



CONNECTED

July—September, 2025

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**HOW MUCH COURAGE
DO YOU REALLY HAVE?**



WINTER COMES

For many years, these words were imprinted on the top of my scratchpads: *"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap," Ecclesiastes 11:4.* Excuses are prolific and everywhere. You can talk yourself out of about anything, and feel justified in doing so. *It's too cold. It's too hot. It may rain today. I'm tired.* Someone quipped, *"If you need an excuse, ask the preacher. He's heard most of them."*

On May 30, I passed go for the 84th time. Yes! Winter comes! To everybody. Should we quit before we get to the *finish-line*? I think not. Reality may not allow what it once did; but do what you can. That's all God expects; but He surely expects that! Just your best. To me, it seems obvious that the thing to do is go forward with a grateful and fruitful life; and let Him handle the end. Just keep on living until you die.

Since my last *Connected Newsletter*, my calendar has had the freckles. I've spent far too much time with doctors; but I'm sure grateful they're there, and that I'm still around to visit them. My feet have been an issue for many years. I developed a full-fledged

case of Plantar Fasciitis; and for a few days, it reduced me to a walker. I have neuropathy and a few other things; but I am learning there's no substitute for staying active. Once you give-in to a wheel chair or Lazy Boy, they'll soon put you in a hole in the ground with a rock at your head. It's called a cemetery.

Since my last newsletter, it was my privilege to preach for Bro. Ed Neal in McKinney, Bro. Gary Milbourne in Pearland, Bro. Darren Simpson here at Northwest and twice for Bro. Thomas George at Lighthouse B.C. in Missouri City. I teach an adult class every Wednesday night at my home church; and am in the process of putting together 32 new lessons which I am calling *Faith Building Blocks*. Of course, I'm still working on the *Genesis* commentary while waiting on my editor. He is doing the

technical work on my third volume of *What We Believe and Why*.

I have finished the special *Teacher's Edition of Basic Bible Truths*. At the Rodgers Missions Conference in July, I will give a complimentary copy to every person who will commit to teaching the course at least one time.

I ask your prayers for a mammoth effort by myself and my lifelong attorney friend from Lufkin, Texas. On this 250th anniversary of the birthday of America, we have a vision and plan to refocus the entire nation on the core beliefs and values upon which she was founded, the beliefs which made her free, prosperous and the envy of the world.

It's great to be alive and still active in the service of the King of kings. Even in winter!

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There was a day when we hunted elk in the high Rockies.

Left to right: Randy Huffman, Lester Hutson, Mark Hutson, Kevin McCall & Brian Goldsby

TOO OFTEN, “CHANGE” IS ABUSED

After a good many trips around the bases, I have learned that all that glitters is not gold. It's wise to be cautious. Don't leap before you look. Until Jesus comes, there will be people in this world who will use their position with deceit to get their way. Some of them pastor churches. That reality has become painfully obvious in the scandal that has recently come to light at Second Baptist Church in Houston.

How many times have I heard, “*We need change?*” Maybe, but maybe not! Anybody with half-a-brain knows *change* is a **must**. Time moves on; change is all about us all of the time. We can't become *set-in-our-ways* and ignore the realities of life. To survive, we must adjust (change); it's not an option. Sermons about apathy, complacency and the lack of change always have a ring of truth; however, where I grew up we say, “*If it ain't broke, don't fix it.*”

Especially in this age, there seems to be a prevailing assumption in the new generation of preachers that they already know far more about church life than their predecessors. Seems that nobody knew much about *worship*, how to run a church or how to reach people until they arrived on the scene. They're pretty good at putting people down, intimidation and casting in a bad light those who ask questions and who do not quickly get on board with *change*. Too often, it seems to be a power thing: if you don't get on board, even when the “*change*” has neither been explained nor justified, you're a “,” “*against progress*” and “*resisting God's anointed*.” As Nancy Pelosi once irately insisted about a new health care bill, *just vote and pass the bill; you can read the details later*.

Leadership involves many responsibilities. It's not just about a parade of changes. It's about integrity, needed and well-thought changes, informing people and getting them on-board voluntarily. It's about changes that will better facilitate the Great Commission to get people saved, baptized and developed to maturity. Most changes cost money; but God forbid that His money be wasted on change that is merely *a wall-dressing want*, and not a need; a change that does little or nothing to enhance true ministry in one of the Lord's churches.

Sometimes, *change* is born out of ulterior motives. When the leadership of a church facilitates a hush-hush business meeting when the vast majority are uninformed, especially of the gravity of the meeting, the demons of hell rejoice. *Change* can be the product of a congregation that is kept in the dark or railroaded. It can be facilitated by one or a handful who are sure they are smarter and know more about God and how to run a church than everybody else, especially the old people who are stuck in the mud. In the Second Baptist case, the brain-trust engineered one of those secret meetings and put all the power into the hands of the pastor. In a sneaky coup, they cut the membership completely out of the picture. Now the pastor has exclusive power to replace himself, buy or sell assets, rename the church and essentially run the church at his discretion. In one meeting based on *change*, congregational government died and the pastor took full control.

Change is often needed. Churches get into ruts, properties need maintenance and facelifts, programs and staff changes are needed and sometimes churches need a new pastor, a new building or a new location. Nobody should resist change for the better; but *change* should always be out in the open, transparent and without deceit or intimidation. Leadership should justify the change, why it's needed, how it will enhance the work of the Lord and they should make sure the church people understand the ramifications including financial. Never get on a bandwagon for *change*. Look before you leap. There is no place for *change for change's sake*.

Tom Fortner

This great man of God was born May 19, 1935. He was promoted to his eternal home April 20, 2025.

When Tom was 10, he trusted Christ at a little country church in Campton, Kentucky. In 1959 he surrendered to preach. He served as pastor of churches throughout Tennessee and Kentucky. He preached in multiple places throughout America and in many other countries. He was a powerhouse in the pulpit and practiced what he preached. Only God knows how many lives he touched for the better.

He was my dear and personal friend. He was my hero and had my ultimate respect.



ACTING LIKE JESUS

Some years ago, a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night's dinner. In their rush to catch the plane home and with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly-missed boarding.

ALL BUT ONE! He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his feelings and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him, waved good-bye, told one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain his taking a later flight.

Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor. He was glad he did. The 16-year-old girl was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her; no one stopping and no one to care for her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket.

When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, “*Here, please take this \$50 for the damage we did. Are you okay?*” She nodded through her tears.

He continued on, “*I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly.*” As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, “*Mister....*” He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, “*Are you Jesus?*”

He stopped in mid-stride And he wondered. He gently went back and said, “*No, I am nothing like Jesus - He is good, kind, caring, loving, and would never have bumped into your display in the first place.*”

The girl gently nodded: “*I only asked because I prayed for Jesus to help me gather the apples. He sent you to help me. Mister, thank you for hearing Jesus.*”

THIS IS A VERY GOOD BOOK

The Case for Miracles

By Lee Strobel
 Zondervan Books
 Grand Rapids, Michigan
 ISBN: 978-0-310-35169-6

This book did not follow the beaten path. I have observed that most apologetic books are the product of someone attempting to defend and propagate his/her preconceived notions. It is rare to find an author who takes an in-depth and open-minded look at the other side of the matter under consideration. Unlike so many authors (and people in general), Lee Strobel started the investigation which led to this book with an open mind. He had opinions, but determined to let objective evidence speak for itself. Lee Strobel is an accomplished and prolific author. This man who was once a committed atheist is now a truly committed Christian. This within itself is a great reflection of his fundamental honesty and objectivity. As a former investigative reporter for one of America's top newspapers, in this book Strobel takes a candid, critical and thorough look both positively and negatively at miracles. It was his willingness to face the evidence that caused him to embrace Christ.

I share a close affinity with Mr. Strobel and the positions set forth in *The Case for Miracles*. I firmly believe that the nine miraculous spiritual gifts set forth in **1 Corinthians 12:1-10** ceased with the completion of the Scriptures. These miracles served as credentials that the revelation being given was indeed divine. When the revelation was finished, the need for credentials to confirm the Scriptures no longer existed.

It is a serious mistake to assume that with the completion of the Bible, God quit doing miracles. He didn't! Miracles still occur! When it serves His purposes, God performs a miracle. He does not use a preacher or other individuals to do the miracle; He simply unilaterally does something beyond the ability of mortals. He gets 100% of the credit and glory. We don't know why or when God is going to heal a person or divinely intervene in a matter, but it's ludicrous to imagine that the one who created the Universe cannot intervene in nature at will.

Mr. Strobel begins *The Case for Miracles* with an in-depth interview with one of humanity's all-time skeptics, Dr. Michael Shermer who runs the spectrum of arguments against miracles. Strobel was not timid. He brought up documented examples of miracles and asked Shermer to explain. He probed Shermer to ensure that the most complex and sophisticated of all objections to miracles were brought to light. They didn't get mad and attack; they spoke as intelligent people.

Strobel then went to Dr. Craig S. Keener, a noted skeptic who turned to belief. Knowing Dr. Keener's zeal, Mr. Strobel exercised great caution lest the evidence be exceeded and the picture become slanted. It's a telling interview filled with documented cases of Bonafide miracles.

Part 3 is Science, dreams and visions. Ever in a search for evidence, Lee Strobel sought out more scholarly and credible witnesses: Dr. Candy Gunther Brown and veteran missionary Tom Doyle. In this section of the book, much attention is given to the impact of prayer on miracles, especially on divine healing. The investigation uncovered that much supposedly objective research on the impact of prayer on healing has been corrupted by unscrupulous persons and poor methodology. Strobel's investigative research documented multiple cases where prayer was directly connected to miracles. It must be noted that the evidence made clear that no person has the power of healing, and not every person who is the object of prayer experiences a miracle. The fact is, miracles are not predictable. God does miracles only when it serves His purposes to do so; and on-lookers may never know what His purpose was.

Part 4 is a most inspiring look at three of God's most spectacular miracles: the Miracle of Creation, the Miracle of the Universe and Planet Earth and the Miracle of the Resurrection. The science and other evidence supporting these miracles is absolutely overwhelming and irrefutable. Once again, Mr. Strobel appeals to great scholars.

Part 5 is titled: *Difficulties with Miracles*. Lee Strobel is an honest scholar, and does not side-step the hard questions and issues. In this part, lots of hard questions are faced and answered well. I particularly enjoyed the interview with Dr. Douglas R. Grootuis, who is a brilliant scholar, yet a gentle and humble man.

The Case for Miracles is an outstanding book. It will challenge you, and it will fortify you. You will realize afresh that ours is not a God of the dead; He's also God of the living. I highly recommend this book.

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**Some things are better left unsaid;
 I usually realize that right after I say
 them.**

Chick-fil-A opened a restaurant in Redding, England. At first, they were warmly welcomed. In an earlier interview, CEO, Dan T. Cathy proclaimed his Christian faith with its support of the biblical family.

Nonstop, LGBTQ radicals harassed the Redding restaurant for eight straight days. Chick-fil-A closed their restaurant. They were driven out in the name of equality by hatred and intolerance. Christians fought for liberty and freedom for all. God-haters don't think that way. *We Will Not Be Silenced*, Lutzer, page 288

Thanks for reading my books!

CHRIST DIED FOR YOU!

ROUTINE EXCELLENCE

Though I think no person could ever merit such an epitaph, it would be a true honor to have *Routine Excellence* chiseled into your tombstone. Even though we're mortal, *routine excellence* should be the desire, goal and effort of every one of us. We should give our best! Routinely! All the time and every time!

Those who are saved are "*bought with a price*," the blood of Jesus Christ. He owns us; we're His "*servants*." He is our "*Master*" with a capital "M." Though as much as is humanly possible we're to "*live peaceably with all men*" (*Romans 12:18*), the fact remains that we answer to no man, but directly to God. Every sermon or song, how we dress, how we respond, how we behave and perform our job, how we treat others and adversity, our attitude, all we are, what we think and all our behavior is really our service to God. We live for Him. "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself,*" Luke 10:27. He's first! In all things! "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,*" 1 *Corinthians 10:31*.

Getting that truth into our systems is so liberating. Life is not about self or pleasing others; it's about God and living His way. Pleasing Him! We're not doing what we do for "*them*;" we're doing it for "**Him**." We want them to like us and what we do; and if they don't, it can really hurt; however, by giving it all to Him, even in the darkest valleys we have peace and deep satisfaction. There's nothing like knowing you're okay with Him. When nobody understands or cares, He understands and cares.

Why shouldn't we practice *routine excellence*? Why would we ever want to give Him less than our best? Not just now and then, but always! When our will is to do His will, "*We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me,*" *Hebrews 13:6*. Goal-line stands are for football teams; not God's people. Their heart is to routinely give their best. 100% of the time! Often, they fail. They fall down; but they get up and move forward with every intention of giving their best. They know their Savior and Master is worthy of more than left-overs and lackadaisical, half-hearted efforts. "*Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth,*" *Revelation 5:9-10*.

SUNDAY, MAY 1, 1955

For me, another mile-marker! When May arrived in 1955, I was 13 years old. The previous October, I had trusted Jesus Christ and my personal Savior. Right away, the Lord began dealing with me about the gospel ministry. At first, I didn't realize what was happening; but thanks to a godly dad and a wise pastor, I came face-to-face with God's will for my life. Yes! I was only 13.

On that first Sunday of May 1955, I walked the aisle at the Fairview Baptist Church near Lufkin, Texas. I publicly surrendered my life to the gospel ministry. Most of the people in that little country church thought it was just a cute childhood fantasy. I'm happy to say that on May 1 of this year, I thanked our great God for 70 years in the ministry. It has been my life; and if I had another chance, I'd do it again. What a privilege it has been to represent Him whose name is above every name!

I turned 14 on May 30. Three months later, the Prairie Grove Baptist Church called me to be her pastor. This little country church was about six miles from where I lived. They were down to about 20 members, and couldn't find a pastor. Thank God for these dear people. They gave me time to grow. Two years later, my dear mother was instantly killed in a car wreck. For a while, the trauma was too great for me to pastor a church. Just over a year later, the Fairview Baptist Church where I grew up and surrendered to preach called me to be her pastor. I stayed there for two years before planting the Berean Baptist Church in Lufkin. Two years later, I married Margaret, and we moved to Houston and attended Berean Baptist Church for a year before moving to Gatesville, Texas to help Bro. Bobby Paxton at the Bridge Street Baptist Church (now Gateway Baptist Church). On October 16, 1964 I accepted the call of the Eleventh Street Baptist Church in Beaumont, Texas. I was pastor there for almost 12 years before becoming pastor at Berean Baptist Church in Houston for 33 years. After Berean, I served with the Christian Law Association preaching in churches across America. When Pastor Tim Dulany went as a missionary to Panama, I accepted the pastorate of Northwest Baptist Church in Houston. It took four years to find my replacement who is Pastor Darren Simpson. I'm privileged to still serve at Northwest Baptist as *Author-Speaker*. I'm writing books and other Christian materials, preaching in many churches and deeply involved in many lives and a broad range of ministry. What a blessing it is to still be deeply engaged in gospel ministry! I can't imagine doing anything less.

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."

Edward Everett Hale