

Volume
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A Newsletter of the Amy Foundation



Are we “walking the walk” as Christians?

by Jim Barrett

Most readers of *Pen & Sword* are familiar with the Amy Foundation publication “*Overcoming Subtle Sins – the Key to Dynamic Discipleship*,” which identifies challenges presented by pride, impatience, selfish ambition, boastfulness, envy, anger, and gossip.

The book also provides a roadmap for confession, self-discipline, and living our faith and the good life. The co-authors, Jim Russell and Jim Dyet, penned their thoughts in 2002.

Fast-forward a few years. The Barna Group is well respected for research on public opinion toward Christianity – and their recent research demonstrates some disturbing trends in attitudes, especially among young people. David Kinnaman, President of Barna, and Gabe Lyons share findings and their ideas on what needs to be done in *Unchristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity. . . and why it matters*.

Judgmental. Anti-homosexual. Hypocritical: saying one thing, doing another. Too involved in politics. Sheltered/old-fashioned, boring, out-of-touch with reality. Too political, right wing. These are common points of skepticism and objections by non-believers toward Christians.

According to Lyon, “We must commit to doing the hard work of recapturing Christianity’s essence in our own lives.... Putting the needs of others above your own, loving your neighbor, doing good to those who would do evil to you, exercising humility, suffering with those less fortunate, and doing it all with a pure heart is nearly impossible. But it is Jesus’s model and call.”

Unchristian lays out negative perceptions toward Christians. *Overcoming Subtle Sins* demonstrates how we can change habits, and by our example, positively influence attitudes toward Christianity. Both books are worth reading.

To order copies of “*Unchristian*”, visit **www.barna.org**.

For copies of “*Overcoming Subtle Sins*”, visit **www.amyfound.org**

Prayer Requests

We believe “The prayers of the righteous availeth much.” We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of The Amy Foundation Ministry.

Amy Prayer List:

- Praise....that the Internet Syndicate has expanded to new outlets, exposing many more people to excellent, professionally written columns dealing with today’s issues from God’s perspective.
- That the Holy Spirit will inspire Internet Syndicate writers and free their time to write to meet the demand of these new editors.

Jim Barrett was recently named the Executive Vice President of The Amy Foundation. He has served on the Foundation’s Advisory Board for many years.

Write short

By Shaunna Howat

Over-wordiness is the bane of any editor. When he says, "Give me 500 words," and you turn in 750 of your best friends, unable to part with any of them, the editor sprouts a dozen gray hairs.

Worse yet, he is forced to either discard your submission or assign a junior staffer to hack away at your text.

You can avoid both of these unpleasant options by learning to pare your writing to meet an editor's word restrictions. You might find that your writing becomes even more powerful in the process.

Think of "concise writing" as surgery, or trimming away all the unnecessary parts. The word "concise," from the Latin *concidere*, has to do with cutting or trimming away, even sacrificing. When I learned this, I found a great mental picture to aid my writing.

The problem with trying to write concisely is starting the actual process. We sit down and think, "I've got to write this in as few words as possible." That's the best recipe for writer's block!

Helpful sources for short writing:

- **Elements of Style** by Strunk & White
- **The Guide to Grammar and Writing**
<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/concise.htm>
- **Grammar and Composition**
http://grammar.about.com/od/words/tp/clutter_tips.htm
- **Paramedic Method:** A lesson in writing concisely
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/635/01/>
- **Conciseness:** Methods of eliminating wordiness
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_concise.html

Instead, just write it all down first. Then go back and edit.

When editing for length, start with a few proven tips:

Cut out passive verbs and verb phrases. Helper verbs such as *would, could, should, will, have, has*, and more, are generally unnecessary. Does your writing contain too many? Could you say it shorter?

Count words in sentences. If you said it in 24 words, could you cut down to 15?

Watch your repetition. Avoid repeated phrases or words. Reword or just hack away with a sharp editing tool.

Quick lesson in concise writing, from student essays:

Example: There is nothing that Aslan does not know of or have power over, not even the evil forces of Narnia that seem so strong. (24 words)

Rewrite: Aslan knows all, has power over all, and even defeats the evil forces of Narnia. (15 words)

Recap: defeat the over-wordiness, repetitive phrases, and dangling prepositions.

Pen & Sword

Editors:

Shaunna Howat
Linda Wacyk

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Amy Syndicate News

Congratulations to Amy Internet Syndicate columnist **Rusty Wright**, whose column "**Could God Use You in Digital Evangelism?**" recently appeared on the home page of the CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network) website.

The article describes Rusty's gradual awakening to how the simplicity and pervasive nature of the Internet is allowing people to find and use his articles in ways he had never imagined.

"I could sit with my laptop in my office, on an airplane, or in a hotel room and compose an article that would tactfully nudge people toward Christ or biblical principles," Rusty writes in the article. "Then, by pushing a button, I could send it to Internet publishers who would make it available to people around the globe. ... What a potential for spreading Good News!"

Read Rusty's column at www.cbn.com/spirituallife/churchandministry/evangelism/Wright_Digital_Evangelism.aspx.

Learn more about Rusty Wright Communications, at www.probe.org/rusty.

Prison ministry presents challenge, rewards

Author unknown--submitted via email: jsrapp@tds.net

As a shy person, it has been almost a lifelong struggle for me to start conversations with people, much less share the Gospel with them. One time, feeling an urgency to share, I responded to a request on my local library bulletin board to do weekly Bible readings at a nursing home. The residents were polite and seemingly receptive to my wavering efforts. But I think they liked my friend Maryann's piano playing of hymns a bit more.

A few years later, when my stepchildren were in high school, I began to help with the Young Life Club nights. (Young Life is a nondenominational outreach to teens.) One of the girls asked if I would bring a lunchtime Bible study. So I did. This lasted for about four years, until this group of friends graduated.

By far, however, the most exciting time I have had sharing Christ has been in our county jail.

Our area has a rampant problem with Methamphetamine, and many of the female inmates have been incarcerated due to charges resulting from their addictions. Going into the jail—it was intimidating at first—but the deep spiritual hunger of these ladies is evident.

I got involved in this ministry when my husband, Jon, joined the Gideons and I joined the women's auxiliary. The lady who had been going to the jail said she needed a break.


What I love about it is that I don't even have to ask the women to turn to Bible verses that I am using; they hear my simple message and eagerly

turn to the scriptures being discussed.

We can bring paperback Christian books to give to the inmates, and they devour these, too. In the past year, three ladies have accepted Christ, along with two men.

As word has gotten around to other Christian groups I am a part of, I have received donated Christian materials such as tracts, homemade bookmarks, and paperbacks. Some dear Christian sisters have helped as well.

The one most faithful has been my friend Roe, who used to be a nun. We read the verses in James 5:13-16, anoint the women with oil and pray over them. Many are touched to tears.

This is a rewarding and challenging ministry I highly recommend for other Christians. 

**Tell us a
discipling
story**

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to:

Pen & Sword
Editors,
Amy Foundation,
P.O. Box
16091,
Lansing, MI
48901;

or email
AMYFOUNDTN@
aol.com.

Place 1/2 page
Amy Writing
Awards postcard
art here

Hank Benjamin mentors and writes from his home in Eaton Rapids, MI.

Author's Note:

Wedgie: Bullying tactic that is supposed to be funny—and prove dominance.
Weggie: Christian tactic that is supposed to show wisdom—and prove dominance.

One w Reggie and we will be even

By Hank Benjamin

I had just finished my nighttime devotional snack, repeated the 23rd Psalm, thanked God for using me to help others, and was ready to turn out the lights when the phone rang.

Don, a recently released inmate, needed a ride home from the emergency room again! He had probably been given the usual pain medication and was being sent home. The warmth of the covers and the warmth of righteous feelings both vanished as I headed for the cold car again!

I felt a different kind of warmth when I arrived at the hospital and was told Don had found another way home. The warmth of self-righteous indignation is fertile ground for really stupid thinking.

"One w Reggie and we will be even" popped into my head.

Not an unpleasant thought.

A series of slogans followed: Tough-love Weggies, W Reggie Therapy, and Wonderful World of Weggies. Was it possible that one of the W's in WWJD is for W Reggie? I was starting to feel good.

Beep. . . Beep. . . Beep. . . This self-righteous thinking is being interrupted for an important announcement. **"Each day of your life is ordained by ME. I will use your time as I choose."** Beep. . . Beep. . . Beep. . . Do not return to your regular programming.

It was time to review the **Bible's Perspective on Mentoring:**

- I am commanded to be both wise and harmless. (Matt 10:16)
- I am being sent in the name of a disciple of Jesus. (Matt 10:42)

- I am to present myself "a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1)
- My rewards will be given me in my eternal kingdom. (Matt 6:20-21)
- God's righteousness must replace my natural self-righteousness. (Matt 6:33)
- Every opportunity to do good work is God prepared and ordained. (Eph 2:10)
- God is using my mentoring challenges to mentor me. (James 1:2-5, Ro 5:1-5)
- The question every mentor must answer: "Do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15)

Failed again—Restored again. The way God's mentoring works.

Thank you Lord! ◀

Order Today!

Resources Available from The Amy Foundation:
For individuals, small groups or Christian education classes

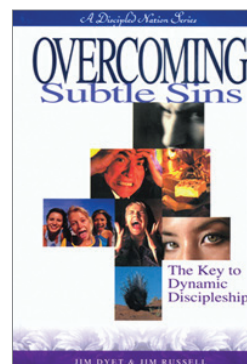
Overcoming Subtle Sins

**"Powerful, Perceptive, Practical:
what every Christian must do to survive and
make disciples in these uncertain days."**

Dr. Ralph S. Bell, Associate Evangelist (retired),
the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

With God's help you can overcome the "subtle sins" in life and learn to live the joy-filled life God intends for each of us. This book is a great resource for individual and small group study with 16 short, digestible chapters and 10 engaging questions for each chapter.

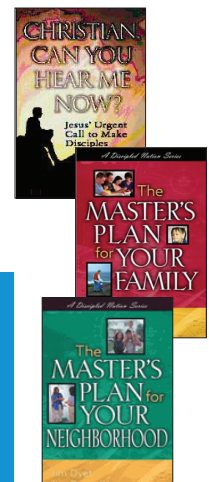
www.amyfound.org



Order Information

Title: *Overcoming Subtle Sins*
Author: Dr. Jim Dyet & Jim Russell

This book, and other discipling materials published by The Amy Foundation can be purchased at:
www.amyfound.org



A life-changing discipling experience

by Janice Wise

For several years, I disciplined women in a weekly Bible study. We laughed, cried and grew together as we learned to follow Jesus in our daily lives.

Then one night Donna came with this unsettling question: "My brother Dennis had emergency surgery and is in the hospital. He has also just come to faith in Christ and wants to attend our Bible study to learn about following Jesus. Can I bring him?"

Having been raised in a church where women did not teach men, although there was no church "rule" against it, I was sure God would not want Dennis in our women's study. So I reminded Donna that this was a women's Bible study, but I promised we would pray for God to show Dennis where to go to learn.

Donna replied, "But Dennis wants to come here. Won't you at least pray about it?"

Because of my love for Donna, I agreed to pray,

knowing God would support my position. Often my prayer started with, "I know you won't want Dennis in our group or me teaching men, so please help Donna to understand, and please find a place for Dennis to be disciplined."

With no answer from God as Bible study night grew closer, I decided to just wait quietly and see if God would answer. He did, with these words, "Whose Bible study is it?" When I meekly replied, "Yours, Lord," he said, "Then I can invite anyone I want and you can teach anyone who comes."

When I told Donna the news, she immediately invited Dennis for the next study. When Donna came in alone, I thought, "Oh good, Dennis decided not to come." But Donna said, "Dennis will be right in. He's parking the car."

For many months, Dennis came and learned and grew—the only man in the group. Then, one by one, the hus-

bands of the women in the group began to attend. We met for seven years, men and women together learning and sharing around God's Word, always acknowledging the Holy Spirit as our teacher. Now I lead many studies where both men and women attend.

Together we are learning what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in today's world. ◀

Author's note:

It troubled me at first to be teaching men—because of Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:11-12.

[God] said I was to teach whomever he sent to me. To obey him exemplified submission, having a quiet and gentle spirit as I taught would make me teachable and keep me from trying to exercise authority over anyone.

...I once read that God often does the unacceptable (to us) in order to do the unthinkable.

Today, in the church where God has led me to teach mixed studies for several years, the men have now started a prayer group and just recently a men's Bible study. Many of the men hold positions of responsible leadership and have become mentors for other men seeking to grow in God.

When God helped me let go of my idea of the unacceptable, he began to do the unthinkable, and I'm so grateful for the opportunities he has given me.

Janice Wise
disciples and
writes from
her home in
Homosassa,
Florida.

Amy Writing Award Rules

**Did you know? Our guidelines
now include submissions of articles
published electronically?**

**You can read the new rules for the Amy
Writing Awards on the Amy Foundation
Website. Check them out on the Writing
Awards page at www.amyfound.org.**

Do you have email?

We can send this newsletter via email. If you would like to help us be a good steward of our resources, please send us your email address so we can email this newsletter to you.

Send an email to:
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“OK, Virginia, There’s No Santa Claus. But There *Is* God”

First Prize — \$10,000

by Tony Woodlief
Excerpt

My 8-year-old son, Caleb, puts his hand on my shoulder; he wears an expression that shows he wants to have a man-to-man talk. “Dad,” he says, “I know there’s no Santa Claus.” He rattles off his indictments, starting with the pure physics of the enterprise. There’s no way one guy can visit every house in a single night. Then there’s the matter of zoology — not a single nature book on our shelves mentions flying reindeer. Perhaps most important, there’s the weight of public opinion — none of Caleb’s friends believe in Santa any more. He leans close, his voice taking that tone of worldliness that is at once endearing and saddening to a parent. “He isn’t real, is he?”

Perhaps a more responsible parent would confess, but I hesitate. For this I blame G.K. Chesterton, whose treatise *Orthodoxy* had its 100th anniversary this year. One of its themes is the violence that rationalistic modernism has worked on the valuable idea of a “mystical condition,” which is to say the mystery inherent in a supernaturally created world. Writing of his path to faith in God, Chesterton says: “I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought that perhaps it involved a magician.”

Magic-talk gets under the skin of many, like renowned scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins. This is doubly so when it is what the Christ-

figure Aslan, in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, calls “the deeper magic,” an allusion to divinity. Mr. Dawkins is reportedly writing a book examining the pernicious tendency of fantasy tales to promote “anti-scientific” thinking among children. He suspects that such stories lay the groundwork for religious faith, the inculcation of which, he claims, is a worse form of child abuse than sexual molestation.

I suspect that fairy tales and Santa Claus do prepare us to embrace the ultimate Fairy Tale. New research from the Université de Montréal and the University of Ottawa indicates that while children eventually abandon Santa, they keep believing in God. Lewis would say this is because God is real, but Mr. Dawkins fears it is the lasting damage of fairy tales. While Mr. Dawkins stands ironically alongside Puritans in his readiness to ban fairy tales, Christian apologists like Lewis and Chesterton embraced them, because to embrace Christian dogma is to embrace the extrarational.

Today’s Christian apologists, by contrast, seek to reason their way to God by means of archaeological finds, anthropological examinations and scientific argumentation. That’s all well and good, but it seems to miss a fundamental point illuminated by Chesterton, which is that, ultimately, belief in God is belief in mystery.

As a parent, I believe that it’s essential to preserve a small, inviolate space in the

heart of a child, a space where he is free to believe impossibilities. The fantasy writer George MacDonald suggested that it is only by gazing through magic-tinted eyes that one can see God.

This sheds light on a seeming paradox in St. Paul’s letter to Roman Christians: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. . . .” How does one see “invisible attributes”? Only people raised on fairy tales can make sense of that.

That’s why I’m not giving up on Santa without a fight. Not everything we believe, I explain to Caleb, can be proved (or disproved) by science. We believe in impossible things, and in unseen things, beginning with our own souls and working outward. In our house, at least, there’s no shame in believing the impossible.

Tony Woodlief is a writer and management consultant whose writing has appeared in The Wall Street Journal, The London Times, National Review, and WORLD Magazine, where he is a regular contributor. His spiritual memoir, Somewhere More Holy, will be published by Zondervan in 2010. He lives in Kansas with his wife and four sons.

Business unusual

by Cal Thomas
Excerpt

Second Prize —\$5,000

Amy Writing Award Winners

In an age when “big business” and “corporate greed” seem to be synonymous in the public mind, some bright lights occasionally emerge from the darkness brought on by AIG big spenders and over-the-top high-livers.

One such light is the CEO of the Aflac Insurance Company. Dan Amos announced last week he would forego a \$13 million golden parachute his company would owe him were he to be fired or lose his job in a merger or acquisition. In an interview with *USA Today*, Amos said, “If they don’t think I am doing a good job, they don’t have to worry about paying me off.” How refreshing.

It would be nice to know how many honest, humble and philanthropic business leaders we have in America. I’m sure they far outnumber the bad ones so often profiled in the media. But then honesty, charity and virtue are not “news,” we are told. Maybe not, but by promoting the sleazy and tawdry, rather than the virtuous and admirable, you are likely to get more of the one and less of the other.

The Philanthropy Roundtable this month awarded the founder and CEO of the Chick-fil-A restaurant chain, S. Truett Cathy, its William E. Simon Prize for Philanthropic Leadership. The prize recognizes the highest ideals of corporate and individual philanthropy.

Cathy is the poster boy (if at 87 one can still be called a “boy”) for selflessness and integrity. He is also a model for what giving back can do for individuals and a nation. “My wife and I were brought up to believe that the more you give, the more you have,” Cathy told *Philanthropy* magazine. “Few people actually believe in this, but we do.”

What has been lost in this model, which is reflective of another age, is the amount of satisfaction one gets by pouring one’s life into other people.

In our marketing environment, big houses and boats, private planes and lots of money in personal accounts are said to be the source of pleasure and contentment. Cathy’s wealth, while considerable in dollars, is defined by nonmaterial standards. This includes the \$18 million his WinShape Foundation spent just last year on foster homes, college scholarships, a summer camp and marriage-counseling programs.

Marriage counseling? Cathy believes a stable home is fundamental to bringing up stable children. For those children damaged by broken family ties, Cathy’s foundation operates a dozen homes headed by husband-wife teams. The goal is “to provide a loving, nurturing home to those children who are victims of circumstances and need a stable, secure family environment in which to grow and mature.”

In an age when business functions 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, Cathy is a throw-back to the blue laws era. None of his restaurants is open on Sunday. Cathy thinks this provides his employees with a biblical “day of rest” that is good for them.

S. Truett Cathy has found that true wealth is not in possessions, but in giving. This not only benefits individuals, but ultimately society.

Rather than build a personal empire, he is storing up treasures. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19).

In a day when the stock market is unpredictable, Cathy’s investments in people will pay dividends long into the future.

With a twice-weekly column appearing in over 500 newspapers, Cal Thomas is one of the most widely read and highly regarded voices on the American political scene. Thomas, a graduate of American University, has authored ten books, lectured extensively, and currently appears weekly on “Fox News Watch.” Thomas and his wife, Ray, live in the Washington DC area. He is a previous first-prize Amy Writing Award winner.

You can read the full text of all 15 winning entries for 2008 at www.amyfound.org.

**Watch for more Prize-Winners in future issues of
Pen & Sword.**



THE AMY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2009

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Amy Foundation Board

**Meet the
Amy
Foundation
Advisory
Board**

James J. Jackson

James J. Jackson has served on Amy Foundation Board since 1996, when he was invited to participate by Jim Russell Sr., who had read his columns in the Lansing State Journal.

Retired from his career as an executive with the State of Michigan, James currently acts as the editor of the Amy Internet Syndicate.

James has been married for 35 years to Donna, with whom he shares four grown daughters and nine grandchildren.

James and Donna attend St. Matthews Lutheran Church in Holt, Mich., where they have been members since 1976.

James has been a disciple of Christ since 1975.

"I was disciplined by Lay Minister Stan Woell," James says.

At present, James is actively involved in discipling relationships with his 19-year-old grandson, Christopher; his former translator in Haiti, Ele Giisuard; and his nephew Howard Smith.

James has some ambitious goals for the Amy Foundation's work and outreach.

"I pray that the ministry will grow to be a more effective tool in the Kingdom of God," James says.

"I would like to increase the Internet Syndicate with more news outlets reading our material, and encourage more writers to join.

"I would like to see us pursue other ways to get

God's perspective into the print and electronic media. I also would like to see the church writing groups expanded."

*James Jackson's book **In All Things... Moral Reflections and Decisions on Life Issues**, encourages readers to acknowledge God's answers to daily challenges. The book is a collection of short essays, some humorous, some serious, viewed from a moral perspective.*

*The book is available online from Tate Publishing at **www.tatepublishing.com** and at most major bookstores.*

*You can also read excerpts and order books at a discount rate from Amazon.com, or you may order a signed copy directly from Jim at **jjaxcoj@aol.com**.*