

PERSPECTIVE



APRIL 2018

TWO WAYS TO LIVE

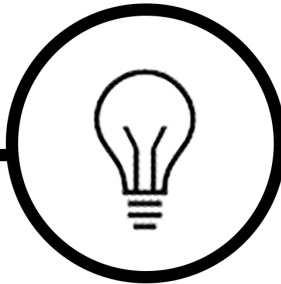
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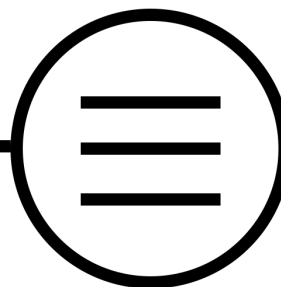


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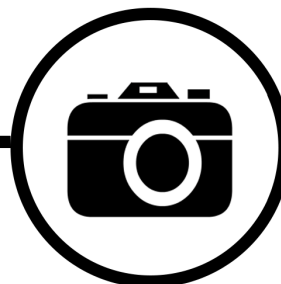
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Two Ways to Live

Christians want to share the gospel. When Paul commended the church in Thessalonica, he marveled at the way they proclaimed Jesus. “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything” (1 Thess. 1:8).

Not long ago, we remembered the life of Billy Graham. He may not have been a theologian, but he lived with a holy zeal. One writer, reminiscing on Graham’s career, noted how when his fame spread to Germany, the newspaper’s there called him “God’s Machine Gun.” Many of you reading this in 2018 have been affected, one way or another, by the life of Billy Graham.

DO YOU NEED TO BE BILLY GRAHAM?

My fear is far too Christians are relying on evangelists in the mold of Graham to bring the gospel to the next generation. We’re leaving gospel proclamation to the experts. We think if we can just bring our friend to the next big event—a youth night, a special concert, a holiday service—they will hear the gospel and be saved through the words of an expert.

Yet, very few of us came to know Christ through the preaching of an evangelist or even a pastor. Most Christians today heard the gospel through the faithful witness of a parent, family member, or friend.

You don’t need to be the next Billy Graham; you just need to be faithful. Know the gospel. Love the gospel. Share the gospel. And in the midst of it all, trust God to build his church.

A GOSPEL SUMMARY

Over the years, Christians have looked for novel ways to share the gospel. A friend once told me a story about a Christian who thought the best way to bring the Good News to his community was to rent a blimp, fly across town, and drop gospel tracts from the sky. I know people who, when they go out to eat, put their church website on the bottom of their receipt (I hope they leave a good tip!).

But there is a better way. A ministry in Australia known as Matthias Media came up with a gospel summary that I’ve been using for twenty-five years now. It’s not a tract; it’s a simple, six-part outline of the gospel that is easy to memorize. I want to commend it to you as a faithful

summary of the gospel. Before I share it with you, let me explain why I think it’s so valuable:

- ✦ Many believers were taught to share the gospel with some variation of, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” But this statement assumes a general understanding of who God is. Many of our neighbors don’t have the foggiest idea of who God is, what it means to love, and why he should even care about us. *Two Ways to Live* begins with a statement about God. This is important.
- ✦ When, in our evangelizing, we say something like, “Jesus died on the cross for sin,” this assumes people understand *they* are sinners and deserve God’s wrath. We shouldn’t be hesitant to explain our total, moral depravity and the fact that we are sinners who deserve hell. This gospel summary doesn’t shy away from that important truth.
- ✦ The six points in this gospel summary can really be thought of as six conversations you can have with an unbeliever. You can squish them all into one encounter if you need to—the summary can be shared in just a few minutes. Or you could take an hour or more to discuss each one, depending on where your friend is struggling to understand or believe.
- ✦ Finally, *Two Ways to Live* is intended to be shared verbally. There are certainly appropriate times to give something to read. But *Two Ways to Live* isn’t about resourcing an unbeliever with gospel literature. It’s about walking you through a natural way to share the gospel.

For all these reasons (and more), I encourage you to memorize *Two Ways to Live*. Of course, it’s not enough to know the gospel. You need to love the gospel, and you must have the boldness to share it. But knowing the gospel is a great start.

Two Ways to Live is divided into six parts. Think of it like a hat rack with twelve pegs. Each peg represents a gospel-centered conversation:

1. Creation
2. Rebellion
3. Judgement
4. Christ
5. Resurrection
6. Response

For each part, I'll give the words you ought to memorize in italics. I'll also give you a verse you can keep in mind as you focus on these words. Remember, the goal is not to be able to repeat these words to an unbeliever as if you were a robot. Rather, the goal is to know each concept as a key piece of the Good News God calls you to share with an unbelieving friend or family member.

CREATION

God is the loving ruler of the world.

He made the world.

He made us to be rulers of the world under him.

The gospel begins with the reality that God made each one of us. We are not here by accident. He created everything out of nothing. And what he made was good, very good. And God made it to glorify himself. This is the clear testimony of Scripture.

- ✦ Gen. 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."
- ✦ Ps. 33:6, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host."
- ✦ Ps. 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."
- ✦ John 1:3, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."
- ✦ Co. 1:16, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."

If God is the creator of everything, it only makes sense that all things are *for* him. They don't simply belong to him, he is the ruler of all things.

Christians do not believe the physical world around is all that there is. Materialism is a theory of creation that's common to many; it denies the existence of God. Christians deny pantheism—the theory that everything is God. This would imply God is not a distinct being, a person. Dualism implies that God changes. He is unchanging. This theory destroys the personal identity of God. Deism suggests God is just one force in the universe with limited power. Christians do not believe God created the world and then let it go to run on its own without his attention or intervention.

Understanding God's role in creation is important. If God is not Creator, he does not exist. If God is part of everything and everything is part of God, he is not

separate from his creation—he is not holy. If God exists in opposition to his creation, just one of many forces, he is not powerful. And if God does not interact with his creation, he is not good.

But this is not the Christian view of God. We believe God made everything, including us. And as our Maker, he is our Lord. We were made to love, worship, and obey him.

REBELLION

We all reject the ruler God—by trying to run life our own way without him.

But we fail to rule ourselves or society or the world.

Everyone agrees the world is full of pain and hardship. Most everyone would agree the world is not what it ought to be. Christians know why. We have rebelled against God. The authors of the Westminster Confession put it this way:

Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

In other words, for reasons that are mysterious to us, God allowed sin to enter into his creation. And this sin of Adam's affected us all. As the old American adage goes, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all."

Most of us are familiar with the fall. We find Adam and Eve living in a right relationship with God, nonetheless rejecting his commands and fulfilling their own desires. By ignoring God's direction, Adam and Eve tried to live life their own way, without God. As a result of what they've done, we are rebels. Imagine how strange it would be for a plant to grow away from the sun. This is our natural condition—growing away from God instead of toward him. This is the rebellion of every human heart. Much of Scripture points to our state without the Lord:

- ✦ Gen. 6:5, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."
- ✦ Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?"
- ✦ John 3:19, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

- ✦ Rom. 3:10–12, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

This is the universal human condition, the natural state of every human being on the planet. Our rebellion is the explanation for all the evil and wickedness in the world. From school shootings to opioid addiction, from war between nations to spats in marriages, sin is the cause. Given the reality of a holy God, the lingering question is a simple but haunting one, “What will God do about this rebellion?”

JUDGEMENT

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

It's one thing to say God is our creator. Lots of people believe this. It's another thing to say we are rebellious, but even this is widely accepted. However, company parts when we assert God will not tolerate this rebellion. He is a judge, and he will judge justly.

It's intimidating to tell family and friends they *deserve* eternal death and judgment. Nobody likes to deliver this news. A medical doctor who refuses to deliver the correct diagnosis—however painful—should be avoided at all costs. Likewise, a friend who refuses to broach the topic of his friend's destiny is not really a friend. As hard and intimidating as it may be to discuss the spiritual states of those we love, we must—with hearts full of grief and hope.

It was the author Charles Williams who wrote about a man who lived a “successful” life: “He passed, however, a not unsuccessful life in his profession, and the only Intruder he found himself unable to deal with was death.” The mortality rate for humanity remains a full hundred percent.

God repeatedly makes it clear not only that death is inevitable, but that death and judgment are a result of our sin.

- ✦ Gen. 3:19, “...for out of dust you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return.”
- ✦ Ps. 90:7–8, “For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.”
- ✦ Rom. 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...”

- ✦ Heb. 9:27, “...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

Indeed, death is not simply an end to existence as we know it. For those who die without God's forgiveness, it is everlasting torment. Jesus minced no words, “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matt. 25:41).

I'm typing these words right now because someone, long ago, was willing to tell me without God's help, I was going to hell. This is God's justice. He promises an end to wickedness. The reality is, we are wicked. Does that mean we are without hope? No, there is hope in Christ.

CHRIST

*Because of his love, God sent his Son into the world:
the man, Jesus Christ.
Jesus always lived under God's rule.
Yet by dying in our place he took our punishment and
brought forgiveness.*

This brings us to the crux of the news. So often, this is where people start when they share the gospel. But that doesn't make any sense. After all, what good is salvation unless you realize you need to be saved?

At this point, we have to wrestle with the reality Jesus is God. To call Jesus God's “Son” is not to assert that he is lesser than God. Think of “Son” more like a title, in this case a title of authority. A careful reading of the gospels will quickly make it clear that Jesus is God in the flesh. Consider the fact that Jesus forgave sins (Mark 2:5). He healed the sick (Luke 5:13). He even received—and welcomed—worship (Matt. 28:9). It's no wonder then that John and Paul used “God” in reference to Jesus (John 1:18; Rom. 9:5) and the author of Hebrews described him as the “Lord” who laid the foundation of the earth (Heb. 1:10).

Theologian Wayne Grudem described the divinity of Jesus in striking terms:

That Jesus possessed divine sovereignty, a kind of authority possessed by God alone, is seen in the fact that he could forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7). Unlike the Old Testament prophets who declared, “Thus says the LORD,” he could preface his statements with the phrase, “But I say to you” (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)—an amazing claim to his own authority. He could speak with the authority of God himself

because he was himself fully God. He had ‘all things’ delivered into his hands by the Father and the authority to reveal the Father to whomever he chose (Matthew 11:25-27). Such is his authority that the future eternal state of everyone in the universe depends on whether they believe in him or reject him (John 3:36).

Jesus is God, yes, but he is also fully human. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20), having been sent by God into the world (Rom. 8:3). His humanity, as Louis Berkhof put it, is “a miracle that passes our limited understanding. It clearly shows that the infinite can and does enter into finite relations, and that the supernatural can in some way enter the historical life of the world.” This is exactly what Jesus did. God took on flesh.

And in the flesh, he lived an absolutely sinless life. From his earliest days, he was filled with wisdom (Luke 2:40). He resisted the wiles of the Devil (Luke 4:1–13). He obeyed each of his Father’s commands (John 15:10). He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And though he was tempted, he never gave in (Heb. 4:5). This is the amazing life of Christ. His soul, as John Dagg put it, “was unlike the souls of ordinary men, in being with the taint of sin.”

You and I sin. Jesus never sinned, not once. And this is why the cross is such a scandal. The Bible teaches the very purpose of Christ’s entrance into humanity is that he might exit on the Calvary road (Mark 8:31). Christ was crucified—a criminal’s death (Mark 15:24). The early church preached his crucifixion—it was the heart of their message (Acts 10:39). In fact, the gospel can practically be summarized by the work of the cross (1 Cor. 2:2). And this was a price Christ willingly paid (Phil. 2:6–8). He gladly suffered death to pay the price for the sins of all who would turn and trust in him.

This is the beauty of the ugly cross. There Jesus died to satisfy the wrath of God and bring forgiveness to sinners like you and me.

- ✦ Rom. 3:25–26, “...whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.”
- ✦ Rom. 5:10, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...”
- ✦ 2 Cor. 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
- ✦ Gal. 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’”

- ✦ Col. 1:19–20, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
- ✦ 1 Pet. 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh.”

This is a bloody topic, and there have been some who have tried to reduce the cross to a footnote in the Bible. It’s not a footnote; it’s the headline. There is no gospel without a cross. There is no redemption without a Redeemer. There is no salvation without the Savior. Without a cross, we would never be forgiven. Don Carson put it well in his book, *How Long, O Lord*:

The cross, then, is the place where God’s justice and love meet. God retains the integrity of his justice; God pours out the fullness of his love. In the cross, God shows himself to be just and the one who justifies sinners whose faith rests in his Son. The death of God’s own Son is the only adequate gauge of what God thinks of my sin; the death of God’s own Son is the only basis on which I may be forgiven of that sin. The cross is the triumph of justice and love.

There is no better news than the fact that our sin can be taken care of, that God’s rebels can, in point of fact, become God’s friends. The cross is the only answer to our deepest need. But that’s not all.

RESURRECTION

*God raised Jesus to life again as the ruler of the world.
Jesus has conquered death, now brings new life,
and will return again to judge.*

It’s a mistake to neglect the resurrection when we share the gospel. It must be mentioned. Years ago, when I was a very young Christian, I asked my pastor a question many people wonder about Christianity—“What if it’s not true?” His answer befuddled me. He said, “At least you would have lived a good life.” But this isn’t what Paul said! In 1 Corinthians 15:14–17, Paul is adamant:

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, who he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Christianity requires a resurrected Savior. Christ's resurrection is the exclamation point on the atonement. It's the proof everything Jesus preached is true. It's the evidence he has power over sin and death. We know Jesus is worthy of our trust because the tomb is empty. This is what all the first Christians believed.

- ✦ 1 Pet. 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."
- ✦ Eph. 1:19–20, "...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places..."
- ✦ Phil. 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection."
- ✦ Rom. 6:9, "We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."

It's impossible to underestimate the importance of the resurrection to Christianity. The truth of the gospel depends on it. God the Father raised his Son to new life with a purpose: to demonstrate his sovereignty over all creation (Eph. 1:21), to conquer death (1 Cor. 15:55), to bring new life (1 Pet. 1:3), and to guarantee his return in judgment (Acts 10:42).

We have good reasons to believe the tomb was empty because Jesus rose from the dead. But it's not enough to have a merely intellectual faith. The gospel demands more.

RESPONSE

The two ways to live:

Our way: Reject the ruler God; try to run life our own way.

Result: Condemned by God; facing death and judgment.

God's new way: Submit to Jesus as ruler; rely on Jesus' death and resurrection. Result: Forgiven by God, given eternal life.

There's no getting around it, the Good News demands a response. Mere assent is not enough. Satan is a terrific theologian, but he hasn't given himself to Christ. As James exhorted the early church: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (James 2:19). In other words, the demons know who Christ is, but they refuse to love him. They hate and fear him.

You see, it's possible to say you *believe* Christianity, but that's not enough. Your life has to show it. And when we've spoken with others about Christ, we haven't fully shared the gospel until we've made it clear there really are only two ways to live.

Some people are looking for middle ground. They pay lip service to the divinity of Christ, his atoning death and resurrection—but it hasn't changed them. They don't love him. They haven't given their lives over to him. This isn't faith at all, not really. Regardless of what they say with their lips, they are running life their own way. They are the masters of their own universe.

To be a Christian is to submit to Jesus as ruler. Trusting in who he is and what he's done, the true Christian strives to glorify God in all of his actions. We won't do this perfectly, but by God's grace, we can do it faithfully.

Our response to the cross and resurrection is not optional. It is, as Josh McDowell so helpfully put it, evidence that demands a verdict.

NEXT STEPS

I began this article with a simple statement: if you are a Christian, you want to share the gospel. I don't have to convince of you this. You are eager to share the Good News with others. Pray for boldness. Ask God to give you opportunities to make the message known.

But boldness is not enough. You need to know what to say. I've found the Two Ways to Live gospel summary of great help to me in my evangelism. And, if you've sat under my preaching, you've heard it most every Sunday.

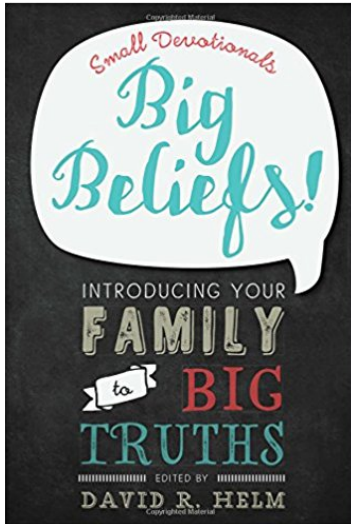
My prayer for you is simple: that you would have clarity in your mind as to what the gospel is, and that you would share it often.

~Aaron Menikoff

Big Beliefs!: Small Devotionals Introducing Your Family to Big Truths

Written by David R. Helm

Bookstall Price \$16



Why did David Helm write the family devotional *Big Beliefs* with the numerous resources available today? This devotional sprung from a desire at Holy Trinity Church in Chicago to provide their families with resources to train their children in Christian faith and doctrine. Helm's previous devotional, *The Big Picture Devotional*, was written as a presentation of biblical theology, while *Big Beliefs* aims to help families learn systematic theology in an approachable manner. Using the Westminster Confession of Faith (located in the back of the book) as a framework, there are 99 devotionals,

each with Scripture and discussion questions. The purpose of the book is to help parents pass on essential Christian doctrine in order to help their children "face tomorrow with courage and conviction."

In the introduction of *Big Beliefs*, Helm communicates an understanding toward parents. He realizes they need flexibility and desires to see them succeed in leading their children spiritually. He communicates with clarity and simplicity, making doctrine accessible for children and parents. Helm organizes the devotional in a manageable way, requiring only three days a week. There is an effort to include illustrations that are relatable to children, questions that spark discussion, and provide Scriptures for families to explore together. While Baptist doctrine differs in some areas, the devotional itself remains fairly neutral in its presentation. This book is written for families with children from ages seven to twelve, and from our family's experience that held true.

David Helm does an excellent job introducing systematic theology to children without being dry or over their heads, and not losing sight of the gospel throughout. In *Big Beliefs*, he succeeds in his goal of providing a "fresh gospel resource" for families. If the idea of teaching your school-aged children doctrine is intimidating, or perhaps you are looking to establish a family devotional time, *Big Beliefs* is a helpful resource to get you started.

– RECOMMENDED BY JENNY IRELAND

Excerpts From the Book

1

"One of the exalted privileges of the church is the opportunity to help young and eager minds to get an early grasp on Christian doctrine."

–Introduction, p. 1

2

"Only God can take sinful rebels with hearts of stone and turn them into obedient and loving people by giving them new hearts."

–Salvation: Effectual Calling, p. 52

3

"Because we have been adopted into God's family forever, we know that when we die we will inherit eternal life- the greatest inheritance of all."

– Salvation: Adoption, p. 58

If You Could Ask God One Question

Written by Paul Williams & Barry Cooper

Bookstall Price \$14



God, if you really exist, why don't you prove it? God, why do you allow suffering? God, why do you hate sex? Human beings are fascinated with God. We are fascinated with who he is, what he is, and *if* he is. Whether from a position of belief or unbelief, people would relish the opportunity to ask God a question (or several). Paul Williams and Barry Cooper have spent years researching the most frequently asked questions about God. In their 2017 book, *If You Could Ask God One Question*, they present those questions and provide answers given by Jesus Christ: God himself. God has

revealed himself to mankind through Jesus Christ and his Word, and Williams and Cooper make that the focus of their book.

Oftentimes, Christians are intimidated by evangelism because of a concern that they do not have all the answers. *If You Could Ask God One Question* is a concise text, well-suited for believers seeking to become more equipped for evangelism. The book has an easy-to-follow question-and-answer format, which serves as a good starting point for engaging with inquisitive non-Christians. Each answer is rooted in the words of Christ, and the supporting scripture references are provided. The Gospel is present in each chapter, so the book is a useful guide for walking someone through the basics of Christianity.

Williams and Cooper rightly acknowledge that having all the right answers is not the ultimate key to evangelism. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that brings people into fellowship with Christ. It is God who does the work in bringing about salvation. That truth being said, *If You Could Ask God One Question* is a helpful tool to increase a believer's confidence when evangelizing. Whether you choose to give the book to a non-believing friend or you use it to supplement an evangelism plan, *If You Could Ask God One Question* points to the truth of the Gospel from a unique perspective.

– RECOMMENDED BY PANASHE NHEKAIRO

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Hell only seems harsh when we don't see how infinitely serious it is to rebel against God. And it only seems harsh when we don't realize how infinitely holy God is; in other words, how entirely perfect, how completely true, how utterly good and how profoundly beautiful God is."

– If You're a God of Love, Why Send Anyone to Hell? , p. 46

2

"So John's definition of faith is: *trusting in Jesus Christ because of the historical facts...* The Bible never asks us to have faith in someone we can know nothing about. Quite the opposite, in fact: it encourages us to trust in someone we can know about. The only way we can determine whether or not there is any truth in Christianity- and whether it makes any sense to have faith—is by examining Jesus' life and teaching."

– Isn't Faith Just a Psychological Crutch?, p. 88

3

"[C]an we be sure that if God were to work a miracle for us now, right in front of our very eyes, we would automatically believe in him? Not according to Jesus. He insists that miracles in themselves are not enough, because miracles only point us toward a truth that not all of us are willing to accept."

– Be Bold, p. 89



“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

—Matthew 5:9-10

We continue reflecting on the beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. They are some of the most well-known passages of Scripture. They are called the “beatitudes” because the word “beatus” means “blessed” in Latin, which is how each one begins.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with the beatitudes to describe what it looks like to live in the kingdom of heaven. They should characterize citizens of the kingdom, those who have trusted and are following the King of the kingdom, Jesus. In verses 9-10, we see that they are peacemakers and persecuted.

Peacemaker (v.9)

Our God is a God of peace. He has removed the hostility that existed between him and us through the gospel. Through the cross, God reconciled us to himself. We are

“blessed” when we model the character of our heavenly father by making peace with others. Evangelism and missions is the task of peacemaking as we tell others who they might know objective peace with God. Furthermore, the church should be a community of peace. A place where strife, conflict, and disunity are not ignored or allowed to fester into bitterness. Rather, we love one another by reconciling and making peace for the wrongs we’ve committed. Who in your life do you need to make peace with?

Persecuted (v.10)

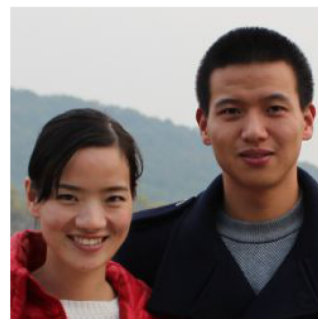
Interestingly, Jesus says we’ll be persecuted for righteousness right after he tells us we are to be peacemakers. The point being that the code of conduct, the lifestyle, and the value we prize above all others—righteousness—will, at times, put us in conflict with the world. The kingdom of heaven’s values will be at conflict with the kingdom of this world. But persecution comes with a promise and reassurance. Persecution for “righteousness sake” reminds us that we have the kingdom of heaven.

— BRAD THAYER

NEW MEMBERS



Don & Donna Ireland



Yuanlai (Andy) Zhou

