

**THE
BROKENHEARTED
EVANGELIST**

THE BROKENHEARTED EVANGELIST

JEREMY WALKER



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Brokenhearted Evangelist
© 2012 by Jeremy Walker

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Direct your requests to the publisher at the following addresses:

Reformation Heritage Books
2965 Leonard St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246
orders@heritagebooks.org
www.heritagebooks.org

Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America
12 13 14 15 16 17/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

[CIP info]

For additional Reformed literature, both new and used, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or e-mail address.

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Chapter 1: Am I Willing? <i>Our Undeniable Obligation</i>	1
Chapter 2: Am I Effective? <i>Our Necessary Equipment</i>	43
Chapter 3: Am I Committed? <i>Our Appointed Means</i>	71
Chapter 4: Am I Focused? <i>Our Declared Aim</i>	91
Chapter 5: Am I Fruitful? <i>Our Great Expectation</i>	127

PREFACE

Do you know and believe that there is nothing that glorifies God more than the accomplishment of His saving purposes in His Son, Jesus Christ? Do you know and believe that there is nothing more important to a person than the destiny of his immortal soul? Do you know and believe that there is a heaven to be gained and a hell from which to flee, and that our relationship to the Lord Jesus is the difference between the two? Do you know and believe that only those who repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved? Do you know and believe that God sends His saints into the world in order to preach that gospel by which sinners are saved?

It is easy to answer such questions with a gutless orthodoxy. Lively faith in Christ grasps spiritual realities in a way that galvanizes the believer. All truth—whether of God’s grace to us or of our duty to God—bears fruit in us only insofar as we are connected to Christ by faith. This being so, says John Owen, “he alone understands divine truth who doeth it: John vii.17. There is not, therefore, any one text of Scripture which presseth our duty unto God, that we can so understand as to perform that duty in an acceptable manner, without an actual regard unto Christ, from whom alone we receive ability for the performance of it, and in or through whom alone it is accepted with God.”¹

We cannot pretend that we have understood divine truth unless we are living it. We cannot pretend that we know and believe the truth

1. John Owen, *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ—God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 1:82.

about men, souls, heaven, hell, and salvation unless it is making a difference in the way we think, feel, pray, speak, and act.

A vigorous, practical concern for the lost, growing out of a desire for God's glory in man's salvation, is an eminently Christlike thing and a hallmark of healthy Christianity. By such a standard, there are many unhealthy churches and unhealthy Christians; by such a standard, and to my great grief, I am not well myself.

While I accept that there can be an unbalanced and crippling expectation and even unbiblical obsession with some aspects of evangelism and "mission" (as the portentous modern singular would have it), there is an opposite and perhaps greater danger in our day that believers and churches enjoying possession of a great deposit of truth nevertheless do not *know* it. If they did, they would be doing something.

It is very easy to be up in arms, for example, about current assaults on what can so calmly be described as the doctrine of hell. "Of course there is a hell!" we protest, offended and disturbed that someone could deny what is so plainly written in the Word of God. Is there a hell? What difference has it made? What have we done differently because there is a hell? Is its reality driving our thoughts, words, and deeds? Many of us who have entered the kingdom have come perilously close to the flames of the pit. We have felt its fire, and yet we have, perhaps, forgotten that from which we have been delivered. The urgency with which we fled to Christ ourselves has perhaps been replaced with a casual awareness of spiritual reality that never energizes us to do anything for those who are themselves in danger of eternal punishment.

The same could be said of heaven, of Christ's atonement for sinners, of God's grace and mercy, of the freeness of the gospel, of the excellence of salvation. "Yes...yes...yes," the monotonous ticking off of doctrines received continues. But what difference does it make to you and me?

It is my heartfelt contention that the truths we believe ought to make the people of God brokenhearted evangelists. My prayer for this book is that the Lord Christ would make its author and its readers truly understand the gospel duty that God has laid upon His church and therefore make us willing to perform the work we have been given to

do. By His strength may God make us able to do it, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

My thanks are due to Seth Getz, who strongly urged me to develop this material and encouraged me along the way; to the several friends who analyzed and assessed various portions and gave their feedback generously and robustly; to the believers, past and present, whom I have come to know remotely or immediately, who in their spirit and activity exemplify the truths I have labored to communicate; and to my wife, who patiently bears with and encourages a husband who fails more often than he succeeds to embrace all the aspects of the work he has been given to do.



*To those who go out in order to compel
the needy to come in.*

*May God grant success to such labors,
that His house may be full.*



CHAPTER 1

AM I WILLING?

Our Undeniable Obligation

His life hangs by a thread, but he sleeps. The fumes rising from the fire smoldering below are creeping into his lungs, slowing his heart and dulling his mind. The flames themselves are catching hold, sucking the oxygen from the air, building in ferocity and intensity, enveloping and devouring with insatiable appetite. Soon those fumes will capture him, and those flames will consume him. He desperately needs to be saved. What will you do? How will you communicate his need to be delivered?

If you were outside his home, watching the flickering blaze and billowing smoke of the fire, would you stand there, the picture of nonchalance, discussing his prospects for survival? Or would you do all that lay in your power to save the man? What would your words and actions communicate? Would their tone and vigor suggest carelessness, ease, and triviality, or would they indicate pressure and urgency—even desperation? What kind of person would stand casually and carelessly by while another was choked and consumed only a few feet away? Under such circumstances, any right-thinking, right-feeling person would be the model of earnest endeavor, laboring with all that was in him to rouse the sleeper, alert him to danger, obtain assistance, and provide help.

Felt Urgency Communicated

So it is with the brokenhearted evangelist. Scripture and church history provide examples of those who labored with a present and pressing sense of the choking reality of sin and the consuming fires of hell. We could never accuse them of nonchalance. They did not display a casual attitude. They grieved over every moment lost, every opportunity

missed. They labored with the urgency of eternity near at hand, pressing upon their souls.

So we see the humbled and earnest Peter, restored to usefulness following his denials of Christ, charging the house of Israel with the awful reality that the very Jesus whom they crucified God had made both Lord and Christ, with the result that those who heard him were cut to the heart (Acts 2:36–37). We find the apostle Paul, a saved persecutor and blasphemer, a man redeemed from zealous but sterile self-righteousness, crying out with sorrow in his soul that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for the sake of his brother Israelites (Rom. 9:1–5). There he is, ready to become all things to all men that he might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9:22).

What brought from Richard Baxter's heart this earnest declaration: "I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men"?¹ Or what of John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, who testified, "I preached what I felt, what I smartingly [acutely, deeply] did feel. Indeed, I have been to them as one sent to them from the dead; I went myself in chains to preach to them in chains, and carried that fire in my own conscience that I persuaded them to beware of"?²

Or, later, there is George Whitefield, as described by his friend John Gillies:

The burning desire to reach the hosts of mankind with the message of saving grace overruled all trials that came in the way, and he testified to the Divine assistance he experienced in learning the task [of preaching in the open air without notes], and the joy that was his as he performed it, saying:... "Sometimes, when twenty thousand people were before me, I had not, in my own apprehension, a word to say either to God or them. But I was never totally deserted, and frequently...so assisted, that I knew by happy experience what our Lord meant by saying, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'... The sight of thousands and thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback, and some in the trees, and at

1. Richard Baxter, "Love Breathing Thanks and Praise," part 2, stanza 29.

2. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: Penguin, 1987), 70.

times all affected and drenched in tears together, to which sometimes was added the solemnity of the approaching evening, was almost too much for, and quite overcame me.”³

These were men called by God to proclaim the good news of everlasting life through faith in Jesus Christ. They carried out that calling with a profound and pressing sense of urgency, constrained by the awareness that not a moment could be lost.

Such a spirit, however, is not restricted to a single vocation—the preacher—or a single location—the pulpit. Remember the example of Monica, the mother of Augustine: persuaded of the value of his soul and grieved over his resistance to the gospel, she pursued her wandering son with her prayers and sometimes followed him physically. One Christian from whom she sought advice encouraged her to continue praying, saying, “It is not possible that the son of such tears should perish.”⁴ In time she bore a spiritual son through her earnest tears.

Or we might consider Charles Spurgeon’s faithful mother, of whom he writes in this way:

It was the custom, on Sunday evenings, while we were yet little children, for her to stay at home with us, and then we sat round the table, and read verse by verse, and she explained the Scripture to us. After that was done, then came the time of pleading; there was a little piece of Alleine’s *Alarm*, or of Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, and this was read with pointed observations made to each of us as we sat round the table; and the question was asked, how long it would be before we would think about our state, how long before we would seek the Lord. Then came a mother’s prayer, and some of the words of that prayer we shall never forget, even when our hair is grey. I remember, on one occasion, her praying thus: “Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my

3. Quoted in Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 1:268.

4. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. E. M. Blaiklock (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 73.

soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ." That thought of a mother's bearing swift witness against me, pierced my conscience, and stirred my heart.⁵

Here again in the relationship of a parent and child we find that same blood-earnestness, that same conviction of the truth of God's Word, that same determination to discharge one's duty to one's children faithfully and lovingly, that same persuasion of the value of a soul and the desperate need of salvation. The foundations of the religious life of John G. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides (now known as Vanuatu), were laid in similar fashion:

The "closet" was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table and a chair, with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. This was the Sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and "shut to the door"; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light as of a new-born smile that always was dawning on my father's face: it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Never, in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles. Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in

5. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Volume 1—The Early Years* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), 43–45.

that sanctuary closet, and, hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, "He walked with God, why may not I?"⁶

Paton's parents did not allow these things simply to lie on the surface of their children's souls, a mere awareness of things spiritual rather than reality known and felt. Rather, these parental prayers formed the basis for their direct dealing with the children for the good of their souls, as they wrestled with God for their children and then wrestled with their children for God. Paton also records how family worship was an unvarying part of life in his father's house, an occasion that proved a blessing beyond the family:

None of us can remember that any day ever passed unhallowed thus: no hurry for market, no rush to business, no arrival of friends or guests, no trouble or sorrow, no joy or excitement, ever prevented at least our kneeling around the family altar, while the High Priest led our prayers to God, and offered himself and his children there. And blessed to others, as well as to ourselves, was the light of such example! I have heard that, in long after-years, the worst woman in the village of Torthorwald, then leading an immoral life, but since changed by the grace of God, was known to declare, that the only thing that kept her from despair and from the Hell of the suicide, was when in the dark winter nights she crept close up underneath my father's window and heard him pleading in Family Worship that God would convert "the sinner from the error of wicked ways, and polish him as a jewel for the Redeemer's crown." "I felt," said she, "that I was a burden on that good man's heart, and I knew that God would not disappoint him. That thought kept me out of Hell, and at last led me to the only Saviour."⁷

We could easily comb the pages of history to find countless further examples of Christian men and women who felt this profound

6. John G. Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 8.

7. Paton, *John G. Paton*, 14–15.

concern, in accordance with their position and responsibilities, for those without Christ.

Failure to Communicate

Equally, we find all too many grievous illustrations of those who felt eternity far off and so could not convincingly urge men and women to flee from the wrath to come, who held so fast to the stuff of this life that they were not able to call sinners to cling to Christ alone with conviction. So we find the prophet Ezekiel complaining of those who prophesy “Peace!” when there is no peace (Ezek. 13:10, 16), assuring people—in the face of sure and impending judgment—that everything will be fine. Or we can contrast the urgency of Baxter and Bunyan with Harry Emerson Fosdick, the infamous theologically liberal preacher of the early twentieth century, marching in the vanguard of unbelief dressed in the clothes of religion. Fosdick declared that preaching is personal counseling on a group basis. Evangelists of our day preach health, wealth, and happiness, fixing the eyes of their audiences on the stuff of this life and calling them to lay up treasures on earth, making Jesus at best the way to financial security, the truth of mere self-realization or self-actualization, and the life of earthly fulfillment, so that no one can come to really love himself except by Him. The world still hears men who—claiming the authority of Christ—tell them that there is peace where there is, in reality, no true or lasting peace.

But perhaps more terrifying is the case of Lot, for the Bible tells us that Lot was a righteous man (2 Peter 2:7). Nevertheless, when Lot spoke it seems that something necessary was lacking or something damaging was present, and his message was fatally undermined. When Sodom was about to be destroyed, Lot was sent to his sons-in-law with an urgent warning of the onrushing judgment, calling upon them, “Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!” What it was that undercut his message we do not know for sure, but his vital communication never reached its target: “To his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking” (Gen. 19:14). Their reaction was much like that of the audience in Søren Kierkegaard’s well-known illustration: “It happened that a fire broke out backstage in a theater. The clown came out to inform the

public. They thought it was a jest and applauded. He repeated his warning, they shouted even louder. So I think the world will come to an end amid general applause from all the wits, who believe that it is a joke.”⁸

Eli also stands out as a stark example of failure in the parental sphere. While recorded dealings between Eli and his sons show his concern and sorrow, there is something tame and toothless about his words. This, it seems, was symptomatic of his relationship with them. When his sons were corrupting everything that was precious about the worship of God, stealing the best of the sacrifices, and having sexual relationships with the women who gathered at the entrance to the tabernacle, Eli spoke to his sons in this way: “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD’s people transgress” (1 Sam. 2:23–25). There is truth in these words, but no cutting edge. It is hardly appropriate to hint that blasphemy and sexual immorality merely constitute something less than a good report! Evidently, God also knew something was lacking: “For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them” (1 Sam. 3:13). Eli’s feeble protestations did not count as restraint—they were too little and too late. They had no power, no bite.

Lot terrifies us not because he was an unbeliever who had no real message to bring, but because he was a righteous man who still went unheeded, who failed to communicate the need to be saved. Eli terrifies us because he was a man who served God in His tabernacle and was concerned for the glory of God, but he signally failed to promote holiness in his own family and in the nation. He failed to restrain wickedness, and his remonstrance and rebukes had no power.

David: The Brokenhearted Evangelist

So what makes the difference? What makes a Christian not only urgent, earnest, and eager to see men and women saved from their sins but also compelling and convicting? The answer lies in our own character and

8. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 1:30.

conviction, in our disposition toward and relationship to God and His truth. A repentant David demonstrates this potent spirit of the broken-hearted evangelist in Psalm 51.

As recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, though King David was a man after God's own heart, he was enticed by and became enmeshed in sin. David saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, bathing one evening. He sent for her and committed adultery with her. Uriah, one of David's faithful warriors who was listed among his mighty men (2 Sam. 23:37), was battling the Ammonites at the time. David desperately tried to cover up his iniquity by calling Uriah back from the battlefield, but the soldier had too strong a sense of duty to enjoy even the legitimate joys and blessings of home while his brothers-in-arms were suffering all the dangers and privations of war. Even when David plied him with drink, Uriah held firm. In desperation, David sent Uriah back to the front carrying his own death warrant: a message for Joab, the commander of the army, ordering him to send Uriah into the hottest part of the battle and then isolate him, in order that he should be killed. Once Uriah had been slaughtered, Joab sent home a casual report, mentioning in passing that Uriah the Hittite had died. David sent back an equally casual response, and then—his hands stained with the wickedness of adultery and murder—he took Bathsheba as his wife, and in due time she gave birth to a son.

It must therefore have been for about nine months, and perhaps a little longer, that David sat on Israel's throne in a stupor of sin, unfeeling and uncaring, his conscience deadened and his heart sullen, distant from God. Then the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to the king. Nathan told David a story that stirred the native sense of justice in David's heart. Presented with the parable of a rich man who stole the delight of a poor man's heart to feed the insatiable traveler who called at his door, David condemned himself out of his own mouth: the thief must die!

We can only imagine how Nathan looked at David as he spoke those heavy words of revelation and accusation: "You are the man!" The traveler Lust had called at David's heart, and rather than satisfy himself with the rich provisions already available to him, David had stolen Uriah's wife. As God through Nathan exposed David's sin and described

the coming judgment, David's sleeping conscience was roused, and he acknowledged his transgressions. Psalm 51 is the lament of David's awakened conscience, a confession of sin and a plea for mercy.

David begins the psalm with a series of repentant cries that communicate his profound sense of God's character. He is conscious of the greatness of his sins, recognizing and depending on the greatness of God's mercy:

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin (vv. 1–2).

He feels the weight of God's holiness and justice and the utter wretchedness of his sinful nature and deeds. He testifies repentantly of his iniquity with a transparent and sincere shame:

For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.
Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me (vv. 3–5).

David is not concerned with mere externals, but he drives to the heart of the matter. God's eye penetrates to the depths of his being, and it is there that he feels his sin and his need of cleansing. His agony of soul over the horror of sin envelopes his whole humanity:

Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice (vv. 6–8).

David returns to his central theme: his desperate desire for reconciliation with God, his sense that all is broken and that the Lord alone can restore him. David feels that all favor is gone, that he must, as it were, start afresh, and he pleads as if he were coming to God for the first time:

Hide Your face from my sins,
 And blot out all my iniquities.
 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
 Do not cast me away from Your presence,
 And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
 And uphold me by Your generous Spirit (vv. 9–12).

Humbly anticipating an experience of the rich mercy that he knows resides in the gracious heart of Almighty God, and grounded in the pleas of the previous verses, David—humbled and contrite—pours out a promise to God:

Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
 And sinners shall be converted to You (v. 13).

The resolution of the thirteenth verse is built primarily upon the desires of verse 12, but with concrete piles that drive into the bedrock of all that has gone before: the profound awareness of his sin matched by his grasp of the saving mercies of a holy God, the degree to which sin offends God, his desperate need of the cleansing that only God can provide, his soul-wrenching pleas to be brought back to the favor of God. “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit,” David implores the Lord. And what will follow when God hears and blesses him? “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.”

This is no light, occasional, or optional work. Charles Spurgeon called this labor “the life business of the Christian.”⁹ Here we see the

9. C. H. Spurgeon, “The Christian’s Great Business,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 2002), 19:494.

character of the brokenhearted evangelist. We hear the cry of a man conscious of his own sin, looking to God for forgiveness, and determined to live to honor and glorify the God of his salvation. Though we must each take account of our graces, gifts, and resources, this is a reality that ought to bind our consciences all our days upon earth.

Like David, we should feel this to be our undeniable obligation: “*I will teach transgressors Your ways: I am resolved. Everything in me is bound to this. I am conscious of it as a duty. I am under conviction by the Spirit of God, whom I desire to uphold me to act in this way.*” David’s declaration communicates a sense of compulsion. He has both a strong desire for the work and a settled purpose to undertake it. In David’s language, it is the work of teaching transgressors God’s ways in order that sinners might be converted to Him. In essence, it is the declaration of gospel truth to sinners in order that they might be saved.

Where We Live

We live in a fallen world. Humanity is taken up with and trapped in sin; it is our native environment, whatever our country or culture. We are slaves of sin, and transgression of God’s law comes naturally. Such wickedness has fearful consequences, whether they are acknowledged or not: unrepentant sinners are exposed to the wrath and condemnation of God, liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever (The Shorter Catechism, Baptist Version, Q. 20).

As we look within us, we see the filth of our own hearts and the horror of our own transgressions. As we look without, we find every nation consumed with and obsessed by filth, froth, and folly. Barriers to iniquity are eroded and removed, if ever they existed. Legislators promote godlessness on a grand scale, not just at a tangent to God’s Word but utterly regardless of it. In the modern West, civil statutes that once were founded on God’s moral law enshrined in the Ten Commandments are being swept away and replaced with the concoctions of the moment. The bestselling and genuinely popular media pander to an appetite for godlessness and self-indulgence. False religions — with and without the vaneer of the Christian name — are on the rise, and few dare to criticize their sins and excesses. How many idol temples — outwardly

and evidently religious or masquerading under the guise of stadia and shopping centers and strip clubs and other such things—are built in comparison to the number of true gospel churches established? How clear and public a testimony idolatry and carnality have in comparison with the good news of salvation through Christ Jesus the Lord!

This is not a general but distant problem. It is both particular and immediate. Consider the town and neighborhood in which you live: go out with your eyes open and observe the perversion, immorality, licentiousness, drunkenness, violence, and other gross sins that characterize our society. Walk among the men and women with influence and see the displays of license and vulgarity, following all their carnal passions and instincts, clothes clinging to flesh or simply not covering it, and pouring blasphemy and filth from their lips. Assess how rampant are those more acceptable sins at which the nations wink but which are an affront to the God of heaven and earth. Behind a veneer of respectability and a façade of morality—and sometimes the outward forms of religion—lie horrible selfishness and abandonment. Think even of the street on which you live and the real godlessness of your otherwise pleasant and friendly neighbors, living with no thought of God. Some of us might look at the members of our own families and see their sin written large.

On every side the dark is rising, a revival of iniquity that—so powerful and insistent does it seem to be—we might wish were mirrored in advancing holiness in the church of Jesus Christ. All the misery and infidelity attendant upon such a course is paraded before us. Rank godlessness rises up on every side. Satan rubs his hands with glee, and the mouth of hell yawns to receive its victims.

If you are a Christian, this is the place in which you live and the system from which you have been redeemed. You used to congregate with sinners to share in sin; wickedness was the atmosphere you breathed and transgression your way of life. Now, though, you have been plucked as a brand from the burning. This is the world of which you once had a portion and from which you have now been delivered, but it is the world in which you still live and through which you are making your pilgrimage. God has granted to you the joy of His salvation and upholds you

with His generous Spirit. Do you not look with genuine compassion and profound pity on people dead in their sins and dying in sin, being consigned for all eternity to a place of endless torment and grievous condemnation? Outwardly respectable and outwardly despicable sinners alike are caught in a downward spiral that ends in the pit. And what will you do? How will you communicate the need to be saved?

Psalm 51 puts this question to the Christian in the very context of redemption from sin in a world captured by sin. We must, of course, find the solution to this question in our Bibles rather than in a sentimental knee-jerk reaction or a program built on mere pragmatism. As those aiming to be children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, as those called to shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15), we must find and embrace God's answer to this question.

David labors under a sense of compulsion: "*I will teach transgressors Your ways.*" And we must face the same obligation. Concerning this Spirit-borne sense of compulsion, we must address this question: "Am I willing?"

The Character in Which David Speaks

David was a multifaceted man with many roles and gifts. He was a king, ruling over Israel as God's anointed. He was a prophet, speaking and recording the inspired words of Psalm 51 and many others besides, the mouthpiece of the Almighty for truth and praise, both in the Psalms and in some of the sacred histories. He was a poet, the sweet singer of Israel, blessed by God to put songs of joy and gladness as well as woe and horror over sin into the mouths of God's people. He was a mighty warrior, who from his youth had snatched lambs from the mouths of lions and bears, and had slain giants. He was a gracious and tender shepherd who had looked after his father's flock, and in doing so had been equipped for the work of shepherding the people of God.

There is no doubt that David was an unusually gifted man. Most of us could not begin to hold a candle to David's sun with regard to some of his extraordinary and God-given capacities and gifts. He was a son, brother, husband, and father. He was, after the pattern of his time, a well-educated and mentally astute man, a man of genuine insight

spiritually and intellectually. As far as his public pronouncements might be considered, you might even call him a preacher.

But look again at Psalm 51. Which of these characters or roles does David assume in order to write this psalm? What is the garment that he wears as he makes this declaration? While many of David's roles, traits, and gifts are evident in what he writes, or at least lie in the background, he does not express himself clothed with the mantle of any of these. None of them is prominent in this psalm. None provides the platform from which David speaks. He does not write as a king, or first and foremost as a prophet. Though he uses a poetic form, he does not write primarily as a poet. He writes not as a warrior or shepherd, nor does he parade his other qualities or roles. Rather, David presents himself here as a penitent, pardoned sinner—nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else. Everything else is abandoned, and he strips himself of everything else that we might consider a qualification for his task. He stands before us as a sinner weeping over his sins and pardoned through God's grace in Christ.

To adopt such a character provides none of us with a route of escape. We cannot excuse ourselves by saying, "Well, David was a king!" because he is not writing as a king. We cannot evade the demands of this text by pointing to his prophetic office or simply claim that he was more gifted or better educated, because those things are put aside or lie in the background. All other factors—our own roles, traits, and gifts—help to determine the sphere in which we take up the task of evangelism and the opportunities we have, but they do not allow us to avoid the holy pressure of this duty. Here is Spurgeon's advice in a sermon on Proverbs 11:30, that he who wins souls is wise:

I have said enough, brethren, I trust, to make some of you desire to occupy the position of soul-winners: but before I further address myself to my text I should like to remind you, that the honor does not belong to ministers only; they may take their full share of it, but it belongs to every one of you who have devoted yourselves to Christ: such honor have all the saints. Every man here, every woman here, every child here, whose heart is right with God, may be a soul-winner. There is no man placed by God's providence

where he cannot do some good. There is not a glowworm under a hedge but gives a needed light; and there is not a laboring man, a suffering woman, a servant-girl, a chimney-sweeper, or a crossing-sweeper, but what has opportunities for serving God; and what I have said of soul-winners belongs not to the learned doctor of divinity, or to the eloquent preacher alone, but to you all who are in Christ Jesus. You can, each of you, if grace enable you, be thus wise, and win the happiness of turning souls to Christ through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

“A Place to Occupy, a Post to Maintain”

Lest you be already overwhelmed at this prospect, let me offer a comforting caution: while I have no wish to pull any punches, the last thing I wish to do is to afflict any sensitive saint with false guilt. So, with Spurgeon, I am not suggesting that Christians in secular employment are second-class citizens of the New Jerusalem or that the *best* Christians are full-time evangelists. God has most emphatically not called every believer to be a gospel minister or evangelist in the vocational sense. Often our ideas of evangelism involve something “out there” on the spiritual equivalent of a Special Forces mission. But to think like this would be to cripple our consciences, deaden us with despair, and blind us to what lies close at hand. Listen to the eighteenth-century Particular Baptist pastor and one of the cofounders of the Baptist Missionary Society, John Sutcliff, on diligent endeavors to promote the cause of Christ:¹¹

An attention to this is immediately, yet not merely, the work of ministers. While these take the lead, they ought to be seconded and supported by the vigorous efforts of all the friends of truth and holiness. Animated by the principle in our text, such will be ready to say to their ministers, as the men of Israel said to Ezra,

10. C. H. Spurgeon, “Soul Winning,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, Tex: Pilgrim Publications, 1970), 15:28.

11. John Sutcliff was one of the circle of friends that included William Carey, John Ryland Jr., and Andrew Fuller, who did much to advance the cause of Christ in their day.

when an important affair was to be undertaken, “Arise, for this matter belongeth unto thee; we also will be with thee; be of good courage and do it” [Ezra 10:4].

Having your souls enlivened by this disposition, you will each study your station and what can be done in it. You have each a place to occupy, a post to maintain. Fill up the place, make good the post where you are stationed. For instance, you who are heads of families, great is the truth reposed in your hands. Your children, your servants, claim your attention. Their health, their temporal concerns, lie near your hearts. The feelings of humanity, the dictates of natural affection, lead you thus far. But you profess to be Christians. And if your hearts are influenced by the principles of Christianity, your practice will correspond with your profession. So doing you will pay a due regard to the eternal interests of your domestics. The example of Abraham, approved by heaven, and recorded in the page of sacred history, will be admired and imitated. “I know,” saith Jehovah, “that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment” [Genesis 18:19].

Were we to take a view of the numerous orders in human society and the distinct obligations of each in a religious view, we should carry the subject beyond the limits now assigned. Suffice it to remark that every one has a proper line in which he should walk and some peculiar privilege which should be improved. The part which every individual acts is of importance, as the smallest wheel, the minutest pin in a watch, is of consequence to the regular movement of the whole machine. Even you that are servants are repeatedly exhorted so to act “that you may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” [Titus 2:10].¹²

12. John Sutcliff, “Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts Illustrated,” appendix 2 in *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* by Michael A. G. Haykin (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 1994), 363–64. Sutcliff preached the sermon at a meeting of the Northampton Particular Baptist Association at Clipstone on April 27, 1791. I am indebted to Michael Haykin for providing me with his transcript of this sermon.

Our responsibility lies where our sovereign God has put us, in the sphere to which He has called us. It is there we are to conduct ourselves as brokenhearted evangelists and pursue our calling as Christians, embracing our vocation—whatever it may be—as those who desire and intend to make Christ known to others. If He calls us to something more definite and all-consuming (and I trust that you will at least consider whether that might be the case, guided by the Word of God and the church of Christ and trusted, insightful counselors), well and good, but if He does not, let us serve Him where we are. Let no exhausted mother, with her hands full of home and children, bruise her soul with the conviction either that she has no way of serving Christ in this way or that she is somehow prevented by her children and her home from doing something worthwhile. Rather, that is the very sphere of her labor. Her mission field is at her feet (and quite possibly under them and in her arms and on her back and currently drawing something indelible on something irreplaceable). Indeed, for her to feel falsely guilty about what she is not doing or to transfer that guilt to her children in resentment and bitterness will only prevent the good that she is called to do as a minister to her children. Consider some of the earlier examples of Augustine, Spurgeon, and Paton, to name but three. We tend to look at those men and think that they are the evangelists, but each of them was first evangelized by his own parents.

Let no man who has no gift for public speech berate himself for not being a preacher. Let him rather consider what he might do as a friend who draws alongside others in any number of contexts. The husband who labors countless hours in the week to put bread on the table for his wife and any children God might give may not be able to spend every Saturday visiting friends, handing out tracts, or knocking on doors, but he might be able to remember in prayer those who do and perhaps give an hour or so once a month to such endeavors.

There are countless avenues—perhaps not public, not formalized, not extravagant—by means of which the people of God can righteously manufacture or embrace an opportunity to declare the truth concerning the Lord Christ. In fifteenth-century England, a humble scholar by the name of Thomas Bilney became a true Christian. He heard an

arrogant and aggressive fellow-student at Cambridge publicly attack Philip Melancthon's teachings. Bilney devised a subtle means of telling that student the truth. He asked if he could make a confession to the student in question, who agreed, and later recorded the encounter in this way:

Here I have occasion to tell you a story which happened at Cambridge. Master Bilney, or rather Saint Bilney, that suffered death for God's word sake; the same Bilney was the instrument whereby God called me to knowledge; for I may thank him, next to God, for that knowledge that I have in the word of God. For I was as obstinate a papist as any was in England, insomuch that when I should be made bachelor of divinity, my whole oration went against Philip Melancthon and against his opinions. Bilney heard me at that time, and perceived that I was zealous without knowledge: and he came to me afterward in my study, and desired me, for God's sake, to hear his confession. I did so; and, to say the truth, by his confession I learned more than before in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the word of God, and forsook the school-doctors and such fooleries. Now, after I had been acquainted with him, I went with him to visit the prisoners in the tower at Cambridge; for he was ever visiting prisoners, and sick folk. So we went together, and exhorted them as well as we were able to do; moving them to patience, and to acknowledge their faults.¹³

The fiery aggressor and subsequently vigorous convert was Hugh Latimer, who, as an old man, was also to die a martyr's death, testifying to the sole, saving sufficiency of the Lord Christ. But you will notice how Bilney, who had a strong desire to declare and defend the truth, was quite prepared to use various and appropriate means to bring the gospel to bear. Bilney was physically small and weak, constitutionally frail, and socially reticent. One historian describes him thus: "Timid and retiring, his influence was exerted in secret; he never appeared as a public teacher of the new system [Luther's recovery of the gospel],

13. Hugh Latimer, "The First Sermon on the Lord's Prayer," in *Sermons by Hugh Latimer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 1:334–35.

but, in private intercourse with his friends, he talked to them of life and hope."¹⁴ The robust and vocal Latimer might have pulled him apart in debate, but Bilney went and "made confession," and so Latimer was won. Notice, too, how Bilney "was ever visiting prisoners, and sick folk": he found his sphere, and there he served his God well and fruitfully. His constitution and character and calling did not hinder his service, but they did direct it.

So by all means be galvanized. By all means look further afield. By all means be inventive. By all means make sacrifices for the sake of Christ and the lost. But by no means reproach yourselves for things that are not sin in you, even though they may be sin in another. Robert Candlish, a nineteenth-century preacher and writer from Scotland, gives some good advice:

The opening of the lips must be the same for all and in all. But the manner of the mouth's showing forth God's praise may be infinitely varied. Constitution and circumstances, temper, time, talents, opportunities; all must be taken into the reckoning. No martinet or formal rule can be laid down. None may prescribe to his brother. None may judge his brother. Every one acts for himself. Only let every one,—all the more for this discretionary allowance,—be sure that his eye is single; that when he offers the prayer, "Open thou my lips," and awaits the reply, it is really that "his mouth may show forth God's praise."¹⁵

But if your particular calling *is* to preach the gospel, then woe to you if you fail to do so (1 Cor. 9:16). As Sutcliff says, let ministers "take the lead"; gospel preachers are to be at the vanguard of gospel advance. If anyone ought to be on the front line, they ought to be, not just within the safe confines of an appointed meeting place or within the enclosed moments of an appointed meeting time, but constantly seeking for and carving out and taking on opportunities. We cannot do it alone, and

14. R. Demaus, *Hugh Latimer: A Biography* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1881), 23.

15. Robert Candlish, *The Prayer of a Broken Heart* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1873), 84–85.

we long for the practical and prayerful support of healthy saints, but we must put our hand to the plough.

Taking all this into account, as well as your distinctive calling, particular constitution, or specific character, consider that the root and foundation of your obligation to teach transgressors the ways of God—the issue of whether you are to be a witness to God’s grace, teaching transgressors the ways of Jehovah—lies in whether you are a repentant and pardoned sinner. If you and I are such pardoned sinners, having come with tears of genuine sorrow and received forgiveness of our sins from God, then we lie under the same obligation as David. Indeed, there is a sense in which we are beyond David, prophet though he was. God has revealed Himself in the new covenant, through the person and work of Christ, with a clarity, glory, and beauty not seen before. He has shown not just the loveliness of His power and justice but has also thrown into yet brighter relief His goodness, mercy, and truth. These glories bind us even more to make known to those dead in trespasses and sins God’s ways of goodness, mercy, justice, punishment, forgiveness, righteousness, holiness, and peace. We too ought to possess this strong desire and settled purpose to be a teacher of God’s ways to transgressors. This verse demands that everybody professing to be a pardoned, penitent sinner be a new-covenant evangelist. Archibald Alexander allows no evasion:

In the charter which Christ gave to his disciples, who formed the first church under the new dispensation, the first command is one which requires action. “Go,” says he. Every Christian must be on the alert. He has marching orders from the Captain of his salvation. He cannot sit down in ease and idleness, and yet be a Christian. As the father said to his son in the parable, “Go, work in my vineyard,” so Christ says to every disciple; and it will not answer to say, “I go, sir,” and yet refuse obedience. We must be *doers* of the word, and not mere hearers. We must be doers of the word, and not mere professors [those making a profession]. The command given by the risen Saviour is still in force, and as it was obligatory on all who heard it at first, so it is binding on all who hear it now. “Go.”

But what are we to do? “*Proselyte*.” Make disciples. Convert to Christianity. The very word “*proselyte*” will frighten some people. No heresy in their view is so great as sectarianism. But Christianity is so intolerant, that it will bear no other religion; it seeks to overthrow every other system. If it would have admitted the claims of other religions, it would have escaped persecution. But no; it denounced every other system and mode of worship as hateful to God, and destructive to the soul. And it made every disciple a *proselyter*. And every one now, whether male or female, bond or free, Jew or Greek, who professes Christianity, takes upon himself or herself the obligation to convert others to Christianity.¹⁶

The commentator Matthew Henry also declared that “penitents should be preachers”¹⁷—that is, repentant sinners obtaining peace ought to pass on their hope to others. He means this not necessarily in the formal, public sense, but most certainly in the sense and character in which David speaks in Psalm 51:13. We ought all to feel an obligation—a strong and settled desire and purpose, an overwhelming conviction and resolve—to teach transgressors the ways of God. We should feel the duty and privilege of being the one to bring truth to the ungodly. If we name the name of Christ, we ought to have something of this desire. We are saved to be instruments of God’s glory, and as such we are obliged and made willing to declare all His works to sinners, that they might be converted:

The first impulse of the restored penitent, when the case as between him and his God is settled, is to go forth from his closet, the secret place of his God,—where the covenant of peace through atoning blood has been ratified as a personal transaction,—and tell what great things the Lord has done. That should and must be your immediate instinct. Many motives may prompt such action. You long to give vent to your emotions; and it is a relief to you to impart to others your sorrows and your joys; your late dismal

16. Archibald Alexander, “Christianity in Its Nature Aggressive,” in *Practical Truths* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1998), 32–33.

17. Matthew Henry, *Job to Song of Solomon*, vol. 3 of *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 354.

fears, and your present blessed hopes. There is pleasure also in the communication of good tidings. And surely there is an earnest and eager desire to save the lost. For you cannot, if you yourselves are taken from the horrible pit, look with indifference on the state of your companions who are still sinking unconsciously in its miry clay.

But over and above all these, there is a paramount consideration. It is the conviction that you owe it to the “God of your salvation” to “show forth his praise.”¹⁸

Are you willing? This is not a matter of whether you feel like it. Desire is not just a matter of whether you have some instinctive inclination or if your emotions happen to be raised to the right pitch. We need a binding resolution of conscience compelling each of us. Each of us must have the conviction that we stand before God as saved sinners who—on the basis of our own pardon—lie under an undeniable obligation to exercise the glorious privilege of presenting Christ to a transgressing, fallen generation. It is in this character that David speaks. Insofar as we possess that character, we lie under the same obligation.

The Nature of the Task

What is the work to which we are called? While we shall go on to consider this in greater depth, we can glean at least two things from the surface of David’s declaration.

A Deeply Personal Task

David says, “I will”: this is a personal undertaking. Do you pray for the men who stand to preach in your church—and elsewhere—pleading with God for a blessing upon the work? Good—there will be no success without it! Do you support the church with cheerful generosity, financially and in other ways, so that your local congregation and others might spread the gospel? Excellent—much to be commended! Do you encourage others who engage in this work, drawing alongside truehearted brothers and sisters, assuring them of your prayers and

18. Candlish, *Prayer of a Broken Heart*, 88–89.