

Revving Up to Rise Above

Reading “gripe sheets” which pilots file after each flight can be hilarious – if you take risking your life humorously. On your next trip by air, best not share these actual exchanges with your seatmate:

Pilot: Auto-land very rough

Maintenance: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft

Pilot: IFF inoperative in OFF mode

Maintenance: IFF always inoperative in OFF mode

Pilot: #3 engine missing

Maintenance: Engine found on right wing after brief search

A businessman boards a plane to find, sitting next to him, an elegant woman wearing the largest, most stunning diamond ring he’s ever seen. He asks her about it. “This is the Klopman diamond,” she says. “It is beautiful, but it’s like the [Hope diamond](#); there’s a terrible curse that goes with it.”

“What’s the curse?” the man asks.

“Mr. Klopman.”

Pre-Flight Briefing

“Most people’s Christianity is like an old iron bed: firm at both ends and sagging in the middle. On one end you trust Christ as Savior and get your sins forgiven. On the other end, one day you go to heaven. In between it gets desperate. You have lots of questions that boil down to one: Where’s the abundant life Jesus promised?”

This is the opening volley from *THE REST OF THE GOSPEL: When the partial gospel has worn you out*. Author Dan Stone continues: “It was the love of God to show me that I couldn’t live the Christian life no matter how hard I tried.”

At my lowest point, contemplating ending my life in 1975, God thrust Gib Martin into my turbulent world. He shined my Bible’s light on two life-changing truths. (1) Although I’d been following Jesus, I had made my self-image “my life.” As Gib showed me, **Jesus wants and deserves to be my life** (Philippians 1:21, Colossians 1:27 and 3:4). Christ *in* me had promised that *He* will live that life since it’s preposterous to think that I could live the Christian life. **I couldn’t save myself, keep myself saved or take myself to heaven. Jesus does it all** (Philippians 1:6). What a deal! Our Creator wants to live *His* life *in* you, *as* you!

To get the life that lets you rise above is not through being religious, but through knowing who God says we are by being intimately connected with His Son Jesus. To clear this up, let's read Colossians 1:15-23; 2:6-15, 20-23 (p. 442 Msg).

Dan Stone learned that Jesus' sacrifice had made him right with God (2 Corinthians 5:21), that God cherishes him (Colossians 3:12), that God has filled him full of all Christ has to offer (Colossians 2:10), that God has forgiven ALL his sin (Colossians 1:22) and that he's always acceptable in God's presence (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Said Stone, "The Lord taught me that when I was crucified on the cross with Christ, as Galatians 2:20 had told me, I died to myself as my point of reference. His living in me was now my point of reference. He would live His life *through* me, *as* me. Has He revealed that to you? If He hasn't, He wants to, because that's the good news."

Gib's second advice: **"Thank God no matter what happens.** This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Gib said by flashing back on how faithful God had been to me in the past, my trust in Him would swell with gratitude. That led to regarding intruders in life as gifts that would draw me closer to Christ. Fear and anxiety never help us rise above. Per Graham Cooke, "The reason we're in our current position is always the result of our thinking (Romans 12:2). ...Once we accept that God is constantly and consistently working in our life, we can be at peace" (Philippians 2:13).

DISCUSS: If you apply "Jesus Christ is my life" and "thank God for everything" to your current situation, what would change?

Back to Paul as we read Colossians 3:1-17 (p. 446 Msg).

We are spirit, soul (mind, emotions and will) and body. Because we didn't create ourselves, our **spirit** needs to answer to an external power. But our egotistic **soul** snaps, "If I submit, it'll be on my own terms." Enter religion with rules to follow, giving us a sense of controlling our destiny. Our **body** carries out our soul's orders. But rest comes when we surrender to God. Let's read Isaiah 40: 25-31 (p. 540 NIV).

Pre-flight, the pilot gathers info to guide him to his destination. En route he may encounter unexpected situations to skirt or rise above. Life is about responding to problems. Jesus said, "The Truth will set you free" (John 8:32, 14:6).

DISCUSS: What do we need to, want to or should rise above in this life?

"May I See Your I.D.?"

Says Paul, the believer's real life is hidden with Christ, in God -- protected, secure, untouchable! Not even an airport security pat down could find it! We tend to judge by externals, but God, using His divinely timeless technology, sees man's real self.

Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and **the Life**” (John 14:6). My rising above depends not on me but on Him who *is* my life.

So much for “performance religion!” God has saved Jesus’ follower undeservedly through faith that God *gave* him, not by shaping up or being good (Ephesians 2:8-10). Knowing that Jesus paid for our pardon in full on the cross frees us to rise above, to forgive others because we’re forgiven, to serve because we can’t wait to serve someone else, not because we need to score points with a glowering God.

“Identity theft” victimizes believers until we, as Graham Cooke writes, understand that “God dealt with sin once and for all” on the cross. “It would be an insult to Jesus if the Father still considered sin to be alive in us. Our old nature is dead” (Romans 6:1-6). Only the *real* you is occupying God’s attention as He reminds us of our new, true identity because “our life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-4).

Before we surrender to God, our spirit controls our soul. The Bible calls it being spiritually blind and spiritually dead. Any good deeds that we do in this state do not spring from God’s Spirit, and therefore, harsh as it may seem, are of no heavenly, lasting good. The Bible says they’re worth is no more than “filthy rags.”

Paul sketches the pre-believer’s dilemma: “The wages of sin is death (separation from God), BUT the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Romans 6:23). We may be honest, hard-working, serving the poor, *always* at church, volunteering with refugees, orphans and foster parenting. Despite our best intentions, none of this impresses God who says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

When we trust God’s love and forgiveness, His Spirit comes to live in our spirit. His wisdom trickles down from our spirit to our mind, arousing our emotions (to feel what God feels), directing our will, then our bodies do that in which He takes great pleasure. And we develop a thankful attitude about whatever comes into our lives.

DISCUSS: Why do bad things happen to God’s kids? Is this the question to ask?

“It’s The Mystery To Me”

Paul says his version of the Gospel *completes* the Gospels preached before and right after Christ’s return to heaven. He calls it “*my gospel*,” the “*mystery*” and the “*secret*” which God kept under wraps until Jesus unwrapped it for Paul (Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:1-7). In Galatians Paul accuses “false teachers” of distorting his message: “Let them be cursed!” The resurrected Christ revealed to Paul that because of His sacrificial death, God had made peace with ALL men, forgiving ALL their sins. No middleman; God’s gone factory-direct.

DISCUSS: What does “no middleman” and “factory-direct” mean to you?

Out With The Old ... In With The New

Without Christ in our life, we don't fully comprehend what He did for us on the cross. We cannot be all that our Maker made us to be. We can't rise above. Does this make sense? When you close the big deal with God, you're *a new you* because *He* says you are (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)! You have a new identity, conferred on you by God who, at the cross, proved that He couldn't love you any more or any less.

DISCUSS: What was accomplished for you when Christ died, was buried and rose from the dead?

Launch Hour

Ready for take-off, Paul says to "set our minds on things above, not on earthly things. For (your old spirit) died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." We can fly! "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Your spirit, where Christ's Spirit resides, is the real you, with His power to rise above.

DISCUSS: How would having Jesus with you all day long change your life today?

From the moment we're reborn, as Jesus put it, Christ's Spirit fills our spirit, giving us the desire to serve God and do what pleases Him. We're now free to move about the country, loving and forgiving others, as God loves us, has totally forgiven us and is not angry at or disappointed with us (Romans 12:1). We can live in a state of thankfulness, assured that all that comes into our life is designed to make us more like Jesus. This is the "abundant life" Jesus has pledged to give us. This is rising above.

Now Boarding

Are you ready? This may or may not be the final boarding call. Why take that gamble! If you don't have your ticket for this trip, it's already been paid for. Just go to God's Will Call and, in faith, ask for and receive it. That might sound like this:

"God, thank You for Your Son's payment-in-full for my sin, freeing me from a hell-bound destiny. I surrender to You to put me in sync with You and keep me there, to rise above life's downward drag, to know You and to do what pleases You. Amen."

His Deal

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