

Lifeline

December 2011

A Message of Life Ministries Newsletter

Christmas Greetings

We wish you a wonderful Christmas. God's Son became flesh, paid sin's death penalty on the cross, and guarantees believers everlasting life. Let us shine His message of life into an imploding world of death. Send friends a *Living Water* with your Christmas cards.

Two for the Price of One

This issue focuses on shepherds. The first article is by John; the second by our son, George, with editing by Dad. While editing his father's notes, George found some key links. We hope you enjoy his article almost as much as his proud parents do.

Have John, Will Travel

We hoped to leave 8,000 *Living Waters* at a dozen stops before Spokane, leaving 3,000 Spanish there. Ryan Korver's Spokane stockpile would supply the rest of the trip's needs. Our truck needed last minute repairs. Plan B was a car trip, but could it carry enough Gospels? Time to be creative.

We did some *installment* drops (first drop going/second returning) and some *take-and-replenish* drops (taking one way; restocking on the return). Overall, we gave half a ton of Gospels, never overloading the car. The Lord and our friends came through.

Spokane's 4th of July festival drew 10,000 visitors. Eleven of us gave 2,400 *Living Waters* one-at-a-time (plus four full boxes). Some in our group were shy at first. They saw Luis Rodriguez of Dallas smile, make eye-contact, and offer a *Living Water*, saying, "Here's your book of John." Even shy teammates

joined the fun. God honors the KISS method (Keep it short and sweet). Many accept booklets as a gift if not pressed into discussion. Some stayed to ask questions, a few even took boxes.

How many will read John? Some will, many will not. Offering to all is the heart of grace. Jesus paid sin's death penalty for all, even for those who never believe (1 John 2:2). He did not fixate on those who may roundfile His Word; nor should we.

Grace gives opportunity to all. Interested ones benefit.

Unbelievers are not the only beneficiaries. Shy teammates gain confidence, becoming more vocal about Christ. Some believing recipients ask for booklets to give away. Unbelievers need to get the message and believers need to give it.

Redmond (OR) Community Church needed *Living Waters* for their centennial and 4th of July celebrations and mission trips. We delivered that Sunday and, again, when going home, a week later.

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Luis giving *Living Waters*
Spokane, WA



Redmond Community Church
Redmond, OR

After stops in Oregon, we restocked in Spokane. We left booklets in Alberton, MT. We ministered at Steps to Life, a Great Falls, MT, recovery center.

In Fairfield, MT, Clark and Ruxandra Fee hosted a Bible study with many ex-Hutterites. They use John's Gospel to highlight grace in their area. We visited a Hutterite colony and saw structured legalism firsthand. Not all who flee the colonies find grace.

We returned to Alberton, MT, and Phil Taylen's church for Sunday School. They mail Christmas packages to armed forces in Afghanistan, each with a *Living Water*. Soldiers e-mailed questions. Some now believe in Christ and want Gospels for fellow soldiers.

We left homeward with 3,000 *Living Waters*, giving boxes as we went. After speaking, July 10, at Midvalley Bible Church, Ken Hornock took us to Salt Lake's Temple Square. Believers in the shadow of a pervasive religious culture appreciate grace. John's Gospel has free rein in Utah. What can it do in your area?

On July 17, Jansen, NE, had a warm welcome in more than one way (104°). Paul Carpenter's people love grace; and sought help with using John for unbelievers.

We fellowshiped in the word at a Coast Bible Church men's breakfast (San Juan Capistrano, CA). I addressed Grace Chapel (August 7), where we ministered many years and our son, Joseph, and his bride, Missy, attend.

The next Saturday, family and friends from across the nation celebrated Joseph and Missy's first anniversary (August

13) in San Diego. Wearing a tux, I had a short Genesis message and led in a renewal of vows by the bay.

Upon arriving in San Diego, I gave Pastor Joe Schiavone *Living Waters*. Later I spoke at Living Word Bible Church; he already gave booklets to twenty neighbors.

School began in late August. Trevor Gaines, an advanced student, lectured for me as Steve Lewis, Diane, and I crossed the Rockies to Craig, CO. We had a five-day September conference on using John's Gospel with unbelievers. With Pastor Dale Potter and his wife Rosie, we saw Dinosaur National Monument. Just before entering, we stopped at an overlook. Hunters were scoping a solitary bull elk. Looking, I instead saw a herd with a bull. Upon seeing my herd, they dashed off just as Rosie gave them a *Living Water*.

I spoke at Denver Rescue Mission October 11 on first century church planting. Planting churches of believers who proclaim Jesus' message of life is for today also.

At ETS (November 16) I gave my John 1:1 paper (discussed later). We saw friends and gave Gospels of John. A professor wanted *Living Waters* for sharing at home in Australia. After my paper, it was time to relax and eat. The cashier, seeing my John 3:16 tie, said, "I like your tie." He soon had *Living Waters* to share.

A friend gave his barber a wrapped *Living Water* for Christmas. "What is it?" "It's a book on the Forever Club; I'd like you to be in it." People love gifts. Give the gift that tells people about the Giver of everlasting life.

Now, that is the Christmas spirit.



Steps to Life Recovery Center
Great Falls, MT



Joe, Missy and Parents
San Diego, CA



Yampa Valley Baptist Church
Craig, CO



Jansen Bible Church
Jansen, NE

Which of You, Having a Hundred Sheep?

by John Niemelä

A few commentaries rightly say Luke 15 speaks of restoring believers to fellowship. Most see *finding the lost* there as conversion. One commentary gives a common, but inadequate, reason for accepting the latter:

Jesus was speaking to Pharisees who were rejecting the message of the kingdom. Their objection was that sinners were coming to Jesus and believing His message. In no way could these two groups [Pharisees and believers] be adequately represented in the third parable [the Prodigal] if the point of the parable is a restoration to fellowship by a believer. [John A. Martin, “Luke,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 244]

Yes, Jesus aims the parable at leaders, but He in no way calls them wicked sheep. Instead, verses 3-4 charge them as failed shepherds. The parable assigns them a shepherd’s role, a task in which they fail miserably. On the other hand, as the Good Shepherd, He fulfills the role perfectly.

So He spoke this parable to them [Pharisees and scribes], “What man of you [Pharisees and scribes] having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” [Luke 15:3-4, NKJ]

An expansion of the logic may help (that in *italics* is implicit):

For a moment, you Pharisees, picture yourselves as a shepherd with one strayed sheep (of a flock of one hundred). You would leave the others with a helper and find the lost one; *but you, Pharisees, do not do so: you abandon any stray, failing to act like shepherds.*

Jesus’ indictment draws upon the rebuke of Israel’s shepherds in Ezekiel 34:2-6:

Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! ... So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, *and no one was seeking or searching for them.* [NKJ: Emphasis mine]

Amongst Israel’s shepherds, only Jesus acted as a shepherd to the nation. In response to the commentary cited early in this article, we say:

The “restoring believers to fellowship” view most certainly deals with both groups (Pharisees and believers). Unlike Jesus who shares the father’s joy over his younger son’s restoration to fellowship, the Pharisees would send the younger son back to a far country and commend the older believing son’s harsh attitude (The Pharisees \neq the older son, even though they like what he says).

Jesus views neither ninety-nine sheep, nor nine coins, nor the older son as already lost. “What man of you having a hundred [unlost] sheep, if he loses one of them. . . ?” If one hundred were already lost, would losing an already lost sheep make it super-lost (whatever that means)? If so, then:

100 already lost sheep
<u>–1 super lost sheep</u>
99 already lost sheep
<u>+1 found sheep</u>
1 found and 99 lost sheep

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If so, why did the shepherd only seek one sheep, not a hundred? Each one suffering loss (shepherd, woman, father) only regards one (sheep, coin, son) as lost.

“Ninety-nine who need no repentance” literally means ninety-nine “need no repentance.” It is not that ninety-nine delusionally imagine they need no repentance. Such believers did not go to a far country, so they need not repent of leaving. Though harsh toward repentent believers, the older son need not repent of going to any far country.

Not surprisingly, Jesus speaks of greater rejoicing over one repentant sinning believer than over multitudes not needing to repent. My last cold was almost three years ago. I take good health for granted and rejoiced more in my health the day after shaking a cold than in all 1,000 healthy days combined. Both Jesus and heaven rejoice greatly when believers return to the Lord from the far country. Eating with these sinners and tax collectors celebrated (or facilitated) their return to the Lord. Luke 15 rebukes wicked Pharisaic shepherds for neglecting stray sheep.

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No Denying It: Peter, Loyal Shepherd to the End

by George Niemelä

Introduction

Many view Jesus’ command that Peter tend the flock (John 21:15-17) as a strange ending to a book for unbelievers. Some twist John 13–17 and 21 into arguments against John’s evangelistic purpose. Not so quick.

Unbelievers needed proof that the apostles did not concoct their message. Linked with the Last Discourse (John 13–17) and the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21), John 21 explains the apostles’ willingness even to die for the risen Christ. He had proven Himself to them (and many others), so risking death to proclaim Him shows their devotion to Christ. This, in turn, makes John’s message credible to unbelievers.

Peter Denied (John 13:36-38; 18:1-27)

Peter always sought to show love for Christ. He even pledged to die for Him (emulating the Good Shepherd who gave His life, not fleeing the cross). True to his promise, Peter severed a servant’s ear with a sword. However, Jesus rebuked Peter: Christ must drink the Father’s cup. Helpless to protect Jesus, Peter denied Him, fleeing like a fearful hireling, not staying as a shepherd (John 10:12-13). He wept, recalling the Lord’s words (Luke 22:62).

Peter Reconciled (John 21:15-19)

Although overjoyed to see Christ risen, Peter worried that his denials proved him untrustworthy for service. Not so, Jesus’ commands to shepherd and feed the flock prove He entrusted Peter as a faithful shepherd — one who will neither flee nor deny. Shepherding faithfully unto death would show Peter’s love.

— *Loving Christ: The Last Discourse (John 13–17)*

The Last Discourse underlies John 21. Only if the eleven love one another and abide in Him will proclaiming His message of life affect an antagonistic world. Unified in obedience to Christ, their message would penetrate Satan’s world. Love for Christ sent them sowing seed (the word) and reaping a bountiful harvest of believers who would, in turn, sow seed in others.

Christ sought from Peter a lifetime of sacrifice, not a singular sacrifice to keep Jesus from death. For this, the eleven needed His strength. After a fruitless night fishing (John 21:1-14), Jesus said, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat.” Obeying Him made them catchers of fish beyond their wildest dreams. Obeying Him would make them successful fishers of men also.

— *Tending the Flock: The Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21 and Ezekiel 34)*

The Good Shepherd sermon draws upon Ezekiel 34, which defines God’s standard for shepherding: **defend the flock, strengthen the weak, and gather strays**. The Lord will *save* (**defend**) His flock by sending His

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shepherd (Ezek 34:21-24). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, elaborates: “If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). Jesus *saved* His flock: He laid down His life to give the flock life. Israel’s leaders are thieves who fleece the flock and kill Him to usurp His divine right as Shepherd and to steal His sheep. On Earth, Jesus **strengthened** believers to abide in Him. He will completely fulfill His shepherding role, **gathering** Israel’s scattered sheep into one flock in the Kingdom. John highlights a different (pre-Kingdom) facet of Jesus’ shepherding: outreach to unbelievers.

Jesus groomed disciples to shepherd after His ascent. Their shepherding complemented Christ's, aiding His ultimate goals. His good undershepherds would **expand the flock by proclaiming the message of life** to the world. Specifically, John's Gospel carries Jesus' outreach to additional unbelievers and Peter's Acts 2 sermon multiplied the existing flock in a day. Jesus prayed for the unity of those who would believe through the eleven undershepherds' outreach (John 17:20). Scattered Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah, will someday **pray for deliverance** (Deut 30; John 12:23-26) **and Jesus will gather dispersed Israel** — one Shepherd, one flock. Meanwhile, the eleven also **strengthened believers by teaching**. Jesus' exhortation to Peter has progression: apostolic shepherding changed lambs into sheep. The disciples continued Jesus' shepherding ministry to both believers and unbelievers.

— *Peter will Love Christ to the End (John 21:18-19)*

Peter was not to spare Christ from death, but to shepherd the flock by spreading the message of life, gathering and strengthening sheep. Peter loved Christ by faithfully obeying God's will unto death. Peter urged others (also answering to the Chief Shepherd) to shepherd well (1 Pet 5:1-4). Both Christ and Peter died to glorify God.

Conclusion

Some see shepherding as behind closed church doors (the sheepfold). How risky is that? No, shepherding is also in open fields where antagonists dwell. Jesus *saved* the flock by giving His life so believers live forever. Apostolic shepherds risked death, openly proclaiming His message of life to an antagonistic world. The eleven's confidence in Christ engendered fearless proclamation (2 Pet 1:16-21), demonstrating John's message as true to unbelievers.

John 13-17 and 21 served a key first century role. John's Gospel and the signs Jesus worked through the apostles show unbelievers that Jesus *sent* the eleven (just as the Father *sent* Him). Their message would be empty if they just *went*. Apostles (as with Jesus) must glorify God both in life and in death. John 21 declares Peter (a good undershepherd) will give his life for the sheep just as the Good Shepherd did. If the promise of everlasting life through Christ is worth dying for, it is also worth believing.

The Trinity and John 1:1

(full conference paper at www.TheMessageofLife.com)

At ETS (Evangelical Theological Society) in San Francisco, John spoke on John 1:1, refuting the Jehovah's Witness theory that Jesus is only a god. Witnesses reason, if 1:1c affirms Jesus as God Almighty, 1:1b would say God Almighty was with God Almighty. They correctly perceive that John does not say that Jesus was beside Himself. However, they take a rabbit trail in trying to explain what John 1:1 actually affirms.

The Trinity refers to deity in common for three distinct members of the one Triune God. Analogously, during David's last three years, Solomon was his co-regent: they had kingship in common. The following illustrates (John 1:1 is the third statement). English says *the King*, but

prefers *God* over *the God*, so that article is bracketed. The sentences only use articles where the Greek would.

*David was **King**; David was with **the King**.*

Solomon was **King**; Solomon was with *the King*.

*The Word was **God**; the Word was with [the] God.*

*The Father was **God**; the Father was with [the] **God**.*

John 1:14 and 18 speak of God called *Son* and also of God called *Father*. John presents Jesus as the lifegiving Messiah and God. Any who reject His deity will hardly believe His promise of everlasting life. Only an infinite Promisor (God) can keep an infinite promise. Believers who know John's Gospel, who Jesus is, and what He promises may use it confidently with unbelievers.

Upcoming Speaking

Other than Christmas travel, we will stay close to home this winter, writing and teaching seminary.

Dec 28: Federal Way, WA: Lakeland Bible Church: Wednesday evening service

Dec 30: Sequim, WA: The Crossing Church: Mini-church meeting

Dec 31: Port Angeles, WA: The Crossing Church: Bible Conference

Apr 22: Corsicana, TX: Believer's Bible Church: Morning worship

Apr 23-26: Fort Worth, TX: GES National Conference

Recent and Upcoming Publications

"Evidence for a First Century 'Tenement Church,'" *JOTGES* 23 (Spring 2011)

"Hebrews 12:14: A Test Case," *JOTGES* 23 (Autumn 2011)

"Introduction to Romans" and "Endnotes" for Zane Hodges' commentary on Romans: Early 2012 publication

"Acts 1:8 Reconsidered," *JOTGES* 24 (Spring 2012)

My series of articles on John's Gospel will start with the second issue of *Grace in Focus* for 2012.

Prayer Requests

Opportunities to distribute Gospels of John, timely completion of the John commentary and notes for the Romans commentary, Message of Life finances, continued good health, travel safety, teaching at Rocky Mountain Seminary, and opportunities both to teach John's Gospel and to encourage others to share *Living Waters*.

The Athletic Member of the Family

Living in cities as we have, pets were impractical. After buying a home with a yard, we adopted Cal, our vocal and energetic German Shepherd/Chow mix, at eight weeks. He is named for Calvin Coolidge (not John



Cal at 8 weeks
The day we adopted him

Calvin), the 30th president of the United States. We live on Coolidge Court. "Cool Cal" is one of our favorite presidents. For Cal, it is always play time. He is insatiably curious. He dislikes rain, but loves snow. He keeps us active and fit, demanding daily three-mile bike rides. He prefers running alongside to pedalling.



Cal at 1 year
Our most recent snowfall

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