



MARCH/APRIL 2005

Jesus said, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63).

Everyone is born with the deep desire for life, and more than just physical life. True life is not found in good health, good works, good job, good ministry, good reputation, good bank account, good house, good marriage, good children, good education, good looks, good talent, good understanding of Scriptures, nor good *anything*...only God is good (*Matthew 19:17*)...and true life is only in Jesus Christ (*John 14:6*). When Jesus, as the source of true life, relates personally to people, His words are good and full of life.

Jesus enlivens the words in the Bible. When we see these words only as rules to follow, there is no life in them. In 1885, A.B. Simpson said the neatest thing, "The way to look at the Scriptures and understand the thoughts of God, is to see in them the face of love, shining through and through; not ideas, nor doctrines, but Jesus Himself as the Life and Source and sustaining Presence of all our life."

Perhaps you may not often read the Bible. That's ok, for Jesus lovingly speaks to you through friends He sends your way. Have you ever met someone whose presence, with or without words, speaks life to you in ways you may not be able to specifically explain? What a healing presence that person is. You are being drawn to the life of Christ in that person.

Christ Life Ministries (CLM) nurtures people in the indwelling life of Christ so that they, in turn, nurture others in the same life. It is amazing to witness people *receive* the truth of life in Christ, and then to spontaneously seek to *give* this life to others. For example, a single mother came to know Christ as her life at CLM. Near the end of her training at CLM, she exclaimed to me, "It's like we are breathing life into others, isn't it?!" Yes! We have received this treasure of Life in our earthen vessels (*2 Corinthians 4:7*), a treasure not to be hoarded, but an endless treasure to be given away. The very life of Christ *is* the treasure.

BREATHE IN THE WORD (THE MIRACLE OF RECEIVING)

Ever since Adam's fall into *doing* good in the Garden, mankind has been obsessed with *doing*. Although Christians have been given new hearts, we still have the old programmed focus of *doing*. After Jesus fed 5000 people with five pieces of bread and two fish, the people crowded around Jesus and asked in *John 6:28*, "What shall *we do* that *we* may work the works of God?" Notice their focus on *doing*. I love the answer Jesus gave them, and us, in *John 6:29*, "This is the work of God..." [Are you ready for this? Is Jesus now going to tell us what to *do*?] "...that you *believe* in Him whom He sent." That's it! The miracle of the Christian life is not *doing* great things, but simply *believing* a great God. Doing anything of eternal value comes out of this miracle of believing.

Believing is breathing in God's word. *Believing* is the miracle of *receiving* what God says has already been *completely done* for us through the cross and resurrection of Christ. He says He has forgiven us, *and* has given us His very life, a new identity. He says Christ has become for us wisdom and righteousness (*1 Corinthians 1:30*). He says we are now *complete* in Christ (*Colossians 2:10*). Before I *received* these words of my new identity in Christ, I was *deceived* into feeling defeated, thinking something was still not quite right with me. But oh to breathe in the breath of Life and be whole! This is why we encourage each boy at the Boys Home during chapel to let us know when a Scripture verse speaks to his heart; we want to give each boy a copy of that verse when he leaves the Boys Home to remind him forever of a personal word implanted in his heart that will grow into hope and joy. This is what I hope happens to everyone I minister, including six families referred to me by the phone counseling ministry of In-Touch Ministries in Atlanta so far this year.

BREATHE OUT THE WORD (THE MIRACLE OF GIVING)

I am convinced that when we breathe in life, we breathe out life. Jesus' earthly brother James describes the seed of life in words from God, "*Receive with meekness the implanted word*" (*James 1:21*). After receiving this living word, James says, "*Be doers of the word*" (*James 1:22*). When God plants inaudible words deep in our hearts, we are enlivened to *do* things that share true life with others!

I recently have found myself praying (giving, if you will) Scriptures back to God, both for myself and for others. I believe this may be my response to the living hope God breathes into me through Scriptures. For example, I have been discipling a woman who has experienced years of an angry relationship with her husband. I was tempted to counsel her to *do* certain "Christian" and "biblical" things for her and her husband, but I knew she first needed to *receive* living hope. We were led to pray based on *Isaiah 61:3*, "Lord, You really *can* exchange beauty for the ashes from her past burns and hurts, can't You?! She has held on to those ashes for so long. Lord, loosen her grip and blow away those ashes. Show her the beauty of who she really is in Christ. Turn her mourning into praise." As I breathed out those words, she breathed in those words with tears of freedom and for healing from the inside-out.

Every one of Paul's 13 epistles (letters) in the New Testament begins with the simple greeting "Paul." I now believe that is more than just a customary greeting. On the back is "A One-Word Sermon: Paul" that came out of my heart as I pondered (*breathed in* ©) how Paul might elaborate upon his simple greeting "Paul." I believe the context and message of each epistle is bound up in this one name. I hope it encourages you to see the value of yourself and your name.

Next GraceLife Conference in Simpsonville, SC May 20-21, 2005

Gregg Gibbons Christ Life Ministries 211 E. Curtis St. Simpsonville, SC 29681 864-228-HOPE gjeggrace@earthlink.net

A One-Word Sermon: "Paul"

Romans 1:1aa

To my dear brothers and sisters in Rome, this is Paul...P-a-u-l...PAUL!!! Oh how I love the sound of that name! PAUL!! Yippee-zippadeedoodah! PAUL! Now I don't mean this in a self-centered way. Quite the contrary. It's not that I love that name *per se*...but I love the One who gave me that name! Jesus gave me that name. Jesus...J-e-s-u-s...JESUS!!! Now that's the name I love! You see, my name is IN His name...yes, Paul is IN Christ. I can live and pray in His name! And I can truly love in His name, for I have no real love of my own. That's why I love you...and the name *Paul* by which I write you this letter.

You see, my name has not always been Paul. I once WAS Saul...but (pardon my grammar) I AIN'T NO MORE! As Saul, I was a graduate of the best seminary in the world, and I thought I could see God's will for my life. I just knew God was so proud to have me on His team, and that I was the first one He picked. I was so proud of my name *Saul*. I was so busy working for God that I could not really hear anyone, including God. I couldn't really minister to the pain and sufferings and needs of others...I was so wrapped up in doing good things. You see, I was a moral man without a heart.

So I thought I could see and I deep down didn't care if I could hear anyone else. *But grace* (oh, what a phrase!)...*but grace* abounded for me on that dusty road to Damascus where Christ transformed my *seeing* and my *hearing*. Christ blinded me initially so I could focus on hearing His strong, yet tender voice. And He called me by my old name, *Saul*. Imagine that, He called me by my name...my old sin-full, selfish name. How could the spotless Lamb of God speak such a dirty word as that? How could He love unconditionally like that? That's beyond me. That's grace.

Yes, He called me by my name...He called me by my name...He called me by my name...I just can't get over the truth that He called me by my self-righteous name! He met me where I was...in my self-righteousness. I am so grateful He called me even when I wasn't willing to listen, and especially when I didn't deserve it.

He called me by my name just as He calls each of His beloved friends by their personal names...including each of you. And He called each of us through questions that only He could answer...and each of us were drawn to the truth inside those questions...we each were drawn to Truth Himself. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" "Peter, do you love Me?" "Philip, don't you know I am the truth?" "Oh Thomas, don't you believe Me through my scars?" "Martha, do you believe that whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die?"

Now, just as amazing as His calling me by my name is the miracle that I heard Him! Saul, that self-absorbed man who was deaf to the human cries in the world, how could he ever hear the divine Creator of the world? It certainly had nothing whatsoever to do with ol' Saul's ability to hear. It all has to do with God's loving ability to speak. Yep...amazing grace again!

And Christ continues to speak, and I continue to hear Him. For what I am about to share with you in this letter, I did not learn from any man. I learned it from Christ who named me *Paul*. He took my old name *Saul* to the cross. He took my old name *Saul* to the grave. That old name...it's gone forever and ever amen! And on Easter morning, He arose...He arose...yes, He arose and called me by a new name *Paul*...P-a-u-l...PAUL! A new name for a new life! Simultaneous reverent gasps from a host (millions) of angels echoed through the heavens all the way into my new heart when the risen Christ uttered the name "Paul" for the first time. Then all of the angels sang, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Who shall glorify Your name, O Lord?" (Revelation 15:3, 4) My new heart joined the chorus, "I, Paul, will...I, Paul, will...I, Paul, will glorify Your name, O Lord!"

So, everything I am about to share with you in this letter is simply an overflow of my name *Paul*...an overflow of who God has made me...an overflow of God's glory...an overflow of Christ Himself who lives in Paul...*in Paul*...oh how I love that name! And God forbid that I should boast in my own name apart from Christ! Because it doesn't matter if I make a good name for myself or a bad name for myself in this world... it just doesn't matter one itty bitty witty bit! All that matters in all the heavens and the earth is that by grace Christ has already made a name for me, and a name for you. Each of us have already been made new creations in Christ...we have been made real, yes genuine, through Christ alone (Galatians 6:14-15).

Whew! I no longer have to strive to make a name for myself. I am free to be who I really am all because of *what Christ really did for me* and *who He really is in me*. *Paul*. Yes, I love that name because it is permeated with the genuine, fragrant life of Christ!

Therefore, I have only one credential for writing this letter...I have only one claim for the authority with which I send this letter...I have only one reason for my joy in writing to you...I have only one hope as you read this letter: *My name is Paul*.

And I write this newsletter for one reason: *My name is Gregg*. ☺ God bless you richly in your name, too!