



Dusty Shoes, Rolled Up Sleeves, and other . . .

SIGNS *of* LIFE

BACK TO THE BASICS OF
AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

DAVID JEREMIAH

SIGNS
of LIFE

DAVID JEREMIAH



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

© by David Jeremiah, 2007

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a trademark of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Thomas Nelson, Inc. titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from The New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked AMPLIFIED BIBLE are taken from THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE: OLD TESTAMENT. Copyright © 1962, 1964 by Zondervan Publishing House (used by permission); and from THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE: NEW TESTAMENT. Copyright © 1958 by the Lockman Foundation (used by permission).

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, LLP, Attorneys and Literary Agents, Orange, CA.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jeremiah, David.

Signs of life / David Jeremiah.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7852-2809-7 (hardcover: alk. paper)

1. Devotional calendars. I. Title.

BV4811.J493 2007

242'.2—dc22

2007027597

Printed in the United States of America

07 08 09 10 11 QW 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents



Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix

SIGNS OF LIFE

Day 1	Signs of Life	1
Day 2	A Faith That Works	5
Day 3	Turn On the Lights	11
Day 4	Living in the Moment	16
Day 5	Pass the Salt	22
Day 6	Witness Statements.	28
Day 7	The Mark You Leave Behind	34

DUSTY SHOES: Living a Relevant Life

Day 8	Dusty Shoes	43
Day 9	Walk Around the Clock	49
Day 10	The Keynote Speaker	55
Day 11	Tongue-Tied.	60
Day 12	The “Other” Mentality.	65
Day 13	Attention to Decals	70
Day 14	Physical Evidence	76

WORN-OUT KNEES: Living a Yielded Life

Day 15	Worn-Out Knees	83
Day 16	The Heavenly Frequency	89
Day 17	Closer to You Than to Me	95

Day 18	Love's Boundaries	101
Day 19	On Pins and Needles	107
Day 20	The Potter's Hands	113
Day 21	Greater Works Than Jesus	119

ROLLED-UP SLEEVES: Living an Authentic Life

Day 22	Rolled-Up Sleeves	127
Day 23	Artistic Impressions	133
Day 24	Profiling the Mind of a Christian	139
Day 25	Making the "E" List	144
Day 26	On the Threshold of Opportunity	149
Day 27	The Ripple Effect	155
Day 28	Jesus' Rolled-Up Sleeves	161

OPEN HANDS: Living a Generous Life

Day 29	Open Hands	169
Day 30	Empty-Pocket Living	175
Day 31	Rich Man, Poor Man	181
Day 32	Making a Way	186
Day 33	Monopoly: The Pursuit of More	192
Day 34	Nugget-Faith Living	198
Day 35	Life in Your Golden Tears	204

OUTSTRETCHED ARMS: Living a Compassionate Life

Day 36	Outstretched Arms	213
Day 37	Pietà: "I Care"	219
Day 38	Our Basic Identity	224
Day 39	A Portrait in Crimson	229
Day 40	Graced and Gracious	235

Forty Signs of Life	241
Appendix: The Poor	243
Notes	257
Afterword	269
How to Get the Most from <i>Signs of Life</i>	273

Acknowledgments



The *Signs of Life* project began as an outline for a church-growth campaign and continues now in this format as a major trade book. Each chapter reflects a lesson we have learned as we have attempted to put into practice the message of the Great Commandment.

At the heart of this initiative is my longtime friend Paul Joiner. All of us who work with him at the Turning Point ministries are daily blessed by the creativity that overflows from his life into ours. I have said many times, “He is the most creative person I have ever met.” Paul first saw the images of Signs of Life in his mind and translated them to paper so that the rest of us could see them as well. Thank you, Paul, for sharing the vision for this book.

While all the members of the Turning Point creative staff have played a part in the development of this project, I want to specifically thank Mary Cayot for her diligence.

Cathy Lord was the managing partner in putting together all the pieces of this puzzle. Thank you, Cathy, for the many hours you spent verifying all the quotations, interacting with the editorial department at Thomas Nelson, and making suggestions that have caused this to be a better book.

Some days the activity in my office complex is like the turbulence of a hurricane. But when I walk into my study and tell my administrative assistant, Diane Sutherland, that I need time to study and to write, she graciously protects me from all interruptions. Diane, you are God’s greatest gatekeeper!

My relationship with Rob Morgan and William Kruidenier has now

passed the five-year mark, and I could not have done this book without their considerable editorial contributions.

Sealy Yates has always been my go-to guy in the publishing world. He is my literary agent, my attorney, and, most of all, my friend. Joey Paul is my editor at Thomas Nelson. His commitment to excellence motivates all of us who work with him.

As I look over my shoulder at the last few years of the ministry of Turning Point, I am amazed at what the Lord has done to extend our influence throughout the world. Without the administrative leadership of my oldest son, David Michael, there would never have been any pockets of time to work on literary projects. David, you are a remarkable young man, and you make me proud!

I am especially thankful to my wife, Donna. She is my closest friend and advisor. Together we have shared the birth of four children, nine grandchildren, and twenty-seven books. Without her support, this book would never have seen the light of day, and I am happy to announce to the whole world that I did not work on this project during our vacation!

Finally, when I think of the privilege that I have been given to write words that bring honor and glory to God, I am filled with gratitude and joy. It is my earnest prayer that you will be drawn to Him as you read—and live—*Signs of Life!*

Introduction



It was October 27, 2003, when I sent this e-mail to our church family at Shadow Mountain Community Church, the congregation I pastor in El Cajon, California:

This has surely been one of the most difficult times in our church's history. Last night I stood on the campus and prayed that God would spare our facilities. During the next couple of hours, the wind shifted, and—at least for now—the campus is safe. We are still in the evacuation mode because the fire department has told us that if the winds were to shift, we could be back in jeopardy again.

Southern California's Cedar Fire was the state's largest wildfire in over a century. It was a confluence of fifteen individual fires and the hot, dry Santa Ana winds. More than 2,300 homes were destroyed; fifteen lives were lost; and more than 280,000 acres were incinerated. Many precious folks in our congregation lost their homes to the voracious flames. . . .

In the mountains just above our church campus is a small community called Crest. Almost every family in that community was severely impacted by the firestorm. These people were our neighbors, and they desperately needed our help.

So, for the next six weeks, we adopted the Crest community. We collected blankets, clothing, and toys. We took offerings for the needy in all of our weekend services. We provided over 1,000 meals, delivered two truckloads of water, gave out nearly \$200,000, provided temporary housing for many, and counseled and prayed with dozens of individuals and families. The firestorm is now a part of San Diego history, but a

whiff of smoke in the air on a hot, dry day brings back a powerful rush of memories.

CROSS-COUNTRY COMPASSION

Now fast-forward to March 15, 2007. I was in Greensboro, North Carolina, where Turning Point, our radio and television ministry, was hosting a breakfast for pastors. I was teaching the series of messages that inspired this book, and we had combined efforts with the organization Feed the Children to provide 3,000 pounds of food for these pastors to distribute to needy families in their communities.

One pastor came from across the state line in Virginia. His community had been hit hard by plant closings, and over 10,000 jobs had been lost. As he left the breakfast that morning, he knew exactly where he was going to deliver one of the boxes of food. But the recipient of the other box was a mystery. When he stopped at his office, he found a form on his secretary's desk from a family seeking help to pay a utility bill. Mystery solved!

The address on the form led him to a mobile home located on a gravel road. The family of six was existing on the husband's small disability check plus a meager amount the wife earned working at a convenience store. The pastor's heart was filled with compassion when he saw the small children in this poverty-stricken home.

The next day a relative of this young mother called the pastor to express her gratitude for the kindness that had been shown to her extended family. She shared this comment from the mother who had received the box of food and essentials: "How did he know we needed those things, especially the soap and toilet paper?"

COMPASSION IS CONTAGIOUS

After I heard this story, I shared it with our congregation when I was teaching about living an open-handed life. Sitting in the auditorium that

day was a woman visiting from New York. She slipped \$25 in cash into one of our pew envelopes and wrote these words on the outside: “I am only visiting this church this one Sunday. I am from New York. If there is any way, please see that the family Pastor Jeremiah spoke of in his sermon this morning receives this.”

We sent the \$25 to the pastor in Virginia, who in turn described the incident for his congregation that following Sunday evening. He challenged the 98 people in attendance to have compassion for those around them who were in need. At the end of the service, a man came forward and added \$20 to the initial cash gift. When the pastor arrived home, an envelope of cash was taped to his door, and another was waiting for him on the secretary’s desk in the morning. On Monday afternoon the pastor gave that needy family a check for \$250. Compassion is contagious!

THE CHURCH’S TREASURES

According to legend, Saint Lawrence, the third-century treasurer of the early church’s resources, was brought before the authorities, who demanded that he hand over all the church’s treasures to the emperor. Lawrence compliantly asked for three days to gather the church’s treasures. He promised to then reveal to the Roman magistrate the extensive riches of the church. On the third day Lawrence appeared and brought with him orphans, the poor, the lame, and the widows in distress. Pointing to them, he said, “These are the treasures of the church.” And for that reply he was sentenced to death.¹

The Bible mentions the poor more than 150 times. If we add to that figure the number of times God’s Word talks about caring for the widows, the fatherless, and the needy, we have more than 300 references reminding us of our responsibility to help people in need. These Scriptures have made such an impression on my own heart and life that I have included them at the end of this book.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

One day a lawyer asked Jesus to identify the greatest commandment in the Law. Our Lord's answer to that question is one of the reasons why I wrote this book:

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

We all know that we are to love God, but exactly how are we supposed to do that? Jesus answered the question like this: we love God by loving the people He created. Jesus taught that loving the least among His brothers was the same as loving Him (Matthew 25:40). In fact, He goes so far as to say that the entire Bible is summarized by these two commands . . . to love God and love our neighbors. No wonder God's Word has so much to say about caring for the poor and needy!

RESPONDING TO GOD'S COMMANDS

In this book you will find forty devotional readings designed to help you express your love for God by reaching out in compassion to others. The book is organized around the five signs of life: dusty shoes, worn-out knees, rolled-up sleeves, open hands, and outstretched arms. Each chapter ends with what we have labeled "Signs of Life." These practical suggestions will help you put the day's devotional thought into action.

At the back of the book, we have included some detailed suggestions for using *Signs of Life* as a call to action in your own life and in the life of your church. We have also developed a forty-day church campaign that will enable you to get everyone in your congregation involved in living out Jesus' Great Commandment.

ASCENDING TO HEAVEN

From Isaac Leib Peretz, a Jewish writer, comes this captivating tale:

In a small Jewish town in Russia, there is a rabbi who disappears every Friday. His devoted disciples boast that during those hours, their rabbi goes up to heaven and talks to God.

A stranger moves into town, and he's skeptical about all this, so he decides to check things out. He hides and watches. The rabbi gets up in the morning, says his prayers, and then dresses in peasant clothes. He grabs an axe, goes off into the woods, and cuts some firewood, which he then hauls to a shack on the outskirts of the village. There an old woman and her sick son live. He leaves them the wood, enough for a week, and then sneaks back home.

Having observed the rabbi's actions, the newcomer stays on in the village and becomes his disciple. And whenever he hears one of the villagers say, "On Friday morning our rabbi ascends all the way to heaven," the newcomer quietly adds, "If not higher."²

As we start our Signs of Life journey together, our goal is to—like this rabbi—go up higher, to draw closer to God by serving His people—and not just on Friday, but on every day of the week.

DAVID JEREMIAH
San Diego, California
June 2007

Signs
of Life

Day 1

Signs of Life



*This book is a mirror by which you
can see yourself as others see you.*

Bobbing on the sea like a pelican, the *Cruise Queen* was a floating mansion, as long as a gymnasium and dazzling white against the blue waters of the Aegean. But something was wrong: the yacht seemed strangely deserted. As silently as death, the detective boarded the ship, pistol in hand, looking for signs of life. . . .

How often have you watched a scene like that in a movie or on television?

One of the reasons whodunit shows are so popular is because there's a little detective in us all. We're all looking for signs of life, hints of our identity, and hidden secrets. Remember Sherlock Holmes? He could unravel a person's entire life by the mud on his shoes, the calluses on his hands, and the threads on his coat. Many of us have played Sherlock Holmes at airports or in waiting rooms, whiling away the time by people-watching, constructing a silent profile of their lives by their clothing, accessories, body language, facial appearance, and mannerisms.

The "hidden person of the heart" shows up in all kinds of ways. Your

appearance and your home environment are extensions of your thoughts and values. Others can tell a great deal about us by the way we look, the car we drive, the language we use, the habits we keep, the friends we make, and the places we frequent. It's amazing how quickly we can size someone up—or how quickly someone can size us up!

As Christ's followers, we should exhibit certain signs of life that evidence our commitment to our Lord and His kingdom. Some of these are obvious to those who see us in our private moments when we're at prayer, reading our Bibles, writing our tithing checks, and resisting personal temptations.

Most people, however, don't have access to such personal moments. They see us from across the street, across the fence, across the hall, across the office, across the miles, or across the pews.

How do those people recognize that we are God's ambassadors?

It's by our smile . . . our joy . . . our compassion in the face of another's misfortune . . . our friendliness . . . our simple lifestyle . . . our willingness to commit random acts of kindness . . . our benevolence . . . our social ministries . . . our tears . . . our generosity . . . our public expressions of our private faith.



One man approached a cadet at the military academy at West Point a couple of years ago and said to him, "You must be a Christian." The surprised cadet said that he was indeed a follower of Christ. "But how did you know?" asked the young man.

"I saw you in the dining hall," replied the guest. "It was loud and chaotic there with bands playing, a pep rally going on, and a thousand cadets eating and laughing and shouting. But I saw you, in the middle of it all, quietly bow your head before eating your meal."

Does anyone ever come up to you and say, "You must be a Christian"? Do they ask a reason for the hope within you? Has anyone recently said, "There's something different about you; I can't figure it out, but I want what you have"?

Egged on by an entertainment industry and national media that often paint us in a negative light, our society tends to have an unfavorable view of Christians. At the same time, however, the very culture in which we live desperately needs genuine people who display signs of abundant living. This world is starved for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, radiance, simplicity, honesty, and compassion.

Christians specialize in these things.

It's not enough just to talk about the Lord, as important as that is. It's not enough to serve Him in secret with our acts of private devotion. We have to display the lifestyle of the Nazarene in the midst of our corrupt culture. Jesus called it letting our light shine before men that they might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. The apostle Paul said, "Do all things . . . without complaining . . . that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14–15).

Think of this book as a sort of mirror that can help you see yourself as others see you. It's also like a doctor's office where you can examine yourself for signs of life. And it's a pep rally where you can be encouraged to walk the talk.

All that—under one cover!

After all, we're not deserted yachts bobbing in paradise. We're fishing boats fitted for the Master's use.

May the Lord give us dusty shoes, worn-out knees, rolled-up sleeves . . . and other signs of life.

SIGNS OF LIFE

Life Sign: My words and actions evidence Christ's indwelling.

Life Verse: *Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*

—Philippians 2:14–15

Life in Action: What characteristics in my life offer solid evidence that I am a follower of Christ? What aspects in my life contradict the claim that I am a follower of Christ?

Day 2

A Faith That Works



*The world around us can't see our inner faith,
but it can see our good works that flow from our faith.*

When the Ringling Brothers Circus went to New York City in April 2004, thousands of people jammed Madison Square Garden to see the greatest show on earth. What they saw instead was a terrifying accident. A performer named Ernando Rangel Amaya, a thirty-four-year-old Venezuelan high-wire daredevil, lost his balance and plummeted to the ground. The crowd gasped in horror as emergency workers rushed to his side. Rangel somehow survived the fall, but he taught us a valuable lesson: life is all about keeping your balance.¹

Remember when you watched your toddler learning to walk? when you taught your child how to ride a bike? when you showed your teenagers how to balance their checkbooks? Many aspects of life are all about balance.

Well, we need a balanced theology too. The New Testament talks a great deal about the balance between faith and works. In Ephesians 2:8–9, we're told: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and

that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

In other words, we might as well try to reach the stars on a pair of stilts as to try to qualify for heaven by living a good life, doing kind deeds, giving generous gifts, or sacrificing our bodies in the flames. We're sinners who can never redeem ourselves in God's sight by our own efforts. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,” Paul wrote in Titus 3:5.

But James, the half-brother of our Lord, apparently felt that some people were misunderstanding this fact, so his letter provides a counterbalance. Though we're saved by faith and not by works, said James, our faith must be the kind that works. We're not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. Faith is the source of our salvation, but good works are the way we express the reality of our salvation.

“What does it profit, my brethren,” asked James, “if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? . . . Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14, 17).

In other words, if your faith doesn't express itself in compassion, love, kindness, generosity, helpfulness, mercy, and good deeds . . . well, it's not real faith at all. It might be intellectual assent or emotional release, but real faith trusts Christ alone for salvation—and then believes enough to be Christlike in daily practice.

I guess some people in James's day, like some people today, spoke the language of Christianity without reflecting the reality of its truths in their lives. That's why James wrote such a practical book. As you read through the book of James (you can read the whole epistle in less than ten minutes), you can't help seeing his emphasis on living out our faith. You'll also see that a faith that works . . .

- Enables us to have a positive attitude in troubled times (1:2).
- Inspires us to resist temptation (1:12).
- Makes us good listeners (1:19).

- Takes care of orphans and widows (1:27).
- Gives honor to the poor (2:5–6).
- Provides food and clothing for the needy (2:15–16).
- Controls and restrains the tongue (3:1–12).
- Doesn't speak evil of others (4:11).
- Doesn't grumble about others (5:9).
- Shows concern for the sick (5:14).
- Prays fervently (5:17).

Christians have changed the world by living out this kind of faith. In the third century, Tertullian wrote that the Christians of his day gave generously and without compulsion to a common fund that provided for the needs of widows, the physically disabled, orphans, the sick, those in prison, and even for the release of slaves.

History tells us of a pagan soldier in Constantine's army named Pachomius who was deeply moved when he saw Christians bringing food to fellow soldiers who were suffering from famine and disease. Curious to understand a doctrine that would inspire such generosity, Pachomius studied Christianity and was converted.²

Throughout the Middle Ages, the church sponsored orphanages, built schools, and fed the hungry. In the 1800s, believers such as A. H. Francke and George Müller provided homelike environments for unwanted children.

Also in the 1800s, a group of Christians in Great Britain worked tirelessly to reform child labor practices. The indefatigable Lord Shaftesbury devoted his life to making speeches and writing policy to improve the conditions of working children.

At roughly the same time, statesman William Wilberforce and his fellow Christians were fighting for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

It's been the influence of Christians in society that has built hospitals, halted infanticide, discouraged abortion, inspired relief societies, and enhanced the arts. The world around us can't see our inner faith, but it can see the good works that flow from our faith. That's why Jesus said plainly, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Some years ago, I read a satirical piece that brought this truth home to me:

I was hungry, and you formed a humanities club and discussed my hunger. I was imprisoned, and you crept off quietly to your chapel in the cellar and prayed for my release. I was naked, and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you preached to me the spiritual shelter of the love of God. I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me. You seem so holy, so close to God, but I'm still very hungry and lonely and cold.³

That's not biblical faith.

Consider what Bible teacher Manfred George Gutzke wrote:

Faith is significant only when it promotes action. Faith without action is useless. This is the basic principle of everything everywhere, and it is true in every case. It would be true in the matter of farming. It would be true in the matter of insuring a home. It would be true in the matter of conducting a business. If we say that we have faith in anything and we do nothing about it, our faith does not amount to a thing.⁴

Now what about you and me?

Perhaps you don't know any orphans, but what child whom you do know needs some extra attention? Do you have a neighbor who needs

her lawn mowed? Has a family in your community lost their home to fire? Does your local crisis pregnancy center need counselors? Perhaps your church is sponsoring a missions trip to provide medical assistance in an impoverished area. Perhaps a single person in your church would like an invitation to dinner.



Several years ago a pastor friend of mine was devoting a rare day off to his garden. Garbed in filthy cut-offs, he was lathered in sweat and dirt, fighting the weeds, and trying to get the last of his beans planted. Right then his sixteen-year-old daughter came running across the yard in a state of panic. “Dad,” she yelled, “there’s a man in the ditch a mile or so down the road. The cars are going by left and right, but no one has stopped to help. Come quick!”

Ron didn’t want to “come quick.” He was tired and dirty and involved in his gardening. He also knew that his daughter, a new driver, was easily excitable, and—truth be told—he thought she had probably misconstrued something. But at her insistence he finally pulled on a shirt, wiped away the sweat, found his keys, and went to see what had happened.

Sure enough, there was a man—elderly, dazed, half-asleep, and in the ditch. Ron and his daughter roused him and got him into their car. Revived by the air conditioning, he began mumbling incoherently. Finally, after repeated questioning, the old fellow muttered a street address several miles away. Ron drove him there.

As they walked up the sidewalk, an old woman came running out. “Praise God!” she exclaimed. “We didn’t know where to find him. He’s my older brother. He has Alzheimer’s, and he wandered away this morning. I’ve been worried out of my head!”

Driving home, Ron had mixed feelings. He was thankful they’d done a good deed, but he also felt a nagging sense of guilt because he had done it reluctantly. His daughter had shown more compassion than he had despite his many years in ministry.



Lots of people are in the ditch. Real faith lends a helping hand gladly, freely, lovingly, and in the name of Christ. Real faith is a balanced faith: it is a faith that works.

So for Jesus' sake, do something for someone—and do it today.

signs of Life

Life Sign: My faith is expressed through works.

Life Verse: *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

—James 2:17

Life in Action: What am I doing for others that clearly reveals the presence of God in my life?

Day 3

Turn On the Lights



*The human heart is dark without Christ,
but what a difference Jesus makes!*

Imagine a world without Christmas lights.

That would be the world before 1882. Oh, people built bonfires and attached candles to the limbs of their Christmas trees (sometimes burning down the town in the process), but it wasn't until Edward Johnson, Thomas Edison's associate, invented electric Christmas tree lights that American homes began to really sparkle and twinkle.

As Johnson's family decorated for the holidays that year, he poured his energy into producing a string of eighty small, brightly colored lights. As they sparkled through the front window, crowds of people lined up to gasp in wonder. It seemed magical, especially after Johnson developed a system for making them flash on and off. Wanting to see the lights more closely, people knocked on the front door. Newspapers sent reports all over the country, and reporters marched, one after another, into and out of the Johnson home.

Electric Christmas tree lights didn't immediately become a

commercial item, however, because no one except Thomas Edison, Edward Johnson, and a few others had electricity in their homes. Furthermore, it was rather expensive. Johnson's string of bulbs cost over \$100 in materials—more money than some Americans made in a year.

Gradually, however, as more people got electricity, Christmas lights became more popular. In 1910, General Electric introduced a string of bulbs that could be produced and sold inexpensively, and Christmas lights have been household items ever since.¹ . . .



Nothing expresses the mission of Jesus Christ better than lights. In the Old Testament, the golden candlestick in the temple was a type of Christ signifying that the coming Messiah would be the light of Israel. And the prophet Isaiah predicted His coming by saying, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. . . . For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:2, 6).

In the Gospels, Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), and John opened his Gospel saying, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).



Now, I'm not a physicist, but I know a few things about light.

First of all, light destroys darkness. In fact, some scholars claim there's no such thing as darkness at all. In their view, darkness is simply the absence of light!

What I have observed, though, is when light comes, darkness flees. The human heart is dark without Christ, but what a difference Jesus makes. Missionary E. Stanley Jones said, “When I met Christ, I felt that I had swallowed sunshine!”²

How sad, then, when people love darkness rather than light. Jesus predicted this in John 3:19, but it's still hard for us to understand. Maybe an old story about a desert nomad who awakened in the middle

of the night can help. This man sat up, lit a candle, and began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one end and saw a worm in it, so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into the second date, found another worm, and threw it away also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any dates left to eat if he continued in this way, he blew out the candle and quickly ate all the dates.

Many people love iniquity so much they'd rather swallow their sins and wallow in darkness than to turn on the light of Christ—and light truly does define Christianity. Ephesians 5:8 says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." In Philippians 2:15, we're described as "children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

We should picture ourselves like that! As you stroll up and down the aisles at the grocery store, remember that your smile, your attitude, your concern for others, and perhaps even your purchases should reflect the light of Jesus. As you work in your yard, remember that you're a mirror designed to reflect the light of Christ so that it shines into your neighbor's window. As you play a round of golf, remember that God may give you an opportunity to say a word for Him.

Now think of prison inmates. What a dark place they are in! Have you ever considered getting involved in a jailhouse ministry? Could you reflect Jesus' light by mentoring prisoners? distributing gifts at Christmas? regularly writing to someone behind bars?

We also need to shine a light into the streets of our inner cities. Does your church have a ministry to prostitutes? the addicted? alcoholics? the mentally ill? What about reaching out to the people in the nursing homes? Jesus said that when we do something for "the least of these," we do it unto Him (Matthew 25:40).

In His Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they

may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14–16).

As I was working on this chapter, newspapers reported that a massive blackout struck the whole country of Colombia. From the northern Caribbean coast to the southern Amazon jungle, the power suddenly went off. People in Bogotá were trapped in elevators. In cities and in the countryside, ten thousand traffic signals were darkened, mobile telephones went dead, the stock market suspended trading, and homes lost their lights and refrigeration. Authorities blamed the failure on a single electricity substation.

I think the same thing is happening to the United States, spiritually speaking. A massive spiritual blackout is spreading across America and Western Europe, and this is the darkest day we’ve ever had in our culture. Our society is more corrupt now than it has ever been.

But even in that harsh fact, I find a bit of encouragement. The darker the night, the more noticeable when our light shines brightly.



A man I know recalls growing up in a little town in the mountains. There were few streetlights, and when bedtime came, the streets were dark. His bed was by the window, and every night the last thing he saw before closing his eyes was the tiny light of a neighbor’s doorbell button—two blocks away. On a dark night, even a small light travels a long way.

So you may not be a famous humanitarian, a worldwide evangelist, or a well-known preacher. But when Jesus returned to heaven, He commissioned you and me to be His lights who must not hide our faith under a bushel. If we don’t reflect the light of our Lord in our dark culture, it remains dark. God has graciously given His children the capacity to meet human need in the power of the Holy Spirit and, as we do so, to be His light in a dark world. And that’s our very identity.

In the devotional book *Voices of the Faithful*, a missionary named Gerri told of working in an African town. One day exciting news reached her. The Lozi king was coming to attend church services and to eat at her

house. As far as Gerri knew, the king usually didn't visit private homes, and word of his upcoming visit spread through the town like wildfire.

When the day finally arrived, the king entered Gerri's house. She explained in the Lozi language that she was a missionary and that, in Lozi, the name *Gerri* sounded like "Jelly" because the "r" sound is hard for the people to pronounce. She boldly asked the king for a Lozi name. Though she didn't know it at the time, such a request was against protocol, but the king just smiled and said, "I'll think about it."

Later as he prepared to leave, the king said, "My wife and I have decided upon a name for you. It will be Liseli [pronounced lee-SHE-lee]. It means 'light.' Just as the sun gives light and life to plants, animals, and people, I want God's Word to be life and light to the people of Western Province."

Gerri later wrote, "I was stunned and pleased to receive this blessing. After the king left the room, a lady seated nearby privately said, 'Ah, you are a very lucky woman to be given a name by the king.'"³

Well, the King of kings has given you a name—and it's LIGHT! Jesus said, "You are the light of the world."

So turn on the light for Him and then shine before men that people might see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

signs of Life

Life Sign: I am a source of light in a dark world.

Life Verse: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

—Matthew 5:16

Life in Action: When people see me, do they see the light of Jesus shining through me? Here are four ways I can reflect the Light into others' lives today and every day:

Day 4

Living in the Moment



*Live your spiritual life in the “always on”
position with God.*

Who were the class clowns in your school? Or which co-worker keeps your office in stitches? We often say about this kind of person, “Man, that guy is always on!” When something happens, people like that don’t have to get in the moment—they *live* in the moment.

Today, *always on* has a new, high-tech meaning that refers to the way we connect to the Internet on our home computers. If you were an early participant in the Internet revolution, you remember the cumbersome process of logging on. Your computer dialed a number, your modem squeaked and squawked for a few seconds, and—hopefully—you got connected. But, more likely than not in those early days, your connection would fail, and you’d have to go through the whole process of logging on again.

In those days you were either on or off the Internet. You dialed in, checked your e-mail, went to a Web site, and then logged off. Now, however, the days of logging on to the Internet are rapidly disappearing.

At the end of 2004, 37.9 million American users were accessing the Internet via broadband connections, and broadband access is now available to 99 percent of American homes.¹ By connecting through your television cable or digitally through your telephone line (DSL), you can maintain an always-on connection. As long as your computer is turned on (and many people never turn them off these days), you are connected; you are always there. In fact, the Web pages of many news sources automatically refresh themselves every couple of minutes, so a constant stream of current news and updated information appears on your computer screen. Again, you don't have to connect to communicate: with a broadband, always-on connection, you are "in the Internet moment" all the time.

BROADBAND SPIRITUALITY

I believe the dial-up mode of Internet access offers a helpful analogy for the kind of spirituality that relies on the daily quiet time (or church on Sunday or a weekly Bible study) to connect to God. Think back to the early days of the Internet when you logged on for a specific amount of time, did your business, and then logged off. There was still activity on the Internet while you were logged off—and you simply missed it. Well, I fear that too many of us live our spiritual lives in the dial-up mode instead of the broadband mode, so we miss a lot that God is doing in the world as well as a lot that He wants to do in our lives.

Too many Christians log on to God once a day when they have their quiet time or once a week when they go to church. They pray; they read their Bible; they've connected with God. And that's good . . . as far as it goes. The problem with that approach to the spiritual life is that there is no sense of being "always on"—no sense of living in the moment with God once you've finished your quiet time. You open your Bible, bow in prayer, conduct your business with God, and then log off for the day.

What we need is a revolution in spirituality like the Internet broadband revolution. We need Christians who are not logging on to God once a day or once a week. We need Christians who have an always-on

connection with Him, Christians who are in constant communication with God because they are walking in the Spirit, Christians who live in the moment with God.

The danger with the dial-up mode of spirituality is that you're liable to miss something God wants you to see or hear or experience or learn from Him. It's as if He is sending you an important e-mail message, but you don't get it until the next day because you only log on to the Internet once a day.

Don't misunderstand me! I'm not suggesting that your daily quiet time is an outdated practice. The daily quiet time is essential to Christian maturity over the long run, and I hope every Christian reader practices that time-honored spiritual discipline. But your quiet time ought to be the equivalent of turning on your computer in the morning: you first connect with God in your morning quiet time—and you remain connected all day long until you go to sleep that night.

Begin to think about whether your spiritual life is more akin to the dial-up mode (log on, log off) or the broadband mode (always on, always in the moment). After all, should there ever be a time in our lives when we're not connected and communicating with God?

DANGERS OF DIAL-UP

If our spiritual awareness—if the time we're really conscious of God's presence—is limited to a half hour each morning or a couple of hours on Sunday, we're missing a lot. Every moment of every day is important to God, and if we're not living in every moment, we may miss what God is doing.

- *Divine Appointments*—How many people do you interact with face to face each day? How many of these interactions do you consider divine appointments (Proverbs 16:9)? If you're living in the dial-up mode instead of in the moment, you may miss something God wants you to give or receive in every encounter.

- *Divine Directions*—When we live in the dial-up mode, we're likely to be disconnected from God during a traffic jam or when our child makes us run late for an appointment—and we will react carnally. Or we might not consider that God is saving us from a calamity as He did Israel once by making them take the long way around (Exodus 13:17–18).
- *Divine Communications*—Thoughts pop in and out of our mind all day long. When we live in the dial-up mode and spend most of the day disconnected from God, we may never realize that some of those thoughts are from Him. God does speak to our hearts; but if we are not attentive to His voice, we may miss Him altogether (Matthew 13:15).
- *Divine Opportunities*—Often when we come to a crossroads in life, our intellectual due diligence doesn't leave room for God's input. It's possible that, logically speaking, Choice A seems best, but Choice B is really from God. The opportunity seems completely illogical, but actually it is right for us at that time. If you're logged off at that moment, you may miss the door God has opened for you.

THE BENEFITS OF BROADBAND

Now consider the number of benefits to living in the moment with God:

- *Attitude*—Just as we expect our home page to come up when we log on, we begin to expect to hear from God. We live with expectancy that God is going to be involved in our lives each and every moment (Mark 16:20).
- *Gratitude*—Living in constant communication with God enables us to see life as a gift from Him. We stop thinking in terms of

“luck” and “coincidences” and start thinking in terms of His generous hand (James 1:17).

- *Beatitude*—When we live in the moment, we begin to experience blessings that we once overlooked. We also begin to dispense blessings since we live in the realm of divine appointments (1 Peter 3:9).
- *Latitude*—Our perspective on the range of God’s activity broadens when we live in the moment. We better see the breadth of God’s reach in the world, and we feel encouraged to get involved. We also more clearly recognize our value to Him as part of His grand plan for the world (Psalm 139:7–10).
- *Magnitude*—Living in the moment with God helps us get our eyes off ourselves and on to Him. Meditating moment by moment on God’s awesomeness helps us keep our problems in perspective (Matthew 19:26).
- *Aptitude*—How much smarter and wiser would you be if you conversed with a certified genius all day long? How much wiser would you be if you conversed with God moment by moment? We will become like those with whom we constantly spend time and communicate (Psalm 119:99–100).

The way you access the Internet is up to you, but I strongly encourage you to live your spiritual life in the always-on position with God. Living in the moment with Him means living in a state of spiritual awareness that you’ll never want to live without again.

signs of Life

Life Sign: Every moment of my life is a *living moment* with God.

Life Verse: *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

—John 10:27

Life in Action: Is my current relationship with God in a dial-up or broadband mode? What specific evidence from my life supports my answer? What can I do to keep my line of communication with God open at all times?

Day 5

Pass the Salt



*There's a power in the presence of Christians
that permeates the society and sets into play the grace of God.*

The other day I heard about a baby camel that asked, “Mom, why do I have these huge three-toed feet?” The mother replied, “To help you stay on top of the soft sand while trekking across the desert.”

“And why the long eyelashes?”

“To keep sand out of your eyes on our trips through the desert.”

“Why the humps?”

“To store water for our long treks across the barren desert.”

The baby camel considered that and then said, “That’s great, Mom. We have huge feet to stop us from sinking, long eyelashes to keep sand out of our eyes, and humps to store water. But, Mom . . .”

“Yes, son?”

“Why are we in the zoo?”

That’s a question for all of us to consider. If we’ve been given all the resources we need to carry our Lord’s message far and wide, and if we’re

completely equipped to fulfill the Great Commission, why do we keep it within the four walls of our churches? The Gospel isn't something we come to church to hear; it's something we go from church to tell.

That point was on our Lord's mind when He preached His Sermon on the Mount and compared His church to a bowl of salt: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matthew 5:13).

In Christ's day, salt was more valuable than it is today, because it had many uses and it was hard to obtain. In fact, until modern times, salt was a major factor in the economies of entire nations. The Roman Empire valued salt as a form of currency, and workers were often paid with it. Our modern word *salary* comes from the Latin term *salarium*, meaning "salt." Jesus understood the value of salt, and His teachings on the subject have several relevant applications to us today.

SALT PREVENTS DECAY

First of all, salt retards decay, and this was extremely important in biblical times when people had no ability to freeze or refrigerate food. The Middle Eastern sun caused meat to spoil rapidly; but with salt, food could be packed, preserved, and transported.

Without the salt of dedicated Christians, our society tends toward decay. Left to itself, a culture festers, rots, and putrefies. The bacteria of evil are everywhere; and without the presence of Christians, the decay would be unabated and final.

Our forefathers knew this, and that's why they established America on Judeo-Christian principles. In 1774, the very first Continental Congress invited Rev. Jacob Duché to begin each session in prayer. During the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Benjamin Franklin proposed that the Convention open each day in prayer.

Evidence of this spiritual heritage is engraved on our great monuments and public buildings in Washington, D.C. If you approach the chamber of the United States Senate from the east, for example, you'll see these words at the entrance: *Annuit Coeptis*, a Latin phrase meaning "God has favored our undertakings." The words "In God We Trust" are written above the southern entrance.

Calvin Coolidge, our thirtieth president, observed, "The foundation of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country."¹

I believe God has blessed our nation because of our legacy of faith, but every effort is now being made to expunge Christianity from the public arena. In the process, our national morals are decaying like an animal's carcass in the blazing sun.

But don't give up! America is filled with God-fearing Christians, and how much worse things would be without us! Our very presence retards decay and preserves godliness in our society. Our presence reduces crime, restrains ethical corruption, promotes honesty, elevates the moral atmosphere, and lifts up the hearts of our people.

You might be the only Christian in your office or in your classroom or on your sports team. What a challenge—and what an opportunity! Don't be afraid to be different. Remember that your influence may halt someone's descent into personal decay and despair.

SALT PROVIDES FLAVOR

Besides preserving food, salt also gives it a great flavor. The ancient patriarch Job asked, "Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?" (Job 6:6). When our Lord said, "You are the salt of the earth," that's what He had in mind, for He went on to warn of the danger of salt losing its flavor, its distinctive taste. It would then be good for nothing except casting into the dirt streets.

Again, salt is very useful because of its distinctive characteristic: it's

salty and pungent. When it's in your food, you know it's there. If it loses that distinctive character of saltiness, it's no better than ordinary dirt.

As salt, we Christians also have a distinctive character. Specifically, whatever we do, we should do with excellence. We should write the best books, produce the best movies, record the best music, design the best buildings, and display the best manners. We should be the most generous people around, the hardest working employees, and the most dependable friends. And characterizing all we do should be the distinctive flavor of our faith.

Our character and ethics should reflect Jesus' values, and our personal interaction with others should be pleasant, personable, and evangelistic. In the rabbinic literature of biblical times, salt was a metaphor for wisdom, and perhaps that was what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6).

SALT PROMOTES THIRST

Salt preserves food, flavors food, and promotes thirst—as you know if you've ever eaten potato chips. Well, as Christians we should be making people thirsty for God. One woman, while giving her testimony, said that she began attending a church where the preacher was a zealous teacher of Scripture. He went verse by verse; and as she began understanding the Bible better, she grew excited. "That man made me want to know God better than I did," she said. "He made me hungry for the Word. I began to realize what the psalmist meant when he said, 'As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God' (Psalm 42:1)."

Our commitment to Scripture, I believe, plus our cheerfulness and our enthusiasm for Christ can influence others in the same way. Journalist Henry Stanley said about missionary David Livingstone

in central Africa, “If I had been with him any longer, I would have been compelled to be a Christian, and he never spoke to me about it at all.”²

SALT PERMEATES FOOD

Finally, salt permeates food—and a little of it goes a long way. Its effectiveness isn’t indicated by its size. Just a touch of salt can affect an entire dish. That’s the way it is with Christians in this world. Sometimes people say, “But what can I do? I’m just one soul.” Let me remind you that the apostle Paul and his two companions (Luke and Aristarchus) were apparently the only Christians among the 276 people aboard a ship bound for Rome in Acts 27. That’s a ratio of nearly 100 to 1. At first they were disdained, but by the end of the voyage, their companions’ attitude changed. In fact, the presence of these three Christians saved the lives of everyone else.

Even if we make up only one percent of our culture, there’s a power in the presence of Christians that permeates society and sets into play the grace of God. And William Wilberforce, the statesman who almost single-handedly championed the abolition of slave trading in the British Empire, is living proof of this.

Dwarfed by disease, Wilberforce didn’t appear to be a person who could accomplish much. But here’s what biographer James Boswell wrote after listening to one of his speeches: “I saw a shrimp mount the table; but as I listened, he grew and grew until the shrimp became a whale.”

It was said of Wilberforce, “Tiny, elfish, misshapen, he was salt to British society, not only bringing preservation but enticement to Christ by his beautiful life. A little salt makes its presence felt.”³

Are you making your presence felt?

Jesus was talking to me and to you when He said, “You are the salt of the earth.” Isn’t it time we got out of the shaker? It’s time to be salty.

SIGNS OF LIFE

Life Sign: I am conscious of influencing those around me.

Life Verse: *Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.*

—Mark 9:50

Life in Action: As the salt of the earth, what am I doing that causes others to thirst for the living water?

Day 6

Witness Statements



Our most effective witness comes when others see hope and joy radiate from our lives.

In the days before cameras were allowed in courtrooms, we depended on artists like Walt Stewart to attend trials with their sketchpads in hand. Their job was to capture electrifying moments for news organizations. Stewart's first assignment was the trial of Jack Ruby, the man accused of shooting Lee Harvey Oswald. Stewart captured on his sketchpad the dramatic moment when the prosecutor, facing the jury, said about Oswald, "Whatever he did, he was entitled to be tried before a judge and jury." Then, whirling around to the defendant, he pointed a finger at Ruby and said, "Just like you."¹



Suppose you were on trial, accused of being a Christian. If the prosecuting attorney assembled a group of your friends to testify against you, would there be any dramatic moments? Would they whirl and point their finger at you?

God has always had a handful of people whose lives were so uniquely

different that the world easily “convicted” them of being Christians. We’re always on display, whether we realize it or not. Romans 14:7 says, “For none of us lives to himself.”



In his book *Ten Mistakes Parents Make with Teenagers*, Jay Kesler describes a conversation he had with a young lady at a Youth for Christ summer camp in Ohio. She told a sordid story of long-term abuse in a dysfunctional home. As they talked, Jay noticed that the girl’s wrists were scarred, and he asked her about it. She admitted that she had tried to kill herself.

“Why didn’t you do it?” Jay asked.

“Well, I got to thinking,” said the girl. “We have a youth pastor at our church—”

At first Jay thought he was going to hear an ugly story about her getting involved with some youth pastor. But that wasn’t it at all. She said, “He’d just gotten married before he came to our church, and I’ve been watching him. When he’s standing in line in church behind his wife, he squeezes her right in church. They look at each other, and they hug each other right in our church. One day I was standing in the pastor’s study, looking out the window, and the youth pastor walked his wife out into the parking lot. Now there was only one car in the parking lot; nobody was around; nobody was looking. And that guy walked all the way around the car and opened the door and let her in. Then he walked all the way around and got in himself. And there was nobody even looking.”

Jay thought that was a nice story, but he couldn’t make a connection between that, her problems at home, or her attempted suicide. So he asked why this was so significant.

She replied, “Well, I just got to thinking that all men must not be like my dad, huh?” Then she said, “Jay, do you suppose our youth pastor’s a Christian?”

“Yes,” Jay said, “I think he probably is.”

“Well, that’s why I came tonight,” she said. “I want to be a Christian too.” She wanted to be a Christian simply because she saw a man being respectful to his wife even when nobody was looking. That’s the power of a consistent life.²

The poet Edgar Guest once wrote:

I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.
I’d rather one would walk with me than merely show the way.
The eye’s a better pupil and much sharper than the ear.
Fine counsel can confuse me, but example’s always clear.
The lectures you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I’d rather get my lesson by observing what you do.³

Many unbelievers don’t attend church because of “all the hypocrites there.” Perhaps we’re all guilty of hypocrisy to some extent, for none of us is perfect. There aren’t any perfect churches on the planet. We don’t live as consistently and perfectly as our great example Jesus Christ did. But we should be trying. We should be maturing. We should be growing. And we should increasingly be learning to “walk the talk.”



It’s said that one day St. Francis of Assisi invited a young assistant at the monastery to go with him into town to preach. The novice was delighted to be singled out as Francis’s companion. The two men passed through the main streets, turned down many of the byways and alleys, made their way into the suburbs, and at great length returned by a circuitous route to the monastery gate. As they approached it, the younger man reminded Francis of his original intention. “You have forgotten, Father, that we went to the town to preach!”

“My son,” Francis replied, “we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behavior has been closely watched; it was thus that we preached our morning sermon.

It is of no use, my son, to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk.”⁴

This scene reminds me of an old poem:

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do, by the words that you say;
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true.
Say—what is the gospel according to you?⁵

What can you do to improve the chances of your being “convicted” of being a follower of Jesus Christ?

Start each day by rededicating yourself to Him and asking Him to guide your thoughts, words, and actions during that day. Bishop Taylor Smith (1860–1937), British commanding army chaplain, once wrote: “As soon as I awake each morning I rise from bed at once. I dress promptly. I wash myself, shave and comb my hair. Then fully attired, wide-awake and properly groomed, I go quietly to my study. There, before God Almighty and Christ my King, I humbly present myself as a loyal subject to my Sovereign, ready and eager to be of service to Him for the day.”⁶

Then enter each day with a joyful attitude. Our Christian faith should show up on our faces. Remember the exhortation of 1 Peter 3:15: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” In other words, our most effective witness comes when others see hope and joy radiate from our lives.

Now imagine that a film crew were following you throughout the day with television cameras, waiting and watching for you, the Christian, to blow it. We need to guard against such moments. We can significantly damage our testimony by uttering that word, looking at that magazine, listening to that joke, or snapping at that employee.

We are the only Bible a careless world will read;
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word;
What if the type is crooked; what if the print is blurred?

When you do fail as a Christian, be quick to admit it and apologize. Recently a Christian father lost his temper with his children while trying to get them ready for church. He yelled at them, slamming his fist on the table and creating a frightening scene. As it happened that day, the sermon was about the importance of a father's influence in his family. Afterward, this man gathered his kids and said to them, "This morning I failed God and I failed you by losing my temper. I'm not a perfect man, but I try to live as I should each day. This morning I didn't do very well, and I'm sorry. I've confessed it to God and asked for His forgiveness, and I'd like to ask for your forgiveness, too." It was a moment his children will remember for a long time.

Finally, be growing each day as a Christian. The Lord wants to perfect anything that concerns you (Psalm 138:8). He desires you to be increasingly conformed into His image so that your testimony will grow increasingly effective. Your responsibility in this daily Christian growth is staying in the Bible, praying, trusting, and obeying.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). That's His solemn command to you. Someone's eyes are on you, and you may be the only Gospel that person will ever see. If they keep watching for evidence of your Christianity, will there be enough evidence for them to convict you?

May we all be found guilty as charged!

SIGNS OF LIFE

Life Sign: Those who witness my life see Jesus.

Life Verse: *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.*

—Colossians 3:23

Life in Action: What can I do to be a more effective representative of God?

Day 7

The Mark You Leave Behind



We don't stay on earth forever; but after we're gone, our imprint remains.

She thought she had gotten away with it. Francisca Rojas of Buenos Aires, Argentina, had murdered two of her own sons. In an attempt to deflect the blame, she had cut her own throat as well and then blamed the attack on a nearby ranch worker named Velasquez. Though the poor man proclaimed his innocence, he was arrested.

An Argentine police official named Juan Vucetich, however, had been experimenting with a newfangled system of criminal identity that relied on fingerprints. It was 1891, and fingerprints had never been used in a criminal trial. Revisiting the scene of the attack, Vucetich studied the bloody handprint on the doorframe of Francisca's house. It matched the prints of Francisca's own fingers. As a result, Francisca became the first person in history to be convicted of a crime based on fingerprint identification.¹

Today the FBI's Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS) electronically stores millions of known fingerprints. In this world of six billion people, each person's fingerprints are unique.

Each fingertip has a pattern of fine ridges on the skin that is slightly different from every other person's pattern, even from an identical twin. Therefore every person leaves his or her own unique mark.



There's another sense in which we leave a mark. Every one of us leaves our spiritual fingerprints, metaphorically speaking, on the lives of other people and especially on our children. We don't stay on earth forever; but after we're gone, this spiritual imprint remains.

John Geddie, Canadian missionary to the New Hebrides, offers a vivid example of the imprint we can have on people. Arriving on the island of Aneityum, he found a wild tribe of cannibals who considered human flesh the most savory of foods. Violence, theft, and warfare were common. His journal for February 9, 1849, reads: "In the darkness, degradation, pollution, and misery that surrounds me, I look forward in faith to the time when some of these poor islanders will unite in the triumphant song of ransomed souls."

He lived to see it happen. Geddie died just before Christmas in 1872, and this tablet was afterward installed in his island church: "In memory of John Geddie. . . . When he landed in 1848, there were no Christians here, and when he left in 1872, there were no heathen."²

You and I may not be responsible for converting an entire island, but we will leave our stamp on some people. The world will be better if we live a faithful life. What, then, can we do to leave our fingerprints—the fingerprints of Christ—behind us?

THE FINGERPRINT OF THE WORD

One of the simplest things we can do is to read the Word of God. Our children see us spending hours in front of the television watching football, following our favorite programs, and renting popular movies. But do they ever see us reading our Bible? When was the last time your child found you hunkered down at the kitchen table poring over God's Word?

Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, once explained why she became a lifelong student of Scripture. Growing up in China, she saw her missionary parents study the Bible every day:

Each morning when I went downstairs to breakfast, my father—a busy missionary surgeon—would be sitting reading his Bible. At night, her work behind her, my mother would be doing the same. Anything that could so capture the interest and devotion of those I admired and loved the most, I reasoned, must be worth investigating. So at an early age I began reading my Bible.³

THE FINGERPRINT OF HONESTY

It's important that we live an honest life, because the people closest to us (especially our kids) are quick to pick up on our inconsistencies. Allen C. Emery, a successful businessman who served on the boards of many Christian organizations, was known for his integrity and common sense. In his book *A Turtle on a Fencepost*, Emery wrote this of his father:

Today I find myself still asking myself, “What would Daddy do?” when confronted with those decisions in business and in life that are so often not black and white, but gray. I am in debt to the memory-making efforts that my father made to imprint indelibly upon my mind the meaning of integrity. . . .

Once [my dad] lost a pair of fine German binoculars. He collected insurance only to find the binoculars a year later. Immediately he sent a check to the company and received a letter back stating that this seldom occurred and that they were encouraged. It was a small thing, but children never forget examples lived before them.⁴

Will our friends and family be able to tell similar stories about us after we're gone?

THE FINGERPRINT OF PRAYER

We must commit ourselves to leaving a legacy of prayer, as a wonderful old story about the great evangelist Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman illustrates. As a young man, he was elected pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. An elderly man approached him after his sermon and said, “I am afraid you will not make it as pastor here.” Allowing some time for that sober assessment to sink in, the man continued, “This is a large church with great responsibility falling upon its pastor. We need a man with equally large experience. But I have made up my mind to help you. I have resolved to pray for you every day . . . and I have made a covenant with two other men to do the same.”

This prayer band grew from three to fifty to hundreds. So it’s not surprising that, within three years, more than 1,100 people had professed Christ as their Savior. This one infirm, elderly man made up his mind to leave an imprint of prayer—and he did!⁵

THE FINGERPRINT OF AN ENDURING TESTIMONY

We Christians must leave behind the imprint of an enduring testimony. As Paul told Timothy, “The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

Recently *Baptist Press* reported the story of Dr. Steve White, a New Mexico dentist. When White was a twenty-one-year-old college basketball player, his ailing mother called him to her bedside. “I just want you to know, Steven,” she said, “that I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.”

Steve later said, “I walked out of that room and I thought, ‘What is she talking about?’ As a family we never talked about that kind of stuff.”

His mother died shortly afterward, but Steve went on to become a successful dentist, one who believed the material world was all that existed and that Christians were crazy to believe in God.

Twenty-four years later, while looking at a picture of his mom, her words came forcibly to mind. He suddenly realized that his mom had discovered the truth before she died. She had found the key to eternal life.

“Those two words kept going over and over in my mind: ‘Jesus Christ.’ For the first time in my life, I realized Jesus Christ is for real.”

Under deep conviction, Steve took off in his truck. Switching on the radio, he heard a preacher explain the Gospel, and he instantly received Jesus Christ into his heart.⁶

With almost her last breath, a mother—herself a new Christian—left the legacy of an enduring testimony that bore fruit more than two decades later. Don’t underestimate the power of sharing Christ. His Word does not return to Him void, and our work in the Lord is never in vain (Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 15:58). . . .



A blind man was once seen walking down the sidewalk at night with his flashlight shining. Someone asked him why, being blind, he carried a flashlight. “Because,” he said, “I don’t want anyone to stumble because of me.”⁷

Do you have a habit or tendency in your life that might cause someone to stumble over you? Are you exercising excessive liberty in your personal habits? Or is your influence the kind that Christ can use to change the lives of others? What kind of imprint are you leaving?

As you consider your answers to these questions, read these lyrics:

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone,
And our children sift through all we’ve left behind,
May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover
Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find.

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful;
May the fire of our devotion light their way.

May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,
And the lives we live inspire them to obey.

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.⁸

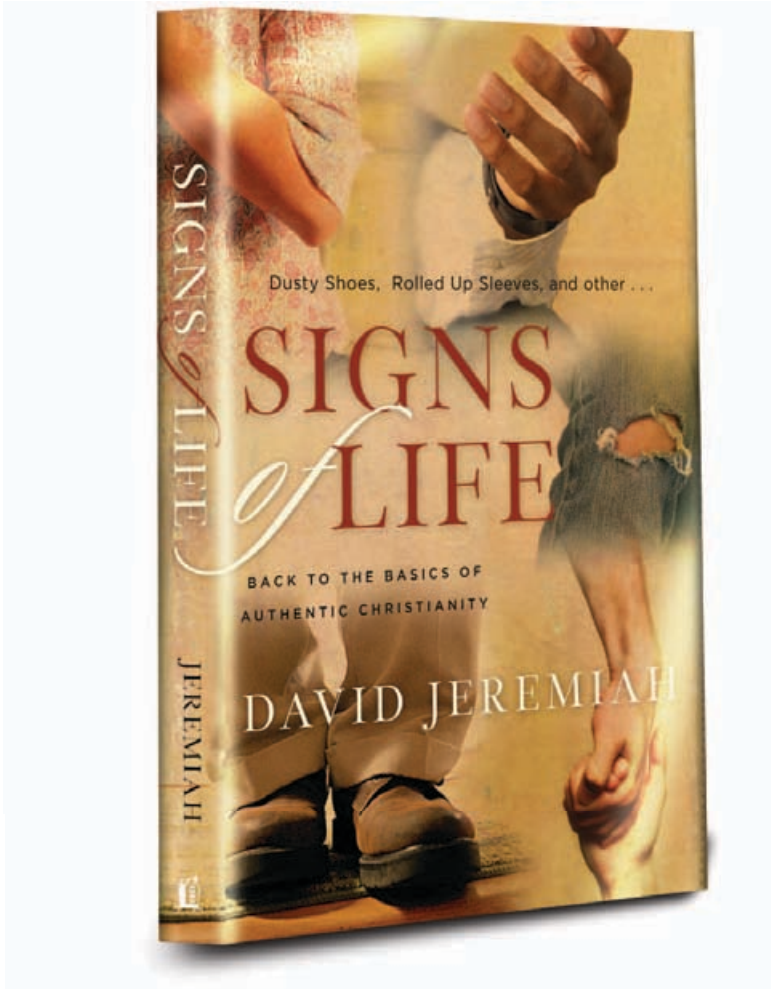
SIGNS of Life

Life Sign: The imprint of my Christian life will remain for eternity.

Life Verse: . . . *It is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*

—1 Corinthians 4:2

Life in Action: In what specific ways am I leaving behind positive—or negative—fingerprints in the lives of my family, friends, co-workers, and community?



You will have everything you need to help you develop dusty shoes, worn-out knees, rolled-up sleeves, open hands, and outstretched arms in your spiritual walk.

Discover personal transformation that changes the world.

[CLICK HERE TO ORDER *SIGNS OF LIFE*](#)