

The background is a solid red color. On the left side, there are several thick, white, wavy lines that curve from the top towards the bottom, creating a sense of movement and depth.

John Gage

**Belonging  
to God's  
Family**

## Belonging to God's Family

John G. Gage

“ ... God is love.” ( 1 John 4:8)

Many people have questions about church, the Bible and this thing called “Christianity”. They feel that they should have a belief system of some sort, but what is seen on television, observed through the media and often experienced in our neighborhoods, schools and places of business is confusing. What is the truth? Who is God? Does He really care anything about me, or if He exists, does He have any interaction with us at all? Why should I conform to some set of rules when I think I am handling life pretty well on my own? If there really is a God, why do I need Him anyway???

I hope to answer some of those questions, but before we dive into it, let me ask *you* a question: WHO or WHAT is your standard of excellence? How do you know if you

are *good enough*? If there IS a God, and you will someday have to answer to Him, how do you know if your behavior has been acceptable? How do you determine whether the scales are weighted in your favor or against you? If you don't believe there is a God, HOW DO YOU KNOW? Can you be absolutely sure that there is no life after death, no eternity, no one to whom you will have to answer?

For some, the standard is the governmental law. If I drive too fast I will be stopped, given a traffic ticket, and will have to either appear in court to attempt to justify my infraction to a judge or just pay the fine. If I steal from a store and am caught, I will have to account for my actions, which could result in jail time and/or a fine. But is the law enough to account for things that make me feel guilty but for which there doesn't seem to be a consequence? If I say something hurtful, or destroy someone's reputation and then regret it, how do I make up for that?

For some, their conscience is their guide...if something *feels* right, it is all right to do it, but if it seems wrong, I should avoid that act. Do we have so much confidence in our conscience that we will always obey the direction it tells us to go? What if we misunderstand the direction the conscience is leading us? What if something *seems* right, but the consequences are terrible?

I just read the story of a professional football player who was driving drunk and ran into the rear end of a car at over 150 miles per hour...the 23 year-old driver of the car he hit was burned to death, and the girlfriend that was riding with him was severely injured. He has been dropped from his football team and is facing DUI, manslaughter and additional felony charges that could result in a 20 -year prison sentence. Did his conscience tell him it would be ok to drive drunk? What standard was he living by when he made such a poor decision?

When a person becomes a member of God's family, they place *all* of their confidence in the fact that God is loving, merciful and forgiving. They replace their own

personal standard of excellence with the standard that God prescribes as the *only* way to satisfy the debt that we all owe...a debt that can only be paid by someone's death. God offers a wonderful, free gift and all that we have to do is accept it...but we will explore that more fully in a little while. First, let's look at what it means to be a part of God's family.

### What is a family?

The United States Census Bureau defines "family" as "a group of two or more people (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage or adoption and residing together."<sup>1</sup> This is a particularly insightful definition as it relates to the family of God, because the Bible uses all three qualifiers for "family" in describing what it means to be a part of God's family! When Jesus was answering a question about His mission on earth, he replied, "Unless one is *born again* He cannot see the kingdom of God."<sup>2</sup> The apostle Paul, while describing

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

<sup>2</sup> John 3:3 NASB

our relationship to God as children, stated, “God sent His Son...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be *adopted*...”<sup>3</sup>. In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, where the apostle John is describing the final events of world history, he says, “...the wedding celebration of the Lamb (Jesus) has come, and His *bride* (all believers) has made herself ready.”<sup>4</sup>

So being a part of God’s family means that we are *born* into it, we are *adopted* into it, and we have a relationship to Jesus that can be described as a “marriage”. What are the characteristics that make a family unique? Here are a few:

- 1) If there are children, there has to be a father.  
Every child has a father. That person may be absent from the family, he may be demanding, overbearing, even mean, or he may be loving, kind and good, but he had to be involved at some

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<sup>3</sup> Galatians 4:4-5 NET

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 19:7 NET

point in time or there would not have been any children.

- 2) The family is bound by love for each other. When I left home at the age of fifteen to attend a Christian boarding school for my junior and senior years of high school, my mom was heart-broken! She loved for the family to be together...to eat meals together, to enjoy holidays together, to take trips together, to attend church together. She loved for us to be together because she loved us and we loved each other, and those times of togetherness were precious to each of us. Families share a mutual affection that is unique and special. Being together as a family brings a special sense of joy.
- 3) A family sacrifices for each other. When I was seven years of age, I had a burning desire to learn how to play the trumpet. Dad arranged with a fine trumpet player who lived across the street from our home to teach me, but Dad, a wonderful musician, wanted to learn too. He made progress so quickly that I became discouraged and wanted

to quit. Dad, seeing my frustration, immediately stopped taking lessons so that I would continue, and trumpet became my passion and my vocation for the next sixty years! An even more moving example of family sacrifice is Huntington Beach native Nadia Morales. When her sister Xenia needed a kidney transplant, she didn't hesitate to offer one of her own. Today, seven years later, both ladies are thriving because one sacrificed something at great risk so her sister could live.<sup>5</sup>

4) Families watch out for each other. Derek and Dominic were a year apart in age and had shared a bedroom their entire lives. They attended the same high school and both played in the band. One day, Derek was confronted by the school bully.

“Give me your lunch money” The bully demanded.

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<sup>5</sup> Ucihealth.org, “Live Well, “Sister to Sister: The gift of a healthy kidney” June 14, 2018. Accessed November 9, 2021.  
<https://www.ucihealth.org/blog/2018/06/kidney-donation>

“But that is all the money I have”, Derek protested! “If I don’t eat lunch, I won’t be able to make it through the rest of my classes!”

“Hand it over!”

Suddenly a familiar voice interrupted. “Leave my brother alone!!” Dominic wrestled in the heavyweight division and was tall and muscular. Immediately the bully backed down, turned and scampered away.

“Thanks, Dominic!” Derek sighed in relief. “No problem” Dominic replied. “That’s what brothers are for!!”

- 5) Families share mutual interests. My mom was a gifted pianist, and Dad had studied organ and voice in college. It was natural then, for my sister to take up piano, my brother the violin, while I gravitated toward trumpet. We shared some wonderful times around the piano playing and singing together. Other families are connected by a love for sports, travel, camping, hiking, cooking or other common interests. Families enjoy being

together when they share similar interests and can discuss and participate in activities they all enjoy.

The Bible gives a wonderful illustration of how believers share the characteristics of family. Acts 4:32 says, “The group of those who believed were of one heart and mind”. In other words, they shared common interests. “There was no one needy among them because those who were owners of land or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales and placing them at the apostles’ feet. The proceeds were distributed to each, as anyone had need.” They were sacrificing for each other, standing up for each other and meeting the needs of one another. No one lacked any necessity because those who *had* shared with those who *needed*. They loved each other sacrificially and made sure that everyone had enough. <sup>6</sup>

This is how the church (the family of God) should function today. If a church is too large to accomplish

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 4:32-35 NET

these family characteristics, then the Sunday School class or Life Group becomes the agent of taking care of the needs of one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 puts it this way, “...Let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds. And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another’s faith....”<sup>7</sup>

### A Good Father

For most of us, our concept of “father” is shaped by the example that was set for us by our dad. Sadly, for some that is a very negative model. Some dads are absent, some are violent, others are demanding and unloving. I recently heard of one father who had NEVER told his children that he loved them!

For others, Dad is there, active in the lives of his children, attentive, caring and loving. Even with the very best human example of fatherhood, none of us could

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<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25 J.B. Phillips New Testament

equal the perfect image of “Father” as demonstrated by God Himself. When Jesus was teaching His followers how to pray, He said, “This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father...” What does this image of a Father look like?

- 1) *God PROTECTS His children.* That may seem like an odd statement in an age that is characterized by pandemics, devastating disease, natural calamities and suffering and loss, but it is true. I remember my dad telling the story of a trip he was on where he was hurrying to get home, and he got stuck behind a tractor on a two-lane curvy road. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't find a safe place to pass, so he fumed and whined and got angry at his plight. Finally, the tractor pulled off the road and dad began to accelerate. As he approached a curve a semi-truck came barreling toward him, on *his* side of the road! Dad told me, “If I had not been stuck behind that tractor, I would have had a head-on collision with that truck! I never again whined or

complained when I was delayed!” We have no idea how often God orchestrates our circumstances to protect us from unseen danger. Psalm 31:23 says, “the Lord protects the loyal...” while Psalm 97:10 states, “He protects the lives of His godly ones.” Psalm 121:5 puts it this way, “The Lord protects you; the Lord is a shelter right by your side.”<sup>8</sup> Just know that as a member of the family of God, your heavenly Father protects you.

- 2) *God PROVIDES for His children.* When I was in elementary school my dad made \$25/week, but we always had food on the table, a roof over our heads, and clothes. The clothes were often patched or stitched up, but we never went naked. As the perfect Heavenly Father, God provides for our needs. Psalm 68:6 promises “God provides homes for those who are deserted.” Psalm 104:14 tells us that “He causes grass to grow for the livestock and provides crops for man to

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<sup>8</sup> All scripture references from HCSB

cultivate.” Perhaps the most well-known Psalm in the Bible is Psalm 23, which begins with, “The Lord is my shepherd, *there is nothing I lack.*”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps His greatest provision is a meaningful relationship with Himself, made possible through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus! We will discuss that more fully in the following pages.

3) *God gives His children what is BEST for them.*

That doesn’t mean He always gives them what they *want*, but always what they need. Psalm 81:16 recalls a scene from the history of the nation of Israel, “But He would feed Israel with the *best* wheat. I would satisfy you with honey from the rock.”<sup>10</sup> This is beautifully illustrated by Jesus Himself, In Matthew 7. “What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

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<sup>9</sup> All scripture references from HCSB

<sup>10</sup> HCSB

will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”<sup>11</sup> God always gives His children that which is best for them.

4) *God disciplines His children to protect them.*

When I was in fourth grade, my parents had to go out for a couple of hours and couldn't take my brother and I with them. Dad drew a line on the sidewalk with chalk. “Do not go beyond that line until we get home!” he sternly commanded.

When Dad got home a while later, I was happily sitting on our neighbor's porch, well beyond the line dad had drawn. That day dad applied the “board of education” to the “seat of knowledge”, and I never went past his boundaries again. What dad knew, that I DIDN'T know, was that two houses down there was a ferocious dog that had been getting loose and terrorizing the neighborhood, and Dad wanted me to be close enough to our home that I could escape to safety if I needed to. God never disciplines us

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 7:9-11 HCSB

capriciously, or just because He is a control freak. He disciplines us for our protection.

5) *God sacrifices for His children.* I don't want to get too theologically deep at this point, but John 1:1 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God." Then verse 14 explains further, "and the *Word became flesh* and dwelled among us." That means that Jesus was God in the flesh. The word "Incarnate" means "in the flesh", and the name "Immanuel" means "God with us". So when Hebrews 10:12 says, "But this man (Jesus), after offering one *sacrifice* for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God" It means that God sacrificed His own Son Jesus, to pay the penalty of sin that we each deserved to pay ourselves. Earlier I mentioned that, "They replace their own personal standard of excellence with the standard that God prescribes as the *only* way to satisfy the debt that we all owe...a debt that can only be paid by someone's death." Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this, that someone would

lay down His life for His friends.”<sup>12</sup> So in essence, God sacrificed Himself in the person of Jesus, which is absolutely the ultimate sacrifice anyone could make.

- 6) *God is there for His children when they face difficult circumstances.* Life is filled with bumps and bruises. Some are devastating...the loss of a loved one or friend, terminal illness or the premature death of a parent. Other circumstances are irritating or hurtful...a broken relationship, various disappointments, failure to get a desired job. Through each difficulty of life, God, as the perfect Heavenly Father, is there to encourage, support and help His children through life’s challenges. Psalm 66 says “For You, O Lord tested us...but You *brought us to a place of abundance.*” Isaiah 41:13 puts it this way, “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.’” Through every challenging, hurtful

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<sup>12</sup> John 15:13 HCSB

circumstance in life, God holds His children by the hand and gives them confidence, hope and compassionate care.

- 7) *God leads His children to maturity so they can make wise choices.* One characteristic of maturity is the ability to make wise choices without having to be told what to do. We make hundreds of choices every day! Some aren't really that important ...what to wear, whether to take a shower (PLEASE take a shower!), what to eat for breakfast, etc. But other choices could have long-lasting consequences...whether to steal from the petty cash drawer at work, have a few drinks at the bar and then drive home, or lie to your "significant other" about your whereabouts. Some choices have moral implications, while others deal with what is good, what is better or what is best. As we learn more about God and the lifestyle that is pleasing to Him, we learn to make wise choices.
- 8) *God would protect His children with His life.* Perhaps the best- known Bible verse in the world

is John 3:16. We see it at football games and on billboards, we hear it quoted by children and adults, by pastors and homeless people. But I wonder if we know the full meaning of this verse.

“For God loved the world in this way;  
He gave His one and only Son,  
So that everyone who believes in Him will not  
perish  
But have eternal life. “(John 3:16 HCSB)

In 1912 Reverend John Harper was on board a ship from England to America to hold a series of meetings in a well-known church. Four days into the trip the ship, the Titanic, hit an iceberg and sank. Harper began to tell people about Jesus as he loaded them into lifeboats. One man began to mock Harper for what he was sharing. Noticing the man didn't have a life jacket, Harper took his off and gave it to the man. “Here, you will need this more than I will!” Soon John Harper sank in the 28- degree water and drowned, but the man to whom he had given his life jacket was saved.

We hear the word “saved” and wonder what it means. People who don’t know Jesus are drowning...they are without hope, facing certain spiritual death, or separation from God forever. They need to be “saved”. They need a lifejacket...they need hope of survival. The next section gives a roadmap for becoming a believer...for being “saved”.

### The Gift

The pathway from being outside the family of God to being a part of it is really a simple one...so simple that some folks miss it. People seem to think that they need to “try harder”, “be better”, or somehow earn their way to peace with God. That is impossible. The good news is that there is absolutely *nothing* we can do to find favor with God. We can’t be better, do better, give more, try harder...all of that is futile.

All we need to do is accept it as a free gift. Here is the simplest way to understand the process:

- 1) *We have a problem!* Romans 3:10 says “As it is written, “There is no one righteous, not even one”. That means that no human who ever lived, is living now or ever will live can reach God on their own. Romans 3:23 says, “ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- 2) *Our only hope is in a relationship with Jesus!* Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death”....that means what we have coming to us since we are born into a hostile relationship with God is eternal separation from Him. The second part of the verse is exciting, “But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Eph. 2:8-9 clarifies this for us: “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s *gift*-not from works so that no one can boast.” Romans 5:8 puts it this way, “But God demonstrates His own

love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

- 3) *How do we receive God's gift?* Romans 10:8-9 puts it very simply, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus Is Lord”, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe...and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith...” “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”<sup>13</sup> The easiest way to “accept” this gift is to pray a simple prayer that looks something like this:

“Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and cannot save myself. I know that the wages of sin is death. I believe that you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, as a payment for the punishment I should have received. I declare that Jesus is my Lord and I profess my faith for salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thank you for your

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:13

grace, forgiveness, peace, and the gift of eternal life. In  
Jesus' name, Amen”

4) *What does this all mean?* The word  
“justified” means “to be declared righteous”.  
It is as though the judge at the trial says, “I  
can find no wrong that you have done. You  
are free to go!” That makes Romans 5:1-2  
especially significant: “Therefore, since we  
have been *justified* through faith, we have  
peace with God through our Lord Jesus  
Christ, through whom we have gained access  
by faith into this grace in which we now  
stand.”

The word “condemnation” means “to stand condemned”.  
Imagine a man on trial for murder, being condemned to  
death. Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, NO  
CONDEMNATION now exists for those in Christ  
Jesus...” That is great news! Once we place our faith in  
Jesus, we are a part of God’s family and are  
free...declared righteous by God Himself. We have been  
*born* into God’s family and have also been *adopted* into

His family as well, with all the rights and privileges of a son or daughter that is related by blood.

## NEXT STEPS

Remember, you can't do anything to make God love you more, to earn salvation or to find favor in His eyes. It is a free gift and God has accomplished everything necessary through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. These next steps are things that you can do to learn more about God and the Christian life and are steps to maturity as a believer.

- 1) Baptism. This is a sign to the world that you understand what Jesus has done for you, and that you are identifying with His family. The best way to demonstrate this is by being completely immersed in water, because that is a picture of dying to your old life and being raised to a new life in God's family. Any pastor can help you with this step.

- 2) Fellowship and grow with other believers. This is most easily accomplished by attaching yourself to a Bible-believing church, small home church and/or Sunday School class or Life Group.
- 3) Study God's Word for yourself. The Bible is God's love letter to you. It contains pertinent history, poetry, wisdom literature, an idea of things to come, the story of Jesus from the perspective of His followers and closest friends, and letters written to early church groups telling them how to live the Christian life. It is vital to your maturity and understanding of the Christian life.
- 4) Talk to God. We sometimes call this *prayer*. Jesus gave his followers a model prayer in Mathew 6:9-13. This is a good example of how to pray.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it in abundance." God wants you to experience:

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness and

Self-control <sup>14</sup>

He wants your life to be fulfilling, to have meaning and purpose, and to be a blessing to others. He longs for you to be content, to have everything you need, to discern what gifts He has given specifically to you, and to find a place to use those gifts to be a blessing to others. The Christian life is a wonderful journey with an incredibly beautiful ultimate destination. I am glad you are on this journey!

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<sup>14</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

## Some additional thoughts

Trying to find the most appropriate Bible verse to give guidance for any specific situation can be a daunting task. We live in an age when information is available at the touch of a button! Here are a few websites that can assist you in your personal Bible study:

<https://www.biblegateway.com>

<https://www.blueletterbible.org>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com>

On any of these sites you can input a key word and will see a list of related verses.

Here are some verses to help you in specific situations, taken from the website <https://www.biblesnet.com>

When you are:

Afraid ..... Ps. 34:4; Matt 10:28; II  
Tim 1:7; Heb 13:5,6

Anxious ..... Ps. 46; Matt 6:19-34;  
Phil 4:6; I Peter 5:6,7

Backsliding ..... Ps. 51; I John 1:4-9

Bereaved ..... Matt 5:4; II Cor 1:3,4  
 Bitter or Critical ..... I Cor 13  
 Conscious of Sin ..... Prov 28:13  
 Defeated ..... Rom 8:31-39  
 Depressed ..... Ps. 34  
 Disaster Threatens ..... Ps. 91; Ps. 118:5,6;  
 Luke 8:22-25  
 Discouraged ..... Ps. 23; Ps. 42:6-11; Ps.  
 55:22; Matt 5:11,12; II Cor 4:8-18; Phil 4:4-7  
 Doubting ..... Matt 8:26; Heb 11  
 Facing a Crisis ..... Ps. 121; Matt 6:25-34;  
 Heb 4:16  
 Faith Fails ..... Ps. 42:5; Heb 11  
 Friends Fail ..... Ps. 41:9-13; Luke  
 17:3,4; Rom 12:14,17,19,21; II Tim 4:16-18  
 Leaving Home ..... Ps. 121; Matt 10:16-20  
 Lonely ..... Ps. 23; Heb 13:5,6  
 Needing God's Protection ..... Ps. 27:1-6; Ps. 91; Phil  
 4:19  
 Needing Guidance ..... Ps. 32:8; Prov 3:5,6  
 Needing Peace ..... John 14:1-4; John 16-  
 33; Rom 5:1-5; Phil 4:6,7  
 Needing Rules for Living ..... Rom 12  
 Overcome ..... Ps. 6; Rom 8:31-39; I  
 John 1:4-9  
 Prayerful ..... Ps. 4, 42; Luke 11:1-  
 13; John 17; 1 John 5:14,15  
 Protected ..... Ps. 18:1-3; Ps. 34:7  
 Sick or in Pain ..... Ps. 38; Matt 26:39;  
 Rom 5:3-5; II Cor 12:9,10; I Pet 4:12,13,19  
 Sorrowful ..... Ps. 51; Matt 5:4; John  
 14; II Cor 1:3,4; I Thess. 4:13-18

Tempted ..... Ps. 1; Ps. 139:23,24;  
Matt 26:41; 1 Cor 10:12-14; Phil 4:8  
Thankful ..... Ps. 100; I Thess. 5:18;  
Heb 13:15  
Traveling ..... Ps. 121  
Trouble, in ..... Ps. 16; Ps. 31; John  
14:1-4; Heb 7:25  
Weary ..... Ps. 90; Matt 11:28-30; I  
Cor 15:58; Gal 6:9,10  
Worried ..... Matt 6:19-34; I Pet  
5:6,7

Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp for my feet  
and a light on my path. (HCSB) I hope that you will take  
advantage of this wonderful road map to guide you on  
this exciting journey.

## About John Gage

Mr. Gage earned a Bachelor of Music Education degree from John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR in 1972, and a Master's in Church Music from Samford University, Birmingham, AL in 1986. He also holds a California Teaching Credential from Cal State University, Bakersfield, CA. As a professional trumpet player from the age of 16, he has played with the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus, Disney on Ice, on several episodes of the television show "Hee-Haw", at the Country music awards show in Los Angeles, the Presidential Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. and at New York's Waldorf -Astoria Hotel. He has been on stage with Roy Clark, Bob Hope, The Statler Brothers, The Fifth Dimension, Kenny Rogers and numerous other artists, including two tours with the Bill Gaither Trio. He served churches as Minister of Music from 1972 until 2019, and is currently retired and living in Broken Arrow, OK.

Mr. Gage has written several books, including:

Love, Dad: 47 Devotionals on Character For The Entire Family (Amazon)

Character For Kids: Devotions and Activities for Kids Ages 3-10 (Amazon)

Hymns in Worship: Rediscovering the Power of the Familiar (Amazon)

Insights on Worship From the Minor Prophets (Amazon) Nine Devotionals on the Fruit of the Spirit (Amazon-download only)

Nine Nuggets From Psalm 119: Devotional Thoughts on God's Word (Amazon-download only)

Brass Players Warm-up and Practice Guide (<http://johnggage.com/music/>)

Chorales For String Instruments in All Major and Minor Keys (<http://johnggage.com/music/>)

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