

PLAIN TRUTH®

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

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A Tiny Ripple of Hope

By Greg Albrecht

Each time a human being stands up for an idea... or acts to improve the lot of others... or strikes out against injustice... he or she sends out a tiny ripple of hope. In crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a mighty current which can sweep down the most terrible walls of oppression and injustice.—June 1966

On June 6, 1966, Robert F. Kennedy (RFK), then the Attorney-General of the United States, gave a speech at the University of Cape Town which has since become known as the **Ripple of Hope** speech. RFK encouraged students who were mired in hatred and apartheid—trapped in an abyss of bigotry and racism—by asking them to think of their part in helping to change the status quo. He encouraged these students to become part of something bigger.

When we look back to the time and particular place in which this **Ripple of Hope** speech was given, through the miracle of hindsight, we might think of these words as

prophetic. At that very moment, when Robert F. Kennedy delivered the **Ripple of Hope** speech, a few miles away (just miles off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa) Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island.

At the time of this speech Nelson Mandela had just finished serving the first two years of a 27-year prison sentence, in three separate prisons in South Africa, finally being released in 1990. No one would have thought at the time of Kennedy's speech that a convict was the **Ripple of Hope** for South Africa.

Tiny Ripple of Hope on Robben Island

How tiny, insignificant and unknown was the life of a convict when it came to the profound abuse and oppression and the horrific legacy of racism that existed in South Africa? What did this then little-known prisoner accomplish?

- Nelson Mandela would eventually lead South Africa out of its apartheid, serving as its president from 1994-1999.
- Nelson Mandela received the

Nobel Peace Prize and eventually came to be known as the Father of South Africa.

When he was imprisoned, Nelson Mandela seemed powerless and without any means to inspire and lift others out of their lives of spiritual and physical slavery. Little did anyone know that a relatively obscure prisoner, whose life for all appearances was over,

would become such a powerful instrument of peace and change in his own country! But Nelson Mandela would eventually become the **Ripple of Hope** for South Africa.

Each time a human being stands up for an idea... or acts to improve the lot of others... or strikes out against injustice... he or she sends out a tiny ripple of hope. In crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a mighty current which can sweep down the most terrible walls of oppression and injustice.

Never underestimate how Jesus can live his risen life in you to serve others, and cause ripples of hope far beyond your own life, changing the lives of others.

Young or old, we never get tired of throwing pebbles into a still pond and watching the ripples radiating in ever larger circles. When the waves reach the shore, they bounce back and their backwash interacts with other small wavelets in the pond. Scientists tell us that even when the ripples in a pond seem to disappear, their

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Four No's of Our Lives in Christ

Do not be afraid...for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32, NIV).

...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2, NIV).

I have a dear friend who pastors a congregation in a neighboring city not far from my home in Southern California. My pastor friend often ends his weekly sermons with a beautiful catch-phrase that both captures and carries great encouragement for our lives together in Christ Jesus. His catch-phrase goes something like this:

In Christ Jesus, we can live our lives with No Fear, No Shame, No Guilt and No Doubt.

Upon offering these words as his conclusion to many of his weekly sermons, my friend then sits down and lets the weight of the Four “No’s” sink in.

What does it mean to live our lives in Christ Jesus with **No Fear, No Shame, No Guilt and No Doubt?**

No Fear: Fear seems to be such a common driver, a motivator, and a “come-from” in the world in which we live today.

Headlining each day’s key news cycles, the media feeds viewers, listeners and readers an unrelenting diet of **what to fear** and **who to blame for that fear**.

Our politicians first campaign on, and then govern from, a continual focus on all the ills that trouble us, and how they will somehow, magically, wave a governmental wand, fix our problems and take away our fears.

Pastors all-too-often use an unhealthy and counter-productive teaching around the **fear of God**; a teaching that just happens to keep their people coming, praying, and paying, in their churches. Sadly, fear has become an emotion we are far too accustomed to living with in our daily lives.

As Christ-followers, Jesus reminds us again and again to **fear not**. Throughout the pages of the Gospel record, 365 times in fact (depending on the translation), Jesus uses the phrase, **do not be afraid**.

In reading his encouragement, we remember that Christ Jesus has mastered our fear. We know that his perfect love within us **casts out fear**. We rest in the fact that Jesus has our lives completely covered, and in that, we live in and enjoy his peace.

No Shame and No Guilt: Guilt and shame can run hand-in-hand. Usually, we first feel guilty about something we said or did (or something we didn’t say or do), and then, not long thereafter, the weight of shame moves in. The two emotions then go to war with us, in a recurring loop that just won’t quit. When we fall short, let others down, or act from a place of our honest human weakness and limitation, we feel the pain of guilt and shame at once.

At such times, we can lose sight of our identity in Christ Jesus. We can forget that Jesus has our lives completely covered. We now live in a kingdom where we are truly loved and forgiven. The truth of our identity rests solely and safely with him, not in our human weakness and limitation.

No Doubt: As a result, we rest assured that Jesus is the author and finisher, the pioneer and perfecter, of our faith. His indwelling faith within us—the total trust and ability to live fully in a true state of grace—with **no doubt**—is his gift to us through the Holy Spirit.

We know, in full assurance, that Christ Jesus has our lives covered. We live in him and he lives in us. It is indeed finished; Jesus has given us the victory and citizenship in his kingdom now.

Each time I think about and reflect on these words of encouragement, I am struck by their simplicity and deep meaning. In one short concluding phrase, I receive the essence of what it means to live free in Christ Jesus. I receive a beautiful reminder of how our Lord has changed our lives completely. I receive and rest in his peace.

To live life as a Christ-follower, with **No Fear, No Shame, No Guilt and No Doubt**, is to live in a true state of grace.

As a citizen of his kingdom now, with an identity in him, we can let go of the old thought patterns and recurring emotions of guilt and shame.

We cast away fear, the fear that is so common in both our world around us, and in our own human nature. We live anew, with no doubt, trusting fully in him. Together, we live from the **Four No’s** of our lives in him. As such, we live free.

When we do stay in touch and keep up with what is happening around us, we can do so from our rest in him. □

—Ed Dunn

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energy lives on in what seems to the naked eye to be the apparent tranquility of the pond.

The Tiny Ripple of Hope Saving the Doomed at Dunkirk

In May, 1940, German forces advanced into France, trapping the Allied Forces, the majority of whom in this theater of war were the British Army. They were boxed in—the German troops were closing in, and over a quarter of a million young British soldiers and 100,000 other Allied soldiers faced capture or death. The German armed forces seemed to have the English armies at their mercy, with the beaches of Dunkirk and English Channel destined to become their graveyard.

The Royal Navy estimated it could save only a small fraction of these troops imprisoned between the German Army and the English Channel. Just when all hope seemed lost, a curious flotilla of seagoing lifeboats, fishing boats, sail boats, pleasure craft, an island ferry named “Gracie Fields” and even the America’s Cup Challenger “Endeavor” appeared on the horizon.

Under air and ground cover from British and French forces, troops were slowly and methodically evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk, using every civilian boat that could be found and was seaworthy. When all was said and done, the heroic mission of this bizarre armada, manned by civilian sailors, rescued 338,688 French, British, Belgian and Dutch soldiers and safely evacuated them to the shores of England.

This ragtag fleet pulled off one of the most remarkable naval operations in history. These civilian sailors responded to the cries for help because they felt they were *part of something bigger than themselves* and thus, during one of the darkest hours for the British Empire during World War 2, provided a **Tiny Ripple of Hope**.

We all have times in our lives

when we engage in remarkable, difficult and sometimes heroic efforts because we know we are *part of something bigger*—we do what we do for others, rather than only ourselves.

A small pebble in our hands can become a mighty ripple of hope in the lives of many others. In such times when we serve and help, when we stand up for others, when we self-sacrificially extend ourselves, serving others in Jesus’ name, without knowing it at the time, we can provide a ray of sunshine, a beacon of a better life. Like a pebble thrown into a pond, our efforts to make a difference can become a **Tiny Ripple of Hope** to others.

It can be difficult when life throws us every curve ball in its arsenal, when our path seems littered with potholes and detours and ditches, when the mighty waves of the sea explode on us, when all that we see and touch seems to turn out the very opposite of what we had planned and hoped—it can be so difficult to imagine that we really are *part of something bigger*.

A Tiny Ripple of Hope on a Little Speck of this Universe

Mathematicians have estimated our galaxy (the Milky Way) in this universe to be the size of an 8½ by 11 inch piece of paper, then the map of the known universe would be about 80 miles long. On that piece of paper, the size of our solar system would be like a molecule, invisible to the naked eye.

We know planet earth is but a small part of our molecule-size solar system. So on this 80-mile map of the known universe what is the size of this “huge” planet upon which we live? Like the comparative molecule-size of our solar system, planet earth is also invisible, but far smaller and more insignificant—planet earth is but a



speck! Isaiah speaks of the nations of this earth like a “*drop in a bucket*” or “*dust on the scales*” (Isaiah 40:15).

It is to this little speck of dust on the “invisible molecule” of our solar system that God, in the person of Jesus, came. The Creator who made humans out of the “dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7) came to our tiny particle of a planet—to our seemingly insignificant lives on this microscopic atom of planet earth, bringing a **Tiny Ripple of Hope**.

Jesus threw himself as a tiny pebble into the great cosmos of the very universe he had created—choosing this tiny little planet we call earth for beginning this **Tiny Ripple of Hope** that would radiate outwards, ever onward, growing, as it were, from a tiny mustard seed, into the kingdom of God.

In and because of Christ, by the grace of God, you are significant, even though you might seem insignificant and even invisible. It may seem to you that God may not even know you—no one else seems to recognize or know you or care about you. But God knows—he cares—and he loves you.

That is the clear message of the coming of God in the person of Jesus to be one of us, to be with us, and to be for us. The clear message of the gospel is that you are *part of something bigger* than you can see and perceive.

By the grace of God you and I have been given his favor... and in so doing he propels, energizes, enables and empowers us to pass on his love and grace to others.

We’re part of something bigger! □



Ageism: Prejudice Against Our Future Selves

By Rachel Ramer

When I was in my twenties, I had a menial interviewing job to survey seniors about their health, including their sex lives—not high school or college seniors, the octogenarian kind. After apologizing for the intrusive questions and using a monotone voice, I read from the questionnaire. I received some eye-opening answers. It taught me something: never underestimate. The experience verified at least one aspect of their health—most seniors have a healthy sense of humor!

The world is full of biases and discrimination including those directed at race, gender, nationality, and disability. One prejudice stands out as unique—the bias against what we will all become if we don't die first: *old*. We hear terms such as “boomer” now used in derogatory ways—as labels we would not dare to duplicate about another race or someone with a disability. Perhaps we find this acceptable because we know we're mocking our future selves. But those currently in an older generation feel the sting of discriminatory comments.

In 1969, Robert N. Butler coined

the term in his article “Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry.” He defined this as “prejudice by one age group toward other age groups.” He explained this as a particular problem in reference to the elderly. “Age-ism reflects a deep seated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle-aged—a personal revulsion to the distaste for growing old... and fear of powerlessness, ‘uselessness,’ and death.”

Of course, ageism can go either way. Not only seniors among us experience chronological snobbery. We may despise the young as well as the old. Aging, however, carries a growing sense of disregard instead of respect when a younger generation gains a few years. The elderly have experienced youth, its energy and naiveté; the young have not yet gained the nuanced wisdom from shattered dreams or scarred achievements.

I recently overheard a thirty-eight-year-old woman speaking to a group of teenagers and apologizing to them for her age. This is not uncommon. It's an indicator that we're conditioning them to accept ageism. Instead of valuing experience and longevity, we tend

to dismiss a wealth of information and experience. In the *Huffington Post* article, “7 Cultures that Celebrate Aging and Respect Their Elders,” the author noted, “Aging isn't just a biological process—it's also very much a cultural one. In Western Cultures... aging can become a shameful experience.”

Shouldn't Previous Generations Be Held to Account?

I've witnessed the bristling among the young toward those who have misused authority or exercised a flawed influence over our culture. Shouldn't we be looking to the future and the next generation instead of honoring those who have had their chance? Aren't many of the social, environmental and spiritual problems we face delivered to us by past generations? Shouldn't younger generations call them to account for their mistakes, negligence, and outright disregard for what will happen if we don't change our course?

None of this should be ignored. We pay a price for how previous generations approached—even solved—problems, often creating new problems along the way. This, of course, could happen for the next

generation as well. Still, if someone with authority in your life caused pain, abuse, or hardship, you don't have to ignore it. If someone older used their age or influence to destroy what is good, find the support and fortitude to address it. This is not an excuse for those who should be called to account.

Prejudice Includes Assumptions

It's true that seniors who struggle with technology can be uninformed and outdated, but this leads to the false assumption that technological advancement means more updated accuracy. In 1970, NASA safely brought back the crew of Apollo 13 while calculating with the use of slide rulers. This was an incredible feat with rather primitive technology. Teachers have taught effectively without technology for most of the history of the world. Did what occurred before technology make it possible for us to be where we are today?

In reality, those growing up more recently could be less educated because of a dependence on technology. In his *New York Times* opinion piece, "You Still Need Your Brain," cognitive psychologist Daniel T. Willingham makes the case for two ways the brain beats the Internet: *context* and *speed*. While past generations may have had to visit the library or reference encyclopedias, they memorized to retain the type of detail students currently search for on the Internet. This gave them speed for direct reference.

In addition, *the abundance of misinformation and outdated information currently at our fingertips shows the advances in technology and the ability to operate that technology do not automatically make people smarter.*

Seniors also have more contextual knowledge simply by living longer, which is incredibly useful to them and those around them. Of course, aging often impacts retention, yet it's a fallacy to think the younger generation is automatically more accurately

informed since *more information does not necessarily mean more accurate information*, even with advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Increased Grief

When we first became aware in 2020 that Covid 19 was a global problem, the message was clear; it would hit the elderly the hardest. The medical world prepared vaccines first for those above a certain age or with challenging medical conditions. Along with the resistance to masks, vaccines and social distancing was a stark reality for seniors—some in their world (perhaps their own family) saw them as expendable, a few even suggesting their deaths were necessary for population control. While some died alone and we counted the deceased, the perceived diminished importance of their lives was on display.

Those who have lived a long time know something about grief and the value of life. Perhaps they've had siblings, life partners, or even children die before them. Maybe they've outlived several pets. Friends have passed due to accidents, disease—even suicide. Public figures who were running the world when they were young are now gone. That's a lot of grief.



Combating Ageism on a Personal Level

Whether we're young or old, ageism is an ethical issue. This generation has a unique opportunity due to advances in medical science. In an article by Robert H. Shmerling (2022) *Harvard Health* reports life expectancy within the United States was 47 years in 1900, 68 years in 1960, and 79 years in 2019. We have the opportunity to interact with longevity both in others and in ourselves.

As with other prejudices, the cure is shared humanity and empathy. What does shared humanity look like? It avoids assumptions. Seniors are still breaking barriers, like those over seventy and well into their nineties running marathons, writing books and giving back to society. Shared humanity means spending time together. Limited mobility may keep seniors from social gatherings. Hearing loss may diminish interaction even when present.

The National Poll on Healthy Aging reports that "chronic loneliness can impact older adults' memory, physical well-being, mental health, and life expectancy." The older generation isn't the only group affected by not spending time together. Children and grandchildren miss out on their perspective, support and presence.

When time is in limited supply, its value increases, not decreases. Our final years matter. We mourn the loss of time with a sense of duty to live those years well.

As I write this, former President Jimmy Carter is in hospice at the age of 99. When he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, he stated, "*The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears and prejudices.*" □

Rachel Ramer is host of "Lost the Legalism, Kept the Love" on Facebook.

What's New?

By Jim Fowler

As the planet we reside on begins another annual trajectory around the sun, it provides an occasion for us to inquire, "What's new in our world or in our lives as we begin this New Year?" The perspective of some might be that they are "stuck in the monotonous rut" of the repetitious "same old, same old" routine. Others may have an entirely different perspective of a fresh vibrancy of appreciation and expectancy of "the compassions and mercies of God" being "new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

At the heart of the Christian faith is the awareness of the present-tense quality of newness. The "new covenant" reality of the living Lord Jesus is the essence of the gospel. The Greek text of the New Testament employs two different words for "new."

Generally speaking, the Greek word *neos* indicates "new in time," temporal inauguration or appearance, whereas *kainos* indicates "new in kind," qualitative newness in contrast or comparison with what preceded.

The "new covenant" is both "new (*neos*) in time" (Hebrews 12:24) in its inauguration in Jesus Christ, as well as "new (*kainos*) in kind" (Hebrews 9:15) as contrasted with the old covenant of the Jewish

arrangement. Both of these Greek words are used in Jesus' words about the "new (*neos*) wine" requiring "new (*kainos*) wineskins" (Matthew 9:17; Luke 5:38).

New Year's Resolutions or New Life in Christ?

In the Western world, we use the Gregorian calendar with carefully crafted leap-year calculations that take into account the solar equinox. New Year's Day on January 1 has traditionally been the day when people make "New Year's Resolutions." These are personal determinations and resolve to engage in particular actions, often with commitments to self-improvement—to do better—to "be good."

Common New Year's resolutions include the vow or promise to lose weight, eat healthier foods, exercise more regularly, quit smoking, drink less alcohol, get organized, get out of debt, save more money and the like.

The effectiveness of such determinations of self-resolve is minimal, with estimates of success in fulfilling New Year's Resolutions for more than one month at less than twenty percent. But it seems to make people feel better about themselves that they try to start the new year with good intentions.

Many Christ-followers take a similar approach of self-resolve in

order to live the Christian life. They often make resolutions of commitment to be better Christians (as if that were possible), live a more holy life, attend church more regularly, get closer to God, give more generously, pray more often, read the Bible all the way through, etc.

But such resolutions for living the Christian life are even less effective than the traditional New Year's resolutions of self-improvement. In fact, such resolutions are truly impossible to implement by self-effort.

The Christian life can only be lived by the grace-dynamic of the indwelling Christ, as we faithfully avail ourselves and surrender to HIS empowering. Christians have access to "newness (*kainos*) of life" (Romans 6:4) by the resurrection-life of JESUS supplanting the old condition of spiritual death.

"In Christ" we have become a "new" creature (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15), a "new" man (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10) as contrasted with the "old" man (Romans 6:6) that we were "in Adam."

May we appreciate everything "new" that we have in JESUS this year! □

Adapted from It's All About Jesus by author and theologian Jim Fowler.



Eden as a Metaphor

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

I was recently interacting with an attractive, engaging woman—mid-forties, school teacher, twice divorced—who told me she had finished reading my book, *Black and White Bible: Black and Blue Wife*. She found the book thought-provoking, particularly my perception of the Garden of Eden as a metaphor for falling in love. She had recently begun dating again, and she felt she needed that warning.

I write the following about this garden paradise in my book:

When I contemplate this Garden of Eden, this Paradise, I wonder if it is appropriate to see it as a metaphor for falling in love. It has all the elements... The Garden of Eden is where beguiling romance is born. All it takes is two perfect people swooning, whispering sweet nothings, finding no fault. The deception of perfection. Suddenly a snake slithers in the grass and comes on the scene. Oh, how crafty is this clever creature. Sure, there have been red flags and warnings, but the serpent casts doubts, soothes an uneasy conscience, dismisses an unsure query. Like Eve, I did not ask hard questions. Suspicions and uncertainties disappeared like blossoms in the breeze. The lure of the forbidden fruit was irresistible. I ate the apple.

Yes, I ate the apple. Red flags were flying, but the loss of rational thinking had disappeared amid beguiling romance. A year later, having been together less than eleven full days, we were married. After all, he was a wonderful Christian man. We wrote lots of letters and talked frequently on the phone. True, he had been expelled from two Christian colleges and had been arrested as a peeping tom, but he had turned his life around. So I thought.

My imagined paradise, however, putrefied. As I tell in the book, enduring my husband's violent threats was worse than the physical abuse (and not just pushing and shoving). I truly was, as the title tells, a black-and-blue wife. But his terrorizing me was worse—even to the point of threatening to kill me.

After nearly twenty years of marriage, when our son turned thirteen and was able to testify in court, we escaped. Many people later asked why we didn't get out sooner. Why wait so long?

In my case, my ex-husband was a minister who could be very charming, and I feared he might convince a judge to award him joint custody. But with our son's testimony, my full custody was ensured.

I did not, however, request or receive child support. I knew it would exacerbate his rage.

Like Eve, I did not ask hard questions. The lure of forbidden fruit was irresistible. I ate the apple.

My fear of being killed far outweighed any fear of poverty. Since our initial meeting I've become better acquainted with the teacher who reminded me of my Eden metaphor. Fortunately, she presents herself as very cautious about marrying a third time.

The man of interest, also divorced, is a recovering alcoholic who, to his credit, faithfully attends AA meetings. Like her, he is personable and fun-loving.

Should I learn they are discussing marriage, however, I swear I will intervene. With a "flaming sword flashing back and forth," like the one that kept Adam and Eve from returning to Eden, I will insist they remain in that blissful garden of romance. Too much danger outside paradise, too many thorns and thistles—even for two perfect people.

She's an absolutely delightful conversationalist, a Democrat, a liberal, whom I'm enjoying getting to know. He's a Republican, a conservative, a workaholic, whom I know very well. He's my beloved son. Meddling mother that I am, flaming sword notwithstanding, he's guaranteed to pay me no heed. Will she?

Hopefully, with God's guidance and tender mercies, she will. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness."—Desmond Tutu

"The greatest deception men suffer is from their own opinions."
—Leonardo da Vinci

"Blind belief in authority is the greatest enemy of truth."—Albert Einstein

"Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional."
—Chili Davis

"With age comes wisdom, but sometimes age comes alone."—Oscar Wilde

"Some people have been spiritually crippled all their lives and know no other reality. They have been taught to fear and distrust everyone outside of their group, and they don't want to be released from the comfort of their closeted world."—Greg Albrecht, *Bad News Religion*

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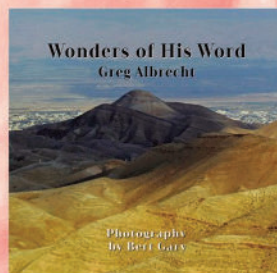
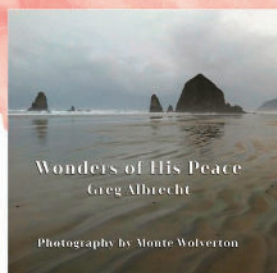
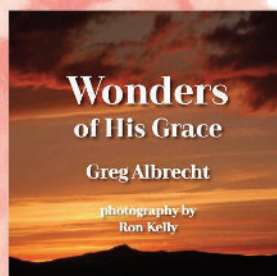
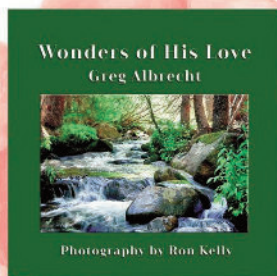
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