

The Light of Home in the Western Dusk: How Worship Restores Us as a Person and a People tells true stories of Christianity's influence on every aspect of our lives. The stories tell us who we were, who we are, and who we can be.

**The Light Of Home In The Western Dusk:  
How Worship Restores Us as a Person & People**  
By Jerry M. Roper PhD

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THE  
LIGHT OF  
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WESTERN  
DUSK

HOW  
WORSHIP RESTORES US AS A PERSON  
AND A PEOPLE

Jerry M. Roper, Ph.D.

A glowing lantern with a candle inside, set against a background of architectural lines.

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# Prologue

## *Manchester, England*

I'm sure that like me you've watched countless murder mysteries on TV and in movies. Typically, a scrap of evidence or inconsistency in a suspect's story is presented early in the investigation. Perhaps, it's an alibi that's not airtight or a door that can only be locked from the inside. Whatever it is, at the time it seems insignificant, but later it turns out to be the clue that solves the entire mystery. This tried and true boilerplate is precisely how this book came to be written. A seemingly insignificant experience years ago is the piece that ties this book together.

Roughly, ten years ago I was traveling on business to England. I worked for an American chemical company, and had been at our offices and laboratories outside of London for several days, but I needed to make a side trip to Manchester. My company had recently purchased a small manufacturing plant in that city, and I needed to size up the plant and meet the employees, who now reported to me. So, midmorning one day, I caught a train to Manchester that arrived just in time for the evening rush hour.

Outside the train station, I hopped in a taxi, exited the station, and then inched along in heavy traffic. It was early spring and the long shadows of dusk were setting in, but there was still enough light that up ahead on a hilltop, I could see a lovely brownstone church. What caught my eye was that even from a distance it was clean and well maintained. There was not a trace of the dingy grime that typically covers old European churches. The true rich color and beauty of the brownstones were on full display. As my taxi got nearer, I could see that the stained-glass windows had recently been refurbished. The

window frames were freshly painted and in the gathering twilight, the light inside the church shined through the stained glass as brilliant blues, crimsons, and golds. As I got closer still, the landscape lighting switched on. It was almost dark now, and the carefully placed lighting accentuated the beauty of the church and its manicured surroundings.

I thought what a wonderful church! I'd like to meet the minister and people of the congregation, because here was obviously a vibrant church, a living church, and a church that says to the world only the best for Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Still, the traffic crept along, and by the time my taxi was in front of the church dusk was giving way to night, but there was an illuminated sign. I would learn the name of this wonderful church. As I read the sign, my spirits sank. "LUXURY CONDOS FOR SALE. ONLY 1 LEFT. CALL TODAY!" It wasn't a church at all. It was only a building that used to be a church. My imagined vibrant and worshiping congregation was just that, imagined. The secular had purchased the sacred, not from a living but, a dying church.

Ten years later as I write this book, this seemingly insignificant experience on an otherwise mundane taxi ride in Manchester has been in my thoughts. Here is the clue that reveals the deep mystery of our times. Western civilization is in the grip of a moral and spiritual dusk that grows darker by the decade. Night approaches, and the people who live in the "church condos" I'm sure are very comfortable. The sign said "LUXURY CONDOS," and based on the pristine condition of the outside of the building, I don't doubt the claim. I trust that the condo owners are very happy in their new homes. But here's the rub: in pursuit of a comfortable, luxurious lifestyle, they have supplanted the building's original *raison d'etre* with a purpose of their own making. They haven't simply converted the sacred into the secular, but instead have gutted the sacred so

that its insides are no longer recognizable. The condo owners are living in a shell of what once was. Their homes are in a structure that has been changed into something it was never intended it to be, and so it is with all of Western civilization.

Twenty-first Century Westerners are living in a shell of a civilization that was never intended to be. In the last century and continuing into this one, we have gutted the *raison d'être* of our civilization which is Judeo-Christianity. We are quite comfortable in our lifestyle, and the shell of our civilization – our institutions, governments, justice system, liberty, concern for human rights and the environment – appears to be sturdy, like the brownstones of the Manchester church. But just as it's insides were gutted and redesigned, so too are the insides of Western civilization. With Judeo-Christianity year-by-year being removed from the West, the inside of our civilization is undergoing renovation for a new intended purpose.

The gutting of the old and repurposing it for the new is celebrated by the modern architects and designers of the West – the media, celebrities, universities, politicians, and Silicon Valley tycoons to name a few. But, this vision of the future comes at a very steep cost, which is the loss of our identity both as a person and a people. As the old Judeo-Christian architecture of the West is removed and carted out to the trash bin, we have trouble recognizing our societal home. Worse, we lose our home's foundational story, because we don't know our home's faith. In fact, we don't even believe there is a place for the old faith or for God. Is it any surprise then that we are confused? Is it any wonder that we lose our way in the growing moral and spiritual darkness? We have traded the light of Christ in the sanctuary for the light of a big screen TV in a living room, and exchanged the fellowship of faith for a loneliness of the soul.



*The Light Of Home In The Western Dusk*

Through the pages of this book, I want you to hop into the back of my Manchester taxi. As we inch along in traffic, I will tell you stories of our home. These are true stories of who we were, who we are, who we ought to be, and who we can be. This is very much a book of stories, each of which reveal an aspect of Western civilization's foundational story that is rooted in Judeo-Christianity. The clue that ties all these stories together is the one that seems unimportant and insignificant. It is the church sanctuary. My hope is that when you have finished reading this book that you will understand why I was heartbroken to see that the brownstone church was now condos. If you have that understanding, then I've done my job in writing this book.

Jerry Roper  
November, 2021

## Introduction

### *Western Sleepers*

*MIST- I don't believe the sleepers in the house know where they are.*

*SMOKE - If the day ever comes when they know who they are, they may know better where they are. But who they are is too much to believe - either for them or the onlooking world.*

(Excerpted from “A Cabin In The Clearing,” a poem by Robert Frost.)

“A Cabin In The Clearing” paints a tranquil early morning picture of an isolated cabin, with the rising sun barely peeking over the tree tops. As dawn’s light pushes into the clearing, no light is seen in the cabin’s window, leaving us to assume that those inside are still sleeping. From the chimney, we watch wispy white smoke from the night’s fire lazily drift skyward. In the adjacent vegetable garden, rays warm the earth and awaken a sleeping mist that rises, but then seems to change its mind and hovers near the ground, shrouding the garden in a ghostly fog. In this quiet woodland clearing, Frost imagines a conversation between Smoke and Mist. Mist states, “I don’t believe the sleepers in the house know where they are.” Smoke agrees and replies, “If the day ever comes when they know who they are, they may know better where they are.” And, so it is with us in America and indeed all Western nations.

We are 21<sup>st</sup> Century sleepers, slumbering yet awake enough to sense that the early morning quietness makes us uneasy, discontented, and perhaps a bit anxious. The anxiety is not even close to the handwringing acute kind. It’s the nagging kind. It is a chronic melancholy sinking kind of feeling that something

in life is eschew, out of place, and even lost. Mist and Smoke pick up on this feeling and identify the problem. We sleepers don't know who we are, or where we are. This insight is helpful, and the key to putting our finger on the source of our melancholy is Mist's observation that the sleepers don't know where they are. Where they are is home. The cabin in the clearing is their home yet, as Frost's poem, which is set in an earlier century, tells us in subsequent lines, the sleepers are not in sync with the surrounding woods, they are not at ease with the nearby Native Americans, and traveling preachers stop by to counsel them in their cabin, but none of this helps. The cabin in the clearing does not feel like their home, and neither does the West for 21<sup>st</sup> Century sleepers. Westerners today have ambiguous, and even negative, feelings about home.

We have dwelling places that we call home – single-family homes, townhomes, apartments, condos, lake homes, mountain homes, beach bungalows, and we even have motor homes. For most of us, these are very comfortable, and by the world's standards even luxurious. But what we don't have is a home in the fullest sense of the word. A place where we say, this is who I am, this is where I belong, and I share a story and destiny with the people who are around me. It is this last bit that is the core problem.

Families – and today these come in many descriptions – can be close, loving, and even live in the same house for decades, and in the same town for all their lives. For these rooted families the answer to who I am and belonging comes easy, but move to that last bit – sharing a story and destiny with the people in their neighborhood, their city, or even nation – and the answers do not come so quickly. Are we really with them, the people around us; the people in our towns and cities? And, are they really with us? These are broader community, societal, and nationhood questions, and they are important because no

individual and no family lives in isolation. All are affected by the society around them. This is the home that we can't locate. Who are we as Westerners? Where are we, not geographically on the globe, but as a society, as a people? What do we believe about ourselves? What is our story? What is our faith or faiths? Where does our destiny lie? Borrowing Thomas Jefferson's words in the Declaration of Independence, what truths do Westerners hold to be self-evident in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

In our libertine, mobile, busy, entertaining, and prosperous Western lives, these questions are answered in a multitude of ways, and literally, the answers are all over the map in part, because the world, i.e., non-Western people from around the globe, now live in Western nations, bringing with them answers based on their indigenous culture and religion. But, a mix of different faiths, philosophies, and cultures is only a minor part of Western confusion about who we are and where we are. The extent of our confusion becomes clear by looking, not at the new things that immigrants bring with them, but by ancestral Westerners asking, what does Western civilization have to offer our newest arrivals? Can the West offer them anything more than a job and an improved lifestyle? If Westerners were tasked with the responsibility of standing on a stage before a large audience of newly arrived immigrants and articulating for them the truths that Western civilization holds to be self-evident, what would we say?

You see, we are tasked with this job, but we cannot complete it, because today there is nothing within Western society that says, here are the truths that we believe about ourselves, humanity, the sanctity of life, the soul, marriage, the universe – all the big questions of life. Buddhist nations, Hindu nations, Muslim nations, Confucian nations, even Marxist communist nations can all answer these questions, but Western Christian nations cannot. For every self-evident truth expressed

by one person or group another will attack it, saying it's a lie. Therefore, there is only one thing that is self-evident in Western society. We are confused. Therefore, we choose to sleep. Sleeping, i.e., ignoring the problem, is a lot easier than trying to find answers. Yet there are certain times in the quiet stillness of an early morning, when we lie awake and eavesdrop on the conversation between Mist and Smoke, and wonder are they right? We have that sinking feeling that they are, and that we really don't know who we are and where we belong. The purpose of this book is to provide answers to these questions of home and identity.

The answers found in this book do not rely upon data, demographics, statistics, trends, or comparisons. Such information is useful for documenting who we were and how we have changed over the decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and now 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, but this is a well plowed field of research, and what typically emerges from these studies is a host of conjectures and conclusions that are backward looking. Such studies are like a doctor, who can document the symptoms of an illness, but cannot diagnose the underlying disease and certainly cannot prescribe a treatment. Therefore, this book offers a different approach to finding answers. One that affords a diagnosis and offers a prescription. This book identifies the nexus of Western civilization. The nexus is that one place where the West's history, governments, institutions, religion, charities, philosophy, thought, and even science intersect. All roads in Western civilization pass through this place, and that place is the church sanctuary. Who Westerners are and where we are is conveyed through the worship service in Christian churches.

The songs, symbols, stories, Holy Scripture, sermons, sacraments, and fellowship in Christian worship have touched every aspect of Western culture, because for two millennia, it shaped the West. Christian worship is the West's nexus and also

its Rosetta Stone. It is where all things meet and are translated into a societal template that is coherent, uniform, satisfying, rational, moral, and hopeful. The societal template that emerged from worship gave expression to Judeo-Christian morals, ethics, and justice which formed the foundation of Western governments, institutions, freedoms, and philosophy. Therefore, faith-worship-institutions-justice system-society worked in concert, because all were based upon the same template.

What developed was a civilization that was coherent and understandable to citizens who worshiped the God of Judeo-Christianity. From God, who is Our Creator and Christ, our Savior, came the truths that Westerners declared to be self-evident. But, if citizens do not worship and do not have an understanding of Judeo-Christianity, then Western civilization is bewildering. We are like amnesiacs, whose shattered memory cannot recognize the nexus of our civilization. We see churches and cathedrals in our cities, but only admire their architecture. We celebrate national holidays that originated in the Christian church, and have no idea of the connection. All Western languages, not just English, are enriched by phrases and expressions that are biblical, e.g., we escaped “by the skin of our teeth” (Job 19:20), and we would never guess that these common expressions came from the Bible. In America curiously, the United States Congress has a chaplain, who opens each new congress with prayer yet children are prohibited from praying in school. For two thousand years, we never questioned that God “knit me together in my mother’s womb,” and that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14) Yet today we cannot agree when human life begins. Untethered and unable to decipher our civilization’s nexus, is it any wonder that we don’t know who we are or where we belong?

Our problem today is that we do not worship and no longer read the Bible. Study after study has documented that the majority of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Westerners do not participate in Christian worship, and the Bible is perhaps at best just another book on the shelf. Therefore, it's Catch-22. The answers that the West needs are in the church sanctuary and on the pages of scripture, but society says, don't go in and don't open that book. There are no worthwhile answers in either! A civilization so divorced and even resentful of its foundational story is homeless, and no different than a homeless person on the streets of Western cities, who wanders aimlessly muttering to themselves. This is the West today: wandering, aimless, and incoherent. Who are we? Where is our home? What is our story? What has happened to us?

These are the questions answered in the following chapters, and the questions are answered by doing precisely the opposite of what Western society advises. We will open the Bible. Each chapter begins with scripture that is explained and set in context. The scripture passage is then linked, amplified, and illustrated by taking the reader on a trip from 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem to a place where an important event in Western civilization occurred. First Century Jerusalem is the starting point, because by the end of that century, Jesus' earthly ministry was completed. He was resurrected, ascended, and Christianity was rapidly spreading across the Roman Empire. The events of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem were the beginning of the West's modern foundational story, and to tell our story, the chapters are organized into three parts.

"Part I. Awakened To Who We Are" arouses Western sleepers by reminding us what we once believed, but now have forgotten. However, this is not enough. It's like sitting next to your grandmother as she flips through an old family photo album, and you feel a tinge of nostalgia that soon passes.

Westerners need to know our stories of who we were, what we believed, and why we are not those same people today. Each of the three chapters in Part I begin by affirming tenets of Christianity that we once believed, but now doubt. Importantly, these chapters expose the sources of our doubt and distrust. With this insight, we better know who we are, and can begin to understand who we ought to be, which is the subject of Part II.

“Part II. Worship Tells Who We Were and Who We Ought To Be” takes us inside a typical Christian worship service. From the Call to Worship to the Benediction, the eight chapters of Part II tell true stories of the modern West that illustrate each part of the worship liturgy. Presidents and prime ministers have prayed Pastoral Prayers. Existentialist writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre have unwittingly illustrated Confession of Sin & Assurance of Pardon. The stories of Part II connect scripture, story, meaning, purpose, faith, and hope to demonstrate who we were and who we ought to be. Having experienced the worship service, we can now begin the restoration of who we are as a person and a people, which is the topic of Part III.

The four chapters of “Part III. Restored To Who We Can Be” tell true stories that identify what we have lost and how recovery is possible. The chapters are: Love & Justice, Goodness & Knowledge, and Worship & Fellowship. These virtuous traits are hard to spot in the West, and Part III explains how they were lost and looks forward to the time they will return.

By reclaiming our foundational story, a new Western dawn awaits – a renaissance of the heart, mind, and soul of Western men and women. Amazingly, Smoke’s answer to Mist hints at our awakening. Smoke says, “But who they are is too much to believe - either for them or the onlooking world.” The message of Christianity is too much to believe. Yet, believe it for it is true! For two thousand years, the faith has illuminated the West,



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and by the light of Christ our civilization was built. When this generation of Westerners sees Christ's light and believes, then we will finally be at home. When the dawn of Christ's light comes, we will eavesdrop again on Smoke and Mist. They will say, "The sleepers are awake now. They know who they are, and where they are."

**Part I:**  
**Awakened To Who We Are**

*Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?*

*A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism

## Chapter 1: Burdens & Rest

*<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*  
(Matthew 11:28-30)

When Jesus spoke these words to his disciples it was still early in his earthly ministry. Crowds of weary and burdened people were answering his call to “come to me” and find rest. Matthew in recording these verses did not specify the nature of the burdens or the source of the people’s weariness, but judging from the context of the scripture and religious climate of Jesus’ day, a good guess is that the burdens were the religious imperatives laid upon the people by the highly legalistic Pharisees, who insisted that faithful and observant Jews could only please God by following to the smallest detail the multitude of Hebrew laws. These laws covered every aspect of life: what you ate and didn’t eat, when and where you worshiped, where you could and couldn’t travel, what you touched and didn’t touch, and the list goes on.

The Hebrew law in the hands of the Pharisees placed burdensomely high expectations on Jews trying to do the right thing, trying to please God. Then, Jesus comes on the scene, and using the very same scripture in which the Pharisees found the basis for imposing burdensome laws, Jesus tells the people that the “Lord of heaven and earth ... has hidden things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” (Matthew 11:25) After saying this, he issued his call to come to him, lay down your burden, and find rest. The Pharisees had

gotten things wrong. Jesus' Father, who is the "Lord of heaven and earth" does "not delight in sacrifice" imposed by the Pharisees. Instead, what God requires is "a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart" that reveals our trust and dependence upon Our Creator. (see Psalm 51:16-17) Jesus told the people they could learn to trust and depend upon God when they answered his call, and in knowing Jesus' "gentle and humble" heart that they would find "rest for [their] souls."

In our libertine, anything-goes Western lives, a society bound in a straitjacket of burdensome expectations of religious duties seems so strange and foreign. But, it shouldn't. If we honestly assess the way Western men and women live, we would see that our society places burdensomely high expectations on all of us – but especially the young – to succeed. If you want to be a success in life, then you need to follow the script, and the script of things we need to do is very lengthy. But, just like 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews following the law, we work very hard to check every box on the road to success. Is it any wonder that we're burdened and weary?

The "wise and learned" in the West have loaded us up with what we must do in life, but what if, just like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they're wrong? What if Jesus' call to come to him and find rest for our soul is just as needed and just as valid today as it was two thousand years ago? Where do we look to find rest for our souls? Jesus told us that this type of rest is "hidden ... from the wise and learned, [but] revealed ... to little children." Good children embody simplicity, innocence, and obedience, but there is another creature that exhibits these characteristics. Horses, and in the following story we'll find out what a horse can teach us.

\* \* \*

***From 1st Century Jerusalem to Baltimore, Maryland 1938***

November 1, 1938 was a Tuesday. It was a work day, and an odd day to have such an important sporting event. But, this event had so captivated America that 40,000 people were in the stands and another 40 million, roughly a third of the population, listened on radio. It was the “Match of the Century.” One-on-one, Seabiscuit, the race horse who had won the most prize money in 1937, was racing War Admiral that year’s Triple Crown winner, who was considered the favorite. The horses were called to post, and took their place at the starting line on Baltimore’s Pimlico Race Track. An excited announcer called the race:

*They’re head-and-head as they head for that home lane. Watch for them now as they turn into the stretch. Head-and-head. Both horses under a drive. This is a real horse race. Just what we’d hoped we’d get. They’re head-and-head and both jockeys driving. It’s the best horse from here in. They’ve got 200 yards to come. It’s horse against horse. Both of them driving. Seabiscuit leads by a length. Now, Seabiscuit by a length and a half. Woolf has put away his whip. Seabiscuit by three! Seabiscuit by three! Seabiscuit is the winner by four lengths!*

But, Seabiscuit’s victory is the end of the story. Now, we must go back to the beginning.

*“Hell, he’s so beat up, it’s hard to tell what he’s like. I just can’t help feelin’ they got him so screwed up runnin’ in a circle, he’s forgotten what he was born to do. He just needs to learn how to be a horse again.”*

These lines are from the 2003 film, *Seabiscuit*, that was based on the best-selling book by Laura Hillenbrand. The book and movie tell the true story of the thoroughbred race horse, and this early assessment of Seabiscuit was given by horse trainer, Tom Smith, who was portrayed by actor, Chris Cooper. When

Smith first saw Seabiscuit, the horse was a basket case – unruly to the point of dangerous and losing races. Smith’s diagnosis of the problem are the lines quoted above – “they got him so screwed up runnin’ in a circle, he’s forgotten what he was born to do.” Great expectations were pinned to Seabiscuit in the beginning, but by the time Smith came on the scene just getting the horse out of his stall was a challenge. Millions of Americans, and more broadly Westerners in general, share Seabiscuit’s anxiety – getting out of the front door and facing the world is a struggle! Like Seabiscuit, we’re running in circles and have forgotten what we were born to do.

Seabiscuit was abused by the expectations that the horse racing industry placed on him. His bloodline was impeccable. He spent his formative years on the finest farms, receiving the best of care. He was trained in the ways of racing. The blinkers that covered his face, the feel of the bit in his mouth, the cinch of the saddle, the lightness of the jockey in the stirrups, and the sting of the whip were second nature to him. Expectations were high! This horse was going to win races and make lots of money! But then he didn’t, and the problems begin to compound.

Veterinarians poked and prodded him. Trainers with their pet methods and latest techniques came and went. Jockeys coaxed and whipped him. Horse whispers talked to him, and the net result was an agitated and angry horse, who was worse off than when he entered the racing world. Despite their investment, Seabiscuit clearly wasn’t living up to his owner’s expectations. So, it is with Western men and women.

Parents invest in us. We’re not just cared for, but pampered. We have the finest schooling. We’re told we are special and have the potential to achieve anything to which we set our minds. We win awards. We earn degrees. We accumulate college debt with the anticipation of earning it all back and

much more. Like Seabiscuit, the world's expectations for us are burdensomely high. But then, the great job doesn't materialize. Our pay is mediocre. Our college debt is like a weight around our necks. Our work is unfulfilling especially in light of our expectations. Relationships are superficial – where is that special someone just for me? In our despair, we search the Web for podcasts on coping strategies, we download books on how to achieve success and wealth. We commiserate with like-minded friends, and we conflate sex with love in our search for anything that might fill our souls. We carried the burden of great expectations into the world only to find ourselves walking in a circle and following bad advice. Truly, we are all Seabiscuits!

For Seabiscuit, the thoroughbred, the way out of his mess was to learn to be a horse again. Tom Smith, his trainer, took him far from the racing world. Gone were the barns, paddocks, tack rooms, grooms, and endless loops around oval tracks. Seabiscuit was released into a green pasture to graze with other horses. He was part of a herd. If it rained, he got wet. If he itched, he rolled in dirt. With the sun on his back and hindquarter to hindquarter with other horses, he chewed tender grass. His instinctual needs were filled. Seabiscuit was a horse again! Likewise, the way out of our mess is to learn how to be human again.

But, humans aren't horses. Horses are one of God's most beautiful creatures, but they are simple minded. Humans are just the opposite. We are not that much to look at, but we are highly intelligent and complex. Therefore, our first thought is that our need for meaning, purpose, and love cannot be satisfied through a simple act that corresponds to one messed up horse grazing with his herd. These needs, however, can be met through one simple act. Worship! When we worship, we are answering Jesus' call to:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Worship of Our Savior is humanity’s green pasture. Our fellow worshipers – those sitting in the pews beside us or standing in the communion line with us – is our herd. Christ’s sanctuary is our green pasture. Hymns, scripture, and sermons are the grasses upon which we graze. From their nourishment, we offer prayers and praise. Bound together by the holy cord of Christ’s love, our herd navigates life with purpose. This is worship, and to understand how such a simple act satisfies our deepest human needs, we look again to Seabiscuit.

After a few months with the herd in the pasture, Tom Smith resumed Seabiscuit’s race training. Smith’s methods were similar to other trainers. Conditioning runs, sprints, time trials, practice loading in the starting gate, etc. – Smith did all the things that were the stock and trade of all horse trainers. What was different this time was Seabiscuit. The angry, dangerous, unpredictable horse was gone, and in his place was a horse with a new spirit. It was the calm, confident spirit of a winner. Something had transformed him.

The grass in the pasture wasn’t magical. The other horses in the herd weren’t special. The time spent with the herd wasn’t long – a few months. What was different for Seabiscuit was the combination of three things. Remove any one of them, and Seabiscuit stays an unmanageable, skittish, and losing race horse. They are: the herd, rest, and trust. The herd reminded Seabiscuit what a horse is created to do, and it’s not racing. Racing channels a horse’s natural instincts into an endeavor that’s artificial. Artificial doesn’t mean that it’s bad or wrong. It just means horses have to be trained to be transported in trailers, conditioned to respond to the jockey’s commands, and



accept a life on the move that is spent in a variety of stalls each with its own sounds and scents. But time with the herd – and returning to the herd periodically for refreshment – allowed Seabiscuit, even while in the grip of his artificial world, never to forget that he is a horse and that there is a pasture and a herd waiting for him. Next is rest. Seabiscuit rested in the pasture, but recuperation of sore muscles and rehabilitation of aching joints do not explain his miraculous transformation. Only a spiritual rest explains the new spirit in him. Such rest comes from a body at peace, a mind that is clear, and an environment that is secure, which bring us to the most important ingredient in this transformation. Trust. Seabiscuit trusted Tom Smith. He trusted that his new trainer intended only good for him, and he responded to his commands.

Our pasture is Christ's sanctuary, and the three ingredients that changed Seabiscuit can change us. Our herd is our fellow worshippers. Together we remind one another that we humans are created for more than the artificial world in which we live. Like Seabiscuit, we are constantly on the move, and like the horse, we often work from stalls called cubicles. Yet in the midst of the rush of modern Western life, we know our herd is out there, and together we share the belief that we are eternal spiritual creatures, and that we are much more than a cog in the artificial world that we encounter daily. In no way does this imply that the artificial world of work, entertainment, sports, travel, and all the other things that make modern life fast paced and enjoyable are wrong or bad. It simply means that worshipping Jesus Christ with our herd reminds us of the deeper reality of who we are as a human being. Therefore, we gather weekly with our herd to worship Our Creator and be reminded of who we really are. Strengthened, we return on Monday to the artificial world, and like Seabiscuit, we are transformed by the time spent in God's pasture.

Rest is the second ingredient. Not enough time in the day and fatigue are common reoccurring complaints. Therefore, adding one more activity to an already jammed packed schedule is counterintuitive. Likewise, rest for an underperforming race horse, who was already losing money was counterintuitive. More training and more racing is surely the better prescription. But, it wasn't for Seabiscuit and it's not for us either. We need body, mind, and spiritual rest. Such a complete rest only comes from doing what we were born to do, and that is fellowship with God through daily prayer and weekly gathering for worship.

Daily private prayer is a necessity for obtaining spiritual rest. Westerners are quite receptive to learning about the restorative value of Eastern mediation techniques. Books, magazines, blogs, and podcasts that promise a healthier life, better sex, and clear, smoother skin due to mediation abound. We will even practice Feng shui, hoping that by raking a tiny tray of sand on our desk in certain patterns we will achieve inner peace. Eastern mediation does have certain value, but so did some of the unusual training techniques foisted on Seabiscuit. They, however, weren't natural to him. They weren't part of who he was, and neither is Eastern mediation for Westerners. Eastern mediation looks outward seeking to bring inside us a host of spirits, natural forces, or mantras to soothe our inward spirit and allow rest. Christian prayer looks upward seeking to bring inside us the living God, who transforms our inward spirit with his spirit, and in doing so shifts our focus from us to him, from ourselves to others, and from the now to the promise of eternity. This reordering is actually a restoring of what we were created to do, which is fellowship with God, and with this fellowship comes a natural spiritual rest. The Apostle Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2) The pattern of this world brings

burdens and fatigue, while worship of Christ brings rest and renewal.

Worship, both in private prayer and a church service, is the acknowledgement and adoration of God, as Creator of all things, and acceptance of our position within his creation. We are not gods, and our relationship to God is not one of equals. When we bow our heads and hearts to God in worship, we are affirming this unequal relationship, and with this affirmation comes the rest of completeness. The Bible even gives this type of rest a special name calling it a “Sabbath rest.”

*<sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest... (Hebrews 4:9-11)*

Worship is where the human herd rests. Christ’s sanctuary is the “green pastures” and “quiet waters” of Psalm 23. It is God who makes us “lie down in green pastures,” and it is he, who leads us “beside quiet waters.” In worship, we place ourselves in God’s calm pasture, and “he refreshes” our souls. This is the Sabbath rest that restores us, and defines our humanity. Our time in God’s secure pasture is where we learn how to be human. However, before we enter the pasture gate, we have to make a judgment. We have to decide on the third ingredient that transformed Seabiscuit. We have to decide whether or not to trust God.

Seabiscuit believed that Tom Smith intended only good for him. This was the starting point for his equine transformation. Likewise, it is the starting point for our human transformation. Do we believe that God only intends good for us? Do we trust God enough to enter his pasture, the church sanctuary, and experience the Sabbath rest? Or do we not trust him, and are content with the burdens and tiredness of life apart from Christ? One or the other must be chosen. There is no halfway in-

between, and the starkness of this choice is written into Creation itself. It is the choice that Adam (every man) and Eve (every woman) made. The world's first couple believed a lie and thought they could "be like God" (Genesis 3:5), which is a burdensomely high expectation! It was an expectation they couldn't live into, and neither can we live into the West's great expectations. Like Adam and Eve, who became fugitives from God and hid among the trees of the garden even as their Creator searched for them calling, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:8), so we hide from God too. Eden was gone for Adam and Eve, and there is not a Western Eden for us either. But, that's not the end of the story. Just as Seabiscuit's failure was not the end of his story but the beginning, so too is humankind's story.

The Bible tells us there is a new Eden prepared for us by Jesus Christ through his resurrection. (Revelation 22) When we worship, we are declaring our choice. We are placing our trust in God, and in doing so we experience the Sabbath rest of Christ's new Eden and we are transformed. Truly, we are all Seabiscuits! Through worship, we can enter God's pasture and be transformed. With the transformation, the burden of great expectations is lifted. No longer conforming to the West's expectations on how life should be lived, we now focus on how life ought to be lived, and that focus is on God, not ourselves.

This transformation does not happen overnight. It happens over a lifetime, and that's the difference between horses and humans. Seabiscuit's transformation happened over a period of months, because the purpose was to calm the horse and gain his trust so that he would be obedient to Smith's training techniques. The goal was to win races. Christ's goal for humans is not winning, but living, and the type of life that Christ wants for us is loving, gentle, humble, peaceful, restful, confident, and truthful. Day-by-day over a lifetime, Christ, whom we trust with our lives, trains these characteristics into us, because they

are in him. When we are obedient to the commands of Our Trainer, the transformation begins.

This process takes time and we may not even perceive that it's happening. When we answer Jesus' call of "come to me... and... learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls," our situation and the people around us do not magically change. Our college debt is not suddenly paid off, the boss who is really overbearing, critical, and watching our every move is still the same, our spouse, whose sloppiness we could once overlook, but now cannot abide, is still sloppy, our teenagers are still mouthy and disrespectful, and the list of difficult and challenging situations that we all face could go on and on. But, what's different is us, and how we feel about and react to the situations in which we live. The reason we're different is because Our Trainer is daily shaping our hearts by infusing his character into our character.

Jesus tells those who come to him to "take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) When people read this verse or hear a misinformed pastor preach on it, they all too often come away with self-absorbed ideas, imaging themselves to be some type of martyr carrying a cross, and their martyrdom can take on a multitude of forms. Perhaps, they imagine themselves doing missionary work in some foreign land under deplorable conditions. Or maybe their imagined martyrdom is closer to home, and their cross is that others cannot see what really good people they are. Unfortunately, these self-guided excursions take us away from Our Trainer's methods, and replaces what Christ wants for us with what we want or imagine for ourselves. Therefore, we need to look carefully at Christ's words. He calls us to him to learn from him "for I am gentle and humble in heart." Now, we are at the core of Our Trainer's method. To be transformed, our hearts must be gentle and humble like Christ's heart. And, from this starting point, the transformation begins.

How we think about, feel about, and react to our situations is much different. It's healthier and constructive.

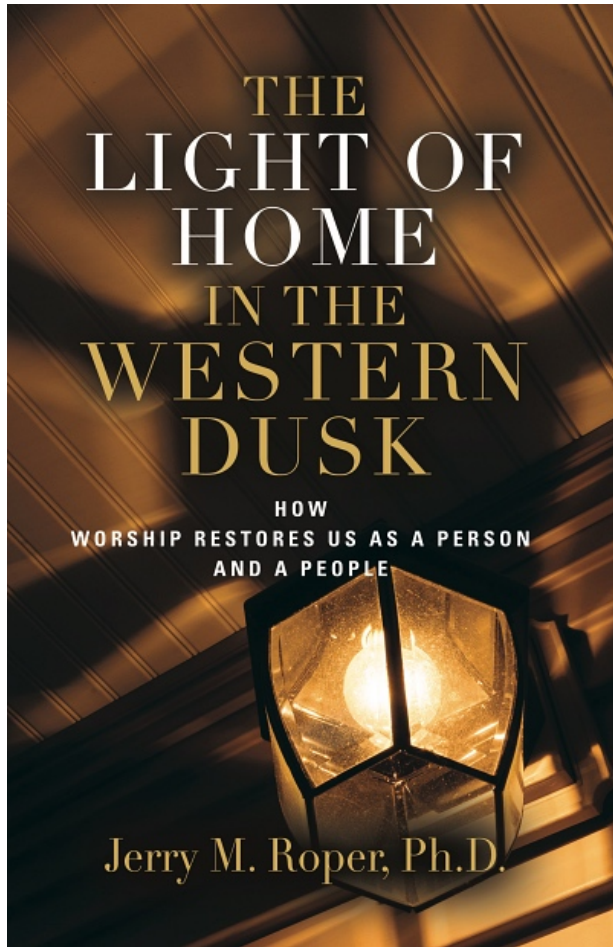
That boss, who is overbearing? We are calmer now, our hearts are gentle and humble, and we are better able to think more clearly and address his dreadful management style. Now, you have the confidence to realize that perhaps the solution is to change jobs. Taking positive action – whatever it may be – is better than being angry and resentful all the time. The sloppy spouse and mouthy kids? Your new attitude toward them will over time influence how they treat you. You see transformation of our heart and character takes time, and it takes even more time to change our life situations, but this is what it means to “take up [your] cross daily and follow me.” Whatever situation you're in, it means that you're sticking with Our Trainer, and making his ways your ways. It's not about winning. It's about living.

In this new life with Christ, we're never alone. When Seabiscuit was angry and unruly, he was so alone. Alone in his stall, because no one could go in. Alone in the racing industry, because no one wanted him. But, then Tom Smith found him, and now Seabiscuit had a pasture, a herd, and a trainer. Is it so different with us? Christ finds us, provides us not just a pasture, but a green pasture with quiet water, and he gives us not just rest, but a Sabbath rest. But, most importantly, he gives us himself and scripture to enable us to know him better, and we have a herd, fellow Christians, around us. With faith in him, he daily trains us, making his ways our ways, his heart our heart, and his desires our desires.

What can a horse teach us? That the West's burden of great expectations is just that, a burden. But, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” No matter how difficult the race is before us, we always know that Jesus intends only good for us, and that God has

*How Worship Restores Us as a Person & People*

prepared for us a green pasture beside quiet water. In God's pasture is where we learn how to be human again.



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