

THE NATURE OF FAITH



NORMAN NOKLEBY

*The apostles said to the Lord,
“Increase our faith!”*

Luke 17:5



*Half Dome from the Panorama Trail (2013)
Yosemite National Park, California*

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*“I tell you the truth,
if you have faith as small as a mustard seed,
you can say to this mountain,
‘Move from here to there’ and it will move.”*

Matthew 17:20

The Nature of Faith

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FRONT COVER: *Sunrise (2002)*
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Florida

BACK COVER: *Post-sunset Light and Reflection, Snake River (2015)*
Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming



Shells and Surf (2015)
Tigertail Beach County Park, Collier County, Florida



*Dwarf Crested Iris, Porters Creek Trail (2015)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee*

SOLI DEO GLORIA

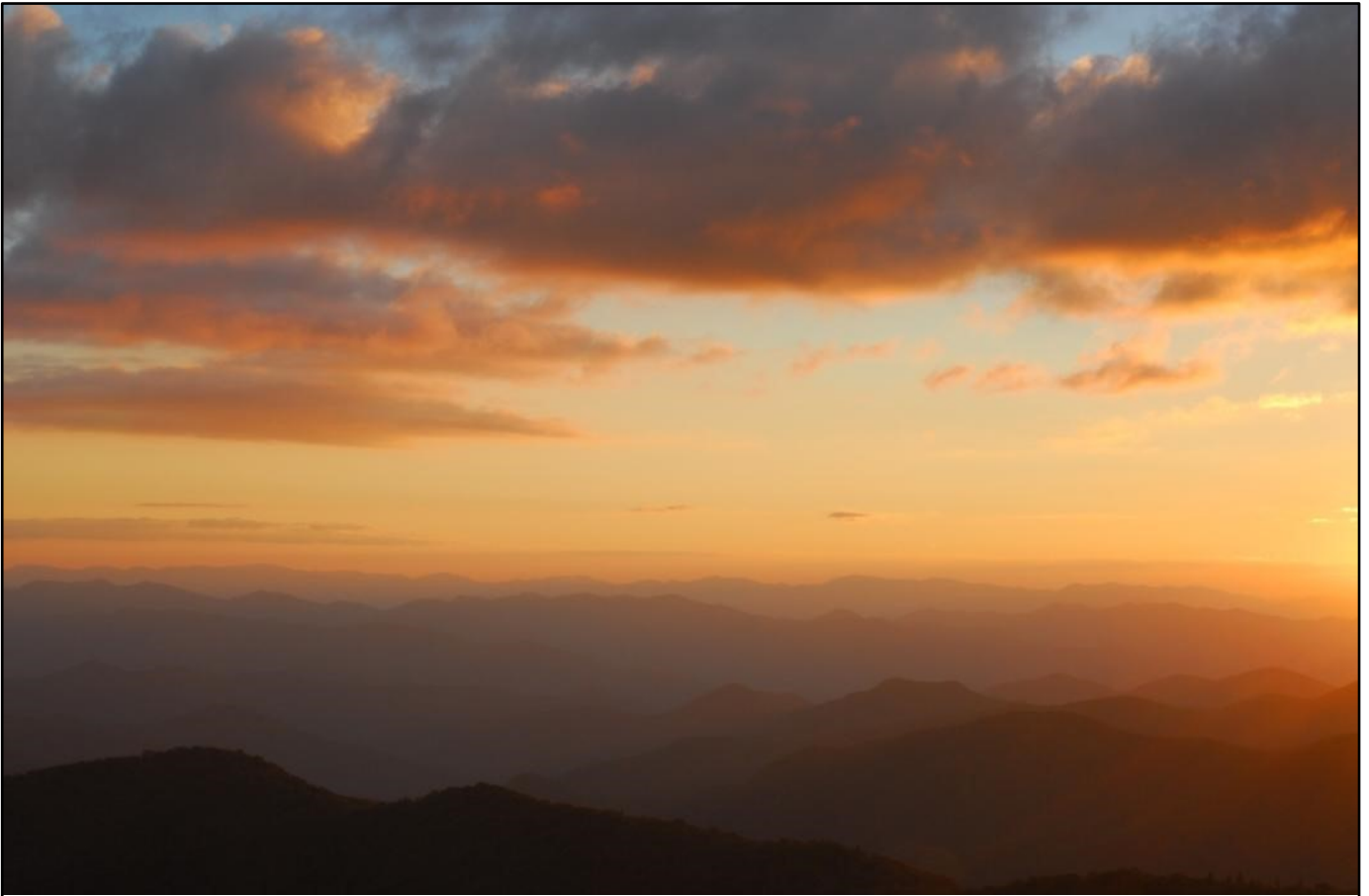


*California Poppies (2014)
Klickitat County, Washington*

CONTENTS

FAITH: NATURE OR NOT?.....	13
INTERNAL FAITH	17
Commitment	19
Courage.....	21
Humility.....	25
Integrity.....	27
Joy.....	29
Perseverance	33
Priorities	37
Sacrifice.....	41
Seeing	43
Wonder	47
EXTERNAL FAITH.....	51
Compassion.....	53
Consistency	57
Forgiving Others	59
Gentleness	63
Helping Others.....	65
Intercession	67
Mercy.....	69
Responding	71
Seizing Opportunities	73
Serving	75
Witnessing	77





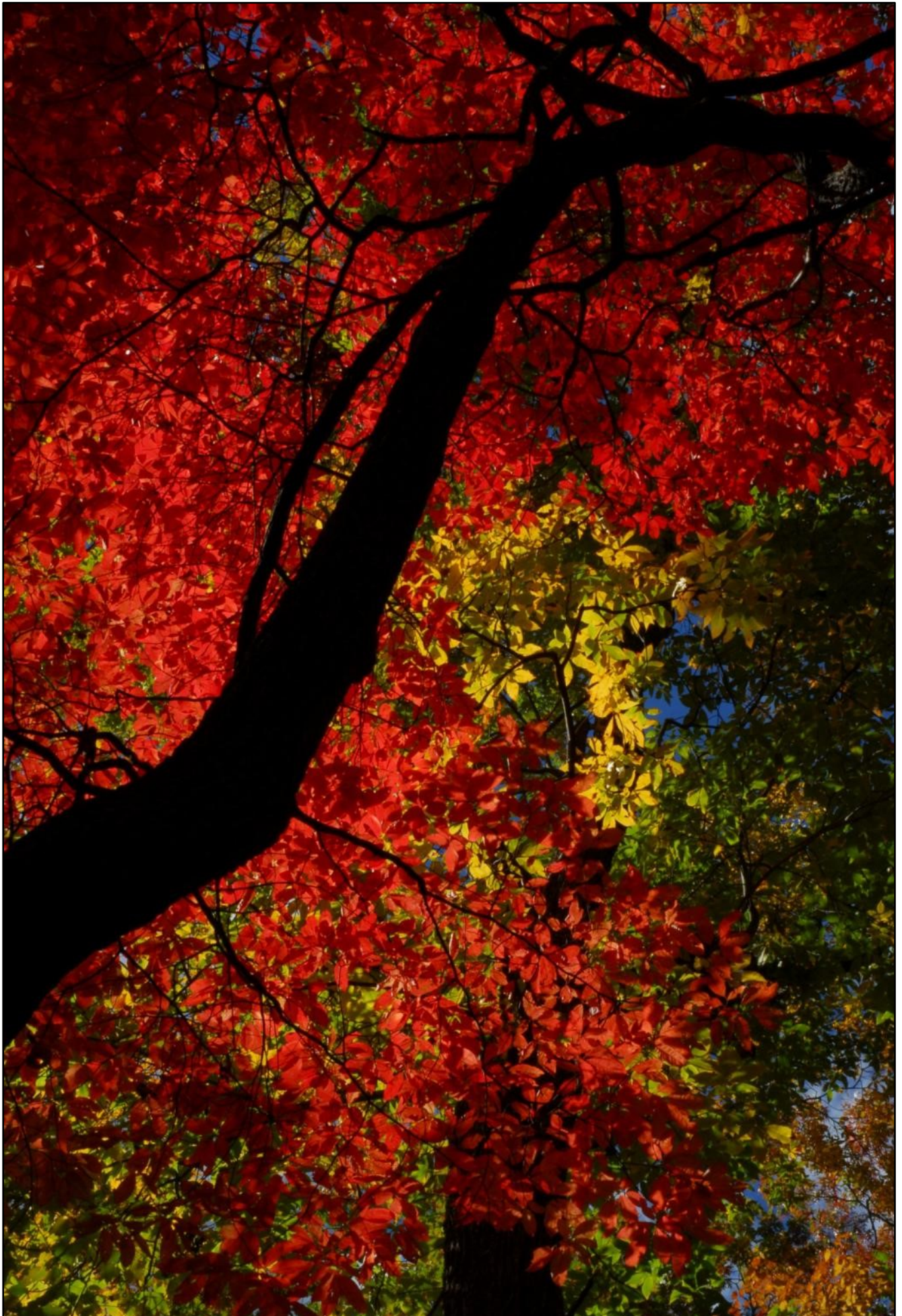
*ABOVE:
Mountain Ridges at Sunset (2010)
Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina*



*LEFT:
Saguaro Cactus (2012)
Coronado National Forest, Arizona*

CONTENTS *CONTINUED*

ETERNAL FAITH	81
Communication.....	83
Confession	85
Growth.....	87
Listening	89
Obedience	91
Patience	93
Peace	95
Stewardship.....	97
Thanksgiving	101
Wisdom	105
IT'S ALL GOOD ...?	107
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	113



FAITH: NATURE OR NOT?

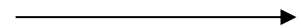
Is it in our nature to have faith? While you are pondering this, let me climb a bit further out on this limb by adding that I don't think the answer depends on whether or not a person is a Christian. If you haven't already guessed, my response to my own question would be "Yes." Now before you start up the chainsaw in your hand and begin working on the branch I'm on, allow me a couple of paragraphs to explain.

I think that faith is a fundamental part of life. (I can see your fingers tightening around the chainsaw's crank handle.) Let me provide two simple examples. When I take a step forward, I'm demonstrating faith that the surface on which I am going to step will provide a firm, stable foundation. When I flip a light switch from "Off" to "On," I am demonstrating faith that power will surge through the wires and provide illumination.

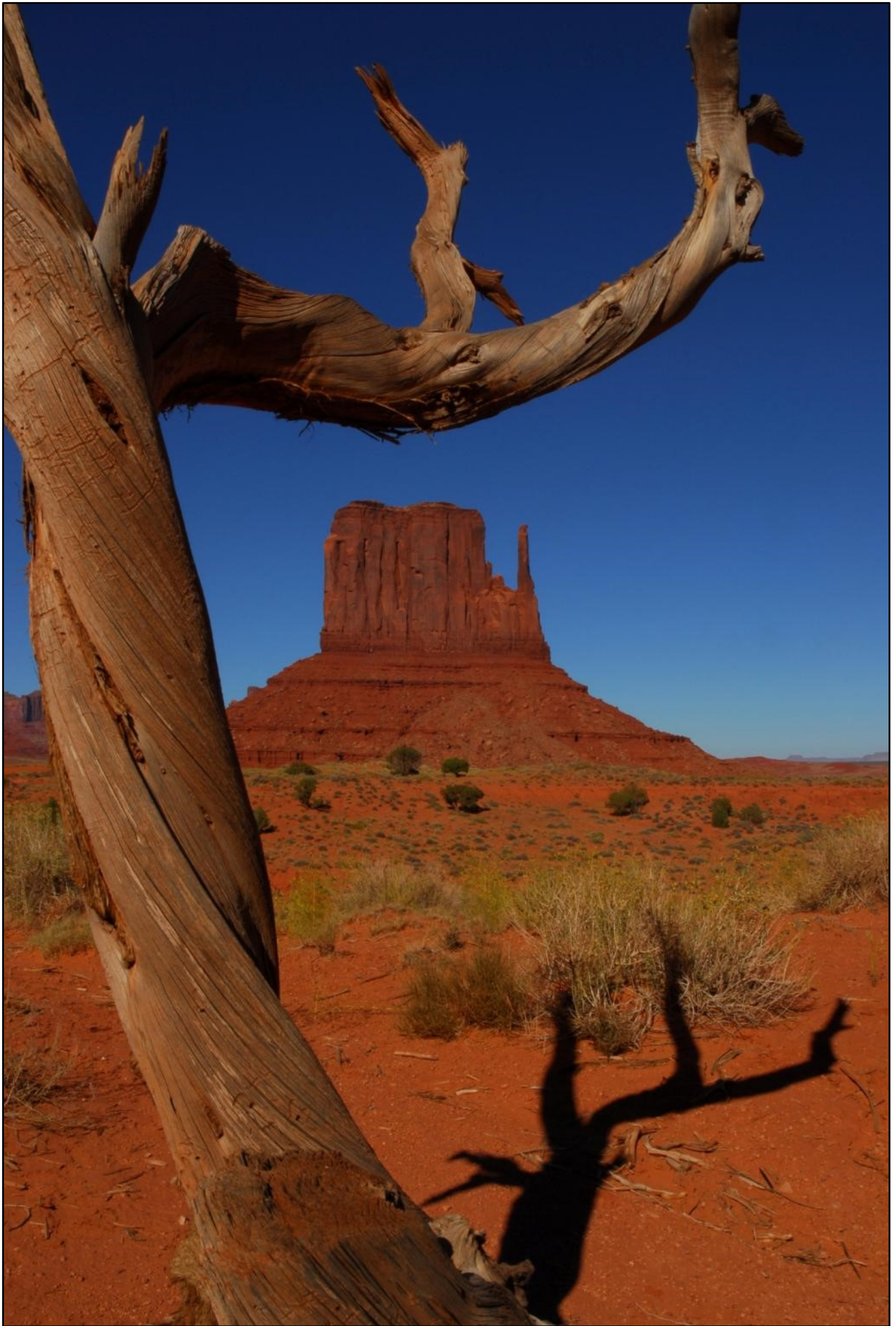
These two rather basic illustrations provide an important insight about faith:

Faith, at an elemental level, is belief put into action.

I can believe, with all my being, that the rock on the path ahead will support me. But that belief is not worth a whole lot until I'm willing to step forward and place my weight on that stone. On a level path in the woods, this is a fairly easy decision. On a ten-inch-wide ridge at 14,000 feet, with precipitous drops of hundreds of feet on either side, that next step is not quite so automatic.



*OPPOSITE PAGE: Fall Colors, Carrick Creek Trail (2008)
Table Rock State Park, South Carolina*



FAITH: NATURE OR NOT? *CONTINUED*

For some people, the difference between faith in general and faith in God is, simply put, evidence - what they can see and experience. I've been working outdoors with a camera since I was a junior in college. As a nature photographer, the wondrous beauty and intricate detail that I see and experience outdoors makes it difficult for me not to believe in God.

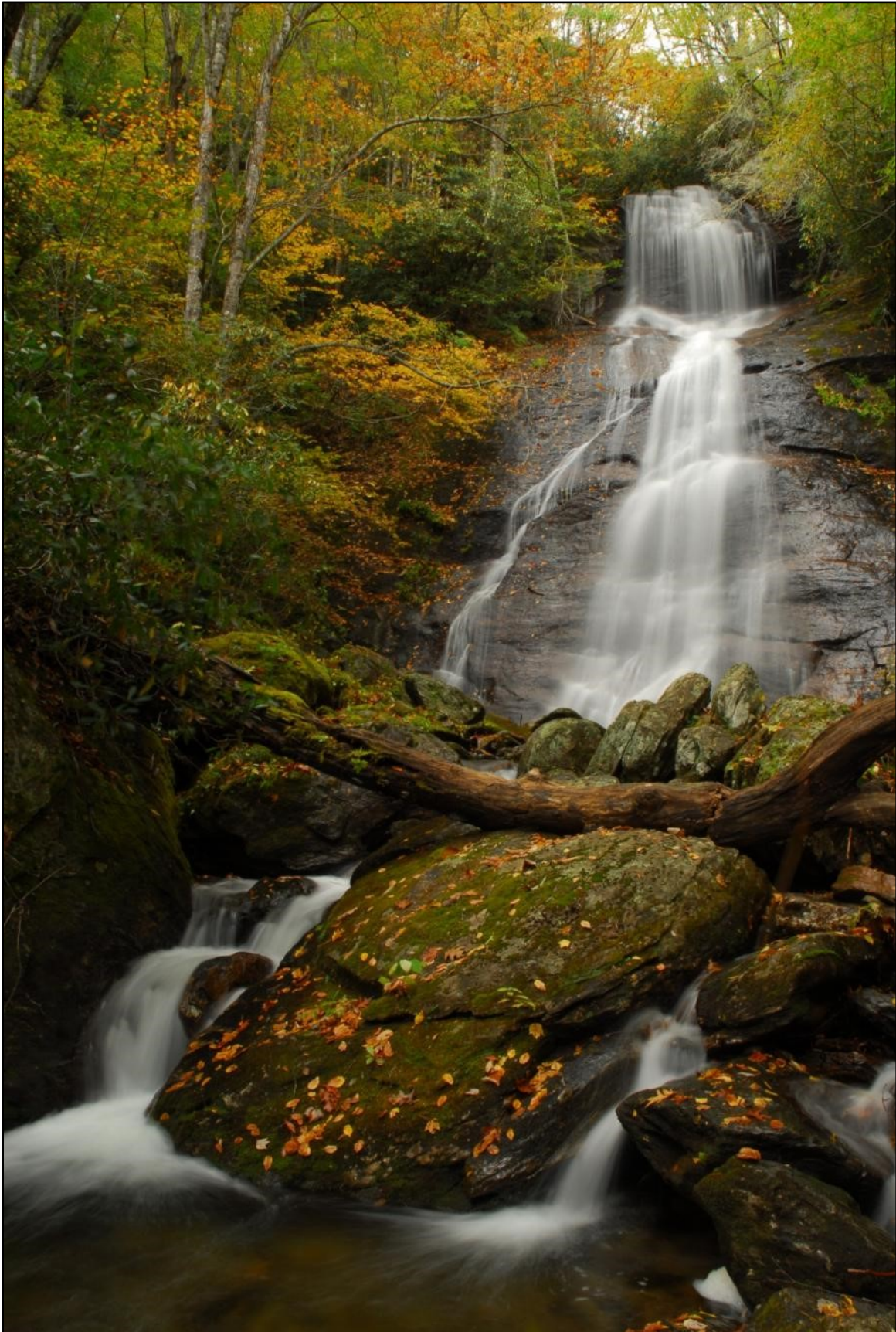
And I am far from being alone in making the connection between nature and faith in God. One of the Psalms attributed to David began with these words, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*" (Psalm 19:1) Colonial American preacher Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Nature is God's greatest evangelist." And a more recent preacher, Max Lucado, observed, "Someone who witnesses God's daily display of majesty doesn't find the secret of Easter absurd."

So, if you are willing to put the chainsaw back in its case for a bit, I would invite you to spend a few minutes exploring the following pages. On them you will find images of nature as well as a few of my thoughts on various aspects of faith in God through Jesus Christ. What I've written is not intended to be an exhaustive treatise on faith. And, if you weren't able to move mountains before reading this, you probably won't be able to afterwards.

However, it is my hope and prayer that, within these pages, you will find "sights to behold" and "thoughts for the soul" that will serve as cressets along the path of faith for you.

OPPOSITE PAGE: East Mitten (2007)

Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park , Arizona



*Dill Falls (2015)
Nantahala National Forest, North Carolina*

INTERNAL FAITH

Many years ago, I went on a mission trip to the midwestern part of the United States to help construct a church building. The group that went was prepared to do carpentry work - framing the structure. But when our team arrived on site, the only work that had been done was the pouring of the footers. (These are the out-of-sight, concrete pads on which the foundation piers sit.) Thus, our group spent the next week hand-mixing one ton of mortar and laying eight- and twelve-inch concrete blocks to build the foundation. We really had no choice. Every other part of the building - the floor, the walls, and the roof - depended on the careful construction of this essential base.

For me, there are some characteristics of faith that are foundational. Some, perhaps even many, of these traits are “out of sight” to most other people. They are, however, the building blocks that provide support for the external and eternal parts of my faith in God.

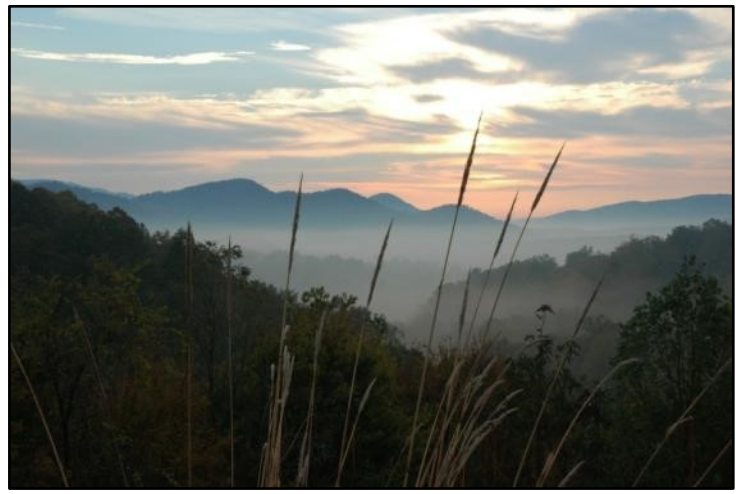
“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

Matthew 7:24-25



*ABOVE: Sun Beams, Lower Antelope Canyon (2009)
Lake Powell Navajo Tribal Park,
Arizona*

*BELOW: Perforated Falls (2015)
Transylvania County,*



*ABOVE: Sunrise (2005)
Greenville County,
South Carolina*

*BELOW: Common Mullein (2012)
Curecanti National Recreation Area,
Colorado*



COMMITMENT

*“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back
is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

Luke 9:62

In a comic strip from many years ago, Dennis the Menace and his young female nemesis Margaret were discussing the “facts of life.” Dennis dismisses a number of ideas as to where he came from including “the stork bringing him,” “being left under a cabbage leaf,” and “falling off a turnip truck.” This leads Margaret to observe, “I guess you don’t care where you came from.” To which her young companion replies, “Nope. Only where I’m goin’ is important.”

I’ve been extraordinarily blessed over the years to travel to quite a few interesting places. And, on occasion, it is pleasant to remember some of these experiences. But I have no desire to relive any of them. That’s because I would rather devote my nature photography efforts to “where I’m goin’ ” next.

Similarly, in my journey of faith, I try not to dwell in the past. Instead, I believe God wants me to commit my thoughts, my time, my money, and my energy to what He calls me to do the next hour, the next day, the next week.

*Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead,
I press on toward the goal to win the prize
for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:13-14



*North Coyote Buttes Area (2003)
Paria Canyon-Vermillion Cliffs Wilderness, Arizona*

COURAGE

The single most difficult photography trek I ever undertook was many years ago in the southwestern United States. On a detailed topographic map of northern Arizona, you might find an area labeled “North Coyote Buttes.” To nature photographers and other folks who know about this area, it’s known simply as “The Wave.”

An ecologically-sensitive area, a maximum of twenty people a day are granted permits to visit. Half of the permits are granted by a lottery drawing the previous day. People outnumber the permits by about four to one. And obtaining a permit is the easiest part of the trip.

It is a three-mile shadeless hike each way, some of it through soft sand and much of it over steeply-sloping rock ridges. And, there is virtually no trail. At the time I went, all the navigation had to be done by landmarks memorized before you started. It is no surprise that this area averages one search-and-rescue a week.

But for those who successfully make the trip, it is a place unlike any other on our planet. Undulating bands of multi-colored layers of sandstone weave across a small section of the Paria Canyon - Vermillion Cliffs Wilderness. I was fortunate to get a permit and complete a solo six-hour round-trip without incident. And while this was a memorable event in my life, I’m glad most of my photo outings don’t require quite as much courage.





*Wind-driven Waves, Lake Superior Shoreline (2014)
Keweenaw County, Michigan*

COURAGE *CONTINUED*

One night, Jesus' disciples were in a wind-tossed boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus came to them on the water, they were understandably terrified. Jesus called to them, "*Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.*" (Matthew 14:27, Mark 6:50) It was a heart-pounding situation that probably made the disciples wish for a prescription-level, IV-administered dose of "vitamin C."

A bit further along in the New Testament, I came across this verse towards the end of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth:

*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith;
be men of courage; be strong.*

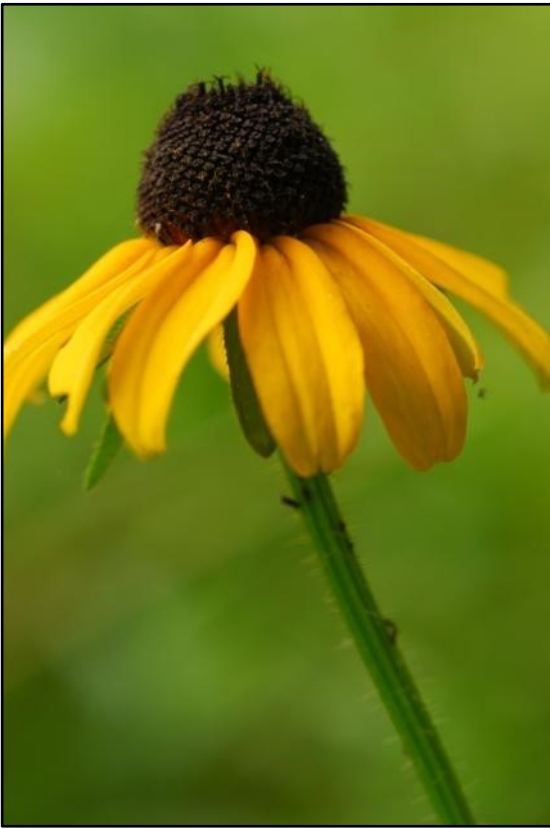
I Corinthians 16:13

Wait a second! Did I read that correctly? *Courage*? I reread the text immediately preceding verse 13. No gale-force winds? No soldiers threatening with swords drawn? No hordes of advancing locusts? No. Just normal, day-to-day living.

Then I thought about: going to visit someone in the hospital; speaking to someone about my faith; participating in a ministry activity outside my comfort zone. And then I realized - everyday "vitamin C" is what I need.

*Grant us wisdom,
Grant us courage,
For the living of these days.*

*from the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory"
Words by Harry Emerson Fosdick*



*Black-eyed Susan
(2014)
Blue Ridge Parkway,
North Carolina*



*Courthouse Towers
Reflected in Rainwater Pool (2007)
Arches National Park, Utah*

HUMILITY

The photographs on the opposite page were shot at locations separated by more than a thousand miles, were taken years apart, at different times of day, and in different light. But they have one thing in common - they were taken with my camera just a few inches above the ground.

With my camera in this position, I had to be on the ground in order to see through the viewfinder or look at the LCD. Not only is this an uncomfortable position to be in, getting down to that level requires some effort. But there was no other way for me to capture these images.

Years ago, during a Sunday morning church service, I was seated in the congregation while my wife was singing in the choir. In the pew just ahead of me was a father, mother, and their young daughter. During the singing of a hymn, the small girl insisted on standing on the seat. Both of her parents told her to get down. She steadfastly refused. Finally, after repeated words did not persuade her, her mom put her hands on her daughter's shoulders and forced her to get down. Rather than cry or pout, the little girl turned to her mother and said, "Okay, I'll get down. But on the inside, I'm standing up."

It dawned on me that sometimes I'm standing up before God when I should be on the ground before Him. Sometimes physically. But always in spirit. Humbling myself before God is not always natural for me. But there is no other way to receive His mercy from above.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4:10



Moonrise (2007)
San Juan County, New Mexico

INTEGRITY

In Daniel 6:1-4, the government officials who reported to Daniel were jealous of him and desperately wanted to find a way to discredit him. Then they could bring Daniel up before the king on charges regarding the way he carried out his responsibilities. The second part of verse 4 reads this way in the New International Version:

*They could find no corruption in him,
because he was trustworthy
and neither corrupt nor negligent.*

Back in the day - not quite as far back as Daniel, but the day of slide film - when I pressed the shutter button of my camera, the resulting photograph, when processed, faithfully represented what the camera was “seeing”. Manipulating a Kodachrome 64 image was pretty much impossible. However, in the digital age, especially with the proliferation of software tools, it is more difficult to know if a given digital image is “trustworthy”. Was that moon really there? Was the sky really that color?

I want my images to have integrity. When someone looks at a photograph or a print that has my name on it, I want it to convey, as accurately as possible, what I saw and experienced in a given moment. Even more importantly, I believe God wants my words and my actions, in effect my life, to have integrity.

*In everything set them an example by doing what is good.
In your teaching show integrity . . .*

Titus 2:7



*Sun Star, Sun's Eye Arch (2016)
Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park, Arizona*

JOY

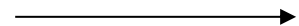
A multiple-offender ex-con. A person severely punished by law enforcement folks on more than one occasion. A guy who spent 24 hours in the sea without a boat. An individual who was betrayed by friends. Someone who went hungry many times. These are not descriptions of folks on a reality television show. These are all experiences of one man - Paul.

And yet, who had more to say about joy than any other person in the Bible? You guessed it - Paul. What can explain this seeming contradiction? I think it best to let the man himself tell you:

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future,
nor any powers, neither height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us
from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:38-39

In these two verses, Paul succinctly explains why joy for a believer is different than happiness. Joy is not based on circumstances, events, luck, karma, the stars being aligned, or even winning the lottery. It is based on the unchanging nature of God and the relationship that a Christian has with Him through His son, Jesus Christ.





*Alpine Sunflowers, Crystal Lake, Red Mountains (2012)
Uncompahgre National Forest, Colorado*

JOY *CONTINUED*

A while back, I was in a restaurant and saw someone I hadn't seen for some time. When I went over to greet this person, knowing of my interest in photography, he asked, "Been any place special?" To which I replied, "Every place I go is special." Now, this was neither a flippant response nor bragging on my photographic ability. It was really more of a confession.

At one point in my photographic life, many of my outings were driven by finding a particular shot or subject. When that didn't work out, I would be disappointed (that is, unhappy). I can't tell you exactly when that changed. But I can tell you that obtaining a given photograph no longer drives how I think, feel, or react. And when I don't find anything to photograph (which occasionally does happen), then I just enjoy being outdoors.

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
I will say it again: Rejoice!*

Philippians 4:4



*Sunset at Great Fountain Geyser (1996)
Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming*

PERSEVERANCE

Some people see patience and perseverance as pretty much the same thing. However, I see these attributes as a bit different. I would define patience as *waiting without worrying*. Perseverance, from my perspective, is *patience combined with some obstacle that must be overcome*. Perseverance, relative to patience, is more of an active trait.

On a trip to Yellowstone National Park in mid-September many years ago, my wife and I found ourselves at Great Fountain Geyser late in the day. It looked like it might be a good opportunity for a sunset. But it would be more than thirty minutes before the sun was in the right position for a shot. And the temperature was in the mid-twenties with a slight breeze blowing that made it feel even colder. We put on all the cold weather clothes we'd brought. Rather than stand in one place, we walked around trying to stay warm. Enduring the bone-chilling weather while waiting on the sun gave me the opportunity to take the photograph on the opposite page. This experience also provided the incentive to go back to this location on a subsequent trip.





*Sunset at Great Fountain Geyser (2010)
Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming*

PERSEVERANCE *CONTINUED*

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

Luke 19:1-4

Zacchaeus persevered in his desire to see Jesus. The result was substantially more significant than a photograph of a sunset. It was an encounter that changed his life.

Perseverance does not guarantee a positive, life-altering experience or even a worthwhile photograph. But I still believe that this trait is a necessary part of faith, because my path is neither consistently smooth nor always level. Perhaps yours isn't either.

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.

James 5:11



*Slick Rock Falls (2013)
Pisgah National Forest, North Carolina*

PRIORITIES

Several springs ago, our cups (as well as our rivers and lakes) “ranneth” over. With precipitation. Lots of precipitation. Parts of the southeastern United States experienced rainfall that was thirty to forty percent above average. One overcast day, I thought this would be an excellent opportunity to photograph waterfalls in western North Carolina.

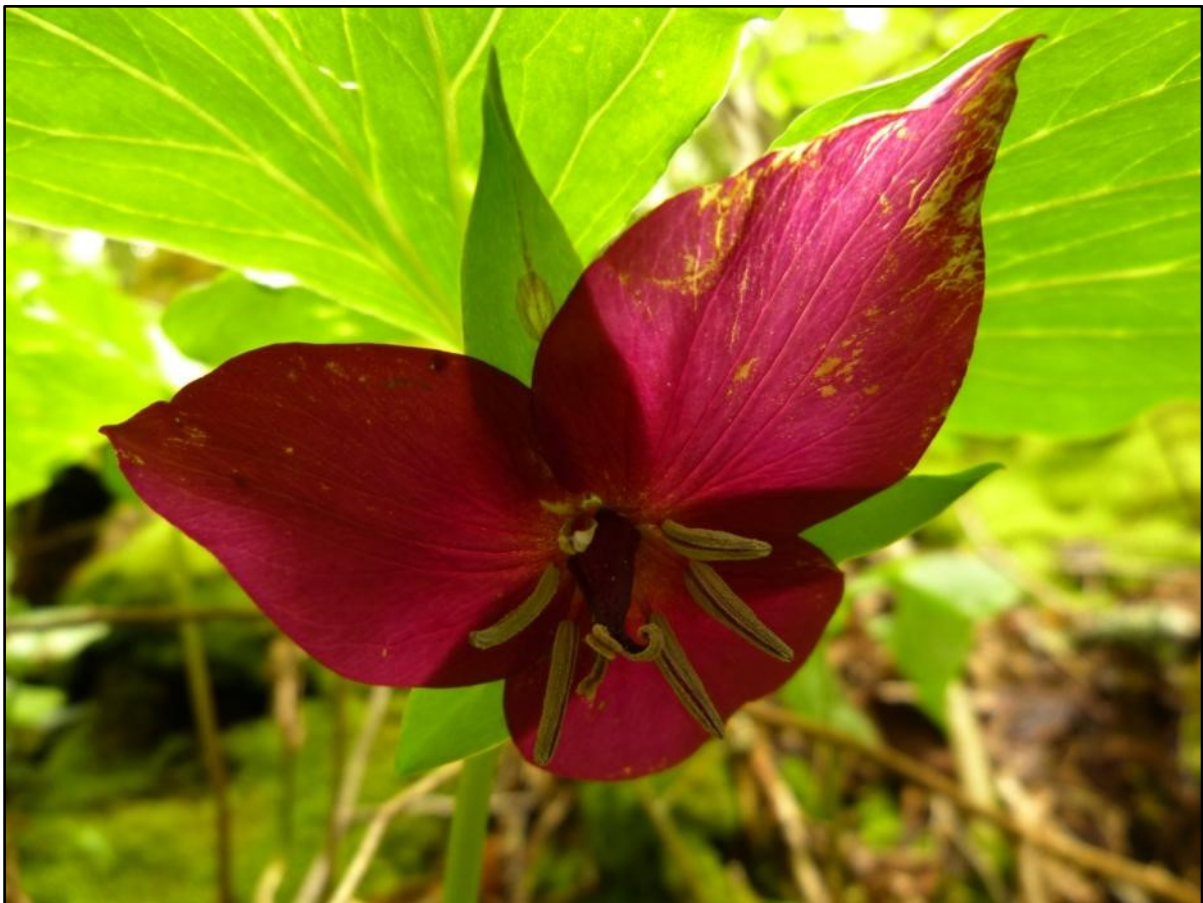
I drove to a location I’d visited several times before. Sure enough, even from a distance, I could tell there was a white cascade of water flowing over the eyebrow of rock and crashing onto the boulders below. Then, as I began to hike up to the base of the waterfall, I noticed something else. Something I’d not seen before in my previous visits to this area: an abundance of wildflowers. Suddenly, my priorities changed.

John 4:4-39 relates the story of another change of priorities, even more fundamental than what subject to photograph. A woman traveled to a well to draw water. There she met Jesus. Her conversation with Him altered her priorities from getting water to sharing the Living Water she’d just learned about.





*ABOVE & BELOW: Trillium (2013)
Pisgah National Forest, North Carolina*



PRIORITIES *CONTINUED*

During my senior year in college, I got a letter trying to sell me life insurance. I don't remember the name of the company. But I do remember the words of wisdom in one sentence: "Some of the decisions you make this year will impact your life for many years to come."

Values, and the priorities they shape, are extremely important. Because those priorities, whether they are conscious or unconscious, guide my decisions and choices. Not just yearly. But every minute of every hour of every day.

*Then, leaving her water jar,
the woman went back to the town and said to the people,
"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.
Could this be the Christ?"*

John 4:28



*Mesa Arch at Sunrise (2009)
Canyonlands National Park, Utah*

SACRIFICE

Beep . . . beep . . . beep. 3:40 AM! I got up and got dressed, loaded up my gear, and headed north out of Moab, Utah. After a while, my car's headlights picked up the sign for Canyonlands and I turned left. Some more driving through the deep darkness brought me to the trailhead I was looking for. Donning my polar fleece jacket, I hoisted my pack onto my back, grabbed my tripod, and headed out onto the trail, illuminated only with my flashlight. About forty minutes later, I took the shot on the opposite page.

*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him,
"I will follow you wherever you go."*

Jesus replied,

*"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests,
but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

Luke 9:57-58

If I only went out with my camera on level trails when the sun was shining, the temperature was 72 degrees, and the humidity was 30 percent, I wouldn't be much of a nature photographer. My paraphrase of what I think Jesus was saying to this man in the above verses (and to me) is:

*If you are going to go down the road with me,
don't expect life to always be easy, everyone will like you,
and you'll always have good health. Because if you do,
you're not going to be much of a follower of mine.*



Patch of Yellow Trillium (2008)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee

SEEING

Our eyes are marvelous parts of our bodies. They automatically adjust to different levels of light. I can focus my eyes on something a hundred feet away and, at the same time, see an object a short distance from my face. I can see in three dimensions. At any one time, my eyes can distinguish between a dozen different light and dark tones

Cameras have made significant advances, especially in the last few years. But for the most part, they are still more restricted, optically, than my eyes. So to create worthwhile, interesting images, I need to take into account the different perspective that the camera has. Put another way - I need to train myself to see as the camera sees.

On the opposite page is a scene I came across one spring in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This is what my eyes saw. But it is not a good photograph. It's difficult to say what the subject is, if there even is one. In addition, the shadows in this picture detract from rather than enhance this image.





Yellow Trillium (2008)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee

SEEING *CONTINUED*

What I needed to do was to take into account the camera's perspective. When I did that, I wound up with the image on the opposite page, which is a much better photograph.

In spiritual terms, there's little doubt about how I should see. In speaking to Samuel, God made it very clear:

*The Lord does not look at things man looks at.
Man looks at the outward appearance,
but the Lord looks at the heart.*

1 Samuel 16:7

Whether I'm on a mission trip to a foreign country or standing in line at a local fast-food restaurant, I need to try to see other people from God's perspective.

RIGHT:
Banana Spider (2014)
Everglades National Park,
Florida



BELOW:
Indian Paintbrush and
Bluebonnets (2012)
Burnet County,
Texas



WONDER

It was a normal Saturday. And there wasn't anything particularly noteworthy about the place. I don't know the names of any of the individuals involved except for one: Jesus. But the gospel writer Mark is very certain about what transpired on that ordinary Sabbath in that ordinary synagogue: a miracle!

Jesus healed a man who had a shriveled hand. Right there, in front of everybody, a disfigured hand became useful. Three words come to mind: A-MAZ-ING! However, some folks who witnessed this event missed the magnificence of the miracle, choosing instead to focus on the insignificance of the inconsequential; that is, their focus was on *When* rather than *What*.

One of my favorite non-fiction authors is Max Lucado. "Majesty in the midst of the mundane" is how he refers to another miracle, the birth of Jesus. Then Mr. Lucado went on to provide this insightful sentence:

*Those who missed His Majesty's arrival that night
missed it not because of evil acts of malice;
no, they missed it simply because they weren't looking.*





*ABOVE:
Great Egret (2011)
Alligator Farm Zoological
Park, Florida*



*LEFT:
Icicles (2011)
Pisgah National Forest,
North Carolina*

WONDER *CONTINUED*

When I'm outdoors, whether I have my camera or not, I see countless "miracles" in God's creation that provide a sense of wonder for me. For example:

< > A spider, lacking a degree in architecture, creates a web of astounding intricacy.

< > Unable to spell either "canvas" or "easel" or hold a palette, a wildflower is still able to create a work of art.

< > An egret, never having been taught even the basics of aerodynamics, flies through the air.

< > Without attending even a single science class, water forms icicles.

I don't know how it is with you, but I can occasionally get overwhelmed with to-do list tasks, never-ending obligations and responsibilities, and just the general business of life. Nature photography helps me to appreciate the wonder that is all around me. All I have to do is what the signs at railroad crossings used to say: Stop. Look. Listen.



*Shadow of Norman and Jean Nokleby at Excelsior Geyser Crater (2010)
Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming*

EXTERNAL FAITH

In the 1960s, one of the most popular singing duos in North America was Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. One of their many hits was a tune entitled “I Am a Rock.” The song ended with these words:

*I am a rock,
I am an island.
And a rock feels no pain;
And an island never cries.*

These lyrics strongly convey a desire to be separated and even insulated from other people.

However, long before these words were ever recorded, God recognized that human beings need other people. In fact, “aloneness” is the first part of creation that God called “not good.” (See Genesis 2:18.) Sixty percent of the Ten Commandments have to do with how we should (or should not) deal with others. Given these facts, it seems reasonable that there are or should be characteristics of my spiritual faith that enable me (or in some cases, compel me) to relate to other people.

*“And the second [commandment] is like it:
‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”*

Matthew 22:39



*Snow-flocked Vegetation and Rocks (2008)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee*

COMPASSION

It was spring. Or so the calendar said. But someone must have forgotten to pass the word along to the weather. My wife and I had traveled to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park for the normal profusion of wildflower blooms in mid-April. What we found, instead, were temperatures in the thirties (Fahrenheit). And a snowstorm.

Not wanting to miss an opportunity, I was determined to try to capture some images of the increasingly white landscape. But the only outerwear I'd brought along was a brown leather jacket with an attached, similarly-colored nylon hood. Undeterred, I donned the jacket, pulled up the hood, and went out, while Jean stayed in the van. (My wife is much smarter than I am. Q.E.D.) A while later, when I got back into the vehicle, she observed, "You look just like a fudgesicle." And at that moment I felt like one. Because I didn't have the right clothing.

In several places, the Bible speaks about what I, as a Christian, should "wear." One of these "dress for success" points comes from the apostle Paul, as follows:





Yellow Trillium (2008)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee

COMPASSION *CONTINUED*

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with compassion . . .*

Colossians 3:12

In the above verse, Paul is reminding the believers at Colosse that one of the essential garments for Christians is compassion. And as Jesus exemplified, this is an article of spiritual clothing I should always have on.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them . . .

Matthew 9:36

*Jesus called his disciples to him and said,
"I have compassion for these people . . ."*

Matthew 15:32



*Dew on Sugar Maple Leaves (2014)
Hiawatha National Forest, Michigan*

CONSISTENCY

Before certain men came from James, he [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Galatians 2:12-13

Recently, I was driving on a local interstate. I was in the left-hand lane to make it easier for vehicles merging from the adjacent on-ramp. Behind me was a van that was right on my bumper. It was clear that, even though I was moving along at the speed limit, that was not satisfactory for the driver behind me. As soon as I could, I moved into the right-hand lane. The van zoomed by me, then proceeded to weave across four lanes of traffic to get to the next exit, cutting off another driver in the process. As the van passed me, I noticed the license tag was PRAYNOW.

I thought about who I was supposed to pray for. The driver of the van? The other drivers on the road around the van? All of the above? While the van driver may have had some personal emergency, this encounter reminded me of the importance of being consistent in my Christian walk. My words, my actions, even what I wear or bumper stickers on my car can influence other people. For better or worse. This experience also brought to mind the words that, many years ago, used to be above the door as you exited the Georgia Tech YMCA:

Your life may be the only Bible some people will ever read.



Arch (2003)
nte National Monument, Utah

FORGIVING OTHERS

Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Matthew 18:21-22

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Everyone says that forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have to forgive.” An early example of forgiveness is seen in Joseph in the Old Testament. His own brothers sold him into slavery and then lied to their father, Jacob. Exiled to a foreign land and culture, Joseph remained true to the values he’d been taught. Then a false accusation resulted in him being put in prison.

Fast forward about ten years. His brothers came to him begging for food. If there ever was a person who had a right to hold a grudge, Joseph did. And, he had the opportunity to retaliate. But Joseph chose instead to forgive his brothers.

An even more compelling portrait of forgiveness is found in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. He forgave the people responsible for crucifying Him. (See Luke 23:34.)

Jesus wants me to be like Him. Jesus has forgiven me. So, if I don’t forgive others, I will be an incomplete image of Jesus, somewhat like the photograph on the opposite page. (To see the complete picture, go to the next page.)





*Metate Arch (2003)
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah*

FORGIVING OTHERS *CONTINUED*

In an article published in Jubilee magazine many years ago, Senior Editor Becky Beane, insightfully pointed out that forgiving is NOT excusing, forgetting, tolerating, dismissing my pain, or reconciling. What forgiveness does mean is relinquishing any claim I have to payback. Ms. Beane went on to point out three reasons I need to forgive others. It saves me from anger and bitterness. It also frees me to be a conduit of God's grace. (Which is another way in which I need to be like Jesus.) And most importantly, God commands it. (See Matthew 6:14-15.)

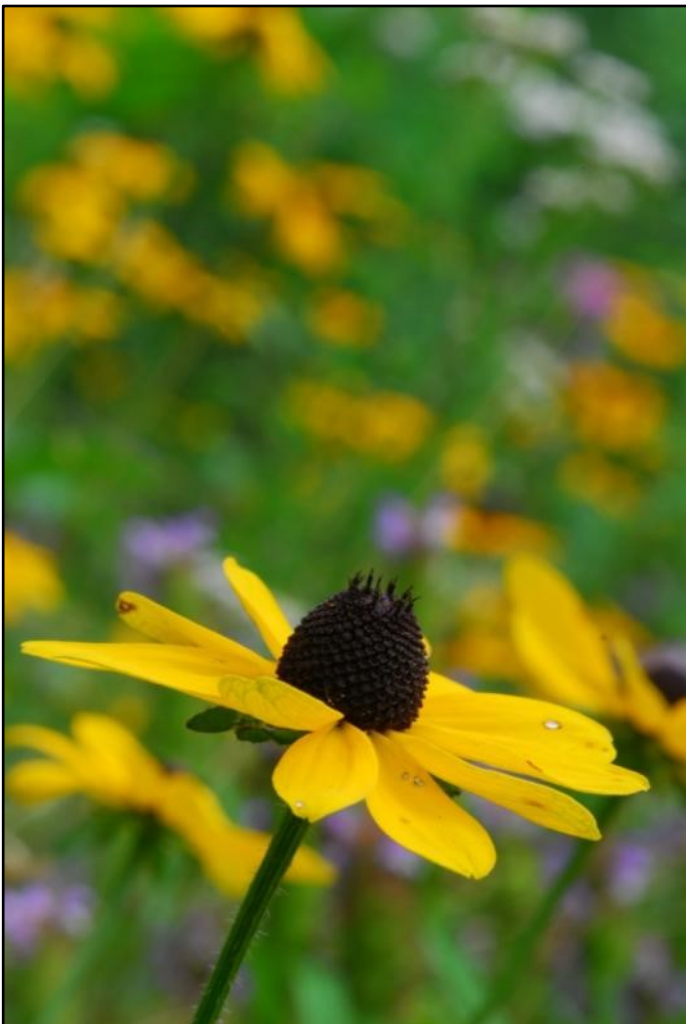
George Herbert, seventeenth century English pastor and poet, penned these words, "He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for everyone needs to be forgiven." Jesus communicated that if someone wrongs me, my forgiveness of that person should be intentional, unilateral, and unconditional.

(I'm glad that He didn't say it should be easy.)

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances
you may have against one other.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Colossians 3:13

Yellow-fringed Orchid (2015)
Dupont State Forest,
North Carolina



Black-eyed Susan (2015)
Pisgah National Forest,
North Carolina

GENTLENESS

In the spring and summer, I will sometimes go out in search of wildflowers. Often, I will find them in clumps or patches. On occasion I will come upon an entire field that will be bursting with blooms. But when it comes to creating an image, it is not unusual for me to be drawn to a single specimen.

This often creates a challenge to get me and my camera in the necessary position. I try to be very careful about where I step and place my tripod legs so that I don't damage another flower. On more than one instance, I have elected to pass on a desired shot because of the harm I might inflict on one or more of these delicate creations.

If I take care when photographing a wildflower, shouldn't I demonstrate even greater sensitivity and gentleness when dealing with another person? A less than thoughtful sentence might bring rain when sun was needed. Failure to acknowledge another individual's action or even their presence could put the ice of isolation around them rather than the blanket of inclusion.

Some time ago, I received a package with these words on the outside: "Fragile. Handle With Care." Good advice. For flowers. And especially for people.

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

Philippians 4:5



Icicles (2010)
Pisgah National Forest, North Carolina

HELPING OTHERS

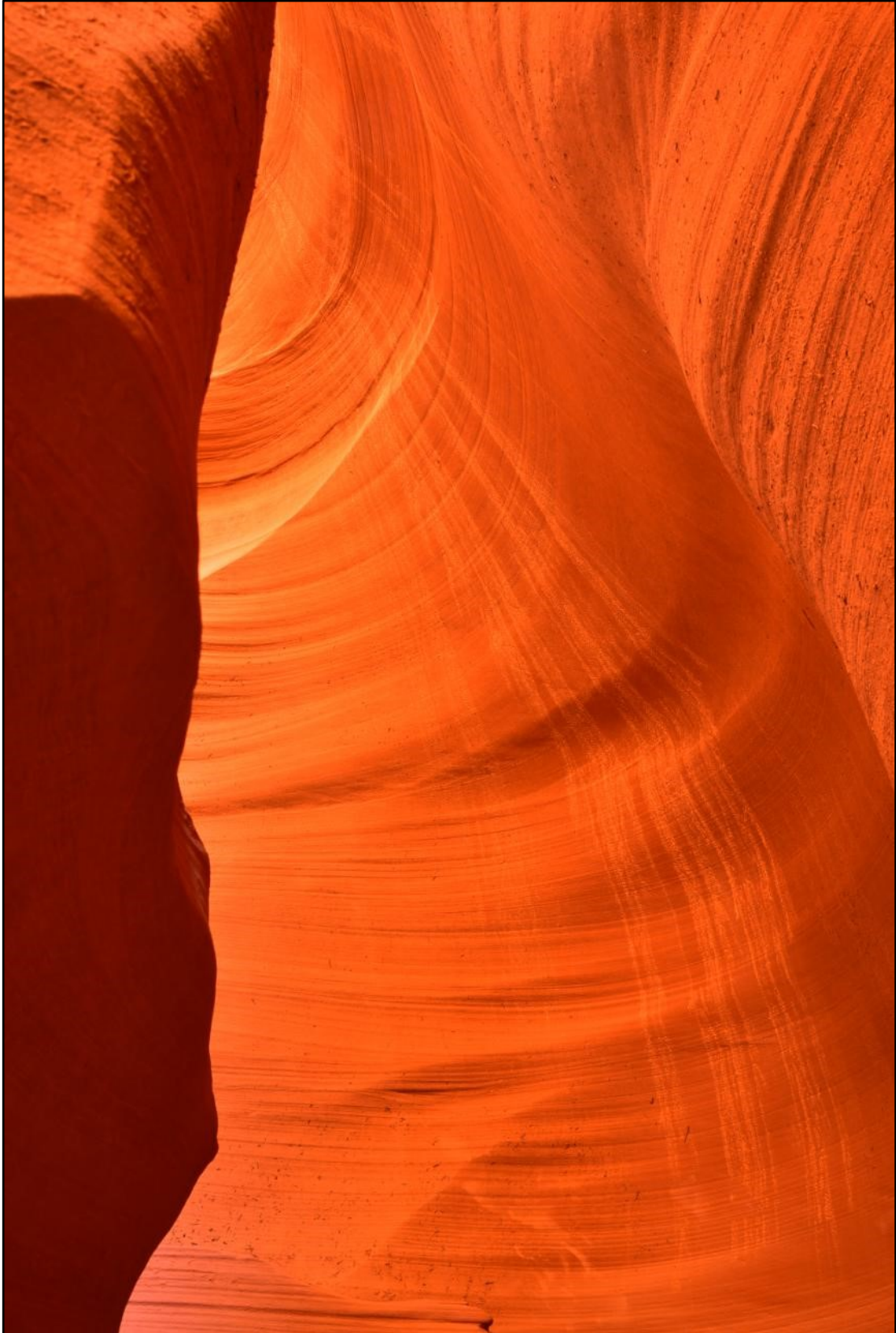
A number of years ago in the Santa Fe Ski Basin in northern New Mexico, two young men went cross-country skiing. One was an experienced cross-country skier; the other was having his first experience on snow skis of any kind. The first part of the trip went reasonably well as they both traveled along the level or uphill trail. Late in the day, the more experienced of the two decided it was time to head back, returning over the same route they had just come up.

With the parting words, "See you at the bottom," the novice was left to negotiate nine miles of downhill ski trail on his own. He did the best he could, but fell often. Sometimes getting off the packed snow trail, he had to lie in the deep powder for a while to gather enough strength to get back up. Almost half-way down, he came upon a couple who were taking a break near a rock outcropping by the side of the trail. "How's it going?" they asked.

"Not too good," the lone skier replied, briefly describing what had transpired.

"Somebody needs to tell your friend about the buddy system," one of the couple responded. "Why don't you rest here for a few minutes and then you can go down the rest of the way with us?" The couple proceeded to share some dates and water they had with the less experienced skier. And then helped him complete the journey.

Are you familiar with the parable Jesus told about the Good Samaritan? (If not, you can read it in Luke 10:25-37.) This story has special meaning for me. Because, you see, I was the cross-country skier that couple helped.



*Sandstone Walls, Lower Antelope Canyon (2016)
Lake Powell Navajo Tribal Park, Arizona*

INTERCESSION

in-ter-ces-sion *n* prayer, petition, or entreaty in favor of another

. . . Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

Acts 12:5

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for the saints.

Ephesians 6:18

One of the photographic terms that has come into vogue recently is “selfie.” It involves taking a picture of yourself while holding (or using a “selfie-stick” to hold) your camera. I travel a lot. If I had a dollar for every time I’ve seen people take photos of themselves over the last couple of years, I could probably have paid for one of my trips.

In the course of Jesus’ ministry on earth, He made it clear that my focus, as a follower of His, should be not on myself, but on others. Nowhere else in my spiritual life should that be more evident than in my prayers.

“But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail.”

Luke 22:32



*Lance-leaved Coreopsis, Flat Top Tower Trail (2011)
Moses Cone Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina*

MERCY

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Matthew 5:7

The image on the opposite page is from one of my favorite locations - an area I've told many people about. You may wonder why I share this information with other folks rather than keeping my favorite places a secret. I do so because I would like other people to see and experience parts of creation that I've been blessed to visit. And, while I can't speak for others who work outdoors with a camera, I try to think of other nature photographers, not as competitors, but as colleagues.

From a spiritual perspective, the definition of mercy that I've heard most often is *unmerited favor*. In other words, showing forbearance, leniency, or compassionate treatment towards someone who doesn't deserve it. God has bestowed an abundance of mercy on me. Why shouldn't I pass it along to other travelers that I encounter along my journey? I don't think it's just a nice thing to do. It's what God expects of me.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Luke 6:36



*Horsetail Falls (2014)
Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Oregon*

RESPONDING

Recently there was a story in the news about a homeless man who walked into a Chick-Fil-A restaurant in Tennessee and asked if they had any extra food. Instead of turning the man away or giving him a few leftovers, the restaurant's manager gave him a complete hot meal, laid his hands on the man, and prayed with him.

Earlier, I wrote about Compassion. Responding is the other leg of this pair of faith components. What if I saw a photographic opportunity, got out my camera, looked through the viewfinder or at the LCD, thought "that would make a nice image," but I never made the effort to trip the shutter? If that happened a lot, describing me as a nature photographer would be overly generous at the very least.

*Filled with compassion,
Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.
"I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"
Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.*

Mark 1:41-42



Fall Leaf (2010)
Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of my favorite places. Several years ago in the fall, my wife and I drove most of the North Carolina portion of this scenic drive. It was a spectacular year for autumn colors! During the course of our journey, we pulled off the road to take a closer look at the trees in one particular area.

Spotting a colorful, interesting-looking leaf on a branch, I quickly set up and took the shot. I turned around to call my wife and show her what I had photographed. When we both turned around, the leaf was gone. It had dropped from its branch and fluttered to the ground. If I had not acted when I did, I would have missed the shot on the opposite page.

The first recorded miracle that Jesus performed was at a wedding in Cana. (See John 2:1-11) When the supply of wine was prematurely exhausted, Jesus' mom came to Him and asked for His help. After she made her request to Jesus, she told some nearby servants, "Do whatever He tells you." In the vernacular it might be phrased, "Whatever He says, just do it."

Several years later, the apostle Peter was presented with a request to go visit a man named Cornelius. Normally Peter, a Jew, would not have associated with Cornelius, a Gentile. But Peter felt God leading him to "just do it." And Peter's action not only changed the life of Cornelius, his family and friends, it also significantly influenced Peter.

In photography, in life, and especially when it comes to other people, I try to remember "the lesson of the leaf": *The opportunity before me might never come my way again.*



*Fall Colors Along the Little River Trail (2006)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee*

SERVING

Through the years, I've benefited from the insights of a number of outstanding nature photographers, through their written and spoken words as well as seeing them at work in the field. One such person is large-format photographer Willard Clay.

At a workshop in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, our group was working outdoors one day, practicing our craft. One of the participants noticed that Will did not have his equipment and asked him about that. His reply was, "I'm here to help you become better photographers. If I were shooting with my gear, I wouldn't be able to assist you." I'm sure that Will saw photo opportunities that day he would like to have taken advantage of. But he chose to lead by serving those he was teaching.

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received
to serve others . . .*

1 Peter 4:10

An even greater example of servant leadership was Jesus Christ. Through His words and His actions, He demonstrated what it meant to serve others rather than be served.

"But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22:27



*ABOVE:
Yosemite Valley
from Tunnel View (2013)
Yosemite National Park,
California*



*LEFT:
Stones on Miners Beach
(2014)
Pictured Rocks
National Lakeshore,
Michigan*

WITNESSING

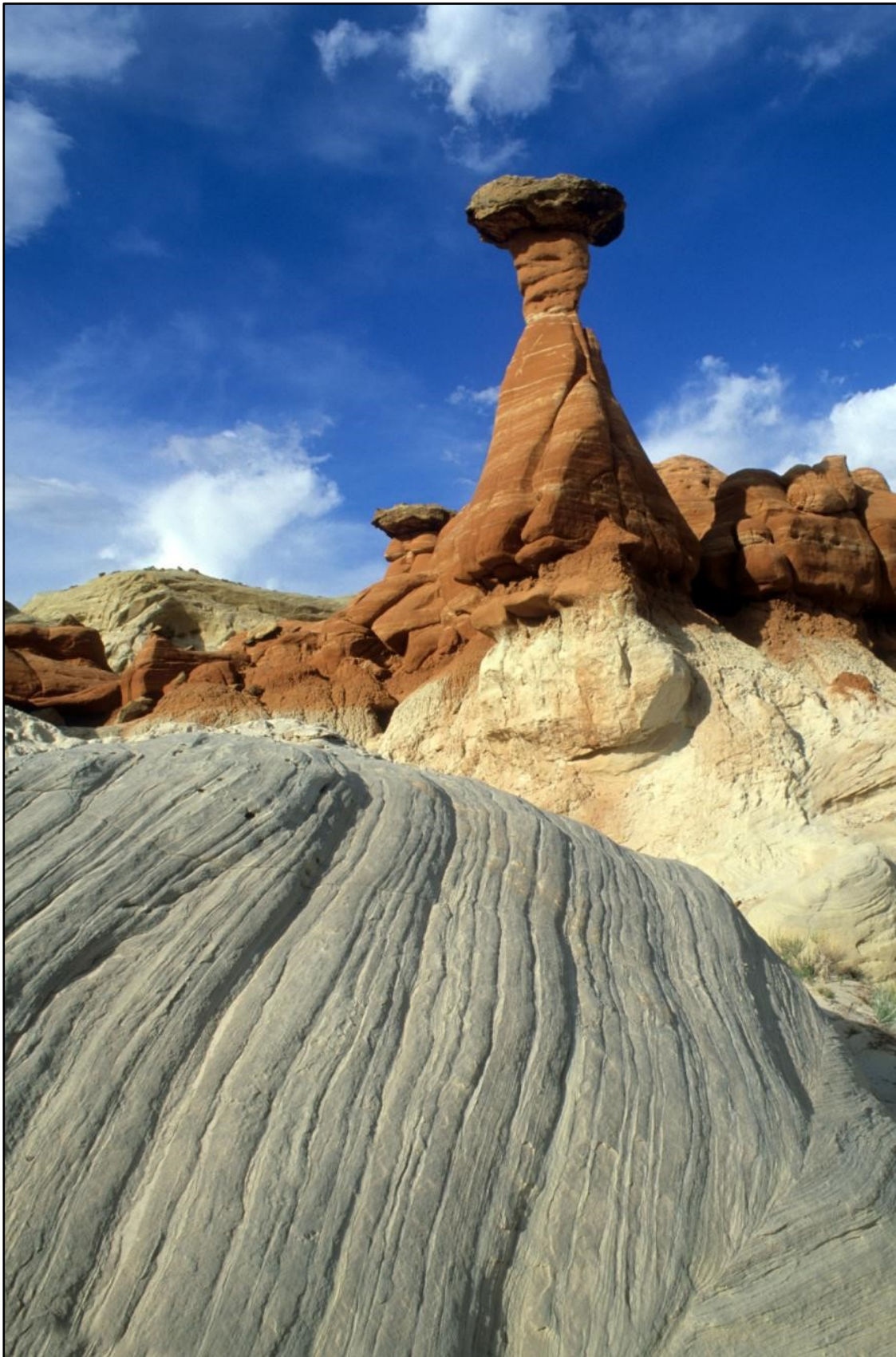
*I have seen here the power and glory of a Supreme Being;
the majesty of his handy-work is in that 'Testimony of the Rocks'.*

*Dr. Lafayette Bunnell
Member of the Mariposa Battalion,
First recorded Anglo-Saxons to see Yosemite Valley*

Like Dr. Bunnell, I felt extraordinarily blessed to gaze upon the grandeur of the rock precipices of Yosemite Valley. Without a doubt, seeing such magnificent masses of rock, towering thousands of feet above me was an awe-inspiring sight.

But there are also scenes, much less obvious at first glance, that nonetheless have caught my attention and caused me to utter "Wow!" when I looked at the LCD on my camera. The subtle, multi-colored beauty of several naturally polished pebbles on a quartz sand beach was such an instance.





*"Toadstool" Hoodoo (2003)
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah*

WITNESSING *CONTINUED*

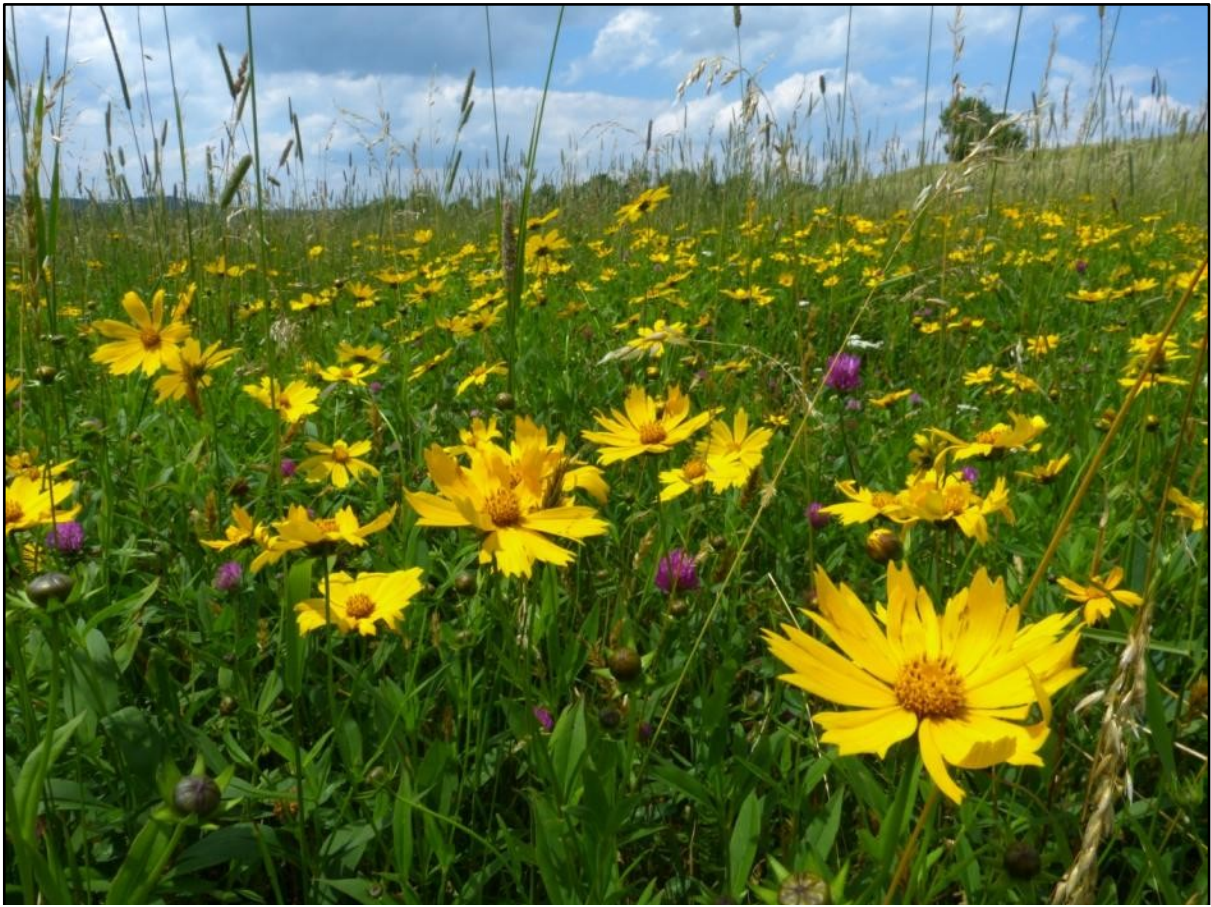
*. . . you also, like living stones,
are being built into a spiritual house . . .*

1 Peter 2:5

I have no trouble believing that people who encountered the Apostle Paul during the First Century A.D. could have easily been overwhelmed by the power of his personality and witness. On the other end of the “whelmed” spectrum is a widow who contributed what most would consider a pittance to the offering. But both Paul and this woman gave witness to what God meant to them. And it is important that I be a witness of - give testimony to - the love, joy, and peace that I experience through my relationship with Jesus Christ. Whether my opportunities are large or small. Or somewhere in between.

*Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus,
“Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”
“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”*

Luke 19:39-40



ABOVE: Wildflower Hillside (2014)

BOTH: Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina

BELOW: Salsify Close-up (2011)



ETERNAL FAITH

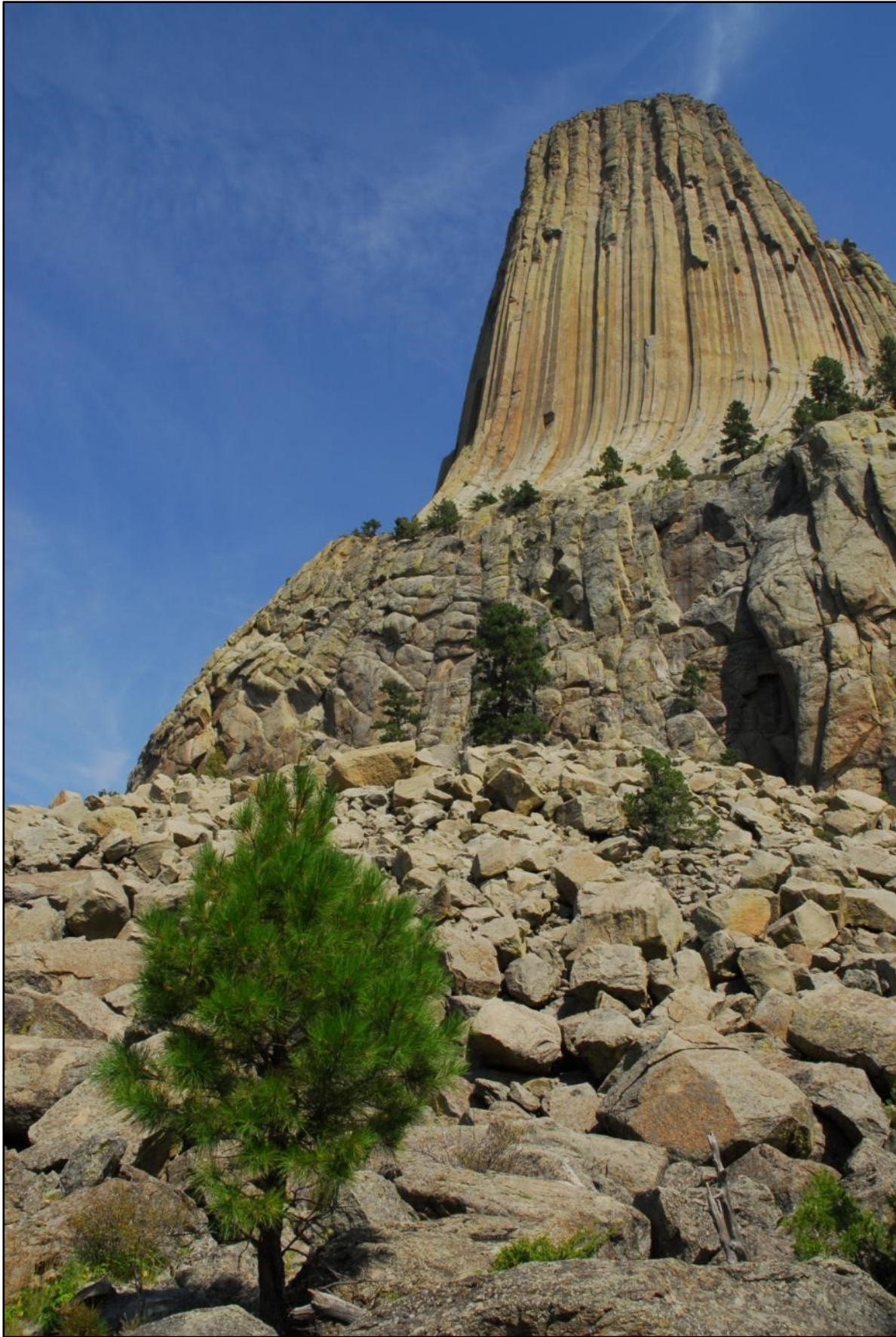
In the Introduction, I stated that I believe faith is an elemental part of our nature - nature that was given to us by our Creator.

You may find it odd that I've left this section of traits for the end. When Jesus had servants at a wedding in Cana take a cup from a just-filled stone container to the master of the banquet, the man remarked, "You saved the best for last." (My paraphrase of John 2:10.) I don't know if that is true in the case of the traits in this section. But I do believe that these characteristics are among those that should be the most enduring. And, therefore, perhaps the most significant.

Wildflowers are among the most interesting subjects that I photograph. I enjoy seeing and creating images of hillsides or fields full of colorful blooms. Then, I'll look closer and see two or three specimens that I find intriguing. Even further inspection reveals amazing detail in a single flower. That's the way I find faith in God to be. The more I explore it, the more amazing I find it.

*"Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor
was dressed like one of these."*

Matthew 6:29



*Devils Tower From the Boulder Field (2015)
Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming*

COMMUNICATION

When I was a lot younger and in a lot better shape, I did some mountain climbing. Ropes. Carabiners. Ice axes. Crampons. Just about as important as the equipment was communication with your partner. Often I would be out of sight from the other person. Sometimes the wind would be howling. In these types of situations where your life, the life of your partner, or both could be at risk, clear communication is imperative.

“On belay?”

“Belay on!”

“Climbing?”

“Climb!”

In the life of faith, communicating with my Heavenly Father is essential. My spiritual well-being is at risk if I don't do this on a regular basis. Fortunately, Jesus not only talked about how to communicate with God, He also demonstrated, with His own prayers, how important it is.

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 5:16

*Do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
present your requests to God.*

Philippians 4:6



*Mobius Arch (2013)
Alabama Hills, California*

CONFESSION

I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed . . .

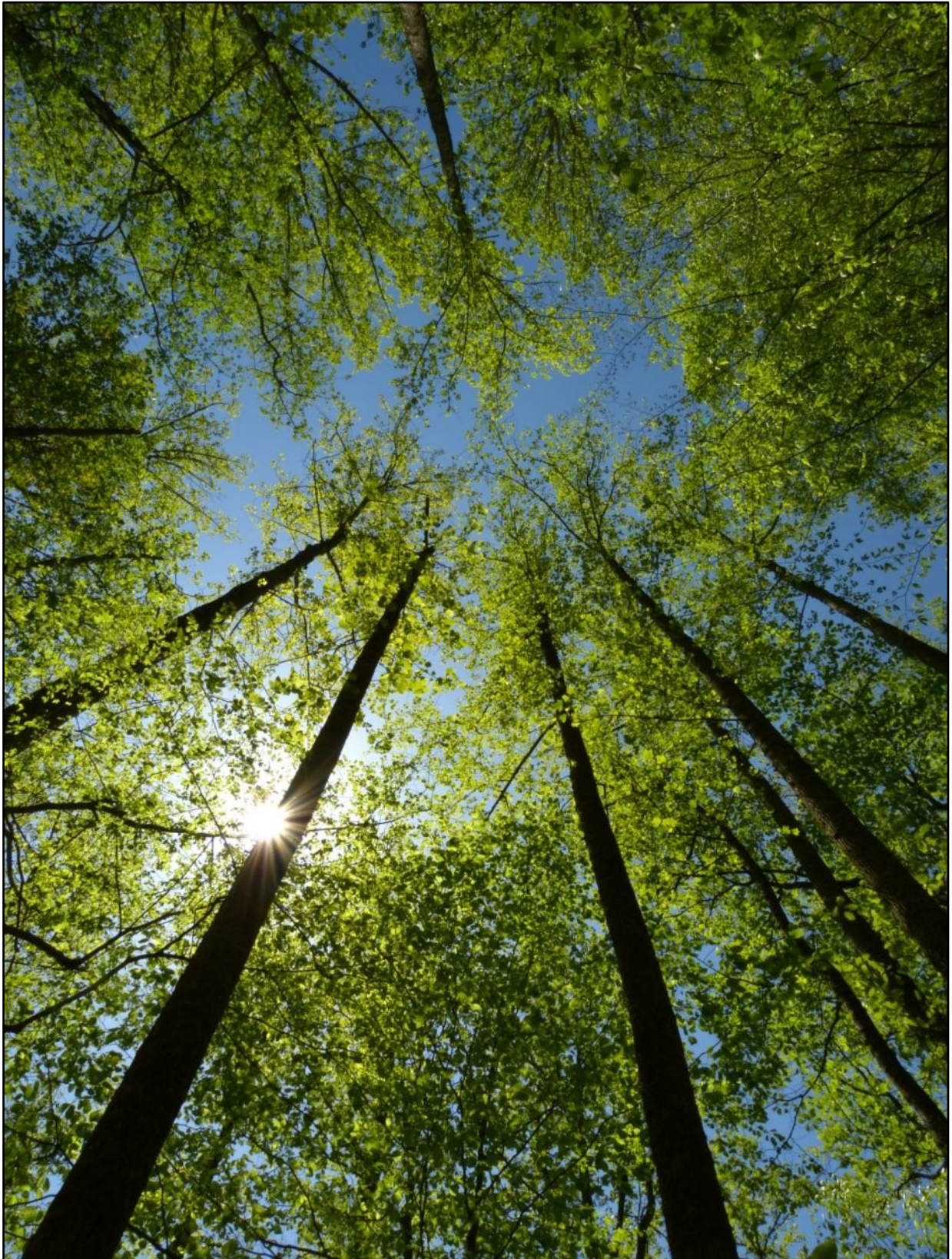
Daniel 9:4

On occasion, one of my lenses will get a spot of dust or dirt on it. Once in a while, I will accidentally touch a lens resulting in a smudged fingerprint on the glass surface. As soon as I become aware of the problem, I will carefully remove the offending spot. If I don't act quickly, then even a small speck that remains can mar more than one photographic opportunity. Because of this adverse impact, I try to be alert to keeping my lenses clean so they can be optimally useful.

There is a Scottish proverb sometimes quoted as "Confession is good for the soul." But my reading of scripture is that confession is not just "good," it is absolutely necessary. In Psalm 32, David provides a vivid word picture when he describes confession as the span that crosses the gap between my sin and God's forgiveness. Unconfessed sin in my life can not only have a negative impact on my relationship with God as well as other people, unconfessed sin can also severely hamper my usefulness to Him.

*If we confess our sins,
he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins . . .*

I John 1:9



*Sun Coming Through Trees, Big Creek Trail (2013)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee*

GROWTH

$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ I'm fairly comfortable with numbers and spreadsheets. And if that's not sufficient, my wife has a degree in Math. But until I began writing this section, I'd never given much thought to measuring my growth as a photographer. Should it be the number of locations visited in a given year? Number of images created? Number of images published? Some combination of these? With all of sixty seconds thought, I'd say, "None of the above." I think the single most significant measure in this area is: Am I doing a better job of photographing nature relative to previous years? In other words, am I continuing to more clearly convey what I see and experience when I am outdoors with my camera?

On the subject of spiritual growth, the author of Hebrews wrote, "*solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil.*" (Hebrews 5:14) Would you like to know the phrase in that verse that caused me to throw my eyes in reverse gear? It was "constant use." In both high school and college, I took Spanish. Today, my vocabulary would not extend much beyond "sí" and "adiós". (And the second word comes from reruns of "The Lone Ranger.") As with photography, I don't think that my development as a believer is something that could or should be measured with an equation. But it is vitally important that I constantly grow closer to God and convey that experience in both my words and my actions.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God . . .

Colossians 1:10



Deptford Pink (2015)
Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina

LISTENING

... a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:11-12

I really enjoy photographing grand landscapes that are so much a part of the western United States. But I live in the eastern U.S. where sweeping vistas are much less common. Thus, my efforts with a camera need to be more narrowly focused. (Pun intended.) The image on the opposite page is an example. At maturity, this species of wildflower is only about 6 inches above the ground. The bloom measures about ½ inch across. It is not something that would catch my eye while driving along at 40 miles per hour. I need to stop the car, get out, and carefully look for the small, delicate, pink petals.

When seeking God's will and guidance in my life, it would be great if He communicated via a grand, multi-colored neon sign with digital clarity. Or even if He spoke to me in a booming bass voice in clearly annunciated words that could easily be heard above the winds, earthquakes, and fires of life. But like the prophet Elijah discovered, I can hear God best when I stop and carefully listen for His quiet whisper.

Blessed is the man who listens to me . . .

Proverbs 8:34



*Bentonite Clay Formations (2013)
Cathedral Gorge State Park, Nevada*

OBEDIENCE

*. . . Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?"
He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."
Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

John 21:16

It was hard to tell what the building had been before. A hardware store. A small retail clothing shop. Perhaps even a pharmacy. But this evening, it was a church.

I was part of a group that was in Waterloo, Iowa, to construct a church building for a group of believers to replace this rented space in a less-than-upscale part of downtown. We arrived on a Sunday afternoon, in time to attend their evening worship service. During the service, the bi-vocational pastor requested each of the team members to give a brief testimony. One by one, each person got up and said a few words. One of the last to speak was obviously nervous, uncomfortable in speaking before a group of strangers. After fumbling through a sentence or two, he said, "I'll let my work speak for me." Then he sat down. And during our time there, going from a concrete slab to a roofed building with framed interior walls, this man did exactly what he said he would.

In the above verse, Jesus was asking, "Can I count on you to do what I'm calling you to do?" Peter said, "Yes." The man in Iowa said, "Yes." I want the same to be true for me.

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."

John 14:23



Mule's Ear Bloom (2013)
Lamoille Canyon, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Nevada

PATIENCE

Creating the image on the opposite page required about 10 minutes of my time. The camera's shutter only took 1/320th of a second to open and close. The rest of the time was spent waiting for the wind to stop and the flower to be still.

I find that sometimes I'm not as patient in my spiritual life as I am in my photography. In II Peter 3:8, it says that a thousand years for me might be like a single day for God. Therefore, it's no surprise that patience should be such an important component of my faith.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him . .

Psalm 37:7



*Wave Breaking on Limestone Rocks (2014)
Coral Cove Park, Palm Beach County, Florida*

PEACE

The accompanying photograph conveys a violent clash of ocean surf mercilessly pounding rocks on the shore. This image may seem like a peculiar choice to illustrate Peace. But consider this: after hour upon hour of relentless external forces doing their best, the rocks are still there. At peace.

Mark, Chapter 5, relates the story of a Gerasene man that Jesus healed from intense inner torment. Then Jesus appointed the man to be a missionary in his hometown - which Jesus had just been asked to leave. I'm guessing this man might nod his head, understanding this illustration of tranquility in the midst of turmoil. And what about, in Luke 7, the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and then was spoken about unkindly by some of the other people in the room? I think she might understand. (In fact, Jesus told her, ". . . go in peace.")

I've smashed my finger while hammering nails to help construct a church building in 105-degree heat and 90-plus percent humidity. My finger hurt. Sweat poured off me. But I had peace. Even though I'm a card-carrying introvert, I've stood and spoken about my faith before hundreds of people. Nervous? Nope. I was at peace. So maybe, this photograph wasn't such an unusual choice after all.

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid."*

John 14:27 (emphasis added)

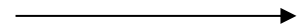


*Fall Colors Along the Little River Trail (2006)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee*

STEWARDSHIP

In the film “The Cowboys,” John Wayne plays a hard-pressed rancher that winds up using a bunch of young boys to help him on a cattle drive. Their first morning out on the trail, while they are still asleep in their bedrolls, the rancher yells, “Get up! We’re burning daylight!” Slowly the boys open their eyes to the surrounding darkness. “It’s still night time,” one of the youngsters observes. Later, as the adolescents become cowboys, they realize the wisdom of the trail boss’s direction. They have certain tasks that need to be performed so they don’t waste a minute when the sun does come over the horizon.

A number of years ago, I participated in a photography workshop in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. One morning we drove to the beginning of the Little River Trail. After we got out of the vans, the workshop leader said, “There’s a lot of material to work with here.” I looked around. It was dark o’ clock. I couldn’t see more than a couple feet in front of me. After several minutes, however, it began to be light enough to start up the trail. I didn’t have to go very far to see that our leader was correct. I walked down to the water’s edge, set up my tripod and camera, and, in the pre-dawn light, took the two-second exposure shown on the opposite page.





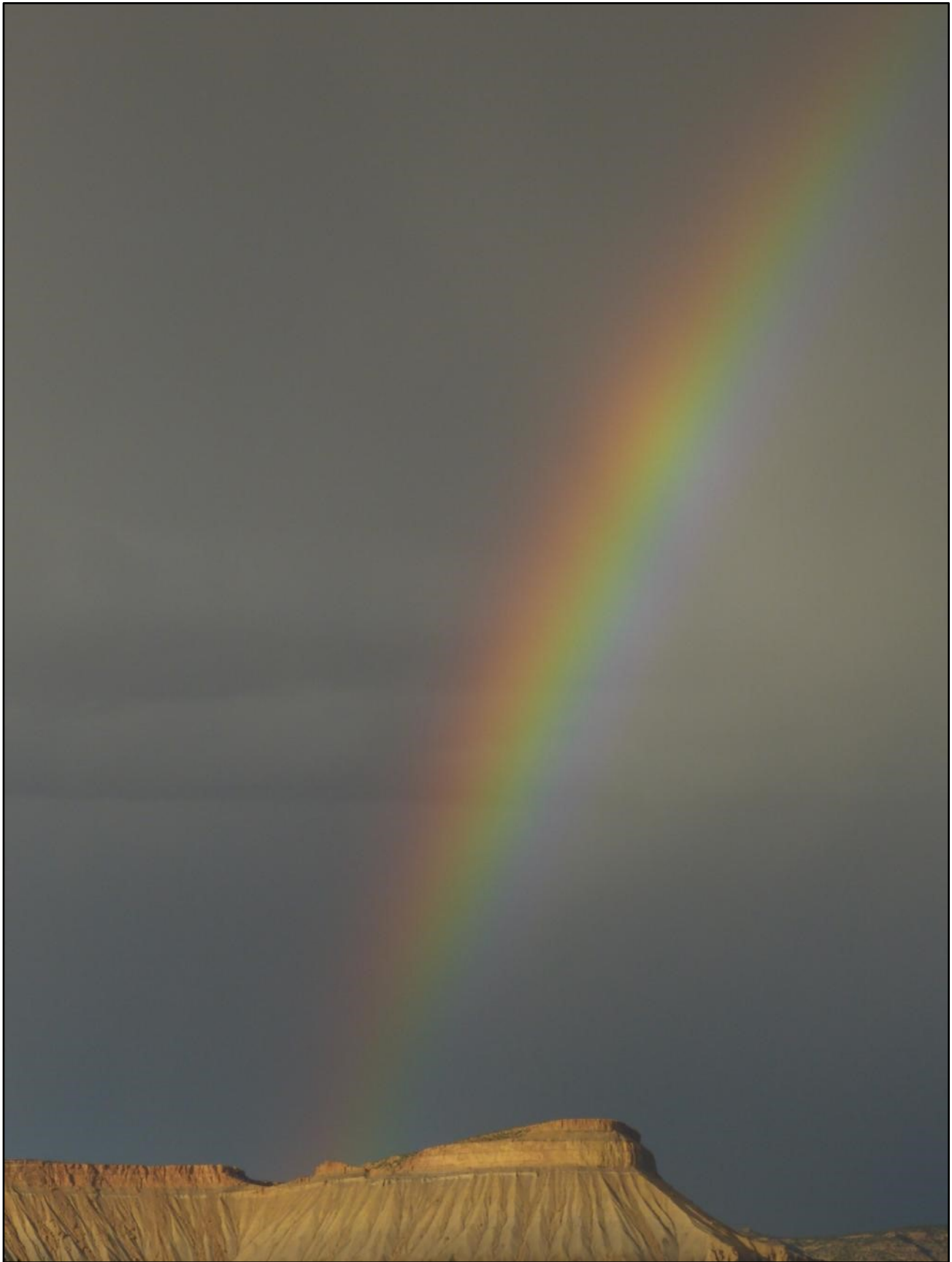
*East Mitten and Merrick Butte at Sunrise (2007)
Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park, Arizona*

STEWARDSHIP *CONTINUED*

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus relates a parable in which three men became stewards of different amounts of resources. Two of them wisely invested what was entrusted to them. The individual who did not make prudent use of those resources, the one who “burned daylight,” was separated from what he did possess.

I am a temporary steward of many assets including material possessions, financial resources, time, health, abilities, freedom, opportunities, and wisdom imparted to me by both God and other people. It is quite clear that God expects me to wisely use what He has given to me for a period of time. But there is another part of this parable that should not be overlooked: I should not be jealous of someone else’s camera equipment or photographic ability or any other resource that another individual has. My focus should be on how best to honor God with what He has entrusted to me.

Well, I have to go now. You see, the Son’s risen and I’m burning daylight.



*Rainbow Over the Book Cliffs (2012)
Grand Junction, Colorado*

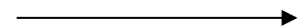
THANKSGIVING

In the Gospel of Luke, we find the story of ten men who were cured of a debilitating skin disease. Then:

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him - and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? . . . Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Luke 17:15-18

Last day of a trip.....western Colorado.....raining while eating supper....filling up vehicle with gas.....rain stopping.....seeing a stunning rainbow!.....driving around looking for a place free of wires and poles to photograph from.....finding a church parking lot.....being able to take a photograph of this incredible sight.....THANK YOU, GOD!





Rainbow (2007)
Capitol Reef National Park, Utah

THANKSGIVING *CONTINUED*

But my thankfulness to God goes much deeper than being able to capture the image of a rainbow. It starts with knowing Jesus Christ as my Savior.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

II Corinthians 9:15

Other blessings that come to mind include: being married to my best friend . . . worshipping with other believers . . . the privilege of prayer . . . food, clothing, shelter . . . the ability to travel . . . Plus, senses that allow me to . . . enjoy the taste of my wife's chocolate chip cookies . . . feel the warmth of a wood fire . . . listen to the "Hallelujah Chorus" . . . inhale the aroma of popping corn . . . and, yes, see a rainbow.

*Give thanks to the Lord ...
I Chronicles 16:8*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving ...
Psalm 100:4*

*... And be thankful.
Colossians 3:15*

*We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty ...
Revelation 11:17*



*Spring Cascade (2013)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee*

WISDOM

. . . the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook . . .

Proverbs 18:4

There are two fundamental elements in photography: aperture and shutter speed. There are also two fundamental principles in the life of faith: "Love God" and "Love your neighbor." (Matthew 22:35-39) On the surface, these pairs of fundamentals appear to be relatively simple. The challenge, or as Shakespeare would say "the rub," is applying the basic knowledge of these "ABC's" to different situations that I encounter. Transforming knowledge into application is what I call wisdom.

It should come as no surprise that I've found wisdom more difficult to acquire than knowledge. That's where Christianity has an advantage over photography. There never has been or ever will be a perfect nature photographer that can be my always-there mentor or guide on real-life situations. But, Jesus Christ is the perfect example of how I should love God and love my neighbor, both in word and deed. And the Holy Spirit is an ever-present guide. They are the sources of wisdom that I need.

*And the child [Jesus] grew and became strong;
he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

Luke 2:40

*Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise,
but as wise, making the most of every opportunity . . .*

Ephesians 5:15



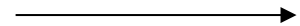
Horseshoe Bend (2016)
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Arizona

IT'S ALL GOOD . . . ?

In introducing this work, I stated that faith is a fundamental part of our nature. In the subsequent pages, I made some observations about various attributes of faith - not just faith in general, but faith in God through Jesus Christ. I wanted to conclude with a few words about one other aspect of faith that should permeate all the others.

On a recent trip out west, my wife and I visited Page, Arizona. We'd been there a couple of times before, visiting Lower Antelope Canyon, Horseshoe Bend, and other points of interest in the area. Wanting to do something different, we decided to take a boat ride on Lake Powell. We felt it would provide some wonderful opportunities to photograph the brilliantly colored sandstone canyon walls and their reflections on the water's surface.

Arriving at the dock, we boarded our vessel and departed a few minutes ahead of schedule. Glancing around, I was pleasantly surprised to see there were only a few people on this cruise. This would allow the flexibility to move around and photograph from different angles. Sound too good to be true? Read on.





*Rainstorm on Lake Powell (2016)
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Arizona*

IT'S ALL GOOD . . . ? *CONTINUED*

The rain started about thirty minutes after we departed the dock. And it was not just a gentle shower. Large, heavy drops, driven by the wind, pelted us, the seats on the boat, and the camera lens. (I think I even heard some frogs start to complain.) In case you're wondering what a rainstorm on Lake Powell looks like, check out the image on the opposite page.

A phrase that has recently come into vogue is "It's all good." I've heard people use this phrase at the end of a list of things that were going on in their lives, some positive, some not so much. I would smile internally when I heard this statement, thinking it was an optimistic, single coat of white paint on a dark wall. I've even said these words myself - with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek. However, this sentence was pretty far from my mind when we disembarked from the boat at Antelope Point Marina.

Later, after we returned home from our trip, I came across this passage in the Bible:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers,
whenever you face trials of many kinds,
because you know that the testing of your faith
develops perseverance.*

James 1:2-3

Could it be that this early leader of the Christian church, the half-brother of Jesus, was espousing as a theological truth what I had said in jest? Surely, having a member of your family crucified could not have been a joyful experience. So what did James mean?





Late-day Light (2016)
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Arizona

IT'S ALL GOOD . . . ? *CONTINUED*

Then I remembered another verse. This one was part of the letter that Paul wrote to believers in Rome:

*And we know that in all things
God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:28

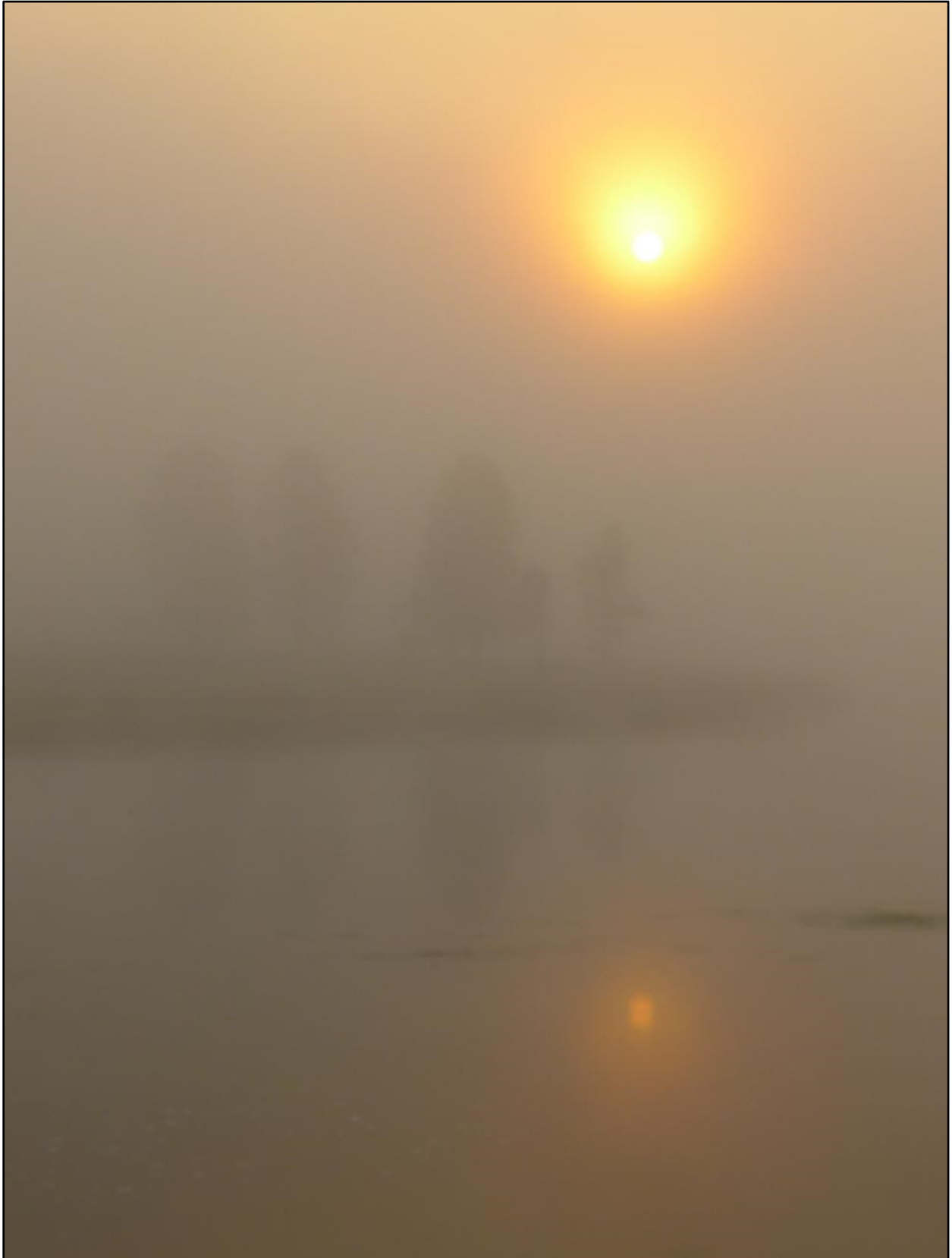
Even though “all” and “good” are in this verse, the two words that really stood out for me were “. . . God works . . .” I believe that James and Paul were both writing about the same thing. Any event or series of events, from my limited, in-the-moment view might be good, bad, or anywhere in between. These passages of scripture remind me that **God has a perspective on events that I do not have.** I cannot see beyond the current “now” that I am experiencing. But God can and does. Recognizing and acknowledging this fact is an essential catalyst that helps me move from just having faith to being faithful.

Back to that day in Page, Arizona. Several hours after my wife and I got off the wet boat and stepped onto an equally soaked dock, we took a short hike, during which we came upon the scene on the opposite page. It's a reflection - formed in a pool of rainwater that would not have existed without the storm we'd experienced a short time before. As I thought about this final point, I realized how blessed I was to have been given an example of God's perspective.

I'm an average photographer with a great God.

Ken Duncan

Amen!



*Sunrise Through Fog, Yellowstone River (2015)
Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many years ago, I led a group on a backpacking weekend in the Shining Rock Wilderness in North Carolina. The day we hiked in was marked by a thick fog that hugged the ground in an embrace that neither party seemed to want to let go. The pace to our destination was necessarily slow since we could only see a few steps ahead at any given moment.

This project, *The Nature of Faith*, reminded me in some ways of that trip. At times, the path ahead was unclear. On more than one occasion, I thought, “How am I going to write about that?” or “What photograph will I use here?” But, like the Shining Rock experience, when I proceeded with the vision that I did have, ideas for other words or images emerged. This book would be incomplete if I did not thank those who “walked the trail with me.”

First, any ability I have as a photographer or as a writer comes from God. Without those talents, this project would never have existed, even as an idea. In addition, the means and ability to travel to wonderful destinations is a blessing that I freely acknowledge.





Rock "Window" (2009)
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS *CONTINUED*

Second, my wife was my collaborator on this project from its inception. Her ideas and encouragement helped me in ways that can neither be measured nor repaid. She could have made a good living with her proofreading and editing skills, of which I have been a beneficiary. And, she participated in most of the excursions during which the included images were made. Thank you, Jean!

Finally, I need to pay tribute to the many nature photographers who have helped me. Seeing their images, hearing and reading their words, and being with them in the field have contributed to my development in this area.

I once saw a poster that contained these words:

Faith
*is going to the edge of all the light you have
and taking one more step.*

Without vouching for the theological soundness of this statement, it does seem appropriate to conclude these thoughts with the hope and prayer that God will guide your next step on the path of

Faith.

