

Book Review
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Muscle and a Shovel by Michael Shank, Michael Shank Ministries, Illinois, 2011, 6th edition revised 2014, 377 pp., ISBN: 9780615474618. \$15.95.

The copy being reviewed is the 6th edition revised published in October, 2014. This edition varies from previous printings of this book. The revisions include: improvements in accuracy, clarity, and readability, portions considered as harsh and/or insensitive have been softened without compromising the truth, cuss-words and chapter titles have been removed, the book has been professionally edited, and the Epilogue has been expanded to include additional reader questions and answers (p. 2).

Michael Shank writes about his personal conversion to Christ. The book was constructed from extensive notes that he took during the process of being taught the truth. During this time, he was exposed to a very patient and biblically literate man whom he calls Randall (the names have been changed to protect privacy). Randall discussed hundreds of passages of scripture with Michael each opportunity he had available to him.

The book consists of forty chapters with an Epilogue. It contains end notes, a bibliography and a list of scripture references (over 1,000).

In chapter one, the author relates the circumstances that led up to he and his wife Jonetta being perched atop the steps of a baptistry ready to be baptized into Christ. This chapter impresses one with the providence of God, the dignity of the elders and members who attended the baptism and the special features of this important occasion in the life of the two prospects. The baptisms took place on March 15, 1988 at 1:15 a.m.

Chapter two begins on August 3, 1987, seven and a half months earlier. This chapter relates the beginning of the teaching process that would lead to the decision to be immersed into Christ. The events related in the book take place in Nashville, TN where Michael was located and worked with OSI Data Solutions. Michael relates the day he met Randall Edges (p. 19) who would be instrumental in teaching him the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In chapter three, Michael and Randall's relationship progressed and they became friends. Randall would ask questions that touched on spiritual matters. Michael noted that Randall was personable and very knowledgeable about the Bible. He was also respectful. Michael related his initial salvation experience. Michael was eight years old and repeated the sinner's prayer in the Baptist church (pp. 23-34). Randall asked Mike if he was ever baptized. Michael replied, "yes" when I was thirteen." Michael was saved before he was baptized. Randall explores this by using the scriptures.

Michael describes his religious experiences in chapter four. He thought he was saved, but he did not live the Christian life. He did drugs, drank beer, cussed and lived like the rest of the world. His relationship with Randall continued and Randall kept asking him Bible questions that stirred his thinking. One such question was, "do you have to be baptized to be saved?" Mike answered no. Randall asked him to consider I Peter 3:21.

In chapter five, Michael approaches his own Pastor with questions. His Pastor labeled baptism as a work and dismissed it as essential for salvation. Armed with his Pastor's remarks in mind, Mike approached Randall expecting a verbal battle over baptism. Randall disarmed Mike and showing love and humility, explained I Peter 3:21 to Mike in context. He also explained

Ephesians 2:8-9 in context. Randall then explained that faith only does not save.

Chapter six relates that some of the co-workers of Mike were upset that he was engaging in religious discussions with Randall. One of these workers was Kirk, who was eight years older than Mike. Kirk told Mike that Randall believed that Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics—everybody but his church—were going to hell (p. 48). He warned Mike away from Randall. Mike confronted Randall with this idea and Randall showed from the scriptures that those who obeyed the gospel were added to the church that Jesus built. Mike was upset by this point.

Mike relates in chapter seven how the fighting spirit kicked in and he decided to refute Randall. As he visited churches in the area, he picked up tracts on various topics and began reading them. He concluded that only one church was able to give book, chapter and verse for everything that they believed—the church Randall belonged to.

Chapter eight relates Mike's experience around Christmas time. He attended the Baptist Church. After the services, Mike and his wife asked the Baptist Pastor where and when the Baptist church began. The Pastor answered that the church began with John the Baptist. He pointed them to Matthew 3 and dismissed them. Mike was very upset at the dismissive way his Pastor treated him and his wife.

In chapter nine, Mike's frustration grows and he inquires of other Baptist preachers where and when the Baptist church began and received a multitude of different answers. Confused, he returned to work where he met Randall who apologized to him for offending him. This disarmed Mike and he asked Randall about who started the Baptist church. Randall showed him in the scriptures that John did not build any church but that Jesus did. Randall pointed Mike to the public library to find out when the Baptist church began.

Mike encounters a Lutheran preacher in chapter ten who states that, "any denomination that claims exclusivity to Heaven is probably some kind of cult" (p. 76). Mike was intrigued by his conversion with this man and returned to work ready to confront Randall. Randall was not to be found. He was out sick. Mike relates a dinner with drinking where he overindulged and got drunk. The next day, he sees Randall and asks Randall to go to lunch with him.

The events of chapter eleven occur just one week before Christmas. Mike and Randall discussed the context of John 3:16 and Randall showed him that John 3:3-5 discussed the new birth which was a reference to baptism. The believers of John 3:16 were born again—baptized. Randall asked Mike to find the Sinner's Prayer in the Bible. Mike also described a racial incident at the restaurant that Randall handled with self-restraint. Randall was black and Mike was white.

Michael relates the experiences he had with his family at Christmas time in chapter twelve. His aunt Nancy prayed for him to receive the Holy Spirit that he might speak in tongues. She spoke in tongues at the gathering. Michael related that he felt nothing but curiosity. He spent the evening asking his relatives where the Sinner's Prayer was found in the Bible. No response was given.

Michael reveals an important discovery in chapter thirteen. He learned by questioning his own family that not many people really study the Bible. They get their beliefs from people that they love and trust and not necessarily from God. At the end of this chapter, Michael thinks he has found the answer to confirmation of his salvation through feelings.

In chapter fourteen, Mike engages Randall about his new found resolution about his salvation. Randall illustrates that feelings can be deceptive because they can be based upon a lie. Randall also reveals that the Bible does not teach "a personal relationship with Jesus" based

upon simply asking Jesus to come into your heart.

Chapter fifteen reveals that Mike's good friend, Larry, had also been studying with Randall. Larry was baptized and he told Mike about it. Mike raised an objection to baptism based upon the circumstances of the thief on the cross. Larry pointed out to Mike that the new covenant went into effect at the time of Jesus' death on the cross and so the thief on the cross lived under a different covenant than we do. Larry and Mike continued their discussion throughout the night and ended it at 5:42 a.m.

The events of chapter 16 start at the beginning of the New Year—1988. Mike engages his friend Ryan about Randall's church and discovers that it has one of the best reputations in Nashville. The chapter closes with a discussion between Mike and Larry on New Year's Day about the meaning of Acts 2:38.

In chapter 17, Mike asks a Methodist minister if the Methodist baptized. The minister replied, "yes." "We sprinkle, pour, or immerse, depending on the individual and the situation" (p. 134). Michael knew this wasn't correct. He asked Randall about it. Randall proceeded to tell him the origin of the Methodist church and the truth about baptism. Their conversation was interrupted. In chapter 18, Michael related the details of the conversation he had with Randall to his wife Jonetta. Randall taught Michael that baptism is an immersion in water for the remission of sins. In this chapter, Randall mentioned that the word baptism was a transliteration of the Greek word *baptidzo* (p. 142-143). This point needs some further elaboration. The English word baptism was in existence long before the KJV was produced in 1611. The KJV translators kept the old ecclesiastical words from previous translations as they had been instructed. Baptism was in the Geneva translation prior to the KJV and so was retained for that reason.

Chapter 19 continues the conversation Michael had with his wife, Jonetta about baptism. They studied the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. At the end of this chapter, Michael related that he decided to leave the Baptist church because of the doctrinal error taught by those who led it.

Michael and Jonetta are faced with choosing where to attend worship. Their thought process and decisions are related in chapter 20. They rejected Catholicism. They rejected churches that taught Calvinism. They rejected Pentecostals and Charismatics. They rejected the Mormon Church. They rejected the Jehovah Witnesses. Community churches were left and so they explored them. They found out that they did not respect God's Word. So, they rejected them.

In chapter 21, Michael and Larry discuss the meaning of Acts 2:38. A summary of the study notes is given on pages 184-185. In the notes, the statement is made that the Greek word *eis* is never translated "because of" in the New Testament. "Eis" is translated "for" in the KJV. This answered an important question for Michael. Baptism is essential for the remission of sins. Salvation does not precede baptism, it occurs at the time of one's immersion into Christ.

In chapter 22, Michael registers his disappointment in the claim of many of the churches he and his wife had visited who stated that they were Christians but were not united. Tolerance was substituted for unity. Unity is based upon truth. They compromised the truth in order to have a pseudo unity.

Michael and Jonetta close the door on the Baptist church and its pastor in chapter 23. The pastor had the nerve to call them and ask for money after they had been absent for four months.

A significant discovery is made by Michael in chapter 24. He learns why he believed the things that he did. His faith originated from the trusted people in his life. It centered in the

beliefs of the church that those trusted people accepted. His faith was not anchored in God's word. He asks, "Why had I been so ignorant of the Truth? Because it takes muscle and a shovel to read the Bible. It takes a heart that's willing to dig. It takes an honest heart (Luke 8:15) that's willing to lay aside preconceived ideas" (p. 209).

Chapter 25 begins the first of five studies with Randall. The first study focused on the church of the New Testament. The second study, related in chapter 26, focused on some of the identifying characteristics of the New Testament church, especially, its worship. The third study, related in chapter 27, focused on the type of music God desires in the Lord's church. There is a useful section in this chapter on quotations from denominational leaders who did not approve of using instruments in the worship assembly (pp. 246-247).

In Chapter 28, Randall has a good discussion with Michael about the use of special titles for men who serve in the ministry, like the title reverend.

The fourth study with Randall is revealed in Chapter 29. Randall addresses the pastor-system with Michael. The pastor-system is foreign to the New Testament.

The fourth study continues in chapter 30. Randall discusses the gospel and what it means to obey the gospel with Michael. Randall emphasizes the importance of being baptized as a part of obeying the gospel.

In Chapter 31, Michael and Jonetta enjoy a night out with friends but Michael drank too much and Jonetta was not pleased. This causes Michael to begin to reflect on his life. In chapter 32, he realizes that he is not living a pure life. He drank socially and got drunk occasionally. He smoked and cursed. He was driven by materialism and had thoughts of sexual immorality and viewed pornography once in a while. He coveted all the nice things the world had to offer. His circle of Christian friends participated in the same immoral activities. Michael admits the one thing that held him back from obeying the gospel. It was pride.

In chapter 33, Michael relates how elephants are mentally conditioned over a period of about 18 months to stay within a limited area by tying a rope with a metal device that inflicts pain on its leg and foot when it attempts to free itself by tugging at it. Eventually, the elephant will remain in a limited space without the device on its leg. It is mentally conditioned. We are also subject to mental conditioning and often remain in a bad place spiritually because of it.

Chapter 34 reveals how Randall takes the opportunity to visit with Michael at his home. Randall discusses a topic that had been bothering Michael. If he obeys the gospel, he would be saying that his grandfather was in hell. Randall gives a good explanation of this dilemma for Michael and then helps him know the motivation behind his visit was love.

Study 5 with Randall is given in chapter 35. Randall and Michael discuss baptism and its results including the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 36 relates the moment when Michael realizes that he needs to be baptized immediately. He wakes up at 11:30 p.m. and tells Jonetta and she reveals that she has been studying the Bible too and has already come to the decision that she needed to be baptized. Michael calls Larry and Larry told him to meet him at the church building. In the final chapters, Michael relates the events that would eventually put him and his wife, Jonetta, at the top of the baptistry steps where he began his story in chapter one. Jonetta was baptized first and then Michael. It was a wonderful moment in both of their lives.

In chapter 39, Michael gives more information about the Sinner's Prayer. In chapter 40, he makes a personal appeal to his readers to thoughtfully consider the events that were a part of his conversion and apply it to their lives.

The Epilogue focuses on Randall as a personal worker. The knowledge he possessed of

God's Word and the character he displayed were crucial aspects of Michael's conversion.

The book is a thorough study of more than one thousand scriptures that played a role in forming a base of knowledge that led to the convictions Michael developed regarding his own salvation. His journey can be repeated by those with honest and good hearts who truly seek the truth and are willing to dig to find it.

The book concludes with end notes, a bibliography and a scripture reference index that follows chapter by chapter the layout of the book.