

I Asked the Lord That I Might Grow

John Newton (1725–1807)

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.

‘Twas he who taught me thus to pray;
And he, I trust, has answered prayer:
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once he’d grant me my request;
And, by his love’s constraining power,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with his own hand he seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this? I trembling cried;
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
‘Tis in this way, the Lord replied,
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free,
To break thy schemes of worldly joy,
That thou mayst seek thy all in me.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

In Praise of Ordinary Men, Part 9: Bill Bevis

Kevin T. Bauder

About twenty-five years ago I was planting a church in Garland, Texas. Our little congregation was meeting in what had been a bank building. Our nursery was in the vault. One Sunday night after church one of our men commented that he had inherited an old military rifle from an uncle. He wished that he knew what it was and whether it was safe to shoot. I told him that he ought to bring it to church next Sunday so we could take a look at it. It turned out to be a No. 4 Enfield with a good bore.

I suggested that we could take the rifle to a local gun show to look for somebody with headspace gauges. We did, and a quick exchange of bolt heads made the rifle fully functional. After that, gun shows became a regular activity for the men of Faith Baptist Church. Sometimes a group of us would go, and sometimes only two or three.

One Saturday our church’s music minister and I were at a gun show, became separated, and I ended up walking through the show alone. As I was ambling along, I spotted a man selling jugs of gun powder. He was wearing a blue and white ball cap that said PILLSBURY BAPTIST BIBLE COLLEGE. I walked up to him and asked, “Do you know somebody who attends Pillsbury Baptist Bible College?”

He answered with a bit of a Texas twang, “Well, no. But my son used to teach at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College.”

“Really,” I replied. “He used to teach there? Where is he now?”

“Oh, he teaches at a little school in Iowa that you never heard of.”

I asked, “You don’t mean Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa, do you?”

That’s when he took a second look at me, and asked, “You know about Faith Baptist Bible College?”

“I went to school there,” I said.



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The man's name was Bill Bevis, and his son Darrell was indeed a music professor at Faith. Bill himself was a gunsmith. He invited me to come visit him in his shop, which I did the following week. He showed me the largest personal gun collection I'd ever seen, and for the next two hours we went back and forth talking about guns and then the Bible.

A couple of weeks later our church was hosting a fish fry. One of the men told me about an old friend he had invited whom he wanted me to meet. When the two stepped out of their car, I immediately recognized Bill Bevis.

"It's you!" I exclaimed.

"It's you!" he responded. It turned out that Bill and his wife Celesse were between churches and looking for a church home. Within about two weeks they were members at Faith Baptist Church.

Bill Bevis was an amazing gunsmith. He built 1911 pistols so accurate that you could plink pop cans at a hundred yards. His work on rifles was phenomenal. I had an old, chopped up Mosin with a shot-out bore that I'd picked up for ten bucks somewhere. Bill found me a barrel and stepped me through the process of turning that junker into a nice sporting rifle. That fall I harvested a deer with it.

One day Bill asked what I was doing for retirement. I just laughed at him—there was no way I could think about retirement. He offered me a deal: if I could come with him to some gun shows, he would show me how to buy broken guns cheaply and to make them into something nice. Then he added, "But I don't want you to just turn around and sell those guns. You keep them and enjoy them and set them aside. They won't lose any value. Then when you retire you can start selling them as part of your retirement." So to this day, I have part of my retirement in stocks.

Much as Bill loved firearms, they occupied a distant third place in his life. He was far more interested in his wife, his children, their spouses, and his grandchildren. Most of all, he loved the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bill wasn't born into a Christian home. He didn't grow up under the sound of the gospel. He was a truck driver who became a machinist. One day he heard the gospel and believed on Christ for salvation. That event changed the whole direction of his life. During the 1950s he sat under the ministry of Joe Boyd at Open Door Baptist Church, was involved with the Baptist Evangelistic School of Texas, and became one of the founders of the Southwide Baptist Fellowship. Later on he was a member at Miller Road Baptist Church (the Hyles church). Somewhere along the line he came under the influence of a Bible teacher whom he always just called "brother Oden," and brother Oden convinced him of four out of the five points of Calvinism. That was pretty unusual among Texas fundamentalists.

When Bill became a member of Faith Baptist Church, he threw himself into the ministry. He was an encourager who loved to help other church members. I never saw the figures, but I know he was a giver. A few times we sort of made a mutual project of somebody we knew needed financial help. When we built our building he swung a hammer with the best of us. He and Celesse became surrogate grandparents to several of the church's children.

I was Bill's pastor for about five years. For the next fifteen he'd call regularly. I'd try to stop in when I was near Dallas. We'd talk guns for a while, then we'd talk family, then we'd talk about the Bible. I can still hear him quoting in his Texas twang, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

About five years ago Bill started to grow weaker. His mind became cloudier. The last time I saw him was last September. We sat out in his shop and he tried to get me to choose one of his custom 1911s—guns that he sold for thousands of dollars. I didn't want to tell him *no*, but I couldn't say *yes*. Finally I said, "Bill, they're both beautiful guns. Let me think until next time we see each other."

In that moment, Bill's mind was razor sharp. He looked at me sideways and said, "Next time, huh?" We both knew that we wouldn't greet each other again this side of glory.

That was our last meaningful conversation. When I called him after that, he no longer remembered me. We'd talk about his family and then I'd start to quote Romans 8:18. He could still finish the verse.

Last weekend Bill slipped into glory. His suffering body was left behind, but his mind cleared immediately. We will certainly meet next time, but my guess is that when we see each other then, claiming a .45 will be the furthest thing from either of our minds.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
