

Follow the Yellow Brick Road

“Follow the Yellow Brick Road” – *Lessons Men of God Can Learn from “The Wizard of Oz”*

One of the things for which I have become increasingly thankful over the years was having been raised in a ‘church’ family. If the doors were open, the Price Spires family would be in attendance – Sunday morning and night as well as Wednesday night. Reflecting back on those days, I appreciate my dad’s leadership and faithfulness in that area of life. However there were times as a kid, it seemed way too strict.

Two things came to mind regarding that time of my youth and Sunday evening church. I never got to see the first half of *The Wizard of Oz* or the Beatles perform on the Ed Sullivan show. Wasn’t that borderline child abuse? Many of my friends did not have Sunday evening church, so they got to watch both. That seemed unfair to me. There were no video recording devices in those days, so by the time we got home from church, Dorothy and the boys were well on their way to Oz and the Beatles had sung their last “Yeah, yeah, yeah!”. My dad was unsympathetic. He did not care much for the shaggy-headed quartet.

After reviewing this title, you may be wondering what men can learn from a children’s fantasy movie based on the journey of a girl to the make-believe land of Oz. All I can say is the following points came to mind as I sat one morning in my quiet time praying about writing something other than the final edits of my forthcoming book. The latter has consumed my time the last couple of months. (Release date August)

As these key points and analogies began to emerge from this classic movie, I became energized by lessons we can learn to help us on our life journey. I invite you to follow me down this *yellow brick road* that takes us ever closer to Home and

the presence of our God, Who is not the Wizard of Oz (spoiler alert!).

Lesson #1: "There's no place like ~~home~~ Home."

Dorothy was a desperate girl. You recall she experienced great trauma at the hands of Miss Gulch, the wicked old rich lady on the bicycle who wanted to have Toto put down. Later Dorothy was harassed by her counterpart, the Wicked Old Witch.

(I confess it was many years before I figured out each main character played two parts – one on each side of the rainbow.)

Sucked up in a cyclone, Dorothy landed somewhere over the rainbow – a song she probably regretted having sung. (*Be careful what you wish for* comes to mind.) Once there, all she wanted was to go back home. The way home? Follow the yellow brick road to the only one able to make that happen – “the great and powerful Wizard of Oz”. So trusting a bunch of squeaky-voiced Munchkins and a “good witch”, she began her journey home filled with unexpected twists, turns, and not the ending she had in mind.

While our lives are neither fiction nor fairy tales, I can safely say every man reading this has had similar experiences on this side of the rainbow we call *life*. Not what we expected. Not where we thought we would be. Not how we thought it would end. The list of disappointments can get out of hand.

Take heart, brothers. If you are in Christ, you are on the way to that place Jesus promised He would prepare for us. Attacked by the “flying monkeys” of life, we cannot look around for the good witch to show up. Neither can we tap our heels together and expect to get raptured out of here – a great escape plan, but not what God intended.

God did intend for us to keep walking, putting one foot in front of the other, and trusting Him as we go. He did not lay

out a yellow brick road for us to walk, but He does have one waiting on the other side **paved with gold**. I love that imagery. Let this verse encourage you as you keep walking in faith by faith.

“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14: 1-3 KJV)

Lesson #2 – The Scarecrow’s Brain

Scarecrow was my favorite character. He was nothing but a bunch of old farmer’s clothes stuffed with straw and hung on a post to scare birds away, something at which he apparently was not very good. No other purpose in life. No brain to try to think of a way out of the corn field. Yet we know from the story, he exhibited tremendous mental capacity despite the apparent lack of a physical brain. His validation at the end was a diploma to represent the fact that he had demonstrated great intelligence.

God’s men are not men of straw. We are men in and through whom the Holy Spirit can work and execute His will because we not only have brains, **we have the mind of Christ**. (1 Corinthians 2: 16) What does that mean? Simply stated, it means we are not limited with human thinking or reasoning of our physical brains. Rather we have access to the unlimited and infinite wisdom of God as the Apostle Paul taught.

The story of the scarecrow also begs the question, why can’t some men get off the post and out of the cornfield? The answer is not that we do not have brains – we simply are not using them in ways that glorify God. Or we use them to argue with and contest God at every turn because we do not like what He is doing or not doing. That implies we think we know better or more than God. I believe all Christians would agree

that is foolish thinking, but it does not stop us from going there on too many occasions.

The friends of Job provide a good example. God maintained silence throughout their long conversations and advice to Job. But in Job 38, God spoke out. I suggest you read that exchange. It is very powerful and speaks directly to the wrong use of our brains (bad thinking).

*Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that obscures my plans with **words without knowledge**? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. (Job 38: 1-4 NIV)*

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that lost men find things of the Lord foolish and hard to understand. We need to stop reasoning as the world reasons as if we can find the answers to our problems in the same places. We cannot. That way of thinking only leads men, even Christians, into more desperate places.

Lesson #3 – The Tin Man's Heart

Tin Man was found standing in the woods rusted stiff. Upon obtaining his freedom via the oil can, he moaned that the tin smith wronged him by leaving out one vital organ when he was built – a heart.

From that point forward, we see many demonstrations of the heart of the tin man despite the claim his chest cavity was empty. Throughout the course of the movie, he showed concern, care, and commitment – three attributes that ought to flow from the *heart* of every Christian man as they did from that of Jesus.

Consider three examples of the heart of Jesus that demonstrate *concern*, *caring*, and *commitment* we can replicate in our hearts toward the same people to whom He reached out.

- A heart of concern and caring

*“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. **When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless....**”* (Matthew 9: 35-36 NIV)

- A heart of commitment

*“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and **suffer many things...and that He must be killed** and on the third day be raised to life.”* (Matthew 16: 21 NIV)

While we can demonstrate *concern* and *caring*, the commitment part stops short of dying doesn't it? Perhaps not. Jesus told His committed followers to “take up your cross” which we know means die to self. That demonstrates before God and men we do indeed have hearts – the living, beating heart of Christ.

Lesson #4- The Cowardly Lion's Courage

Cowardly Lion: “All right, I'll go in there for Dorothy. Wicked Witch or no Wicked Witch, guards or no guards, I'll tear them apart. I may not come out alive, but I'm going in there. There's only one thing I want you fellows to do.” *Tin Man and Scarecrow in unison:* “What's that?” *Cowardly Lion:* **“Talk me out of it!”**

That exchange is one of the funniest in the movie. I laugh every time I read it. The cowardly lion was scared of everything that moved or made noise. He joined the group out of sheer desperation – he was ‘afraid’ to stay the same. The first time he encountered the Wizard, he got so scared he turned and ran out through a plate glass window.

While we may not be that exaggerated in our demonstrations of fear, men of God have been known to act just as cowardly. How? We lay down our weapons when we should fight. We remain silent when we should speak the truth in love. We sit when we should stand firm.

My dear brothers, we are now in a season before the Lord returns in which we are going to have to demonstrate more courage than any Christian man has since the Roman Empire. Think that is being overly dramatic? Ask the families of the Christian martyrs whose heads were sawn off on video because they refused to deny Christ. Many others are tortured and killed while we sit and watch in horror.

Courage is the answer. Courage to stand firm. Courage to speak out. Courage to act on biblical principles passed down to us by men of great courage. Courage that only came from God. We are not alone as fearful men. Think Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Mark, Peter, the list is long. Moses spoke these words of encouragement to God's people in the face of their enemies and opposition.

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6 NASB)

Lesson #5 – God is not the Wizard of Oz

In his first appearance in the movie, the Wizard of Oz nearly scared the small group to death. Big, loud, mean-spirited, and intimidating. On the second visit, the curtain was pulled back revealing a small man who just another fraud and deceiver of men. The trusting group of seekers was devastated by the truth.

Sadly, many people today view God as one of those personas of the Wizard of Oz. Neither is accurate. Others picture God as a combination of the Wizard of Oz, Santa Claus, and a genie in the bottle. They only go to Him to satisfy their wish lists

so they can live any way they chose. And they are bitterly disappointed when He does not grant their wishes. Very bad imagery. Worse theology.

While the Wizard of Oz turned out not to be "the great and powerful" as he claimed, I have good news: God is! I want to close with a couple of verses in which God declares Himself to men.

"Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with (Moses) and proclaimed His name, the LORD. And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin..." (Exodus 34: 5-7a NIV)

He is the only God worthy of pursuing. He does not hide behind curtains because the death of Christ tore the veil in half, opening the Holy of Holies to all who seek Him. Use your brain to get to know Him better. Use your heart to love Him deeper. And use your courage to serve Him forever.

When Dorothy first landed over the rainbow, she walked outside, looked at her new surroundings, and said to Toto, "I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." One day we will say the same kind of thing when we awaken to those streets "paved with gold", finally Home.

Walter

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