

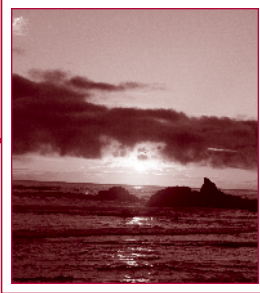


# I'M LISTENING, LORD

Volume 3

*Essays by Gene Shelburne*

**THE CHRISTIAN**  
**Appeal**



## I'M LISTENING, LORD

**“H**ear the word of the Lord!” the grand old prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel repeatedly counseled the people in their times. Now, in this generation that seems to be replacing Sunday worship with youth sports and Bible study with non-stop Facebook and Twitter, this call for people to listen to the Almighty seems to be increasingly urgent. In a time when so many lawmakers and educators and medical gurus seem bent on replacing biblical morality with an ethical system that labels nothing right or wrong, more than ever we need to hear God’s rules for our lives. In his devotional essays in this issue, Senior Editor Gene Shelburne bids us to say once more, “I’m Listening, Lord.”

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*“But to  
you who are  
listening,  
I say . . .”*

✻ The Lord Jesus  
Matthew 6



Curtis Shelburne

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *Cheap Therapy*

**O**n our first night in a cabin high on the Spanish Peaks I fired up my laptop and checked to see if we were going to have an Internet connection there.

We did. Surprisingly but somewhat appropriately, I suppose, I soon found myself peering at a poster that featured cloud-shrouded mountains with pine forests that looked a lot like those just outside our windows.

The caption on the poster: Nature. Cheaper Than Therapy. Our high-country experience that week would confirm this simple slogan.

Until we nested in that modest mountaintop cabin and hid away there from virtually all our usual responsibilities, neither my lady nor I realized how stressed out we had become.

No major crises had erupted in our world. No huge disappointments had dampened our days. Thankfully, we had not been facing the massive challenges of death or divorce or disease some of our dearest friends are dealing with.

But, while we knew we had so much to be thankful for, our stress levels still had crept up. Without our realizing it, life's demands had multiplied, the pace of our obligations had accelerated. More than we

knew, we needed that break.

What a blessing it was for us to get to retreat—even briefly—from the demands of work and family. No duties to discharge. No appointments to keep. Nowhere we had to be. That week I started our car and drove down off the mountain only one time—to buy my bride a steak in the village on our 58th anniversary.

As we hid out that week high in the Colorado pines, we had a new appreciation for the wisdom of our Lord. At one point in his ministry, Mark tells us, the crowds were so big and their requests so constant that Jesus and his men couldn't even find time to eat. He told his overworked crew, "Let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest a while."

Jesus and the Twelve withdrew from the demands of ministry, not because they were lazy or irresponsible or unloving. They retreated to a quiet place in order to refresh their weary spirits and renew their energy—to revitalize their ministry God had called them to.

Sometimes the best way—possibly the only way—to get ready to do something is to do nothing.

What a blessing it was for us that week to "put it in neutral" and let the Lord renew our souls. *CA*

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *Expensive Experience*

**A** preacher friend of mine—a fellow for whom I have a lot of respect—got invited not long ago to preach a series of sermons on the dicey subject of divorce and remarriage.

In the large congregation that assigned him this topic, several people were struggling with it. And the leaders in that church were finding out what the Pharisees knew when they tried to embarrass Jesus with questions on this subject. They had learned that nobody's ideas about divorce will ever please everybody.

My preacher friend surmised that he got the invitation to address this hot topic because the inviters thought his own experience equipped him to know all about it. He had been preaching almost four decades, so he knew what the Scriptures say. But, perhaps more important in this case, this preacher has been married three times, buried one wife, and got divorced by another.

Instead of bragging or celebrating his hard-gained insights, my friend said he would much rather have been a novice on the topics at hand.

I understood what he was saying. A few of my buddies have thoughtlessly popped off about my

handicap parking tag. They wish out loud that they had a permit to park as close to the door as I do. So far I've managed to bite my tongue, but instantly in my mind I yell, "I wish I didn't!" With all my heart I wish I didn't qualify for that permit. I wish that the stroke that stole the feeling in my foot and leg never had happened.

No sensible person wants to hurt. None of us welcomes the damage of a divorce or a stroke. But no amount of faith or righteousness makes any of us exempt from life's disasters. Even the best people lose jobs, bury children, get cancer, go broke.

Bad experiences never are entirely bad, though. My friend's hardest days prepared him to offer genuine pastoral guidance and solace to those who now are hurting just as he did.

Surely the apostle Paul wasn't elated that he got to spend multiple years in prison and in chains, but later he realized that this harsh experience taught him to trust more fully in God's grace.

Who knows? Your present pain may be drawing you closer to the Lord. Your breaking heart may be getting you ready today to repair someone else's heart tomorrow. *CA*

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *Mountain Sounds*

**B**lessed quietness was what amazed me most when I first stepped out onto the deck of the mountaintop cabin we had rented. That was our first morning there, and I couldn't believe how quiet it was. Compared to the constant roar of any city or the cacophony of noise even in small towns today, the silence was incredible.

Not even a whisper of mechanical noise reached my ears—no vehicles rumbled, no air conditioners growled, no dogs yapped, no voices babbled, no lawn mowers droned. I was amazed that today any place on earth could be so marvelously muted.

By mid-morning that first day I became aware of the swoosh of wind ruffling the tall pines. Then, high in the nearby pines, I heard the loud squawk of a raven. My wife's ears are better than mine. She heard smaller song-birds chirping unseen high in the surrounding forest.

Slowly that alpine world began to wake up. Not far down the slope a chainsaw whined, but only for a moment. Later in the quietness I heard the crunch of footsteps. Two of our cabin neighbors—a plucky elderly couple—came hiking briskly down the gravel road.

It was almost noon before I heard the first sound of a vehicle. When I looked to identify the source, I spotted

a bright red pickup driven by a local who, unlike us summer tourists, had somewhere he needed to be. After he vanished down the hill, quietness engulfed us again.

Our noon snack was over, and I had gone outside on the deck again when I heard, on a road far below us, the rumble of a truck. Not a big one. Perhaps a FedEx guy, or maybe a repair truck, I thought.

Whoever it was, the truck noise died in just a few seconds, and again I stood there under the towering trees almost drunk on the absence of sound. What a rare experience in our constantly loud world!

Only when I detected the brief distant roar of a commercial jet gliding unseen across the sky several miles above us did it occur to me that in my usual world some sort of sound bombards me from above all the time.

Until that week on the mountain, I had forgotten what a blessing quietness can be. I reacted as Pastor Richard Dahlstrom did while trekking the Alps. He wrote, "Silence baptizes everything like a symphony."

In 19:4 (The Message), the psalmist says of the stars, "Their silence fills the earth." As a result, he says, "Unspoken truth is spoken everywhere." Up there in the silence of the mountains, I heard those truths. *CA*

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *God's Critters*

**T**he first shafts of sunlight had burst from atop the Spanish Peaks and sliced through the tall pines and aspens that surrounded us.

I stepped out on the elevated deck of our rented Cuchara cabin and swept the surrounding forest with my eyes, looking for any signs of wildlife.

Four decades ago our family tent-camped and trout fished in the high country just a few miles from there. Our neighbors in that Bear Lake tent camp—a band of early-season bow hunters—told us that Colorado's state-record bow-hunting elk had been taken just a thousand feet or so up those slopes.

So I had high hopes as I peered into the dense woods around our cabin. Who knew what kind of exotic critter might emerge?

But the forests were still and quiet that morning. When we stopped in the village the day before to pick up the cabin key, somebody told my wife that only a few days before they had seen a black bear. Locked dumpsters at the foot of the cabin road bore mute evidence that such critters did indeed roam the mountain.

So I was watching. Hoping. Maybe a prize elk with a fairy-tale rack would amble by, or a bear worth telling about would come prowling on the premises below.

Not that morning. The biggest—the only—wildlife specimen I saw in these early hours was a tiny, jet-fast ground squirrel not much larger than a city-bred mouse.

Fast forward three days.

I was half asleep, lounging on the cabin deck, when I was startled by a whirring. When I opened my eyes, not two feet from my nose buzzed an incredibly aggressive hummingbird, five times the size of the shiny, docile ones that delighted me when I was a kid in south Texas.

As the temps crept up before noon on Wednesday, I retreated inside and was killing time checking emails and Internet news. The creaking of the steps up to the south deck told me we had company.

When I turned to the arcadia door to see which neighbor had dropped by to chat, I found myself nose-to-nose with a much-too-friendly black bear. Thankfully, the door was closed. And, when we didn't offer to share our noon snack, he soon ambled back into the forest.

That week on the mountain helped me to understand better why the psalmist called on "all animals, tame and wild" to praise the Lord. The Lord himself said in Isaiah 43:20, "The wild animals honor me." Do we? *CA*

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## Books for a Dollar

Until my lady managed to make a spur-of-the-minute booking for us that night, I don't think I'd ever set foot inside the beautiful old Cuchara Inn.

Soon after we checked in, several shelves of books on the west lobby wall caught my eye. This rustic inn must have a lending library, I surmised. Then, behind the Keurig and the breakfast oatmeal, I spotted the sign that told me they were used books for sale. At half price.

When I sidled over to take a closer look, a bevy of familiar author names jumped out at me: Clancy, Grisham, Baldacci, Mary Higgins Clark, and a host of others. The name that grabbed me first, though, was Greg Iles. In huge luminous silver letters, his name beamed at me on a pristine hardback copy of one of his thrillers. For the eye-popping price of one dollar!

The truth is that I probably wouldn't have paid much more than that for a book with Iles' name on it. If you are a regular reader of my columns, you may remember an uncomplimentary one I wrote last year about that author's work. When a friend recommended his novels, I sadly defiled my Kindle with an Iles series that makes his readers wallow non-stop in grammatical porn.

After that disgusting experience,

I had erased Iles' name from my list of authors to read while vacationing, but I kept hearing better opinions of his work. And—the book price cried out to my cheap soul—for just a dollar I could check it out. For one buck I could see if he did any better in the one he called *The Devil's Punchbowl*.

He did. On several pages Iles still got more erotically graphic than the plot required, but his story was well told and the plot in this one did make the raunchier scenes more like narrative than porn. I came away from it convinced that my greenback had been well spent.

Iles, of course, is not the only modern novelist who stains his pages with seduction and lust and bedroom bedlam. Evidently the major publishers sip the same marketing Kool-aid as Hollywood producers and Victoria's Secret ad writers. They know that sex sells.

Unfortunately, porn addiction develops just like most others. At first we just dabble in it. Then it takes bigger and bigger doses to give us a thrill. What seems like innocent twiddling to start with silently morphs into a life-ruining craving we can't turn off.

So, instead of being *The Devil's Punchbowl*, that dollar book could have been the devil's bait. And the price could have been too high to imagine. CA

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## An Ump's Decision

Art connoisseurs often turn up their prissy noses at grassroots works such as Norman Rockwell's vignettes of common people in everyday settings. Such snorts got quieter after a Rockwell sold for 1.6 million dollars.

And, to rub the salt in a bit deeper, that high-priced painting was just a prep piece—the artist's practice daubing to get ready to paint his famous “Tough Call.”

Both of these canvasses, the one he warmed up on and the “real” one, capture three umpires with furrowed brows. The palm of one of them reaches out to catch a raindrop while they decide whether to call the game.

Part of the surprising auction price for this second-tier Rockwell painting surely rests on the fact that the artist autographed it to Umpire John “Bean” Reardon.

I ran across the news of the lucrative sale of this baseball painting during the same week when I enjoyed fellow-columnist Jon Mark Beilue's fun piece on baseball memories in our town.

Having often perched in the old Potter County baseball stadium and cheered on the Amarillo Gold Sox (and their later incarnations), I shared his delight in the tales of their past. But Jon Mark left out one of the best.

Our mutual friend, Welcome Partner head-honcho and longtime media personality DJ Stubben, tells of the time when she was pounding the organ keys at a Gold Sox doubleheader.

During the first game, as she tells it, the umpires made several ludicrous calls in favor of the out-of-town guys. Gold Sox fans got on their case. Loudly.

When the first game ended and the Gold Sox got clobbered, thanks to the umpires' dubious calls, DJ began the intermission with a loud organ rendition of “Three Blind Mice.” She chuckles as she recalls that the home-plate umpire had her evicted from the stadium.

Isn't it interesting that for at least a century now in America the activities involved in baseball have given us a commonly-held set of codes and symbols and terms that all of us understand? Whether we're smiling at Rockwell's umps or giggling at DJ's blind mice, all of us grasp the message. All of us can get in on the fun.

For at least a century longer, another strata of experience and words and assumptions common to Americans was rooted in the Bible and Christian faith. That shared link is sadly vanishing. Allude to a Bible character or quotation now and you're likely to evoke a blank stare. Defend biblical morality and you're a Martian on Venus. CA

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## Growing Old

As the sum of my years keeps rising, I am more and more convinced that age is less a matter of math than of perspective.

In his thriller called *Tripwire*, I ran across a line where Lee Child said of one of his characters, "He was old. Maybe sixty . . ." I broke out laughing.

Was that Child's view of the man? I wondered.

Or was the author looking at the fellow through the eyes of who he would like to have as his typical readers (maybe middle-aged or younger)?

Just a few days after I ran across that Lee Child line, one of our local newspaper reporters was dead serious when he called a sixty-three-year-old victim "an elderly man." I wondered how old that reporter must be.

Don't hear me wrong. I'm not being critical. All of this amuses me and interests me because I have seen too clearly my own sliding scale of age measurement. If I try to warm up a sermon script I wrote when I was in my early thirties, I chortle when I find that back then I was using fifty or sixty as generic terms for "old." Now that I'm knocking on the door of eighty, what's "old"?


When my late father was still active in his mid-eighties, one day I

asked him, "Dad, in your own mind, how old do you see yourself?" He pondered for a moment, and then replied, "About twenty-eight."

Age is a matter of perspective. Comedian George Burns, who lived to be one hundred, said in his later years, "Retirement at sixty-five is ridiculous. When I was sixty-five, I still had pimples."

General Douglas MacArthur wrote: "You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair. In the central place of every heart there is a recording chamber; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, and courage, so long are we young. When the wires are all down and your heart is covered with the snows of pessimism and the ice of cynicism, then and then only are you grown old."

The biblical psalmist agreed. He wrote that those of us who are righteous will "bring forth fruit in old age. They will be full of sap and green, to show that the Lord is upright" (92:14-15, WEB).

And God promises us "old" folks: "Even when you're old, I'll take care of you. Even when your hair turns gray" (Isaiah 46:4, GWT). 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## Word Choices

My regular column readers no doubt will recall my previous expressions of dismay about the way some current journalists mislead us with the word "after."

Soldiers get slandered in "after" headlines. Fox News reported, "Seven Marines killed after explosion at Nevada military base." Were they being punished for it? What about the elite sailor that Fox said "was killed after a parachute training accident"? Stiff penalty?

Cops get plastered too. "1 officer killed after police cruiser crashes." That will teach him to drive better!

Sometimes weather or accidents get the blame. AP quoted a Kenyan official, "1 student killed after accidental explosion at school." AOL blamed local officials for saying, "At least 65 killed in Haiti after Hurricane Matthew." In both cases the officials knew better. Ditto for Fox's grabber line: "Dozens killed after magnitude 7.3 quake strikes Nepal." They really died in the quake.

Often just reading the first line of a news report will show us that the headline writer is the one who screwed up things by using "after." An AP headline, for example, said, "4 injured after severe storms," but the story's lead line said, "A severe storm left four people injured."


Likewise an AOL headline told us,

"Two Killed After Tree Crashes on Home," but the story told us two brothers were killed by the falling tree. A Fox headline emblazoned, "Texas man killed after being hit by 4 cars," but the story told us that the man crossing a busy, dark highway was killed "when he was hit" by the cars.

Fox's headline also insisted, "Homes damaged after tornadoes hit." But their story told the truth. It really was the tornadoes, not vandals, that damaged those houses. Or the French activist who was "killed after brutal attack by skinheads," a la Fox's headline, in fact was killed by them, the later story made clear.

Often the problem may not be "after." Just swapping "dead" for "killed" may fix this confusion. In my local newspaper one head declared, "Woman killed after stray cow causes wreck." But the first line clarified that the poor lady was dead (not killed) after the wreck.

Something is wrong when professional wordsmiths like these headline writers muddy their message by mis-using simple words.

This concerns me because I've spent six decades in a profession that depends hugely on the right use of words. Those of us who speak and write for "the Word" need to be especially careful to do it right. 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## Torso Graffiti

They face a monstrous task, I know, but slowly my kids and grandkids are softening my gut-level, negative, knee-jerk reaction to garish body art.

When tattoos started showing up even on normal, decent people in our society, my immediate reaction was as negative as my normally gracious father's had been to facial hair on any young man.

Looking back, I now suspect that much of his strong revulsion toward beards and mustaches stemmed unconsciously from his awareness of how seriously such facial adornment would limit the prospects of the hairy ones in the world they lived in back then.

At least part of my initial reaction to tattoos was rooted in similar concerns. Many of the young men and women getting their torsos decorated had no way to know how many of their prospective employers first saw tattoos on the pecs and biceps of soldiers returning from war, veterans now regretful that they ever got drunk enough to pay for ink on their skin.

When I was a teenager back in the 1950s, every decent guy I knew who had a tattoo wished he didn't.

So my earliest reaction to tattoos was not unlike my take on the kind

of graffiti that mars the landscape from Gatwick to Victoria in London. Any culture that tolerates such defilement has given up on basic decency.


Torso graffiti still sends that message—on purpose in some cases, even if tattoos are becoming more acceptable in polite circles today.

A few years ago, for example, a poor fellow got bludgeoned to death at an airport in Sydney, Australia, when two rival gangs arrived on the same flight. Police reported that a deadly melee broke out between “two groups of heavily tattooed men—one believed to be connected to the Hell's Angels and the other to the Comancheros biker gangs.”

Why were those thugs wearing all those tattoos? To send a message.

Old codgers like me—guys who grew up in a world where tattoos always were either a mistake or an anti-social announcement—have a hard time learning to interpret them any other way.

Since I know this reaction is common in mature folks, I find it hard to smile and signal my approval when I see promising young adults opting for hard-to-hide tattoos that may penalize them for years to come.

Is it ugly for me to want what's best for them? 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## Hook, Line, and . . .

Have you ever visited the little Oklahoma panhandle town named Hooker? It's just a few miles from Booker. A perfect layout for frequent confusion.

While I was running errands around town a few days ago, I happened to be listening to Rush Limbaugh when he got a rare call from a really sharp fellow who lives in Hooker.

In the instant before Rush could switch to his next caller, that guy from Hooker managed to inject, “That's a location—not a vocation.” Rush chuckled. So did I.

Unless you're a lawman on your town's vice squad, you probably don't know many hookers.

Years ago one of my fine deacons filled that exact role. One night he asked me to ride along with him.

Before we hopped into his car and began popping into the seamier bars in our city, he plopped a photo file onto the police station desk in front of me. It contained several dozen pictures of our area's active hookers.

Unlike Hollywood's stereotype, only two or three of those ladies-of-the-night were even slightly attractive. But they were the real McCoy. Before that night was over, I had been face to face with several of them.


The very same day when I heard

Limbaugh talking to the resident of Hooker, in John Alan Turner's latest book, *Still Me*, I read a line he wrote to compliment Jesus. He said, “Sailors and hookers liked to hang out with him.”

There, within just two or three hours, were those hookers again. Was God trying to say something to me?

Let me be frank with you. I don't know a single hooker today. Not one. In my role as a small-church pastor, the women I deal with daily are the most upright, godly, well-behaved gals on the planet. The hooker babes don't seek me out. In that way, I'm not like Jesus.

When my dear friend Sister Olivia Prendergast was here running our original hospice, that little Irish nun constantly amazed me with her ability to form solid friendships with the roughest, toughest outcasts in our town. The drag queens and hookers loved her. Communicating Christ's love for them was Olivia's special gift.

Jesus warned the self-righteous church leaders of his day to get out of the way, because the hookers were apt to make it into heaven before they did (Matthew 21:31). In the next breath he praised John the Baptist because he was the kind of preacher even hookers wanted to hear. I wish I had that gift. 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *Signs of Aging*

High in the mountains where rustic is often the decor of choice, it can be hard to tell how old some of the cabins actually are. They're supposed to look old even if they're not. But the last one we rented had some tell-tale giveaways that, despite some modernizing, it had been perched on that mountainside for a long time.

The first hint I detected was the glass in the cabin windows. On our first morning there, when I peeked out to check the sun rising behind the east Spanish Peak, the distorting waves in the Depression glass reminded me of similar squiggles in window glass in the Key Place (my mother's childhood home built in the 1920s).

One sign of a relatively recent cabin upgrade was the occasional availability of a weak Wi-Fi connection. But when my laptop battery ran low and I needed to plug in its charger, I discovered that all the electrical sockets in the cabin except the one behind the refrigerator were two-prongers like the antique ones I had to replace years ago in our pre-WWII rent houses.

Some benevolent soul had added indoor plumbing and a modern shower to the now-aging cabin. At least four decades ago our little family spent a heavenly four-dollar

night in an even older cabin less than a quarter mile up the trail on that same mountain. That first cabin had only a path and a two-holer, so the plumbing upgrade in this latest one made us give thanks.


Without actually looking for them, one by one I stumbled across bits of evidence that the unfamiliar cabin we were roosting in was old.

Confronted with this evidence of age, I then found myself wondering: at least in some instances, do you have to be old to see what is old?

Would the evidence of aging that seems so cut-and-dried to me mean anything to my youngest grandkids?

Soon my reflections roamed beyond rustic cabins. I began to wonder if the same limitations that keep even a brilliant teenager from deciphering any mention of a party-line or oleo or boils would also make her come up blank if you read her Bible verses that tell her, "Submit to your husband," or, "Be a keeper at home."

Only those of us who have been around a lot of years can remember "the good ole days" when most of our neighbors spent Sunday morning on a pew somewhere instead of on a ballfield, or when TV and Hollywood banned gutter-talk and porn.

How old do you have to be to see "old"? 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *Not Enough?*

When the holy Trinity were creating our universe, only one vital component was still missing. "Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves.'"

"So God created human beings in his own image," the next verse tells us. "In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

That was enough for the Creator, but evidently not enough for folks in Vermont and California. Their legislators have decided to add a third gender to their driver's licenses. And California even offers a "binary" (gender-neutral) option now on birth certificates.

I'm waiting to see how many riots will erupt over what they decide to call that new third category. It's sure to offend somebody, since nobody seems to be pleased by anything anybody says on this topic. Somebody is sure to call you a homophobe regardless of terms you use to discuss these issues. The ink on Vermont's third-gender law was hardly dry when *Burlington Free Press* fired their editor for objecting to it.


Headlines tell us that Canada's new laws criminalize anybody who dares to use the wrong gender pronoun. By "wrong," I suppose they mean one that the person being described dislikes.

If you think this is confusing, put yourself in the shoes of the officials up in Illinois who are trying to communicate with each other about the plight of a transgender woman. Because of her own gender choices, she got locked up in one of their male prisons. As we might expect, she got abused there, so now they need to move her. But where?

The way God made us was simple. For centuries all the relatives involved would take one look at a newborn's genitals and announce, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" How could any midwife or obstetrician filling out a birth certificate come up with a third choice?

But in our "educated" western world today, we have thrown God's simple plan out the biological window. Our best educated experts can't tell a boy from a girl. And anybody who thinks they can, gets labeled a bigot.

All of this would be laughable if it didn't pose such a daunting challenge to those of us who want to believe the Bible and still be loving and kind at the same time.

On every social level—in the military, in schools, in prisons, even in airport restrooms—our current gender confusion leaves us with a muddled mess. No wonder God warns us not to take this route. 



# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## A Priority Assignment

Most of us know at least a tale or two about Teddy Roosevelt. How many do you know about his son?

Let me share one. Back in World War II days, Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., stood in an airport waiting for a flight. He was close enough to the ticket counter to hear a sailor's request for a seat on the same plane. The sailor told the woman behind the counter, "I don't have much time, but I want to go see my mother."

Unfortunately, the flight was already full. When Teddy, Jr., heard the agent's negative reply, he stepped over and told the clerk to give his seat to the sailor.

Surprised by this, Roosevelt's travel companion asked, "Teddy, aren't you in a hurry, too?"

"It's a matter of rank," he replied. "I'm only a general; he's a son!"

Teddy, Jr., was right. Nobody has more influence on your mother or matters more to her than you, her child. One way you and I can obey the Bible command to "honor your father and mother" is to recognize this.

Back in 1962, when I was still in my first year as a full-time pastor, on Mother's Day my mother bridged the 700 miles between us by sending me an anonymous poem titled "Like Mother, Like Son":

*Do you know that your soul  
is of my soul such part*

*That you seem to be fibre and core  
of my heart?*

*None other can pain me as you,  
dear, can do;*

*None other can praise me,  
or please me, like you.*

*Remember the world will be  
quick with its blame*

*If sorrow or shame ever darken  
your name.*

*Like mother, like son, is a saying  
so true*

*That the world will judge largely  
that mother by you.*


*Be yours then the task, if task  
it shall be,*

*To make a proud world to do  
homage to me.*

*Be sure it will say when its verdict  
you've won,*

*She's reaped as she's sowed;  
lo, this is her son!*

My mother has been gone from us now for more than a quarter of a century, but not a day passes when she doesn't touch my heart and mind in some way.

When she was still alive, nothing made me happier than knowing that I had made her happy. Although she's been gone for so long, that's still a huge influence on me. I'm still trying to obey Proverbs 23:25 that says, "May she who gave you birth be happy." Or, as The Message translates it, "Make your mother proud!" 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## What We Sow

The Bible could not possibly be clearer in its message that our behavior always has consequences.

Those of us who live in agricultural centers surely understand the apostle Paul's warning that we will reap whatever we sow. Nobody plants thistles and expects to harvest corn. We don't sow dandelion seeds, hoping to grow roses. Bad seeds produce bad crops. Every time.

Over and over Moses promised his people prosperity and security and happiness if they were careful to do what God commanded. But he also added repeated warnings that those who sinned would bring trouble on themselves and on their children.

In this age of entitlement, far too many—even the most prosperous and popular among us—think they can do anything they please without paying the price for misbehavior. It doesn't work that way.

Do you remember what got the most media attention during the 2018 NFL draft week? Not the young stars rising to fame. Not the obscene salaries offered to the new recruits. Not a day passed without some reporter focusing on the rants and whines and complaints of Colin Kaepernick.


In every interview this benched

quarterback blamed everybody else in the NFL for costing him his lucrative job. Not once did we hear him admit that he alone caused his own problems. He made a foolish choice, and now he was reaping what he sowed. He was finding out the hard way that this is the way life works.

It's not his fault, of course, that he grew up in a generation that too often assume that they get a free pass for breaking all the rules.

Many today, in fact, think there are no rules. At least, none that apply to them. The Bible's rules are outdated and needlessly restrictive of their fun, they insist. Every night's gruesome headlines chronicle the price people inevitably pay for sex without boundaries, drugs without discipline, porn instead of decency.

"The wages of sin is death," the Bible solemnly warns us. If you doubt this basic moral truth, just watch the six o'clock news. Tragically, this death too often happens to innocent victims—to people in a head-on crash with a drug addict or a drunk, or to helpless children caught in the mindless mayhem of out-of-control parents. Sin always comes with a price.

Only if we plant the seeds of loving, wise, upright behavior can we hope to harvest blessings. 

# I'M LISTENING, LORD

## *Foolish Anger*

“A fool gives full vent to his anger,” Proverbs 29:11 warns us, “but a wise man keeps himself under control.” Each day’s headlines identify lots of fools.

Fools such as that Lubbock, Texas, nut who bashed in McDonald’s drive-up window with a ball bat when a computer glitch canceled his biscuits-and-gravy order.

Fools like that Rhode Island dude who got so upset at the Boston airport about his lost luggage that he punched and spat on a state trooper and sprayed hand lotion in his face.

Fools like the 58-year-old Floridian who got so mad about cat hair on the couch that he shot and killed his roommate.

Fools like that YouTube shooter out in San Diego—the one who went postal and came back to shoot his former bosses and co-workers after he was fired.

Isn’t it strange that for so many folks the first response to frustration is anger—the one response that is least likely to fix whatever has gone wrong?

Hardly a night passes when we don’t hear a news report about the latest incident triggered by road rage.

Is road rage something new? Did drivers of horses and buggies shout and shake fists and cuss out other

buggy drivers who offended them?

This happens so often today that I wonder if anger management classes should be required before anybody gets a license to climb behind the wheel of a vehicle. Today the rage far too often gets expressed with bullets instead of bluster.

In April 2018 one Virginia driver’s road rage got cured in a way he obviously did not anticipate. This furious fellow stormed out of his car to confront the van driver behind him. But his temper fit didn’t last long.

Before the mad man could spew three curse-words or spout insults at the offending driver, an 18-wheeler that couldn’t dodge the two vehicles shut down in the middle of the highway flattened him.

That same week in Ohio police arrested four students who threatened to shoot up their school and made hit lists of targets they wanted to stab to death. One of the culprits said this was “his way of venting his anger.”

Be slow to anger,” the Bible warns us. Why? Because our anger “does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:20). In fact, blowing our stack almost always makes a bigger mess of whatever was aggravating us in the first place. *CA*

“Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear.”



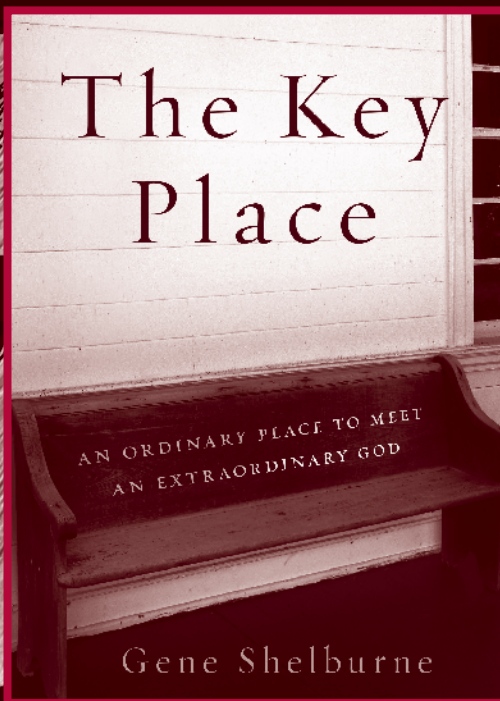
**James**

*James 1, The Message*

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