The REST of the GOSPEL

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THE REST OF THE GOSPEL
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To Barbara Stone, my wife, whose simple question one day,
“Dan, what would you do if you could do anything you wanted to?
And don’t stop to think about your answer,”
led to more than fifteen years of travel together,
sharing the good news of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
Barbara died January 22, 1993, of cancer.—DS

To my best friend, my strongest support,
an unexpected gift from God who exceeds all my dreams:
Ava, my wife. What a wonder you are.—DG
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I first met Dan Stone at a retreat near Tyler, Texas. His message of the believer’s union with Jesus Christ was not entirely new to me, but through him the Holy Spirit began opening the eyes of my heart anew to this wonderful reality. So has He used Dan in the lives of countless others to usher them into a deeper experience of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Years later, I proposed to Dan that I put his teaching into book form. He graciously supported the project, which has resulted in this book. The book is written in the first person, as from Dan. The primary content is Dan’s, although he instructed me to note that he disclaims any originality of the material. So noted. My contribution has been to organize, supplement, and clarify—and to be repeatedly blessed by the content myself.

Dan went home to the Lord in October 2005. God has continued to use his teaching in the lives of tens of thousands both in America and abroad through more than ten translations of the book. I am thrilled that Harvest House Publishers has decided to release a new version of the book to an even wider audience.

May the Lord be pleased to use this book to cause “the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). And may you drink deeply of the water of life who is Christ, “know[ing] the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).

David Gregory
August 2013
I spent 24 years traveling around the country talking to people about the mystery of the gospel: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Christ living in us and through us, as us, is the only hope we have of experiencing the glory God intends for our lives. David Gregory and I have written this book to help you enter into Christ’s fullness in your life.

There is a flip side to “the hope of glory,” however. Yes, Christ in us is our only hope of experiencing God’s glory ourselves. But it is also the way that God has chosen to glorify Himself through us. As DeVern Fromke writes in Ultimate Intention, God has chosen to eternally manifest His glory by living His life in and through a host of sons and daughters. I want to begin this book by discussing not the glory we receive from God, but the glory He receives through us.

Christian books always run the risk of being man-centered. Most are addressed to a specific human need or to our deep, universal need of intimacy with God. Addressing man’s needs, many Christian books, as well as much Christian teaching and thought, essentially begin with man and implicitly portray God as man’s need-meeter.

If we don’t begin from God’s point of view, we end up with man at the center. That’s true even in our approach to the Word of God. We often read the beginning of Genesis and focus immediately on the fall of man into sin. The rest of Scripture chronicles God’s redemption of man. All of which is true. It can appear, however, and is often preached, that God’s ultimate purpose is the rescue of man. The result is a focus on us and our need.

But if we begin before the foundation of the world, before Genesis 1:1, we start from another point of view. We start with this question:
what is God's intent? Answering that question is like Galileo or Copernicus discovering that the earth wasn't at the center of the universe (or at least our solar system). The sun was. We are not the center of the universe. The Son is.

It's easy to live as if we are the center of the universe. We would never say it, or even think it consciously, but we can live as if God is here for us. That has come across in a lot of “Christian” teaching. God is here to bless you. You ought to be rich. You ought to be prosperous. It's your due to be successful. It's your due to get ahead. God has to respond to your faith. God has obligated Himself to bless you if you do the right things. All of which means what? You are the center of the universe.

If we start before the foundation of the world, though, we discover that God has a plan—a plan conceived before time began. Paul revealed God's plan most clearly in the first chapter of Ephesians.

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…(1:3)

Is it God’s intent to bless us? Absolutely. He has already blessed us with every possible blessing in the heavenly realm.

…just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world…(1:4a)

God had a purpose for us before the foundation of the world. He chose us for that purpose.

…that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself…(1:4b-5a)

God’s plan involved having a host of sons (and daughters) who would be holy and blameless in His sight. Through the subjection of the Son to the cross, God intended to bring many children into glory (Hebrews 2:10). Why? Paul continued:

…according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of
the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (1:5b-6).

To make sure we don’t miss the point, Paul repeated it six verses later:

…to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory (1:12).

And two verses after that:

[The Holy Spirit] is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory (1:14).

We exist for the praise of His glory. God “works all things after the counsel of His will” (1:11b) to accomplish that purpose. And what exactly is it that glorifies God? What has He set out to accomplish from before the foundation of the world?

In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in [Christ] with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth (1:8-10).

God’s plan was to bring into being a host of sons and daughters whom He would indwell, through whom He would live and manifest Himself, and in and through whom Christ would reign supreme. We are the beneficiaries of that plan. God, in His love and grace, has made us a part of His plan. But we are not the center of it; Christ is. We are participants in the plan, participants God loves and cherishes and nourishes, as a husband does his bride (Ephesians 5:25-32).

We are God’s inheritance. We tend to focus on what we inherit in Christ, but the greater truth is that we are His inheritance:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know…what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18).
His inheritance is His body—the Body of Christ—accomplishing His purpose. And though the Bible records man’s fall, that calamity did not do one thing to delay or alter God’s purpose. His intention was always to have a vast family of sons and daughters. The fall didn’t change that intention. God incorporates our redemption into that plan, but the plan’s goal is still the same. We are here for the praise of His glory.

Romans 11:36 amplifies this marvelous truth:

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.”

From: everything comes from God. Through: by means of Him. And to: the ultimate end is unto Him—not Him unto us, but us unto Him.

In The Rest of the Gospel we say that everything we need to know for experiencing God’s abundant life is found in the cross of Christ. We look at the cross and see what God did for us there. Praise God that is true. That was Christ’s work on our behalf.

Even more than that, though, the cross was God’s work on His own behalf. Through the cross God accomplished what He needed to fulfill His own eternal purposes, that all things might be summed up in Christ.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” is primarily His glory. Christ lives in us to manifest His life through us. Christ in us accomplishes His own purposes. Part of His purpose is intimacy with us, but His plan encompasses more than that. He is working toward His own ends, and we are the vessels through which He works. We are the visible manifestation of what God is doing, with Himself as the ultimate goal, “that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

That’s why the Father wants us to be “filled up to all the fullness of God.” And that’s what The Rest of the Gospel is about: being filled to all the fullness of God, to the praise of His glory.
Part One

Union with Christ
Most people’s Christianity is like an old iron bed: firm at both ends and sagging in the middle. On one end you trust Christ as Savior and get your sins forgiven. On the other end, one day you will die and go to heaven. In between, it gets pretty desperate. You have lots of questions that all boil down to one: Where is the abundant life Jesus promised?

Jesus met a man with such a question. The Bible calls him the rich young ruler. One day he came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus said to him, “You know the commandments. Don’t murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.”

The young man replied, “I’ve kept all those commandments.”

I always say, Jesus wasn’t a Baptist preacher. If He had been a Baptist preacher (like me), He’d have said, “There’s no way you could have kept them. You know you’ve broken them. You know you’ve looked lustfully at a woman.”

Jesus didn’t say that. He took him at his word: “I’ve kept all those commandments.” But the real question was still on the man’s heart. “Where is the life?”

Where is the life? The same question so many Christians ask today. Yes, I received Christ, but isn’t there more to life than what I’m experiencing?
Where is true life? Jesus said, “The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life” (Matthew 7:14). He said the life He gives is abundant, fulfilling, freeing, wonderful. And though there is a gate that leads to this life, Jesus went on to say, “There are few who find it.”

It’s there. It’s real. But few find it.

I’ve found that there is a series of gates along the path to life. These gates are the progression from being a completely external person (trying to find life in things and people around us) to being an internal person, finding life in the One who lives within us. These gates are unique to each person. Let me tell you about mine.

Before I came to Christ, my whole life, like everyone’s, was based on externals. When we are without Christ, we perceive life in things or people and we live on those externals. I didn’t know who I was except in relation to the external things in my life. I was in my early twenties and took my entire identity from the crowd I hung out with: our dress, our conduct, our activities.

One Sunday morning, after a long night on the town, I struggled into church to be with a girl I liked. God lured me through a trap called “female.” At that point I was still outside my first gate. I hadn’t even begun the journey from external to internal, because I hadn’t received Jesus Christ by faith as my Savior.

The young preacher that morning was inside that first gate, though. He had already received Christ, and he was proclaiming the good news that “Christ died for you.” As I listened, for the first time in my inner being, I knew that I had a problem in my relationship with God. My sins separated me from Him. That was a revelation from the Holy Spirit.

The answer to my problem was that if I trusted Jesus Christ, in His death as payment for my sins and in His resurrection from the dead, God would forgive me. Well, that sounded like a pretty good deal. I could be forgiven by just trusting in Jesus.

Looking back, I paint the following figurative picture of that event. It was as if I walked up to the gate named “salvation.” But I was clothed with all the externals that I wore to give my life meaning—my peers, my activities, and so forth. None of that clothing, however—none of my externals—could get me through that gate. None of them could address the inner need I felt. I had to shed those clothes if I wanted to get
through the gate, because the gate wasn’t wide enough for both me and the clothes. I had to stop trusting in my externals and put my trust only in Christ. So I took off those clothes, my externals, and went through the gate naked, because I had nothing to offer God but me.

Walking through that first gate was like putting on a new pair of jeans. I got the vital parts covered. I got my sins forgiven. For the first time I didn’t just have externals in my life. I had a true inner identity: I was saved and I was forgiven. But that was all I knew about my new identity. That was good—very good—but the new jeans weren’t enough to clothe all of me. Being forgiven was great, but I needed more than that to give my life meaning. I thought I still needed more clothes to cover me up, something else to make my life whole.

So I reached for some new externals to add to my wardrobe. I received Christ in a Baptist church, so I put on the identity of “Baptist.” I began to run around and find out what Baptists believed, what we stood for, and how to conduct my life properly. It was exciting. It’s fun when you have a brand-new external, like a kid at Christmas who has a new toy. But it doesn’t take long to get tired of a new toy, does it?

I went to a Baptist college, which I enjoyed. I was learning about the Word of God. I progressed to seminary, but it wasn’t as much fun there. I began to spend more time in the gym than in the library, but I studied enough to get through. And now I had a new external identity.

“Who are you?”
“I’m Pastor Stone.”
“What are you?”
“I’m a Baptist.”

Before, I just had new jeans. Now, I had some more new clothes. My new robes were called “Baptist.” You’ve had your own new robes, haven’t you? They may have been your job, your church, your family, your activities, your performance—any external you seek life from.

At this point I did have some internal reality—the jeans God had clothed me with. It’s a revelation from God to know that Jesus Christ is more than a man, that He’s the Son of God, the Savior of the world. It’s a revelation to know your sins are forgiven. But I still had a whole lot of externals from which I was seeking more life: my denomination, my vocation, my performance. Those were the new clothes I had found for
myself. Unfortunately, knowing that I was saved and that my sins were forgiven was the only inner reality I knew. Like most Christians, I was trying to live the Christian life on that raw reality.

The trouble is that, as true as it is, having your sins forgiven doesn’t tell you one thing about how to live the life. The only thing it says is after you commit a sin, you are forgiven. You don’t know anything yet about true life—God’s life. So life to you is still external. You ask: “How do I do it? Give me a plan, give me a method, give me a scheme.”

It’s as if the day we receive Him by faith, Jesus says, “Now you’re saved. Good luck. I’ll see you when you die and it will be wonderful. But in the here and now it’s up to you. Get out there and try as hard as you can.”

What a struggle! I tried as hard as I could for years. After God had given me enough misery trying to be a good Baptist, I got to the point where I thought, “I’ve done all of these Baptist things. I’ve kept their Golden Rules. I’ve kept their commandments. Now where is the life?”

We move from outer to inner—from seeking life through externals to drawing life from the internal One—by letting the outer become exhausted. We let the outer do what it can do, because for a while the outer is fun and exciting. It’s life to us, until it becomes routine and we have to keep performing to measure up. Finally, though, we say, “There’s got to be something more.” And there is something more. We are meant to get to the internal, and we can’t be content until we get there. We can be momentarily satisfied with a new toy, but we can’t be permanently content until we get to the place that God means to get us.

So we drag up near the next gate, exhausted by our own self-effort to live the Christian life. We’re pleading, “Where’s the life?”

The Holy Spirit says to us, “Yes, there’s more.”

“Where is it?” we ask.

“Over here.”

“Good, I want to come.”

We run up to the gate, but we bump into it and bounce back, because we can’t get through. We still have our own robes on, the externals we are trusting to give us life. The robes, although tattered and torn by now, are too thick to get through the gate. The only way to get through that gate is to take off those externals again. We will never get through a new
gate as long as we base our identity and meaning on outer things, whatever they may be.

I approached my second gate in my mid-thirties. I was lying on my bed of affliction, which is called depression. My outer identity, being a Baptist preacher, didn’t satisfy me anymore, and I didn’t know where to turn. At home in my bed, I had the shades down and the curtains drawn over the shades, and the room still wasn’t dark enough for me. So I was under the covers, because I was trying to get the room as dark as I was. Some friends called, though, and asked me to lead a retreat. There’s one thing a Baptist preacher can’t resist: an invitation to speak. I don’t care if he’s on oxygen, he’ll manage to preach. So I said, “I’ll be there.” Most of the people at the retreat were from my hometown church, but I hadn’t seen them in twelve years.

I still hadn’t moved beyond my first gate. I was primarily preaching salvation: how to receive Christ. I was talking about many different things, but all I truly knew was salvation.

I was supposed to be teaching these folks, but I was watching them and, to my surprise, they were teaching me. These weren’t the same people I had left twelve years before. God had been moving on in them, but He hadn’t gone any farther in me yet. I called Barbara, my wife, and told her, “Something’s happened to our friends. They’re different.”

I’m like you. I have a heart for God, just like you do. If we sense something is real and we are hungry, we want it. Whatever my friends had, I wanted it.

At that time, the extent of my inner knowing was Christ died for me. My friends’ inner knowing was Christ is with me and He’s in me to help me. That was farther down the pike than I was, so I thought, This is the next thing to come along for me; I’m going to grab it.

That was my next gate, my next point of shedding more externals and experiencing more of God’s inner life. To make it through the gate, though, I had to take off all the extra robes, all the externals I had clothed myself with. In my case, I had to shed my denominational robes that I had been trusting to provide me life. I could go through only with my new jeans, the one internal reality that God Himself had clothed me with: the fact that my sins were forgiven. So I walked through that next gate, and it led me into what we called the charismatic renewal.
Going through that next gate is like God putting a T-shirt over your jeans. Your inner knowing of God’s life is expanded. I knew more about the inner life than I had known before the first gate. I knew more of the Spirit of God in me.

But I still had some bare spots I thought I needed to cover up. So once again I reached for some externals to clothe myself with. I ran out and learned what it was to be a charismatic. And I wondered about my old denominational friends: *How can those folks stay in those dead churches? This is the most exciting thing around. This is where the life is.*

For a while, life was great. During the praise services I was emotionally high and stimulated. But I confused those feelings of happiness with God’s inner joy. I was looking for a permanent high, and I stayed on a high for about six months. I had to attend a lot of meetings to stay up there. I had to stand on my feet a long time and sing an awful lot of songs. Everybody did.

If we would be honest with ourselves, however, most of us were still searching. So much of our activity still involved externals. We were still desperate. We went to those meetings to get something. I went to get blessed, get healed, get delivered. Everybody went with a great need. But we’d leave, stepping right outside those doors, and we still had that need. Deep down we were still saying, “Where’s the life?”

During this time we were part of a little prayer group that included a lady much younger than I. I loved my wife, Barbara, but I began feeling very enamored with this young lady. And I was confused, because the message I was hearing (I’m not saying this was actually being taught) was, “If you’re high, it’s the Holy Spirit. If you’re emotionally worked up, if you’re excited, if you feel good, it’s the Holy Spirit.” Here I was having good feelings about this young lady, but I knew those good feelings couldn’t be the Holy Spirit. It was eating me up inside.

This time, though, I didn’t get depressed. I got angry. I had put 21 years into this Jesus thing. I’d gone everywhere I’d heard that there was life. I had listened to everybody I could. And I had reached a bottomless pit. At that point I wrote my letter of resignation. I told God I was checking out.

Twenty-one years of trying to live for Jesus. I had known Christ for me. I had known Christ with me. I had begun to experience the concept
of Christ in me, but I hadn’t yet experienced Christ as me, expressing His life as me. Rather, it was Christ in me to help me become something. To make something out of me. And I had come to my end.

Over the years, I had gradually concluded that I couldn’t pull off living the Christian life. I was a failure at it. But in one area I seemed like a success. Barbara said what a good husband I was. Yet here I was as her husband having feelings for this younger woman, and it was not good. I saw that, regardless of how much I loved God, given the right circumstances I was capable of anything. Trying to live in my own strength for God, or even trying to live with His help, I was still a dangerous creature in this world. It was the love of God to show me that I couldn’t live the Christian life no matter how hard I tried.

It was about this time Barbara asked me to read a book called Power in Praise. I had already told her, “Barbara, I’m through with the Christian thing. I know that when I die, I’m going to heaven, but I’m through with this charade.” It was spring and I was sitting in the yard under the trees, pouting. I was so far back in the doghouse with her that I thought if reading a book would help me get out, I’d read it.

So I did. And God had one thing for me in that book, a passage of Scripture: “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

I didn’t give thanks for the ugly things. Do you? I thought, You really don’t give thanks in everything. You give thanks for the good things. But that isn’t what the Bible said. And though my soul was pouting and angry with God, that word became spirit and life to me. So I began to say, “Thank You, God. I’m still just as mad as I can be, but I’m being obedient. So, thank You. I’m still grinding my teeth so much that I’m lucky to have any enamel left, but thank You. I don’t understand it, and I’m not particularly happy about it, but thank You.”

It’s odd, but I began to get some insight into what was going on. I saw that God had to kill me off in that area where I thought I was good, so that He could honor a prayer I had always prayed: “I want to be Your man.” Just like you might have prayed, “I want to be Your man.” “I want to be Your woman.” Then you see that it’s the love of God to crucify your own sense of goodness. While everybody else is saying, “He’s fallen,” God just sees the vessel that He’s making.
The insight God provided finally led me to say concerning my most recent gate, “You know, this has been wonderful. I’ve learned a lot here, but I don’t have the final answer. For me, there’s got to be more. Where’s the life?”

At that point the Holy Spirit said to me, in essence, “There is more, Dan, but you have to take off that external you have.”

“Again? What is my external now, Lord?”

“You have to take off that charismatic external. If you want Me, you can’t have any externals.”

I took off those outer robes again. I’ve discovered that when the time comes you’re about ready to shed whatever you need to, like some old dirty clothes. So there I stood, with only the inner, spirit realities that God had revealed to me: my jeans and my T-shirt. With those, I was able to get through my next gate, which was Christ in you, the hope of glory.

A lady had invited Barbara to hear a speaker, Norman Grubb. After the meeting Barbara asked him, “Would you come to my house and talk to my husband? He needs to hear what you said.”

Months later, Norman came and spoke to a small group in our living room. The first thing he said was, “You can’t live the Christian life.”

I thought, Amen to that. I am a walking testimony to that. You can’t live the Christian life.

Then he said, “Christ is the life.”

Well, I knew that. I had a head knowledge of that.

But finally he stated, “Christ is in you and He will live the life.”

And my spirit responded, Ohhhh! It’s not “He will help me live the life,” but “He will live the life.” That’s the good news! I can let Him live the life.

I had 21 years of trying on my own. I was absolutely convinced I couldn’t live the Christian life, not the way the Bible described it. Now I realized, Christ can. I’ll let Him live it in me. It was a revelation from the Holy Spirit.

In the following days God added to that inner revelation. He put His clothing on me. I had too many exposed spots that I had tried to cover up with externals. He put His whole wardrobe on me. In truth, His clothes had been on me all along, I just didn’t know it.

For the first time I came to know that He had already made me the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). I was truly
righteous. He had made me holy (Colossians 3:12). He had made me complete (Colossians 2:10). I was blameless in His sight (Colossians 1:22). And loved. And acceptable.

The Lord taught me that when I was crucified on the cross with Christ, as Galatians 2:20 had told me for so long, I died to myself as my point of reference. He living in me was my point of reference. He would live His life through me, as me. Has He revealed that to you? If He hasn’t, He wants to, because that’s the truly good news.

We have only two basic questions in life: how do I get my sins forgiven, and how do I live the life? We may have found out how to get our sins forgiven, but most of us haven’t yet discovered how to live the life. You can’t. That’s the first thing you have to learn. He can. And, He will. He will live His life in us, as us.

You have to go through those gates, though. You have to lay down the externals that you have tried to draw life from.

When you finally go through the last gate, it’s like the Old Testament priest going into the Holy of Holies. He was in there with just one Person—God. Everything else was external. It was just him and God.

After receiving Christ, in your awareness you have a little internal, a lot of external. You go through more gates and you have a little more internal, still some external. In the end, God brings you to your Holy of Holies, to live in your spirit. You live as an internal person. No more trusting the externals.

When you have entered into that “knowing” in your inner being, no external can tell you anything about yourself. Your identity and your life come from God. When I used to speak to groups, Barbara would remind me, “Tell them about my gate.” She found out that she had an external. It was me. She was Dan’s wife. I was her sufficiency. I was her adequacy. I was her identity. One night she had to go out and lie on a blanket under the stars and do business with God. He said, “You have an idol in your life. It’s your husband.” After that night, I was no longer Barbara’s god.

We all have different robes we have to shed. Some people have robes called children. For others, it’s a profession, or possessions, or addictions, or a finely cultivated image. Many Christians have a robe called “ministry.” Anything that’s external, that’s telling you something about yourself,
God has to take it to the altar and kill it so He can be your all in all. When you see that, you praise God for it.

We have to be grateful to God because He drives us to Himself. But He does it with love. He says to us, “You want that, you can have it. You want that external, go get it. I know you’re going to lay it down. I’m not going to keep you from picking it up, touching it, examining it, playing with it awhile, and finally putting it down. Then you’ll pick up and put down the next thing, and the next thing, and the next. One day you’re going to get to the final gate. You’re going to walk into that holy place and you’re going to meet Me. Not that you haven’t met Me before, but you’re going to meet Me and Me only, and you’ll have the answer.”

“Good Teacher, where is the life?”

“Well, you’ve been religious.”

“Yes, Lord, I’ve done the denominational thing.”

“Well, you tried the other religious route.”

“Yes, Lord, I’ve been charismatic.”

“And you’ve done the success thing.”

“Yes, Lord, I have, but where is the life?”

When you are perfectly prepared, Jesus whispers the old news, which is still the good news: “I am the life. You take Me into you, and you have the life. I live the life as you, just as the Father revealed His life as Me.”

Then the 21 years in the wilderness turn into a blessing. The lost job yields a blessing. The wayward child becomes a blessing. The failed marriage reveals a blessing. You’ve gone through those gifts of misery and you thank God for them, because you came out with one precious possession: Him. You’ve come to the end—He in you and you in Him. You have arrived at the pearl of great price. There isn’t anyplace else to go.

Where is the life? “The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life.” May this book be a beacon to you, shining on that final gate, pointing the way to the only One who is true life.