

Gospel-Centered Worship

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Ephesians 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

When I first started preparing for this message I was going to preach verses 3-14 and then had to reduce that to verses 3-6 and then I had to reduce it to verse three, and now, finally, we're going to look at only the first half of the verse three.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

What an amazing way to start an epistle. Paul begins his epistles mostly in the same fashion, there's the salutation where he gives you his name and to whom he is addressing, and then he offers grace and peace. Knowing what he's about to write and knowing what this epistle is for, his heart is full and he cannot wait. He bursts into praise for God. His heart is swept away and carried by an exuberant river of praise. He is carried aloft, his heart full, and his tongue given freedom: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In this epistle you have one of the richest explanations of the gospel of grace coming second to none other than the premier Epistle of Paul to the Romans. This grand six-chapter book is an explanation of the treasures and wealth of God and His grace toward us whom He has saved.

Our text is part of the longest sentence in ancient and modern literature. It starts in verse three and ends in verse 14. The original was one sentence. In your English Bibles it's split into multiple sentences but in the original it was only one. Of course this sentence would belong to the Apostle Paul who had this special talent of running complex sentences together and cramming them into long paragraphs. The object of studying Scripture is to break down these complex thoughts into the subjective clauses and phrases. In the multiplicity of themes Paul is putting together, you almost have to dissect each one and then reassemble them to see what his structure and aim is. That's what I intend to do with you today.

In this opening clause we see what Paul will state in the first three chapters—the great Gospel in which we rejoice today. The first three chapters are doctrinal in nature, meaning they are explicit statements of religious and spiritual truth, and the last three are chapters of practicality, how to put into practice what you read in the first three chapters.

Many of us are wired to delight in practicality. “Don’t give me high and lofty intellectualism or philosophical truth; I don’t think in those terms. The air is too thin up there for me. Just tell me what to do. Make it practical.” But the apostle knows the practical cannot happen until you first understand the truth. Practical living is based on and comes out of truth. It is the truth that is the fuel of everyday life. Unless truth is driving your life, your life is going nowhere.

These first three chapters are a reiteration of our glorious Gospel—God saves sinners—and how He does so.

I. The Greatest Priority of the Gospel—The Worship of God

The reason for the Gospel is that you might know God and then knowing Him you would worship Him. This is it. In this age of hopelessness and aimlessness, when people enroll in colleges and universities still not knowing what they’re going to do with their lives, changing their majors many times over before they graduate, Paul tells us clearly there is one single, grand purpose for life and it is to know God and thereby worship Him.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” (Ephesians 1:3)

We’ll talk about the last half of the verse next week, but right now I want you to focus on God being the one blessed.

A. Definition.

This word *blessed* reminds us of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3-12, the beatitudes. *Blessed be the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness.* So on and so forth. But in Jesus’ sermon the word *blessed* is different than the one Paul uses.

In Matthew 5 the word *blessed* is *makarios*, which means “to favor” or “to be happy because of good fortune.” Favored are the poor in spirit. You ought to be happy because you have been given the favor of God. Blessed are you.

Here Paul doesn’t use that word. He uses a word *eulogetos* which means “to speak well of,” from which our word *eulogize* comes. “Let good be spoken of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, let Him be eulogized. Often the word *eulogize* today is used only to speak well of the dead. At a funeral we eulogize the deceased. We talk about the good things of that person’s life, discount the bad periods, and focus on things we can speak well of. We eulogize them.

God is not being eulogized in the sense that He’s dead and we’re talking about Him after the fact. Don’t we often say that we ought to give roses to the living and not to the dead? We mean we should say good things and say good things while they’re still living and not wait until they’re dead

to give them the bouquets of our compliments. Well, the Lord is not dead and Paul is saying we ought to speak well of the Lord, exalt Him, declare His goodness, revere Him, and lift Him up in words that are honorable. This is how Paul starts the letter and for the next three chapters it is the purpose of the epistle.

B. Purpose of Ephesians.

This is the purpose of this epistle, to explain the blessings of glorious Gospel with which He has saved us in order that we do one thing and one thing only—bless Him. We are to speak well of Him, lift Him up, praise Him, adore Him.

having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:5-6)

He predestined you because it was pleasurable to Him and so you might praise His glorious grace. Verse six is almost a mirror image of verse three. They're almost like bookends. The whole theme is the praise of God. That's what Gospel-centered worship is. It is to see God as the One who has given to us so great a salvation that we cannot be silent and we speak well of Him.

having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

Here we see that the Gospel is very God-centered not man-centered. Have you noticed this, even in these couple of verses? The reason you're saved is a God-centered not me-centered reason.

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

The words *in Him* are favorites to the Apostle Paul, especially in Ephesians. Count them sometime and you'll find "in Christ," "in Jesus," "in Him," repeated all through these six chapters. Why? Because in Christ God is wrapping up this whole plan of creation and redemption so that in Christ is all power and honor now and forever. Amen.

"that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:12)

"who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:14)

"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," (Ephesians 1:17)

Why is he praying that they would have greater wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God? Because the more you know about Him the more this praise and worship comes forth. What we have done thus far this morning and what we propose to continue doing after we leave this place is not an exercise of religious duty. It's not just something you do on a Sunday morning in a "church building" in what is called a "worship service." No, we worship God because we know Him and what He's like, and what He's like brings forth this necessity from within of extolling, speaking of His greatness and beauty.

In the second chapter Paul explains that the reason for God saving you by His grace is so . . .

"that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7)

You are redeemed so God might be praised for lavishing His goodness on you.

Then he ends the doctrinal section with these words,

"to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."
(Ephesians 3:21)

The sole purpose is that God be praised! That's not the only purpose of the epistle but it is the ultimate purpose, and it is also the ultimate purpose of the Christian.

C. The Purpose of the Christian.

I want you to leave here knowing why God made you. You're not some accident. You're not some random selection of chance, as the evolutionists teach. You're not the mistake of your parents. No, you were designed by God and you were made that you might know Him and that in knowing Him you would bless Him. This is the purpose of every one of us, especially those who are believers. This is the reason you have been saved, this is the reason for the blood of Jesus Christ and this is the reason to live your life in worship and praise to God. Your whole life is to be consumed under the banner of worship and praise unto God. Let your bodies be living sacrifices, let your life be spent for the worship of God.

I know that to some of you that sounds terribly boring. Let's just confront that right now. I understand that because I remember a time when to have heard, "We're going to spend eternity doing nothing other than worshipping and praising God around His throne," I would think, "Oh no, eternity? Worship *forever*? Aren't we going to get tired of it?" But the more you know Jesus, the more you see of His beauty and excellence, the more you taste of His goodness, the more eternity doesn't seem long enough. It's not about standing and singing hymns forever and ever. The purpose of your life is that as you get to know Christ as the joy that is absolutely superior to any other pleasure on this earth.

There are two reasons you ought to worship God.

1. Because He deserves it.

He is worthy of it. There is no one like Him and because of who He is He deserves constant and continual worship and praise from these lips. Before you think God is an egomaniac and that His happiness is somehow dependent upon our praise and if our lips cease to praise Him He will slip into depression, let's state for the record that is not the case. There are people who are like that. Unless they're being complimented and flattered they enter a point of despair. They're unhappy because they need someone stroking them at all times in order to feel good about their self. That is not God. God is *worthy* of praise because there is no one in the universe of more value than God.

Let me see if I can illustrate what I'm trying to say. I took great interest in last week's events of the Pope's visit. I once again was amazed, but not surprised, by the reception this man received by many people in the United States. Thousands upon thousands would come out to see him and I watched as they cheered and praised this man, a mere mortal as they. I watched as grown men bowed to this man and kissed his hand or the ring upon it. I watched grown women break into tears as he passed by and touched them or blessed them.

I saw people stand and clap and revere him, lifting up this one mere mortal man, and I thought, "Why are they doing this? What has this man done and what is he that he should deserve praise and adulation like this?" Here is a man who heads up an entire religion and he is given this kind of worship. How much more worthy and deserving is the Almighty, the One who made you, sustains you, and sent His Son to die for you? He sacrificed His Son for your sins so you could live with Him in a perfect paradise forever. He is worthy.

This isn't a matter of *having* to worship Him—I get to worship Him. And the more you know Him it's not a matter of *having* to do this but you will be unable to dam up the heart. If worship sounds boring to you, it's simply because you're unacquainted with Him. Let's go deeper into the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Let's experience Him. Let's journey together and pray to God, "Help us see more of Your heart. Help us to understand more of Your compassion and love for us. Help us to see more of the height, the width, the breadth, the depth, of the love You have for us in Christ Jesus," and I guarantee the more we see, the more worship will flow. It's automatic.

We worship not because of God's benefit. He is going to continue to be God even if none of us worship Him.

2. In the end we worship because it benefits us.

We were made to worship. Worship you must and worship you will. All of you are worshippers. You worship something, even if it's not God. Most often it's our selves. Therefore, "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," is a statement for our benefit, not God's. In the act of

praise and worship of God, something exquisite happens in the soul of a person that loves Him. It's beautiful beyond my ability to describe. God made you to know Him and thereby worship Him and if your Christian experience has become dull, may I suggest something basic to your nature? Learn to worship God and give Him praise continually. Let the fruit of your lips, as the writer of Hebrews says, be continually upon the Lord God, and something will happen. You were made to worship.

George Barna, the famous pollster and sociologist, observes the contemporary Christian's view of worship: "Most adults will contend that a Christian has a responsibility to worship God. However, when asked to define what worship means, two out of three are unable to offer an appropriate definition or description of worship.

"Even among the people who consistently attend Christian worship services, apparently for the purpose of worshiping God, the majority does not consider worship to be a 'top priority' in their lives. It need not be the top priority; but most of them do not even include it among a laundry list of top priorities."

Most Christians do not make it a priority to live as a being of worship unto God. Barna goes on to reveal the true motivation behind many American Christian's attendance at worship services. He says it's to "satisfy or please them, not to honor or please God." Most people are coming to a church on a given Sunday not to please and honor God but to please and honor themselves. Beloved, worship is not about you, it's for you, but it is always to be Christ-centered. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It's always been and it always will be about God whether you recognize it or not. For in the end "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

If that is true, and it is, all problems are a problem of worship.

D. All Problems are a Problem of Worship.

Think of any and every problem you are facing, have faced, or will face, and I suggest it's a worship problem.

For example, even sickness is a worship problem. Why do we struggle physically? Why does the body degenerate? Why do we have disease and finally death? It's a worship problem. The reason is because our first parents chose not to worship God but themselves. Every problem you and I are confronted with, even in this very hour, is a worship problem that stems from their rebellion. But not just theirs but our failure to worship the true and living God.

For the last 30 years, American Christians have been fighting what they call "Worship Wars." It's one of the most crazy and ignorant thing I've ever heard of. It's Christians fighting over worship styles. One particular group will want to worship God through contemporary, more modern,

music and others are more traditional and will maybe want to sing more classic hymns. Even among the contemporary worshippers there are divisions. They want to do hip-hop and some want to do reggae. There are all these styles of worship and we divide ourselves over them, hence the term, “worship wars.” Supposed Christians fighting to see who will have their style utilized in the worship service.

I want to suggest all strife in your life is a “worship war.” Let me demonstrate that for you. Do you ever have strife, disagreement, or dissension? And, by the way, you don’t need anyone else to have a disagreement and strife. So often we have more trouble and strife with ourselves than with anyone else. There is always a sense of stress inside, a civil war going on within. Where did it come from? It’s a worship war, because wherever there is strife there is someone fighting, striving for preeminence, seeking to be honored, revered, and blessed.

Why do two people have dissension and strife? Because one is insisting they are right and demanding the other acknowledge their rightness. That acknowledgment of rightness is an act of worship even though that person would never define it as so and didn’t see it as such. One or both insists they are right and the other must honor them and see what they are claiming to be the truth, if for no other reason than they said it was. They’re demanding worship. “Bless me. That is, see the goodness in my position. And if you really honor me you will adopt my position.” That is an act of worship. Therefore, when it doesn’t happen there is strife.

The next time you and your spouse have a lover’s spat, stop in the middle of it and say, “Who is demanding worship right now?” Of course the argument will continue because it will be the other person’s fault. This is the problem though. It’s a worship war over who is right and then who is going to be blessed for being right.

I suggest that the Apostle Paul begins this epistle this way because he understands this. He understands the worship of God is the correction, the remedy, the answer to all that plagues us. Everything that plagues you. Let me illustrate this for you.

You’re in a disagreement. Somebody does not recognize you as being right nor do they seem able to assess and discern your worth. They have basically cut you off and offended you. The depth of your pain and hurt will be the degree to which you worship yourself. The more you worship you, the greater your pain. I suggest you turn your focus away from worshipping you and begin to bless God. Be lost in God and you’ll find the pain will be lost too. You’ll be caught up in what you were designed for—the blessing and worship of God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You can worship God no matter where you are or what you’re going through. You can even be going through severe loss, trials, and judgment and still worship God. You can remain centered, balanced, and full of peace while great turmoil is brewing. Remember Job? Within one hour he was confronted with the news that he lost all of his children had died. Then he lost his wealth and finally his health. The Bible said Job was determined to worship God and he said, “Blessed be

the name of the Lord.” He worshipped. It’s in worship that you find your balance. It’s in worship that you find yourself. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

II. Through the Son Alone

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” (Ephesians 1:3)

Paul could have just said, “Blessed be God, who has blessed us...” but he doesn’t. He adds a modifying phrase.

A. Paul’s Description of God.

The word *God* is modified by the phrase, “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This helps the reader to relate to God. God is God. How do you like that profound statement? But stop and think about it. It really is profound. Try to explain it and you find that “God is God” says it quite nicely after all. God is God because there is no one else like Him and therefore He is incomparable. You can’t point here or there and say, “This is what He’s like.” You can’t look there and say, “There’s an example.” He is incomprehensible. He is beyond our intelligence and thinking capabilities. Who can wrap their mind around this God, the Almighty one? You can’t do it—He defies logic. You cannot grasp the totality of what it means for God to be God and yet God has helped us because He has established Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. And He has established Himself as a father.

But for some the word *father* is a difficult word. It is not a word loaded with good and pleasant memories. For some, it is a word shackled to pain, a word that reminds them of someone who abandoned them and so the word *father* means a person who will abandon you when you need it. For others, the word *father* is a drunk who spent all the family’s income and kept them in poverty. Some struggle with the fact that God is Father, and to relate to Him as such is very difficult.

But when He says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that helps us. This can help even those who had an earthly father that mistreated them or neglected or abused or even abandoned them. When you see Jesus, you know what the Father is like because He is the express image of the Father. Do you see this? He truly is a chip off the old block. If you’ve seen Jesus, you’ve seen the Father. Those are Jesus’ own words.

The Gospel writer John, in his prologue, says it like this, “and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” How do we know what the Father is like? We saw Him in the person of Jesus Christ. John said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” He tabernacled among us. We saw Him, touched Him, felt Him, heard Him. Do you realize that had Jesus not come to this earth and we didn’t have the Gospel testimony of His life, we would still be in as much darkness about who God is as the Old Testament people? But God took on skin and bone and muscle and flesh. God infiltrated our world and said, “Here I am. Look upon me.”

I know the incarnation, God becoming man, is quite difficult to understand. It's incomprehensible. Both deity and humanity in the same person at the same time, I don't understand that. But this I do know: I know better what the Father is like by watching Jesus. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's why the apostle adds this phrase. Jesus let's us know what God is like and that He is good.

Watch Jesus as He walks through the villages of His own land and takes compassion on the poor, the blind, the lame, the deaf. Look at Him as He looks upon this poor widow as she loses her only son. What does Jesus do? He stops the funeral procession and restores her son to her. Why? Because this is the way the Father is. Jesus isn't different from the Father. He's not the good cop vs. the bad cop. This is God Almighty acting in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Now you know what the Father is like and always will be like. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There's a second reason I believe Paul adds these words, "of our Lord Jesus Christ." As Paul prepares to explain the Gospel that flows out of the heart of the Father through the Son, made real to us by the Holy Spirit, he wants us to see it's in Christ alone.

B. In Christ Alone.

It's not in Christ and in something else. It's not in Christ and your good works or in Christ and your efforts to change your behavior and bad habits. It's not in Christ and being a member of the church. It's not Christ and being baptized. It's not Christ and being a discipler of others. It's in Christ alone. Jesus and nothing else.

I know that. You're preaching to the choir. Why don't you just go ahead and shut your message down so we can go eat? You're not saying anything we don't already know.

I'm only giving you the words of the Apostle and he had taught these people, surely he knew he had taught them it was in Christ alone and yet he repeats it. Why? Because he knew the vices of our enemy. Satan is never asleep but always busy trying to add to your Christianity something other than Jesus.

In C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, the devil's strategy is not to remove Christ from Christianity, this he could not do. His strategy is to add to Christ, which in effect does remove Christ. When you add something to Jesus you just negated Him, you have stated He is insufficient and if He is insufficient then tell me how you are going to have eternal life and know God? There is no other way. It must be Christ and Him alone. In the twenty-fifth letter, Screwtape, the superior uncle demon, is training his nephew Wormwood. This is what he advises this demon-in-training:

What we want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of "Christianity And." You know--Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychic Research,

Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform. If they must be Christians, let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring. Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing.

Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing. That's why Paul puts "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is a twisted tendency in all of us to look at the Gospel of Christ alone and become dissatisfied. There is a horror in the mundane, routine, the same-old, same-old. How many of you have been saved for a while and you've lost the glimmer of the early days of your walk with Jesus and now you've slipped into this horrible state of mundaneness with Jesus? Jesus just doesn't excite you anymore; He's just not fascinating anymore.

So here's what we do to drown out the monotony. We come up with Christ and something else. A good many Christians want to talk about nothing but prophecy and end time things. We've got people who are into Jesus and prosperity, health, and wealth. We've got people who are into Jesus and social justice, because to them the Gospel is about bringing social order to our culture. And then there are people, some perhaps among us, for whom Christ is not enough, and added to Christ is reformed theology. They're more excited about John Calvin than Jesus Christ. Jesus isn't sufficient to fascinate them and keep their souls in a worshipful adulation of God so they've got to add something to their Christian experience.

Friend, you need nothing more than Jesus. The problem is you haven't gotten deep enough into the well. You'll never exhaust the well of Christ! There are deeper levels to go and higher heights to climb. You've been shelved because you've tried to add to Christ.

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

There's not a second name out there. There's only one name—Jesus Christ.

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:9)

Did you hear that? Only the person that abides in the doctrine, the teaching, of Jesus and Jesus alone has the Father. Is Christ your lover? Is Christ your fascination? Is Christ your delight? Is Christ the object of desire, compulsion, love, motives?

I'll never forget hearing Ravi Zacharias tell what he calls his most favorite story. It's a true story that happened to him in his earlier days of ministry. It's about a Vietnamese friend of his that had been imprisoned by the communist government after the Vietnam War. In the story, Hien, Zacharias's friend, is about 17 and Ravi was 25. Zacharias preached and Hien translated for him. The US

Army Corps sent him over in a kind of chaplain ministry and God used those two men to bring about a small revival in South Vietnam. Here's the story from one of Zacharias' books.

After Vietnam fell, Hien was captured by the Vietcong and imprisoned. They accused him of collaborating with the CIA, since he had worked with missionaries. In prison, they worked him over, telling him again and again that he had been brainwashed by Westerners. They took away his Bible and forbade him to speak English, the language he loved, permitting him to use only Vietnamese or French.

"There is no such thing as God," came the refrain from his captors, day after hellish day.

The hour finally came when Hien wondered, "Maybe they are right. Maybe there is no such thing as God." As he thought back to some of my sermons and the shared blessings we had enjoyed, he wondered if perhaps I had been deluded too. That night he went to bed, muttering to himself, "I'm through with God. When I wake up in the morning, no more God, no more prayers."

The new day dawned, and the commanding officer of the prison barked out the prison assignments for the day. Hien was to clean the latrines. He cringed when he heard it. It was the ultimate form of indignity for the prisoners. The latrines were the absolute dregs of human filth, and Hien spent the entire day in those inhospitable surroundings.

His final task was to empty the trash cans, which were filled with soiled toilet paper. All day long, he labored with reminders to himself—"No God today." But as his work was coming to an end, something in the trash can happened to catch his eye. It was a piece of paper with printed type. As Hien looked closer, he saw it was in English. Hungry to read this language again, he looked around to make sure no was watching. He hastily washed off the filth and tucked the paper into his pocket.

That night, after everyone had fallen asleep, he carefully took out his flashlight and removed the still damp paper. In the upper right-hand corner of the page were the words "Romans 8."

The Bible.

Hien, in a state of shock, began reading.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

He read on.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, 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, along with him,

graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hien began crying. Of all the Scripture verses he had known, these were the ones he most needed to hear, and now they had come back to him. "Lord," he realized, "you would not let me out of your reach for even one day." He turned over in his bed that night and prayed.

The next morning, when he saw the commanding officer, Hien asked him, "Sir, would you mind if I clean the latrines again?"

The officer stared at him, quite puzzled. Thinking Hien was being rather arrogant he decided to assign him to the latrines indefinitely. "You are going to clean them every day, until I tell you to stop," he commanded.

Hien did not know it in the beginning, but the officer himself had been tearing out those pages from the Bible and using them for toilet paper. Now, each day, Hien rinsed them clean, hid them in his pocket, and use them for his devotions at night. He ended up collecting numerous passages from the book of Romans, as well as from other books of the Bible.

After his release from prison, Hien escaped Vietnam and came to the United States where many years later he reunited with his old friend Ravi Zacharias. He traveled to Atlanta and met Zacharias and his family, where one night around the table he spoke to the Zacharias children and said, "You know, you can go all over the world, go through all kinds of things trying to find happiness. I want to tell you something, the answer is right here and now. It is intimacy with God. You find that intimacy with God and you will have the happiness you are looking for. You can find it any where in the world when you are walking close to God."

You mean even when you're on your knees at the bottom of a filth-laden latrine in a prison camp in North Vietnam, I can still find Jesus and happiness and peace and contentment? The answer is yes, anywhere in the world, if you learn to bless the God and Father of your Lord Jesus Christ.

When you understand that you were born and you were saved to live as a sacrifice of worship to God, prison can become a heaven on this side of glory. Because it's not your surroundings that changes your heart and attitude, it's to look upon your God through Christ and see His glory and beauty and to marvel in Him. That's the secret. That's what you were made for. Don't you think it's time to get busy doing what you were made to do? Lose yourself in Jesus. Amen.