

PLAIN TRUTH®

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®



A Five-Cent Ice Cream Cone

Greg Albrecht

“...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Jesus explained that he would live his kingdom within his followers in such a way that the little things done in his name would be for him and even “to” him as much as they were for and “to” another person.

Jesus talked about offering a cup of cold water to a person who was thirsty. He talked about kindness to strangers and giving clothing to those in need. He talked about visiting the sick and those in prison.

While we won’t find Jesus specifically talking about buying

and giving a **Five-Cent Ice Cream Cone** in the Bible, I believe a **Five-Cent Ice Cream Cone Bible** can have a great deal to do with the gospel. **Five-cent ice cream cones** don’t exist anymore, but our story is set in such a time...

Our story is about a young boy who was named Issur Danielovitch at birth. Later, early in life, his name was changed to Izzy Demsky. Izzy grew up in Amsterdam, New York with his immigrant parents and six sisters. Izzy Demsky’s father was a ragman, buying old clothing and collecting discarded pieces of metal and junk.

The Demsky family grew up impoverished, living in the poorest part of town. The lowest rung on the ladder in the poorest part of town was the profession of ragman.

Ragmen did not make enough money to take care of their families, so as he grew up, Izzy scrambled to help the family. Izzy delivered newspapers, he worked as a janitor and a gardener... he had forty different jobs before he entered the career that made him famous.

Izzy Demsky changed his name one more time—when he entered the United States Navy in World War 2, he took the name Kirk Douglas.

The Oscar-winning actor Kirk Douglas, whose most career-defining role in the movies may have been when he played the Roman rebel slave Spartacus, tells a story about his father in his autobiography, *“The Son of a Ragman.”*

Douglas remembered being extremely close to his mother as he grew up in his impoverished family, while his father seemed emotionally detached. He recalled how much he craved the love of his father.

At school, the young Kirk Douglas (Izzy Demsky then) was given a major speaking, dancing and singing role in a play that would be performed one evening. Kirk Douglas knew his mother would be there because she was always supportive, but he seriously doubted whether his father would make the effort to attend. About halfway through the program, the young Kirk Douglas (Izzy) was standing on the stage, having

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Freedom, Festival & Fireworks

Christ has set us free to live a free life. So, take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you (Galatians 5:1).

Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better.—Albert Camus

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).

We have a small town a few miles to the south of us in Pasadena, California.

Technically, the town is more like a city in terms of its population, but the feel of San Marino, California is definitely *small-town*, especially on the **Fourth of July**. Its central park, Lacy Park, is shaded by a forest of towering mature trees. The grounds of Lacy Park are a beautiful mixture of freshly mown green-grass lawns and playgrounds filled with children playing on colorful slides, swing-sets and monkey bars. Adorned with patriotic flags and red, white and blue balloons on every lamppost, Lacy Park represents the best of Americana on any **Independence Day**. The park has been a special place to celebrate **freedom, festival and fireworks** for as many years as I can remember.

I remember years of meeting up with friends and family to celebrate by the shady trees, green-grass lawns and colorful playgrounds. Some years, our group picnicked together in an open atrium around a rose garden. Some years we walked together around the interior loop of the park just enjoying each other's company. When the children among us were little, we

had to cover their ears, as the fireworks were far too loud. As they grew, the parents in our group had to bring more sparklers, as the children twirled their way through our short supply far too quickly. I treasure these memories, as do my friends and family. Together, we deeply appreciate how the themes of **freedom, festival and fireworks** from years past carry into our lives now.

Freedom: The friends and family who gathered around these annual celebrations shared, and still share, a love of freedom. We live free together in the United States of America and enjoy so many opportunities and blessings (as do our friends and family in Canada). We cherish the opportunities to travel freely, get an education, work and set up home lives largely as we choose. And we share these blessings in the context of family life. So many in our world today do not have such freedoms and opportunities. More importantly, as Christ-followers, we live free in Christ Jesus. We live free of the ultimate wages of sin and the fear of death. We know that no matter what we may face in the seemingly endless stream of challenges and difficulties life can bring, Jesus has us covered. We celebrate and stand firm in him.

Festival: The annual celebrations we look forward to—the **festival** of life (if you will), give us context in our lives. Each year's **Fourth of July** festivities remind us of our national and physical freedoms. Each year's celebration, or **festival**, of Easter and Christmas reminds us of our eternal and spiritual freedoms. In the midst of celebrating these

annual reminders, we share in the love, joy and peace Jesus Christ has for us. Christ Jesus is our true **festival**.

Fireworks: In him, our true **festival**, the love, joy and peace we share are like the glorious flashes of fireworks that explode and take our breath away. These colorful and creative gifts from above brighten our lives. These beautiful gifts expand and flow from Christ-in-us outward, toward others. We become a light, as he is light, to the world. His fireworks in our hearts, in our lives, bring **freedom** and **festival** to all.

Christ offers the world the true **freedom** to be better. Christ Jesus has set us free from all forms of slavery and invites us into a life of taking a stand in him. He is the Spirit, and where he is there is true life and true freedom. We celebrate our lives, our freedoms and opportunities in him, and his indwelling life in us.

The annual celebrations that give our lives context, both physically and spiritually, serve to remind us. The festivities around the **Fourth of July** help us to remember our national **freedom**, and can point us toward our **greater freedom In Christ**. The celebrations of Easter and Christmas bring **festival and fireworks** all their own. We celebrate all that has been done for us in Jesus Christ.

We celebrate together, as friends and family, the **fireworks** of love, joy and peace in our lives. Only through him could these beautiful gifts be both given and received. Only through him can we share them with the world. □

—Ed Dunn

Continued from page 1

already located his mother in the audience, when he caught view of his father standing at the very back of the auditorium.

When the play was over, the young Kirk Douglas was hoping his father would come up and congratulate him on a job well done. His father came up to him and, as usual, didn't say much or express any outward affection. But, as they left the auditorium, he asked his son if he would like to stop on the way home and have a **Five-Cent Ice Cream Cone**.

As Kirk Douglas looked back on his life, he reflected on all the awards he had won and been given, he said that most of all, he prized that ice cream cone more than anything—even more than his Oscar.

God's Grace and Gracious Good Manners

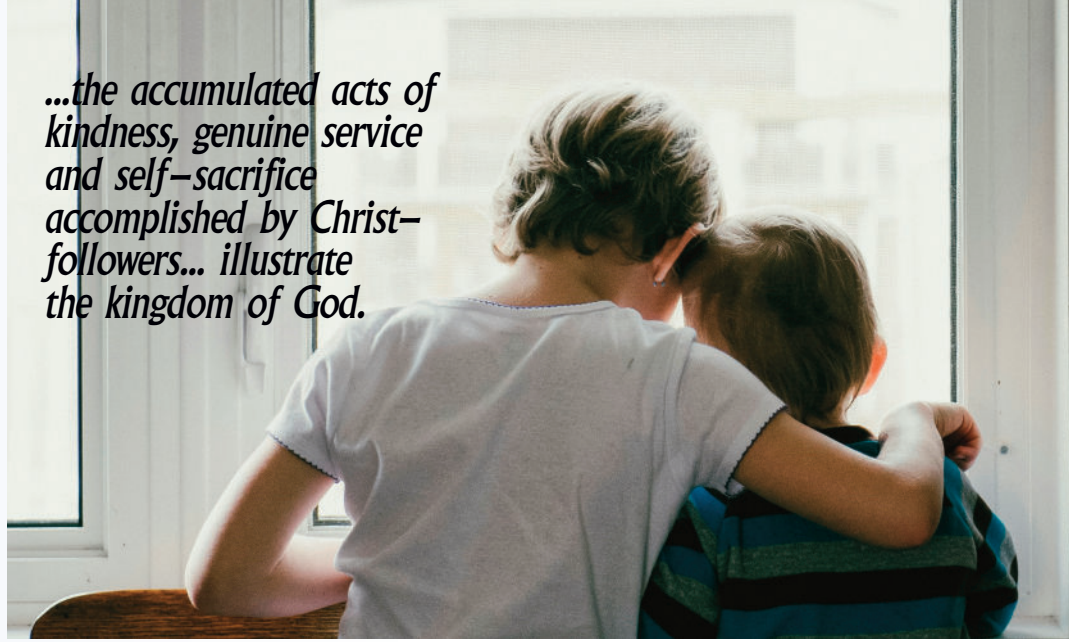
It is so easy to think that what you might do as a Christ-follower is insignificant and unnecessary. It is so easy for Christ-followers to think our contributions and gracious acts of service are so small perhaps we should not even bother.

But when Jesus explained *how* we are his servants, he did not talk about how we might change the world by building a hospital, founding a school or curing a disease.

But Jesus said that *where two or three are gathered together...* maybe just for a chat... maybe just for a phone call or email... maybe just for coffee and snacks, or to attend a movie or walk in the park... maybe to visit a friend or loved one in the hospital—in such small and unremarkable times and events he is with us and in us and in them (Matthew 18:19-20).

The secret of the kingdom of God is like a **Five-Cent Ice Cream Cone**. It doesn't take much to make a difference in the life of another! The principle of extending ourselves and helping others is not only a hallmark of Christ-centered

...the accumulated acts of kindness, genuine service and self-sacrifice accomplished by Christ-followers... illustrate the kingdom of God.



faith—it is one of those gracious traits of “good manners” so sadly missing in our contemporary world. We often have no idea about how and when “good manners” and gracious behavior will impact the life of another.

You may be familiar with the name Roone Arledge. Before he died in 2002 of cancer at the age of 71, Arledge became a television legend. He made ABC into a commercial powerhouse and was the brains behind the success of the early versions of ABC evening news.

During an interview, Arledge told the story about how he got his start in television. He was a young man, looking to start his career. He had navigated his way through several interviews and he was now sitting outside the office waiting to see the man in charge of programming for a small television station.

Several years before that interview, Arledge was paying for college by working as a waiter in a restaurant in Cape Cod called the Wayside Inn. One night a family came in after the dining room had closed. As he was cleaning up, young Roone Arledge saw their disappointment, came over and invited them to take a seat at one of the tables. He told them that he would find something in the kitchen so that they could have their dinner.

The family was extremely grateful. After they finished their meal they asked him for his name.

A few years later, Roone Arledge had graduated from college, and he was looking for a job in the television industry. He found himself sitting outside the office of the man who had the power to hire him.

Roone Arledge was ushered into the office. The programming director remembered him, and greeted him by asking, “How is everything at the Wayside Inn on Cape Cod?”

The young Roone Arledge was confused. He said, “What do you mean?”

The director of programming said, “You don't remember me but I remember you. Several years ago, my family and I were on vacation, and we came into the dining room at the Wayside Inn after the kitchen had closed, and you saw to it that we had dinner.”

That programming director never forgot the young waiter who extended an extraordinary, above and beyond, gesture of kindness. I don't know whether Roone Arledge was extending the grace of God or whether he was just extending “normal” graciousness and courtesy, but years later, his good manners got him the job, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Service To Others In His Name

We help in small and simple ways, sometimes, as Matthew 25 says, ways that we even forget, but they turn out to be critically important

in the life of another... and they will never forget.

And when you put all the small and little things that all members of the body of Christ produce, by God's grace, as Christ lives in them, we see the kingdom of God in action. Together, as Christ followers we can and do impact the world, in the name of Jesus.

There's an old story about an old pagan king from Babylon. According to the story, the king came back to life and visited a modern, 21st century city in North America. The pagan king was assigned a host to show him around the city. The host wanted to impress this famous and rich king from the past, so the king was shown towering skyscrapers that serve as monuments to materialism.

Then, still trying to show the Babylonian king a good time, his host showed him the wild night life of the city. When the tour was over and the host was dropping the king off at his hotel the king said to his host, "Well, I'm really not that impressed—we had huge monuments in Babylon, and wine, women and song were always available everywhere.

But I have heard many people now call themselves Christians—we didn't have them back in Babylon. What do these Christ-followers do? Where can I find them?"

So his host told him he could show him a little more of the city the next day. After the host picked up the king at his hotel, they toured drug rehabilitation centers, homeless shelters, homes for unwed mothers, soup kitchens, free medical clinics, and institutions for the disabled. He showed the pagan king Christian ministries who reached out to others with a helping hand in the name of Jesus. When the day was over, the king said to his host, "All I have seen today is new. We didn't have these things in my kingdom."

Jesus is deeply involved in random acts of kindness, small gestures—**Five-Cent Ice Cream Cones**, if you will. While serving others in Jesus' name may seem somewhat inconsequential, the accumulated acts of kindness, genuine service and self-sacrifice accomplished by Christ-followers, empowered by our risen Lord who lives within us, express and practically illustrate the kingdom of God. □



In need of mending
from Christless
religion?

Jesus brings hope, comfort,
encouragement & healing.



PTM/CWR — All Jesus, all the time



Why Worship God?

From fear, for rewards or for love?

Brad Jersak

The legend is told of a sage who was found marching through the streets of her ancient city, bearing a torch in one hand and a pail full of water in the other. It was plain to everyone that she was focused on a mission, with a stern expression and long, determined strides. Just where she was headed was not as clear. Up and down the streets she went, muttering prayers as the flames danced and the water sloshed.

At last someone asked, “Where are you going? What are you doing? What is the torch and bucket you’re carrying?”

She replied, “With this bucket of water, I will douse the flames of hell and with this torch, I will burn down the gates of paradise.”

“But why?” they asked, breathless at such boldness. She replied, “So that God’s people will worship him, not for fear of hell or hope of reward, but simply for the love of God.”

WORSHIPING FROM FEAR

Some worship God out of fear. They conceive of God as a punishing judge and they worry about being locked out of paradise, thrown into the outer darkness or cast into a lake of fire. The fear of being burned alive forever in everlasting hell darkens their hearts and distorts their gospel, reducing it to a kind of fire-insurance. The end game is not about knowing or loving God from a full heart of gratitude, but a desperate plan to avoid eternity in a blazing furnace. “Faith” is then (1) a withering admission that humanity deserves to be burned and (2) an affirmation of the right doctrine or

praying the right prayer or performing the right rituals to escape that terrifying outcome.

Worshiping God from fear falls miles shy of a willing response of trust. It’s more like a gun-to-the-head ultimatum. “Just tell me what to do! Anything!” Rather than worshiping in spirit and in truth (John 4:23), such disciples merely want to evade their destiny in a dungeon.

WORSHIPING FOR REWARDS

Other religious devotees are not so terrified. Their focus is on their rewards, their inheritance, their mansions in glory. They might think about the comfort that awaits them, the crowns they will receive, and the eternal banquet in the sky. These images of paradise are, without a doubt, described in the Bible. They offer solace to the suffering, joy to the despairing, and freedom to those who experience life as spiritual bondage or emotional torment. To them, the good news does sound like a grand upgrade!

Yet sadly, a good many focus on the gift rather than the Giver. They pine for celestial luxury but have the heart of a gold-digger (someone who marries for fortune, rather than for love). God is, for them, a means to an end... and because of their reward mentality, tend also to misunderstand faith, conceiving it as the password to earning their presumed reward.

WORSHIPING FOR LOVE

In both cases, the obsession with avoiding hell or inheriting heaven warps our notion of God and makes salvation instrumental instead of

relational. God is their heavenly fire-insurance salesman or their casino slot machine, rather than a loving heavenly Father or beloved Husband with whom we’re forever united and in communion.

Jesus’ definition of “eternal life” was NOT escaping hell or earning heaven. Praying to his Father, Jesus said, “*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*” (John 17:3).

Jesus does not say that eternal life is the reward you get for knowing God. Rather, **knowing God IS eternal life. Heaven IS the relationship.** And the kingdom of heaven is *within us*—that is, the very presence of the Beloved who has made our hearts his home! As John (“the beloved”) testifies, “*We love him because...*” NOT because we’re saved from hell or promised paradise. No. “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

The first two motivations are common entry points into Christian faith. Starting there may be part of the human condition and one of the challenges of growing up. Sadly, many believers (including pastors and teachers) become stuck there. I, too, once mainly believed in Jesus in order to avoid hell and attain heaven. But as I see more clearly how high, wide, deep and long God’s love is for me, so too my love grows and I love God for God’s own sake. May we all deepen in our love for God, so that knowing God finally becomes the point. □

In addition to the many roles Brad fulfills for CWR/PTM, he is Principal of St. Stephen’s University in Canada.

Life Is Messy!

Barbara Dahlgren

The abundant life realizes that life is unpredictable. It's filled with inconveniences, difficulties, and frustrations. For want of a better word—life is messy. For those of us who love routine, order, and organization, life's messiness can take a toll.

It's a bitter lesson to learn that no matter how hard we try to control things, life isn't neat and tidy.

Unfortunately, a lot of people aren't neat and tidy either. Unfortunately, they can be in our families. Unfortunately, they can be our co-workers. Unfortunately, they can be our boss. Unfortunately, they are all around us.

Here's the truth. Life is unpredictable. Life is just one inconvenience after another. Major tragedies and minor frustrations will always abound.

Disorganized people will always tend to disrupt those who aren't. Dealing with life's troubles can be stressful, time consuming, overwhelming, and uncomfortable.

However, those living the abundant life realize that God is not as concerned about our comfort as He is about how we deal with our discomfort. We are always going to have some unexpected mess to deal with.

When we overreact and let things irritate or upset us to the point where we are angry or irrational, we cannot reflect God's love.

Reflecting God's love is important because our lives are not our own. We belong to Jesus. We were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Since our lives belong to Jesus, He will always meet us in the midst of the mess. All God's children have to deal with messes, but Jesus is always with them. He was with Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. He was with Job when he was stricken with boils. He was with Nehemiah when he was rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. He was with Gideon when he was facing battle. He was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

The key to their survival was looking to God, not their situations. That's the key to our sanity and peace of mind as well. When we don't look to God/Jesus/Holy Spirit, the images of what we experience get distorted and blurry.

Jesus gives us the flexibility we need to live with the messes as they come along. There's an old saying that rings true:

Blessed are the flexible for they shall not get bent out of shape.

The abundant life knows that God is greater than our circumstances. Messes come and go but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

"...I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, KJV). □

Barbara Dahlgren is an author, speaker and freelance writer whose articles and books are available worldwide. You can follow her at: www.barbdahlgren.com.



Pen Pals

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

I once had a pen pal. A boy from Kissimmee, Florida. I was ten, he the same age. Other than that, I don't remember anything about him, not even his name. I was reminded of him the other day when I read a fascinating story about pen pal connections that spanned decades. The article was from the *Washington Post*, and I was immediately taken by the fact that the one-time girl grew up in East Grand Rapids only a short distance from where I lived for most of three decades. Twelve-year-old Kristina Olson had gone door-to-door, raising money through Camp Fire Girls in order to send care packages to soldiers stationed abroad. Hers went to Ned Felder in Vietnam. He wrote back thanking her and their correspondence continued most of a decade, sometimes with gifts: a doll adorned in silk, a book about Vietnam.

After Felder returned to the States, his life was consumed with family and work in Virginia, having risen to the prestigious position of associate judge for the US Army Court of Military Review. Indeed, he had come a long way from his impoverished Gullah Geechee heritage, living in a single-room alley shack. But he was convinced that his hard work and the church had paved the way out of poverty toward eventual success. Yes, there were some blacks who would enjoy great accomplishments and prestige. But many more had been left behind amid joblessness and delinquency. For too many of them crime would become a way of life, and prisons would be largely populated with black men.

Kris Olson, growing up in lily-white, well-educated East Grand Rapids, never would encounter race discrimination. A successful life was simply assumed. Happiness would be frosting on the cake. After high school, she entered and graduated from Michigan State University. From there she would land a job in New York City. Her work was in the field of textiles which entailed a lot

of travelling. She had reached the pinnacle of success. In the years that followed, she would marry, take the name Feeney and have children. All was well—that was, until the good life disintegrated.

As hard as she worked to keep her family afloat, things went from bad to worse. Her mother died. Then her father, who had Parkinson's, came to live with the family. After a serious sickness, her husband became critically ill, and medical bills skyrocketed. She moved the family to Texas to save money and worked two jobs. There the desolation just piled up. Her father died, followed by the

He ascribed their lasting friendship to divine intervention and was determined to make her part of his own family—crowning them both with *tender mercies*.

painful death of her husband and then the death of her son, only twenty-seven. He too had suffered severe pain. Fentanyl, although approved by the FDA as a pain killer, can be lethal, as it was in his case.

Kris would move on to South Carolina. Here she thought again of Ned Felder—not that she had ever forgotten him. And so, she decided to look him up and write him a letter. He might have ignored it and thought *enough is enough*. But he didn't. "I was so happy! So happy. This one [letter] is more meaningful than any of the others." He invited her to South Carolina State University on Veterans Day and they watched the football game from the president's box. They hugged and laughed and talked—so filled with emotion that he feared he would cry. And he wondered how it would look if people saw an Army officer crying.

He ascribed their lasting friendship to divine intervention and was determined to make her part of his own family—crowning them both with *tender mercies*. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"If we pledge allegiance to Jesus, we will stand up for the rights, privileges and humanity of others—even those who are not like us at all. And because we are free in Christ, we will not allow others to bully us down the slippery path of political or religious conformity—even under banners of one-sided 'freedom' or 'tolerance.' Our spiritual pledge of allegiance follows Peter's response to religious authorities, 'We must obey God rather than men!' (Acts 5:29). —Greg Albrecht

"If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers."—Thomas Pynchon

"Most people are afraid of freedom. They are conditioned to be afraid of it." —Hebert Marcuse

"We must picture hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance and resentment... A person can't be taken to hell, or sent to hell; you can only get there on your own steam." —C.S. Lewis

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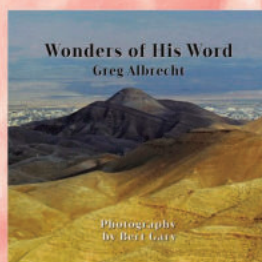
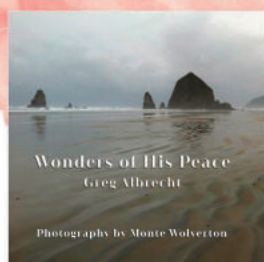
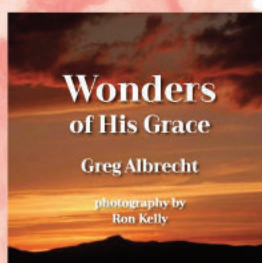
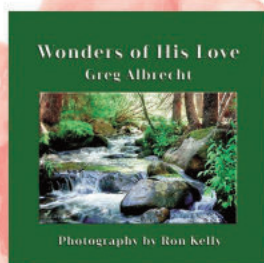
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