

THE POWER
—TO SEE IT—
THROUGH



For Those Who Struggle With Life

JIM MCGUIGGAN

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Jim McGuigan



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The Power to See It Through

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Dedication

To my brother, Eddie –
lover of God & Christ-centered.

And to Margaret his wife –
devoted Christian & his lifelong friend.

September, 2022

Foreword

In the end the Power to See It Through comes from a person: the God and Father of Jesus Christ. This book addresses mainly those who have committed to Jesus Christ in trusting obedience! Without developing the truth of it (I've made an attempt at that elsewhere), like countless others I hold that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the man that God is being. Our accepting the truth of John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-9; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Timothy 2:5 will have to do for now.

This Jesus is now the glorified and immortal Lord of all, having been slain by the religious and political authorities but then raised by GOD to immortal Life because it wasn't possible for Death to hold Him when GOD had an eternal purpose to fulfill in Him (Acts 2:24-36; Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; Romans 16:24-27).

The Power to See It Through I have in mind is to see it through to that unending climax of glory, adventure, mystery, joy, righteousness and incorruption that we will experience when Christ returns to right all wrongs (Acts 17:31) and GOD completes His

promise. *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ... in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”*

But the title implies a struggle! That struggle is the consequence of our choosing to make ourselves rival gods to GOD. (See how Genesis 3 tells that story!) That self-corruption was contagious and ran as a plague through the human family just as after four years of war (1914-18) starved and diseased people the ‘Spanish Flu’ invaded and destroyed hundreds of thousands in Europe.

Going along with our self-corruption we built a corrupt world, that is a ‘universal culture’ that shows itself in various sub-cultures. We built them and then became servants to them and finally slaves to them. (We look around, glance at human history and still pretend we are “free”.)

We humans have never got over THE GREAT CON about ourselves! The critics can jeer all they want about *how* Genesis tells us the truth about ourselves, but the idea that we are ‘gods’ who can take care of ourselves is unmitigated nonsense and is demonstrated before our eyes generation after generation, century after century and millennium after millennium.

We think we ‘struggle’ against other men and women, against other nations, against ‘flesh and blood,’ and that this is the entire story. But it’s not! Jesus didn’t come to deliver us from other men and women – He came to deliver us from “an evil world” (Galatians 1:3-4), from an “empire of darkness” (Colossians 1:13) that has enslaved us.

I understand that fierce non-believers who see themselves as ‘realists’ dismiss all that as drivel or, even if there is some truth in it, it is completely irrelevant, and so they turn to war to end war, to

sanctions that are cruelly brutal on the innocent and poor in order to be good to the poor. Can they justify Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the British carpet-bombing of many German cities we knew were civilian, including Hamburg & Dresden?

I can understand this kind of thing from the fierce non-believers, but when Christian teachers, preachers and leaders embrace and support the view that we humans can fix this world, and if only we all really tried we could make this world a paradise. This or that form of government, this or that wise policy, this or that economic or medical or scientific or judicial wisdom could create a heaven on earth. That's an old Enlightenment story that has been exposed time and time and time again by "man," the very creature the optimistic ones depend on for their optimism. It's the false narrative that "every day and in every way we are getting better and better."

We can fix the 'world' because in "woman and man we can trust." We don't "get it" but 'the world' (the universal culture) is under the sway of the Wicked One (1 John 5:19).

The newer humanist phrase that we will soon hear more of is "*The eclipse of God.*" That's the real 'problem.' In 'Man we Trust' (whether Marxist or Capitalist, Totalitarian, Fascist Democratic or Anarchist) is obviously bankrupt. The once popular conferences on social justice where comfortable speakers spoke to comfortable listeners about the absent hungry, homeless, jobless and voiceless (who were never asked to speak at the conferences), that 'fashion' is on its way out.

And yet, still with one mind we think, "If only we would... we could..." Following Genesis 3:4-5 we're well and truly rooted in Genesis 11:1-4. Jesus Christ on the cross stunningly and vividly exposed 'the world' (the corrupt universal culture that we created

when in our original parents we said to GOD, “we don’t need you!”)

On that cross (John 12:31) He was saying to His chosen witnesses, “This is what is to be done with this ‘world’ (that is, the invisible but powerful universal culture) if there is EVER to be LIFE for humankind. *“God forbid that I should glory except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world was crucified unto me and I unto the world.”* Galatians 6:14).

It was into this ‘world’ that God came as Jesus of Nazareth, and while in it He called out of the ‘world’ a great number of people – ‘chosen ones’ – and they constituted a ‘nation’ like no other nation (1 Peter 2:9-10). A nation of which it can be said what was said in Numbers 23:9 of (later faithless) Israel:

From the top of the crags I see them,
From the hills I gaze down on them,
A people that dwells alone,
A nation not numbered among the nations.

This People is ‘not of the world’ but the Lord Jesus wants them in this ‘world’ for the same reason He came into the ‘world’ (John 17:14-19). They are to proclaim in HIM the end of that ‘world’ (the universal culture) created by a self-alienated human race under the sway of the Wicked One, and that destroys itself and one another in its moral and spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4), and to offer full salvation and LIFE to all who believe Him and trust themselves to Him for LIFE. And in response they are to be “a called-out nation” that is to bring light and salvation to a ‘world’ in darkness (1 Peter 2).

Their business is to live as God enables them in the image of Jesus Christ in their behavior, but they are also to proclaim that humankind needs a Savior and that humankind can't "fix" what is wrong with us. Their message is not a whimpering, hand-wringing bleating! It is an assured gospel that is meant to energize, inspire and result in their separating themselves from the 'world' (not the people!) – I mean the enslaving universal culture into which every innocent child is born, and by and by can be shaped by the very atmosphere into a Hitler, Stalin or any other heartless, godless creature.

Introduction

There are those who go through life with a contented smile. They never seem to have a crisis of faith or a difficulty that silences them. They seem assured in their relationship with God and experience a peace that suggests they have no fierce struggle with a besetting sin. They don't swagger; they appear to have mastered Kipling's description of a morally mature person who doesn't make a point of "looking too good or talking too wise."

Such people are in no need of Paul's crisp rebuke in 1 Corinthians 4:7 of the swaggering spirit:

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? (ESV)

Thank God for them! In their much-praised moments give them only a minute of reflection and they remember the true source of their steadiness, peace, stamina and energetic commitment to the

righteousness of God. And because this is true of them they don't look down at the rest of us whose lives are littered with failure and failures though we hunger for righteousness.

I wonder if I know anyone who for years made themselves present to worship God in the Lord Jesus and who openly spoke in praise of Christ as their Lord but narrowed their lives, refusing to share the burdens of others, who carry only as much as they choose for only as long as they choose it. I wonder if there are those who show no burdened heart precisely because they refuse to have one.

I read of such people in the Holy Scriptures (see Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46). I take Jesus' word for it because He is the Lord Jesus and He wouldn't say such things if He didn't know they were true. I believe Him because He even wept over such people (see Luke 19:41-44; Matthew 23:37; Philippians 3:18-19).

This little book is geared for those who are wrestling with the war and trouble Christ brings into a life that seeks devotion to him. It has nothing to say to those who know no struggle or to those who are prepared to stand back and let others bear the heat of battle unaided. It is written for the wounded and for those who regard it as a part of living to be helpers of the wounded.

Chapter 1

Why Do Some of Us Fail to See It Through?

Some of Us Are Worn Down by Life's Endless Struggle

When Paul in Romans 8:31-39 lists the realities that might lead us to doubt God's loving faithfulness toward us he includes "life." Why would he do that? He said, "Not even life could persuade me that God doesn't love us." Why would that be in the list?

Ask the jobless, the chronically ill, the lonely who would love to be loved and have someone to love. Ask the families that are herded into stinking tenement buildings owned by blood-sucking landlords if life as they experience isn't a threat to faith. It's easy for richly blessed people to think they would be as noble and as devoted to God as they now are even if they had been in poverty. But take away from us our wonderful families, our loving friends, our Sunday school teachers, our decent jobs – take from us all these lovely things – and have us born in some soul-killing ghetto, what then?

There's no point in dismissing this by saying that lots of people have beaten a horrible, life-long environment. Of course, that's true! But we point to such people because they are remarkable – they aren't the norm! Most children born and raised in corruption are destroyed by it. When we come across some who have joyously risen above all that, we're thrilled and inspired by it. The opposite is also true!

Take a child raised in a godly, loving, well-balanced home. Give him good health, good food and pleasant surroundings. Let him see his parents loving and respecting one another; give him good schooling and warm upright friends. Now, see him pursue shameful and criminal things. Aren't we shocked?! Don't we shake our heads in wonder. "You'd think with such advantages in life he would turn out better!" we murmur. And we're right to be puzzled! We expect this ideal environment to result in a noble and upright young man. When it doesn't, we're perplexed. Environment isn't all-powerful, but it's very powerful! It wears people down or it raises them up. If a godly and loving home, richly blessed, is an *advantage*, why isn't an ungodly, hate-filled and impoverished home a *disadvantage*?

Life's inequalities can wear people down! In Exodus 6:9, the Israelites couldn't listen well to Moses because of the pain of their environment. They were beaten down by cruel bondage and discouragement!

Many of Us Are Worn Out by the Struggle Against Sin

AJ Gossip said:

Those of us who fail in religion (most often) do so... through sheer depression and a daunted feeling that it has proved to be of no use in

their case at least... things turn out not at all what they had expected: they had supposed that one pitched battle would bring matters to a decisive issue, and that thereafter there would be little more to do than the hunting down of broken groups of disheartened failings... that, and the procession through the cheering street, and it is with dismay that they waken up to discover they are immersed in a prolonged campaign of dull trench warfare, in which from day to day not much that is vital seems to happen, until growing heartsick of the mud and the shelling... and the brave rushes that appear to make no real difference... they make a kind of dishonorable peace and slink off home. Or things go wrong more tragically, and they fling down their weapons, surrender to themselves, stop trying, assume hopelessly that nothing further can be done, and let the fierce currents of their nature drift them where they will. That's how some souls go down!

Many of Us Come to Believe That God Can't Really Love Us

David, in Psalm 8, wondered why God bothered with puny man. What would he have thought if he could see the universe through our modern telescopes? Have you never staggered at the thought of someone so powerful, wanting to deal with us at all? *Never?*

What of the suffering we see going on in the world? The rape of whole nations, the exploitation of the masses, the abuse of children, the success crime enjoys, the muggings of the elderly and the stench of the housing complexes where greedy landlords have the people boxed in like so many animals in a pen? Doesn't that sometimes unzip us and make us wonder? Would it surprise you if people living under those conditions sometimes had fierce doubts about the love of God?

It does appear to me that many have their first doubts about God's love for them when they look at themselves as useless! They see

their lives as pathetic and trivial, or their struggle with the grosser evils appears to be a losing one. In either case they begin to wonder how a holy God could stomach them. They can hardly face themselves so, they feel, an infinitely holy God must find them unbearably evil or trivial.

And if you add to this the speed with which the friends of God (Christians) seem to tire of them should their struggle against sin not progress as well as their Christian brothers and sisters think it should, their doubts grow stronger.

Many are bored listless by the lack of challenge or relevancy in *the Christ they hear proclaimed week after week*. A Catholic priest once said, "If the Protestant pulpit is ever to die, it will be found stabbed to death in some alley with a Protestant sermon sticking in its back."

Whether or not that's fair criticism, the Christ we see is the Christ the minister brings to us in weekly sermons. Depending on how he feels, we get one portrait of Christ or another. The main issues in so much preaching is about *church attendance* and financial *contributions* and plenty of generalized moral exhortation. There is so much competition between churches and so many reputations on the line based on *church growth* and *numbers*. Where this is the case, the "weekly bulletins from the Almighty" have large doses of "Let's bring our friends," "Let's have an attendance drive" or "Let's meet the budget the leaders have set." A steady diet of this, and the heart and soul of the people begins to grow thin and weary. Joy in the presence of God on a daily basis is gradually replaced with "doing your part" in bolstering the numbers of the local assembly and attending without fail even the mid-week meetings.

In many assemblies there is no big push for numbers; there is the constant chorus of “how right we are and how wrong everyone else is.” For a while that may act as a support for the soul of those who love truth, but it soon becomes a meatless bone. A God who is always and only interested in people holding correct views and exposing those who don’t (even if the “heretic’s” life-style is glorious); a God like that loses attractiveness and has little to say about *life*. He’s always talking to people who aren’t at the assembly, that is, the people “out there” who hold all these errors the preacher is telling us about. And since there’s more to life than being “correct” about every verse of Scripture you read, many people grow listless and weary with the God they’ve been led to believe has nothing to say about *life* as a whole. A.M. Fairbairn said of that brilliant woman, George Eliot (pen name of Mary Ann Evans), that she didn’t stop believing the Christian faith - she stopped *loving* it. I don’t find that at all surprising!

Then there are the churches that ask nothing of anyone. They are all “nice” people being “nice” one to another; as someone put it, it’s “the bland leading the bland” and they both fall into a religious rut. The church becomes a club with “nice” social overtones, where no one is passionate about anything, where there isn’t enough drive to produce a heresy much less the recognition of a stunning cosmic truth. There are churches where everyone dresses well, succeeds in business, sings hymns if they aren’t too “fundamentalist” and, in general, have a happy time as a member of that ‘club’. Elmer Sudermann bitterly spoke of just such an assembly. He spoke of them as baptized in the smell of classic Chanel, sun-tanned, soft-skinned, “elegant, swellegant, natty, delectable, suave, cool, adorable and *damned*.” The psalmist reminds us (Psalms 106:15), that a well-fed and well-dressed people had “leanness” in their soul!

God Loves Losers, Too!

Losers lose *in spite of* what God wants for them! If Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11 mean anything at all, they mean God feels awful pain when losers lose. Love *involves* a desire to see justice done, but if we think God is a “heavenly hit man” who enjoys His work, we haven’t begun to know Him!

Matthew 23 is one of the most scathing pieces in literature, but it doesn’t end with: “Woe... hypocrites... sons of hell!” It ends with a heartbroken Christ saying He felt like a mother hen in panic, desperately wanting to hide her chicks under her wings because danger is near.

Luke 15 says when sinners lose God loses, too. No shepherd sought a lost sheep more fervently than God pursues lost people! No finder is more thrilled as he joyously walks home with a lamb on his shoulders than God is when he holds a former wanderer close to His heart (out of which the wanderer had never wondered however far he had wandered).

The God who has uniquely revealed Himself in Jesus Christ is *for* us. If He came at all, He came to do us good! If He came to serve, He came to serve the selfish, for that’s what we are. He came to die along with us and for us. He came to die for destroyers of life, for that’s what we are. If He came to offer friendship and reconciliation, He came to offer it to treacherous people, for that’s what as a human kind we are – Romans 3:19; 8:3. And look what God did in and as Jesus (Romans 8:3)! He came into this cauldron of wickedness armed only with what we entered with!

We’re going to have to make up our minds to this: God thinks us precious! He thinks it worthwhile to redeem us at awful cost. In Romans 5:6-10 we’re assured that He died for the weak and

ungodly (v. 6), for the sinner (v. 8) and for the enemies (v. 10). And can God who *so* loved us, rejoice when we eternally lose?

We read of a father who's worth millions and lives in the lap of luxury. His boy is wayward and far from home. The father is fragmented, lonely, and he lives oblivious to all his vast wealth. That doesn't surprise us, does it? We know of a mother who is honored by the community, the state, maybe even the nation. Her daughter lives in shameful rebellion in some squalid hut, away from the mother who adores her. Does it surprise us that the mother finds no lasting joy in the recognition she receives? She'd gladly swap it all for the love and blessing of her foolish daughter. That isn't hard for us to believe! We know of friends, brothers, sisters who gladly give themselves one for another, who compete, it appears, to outdo one another in expressions of genuine love and affection. We see all this, and *because we believe it, we are warmed and moved by it.*

We can believe that sinners can give their children bread rather than stones; we can accept fully that a father can give his son fish rather than a serpent – but we find it hard to believe God can outdo sinners in his love for his creation! Luke 15 says something to us, but never enough. The book of Hosea grabs us by the lapels and looks right into our eyes with its message of God's passionate love for wicked people, urging us: Believe it! Believe it! And still we have teachers in Christian assemblies speaking to devoted Christians, upset that others aren't emphasizing enough that God is wrathful 'as well as' loving.

Do we think, because our love is shallow, that His is? He has already endured the final insult! He passionately sought the opportunity to embrace the ultimate insult and dishonor! Does

that not tell us once and for all that God rejoices in our joy and grieves at our loss? After the cross, it isn't fair to doubt God!

But maybe it's the holiness of God, His justice, that makes us afraid to lean too heavily on His love toward us. And yet we're explicitly told that God is *just* in forgiving our sins (1 John 1:9). We're expressly told that God shows himself *righteous* in passing over our sins; He makes it painfully plain in the death of Christ (Romans 3:24-26). In the death of Christ a *righteous* God is expressing his love to us. His love isn't immoral. His love doesn't despise justice. But His righteousness doesn't get in the way of His loving us! Whatever theory of the atonement you subscribe to, *it's still true that in and as the man Jesus Christ, God pays the price in order to demonstrate His love for us! In the man Jesus Christ it is GOD who is bleeding* (Acts 20:28) *to purchase sinners.* In bleeding for us GOD is not punishing Himself, He, as a man is expressing His already, eternally existing, love for us.

Some of us permit our sins to separate us from God even when He assures us that He has dealt with them in Christ Jesus. We live, never free from the notion that God is always on edge, becoming more and more irritable with us. We glance around fearing a smashing blow from His huge fist because we've wronged Him again. We see His acts of discipline as proofs of His lovelessness rather than what He has expressly told us they are (Revelation 3:19), expressions of His commitment toward us. And when we reject Him with finality and insist on losing, we feel we're getting what God wanted us to have all along and we feel, since we are now utterly lost, God is content. And God feels again the throb in his hands and feet and head... and weeps! *God loses when we lose, and God loves even the losers!*

Chapter 2

Where Do People Get the Power to See It Through?

There are no noble thoughts which do not find their ultimate source in God himself! There are no lovely and selfless things done unless God fathers them! No one Christian or non-Christian speaks beautiful and uplifting words that God is not the author of. Every good and perfect thing that Man has or has done comes from God!

Bible believers insist that this is true for all those who wear the name of Christ. They gladly accept the truth Jesus spoke (John 15:5) when he said that apart from Him we can do 'nothing'! It is *God* who works in us both to will and do his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13), and it is *He* who works in us that which is well pleasing in His sight (Hebrews 13:20-21).

But many believers are often slow to confess that God is at work in the lives of those who haven't yet said *yes* to Jesus (even though He was in *their own* lives before they came to know Him!) For one reason or another we're reluctant to admit that God ennoble the lives of those who do not acknowledge Him. A thoroughly unbib-

lical notion makes the rounds in religious circles that one must be a Christian in order to experience the ennobling work of the Spirit of God in life. *This isn't true!* From ancient times God has made it clear that he is at work in people who don't know him. One doesn't have to be "indwelt" by the Spirit to produce the kind of fruit the Spirit produces.

Cornelius was already a very godly man indeed before Peter ever came to him to bring him the fullness of truth by which he was saved in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:1-6, 34-48; 11:13-14). And Lydia, long before she was baptized into Christ was a gloriously lovely lady (Acts 16). All around us, every day of our lives, we watch people endure torment with a nobility that stuns us. Where do we think they get such strength? How often have you heard people say their neighbors who aren't Christians show more integrity than some who are? Are we amazed that a Samaritan heretic returned to thank Christ for healing when nine orthodox believers didn't? Christ wasn't amazed at it; he was saddened by it. And when he turned in amazement at the greatness of the centurion's faith (Luke 7), aren't we being told that God operates in the lives of people outside our "fold"? (The ancient Jews found this idea offensive. God was going to use Cyrus, the heathen, to redeem Israel from captivity and the Jews didn't like it. See Isaiah 45:1, 4, 9-13.)

Christians or non-Christians, God gives the strength to live nobly to all the genuinely kind and socially useful people we see around us. We will not give the credit to the Devil for the loveliness in the lives of people who have not yet turned to God in Christ! Nor will we deny that such loveliness exists. I've heard people go in that direction. In the end, there's no answering such people. We find adoring husbands, devoted wives, loving and wise parents, loyal friends and respectful children throughout the world who haven't

yet said *yes* to Christ as Lord. They may not have made a commitment to him, but he has made a commitment to them. To the degree that any of us is honorable and noble and brave – it has been worked in us by God. Wherever in the world we find people bravely living radiant lives in spite of unspeakable poverty, outrageous oppression and disease-bringing hunger, there, right there, we see God at work! *The power to see it through comes only from God! From nowhere and no one else!*

This truth means that no one can boast! Paul insisted that what he was, he was by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10). He insisted that the life he was able to live was because Christ was living in him (Galatians 2:20). And he prodded the smug Corinthians by telling them they had nothing they weren't given, that whatever difference there was between them and others was the work of God, that if they were *given* all their blessings they had no grounds to strut (1 Corinthians 4:7).

But how does God go about enabling people? How does he give them the power to see it through? There is no one avenue through which God blesses us with that kind of power. Every thinking person could make up his/her own wise list. To give us the power to see it through God brings us face to face with truths we must acknowledge and people who enrich us in so many ways. What follows are some of the things I think about when I think of people who've been granted the power to see their pilgrimage through in a radiant way.

O God, our Father, our souls are made sick by the sight of hunger and want and nakedness; of little children bearing on their bent backs the burden of the world's work; of motherhood drawn under the grinding wheels of modern industry; and of overburdened manhood, with empty hands, stumbling and falling. Help us to understand that it is not thy

purpose to do away with life's struggle, but that thou desired us to make the conditions of that struggle just and its results fair.

Enable us to know that we may bring this to pass only through love and sympathy and understanding; only as we realize that all are alike thy children – the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the fortunate and the unfortunate. And so, our Father, give us an ever-truer sense of human sisterhood; that with patience and steadfastness we may do our part in ending the injustice that is in the land, so that all may rejoice in the fruits of their toil and be glad in thy sunshine. Keep us in hope and courage even amid the vastness of the undertaking and the slowness of the progress, and sustain us with the knowledge that our times are in thy hand. Amen. – HELEN RING ROBINSON