

## **We Have All We Need, So Let's Get Moving**

**Presented to the "Straight Talk Business Breakfast"**

**Hawaiian Islands Ministries**

**by Kent M. Keith**

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Good morning! It is wonderful to see so many friendly faces this morning. Thank you all for being here.

There are a few people I would like to call attention to before I begin. I want to introduce my wife, Elizabeth, and ask her to stand. Elizabeth is my better two-thirds. I am very fortunate that she is my wife and the mother of our children.

I would also like to recognize some special friends from the clergy here this morning— people who have meant a lot to me over the years.

— Rev. John Heidl, Chaplain at Punahou School, was Youth Minister and my Sunday School teacher when I was in high school 30 years ago.

— Rev. Randy Furushima, with the New Hope Christian Fellowship, was Youth Minister at Manoa Valley Church when I joined it 20 years ago.

— Pastor Don Asman of Manoa Valley Church, who has been a friend and counselor for 15 years, is here with his wife Judy.

— Fr. John Bolin, a mentor and friend, who was Rector while I was at Chaminade University. He is now Vicar-General for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu.

— Bro. Tom Spring is a friend and the head of volunteer community service programs at Chaminade.

— Rev. Nelson Kwon is here— he is currently my Sunday School teacher at Manoa Valley Church.

I am grateful to all of them for their help and friendship. Please don't hold them responsible for what I say this morning. The errors are mine and mine alone.

The process of thinking and writing this talk has been an opportunity for me to learn and grow. I want to thank Rev. Dan Chun and all of you for this opportunity. My hope is that something that I say may be useful to you, so that I can return the gift.

I have given this talk the title, "We Have All We Need, So Let's Get Moving." I mean this to be a call to action. The basic premise of my talk is that God gave us this wondrous Earth, Christ came to teach us how to live and how to be saved, and the Holy Spirit is with us, encouraging and enabling us. That means that we have all we need. Now all we have to do is get moving. Now all we have to do is to take action in ways which are consistent with the will of God and the teachings of Christ.

### **We Have All We Need**

Let me begin with the premise that we have all we need. First, we have God. I realize that not everybody believes in God. Personally, I find it hard to *not* believe in God. If there is no Creator, how did all of this— how did all of *us*— get here? The atheistic notion must be that everything is the result of either the random collision of atoms and molecules, causing one event after another, or simply a giant chain reaction which cannot be broken and engulfs us and causes us to do all that we do. Everything which occurs is either an accident or is predetermined, and is possibly a predetermined accident.

There is no place in this theory for free will, no place for human beings to make decisions, to be moral, to be accountable, to grow toward God or even— sadly— to grow away from Him. What I am saying now has been predetermined, or is an accident, and in either case, I have no control over it— it is just happening— and you have no control over yourselves— you are just listening.

To me, the idea that everything is either random or predetermined by a chemical chain reaction is too hard to believe. It doesn't match what we know about our lives. We know that there are causal forces and physical constraints, but we also know that we feel, we love, we think, we choose, and we act— we make choices. We choose to reach out to each other in ways which demonstrate our

morality, our love, our courage, and our unique talents. We see the hand of a Creator, we see the miracle and the mystery of life, and we experience the spiritual.

So I believe there is a God. I also believe that He has given us immense resources. We have the physical universe, plants and animals, organic and inorganic matter, and energy. Even in the face of the population explosion, the bounty of the Earth has been sufficient to sustain us. All we have to do is to learn how to take care of the garden God has given us, and serve as its stewards. That is not easy, and we are mucking it up pretty badly, but we are not short of resources. We live in the midst of a bountiful creation.

How should we live amidst this bountiful creation? I believe that God wants us to grow toward him, and find salvation. To help us do that, he sent us His Son, to teach us and to die for us.

I have to confess immediately that there are a lot of things I don't know. In particular, I don't know much about doctrinal issues. I honestly haven't gotten that far, yet. I am still focused on the simple things that Jesus said and did while He walked among us.

Pasted to my forehead are the two Great Commandments— to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The implications of those two commandments are huge. Then there are the inspiring, demanding, radical spiritual insights of the parables. Then there is the beautiful Sermon on the Mount. Then there is the Great Commission.

The teachings of Jesus give me so much to think and feel, so much to do and be, that I am nearly overwhelmed. His teachings tug at me, challenging me and pulling me forward. His teachings give all of us a very good idea of how we should live, and what we should do. Specific applications are sometimes difficult, but Jesus made it clear which direction which should be facing as we move forward.

To help us even more, God sent us the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Spirit as the encourager, enabler, companion— a source of strength. God created the world, Jesus taught us what we should do, and the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to go forward and do it. So, we have all we need. God must love us, because He has given us these extraordinary gifts. All we have to do is to make use of these gifts to live greatly as Christians.

## Relationship with God

Before going further, I should confess that the idea of God as bounteous creator, Jesus as teacher and savior, and the Holy Spirit as enabler or encourager has affected my relationship with God in at least two ways. First, it affects my notion of prayer and what I pray for. I believe that if you ask, it will be given to you. I believe that especially because I believe that almost everything we can ask for *has already been given*. God has already given us the universe, with immense resources; He has already given us life, and free will. Jesus has already taught us how to live and how to be saved, and the Holy Spirit is already here, among us, to encourage us along the way.

With such immense blessings, I find it very awkward to be asking for anything more. There is a story we tell in our family which is about keeping perspective and being grateful. You've probably heard at least one version of this story. A grandmother is at the beach with her grandson. He ventures out into the waves, as boys do, laughing and playing. Suddenly, he lets out a scream, and his head goes down. Grandma jumps up, and yells for the lifeguard, who races out down the beach and dives into the water. He grabs the boy, carries him up onto the beach, lays him down, and does CPR. The boy coughs and sputters, and opens his eyes. "Billy, Billy," grandma says, full of joy. "Oh, my Billy, he was drowning, he was gone, he was dead, but he's alive again, he's alive, he's okay, he's okay, my Billy!" Suddenly she stops, and her face and voice turn cold. "He had a *hat*," she says to the lifeguard.

I don't want to be like that grandma. I have been so amazingly blessed that it is embarrassing. I can't imagine saying to God, "Lord, thank you for my beautiful wife and family, a wonderful place to live, a nice house, an exciting career.. *I wanted a red sports car.*" I can't bring myself to do that. It would be so incredibly ungrateful.

Another reason I have trouble praying for things like a new car, or praying that I will not be late for the bus, or praying that I will pass the qualifying exam, is that I think God has already given me the ability to work hard to earn the money for a car, He has given me the intelligence to buy a watch to make sure I am not late for the bus, and He has given me the time to study and write so I can pass the qualifying exam.

I admit I have not worked out the theological basis for this belief. I was shocked to learn, late in life, that “God helps those who help themselves” was not in the Bible, at least not a direct quote. But I don’t feel like asking God for more things, when I am not doing all that I can with what He has already given me. When I pray, I give thanks for everything that has already been given. I pray for others and their needs. As for my own needs, I pray for courage and wisdom, for commitment and perseverance, for guidance and insight. I pray for spiritual strength. I ask the Holy Spirit to just help me to get moving. *Please.*

Another strange notion I have about prayer is that God does not answer my prayers by zapping other people or things to change them into a pattern which makes life easier for me. I don’t think God is trying to make life easier for me. I think He wants life to be challenging—hard enough that I will have to keep learning and growing. So he doesn’t change other people or events to suit my fancy. I am reminded of a scene in the movie, *Oh, God*, when John Denver is driving along in his car with God, who happens to look a lot like George Burns. Denver asks God to make it rain. God makes it rain *inside the car*. When Denver asks him why He did that, God says that He saw no reason to ruin everybody else’s day by making it rain all over the place, just to please Denver. That makes sense to me. Why should God make somebody else’s day a little harder, just to make mine a little nicer?

If I think that God has already answered most of my prayers, and I don’t expect him to zap other people or things to make my life easier, then why do I pray? Well, because something *does* change as a result of my prayers. That something is *me*. I change. I notice things I didn’t notice before. I understand things I didn’t understand before. I am open to ideas I wasn’t open to before. I think God answers my prayers by changing me, not others.

There is another story which I have thought about quite often in the last few months—another story you have heard before. A man is caught in a flood. As the water rises, he climbs up onto the roof of his house. A rowboat comes by, and the people in the boat tell the man to get in, but he says, “No, I have faith in the Lord, and He will save me.” The water rises higher, and the man sits on the very top of the roof. A motorboat comes by, and the people in the boat tell the man to get in, but he says, “No, I have faith in the Lord, and He will save me.” As the water laps around his ankles, a helicopter comes by, drops a rope ladder to the man, and the

pilot tells the man to grab hold. “No, I have faith in the Lord, and He will save me.” The man drowns, and goes to heaven, where he comes face to face with God. “Lord,” he says, “I had faith— why didn’t you save me?” “Why didn’t I save you?” the Lord says. “I sent you a rowboat, a motorboat, and a helicopter!”

I have this feeling that there are rowboats, motorboats, and helicopters around us pretty often when we are in need, but we don’t see them, or we don’t recognize them as gifts of God. It is hard to interpret our circumstances and know when God is sending us a message. We put our trust in the Lord, but that it doesn’t mean that we understand the signals that the Lord sends us. Sometimes, I imagine God up there, filled with love and patience, watching me with a benevolent smile, humming happily, saying to Himself: “Kent will finally catch on. He really will. He will finally get it. It’s right in front of him, and he will finally see it.” I am most likely to finally see it, if I pray. Prayer helps me see the rowboats, motorboats, and helicopters that I didn’t see before.

I have said that the idea of God as bounteous creator, Jesus as teacher and savior, and the Holy Spirit as enabler or encourager has affected my relationship with God in at least two ways. The first was the affect it has on my notion of prayer and what I pray for. The second way is that I believe that God is there, period. He is there when I feel His presence, and He is there when I don’t feel His presence. *He* is the constant, and *I* am the variable. If I don’t feel His presence, He has not abandoned me— I have abandoned Him. He is there, I am just not paying attention to Him.

One reason that I see God as the constant and all of us as the variables is that I believe that God has given us free will. We have the freedom to do good or ill, to be better or worse. Since we all have that freedom, and we all have impacts on each other, we make things better or worse for each other. I do not believe that every time a good thing happens to me, God is rewarding me, or every time a bad thing happens to me, God is punishing me. Maybe He is, but maybe not.

Also, I don’t believe that if I do good, only good things will happen to me. In general, I think that those who do good will find that good comes back to them, but bad things are inevitable in a world of free will. I don’t agree with people who basically bargain with God, saying: “God, I’ll believe in you if you give me the good stuff, but if you send me the bad stuff, the whole deal is off.” First of all, that’s not a commitment to a relationship with God, and secondly, we can’t have

free will and expect only good things to happen to us. Others will not always make choices that are good for us.

Then there is the question of what is, after all, a *good* thing, and what is, after all, a *bad* thing. What we think of as a good thing can lead to complacency and false pride, and what we think of as a bad thing can lead to new growth and humility.

I know that some people have trouble believing in God, because there is so much evil in the world. I think that much of the evil in the world is the result of choices made by people who are twisted and confused, exercising their free will in harmful ways. I make mistakes myself. It is a shocking truth that I am often the immediate, direct cause of my own problems. I don't blame God for that. God doesn't *cause* any of us to make bad choices. He *allows* us to make choices, and inevitably, some of the choices will be bad. As I see it, the Christian does not avoid any of the bad things in life. Rather, the Christian has the Creator, Teacher and Savior, and Enabler at his or her side when facing those bad things. God is our counsel and strength in getting *through* the bad things.

In the meantime, some things will simply remain unclear. God may be sending me signals, and I need to ponder them, and pray about what it all means, and be open to new understandings. I need to be looking for the meaning, the purpose, the significance of what is happening. For the most part, though, I have to move forward with faith, not with certainty. That is what faith is for— to continue believing in the midst of uncertainty.

### **Let's Get Moving**

Okay— we have all we need. We have the Creator, the Teacher and Savior, and the Enabler. What we need to do is to get moving. We need to do something with our faith. We have to live it, act on it. That's how we grow. That's how we make a difference on this planet. In this regard, I think of myself as a PC— a Practicing Christian. I mean “practicing” in both senses— first, I have to practice because I am not good at it yet, and second, I want to put my faith into practice.

It is significant to me that Christ came to serve, not to be served. During the years of his ministry, He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and reached out to the outcast. He also made it clear that his followers are to do the same. The parable of

the sheep and the goats is very direct: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” And when the righteous ask, when did they do those things, the King will reply: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Some things in life are ambiguous, and some teachings are hard to fathom, but this one seems desperately clear. There’s no getting over, under, or around the parable of the sheep and the goats. We can’t waffle our way out of this one. Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, provide hospitality to strangers, give clothes to those in need, heal the sick, and visit those in prison. In doing these things for others, we are doing them for Jesus.

This gives us a clear fix on the sorts of things we are meant to be doing. We are meant to be helping others. We can begin with our own families, loving and helping our spouses, children, and relatives. We can give directly, personally, to help friends and individuals beyond our immediate families. We can also work on the social, political, and economic systems, the larger structures and decisions of our society which affect food, clothing, shelter, health, education, crime, justice, jobs, family life and community values.

If you are not sure about how to get moving and how to help, just remember the story of the good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan saw a man at the side of the road who was injured, beaten by robbers. He went to him, bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn, and took care of him.

So far as we know, the Samaritan did not debate with himself as to whether there might be somebody with a greater need further down the road, or on another road, or in another city. He did not argue with himself as to whether he was the right man to help, or whether he had the time to help, or could afford to help, or whether somebody else should come to help instead. He didn't say this is a rural problem, outside his urban jurisdiction. No— he saw a need, right there in front of him, and he took action.

That is what life can be like for us. We can live each day, discovering needs and addressing them. Our biggest challenges may be ones that we just happen to

come across, ones that are right in front of us— like a man lying injured by the side of the road.

When I look around me today, here in Hawaii, I am astonished at what I see. I see a state that is suffering its worst economy in 50 years. We have lost tens of thousands of jobs, tax revenues are down, government services have been cut, and private donors have less money to give to non-profit organizations which serve the needy. There is a great deal of pain in our community which can be tied directly to six years of economic stagnation. Families are struggling. More people need food; just ask the Foodbank. More people need clothing and shelter— just ask pastors, priests, and social workers. Unfortunately, the list of needs is long, and growing longer. There is a lot to do, here in our State, and I believe Jesus wants us to get moving.

### **In the World, Not of the World**

There are some things to keep in mind as we get moving. I believe that it is important to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. This is a distinction that I find in the Bible at John 17: 14-16, when Jesus is praying for his disciples during the Last Supper. We are *in* the world, and we should engage it fully, loving others, serving others, feeling joy and sorrow, working hard, growing in wisdom. But even as we are fully engaged in the world, we do not have to be *of* the world— we do not have to base our actions on the world's values, nor judge ourselves by the world's definitions of success.

Being *in* the world but not *of* the world is the first step toward spiritual freedom. It frees you from secular values which drive you toward a fruitless desire for power, or money, or fame. For example, Jesus taught us that we should forgive others. That is sometimes very hard to do. The secular world may tell us to fight back, get even, not let people take advantage of us. But if we fight instead of forgive, we may carry a burden of anger or hate or a gnawing desire for revenge. That burden distorts us, ties us down, entraps us. It is better to forgive, and drop the burden, and be spiritually free.

People have set out to hurt me, and have succeeded in doing so. But if I do not approve of their behavior toward me, the last thing I should do is to let that bad behavior burden me, distort me, or destroy me. I may have to respond in some way, because it may be my job to respond, but not by returning hate for hate and

distorting my own life and spirit.

Similarly, turning the other cheek seems foolish, weak, and unnatural to the secular world. That's why there are feuds which go on and on, destroying people's happiness. Turning the other cheek is often the only way to stop a feud and be spiritually free. It hurts to absorb an attack, but if you can, you are free to go on and focus on what you want to do, and need to do, no longer trapped by the never-ending, back-and-forth of jealousy and one-upsmanship. When you do not retaliate, you declare your freedom from domination by the feud and those who promote it.

The older I become, and the more I see of the world, the more impressed I am with the practical wisdom of the teachings of Jesus. I believe that He wants me to be spiritually free, and not burdened by every bad thing done to me by others. He wants me to get moving, with as light a load, and as happy a heart, as possible.

## **Two Scoreboards**

When you are in the world, but not of the world, you will confuse a lot of other people. That's because they have only one scoreboard, while Christians have two scoreboards. The regular scoreboard is the one which measures public success: the results of the election, the bottom line of the business, the outcome of the athletic event. This scoreboard is about the values of the secular world.

The other is what I call God's scoreboard. It's a private scoreboard which measures spiritual growth. It's about whether or not you are using the gifts God has given you, and whether you are living as He would have you live. This scoreboard is about the values of the spiritual world.

It is possible to win on both scoreboards, of course. But a politician who wins an election by cheating, or a business manager who turns a profit by tyrannizing his employees, has only won on the public scoreboard, and has lost on God's scoreboard. Conversely, a person who takes a moral position which is unpopular, or an athletic team which uses every bit of talent and spirit it has but still loses the game, has only lost on the public scoreboard, and may have won on God's scoreboard. A practical Christian keeps his eyes on both, but remembers that God's scoreboard is the one that really counts.

## **The Personal Mission**

When we get moving, loving and helping others, engaged in the issues of life, we discover meaning and purpose. We find our personal missions and ministries. Many Christians find their personal mission and ministry by doing what Jesus did: Helping others.

Discovering one's mission can be a spiritual homecoming, and fulfilling one's mission can be a continuous act of joy. To find the will of God for one's life, and to fulfill His will, is to become whole, centered, deeply at peace, and profoundly liberated— more alive, more vibrant, more giving.

A lot of things in life are hard, but the hardest may be not knowing what life is for. It is not easy being a Christian, but most Christians have at least one advantage— most of us have an idea of what life is for. We have an idea of who we are supposed to be, and what we are supposed to do. We suffer pain, but not the pain of total emptiness and meaninglessness. We struggle, but we are not lost. It is not easy to do what Christ would have us do, but it is easier than being lost without a clue.

## **Doors to the Faith**

There is one last thing I would like to say this morning before I conclude. I have talked about faith. You and I know that there are many doors into the Christian faith. There is the Bible, there are pastors and priests, and there are fellow Christians who point us toward those doors. Most would say that getting inside matters more than which door one chooses.

In addition to the individuals who have helped me on my journey, a major door has been the writings of C. S. Lewis. For that, I thank Randy Furushima, who gave me my first set of C. S. Lewis books. Reading Lewis's work has been an immense joy— invigorating, inspiring, challenging.

The single book which hit me like a reconversion experience was *Mere Christianity*, which is based on Lewis's talks about Christianity which he broadcast during World War II on the BBC. I have re-read it five times over the years. The first time, there were a number of passages that spoke to me so strongly, and so beautifully, with such clarity and hope, that tears rolled down my cheeks as I read.

This happened one day on an inter-island flight. I was coming back from the Big Island, and as we landed in Honolulu, I was reading a passage about the perfection that God wants for each of us, and the tears began to roll down my cheeks. The kind elderly lady sitting next to me was uncertain what to do, but finally patted me on the hand. "It's okay," she said, "we've landed, we're safe, it will be all right." I didn't know what to say, so I said "Thank you."

C. S. Lewis is just one door, but if you have not read him, or want to read him again, or would like to give his work to a friend to read, I happen to have 100 copies of his books here to give away this morning. I have 70 copies of *Mere Christianity* to give away, plus two sets of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, two sets of the science fiction trilogy, and two sets of other writings. The books are at the Logos Bookstore book table up front here to my left. I invite you to take a book and read it, and then pass it on to someone else who might read it, or give it to your church library. A quick hint: If you have never read any C. S. Lewis, take *Mere Christianity* with you. If the first few pages seem slow, skip the first 60 pages, which is a separate section, and go on to the practical lectures. I think you will find it very rewarding.

Well, that's my "straight talk." God bless you, and thank you again for the opportunity to share with you this morning.