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How Now Shall We Live? Devotional

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Designed by Luke Daab

Edited by Susan Taylor

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INTRODUCTION

Recently the Wilberforce Forum launched an intensive, one-year worldview training program for one hundred serious Christians we named “the Centurions.” Our goal is to teach community leaders from coast to coast to understand, articulate, and live out a biblical worldview and then to teach it to others.

As we worked together, one thing we discovered was the importance of a daily devotional. Theologian and Wilberforce Fellow T. M. Moore writes an online devotional guide exclusively for Centurions that offers a bracing dose of worldview thinking at least once a day. Almost to a person, the Centurions rank it among the most formative influences in their study.

This daily dose of worldview thinking is desperately needed. The biggest single challenge in the church today is helping the faithful understand that the Christian life is about far more than simply attending church on Sundays. And as shocking as this may sound, it’s also about far more than fulfilling the great commission.

Christians are indeed agents of God’s saving grace—instruments of bringing others to Christ. We are also agents of his common grace: He calls us to sustain and renew his creation and defend the created institutions of family and society.

The book of Genesis lays the foundation for this cultural mission. For five days God created the heavens and the earth. On the sixth day he created human beings—and ordered them to pick up where he left off. They were to reflect his image and have dominion, but from then on, the development of the creation would be primarily social and cultural. It would be the work humans performed as they obeyed God’s command to fill and subdue the earth.

The same command binds Christians today. While sin introduced a destructive power into God’s created order, it did not obliterate that

order. When we are redeemed, we are both freed from sin and restored to do what God designed us to do: create culture.

But we cannot fulfill this commission if we do not take religious doctrines seriously, if, in the words of *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, we “emphasize the upbeat and the encouraging and play down the business of God’s wrath”—in other words, if we practice religion that is easygoing and experiential rather than rigorous and intellectual. Sociologist Alan Wolfe put it bluntly when he said that Christians have become “part of mainstream culture, not dissenters from it.”

Wolfe is right. The church *has* been mainstreamed (and the culture largely lost) because we have forgotten that God commanded us to love him with all our *minds*. We have lost the concept of worldview.

How do we get it back? Working with the Centurions has made me realize that the only way to get people thinking differently is to make a huge paradigm shift. We can do this only through regular practice. We cannot simply say one day, “I am going to start thinking differently.” We have to discipline ourselves to think about cultural matters from God’s perspective every single day.

That is the purpose of this book. It offers a disciplined approach to helping you change how you think about art and literature, television and films, politics and bioethics, terrorism—and truth. This devotional is designed to help you learn to think *Christianly* every day of the year, to apply worldview thinking to the moral dilemmas and difficulties of your own life.

Only when large numbers of Christians begin to think this way—and act on it—will the faithful stop floating lazily along in the mainstream and have the courage to leap into the cold, countercultural rapids. If enough of us take the plunge, the force of the current will inevitably reshape the surrounding culture.

Are you up to the challenge? Then grab your life jacket and turn the page. That first, bracing splash awaits you.

—Charles W. Colson

June 2004

STORMING PAGAN STRONGHOLDS

TO READ: ACTS 17:16-33

He is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." Acts 17:27-28

In a culture as hostile to Christianity as ours has become, the church's impulse may be to circle the wagons and keep strictly to our own kind.

But is this the right response? Should Christians retreat into a new isolationism? Or should we go on the offensive, infiltrating increasingly hostile territory?

In the book of Acts we find Paul as he stands on Mars Hill, disputing with the philosophers of Athens. Acts 17 says that Paul was accosted by Stoics and Epicureans. The Stoics taught that virtue lies in an act of sheer will, not unlike the teaching of modern existentialists.

The Epicureans endorsed a philosophy of eat, drink, and be merry, not unlike today's consumption-driven pleasure seekers, whose motto is, "Whoever dies with the most toys wins."

Yet Paul was willing to mingle with these pagans and unbelievers—and to use their own literature in speaking to them. In describing God as the architect of the universe, he echoed a reference to the philosopher Plato. The line "In him we live and move and have our being" was a direct quotation from a Greek poet.

Yet Paul never compromised his message. The climax of his speech was a bold proclamation of the empty tomb—unarguable evidence for Christ's resurrection.

Some mocked him, Acts tells us, but a few believed. Paul had made a dent in a pagan culture.

Each one of us has our own opportunities to mingle with non-

believers and engage their hearts and minds. For you, it might be a neighborhood association, a PTA, or a workstation.

What matters is not where we speak but what we say.

This is no time to circle the wagons, no time to be faint of heart. It is time to storm the strongholds of pagan America.

Father, I ask for the courage to befriend those around me who may be hostile to Christianity. Help me to find ways to recast the eternal message of salvation in language they will understand.

J A N U A R Y 2

CONFRONTING OUR FRIENDS

TO READ: 1 SAMUEL 20:1-17

Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. 1 Samuel 20:17

One of the best ways we can teach our kids about the value of friendship is by dusting off the best works of children's literature, like Kenneth Grahame's classic, *The Wind in the Willows*. It tells a charming story about a mole who leaves his underground home in the English countryside and makes friends with a water rat. Through his new friendship, Mole discovers a fascinating new world, populated by Badger and Otter and Toad and a host of other colorful animal characters.

The Wind in the Willows was one of C. S. Lewis's favorite children's books—and it's safe to say he knew something about the subject. Vigen Guroian, author of *Tending the Heart of Virtue*, says the story shows “how friendships can form us into stronger and more integrated persons. . . . Mole is called out of his womb-like home to become a friend to others,” and his character develops precisely through learning to be a loyal and giving friend. To quote Guroian again, “Modern psychology confirms that common stock of human wisdom which says that children ought to have friends, and not just any friends, but [ones] with real virtues that in combination contribute to the moral growth of all the friends.”

And when children go astray, it is often their friends who call them to accountability. In *The Wind in the Willows*, Toad suffers from uncontrollable appetites that threaten his own destruction. He is lucky to have friends who love him enough to act severely with his weaknesses.

Led by the tough-minded but loving Badger, they confront Toad about his excesses and fight off the vicious stoats (ermine) and weasels who have taken advantage of him. What else are friends for?

The view of friendship that Kenneth Grahame expresses in story form comes from ancient times. It was the Greek philosopher Aristotle who wrote that friendship “helps the young to keep from error; . . . [and] those in the prime of life it stimulates to noble actions . . . for with friends men are more able to think and to act.” Even more important, friendship reminds us that in Christ, God himself has called us his friends. As Guroian writes, “Friendships sound the call to a higher and transcendent communion with God.”

Why not introduce the children in your life to a hero who is not afraid to be a friend—one like Badger, who helps his friend Toad conquer the demons within. And we ourselves must remember that we have an obligation to our own friends to call them to accountability when we see them falling into sin—and to be open to the loving rebukes of friends who are concerned about our moral character.

Lord, help me not to fall into friendships that degrade my moral growth. Give me the wisdom to choose friends whose characters inspire me to follow you more closely—friends who love me enough to risk my wrath to offer necessary rebukes.

J A N U A R Y 3

ARE ANIMALS “PERSONS”?

TO READ: GENESIS 1:24-26

*God said, “Let us make man in our image . . .
and let them rule over . . . all the creatures.” Genesis 1:26*

Not long ago the California Milk Advisory Board ran what became known as the “happy cows” television ad. It featured singing, wise-cracking dairy cows contentedly munching grass in bucolic bliss. Viewers loved them, but the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) sued, claiming that the ads violated consumer protection laws. How? According to PETA, the ads deceive consumers about the way cows actually live. (Note to PETA: Cows don’t really sing, either.)

PETA also got upset over the “Chicken Challenge” at an Illinois casino, where customers were invited to play tic-tac-toe against chickens. PETA said the game “disrespected chickens.”

We laugh at stories like these, but the influence of animal-rights advocates has been growing, and their agenda is dangerous. Americans and Europeans alike are passing laws that do more than just protect animals. In Germany, for example, a law was passed declaring that animals have the same rights as humans.

Some changes in how animals are treated on farms and in labs may be needed. But the modern animal-rights movement is driven by more than just humane concerns; activists have a serious agenda—one that challenges Christianity’s most fundamental doctrines.

Animal-rights activists believe there is no fundamental difference between animals and humans. The idea that humans are special in any way is called *speciesism*, defined as a prejudice akin to racism and sexism. PETA’s Ingrid Newkirk even compares eating meat to the

Nazi Holocaust and says that the animal rights movement is “at great odds” with Christian teachings.

Ominously, some animal-rights activists carry their logic to extremes. If it’s “murder” to kill chickens, they believe, then it’s morally acceptable to stop the “murderer.” In *National Review Online*, Wesley Smith writes about terrorists who employ “death threats, fire bombings, and violent assaults against those they accuse of abusing animals.”

These people are dangerous in more ways than one. Charles Oliver of *Reason* magazine explains: “By placing chickens and Jews on the same ethical plane, animal rights activists may inadvertently make it easier for a future Hitler to herd millions of humans into gas chambers.”

Oliver is right. The philosophy behind the animal-rights agenda is an assault on human dignity. Christians have a moral duty to respect the animal world as God’s handiwork. This means finding out how animals are treated in research labs and on factory farms and helping shape laws that determine their treatment. We must make sure we and others treat animals “with the mercy of our Maker,” as Christian writer Matthew Scully writes in his book *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*.

But *mercy* for animals is completely different from *rights* for animals—and we should never confuse the two.

Lord, teach me to be concerned enough about animal suffering to ensure that I am not contributing to it. Grant me a heart that beats with the mercy that the Creator has for his creatures.

J A N U A R Y 4

MIRACULOUS EVIDENCE

TO READ: MARK 8:22-26

When he had spit on the [blind] man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" Mark 8:23

In *An Anthropologist on Mars*, Oliver Sacks describes the case of a man named Virgil, who had been blind since childhood. At the age of fifty, Virgil underwent surgery to restore his sight.

What he experienced afterward inadvertently confirmed the Bible's account of one of Jesus' miracles.

Following the surgery, Virgil suffered from what is called "post-blind syndrome"—the inability to make sense of the panorama of colors and shapes that crowd our field of vision. As Sacks writes, Virgil would "pick up details . . . an angle, an edge, a color, a movement—but he would not be able to synthesize them, to form a complex perception at a glance." For example, when looking at a cat, Virgil "would see a paw, the nose, the tail, an ear, but he couldn't . . . see the cat as a whole."

It took time and practice, but Virgil finally adjusted to being sighted. As his wife put it, "Virgil finally put a tree together—he now knows that the trunk and leaves go together to form a complete unit."

These words ought to ring a bell for Christians. In the Gospel of Mark, we read that Jesus led a blind man "outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?'" The blind man replied, "I see people; they look like trees walking around" (Mark 8:23-24).

As Keith Mano writes in *National Review*, this phrase "is a clinical description. Like Virgil, the Bethsaida man can now see, but he cannot yet make sense of what he is seeing. Tree and man run together, as did trunk and tree-top for Virgil."

In short, “this is irrefutable evidence that a miracle did occur at Bethsaida. . . . No [charlatan] in the crowd could have faked it all by pretending to be blind because only someone recently given his sight” would see people who, according to Mark, “look like trees walking around.” Mano concludes, “A faker, not knowing about post-blind syndrome, would have reported that Jesus had given him perfect vision.”

Instead, the Gospel reports that Jesus cured the man twice: once of blindness and then of post-blind syndrome.

The story of the blind man’s miraculous healing could not be understood until our own day, when modern medicine has revealed the true nature of blindness.

Do you have trouble believing in the miracles of Christ? Do your friends? If so, read the fascinating story of the two men who were healed of their blindness—both of whom saw people who “look like trees walking around.”

Lord, thank you for modern medicine that offers testimony to ancient miracles.

J A N U A R Y 5

TEACHING CIVILITY

TO READ: LUKE 6:27-36

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31

There's a modern-day "punishment room" that many lawbreakers fear and hate—and some would say violates laws forbidding cruel and unusual punishment.

But the judge who sends people to this ersatz torture chamber says he's only making the punishment fit the crime.

Municipal Court Judge Paul Sacco of Fort Lupton, Colorado, got tired of complaints from senior citizens about teenagers driving through their neighborhoods with boom boxes blasting loudly enough to wake the dead. So the judge came up with an original—and appropriate—penalty. Kids who violate the noise ordinance are locked in a room at the courthouse and are forced to listen to the worst music imaginable—at least to the ears of rap-loving teenagers.

One recent batch of scofflaws was shut up with the sound of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans warbling "Happy Trails to You." They suffered through Disney tunes, bagpipe music, and songs by Wayne Newton and Barry Manilow. But the teens were nearly driven mad hearing Tony Orlando and Dawn sing "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree" and Dean Martin crooning "The Middle of the Night Is My Cryin' Time."

The treatment is unorthodox—but extremely effective. Seventeen-year-old David Mascarenas says he's already taken his stereo out of his car. And not one survivor of this punishing ordeal has ever reappeared before Judge Sacco.

This judge may be onto a good thing. It's clear that for these kids

the more informal channels of teaching civility—the home, the school, and the church—have failed. When that happens, the heavy hand of the law must take over. But instead of taking a punishing approach, Judge Sacco has opted for a teaching approach. He’s helping these kids understand why laws of civility and courtesy exist in the first place.

The result is that they’re learning firsthand the most universal moral code: Do unto others what you would have others do unto you.

This is a lesson in civility we all ought to take note of at a time when we Americans are encouraged to think too much of our own rights and not enough about the rights of our neighbors.

It’s a lesson that dozens of Colorado kids won’t soon forget—kids who still shudder at the memory of the day they were forced to listen to Roger Whitaker and Dean Martin.

As one teenager put it, “If I ever get caught again, I’d rather pay the sixty-five dollars.” But I’m sure he—and his neighbors—benefited much more from a musical lesson in courtesy.

Lord, as I go into the world today, illuminate ways in which I routinely put my own “rights” ahead of courtesy, compassion, and consideration for others. Help me daily to conquer every selfish impulse as I interact with people in my office, on the road, in my neighborhood, and in my home.

J A N U A R Y 6

TURNING HUMAN LIFE INTO A COMMODITY

TO READ: GENESIS 1:26-31

*God created man in his own image . . . male and female
he created them. Genesis 1:27*

A graduate student at New York University's film school, Carrie Specht, was borrowing money daily just to buy food. But rather than take another low-paying job, Carrie signed on with an infertility clinic to sell her eggs to an infertile couple.

It's the latest trend among college coeds—a trend that could change the very definition of what it means to be human.

Carrie had held a series of low-paying jobs, such as dog walking, before spotting an ad in the *Village Voice*. A clinic called Advanced Fertility Services invited “healthy, caring women” to assist infertile couples, and it offered two thousand dollars to cover “time and inconvenience.”

It turned out the clinic was looking for women willing to let doctors harvest their eggs and sell them to infertile couples.

Carrie had her eggs harvested four times. They were fertilized and implanted in the wombs of anonymous recipients. Carrie has used the money—some eight thousand dollars—to pay tuition and finance film projects.

Dr. Mark Sauer, director of an assisted-reproduction program, says the average donor is a college student who is “clearly doing this because of the financial gain.” But what are the ethical issues involved in the sale of human eggs?

For example, in some states there is no limit to how many times a woman may donate eggs. But what happens if two people spawned

from the same donor should meet and marry? It could be a genetic disaster if they had children.

Perhaps worst of all is what egg harvesting teaches women about their own worth. In an article in *Jane* magazine called “Chicks Selling Their Eggs,” a young woman named Martha said, “It occurred to me that they were going to pay me money for something I wasn’t ever going to use.”

What we’re seeing here is the triumph of a completely mechanistic view of human life. The human body is regarded not as a gift from God but as a purely physical object to be taken apart, sold, and used—just like any other physical object. Human eggs are regarded merely as a commodity.

In *Without Moral Limits* Debra Evans writes, “Women are not machines of reproduction, but are each unique, individual persons in body, mind and spirit.” She’s right. Genesis says we are made in the image of God—that we find our ultimate identity and worth in reflecting our Creator.

You may never be asked to sell off part of your own body—but you are almost certainly hearing arguments demanding that you accept a redefinition of what it means to be human, whether the subject is abortion, cloning, or selling human eggs. Are you prepared to make the biblical case against the commodification of human life?

Lord, open my eyes to cultural changes that defy your teachings. Give me opportunities to share these teachings with those who are being dangerously misled into believing that your gift of life is something to be sold to the highest bidder.

J A N U A R Y 7

ARE WE ABOLISHING MARRIAGE?

TO READ: GENESIS 2:18-25

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,
and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24*

The moment Michelle Meako became engaged, she told her intended, “I want a big wedding.” The couple wrote their own vows, picked out a cake, and planned a Canadian honeymoon. The couple omitted only one detail: a marriage license. They couldn’t get one because Michelle and her “spouse” are both women.

Is it unjust for a government to refuse to authorize same-sex “marriages”?

In *The Clash of Orthodoxies*, Princeton philosopher Robert George writes that the matrimonial law reflects a moral judgment: that marriage is inherently heterosexual, monogamous, and permanent—a union of one man and one woman. This judgment is based on both the biblical and natural law understandings that marriage is a two-in-one-flesh communion of persons. This communion is consummated and actualized sexually—that is, by acts that are reproductive, whether or not they result in children. They unite the spouses as a single procreative unit—an organic unity achieved even by infertile couples. Only a mated pair can be a complete organism capable of human procreation.

By contrast, homosexual acts have no relationship to procreation and can’t unite persons organically. As a result, these acts can’t be marital—which means relationships integrated around them can’t be marriages. Same-sex partners are physically incapable of marriage. It takes a man and a woman to become “one flesh.”

“Okay,” our secular neighbors may say, “that’s your definition of marriage. But why should you be allowed to impose your views on everyone else?”

That’s why we have to be ready with additional, nonreligious arguments for traditional marriage. For instance, if we expand the meaning of marriage to include same-sex unions, on what grounds could we legitimately oppose marriages of three or more people, or weddings between siblings?

Another argument, made by Bill Bennett, is the impact it would have on the shaping of human sexuality, especially among the young. “Societal indifference,” he writes, “about heterosexuality and homosexuality would cause a lot of [sexual] confusion.”

Since the beginning of recorded history, virtually every society and every major religion has revered and protected traditional marriage. It’s the institution that nurtures, protects, and civilizes children. Marriage forms the framework of society’s most basic institution: the family.

If supporters of same-sex marriage succeed, marriage will be reduced to nothing more than a legal contract between any two people based solely on feelings. True marriage would be abolished, and the damage to our society would be irreparable.

We Christians are often made to feel “intolerant” for not going along on issues like same-sex “marriage.” When others try to intimidate us into silence through the “bigot” label, we need to speak out—to explain why same-sex “marriage” is impossible and how attempts to impose it will harm us all.

Lord, give me the courage to be salt and light in the world and to speak up for your truth, regardless of the consequences.

J A N U A R Y 8

WHY MEN WON'T COMMIT

TO READ: RUTH 2:8-14

My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. . . . I have told the men not to touch you. Ruth 2:8-9

Tina wants to get married, but her boyfriend, Ted, just wants to move in. Ted is an exceptionally honest young man, so here is what he says: “Tina, I’m fond of you, and I want to live with you for the following reasons. First, it will make it easier for me to enjoy regular sex. Second, I want to protect my assets—assets I’d have to share with you if we got a divorce. Third, you already have kids, and I don’t want to support them. Fourth, I’m waiting for my perfect soul mate to come along. Until I meet her, I’d like to live with you.”

Ted’s arguments are incredibly insulting. And yet, according to a new study, these are exactly the reasons men want to live with women—reasons that not only insult women, but also make them big losers on the domestic front.

Researchers with the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University have published a report called *Why Men Won't Commit: Exploring Young Men's Attitudes about Sex, Dating, and Marriage*. It offers the top ten reasons men are reluctant to say, “I do.” Among them: They can get all the sex they want without marriage. They want to avoid the financial pitfalls of divorce. And they’re afraid marriage will demand too many changes and compromises. Apparently, their live-in girlfriends can get used to their bad habits or leave.

Most galling of all is men’s admission that they’re waiting for their “true love” to come along. Then they’ll tie the knot, buy a home, and father kids. Meanwhile, their live-ins can pick up their socks and provide sex on demand.

Grandma was right. Men won't buy the cow if they can get the milk free. Grandma was echoing the wisdom of the biblical writers. Read the Old Testament, and you'll get a picture of how carefully the ancient Israelites protected unmarried women: They knew how predatory, how utterly selfish, men can be. Taking on the responsibilities of a wife and children involved hard work that would last a lifetime. And men were motivated to shoulder those responsibilities only because their culture demanded it.

Modern women have far more freedom of movement than their sisters in the ancient world did. But human nature is still fallen. This means that men are as predatory as ever—and women today are paying the price for it in a culture that doesn't demand marriage.

The sad truth is that nearly everyone suffers from an inclination to be selfish. We need to become fully aware of relationships in which we ourselves are tempted to put our own desires above the good of others simply because we know we can “get away with it.”

O God, teach me to put generosity ahead of getting my own way, remembering that Jesus was tempted by Satan to put him first—but chose instead to sacrifice himself for the sake of all mankind.