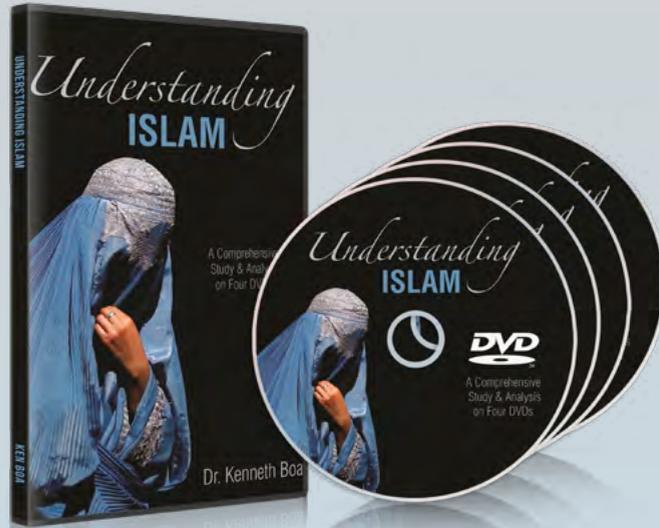
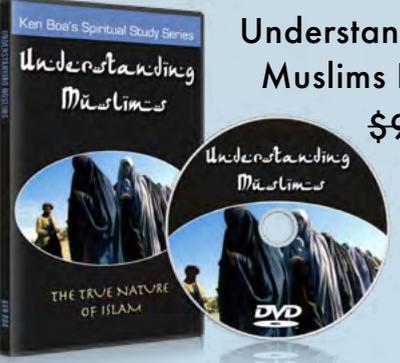


SEPTEMBER DEALS

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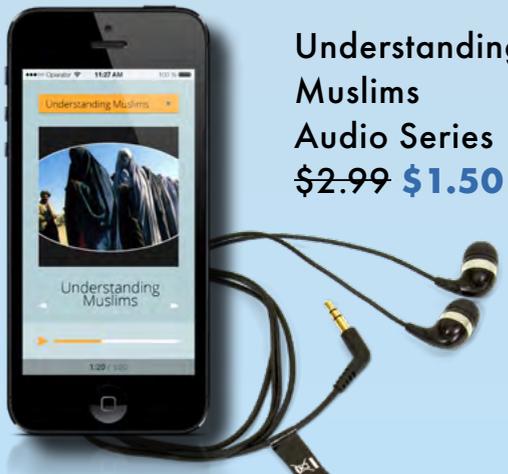


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WINGS LIKE EAGLES



But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31 NIV)

The life of one of God's most appreciated saints was ended at an early age by a brain tumor. But since Isaiah 40:31 was one of his favorite verses, Eric Liddell approached his unforeseen trial with the same faith in the sufficiency of God with which he had lived his life as a Christian.

Born to missionary parents in China, Liddell (1902–1945) became an athlete and later a missionary to China from his homeland of Scotland. While a student at Edinburgh University, he represented Scotland as a competitor in the 1924 Paris Olympics, where he won the gold medal in the 400-meter race.

While he depended on God for strength to run with “wings like eagles,” he discovered at the Olympics a new challenge that caused him to “walk and not be faint.” Due to run in a race on a Sunday, he said he could not, based on his commitment to “keep holy the Sabbath” (Exodus 20:8–11). No amount of influence from his coaches and friends, even British royalty, could persuade him to violate his conscience and principles of faith. At the last minute, an alternative was discovered when a teammate volunteered to switch races with him so he would not have to run on the Sabbath. And he “soar[ed] on wings like eagles,” winning his race for Scotland.

Faced with the possibility of compromising his convictions, Liddell exchanged his possible weakness for God's strength and remained strong—exactly what God promised to do for the nation of Israel. Israel had been tested by God's judgment, but when that test was almost over, God sent a message through Isaiah that “those

who hope in the Lord” would “renew their strength.” Israel might have been weak, but her God was strong.

Even the strongest of God's saints will face times of testing, weakness, and temptation. But in those times, when human strength is inadequate for the race set before us, God's strength is more than sufficient. Like the majestic eagle being lifted by the power of the wind, believers can exchange their weakness for God's strength. It's then that the adequacy of God in every situation is made most real.

GOD'S PROMISE:

You are always welcome to exchange your strength for His.

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REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth

Jesus, I thank You that You never ask us to do what You have not already done for us. You taught us to love one another, and You first loved us. You taught us to forgive one another, and You first forgave us. You taught us to serve and sacrifice for others, and You first served and sacrificed Yourself for us. You taught us to obey the Father, and You obeyed Him perfectly. You taught us to pray, and You fully exemplified prayer in all that You did. You taught us to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, and You accomplished all things in His power. You taught us to notice the obscure and the unlovely, and You first did that for us. You taught us to have patience and forbearance for others, and You demonstrated that throughout Your earthly ministry. You taught us to be kind and merciful to others, and that characterized all of Your life. May I grow in Your grace and become more like You.

WALKING IN THE STEPS OF JESUS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



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COMMITMENT, PART 3

BEING COMMITTED TO GOD

QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS are founded on the rock of commitment, not the shifting sand of feelings or emotions. God calls us to be people of commitment, first to Him and then to others. As a great leader of Israel, Joshua's entire life was marked by commitment. We even hear this in his final words:

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."

But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord."

Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord."

"Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

"Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel."

And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the Lord our God and obey him."

On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

"See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God." (Joshua 24:14–27 NIV)

*God alone is the worthy object
of our total commitment.*

Joshua told the people that even if they chose not to serve the Lord, they would still not be exempt from service. If we do not serve the Creator, we will unavoidably serve some part of the creation. But the gods of success, position, and possessions are cruel taskmasters and never deliver the profound satisfaction they promise. God alone is the worthy object of our total commitment, and if we direct our highest commitment to anything else, we commit idolatry. We were designed to serve God and to find our deepest satisfaction in Him, but we

will be half-hearted at best if we try to play by two sets of rules and serve two masters (Luke 16:13).

ONE THING

*It's one thing . . . the secret to life
is pursuing one thing.*

In the 1991 movie *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal plays Mitch—a confused, dissatisfied man with a vague sense that life is passing him by. Jack Palance plays the ancient sage Curly—"a saddlebag with eyes." At a critical moment in the film, Curly asks Mitch if he would like to know the secret of life.

"It's this," Curly says, holding up his index finger.

"The secret of life is your finger?" asks Mitch.

"It's *one thing*," Curly replies. "The secret of life is pursuing one thing."

Something about this strikes a chord deep within Mitch. His life is a mess; he feels pulled by his obligations to his family and his desire for fulfillment at his work—torn between his need for security and his longing for excitement. Like many men, Mitch is divided. His life is about too many different things. Thus, he feels it is about nothing.

He asks Curly to tell him what that one thing is, but the best Curly can do is to tell Mitch, "You have to find it for yourself."

Believe it or not, the wise, old cowboy is parroting Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who saw double-mindedness as the primary affliction of modern man. His book *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* is a meditation on the biblical statement, "Purify your hearts, you double-

minded" (James 4:8 NIV). The sickness, according to Kierkegaard, is really a failure to achieve an integrated life, a life that is focused on one thing. It is the failure to make an ultimate commitment to "the Good," to "seeking first the kingdom of God."¹

Many who followed Jesus were merely curious. Others were convinced of the truth of what He was teaching. Only a few were fully and personally committed to Him. When His uncommitted followers began to leave Him in response to His difficult sayings, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked if they wanted to leave with the others. Although it is doubtful that they understood the Lord better than those who were leaving, they realized that once having committed themselves to Him, there was no turning back (John 6:60–69).

As modern-day disciples of Christ, we are also called to remain committed to Him, even when we don't fully understand all of His plans for us. Failure to do so leads to misery and a lack of effectiveness in ministry. As François Fénelon wrote,

Woe to those weak and timid souls who are divided between God and their world! They want and they do not want. They are torn by desire and remorse at the same time. . . . They have a horror of evil and a shame of good. They have the pains of virtue without tasting its sweet consolations. O how wretched they are.²

Remember Joshua's message to the Israelites: "You are [a witness] against [yourself] that you have chosen to serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:22). The call to commitment is a call to constant vigilance in maintaining and understanding the standards of that commitment. No matter what distractions you may encounter as a follower of Christ, you need to maintain a focus on, as Curly put it, "one thing": serving the Lord.

NEXT MONTH:

*Look for the fourth and final part in this series,
"Commitment in Action."*

¹Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* (New York: Harper Bros., 1938). ²François Fénelon, *Christian Perfection*, quoted in Richard Foster and J. B. Smith, eds., *Devotional Classics* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 48.