



WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

AND OTHER ESSAYS BY JOE R. BARNETT

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal

Preface



John Gulley

Though we journey through calm seas or tempests, God promises to be our Guide. As theologian J. I. Packer reminds us, “Not merely does God will to guide us in the sense of showing us his way, that we may tread it; he wills also to guide us in the more fundamental sense of ensuring that, whatever happens, whatever mistakes we may make, we shall come safely home.” In this issue, Dr. Joe R. Barnett encourages us to trust in the sovereign love of our Lord even “When You Don’t Understand.”

THE CHRISTIAN APPEAL (UPS 107-240)

February 2023, Vol. 71, No. 8. Owned and published monthly by CHRISTIAN APPEAL PUBLISHERS, INC., 2310 Anna Street, Amarillo, Texas 79106. Senior editor, Gene Shelburne. Managing editor, Curtis Shelburne. Consulting editor, David Langford. Subscriptions: Free, thanks to our donors, to all who request the magazine. Free monthly bundles to churches, Bible study groups, and ministries. Send all orders to Christian Appeal Publishers, Inc., 2310 Anna Street, Amarillo, Texas 79106. (Offer subject to issue and print-run availability.) Postmaster: Send address changes to 2310 Anna Street, Amarillo, Texas 79106. Periodical postage paid at Amarillo, Texas. © 2023 by Christian Appeal Publishers, Inc.

COVER PHOTO by Ronda Goyne

FOR ALMOST SIXTY YEARS of issues (and more!) visit our website at www.christianappeal.com.

Trust Him

Our God Is SOVEREIGN



RRRRich B

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. . . . We adore you as the One who is over all things.”

✱ **King David**
1 Chronicles 29

RRRRich B



when you don't **UNDERSTAND**

I STOOD with a grieving mother and father in the cemetery, where we stared at a casket and an open grave. They were each holding a toddler. Their daughter, the children's mother, had lost her battle with cancer. The heartbroken couple was left with memories, bills, and two babies.

It isn't suffering that troubles us; it's undeserved suffering. Those who are thoroughly good suffer as severely as those who are monstrously evil.

Attempts at explanation invariably fall short. I have learned more about trust from those who have it than from those who write about it. Three people—Joseph, Job, and Jesus—have defined trust for me.

Joseph: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

We wouldn't rush for a front-row seat to hear Joseph deliver a homily on trust back when he was living in luxury, the

spoiled son of a wealthy father. But we listen with slack-jawed awe when he declares his trust in the face of betrayal, false accusation, and unjust imprisonment.

“I HAVE LEARNED MORE ABOUT TRUST FROM THOSE WHO HAVE IT THAN FROM THOSE WHO WRITE ABOUT IT.”

Job: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (Job 13:15).

We wouldn't walk across the street to hear Job spout aphorisms on trust back when he was the richest man in the world. But he has our undivided attention when he declares his trust-unto-death after losing his family, wealth, and health.

Jesus: “Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!” (Luke 23:46).

We wouldn’t even give undivided attention to what Jesus might say

“YOU BELIEVE IN ME WHEN YOU ARE PROSPEROUS—WOULD YOU STILL TRUST ME IF YOU LOST IT ALL?”

about trust before his earth-visit. But we listen in bowed-head reverence when he gasps his trust from the Cross.

From these three, I have learned what trust is:

It is certainty that God is in control even when it seems that everything is out of control.

It is certainty that God

is doing what is right even when it seems that everything is going wrong.

It is certainty that God is present even when it seems that he is absent.

Joseph, Job, and Jesus modeled trust by declaring it, not when things were wonderfully good, but when things were

terribly bad.

So, I hear God asking me:

You believe in me when everything is going right—would you still trust me if everything was going wrong?

You believe in me when you are prosperous—would you still trust me if you lost it all?

You believe in me when

you feel my presence—would you still trust me if you felt I had forsaken you?

Trust means hanging on to an unyielding faith in God when things are not going at all like you want them to: when God doesn’t seem supportive; when you feel mistreated, betrayed, and abandoned.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,” wrote Solomon—then added, “do not depend on your

own understanding.” Your understanding is limited. God’s isn’t: “His understanding has no limit” (Psalm 147:5). Trust is an acknowledgment of that truth.

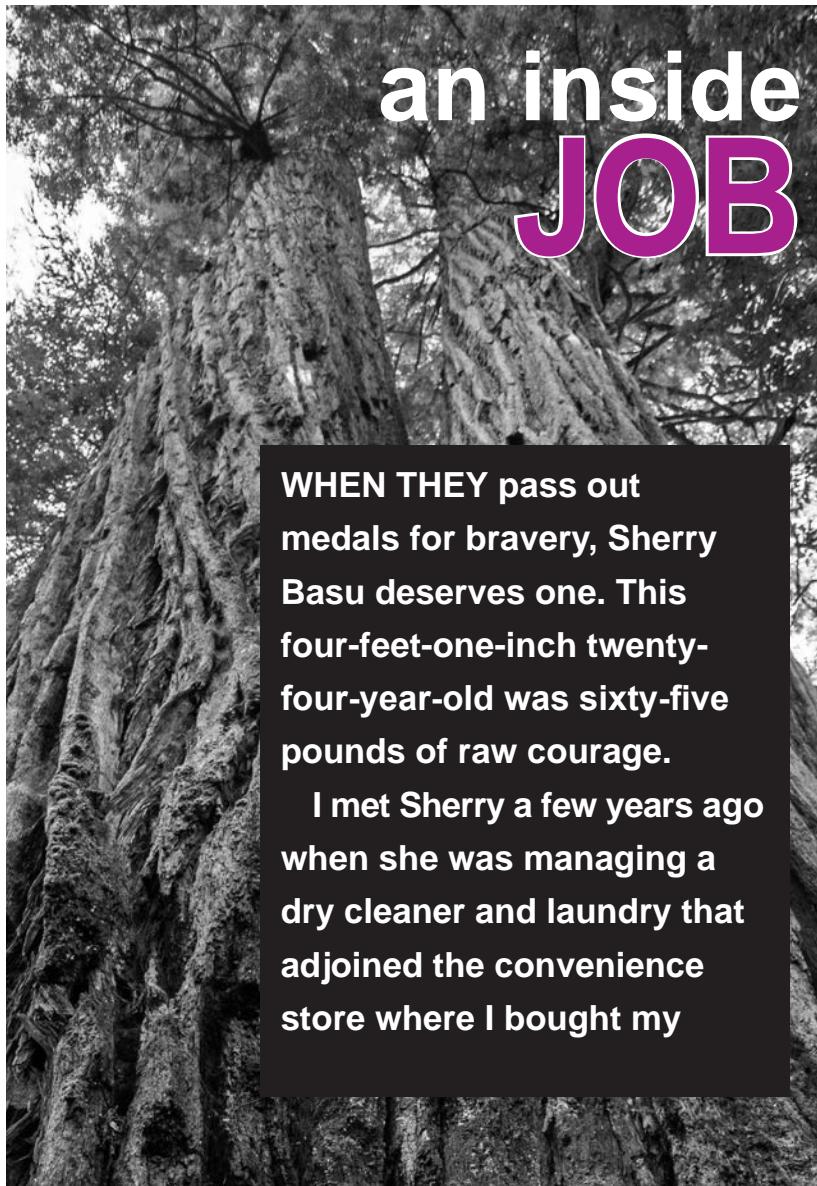
He knows what he is doing; you may not.

He knows where he is taking you; you may not.

And he knows why; you may not.

So through tears, trial, and trouble, trust him—even when you don’t understand.





an inside JOB

WHEN THEY pass out medals for bravery, Sherry Basu deserves one. This four-feet-one-inch twenty-four-year-old was sixty-five pounds of raw courage.

I met Sherry a few years ago when she was managing a dry cleaner and laundry that adjoined the convenience store where I bought my

morning paper and coffee. I began timing my trip to arrive when Sherry did, so I could carry her purse and the plastic bag that contained her lunch.

Sherry had a congenital deformity that had her trapped in a twisted body with legs that wouldn't work. Negotiating the five yards from the car to the front door of her store was an ordeal. Holding on to a railing, she would take a short, faltering step with her left foot, drag the right one alongside, rest—then repeat the routine.

Nothing in the shop was user-friendly for someone her size. The four steps from the customer service counter to the garment-conveyor carousel was a slow, torturous trip for

Sherry. I would find it tough to live with her handicap for one day. She had lived with it every day of her life.

Sherry would have been a shoo-in for

"REACH DEEP WITHIN YOURSELF AND SUMMON THE COURAGE TO ACCEPT OWNERSHIP OF YOUR ATTITUDE."

disability benefits. Instead, she showed up for work six days a week and tackled a twelve-hour shift, 7-to-7. I asked her what time she had to get up to get ready for work. Three-thirty, she said.

Never and always described Sherry: she *never* complained and *always* smiled. "Be strong and courageous!" God said to Joshua (Joshua 1:9).

He didn't need to say it to Sherry.

Courage has many faces:

It is the single mom struggling to make ends meet and hours stretch.

"SOMEONE HURT YOUR FEELINGS. BROKE YOUR HEART. SHATTERED YOUR DREAMS. LET IT GO! MOVE ON. FORGIVE."

It is the laid-off father, feeling the agony of hopelessness but refusing to give up.

It is the child of divorce, suffering the ache of rejection and battered self-image but hanging in there.

It is the caregiver, contending with exhaustion but remaining compassionate and cheerful.

It is the chemo patient battling terror and fatigue,

who jokes that bald is beautiful.

It is the widow facing old age alone and the world with a smile.

And it is the person whose heartache is

played out in the shadows, unknown to others. Your youthful dreams envisioned a lived-happily-ever-after

adventure. But life may have taken a cruel turn and dumped you at a very different destination.

Life is a mixture of joy and sorrow. You have good days and bad days. Victories and defeats.

Times when you feel good and times when you don't.

What sets courageous people apart is that they refuse to give up. They stumble. Fall. Get up. Move

on. The strongest aren't those who win but those who don't quit when they lose.

"Courage doesn't always roar," writes Mary Ann Radmacher. "Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'"

My friend Allen Isbell says that it is easier to control your actions than your attitudes. Bad attitudes, he says, are toxic. They poison from inside out. They contaminate relationships. Sabotage happiness. Make life miserable.

Reach deep within yourself and summon the courage to accept ownership of your attitude.

Stop blaming others for your actions and moods, your flaws and failures. Someone hurt your

feelings. Broke your heart. Shattered your dreams.

Let it go! Move on.

Forgive.

However badly someone has treated you, and however deeply it hurts, get over it.

That's not easy, Joe.

I know.

Do it anyway. For your own sake. For until you do, you will spend your days wallowing in the muck of misery and self-pity. So, decide now, this very minute, to give up the blame game.

Your circumstances may be beyond your control, but your attitude isn't. Courage to change your attitude is an inside job.



are we fit to be His WITNESSES?

APPROVAL RATINGS of politicians are at an all-time low. In a Gallup poll, Americans were asked to rank twenty-two professions for honesty and ethical standards. Congress scored next to last. We long for integrity in our elected leaders, but it no longer surprises us when a politician is caught

lying, discovered taking bribes, exposed as a philanderer, or has their obscene language picked up by an open microphone. We've come to expect some bad apples in politics.

Is there any rotten fruit in the church?

Here are the last words Jesus spoke to his disciples before returning to heaven: "You will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." He charged them to "Go and make disciples." That had to create heartburn in the early church: someone was sure to bring up Judas. "Who are you to be talking to me when Judas was on your original twelve-member board?"

Or someone will mention Peter: "Peter, also one of the big-twelve, denied this Jesus you want to talk to me

about—said three times that he didn't even know him. And you put this turncoat front-and-center as chief spokesman for your bunch on Pentecost.

"In fact, all the apostles abandoned Jesus and

"WHO ARE YOU TO BE TALKING TO ME WHEN JUDAS WAS ON YOUR ORIGINAL TWELVE-MEMBER BOARD?"

hightailed it out of Dodge when he was arrested. Wasn't a stranger strong-armed to carry the cross because none of his disciples hung around to help? Is that the best you can do—showcase a bunch of cowards who couldn't be counted on when the chips were down? And you want to talk to me about becoming a part of your crowd? Save your breath.

"Oh, and didn't your

church get into a squabble because the Hebrew-speaking widows were elbowing their way to the front of the cafeteria line, stuffing their faces with pot-roast, mashed potatoes and gravy, leaving the Greek-

“WITH ALL THESE FLAWS, DO WE HAVE A RIGHT TO BE CHRIST’S WITNESSES, TO URGE PEOPLE TO DISCIPLESHIP?”

speaking widows to make do with leftover turnip greens and black-eyed peas? And what about Brother and Sister Ananias lying about their offering? You have the audacity to say that I should listen to what you have to say when you have these kinds of people in your church? Give me a break!”

Twenty centuries later, we’re still skittish about witnessing. From the

get-go, we feel the need to disqualify ourselves. “Who am I to be talking to others about the faith? I have enough trouble keeping myself on the straight-and-narrow without presuming to tell someone else how to live.”

Then there’s the unnerving fact that our house isn’t all that clean. It wouldn’t be so unsettling if we could

hold our church up as a model of morality—if there were never any misconduct, infidelity, or scandal among us: if no one on our rolls was addicted to pornography, drugs, alcohol, calories, credit cards, or social media—then we could feel comfortable talking to people about committing their lives to Jesus. But we’ve got trouble right here in River City; we know it,

and they know it. So, what right do we have to witness and disciple?

And there’s that unity thing. Jesus prayed, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me.” If our attitudes and actions were an answer to that prayer, we could easily talk to people about him. If we loved one another, got along, didn’t split into contentious, antagonistic, quarreling camps over opinions and personal likes and dislikes, we would have the right to witness. But with a half-dozen churches in our town wearing the same name, many of which wouldn’t be caught dead fellowshiping the others, do we have that right? And—forgive me for calling this to your attention—whether you’ve pitched your tent in the camp on the left, on the right, or in the middle, if you go about your religious business with

a judgmental and hostile spirit, you’re helping create the mess that causes people to question our right to witness.

With all these flaws, do we have a right to be his witnesses, to urge people to discipleship?

Yes, yes, we do. Because witnessing isn’t about us, it’s about Jesus. How do we justify our failings? We don’t. We can’t. The blemishes are in plain sight, and any attempt to whitewash them is a sure-to-fail effort to defend the indefensible. The Bible spends no coin trying to cover the sins of church members. Neither should we. But we must never permit the exposure of our weaknesses to get us off message. Our message is not to defend the human element but to exalt the divine. Our message is about Jesus, not us, only Jesus. For it is Jesus who saves, not us, only Jesus.



many, many CHOICES

DR. FRED ALEXANDER, my college roommate, and lifelong friend, chose a career in higher education. It was a close call, because early on he felt the tug of a different calling. As a young Navy Reservist, Fred blew the top off pilot aptitude tests. The U.S. Navy pulled out all the stops to convince him to become a Naval Air Force

pilot. He almost did—but didn't.

What if he had? Well, he wouldn't have met and married Claudette; there would have been no Joe, Denise, and Beverly, their three remarkable children; and the hundreds of students that were influenced by him wouldn't have been. Would he have met and married someone else, had different children, and contributed to the world in an equally effective way? No way to know.

Think about this: with just an ever-so-slight shift, you could have been a Joe, Denise, or Beverly that never got in the game. Follow me here . . .

Your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-

great-great granddaddy planted his boots in Jamestown in the early 1600s. Maybe he bolted England to escape the sheriff. Or perhaps he was a dreamer who decided to run

"HERE YOU ARE—AT THIS SPECIFIC TIME IN THIS SPECIFIC PLACE, WITH YOUR SPECIFIC TALENTS."

away and join the circus. Or possibly he was a real visionary who saw America as the land of opportunity. Whatever the reason, he ended up in Jamestown.

The girl that became his wife may have been one of the "100 Maides, young and uncorrupt," sent over in 1619 to get hitched to the Virginia men. The minutes of a meeting of the Virginia Company of London

stated: “These woemen if they marry to the publiq Farmours, to be transported at the charges of the Company; If otherwise, then those that takes them to wife to pay the said charges.”

“YOU CAN’T SERVE GOD’S PURPOSE IN YOUR PARENTS’ OR CHILDREN’S GENERATIONS—ONLY IN YOUR OWN.”

Can you visualize your progenitor grandpa standing on the Jamestown dock, bidding for your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandma? What if he’d bid on and bought someone else? Too bad for you. Just one different husband-wife match-up in the fifteen generations from then till now, and you wouldn’t be

here. That only covers the last 400 years. Try calculating it all the way back to Adam, and you’ll blow a circuit.

But here you are—at this specific time, in this specific

place, with your specific talents. How are you using this unique life, brought into being under these unique happenings?

The Apostle Paul said that “when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers” (Acts 13:36).

Your thirteen-greats-ago grandparents pulled up their British roots and helped launch things here in America. Were they godly people who served God’s purpose in their generation and made Jamestown a

better place? And did each generation that followed them serve God’s purpose and make the place they lived a better place? Likely some did, and some didn’t.

What about you? You can’t serve God’s purpose in your parents’ generation or in your children’s generation; only in your own.

You are here at exactly the time God wanted you to be, equipped with exactly the gifts he wanted you to use to serve his purpose in your generation. Many use God’s gifts of time and talent to serve their own purpose, giving little thought to God’s purpose—a disappointing choice, but one that he allows.

There are many life elements over which you had no control: you didn’t choose your parents, your country of birth, your race, or your generation. But you do choose how you use these endowments—whether to serve your own purpose or the purpose of God.

This prayer that I’ve lifted from *The Book of Common Prayer* (with minor editing to first person) is one that we would do well to pray at the beginning of each day:

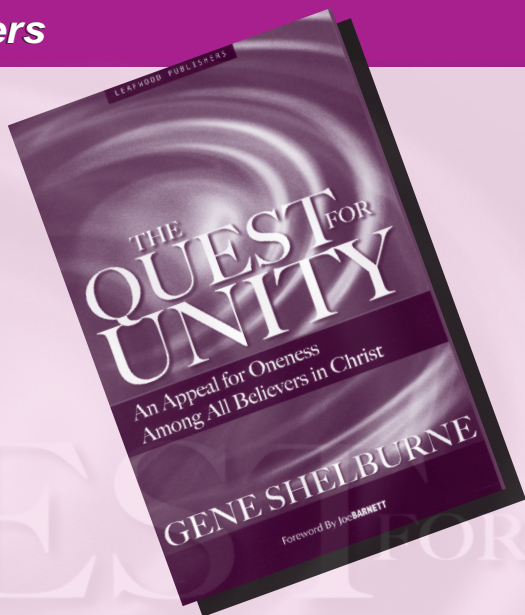
“Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought me in safety to this new day . . . in all I do, direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.”



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.

***From
Leafwood Publishers***

**GENE
SHELBURNE'S
TIMELY
BOOK**



Order Now!

Price now reduced to \$7.99 each, plus \$4.00 shipping and handling for the first copy and \$1.00 for each additional. Texas residents, please add 66 cents sales tax per copy.

Please send orders to:

Gene Shelburne
2310 Anna Street, Amarillo, TX 79106
(806) 683-5966 • GeneShel@aol.com