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WHAT MAKES A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

Jesus never said the world would know
His followers by their politics, denomination,
or success—but by their love.

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Writers



Kelly John Walker

As Founder and Editor-in-Chief, Kelly has over two decades experience as an accomplished communications specialist, senior writer, and award-winning advertising executive.



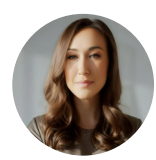
Madame Publius

Nom de plume of a regular contributor with excellent insights into our Founding Principles.



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Gregory is one of the youngest nationally syndicated columnists in the US, covering politics, education, and public policy.



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Stephanie is a civic strategist who equips grassroots conservative leaders to build coalitions and achieve lasting institutional victories. Her work is rooted in her own experience fighting for her children in family court..



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Geno is a 29-year-old Black conservative author from Chicago's South Side and former congressional candidate. Author of *Sex, Drugs, And Illiteracy: The Death of Education In America*, he uses firsthand experience to expose failures in education and advocate for greater accountability in America's classrooms.



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Robert Renteria is an internationally recognized author, U.S. Army veteran, and civic leader whose work inspires youth through education, leadership, and overcoming adversity.



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Alden Sykora is a Catholic conservative writer and commentator from Long Island whose early interest in politics led her into advocacy, public discourse, and media. She is entering Hillsdale College as part of the Class of 2030.

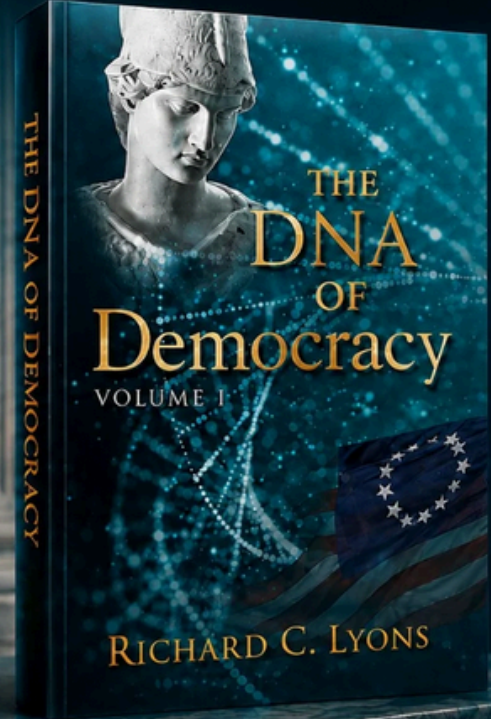


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WHAT IS A REAL CHRISTIAN ?

By Kelly John Walker 

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with somewhere near 2.4 billion people—roughly 30 percent of the earth's population—professing to follow Jesus Christ. But even in Jesus' own day, many people followed Him, yet not all were His disciples.

Jesus expressed this reality when He said, "Many are called, but few are chosen," and illustrated it in the Parable of the Sower. The seed is the Word of God, and whether it takes root and produces mature fruit depends upon the condition of the soil upon which it falls.

He taught that "the enemy" would sow tares among the wheat, the two growing together,, nearly indistinguishable from one another till harvest.

It can be just as difficult to distinguish between those who do His will and those just going through the motions. They often appear very much alike and may not be fully separated until the Day of Judgment, when "the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven," Jesus said.

So, then, what is a real Christian? How do we distinguish the wheat from the tares? More importantly, how do we know whether we ourselves are truly disciples of Christ?

The answer is astonishingly simple.

It is not ultimately determined by creed or doctrine, by denomination or church affiliation. It is not merely a matter of profession, nor of faith or works alone.

Jesus said, **“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Luke records an encounter in which a lawyer asked Jesus, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Few questions could be more important.

Jesus answered: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

When the lawyer then asked, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan:

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.”

Jesus then told the lawyer, “Go and do likewise.”

One of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture appears in Matthew 25, where Jesus describes the final judgment:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

The King welcomes the righteous because: “I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.”

The righteous are astonished: “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?”

And the King answers: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

That is a remarkable statement.

When we stand before our Creator, He will not ask which church we attended, how many programs we built, how many conferences we hosted, or how many missions we funded. **He will ask us how faithfully we put love into action by serving others.**

Christ Himself “did not come to be served, but to serve.” He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.” He said, “I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

James, the brother of Jesus, later wrote: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

This principle applies not only to individuals but also to nations. The prophets repeatedly warned that God judges entire societies according to how they treat the vulnerable—the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the oppressed. While the phrase “little ones” is especially associated with Jesus, the Old Testament establishes the same principle: societies that neglect or exploit the defenseless invite judgment.

Isaiah pleaded with his nation: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; **Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.**”

Jeremiah urged swift and timely justice, echoing our nation’s own Sixth Amendment’s right to a speedy and impartial trial:

“Execute judgment in the morning; And deliver him who is plundered out of the hand

of the oppressor, Lest My fury go forth like fire and burn so that no one can quench it.” The prophet understood that delayed justice is denied justice.

Thomas Aquinas wrote, “Justice without mercy is cruelty, and mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution.” Biblical justice requires both truth and compassion. It demands that we restore what has been broken and defend those who cannot defend themselves.

C.S. Lewis likewise observed, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.” Every widow, every orphan, every prisoner, and every victim, possesses an eternal significance.

The “least of these” are not abstractions. They are fathers estranged from their children, mothers separated from their families, young people driven into despair, and ordinary people whose names, livelihoods, and reputations have been destroyed.

Years ago, a young man walked into our coffeehouse after being placed on suicide watch during the COVID era. The policies imposed upon children had left him hopeless. By simply giving him a voice and allowing him to tell his story, he found renewed purpose and eventually began speaking publicly himself. One act of compassion changed the course of a life.

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward,” said Jesus.

My own family has spent years trying to recover from the consequences of government weaponization for doing the right thing. We endured the loss of our livelihood, the destruction of our reputation, financial hardship, family estrangement, displacement from our home and community, and the lingering anxiety that follows public vilification.

But **where is the Church when it counts?**

Why do these people continue to hope for restitution from civil government that may never come? How shameful is it that churches often stand by while people within their own communities continue to suffer for having done what they believed was right?

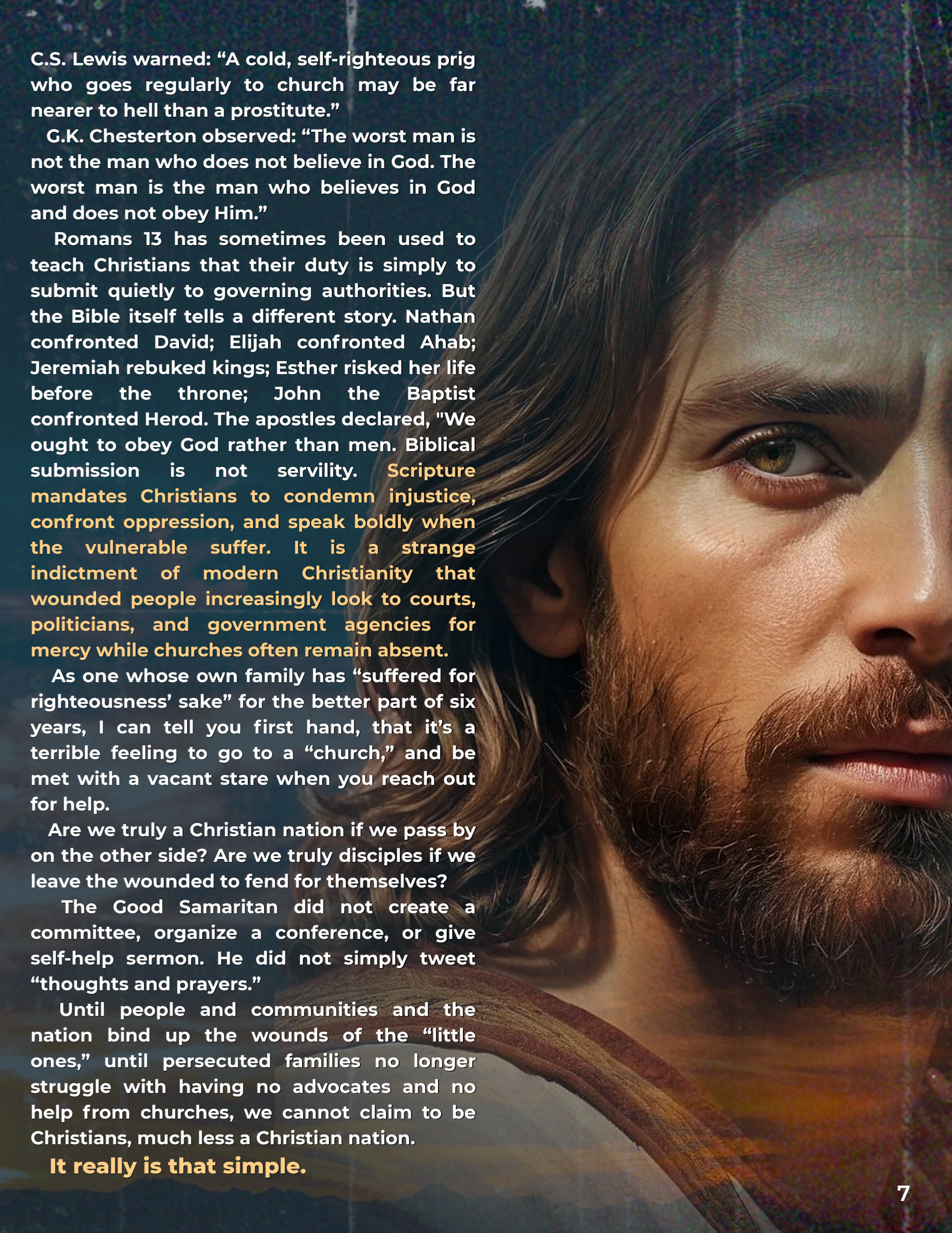
The American church raises its hands in praise but will not stoop to lift up the victims of weaponization right in front of them or fight to deliver those in prison. Is the church complacent in the face of the child trafficking epidemic, while monsters are protected with redaction? Do they think God will hear their hymns over the cries of the oppressed?

Amos gave a sobering warning, speaking to a deeply religious nation filled with worship services, festivals, and songs, God declared: “I hate, I despise your feast days...Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.”

God was not impressed by Israel's worship because Israel had neglected justice.

Today, the weaponization of government has become a prominent reality in our public life. We have heard the stories of the J6 gulags, of parents whose lives and reputations were destroyed for speaking against abuses in public schools, and of countless citizens struggling to recover from injuries inflicted by their own institutions.

We hear much these days about so-called Christian nationalism. Certainly, our nation was deeply influenced by Christian principles, and many of our laws and institutions reflect that inheritance. We hear pastors, priests, and public figures praise America as a “Christian nation.” But though our monuments contain biblical inscriptions, our ceremonies invoke God, and Christian “revival” brings music and raised hands, if we do not practice love, we are nothing.



C.S. Lewis warned: “A cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute.”

G.K. Chesterton observed: “The worst man is not the man who does not believe in God. The worst man is the man who believes in God and does not obey Him.”

Romans 13 has sometimes been used to teach Christians that their duty is simply to submit quietly to governing authorities. But the Bible itself tells a different story. Nathan confronted David; Elijah confronted Ahab; Jeremiah rebuked kings; Esther risked her life before the throne; John the Baptist confronted Herod. The apostles declared, “We ought to obey God rather than men. Biblical submission is not servility. **Scripture mandates Christians to condemn injustice, confront oppression, and speak boldly when the vulnerable suffer. It is a strange indictment of modern Christianity that wounded people increasingly look to courts, politicians, and government agencies for mercy while churches often remain absent.**

As one whose own family has “suffered for righteousness’ sake” for the better part of six years, I can tell you first hand, that it’s a terrible feeling to go to a “church,” and be met with a vacant stare when you reach out for help.

Are we truly a Christian nation if we pass by on the other side? Are we truly disciples if we leave the wounded to fend for themselves?

The Good Samaritan did not create a committee, organize a conference, or give self-help sermon. He did not simply tweet “thoughts and prayers.”

Until people and communities and the nation bind up the wounds of the “little ones,” until persecuted families no longer struggle with having no advocates and no help from churches, we cannot claim to be Christians, much less a Christian nation.

It really is that simple.

A decorative border of figs and leaves surrounds the text. The border features several purple figs, some whole and some sliced to show their red, seed-filled interiors, along with green fig leaves with characteristic lobed shapes. The background is a light, textured cream color.

What Is a Real Christian?

What Jesus Said About Knowing the Difference

by Stephanie Hope

What does it actually mean to be a real Christian?

Not the version performed for an audience. Not the version that looks right from a distance. The real one—the one Jesus himself gave us a test for.

In Matthew 21 and Mark 11, Jesus is walking and sees a fig tree. It's full of leaves. It looks healthy. From a distance, it looks exactly like what a fig tree is supposed to look like. But when he gets close, there's no fruit.

What strikes me every time I read this story is what Jesus doesn't do. He doesn't celebrate the leaves. He doesn't say, "well, at least it's green." He doesn't give credit for appearance. He uses the tree as a lesson about the gap between looking productive and actually bearing fruit.

A lot of us are living in that gap right now. We attend church. We post the right things. We have the right conversations at the right moments. We look like faithful Christians. We feel like faithful Christians. But if we're honest, many of us are not yet bearing real fruit in our daily lives—in our homes, our communities, our witness to the watching world.

The tree in the story wasn't dead. It wasn't diseased. It wasn't unwilling. It was leafy—full of the appearance of life with none of the substance.

This raises an obvious question: if appearance isn't the test, what is? How do we know who's the real thing—in our churches, our leaders, even ourselves?

Jesus answers that too. In Matthew 7, he warns about false prophets—people who look the part, who say the right things, who carry themselves with confidence and certainty. And he gives one test that cuts through all of it: "By their fruits you will know them."

Not by their words. Not by their confidence. Not by how polished they sound or how large their following is. By their fruit.

Good trees produce good fruit. Bad trees produce bad fruit. That's the whole test. You don't have to win an argument with someone to know who they are. You don't have to out-debate a false teacher. You watch what they actually produce over time.

In plain terms, fruit looks like this: honesty or deception. Humility or manipulation. Justice or exploitation. Self-control or chaos. These are not abstract categories. They are visible—in a person's conduct, their consistency, what their leadership actually leaves behind over months and years.

That test cuts both ways. The same standard you use to discern others is the standard others use to discern you. Your neighbors, your community, the people watching your life—they are not weighing your intentions. They are watching your fruit.



By Their Fruits You Will Know Them

What Jesus actually said about knowing what's real —
and becoming it.

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So the real question isn't whether you call yourself a Christian. It's not whether you have the right beliefs stated correctly, or whether you show up looking the part.

The real question Jesus keeps asking is the same one he asked the fig tree: what are you actually producing?

That is the test. Not leaves. Fruit.

WE WRESTLE AGAINST THE WORLDLY GOVERNORS

Any discussion concerning the definition of true discipleship should include Paul's admonishment to "call to remembrance the days that are passed"[1] as it still remains an undeniable truth that history is a master teacher.

Paul wrote of those Saints "whom the world was not worthy"[2] that he considered to be true disciples for all their "trial[s] of cruel mockings and scourgings"[3]—"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword."[4]

Since Paul's time, many others have struggled against their cruel masters only to meet the same fate as those of whom Paul wrote about. History teaches us of our Christian ancestors who fled the tyranny of European powers such as the Vatican and the Church of England to come here to the New World to build a better world. History also teaches us of our Christian ancestors who rose up against the King of England to fight and die in their struggle for liberty because they were motivated by the Spirit of the Lord for, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."[5]

One of the forgotten Christian martyrs was William Tyndale who was murdered for translating the New Testament into English in 1536. Following Tyndale's martyrdom, William Whittingham along with others risked their lives to give us the first full English version of a Bible. They left England and fled to Geneva, Switzerland in order to translate a Bible into English. They published it in 1560, and it became known as the Geneva Bible. History also teaches us that it was also known as the Bible of the Protestant Reformation.

What has been lost to history is the very important fact that the Geneva Bible was actually the Bible that the Pilgrims carried to the New World—NOT the King James version (KJV). Even though the KJV relied heavily on the translations used by the translators of the Geneva Bible, King James made sure certain things were taken out of his version.

For example, anything that cast monarchies in an unfavorable light was removed. Another important fact that was also lost to history was that the Geneva Bible was the primary Bible for English Protestants before the KJV. There are a number of differences, which are not just grammatical. The KJV took out the word tyrant, which means that there was obviously a political influence on that translation. There are also doctrinal differences in the text between the versions.

The Geneva Bible was not part of the Roman Canon. The Geneva Bible, for example, also contains the Apocrypha and some translations that are not consistent with Rome nor the KJV.

What few people even realize today is that we have an English Bible in spite of the censorship of the Vatican because of martyrs like William Tyndale and others who struggled against the worldly governors of their day. They pledged their lives to the English translation of the Hebrew texts in order to bring us their version of the English Bible. We are also the beneficiaries of the "Blessings of Liberty"[6] bestowed upon us by those Christians who struggled against the worldly powers of England in 1776.



Unlike our Christian ancestors, too many of us today believe that struggling against worldly powers is not the Christian thing to do anymore. Yet, one of the more important verses of scripture in the KJV in this regard was deliberately changed from the Geneva Bible, because King James did not want us to struggle against his worldly power.

In the KJV, we read: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”[7]

In the original Hebrew text as translated into English for the Geneva Bible, it reads: ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, BUT against principalities, against powers, AND against the worldly governours...’[8]

As seen in the examples of Tyndale, Whittingham, our American Forefathers, and others, it is clearly our duty as Christians to wrestle against corrupt “worldly governors” in order to protect our liberty as secured by our sacred U.S. Constitution. I say sacred for according to James Madison, aka the Father of our U.S. Constitution being its chief architect, our Constitution was given by the “finger of that Almighty hand” in their proceedings during the Constitutional Convention.[9]

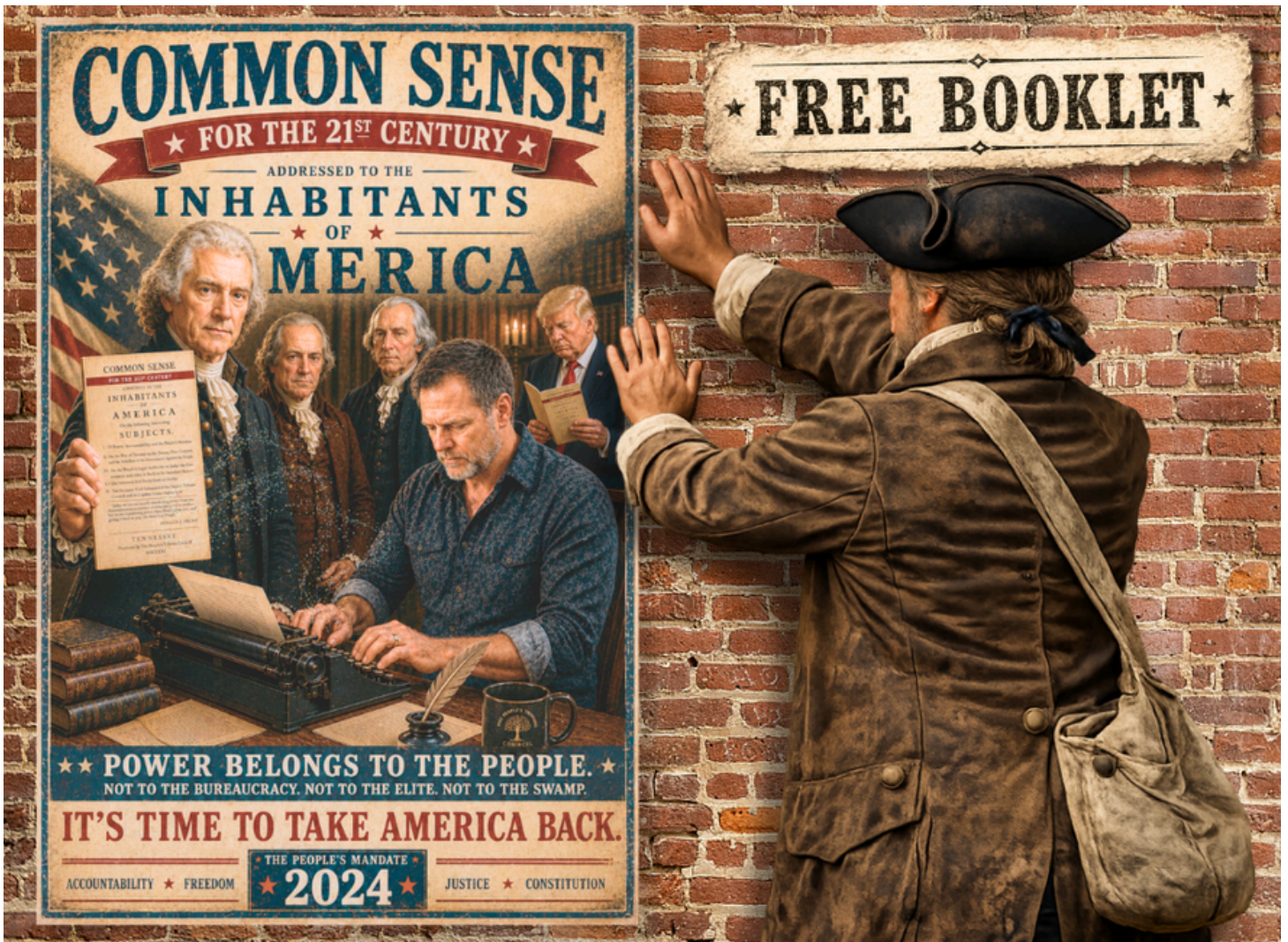
Even the Declaration of Independence affirms the obligation to war against worldly governors: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness ...whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it.”

[1] Heb. 10:32 (Geneva Bible 1560) [2] Heb. 11:32 (KJV and Geneva Bible 1560) [3] Heb. 11:36 (KJV) [4] Heb. 11:37 (KJV) [5] II Cor. 3:17 (KJV) [6] U.S. CONST., Preamble [7] Eph. 6:12 (KJV) [8] Eph. 6:12 (Geneva Bible) (emphasis added) [9] Madison, The Federalist Papers, Ltr. 37, ¶14.

As I have written about in numerous articles, our Constitutional Republic has been destroyed by the political party power structure in Washington, D.C. Those worldly governors are intent on destroying our Constitutional Republic in order to bring in the tyranny of a world communistic global power structure.

God will only help us save our Constitution from the tyranny of those evil forces just as He helped our Forefathers when we follow their examples and initiate a righteous struggle against our worldly governors in order to restore our God-given Constitutional Republic.

Madame Publius



Seeing Jesus Next to a Sewage Ditch in Nigeria

People make following Jesus more complicated than it needs to be. It's really three things.

First: live in a way that when people look at you, they see Jesus. Paul said it plainly: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." The self steps aside as you follow the Spirit's lead, one step at a time.

Second: help others do the same. Everything every human being has ever looked for—and can't find anywhere else—is the Fruit of the Spirit. Love. Joy. Peace. The things people reach for in every direction and never seem to grab. They only come one way: through a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That's what the first step gives you. Discipleship is helping other people find those things for themselves. One life at a time.

Third: build the body. A community that holds each other up in love. Not a brand or an empire. People who actually care for each other.

That's it. That's the whole job.

I know a woman who does all three. Her name is Ms. Hanatu. I met her in a displacement camp in the middle of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. She fled a jihad massacre in Borno State in the dead of night—barefoot, no lights, children beside her, Boko Haram behind her. She lived through through unimaginable horror, atrocities and trauma.

The complicit Nigerian government denies people like her even exist. She has been given no recognition or assistance. She built her own shanty next to a sewage ditch with her own hands, and she has lived in it with her three daughters for ten years. Hundreds of women in that camp have delivered babies without a doctor. Her neighbors die from preventable ailments, children are abducted in the night. Her words: "Only God that is saving us."

So she started a school. Three displaced people with nothing began teaching 256 children. No salary. No building. Her reason was simple: children with books don't pick up guns.

She's doing all three things. When I look at her, I see Jesus. She lives it—not as a performance, just as the only life she knows. She's helping others find what she found. And she's building something that holds people together when everything else has fallen apart.

She looked at me—ten years into this, nothing but a hand-built shanty to her name—with a glimmer in her eye and said: "I am happy."

Happy to be alive. Happy her daughters are with her. Happy that God is using her to do good. That's not a broken woman. That's a free one.

Nigeria taught me what phony looks like too, and the incalculable damage it causes.

Nigeria has some of the wealthiest pastors on earth. Private jets. Stadiums that seat a hundred thousand. Television networks reaching across the continent. Meanwhile more than 185,000 Christians and non-jihadist Muslims have been slaughtered since 2009. More than 20,000 churches burned. Twelve million people, like Ms. Hanatu, driven from their homes. Not one of Nigeria's richest and most powerful Christian leaders has stood up and named what is killing their flock. Not one has set foot in these camps full of widows and orphans, which are often virtually in the shadow of opulent megachurches.

Jesus said you will know them by their fruit. Nigeria's wealthiest pastors collect private jets and reflect the world. Ms. Hanatu built her shanty with her own hands and has slept in it for ten years and reflects Christ.

The answer to what is a real Christian is astonishingly simple. I've seen it. She lives next to a sewage ditch in Abuja.

Mike Arnold is the author of *UPRISING: Time for Christians to Rise and Shine*, founder of Africa Arise International and executive producer of the upcoming documentary film, *Me & Ms. Hanatu*. www.MikeArnold.org #EarthShaker

"I Tremble for My Country."

by Kelly John Walker

"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever." -Thomas Jefferson

In his biographical book about the Prophet Jeremiah, *Run with the Horses*, Eugene H. Peterson writes,

The city was under final attack by the Babylonians. It would soon fall. Jeremiah had given counsel to the leaders and had preached to the people that the Babylonian presence was God's judgment. It should be accepted and submitted to. They had sinned and they were being judged. The judgment was God's way of restoring wholeness.

People didn't like that. They kept trying to find ways to avoid the reality of judgment, to think in other categories than those of right and wrong, sin and irresponsibility. One of their substitute ways of thinking was in terms of loyalty and disloyalty. Patriotism was used to muddle the sense of morality. "Our beloved country is being attacked and we must be loyal to it; in times of crisis it is not right to criticize your leaders. It is disloyal, an act of treachery."

Using jingoist language is far easier than taking responsibility for righteousness in the nation. Far easier to shout patriotic slogans than to work patriotically for justice...

Irijah was a man who used his job to escape his responsibilities as a person. He was a bureaucrat in the worst sense of the word, a person who hides behind the rules and prerogatives of a job description to do work that destroys people. Without considering morality or righteousness, God or person, he did his job. We meet these people all the time. And there are more and more jobs like this all the time.

Every day people are hurt and demeaned by officeholders who refuse to look us in the eye, shielding themselves behind regulations and paperwork, secretaries and committees.

"Only two responses are possible: attempts to escape, or self-deception by grasping at illusions." -Israel Gutman

"We must be patient and a miracle will occur," Gutman quotes a Ghetto leader. "Fighting against the enemy makes no sense...Defense means the utter destruction of the Warsaw ghetto! If I were convinced that we could not manage to save the core, I would arrive at a different conclusion."

The inaction resulting from such a desperate belief can be tragic: "As long as the ghetto's population could be deceived by reassurances from those in authority—Germans or Jews—they were prepared to carry out German orders and treat the Jewish Fighting Organization as provocateurs endangering the entire ghetto. In this new climate, however, [when all hope was lost] the *Judenrat* [Jewish police complicit with the Nazis] and the police could no longer dominate public life. Public opinion no longer regarded the Jewish Fighting Organization as an irresponsible element that could bring catastrophe to the ghetto. They had already experienced catastrophe."

Maybe there is a "Plan"; many of us would like to think someone ultimately has control, and everything will turn out fine. And yet, as the saying goes, it is wise to "hope for the best, but prepare for the worst." Politicians and the powerful cannot always prevent catastrophe, and God does not always choose to for reasons perhaps only He fully comprehends. "The proverbial unwise virgins did not fill their lamps, and their lack of

preparation and vigilance cost them dearly. 'Faith without works is dead'; faith without preparation can be fatal.

But no leader, no government, no kingdom will escape judgment if that society does not execute justice on behalf of the oppressed. That is because God can only bear to hear the cries of the oppressed before He must bring mercy to his "little ones" by judging those who refuse to give it. And in our form of government of, for, and by the people, if we stay silent, we share in the blame and the consequences. The very criteria for the separation of the "sheep" from the "goats" in Matthew 25 is clear: "I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me...inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me..."

The "moderate man," who may be used for wrong because he's "just following orders," who is useless for right because he's "doing his job" will not escape this judgement. Not when that job includes shielding the guilty and withholding justice from those the government itself has harmed.

"Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it." -Abraham Lincoln

A nation does not fall first by invasion—it falls when justice is denied its most vulnerable citizens, when the law becomes a political weapon, and when those entrusted with power cease to see the People as human beings made in the image of God.

All of that is happening now—yes, even under this administration—and that is why I tremble for my country."

"They have grown fat, they are sleek;

Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked;

They do not plead the cause,

The cause of the fatherless;

Yet they prosper,

And the right of the needy they do not defend.

Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the Lord.

"Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?"

-Jeremiah 5:28-29



Faith Is An Action Word!

Put Some Feet To Your Faith! By Geno Young



Would you believe that one of the most powerful scriptures on success in the entire Bible was never taught to me by a pastor, minister, bishop, or archbishop?

It came from a comedian.

For nearly 30 years, I lived in and around the church. My great-grandmother founded a church on the South Side of Chicago. I attended three Catholic schools growing up. I have worshipped in Baptist churches, Catholic churches, non-denominational churches, and just about every other Christian setting you can imagine. Yet somehow, through all those years, I never once heard a sermon centered on what I believe is THE most powerful scripture in the entire Bible for anyone seeking purpose, success, and direction in life:

“Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” — Habakkuk 2:2

The scripture continues:

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time... though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” — Habakkuk 2:3

In plain English, God is telling us to write the vision down. Put it on paper. Make it visible. Give it form. Then pursue it with expectation.

I first heard that message not from a theologian, but from comedian Steve Harvey through his *Motivated+* series. It was a blessing that arrived at exactly the right time as I approached my 30th year of life. And it forced me to confront a truth that many Christians never fully embrace: Christianity is not merely about believing. It is about doing. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes action over empty words. In the book of James, we find perhaps the most direct statement on the subject: “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26) Not weak. Not struggling. DEAD.

That verse alone should challenge every Christian who believes that prayer by itself is enough. Prayer matters. Faith matters. Worship matters. But faith was never intended to be passive. Jesus Himself warned against treating prayer as a substitute for action. In Matthew 6:7, He said:

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”

In other words, God is not impressed by the length of your prayer. You can pray for 45 minutes every morning. You can pray for seven minutes over every meal! You can memorize scripture. You can attend church every Sunday. You can post Bible verses on social media. But if you never take action, if you never move, if you never pursue the vision God placed in your heart, what exactly are you expecting Him to bless? You will NEVER realize your vision that God placed into your heart.

Too many Christians spend their lives waiting for doors to open while never reaching for the handle.

The Bible consistently teaches partnership between faith and action. Noah built the ark. Moses confronted Pharaoh. David picked up the stone. Nehemiah rebuilt the wall. The disciples casted their nets again. Every major biblical figure had faith, but they also moved their feet. As the late Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon (Founder and Former Pastor of Christ Universal Temple, Chicago) often taught, believers must, “Learn to stand on your own two big spiritual feet!”

That wisdom echoes scripture itself. God rarely calls people to sit still and wait indefinitely. More often, He calls them to trust Him enough to take the next step. That’s why Habakkuk 2:2 resonates so deeply with me. I’ll break it down in five steps:

- 1.) Write the vision. (You MUST have a vision board!!!)
- 2.) Make it plain for all who read it.
- 3.) Work towards it. (“That He May Run That Readeth It”)
- 4.) WAIT for it. (Be patient — Easier said than done, I know OH too well...)
- 5.) Realize God’s mercy and faithfulness to his word.

Build the vision board. Make it plain. Then get to work.

The promise was never that success would happen overnight. In fact, Habakkuk specifically says the vision may “tarry.” It may take time. It may take years. It may take decades. But if God gave you the vision, your responsibility is not merely to pray about it. Your responsibility isn’t to incessantly wonder IF it’ll happen. That’s God’s business. Your responsibility is to pursue it, no matter how bleak it looks. Full disclosure: I’m still working on all of this myself. My faith has been put on trial like never before in recent years. It may take decades. But if God gave

you the vision, your responsibility is not merely to pray about it. Your responsibility isn’t to incessantly wonder IF it’ll happen. That’s God’s business. Your responsibility is to pursue it, no matter how bleak it looks. Full disclosure: I’m still working on all of this myself. My faith has been put on trial like never before in recent years. This lesson took me 29 years to get to, and I’m just starting to fully grasp it. I may not always understand it, but I’m doing my part and waiting on God to come through with his. Like he always does. And I am grateful that Steve Harvey was the one who finally brought this lesson to my attention.

Christianity was never designed to be a spectator sport. Faith is not magic. Faith is not wishful thinking. Faith is belief put into motion.

Or, as Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon famously taught, “It works if you work IT!”

The Bible agrees.

Faith works—but only when you put it to work.

Now, GET to work!

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NON-COMPLACENT CHRISTIANITY

HOW ONE MAN HELPED RESTORE CHRISTIANITY IN RUSSIA

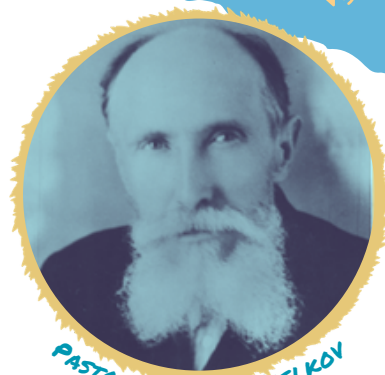


Many years ago, immediately upon graduating from college, I flew halfway around the world to Russia to be a missionary for a year and a half. It was an experience that shaped me in too many ways to recount. I was there in 1997-98, just a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and I got to witness post-Soviet life in Russia in a few provincial towns and cities on the Volga River, southeast of Moscow. During this time, one of the things that shocked me the most was out of maybe a thousand or so people with whom I spoke about God, I met exactly one person who claimed to be an atheist.

After my mission, I attended graduate school and wrote my master's thesis on underground Christians in the Soviet Union, their survival tactics, and the tactics of the Soviet state to try to dismantle Christianity. I spent two years up to my neck in primary sources detailing the horrific treatment of dissident Christians in the USSR - the abuses at the hands of the government, the arrests, imprisonments, harassment, forcible removal of children, forcible internment in psychiatric hospital-prisons, and beatings and torture - all the way up through the mid-1980's. It shook me that while I was a young child in suburban America in the early 80's, playing with my Cabbage Patch Kids and Barbies, riding my bike with my friends, and watching Saturday morning cartoons, independent Christians in the Soviet Union languished—their pleas to Christians worldwide going mostly unheeded and unheard.

While writing my master's thesis, I read many inspiring accounts of Soviet Christians who boldly withstood persecutions and pressure from the Soviet state to submit to communist rule, and pressure from the Soviet state to submit to communist rule, and if not to renounce their faith in God, then at least to accept membership in a government-controlled, KGB-infiltrated church.

The story of one particular Soviet dissident Christian always moved me. He was the leader of an obscure dissident Christian church that almost nobody has ever heard of - The True & Free Adventists (an offshoot of Seventh Day Adventism). This obscure, dissident Soviet church was relatively unknown and in the early 1980's was successfully demolished by a coordinated attack of the Soviet apparatus. But the legacy of the man who led this church - Vladimir Shelkov - is anything but insignificant. He was credited by some with being a key reason Russia so quickly returned to Christianity after over 70 years of enforced atheism. Next page—>



PASTOR VLADIMIR SHELKOV



Reprint from our Aug, 2024 issue

By: Julie Behling, author/producer of *Beneath Sheep's Clothing: The Communist Takeover of Culture in the USSR & Parallels in Today's America*. Learn more at www.beneathsheepsclothing.movie.

How did he do this? On one hand, Shelkov led his church on a highly revolutionary path. They collaborated with Soviet human rights activists. They had an underground printing press where they printed petitions, tracts, and open letters working to expose the multitude of human rights abuses of the Soviet government. In this activism, Shelkov and his fellow church members risked much. He personally spent 23 years imprisoned in the heinous privation and abuse of the Gulag.

On the other hand, according to accounts, Shelkov was a pillar of spiritual strength and fortitude as well as a guiding light to his fellow prisoners while incarcerated in the Gulag. He didn't just preach a gospel of love and redemption—he exemplified it. Because he walked in forgiveness of his “enemies” and those who persecuted him—even at the exact time they were persecuting him—Shelkov was able to influence countless other Soviet citizens from all walks of life.

One fellow prisoner—Avraam Shifrin, fellow prisoner in the Gulag with Shelkov and a Jew—said of Shelkov, “Into the cell walked a tall, thin man about 60 years old, with an intense, expressive face, framed by a long white beard. The beard was so white that it looked unreal in the middle of our filthy cell. But even more striking than his beard were the gentle old man’s eyes: they were dark and peaceful and literally radiated tenderness....He seemed to discern an inner meaning in the horrors which we witnessed and was always turned inwardly to God...Not once did I see him show anger, offence [sic] or rebellion against his fate.”

In 1979, Alexander Ginzberg—renowned Soviet human rights activist and former atheist—said of Shelkov, “I met Shelkov during my second sentence in a Soviet concentration camp, and I would say that Shelkov played a decisive role in my own moral education as a human being...that he retained his intellectual power and human personality was truly a miracle. And this miracle has had its influence not only on those of us in the camp who knew him, but also on those who heard about him...It is due to the influence of people like Shelkov that our society, which has been perverted into a society of atheists, will one day revert to being a society of believers.”

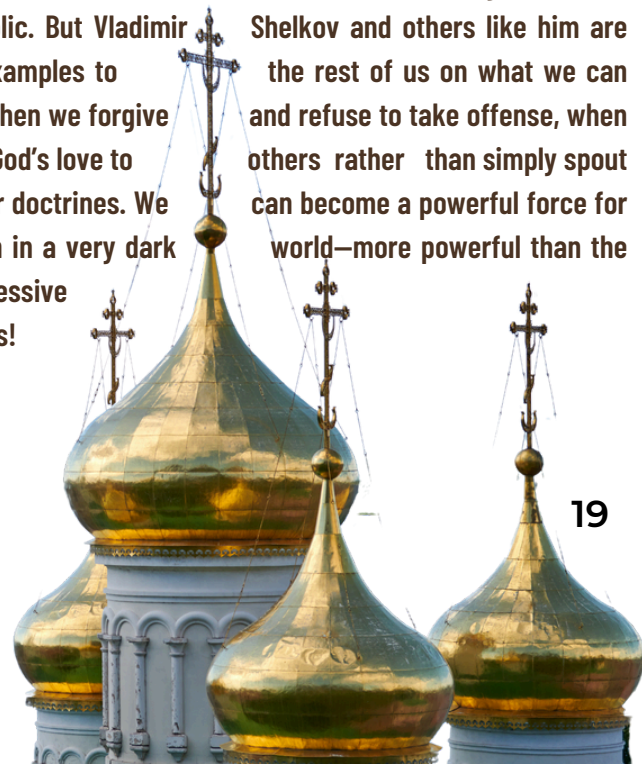
In Vladimir Shelkov, I see a worthy example for everyone, especially Christians. **Today, America’s Christians are being offered two different paths that both lead to destruction. The first is the path of complacency.** Shelkov was anything but complacent, diligently working to lead his church and also link arms with those not of his faith, but who shared the same goal of exposing the Soviet Union on the world stage so as to pressure it to follow the international human rights agreements that it had signed.

America, today, needs Christians who will take a stand, and who will work together with anyone of any background who also advocates for the cause of freedom.

In America today, most of us are in no danger of imprisonment, at least at this stage of the game. We risk mockery, but the Soviet dissident Christians risked far more in their efforts to oppose tyranny, insist on the freedom to worship according to their conscience, and in their attempts to alert the world to Soviet human rights abuses.

The second path that some today are offering to America’s Christians is the path of advocating for coercive tactics, which may border on fascistic, in the attempt to force a return to conservative Christian values in our nation. There are some who advocate for Christian Nationalism and who hearken back to fascist governments as a supposed solution to growing Marxism/communism here at home. There are a tiny minority of these Christians who even want America to become a theocracy. There are also some who may, even if well-intended, advocate for actions that can easily be made to be viewed as dangerous or extremist and, therefore, repel the large non-Christian and leftist segment of society that consists of a lot of youth.

Vladimir Shelkov was a man who had obviously done his spiritual work. The warmth and humanity that he exhibited even while imprisoned testify to that. If America’s Christians are to once again have a large impact on the future direction of America’s mainstream culture, which would involve reaching young people more successfully, then we would do well to follow Shelkov’s example. Yes—we must not be complacent and we need to take a stand for freedom, for freedom of religion, and for the Republic. But Vladimir Shelkov and others like him are shining examples to the rest of us on what we can become when we forgive and refuse to take offense, when we show God’s love to others rather than simply spout dogmas or doctrines. We can become a powerful force for good even in a very dark world—more powerful than the most repressive of systems!



FROM POVERTY TO PURPOSE

THE JOURNEY OF
DR. ROBERT RENTERIA



My pathway looked like I was destined to be dead by the time I was twenty-one years old or do twenty-five years to life in prison without parole.

One of the smarter decisions in my life was to get away and start over, so I joined the military. That is where I learned about duty, honor and country. The military not only made me a man, but it made me a better man. I traveled all over the world jumping out of helicopters and airplanes. Joining the military was one of the best decisions of my life.

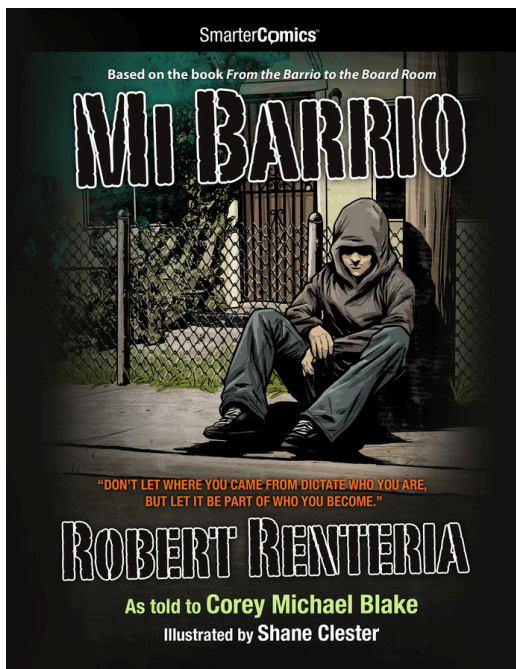
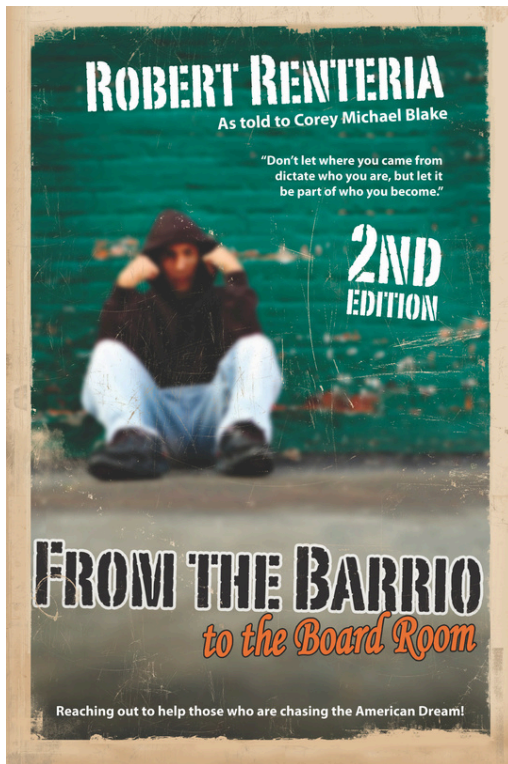
I am proud to say that I honorably served our country for over seven years as a U.S. Army airborne veteran and non-commissioned officer (a patriot).

After serving in the military, I moved to Chicago with just \$200 and a duffle bag and talked my way into a laundromat sales and management company.

I worked hard every day, every weekend, every holiday for over five years. I was then recruited by a company that would soon go through an IPO (Initial Public Offering). I was promoted to run a national and international sales division and became Executive Vice President of a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange.

Just when I thought I had everything I could have ever wanted—from sleeping on a smelly mattress on a concrete floor in a musty basement as a child to having a house on a pond and a Mercedes Benz—I learned that the two greatest days in your life are the day you were born and the day you realize why you were born. I also learned that the greater the struggle, the greater the victory, and that your pain, my pain, our pain is not in vain.

So, at the top of my game, I walked away from business to dedicate my life to lifting our nation's children up so that they too can spread their wings and fly like the angels God intended them to be. As a Christian conservative, I wanted to share that we must be both missional and relational. We must follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and get out into our communities and love on all of God's people.



God's love must not just be about age, race, religion, or economic backgrounds, but rather about one race: the human race. It is not just about one nation under God, but truly one family under God.

A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ who bases their beliefs and lifestyle on the teaching of the Bible. They believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of humanity, and that His life, death, and resurrection offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Being a Christian is more than occasionally attending church. Some people walk by sight while others walk by faith. Some folks say, "If I can see it, then I can believe it." I say, "If you believe it, then you can see it."

I have been blessed to serve and work with people from all walks of life, whether it be boys and girls in schools, men and women presently or formerly incarcerated, homeless shelters, battered women's shelters, police, probation, foster care, gang members, victims of human trafficking, those involved in prostitution, mental health professionals, counselors, churches, and corporations.

My hope is that we can learn to love one another because loving each other is how the foundation of this world was built. If we build on that foundation, we can be champions for our families, our neighbors, our communities, our cities, and beyond.

I pray that all of us will open our eyes, open our hearts, and take a good look in the mirror. Together we can help change and make the world a better place, especially for our children.


If you are interested in having a conversation about ways we can collaborate and together make a difference, please reach back to me personally. The Barrio books and curriculums that I have written are now teaching tools being used in classrooms across America and in more than 25 countries around the world.

In God We Trust,

P.S. I love you and there is nothing you can do about it! -Dr. Robert Renteria



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“By respect for life we become religious in a way that is elementary, profound and alive. I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve. I have always held firmly to the thought that each one of us can do a little to bring some portion of misery to an end. You don’t live in a world all alone. Your brothers live here too.”
 -Albert Schweitzer

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If we could not make free choices, we could not love, we could not create and achieve, we could not be all that makes us human. A union of love between God and the human person is possible only if the human person is free, free to choose for better and for worse, free to accept or reject God. But if freedom is essential to our being human, it is necessarily a double-edged sword. To be human means that you can also make bad choices and act maliciously. Being human means being capable of the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia and the savagery of 9/11. In short, if God has indeed created us free and if freedom necessarily involves the possibility of choosing either good or evil in this world, then the exercise of freedom is responsible for the evil in this world, and God permits the inescapable option of evil in order to bring about the greater good of enabling us to freely love him.” -Roy Abraham Varghese



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Now retired from law enforcement, Mark Lamb is once again answering the call to serve, seeking to succeed Rep. Andy Biggs in Arizona’s 5th Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives.

A proven conservative leader, Lamb is committed to defending God, Family, and Freedom by securing the border, eliminating government waste and corruption, and restoring the American Dream for hardworking families.



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