

# Because

...for anyone who's ever asked, 'why?'

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## Because You're Worth It!



I love to watch the sparrows as they flutter around the feeder in the garden. They're quite cheeky at times and they can chase other birds away.

The sparrow is found over most of the world, despite originating from Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia. Strongly associated with humans<sup>1</sup>, sparrows go where we go, feeding on grains, weeds and insects. If we ignore the domestic chicken, the most abundant bird in the world is the sparrow's close relative, the red-billed quelea from Africa.

We may not give a passing glance to a sparrow or think much about them, but sparrows have more value than we might realize.

### What they're worth *ecologically*

The year was 1957, and the then leader of China, Mao Zedong, ordered the killing of all sparrows as part of a

pest eradication campaign – believing sparrows were 'enemies of the state' and responsible for devouring essential and crucial cereal crops. Citizens of China took to beating pots and pans to scare sparrows from landing so that they fell out of the sky exhausted. Incentives were offered to schoolchildren to destroy nests.

It is estimated that by 1962 two billion sparrows were eradicated, and the subsequent ecological imbalance opened the floodgates for the crop-eating insect population to mushroom. Locusts, no longer kept under control by the Chinese sparrows, devoured the crops. The Great Chinese Famine ensued with over 30 billion people dying of starvation. Sparrows had to be imported from Russia to help redress the imbalance!<sup>2</sup>

### Their *culinary* value

A scrawny sparrow does not look appetizing, but they

Photo: istockphoto.com

have been eaten through the ages, especially at times of food shortages and crop failures.

Travelling through China in 1990, I came across 'sparrow shish kebabs,' plucked, skewered and on sale in markets. Apparently this was (and perhaps still is) also customary in some parts of the Middle East and Europe, ie to sell sparrows skinned and roasted, ready to eat. An ancient inscription (301AD) describes Emperor Diocletian's tariff law as saying sparrows were the cheapest of all birds used for food.

There is a recipe in a 1736 cookbook for "Sparrow Pye"! It called for over 60 sparrows, and, when ready, had to be served immediately.<sup>3</sup>

### What they're worth financially

Let's consider what a sparrow really is ... a commonplace, small bird, generally considered of little significance. To borrow a familiar British phrase, they were historically as 'cheap as chips.' So plentiful were they that, in some ancient cultures, they could be used as a sacrifice for those unable to afford the usual lamb or goat.

In the Bible the word sparrow is used as a generic, non-specific term to imply something that is widespread and familiar; perceived of little value; mundane and ordinary<sup>4</sup>. There are some references to sparrows in the context of money. For example, in Matthew 10:29-31 (NKJV) we read: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*" Also, in Luke 12:6-7 (NKJV): "*Are not five sparrows sold for two*

*copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*"

### Your comparative value

Did you notice the phrase above? Jesus Christ said '**You are of more value than many sparrows**'.

Just as no sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing it, so nothing happens to you and me without God being aware of it. He cares passionately for all of us. So next time you see that flitting sparrow, why not think of God's love for his creation, and of how he sent his Son that we might be saved?

Why does the great God of the universe bother with the sparrow and with us? Because we're worth it ... to Him!

1. Owen, J. (2010) *Wildlife of a garden: A Thirty-Year Study*. Royal Horticultural Society, RHS Media, Peterborough.
2. Ironically, today the sparrow is on China's protected species list, banning their unauthorised killing

3. See <http://www.theoldfoodie.com/2006/07/proper-appreciation-of-sparrows.html>

4. The Bible mentions 'sparrow' on seven occasions. However, if we examine deeper, the Hebrew word 'tsippor' or Greek word 'strouthion' is more often translated 'bird' or 'fowl' rather than 'sparrow', referring to small birds that frequent human habitations. So whilst the Biblical term 'sparrow' does not translate specifically to the species of bird we might know (*Passer domesticus*), when the term 'sparrow' is used, translators felt this fitted the context better. See Parmelee, A. (1959) *All the Birds of the Bible: Their Stories, Identification and Meaning*. Lutterworth Press, London.



Photo above: Irene Tibbenham

Photo below: istockphoto.com

# The Party Manifesto

by Helen Francis

Many of my friends share my Christian beliefs. I also have friends from other faiths; a number who are unsure about religion and some who are devout atheists. What always intrigues me about the latter group is how much they want to talk about God and the Bible, even though they are adamant that God is a myth. Often, when we dine together or chat on social web sites, they are the ones to bring God into the conversation.

Once under way, it seems they can refute anything I say because they 'already know that the bible is myth'. They have heard the stories at school and elsewhere when growing up and they have dismissed them.

Some of my non-believing friends are also very involved in politics, and debate. One day, in the middle of a deep conversation, I became so frustrated by their usual approach of dismissing the Bible because they already knew what was in it, I found myself asking "Have you ever actually read the Bible?" When they admitted they had not, but had heard bible stories as a child so therefore knew what it was about, I asked "If I were arguing with you that your political beliefs were nonsense and that the party you support was non-existent, and, if I were purporting to be an expert judge on its policies, wouldn't you at least have expected me to have read the party's manifesto?" That was one thing we agreed on!

The definition of manifesto is "A published declaration of the views and intents of the publisher". The Bible, written by many Spirit inspired people, over thousands of years, is the published declaration of God's intents and views, and it's something we "party members" (Christians) try to be very familiar with. Yet, even amongst us, there are not many who can honestly say they have actually studied the whole word of God for

themselves, in detail and at length.

Imagine the embarrassment to a political party if its new members were not fully conversant with the party's policies. Such people might make rather alarming statements that put the party in a bad light (or worse light depending on how you view the party in the first place!). In the field of politics it is not uncommon for people to switch allegiance if there are new policies added that they don't like, or just ignore the bits that don't fit in with their own views. But, for Christians who bear the name of Jesus Christ, the bible makes it clear that being a member of His party is not something we should take lightly, or misrepresent. Therefore being



conversant with what it has to say is vital.

But the Bible is more than a manifesto. It is God's love letter, written to each one of us individually, and personally; a letter that people risked their lives to deliver to us.

Maybe those who do not believe, and also those who do, can both benefit from taking time to read it, to hear what God has to say to us, to understand what it really is about.

Take the time to open its pages and let it speak to you.





# May There Be a Road

by Cliff Neill

I have just finished reading a novel<sup>1</sup> about an individual who was a wanderer, a scholar, a physician, a swordsman and a man on a quest to find his father who had been captured and enslaved by a middle-eastern warlord and attempt to rescue him.

During his journey he meets up with a group of warriors from the Steppes of Mongolia and builds up a friendship with them; apparently they have a greeting that also doubles as a goodbye, and here it is—“Yol Bolson”—meaning, “May there be a road!” This is a wish for a way, a trail, a road, or a highway to make your journey more bearable and to ease your mind as you journey across unknown territory; just two words but a big blessing for your onward journey and I guess for your safe arrival at your final destination.

The only thing better than a good road is, a good road and a good companion to share your journey, someone to communicate with and share the weary hours with as you travel. Jesus is such a companion!

But you know, Jesus is not just a travelling companion, he is much more than that; he reveals many things to us during our journeying together; he opens our understanding as we go along the way.

This is exactly what happened to the two disciples who were travelling home to a village called Emmaus after the crucifixion; they were sad, depressed, totally

disheartened, and not knowing what to believe. On this road to Emmaus Jesus comes alongside them and journeys with them. Initially he asks “What were you discussing along the way?” With long faces they told him about what had transpired in Jerusalem over the previous three days and add that “Some of our women went to his tomb but found it empty!” Then Jesus, “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, explained to them everything in the scriptures that referred to himself.”<sup>2</sup>

What an amazing journey for these two disciples, to be instructed and taught about the things that had happened to him over that period of time. Also the most amazing thing about this special Bible study was that it came totally from the Old Testament and if we take the time to search we will see Jesus behind every shadow in those prophetic scriptures.

This was the Good Shepherd caring for two of his sheep who had wandered away—how did his loving concern impact them? Well, they turned around and legged it back to Jerusalem to meet up with their friends and brothers to find out more and meet up with the Shepherd once again.

Are you on a journey today? If so, I’d like to wish you—“Yol Bolson”—may there be such a road for you.

1. *The Walking Drum* by Louis L’Amour
2. *Scripture Luke 24:17-35 NIV.*

# It's More Blessed to Give than to Receive

by Denys Fell

When the BBC came down to the farm to film for their 'Nature of Britain' series the cameraman asked me about the best locations and then asked if he could meet the farmer. When I told him that I was the farmer he had a hard time believing me and said in all seriousness: "You can't be, you're not grumpy."

Oh dear! We farmers, it seems, do have a reputation for complaining and not being friendly to the public. I'm reminded of the time when my eldest daughter brought her boyfriend to the farm, he was more than a bit worried that I'd scream: "Get off my land!"

Seven years ago, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, I did something radically different. I invited three young men from a local care home to visit the farm on a regular basis every Wednesday and Friday. We began by planting potatoes together. I'm pleased to say that they're still coming today. In the intervening years the farm has been utterly transformed.

Why? Because it's better to give than receive. Thinking about Jesus' first followers, I noticed a short section in the book of Acts (chapter 4) with the subtitle 'The believers share their possessions'. I determined that one of the main purposes of my farm was 'to share the farm with those who may benefit'. It still is today.

Back in 2008 I had very little to share, a cold draughty barn in which to socialize and eat, open bleak fields and makeshift toilets. Looking back, the possessions I sought to share were not very attractive but I did have a passion to share and to give. And, little by little, the farm began to grow.

I was out for a meal one evening and a complete stranger came up to me. He explained that he'd heard about what was happening at the farm and he'd love to help. What's more, he added, he was the President of the local Lions branch that year and they'd like to help too. So began a wonderful relationship with the Lions

organization. Word began to spread and other groups began having a much-appreciated impact, hands-on and financially.

One lady got in touch and explained that her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday was coming up. She'd told her guests that instead of buying her presents they could make a donation to the farm which by this time had become a fully-fledged care farm, a social enterprise with charitable status.

For those who've never heard of care farming before, it's where a farmer uses some of his resources and experiences to benefit in some way those with learning difficulties, mental health issues or drug addictions.

When I set that attitude of giving in motion on the farm I soon found that others came on board who were inspired and gave magnificently. One lady even went so far as to say: "It's the sort of venture you only dream of happening – but it never does."

And many of those whom I sought to help have become dear friends, oh what fun we have sometimes! I have never eaten so much birthday cake; we seem to have a birthday every week.



We now have 8 employees, 33 regular students and thousands of visitors each year. We have woodland and an orchard, several environmental schemes, a classroom with under-floor heating, horticulture, and a variety of animals. We work with lots of schools. We hold barn dances, road races, barbeques and various open days.

I could have resisted the urge to give and share by focusing on the risks. In the first four years especially, there were many discouragements. I could have easily continued on my little red tractor going up and down the fields on my own. But oh how my world has been challenged and enriched these last seven years! And so have the lives of all those who seek to give of their resources because it is more blessed to give than receive.





# Voting and the Christian

by John Stettaford

How should Christians vote?

In the UK press and on television news programmes, a furore arose because two major church denominations decided to issue letters to their respective flocks. In these they outlined ideas, which they felt their members needed to consider before casting their votes in the upcoming general election.

For certain sections of the press and for other interested parties, this was interference in matters on which the modern churches should remain silent.

My own fellowship does not willingly involve itself with politics or with anyone's God-given freedom of choice concerning candidates or parties. For that matter, neither do we seek to influence our own members concerning whether they choose even to vote or not.

The New Testament, however, is not silent on the rights and responsibilities of a nation's citizens. Guidelines are given. For example, although elections were not part of the political scene in New Testament times, Paul is very clear as to the duties of a Christian: "Therefore I exhort

first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1 NKJV UK). Not just at election times, note, but all the time. He goes on: "...for kings and all who are in authority." Therefore our prayers should extend to all who have any rule in our country, from the monarch or the president downwards. But not perhaps as they would prefer we pray on their behalf—particularly as regards forming the next government: "...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (verse 3).



Following Christ's command to us (John 13:34–35; 15:12; 17:23), our prayers are to reflect on the purpose for wise government. They should be on behalf of the people's welfare; to enable Christians to live in the godly manner

in which we are urged to live, as well as enabling us to exhibit love, concern and support for our fellow Christians, our church, and our neighbours.

Paul continues: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed

by God” (Romans 13:1). Again, not a slavish or craven obedience, but one which recognises a higher purpose: “Therefore who resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. [Because] rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil [works]. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? [Then] do what is good, and you will have praise from the same” (verse 3, my additions). Again, the purpose is that we may lead a quiet and peaceable Christian life.



Paul repeats this instruction to the ministry of the church but adds an additional purpose: “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1). Christians at times need to be ready to go above and beyond in service not only to their church, their fellow members, but also to those in need in the community.

Finally, Peter adds yet another reason for Christians to be aware of their civic responsibilities: “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do good” (1 Peter 2:13–14). And the reason? “For this is the will of God that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” This is perhaps better explained in verse 12: “...having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

We may only see our political representatives sporadically, specifically when they want to canvas our

votes, but a Christian, to comply with what the will of God would have us do, has civic responsibilities and duties all the time. It was Joseph de Maistre, the 18<sup>th</sup> century French politician, who first penned the idea that “every nation gets the government it deserves”. Let’s therefore also be sure to pray that, in the coming UK election and in other elections around the world, we will get the government that best fulfils God’s grace on our country rather than perhaps any government we might deserve.

## Were you there?

Have you been there when something historic took place? If so, would you like to let us know?

We are planning a feature entitled “I was there”. It will appear in an edition of *Because* during the second half of 2015.

Submissions can be e-mailed to [info@because.uk.com](mailto:info@because.uk.com), or posted to **PO 7703, Market Harborough, LE16 7ZG**. They should be between 50 and 200 words and mention the event in question, and describe any feelings or thoughts you had at the time or since. As a guide, this article is 165 words. Please also think of sending in some related pictures, preferably electronically. The deadline date is the 30<sup>th</sup> June.



# day BY day

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# Speaking of Life:



## Calling Out For Help

Last year while hiking near Sacramento (pictured below), Mike Vilhauer got lost. He wandered off the path and suddenly realized he couldn't find his way back. As the sun sank, Mike crawled under some shelter – and over the next five days, he weathered storms, battled hunger and even fought off an angry wolverine! But as he grew weaker, he started to think he'd never be rescued.

Have you ever felt this way? Like you're hopelessly lost? We all go through trying times. And when I start to feel this way, I open up my Bible and turn to the Psalms. If anyone knows what it feels like to be lost, overwhelmed and abandoned, it's King David. See how he writes about it in Psalm 22 –

**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest... Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me” (Psalm 22:1-2; 22:16).**

What David was feeling here is sometimes called “the Dark Night of the Soul,” a term coined by the 16th-century Catholic mystic, Saint John of the Cross. Now widely recognized among scholars worldwide, this term

has even been picked up by Hollywood screenwriters. It's that point in the movie where the hero feels like there's no hope left. But that's not where this biblical story ends. Listen to how David finishes his Psalm --

**“For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help” (Psalm 22:24).**

I love that last verse about crying out for help. It's a truth we should never forget. Mike Vilhauer sure didn't. Instead, he made an 8-foot sign that read – “HELP.” Searchers saw it and were able to save his life. The next time we're feeling deserted, overwhelmed or alone; remember that our Triune God is faithful to hear us when we call on him. He will never abandon us or forsake us. And that's a promise we can count on.

I'm Joseph Tkach, Speaking of LIFE.

***Speaking of Life is now on TV! It is used by UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) in between longer programmes and is aired on UCB and on SKY channel 584 on Thursdays and Fridays between 7.15 - 7.30 am and between 1.45 and 2.00pm, on Saturdays between 6.45 and 7.00 am., and on Sundays between 1.45 and 2.00 pm. These timings may vary.***



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