

# The High Calling

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## The Red Sea—Let the Journey Begin

By Stan Key



Getting out of Egypt and beginning the journey to spiritual wholeness is both harder and easier than you might think. Before we begin to follow Christ, we tend to think that the hard part will be discerning the way, finding provisions, winning the battles, and

going the distance. As for putting our faith in God, that's easy. However, once embarked on the journey of salvation, we discover that just the opposite is true. The easy part is doing the walk and freely receiving God's gracious provision every step of the way. But trusting in God when all hell is breaking loose? This may be the hardest thing we've ever done! "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

Paul put it this way: "By grace you have been saved *through faith*" (Eph. 2:8a, emphasis added). Salvation is "not a result of works." All we must do is believe. It sounds easy, doesn't it? But have you tried believing the promises of God lately? Listen to me: trusting in God is not only difficult, it's impossible! Unless God touches your doubt-filled heart with grace, you will never be able to do it—never. But that is precisely what

God wants to do. He stands ready to graciously enable your stubborn, rebellious heart to grab hold of those precious promises and believe! "This is not your own doing; *it is the gift of God*" (Eph. 2:8b, emphasis added).

Nothing better illustrates both how easy and how hard redemption is than the story of the passage through the Red Sea as told in Exodus 12–14. It all begins with a lamb. Who could have imagined that deliverance from slavery would begin this way? Each family was to take a lamb and kill it at twilight. By putting lamb's blood on the two doorposts and the lintel of their houses, they would be spared when the angel of death passed over the land. The flesh of the lamb was to be roasted and then eaten to provide strength and nourishment for the journey ahead (see Ex. 12:3–13, 24–27). No one gets out of bondage without first getting "under" the lamb's blood and eating its flesh. The lamb dies so that we can live. Redemption starts here!

With the completion of the Passover meal, the people of God began their journey. God provided a pillar of fire to be

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**Finding your way on the journey of life**

# You Must Be Born Again

By E. Stanley Jones (1884–1973)



One of the best-known and most influential missionaries of the twentieth century, E. Stanley Jones devoted his life to preaching the necessity of conversion. Whether preaching to Hindus in India or churchgoers in America, Jones knew that no one starts the journey to spiritual wholeness without a crisis decision of faith. The following article, abridged and slightly edited, is taken from the first two chapters and the Epilogue of his book *Conversion* (Abingdon, 1959: 15–39, 250–51).

**W**e divide humanity into many classes—white and black, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, East and West. But Jesus drew a line down through all these distinctions and divided humanity into just two classes—the unconverted and the converted, the once-born and the twice-born. All men live on one side or the other of that line. No other division matters.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3 NKJV). “Assuredly,



**“Jesus... divided humanity into just two classes—the unconverted and the converted, the once-born and the twice-born.”**

I say unto you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). What did Jesus mean by being “born again” and being “converted”? Obviously, he meant something very, very important, for having it or not having it divided men—all men—for time and eternity.

We must clear up a confusion that exists in many minds today between proselytism and conversion. They are the same for many people, but nothing could be further from the thought of Jesus than to make them one—he rejected one and insisted on the other. He said to the religious leaders of that day, “You travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matt. 23:15). Proselytism is a change from one group to another without any necessary change in character and life. It is a change of label, but not of life.

Moreover, to confuse being converted with being inside the church and being unconverted with being outside the church is to fall into the same fatal error. For Jesus urged this necessity

of being born again upon Nicodemus, a highly respectable religious “teacher of Israel.” Why did Jesus say this straight off: “You must be born again”? The reason obviously was that Jesus knew that Nicodemus was among those who do not see the kingdom of God.

Probably two-thirds of the membership of the churches know little or nothing about conversion as a personal, experimental fact. That should not discourage us, however. Hospitals are out to banish disease and yet they are filled with diseased people. Schools are out to banish ignorance and yet they are filled with ignorant students. The Church is out to banish sin and yet it itself is filled with sinful people. That is not to be wondered at. The point of concern is, are the people inside the churches being converted? Or are they, having come into the church, settling down to half-conversions, or worse, in complete emptiness under the respectable umbrella of the church? Someone once asked George Whitefield why he preached so often on the text, “You must be born again.” He replied, looking the questioner in the face, “Because you must be born again.”

John 1:12 gives an excellent summary of what conversion is *not*:

*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

The Bible tells us that the new birth is *first* of all “not of blood.” You don’t get it through the blood stream, through heredity. Your parents can give you much, but they cannot give you this. Being born in a Christian home does not make you a Christian any more than being born in a cracker box makes a mouse a cracker.

*Second*, this new birth does not come through “the will of the flesh.” You don’t get it by striving a little harder, by being a little more faithful, by being more regular in church attendance, by lifting yourself by your bootstraps. It does not come through the whipping up of the will but by the surrender of the will. You don’t find God by climbing a ladder of worthiness rung by rung to find him at the top. You find him at the bottommost rung of the ladder, for he comes down the ladder of incarnation and meets us where we are as sinners. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

*Third*, it does not come through “the will of man.” No man can give it to you. If any prophet, or pastor, or priest, or pope says he can give it to you, he himself is in special need of it. It comes from God directly or not at all.

Then if conversion is none of these, just what is it? Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). To be “born of water,” I suppose means to come into an outer

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# “Getting Saved” Is Not Enough

By Scot McKnight



In his radical book *The King Jesus Gospel* (Zondervan, 2011), theologian Scot McKnight claims that evangelicals today have strayed from the gospel as it was preached by Jesus and the apostles and changed it into a message of personal salvation: how to “get saved.” Calling us to take a fresh look at the New Testament, McKnight’s words help us to better understand what crossing the Red Sea is all about. The following article weaves together passages taken from his book (26–27, 62, 73–76, 127–134) and has been slightly edited.

I believe the word *gospel* has been hijacked by what we believe about “personal salvation,” and the gospel itself has been reshaped to facilitate making “decisions.” The result of this hijacking is that the word *gospel* no longer means in our world what it originally meant to either Jesus or the apostles.

I know some will think my claim is outlandish, so I’m going to ask you to be patient enough to hear me out. Our system is broken, and our so-called gospel broke it. We can’t keep trying to improve the mechanics of the system because they’re not the problem. The problem is that the system isn’t doing what it should do because it is energized by a badly shaped gospel.

For most American Christians, the gospel is about getting my sins forgiven so I can go to heaven when I die. But if the gospel isn’t about transformation, it isn’t the gospel of the Bible. Our biggest problem is that we have an entire culture shaped by a misunderstanding of the gospel. That so-called gospel is deconstructing the church.

We have so focused on the Plan of Salvation that we have forgotten the biblical story. When the plan gets separated from the story, the plan almost always becomes abstract, propositional, logical, rational, philosophical and, most importantly, de-storified and unbiblical. When we separate the Plan of Salvation from the story, we cut ourselves off from the story that identifies us and tells our past and tells our future. We separate ourselves from Jesus and turn the Christian faith into a System of Salvation.

There’s more. We are tempted to turn the story of what God is doing in this world through Israel and Jesus Christ into a story about *me and my own personal salvation*. In other words, the plan has a way of cutting the story from a story about God, God’s Messiah, and God’s people into a story about God and one person—me—and in this the story shifts from Christ and community to individualism.

There are huge pockets of contemporary evangelicalism where the gospel is understood almost uniquely in terms of four simple (and thin) points: God loves you, you are messed up, Jesus died for you, accept him and (no matter what you do) you can go to heaven. My contention is not so much that this is wrong, but that it is a pale shadow of what it ought to be.

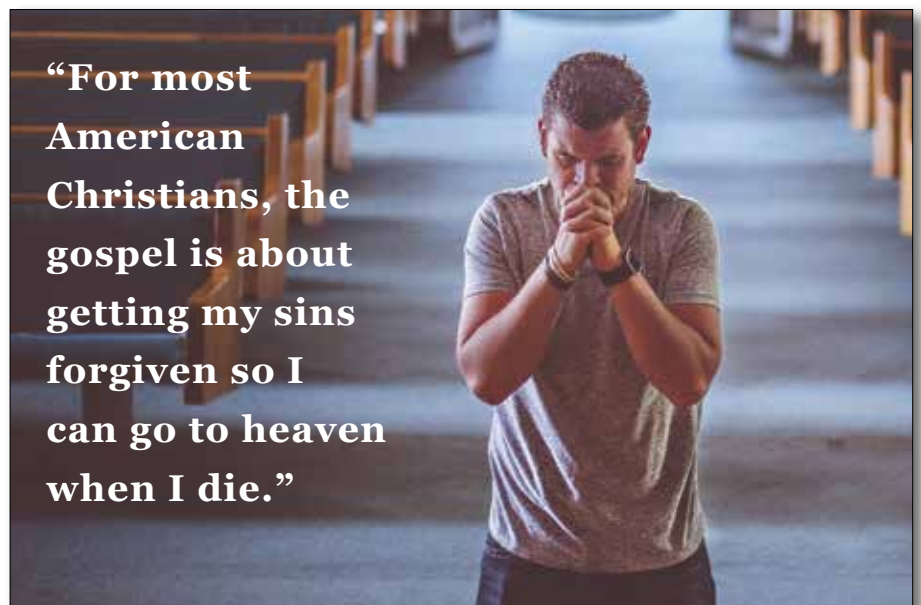
Dallas Willard discusses this reduction of the gospel to salvation and the reduction of salvation to personal forgiveness and gives it a potent and damning label: *the gospel of sin*

*management*. Willard uses the image of a barcode for this salvation culture: if we get the right barcode—make the right confession, have the right experience, make the right decision, etc.—when God scans the barcode, the lights will go off and we will be safe. Willard states the problem this way:

*If you ask anyone from the 74 percent of Americans who say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ what the Christian gospel is, you will probably be told that Jesus died to pay for our sins, and that if we will only believe he did this, we will go to heaven when we die.*

And then, talking about our contemporary evangelical culture, he continues:

*Your system is perfectly designed to yield the result you are getting. “Gospels of Sin Management” presume a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming*



*mankind... [and] they foster “vampire Christians,” who only want a little blood for their sins but nothing more to do with Jesus until heaven.*

The apostolic gospeling in the book of Acts forms a powerful support for what gospeling can be today. One of the most important contributions that Acts makes to gospeling is the *how*—for it is in these sermons that we see how the apostles called people to respond. And they are consistent: to participate in the Story of Jesus the apostles called people *to believe, to repent, and to be baptized*. I would contend that there is no such thing as gospeling that does not include the summons to respond in faith, repentance, and baptism.

These three terms—believe, repent, baptize—are the terms the apostles used for *how* one entered into the gospel story. How are the three terms related? I will take a stab and put it this way: *faith* is the big idea with *repentance* and *baptism* as manifestations of that faith. The one who turns in *belief* to Christ *turns away from* (the word picture in the word *repent*) everything and everyone else—and Paul calls them to *turn*

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# Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?

By Charles Wesley (1707–1788)



Many readers of *The High Calling* will be familiar with the conversion story of John Wesley, when his heart was “strangely warmed” during a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street, London, on May 24, 1738. But how many know the story of his brother’s conversion three days earlier? In the winter and spring of 1738, Charles Wesley was very ill, at the point of death. In his own words, he tells of his

dramatic transition from bondage to freedom, from doubt to faith, from death to life. This article is taken from his journal and has been slightly edited. *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M. A. The Early Journal 1736–1739* (Taylors, SC: Methodist Reprint Society, 1977: 134–153).

**F**riday, February 24—Peter Böhler came to my bedside. I asked him to pray for me. He took me by the hand and calmly said, “You will not die now.” Then he asked me, “Do you hope to be saved?” “Yes,” I said. “For what reason do you hope it?” he asked. I replied, “Because I have used my best endeavors



**“He calls you now, invites you home:  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come.”**

to serve God.” He shook his head and said no more. I thought him very uncharitable, saying in my heart, “What, are not my endeavors a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavors? I have nothing else to trust to.”

*Tuesday, April 25*—Soon after five, we met in our little chapel. We sang and fell into a dispute whether conversion was gradual or instantaneous. My brother was very positive for the latter and shocked me by mentioning some late instances of gross sinners believing in a moment. I was much offended at his worse than unedifying discourse.

*Friday, April 28*—The pain in my side returned and with that my fever. In the morning Dr. Cockburn came to see me; and a better physician, Peter Böhler, whom God had detained in England for my good. He stood by my bedside and prayed over me, that now at least I might see the divine intention in this illness.

*Thursday, May 11*—God sent Mr. Bray to me, a poor ignorant mechanic, who knows nothing but Christ; yet by knowing him,

knows and discerns all things. We prayed together for faith. I was quite overpowered and melted into tears.

*Saturday, May 13*—I waked without Christ; yet still desirous of finding him. At night my brother came, exceeding heavy. I forced him (as he had often forced me) to sing a hymn to Christ and almost felt that Christ would come while we were singing.

*Wednesday, May 17*—Today I first saw Luther’s commentary on Galatians. Who would believe our Church had been founded on this important article of justification by faith alone? I am astonished I should ever think this a new doctrine! I spent some hours this evening in private with Martin Luther, who was greatly blessed to me.

*Friday, May 19*—At five this morning the pain and difficulty in breathing returned. I received the sacrament, but not Christ. At seven Mrs. Turner came and told me I should not rise from that bed till I believed. I believed her.

*Pentecost Sunday, May 21*—I waked in hope and expectation of his coming. At nine my brother and some friends came and sang a hymn to the Holy Spirit. My comfort and hope were hereby increased. In about half an hour they left and I gave myself to prayer, the substance of which was as follows: “O Jesus, you have said ‘I will come to you,’ and ‘I will send the Comforter to you.’ You are a God who cannot lie so I am trusting you to accomplish your promise in your time and your manner.”

Having prayed, I was composing myself for sleep, when I heard someone come into the room (Mrs. Musgrave, I thought, by the voice) and say, “In the name of Jesus of

Nazareth, arise and believe, and you will be healed of all your infirmities!” The words struck me to the heart. I sighed and said within myself, “Oh that Christ would but speak thus to me!” I lay there musing and trembling, then thought; “But what if it should be him? I will find out.” I called Mrs. Turner and told her I desired to see Mrs. Musgrave. She went to look for her but returned saying, “Mrs. Musgrave has not been here.” So, I sent her downstairs again to inquire, but felt in the meantime a strange palpitation of heart. I said, yet feared to say, “I believe, I believe!”

Mrs. Turner came up again and said, “It was I, a weak, sinful creature, who spoke those words; but the words were Christ’s; he commanded me to say them and I could not forbear.”

I now found myself at peace with God. I saw that by faith I stood; by the continual support of faith, which kept me from falling, though by myself I am ever sinking into sin. I went to

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# Counting the Cost

By John R. W. Stott



In his classic book *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958, 1971), John Stott does what he does best: he cuts through the fog of theology and the confusion of personal experience and takes us directly to Scripture, helping us to hear what the Word of God actually says. In a chapter entitled “Counting the Cost,” he reminds us what is involved in taking the first steps of salvation: beginning the journey. This article is abridged and slightly edited (107–112).

It is now time to ask the personal question put to Jesus Christ by Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10) or the similar question asked by the Philippian jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

Clearly, we must do something. Christianity is no mere passive acquiescence to a series of propositions, however true. We may believe in the deity and the salvation of Christ and acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in need of his salvation; but this does not make us Christians. We have to make a personal response to Jesus Christ, committing ourselves unreservedly to him as our Savior and Lord.

Jesus never concealed the fact that his religion included a demand as well as an offer. Indeed, the demand was as total as the offer was free. If he offered men his salvation, he also demanded their submission. Luke tells us of three men who either volunteered, or were invited, to follow Jesus; but not one passed the Lord’s tests (Luke 9:57–62). The rich young ruler, too, moral, earnest and attractive, who wanted eternal life on his own terms, went away sorrowful, with his riches intact but with neither life nor Christ as his possession (Mark 10:17–22).

Jesus never lowered his standards or modified his conditions to make his call more readily acceptable. He asked his first disciples, and he has asked every disciple since, to give him their thoughtful and total commitment. Nothing less than this will do. Listen closely to what he said:

*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:34–35)*

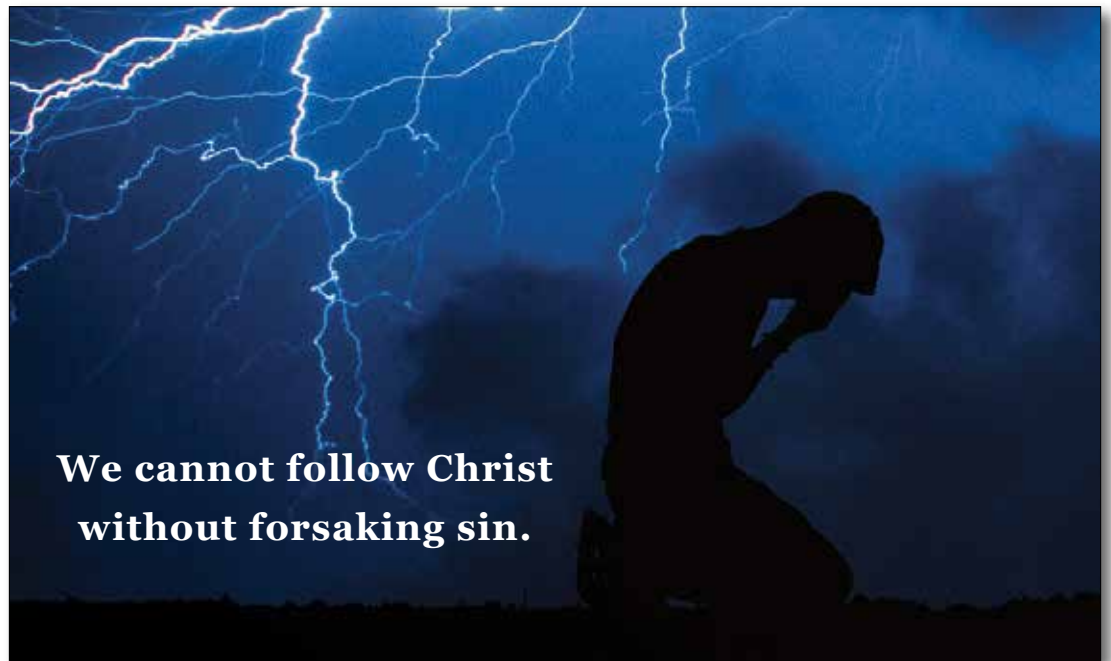
At its simplest, Christ’s call was “Follow me.” He asked men and women for their personal allegiance. He invited them to learn from him, to obey his words, and to identify themselves with his cause. Now there can be no following without a previous forsaking. To follow Christ is to renounce all lesser loyalties. In the days when he lived among men on earth, this meant a literal abandonment of home and work. Simon and Andrew “left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:18).

Matthew, who heard Christ’s call while he was sitting at the tax office, left “everything, and rose and followed him” (Luke 5:28).

Today, in principle, the call of the Lord Jesus has not changed. He still says, “Follow me,” and adds, “anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). In practice, however, this does not mean for the majority of Christians a physical departure from their home or their job. It implies rather an inner surrender of both, and a refusal to allow either family or ambition to occupy the first place in our lives.

Let me be more explicit about the forsaking which cannot be separated from the following of Jesus Christ.

First, there must be a *renunciation of sin*. This, in a word, is repentance. It is the first part of Christian conversion. It can in no circumstances be bypassed. Repentance and faith



belong together. We cannot follow Christ without forsaking sin. Repentance is a definite turn from every thought, word, deed, and habit which is known to be wrong. It is not sufficient to feel pangs of remorse or to make some kind of apology to God. Fundamentally, repentance is a matter neither of emotion nor of speech. It is an inward change of mind and attitude towards sin which leads to a change of behavior. There can be no compromise here.

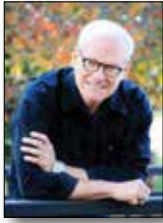
Second, there must be a *renunciation of self*. In order to follow Christ, we must not only forsake isolated sins but renounce the very principle of self-will which lies at the root of every act of sin. To follow Christ is to surrender to him the rights over our own lives. It is to abdicate the throne of our heart and do homage to him as our King. This renunciation of self is vividly described by Jesus in three phrases.

It is to *deny ourselves*: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself.” The same verb is used of Peter’s denial of

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# Altared Lives

By Jerry B. Jenkins



To devote this issue of *The High Calling* to the subject of conversion and make no mention of Billy Graham (1918–2018) would be a tragic omission. Graham preached to more than 215 million people in 185 countries over the course of more than 60 years. His message never changed as he closed every meeting with an invitation for those listening to come forward and put their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and

Lord. Jerry Jenkins spent 13 months assisting Billy Graham with his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, which he considers the privilege of a lifetime. This article is an abridgment taken from Jenkin's book *In His Own Words: Inspirational Reflections on the Life & Wisdom of Billy Graham* (Tyndale, 2018: 3–4, 7, 21–22).

**B**illy Graham's weakness, critics said, was the simplicity of his message. Yet those who benefited from it—particularly those who came to faith because of it—knew it was his greatest strength.

"I preach Christ and him crucified," Mr. Graham would say. And that was true whether he was speaking to the largest crowd in his history—1.1 million in Seoul, South Korea, in 1973—or to a busboy at a suburban Chicago eatery decades later. Regardless of the venue or the audience, Billy Graham shared the gospel.

Before great stadium crowds, he often began his message with local references about the host city. Then he moved directly into the current world scene, painting a word picture of the geopolitical chaos and turmoil, acknowledging the fear that gripped the nations. But soon he zeroed in on the deepest needs of the human heart. In minutes, Mr. Graham—piercing voice booming—moved from the global to the personal. His distinctive, authoritative, passionate preaching targeted each listener's loneliness, fear, uncertainty over the future, and feeling of emptiness. And his message was always the same. He eschewed esoteric doctrine and sidestepped specific moral, especially religious, controversy. Listeners around the world said they felt he was speaking directly to them, spotlighting their most private needs.

Billy's most common phrases were "The Bible says..." and "Jesus is the answer!" And while his volume and tone varied for the more intimate mediums of radio and television, or during one-on-one conversations, he always moved quickly to his singular message. He explained it this way:

*First, you must recognize what God did: that he loved you so much, he gave his son to die on the cross. Second, you must repent of your sins. Third, you must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This means you cease*

*trying to save yourself and trust him completely, without reservation. Fourth, you must confess Christ publicly as a sign that you have been converted. It is extremely important that you tell someone else about it as soon as possible.*

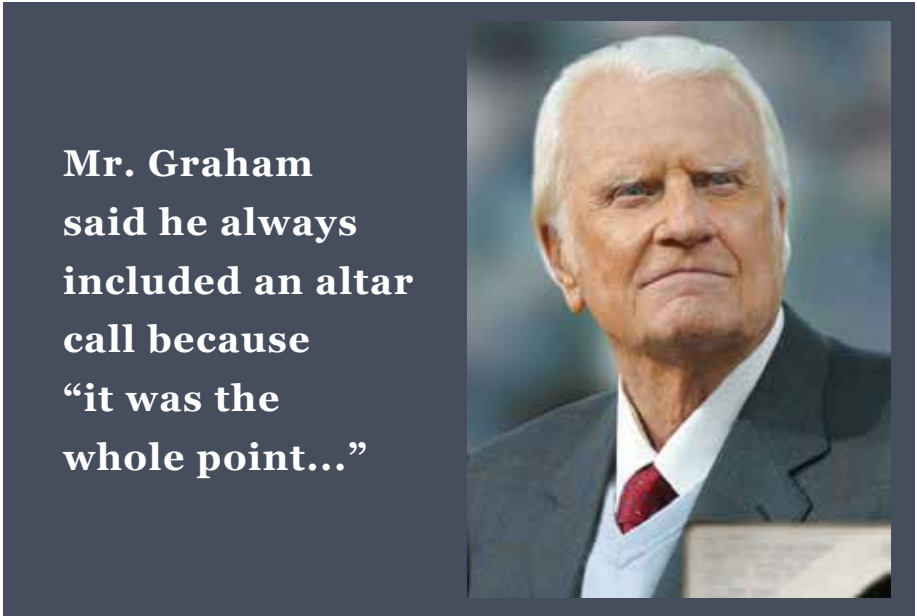
One of the most iconic photographic images from Billy Graham's crusades depicts him—following his message and the invitation—standing with his head bowed, chin resting on folded hands. Asked what went through his mind at those moments, as thousands streamed forward to make their decisions for Christ, he said he was praying that God would move mightily in the hearts of those who longed for him but feared making the commitment. "I prayed he would give them the courage. And I thanked him for the privilege of playing a role in someone's salvation."

Graham was widely criticized for his passionate altar calls at the end of each crusade message. Some felt he unfairly played on people's emotions, and others were concerned that those who responded might wrongly believe their souls were saved simply because they walked forward.

But according to former Moody Bible Institute president Michael Easley, that accusation is much older than Billy Graham. Apparently, many leveled the same charge against nineteenth-century evangelist D. L. Moody. When Moody was criticized for his methods, he reportedly responded, "I like my way of doing evangelism better than your way of not doing it."

Easley acknowledged that a person could wrongly assume that merely going forward was "equivalent to salvation." However, he pointed out that trained counselors were there to clarify the process of coming to faith and that, even then, the Graham organization was under no illusion that every person who came forward had been saved.

Mr. Graham said he always included an altar call because "it was the whole point. We were there to share the gospel and to give men and women the opportunity to respond to it." He also cited D. L. Moody's reason for a sense of urgency. Moody once told a Chicago audience to think and pray about their decision to follow Christ and be prepared to act upon it the next Sunday. But that very night the Great Chicago Fire swept through the city, and Moody was forever haunted by the fear that some he'd sent home to ponder God's invitation might have been lost for eternity. Moody never again postponed an altar call. And Billy Graham never preached without including one. ✦





# The Step of Faith

By Os Guinness



A great danger comes when conversion to Christ is reduced to a formula, a recipe, a set of steps. We must beware of thinking that others must cross the Red Sea in the precise same way that we did; that our experience should be normative for others. In his book *The Journey* (NavPress, 2001), Os Guinness reminds us of those elements in conversion that are essential and those that are variable. The following article is taken from the introduction to the final chapter of his book (183–87). It has been slightly edited.

There comes a time when, as seekers, we must stop weighing the evidence and move boldly forward in a step of commitment. This is when we can truly say we believe and that we have launched ourselves on our journey home to God. Sometimes we are conscious of our part—the “step of faith”—and sometimes of God’s part—which Jesus spoke of as “being reborn from above.” But by taking this initiatory step, we have become a follower of Christ. As a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, so our journey has begun.

A common mistake is to allow the lure of technique to define what happens. Far too often the seeker is confronted by people who are out to simplify and sell the faith, reducing their understanding to a formula and their promotion of their method to a franchise. The effect can be to shrink the “great change” of conversion, as William Wilberforce called it, and reduce it to a simplistic, stereotyped recipe that insults both the integrity and diversity of human beings and the sovereign freedom of God.

There are as many ways to faith as there are people who come to faith. Conversion may be gradual or sudden, quiet or dramatic, unmistakably evident to others or virtually unnoticed. Such variations are infinite, but the reality of the experience is what matters. It launches us on the journey home.

Yet two themes stand out in all the variety, themes which combine to make this a time for commitment. The first is that Christian conversion entails an irreducible component of personal responsibility in commitment. Even if someone has grown up with the faith, it has to be chosen and entered into, not just inherited. Even if awareness of faith has crept in on silent feet like the dawn, the daylight reality of faith requires whole people and full participation. The good news of the gospel is a covenant agreement, a contract within a relationship that God offers to us. It is not enough for us only to see the need for what is offered or even the attractiveness and reliability of the terms. The covenant becomes binding only when it is

signed, and our signature is the binding commitment that each of us gives as a whole person.

There is a second universal feature of the time for commitment: an unmistakable awareness that we start out searching, but we end up being discovered. We think we are looking for something, but we find we are found by someone. In the famous picture of Francis Thompson’s poem, “the hound of heaven has tracked us down.” As Augustine stated the matter: “I would not have sought you unless you had first found me.”

There are obvious reasons why such a commitment of faith is commonly diluted in the West today. With two thousand years of tradition, it easily becomes formal. With purely theoretical understandings of knowledge common, it easily becomes abstract and remote. With loose and inadequate descriptions of faith in circulation, it easily becomes weak and irrational. For example, one of the most common descriptions of faith is also the faultiest—when believers say their faith is “a leap in the dark,” to suggest that it is blind or not based on reason at all.



True, C. S. Lewis uses the term of his own conversion, but in a very different sense. Skeptics use it justifiably to accuse believers of irrationality in faith, but many believers also use it as their preferred description of faith. A “leap in the dark” all too aptly describes how many believers actually come to believe irrationally, but does not properly describe what faith should be.

The term “leap of faith” was made popular by the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who used it to emphasize the passionate, personal nature of faith. But in his reaction to the excessive rationalism of his day, he—or at least his followers—toppled over into an equally exaggerated irrationality that does not do justice to the proper place of reason and truth in coming to faith.

The term “step of faith” is more apt than the phrase “leap in the dark.” Christian commitment is more than naked reason. It is, after all, a whole person who makes the act of commitment, and whole people are far more than walking minds. But the commitment of faith is neither against reason nor does it lack reason. It is thoroughly rational yet wholly personal too.

With all the confusion surrounding faith, it is worth emphasizing three vital aspects of Christian faith: Faith in Jesus Christ is *knowledge* that has grown into *conviction* that has grown into *trust*. Faith requires knowledge because we are

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# Conversion: The Whole Person Must Be Involved

By David F. Wells



In his book *Turning to God: Reclaiming Christian Conversion as Unique, Necessary, and Supernatural* (Baker, 1989, 2012), David Wells, professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, introduces us to one of the most famous conversions in the history of the church: Augustine. While many evangelicals tend to reduce conversion to “making a decision for Christ,” Augustine’s story reminds us that for conversion to be complete, the whole person must be involved. The following article is taken from the fourth chapter, “The Church’s View of Conversion” (92–95).

Augustine was not the first person in the post-apostolic period to think about conversion; he was not the first person to be converted. But he did bring to his own experience extraordinary powers of analysis, a depth of understanding, and a range of theological knowledge that make him a good point of departure for our consideration.

We can, in fact, find evidence of three “conversions” in Augustine’s life. These were intellectual, moral, and ecclesiastical in nature, but

their occurrence was also part of the unfolding of Augustine’s life. Augustine was not really raised as a pagan. His father was a pagan, but his mother was a Christian and the dominant religious influence on him. In his adolescence he drifted away from Christianity, both intellectually and morally. Intellectually he rejected the simplicity of Catholic Christianity and was drawn to the sophistication of Cicero

and the elitism of Manicheism. Morally, he became dissolute, taking a concubine. In his *Confessions*, he records the process by which God brought him back. He tells of his intellectual pilgrimage from disillusionment with Manichean dualism to a period of skepticism. He emerged from his skepticism through a discovery of Platonism and through a renewed interest in Christianity because of the preaching of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan. Augustine confessed that through Platonism and Ambrose he came to understand and accept the truth. His *intellectual conversion* had occurred.

But a moral problem—primary for Augustine—remained. “It is one thing to see the land of peace.... And quite another to hold to the way that leads there,” he wrote. “My desire now was not to be more sure of You but more steadfast in You.” He accepted the truth, but he felt chained by a perverse will to carnal habit: “For the law of sin is the fierce force of habit, by which the mind is drawn and held even against its will, and yet deservedly because it had fallen willfully into the habit.”

Augustine experienced a growing sense of frustration with his inability to overcome his sexual lusts. One day he was reading and meditating alone in a walled garden. He heard a

child’s voice saying, “Take and read; take and read.” He picked up the Scriptures and read Romans 13:13: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences”. The dramatic experience marked his *moral conversion* and was an occasion of great joy. “By your gift I had come totally not to will what I had willed but to will what You willed.”

This moral conversion led Augustine to embrace ascetic Christianity and moral rigorism. Just before his conversion, Augustine had been reading the life of Saint Anthony, the Egyptian hermit. In describing his own change, Augustine wrote, “For You converted me to Yourself so that I no longer sought a wife nor any of this world’s promises.” For Augustine and for many others, genuine moral conversions came to be marked most fully by embracing an ascetic life. By the fourth century, especially after the conversion of Constantine, ascetic Christianity was becoming the response of serious Christians to the formalism and nominalism of the church.



Still, Augustine believed his conversion was not complete: “Thus in that depth I recognized the act of Your will, and I gave praise to Your name, rejoicing in faith. But this faith would not let me feel safe about my past sins, since Your baptism had not yet come to remit them.” The evening before Easter, April 24, 387, Ambrose baptized Augustine and many others. Augustine reflected: “We were

baptized, and all anxiety as to our past life fled away.” This was his *ecclesiastical conversion*.

The *Confessions* also show Augustine’s understanding that his conversion was entirely the work of God’s grace. He wrote the work as his testimony to God’s electing and pursuing grace. His conviction about the sovereignty of God in salvation and his rejection of any role for human free will was strengthened in the Pelagian controversy. Augustine’s victory over Pelagius established the label *Augustinian* as synonymous with virtue and *Pelagian* with evil. ✦

## The Step of Faith *continued from page 7*

not asked to trust someone about whom we know nothing. But it also requires conviction, because we not only know what faith is about, but are sure it is true. And finally, it requires trust, for having faith is not merely being convinced of something, it is being committed to someone. Faith cannot stop short of commitment; it transfers reliance from ourselves to God. It is not belief in a set of propositions, but trust in a person. Never in our lives are we freer, more active, and more responsible than when we act on the decision to put our faith in God and set out on the journey home to him. ✦



Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin? continued from page 4  
bed still sensible of my own weakness (I humbly hope to be more and more so), yet confident of Christ's protection.

*Tuesday, May 23*—At nine I began writing a hymn about my conversion but was persuaded to break off, for fear of pride. Mr. Bray coming, encouraged me to proceed. I prayed Christ to stand by me and so I finished the hymn.

*Wednesday, May 24*—Toward ten tonight, my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of friends and declared, "I believe!" We sang the hymn<sup>†</sup> with great joy and parted with prayer. ✝

<sup>†</sup> The hymn Charles Wesley wrote to commemorate his conversion (and then sang three days later to celebrate also his brother's) was probably the hymn "Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?"

## Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?

By Charles Wesley

*Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
How shall I all to heaven aspire?  
A slave redeemed from death and sin,  
A brand plucked from eternal fire,  
How shall I equal triumphs raise,  
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?*

*O how shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which thou to me hast showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God!  
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,  
Blest with this antepast of heaven!*

*And shall I slight my Father's love,  
or basely fear his gifts to own?  
Unmindful of his favors prove,  
shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,  
refuse his righteousness to impart,  
by hiding it within my heart?*

*Outcasts of men, to you I call,  
harlots, and publicans, and thieves;  
he spreads his arms to embrace you all,  
sinners alone his grace receive.  
No need of Him the righteous have;  
he came the lost to seek and save.*

*Come, O my guilty brethren, come,  
Groaning beneath your load of sin!  
His bleeding heart shall make you room,  
His open side shall take you in.  
He calls you now, invites you home:  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come.*

*For you the purple current flowed  
in pardon from his wounded side,  
languished for you the eternal God,  
for you the Prince of Glory died.  
Believe, and all your sin's forgiven,  
only believe--and yours is heaven.*

Counting the Cost continued from page 5

the Lord in the courtyard of the high priest's palace. We are to disown ourselves as completely as Peter disowned Christ when he said, "I do not know the man" (Matt. 26:72). Self-denial is not just giving up sweets and cigarettes, either for good or for a period of voluntary abstinence. For it is not to deny things to myself, but to deny myself to myself. It is to say no to self, and yes to Christ; to repudiate self and acknowledge Christ.

The next phrase Jesus used is to *take up the cross*: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." In his commentary on Mark's Gospel, H. B. Swete writes: to take up the cross is "to put oneself into the position of a condemned man on his way to execution." In other words, the attitude to self which we are to adopt is that of crucifixion. Paul uses the same metaphor when he declared that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24). In Luke's version of this saying, the adverb "daily" is added (Luke 9:23). Every day the Christian is to die. Every day he renounces the sovereignty of his own will. Every day he renews his unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ.

The third expression which Jesus used to describe the renunciation of self is to *lose our life*: "Whoever loses his life... will save it." The word for "life" here denotes neither our physical existence nor our soul, but our self. The *psyche* is the ego, the human personality which thinks, feels, plans, and chooses. This does not mean that a man loses his individuality, however. His will is indeed submitted to Christ's will, but his personality is not absorbed into Christ's personality. On the contrary, when the Christian loses himself, he finds himself, he discovers his true identity.

So in order to follow Christ we have to deny ourselves, to crucify ourselves, to lose ourselves. He calls us to make him our Lord. The astonishing idea is current in some circles today that we can enjoy the benefits of Christ's salvation without accepting the challenge of his sovereign lordship. Such an unbalanced notion is not to be found in the New Testament. "Jesus is Lord" is the earliest known formulation of the creed of Christians. In days when imperial Rome was pressing its citizens to say "Caesar is Lord," these words had a dangerous flavor. But Christians did not flinch. They could not give Caesar their first allegiance, because they had already given it to the Emperor Jesus. ✝

## FAS Presidential Search

We are now accepting resumes of qualified persons interested in being considered for the role of president of FAS. To be more available to Katy and her physical needs and to be more present in the lives of his grandchildren, Stan desires to step down from his role as president. He will continue as Director of Publishing as well as speaking and writing. We believe this change will both deepen and broaden the overall ministry impact of FAS.

Those who desire to be considered for this position should send their resumes to the address below. Please pray for FAS as we seek divine guidance in this important matter.

Dr. Chris Bounds, Chairman of the Board  
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fellowship, the church, through baptism. To be “born of the Spirit” means to undergo a change in character and life by the impact of the Holy Spirit upon our spirits. Some are “born of water” but not “born of the Spirit.”

My case was like that—I underwent a half-conversion under the appeal of a preacher, joined the church, felt religious for a few weeks, and then it all faded out. I was back where I was before—the springs of my character were uncleansed. My label had been changed but not my life. I had been horizontally converted but not vertically. Then two years later I faced another crisis. This time I wanted the real thing. I wanted reality. For three days I sought but I received no answer. The heavens were brass. On the third day I knelt beside my bed before I went to church and prayed: “Oh, Jesus, save me tonight.” A tiny ray of light pierced my darkness; hope sprang up; I found myself running a mile to the church. I sat on the front seat. The minister had scarcely stopped speaking when I went forward to the altar. I had scarcely bent my knees when heaven broke into my spirit. I grabbed a man by the shoulder and said, “I’ve got It.” “It”—what did I mean by “It”? Everything I wanted—reconciliation with God, with myself, with my brother man, with nature, with life itself. I was reconciled. The estrangement was gone! The universe opened its arms and took me in. I felt as though I wanted to put my arms around the world and share this with everybody.

I was born of the Spirit at that blessed spot in the little church in Baltimore. Soon the whole community heard about it. Some of my chums who shared the old life with me couldn’t believe it, so they cornered me one day and asked: “Stan, you ain’t really converted, are you?” My reply, according to an old schoolteacher friend, was: “The h— I ain’t!” I used the old vocabulary to express the newfound joy!

In speaking of the new birth and of conversion Jesus used a very decisive word in both cases—“Except.” “*Except* a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “*Except* ye be converted and become like little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” The demand stretches from the topmost best that man can produce to the bottommost worst that sin can produce—all up and down the whole gamut of life, all human nature needs conversion—not some, *all*. There is no exception to this “except.” ✱

*away from* idols (Acts 14:15)—and the one who trusts in Christ obediently embodies that faith in *baptism*. Baptism embodies dying with Christ and being raised with Christ, as Romans 6 makes so abundantly clear. Those who hear the gospel, and those who respond in faith, repentance, and baptism *are saved*.

If we put this gospel now into one bundle, and if we focus on how that gospel was preached by the apostles, the book of Acts reveals that the gospel is, first of all, framed by *Israel’s Story*: the narration of the saving Story of Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his coming again—as the completion of the Story of Israel.

Second, the gospel centers on the lordship of *Jesus*. In ways that anticipate the Nicene Creed, the gospel of Peter and Paul is anchored in an exalted view of Jesus. Jesus is seen as suffering, saving, ruling, and judging because he is the Messiah, the Lord, and the Davidic Savior. He is now exalted at the right hand of God.

Third, gospeling involves *summoning people to respond*. Apostolic gospeling is incomplete until it lovingly but firmly summons those who hear the gospel to repentance, to faith in Jesus Christ, and to baptism.

Fourth, the gospel *saves and redeems*. The apostolic gospel promises forgiveness, the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, and justification.

There is a huge difference between the gospeling of Acts and our Plan of Salvation approach today. The difference can be narrowed to this single point: the gospeling of Acts, because it declares the saving significance of Jesus, Messiah and Lord, *summons listeners to confess Jesus as Messiah and Lord*, while our gospeling *seeks to persuade sinners to admit their sin and find Jesus as the Savior*.

Much evangelism that follows the Plan of Salvation approach fastens on Jesus as (personal) Savior and dodges Jesus as Messiah and Lord. If there is any pervasive heresy today, it’s right here. Anyone who can preach the gospel and not make Jesus’ exalted lordship the focal point simply isn’t preaching the apostolic gospel. ✱

## Enhancing Community Through Charitable Giving

*By Charlie Fiskeaux, Special Assistant to the President for Development*

Upon first thought, the concepts of community and charitable giving would seem to be so diverse as to be unrelated. But first consider that a sense of community within a group of people is a positive characteristic of participating in a society, which can be defined as “a group of people united in a relationship and having some interest, activity, or purpose in common.” In particular, participating in a society encompasses elements of a common mission, a similar world-view, and personal involvement at some level. This participation fosters a sense of belonging, a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of these shared relationships.

As described, the Francis Asbury Society is a society where like-minded people can find strength, encouragement, and fellowship to live out the gospel in meaningful ways. Some participate by being involved in discipleship and Bible

study, others by reading publications and books, and some by speaking and sharing the Scriptural message that we can be “wholly devoted to God.” Many participate by charitable giving. And it is through charitable giving that most of the ministries of the Francis Asbury Society are made possible. So, when you support FAS through charitable giving, you are enabling FAS to move forward with its vital ministries. All persons involved—those ministering, those being ministered to, and those behind the scenes that enable ministry—can have a sense of being part of a community that promotes transformational ministry.

Details for various methods of giving to the ministries of the Francis Asbury Society are available on our website [www.francisasburysociety.com/support](http://www.francisasburysociety.com/support). ✱



a constant source of direction every step of the way (see Ex. 13:17–21). God had given his people something far better than a map: they had a guide.

The air must have been thick with excitement as the people set out on their journey. Perhaps they sang and danced as they followed the pillar of fire before them. Surprisingly, God led them to the shore of the Red Sea where steep mountains rose on both sides. They were boxed in. God had led them to a place where there was no way out—and the Egyptian army was in hot pursuit (see Ex. 14:5–9). Had God led them into a trap? Many threw up their hands in despair. “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?” the people grumbled to Moses. “It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (Ex. 14:11–12). What looked like disaster, however, was about to be transformed into victory!

In the biblical story, water is often associated with salvation. Just as the waters of the flood carried the ark to safety while at the same time destroying those who persisted in unbelief, so the water of the Red Sea provided redemption for the faithful but judgment on those who rebelled against God. As in baptism, water symbolizes a new beginning.

The story of what happened at the Red Sea illustrates what it takes for God to accomplish our salvation. Most importantly, it takes a promise from God. True freedom is never the result of human effort or wishful thinking. Our sins hold us in a stronger grip than we can break on our own. Without divine help, we will remain in bondage forever. However, if the sovereign God makes us a promise of deliverance then everything changes. This promise was heard most forcefully perhaps when God said to Moses at the burning bush: “*I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites... a land flowing with milk and honey*” (Ex. 3:17, emphasis added).

But a promise, to be effective, must be *believed*. No one experiences redemption who does not put into practice what the New Testament calls “the obedience of faith” (see Rom. 1:5; 16:26). At the Red Sea, when faced with an impossible situation, the people of God discovered that faith meant more than an intellectual acknowledgment of the truth about God. Even demons have this kind of “faith” (see James 2:19). God’s people gave evidence of genuine, saving faith when they responded to the three commands that came to them at the Red Sea.

*And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” The Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.” (Exodus 14:13–15)*

*Fear not.* When the Bible tells us not to fear, it doesn’t mean we are not to have *feelings* of fear. Rather, it means we are not to be controlled by our fears. As emotional beings, few of us can stop from trembling in the face of sudden danger. But we can control whether we permit our fears to lead us into paralysis and disobedience.

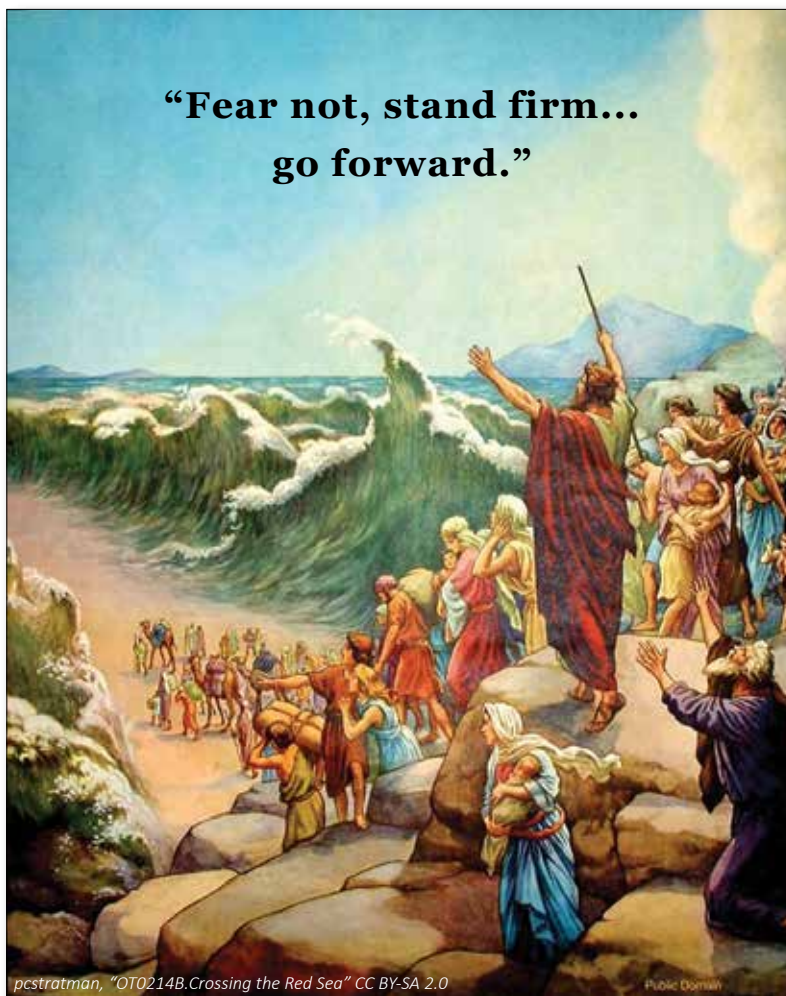
*Stand firm.* We can easily imagine at this point what the Hebrews may have been tempted to do: run, hide, negotiate, surrender, swim, etc.

However, such responses would have thwarted the deliverance that God was about to perform. In this situation, the command was straightforward and clear: be still and let God do the rest. This was *his* battle. We are familiar with the adage, “Don’t just stand there; do something!” For the Hebrews, their challenge was to do just the opposite: “Don’t do anything; just stand there!”

*Go forward.* God had just told the people to be still and do nothing. Now, he tells them to march forward. Though the commands at first seem contradictory, they are really two ways of saying the same thing. The key is timing. There is a time for passive trust, and there is a time for active obedience. When we remember that the waters of the Red Sea had not yet parted at the time this command was given, we begin to realize what a

bold step of faith they were being called to make! But as the people resolved to trust God and simply do what he told them to do, Moses held up his rod, the waters divided, and a highway appeared through the sea. God made a way where there was no way. Often God delivers his people *through* their difficulties rather than *from* them.

This issue of *The High Calling* is about the all-important first step on the journey of salvation. Some call it conversion, others the new birth, and still others justification by faith. Whatever the term, the Red Sea refers to that crisis moment when we are empowered to step boldly forward in the obedience of faith. If you have never made that step, we pray this may be the moment for you to come to a life-changing decision. It is both easier and harder than you think! ✠





# *The* High Calling

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## Through the Red Sea Brought At Last

*By Ronald A. Knox*

*Through the Red Sea brought at last, Alleluia!  
Egypt's chains behind we cast, Alleluia!  
deep and wide flows the tide  
severing from bondage past, Alleluia!*

*Like the cloud that overhead, Alleluia!  
through the billows Israel led, Alleluia!  
by his tomb Christ makes room,  
souls restoring from the dead, Alleluia!*

*In that cloud and in that sea, Alleluia!  
buried and baptized were we, Alleluia!  
Earthly night brought us light  
which is ours eternally, Alleluia!*

### ***The High Calling—May–June 2020***

*The High Calling* is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

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