

Pottering and

As John Stott turns 80, he still finds weeds to pull, birds to

THAT FIRST MORNING, as I walked into John Stott's bedroom (my office during daylight hours), I found his 10-page, handwritten manuscript on my desk with a note: "This is an interview for a book written for single people in their 20s. Could you give me your feedback on what I've said, and suggest any changes to make it more interesting or relevant?" Not certain the thoughts of this 21-year-old were of any value, I nevertheless carefully read through the manuscript and listed several suggested additions, deletions, and modifications.

The next morning, there again on my desk was the manuscript and a note: "What do you think now?" The interview had been rewritten—and every single suggestion employed. Britain's world-renowned, 75-year-old writer and teacher had consented to every piece of advice from a recent college graduate on his first day of work.

I had learned a key characteristic of John Stott: his disarming humility.

John Stott turns 80 years old on April 27. Known principally for his writing (almost 40 books) and preaching, Stott has been one of the most influential leaders of world evangelicalism in the last 50 years. Much has been written about Stott's theology and his influence on evangelicalism worldwide, with little attention paid to his personal life.

As his study assistant from 1996 to 1999, responsible for everything from research to making tea and running errands, I have often been asked what personal qualities make Stott the man he is.

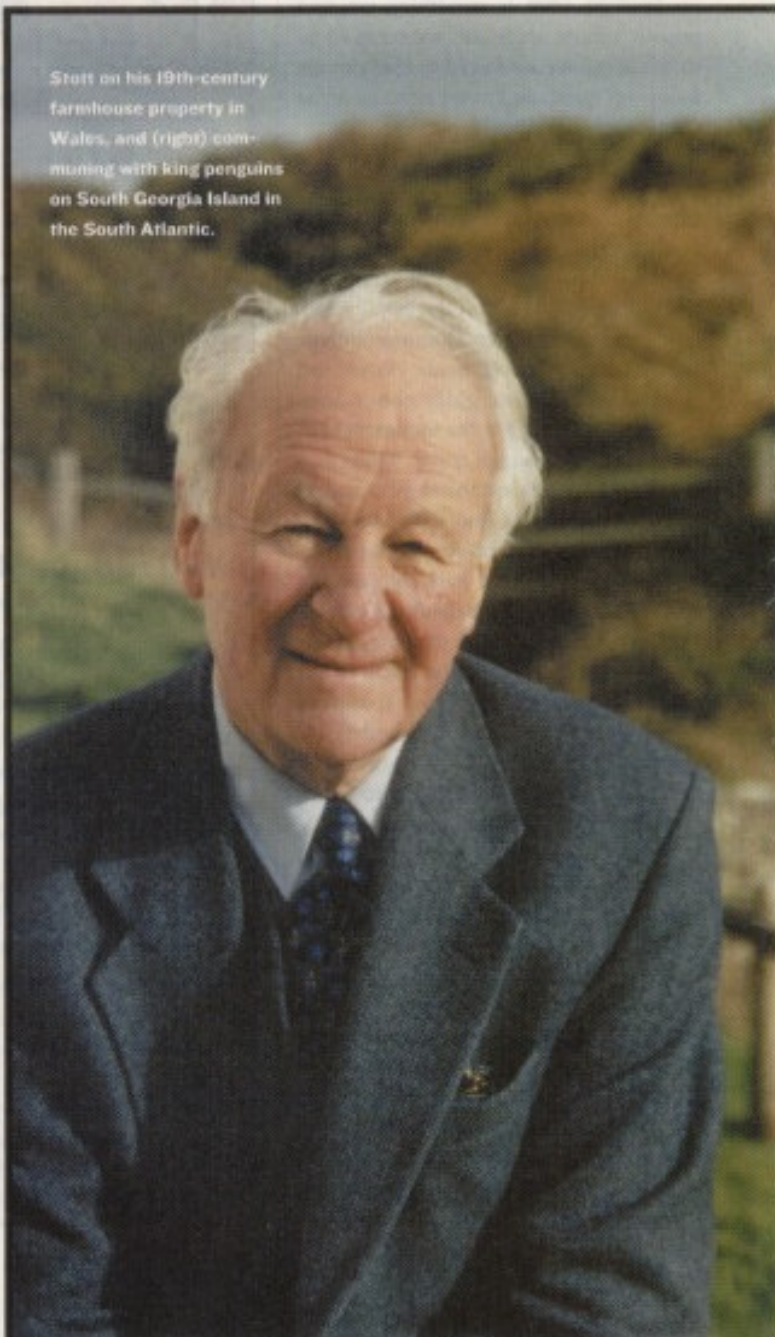
Of the many characteristics I could mention, these struck me most: his humility, his discipline of prayer, and his balance of work and play.

You notice his humility first in the priority he gives to others. To speak with him briefly after church in a crowded hallway is to be the absolute center of his attention. To visit him for a meeting is to be welcomed into his home and offered a cup of tea out of

his own hands. A handwritten letter from a young pastor in Nigeria gets a handwritten response.

"Humility is not another word for hypocrisy; it is another word for honesty," Stott says. "It is not pretending to be

Stott on his 19th-century farmhouse property in Wales, and (right) communing with king penguins on South Georgia Island in the South Atlantic.



Prayer

by John W. Yates III

watch, and petitions to make.

other than we are, but acknowledging the truth about what we are."

With a keen sense of the "paradox of our humanness," he recognizes that we are at once the most glorious creatures in all of creation, redeemed by Christ, and at the same time rebellious, God-scoffing sinners.

This might be a distant theological concept for some, but for Stott it is a fundamental principle, one lived out in the day-to-day details of a busy life.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The day begins for Stott at 5 A.M. He swings his legs over the side of his bed and starts the day in prayer:

Good morning, heavenly Father; good morning, Lord Jesus; good morning, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I worship you as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world. Holy Spirit, I worship you, Sanctifier of the people of God. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God, have mercy upon me. Amen.

For decades, Stott has begun each day with a version of this Trinitarian prayer.

There is a small leather notebook, stuffed full of folded papers and pamphlets and held together by a strong rubber band, that travels as a twin with Stott's Bible. Each morning, having read three chapters of Scripture and meditated prayerfully over them, he pulls out his prayer notebook, takes off the rubber band, and prays for

friends, family, ministries, and even strangers.

Inside the notebook is a daily prayer list that is under constant revision. In minuscule print, the pages are divided into four columns: for evangelism or new converts, for people who have decisions to make, for the sick and bereaved, and for miscellaneous requests.

Each day he reads through, prays over, and amends these four columns. Beneath the columned pages is a short stack of prayer guides. Stott prays daily through the requests of up to seven different organizations to which he is connected.

Finally, having worked through the various handouts and pamphlets, he comes to an old, well-worn page with a handwritten one-month calendar. Each day has a list of names, some dating back 30 years, some just a few months.

For Stott, prayer is the rhythm of each day. From the discipline of regular intercession in the morning, to spontaneous prayer at the end of a pastoral visit, to bent knees shortly before bed, each day is marked by simple, unpretentious, direct, and persistent prayer.

WORK AS PLAY

Any day that starts at 5 A.M. and finds one seated at the desk shortly after 6:30 is bound to be full. Most of Stott's daylight hours are spent at a desk, in front of a podium, or in meetings. This doesn't leave much free time for fun and games. Nevertheless, he is a great believer in a balanced life.

This became most evident when Stott was at his cottage home on the southwest coast of Wales, where for nearly 50 years he spent three months of the year. There he took time away from London to study and write at the Hookses, a 19th-century farmhouse with sizable grounds that was in constant need of upkeep and repair. (Stott has since sold the Hookses.) He devoted an hour or two of every afternoon to such "pottering."

One of the great pottering traditions at the Hookses was to clean out weeds and other unwanted vegetation from a small fish pond. This duty was usually shared by Stott and his study assistant and any other willing volunteer who hap-



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POTTERING AND PRAYER

pens to be visiting. Wearing knee-high wading boots, his sleeves rolled up as high as they can go, he traversed the length and breadth of the pond pulling up weeds.

Perhaps few sights were more surprising to the uninitiated than John Stott wearing grimy clothes, up to his knees in cold water, grinning with satisfaction as

he repeatedly shoved his bared arms underwater to grab handfuls of weeds and cast them onto shore.

Then there was his predilection for washing dishes. Because he makes no contribution to the preparation of food, Stott insisted that he be allowed to do the accumulated dishes of the day after the

Stott's Emerging Legacy

Though most famous for his writing and preaching, John Stott's greatest long-term influence may come through one of his lesser-known projects: the U.S.-based John Stott Ministries (www.gospel.com.net/stott), part of the Langham Partnership.

The ministry supports men and women from all over the developing world, helping them work toward doctoral degrees. These scholars return to their home countries and teach in local seminaries and Bible colleges.

Along with awarding scholarships, John Stott Ministries buys books for seminary libraries, seminarians, and pastors. The ministry's New Millennium Fund has raised \$3 million recently, but Stott hopes to raise another \$1.5 million before his 80th birthday on April 27.

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evening meal. Defiant volunteers unwilling to see him spend half an hour washing dishes may have objected, but in this matter he always got his way.

To observe Stott washing dishes was to witness the surprising combination of a meticulous mind with the playfulness of a child in the tub. Each dish was vigorously scrubbed in the left-hand sink, then summarily plopped into the other side filled with hot water for rinsing. The hapless volunteer who had assumed the job of drying received a splash and a chuckle with every dish.

By the end of the cycle, the volunteer was soaked, while Stott whisked off his plastic apron, as dry as the moment he started.

CHIRPING AT SUNRISE

Perhaps the greatest passion in Stott's life outside of the Bible is his enthusiasm for birds. On a recent visit to Thailand, he began three busy weeks of teaching and preaching by getting up at 3:10 A.M. the first day to drive two-and-a-half hours to a game reserve. He wanted to greet the early-morning birds at the rising sun.

During the remainder of this trip, on half-a-dozen separate occasions, he organized special outings to tramp around in the marvel of nature with binoculars in hand and eyes turned upward. Some may be tempted to see this kind of devotion as fanaticism; others, who know the man, see it for what it is: praise.

Laughter, mischief, simple labor, and a love for the natural world all form the balance of Stott's disciplined life. The fish pond is right outside the study window, the dirty dishes are just a few rooms away, and the birds are everywhere.

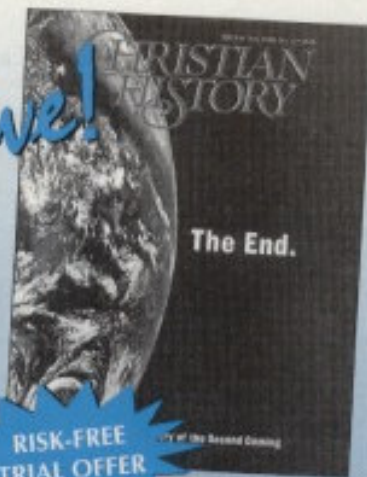
There is no special secret to Stott's success, or one characteristic that makes the man. Rather, those who have the chance to enter into his life, to watch and to listen, come to know a man of gentle humility, regular prayer, and—for someone so diligent at work—a surprisingly balanced life.

John W. Yates III is coauthor, with his brother, Chris, of *The Incredible Four-Year Adventure: Finding Real Faith, Fun, and Friendship at College* (Baker).

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REFLECTIONS

On the occasion of John R.W. Stott's 80th birthday



The Quotable Stott

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE is not just our own private affair. If we have been born again into God's family, not only has he become our Father but every other Christian believer in the world, whatever his nation or denomination, has become our brother or sister in Christ. . . . But it is no good supposing that membership of the universal Church of Christ is enough; we must belong to some local branch of it. . . . Every Christian's place is in a local church . . . sharing in its worship, its fellowship, and its witness.

Basic Christianity

THE GOSPEL is good news of mercy to the undeserving. The symbol of the religion of Jesus is the cross, not the scales.

Christian Mission in the Modern World

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY becomes an aspect not of Christian mission only, but also of Christian conversion. It is impossible to be truly converted to God without being thereby converted to our neighbor.

Christian Mission in the Modern World

SIN AND THE CHILD OF GOD are incompatible. They may occasionally meet; they cannot live together in harmony.

The Letters of John

GOD'S WORD is designed to make us Christians, not scientists, and to lead us to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. It was not God's intention to reveal in Scripture what human beings could discover by their own investigations and experiments.

Christian Basics

GOD IS A PEACEMAKER. Jesus Christ is a peacemaker. So, if we want to be God's children and Christ's disciples, we must be peacemakers too.

Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today

IF YOU FIND it hard to believe in God, I strongly advise you to begin your search not with philosophical questions about the existence and being of God, but with Jesus of Nazareth. . . . If you read again the story of Jesus, and read it as an honest and humble seeker, Jesus Christ is able to reveal himself to you, and thus make God . . . real to you.

I Believe in God

THE MODERN WORLD detests authority but worships relevance. . . . Our Christian conviction is that the Bible has both authority and relevance . . . and that the secret of both is Jesus Christ.

Culture and the Bible

THE INCENTIVE to peacemaking is love, but it degenerates into appeasement whenever justice is ignored. To forgive and to ask for forgiveness are both costly exercises. All authentic Christian peacemaking exhibits the love and justice—and so the pain—of the cross.

The Cross of Christ

IT IS NEVER ENOUGH to have pity on the victims of injustice if we do nothing to change the unjust situation itself.

The Cross of Christ

Compiled by Richard A. Kauffman