in 1845, when he was 25, and his painful challenges came with him as he met with more of such, here, though it was *through* all of these very difficult experiences that he would be able to write his most encouraging poem, "Pray Without Ceasing", as he so thankfully remembered to always keep Paul's wise counsel in mind. (I Thess 5:17)

The drowning death of his bride-to-be, on the day before their wedding, was just one of his life's very many encounters with *real grief and sorrow*. His reliable *prayer life* kept him in constant touch with God's *reassuring Peace* in Christ, throughout all of *his life's very many difficult challenges*.

And, *what very worthwhile exclamatory affirmations of praise* Scriven *did give us*, when he wrote this poem, "Pray Without Ceasing"! Here's what he wrote: "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear! All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer! Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a Friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer. Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer, in His arms He'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there."

Such was *his Christian faith's faithful testimony throughout all of his own life's daily challenges!* Thank God, he wrote it all down, for our instruction!



His poem was later set to music by Charles C. Converse, an American attorney and hymn-tune composer. Then, the poem was *sung together*, as Christians encouraged *one another*, while singing this poem's great truth.

In 1886, during Scriven's final illness at Port Hope, on Lake Ontario, a visitor noticed a manuscript of this original poem on the table beside them. He asked Scriven if *he'd* written it. Scriven replied that, *he and the Lord had written it together*. What a most appropriate reply for *whatever* one ever writes, or ever says, that's *in truest accord* with Holy Scripture!

As Scriven so frankly *took note of our weaknesses, more importantly*, he reminded us that, "*Jesus knows our every weakness*", and *He* is our Loving Savior and our True Refuge. Scriven, also, so wisely recalled what Jesus asked us all to *do*: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me." (John 14:1) Thus, he urges us to, "*Take [whatever is troubling us] to the Lord, in prayer.*" He knew from his own many years of *personal* experience with *his own sin and grief*, that *it is truly a very real privilege, and a very real relief*, to take *all of our burdens to God and leave them all, right there, with Him*, in His Deepest Love, in His Fullest Wisdom, and in His Eternal Care!

In 1919, Scriven's *earliest manuscript* of, "Pray Without Ceasing", signed by him, was located. In addition to his familiar verses, a fourth verse that's still not often included in printed hymnals, appropriately asks and advises: "Are we cold and unbelieving, cumbered with a load of care? Here, the Lord is still our refuge: Take it to the Lord in prayer." This was surely *his own personal experience* when *he*, too, did as *we* do -- fail to turn to God in prayer. It makes *no* sense to *fail to turn to God* through *all* of our needs!

In Scriven's time, this poem was said to be, "*beyond question, the best-known piece of Canadian literature!*" *Imagine that!* This *couldn't* be said to be the case for a *Jesus-centered anything today*, either up in Canada or in America or in *any* country. It's far too *unforgivably* "un-woke" for any *self-righteously secularized society, postmodernist theology, politically correct* points of view and for all of our overly, overtly *self-obsessive whining* over everything, without any thought of taking *anything at all to Jesus, in prayer*.

Yet, in recalling the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, in evangelical churches, *some* of us sang Scriven's poem as a hymn in Sunday School, as I did, if not in a more formal Sunday worship service. After those days, came all of the ear-splitting *performance-worship* in darkened auditoriums of amplified boombox "Jesus Rock", with flashing spotlights that all *distracted* from who Jesus really *is*.

But, did *you* know, or would *you* now even be able to *believe it*, that, back in 1951, when I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the *very most popular secular* singers,

*Bing Crosby*, then, in 1959, a year before my college graduation, *Rosemary Clooney*, each sang these words of Scriven's on their own LPs. So did the *spiritually-attuned* Merle Haggard, Glen Campbell, Alan Jackson, Odetta, Aretha Franklin, Al Green, Ella Fitzgerald, Loretta Lynn, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Mahalia Jackson, James Cleveland, The Mighty Clouds of Joy, *et al.*

Who would you think might *record* this *inspiring Christ-centered* hymn in our "woke" and "politically correct" 21<sup>st</sup>-Century as "mainstream" media and entertainment monopolies *ignore* and even openly *mock*, those who *identify as committed disciples of Jesus*? Well, *remember*, Jesus *prepared us* to be ready for *this world's* opposition and hate. As Jesus put it: "If they hated me, they'll hate you, too." (John 15:18) He promised us: "In *this world* you *will* have trouble, but *take heart*, I have *defeated this world*." (John 16:33)

Our *self-righteously-defensive, secularist* era, unwittingly reveals our own *need* for the *reassuring message* of Scriven's words to *cope* with all of the confusion, conflict, and contentiously *anti-Christian bias* that's at an all-time high here in America. Humanity's gnawing hunger-pangs for the *truest of meaning*, are all on public display in today's generation's *irrational "self-actualization"*, seeking solutions to disappointment and anxiety from *drugs*, from "*mentions*" on personal social media, or in socially-contagious "*fixes*" in "*solutions*" of middle-school trans-gendering and in *anything else but*, any *truly dedicated life of serious, faithfully Christ-centered discipleship*.

It's reported that *attacks on churches and Christian institutions* in America are at an *all-time high*. And, for both *virtue-signaling sake* and for their own *continued employment*, "mainline" liberal Protestant clergy must be careful not to annoy their dwindling congregations with a bit of *politically incorrect* preaching, so they must *avoid a truly biblically-based Jesus, Savior from sin, God Incarnate*, and all *truly biblically-based, Gospel-preaching* that would *offend* those who push *Interfaith* amalgamations of *pious* political-correctness and *supposedly "broadminded inclusion"* while opposing all of their *distastefully "narrow-minded" caricatures* of "Fundamentalism".

Talk about "*self-righteousness*" on *public display* in all of its *very agitated opposition against evangelically biblical theology* and all its *hyperventilating support for "political correctness"*! It's *so-oddly, so-sadly, pumped up* as "mainline" Christianity. But it *can't* be said that, Jesus gave us no clue that this was what we *could and should* expect, when it comes to *this world's propaganda against Jesus, as deconstructed, redefined, to suit, "itself"*.

We in EC, however, are given inspiration to remind us of the *eternal truth* of God's Amazing Grace, from, e.g., Eugenia Price, evangelical author of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century best-selling inspirational Christian books and historical fiction.

She'd *been* an *atheist*, writing scripts for 1940s radio soap operas. But in 1949, on a visit to New York City to meet up with her best-friend from their West Virginia high-school days, her friend invited her to attend the Calvary Episcopal Church (where some of our NYC EC guys worship nowadays). It was *there*, on *that* Sunday morning, that Genie was quite dramatically born-again under the preaching of Calvary's faithful pastor, Sam Shoemaker.

For the rest of her life at her home on St. Simons Island in Georgia, she'd write Christian devotional books and Southern historical novels, adding her Christian insight into them. As she'd put it so well in one of her redeemed life's devotional books: "He loved enough to be the God of the poured-out life. He did not wait for us to ask him to demonstrate the extent of his love, he broke into human history to give himself as proof. To 'shed his blood'."

Well, five months after EC's public launching at The National Association of Evangelicals' 1976 convention, Genie Price wrote to me to say: "YOUR MATERIAL [*An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, 1971] IS, IN MY OPINION, ON DEAD CENTER. True, true, true. I receive so many booklets and literature on projects of one kind or another, I confess I can't read it all. But I did read yours and am more enthusiastic than these few hastily written (and poorly typed!) lines will convey. Right on, man! Jesus Christ backs you up every step of the way. From my heart (and my mind) I thank you again for sharing with me. The big need in the past has been (in my 'humble-dogmatic' opinion) God's blind people even more than homosexuals. Why set us apart in little villages anyway? Any of us?"

Yet, so many now doubt Christian faith and denounce it based on some *homophobic* preaching by Fundamentalists. It's crucial for all to set *the record straight* rather than to, fruitlessly, keep on trying to make *the same-sex-attracted "straight"*. "Ex-gay" promises were *shams*, even *scams-for-sex*, that, in effect, set up *same-sex attracted* folks to *fail*, resulting in tragic deaths among these misled, maltreated, even *erotically abused* Christians, forcing so many, and with their loved-ones -- out of all their Christian faith. "Ex-gay" efforts *never* launched *one* "ex-gay" *out of same-sex orientation*, but they did destroy many Christians who could no longer trust their *antigay* mentors. The remaining "ex-gay" movement leaders *finally did close down the entire "ex-gay" fiasco*. But, so very sadly, some in that disgraced effort had already *pushed* their *sexually molested* and *demoralized* victims *out of all of their conservative church connections*. Using misinterpreted Bible verses against one's own ignorantly pet peeves is never a right thing to do.

Most people *don't realize* how many *evangelical leaders have been, for years, supportive of same-sex-attracted people*. C. S. Lewis' Belfast neighbor and *very closest friend*, from 1926 until 1963, when they both passed away, was his "first friend", as Lewis called him. That was Arthur Greeves, a devout Christian *long before* Lewis became a devout Christian. Arthur was a lifelong invalid and *a homosexual*. The two of them regularly communicated with each other from their very first meeting to the last few days of Lewis' life when Lewis wrote his last letter to his "dear Arthur", so sadly expressing his *crushing grief* in realizing that, as they *both* were now shut-ins, they'd never again *be seeing one another* in-person, in *this* world.

In 1957, Lewis advocated for the UK's Wolfenden Report's call to drop all *criminalization of private same-sex relationships*. Finally, Lewis entrusted all of his *life's papers* to a more recently met *homosexual* friend, for their *historical preservation*. And, there were noted Christians back in those days of vicious homophobia who *couldn't* afford to "come out of the closet".

Well, here's a list, in no particular order, of *recognizably evangelical leaders* who've all *agreed with EC's basic views* on homosexual matters and evangelical Christian faith -- and, many of these men and women were *with us* from our *very earliest* years in the mid-1970s.

Robert G. Rayburn, was the Founding President of the evangelical PCA's Covenant College and Seminary and a former pastor of Wheaton's College Church. As a charter subscriber to my *Homosexual Counseling Journal*, Bob attended my *HCJ* lectures on homosexuality in Kansas City on March 3, 1975, along with William T. Kirwan, professor of counseling at Covenant Seminary. I'd known Bob since meeting him in 1961 where I preached and helped lead others in founding a *biblical* Presbyterian congregation in my hometown of Youngstown, Ohio. Since that Kansas City event, Bob had wanted to talk further, in person, but either *his* busy schedule or *mine* didn't easily facilitate that. Finally, we were able to meet on November 2, 1975.

On that day, I'd spoken in the Auditorium of New York City's Lenox Hill Hospital, from 10 AM to 4PM, instructing the medical staff on effective ways to work with gay patients. That evening, I met up with Bob at his mid-town hotel and we had dinner at the old Gov'nor Restaurant near Grand Central Station, so we could follow-up on our Kansas City conversations.

When I told him that I was founding EC, he was in fullest agreement and *he* urged that it be launched during the upcoming 1976 Convention of The National Association of Evangelicals, in Washington, DC, in March. And that's exactly what we *planned*, and what we *did*. Of course, *ever after* that event, the NAE has *denied* this *truly* (if *unofficial*) historic connection to EC.

What the NAE also has never, to my knowledge, publicly acknowledged, was the fact that at *that very* convention, NAE gave Guy Charles a booth on the floor to push his “ex-gay” schtick. But he’d soon be fired by his own Pentecostal sponsors for *sexually molesting* gay young men coming to him for the “ex-gay” experience and getting, instead, what they’d not expected.

Predictably, *secular gays* were upset over *my publicly shared evangelical identity*, though they *could* have made use of my *evangelical* identity to push back against all of the *homophobic* evangelicals. But as I tell my therapy clients, to help *them avoid irrationally personalizing others’ negative opinions of them*: *Taking offense* is the story of *the ones who take offense*, not the story of *the ones about whom they take offense*.

Here’s a random roster of some of the evangelicals who’ve *affirmed* EC’s ministry: Marten H. Woudstra, Calvin Seminary OT professor, President of the Evangelical Theological Society and chair of the NIV OT translation; Paul King Jewett, Fuller Seminary systematic theology professor; David Augsburger, Fuller Seminary pastoral care professor; Val Clear, chair of Social Work at Anderson College; Clark Barshinger, chair of psychology at Trinity College (Deerfield); Larry Holben, screenwriter, *The Hiding Place*; Ray McAfee, the longtime associate pastor, song leader and A. W. Tozer’s personal prayer partner; Doris Akers, gospel singer and songwriter of “Sweet, Sweet Spirit”; Tom Hanks, Latin America Biblical Seminary OT professor; Harry R. Boer, missionary founder of a Nigerian seminary and author of *An Ember Still Glowing* (Eerdmans); RCA seminary president & OT scholar, Lester Kuypers; Hope College pastor Gerard Van Heest; Methodist Bishop, Melvin Wheatley, *Going His Way* (Fleming H. Revell); George E. Moreland, builder of Houghton College’s science department; Robert G. Bratcher, NT scholar and translator of the *Good News for Modern Man*; Robert S. Sterling-Smith, counseling director at NYC’s Calvary Baptist Church; Joel Kauffmann, *Pontius’ Puddle* creator and a Museum of the Bible associate; Westmont College philosophy professor Robert N. Wennberg, *Life in the Balance* (Eerdmans); theologian Clark H. Pinnock, *The Christian Principle* (Baker); BJU Board’s D. D. Davis and Velma Blair Davis; Calvinist counselor J. Rinzema, *The Sexual Revolution* (Eerdmans); IVCF’s National President, Steve Hayner; Steve Schimmele of IVCF; Institute for Christian Studies’ James Olthuis; Margaret Evening, *Who Walk Alone* (IVP), and many others, including major scholars who’ve contributed to the evangelical reference works such as the *Wycliffe Bible*

*Encyclopedia* (Moody Press), *The New International Commentary Series* (Eerdmans) and *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

In 1980, *Eternity* magazine noted the NIV Bible's English style consultant, Virginia R. Mollenkott and the black Pentecostal journalist and Tom Skinner Associates' editor, James S. Tinney, as two of "Fifty Evangelicals Who Influence You". Edwin H. Palmer, a Westminster Seminary professor of mine and the Executive Secretary of the NIV Bible's translation, selected Mollenkott for this work. It was also in 1980, that Mollenkott and Tinney keynoted EC's very first summer retreat up on the mountain at Kirkridge.

As already noted, Rosalind Rinker keynoted for EC, as Nancy Hardesty and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, authors of, *All We're Meant to Be* (Word) also keynoted. *Eternity* called their book, "the most significant book" of 1975.

EC keynoters have also included Calvin and Fuller Seminary ethicist Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Eerdmans); Randall Balmer, *Christianity Today* editor and ecclesiastical historian; Nicholas Wolterstorff, Calvin College professor and Yale philosopher, *Lament for a Son* (Eerdmans); Donald W. Dayton, writer on evangelical history, *Variety of American Evangelicalism* (IVP) and *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Harper Collins); Southern Baptist pastor Mahan Siler; Phyllis Hart, Fuller Seminary psychologist; Messiah College NT professor Reta Halteman Finger; Mary Kay Beall of Hope Publishing; C. S. Lewis scholar, Kay Lindskoog, C. S. *Lewis: Mere Christian* (IVP); Drew Seminary D. Min. chairman Michael J. Christensen, *C. S. Lewis on Scripture* (Word); Southern Baptist theologian Fisher Humphreys, *The Death of Christ*, (Broadman); RCA's Western Seminary D. Min. chair, Stanley Rock, *This Time Together* (Zondervan); Hope College social psychologist David G. Myers, *Social Psychology* (McGraw Hill) and *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Harper); Hope College psychology professor Jane R. Dickie; J. Harold Ellens, founding editor of The Christian Association for Psychological Studies' *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*; Ken Van Wyk at Toronto's Christian Counseling Center; Reformed philosopher, Hendrik Hart of The Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto; Pentecostal OT scholar Gerald T. Sheppard; American Scientific Affiliation's editor Walter R. Hearn, *Being a Christian in Science* (IVP); Kathy Olsen, *Silent Pain* (NavPress) with her partner, Melanie Beachy of Asbury College; Jeanne Hanson, retired TEAM missionary to Korea; Peggy and Tony Campolo; Anne Eggebroten and June S. Hagen of Evangelical Women's Caucus; Messiah College philosophy professor Jan Evans; Hope College philosopher Caroline J. Simon, *Bringing Sex into Focus* (IVP); Howard Rice, Moderator, 191<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, PC/USA, *Reformed*

*Spirituality* (Westminster); Jack Rogers, Fuller Seminary professor and Moderator of the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, PC/USA, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical* (Westminster); Wally Howard, Young Life Institute Dean and editor of *Faith at Work*; Jim Rayburn III, son of Young Life founder, Jim Rayburn, and a nephew of EC's first enthusiast, Bob Rayburn; Pat Burgin of Campus Crusade; Roy Clements, physicist, British Bible expositor and Cambridge pastor, *Faithful Living in a Faithless World* (IVP); Nelson Gonzalez, John Stott's personal researcher and World Vision consultant; Calvin College music professor, Ruth Rus; Calvin College theater professor Stephanie Sandberg; AIDS ministry's Stacey Latimer; GIFT's Theresa McClellan; Glory Tabernacle's Sandy Turnbull; Christian psychiatrist John A. Bostrom; Grammy / Dove winner, Cynthia Clawson; Dove-winning singer/songwriter, Kirk Talley ("He is Here"); blind Gospel singer/songwriter Ken Medema; Marsha Stevens-Pino ("For Those Tears I Died") and her partner Cindy Stevens-Pino; Ron Drummond as Henry Drummond; Tom Key as C. S. Lewis; Mel White, ghostwriter for Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, *et al*; Carol Ann Vaughn Cross, the faculty adviser to Samford University's gay/straight alliance; psychologists Tom and Mary Franzen Clark, *Hiding, Hurting, Healing* (Zondervan); pastor Chuck Smith, Jr.; NT scholar James V. Brownson of RCA's Western Seminary; Douglas J. Miller, Eastern Baptist ethicist; *The Other Side's* founding editors, Mark Olson and John F. Alexander; Nick Warner of Oasis Chapel in Palm Springs; GIFT's Jim Lucas and Calvin Seminary graduate; Pentecostal preachers Evelyn Schave and Deanna Jaworski; Justin Lee, Gay Christian Network's founder and founder of Nuance; GCN chair, Ling Lam; Nuance chair, Matt Carden; Nuance treasurer, Linda Robertson; Diana McLean, Gordon College's straight student editor for Gordon's gay/lesbian students; Kori Ashton, founder of LesBePure; One Wheaton's Steve Slagg; BJUnity's Jared Porter, a great-grandson of evangelist Ford Porter; Jenny Morgan, Youth for Christ National Training Director; the Black Preaching Network's Gerald Palmer; R. Maurice Boyd of The City Church in NYC; Mennonite leader Roberta Kreider; Daniel Dobson, gay son of Ed Dobson, formerly of The Moral Majority, *et al*. Parents of lesbian and gay children have been keynoters, e.g., Mildred Pearson, a mom in Brooklyn, who lost her second son to AIDS on that very morning of her EC keynote. She said, "I can't do anything more for him. Maybe I can help you boys." Her words evoked grateful tears of support. At another EC retreat, a dad of two gay sons sparked chuckles as he *reassured* us all that, "gays are like everybody else, some you like and some you can't stand, and I got one of each!" Other parents of same-sex attracted children were Chip and Nancy

Miller; Bob and Mary Lou Wallner; Mary V. Borhek; Charlie Shedd; Beverly Barbo; Barbara Johnson and Shari Johnson. Keynoters have also included filmmaker Todd Kommarnicki with his wife, actress Jane Bradbury; Abigail Santamaria, biographer of Joy Davidman; Gayle R. Postma, an editor with The Christian Reformed Church's *Banner*; EC board's David Holkeboer; Ruth and Billy Graham's granddaughter, Jerushah Duford with husband, Kyle; and ex-"ex-gay" leaders: Gary Cooper, Michael Bussee, Jeremy Marks, Alex Haiken, Ann Phillips and Jeff Ford.

It should be obvious that, this roster of EC's *evangelical* supporters for half-a-century puts a *dent*, shall we say, into all of those *homophobic accusations* that EC is *not really a seriously evangelical* ministry. These supporters of EC have been serious Christians who've refused to forget Jesus' call for us all to *love all of our neighbors as we, ourselves, love ourselves*. (Mk 12:31)

They've all also followed the Apostle Paul in his telling the Thessalonians: "Because we loved you so much, we were glad to share with you, not only the gospel of God, but *our own lives* as well." (I Thess 2:8)

Meanwhile, *21<sup>st</sup>-Century's secularists* in church pulpits are *pushing* 20<sup>th</sup>-Century's "*modernism*", now *bloated* into updated "*postmodernism*", in their *defensive denial* of what all they *disdain*, in *self-congratulatory posturing*, as an *outdated* "bloody" religion that we must all *outgrow*, and all for "woke sake". Postmodernists, *asleep at the switch*, fail at any *legitimate exegesis* for the sake of *fashionable favor* with an anti-Christian *interfaith* movement.

What Genie Price so gratefully discovered and was so motivated and so very relieved to *leave*, was *her worn-out atheism* to *embrace its antithesis* - *the amazing grace* of the One she now called, "the God of the poured-out life" in *His Incarnation in Jesus* for our *salvation* and *resurrection* forever.

Sadly, instead of this *biblical truth* of that gruesome agony and death at Golgotha, followed by Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension, today's "progressive" clergy are largely *illiterate in rigorous biblical studies* due to *liberal seminaries' deliberate deficiency-training's* push for *politically correct diversions*. So, they've nothing to preach but "updated", politicized "social gospel". They've *aborted* the preaching of the *very truest Good News* that was ever heard on earth, to push their *driveling counterfeit* that never fills the *void* of which they're so *proudly oblivious*, or in *defensive denial*, for *their own* "woke sake" and for all of *postmodernism's genuflecting approval*.

No wonder so many lay folks find a satisfactory substitution for falling fast asleep in a hard church pew, by comfortably staying in bed every Sunday morning. And it's also no wonder so many churches are now so empty on



every Sunday morning, or that so many church buildings have been closed down. *The New York Times* reports that, in the US, *each year*, some 6,000 to 10,000 churches are closed down and the buildings are repurposed as apartments, laundries, skating arenas, etc., or, they're simply *demolished*. That's after their *unorthodox* message *demolished* their preaching of *The Good News*, years earlier. The *churches* were *destroyed by liberalism's bull-headed heresies*, before the *buildings* were *destroyed by bulldozers*.

Still, God's Amazing Grace is *the historically true Good News of Jesus* in His crucifixion and resurrection for our sin and salvation from damnation. It's all so well worth our hearing and being reminded of it, each and every Sunday, by *true Gospel preaching*, to be gratefully remembered throughout the coming week, and, in so many cases, and in so many ways, assuredly reinforced and recalled for the rest of our life of discipleship in *this* world.

Postmodernism's substitute is a *shaky, self-centered, con-game* that the guilty *try to rely on to cover up* their disturbingly distracting sense of the *sin* that they're told is simply their "inferiority complex" or the *disadvantages* caused by society's mean-spirited *discrimination* that can be overcome by counting on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity establishment to save us by *contempt* for all of that Right-wing "Fundy" religious *oppression*.

What an unbalanced choice is ours -- *truthful repentance* of what, by the grace of God, we *know is needed*, or continuing in *self-righteous* charades that fall flat *within our own awareness* and with all the other *self-righteous* for whom all try to *preen* while never being able to really believe *anyone's preening*, least of all, one's very own *con-job* on oneself. Of course, *seeing through our own con-job can be the most effective escape from our con-job* and on to *Reconciliation rooted in God's Truth in Christ's Redeeming Love*.

Choosing Christ's Way, by His Own Call, we're *saved here and hereafter*. But trying to follow *our own foolishly self-centered way*, we're *doomed, here and hereafter*. Still, we're all continually *called to yet, turn* to the Only One Whose Gift of Peace truly passes way beyond all of *our* ability to more fully *comprehend*, for it's so *overwhelmingly* and so *truly*, so *Graciously Merciful*.

Here's what John and Matthew say Jesus promised of this Peace we find in partnering with him as our Savior: "Come to me, all of you who are so worn down and so weary, and I'll give you the rest that you truly do need. I'm gentle and humble, and sharing your own burden in yoke with me will *lighten your load*, and you'll find the very *deepest rest*." (Matt 11:28-30)

Still, Christians have always been in grave danger of *captivity, torture* and *slaughter* by anti-Christian totalitarians -- including Nazis and Marxists, Islamist jihadists and Hindus, *et al*. Today, the North Korean Communists

imprison-for-life even toddlers, if a Bible is found in the home, while they torture and enslave the toddlers' parents at lifelong hard labor camps.

In and through all of such persecution, Jesus said: "My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make Our home *with* them. Anyone who does not love me, will not obey my teaching. These words are not my own; they belong to The Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, Who the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I've said to you. *Peace*, I leave with you; *My peace* I give to you. I don't give to you as the world gives. So, *don't let your hearts be troubled*, and *don't be afraid*. You heard Me say, 'I'm going away and I'm coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would be glad that I'm going to The Father, for The Father is greater than I. I have told you now, before it happens, so that when it happens, you will believe." (John 14:15ff)

Thus, as Paul put it to the Christians he taught in Philippi, "*The peace of God, that transcends all mere human understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" (Phil 4:7) There is, indeed, no peace like that Peace that truly does transcend all mere human understanding.

Last month, our U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy, issued an 81-page report on a new public health *epidemic of widespread loneliness*, noting that the health risks in *such loneliness* are *as deadly as smoking a dozen cigarettes a day*. According to Dr. Murthy, it's costing the health industry *billions* of dollars annually. In *personal* terms, it affects some 188,000,000 Americans with *the difficulties of bitter loneliness*. He says: "It's like *hunger or thirst*. It's a feeling the body sends us when something *we need for survival is missing*." Therefore, the *two truly* biggest questions in all of *this loneliness* are: *What's missing? Who's missing?*

Unfortunately, popular, but *woefully inadequate*, suggestions for dealing with *loneliness*, typically include: "Fall in love *with yourself*.", "Take care of your *body*.", "Take a walk.", "Go for a swim.", "Smile!", "Jump *Online!*", "Sit in *silence*.", "Hang out with some *non-humans*.", "Connect with *nature*.", "Follow *your heart's desires*.", and finally, on such lists, if all else fails, "Talk to a mental health professional." Notice what's missing in each of these suggestions? Mostly they're *solitary settings* -- *as a solution to loneliness!* Even that last one is not of much help, given how few "professionals" are well-informed on *the most basic spiritual cause of all deepest loneliness*.

The *underlying etiology* of this *loneliness epidemic* can be *discerned* from what's reported by *The Intelligencer*: "Two-thirds of Americans born before 1946 belong to a religious institution, according to Gallup. That drops to 58

percent among baby-boomers, 50 percent among Generation X, and 36 percent among millennials.” Limited data on Zoomers indicate they’re as *irreligious* as their immediate predecessors *i.e.*, they all are “the nones”.

As America’s *rising* generations displace *passing* generations, *religion’s cultural relevance continues to fade*, with “mainline” churches’ rejection of *truly biblical Christianity*. Instead of “rightly interpreting the Word of Truth” (2 Tim 2:15), the “Christian” Right’s awkward influence is as misleading as ever, replacing *The Good News* with *socio-political hype* of the *Rightwing* to combat *socio-political hype* of the *Leftwing*, as if there’s no *Gospel of Christ* to declare, across the entire *political spectrum*. Paul said clearly: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our sins against us, and entrusts to us, this message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor 5:19)

Because *loneliness* increases the risk of premature death by nearly 30%, Murthy calls on workplaces, schools, tech firms, community organizations, parents and others to make changes to boost human *connectedness*. He advises joining community groups, putting down phones when catching up with friends in person and cautions against too much *remote* work. As Murthy concludes: “There’s really no substitute for *in-person* interaction.”

So, what about, “*in Person*” interaction, *i.e.*, *with God*? He’s the very *Heart of Who we’re all meant to interact with*, as we’re created *in God’s Image*, thus, *lost in the worst of loneliness*, *without our relating with Him*.

Murthy notes, too, that, “*loneliness is like hunger and thirst*”. Well, didn’t Jesus say: “*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and will never be thirsty. All that The Father gives to Me, will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me, I will never reject.*” (John 6:35ff)

*This is our Truest Calling and our Truest Connection -- with our Heavenly Father, Christ Jesus, our Savior and The Holy Spirit, along with our fellow believers in Christ, now, and for all of Eternity!*