

CWR *magazine*

June 2024
Volume 15, Number 3

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



8 DECADES LATER

ED DUNN

Also in this issue:

The Father Never Leaves Us | Steve Brown p. 5

Navigating Grief | Stuart Segall p. 6

“D-Day” June 6, 1944



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8 DECADES LATER

They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate.

—President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

—Matthew 5:44-45

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering, enough to disarm all hostility.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

So much of the progress that would define the 20th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, came down to the battle for a slice of beach only six miles long and two miles wide.

—70th Anniversary, D-Day Ceremony

June 6, 1944 marks time with a date that is absolutely central to the freedoms we enjoy today. *Eight decades ago* this month, a combined force of nearly 156,000 troops from America, Britain and Canada landed on a small slice of beach in Normandy, France. The Allied force landed to try to stem the tide of Nazi aggression.

D-Day, as it would come to be known, would see the loss of life for 4,417 Allied soldiers, and the wounded or “missing-in-action” status for over 9,000 more. The freedom that resulted from those brave men taking that beach came at a tremendous and terrible cost. *Eight decades later*, it's hard to fully imagine both the cost and the long-term impact of that Day's events.

The lives of 156,000 men storming that beach on that Day must have come with such diversity. Out of the troop carriers came men of wealth and men of poverty. Men of color, men of differing levels of faith, education and culture. Men with families, and men who fought alone. Men with no God, and men

Cover Image: The wall-sized “D-Day Planning Map” was critical to the massive Normandy landing. It was located at Southwick House, the Allied strategic nerve center, a few miles north of Portsmouth, UK. It shows the perilous route the Allies took through a large Nazi minefield.

who trusted deeply and *never-more-intensely* in their own personal God. And, as we know well from documented accounts of the history of that Day, many of those brave and tremendous men of diversity never made it one step off their troop carriers.

As for the men who trusted deeply and *never-more-intensely* in their own personal God, we can only imagine what internal tension and dilemma that Day must have presented. Being a Christ-follower and going to war was not unique to soldiers in World War II. Countless men (and women) of faith have been approached, enlisted and conscripted to fight battles for causes both noble, and not-so-noble, since the time of Christ. To line up and go to war and to hold the words of Christ Jesus closely, could not have been easy. The sand those soldiers had to move through on D-Day was some of the most difficult (literally and figuratively).

How do we *love our enemies* when our enemies stand for an evil cause? What do we do when we find ourselves in the position of having to fight in-order-to stem the tide of evil? How do we harmonize a noble cause demanding difficult actions with higher ideals? There are no easy answers to such questions.

In the face of no easy answers, we whole-heartedly celebrate and remember those who have fought and lived, and those who have fought and paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. We gratefully live in and cherish the freedoms we enjoy that their *laying down of their lives* provides for us today. As someone who has

never been asked to serve under such unimaginable circumstances, I am left simply and humbly to pay my respects. I cannot know the magnitude of what those men faced.

than-noble beliefs and behaviors, we could see ourselves in the other. The truth is, *we are all made from the same clay* physically. As such, when it comes down to it, we have more

“If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man’s life sorrow and suffering, enough to disarm all hostility.” —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

WHO IS MY ENEMY?

When Jesus taught that we should *love our enemies*, what was he asking of us? Was he asking us to do the impossible through his frequent use of paradox? Was he setting a new high-water-mark for human relations in both times of war and times of peace? As I reflect upon his teaching, I believe he is asking us to have a complete shift in our perspective.

How can I love someone else and still see them as my enemy? The two thoughts seem totally incongruent. I believe Jesus is simply and ultimately saying, have no enemies. In the war-torn world of his time, as in our time today, this teaching was indeed radical.

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man’s life sorrow and suffering, enough to disarm all hostility, writes Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. If we could see the hurt and pain that another person lives with; hurt and pain that may well drive them to less-

in common in this physical life than not. More in this physical life binds us together as humans than pulls us apart.

Seeing this, and more importantly, understanding this, leads us to a shift in perspective. I believe this is what Jesus was asking of us. His risen life in us empowers Christ-followers to see ourselves in the other, and they, ultimately in us.

With this insight, how could someone else remain our enemy? *How could we hate someone else who is so much like us?* Even in the face of warfare, this shift in perspective could more readily lead us to fight against the less-than-noble ideology, and less so against the other person. If we truly love the other person, and no longer see them as our enemy, we enjoy the peace of Christ.

THE ONE WHO LIBERATES US

They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate. So stated President Franklin D.

Roosevelt in a public address to prepare the American nation for war. The Allied forces fought together to free Europe from the boot of tyranny. They fought to liberate those who deeply desired freedom but could not fight such tyranny on their own. That form of conquest is the most noble of causes. That resulting liberation points us to the highest and most

the tyranny of sin and death. Jesus alone has freed us from the less-than-noble beliefs and behaviors we all have in our lives, and he works lovingly and continually to transform us into his image.

Although we were once the enemies of Christ Jesus, as the Apostle Paul tells us in the book of Romans, that is no longer our place or position (Romans 5:10). We have been saved through faith in him. Our victory in him is secure.

As we whole-heartedly celebrate and reverently remember that victory in Christ, we give thanks for a complete shift in perspective. As he transforms us, we no longer see others as our enemies. We see others through his eyes of compassion, knowing that their sorrows and sufferings are our own. We face what all others face. We are one together in him and with each other.

Eight decades later, we give thanks with grateful hearts for the sacrifice of those who fought on that beach on that Day. The



This striking piece of sacred art was designed so that the light shining on Christ casts shadows that represent the two thieves next to him. (St. Francis Xavier, Missoula, MT. Photo via Scott Klautd.)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

—Matthew 5:44-45

Wars will continue to be a part of human history, as they have been to-date.

Christ-followers will be approached, enlisted and conscripted to fight in those wars. This is

simply a sorrow of our physical lives on earth at this time. Yet, we know this will not always be the case. We trust in and rest in the fact that the war for our lives is over. Christ Jesus has won; Christ Jesus has given us the victory.

act of self-sacrificial love to liberate on the part of the Allied forces marks time as one of the most important Days in history.

The act of self-sacrificial love to liberate on the part of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to free all of humanity from the tyranny of sin and death, marks time as *the most important event in history*.

Christ Jesus has given us the victory, and in so doing, has made us children of our Father in heaven. Thanks be to him! □

Ed Dunn, a Vice President of PTM, is a staff writer and serves on the CWRm editorial team.

important of victories.

We have One Liberator. Our Lord and Savior has made the ultimate sacrifice and paid the ultimate price in-order-to liberate all who will follow him.

Jesus alone has freed us from



The Father Never Leaves Us

Steve Brown

A friend asked me to contribute a story about my father for a chapter of his book, *What Fathers Say*. My friend asked me to tell a story about my father and then draw on something important I learned from him. I thought about the time I almost blew up an old lady sitting on her porch. I honestly didn't see the lady when I threw that cherry bomb. But when I went back (with my friends) to check on her, someone got my license plate, and by the time I got home an hour later, the police had already been there. When I looked at my father and heard him say, "And where have you been?" in a way that suggested he didn't need an answer, I knew I was in trouble... big trouble.

To make a long story short, I went to the police (twice) and then to the house where I had thrown the cherry bomb. I sat with the elderly lady I had almost injured and listened to her son (a very big and angry guy) threaten to kill me. And then I had to face my mother, who made that man look like a kitten. It was not a pleasant experience, and just so you know, I haven't touched a cherry bomb since.

Was my father happy with me? Are you crazy? I lost my driving privileges until I was 45 years old! But you know something? Throughout that

whole time my father never left my side... not once. Not only that, he made it clear I was his son (I thought I would be disowned) and he loved me deeply.

My wife Anna (when I told her I planned to contribute this story to the book) reminded me of the time when our daughter Robin was a little girl struggling with a serious case of pneumonia. My father walked into the room where Anna was standing there crying. I was out of town and Anna felt quite alone and afraid. She said my father stood by her and put his arm around her, squeezing her shoulder.

"He didn't say a thing," Anna said, "He just stood there with his arm around me and quietly waited."

His presence made all the difference and she felt everything would be all right. I understood, because under very different circumstances, my father did the same for me.

When I think of my father, I think of Jesus' words in Matthew 7:11, "*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*"

The first time I read those words, I thought, *Wow... if that's true and God loves me half as much as my father did, I've got it made.*

My dad wasn't big on church because he didn't think he was good enough. He wasn't. Neither

am I. Neither are you. But that's the message of Jesus—that he came for people who weren't good enough. My father never understood that but he does now. Just before he died, his doctor (a Christian) told my father that he had only three months at most to live. He said, "Mr. Brown, we're going to pray and then I'm going to tell you something more important than what I just told you." They prayed and then that beloved doctor told my father about Jesus and his love for those who don't fit, who were sinners and who always felt on the outside. That day my father ran to Jesus.

Maybe when we all get Home, you'll get a chance to watch my father play pool, but probably not. I can't find any mention of pool halls in the Bible. Besides, my mother—who was sure the devil resided in pool halls—would go ballistic. I do know my father felt more comfortable in pool halls than he did in church, and that's kind of sad.

That's one of the reasons I'm so passionate about the truth of God's radical grace. There was, of course, my father's unconditional love that I would later recognize in my heavenly father. But when I think of my father missing the central message of the Christian faith because he didn't think he was good enough, didn't fit, and thought he would be rejected, I wince. I wonder how many others are just like my father. □

Steve Brown is the president of Key Life Network.

Navigating Grief

Stuart Segall

We hear about the certainty of “death and taxes,” but grief has to be right up there with those two. You might be resigned to the others but how do you navigate grief?

For most of my adult life, I’ve done a lot of work as a chaplain. I’ve sat with the dying; many I did not know until I met them at their end. I often journey back in my mind to where my mom would take me

as a boy to nursing homes to teach me the art of comforting those who are alone even at a time when they might be surrounded by humans that love them. It would have been easy to avoid such uncomfortable scenes by avoiding the dying. Many do; it’s how they cope. Death can be too scary for many and too close for others to deal with, so it is very easy to make up all kinds of reasons to avoid the discomfort of “being there” at the end.

When studying grief as a young man, I read the famous book by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross “Death and Dying.” In her book, she states that those experiencing grief go through a series of five emotions: *denial, anger, bargaining, depression* and *acceptance*.

She later wished she hadn’t used the phrase “stages” because it gave people the understanding that these phases are like stepping stones or a clear pathway where one stage leads to the next. Now, the understanding is clear that they can come in any order and reoccur again and again.

A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE

Grief is one of the most common and unique things we experience in our journey of life. How we go about it and how long grief lasts can vary with the person. The reality is, with some, it will not just go away. Grief can last for years and come back when you least expect it. It might be a billboard, a

commercial, a smell or a sound—there is always something there to remind you.

My 44 years of serving those who grieve have given me a few things I would love to share with you.

My first thought is about being with the one who is grieving or perhaps facing death. I have a tendency to want to be a fixer—to perform and to please. In the past, I tended to feel responsible for other people’s problems or grief. The reality is that grief can only be fixed, or progress made

by the grieving person. All I can do is dock alongside the griever as a companion that through the quietness reminds them of my care for them during this trying time.

My second thought is about how we approach the chaos of grief. Many are naturally analytical in their thinking and therefore may also see a need to be orderly at such a time. We are more helpful in respecting their disorder and confusion, rather than thinking it is for us to come in and impose order and logic. While these qualities are good in many



areas of life, they can cause problems when aiding with grief. They can be obstacles for someone trying to be in touch with their pain. It's better to feel someone else's pain, to feel empathy, rather than try to problem-solve them out of their grief.

A third suggestion from my own experiences is about this process of comforting those who are grieving. You serve more effectively if you come to learn from others; helping others grieve is not about teaching them. You may have more experience and knowledge in many areas than those you want to help, but when it comes to grief, it's better to try to understand how that person sees their world. It means listening and reflecting.

My final thought is when we have the unique opportunity to sit with the broken and wounded in their grief, to approach them with consoling and compassionate curiosity; it is not about expertise.

NOT ABOUT US

When it comes to someone else's unique grieving, none of us are experts. If that was required, I would have belly flopped. What works for me might not be solutions that work for the person I'm with. Approaching a grieving person requires us to try to understand them—their thoughts and feelings—rather than thinking we can bring in an imaginary crate to pack up their pain.

When I was that young chaplain, I often reflect on how it was so painful. I just wanted those I saw to have hope. I did not care if their theology was different than mine, as long as there was some rope of hope they were hanging onto. Why? Because I wanted the problem resolved with hope.

I was very caring, but I projected my own feelings too much of the time. When I go into the room of the griever, whether they are grieving the loss of a loved one or their own impending loss of life, I remind myself that this is not about me and my feelings at all, but about them.

The example of our great God and Creator gives us guidance even in His creation. Many in the

animal kingdom are hardwired to perform this act of companionship with others in death. From a bird to an elephant, we have seen or heard about the animal that sits or lays down next to the dying animal. No moans or expressions, just silence, giving presence. It is powerful and helpful for us to learn this lesson from nature.

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?"

—Job 12:7-10

Death, taxes and grief. It is on the life menu for every one of us. We are not there to treat those we seek to comfort like a medical professional would treat a patient. We are there to offer heartfelt companionship. I call myself "Companion Stu"

when I do this, so as not to lose my purpose for being there.

In Psalm 139:14, we read: *"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful."* The Psalmist was so right, yet we are also complicated, and it is obvious to see this in action when we grieve.

We all suffer grief and loss. It is part of the package. So, I encourage you to give the griever what you, yourself would appreciate in your time of pain. You will find

that a heartfelt approach will lead you to serve in a better way.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God." —2 Corinthians 1:3-4

This is just one more way we can be more effective in following in His footsteps. □

Stuart Segall lives an hour north of Seattle. He has spent most of his adult life counseling, encouraging, inspiring and uplifting others.



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Reflections Along the Jesus Way

with Greg Albrecht

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