



Ambassador
INSIGHTS:
*Representing
the
King*

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Introduction

It is often said that you may be the only Bible some people ever read. Your words, your manner, and your actions speak volumes. That's what it means to be an ambassador. You will speak for Christ one way or another, for good or for ill if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. This booklet offers practical tools and insights to help Christian ambassadors grow in knowledge, wisdom, and character – three essential elements of being an effective ambassador for our King.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you sharpen your skill and deepen your virtue and spiritual vitality as a representative of Jesus Christ.

Leaving Behind a “Fragrant Aroma”

I’ve talked often about what it means to be an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). You might have wondered how this works out in the nuts-and-bolts of daily life. It occurred to me that sometimes being a good representative of the Kingdom hinges on the simplest things, almost trivial.

Let me give you an example from my own life.

I have had some of the most interesting conversations about spiritual matters with ordinary people who serve my table in restaurants. Since any contact with others is an opportunity to be an ambassador, I try to keep an eye open for what might turn out to be a “divine appointment.”

This is something you can do, too. Here are some ways to set the stage to engage them in a friendly way.

First, find out the server’s name.

This is easy if they’re wearing a name tag. If not, simply ask. If it’s a unique name or suggests some ethnic history, ask about it. It’s a friendly thing to do—even flattering—and will help you remember their name better.

Begin to use their name immediately. If you’re like me, it’s difficult to keep track of names, especially of people you encounter for the short duration of a quick meal. But there are a few things that help.

To begin with, just the conscious effort itself may be enough to help you remember. Another way is to associate something new with something old. When you tie the new thing to something you already know, the job is much easier. In my case, if the waiter’s name is Mike I immediately think of Mike, my good friend and former tennis partner. That alone will temporarily fix the waiter’s name in my mind.

The second thing to do: Leave a decent tip.

My own standard is between 15% on the low end to 20% for really good service. Sure,

sometimes they don't even deserve 15%. But if they get shorted by me on the tip, I think they're less likely to attribute it to their poor service than they are to associate bad tipping with stingy Christian patrons. (The after-church crowd is notorious for stiffing the restaurant help.)

There's one last thing I do, and it may be the most important. As I'm walking out, I make a point to find the waiter or waitress and simply say, "Thank you." It's a small gesture, but I want their last impression of me to be as pleasant as their first.

What's the real goal behind this modest effort? Simply this: People are important to the Lord, and if they are important to Him, they should be important to you and me.

Addressing a person by his or her name and showing genuine appreciation for service are simple ways to show that they are valued. This speaks volumes about the One you represent. Never underestimate the role of simply being warm and pleasant.

How do they know I'm a Christian? Maybe they don't. I don't always have a Bible with me, and I don't wear religious jewelry or shirts with Christian slogans.

However, since we always bow our heads to give thanks at our table, and the server may overhear snatches of conversation about spiritual things, it's certainly possible they'll make the connection. The last thing I want anyone to do is associate my prayer or my Bible or my Christian tract with rudeness, stinginess, or a demanding, high-maintenance customer.

It may be that we never get around to spiritual matters—in point of fact, we usually don't. Yet Paul says in Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"—that is, as His representative and consistent with His wishes.

That's one of our first goals as ambassadors. In every situation we want to leave behind a "fragrant aroma" for the sake of Christ.

In the Presence of Hostile Witnesses

I had every reason to be confident going into the debate. How could I lose? I was defending an irrefutable proposition: Objective truth can be known.

My debate opponent had happily agreed to defend the opposite view: objective truth *can't* be known. He would be forced to explain how he knows that nothing can be known, how he's certain there's nothing absolutely certain.

As you can see, I couldn't lose. Or could I?

What was I missing? My opponent was too smart to make such an obvious blunder. He was no fool. In fact, he was a brilliant man. He held a Ph.D. in philosophy, was a member of the Jesus Seminar, and had even translated the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas.

Worse for me (in a way), he was an affable, winsome, and engaging personality. And he was making his case on his home turf.¹ Many of the young adults packed into the student union lounge were his own students.

It seemed a little too easy and that made me nervous. I must be missing something. What did he know that I didn't know? What flaw in my ideas had alluded me?

I was about to find out. And that's a good thing.

Peer Review

None of us wants his views proven wrong, especially his most cherished ones, regardless of which side of the fence we're on. But if we want to cultivate a sensible faith, we need to be aware of our own powerful instincts for theological self-preservation.

This instinct is so strong, in fact, that sometimes we are tempted to intellectually circle the wagons and guard against the slightest challenge to our beliefs. This strategy, however, provides a false sense of security. The opposite approach actually provides much more safety.

¹ My debate was with Dr. Marv Meyer at Chapman University. The debate was entitled "Is Truth True?" A CD and MP3 is available through Stand to Reason.

In Medieval times when a knight threw his gauntlet—an armored glove—into the arena, it was a challenge to fight. This was his signal to the world he was willing to take on a challenger. He was in the game.

In the same way, Christians need to throw down the gauntlet. Instead of digging in behind the trenches to defend against attackers, we should tear down our defenses. We should throw our ideas into the arena and invite attack by hostile witnesses.

In academic circles this is called “peer review.” Philosophers, scientists, and theologians present their ideas in professional forums and solicit critique. They test the merit of their thoughts by offering them to people who are inclined to disagree.

Some years ago, I attended a three-day conference entitled “Design and Its Critics.” Here the best minds in the Intelligent Design movement—Behe, Dembski, Meyer, Nelson, to name a few—assembled to make their case. But they weren’t alone. They’d invited the top Darwinian thinkers in the country to listen to their ideas and take their best shots. It was one of the most invigorating and intellectually honest encounters I’d ever witnessed.

The idea of peer review is based on a very sound notion. If our ideas are easily destroyed by those acquainted with the facts, they ought to be discarded. But if our ideas are good, they will not be upended so easily. In the process, we’ll learn what the other side knows, and may be surprised at how weak their resistance really is.

This lesson was driven home to me quite unexpectedly one day while sitting in my own library minding my own business.

A Knock on the Door

While preparing for a radio show one Sunday afternoon, I heard a knock on my front door. When I answered, two middle-aged women smiled at me pleasantly, bundles of apocalyptic literature in hand. Would I like to see their material?

I mentioned there were two at the door, but only the one in front—the one who’d knocked—spoke. The second stood quietly in the back, watching. Jehovah’s Witnesses go out in pairs, one experienced Witness and one new disciple. The neophyte makes the initial contact, while the mentor waits protectively in the background, ready for a flanking maneuver should the young cadet get into trouble.

I knew I had very little time to make an impact. For one, I was preparing a commentary for radio and was running against the clock. Still, I didn’t want to send my visitors away empty-handed.

Second, door-to-door cult missionaries usually have little time for anyone who is biblically literate. Once I showed my hand, I knew they’d disappear quickly looking for

an easier mark.

“I’m a Christian,” I began. I directed my comments to the younger convert, the one less influenced by the Watchtower organization and hopefully more open to another viewpoint.

“It’s clear we have some differences, including the vital issue of the identity of Jesus. I believe what John teaches in John 1:3, that Jesus is the uncreated Creator. This makes Him God.”²

Mention of the deity of Christ was all that was needed to bring the rear guard into action. The person in the shadows spoke up for the first time. I honestly wasn’t prepared for her response.

“You’re entitled to your opinion and we’re entitled to ours,” was all she said. No question, no challenge, no theological rebuttal. This was a dismissal, not a response. She turned on her heel and started for the next house, young cadet in tow, in search of more vulnerable game.

I cast about for something to say that might slow their retreat. “You’re also entitled to be wrong in your opinion,” I blurted out, but the retort had no effect.

I admit it wasn’t a devastating rejoinder, but it was all I could think of in the moment. “Clearly we both can’t be right,” I added, “even though we’re both entitled to our opinions.” I was hoping for some kind of reaction, some kind of engagement, but my challenge went unanswered.

As they marched down the walkway I fired my final salvo, vainly hoping for a response: “Obviously, you’re not interested in hearing any other point of view than your own.” Then they were gone.

Gun Shy

In the moments that followed a host of questions flooded my mind. Did I use the right tactic? Would a different approach have been more effective? Did anything I say leave a good impression? Did I plant even a seed of doubt in their minds?

I’ll probably never know the answer to those questions, but the meeting was still educational. Notice a couple of things about this short exchange.

What did these two missionaries do when they encountered someone who was biblically literate? What was their first response when I mentioned my background and then gave

² An irrefutable Biblical argument for the deity of Christ based on this verse (John 1:3) is featured in the CD and MP3, “The Trinity: A Solution, Not a Problem,” and also in the article “The Deity of Christ: Case Closed.” The CD and MP3 is available through Stand to Reason. Find the article for free on our website at str.org in the back issues of *Solid Ground*.

a thumbnail sketch of an argument striking right at the heart of their most cherished doctrine?

They backed off. They bailed out. They ran away.

What's wrong with this picture? If you were convinced that the medicine you held in your hand would save the life of a dying patient, would you turn on your heel, letting him perish just because he didn't like the taste of the treatment? In the same way, isn't it strange that a door-to-door evangelist out to save the world would take flight at the first sign of any of opposition?

These Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries were in a battle for human souls, yet they fled at the first sound of gunfire.

Three Revelations

This encounter taught me three things about these missionaries.

First, they weren't very confident in their message. Why should I take a single moment to consider an alleged message from God that God's messenger herself wouldn't lift one finger to defend? Why should I respect the cause of a soldier who retreats at the first sign of resistance?

Second, these missionaries could not have been very interested in my salvation. If they were genuinely concerned about rescuing my lost soul, their first impulse should have been to find out what I believed and why, then correct my errant theology. Isn't that why they go door to door, to witness to the lost, to give them the truth about Jehovah God and invite them to join the Watchtower organization?

But they didn't even listen to my point of view, much less try to correct my error. Do you know what that tells me? They didn't care much about my eternal destiny.

Third, I learned they didn't take the issue of truth very seriously, either. Religious evangelism is a persuasive enterprise. The evangelist thinks his view is true and opposing views are false. He also thinks the difference matters, which is why he's trying to change people's minds. Follow the truth, you win. Follow a lie, you lose—big time.

A commitment to truth (as opposed to a commitment to an organization) means an openness to refining one's own views. It means increasing the accuracy of one's understanding and being open to correction in thinking.

A challenger might turn out to be a blessing in disguise, an ally instead of an enemy. An evangelist who's convinced of his view should want to hear the very best arguments against it.

One of two things would then happen. He may discover that some objections to his view are good ones. The rebuttal helps him make adjustments and corrections in his thinking, refining his knowledge of the truth. Or it may turn out he's on solid ground after all. Developing answers to the toughest arguments against him strengthens both his witness and his confidence in his religion.

A Lesson Learned

There's a lesson here for Christians: Don't be too quick to back down from opposition.

First, as intelligent or aggressive as your opponent might seem, he still is, in fact, perishing without Christ. You don't know what internal struggles he's facing that don't show through his confident or gruff exterior. You don't know but that God will use your simple, gracious, but direct challenge to his beliefs and begin to melt his rebellious heart. It happens.

Second, you might learn something yourself. Maybe you're the one mistaken, at least in part. Or maybe your view is right, but the way you defend it is flawed. If your bad arguments are refuted, ditch them. The case for Christianity is too good to be compromised by faulty defenses.

Third, maybe you're not mistaken. If so, you want to be certain your convictions can stand up to the most rigorous analysis. When it does, the confidence you gain will be worth its weight in gold.

Not Quick on Your Feet?

This does not mean you must charge headlong into every skirmish that comes your way. Maybe you don't consider yourself fast enough on your feet to keep up with someone who's quicker than you in an intense discussion. No problem. Don't feel under pressure to immediately answer every question asked or every point made.

For tactical reasons you may want to adopt the posture of a neutral observer. Shift from argument mode to fact-finding mode.

Try this. Say something like, "Interesting point. I'd like to hear more. Let me ask some questions about your view and your reasons for it so I understand it. Then let me think about it. We can talk more later." This shows you take the other person's view seriously and also buys you valuable time.

Ask probing questions (Columbo tactic), but don't try to win your case just then. Take notes if you need to. Make sure you understand the challenge or the objection clearly. Then do some work on your own—maybe even enlisting others in the process—and come back prepared.

If your discussion was just part of a chance meeting, you may not be able to revisit the topic with the same person, but you'll be prepared next time the issue comes up.

This is a wonderful way to completely take the pressure off you. It's not a retreat, just a different type of engagement. It greatly reduces your anxiety level, strengthens your own confidence, and prepares you to be more effective next time around.

Courage Under Fire

My debate with the likable and learned professor went remarkably smoothly. I wasn't blind-sided or buffaloed. Instead, I learned through experience what my mind already told me was true: My opponent's views were seriously flawed. They were made compelling because they were confidently held and boldly expressed. But the substance wasn't there. My own argument was on solid ground.

This taught me a powerful lesson. Don't retreat in the face of opposition. Too much is at stake. Be the kind of soldier that instills respect in others because of your courage under fire.

Make your case in the presence of hostile witnesses. Throw your gauntlet into the arena and see what the other side has to say. It's one of the most effective ways to establish your case and help you cultivate sensible faith over time.

Two Simple Questions

Earlier I wrote about everyday encounters we all have in restaurants. As an ambassador I've learned that encounters are the bread and butter of my witness for Christ.

For example, while giving a talk at a local Barnes & Noble, someone asked why it was necessary for him to believe in Jesus. He was Jewish, believed in God, and was living a moral life. Those were the important things, it seemed to him—how one lived, not what one believed.

To him our message depicted a narrow-minded God pitching people into Hell because of an arcane detail of Christian theology—Jesus. How should I answer?

Remember that the first responsibility of an ambassador is knowledge—which includes an accurately informed message. What is our message?

One way to say it is, “If you don’t believe in Jesus, you’ll go to Hell. If you do believe, you’ll go to Heaven.”

That’s certainly true, as far as it goes. The problem is it’s not clear. Since it doesn’t give an accurate sense of *why* Jesus is necessary, it makes God sound petty.

So how do we fix this? Here’s how I responded to my Jewish questioner. I asked him two simple questions.

“Do you think people who commit moral crimes ought to be punished?”

He thought for a moment. “Well, since I’m a prosecuting attorney...yes.”

“So do I,” I agreed.

“Second question: Have *you* ever committed any moral crimes?”

There was a slight pause. This was getting personal. “Yes, I guess I have,” he admitted.

“So have I,” I confessed, agreeing with him again.

“So now we have this difficult situation, don’t we? We both believe those who commit moral crimes ought to be punished, and we both believe we’ve committed moral crimes. Do you know what I call that? I call that bad news.”

In less than 60 seconds I had accomplished a remarkable thing with this approach. I didn’t have to convince him he was a sinner. *He was telling me.* I didn’t have to convince him he deserved to be punished. *He was telling me.*

I was tapping into a deep intuition every person shares: knowledge of his own guilt and a realization that guilt should be punished. And I didn’t do it arrogantly or in an obnoxious, condescending way. I freely admitted I was in the same trouble he was.

Now that we agreed on the problem it was time to give the solution.

“This is where Jesus comes in,” I explained. “We both know we’re guilty. That’s the problem. So God offers a solution: a pardon, free of charge. But it’s on His terms, not ours. Jesus is God’s answer because He personally paid the penalty for us. He took the rap in our place. No one else has done that. Now we have a choice to make. We either take the pardon and go free, or refuse it and pay for our own crimes.”

This approach reveals a very important sequence in making our message intelligible: First the bad news, then the good news.

There are other illustrations you could use to do this, but the sequence is critical. It’s the way any good doctor proceeds. And it was the consistent method used by the apostles. Take a look for yourself. In every one of the 13 times the Gospel was preached in Acts, the disciples used the same approach.

Why is this technique important? Because it gives an accurate sense of *why* Jesus is necessary. It shows that God is not trivial. He is just, but merciful, not petty, but kind, graciously offering forgiveness to those who desperately need it.

I didn’t say to him, “If you don’t believe in Jesus you’ll go to Hell.” I said if he didn’t receive a pardon for his crimes, he’d suffer the punishment he knew he deserved. This gave him something to think about.

This principle—first the bad news, then the good news—is the core idea in Ray Comfort’s wonderful message “Hell’s Best Kept Secret.” When used carefully, it gets us past religious slogans. It helps us answer the question we all ask: Why do I feel guilty? The answer: We *feel* guilty because we *are* guilty.

Being able to communicate this message clearly is key to cultivating sensible faith and being an effective ambassador for Christ.

Faith & Wishing

I don't like the word "faith."

It's not that faith isn't valuable. True biblical faith is essential for salvation. But faith is often deeply misunderstood in a way that hurts Christianity and harms Christians.

Some think that having a level of certainty about the truth of Christianity makes "belief" unnecessary or irrelevant. That kind of knowledge undermines genuine faith and offends God.

The reasoning goes something like this. We all know God wants us to have faith. In fact, without faith, it's impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). However, gathering evidence for God and Christianity leaves little room for faith. After all, how can one have faith in something he knows is true? Faith, then, is opposed to knowledge. Therefore, apologetics undermines the faith project and thus displeases the Lord.

On this view, faith is believing the unbelievable, clinging to your convictions when all the evidence is against you. Faith is a "leap," a blind, desperate lunge in the darkness. When doubts or troubles beset us we're told to "just have faith," as if we could squeeze out spiritual hope by intense acts of sheer will.

This view of faith reduces Christian conviction to religious wishful thinking. We can hope, but we can never know.

But this will never work. Someone once said, "The heart cannot believe that which the mind rejects." If you are not confident the message of Scripture is actually true, you can't believe it even if you tried.

The "I just take Christianity on faith" attitude can't be the right approach. It leaves the Bible without defense, yet Peter directs us to *make* a defense for the hope that is in us.³

Also, the biblical word for faith, *pistis*, doesn't mean wishing. It means active trust. And trust cannot be conjured up or manufactured. It must be earned. You can't ex-

3 1 Peter 3:15.

ercise the kind of faith the Bible has in mind unless you're reasonably sure that some particular things are true.

In fact, I suggest you completely ban the phrase "leap of faith" from your vocabulary. Biblical faith is based on knowledge, not wishing or blind leaps. Knowledge builds confidence and confidence leads to trust. The kind of faith God is interested in is not wishing. It's trust based on knowing, a sure confidence grounded in evidence.

The following biblical examples suffice to make my point:

Blood, Boils, Frogs and Flies

Israel's exodus from Egypt was depicted in a clever animated film called "The Prince of Egypt." After seeing the movie, my wife and I spent time reading the original account in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Though I'd read this passage a number of times, something jumped out at me I hadn't seen before, a phrase God kept repeating over and over.

Reading the encounter with God at the burning bush, we sense Moses' reluctance to be God's deliverer. And it's understandable. Why would Pharaoh, the most powerful leader in the world, submit to a renegade? Why would two million Hebrew slaves follow a murderer and a defector?

"What if they won't believe me, or listen to me?" Moses demurred. "What if they say, 'The Lord hasn't appeared to you?'"

What God didn't say in response is as important as what He did say. He didn't say, "Tell Pharaoh he's just going to have to trust you on this one. Tell the Hebrews they've got to have faith."

Instead God asked, "What's that in your hand?"

"A staff," Moses answered.

"Throw it on the ground."

So he threw it down, and it became a serpent.

"Stretch out your hand," the Lord said. "Grab it by the tail."

Reluctantly, Moses did as he was told. When he grabbed the snake, it became a staff again.

"Do this," God said, "and then they'll believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, has appeared to you."

More signs followed that got the people's attention: the river of blood and frogs covering the land; the gnats, flies, and locusts; the boils and the pestilence; the hail, the darkness, and finally the angel of death. All for one purpose: "*That they might know* there is a God in Israel." This phrase is repeated no less than ten times throughout the account.⁴

What was the result? "And when Israel *saw* the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they *believed* in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).

Note the pattern: a powerful *evidence* (miracles, in this case), giving the people *knowledge* of God, in Whom they then placed their *faith*. Knowledge—some level of certainty—went before belief in each of these cases.

God didn't ask Pharaoh, the Hebrews, or even Moses for mindless faith, blind leaps, or wishful thinking. He demonstrated His power, giving them good reason to believe, resulting in obedience. First, Pharaoh and the Hebrews were given good reason to *know*. This then grounded their investment of *faith* (active trust) in God.⁵

In the animated feature, Miriam sings a song of deliverance which includes the refrain, "There can be miracles when you believe." But the reality was just the opposite. Miracles didn't *follow* belief; they *preceded* it. Acts of power led to knowledge, which then allowed faith to flourish.

Taking the Easy Way Out?

Fast forward to the New Testament and you'll find the same pattern in the life of Christ.

In Mark 2, we encounter Jesus speaking to a group gathered in a home in Capernaum. A crowd blocks the front door, keeping a paralytic—being carried by his four friends—from gaining an audience with the Healer. The only way in is from above, so they dig through the earthen roof and lower the deformed man down on a pallet.

Jesus is impressed. Seeing their faith He says to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

His words offend the scribes, though, who grumble among themselves at such an audacious claim. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" they whisper.

Jesus, aware of their complaint, puts a question to them. "Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or, 'Arise, take up your pallet and walk'?"

⁴ Cf., Exodus 6:7, 7:5, 7:17, 8:10, 8:22, 9:14, 9:29, 10:2, 14:4, and 14:18.

⁵ Of course, Pharaoh's "faith" was not expressed in humble surrender leading to salvation, but in obedience under compulsion. The point is, he was compelled to act based on the unmistakable evidence of God's power.

How would you respond? If you were in Jesus' position, would it be easier for you to claim to forgive sins or claim to heal paralysis? The correct answer is it's always easier to boast about something no one can check up on than to claim to have supernatural powers and be put to the test.

Jesus knew it looked like He was taking the easy way out, until His next remark: "But in order that you may *know* that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He then turned to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." Then, in the sight of everyone, the paralytic got up and got out.

Jesus gives us the same lesson we find in Exodus. He proves something that can't be seen—the forgiveness of sins—with evidence that can be seen—a dramatic healing. Jesus heals "in order that you may know." Once again, the concrete *evidence* allows the doubters to *know* the truth so they can then *trust* in the forgiveness Christ could give.

The Apostle Peter

On to the book of Acts and Peter's dramatic sermon on Pentecost. The crowd is both amazed and bewildered at the manifestations of the Spirit they see with their own eyes.

Peter takes his stand before the throng. It isn't intoxication they witness, he tells them, but inspiration, prophecy being fulfilled in their midst by the hand of God. He recounts that Jesus—even though attested to by miracles, signs, and wonders—had been murdered at the hands of godless men. Death couldn't hold Him in the grave, though. He has risen. Not only did King David himself foretell such a thing; Peter and the rest of the disciples had witnessed the risen Christ themselves. The promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, was now being poured out in a way that Peter's entire audience could see and hear.

He closes with a statement tailor-made for all those who think that certainty somehow diminishes genuine faith: "Therefore let all the house of Israel *know for certain* that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."⁶

When the crowd hears the evidence—the miracles, the fulfilled prophecy, the witnesses of the resurrection, the powerful manifestations of the Spirit in their midst—the people are pierced to the heart. They are *convinced* of their error, they *know* the truth, and thousands *believe*, putting their *trust* in the Savior.

Hear, See, Handle, Believe

The Beloved Disciple brings it all together for us in 1 John. He opens his letter with the evidence of his own eyewitness encounter with Christ. Notice how many senses

⁶ Acts 2:36.

he appeals to:

What was from the beginning, what we have *heard*, what we have *seen* with our eyes, what we *beheld* and our hands *handled* concerning the Word of Life—and the life was *manifested*, and we have *seen* and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was *manifested* to us—what we have *seen* and *heard* we proclaim to you also...

Then he closes his letter like this:

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may *know* that you have eternal life.⁷

To John, faith wasn't a blind leap. It wasn't wishing on a star. It was grounded in evidence that led to knowledge. It was certain.

The record is clear from the Old Testament, to the Gospels, from the very beginnings of the early church, to the epistles of the apostles: Biblical faith isn't wishing, it's confidence. It's not denying reality, but discovering reality. It's a sense of certainty grounded in evidence that Christianity is true—not just “true for me,” but actually, fully, and completely true.

Spiritual growth involves increasing our knowledge *and* our certainty of God. So there are two things here: first knowledge, and second confidence in what we know.

How do we increase confidence? Wish harder? Hope against hope? Stop our ears to the sounds of the critics without, and ignore the doubts of the agnostic within? This will never work, because confidence cannot be fabricated. It must be earned. As you gather substantiating evidence, your confidence grows automatically and your faith is deepened.

Faith is not about wishing, but about confidence, and the facts make the difference. You get a hold of the facts, you study, you learn—even a little—and you'll realize you're not just wishing on a star about eternal things. You'll realize Christianity is really true.

And that changes everything.

⁷ 1 John 5:11-13.

Cultivating a Fruitful Prayer Life

Seasons of dryness are part of our walk with Christ. They are a natural element in the ebb and flow of any healthy relationship. Sometimes our spiritual gardens burst with life. Other times they're parched, dry, and brown.

Cultivating sensible faith requires recognition and attention to these seasons so we don't dry up. For followers of Christ, a vital element of that cultivation is prayer.

I have to confess, prayer has never come easy for me. For a few hardy prayer warriors, talking with God is as easy as breathing; it happens almost effortlessly. When you ask them how they do it, they simply shrug and reply, "I just pray."

Unfortunately, for some of us that's about as helpful as Tiger Woods saying "I just hit the ball." We need a little more instruction to get the job done.

Most of those whose prayers are recorded in the Bible engaged both their hearts and their minds in the process. We should do the same.

I try to start my prayer time with a hymn that moves my heart because it expresses my genuine wonder or affection towards God, or my humble surrender to Him. Then I spend time thanking God for specific things in my life. Finally, I focus on petition, praying specifically, intelligently, and persuasively (SIP—think of "sipping" when you pray).

Here are some other practical guidelines I've personally found helpful in cultivating a more fruitful prayer life. If you begin incorporating a few of them, I'm confident your own time with the Lord will improve and your faith will be refreshed.

- ♦ *Make a list* of prayer items on a scratch pad to guide you.
- ♦ *Choose a specific place* to pray away from distractions so you can concentrate. Ringing phones and crying children will sabotage your time before it gets started.
- ♦ *Pray out loud.* Many people can pray under their breath or in their minds for long periods and still maintain intensity, but for most of us it's a quick ticket to dream-

land. When we pray out loud we have to form intelligent sentences. We have to concentrate more on what we're praying about.

- ◆ *Keep a note pad handy* so you can jot down things that come to mind while you're before the Lord. Sometimes you'll get great ideas totally unrelated to what you've been praying about. If you jot them down, you can quickly get back to the topic at hand without being too distracted.
- ◆ *Pray short, sincere prayers.* If the thought of laboring over a topic wears you out, pray in short paragraphs instead. A few sentences may be all that's needed to exhaust the topic for you for the time being. If so, just move on to the next item without feeling guilty for your brevity.
- ◆ *Redeem time for prayer* from unused corners of your schedule. When driving, talk to the Lord instead of screaming at traffic. Busy homemakers can combine prayer with housework, especially if the task doesn't require a lot of concentration. Joggers, swimmers, and cyclists can use their workout time for prayer. Sometimes my most satisfying and intimate conversations with the Lord have been during long walks.
- ◆ *Pray with someone else.* Though some prayers can only be said in solitude, there will be times you'll want to join hearts with another person in prayer. If you commit to meet on a regular basis, the accountability can help build consistency. Such prayer trysts often lead to powerful, life-changing friendships.
- ◆ *Keep a prayer journal.* This can be done easily with a computer. Here are two variations of this idea. The first is to keep track of what you prayed for and when you prayed for it. Leave a space to jot down the answer when it comes. This will help you to keep alert to God's answer so you can thank Him promptly (Colossians 4:2). Sometimes prayer answers come in the back door and you don't want them to slip by you. The second variation is to write the entire prayer in your journal. Make it a personal letter to the Lord.

Try these ideas. They can make a big difference to bring refreshment in the dry spells.

Devotion, Not Devotions

I know that nourishing our relationship with God is an important part of cultivating sensible faith. But one way of pursuing that—having a daily “quiet time”—has always been difficult for me. Maybe it’s been hard for you, too.

First, I’ve never done well with the ritual because I could never be consistent. The fact that I’m not really an early morning person combined with a chaotic schedule both seem to sabotage my best intentions.

Second, I don’t think you have to have “daily devotions” to be a good Christian. It’s become somewhat of an Evangelical sacrament, a source of blessing for many, but also a source of guilt for others who don’t (or can’t) keep the regimen.

Yes, the Bible says we should pray, study, and meditate—no question there—but it doesn’t demand a particular time or pattern. There are a number of ways to satisfy that requirement. Jesus, David, and others often started their days with prayer, but that doesn’t mean it’s the best pattern for you and I.

Third, I’ve long suspected the effort is somewhat misdirected. Quiet times are encouraged as a way to “get closer to God,” meant to accomplish a subjective goal (generate emotional closeness), not an objective one (gain spiritual understanding).

It’s not that such a goal is wrong as much as it’s wrong-headed. Feeling close to God, it seems to me, is much like the pursuit of happiness. It’s gained not as a goal in itself, but as the outcome of pursuing some other goal. To get something for yourself, you have to focus on someone else: God, in this case.

So I have a recommendation. Instead of trying (unsuccessfully) to have devotions every morning, I have *devotion*. That is, I take five to ten minutes early in the day to focus on God—not to get something from Him, but to actively devote myself to Him for the day. After I sing a hymn or two, I use a biblical prayer (I’ll share it with you in a moment) as a guide to express my dedication to the Lord.

Devotion (in the sense I’m using the word) is different from “devotions.” My goal

isn't to squeeze a sense of well-being out of the encounter, but to focus entirely on Him, worshipping Him, thanking Him and devoting myself to His purposes for the day. The focus is entirely on God, not on my feelings, surrendering myself to the Father, no matter how I feel nor what befalls me. It's fairly brief by design, but still very meaningful.

My moments of devotion may develop into a longer prayer time, but they don't have to. Instead, no matter what my schedule is, I can start each day devoted to Christ, then anticipate time for regular prayer and supplication later in the day by scheduling it or squeezing it in using the methods I discussed in the last chapter.

I suggest using a biblical prayer as a model. Many have used the prayer of Jabez for this purpose. I don't care for this because it's too general and therefore invites abuse. I don't think that's author Bruce Wilkinson's fault. I think his work is abused by Christians who make the prayer into a kind of talisman or charm. They buy *Jabez* by the dozens to pass out to non-Christian friends who they hope will recite the prayer like a magic chant to get what they want and then be attracted to Christianity.

Instead, I use the prayer of Paul found in Colossians 1:9-12. I pray this prayer in personalized form every day for myself, my wife, my son and daughters. Here's my adaptation:

I pray that we may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may walk in a manner worthy of You, Lord, to please You in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to Your glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

I add other personal sentiments before and after, as seems appropriate, but this prayer is the core. Notice that when you pray this way the focus is entirely on God and His purposes. You ask for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding so you can honor and please God, bearing fruit in your daily walk. You ask for power so you can attain steadfastness and patience. You ask for joy in the context of thanksgiving.

As you can see, it will be very difficult to co-opt this prayer for selfish purposes. But it's perfect to help you and I start our day on the right foot, devoting ourselves to God regardless of how we feel.

If you've been having trouble with "quiet times," try daily devotion for two weeks. Write Colossians 1:9-12 on a card and use it as a guide. Gather a small collection of favorite songs—not ones that report your feelings, but ones that focus on the Lord—and use them to begin your devotion.

All good ambassadors need to stay in close contact with their sovereign. This is one small way to help you accomplish that. It may even become a habit. Of course, it's not meant to be a substitute for the kind of extended prayer we talked about last chapter. But it may help you to consistently start your day *devoted* to the Lord even when you can't schedule "devotions" first thing.

Arguing Is a Virtue

Imagine living in a world in which you couldn't separate truth from error. You wouldn't be able to tell food from poison, or friend from foe. You couldn't tell good from bad, right from wrong, healthy from unhealthy, or safe from unsafe. Such a world would be a dangerous place. You wouldn't survive long.

What protects us from the hazards of such a world? Some say the Word of God, but that's not entirely true. Something else is necessary before we can accurately know the Bible's teaching. Yes, the Bible is first in terms of *authority*, but something else is first in terms of *the order of knowing*.

We cannot grasp the authoritative teaching of God's Word without using our minds properly. Therefore the mind, not the Bible, is the very first line of defense God has given us against error.

In order to understand the truth of the Bible accurately, our mental faculties must be intact, and we must use them properly as God intended. We demonstrate this fact every time we disagree on an interpretation of a Biblical passage and then give reasons why our view is better than another's. Simply put, we argue for our point of view, and if we argue well we separate truth from error.

Arguing Is Good

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Loving God with the mind is not a passive process. It's not just having thoughts about God. Rather, it's coming to conclusions about God and His world based on revelation, observation, and careful thinking.

Both a process and a skill are involved. There is a way that thinking works, a tool that needs to be employed. What is the tool we use in our observations of the world that help us separate fact from fiction? That tool is reason, the ability to use our minds to sort through observations and draw accurate conclusions about what is true. Rational-

ity is the tool God has given us to acquire knowledge.

Generally, this is not a solitary enterprise. It's best done in the company of others who dispute our claims and offer competing ideas. In short, we argue. Sometimes we are silent partners, listening, not talking, but the process is going on in our minds just the same.

The ability to argue well is the essence of all clear thinking. That's why arguments are good things--arguing is a virtue because it helps us discover what's true.

This is not rationalism, a kind of idolatry of the mind that places man's thinking at the center of the universe. Rather, it's the proper use of the faculties God has given us to understand Him and the world He's made.

What Is an Argument?

There's a difference between an argument and a fight. Christians are not to be acrimonious, nasty, or harsh, fighting for the fight's sake. Paul warns against such quarreling and abuse (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

An argument is not a fight or a quarrel, but a reasoned and principled disputation about matters of fact. Arguments are important, therefore, because they help us discover the facts and find the truth. If you think about it, much of the New Testament consists of arguments in written form--Paul, Peter, and the others arguing for a critical point of truth.

Think of an argument like a simple house, a roof supported by walls. The roof is the conclusion and the walls are the supporting ideas. By testing the walls we can see if they are strong enough to keep the roof from tumbling down. If the walls are solid, the conclusion rests securely on its supporting foundation. If the walls collapse, the roof goes flat and the argument is defeated.

Some arguments are not really arguments at all. Many people try to build their roof right on the ground. Instead of erecting solid walls--the supporting ideas that hold the conclusion up--they simply assert their view and pound the podium.

An argument is different from an assertion, though. An assertion simply states a point. An argument gives supporting reasons why the point should be taken seriously. The reasons, then, become the topic of mutual discussion or analysis. Opinions by themselves are not proof. A mere point of view is not worthy of belief. Belief requires reasons.

Roofs are useless when they're on the ground; they don't cover anything. In the same way an assertion without evidence doesn't do any work. I frequently get calls on the radio show from people who think they're giving me an argument, when all they're

doing is forcefully stating a point of view. They sound compelling, but a closer look reveals an emperor with lots of bluster, but no bloomers. My job is to recognize that the roof is laying flat on the ground and simply point it out.

If you find yourself stymied in a discussion, you may be looking for an argument that's not there. Ask yourself, "Did they give me an argument or just make an assertion?" If the latter is true then say, "Well, that's an interesting opinion. What's your argument? Why should I believe what you believe? Give me your reasons."

Don't let them flatten you by dropping a roof on your head. Make them build walls underneath their roof. Ask them for reasons or facts to support their conclusion.

Fight Phobic

If the notion of truth is central to Christianity, and the ability to argue central to the task of knowing the truth, why do some Christians often get so upset when you try to find the truth through argument and disagreement?

Two things come to mind. First, some fear division. When people are free to express strong differences of opinion it threatens unity. Just when the Bible study starts getting interesting, someone jumps in to shut down dissent to keep the peace. This is very unfortunate.

True, sometimes Christians get distracted by useless disputes. Paul warns against wrangling about words and quarreling about foolish and ignorant speculations (2 Timothy 2:14, 23-24). But Paul also commands us to be diligent workmen handling the word of truth accurately (2 Timothy 2:15). And, because some disputes are vitally important, Paul solemnly charges us to reprove, rebuke, and exhort when necessary (2 Timothy 4:1-2). This cannot be done without some confrontation, but disagreement need not threaten genuine unity.

To be of one mind Biblically doesn't mean all have to share the same opinion. It means a warm fellowship based on communion with Christ in the midst of differences, not abandoning all attempts at refining our knowledge by enforcing unanimity. True maturity means learning how to dispute in an aggressive fashion, yet still maintain the harmony of the body and the unity of peace.

There's a second reason Christians resist arguments. Some believers unfortunately take any opposition as hostility, especially if it's their view being challenged. In some circles it's virtually impossible to take exception with a cherished view or a respected teacher without being labeled malicious. This is a dangerous attitude for the church.

The minute one is labeled mean-spirited simply for raising an opposing view, it cuts off debate. This simply isn't fair. We avoid what may be a legitimate discussion by simply calling names. Worse, we compromise our ability to know the truth.

It's absolutely imperative that we not silence dissent in this way. We ought to learn how to argue fairly, reasonably, and graciously. We need to cultivate the ability to disagree with civility and not take opposition personally. We also must have the grace to allow our own views to be challenged with evidence, reasoning, and Scripture. Those who refuse to dispute have a very poor chance of growing in truth.

“And If Your Brother Sins...”

Sometimes a different objection is raised. Some refuse to even consider a public critique of another's ideas unless that person has first been confronted privately. According to Jesus' directives in Matthew 18:15-17, this should be done before going public with an analysis, they say.

I don't think that's what Jesus had in mind, though. Note the specific wording of the passage: “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”

Three things are worthy of note here. First, the pattern given in Matthew 18 is meant for a brother who is in *sin* (v. 15). Second, it initiates a process in the *local congregation* (“the church” v. 17) where individual discipline can be carried out. Third, if it runs its course, the correction results in *excommunication* from the local body (v. 17). The local community of faith has the responsibility of correcting moral error in its midst because they're the only ones in a position to do so.

To my mind, none of these apply when you critique someone's ideas or teaching. When brothers in Christ disagree about an issue of doctrine, it's fully appropriate to register the differences publicly, particularly when the teaching in question has been public.

This is the New Testament pattern. Paul's own letters are, in many cases, public refutations of error being taught by others in the church. In some cases, he even mentions the names of those who have faltered, either doctrinally or morally (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 1:15, 4:10, 14). An especially noteworthy example is when Paul publicly corrects the apostle Peter while many others are present (Galatians 2:11, 14). This was no private confrontation about sin, but a public correction of wrong doctrine.

Keep in mind that the person's heart is not the issue in such a dispute. His doctrine is. The proper way to judge doctrine is not to look at a teacher's personal spirituality, but at his teaching. Further, it's important not to strain at the gnat--concern about Matthew 18--and swallow the camel--the Biblical arguments raised against one's teaching. An unbiblical doctrine can't be ignored just because the critic fails to fulfill the direc-

tives of Matthew 18.

Retaining the Standard

There is no reason to threaten our unity by frivolous debate. However, many debates are not frivolous, but are worthy of our best efforts.

Paul told Timothy to retain the standard of sound words, and to guard the treasure which had been entrusted to him (2 Timothy 1:13-14). He told Titus to choose elders who could exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict, teachers, he said, who must be silenced (Titus 1:9, 11).

This kind of protection of the truth is not a passive enterprise. It's active and energetic. Arguments are good and dispute is healthy. They clarify the truth and protect us from error and religious despotism.

When the church discourages principled debates and a free flow of ideas it leads to shallow Christianity and a false sense of unity. No one gets any practice learning how to field contrary views in a gracious and productive way. The oneness they share is contrived, not genuine. And they lose the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff.

When arguments are few, error abounds.

Read Less More and Twice as Fast

If you're like me, you really want to read more effectively, but you don't know how and can't find the time. Solomon wrote, "The writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body."^{8*} I agree. The stacks of unopened volumes in my own library weary me just looking at them.

To make matters worse, even the good books we read teach us nothing. We forget the details almost immediately because our goal is to finish the book, not master the material.

I have a plan to change that. I want to show you how you can read less, more. It's based on one simple idea: It's better to thoroughly read one or two good books than "finish" ten or twenty by reading them cover to cover and then moving on.

The idea raises two practical problems. First, how do we know if a book is worth investing time in? Second, what techniques will allow us to read thoroughly, yet quickly, leading to mastery?

Four Pages a Day

Don't think you've got to read 50, 25, or even 10 books a year to stay educated, informed, and equipped. Instead, I want you to think about carefully reading just six books during the next twelve months.

For some of you the idea may seem overwhelming. It isn't. It's 60 days per book, or four pages per day for a 200 page title. Even a person who reads very casually can accomplish this, especially using the tricks I'll show you.

I want you to consider devoting two months to one book. The object is not simply to read from beginning to end, though. The goal is to master the contents. I'm going to show you how to read a book in such a way that at the end of two months you can say, "I own this book."

⁸ Eccl. 12:12.

For that you need a system. Don't start from the beginning and read through word by word to the end. That's a mistake. The key is to read through the book more than once at different levels. I'm going to show you how. Follow these four steps for non-fiction books: overview, preview, read, and post-view.

Overview the Book

Every book does not deserve a good reading. The initial overview allows you to determine whether a title deserves your attention by giving you a sense of the main thrust of the book in five to twenty minutes.

Start by reading the jacket cover. Read the table of contents. Skim the book's preface and the introduction. Read the conclusion in the last three pages of the book. Browse through the index in the back. Note the publisher and the date of publication.

If you don't like what you see, abandon the effort and look for a better book. You've only lost five minutes and saved hours of fruitless reading.

If the treatment looks promising, though, page through the entire book at the rate of 2-3 seconds per page. Don't try to "speed read." This first step is a casual one. Let your eyes stroll over the material as your gaze falls on the text and enjoy the process of serendipitous discovery.

The overview takes less than twenty minutes in the extended form and can be done while you're browsing in the bookstore. If you like what you see, buy the book to read more thoroughly later.

The overview is always the first step of thorough reading, even if you already own the book and have decided to read it (or it's been assigned to you for a class).

Preview the Book

Go through the book a second time. Sit down and read it at a slower rate, but still not word for word. I suggest you skim at the rate of four to ten seconds per page. Force yourself to move quickly.

Obviously, you're not reading all the words. You're skimming. I read the headings and the first sentence of each paragraph. Get a feel for the author's main case and his progression of thought.

This is more aggressive reading than you did in the overview, but still casual. Don't linger, though. Force yourself to push ahead, turning the page every four to ten seconds. Break the book in as you go, gently creasing each page as you move forward. You'll be amazed at how much you'll absorb during this quick preview phase.

When you're done, write a summary sentence or two on the title page capturing the main thrust of the book. Answer the question, "What is this book about?" What is the book trying to accomplish? Use pencil because you may want to change the summary after you've read the book more thoroughly.

The second step of our approach will take 20 to 40 minutes at four to ten seconds per page, depending on the book. You'll have gone through the whole book twice—over-viewing and previewing—in about an hour, with a summary statement capturing the central idea of the book.

This "layering" method imbeds the book's basic ideas in your mind in a way that won't happen if you simply start at the first page and read through to the end. The first layer--the overview--gives you a general sense of the material and allows you to decide whether the book is worth reading or not. The preview clarifies the basic content and organization of the book, and gives you the author's approach and main argument.

Read the Book

Now it's time to actually read the book. This can be done in multiple sessions, one chapter at a sitting.

Start by quickly previewing the chapter once again, 4-10 seconds per page. This is very important. It reacquaints you with the material, but takes only minutes. Then read the text word for word, as quickly as possible.

Don't linger and don't regress (don't reread what you've just been over). Don't stop to underline, either. It slows you down. Instead, use a pencil and make a vertical line in the margin to mark those things worthy of note. You'll come back to those places later. You don't want to lag here, even though you're reading carefully.

Complete this phase by writing, in pencil, a summary sentence or two in the big white space above the title at the beginning of each chapter. Try to capture the main point of the section. Use pencil because you may want to make changes when you post-view the chapter.

Post-view the Chapter Immediately

Go back over the chapter focusing on the marks you made in the margin. Review the material, interacting with the author's ideas and making further notations. At the end of each chapter or in the flyleaf sketch a quick outline or recall pattern. Look at the summary you placed at the beginning of the chapter and see if it's accurate and precise. Refine it if you need to.

Go through each chapter in the same way. Preview it, skimming quickly, then read it carefully but at a good clip, making your notations during the post-view. If you take a break and resume your reading a day or more later, review your summaries at the beginning of the book and each preceding chapter before you pick up where you left off. This will only take a few short minutes, but will set the stage for your next session.

This is aggressive reading. When you're done you'll have gone through the book at least four times in a fairly short period of time working from the whole to the parts to the whole again. You'll have brief chapter summaries and an outline--handy tools for quick review in the future--and a solid grasp of the material.

In the future when you simply skim through the book again, all the information will come back to you. You'll be able to clearly state who the author is, his main point, the structure (development) of his thought, if his views are correct (why or why not) and what difference it makes. You'll have mastered the book, not just read it.

Double Your Reading Speed Instantly

Let me give you an additional tip that will double your reading speed in one step. Use your finger as a pointer and move it along underneath the sentences at the fastest comfortable speed you can read. You can read above your finger, ahead of it, or behind it, whichever is most comfortable for you.

This forces you to read more aggressively, with more concentration. Don't be afraid to push yourself a little bit. Go as fast as you can and still grasp the material. Don't stop, pause, or reread portions of what you've just covered (regressing). Keep up with your moving finger, just like following the bouncing ball.

Again, this is not "speed reading," taking in a whole page at a glance. You're still reading every word just as you normally would, but you're using your finger as a pacer, increasing your speed and keeping your eyes from drifting.

You'll be surprised how dramatically your reading speed will increase. If you're reading 150 words a minute (a relatively slow rate) you can jump to 300 words per minute simply by consistently using your finger as a speed guide. Just move it underneath the words and follow along. Your comprehension and retention will improve too, even though you're moving faster.

Finding the Time

Anyone is fully capable of mastering six books a year, but it won't happen by itself. It takes a plan (which I've just given you) and the will to apply a modest amount of time to your goal. Thirty minutes three or four times a week is all you need.

First, turn off the TV. The average person watches two to three hours of TV a day. Most of you can read 50 books a year in that time. Devote some of your TV time to reading. Skip the nightly news. It's the worst possible source of information and almost always puts people in a bad mood. Instead, use that half hour to read. You'll be amazed at how much you'll get done and how civilized you'll feel as a result.

Here are some other ways to redeem pockets of useful time for reading. Try getting up half an hour earlier in the morning. Go into the family room before the household is up and read. Or redeem the time you spend sitting in the bathroom. Just ten minutes a day will get even slow readers 150 pages a month. That's six books a year. I also keep a book with me in the car so I can read while waiting for an appointment or stuck in line.

Think for a moment what six books you would like to have mastered a year from now. You can do it. Choose your titles carefully, then apply the plan. This may be one of the most rewarding habits you'll ever develop. I hope you start today.

I keep the following information on an index card for ready reference. We've also incorporated it into a book mark. Call STR at 800-2-REASON and ask for some.

Overview

- ◆ Get a sense of the book in 5-10 minutes.
- ◆ Read jacket copy, contents, skim preface & introduction, read conclusion (last 3 pages) and skim the index. Note publisher and date of publication.
- ◆ Quickly page through the entire book at the rate of 2-3 seconds per page.
- ◆ Determine if you want to read the book more thoroughly, give it away, or file it for future reference.

Preview

- ◆ Skim entire book at a slower rate (4-10 seconds per page), breaking the book in as you go.
- ◆ Look for structure, outline, key facts and concepts.
- ◆ Write a quick summary for the book in pencil on title page.

Read

- ◆ Preview each chapter again before you read it to get the structure (4-10 seconds per page).
- ◆ Read every word at fastest comfortable speed using a pointer so you won't wander, hesitate, regress, or lose your place. Mark the margin, but don't underline the text.
- ◆ Write a 1-4 sentence summary in pencil at the beginning of the chapter.
- ◆ Sketch a quick outline or recall pattern.

Post-view Immediately

- ◆ Re-read the chapter quickly, focusing on marked sections, interacting with the text.
- ◆ Refine your 1-4 sentence summary at the beginning of the chapter.
- ◆ Review at regular intervals, looking over recall patterns and summary material.

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Ambassador INSIGHTS:

Representing the King

Greg Koukl is the founder and president of Stand to Reason (www.str.org). Greg started out thinking he was too smart to become a Christian

and ended up giving his life for the defense of the Christian faith. A central theme of Greg's speaking and writing is that Christianity can compete in the marketplace of ideas when it's properly understood and properly articulated.

Greg's teaching has been featured on Focus on the Family radio, he's been interviewed for CBN and the BBC, he's debated atheist Michael Shermer on Hugh Hewitt's national radio show, and did a one-hour national television debate with Deepak Chopra on Lee Strobel's "Faith Under Fire." Greg has been quoted in U.S. News & World Report and the L.A. Times. An award-winning writer, Greg is author of *Tactics—A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* with Francis J. Beckwith, and *Precious Unborn Human Persons*. Greg has published more than 180 articles and has spoken on over 60 university and college campuses both in the U.S. and abroad.



Greg received his Masters in Philosophy of Religion and Ethics at Talbot School of Theology, graduating with high honors, and his Masters in Christian Apologetics from Simon Greenleaf University. He is an adjunct professor in Christian apologetics at Biola University. He hosts his own radio talk show advocating clear-thinking Christianity and defending the Christian worldview.



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