

Breaking that habit, however, will pay tremendous dividends. You will get to see Jesus in the eyes of other believers and they will get to see Jesus in yours. You will get to join in praising God for who he is and what he has done in your life—and in the lives of others. Your faith will grow and your maturity as a disciple of Jesus will leap forwards.

The Bible is very clear that this “church” thing is to be a community of God’s people. You can’t do that sitting at home on the recliner! There are over 30 commands in the New Testament that followers of Jesus, in order to obey them, have to do with “others.” Love one another, bear with one another, etc. those things are difficult, if not impossible, to do alone. In fact, if you read the New Testament, you won’t find a single follower of Jesus living out his faith separate from the “community” of God (church).

Do you want to be obedient to Jesus? Jesus said he loves those who obey his commands. This is a great time to get rid of an old habit (not meeting together) and replace it with something much better (meeting together on a regular basis).

Here at *Community* Christian Church, we have an acrostic depicting what “*Community*” means:

**C**ultivate relationships with those who are seeking.

**O**ffer time and assistance to community services and activities.

**M**otivate and encourage others to attend our services and activities.

**M**aintain simple structure for people to get involved in.

**U**nderstand and accept each other under the grace of God.

**N**urture one another in teams and small groups.

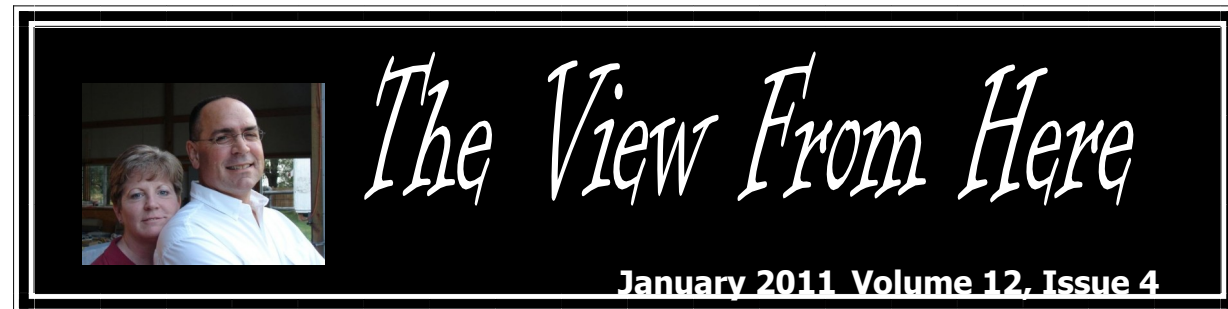
**I**nitiate a verbal witness.

**T**rust God to use your spiritual giftedness in ministry.

**Y**ield your resources in obedience with God’s leading.

*...be a part of it!*

*Jack*



## *OLD HABITS ARE . . .*

You and I know full well that old habits are hard to break, some of them seem almost impossible. You may have noticed by now that each of the bathrooms in our church building have automatic lights. Yet—I still find myself reaching for the switch as I go through the door! How long is it going to take for me to remember not to do that?

You may have had similar experiences of changes being made in your life or in you home, workplace, or elsewhere—and you’re still reaching, grabbing, looking or going to the wrong place.

Maybe you’ve struggled with a personal habit like smoking, drinking, overeating, gossiping, or something else that you just can’t let go of or get away from. Habits are hard to break!

And we are such creatures of habit! Some of them can be good, but a lot of them can be no so good. The author of Hebrews (possibly Apollos), addresses a very important **bad habit** in chapter 10, verses 24 & 25:

<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not **giving up meeting together**, as some are in the **habit of doing**, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

He’s saying that some folks in the early church had developed a habit of not meeting together at church gatherings—such as worship services, communion and fellowship meals, and other activities.

Once established it’s hard to break the habit of *not* going to meet with other Christians in praise and worship. It’s much easier to sleep in, have a late breakfast, watch a DVD or sports on TV.

## TAKE COURAGE

"God's well of grace must have a bottom to it," we reason. "A person can request forgiveness only so many times," contends our common sense. "Cash in too many mercy checks, and sooner or later one is going to bounce!" The devil loves this line of logic. If he can convince us that God's grace has limited funds, we'll draw the logical conclusion. The account is empty. God has locked the door to His throne room. Pound all you want; pray all you want. No access to God.

"No access to God" unleashes a beehive of concerns. We are orphans, unprotected and exposed. Heaven, if there is such a place, has been removed from the itinerary. Vulnerable in this life and doomed in the next. The fear of disappointing God has teeth.

But Christ has forceps. In His first reference to fear, He does some serious defanging. "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9.2, NASB). Note how Jesus places courage and forgiven sins in the same sentence. Might bravery begin when the problem of sin is solved? Let's see.

Jesus spoke these words to a person who could not move. "A paralytic lying on a bed ..." (v. 2, NASB). The disabled man couldn't walk the dog or jog the neighborhood. But he did have four friends, and his friends had a hunch. When they got wind that Jesus was a guest in their town, they loaded their companion on a mat and went to see the teacher. An audience with Christ might bode well for their buddy.

A standing-room-only crowd packed the residence where Jesus spoke. People sat in

windows, crowded in doorways. You'd have thought God Himself was making the Capernaum appearance. Being the sort of fellows who don't give up easily, the friends concocted a plan. "When they weren't able to get in because of the crowd, they removed part of the roof and lowered the paraplegic on his stretcher" (Mark 2.4, *The Message*).

Risky strategy. Most homeowners don't like to have their roofs disassembled. Most paraplegics aren't fond of a one-way bungee drop through a ceiling cavity.

And most teachers don't appreciate a spectacle in the midst of their lesson. We don't know the reaction of the home-owner or the man on the mat. But we know that Jesus didn't object. Matthew all but paints a smile on His face. Christ issued a blessing before one was requested. And He issued a blessing no one expected: "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9.2, NASB).

Wouldn't we anticipate different words? "Take courage. Your legs are healed." "Your paralysis is over." "Sign up for the Boston Marathon." The man had limbs as sturdy as spaghetti, yet Jesus offered mercy, not muscles. What was He thinking? Simple. He was thinking about our deepest problem: sin. He was considering our deepest fear: the fear of failing God. Before Jesus healed the body (which He did), He treated the soul. "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven."

MAX LUCADO

## KEEPING DOWN APPEARANCES

Some years ago an article in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* featured this headline: "Appearance Counts When Wrapping Holiday Gifts." Said one employee at a luxury goods store in San Antonio, Texas, "The biggest thing I've seen through the years is that the wrapping is just as important as what's on the inside. You can take a \$5 item and make it look like a million bucks." Another person quoted in the article noted, "Packaging will make a whole lot of difference, and it will make the gift special."

On the other hand, there are occasions when the lack of "proper" packaging sets a gift apart. Parents and grandparents do not feel offended at all when a child or grandchild gives a gift for Christmas or any special occasion that may lack style in appearance but is clearly given with love.

The "packaging" of Bethlehem may seem so inappropriate for the Messiah, God's Son: a feeding trough for animals; dirty, smelly shepherds; and a humble peasant couple from a remote village "up north." Many in Jesus' day wondered how someone from such surroundings could possibly be the Messiah. Here too, however, the *lack* of appearance is what counts. That Jesus came to earth as he did conveys, literally, the depth of God's

love for us. He was willing to come down to our level because he knew there was no way for us to rise to his. The packaging of Bethlehem does not reflect the absence of love; on the contrary, it declares the greatest love the world has ever known.

This packaging also serves as a model for the way we are to respond to God's gift. We do not have to "keep up appearances" in presenting ourselves to him. The father of the prodigal son was not repulsed in the least by the shabby, scruffy appearance of his wayward son. He loved him as he was—in spite of what he had done.

Nor is our Father offended when we come to him, sins and all. In fact, he did much more for us than kill a "fatted calf"; he gave his Son as the spotless Lamb to die in our place. Such love is not received by trying to "impress" the giver. The recipient can only offer humble thanks and seek never to forget the grace that has been shown him. Paul's words say it so well: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8.9).

*By Doug Redford, professor of biblical studies at Cincinnati (Ohio) Christian University*



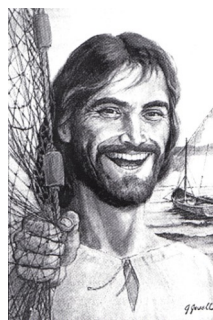
The CCC annual business meeting is scheduled for January 30, 2011. The meeting will follow our 5th Sunday fellowship potluck dinner after worship service. The 2011 operating budget will be presented for approval at this meeting.



Denise and I are so grateful for the outpouring of love this family of God has shown to us this past Christmas season.

Our hearts are warmed and our minds amazed by your generosity, support, love, and by your continued desire to grow together in the Lord. We are excited about what God has planned for us and this body of Christ as we follow the Spirit's lead and work hard at being obedient.

*Thank you all again and again!*



# Jesus: The Powerful Servant

## The Word of Truth

January 2	<b>Guest Speaker</b>	<i>Jack is on vacation</i>
January 9	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Scripture</i>	<i>Revelation 1.1-11</i>
January 16	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Christ</i>	<i>Revelation 1.12-20</i>
January 23	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On the Church</i>	<i>Revelation 2 &amp; 3</i>
January 30	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Worship</i>	<i>Revelation 4 &amp; 5</i>
February 7	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Evil</i>	<i>Revelation 6 &amp; 7</i>
February 14	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Prayer</i>	<i>Revelation 8 &amp; 9</i>
February 21	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Witness</i>	<i>Revelation 10 &amp; 11</i>
February 28	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Politics</i>	<i>Revelation 12-14</i>
March 7	<b>THE LAST WORD</b> <i>The Last Word On Judgment</i>	<i>Revelation 15-18</i>