



— AN ARM AROUND — MY SHOULDER

AND OTHER ESSAYS BY JOE R. BARNETT

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal

Preface



John Gulley

So you won the lottery on Tuesday. (Found the ticket on the parking lot.) Won big. Sure, the IRS got a hefty cut, but what was left was utterly amazing! When you finally lay down, your head was literally pounding as you tried to imagine life with that much money. What you didn't count on was not waking up on Wednesday. Didn't realize the head-pounding brain-strain was actually an aneurysm. You only take with you what you *were*, not a dime of what you *had*. So what really mattered? This month Dr. Joe R. Barnett puts his arm around our shoulders and helps us answer that question.

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If God Is FOR You THEN WHO...



John Gulley

**“If God is for us, then
who can be against us?
He who did not spare
his own Son, but gave
him up for us all,
how will he not also . . .
graciously give us
all things?”**

 **Paul**
Romans 8

John Gulley



an arm around your **SHOULDER**

JACKIE ROBINSON is celebrated as the first African-American to play major league baseball, breaking the color barrier and changing professional sports forever.

(Note: Actually, Jackie wasn't the first black ballplayer in the major leagues. That honor belongs to Moses "Fleet" Walker, way

back in 1883. But that's a history lesson for another time.)

Robinson is lauded today but was reviled in 1947 when he signed on with the Brooklyn Dodgers. When he jogged onto the field or came to bat at opposing ballparks, the sneers and slurs were deafening.

Jackie preferred playing at home, in Brooklyn's

Ebbets Field, where there were no racial taunts—until he misjudged a sizzling grounder. A trickle of boos quickly swelled into a roar. Jackie stood at second base, head bowed, humiliated.

Shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese walked over, draped his arm around Jackie's shoulder, and glared at the 25,000 spectators. Ebbets Field became as quiet as

a graveyard. Jackie said Reese's arm around his shoulder saved his career.

Crowd conduct is often judgmental. Callous. Brutal.

Luke introduces us to Zacchaeus, a short-stuff

"WHEN ZACCHAEUS HEARD THAT JESUS WAS TREKKING THROUGH TOWN, HE WANTED TO GET A LOOK AT HIM."

who had become rich by exorbitant tax-collecting fraud (Luke 19)—the sleazebag of Jericho. When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was trekking through town, he wanted to get a look at him. His curiosity had been simmering for nearly three years—ever since he'd heard that Matthew, one of his tax-collecting comrades had gone batty and was

quitting his lucrative tax racket to join up with this nowhere-to-lay-his-head Jesus.

Zacchaeus moseyed into the crowd, hoping to go unnoticed. Fat chance.

“LUKE DOESN'T TELL US WHAT JESUS AND ZACCHAEUS TALKED ABOUT, BUT HE TELLS US THE END OF THE STORY.”

People bitterly hissed his name, cursed him. Skirting the mob, he ran ahead as fast as his short legs would carry him and scrambled up a tree. It was from this perch that he first saw Jesus.

When Jesus came close, he stopped, looked up, and locked eyes with Zacchaeus. When he spoke, Zacchaeus' heart almost stopped: “Zacchaeus, come down,

I'm going to your house with you.” Jesus knew his name, his address, and his reputation.

The next few hours are blank space; Luke doesn't tell us what Jesus and

Zacchaeus talked about. But he does tell us the end of the story: Zacchaeus said, “Lord, I'm going to give half of all I have to the poor,

and to those I cheated I'm going to give four times as much as I took.”

Jesus looked at him and said, “Today salvation has come to this house.” And his last recorded words to him were, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

How's that for an arm around the shoulder?

Have you ever been lost? I don't mean

damned-and-doomed lost—I mean lost because you took a wrong turn and ended up in the wrong place. Are you there now? Have you lost your way because you've abandoned your principles, your values, your fervor? If you've walked away from your better self, there's a good chance it's messed up your relationships—with people and with God.

Maybe you made a mistake, misjudged a situation, bungled a play. You're standing at second base, head bowed, humiliated, defeated. Do

you still have a chance to get in the game?

Yes, you do.

Jesus sees the good in you, knows your heart, knows your worth. That's his arm around your shoulder, standing up for you, turning you in the right direction, telling you that the game isn't over.

“If God is for [you], who can be against [you]. . . . [You] are more than conquerors through him who loves [you]” (Romans 8:31, 37).

How's that for an arm around your shoulder? Lace up your cleats and stay in the game.



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questions worth ASKING

VOLTAIRE SAID the way to judge a person is by the questions they ask. That, it seems to me, is especially true of questions we ask ourselves.

Here are a few questions that are worth asking:

Is anger going to make this better?

Some people send our anger

thermometer sky-high: callous bosses, crabby salespeople, exasperating know-it-alls, disrespectful children, surly spouses.

Conflict arouses anger that seems justified—but that doesn't mean it's wise to yield to it. The end result of anger is often more damaging than the incident that caused it.

Anger makes things worse. Always. It's bad for your heart, bad for your mind, bad for those around you. Bad. Period.

"Refrain from anger and turn away from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil" (Psalm 37:8).

Is this the kind thing to do?

When Jeff Bezos was a teenager, he read a treatise

that cited the number of minutes a person's lifespan was reduced by smoking a cigarette. His grandmother was a smoker. He did the math and told her, "You've lost

"CONFLICT AROUSES ANGER THAT SEEMS JUSTIFIED—BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S WISE TO YIELD TO IT."

nine years of your life, Grandma."

She burst into tears. Jeff's grandpa pointed a finger in his face and said, "Jeff, one day you'll understand that it's better to be kind than clever."

Being right isn't a license to be condescending, judgmental, and unkind. Catch the sharp, sarcastic words before they come out of your mouth or are

fired off into the ethernet on social media. Replace them with respect and kindness.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but

“BITTERNESS AND RESENTMENT WILL EAT ON YOU ONLY AS LONG AS YOU LET THEM. LET IT GO.”

only what is helpful for building others up. . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another” (Ephesians 4:29, 32).

Is this something I should let go?

Sometimes things go sideways, and you get mistreated and wounded.

It's not fair.

It's not your fault.

But there it is.

The offense hurts your feelings, but it doesn't tarnish your character—doesn't keep you from being a good person. Maintain your principles and values. Marcus

Aurelius said, “Just do the right thing; the rest doesn't matter.”

Someone did you wrong; that's their problem, not yours.

You've been criticized and judged; that's the critic's problem, not yours.

The question is: How long are you going to carry this baggage?

Bitterness and resentment will eat on you only as long as you let them. Let it go.

The only thing that matters is that you do the right thing—that's the only thing you can control.

“God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Is it okay to say no?

It's hard to say no to invitations, requests, demands. We don't want to disappoint a friend, a casual acquaintance, or even a stranger.

We have a baffling relationship with time. We're cautious with our money, but not with our time, our most valuable asset.

When someone asks for your time, they're asking

you to give up a slice of your life—sometimes in exchange for something that intrudes on your most important work.

When someone requests a little of your time, ask yourself, “What if I say no?” If the answer is, “I would be more faithful to my calling,” or “I would be a better steward of my limited time,” or “I would be more productive”—say no.

“Teach us to number our days” (Psalm 90:12).

But time spent asking questions like these?

That's time very well spent!



Phil Kent



what will MATTER?

(part two)

A WHILE BACK, I wrote a piece titled, “What Will Matter?” I have continued to think about it—so here’s a second batch.

There will come a time in your life when your book, *This Is Your Life*, will sign off with “The End.”

A time when the last page on your calendar has been turned.

A time when your clock has ticked its last tock.

A time when everything that belonged to you belongs to someone else.

A time when your life is no longer history-in-the-making—just history.

How will the value of your life be measured?

What will matter?

What will matter . . .
won’t be how long you lived, but how you lived.

What will matter . . .
won’t be where you started from, but where you ended up.

What will matter . . .
won’t be whether or not you were successful, but whether or not you were good.

What will matter . . .
won’t be the talent you had, but the talent you used.

What will matter . . .
will be that you did some good things that wouldn’t

“HOW WILL THE VALUE OF YOUR LIFE BE MEASURED WHEN YOUR LIFE IS NO LONGER HISTORY IN THE MAKING—JUST HISTORY?”

have been done if you hadn’t done them.

What will matter . . .
will be that you put integrity before advantage.

What will matter . . .
will be that you refused to compromise your values.

What will matter . . .
won’t be that you never stumbled, but that you never stopped getting better.

What will matter . . .
won't be that you made
a mistake, but that
you were big enough
to acknowledge it and
correct it.

**"WHAT WILL MATTER WILL
BE THAT YOU FOUND THE
MOST IMPORTANT THINGS,
AND COMMITTED YOUR
LIFE TO THEM."**

What will matter . . .
won't be how much you
got, but how much you
gave.

What will matter . . .
will be that you used
the hard lessons of life
to make you better, not
bitter.

What will matter . . .
won't be the circum-
stances that were
beyond your control,
but that your attitude

and actions were under
control.

What will matter . . .
won't be how many
people knew you, but
that someone was better
because they knew you.

**What will
matter . . .**
will be that
you made
someone who
felt unimportant
feel important.

**What will
matter . . .** will be that
you said something to
someone that made a
difference in their life.

What will matter . . .
will be that you brought
joy, not heartache, to
those who loved you.

What will matter . . .
will be that you will
be gratefully and
fondly remembered by
those whose lives you
touched.

What will matter . . .
will be that you will be
missed because of the
place you occupied in
someone's life that only
you could fill.

What will matter . . .
will be how you will be
remembered by those
you loved.

What will matter . . .
will be that you found
the most important

things, and committed
your life to them.

Yes, dear friends,
those are some of the
sweetest truths of this
incredible life . . .

**and
they
will
matter.**



John Gulley

what is most IMPORTANT?

OCTOBER 22, 2019, was the first day of the World Series between the Houston Astros and the Washington Nationals.

The games weren't Friday Night Lights for low income families; the average per ticket price was \$950. Standing room started at \$360; a seat on the outfield deck was \$650; a box seat went for a jaw-dropping \$10,500.

For die-hard fans, it was the most important event in the world. One devotee, reflecting on the Astros' World Series win two years earlier, said, "The greatest day of my life is when we won."

One buff offered a kidney for a ticket to the first game of the 2019 series.

But the post that sent chills down my spine was a tweet from Kaylise, offering to sell her soul for World Series tickets. Kaylise's tweet causes us to cringe, but aren't there many who sell their souls for the paltry returns of all-consuming desires? Things like . . .

Popularity

From rural and urban America, they gravitate to New York and Hollywood to claim the fame of stardom.

They park cars, bus tables, clean restrooms—even turn tricks—to eat and pay the rent while chasing their dream of getting their name on the marquee and their

"SOME WILL SELL THEIR SOUL FOR THE TOP-FLOOR CORNER OFFICE. MORE THAN ANYTHING, THEY WANT TO BE TOP DOG."

picture in the Sunday Supplement.

Position

Some will sell their soul for the top-floor corner office. More than anything, they want to be top dog, claiming a spot on *Forbes'* "Most Powerful" list. They'll do whatever it takes to get there. No price is too high.

Politics is intoxicating.

The position of power has a way of anesthetizing the conscience. Few politicians remain sufficiently grounded to resist shady conduct to maintain their domain of

“THE BOTTOM LINE OF FOCUS ON THE HERE-AND-NOW WILL INEVITABLY BE THE SALE OF THE SOUL.”

dominance. To get there and stay there, they will sacrifice integrity and honor, family and faith.

Possessions

Jesus spun a story about a farmer who hit pay dirt with a bumper crop and laid out a plan to protect his fortune and live a long life of leisure and luxury.

He would be applauded

in our culture as practical and prudent, a hard worker, respected and envied. His flaw was that he had an outsized sense of ownership and a dwarfed sense of stewardship.

His passion for prosperity monopolized his life. He thought he had the future by the throat; he was in control.

His security

wasn't in his God but in his wealth.

“I have enough stored away for many years,” he said. “You fool!” God said. “You will die this very night” (Luke 12:19–20).

There are two panels to this picture.

The first shows the drawings on his desk: state of the art barns bursting with grain.

But shift your gaze to

panel two, and you'll see him in his coffin with his hands crossed on his chest.

Jesus didn't give him a name—just “a certain rich man.” He was known in his day for only one thing: he was rich. He is known in our day for only one thing: he was a fool.

He thought he had many

years when, in fact, he didn't even have one more day.

The contrast is sobering: “Many years.” “This very night.”

The bottom line of focus on the here-and-now will inevitably be the sale of the soul.



John Gullley

For more inspirational writing by Joe Barnett, including his fine book *6 Verses That Can Change Your Life*, and for other resources, visit www.pathwayco.com online.

A person is walking on a sandy beach, leaving footprints. The ocean waves are breaking in the background. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly desaturated light, possibly during the golden hour.

Last Chance!

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We are about to downsize our overflowing stock of past issues of *The Christian Appeal*. Recently we sent bound copies of more than fifty years to several key historical collections. But now we need to clear out our storage area. The issues for decades past will soon be available only digitally on our website. Between now and October 31, 2020, we will send any available past issues in any quantity desired to anyone who requests them. Order them via e-mail (geneshe1@aol.com) or by snail-mail at 2310 Anna Street, Amarillo, TX 79106.